

Thinking-cum-knowing

Alexander García Düttmann, *The Memory of Thought: An Essay on Heidegger and Adorno*, trans. Nicholas Walker, Continuum, London and New York, 2002. 338 pp., £60.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 0 8264 5900 5 hb., 0 8264 5901 3 pb.

When Hermann Mörchen was accumulating materials for his massive study *Adorno and Heidegger: An Investigation of a Philosophical Refusal to Communicate* (1981), he asked Heidegger whether he had ever met his persistent antagonist. Heidegger recalled that he had been introduced to Adorno after Heidegger had delivered a paper on 'Philosophical Anthropology and Metaphysics of Dasein' in Frankfurt in January 1929. As Heidegger remembered the meeting, 'no more extended conversation followed'. Heidegger never read anything Adorno wrote. 'Hermann Mörchen once tried to convince me that I really ought to read Adorno. But I never did.' The refusal to communicate referred to in Mörchen's title appears to have been a decidedly one-sided refusal. Whilst Adorno's work is saturated with direct references and oblique allusions to Heidegger, from the early philosophical manifestos and his 1933 study of Kierkegaard through to *The Jargon of Authenticity* and the first part of *Negative Dialectics* (1966), Heidegger adopted a policy of silence in the face of these explicit criticisms of his work. At first sight there might seem to be little to wonder at in this, even before considering the gulf between Adorno's Marxism and Heidegger's National Socialism. Yet Adorno's intense antipathy to Heidegger's work is motivated not by the absence of any point of contact with it but by convergences which run much deeper than the starkly contrasting philosophical styles of each thinker might lead us to expect. In 1949 Adorno tried to persuade Horkheimer to write a review of Heidegger's *Holzwege* for the journal *Der Monat*, adding that Heidegger was 'in favour of false trails [*Holzwege*], in a way that's not very different from our own'. This history inevitably puts Mörchen's efforts in a rather comical light. His book appears as a well-intentioned but doomed attempt to pacify an antagonism, and in a case where the simultaneity of affinity and hostility is just what needs thinking about. That study too willingly accepts its own secondariness, and is thus fated to break down these two breathing authorships into large quantities of atom-like philosophemes, which are then reassembled

into the large but unstable edifice of an imaginary *rapprochement*. Despite the local serviceability of Mörchen's labours, then – and despite the existence of perceptive comments and essays by others here and there – a decisive account of this important collision remains lacking.

Alexander García Düttmann's attempt, first published in German in 1991, is now issued in an outstanding translation by my friend Nicholas Walker. (Not the least of its many merits is that Walker supplies his own versions of the texts quoted, versions which are almost invariably superior to those already available, especially in the case of quotations from *Negative Dialectics* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.) From the start it is clear that Düttmann is operating at a level which is in every sense far more sophisticated than Mörchen's. Düttmann's justified insistence that he is not offering a contribution to the secondary literature on these authors, but pursuing through an interpretation of them a series of independently significant questions, is, as it turns out, part of what pushes his readings to a level of interpretation at once subtler and sharper than most existing commentary on the subject.

The book deserves, first of all, then, to be read in terms of its own matter, and only subsequently to be considered as commentary. This, however, is just what most readers will be unlikely to do, since – it is fair to warn – the book presents barely superable difficulties to reading. One ready response to such difficulty will be mentally to convert it into a set of descriptions of these two authorships and then to judge favourably or unfavourably the accuracy of this set. I shall myself yield in part to this temptation later. I wish first, though, to confront Düttmann's 'argument', in so far as I understand it. In order to do so I shall have to begin immanently. This will involve me in repeating ideas which are not yet wholly clear to me. I must say, too, that there are many rich problems and analyses in this book – including the consideration of fate and sacrifice in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; the discussion of

revolt and revolution in Benjamin; the account of 'constellation and de-constitution' – which I shall be unable to consider in this short review.

The 'hypothesis' which Düttmann sets out concerns 'the name': in this century Heidegger and Adorno have experienced the force and power of the event in question, and consequently that of the name in question, as few other thinkers have done. And this most tellingly where the opposition between them seems to leap out at us most obviously: there where Heidegger – with explicit reference to Hölderlin – speaks of Germania and Adorno speaks after Auschwitz. In their own way and in their own language both thinkers have acknowledged the power of the name, and have inevitably fallen victim to that power themselves. Their thought can therefore teach us the impossibility of escaping the power of the name.

Thus begins a patient, even a laborious, movement in which immanent critique or repetition of the two authorships would disclose 'the name' as at once a limit and a condition of both: '[t]he name marks the limit of 'negative dialectics' and of the 'destruction' or 'overcoming' of metaphysics, even if these approaches themselves first serve to reveal the limited and limiting character of the name.' Just how all this is so, however, stubbornly refuses to crystallize.

It is clear enough that the intention is not at all to construct any kind of synthesis between Adorno and Heidegger, nor to adjudicate between them, but to reveal in reading them a limit that they share, and which might be constitutive of their thinking. But if 'the name' marks the limit of negative dialectic, on the one hand, and of destruction of metaphysics, on the other, the brisk reader will want to know why we do not start with saying what is meant by 'the name'. If it is the trump here, it should surely be explained?

Or named? But this demand shows in its own form, for Düttmann, why 'the name' has to be approached with such indirection, and this reason can be given in both idiolects:

Caught as we are in the tension between concept and name, we cannot simply hurl ourselves to the side of the name. Or to express this differently, and in Heidegger's terms: caught in the movement of a beginning which is marked by its own counter-turning, we are unable to bename originary naming itself.

