

Mathematiquerie

Ellie Ragland and Dragan Milovanovic, eds, *Lacan: Topologically Speaking*, The Other Press, New York, 2004. 350 pp., £19.50 pb., 1 892746 76 X.

Late in her biography of Lacan, Elisabeth Roudinesco gives us the quietly moving image of Lacan in his dotage, playing with pieces of string and seemingly drifting further into some private world from which communication was all but impossible. His *jouissance* now seemed tied to a repetitive topological manipulation even as his always radical scepticism about the possibilities of symbolic transmission finally destroyed the plinth from which his thirty-year monologue was pronounced. Considerably less affecting, the collection under review rehearses as philosophy what might have been regarded as the consequences of pathological physiology, even as it raises some interesting issues about more general aspects of Lacanian, and other, fetishizing of the mathematical.

After the infamous Sokal affair it may be necessary to tread a little warily around questions of the misuse of science in certain philosophical contexts. Sokal and Bricmont got Deleuze and Derrida wrong and failed to engage properly with Latour or even Feyerabend and Kuhn. But the discussion of Lacan's and Kristeva's fundamental misunderstanding of imaginary numbers and set theory now reads as unobjectionable: Lacan and Kristeva simply got the maths wrong as they shifted notions, say, of the square root of minus one or the continuum into a metaphorical register, applying misappropriated notions in an analogical way. For Lacan especially, whatever his expertise in Freudian theory and semiotics – indeed the whole panoply of disciplines from which he borrowed and stole – mathematics clearly had a fascination that often outshone his capacity for understanding the simplest requirements of mathematical manipulation, let alone the radical developments in twentieth-century philosophy of mathematics. His fascination seemed to lie in the capacity of mathematics, as he (mis)understood it, to solve his philosophical difficulties with ideas of communication and transmission, and in a curious way to reinstate a Cartesian solution to his ongoing Heideggerian problematic of truth: mathematics as formula would allow for a form of truth as revelation and therefore the transmission of truth without the need for interpretation. Certainty would emerge as *mostration*, which is no more than saying that the

letters of certain formulae would function as the site of *aletheia* – Heidegger's primordial revelation. The problem of errancy in Lacan's teaching – the fact that his concepts always seemed to go astray in their dispersion and appropriation – would be solved by the transference of letters without meaning: self-sufficient marks that showed.

As becomes clearer with the publication of more and more of the seminars, Lacan's trajectory is one of ever more intense scepticism and mistrust: one ungenerous version would be that it sketches out an arc of growing paranoia and conceptual violence, as first the lures of totality and authenticity are undercut, and then the possibility of symbolic articulation undergoes dislocation, even as Lacan's own drive to speech become ever more untrammelled. The drive to speech is accompanied by a growing conviction that speech is useless, or can only perform its true task by revealing its limit and inadequacy: the site of the self-undoing of language is the site of the revelation of truth, which is only that truth lies outside the compass of language. So far, so deconstructionist, and in a way this is Žižek's Lacan (demonstrated ad nauseam): the prophet of the revelation of the real at the point of the failure of language, the moment of its torsion and tension, where the unsayable warps the fabric of the saying and thus indicates its negative presence. But accompanying this relatively commonplace linguistic pyrrhonism is a conviction that there is a way of showing how the world and the subject are, of doing more than merely indicating, which actually provides something that might be truth. Here, then, is Lacan's engagement with a certain formalism and the language of mathematics and, at different points in his career, with topology.

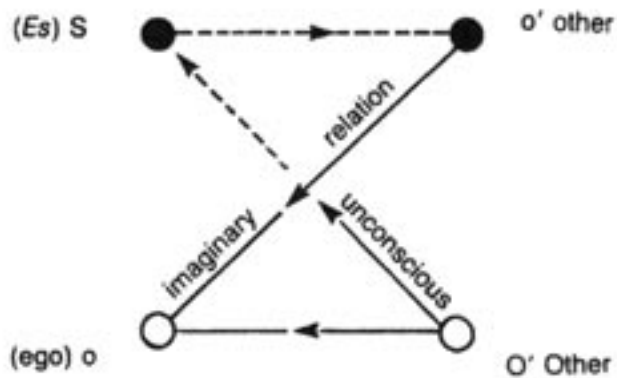
The formalism we can see developing early with the idea of the bar in the relation signifier/signified, and then the extension of this writing to the formulae for metaphor and metonym in 'The Agency of the Letter' (1957), where such formulae are called algorithms, suggesting that they are means of deriving further results, or indeed could produce certain calculations with appropriate values inserted. About the same time, he constructs the various schemas and the notorious

