

'The man hit the woman'

Jean-Jacques Lecercle and Denise Riley, *The Force of Language*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2004. vii + 186 pp., £50.00 hb., 1 4039 4248 X.

Carol Sanders, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004. xii + 303 pp., £45.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 0521 80051 X hb., 0521 80486 8 pb.

The Force of Language is a Napoleonic book, short and ambitious. In the very first pages Lecercle promises us a new philosophy of language, and he reminds us throughout of both his promise and the fact that its fulfilment will be 'utterly unpalatable to mainstream linguistics and current philosophies of language'. As if that weren't enough to accomplish in 170 pages, once you begin reading you realize that this new thinking about language implies a new style of writing about it as well. Lecercle thinks Chomsky's notorious 'the man hit the ball' is a terrible place to start when theorizing about language: the slogan and the literary work, not the simple declarative sentence, are far more typical and useful as paradigms. It is therefore apt that slogans and poetic writing are the authors' chosen instruments as well as their chosen objects.

Actually, this is not clear when you begin reading; it only gradually dawns on you. Lecercle's Introduction is straightforward enough, calling our attention to the kind of linguistic phenomena – jokes, expressions of affect, poetry – that are beyond the ken of Noam and Ferdinand. But after that we are launched (and launched, as we are talking of affect, is exactly how it feels) into Part I, written by Riley alone, an evocative, densely metaphorical, 'literary' discussion of inner speech and 'bad words' (i.e. insulting, injurious speech). A characteristic discussion of the colonization of inner speech gives you the flavour of it:

For inner speech is no limpid stream of consciousness, crystalline from its uncontaminated source in Mind, but a sludgy thing, thickened with reiterated quotation, choked with the rubble of the overheard, the strenuously sifted and hoarded, the periodically dusted down then crammed with slogans and jingles, with mutterings of remembered accusations, irrepressible puns, insistent spirits of ancient exchanges, monotonous citation, the embarrassing detritus of advertising, archaic injunctions from hymns, and the pastel snatches of old song lyrics.

These sixty pages are full of interesting ideas, but the evidence for Riley's theory of inner speech is largely introspective, and the writing mixes conceptual

argument with – shrewdly judged – rhetorical gestures and metaphorical excursions.

We need a bit of help figuring out where inner speech fits into the grand plan and what we should be taking away from Riley's compelling prose. And help is promptly at hand: Part II, written by Lecercle alone, begins by quoting passages from Riley and proceeding to a critical explication of what Riley has laid out in her own elegant terms, including a *post hoc* explanation of why her chosen topics are critical to the new philosophy of language. 'Bad words' are apparently the best place to start such a philosophy, and much, much better than men hitting balls, because they have force, because they wound, and because they reveal the essentially agonistic nature of language.

Even better than bad words are the writings of literary madmen, a few of whose ravings Lecercle then discusses in order to draw out their useful 'intuitions about how language works and the way literature is constituted'. A brief critique of Chomsky, who is appointed chief representative of the 'mainstream' philosophy of language (the term 'mainstream' does an awful lot of work in this book), leads us finally to Lecercle's sketch for a new philosophy of language, now made more concrete as a 'Marxist form of pragmatics'.

Yet we don't really get a new philosophy of language, unless you think that attaching a few predicates to the concept of language amounts to a philosophy. Lecercle first characterizes his view of language by simply laying out six properties ascribed to language by Chomsky and Co. (immanence, functionality, transparency, ideality, systematicity and synchrony) and insisting on six counter-principles, which the reader can probably figure out for him- or herself. Obviously an alternative account of language has to be more than the bare negation of what you disagree with, and the final chapter is accordingly devoted to the 'concept of language we need'. But this concept turns out to be four theses that essentially condense the earlier six: language, it turns out, is historical, social, material and political.

To be fair, Lecerclé makes some effort to flesh out these claims. Language is historical in the sense that it can only be understood as the ‘sedimented aggregate of past and present political struggles’; social in the sense that it is the bearer of ideology and the instrument of our interpellation; material in its imbrication with the labouring body; political in that it is a vehicle of imperialism and class struggle. Nevertheless, Lecerclé does not transcend the polemical starting point of his argument: in the end we are left with a set of ‘slogans’ no less abstract than the suppositions they’re meant to counter. It’s not just that these slogans are never woven together into a theory of language capable of explaining and describing the force and meaning of utterances (or whatever other unit of analysis is deemed relevant). The big problem is that Lecerclé writes as if insisting that language is political, social and the rest of it in and of itself created a Marxist philosophy of language. It is, however, perfectly possible for a non-Marxist to make the same claims, and many non-Marxist linguists do so all the time. One would be hard-pressed, in fact, to find a linguist (Chomsky aside) who disagreed with the central contention that language is a social practice: Saussure spent a good part of his lectures on general linguistics insisting on this very point.

The difference should surely be that a Marxist account of language explains the force and significance of language in terms of the history and structure of capitalist societies, in terms of the particular institutional complexity that characterizes those societies and the political force-field that distends them. Just saying societies are agonistic and that language is embedded in institutions isn’t enough. (Lecerclé is uncomfortably aware that the agonistic conception of politics he adheres to finds its ultimate expression in Carl Schmitt, not Karl Marx.) Furthermore, as a practice or institution itself, language might have a developmental history of its own, just like labour and politics; maybe the force of language itself is transformed, in a manner we can evaluate as well as describe. Ironically, it’s probably Habermas, one of the Bad, Abstract Guys in Lecerclé’s universe, who has come closest to this kind of theory. While there is a great deal to disagree with in the substance of Habermas’s theory of communicative action, methodologically it does what a Marxist theory of discourse ought to do: it situates the order of discourse within the recent history of capitalist society, and attends in particular to the way in which the formal structures of discourse themselves have had to change and develop. By contrast, what Lecerclé offers is less a Marxist pragmatics than a philosophical anthropology of language, which sketches out the

structures of linguistic praxis that make possible its historical development, what Honneth and Joas once described as ‘the unchanging preconditions of human changeableness’.

Yet if the book doesn’t deliver on a promise it might have been rash to make, it nevertheless delivers. What really inspires and intrigues the authors is Althusser’s foray into anthropology, the theory of interpellation. Lecerclé’s suggested elaboration of the theory, albeit drawn from an earlier book, is useful. But the most striking innovation is found in Riley’s opening chapters, which, perhaps not surprisingly, fit somewhat awkwardly into the book’s grand scheme. She cleverly shows that inner speech can be the lever for a general revision of both the concept of interpellation and the mechanics of insult and injury. Inner speech, as she has described it in the paragraph quoted above, is the mechanism whereby the subject performs an ‘autoventriloquy’, speaking to itself ‘spontaneously’ in a language brought into it from beyond. Her analysis of bad words builds on this idea, using defence against insult and hate speech as a test case for the exercise of resistance to interpellation. It’s the power of this kind of speech that theorists like Habermas are unable to account for, and Riley deftly uses the opportunity to illustrate the weaknesses of any pragmatics too dependent on a utopian concept of intersubjectivity. Although the ideas she hazards need further testing and explication, she has nonetheless made an original and bold effort to take insults and hate speech seriously as language, rather than as its deformation, and to think through the theoretical consequences.

The polemical abstraction of Lecerclé’s argument makes you wonder whether anyone actually holds the views he ascribes to the notorious mainstream philosophy of language. If the *Cambridge Companion to Saussure* is anything to go by, even the father of all that is structuralist did not. Even more interestingly, it turns out that the father of structuralism is not its real father at all, but more a benign uncle who has been blamed for all the mischief caused by his would-be progeny. This correction of the received intellectual genealogy is just one of the virtues of the *Cambridge Companion to Saussure*. Publishers’ catalogues these days are like matchmakers: all they seem to want to do is sell you a ‘companion’. But this *Cambridge Companion* does exactly what it says on the tin: it’s just what you need to have to hand on those lonely nights you spend ploughing through the *Course in General Linguistics*. First, because so many of the people who read and discuss the *Course* (like the author of this review) have no professional training

in linguistics. Second, because the *Course* itself, like Saussure's career, is a strange, composite thing, a work put together by two colleagues from Saussure's occasional written notes and the extensive notes taken by students of his lectures on general linguistics between 1907 and 1911.

The various sections of the *Companion* provide, respectively, an account of the intellectual context in which Saussure developed, analysis of the editorial practice that produced the course and of how certain key issues are dealt with within it, a series of studies on the dissemination and influence of the text in the decades following its publication, and a careful thinking through of the consequences Saussure's work has for the further development of linguistics, semiotics and the philosophy of science. Nearly all the contributions display just the right mix of philological thoroughness and theoretical rigour. What's particularly useful for the reader of Saussure is the care taken to interpret the mosaic of the *Course* through the prism of both the now-published notes to the lectures on general linguistics and the recently published *Écrits de linguistique générale* (Gallimard, 2002), which includes a long manuscript on the 'double essence of language' from 1894 (and if the mixed metaphor of a mosaic seen through a prism makes your head spin, that is my point).