Düttmann, in these final pages, is interpreting a story by Kafka. A philosopher, believing that proper knowledge of any tiny thing would suffice to produce knowledge of the universal, gets ready, whenever he sees children spinning a top, to seize it. If he could know this one thing properly, he would know everything. Yet as soon as he gets hold of it, he finds that all he has in his hands is 'a silly wooden thing' – a discovery which sends him reeling like the top he has just brought to rest. Thus far Düttmann has read this story as a diagnosis of thinking's fate. Seizing the top would be just what we cannot do: to 'express the name immediately and hold the name within one's hands'. Yet on the very last pages of the book, another possibility is raised, one which is almost the only intimation of escape from a heavy logic of fatedness which otherwise sets the tone throughout.

It is decisive for the understanding of the story that we recognize what it is the philosopher would properly like to grasp here: namely, not the resting object – the silly piece of wood – but the spinning itself, or speaking as such. If he were ever to succeed in uttering the word of the word or in entering fully into the event of language, he would be free of the reeling revel into which we are whirled by language. He would be bereft



of the name, bereft of the concept, though not like one who had isolated the concept or the name and incurred guilt in doing so; but rather like one who no longer needs to inaugurate anything. Such thinking would be a thinking without the memory of thought.

A happiness which looks to us like bereavement; a knowledge which looks to us like madness: thus, the book implies, must happiness and knowledge appear to the fated.

The gloomy subtlety of this is wholly characteristic. So is the thinness of the air breathable at this altitude of ideation. It is clear that for this writing what is meant by 'the name' has little to do with what is usually understood as philosophy of language, still less with philology; just as it is convinced that nothing but *petitio principii* would result from an attempt to understand 'the event in question' in relation to any kind of *information* whatever, whether historical, sociological, biographical, and so on. This, however, may indicate that the promise made that 'The argument is not itself conducted from the perspective of either of these thinkers' nevertheless does not imply perfect evenhandedness. Adorno could describe his own thought as a 'rebellion of experience against empiricism.' Negative dialectic 'inaugurates' nothing at all; 'it is time not for first philosophy but for last philosophy'. When he was trying to explain what he meant by 'constellations' he turned to Max Weber. Heidegger, on the other hand, reasoned thus:

Science does not think. This is a shocking statement. Let the statement be shocking, even though we immediately add the supplementary statement that nonetheless science always and in its own fashion has to do with thinking. That fashion, however, is genuine and consequently fruitful only after the gulf has become visible that lies between thinking and the sciences, lies there unbridgeably. There is no bridge here – only the leap. Hence there is nothing but mischief in all the makeshift ties and asses' bridges by which men today would set up a comfortable commerce between thinking and the sciences.

Even here there is something not wholly unlike the – at once cooperative *and* antagonistic – relation between different kinds of enquiry imagined in the project of critical theory. It is just that the price paid for the conscious exclusion of Adorno's explicit criticisms of Heidegger from the discussion comes into view.

The reason given for this exclusion is that 'the task here is not to examine the justification or plausibility of this critique. It is, however, assumed that such an examination, whatever the eventual result, would make

no essential or decisive difference to the hypothesis explored here.' I am not certain that that assumption is justified. That critique is not an adventitious or merely polemical part of Adorno's writing. It is essential to negative dialectic in the sense that without it negative dialectic – a 'rescue', in Adorno's particular sense of that word, in opposition to a 'destruction' of metaphysics – cannot be specified. With its exclusion, a whole organ of Adorno's thinking vanishes: the theory of illusory concretion, a necessary partner for the critique of empty proceduralism. And with it the experiential middles of Adorno's world, those 'different colours' without which we could not even despair over the grey (kindness, wit, delight, *désinvolture*), drop out too. Düttmann's discomfort with this side of Adorno's work is stood in for, in this book, by a placeholder, a series of attacks on Habermas. In effect that whole side of Adorno's thinking which differs from Benjamin's is treated as inessential.

The theory of illusory concretion asks: what happens when a decided 'leap' hits the turf? At just this juncture thinking-without-knowing *decides*, precisely, that it is going to know after all in any case. So it *pronounces*, about various matters of which it is ignorant. So Heidegger could both declare philology unimportant to his project and keep on deciding to make it up; so we tumble into the bathetic inadequacy of what he was able to say about National Socialism; so indeed, we arrive at the whole medium of *Scheinkonkretion*, illusory concretion, in his writing: the existentials, luminous with the names of passion, suspended above all merely ontic feeling. Thinking-without-knowing which *decides* to know after all: what is this but that amphibious fluid, the *quasi*-transcendental, in which so much vanguard thinking-cum-knowing remains suspended? I repeat, it is possible that I may not have understood this book. It is a long time since I found it so hard to finish a book which appeared to have so many claims to my admiration. Yet again and again particular claims that it makes are not intelligible either as transcendental or as empirical; they seem to make no sense unless they are understood as quasi-transcendental. This book is one of that element's most advanced tongues, 'groundbreaking' indeed in what it erodes. It is one of its most defended fortresses, binding to itself a joy it will not name. All pathos and lustre of experience find themselves here compressed as in a dark chamber, where passions have the privilege to work, yet only hear the sound of their own names.

Simon Jarvis

The new scholasticism

Nathan Widder, *Genealogies of Difference*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2002. 190 pp., £25.99 hb., 0 252 02707 8.

Who could have predicted that philosophy, whose end had been announced so often that it was difficult to imagine it returning as anything other than a zombie, would be reinvigorated by a return to the medieval notion of the ‘univocity of being’? If Deleuze had not rediscovered the power of this theme, languishing in the unloved pages of scholastic philosophy, would the Hegelian vision of the absolute still be the only conceivable horizon under which a philosophy could even think about expressing ‘Being itself’ in a transparent logos? The thesis of univocity claims that there can be no equivocal uses of the concept of being: each being is said in the same way; consequently there is no kind of being that is ontologically hidden from us. It gives thought access to being in the same radical manner as Hegel’s philosophy does, thus putting into question the popular idea that speculative thought is doomed never to get beyond Hegel.