graph of desire. The idea of the *matheme* emerges; for example, the classic $\$ \diamond a$, which marks the relation of the barred subject to the object *a*. What this formalism does is to indicate a non-conceptual ostension and precision, and to suggest that the clarity and operability of the mathematical is at work here. To call something a graph is to claim more than labelling something a diagram: graphs visually present relations between variables, which can be specified also in terms of the solutions to equations. Algorithms like those that underlie the working of computers are means to calculate certain outputs from certain inputs. What even the most cursory examination of Lacan's inventions shows is that they share none of the properties of their mathematical homophones. The letters of his algebra are ill-defined; there is no definition of a well-formed formula; the rules of combination are never spelled out, and there is no presentation of permitted operations. Sometimes Lacan will act as though elements of his 'algorithms' can function as though they were part of a standard algebra – as when, in the paternal metaphor, he eliminates terms as one would in a standard equation. Other times he stipulates that the bar, say, is not a ratio, but something else – yet the scope of such changes and the effects on previous formulae are unclear. With the graphs, their complexity is such that no information can be read off them without a massive apparatus of explanation: the 'graphs' are résumés of information, no more than diagrams, visual transcriptions, highly dependent on symbolic articulation. Similarly, the *mathemes* intended to replace teaching through words, with its inevitable misunderstandings, and to provide the basis for a full formalization, only ever operate as shorthand: in the absence of any fully developed rules and axiomatization – the articulation of a powerful mathematical system, in other words – they are merely *aides-mémoires*.

At one level all this is obvious and in a sense would be irrelevant if Lacan did not make stronger claims for what he was doing. Drawing diagrams, giving nifty and sharp illustrations, using a symbolism and setting up some definitions of how those symbols work – in short, filling out a symbolic discourse with visual material – is part of what the soft sciences do – biology and geology, for example, have huge recourse to illustrative modelling with no scientific ill effects. But Lacan's suspicion of the visual and the symbolic

is so powerful and the demand for a revelation of truth so strong that he must make harder claims – hence the trade on the Cartesian notion of the mathematical and the masquerade that he has somehow produced an equivalent. One would have to come to the conclusion though that his is a *mathematiquerie*, a curious parody of mathematics.

The tarrying with topology confirms these points. Topology, as the developing study of transformable surfaces, seemed to suggest itself to him as an investigative tool for thinking the relations between inside and outside quite early – certainly the 1955 Rome Discourse mentions the torus as... well here is the problem. What is the torus, how does it relate to the problem of inside/outside? Is it a model? Is it the way in which inside and outside of the 'psyche' are mappable? Is it a useful analogy? In the early work, such a surface and the other surfaces Lacan will investigate – the Moebius strip, the Klein bottle, the cross-cap – seem to be models for thinking sites of inscription and avoiding traditional accounts of subjectivity and their spatial metaphors. But Lacan later hardens his view: these topological figures 'are not metaphors', he will insist, but structures. This seems to indicate a shift from the logic of representation to the presentation of structure, or, in terms of the trajectory we outlined, to the revelation of the truth of the subject in the forms of topology. But this immediately proves to be an impossible project. To make the topological forms in any way functional as 'structures' of the subject they

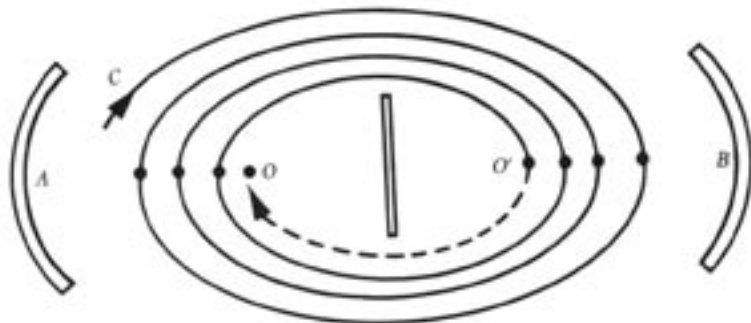


need to be supported by an apparatus of interpretation: the very self-evidence that is the mark of their *mostration* turns out to be a construction of language. When Lacan shifts his attention to knot theory, the connection between the two topological universes is never really worked out, and the reliance on linguistic explanation is, if anything, increased.

Yet this is hardly a surprise. The rather quaint view of mathematics that Lacan (and many of his epigones) holds is that the systems that mathematicians

develop reveal the world rather than describe it. But as the early-twentieth-century debates on the foundations of mathematics showed – and it is perhaps something that Badiou should take note of – that even the most powerful axiomatic systems still require an interpretation before they connect to the world. The very controversies that surround quantum mechanics and the relation of its formalism to the world – the status of the Copenhagen interpretation, the notion of operationality as the criterion of truth and so on – all point to the epistemological and ontological problems still haunting some of the most sophisticated mathematical apparatuses yet devised. The dream of mathematical self-evidence only cashes out at the level of symbolic manipulation, and here self-evidence really is a question of emptiness: at the point of application, other considerations apply, and the problem of interpretation and error returns. Lacan really does not avoid the analytic–synthetic problematic, whatever the blurb writers might claim about him advancing ‘a 21st century teaching that obviates symbolic logic and its positivist assumptions’.