One after the other, contributors draw attention to the unresolved ambiguities of the *Course*, sedimented in the conceptual pairs (*langue/parole*, synchrony/diachrony, arbitrary/motivated, and so on) for which the *Course* is best known. As is so often the case, Saussure's brilliance lay less in the ready-to-wear usefulness of his concepts than in their determinate fuzziness, the way in which their ambiguities continually focus our attention on the key questions facing the modern philosophy and empirical study of language. Principal of these is his concept of language itself, or rather that aspect of language that should be the object of linguistics, the language structure or *la langue*; the concept of the sign itself, arbitrary or relatively motivated, runs a close second. The epistemological and ontological issues raised by the former crop up in virtually every contribution, but they receive particular, sustained attention in articles on the philosophy of

science by Christopher Norris, on the *langue/parole* dichotomy by W. Terrence Gordon, on Saussure's genuine interest in the study of discourse by Simon Bouquet, and on value and arbitrariness by Claude Normand. John Joseph's excellent discussion of the theory of the sign is complemented by Geoffrey Benington's model explication, perfectly lucid and subtle, of Derrida's critique of Saussure in *Of Grammatology*. In all these discussions the issue isn't whether language is social or historical, but what that amounts to and what consequences it has for linguistics.

Naturally, these complexities become yet more evident and awkward in the use made of Saussure's



writings by those who come after him. Julia Falk's article on American linguistics points out that Saussure had very little influence on the American scene until Jakobson forced him onto it in the early 1940s, at which point American linguists decided they were structuralists rather than descriptivists. Jakobson also occupies centre stage in Stephen Hutchings's account of the Russian reception of Saussure, far too much of the stage in fact, in so far as Hutchings doesn't discuss the efforts of a number of important, left-wing Russian linguists to adapt Saussure to Soviet cultural politics in the 1920s, efforts that have been the object of much interesting work in the last few years. Two contributions on European interpretations of Saussure by linguists (Christian Puech's chapter) and 'structuralists' (Stephen Ungar's chapter) point up how easy it was for this composite theory to be rerouted in so many different directions.

The lesson here is not that Saussure remains the horizon within which even Marxist linguists must work. It is that 'the class struggle in theory' may not be the best rallying call or model for intellectuals

of the Left. It encourages a sloganeering concept of theory-building, and an abstract relationship with what used to be called 'bourgeois' science. Saussure put the conventionalism of language centre stage, with all the problems that idea entailed. If his notion of the social character of language was consensual yet authoritarian, and his account of its history unpersuasive, it had less to do with his misunderstanding of language than with his misunderstanding of European history and society. Getting past or beyond him demands a new history of language as much as a new concept of it.

Ken Hirschkop

The Hegel to come

Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth Doring, with Preface by Jacques Derrida, trans. Joseph D. Cohen, Routledge, London and New York: 2005. xlix + 240 pp., £60.00 hb., 18.99 pb., 0 415 28720 0 hb., 0 415 28721 9 pb.

This translation of Malabou's book (originally published in French in 1996) is extremely welcome. It will be of interest not only to anglophone Hegel scholars but also to a broader post-Heideggerian philosophical community concerned with questions about time, history and future(s). The book is also of note because it is 'prefaced' by Jacques Derrida, who provides a thoughtful, typically provocative commentary on its themes, perhaps best read after reading Malabou herself, rather than before. Malabou's argument concerns the dual question of whether Hegel offers a way of thinking the future, that is to say 'to see what is coming' (*voir venir*), and whether there is any future in reading Hegel. Her answer to both of these questions is 'yes'.

Malabou begins with an explicit statement of how she will read Hegel and ends with a return to the question of reading. In truly Hegelian fashion, what is introduced abstractly and dogmatically in the introductory remarks is elaborated and demonstrated in the course of the argument itself to produce a systematic interpretation. The key to the interpretation is the concept of *plasticity*, which Malabou defines as the simultaneous capacity to give and to receive form. Malabou does not suggest that the concept of plasticity is a major focus of Hegel's philosophical work, though she points to the ways in which it appears and is defined within his texts. Nevertheless, she claims that Hegel's concept of plasticity provides a key insight into his accounts of nature, spirit and thought:

Elevated into its speculative truth, the relation between subject and predicates is characterized by 'plasticity'. Within the process of self-determination, the universal (the substance) and particular (the accidents as something independent) give form to each other through a dynamic like that at play in the 'plastic individualities'. The process of self-determination is the unfolding of the substance-subject.

This quotation exemplifies the way in which Malabou reads Hegel throughout her text. Unusually for much contemporary Hegel scholarship, Malabou takes Hegel at his word and reads the *Encyclopaedia* texts as the summative statement of his system, although her argument does sometimes draw on other texts, including *Faith and Knowledge*, the *Science of Logic* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. She goes on to elaborate on the idea of plasticity as the key to Hegel's future in an engagement with three stages of Hegel's argument in the *Encyclopaedia Philosophy of Spirit*, which form the tripartite structure of her book.

In Part I, 'Hegel on Man: Fashioning a Second Nature', Malabou interprets Hegel's anthropology via his interpretation of Aristotle, and argues for the crucial role of habit in the self-fashioning of spirit in, through and from nature into 'man'. In this Greek schematization, plasticity is read teleologically as the movement from accidents to substance, a movement exemplified in the Greek art of sculpture. In Part II, 'Hegel on God: The Turn of Double Nature', Malabou contests the theologians' reading of his account of the death of God in Hegel's discussion of 'Revealed Religion', which, they argue, necessitates a foreclosure of the future that undermines the meaning of God's infinite promise. Instead, she puts forward the argument that Hegel's discussion of 'Revealed Religion' explores the different future of plasticity to be found both in the God of Protestant Christianity and in the Kantian transcendental subject. Here teleological time gives way to linear time, the mode of synthesis of the transcendental imagination.

The Greek concept of 'form-creation' ... assumes that self-determination is to be thought in terms of becoming essential of the accident which finds representation in the 'exemplary individual'. On the other hand, the modern concept of plasticity seems to join itself with a concept of self-determination conceived as the becoming accidental of essence, the very development in which the fundamental significance of the Incarnation is expressed.

In Part III, 'Hegel on the Philosopher or, Two Forms of the Fall', Malabou interprets Hegel's notion of 'Absolute Knowledge' as bringing together the insights

offered by Greece and modernity (in its Christian and Kantian forms). This is the meaning of speculative philosophy, which, rather than schematizing experience from a Greek or transcendental temporality, schematizes from the crossroads of teleological and linear time, a time in which plasticity is understood in terms of the impossibility of privileging the 'accidental' or the 'essential' in the ongoing self-fashioning of thought, spirit and nature. The concluding sections of the book demonstrate how seriously Malabou takes Hegel's notion of the speculative proposition as a matter of dynamic reading, in which the universal, particular and singular elements of the syllogism are perpetually reordered as the reader opens him or herself to the 'plasticity' of language and therefore also of doing and being.

Within all three parts of the text, Malabou offers highly sophisticated analysis of Hegel's work, engages with critics of Hegel and, as Derrida notes in his Preface, develops her own (highly expressive) rhetorical idiom as a specific, contestable, rendering of Hegel's future. I found myself very much in agreement with large parts of Malabou's argument, and was particularly impressed by her reading of the anthropological sections in the *Philosophy of Spirit*, which is illuminating about how to grasp the connection between nature and spirit in Hegel's work. Her exposition of the role of habit in both human and non-human animal life makes clear how spirit is necessarily inter-implicated with nature even as it breaks with it. This is a case in which the metaphor of plasticity and Malabou's repeated insistence on its capacity to mean both the solidification and rupture of form seem particularly apposite. However, Malabou's analysis is one which is very much oriented towards contesting readings of Hegel's philosophy in which the 'end of history' entails the meaninglessness of the concept of 'future'. In particular Malabou's analysis is one which has Heidegger's dismissal of Hegel's 'levelling out of time' in its sights. This particular anticipatory structure (*voir venir*) has distinct implications for the readers of the book, some of whom will have read Hegel through either Heidegger or later poststructuralist critics, but many of whom won't. I want to go on to suggest that these different readerships are likely to identify rather different strengths and weaknesses in the book.