The impetus for Nathan Widder’s book is clearly the key section on the univocal ontology of difference in Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*. He has set off in search of the background to Deleuze’s references to Duns Scotus and Aquinas, tracing crucial moves in the philosophy of difference back to Aristotle. However, at some point in his quest Widder appears to have gone native, and returned with what appears to be a work of postmodern scholasticism quite of his own making. Widder’s book shows that the ‘univocal turn’ might itself be a perilous passage, and it bids us look to other motives at work in the appropriation of the Deleuzian return to Scholastic theology (a theology which Deleuze argued was the matrix of Spinozism).

Widder begins by suggesting that the idea that antifoundationalism and pluralism entail a commitment to ontological minimalism is a mistake. Might speculation and ontology not provide new ways of undermining concepts of identity, unity and totality? Rather than embarking on a new ontology, however, Widder seeks to perform a genealogy that clarifies the ontological elements at work in the contemporary philosophy of difference. At certain crucial junctures in Western philosophical history, he says, it is possible for the genealogical eye to discern alternative speculative routes not fully taken, leading off towards radical notions of difference, finally fulfilled in our times by Nietzsche and Deleuze. Widder’s book is

composed mostly of highly abstract sketches of these philosophical junctures: the elaboration of teleological thought in Greece, the disputes between the early Christian Fathers and the Gnostics, as well as Scholastic debates about univocity.

The whole project of a genealogy of ‘difference’ raises certain questions straight away. Can a logical/ontological concept like difference be treated as the object of a genealogical analysis in the way, say, morality or the prison are? The last two were taken as objects for genealogy, by Nietzsche and Foucault respectively, in order to undermine long-established ideas about their development, and to bring to light hidden contingencies in their formation. But Widder seeks a genealogy of difference precisely to *confirm* poststructuralist accounts of difference. It often looks as if, no matter which period of thought we look at, the face of Deleuze keeps appearing in its midst, grinning and pointing out the correct direction for philosophy. More problematically, doesn’t the concept of difference have certain philosophical and logical constraints that morality and the prison don’t? Don’t these constraints – which would be the subject of the *philosophy* of difference – need thorough examination before one floats ‘difference’ on the seas of genealogy? In Deleuze, genealogy is put at the service of a philosophy of difference, rather than vice versa. Hence there is an empty space at the centre of the book, since the theory of difference that is the object of genealogical analysis is not fully expounded. What happens instead is that difference is often primarily characterized in terms of the vocabulary of ‘excess’ and ‘otherness’ (to concept, identity, representation, measure, etc.) in a way that ultimately suggests (because nothing is introduced to replace the concepts just mentioned) that a coherent and determinate formulation of it would somehow betray it. While Deleuze attempts to construct a determinate account of *internal difference* to rival Hegel’s, Widder is driven by a pathos of indeterminacy foreign to Deleuze. Rather than doing any differentiating work, ‘difference’ is continually fetishized as wild, feral, the dog outside the house of Being.

As it happens, though, Widder’s real methodological approach is as much deconstructive as it is genealogical or Deleuzian. For instance, he rehearses certain internal tensions in Aristotle’s thought in order to suggest

(rather too quickly in this case) that these tensions are irreducible, and that Aristotelian thought necessarily inhabits an unstable and ambiguous ground, as a symptom of its suppression of difference. At other times, he will suggest that a certain trend of thought (for example, Epicureanism or Gnosticism) manages to harness a current of difference or plurality in a way that never quite fulfils its potential, 'domesticating' its creative powers at the last moment. But either way, the 'genealogies' continually lead to something that is never fully spelled out.

Hence there is something of a paradox at the core of this book. In Deleuze's case, pluralism and groundlessness are effects to be found *within* a system that is nevertheless itself intended to have universal validity (as, similarly, Freud's metapsychology is not itself overdetermined, even though dreams and other psychopathological phenomena are). But if, as here, a notion of difference as perpetual excess seems to hold in a virulently antifoundationalist way at the meta-theoretical level as well (or at least if there is nothing to show that this is not the case), then what need is there for the kinds of ontology outlined in this book? Why does radical antifoundationalism or pluralism need to know about what *is*?

Perhaps a subterranean anxiety exists within the theory of excessive, indeterminate difference advocated by Widder (in common with Hardt and Negri on the Left), and perhaps this is at the source of the attempt to reinscribe itself at the level of ontology, with the help of Scholastic theology.

Because pluralism relativizes all convictions, it tends to attenuate the connections between ontology and subjectivity (to the extent of risking its own existence). A certain kind of pluralism can gain from a pact with Scholastic theology because the latter offers it a theory of the powers of being, or power to act, in which pluralist subjectivity, weakened by lack of unity, can nevertheless affirm that *something*, something substantial, flows through it: power. For it is the God of omnipotence, of Power, who is solicited by the contemporary return to scholasticism, not the God of benevolence, providence, redemption.

If this is true, however, it seems inconsistent with a major shift in recent history. The age in which anxiety was felt that God, or totality, might not exist (and the universe therefore be a wasteland abandoned of meaning) is passing. Rather, the most horrible thing, worse than the vacuum itself, is that God might exist after all. That God, the bastard, exists. The thought that the world might be unified, totalizable, after all, must be denied at all costs. Why? In such a world, our

glorious infinite creativity, our precious fundamental indeterminacy, might be eroded. But the only way to staunch the doubt that God might exist is to give pluralism the status of a counter-theology. Subtract the teleological aspects of the God of the Scholastics (benevolence, providence, redemption) and expose the Being of infinite power beneath. Now we can see Him clearly: we realize that what is being sought is a proof for the existence of Satan. Only a Devil can save us. The only way a pluralist can look at himself in the mirror is through the mask of Mephistopheles.