As might be expected, these considerations are not to the fore in the volume of essays under review here. For the most part written by non-mathematicians, the essays start from the assumption that Lacan’s topological work is coherent and unproblematic, and



they are redolent of the characteristic (and unwarranted) triumphalism that seems to be a sine qua non of contemporary Lacanian writing. Oddly, given his otherwise difficult reputation, it is Jacques Alain Miller who writes most cautiously about Lacanian mathematics, and, whilst never abjuring the validity of the mathematic project, he comes closest to raising a sceptical eyebrow at the more hyperbolic claims of Lacan and his followers. This may have something to do with his having actually been a mathematician before his headlong flight into *gauchisme* and then his capture by and of the Lacan *apparat*. Juan David Nasó goes a long way to specifying Lacan’s topological practice, and to unifying the distinct moments of what

we could call Lacan’s writing project: the invention of signs and diagrams. But in clarifying or cleaning up Lacan’s messy theoretical production he tendentially produces an empty system, and this only by throwing out the whole Borromean apparatus. Several of the other essays treat various topological figures with great verve, though occasionally insisting that ‘Lacan could do without topology, because he made use of it: topology was his practice’ (Metzger), which comes close to having your cross-cap and eating it too. Jeanne Lafont’s execrably translated essay seems to contradict Ragland’s point by point on the questions of *mostration* (revelation), truth and representation. Duff translation spices up Miller’s essay too, but at least his grasp of the limits of the project and his command of the philosophical archive make his paper interesting reading. The American contributions, mostly from literary or humanities scholars, tend to have the most elastic conception of what constitutes ‘topology’ as well as the most inflated claims for the problems such an approach can resolve. Ragland tendentially reads the ‘maverick’ mathematician Spencer Brown in parallel with Lacan without much grasp of the former’s complex axiomatic system – significantly she quotes from the author’s discursive preface rather than doing any work on the ‘laws of form’ themselves, giving the lie to her own claims (after Lacan) on the particular truth power of the structure – yet quickly escapes to standard Lacanian reflections on the registers. Milovanovic, Dravers and Watson do various sorts of literary and legal work but really fail to do much topological work at all – though often invoking the novelty and power of just what it is that they do not do.

‘The authors collected here are world renowned Lacanian topologists’ – and it could be argued that this collection does what most research programmes do, if we were to grant a Lakatosian legitimacy to the Lacanian project: that is, take the basic tenets of a paradigm and develop them in a heuristically positive direction. But against that could be countered the view that the fundamental incoherence of its basic account of the world coupled with a radical inconsistency of development and deployment, makes the Lacanian topological project, as yet another avatar of the claim of psychoanalysis to epistemological primacy, deeply flawed.

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Philip Derbyshire

Dear mammoth...

yours, the great cow (and giraffe)

Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel, Band 2, 1938–1944*, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 2004. 662 pp., €44.90 hb., 3 5185 8423 5.

The second volume of correspondence between Adorno and Horkheimer is, like the first, an outstanding editorial achievement. Each letter has an appendix with explanations, biographical notes and references to the projects that the authors were working on at the time; a twenty-page appendix, a bibliography and an index of names completes its near-700 pages. (The appendix contains correspondence between Adorno and Paul Lazarsfeld, Adorno's letter to Jean Wahl, three drafts – 'Notizen zur neuen Anthropologie', 'Chaplin und Hitler', 'Contra Paulum' – and ten 'memoranda'.) The modest blue cover lets the reader know that this is not only the latest in a series of what will probably amount to five heavy bricks of correspondence, but also a contribution to Adorno's Posthumous Works, which is projected to run to over thirty volumes.

The book begins with Adorno's last weeks in England, as he worked on *In Search of Wagner*. Other significant events include Horkheimer's role as adviser for the American Jewish Committee; the beginning of Adorno's research at the Princeton Radio Research Project (directed by Paul Lazarsfeld); Horkheimer's coordination of empirical social studies with the Public Opinion Study Group of the University of California at Berkeley; the consolidation of the Institut für Sozialforschung in the USA (or, at least the attempt to find a place in the American scientific community); and, as part of this, the extension of *Studies on Authority and the Family* into an elaborate research project on anti-Semitism, which provided the empirical data for the 'Elements of Anti-Semitism' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (other parts were later included in *The Authoritarian Personality*). On a personal front, these years saw the suicide of Walter Benjamin in 1940 fleeing the Nazis, and the emigrant community life in Los Angeles, where Adorno supported Thomas Mann in his *Dr Faustus* project and wrote *Composing for Films* with Hans Eisler. Other important figures there included Arnold Schoenberg, Bertolt Brecht, Günther Anders, William Dieterle and Institute members Herbert Marcuse and Leo Löwenthal. There were realignments, notably the controversy and final break between the Institute and Erich Fromm at the beginning of the 1940s. In the early years of the Institute it was Fromm who dealt with questions of the relation of

materialism and psychoanalysis; later it was Marcuse. After the break with Fromm it was Adorno himself who outlined a theory of needs, and engaged with psychoanalytical questions of childhood. The end of the period covered in this volume sees the completion of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published in a limited edition, as a hectographic typescript of the Institute, in 1944, and reprinted by Querido of Amsterdam in 1947.

'Those who do not wish to talk about capitalism should not talk about fascism' – Horkheimer's statement is as instructive as it is famous. Yet it is disturbing how little in this era of national socialist terror and war, the period in which the concept of a Critical Theory was developed, Adorno and Horkheimer actually wrote about politics. They also wrote very little about National Socialist Germany; nor did they problematize the anti-communist climate in the United States. Even though the correspondence deals with problems of emigration and their research at that time focused on anti-Semitism, the Nazi terror against the Jews is not thematized. The concentration camps are mentioned only briefly; concrete politics provide only a distant background, even when, for instance, on 8 February 1938 Adorno wrote to Horkheimer from London:

I have already written so much that—together with all my other notes—the Institute could edit a respectable posthumous publication, if I was unexpectedly sent to the gas chambers [!]. That we are concerned with the very thought of being sent to the gas chamber is hardly amazing. Although it is very difficult to get a picture of the situation, given the contradictory information we receive, I would consider the recent development in Germany in the most negative sense: The only choice left is between a stabilization of the worst, or, the unavoidable prospect of war.