Malabou is fond of pointing out that plasticity as a term may refer both to solidity and rupture, and she draws the reader's attention to the meaning of plastic as, among other possibilities, *explosive*. This metaphor is deployed against readings of Hegel which claim that the future as difference is unthinkable in terms of

Hegel's system. However, it is clear that even explosions 'emerge'; they do not come out of nowhere. As Malabou herself puts it:

Plasticity designates the future understood as future within closure, the possibility of a structural transformation: a transformation of structure within structure, a mutation 'right at the level of the form'.

I have no quarrel with this understanding of the future as open in its closure within Hegel's thought, but it is hard to see how this argument genuinely responds to Heidegger's critique of Hegel, which looks to a different understanding of time, and which would be likely to see Malabou as reiterating Hegel's historicist error in her account of speculative thought as the synthesis of Greek and modern temporality. In addition, I share Derrida's doubts, expressed in his Preface, that Malabou's reading of Hegel permits an understanding of the accidental in terms of that which may or may not be foreseen or explained. As Malabou herself shows, Hegel's conception of time is a time which changes, but it is a time which changes in the inter-implication of thought, spirit and nature, and which in effect conditions its own intelligibility in retrospect, even if the future comes as a surprise. From a Derridean point of view, this way of thinking about time and thought is too holistic in its grasp, it holds too much of the future already to fit with an anticipatory structure in which, as Derrida puts it, the death of God could have been genuinely accidental. Here Derrida's reading of Malabou incisively demonstrates the difficulty of accommodating Hegel's argument to any ways of thinking in which a trace of transcendence (that which cannot be thought) remains.

From the point of view of readers of Malabou such as myself, who come to the text already persuaded by 'open' interpretations of Hegel, her plastic reading will be both acceptable and to some extent familiar. For this readership, Malabou provides rich support for the continuing relevance of Hegel's work to questions of time and change. And her use of the concept of plasticity provides a very helpful way of thinking about the substance-subject in Hegel's thought. The problem with Malabou's account for this audience is likely to stem more from its selectivity and abstraction. In taking Hegel's systemic version of his philosophy in the *Encyclopaedia* as her starting point, and concentrating on three specific moments within the *Philosophy of Spirit*, Malabou's interpretation gains in clarity, but risks a certain dogmatism. In particular, this seemed to me to be a problem with her reading of 'Revealed Religion', which stated her interpretation as

the inverse of the Aristotelian anthropological dynamic rather than demonstrating it in detail. This abstractness paradoxically results in a rather impoverished account of what it might mean to think the future in Hegelian terms in the closing passages of the book. In her conclusion, Malabou speaks of the economy of the future in terms of the possibility of new events, but can say very little, because she hasn't explicitly thematized how and why the dynamic of plasticity changes, even though we know that the change has to be understood

as self-change. To describe this change in terms of self-change is surely right in Hegelian terms, but it does not exhaust what may be said about the complex relative identities of thought, nature and spirit as plastic. Having said this, it is perhaps unreasonable to expect Malabou to accomplish more than she has done, which is to provide a fresh and compelling reiteration of the case for Hegel's future.

Kimberley Hutchings

A reduction short of the truth

Jean-Pierre Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth: Neuroscience and Human Knowledge*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise, Cambridge MA and London: Belknap–Harvard, 2004. 336 pp., £29.95 hb., 0 674 01283 6.

There is something comical about the spectacle of philosophers – oblivious to the lessons of history in this regard – expending vast resources of time and energy trying to tell science what it cannot do. So it is amusing to observe just how many contemporary philosophers feel duty bound to draw a line in the sand where the status of consciousness is concerned, as if to tell science: this far and no farther. This is a move as hopeless now as it was some 150 years ago when it was made with regard to the idea of 'life'. But while philosophers busy themselves contriving ever more sophisticated proofs of why science will never be able to explain human sentience, neuroscience continues its implacable advance toward the citadel of consciousness. Despite the superstitious braying of assorted anti-reductionist witch doctors, 'consciousness' – like 'life' before it – will succumb to science, and sooner rather than later if the work of the neurobiologist Jean-Pierre Changeux is anything to go by. Director of the Pasteur Institute's Laboratory of Molecular Neurobiology (a discipline of which he is widely acknowledged to be the founder), and a self-proclaimed adept of Bachelard's *materialisme instruit* ('learned materialism'), Changeux is a serene and unrepentant exponent of scientific reductionism calmly engaged in vivisectioning consciousness so as to expose the mechanisms of sentience.

Changeux's scientific reputation rests principally on several important discoveries concerning molecular and cellular receptor mechanisms in the nervous system. These have provided the basis for a neurobiological model of the epigenesis of neural networks operating through the selective stabilization of synapses; a model which extends the selectionist schema to higher brain

functions and marks a significant advance in the explanation of consciousness. At the centre of Changeux's current research lies the 'neuronal workspace hypothesis', which proposes a model of the unitary integration of distributed neural processing and may well turn out to be the first detailed neural network architecture capable of carrying out conscious tasks. Yet Changeux remains commendably circumspect about its import vis-à-vis any so-called 'science of consciousness'. Thus the neuronal workspace hypothesis 'does not aim at solving the problem of consciousness ... or pretend to account for all of [its] experimentally identified characteristics'. But, despite these diplomatic caveats, Changeux's underlying confidence resurfaces a few pages later when he unabashedly observes that 'the day when the autonomy of consciousness can be given a neuronal explanation may not be as far off as is generally supposed'.

If we set aside those philosophers who simply ignore science altogether, there are basically two philosophical strategies available to those who would dismiss Changeux's neurobiological programme: the 'explanatory gap' strategy and the functionalist strategy. The 'explanatory gap' strategy claims that no neurophysiological facts about the brain can be relevant when it comes to explaining 'what it is like to be' (Nagel) conscious. The data of first-person phenomenological experience cannot possibly be accounted for by facts about neurological processes. No amount of information about the latter can suffice to explain the former. This well-worn strategy, recently revitalized by David Chalmers and his followers (for instance, David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, Oxford University Press,

Oxford, 1996), relies on letting the putative subject of conscious experience define the constitutive characteristics of the phenomenon called ‘consciousness’. These characteristics are then deemed to provide the phenomenal data to which neuroscience is accountable. Once this move has been allowed, there is nothing to prevent the stubborn anti-reductionist from perpetually refining the ‘essentially constitutive’ features of conscious experience in such a way as to ensure that there will always be a mysterious residuum forever eluding neuroscientific grasp. The only sure way of circumventing this potentially interminable shifting of the goal posts is simply to refuse the initial premiss: there is no reason to accept the claim that the subject of conscious experience (the ‘conscious self’) enjoys incorrigible epistemic authority when it comes to characterizing the salient features of his or her own ‘consciousness’ – particularly if, as Thomas Metzinger has persuasively argued, there are no such things as ‘selves’ in the first place (Thomas Metzinger, *Being No-One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2004). It may well be that there is no single unitary phenomenon corresponding to what pre-theoretical common sense calls ‘consciousness’; no real feature of the world underlying the variety of different ways in which the word is used. On this view, it is simply a mistake to assume that the use of a word provides a reliable index of a real phenomenon. Thus neuroscience is not obliged to let phenomenological common sense stipulate the defining features of all those phenomena which we perhaps erroneously group together under the single heading of ‘consciousness’. One of the most valuable aspects of the work of philosophers like Dennett, the Churchlands and Metzinger, is its exposure and critique of the pernicious assumptions underlying the explanatory gap strategy.

Functionalism, although a good deal less reverential about ‘consciousness’, and considerably less defensive in its attitude towards reductionism, is nevertheless also liable to be dismissive of Changeux’s neurobiological agenda. Jerry Fodor, for instance, has argued that neurological data have no real bearing on the problem of understanding sapience: on this view, *where* things happen in the brain is irrelevant until you understand what they’re for (Jerry Fodor, ‘Let Your Brain Alone’, *London Review of Books*, vol. 21, no. 19, 30 September 1999; available at www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n19/fodo01_.html). Knowing where a carburettor is located will not illuminate your understanding of how an engine works unless you know what an engine is for and how its subcomponents are functionally related to one another.