A new theology of power is sought to aid the affirmation of our activity in a world of indeterminacy and uncertainty. This often abstract, second-order affirmation of 'creativity' and 'difference' is proclaimed loudest at a moment in history when the obese figure of universal capitalism is blocking the view to any genuinely creative future. By its abstraction the affirmation shows itself to be ideology. Perhaps the hyperbolic, abstract appeal to the Scholastic theory of power is drowning out a deeper anxiety about powerlessness, which needs to talk abstractly and ceaselessly about creativity, in order to conceal its inability actually to create anything. The problem is that the ideology of maverick, diabolical creativity suits capital nicely as it enters its perverse age.

Christian Kerslake

Death struggle

Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, Verso, London and New York, 2002. 588 pp., £25.00 hb., 1 85984 822 2.

Why do the life and work of Georges Bataille still exert a fascination over us? A steady stream of new translations and reissues of Bataille's writing continue to appear, along with new critical studies of his work. There is very little doubt of the relevance of this most untimely of thinkers. Perhaps this is because the world of late capitalism finds its uncanny mirror in Bataille's world of excess. What he regarded as extreme states – such as war, cults, games, spectacles and perverse sexuality – now constitute the 'normal' states of everyday experience. As Slavoj Žižek has remarked, the new technologies of biogenetic manipulation and virtual reality promise not only freedom from bodily suffering but also enhanced possibilities of torture. The image that fascinated Bataille of the Chinese torture victim (reproduced in Surya), whose suffering has been



extended by the administration of opium, was only an indication of future possibilities for the infliction of pain. It appears that a deterritorializing late capitalism has caught up with Bataille and the anti-capitalist impulses he sought to analyse.

Michel Surya's magisterial intellectual biography of Bataille is both a symptom of our fascination with Bataille and an attempt to analyse it. Surya pursues 'the secret of the fascination his work exerts' by sifting through the biographical evidence, and his thesis is that the secret lies in Bataille's fascination with death, in particular 'the practice of joy before death'. For Bataille death is not an occasion for mourning or for the assigning of meaning to a life (it was Hegel, Bataille argued, who turned death into mourning/meaning). Instead death has overflowed these limits; it is a spreading contagion that cannot be contained or assimilated and it is this contagion that Bataille tried to transmit in his writings.

Surya seeks the source of this contagion in Bataille's own experiences, and especially in the death of Bataille's father in 1915 when he was eighteen. Bataille's father will be familiar to anyone who has read the 'Coincidences' section of Bataille's 1927 novel *Story of the Eye*. He appears there as a mad, blind, syphilitic figure who destroyed the constraints of Bataille's strict upbringing by shouting to the doctor who had come to attend to him, and was alone with his spouse, 'Doctor, let me know when you're done fucking my wife!' Whether this portrait is accurate or not was the matter of some dispute between Bataille and his brother Martial, when Bataille admitted to

being the author of *Story of the Eye* in 1961. Surya's discussion lends support to Bataille's claims but he also has to concede the absence of any definitive or decisive evidence. Bataille did not only experience the trauma of his father's madness but also guilt because his father died abandoned by Bataille and his mother when they fled Rheims at the beginning of World War 1. For Surya this is the key event of Bataille's childhood, and from this point on Bataille will be haunted by 'the spectral, monstrous, mad, paternal presence' of his dead father.

Surya returns again and again to the death of the father to explain the events of Bataille's early adulthood. So, his conversion to an extreme Catholic piety, which lasted longer than Bataille claimed, is seen as an attempt to relieve the guilt he felt at his act of abandonment. Then Bataille's 'conversion' to Nietzsche, under the influence of the Russian philosopher Leon Chestov, is interpreted as an affirmation of the senselessness of his father's death. From a Christian 'No!' to a Nietzschean 'Yes!' philosophy is reduced to a matter of father and son, a very traditional schema. The image of his blind father's rolling eyes will also penetrate into Bataille's earliest writings on the 'pineal eye', claims Surya. This 'eye', which erupts through the top of the head and gazes directly at the sun, is another thinly veiled autobiographical reference. What this reading fails to recognize is Bataille's parodic treatment of the traditional philosophical metaphor of the sun as source of knowledge. Also, Bataille subjects the Oedipal thematic Surya detects to wild exaggeration in his philosophy and fiction, to the point where it is

radically destabilized. Although the biographical offers resources for Bataille's thinking, there is little sense on Surya's part of how these elements are transformed in the space of writing. What is lost, in particular, is any real sense of the strange humour of Bataille's writing. While he may not make us laugh, as Sartre argued, his laughter does disturb any serious approach to his work.

Surya is on stronger ground when discussing the most interesting period of Bataille's life, the 1930s. Biographical details of Bataille's relationships with such figures as Boris Souvarine and Simone Weil make vivid the stakes of his political engagement. Surya also devotes considerable discussion to settling, once and for all, the charge that Bataille's politics during this period were somehow tainted with fascism, despite their explicit anti-fascism. This makes it all the more ironic that one recent reviewer of this biography (Peter Conrad in the *Observer*) could not resist describing Bataille as 'possibly a fellow-travelling fascist'. In this case, a fascination with Bataille, albeit negative, blocks any recognition of the reality of what he actually did, said or wrote. Surya's patient attempts to rescue Bataille from these charges and from claims that his thinking is nihilistic are essential, but can make little headway against those who would peddle the clichés of the 'mad philosopher'.