The activities of the Institute in exile in the late 1930s and early 1940s are nonetheless political in the broader terms of the work undertaken: the philosophical and sociological investigation of authoritarianism and anti-Semitism, and their relation to developed capitalist society. This involved, on the one hand, empirical social research, and, on the other, a speculative

negative philosophy of history. American society and its mass culture are the empirical background, but the theoretical foundation is, of course, historical materialism – though by now this is far from the Stalinist version – as well as an affirmative view of class struggle. This needs to be considered in relation to the activities of the Committee on Un-American Activities, which Adorno and Horkheimer never mention in their correspondence, although friends and colleagues were suspected of being communists.

Adorno and Horkheimer began their cooperation with two open questions. What is the condition and definition of a form of empirical social research that is not purely positivistic, but critical? And, how can Hegelian idealist dialectical logic be translated into a theory of history that does not ignore what Horkheimer later called the ‘eclipse of reason’, namely the catastrophe of modern society that induced a negative logic of historical progress? Whereas for Lukács, writing two decades earlier, the answer to both questions lay in the concept of concrete totality, for Adorno and Horkheimer it became clear that a systematic approach to the whole was only possible through ‘philosophical fragments’ – the working title of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* before it was demoted to its subtitle.

On 12 June 1941 Adorno wrote to Horkheimer about Benjamin’s ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’: ‘A certain naïveté in the sections that discuss Marxism and politics is, once more, unmistakable.’ Notwithstanding this, Benjamin’s ‘last conceptions’ before he committed suicide effectively turned into the hidden philosophical framework of Adorno and Horkheimer’s project. In a long letter to Adorno two weeks later, Horkheimer writes:

Like you, I am happy that we have Benjamin’s theses on history. They give us much to think about and Benjamin will be in our thoughts. By the way, the identity of barbarianism and culture, which both of you asserted using identical words, was the subject of one of my last conversations with him in a café by Montparnasse railway station. There I (or he) argued that the beginning of culture in the modern sense coincides with the postulation of ethical love [*sittliche Liebe*]. The suggestion that class struggle is universal oppression, and the disclosure of history as empathy with the rulers – these are insights that we should consider as theoretical axioms.

Yet whereas in Benjamin’s view the need for practice is still the central point of the theory, claiming that revolution – supported by a ‘weak messianic force’ – is still possible, Adorno and Horkheimer turn this conception of history into an exclusively negative

dialectic of progress. That is, where Benjamin stressed the idea of standstill as revolution – in his wonderful image of revolution as ‘grabbing at the emergency brake’ – Adorno and Horkheimer describe such historical stagnation not as a revolutionary turn, but rather as the final descent into barbarism. This connects to their presumptions about the development of the capitalist economy: for them, capitalism – in the United States as well as in Europe – was fully ensconced as a stable monopoly-capitalist bloc. (Remarkably, in the 1940s Adorno did not agree with Franz Neumann’s *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (1942) – he refers to it derogatively here on p. 395 – but later he recommended it in his Frankfurt lectures as one of the best books written on Nazism.)

Their negative philosophy of history emerges clearly in Adorno’s letter from 30 July 1941:

Maybe one can say that the old concept of superstructure is no longer valid, i.e. that it is essential for this era that it no longer has an ‘ideology’, and that therefore questions concerning consciousness gain a dignity that they did not possess for as long as the culture had to conceal something which today is unconcealed ... there is nothing harmless anymore, and already in the smallest thought an explosive force is inherent, such that one has to repeal thinking all together ... This would be the perfect counterpoint to the assumption that there is no economy anymore.

Horkheimer termed this ‘the open transition from the class-phase to the racket-phase of society’. In 1942 Adorno and Horkheimer developed a ‘sociology of rackets’. This project remained unrealized, but parts of it appear in Horkheimer’s article ‘On the Sociology of Class Relations’ (1943) and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. There are important notes in the letters for a book on ‘racket-theory’:

It should be demonstrated that the idea that the proletariat consists in rackets was previously something that served the enemies of the proletariat, indeed, furthermore, the idea that domination in general was at all times racket-like, is suitable for quenching every impulse to exchange the present society for another ... That history is a history of class struggle means that history is a history of rackets, fighting amongst each other and against the rest of society. But where those rackets reproduce themselves in the lowest levels of society, they are the most terrible; the terror, executed by the lowest, is the worst. (30 August 1942)

This connects with Adorno’s ‘Notes on the New Anthropology’ (1941), where he claims that the individual is over:

The new anthropology, i.e. the theory of the new type of human, developed under conditions of monopoly- and state-capitalism, is explicitly contrary to psychology. The individual is the central concept of psychology. This concept is in critical respects out of date, or at least perforated. The concept belongs to liberalism and to a world that ranged between the poles of freedom and competition. Both have disappeared. The representatives of the new type are no longer individuals, i.e. the uniformity, continuity and substantiality of the single human has disintegrated. The concept of repression [Verdrängung] no longer exists. Contemporary 'men of the crowd' repress very little (in the same way as with the decline of the family sexual taboos have died off). The ego-instance [Ichinstanz] that causes repression is absent.