Thus functionalists insist that cognitive architecture is non-isomorphic with neural architecture, and can be investigated independently of the latter. The thesis of substrate independence, which implies that cognitive functions can be understood independently of their neural vehicles, follows from a computational idealization of cognition and licenses the functionalist’s disregard for neurological details about how the brain actually processes information. Changeux’s work, insisting as it does on the ‘fundamental relationship between anatomy and function’, challenges this stance. Knowing the location of the carburettor may not be enough on its own when it comes to understanding how an engine works; but knowing it is connected to an inlet port will surely have some bearing on our understanding of its contribution to the overall functioning. Neurobiologically accurate accounts of modular functioning can be used to build up a realistic model of integrated global functioning; models which may challenge computational idealizations. Changeux points to the visual system: it exemplifies a model of functional organization in which horizontally distributed (‘bottom-up’) parallel networks are integrated with vertically nested (‘top-down’) hierarchical structures in a way that stymies the facile distinction between physical hardware and cognitive software, and by implication (though Changeux does not say so) not only straightforward functionalism but also Dennett’s claim (in *Consciousness Explained*) that the brain’s connectionist architecture merely provides a vehicle for the mind’s serial computational software. Changeux’s book is replete with this kind of empirical detail, which can be daunting for the lay reader, but also profoundly instructive, as when he lays waste to Steven Pinker’s simplistic genetic determinism about linguistic capacity by explaining how the relationship between individual genes and their role in cognitive functioning is mediated by non-linear neurological mechanisms, which may either dampen or amplify the gene’s expressive relevance depending on a complex array of variables. Here, as elsewhere, Changeux is at his most instructive when simply detailing the intricate neurobiological mechanisms which make of the brain an ‘open, motivated, and self-organizing system’.

Yet, despite Changeux’s impressive roll-call of philosophical references (the list includes Empedocles, Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, Diderot, d’Alembert, Condorcet, Kant, Mill, Russell, Bergson, Peirce, Freud, Samuel Alexander, Popper, Wittgenstein, Piaget, Lévi-Strauss, Chomsky, Davidson, Searle, Nagel, Fodor, Dennett, Simondon, Bouveresse, Ricoeur), the book

is vitiated by a fundamental philosophical naivety. Indeed, Changeux's ostensible philosophical erudition seems to render him incapable of distinguishing neurobiology's materialist friends from its idealist foes. Most egregiously for a book about neuroscience that seems to advertise its philosophical literacy, Changeux makes no reference whatsoever to the philosophical work that is surely most sympathetic to his neurobiological agenda – specifically, the neurophilosophy of Paul and Patricia Churchland. As a result, despite his avowed intent not to compromise on the methodological ideals of reductionist science, Changeux ends up conceding far too much to the most obfuscatory variety of anti-reductionist philosopher. Although he quietly but decisively undermines the functionalist strategy, he fails to see the necessity of mounting an equally robust attack on the explanatory gap strategy. On the contrary, he even seems to endorse Searle's nefarious suggestion that the scientific problem consists in explaining 'how neurobiological processes in the brain cause consciousness'. This is a dangerous concession; a serious misstating of the problem (denounced by Dennett and Paul Churchland among others) which harbours a welter of confusions and leaves the door wide open for the 'explanatory gap'. For anyone bound by the constraints of reductionist explanation, neurophysiological processes can no more be the 'biological cause' of consciousness than H₂O can be the 'physical cause' of water. They must be the same thing.

Changeux's philosophical insouciance becomes even more problematic when he ups the ante and proposes a neurobiological appropriation of the correspondence theory of truth. According to Changeux, 'correspondence' can be cashed out in terms of a relation of congruence between one part of the physical world – a representation neurologically encoded in the brain – and another – the organism's physical environment. This physical correspondence is underwritten by the vicissitudes of the organism's (and social group's) evolutionary history. Evolution guarantees the selection of 'true' (i.e. adaptive) representations and the elimination of 'false' (i.e. maladaptive) ones. Thus 'the conceptual development of science resembles to some extent the biological evolution of species by natural selection'. This is the weakest aspect of Changeux's book. Not only does he disregard the correspondence theory's fractious philosophical history and assume an implausible continuity between the mechanics of biological and cultural evolution; he unwittingly dissolves truth-as-correspondence altogether. What he actually offers is a Darwinian recoding of philosophical pragmatism in the guise of a correspondence theory. But, as wily anti-naturalists know full well, this kind of neurobiological pragmatism about truth is open to a speedy *reductio*: if there is no more to true representations than adaptational success, and if all extant representations are equally adaptive simply in so far as they have avoided evolutionary elimination, then



what privileges this neurobiological account of representation over rival, non-neurobiological accounts? By trying to turn representational truth into a function of evolutionary adaptation, science threatens to undercut its own epistemic privilege as the most authoritative representation of the world. For if correspondence is simply a matter of adaptation, what distinguishes the scientific representation of representation from its spiritualist or idealist rivals? Changeux remains oblivious to the possibility that his neurobiological reductionism about truth may be unwittingly eliminating the latter altogether and hence undermining science's own epistemic authority. Hence the force of the Fodorian gambit that truth as representational adequation can only be secured by insisting on the functional autonomy of representation as a domain which, in the absence of psychophysical covering laws, must remain provisionally irreducible to the neurobiological realm. Alternately, perhaps 'truth' is precisely the kind of 'folk philosophical' concept that needs to be supplanted by a neurophilosophically enriched account of why certain representations should be granted an explanatory privilege over certain others. Either option entails a non-eliminative reduction of truth. Changeux's book fails to deliver on the promise of its admirably provocative title precisely in so far as it remains blind to these philosophical complexities.

Ray Brassier

Essais

Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2005. x + 431 pp., £22.95 hb., 0 520 24272 6 hb.

Martin Jay's book sets itself both a limited and an expansive task. The limited task consists in relating the history of the idea of experience as a multifarious grouping of different 'songs of experience', without attempting to construct or defend one particular tradition or idea of experience. However, this involves a massive trawl through the history of Western philosophy to narrate the 'universal theme' of experience as it is played out through different philosophical traditions and historical periods. Jay's methodology is both chronological and thematic. There is a broad commitment to a chronological narrative, in that the book begins with Ancient Greek philosophy and culminates

in a discussion of the project of 'experience without a subject' in writers such as Bataille, Foucault and Barthes. However, this chronology is freely interrupted when the thematic of the different chapter headings demands it. Therefore Chapter 5 blends together a discussion of Burke, Oakeshott and the English Marxists in relation to a consideration of politics and experience. This can cause repetition, particularly in relation to the work of William James that is outlined in both the chapters on religious experience and the chapter on American pragmatism.

The difficulty of such a historical project is that there are bound to be glaring omissions, as otherwise, the project would take three volumes. This is appropriate and understandable. Therefore Jay's starting point historically is the idea of experience as it appears in Montaigne's essays. Although there is a rapid perusal of the concept of experience prior to the mid-sixteenth century, it is Montaigne who serves as both a starting point and a moral anchor for the narrative. Montaigne's expounding of a concept of experience as uncertain, open to failure and bounded by death continually returns as the thematic of experience that Jay wants to uphold and maintain, and it is a concept of experience that he sees return in the work of Dewey and Adorno. Opposed to this idea of experience is the concept of empiricism, which, in its many guises, elevates an idea of positivist and certain knowledge, achieved through experience as experiment. The brief trawl through Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant's first critique does not allow enough time for the subtleties and contradictions involved within the concept of experience as empiricism. The contradiction between experiment and certainty, which is central to the empiricist project, results in concepts of experience that are far more open than Jay allows. For example, to conclude that Hume ultimately relied too much on a method of reasoning rather than experiment and observation nevertheless ignores the importance of concepts such as habit and the foregrounding of the passions and the imagination in Hume's work, which challenge positivist concepts of experience from within. Similarly, the unproblematic acceptance of Montaigne's concept of open experience downplays its reliance on traditional concepts of authority and wisdom which can operate as closing down routes for experience politically, as well as legitimating certain experiences on the grounds of political or economic power. There is a similar problem in Giorgio Agamben's parallel attempt to use Montaigne's authority of experience as a starting point for a historical narrative of a fall

from grace, which can be traced from this point, and this uncritical acceptance of a concept of a fulfilled, yet open, experience finds its way into the work of Critical Theory, particularly in parts of both Benjamin's and Adorno's work.

However, despite this problematic beginning, there are superb chapters at the core of this book. The chapter on religious experience sets out the central dialectic of experience which develops in Western philosophy from the nineteenth century onwards, the dialectic between *Erfahrung* (the coherent narrative experience, that has a more public and collective character) and *Erlebnis* (the experience that is more individual, prior to subject-object divisions, and transgressive of normal notions of temporality and narrative). The innovation of this chapter is precisely to read this division as a formulation of religious experience, which reveals the many different political and cultural connotations of *Erlebnisse* and *Erfahrungen*. The discussion of Martin Buber's move from a philosophy of *Erlebnis* – which politically informed a glorification of the experience of fighting in the First World War, alongside other figures such as Ernst Junger – to the dialogical philosophy of 'I-Thou', which informed Buber's later work, shows both the uncomfortable political ambiguities of a philosophy of pure experience alongside the modes in which a concept of *Erlebnis* returns, even in Buber's later work. In this later work there is an attempt to outline a more authoritative concept of experience, but this concept of the event of experience ontologizes *Erlebnis*. This chapter also sets the background to the hostile reception of the concept of *Erlebnis* by writers such as Walter Benjamin, who saw clearly the political implications of such a concept of pure experience.