After the excitement of the 1930s, which includes a great deal of tactfully described debauchery along with political engagement, comes what Surya concedes is the 'ebb' of the 1940s and 1950s. Although he wrote against the background of the experience of total war and then the Cold War, Bataille's life and writings display a growing sense of detachment. Surya is keen to stress that Bataille's political engagement did not end in 1939 but continued until 1953. However, this was not based in any practical political experiments and lacked the personal intensity of the 1930s. The 1950s were, instead, the time when Bataille consolidated his work, trying to establish it in a more definitive form. He founded the journal *Critique* to encourage eclectic research across disciplines, and published *The Accursed Share*, an attempt to systematize his earlier insights into expenditure. Here Surya could have taken the opportunity to contextualize Bataille's thinking more widely, rather than continuing his focus on Bataille's disputes with André Breton. The biographical certainly has dominance over the intellectual.

Ending with Bataille's death in 1962, Surya reiterates his argument that 'All his life Bataille wrote with his eye on death, thinking of anguish and of ecstasy; inflamed, fascinated by death.' While he recognizes

that Bataille did not regard death as a moment of closure, but instead of radical incompleteness, he does give weight to an interview Bataille gave to Madeleine Chapsal for *L'Express* in 1961. There Bataille said that death 'is what seems to me the most ridiculous thing in the world' and he talked of 'devouring death'. What Surya does not consider is how the radical incompleteness of death threatens his model of Bataille's life as bounded by birth and death. If death is not a moment of completion then Bataille 'lives on' after his own death. Bataille was a radically unconventional thinker who probed the unstable boundary between 'life' and 'work', but Surya has produced a remarkably conventional biography. Although his achievement is significant, and unlikely to be surpassed, his confidence in the biographical form appears misplaced.

Perhaps Bataille lives on and fascinates us because he is an acute representative of the twentieth century, with its mass production of corpses. Certainly Giorgio Agamben has argued that Bataille's thinking is 'useless to us' because, for him, it remains trapped within the limits of a Western thinking of death. What Bataille 'celebrates' with his joy before death is, simply, the horror of a meaningless death and our powerlessness before those who would decide who is worthy or unworthy of life. Has Bataille then been outrun by a capitalism that is more inventive and flexible than he could grasp? Transgression and death, valorized by Bataille, no longer seem to be threats to the existing order but lifestyle options for a bourgeoisie seeking new 'limit-experiences'. It is the radical incompleteness of Bataille's work that makes it available for appropriation, recuperation or 'reterritorialization' in these ways. At the same time this incompleteness also makes it slip from the grasp of such appropriations, and it is this paradox that Surya neglects. To paraphrase Bataille's comment on Nietzsche, it may be that 'Bataille's doctrine cannot be enslaved'. This, though, is far from evident and to establish it is a matter of struggle with those appropriations of Bataille that attempt to assimilate him to contemporary 'reality'. The importance of Surya's biography is, then, partly negative: it has exhausted a particular biographical approach to Bataille's works and suggests the limits of all biographical approaches to his work. If it cannot yield the secret of Bataille's fascination, it may be because this secret is not biographical. The struggle with death will continue then, this time *with* and *against* Bataille, but further along the path he has opened for us 'without reserve'.

Benjamin Noys

Aestheticism of nature

Sherry Weber Nicholzen, *The Love of Nature and the End of the World: The Unspoken Dimensions of Environmental Concern*, MIT Press, London and Cambridge MA, 2002. 216 pp., £19.50 hb., 0 262 14076 4.

This work seeks to reveal the underlying reasons for what it claims is a persisting equivocation in our attitudes to nature: that we both love it and remain largely indifferent to its destruction. Readers should be forewarned, however, that even if they agree that there is such a conflict of responses (or at least are prepared to consider it) they will not find any very sustained or cohesive engagement with the grounds for its existence. The author is a translator and writer on Adorno's aesthetics (though little is said on him here) and a practising analyst, and her main influences are either literary and artistic (Thoreau, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Gary Snyder, Cézanne are regularly cited) or psychoanalytic theorists. The work of Winnicott, Wilfred Bion and Donald Meltzer figures especially prominently, and, in so far as the book offers a conceptual framework for addressing the questions it raises, it is they who provide it. As one might expect, much is made of the legacy of childhood experience and the ways the mother-child relation – its intimacies, identifications, reciprocities, resented dependencies and ruptures – conditions and maps our subsequent responses to the natural environment. But Weber Nicholzen's purposes here are, on the whole, more therapeutic than explanatory. Her main aim, she tells us, is to provide a 'collage of meditations' that will evoke feelings and prompt reflection on aspects of our emotional experience with the natural world that are 'so deep and painful they often remain unspoken'.

Those, then, who are allergic to anything very 'primal', New Age or mother-child evocative in discourse about the environment might do well to skip this read. So, too, those who prefer the systematic to the suggestive, the definitive to the elliptical, and the ironic to the profound. Even those, however, who are more charitable to a project of this kind are likely to feel a little cheated of discussion of some of its major premisses. Weber Nicholzen acknowledges that it may be empirically problematic to insist that everyone feel an appreciative connection to nature even as they tend to ignore or abstract from its destruction. However, she believes it to be the case, and we are invited to take her word for it. Even if this is the case, can we also be expected so readily to go along with the apocalyptic presumption that we are all in denial of an environmental devastation that will bring

us to the 'end of the world'? Many will agree that environmental degradation is serious, progressive and potentially calamitous in its consequences. But this is hardly the universal view, and even those who do hold it will want to acknowledge there are now some countering forces, and more to the historical dialectic than Weber Nicholzen seems willing to admit. By implicitly dismissing all sceptical voices as if they were expressive of a Freudian negation, rather than an articulate opposition in need of persuasion, she detracts from the more serious consideration her case might otherwise receive.