MAMMOTH SELFHAVING MUST BE DIFFICULT.



Mass culture – later called the culture industry – transforms all of everyday life into an advertisement for the system as totality: 'If the advertisement has destroyed experience, it has also simultaneously made experience a means for the mere advert.' The result is: 'The boundary between the individual and reality begins to tremble.'

Adorno's concept of a new anthropology and Horkheimer's sociology of the racket were the theoretical framework for empirical research. Adorno's minor

conflict with Paul Lazarsfeld in the context of the Radio Research Project is striking because it outlines the bigger conflict between Critical Theory and positivism in empirical research. In September 1938, Lazarsfeld wrote unambiguous and harsh words to Adorno:

My objections can be grouped around three statements:

(1) You don't exhaust the logical alternatives of your own statements and as a result much of what you say is either wrong or unfounded or biased.

(2) You are uninformed about empirical research work but you write about it in authoritative language, so that the reader is forced to doubt your authority in your own musical field.

(3) You attack other people as fetishistic, neurotic and sloppy but you yourself clearly exhibit the same traits.

Adorno was naturally irritated by this critique, but in the end the Radio Research Project was a success, and he used a lot of material later in his *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*. More material will be available with the forthcoming publication of Adorno's work on a theory of radio.

Of course, this is not only a correspondence between colleagues, but also between friends. Though they write using the German polite form of address, they use forenames, and, moreover, a whole zoo of nicknames. Adorno is 'Teddie, the great bull or cow'; his wife Gretel, who wrote several letters, or transcribed them, is the 'giraffe' and 'gazelle'; and Horkheimer is the ancient mammoth. Sometimes Horkheimer draws a little mammoth, instead of a signature; some of them are reproduced in the edition. But, and this is the only small criticism I would make of the edition, in so far as we find some drawings attached to the letters, and, furthermore, in so far as a lot of correspondence is written on postcards, the absence of images and facsimiles is annoying. However, even just typographical emphasis reveals how funny this correspondence can be: Horkheimer to Adorno, New York, 21 February 1938:

CABLE IF NICE FLAT WITH GRAND PIANO
NEXT TO METROLINE UNACCEPTABLE
NOISE-WISE

HORKHEIMER

Adorno replied to Horkheimer, from SS *Champlain*, 22 February 1938:

UNFORTUNATELY UNSUITABLE COS VERY
NOISE-SENSITIVE = MANY THANKS

One really wants to know what the postcard picture looked like – 'The Keyhole' at the Copley Square

Hotel, Boston, Massachusetts – on the back of which Adorno wrote on 2 July 1938:

Dear Max, this from the first stage of our journey, we are in New England but very jolly – hopefully you are doing well in the wild as well as golden west, and the stocks are climbing. Long live the dialectic! Please, bring along a scalp of a beautiful film actress.

Your faithful Teddie
Cordial greetings from Gretel too.

Roger Behrens

Anticipation or hyperdialectic?

Jack Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: Intertwining Embodiment and Alterity*, Ohio University Press, Athens OH, 2004. xix + 233 pp., £36.50 hb., 0 8214 1592 1.

R.D. Laing describes the fetishistic image as connoting the perpetual being beyond itself. This book attempts to move beyond the philosophical manifestation of this state of affairs, the dead ends demarcated by polarized conceptions of immanence and transcendence and their self-defeating girations. It does so via two of Merleau-Ponty's central themes – 'chiasmic intertwining' and *écart* ('split' subjectivity). Whilst the weight of the book's argument rests on the assumption of the validity of these ideas, this is always within a horizon of their affinity to the work of Derrida. Hence, chiasm and *écart* are taken as methodologically valuable in that they don't violate the latter's strictures on the 'metaphysics of presence'.

The danger here is that, whilst these concepts might play an important role in Merleau-Ponty's critique of rationalism and positivism, it is also a crude move to suggest that anything which serves as a potential *vehicle* of presence – utterance as expression, institution, intentional objects (the sense of praxis), the lifeworld and wild logos, the structures of experience, and so on – might be sidelined in the appropriation of Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre, so that he risks becoming a sort of Derrida *avant la lettre*.

Reynolds acknowledges this fetishistic appropriation of Derrida's ideas in the academy and how the employment of *différance* can lead to an absolute alterity that fetishizes difference. However the irony of Reynolds's observation is that his move away from discussion of lived experience (*Lebenswelt*) deprives

us of a means of understanding this phenomenon as an everyday feature of academic life. Merleau-Ponty himself does present us with such a structure. In *Sense and Non-Sense* he notes that capitalism is the concrete expression of a phenomenology of mind – that its ideological imbrication shapes the mute or background content of utterances – and he returns to Marx's notion of fetishism in his discussion of Sartrean alterity at the end of *The Visible and the Invisible*. The carnal intersubjectivity of the lifeworld provides the exteriority or 'wild logos' through which the world can be known – in this case in its fetishistic structures – whereas if we followed Reynolds's critique the commodified aesthetic would appear as a failure to grasp deconstructive technique rather than as an expression of the being of capitalism.