This dialectic between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* runs through the remaining chapters of the book, with illuminating discussions of Dewey's attempt to relate aesthetic experience to wider communal and societal processes, and the debate in English Marxism around the attempt to construct a concept of experience by writers such as Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson, an experience that would both have a link (as *Erfahrung*) with a wider working class and oppositional culture, and (as *Erlebnis*) would provide means of moving beyond reified culture through the common historical and contemporary experience of struggle. The critique of such a concept of experience as irredeemably idealistic and complicit with a capitulation to structures of power – the "lived experience" of ideology', as Althusser named it – inaugurates the final problematic of the book in what Jay terms the concept of 'experience without a subject'.

This experience exists in the realization of a loss of traditional *Erfahrung*, and the overwhelming of modern life as a pure stimulus response to fleeting and irrecoverable *Erlebnisse*. The concept of *Erlebnis* loses all its force as an oppositional concept to positivist forms of rationality, and becomes another word for the deadened and fleeting experiences of a modernity cut adrift from any relation to tradition. The problem becomes how to turn these *Erlebnisse* into *Erfahrungen*, and Jay traces this project in a number of different keys. Although to term this 'experience without subject' is questionable given the strong commitment to forms of subjectivity in Adorno or even in Bataille and Foucault, where the transgression or dissolution of the subject only occurs there through a heightened or sovereign subjective experience. What occurs despite this narrowed definition of *Erlebnis*, is that some form of *Erlebnis* continually returns in the attempt to move beyond subject/object divisions or beyond the reified 'damaged life' of modernity. This form of *Erlebnis*, as a concept that is transgressive of normal forms of temporality and experience, takes many different forms, from Bataille's sovereign experience to Adorno's more sober aesthetic experience, but it opens up the question about whether we remain within this dialectic of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, or dispense with a concept of experience altogether. Jay does outline clearly and persuasively why a concept of experience still matters in philosophies as diverse as those of Barthes and Derrida (there is an excellent discussion of Barthes here); however, the opposition to a concept of experience at play here is only configured through forms of structuralism, and Jay doesn't grapple with the ontological dissolution of subjective experience implicit in Deleuze and Guattari's work, or the post-human or anti-human philosophies which trace their lineage from Nietzsche. Apart from a brief discussion of Lyotard, there is thus little consideration of the problem of whether a philosophy could completely rid itself of the concept of experience.

The glaring omissions in the book concern the lack of a dedicated chapter to phenomenology, surely the tradition within modern Western philosophy that has most privileged a concept of experience. There is also a lack of concerted consideration of Hegel's concept of experience, other than through its reception in Critical Theory, or in English neo-Hegelianism (Oakeshott and F.H. Bradley). However, this is inevitable given the constraints of such a large project. Martin Jay has provided an invaluable resource for philosophers researching and writing on aspects of experience in modern philosophy, through a thorough and illuminating

exploration of the different thematics of experience in numerous philosophical traditions. If the reader is left with a frustration that there is no definitive proposal of a certain concept of experience, it is a frustration that encourages further research in the spirit of a concept of experience as *essai*, in the terms that Montaigne outlines, an attempt, always open, always uncertain, to articulate and formulate the radically new.

Alastair Morgan

Don't forget to forget...

Marc Augé, *Oblivion*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2004. 92 pp., £40.00 hb., £9.86 pb., 0 8166 3566 8 hb., 0 8166 3567 6 pb.

This small book's focus is not directly aimed at oblivion and forgetting; rather it is concerned with living and memory seen from the perspective of forgetting and oblivion. Oblivion provides the oblique angle that allows Augé to sketch a poetics and taxonomy of memory that recognize the formative work that forgetting does. In an analogy that suggests a psychoanalytic penchant, he writes: 'memory and oblivion in some way have the same relationship as life and death'. In a more geological vein, he writes: 'memories are crafted by oblivion as the outlines of the shore are created by the sea'. Such a perspective allows for a more nuanced sense of the range of forms that memory and remembering take. Remembering a dream, for instance, is a very different proposition than remembering a number sequence. On waking, when that dreamworld, with all its delicious and sometimes deadly intrigues, is just slipping from view, we know that the worst thing in the world we can do, if we hope to retain some trace of this dreamworld, is actively to search it out. That hard, slightly panicky, concentration dissolves dreams into a puff of nothingness: much better to give into the lure of forgetfulness and sink into the half-light of the snooze. The remembered dream, then, is the product of an ability to let oblivion do its share of the memory work. Other examples that Augé catalogues are 'memories worked over by oblivion': these are memories unmoored from any sense of time (though not very often from a sense of place); they seem to come from childhood, but can be fashioned at any

point in your life. These are memories that press in on you like some recurrent, ungraspable insight, and their energy seems to be connected to their lack of temporality.

Yet Augé isn't just concerned with the personal world of reminiscence: his is, ultimately, an account of social memory, or more crucially an account of the social uses of time. In this way memory doesn't have to be the possession of individuals at all. Places, even the most unlikely of places, can simultaneously 'remember' and 'forget' previous spatial arrangements: 'beyond their sadness and desolation, what is fascinating about the shapeless scenery of the most developed urban life (airports, parking lots, cement-covered squares where anonymous silhouettes pass each other without stopping) is their unconscious resemblance to the almost abstract, barely outlined spaces of courtly romance'.

No socio-cultural account of memory and forgetting is going to be able to ignore the enormity of the Holocaust, and Augé recognizes how such recent traumas pull on our obligation to remember. Yet while horrific memories would obviously be part of the survivor's world, what makes a survivor survive is an ability not to be laid low by memory, not to be completely undone by reminiscence. Memory and oblivion coexist and they do so because living in the present demands it. Because we live in what Andreas Huyssen has called a 'culture of amnesia', it might seem odd to come across a book that argues for the importance of forgetting as an aid to remembering. In various ways *Oblivion* reminds me of Chris Marker's wonderfully sprawling ethno-documentary film *Sunless* (*San soleil*, 1982). In *Sunless*, which is also a treatise on the use of time in various societies, mention is made of a science fiction film that the filmmaker was going to make about a man who had 'forgotten to forget' and consequently can't really understand the work of the past as it exists in the present. Total recall is in the end total exile from the present. *Oblivion*, then, isn't courting a culture of amnesia, but nor is it wedded to indiscriminate reclamation of the past. In the end, to stake the importance of forgetting is to continually launch an inquiry into the value of memory, history and reminiscences. In other words, foregrounding forgetting makes us continually ask what, how and why should we remember.

Marc Augé is first and foremost an anthropologist who has conducted extensive fieldwork in a number of African societies (Ghana and Nigeria, for instance), as well as fieldwork in Paris (in the métro, at football games, walking around Paris, and so on). What

Augé practises is a kind of comparative ethnology, and he practises it with the full knowledge that this occupation has more often than not been emphatically ethnocentric. As Johannes Fabian in *Time and the Other* (mistakenly referenced in this book as *Time and the Others*) demonstrates, comparative ethnology has classically set comparisons between the west and 'the rest' on a timeline, where difference from the West was translated into a different temporality that always claimed that 'other' cultures were behind: less developed, less complex and historically much earlier. Anthropology in this classic, colonial form was seen as a branch of archaeology whereby scientists could study earlier evolutions of man as they existed as residual cultures in the present. A neo-liberal version of comparative ethnology can be found in forms of culturalism whereby equivalence across cultures is suggested by framing each culture as a relatively complex arrangement of representations (usually narrative in form) all more or less adequate to the business of making culture. Where ethnocentrism is evident in this formulation is in the unquestioned assumption that the scientific perspective of the ethnologist is the one 'culture' that is *not* open to the disruption of radical relativism.

Augé's method is an attempt to counter ethnocentrism, not by refusing comparative ethnology, but by practising it as a form of what Georges Devereux called 'disorientation testing', whereby any cross-cultural comparison works to place all cultural truth in jeopardy (including, most importantly, the unexamined truisms of the scrutinizing culture). Thus, for Augé, 'others help me to become aware of the narrative dimension of every existence, mine as well as theirs, and that this awareness definitively prevents me from assigning them to a time ("mythical" or "magical") that is fundamentally different from mine.' But while this might seem to slide towards culturalism, Augé, taking his cue from Georges Bataille, claims that 'the relativization of one culture by another (changing the "frame of reference") is basically an exercise in anticulturalism that in every culture respects above all the power it has to destabilize the others'. The Mojave Indians' culture of dreaming offers another idea of the unconscious, one that reveals the paucity (for a fully fledged socio-cultural understanding of the unconscious) of Freudian psychoanalysis. Yet Freudianism is also able to disrupt the lexical stability of Mojavian dream interpretation. However, the fact that dreaming exists across all cultures alerts us to the base materialism of our 'species-being', and should work to refigure comparative ethnology as a radically

materialist enterprise, one that connects cultures at this level.