We might ask, too, whether what is really most problematically at issue here is the death of nature and the repression of its pain rather than tolerance and adaptation to social and environmental exploitation. Even if we grant that there is much suppressed grief occasioned by the extinction of species and destruction of wilderness, we surely need to be concerned with the readiness of so many to accept and live with the political and economic consequences of the Western consumerist model. Viewed through this more politicized optic, the rhetoric that speaks of a generalized and collective 'end of the world' or 'death of nature' looks itself to be repressive or evasive of another and more likely denouement: that the affluent will continue to inherit the earth together with many of their more favoured species and places – and in doing so come to tolerate increasingly aggressive measures to protect 'overdevelopment' and hold off the influx of economic migrants and eco-refugees from less fortunate areas of the globe.

But readers who can get past, or agree to shelve, these larger issues may find something to engage them in the more particular questions raised in this book. There is, for example, an extended reflection on nature's ineffability and our silence in the face of it. We are referred here to Adorno's arresting – although surely contestable – point in his *Aesthetic Theory* that the disinclination to talk about natural beauty is 'strongest where love of it survives. The "How Beautiful" at the sight of landscape insults its silence and reduces its beauty.' And there are relevant and provocative citations in this context from a number of other authors. In the end, though, Weber Nicholzen's discussion is disappointing, mainly because it quickly

removes itself from any concern with the aesthetic motivations for silence, and comes to focus exclusively on its role as psychological self-protection. (What interests her primarily is our reluctance to talk of our environmental concerns, a silence that is treated as exemplary or a more general resistance to speaking about our profoundest loves and anxieties, and for which she provides a confusing array of explanations: that it is designed to protect the loved object, or to guard against betrayal of love, or to avoid madness...) She also leaves it unclear whether it would be a better thing if we did manage to become more voluble. But there are resonances here that an interested party can reflect upon.

Something similar can be said of the themes of Chapter 5. They relate to a recurring motif of the book concerning the differential impact of individual death and species extinction (the 'end of birth'), but are directed specifically to the psychological effects of confronting the possibility of wholesale planetary devastation. The argument here owes a good deal to

Robert Jay Lifton's account of the role of 'symbolic immortality' (the afterlife guaranteed by descendants, religious beliefs, cultural achievements and the natural world) in allowing us to come to terms with our individual mortality, and the prospect of its loss in the face of nuclear holocaust and ecological collapse. As suggested, one can question how helpful it is to think about our environmental situation in quite such apocalyptic terms, but the considerations raised here are important and worth attention. However, this only makes the concluding discussions of the book seem all the more woolly and feeble. For when Weber Nichol森 turns there to the question of possible remedies for our plight, she has little to offer but platitudes. 'Our capacity to meet the adaptive challenges we face will depend', she tells us, 'on our ability to collaborate effectively as thinking individuals'; while 'the wish for a clear and definitive answer to the question of what we should do reflects the urgency and anxiety we are prey to'. Could one disagree?

Kate Soper

Expunction

William Rehg and James Bohman, eds, *Pluralism and the Pragmatic Turn: The Transformation of Critical Theory. Essays in Honor of Thomas McCarthy*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2001. 464 pp., £16.50 pb., 0 262 6813 2 pb.

This collection of essays is largely concerned with exploring the ramifications of Thomas McCarthy's 'pragmatic' critique of Habermas's theory of communicative action. These could be formulated in terms of the following questions. How is critique possible once the strict formal presuppositions of Habermas's theory of communicative rationality are relaxed to allow for different perspectives within the communicative sphere? And what is the consequence of this admission for democratic theory?

The formal presuppositions or 'idealizations' of communicative action are fourfold for Habermas. Every communicative act involves the supposition of a common objective world to which the interlocutors refer. Subjects are accountable for their acts and omissions. Validity claims are unconditional in the sense that something is lost in the *sense* of propositions and ethical judgements if 'truth' and 'rightness' are construed as properties that they can lose. Discourse or argumentation theory represents the intersubjective forum for the justification of norms and ideals through

the 'decentring' of participants' perspectives. Taken together these comprise the formal-pragmatic presuppositions of communicative rationality. They are implicit in every action without for that reason being realized.

The collection begins with a helpful restatement of this theory through a contrastive exposition with Kant's theory of ideas. (Habermas calls it a 'genealogical' exposition of the idealizing presuppositions of communicative action, but it is unclear why.) Like Kantian ideas, the idealizations of communicative rationality have a twofold function: a 'norm-setting function' that enables critique, and a 'concealing function' that calls for vigilance and self-critique. Without these idealizations we lose the capacity to critique, although with them we constantly run the risk of lapsing into illusion through hypostatization.

The central question that this theory gives rise to – and it is a question that is taken up in the essays that immediately succeed it – is why Habermas views the transition from idealism to formal pragmatics as a

'de-transcendentalization' of reason? What a transcendental theory consists in is a contested notion that cannot be adequately developed here, but at least *one* important sense is the concern to distil the *pure* elements of reason and rationality which can then serve as the basis of a *general* (i.e. transhistorical and transcultural) theory of rationality. In this respect Habermas's theory of communicative rationality – in its concern to distil the pure elements of rationality that can serve as the formal presupposition of *any* communicative act regardless of context – appears to remain very much within the transcendental fold. This is notwithstanding what he says about the dissolution of Kantian oppositions (appearance/reality, transcendental/empirical) implied in the pragmatic turn.