Although Derrida is keen to distance himself from Husserl's transcendental intuition, vestiges of phenomenology remain in, for instance, *Of Grammatology*, as Reynolds notes. The trace as a temporal deferment of presence – which delineates the logic of a text in the way the content of binary oppositions is undermined by a challenge to their metaphysical assumptions – echoes the point of articulation between the fertility of utterances and the mute, sedimented content of language in Merleau-Ponty. However, deconstruction can only mime the path of the trace rather than articulate (intertwine with) it. Ironically, it needs to be said that the trace owes more to Husserl and the language of conscious perception than does chiasmic articulation, as Trần Duc Thao's influence in moving Merleau-Ponty away from transcendental intuition in favour of a constituting lifeworld demonstrates. However, Derrida's performative notion of arche-writing, which expresses a difference between authorial intention and the outcome of communication, is similar to the distinction between aim and intention (*sens*) in Merleau-Ponty; both signify a deferment of intention or idealization. The situatedness of this process of understanding, as Gasché notes, is overlooked by Derrida, for whom meaning appears to unravel according to an internal binary logic, as in the process of supplementation. Hence we get the transformations of meanings such as those derived from culture and nature into their opposites but without any apparent mediation.

Reynolds goes on to draw a parallel between deconstruction and Merleau-Ponty's use of the idea of difference, which can also be seen as a form of deferment. However, whereas in Derrida difference takes the form of mutually generating polarized binaries, arguably for Merleau-Ponty difference is closer to Lacan's idea of lack. In *Signs* Merleau-Ponty uses the metaphor of

chiaroscuro to indicate the phenomenological way of proceeding to elucidate meaning. Difference is here characterized in terms of *what remains unsaid*, the shadow that remains to be filled in, foregrounded. Whilst this has some similarities with the reversals of deconstruction, the idea of reversal in *Signs* seems to owe more to a *gestalt* model – the figure-ground idea broached in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Reversals are a feature of chiasma and as such are brought about by articulations of lived experience in ‘fertile language’.

Reynolds shows that, unlike Derrida, Merleau-Ponty is concerned with the way meaning is stabilized and suggests that his explanation rests on the natural attitude and the tendency of human beings towards habitual behaviour. While this is no doubt true, it hardly constitutes a theoretical explanation, and indeed Merleau-Ponty’s own account places the referentiality of language within the context of the lifeworld which is the domain of sedimented meanings but also living or operative language. The articulation of these further entrenches meaning within culture and, following Husserl’s account in ‘The Origin of Geometry’, brings about a process of inscription based on the structural affinities of the sedimented meanings.

What is the structure of the chiasma though? *How* does it interrupt or reverse the order of signification? Reynolds fills in some of the background here by investigating the twin, linked moments of the constitution of meaning, the operative and the thematic. The operative undermines the tendency towards idealization represented in the thematic by rendering its knowledge incomplete and open-horizonal. Merleau-Ponty airs this problematic in *Sense and Non-Sense* when he observes that the Marx of the *Manuscripts* saw the specificity of the human as lying in that ‘man’ through ‘his’ activity becomes an object for himself. This operative moment of meaning is hence the structuring, intersubjective framework through which we become aware of our activities as an objective reality. Constitution doesn’t indicate a form of presencing as Reynolds notes, because this is always deferred, interrupted by the constitutive moment. Intersubjective structuring represents the activation of culturally sedimented meanings which instantiate an excess of meaning over what is *visibly* said, thematized. The effect here is the opposite of the Derridean case where a surplus of meaning volatilizes signification.

What kind of object is human activity and what does it tell us about the nature of subjectivity that it can be an object for itself? From *Signs* through *Prose of the World* on to *The Visible and the Invisible*,

it is clear that we experience ourselves not only in introspective mode (production of idealizations, etc.) but also as an exteriority, from which the famous exemplar of touching/touched dehiscence is drawn upon by Reynolds to indicate the *écart* of subjectivity, its exteriority to itself. Reynolds is at pains here to point out that there is no temporal deferment in the Derridean manner here; it is not as though we touch ourselves and then feel the touch. Rather, there is one event which is composed of the two aspects of sensing. Hence we can conclude that the other, alterity, is *chiasmically* constitutive of the self. The self-knowledge we take to be primordial is always already mediated by alterity. It can never be ‘owned’ because it is culturally generic. Conversely, everything that supposedly exists externally ‘for me’ is in fact mine, its appearance for me in my perspectival field depends on its being first an ‘unfamiliar’ element of my ‘split’ subjectivity (*écart*). This marks a sharp breach with the radical polarized alterity found in Derrida and Sartre.