In the end it is easy to like a book that is this erudite, that skips so easily from discussions of Stendhal and Dumas, to Evans-Pritchard, Ricoeur, Devereux, and Pontalis, to Augé's own fieldwork experiences in Togo and Benin. It is even easier to like a book, written by an anthropologist, that is oblivious to the usual practices of granting epistemological superiority to the work of the social scientist over the novelist or the Mojavian dreamer. Perhaps he just forgot.

Ben Highmore

Extravagance

Gregg Lambert, *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture*, Continuum, New York and London, 2004. 168 pp., £65.00 hb., 0 8264 6648 6 hb.

The title of this book might lead one to expect the answers to a series of questions. What is the baroque and what is it for this baroque to return? Has it really been away? And what about the space it returns into – modern culture: how do we characterize this, or, better, how do we characterize 'culture' and 'the modern'? The title also suggests a Freudian motif: the implied identity of 'repressed' and 'baroque' is strong to overwhelming. As it turns out, Lambert, though aware of all these questions – and at times seemingly committed to psychoanalysis as at least a powerful analogy for some of the processes he documents – is not in the business of answering them in any straightforward way.

Rather, confessedly dug out of the drawer in which it had languished for over a decade, the book circles around these themes and many more in the form of a series of essays on a number of different writers from the 'Continental' philosophical tradition, Spanish letters and historiography and Latin American literature. These are bookended by an introduction and epilogue, which repeat a number of propositions on the relation of the name 'baroque' to historical periodization, temporality, aesthetic form and content, and, more dilutedly, historical and social change. Perhaps a strong thesis on the appropriateness of the characterization of our current (post)modernity as baroque emerges from the swirling philosophemes. However, the danger flagged by an epigraph from Walter Benjamin – 'It is quite characteristic of baroque style that anyone who stops thinking rigorously while

studying it immediately slips into a hysterical imitation of it' – is all too blithely courted. The 'baroque' in its sheer indefiniteness acts as an absent centre, unifying what is in effect a quite heterogeneous set of readings (themselves internally heteroclitic and excessive) – in tradition, style and purpose – whose retrospective connectedness and importance always threaten to dissipate as the spectator/reader refuses the task of completing the work. To contrive another self-referential trope, they only meet in the non-place of this book, and the encounter is vertiginous.

One could see the book as itself anachronistic and belated, features that Lambert will use to characterize the baroque. As the author acknowledges, the concept of the 'baroque' was the substance of an extensive debate in the 1980s in Europe – with Buci-Glucksmann and Omar Calabrese, both names cited but not extensively discussed, staking out claims for its relevance to the postmodern. In the same period, in Latin America there was a renewed concern with the content and expression of modernity on the periphery, and the question and status of the baroque and the possibility of the neo-baroque became central, critical themes in cultural criticism in the light of the failure of state-led modernization projects and the aftermath of dictatorship. Lambert's book clearly belongs to this period and it might be usefully read as a fragmented response to these debates.

The book is divided into four sections. The first deals with definitions and addresses the derivation of the baroque in art history and its critical mobilization in the work of the Spanish writers José Maravall and Eugenio d'Ors. The baroque here has a specificity as a moment of European art history: articulated against classicism and Mannerism, it is located within a history of production of forms and tied to a set of ideological and political struggles around the Counter-Reformation and the drive to absolutism. The characteristics of the baroque as form – its engagement with temporality as novelty, the features of multiplicity and variety, the loss of central focus, the involvement of the spectator as a crucial anchor of the work and the heightened sense of affect within and through the work – allow Lambert to use the notion as a historical marker and as the placeholder for a set of more general philosophical disputes – on the term, on ornament, on the sublime – that emerge in the work of Deleuze, Derrida and others. The discussion of Maravall's notion of the 'baroque mechanism' engages with the baroque as a periodization of political technology: the emergent urban *populus*, crowd or masses of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are the target for

a certain cultural work – their integration and demobilization through spectacle. On the other hand, d'Ors deploys the notion of the 'baroque eon' as a critical term against Enlightenment philosophy of history, postulating it as an immutable form perduring within history, against history as linearity.

The second part of the book deals with conceptions of the modern in Octavio Paz, Paul de Man and Walter Benjamin. The comparative work here illuminates a common sense of modernity as the repetition of rupture, self-origination and forgetting, paradoxically conjoined with a sense of the expanding accumulation of perpetually present pasts. For Paz, according to Lambert, the baroque is a belated and alternative Latin American romanticism, whose (re)discovery allows for a post-avant-garde poetry. The baroque is the moment of the irruption of eternity into the instant – the place of the poetic – a vision of the suspension of history close to Benjamin's notion of *Jetztzeit*. Lambert ascribes a different notion of the baroque to de Man: it is the synthesis of those themes that take modernity as their object.

The third part of the book is an engagement with the Foucault of *The Order of Things* and the representation of representation in Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, Genette's literary criticism, the baroque emblem in Yuri Lotman and Derrida's panoramagram. Here the central trope of *mise en abîme*, the text within the text, is traced through a now definedly modern anxiety over resemblance and isomorphism.

Finally, there are three chapters devoted to the baroque in Borges, and the Cuban writers Severo Sarduy and Alejo Carpentier. Borges's notion of the baroque as the tendential exhaustion of a form, which becomes parodic, is explored in the role of repetition in his fiction. Sarduy's inflection of the baroque through Lacan and *Tel Quel's* poetics is read in his novel *Cobra*. Carpentier's investigation of origins in his novel *Concierto barroco* makes the status of representations of the 'New World' deeply problematic: fabulation, spectacle and the end(s) of history are all complexly linked.

Already, we can see the problems. The conceptual investigation and its articulation across history constantly overreach themselves. There is too much detail, too much ornament and too many questions: the space for exegesis is exiguous so that arguments are condensed to the point of gnomic ciphers. This excess produces an intolerable demand on the reader to provide the material that confirms or contests the argument, or to succumb to theoretical overload. The conceptual work is tenuously grounded histori-

cally. There is no space, for example, devoted to the long debate on the accuracy of Maravall's picture of baroque Spain. There is little attempt to date material either biographically or historically. Single works stand in for complex oeuvres. And, perhaps most crucially, historical explanation is repeatedly promised but never presented with any depth or fullness. Indeed, a certain bathos haunts Lambert's historical asides: for instance he cites the impact of mass movements and migrations on the genesis of the baroque, and notes that much of this dislocation was due to the 'Thirty Years War, which raged through the European continent between the years 1618 and 1648', an explanandum that does no work at all. Or again, in discussing the roots of 'complexity and ornamentality' with spectatorial responses of 'awe', he notes 'an event inseparable from the history of baroque sensibility and logic of culture: the European colonial adventure that followed the discovery of the New World' and then lists the history of the early European maritime discoveries and certain cultural products like St Peter's in Rome or the publication of *Orlando Furioso*. The complete failure to develop any historical mediations leaves the connections merely cosmetic. And there is an odd reliance on a psychoanalysis of the dream-work which is never developed. The overcompression of argument and underpresentation of historical material tend to vitiate the work *ab initio*.

This is perhaps best seen in the treatment of Latin American themes, the inclusion of which is unusual within texts on general cultural history published in the Anglo-American academy. For this, at least, Lambert should be applauded. However, his contextualization of the works is thin, at times seemingly indebted to a single text of literary criticism, Roberto González Echevarría's 1993 study *Celestina's Brood*. The treatment of Sarduy's baroque is probably the most accomplished, seeing it as articulating the displacement of European culture in a process of grafting and cultural translation organized through writing which covers over the lack of origin. These reflections on the relation of periphery to metropole, and the refraction and

dislocation of cultural forms in their translation, could usefully engage with the debates on transculturation stimulated by Angel Rama and continued by John Kraniauskas among others. (A similar need is obvious in the essays on Borges and Carpentier.) However, the post-structural hybridization of Sarduy's baroque is only outlined, never problematized, and moments of the discussion of Lacan and Althusser seem faulty (*objet a* plays little role in Althusser's theory of ideology!). Certain claims about the Latin American literary tradition – 'the central problem of separating history and culture from the defiles of its imaginary projections by the West and from its own specific "Orientalism"', for example – seem tendentious or vacuous when so baldly asserted. The essay on Borges shows no evidence of the enormous body of criticism on his self-understanding as Argentine and his relation to 'world culture'. The essay on Carpentier subordinates joy to



baroque melancholy in a reading of a text that is but one moment of a contradictory oeuvre. The relation of all three writers to the historical and contemporary debates on the Latin American baroque is only cursorily examined: a couple of lines on Lezama Lima – the great theorist of the American baroque – and José Martí, speculatively assimilating him to a tradition of the baroque, are insufficient.