Hereafter the contributions take up what William Rehg refers to as 'indexically sensitive idealizations' that participants find useful in their discursive activities. The problem could be put thus: if we give up on Habermas's attempt to distil the purely formal presuppositions of communicative rationality along with the project of a general theory of rationality and instead admit of no context-independent ideals underpinning communicative action, how are we to account for the possibility of critique?

While McCarthy himself demurs at bidding an irrevocable farewell to general theory, his former students, emboldened by Rorty's critique of communicative rationality, do not hesitate. Both Bohman and Rehg attempt to show how critique is possible having dispensed with context-independent idealizations. Bohman offers an 'interspectival' rather than 'transpectival' account of critique. Hitherto, according to Bohman, critical theory has sought to account for the possibility of critique in 'transpectival' terms. In other words, the superiority of critical theory over traditional theory was to be understood in epistemic terms – in its capacity to penetrate through to the core of social reality, while traditional theory splashed about in the realm of appearance. To cut a long story very short indeed, Bohman believes that something of the transpectival conception survives in Habermas's theory, particularly in the residual metaphysical realism in his consensus theory of truth as criticized by Rorty.

Bohman explicates the interspectival conception of critique as a second-person standpoint that mediates between first- and third-person perspectives. First-person perspectives yield cultural self-interpretations that serve to render explicit what is already in some sense known in a practical and proximate

way. Third-person perspectives, on the other hand, produce 'objective' descriptions and explanatory theories. Neither perspective, however, represents an adequate basis for critique: first-person perspectives, because they simply render explicit what was implicit and are powerless to generate *new* norms and ideals; third-person perspectives because they remain trapped in the epistemological delusion that we *can* arrive at warranted access to the world. Instead of taking interpretation and explanation as mutually exclusive social scientific methodologies, Bohman recommends that we consider them as 'dual perspectives' within a critical social theory. When we adopt a second-person 'dialogical' perspective, theories and interpretations are dramatized and enacted. Norms and ideals that were previously perceived statically from first- and third-person perspectives are now viewed as emerging from a dialogical process between social scientist or critic and her prospective audience. In other words, Bohman seeks to salvage the notion of critique, which threatens to evaporate altogether as a result of the rejection of context-independent idealizations, through a Gadamerian critical hermeneutics.

Critical hermeneutics is probably the right direction in which to head to account for the possibility of critique, although not in the highly idealized sense that Bohman is advocating. The problem with Bohman's account – like so many post-Habermasian accounts – is that it tends to presuppose an operative, politically functioning public sphere as the precondition of its communicative reconstruction, delivering critical consensus on a range of issues of immediate public concern. Phenomena like the de-activation or 'privatization' of the modern individual and the collapse of the *actual* (albeit restricted) public sphere that was the *bourgeois* public sphere of classical liberalism, which used to exercise critical theorists, have mysteriously vanished and been replaced by a vital public sphere eager to fathom its own normative underpinnings. Bohman is able to ignore a good deal of the concerns of 'traditional' critical theory by dismissing its objectivist pretensions. But this is hugely problematic. Does he really want to suggest that all critical theory from Marx to Habermas is metaphysically realist in orientation – seeing its essential difference and superiority to traditional social theory in the cognitive access it secures to social reality in itself, rather than how it appears to the situated observer? To say this would be a gross mischaracterization of 'traditional' critical theory that completely ignores its relationship to ideal-

ism and overstates the importance of Rorty's naturalizing-pragmatic critique of traditional epistemology.

The charge of idealizing the public sphere and refusing to think its historical collapse could be levelled *a fortiori* at the position set out by William Rehg. Like Bohman, Rehg is concerned to account for the possibility of critique having admitted an ineliminable perspectivism into the communicative sphere. Unlike Bohman, however, who links the possibility of critique to the possibility of 'new' and 'better' interpretations resulting from dialogue, Rehg seeks to understand critique in terms of an ever-widening public that the social scientist addresses. Thus he distinguishes between mere 'laboratory talk', in which the background suppositions ensuring successful communication are many; 'locality-transcendent' claims, in which scientists subject their arguments to peer review; and finally 'context-transcendent' claims, in which scientists address scientists from other fields or even the lay public itself. Scientific claims, he holds, are subject to their 'severest test' and process of justification when they are addressed to the general public and their background suppositions are reduced to a minimum. Thus the conception of critique emerges as a kind of 'democratic validation' of scientific claims in which the onus is on the scientist/expert to couch her argument in terms that a lay audience can understand and thereby engage with. Rehg points to the public criticism to which research into the AIDS virus was subject as a case in point.

The shortcomings of this account of the possibility of critique hardly need stating. What, one wonders, would be Rehg's response to the all too imaginable prospect of the context-transcending claim of the scientist being met with indifference? While doubtless there are pockets of political activism in contemporary public life over issues pertaining to gender, sexuality and environment, these tend to be the exception rather than the rule. What happens when the scientist or critic doesn't have an audience to whom to address the claim? I think the real mistake here is to suppose that context can do all the work in restoring the public realm. What is missing is any account of how the intellectual division of labour that structures knowledge is implicated in the process of social fragmentation and the loss of meaning, anomie and nihilism that this entails.