The reflexive possibilities of *écart* are noted in *Prose of the World* where it is argued that in an unfamiliar text we experience not so much *absolute* incomprehension but an aspect of the self – a pattern of events – which is already ‘in the world’. The disorientation and confusion of such encounters is a product of defamiliarization, reading from the outside, so to speak. This element of understanding (reversal) is in fact taken up by Merleau-Ponty in his discussion of aesthetics and reading in the above work. He stresses the importance of the naive approach, coming to a subject as if new to it, having to learn its rules from scratch. This open-horizonal strategy puts everything up for grabs, breaks up the preconceived and (as argued recently in Paterson’s review of Watson’s *Shitkicks and Doughballs* in *RP* 124) engenders a reliteralization through which the latent, sedimented content of language is revealed, within one’s horizon. Consequently, the terms ‘arselicker’ or ‘monster’ become the fertile language of articulation, also moments of being: the former as perhaps the self-abnegatory parasite and the latter as deformed-yet-*strangely*-familiar humanity. Literalization represents their actuality or ‘*expression*’.

The shattering of conventional modes of reception by chiasmic horizonal interruption interweaves with Merleau-Ponty’s conception of dialectic, the hyper-dialectic. It’s suggested that this formulation of transcendence marks a kind of poststructuralist moment announced in *The Visible and the Invisible* which Reynolds seems to characterize, to use a cliché, as a ‘work of the break’ towards a more Derridean,

irreconcilable view of linguistic oppositions. However, the criticism of Hegelian dialectic appears earlier, in *Prose of the World*, where it is argued that we have access to the contents of history from an open-horizontal perspective and hence are able to recuperate, say, Descartes from the transformative conceptual labours of Hegel by the chiasma of our own situating. In *The Visible and the Invisible* this moment appears in the terminology of 'bounded wholes'. The temporal deferment of a 'now' moment in some ways produces a more convincing statement of the redemptive. Rather than produce unmediated positions the chiasm enables us to grasp, via a naive reading, some interesting phenomena relating to the mode of presence to us of the past. For example, in Proust eating the madeleine evokes childhood; when I listen to Oasis I can 'hear' John Lennon; Coldplay's *Politik* echoes Pachelbel's *Gigue*; and so on. I can put together the sediments because they are already part of me, as the *écart* of

subjectivity, and so I have direct contact with them but only as interrupted by my own situatedness.

In his treatment of Derrida's *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* Reynolds shows how the inter-subjective intertwining of self and other can dissolve Derrida's implacable oppositions: whilst genuine forgiveness involves forgiving the unforgivable, responsibility and guilt leaks across these boundaries. He also foregrounds the problems Derrida encounters over the disembodied nature of deconstruction. On the other hand, sometimes he seems to have abandoned the spirit of the hyperdialectic in favour of the anticipatory even whilst describing it: 'Aside from the recourse to terms like "being," this passage reads very much like Derrida's deconstructive prescriptions, or at least an embodied version of them.'

On the contrary, being isn't incidental: chiasm and *écart* are ontogenetic processes. The prose of the world is the chiasmic language of the world.

Howard Feather

Language-play

Chris Lawn, *Wittgenstein and Gadamer: Towards a Post-Analytic Philosophy of Language*, Continuum, London and New York, 2004. xviii + 161 pp., £60.00 hb., 0 8264 7529 9.

The approach to language and philosophy taken in this book is not one to which, I think, Wittgenstein would have been sympathetic. I do not mean this as a criticism of Chris Lawn's valuable monograph. I make the point because Lawn, like many before him, has clearly tried to extract philosophical theses from Wittgenstein's early and late work. Yet Wittgenstein explicitly warns us against trying to advance theses in philosophy. Still, it is not really possible to write about Wittgenstein without attributing at least some views to him, and thus Lawn's approach is somewhat inevitable. I am more concerned, however, with the nature of some of the theses that Lawn attributes to Wittgenstein.

Lawn's starting point is an outline of two broad pictures of language. The first is the view that the only function of language is to represent or designate. The simplest version of this picture would treat the whole of language as a concatenation of names that get their meanings from the things (concrete or abstract) that they name. The second is the view that language has primarily an expressive function. The simplest version of this picture takes verbalizations like 'ouch', which

express rather than represent pain, as paradigmatic of the whole of language. Like Charles Taylor, to whom he attributes the distinction between the two views, Lawn argues for the superiority of the second approach and bemoans the dominance of the first in the history of philosophy. Also like Taylor, Lawn associates a monological view of language with the first picture and a dialogical view with the second. Thus, because of the dialogical character of his philosophical hermeneutics, Lawn firmly situates Gadamer in the expressivist camp. He is more tentative about Wittgenstein's placement, but claims that in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* he subscribed to a designative view of language, and that in the later work he moved toward the expressivist camp without fully relinquishing the designative approach. It is for this reason, Lawn claims, that Wittgenstein's work fails to take into account the historical dimension of language.

Having set up the contextual background for his exploration, Lawn proceeds to argue for his placement of both Wittgenstein and Gadamer on the expressivist side and to offer a discussion of some similarities and differences in Gadamer's and Wittgenstein's positions

on language. He follows this discussion with two final chapters that are dedicated respectively to Gadamer's and Wittgenstein's interpretations of Augustine, and to a discussion of their respective positions on the relation between ordinary and poetic language. With regard to Augustine's views on language, Lawn successfully shows that Wittgenstein's reading is very crude, while Gadamer is more attentive to the subtleties in Augustine's thinking. With regard to the issue of poetic language, Lawn describes Gadamer's view of poems as 'eminent texts', and discusses the tragic significance of Wittgenstein's aphoristic style.