In the end, the book is strangely reluctant to address its central conjunction: the baroque and (post)modernity. We wait till the closing pages, unsure as to the answers to our opening questions, only to find that our author is similarly dubious. The unity of the central concept dissolves into its fictionality ('one or many baroques?' Lambert wonders) and the connection with modernity becomes clear but question-begging: "'the baroque" occup[ies] the exact *middle* of modernity, in the sense that it ... recur[s] historically precisely in the moments when one tradition of modernity exhausts its own possibilities and transitions into another, and even as the symptomatic principle of this exhaustion'. But this flies in the face of the discussion of the Latin American baroque, and poses unanswered questions about 'traditions' of modernity and their exhaustion and renewal. And if

the return of baroque is ‘the last sign of our fading modernity’, it behoves Lambert to be a little clearer about who ‘we’ are.

In short, this is a deeply frustrating book, which is also marred by appalling copy-editing. Heideggerian terms of art are misspelled in the German so that they become meaningless (*Vorhandeln*, *Zuhandeln*...); the German naturalist and geographer of South America, Alexander von Humboldt, changes sex; Robinson Crusoe becomes Latinized; there is a confusion between epoch and *epoché*, the latter misspelled, and so on. It might have been better for this text to have been left in the drawer and the questions addressed afresh.

Philip Derbyshire

Don't look at me

Guy Debord, *Panegyric, Volumes 1 and 2*, trans. James Brook and John McHale, Verso, London and New York, 2004. 182 pp., £16.99 hb., 1 85984 665 3.

Debord's notorious autobiography is presented here for the first time in its entirety in translation. The third volume referred to in the text, along with the succeeding ones, which were still at the manuscript stage, were burned during the night of 30 November 1994, following his suicide, as Debord had instructed. What we find turns on its head any Greek ideal of a panegyric. Debord's philosophy bore no relation to the revolutionary Hellenic asceticism of a Che Guevara, for instance. His understanding of Marx grew out of the less orthodox Marx very much at one with the history of philosophy, specifically the history of materialist philosophy, and drew him to despise the transcendently founded values of the ascetic ideal. This was a Marx germinating out of Schelling and in symbiosis with Nietzsche. In this historical approach Debord owed much to his once great friend Henri Lefebvre in his famous espousal, against Althusser, of the early humanist Marx. He also shared with Lefebvre a Socratic concern for the inseparability of philosophy and life, but, unlike Lefebvre, Debord always maintained a dogged refusal to compromise with the technocracy. Indeed, this book is essential for evaluating his claims for having realized the becoming worldly of philosophy more than his contemporaries, through a revolution of everyday life, through the *détournement* of abstract images, beyond

our creation, to which we are enslaved. ‘Directive No. 2’, documented here, demonstrates this imperative with the daubed command: ‘réalisation de la philosophie’. Debord also quotes Chateaubriand: ‘Of the modern French authors of my time, I am almost the only one whose life resembles his works.’

Panegyric, where philosophy becomes poetic, is the necessarily unfettered companion of Debord's magnum opus *The Society of the Spectacle*. After establishing his critique, he can assume its foundations by entering the subjective realm of poetic reverie, returning to the elemental and primordial, akin to his literary idol Lautréamont. In so doing, his images return to nature and non-formal creation: ‘an image that has not been deliberately separated from its meaning adds great precision and certainty to knowledge’. Much of Volume 2 comprises images like this, such as that of ‘The Author's Hand’, which lies alongside images which have the quality of historical documents of Debord's revolutionary praxis, – iconic images, maps, cartoons, the *Kriegspiel*.

Debord was so keen that the meaning of his text be unfixed and constantly shifting for the reader that he provides an appendix, ‘On the Difficulties of Translating Panégyrique’. Here, not unusually, he cultivates for himself the image of genius, setting a new course whilst unaware of its telos, a course which is impossible to repeat: ‘The end of the book is projected outside itself.’ Hence, also not unusually, Debord's prose is at times intoxicating, vital and earthy, and at times quite unashamedly pompous. But it is when these natures combine that Debord is at his most effective, demonstrating the aristocratic indifference of the autodidact to standards and codes that insidiously trap one within the capitalist spirit, within the ordeal of *ressentiment*.

In many ways Debord sees his infamy and resulting malediction in a philosophical sense, as arising not out of his imagined role in the May 1968 revolt, but out of his original conception of the unconscious possibilities to be realized once ‘the external husk of life’ is cast off to reveal ‘the severe commandments within’. As he sees it, it was actually his 1952 call for an art that would create situations rather than reproducing already existing situations that was disliked for so long. That was also the year of his full-length film containing no images, *Howls for Sade*. However, for Debord, the artistic entering of the real in order to ‘change life’, needed to confront the fact ‘that there could be no more poetry or art’. Indeed, he saw, as Nietzsche had before him, that art must not quench the affirmative potential energized in confrontation with the real.

Resignationism was not the order of the day. For Debord sublimity, it seems, must be 'real': 'Just once, at night, I saw lightning strike near me outside: you could not even see where it had struck; the whole landscape was equally illuminated for one startling instant. Nothing in art has ever given me this impression of an irrevocable brilliance' – except, that is, for the prose of Lautréamont, father of the surrealists' unconscious and excessive reality, shocking the intellect from its habitually veiled, repetitious, unreality. Art has given way to revolution as philosophy's indistinguishable organ. Many felt Debord treated his comrades largely as dispensable tools, to be discarded when threatening the cohesion of the art or the 'game of war' – *Kriegspiel*. Debord quotes General Westermann: 'pity is not revolutionary'.

Many readers undoubtedly turn to this work, not just as the autobiography of a dynamic, some would say dangerous, individual, but also for its account of his profligate drinking and its essential role within his philosophy. Indeed Debord's alcoholism has often been the easy critical refuge of those instinctively disgusted by his influence. One is once again inclined to notice a superficial influence of Schelling or Nietzsche here, as he quotes Machiavelli: 'And even if someone judges this way of life shameful, I find it praiseworthy, for we imitate nature, which is changeable.' Also often cited by sympathetic readers is Debord's account of drink giving him 'the true taste of the passage of time', a sense of becoming without the subject's natural tendency towards *homo faber*. A philosophy incorporating a profound sense of both the layers and concentrations of historical and revolutionary time was essential to Debord. 'All revolutions run into history, yet history is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers of revolution come, thither they return again.'

In his reverie, Debord takes the opportunity to mourn the 'economic re-education of social classes that had long remained independent of large industrial production', so that certain original drinks may retain only their labels, so 'one can photograph them as they used to be – but not drink them'. For Debord this is symptomatic of his wider contention that:

The pleasures of existence have recently been redefined in an authoritarian way – first in their priorities and then in their entire substance. And the authorities who redefined them could just as well decide at any moment, untroubled by any other consideration, which modification might be most lucratively introduced into the techniques of their manufacture, entirely liberated from any need to please.

Drinking, for Debord, served the function of enabling a Dionysian mimesis, but it could never be a means to what he most disdained, a 'general decadence' facilitating 'the empire of servitude' that is a part of the passive commodity fetishism of the spectator.

What separated Debord from many twentieth-century Marxists, especially in France, was that, despite everything, his ideas did to some extent succeed in disrupting 'the general tendency of social domination'. The degree to which this happenstance was not the work of Debord as egoistic prime mover is admitted by him and indeed integral to his philosophy. Any isolation of himself for particular admiration outside of the consciousness of history would be to assume a false and distinctly capitalist perspective. That is why the mischief-maker of *détournement* lives on here in creating, of all things, a panegyric, when forces prior to any principle of individuation are at work. As he cites Orson Welles's Mr Arkadin as saying: "I can't help it", said the scorpion. "It's my character."

Andrew Aitken

Does Derrida do business?

Mark C. Taylor, *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World without Redemption*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2004. xx + 395 pp., £17.95 hb., 0 226 79166 1.