The political ramifications of a further or fully pragmatized reason lie in a more intransigent pluralism than Habermas's consensus theory could have admitted. This would seem to favour a Rawlsian conception

of justice over a Habermasian one because of its indifference to individual and essentially private conceptions of the good. The essays collected in section three of the volume for the most part explore this possibility. Andrew Buchwalter recommends Hegel's political pluralism over Rawls's. Seyla Benhabib offers a critique of the Kantian conception of a cosmopolitan right as an inadequate basis for defending the claims of refugees and asylum seekers to political participation. The one exception is Axel Honneth's essay on Dewey and the 'logic of fanaticism'. Drawing on Dewey's account of the rise of nationalism and, later, fascism in Germany, Honneth stages the relation between pragmatism and idealism in more fruitful ways than was possible in section one, with its over-reliance on the naturalistic pragmatism of Rorty.

The principal dissonant note, however, is struck by Joel Whitebook in the essays collected in section two on conceptions of autonomy and the self. Whitebook gives a trenchant critique of the 'intersubjectivist turn' of Habermasian and post-Habermasian critical theory, singling out Habermas and Honneth and their reliance on George Herbert Mead's social psychology in their respective concepts of recognition. Whitebook, in my view rightly, argues that the consequence of the attempt to socialize the subject 'all the way down' is the loss of a good deal of radical and revolutionary potential in critical theory. Might not the inability to see anything other than different shades of liberalism on the political horizon have something to do with the predominance of the 'intersubjectivist paradigm' over the last thirty years and the success with which it has met in effectively expunging the concept of negativity from social theory?

Timothy Hall

Defensive work

Jonathan Joseph, *Hegemony: A Realist Analysis*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002. 240 + xii pp., £60.00 hb., 0 415 26836 2.

Hegemony: A Realist Analysis has, as its title indicates, two closely related aims. First, it hopes to present an account of the principal theories of hegemony, as well as a range of hegemonic practices, in such a way as to distil from them a new concept of hegemony that is not only useful politically but also scientific. In this sense, *Hegemony* works through processes of

historical recovery, critical engagement and conceptual discipline. Second, it enters into a dialogue with Roy Bhaskar's account of critical realism within the social sciences, and in particular his overall theoretical approximation to society contained in the idea of the 'transformational model of social activity' (TMSA), so as to endow the scientific concept of hegemony with a critical realist stamp and, thereby, reflect on the relations between Marxist and realist materialisms.

These critical aims presuppose each other and sometimes work well in tandem, as when, for example, Joseph 'rescues' Gramsci from his 'Italian voluntarist' milieu (and the influence of Machiavelli, Croce, Labriola, Sorel et al.) – that is, from an idealist philosophy of history – and reinvents him as a 'realist' political thinker. For the most part, however, Joseph's first aim endlessly stumbles over his second, defining the style and tenor of the book, as well as the exhausting experience of its reading. It is at times dogmatic, and relentlessly accumulative, rather than probing, in its subjection of all to the same realist criticism. As the work engages with hegemony in-theory-and-practice (in the work of Williams, Thompson, Anderson and Nairn, Althusser, Poulantzas, Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe, and Habermas, among others) its arguments repeatedly run into the wall of merely asserted critical realist postulates. This is particularly so in the series of binarisms generated by the opposition between the intransitive and transitive realms that is constitutive of critical realism as a conception of 'science', and that here comes to organize and define the new, scientific concept of hegemony as a combination of a 'hegemony 1' (of 'deep' structural reproduction) and a 'hegemony 2' (of 'surface' political and cultural projects). From this perspective, hegemony is an *emergence* into surface agency of structural possibility – a nice idea, poorly argued.

In Joseph's view, critical realism endows the concept of hegemony with the ontological depth which it had lacked: the social as a stratified combinatory of structures and causal mechanisms. And it is the addition of the idea of hegemony 1 to the more common historical notion of hegemony 2 that fulfils this scientific function. However, there is no real explanation of how causal mechanisms and deep structures work, in what sense they exist independently of social practices, and how they are more or less unconsciously reproduced. And although there are references to the historical effects of unintended consequences and to the abstract

character of deep structures (at one point the idea of 'mode of production' itself is given as an example of a causal mechanism), no real explanations are given – we are just repeatedly told, on almost every page, in the midst of every philosophical argument (against idealism, humanism, structuralism, deconstruction, discourse theory, praxis ontology), of their determinate effects and existence and how they 'must' or 'should' be taken into account. It is as if – and he is clearly aware of this – the reproductive slant of Joseph's account of hegemony has to be asserted as a critical imperative because in fact such a necessary structural attribute of endurance over time threatens to make the very concept of hegemony itself unnecessary.

Hegemony does nevertheless touch on a series of questions of enduring interest: the historical origins of the concept of hegemony in the perceived experiences and political effects of uneven development, not only in the Russia of Lenin and Trotsky but also in the Italy of Gramsci (the Southern question); the hypostatization of 'political revolution' around the French model in the work of Perry Anderson on the underdevelopment of the English bourgeoisie and proletariat, and the effects this has on thinking 'social revolution'; the significance of Poulantzas's late attempt to de-fetishize the concept of the state within the Marxist tradition for a renewed concept of hegemony that might rethink state form. Because it is the scientific status of the concept of hegemony that is the prime concern, however, none of these issues is really developed.

In this sense *Hegemony* is a defensive work. On the one hand, it defends the continued usefulness and relevance of hegemony at a moment in which its privileged terrain of operations – the modern nation-state – would seem to be on the wane due to the tendential transnationalization of capital accumulation and its juridico-political conditions. On the other, it actively retreats from the consequences of Bhaskar's transformational model of social activity. Joseph realizes that in subjecting the intransitive domain of the social to the transformative effects of human practice, Bhaskar must reground his critical realism anew. He did so as a philosophy of history whose negative logic is a dialectical unfolding of freedom. Bhaskar's work thus became, from the point of view of this political critical realist, merely idealist. But without an alternative model of structural social transformation, geared to emancipation, what is a critical concept of hegemony for?

John Kraniauskas