The blurb on Mark C. Taylor's *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World without Redemption* tantalizes with the prospect of a new age in which Continental philosophers, including Bataille, Baudrillard, Lacan and Derrida are taken seriously by economists. In drawing on all of the above, Taylor receives the highest praise from the kind of notables whose contact with the father of deconstruction one might assume to be limited to the particularly ungenerous obituary published in *The Economist*. Sadly, the brilliance of his book is undermined by the elision of the very philosophies it would purport to deliver over to the stock exchange.

The 'confidence games' of the title refer to the idea that the art of finance is based on the maintenance of a certain 'economy of faith'. Recent history shows financial markets continuing to rise so long as consumers continue to believe in them. Crises of confidence lead to surges of selling, causing prices and whole markets

to plummet in value. The problem becomes one of how to sustain confidence in the economy while living under the burden of the 'death of God' – that is, in the absence of an underlying truth to which the various forms of capital speculation could bind themselves, and thereby prevent the disastrous crashes to which they periodically succumb.

This lends itself to a Lacanian or Žižekian analysis of the Big Other, the symbolic order of exchange, whose existence is the product of a fantastic longing for just such an ontological ground. Žižek's knight of faith, the silent antihero of the 'vanishing mediator', who sacrifices himself to uphold the fantasy of reality, might find it a tall order to bear the entire edifice of the global economy on his (or her) shoulders. Even were it desirable, how many martyrs would it take to save capitalism? On occasion Taylor alludes to Lacan: the first section of the final chapter, entitled 'The Return of the Repressed', discusses the resurgence of religious fundamentalism in terms which do not quite map religion onto the Lacanian fantasy – the author is too earnestly politically correct for that. Rather than a return to Freud, he embarks on a return to Hegel: 'By recasting his speculative philosophy, I develop a dialectic without synthesis in which religion, art and economics progressively displace but do not replace one another. Religion gives way to art, which then is displaced by economics.'

This non-dialectical synthesis, I suspect, owes far more to Derrida than to Hegel, though it perhaps comes closest of all to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, of which Taylor makes no mention, but whose theoretical proximity to 'complex theory' would surely have taken his argument to another level. Taylor's most fertile insight reiterates the post-structuralist claim that money is a type of deconstruction, a deterritorializing *différance* that simultaneously conditions and resists every restricted economy of exchange:

Medium, liminal, surplus, supplement, fluid, irrational, excessive, polymorphous, polyvalent, perverse: money appears to be dangerous; ... it cannot be captured or contained in the clear and precise binary oppositions of closed systems that seem to pattern thought and organize experience. Uncategorizable and uncontrollable, excess can be identified with the lowest as well as the highest.

In a reworking of Hegel's theory of history (which, again, more closely resembles Deleuze and Guattari than Hegel), closed systems of religion are broken down by the excessive proliferations of capital. We begin with a fascinating section on the history of

markets as sacred liminal spaces beyond the *oikoi* of identity. Taylor subsequently analyses the ambiguous treatment of money in Christianity, Smith, Kant and the sublime autonomy of the omnipotent market-as-God, before culminating with an analysis of the death of God and the emergence of aestheticized 'godless markets', where one nevertheless achieves Hegel's 'recognition by and through the other' through one's Internet connection to the rest of the virtual world. Increasing amounts of space are devoted to recent economic history and the emergence of network society, on whose details Taylor writes with impressive authority, albeit at the expense of the theoretical insights that characterize the rest of the book. Chapter 5, on 'Specters of Capital', makes the most cursory of glances towards Derrida, never seriously engaging with his writings on the subject.

At no point does Taylor ask whether the three spheres of religion, art and economics share anything that could explain their intertwining evolution, for example a relation to desire, as forms of repressed desire. They could equally be three forms of progressively more sophisticated technological 'en-framing', in the Heideggerian/Derridean sense, though to venture this would risk a stronger challenge to the prevailing order. Subsuming Derrida under Hegel conveniently takes the edge off his politics. Derrida, like many of his contemporaries, haunts the book. But can the promise of what is to come sit so comfortably with the markets?

Gerald Moore

Sex with strangers

Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought*, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 2004. 352 pp., £69.00 hb., £17.50 pb., 0 822 33303 1 hb., 0 822 33315 5 pb.

Towards the end of her book, Alys Eve Weinbaum tells an instructive anecdote: 'Some years ago, a white mother who utilized in vitro fertilization involving donated sperm gave birth to twins, one of whom was black. She sued the fertility clinic for damages she explained had resulted from the duress of her wayward birth and the racist taunting that her child had had to confront as a result.' The anecdote concludes an exploration into what Weinbaum refers as the 'race/

reproduction bind' – that is, the 'inextricability of the connection between race and reproduction'. Rereading feminist, Marxist, psychoanalytical and other texts, she explores how race is reproduced, and reproduction is here understood as both an operation within the discursive field and biological reproduction.

The connections between race, nation and genealogy have already been investigated by feminist and post-colonial scholars. What Weinbaum adds to these works is her interest in the ways in which reproduction is thought by writers and thinkers of the Euro-American world. Race, she demonstrates, remains a determinant factor regardless of scientific discoveries that have proven its biological inexistence. There is no gene for race and yet race exists and remains bound up with reproduction. Not even new genomic knowledges and biotechnologies have been able to transcend essentialist ideas about race and reproduction: what strategies, what discourses and representation will succeed in unbinding race and reproduction? Weinbaum asks how 'wayward reproductions' – those that do not obey the rules dictated by theories of nationalism claiming to be 'race-neutral' – question biologically and racially determined discourse?

Weinbaum starts with an analysis of Kate Chopin's novel *Désirée's Baby* as an introduction to a rereading of Benedict Anderson's and Ernest Gellner's classic texts on nationalism. Her critical reading of these authors seeks to uncover the anxieties produced by the difficulties of securing the 'racial purity' of the nation. However, it is a genealogical impossibility that writers such as Chopin or theorists such as Anderson and Gellner want to hide. Weinbaum's cogent argument about the 'role of the maternal body in transmitting racial property across time' is illuminating. She turns to Étienne Balibar for a theory that acknowledges the 'historical reciprocity' of nation and race. However, the racialization of reproduction must be thought in relation to sexism. 'Racism and sexism converge within the concept of reproduction', she argues. Race and reproduction are not 'biological entities but articulated ideological structures'. Foucault's methodology of genealogy is, of course, called upon by Weinbaum. The racialized foundations of reproductive politics upon which nations are built are denounced for what they are: not aberrations, but constitutive of the nation. (These remarks could be extended to an analysis of US policies on reproduction: with the government withdrawal of funds to prenatal and postnatal care, and support for abstinence, decisions are made about who deserves to live and who does not, whose life matters and whose does not.)

In her next chapter, Weinbaum points to Charlotte Gilman's racial nationalism, a dimension too often neglected by feminist scholars. Weinbaum continues her reading of the race/reproduction bind with a revision of the post-Marxist and poststructuralist feminist critique of Friedrich Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. She wants to restore *Origin* as a 'central text for antiracist feminists committed to Marxism'. Leading figures of materialist feminism, such as Michèle Barrett or Rosemary Hennessy, discovered through poststructuralist discourse analysis (whose debt to anti-colonial struggle should always be recognized) the role of racial difference and argued consequently against the ethnocentrism of Marxism. Weinbaum thinks, however, that *Origin* must not be read for its accuracy or as a plan for women's emancipation, but rather as a text providing an 'understanding of the articulation of the gendered, raced, and classed modalities of thinking'. Engels's story of the origin of family, private property and the state illustrates in fact the race/nation/reproduction bind that Weinbaum explores. Weinbaum's chapter on Freud is another exercise in reading against the grain: Freudian psychoanalysis 'resignified anti-Semitic discourse about wayward reproductivity' by 'casting Jewishness as a constitutive function of wayward reproduction'. In Du Bois, Weinbaum finds a genealogical counter-narrative. She shares the criticism of the essentialist conclusion of *Dark Princess*, but she shows how Du Bois finally turned to anti-imperialistic alliances and racial kinship built upon the interconnection among the 'darker peoples of the world', the oppressed peoples of the world not connected by blood and the womb, but by the will to fight for social justice.

Though Weinbaum does not fully provide an answer to the challenge of elaborating anti-racial politics beyond the race/reproduction bind, she has written an eloquent and convincing argument on a binding process that has shaped and is shaping our world. One minor but telling remark: the term 'transatlantic' refers to the 'strong and continuous flow of ideas and cultural products back and forth across the Atlantic and across national borders'. Why call a Euro-American world 'transatlantic', thereby erasing the African and South American continents? Why this Euro-Americanization of the Atlantic? Being from the so-called 'South', I am always surprised at the tendency, even in critical work like Weinbaum's, to name a space geographically with the goal of showing hidden cultural contacts, while, with this operation, hiding other spaces of signification.

Françoise Vergès