As I mentioned above, I am rather sceptical about Lawn's interpretations of some of Wittgenstein's pronouncements about language. For instance, Lawn only briefly defends (at the beginning of Chapter 4) the claim that the early Wittgenstein subscribed to the designative picture of language. Yet this claim is far from uncontroversial. Much of the recent debate on the *Tractatus* has focused precisely on whether the lesson of the book, for Wittgenstein, is that all attempts at formulating a designative theory of language end up in nonsense. Lawn unfortunately does not address these questions.

I also have reservations about Lawn's interpretation of the later Wittgenstein's writings on language and rule-following. I shall mention two of them here. The first and broadest reservation concerns the very attempt to situate Wittgenstein in one of two camps, both of which attribute to language one function only: to represent or to express. Throughout the *Philosophical Investigations*, instead, Wittgenstein insists on the multifarious nature of language. He likens it to a toolbox which contains tools that serve a variety of different purposes. He also warns us against a craving for generality which pushes us to believe that we can encompass the whole of language with one theory. For him, the whole project of producing a philosophical theory of language was seriously misguided. He might have been wrong about this, but I think it is reasonably clear that this was his attitude.

My second reservation concerns Lawn's reading of Wittgenstein's pronouncements on language and rules. Lawn thinks that there are tensions in Wittgenstein's writings on these topics; he thinks he can detect a line of thought according to which Wittgenstein



subscribes to 'a brittle calculus model of language', according to which 'language games are no more than (blind) repetitive re-enactments of the already given'. Lawn does not claim that Wittgenstein wholeheartedly subscribes to this view. Rather, he takes this to be the view to which, perhaps unwillingly, Wittgenstein is, at least in part, committed.

I must confess that I do not recognize this picture of Wittgenstein, and in this, as Lawn himself acknowledges, I am not alone. Some of the theses Lawn attributes to Wittgenstein are precisely the views that Wittgenstein explicitly puts forward only as temptations which we must ultimately reject. Wittgenstein acknowledges that he is not immune to these temptations, but it seems to me to misunderstand the dialectic of the *Investigations* to think of these temptations as theses Wittgenstein (perhaps unwillingly) endorses.

It is also surprising that Lawn does not try to provide much textual evidence for his unusual interpretation. He bases his conclusions on the claim that for Wittgenstein '[r]ule-following excludes interpretation'. Lawn takes this claim to mean that for Wittgenstein to follow a rule is a matter of mechanical, calculative

application. He offers as textual support for this interpretation a couple of remarks from the *Investigations*. One is the passage in which Wittgenstein deploys the metaphor of rules as rails laid out to infinity. Since this picture is presented by Wittgenstein as embodying a tempting thought that we must nevertheless resist, it offers little comfort to Lawn's interpretation.

The other is the passage in which famously Wittgenstein writes that 'there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation'. This passage does not preclude the possibility that some rule-following involves interpretation. Wittgenstein simply shows that rule-following cannot be interpretation all the way down because to grasp an interpretation of a rule is a matter of following a further rule about how to follow the original rule. Thus, if to follow a rule requires that we interpret the rule, it also requires that we interpret the interpretation of a rule, and the interpretation of the interpretation of the interpretation of the rule and so forth ad infinitum. Lawn takes this passage together with Wittgenstein's claim that we obey rules blindly as evidence that rule-following is a mechanical activity. I take it as evidence that for Wittgenstein, all reflective understanding (interpretation) presupposes some pre-reflective apprehension of rules. In this regard, Wittgenstein is much closer to Heidegger and Gadamer than Lawn allows for. In support of this alternative orthodox interpretation, and against Lawn's, one can also point out that much of the discussion of rule-following in the *Investigations* is directed against the view that the 'ought' of rules can be modelled onto the behaviour of an 'ideally rigid machine that can only move in such and such a way'. When Wittgenstein writes that we follow rules blindly, he does not mean that we behave like mechanical automata.

Lawn appears to be on much surer footing in his chapters on Gadamer's hermeneutics, and he is surely right to point out that Wittgenstein's lack of interest in the temporal dimension of the development of language is a serious weakness in his approach. Lawn also suggests that their common use of the notion of 'spiel' points to a similarity in Wittgenstein's 'language-games' in the *Investigations* and Gadamer's 'playfulness' in *Truth and Method*. I am a little unsure about the depth of this similarity. Nevertheless, much illumination can be gained by thinking about the connections and differences between the practice of hermeneutics and Wittgenstein's unusual approach to language. Lawn is to be complimented for opening up this avenue of thought.

Alessandra Tanesini

Volume 50

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 50, Frederick Engels's Letters 1892–95*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 2004. 658 pp., £45.00 hb., 0 885315 626 3.

This book of Engels's letters is the last volume of the Marx–Engels *Collected Works* to be published. It provides an opportunity, therefore, to raise some broader issues about this attempt to collect the complete works of Marx and Engels, which is in truth *not* complete!

The *Collected Works* is divided into three separate parts: volumes 1 to 27 contain all of Marx and Engels's works except Marx's economics; volumes 28 to 37 contain the economics; and volumes 38 to 50 contain the correspondence. This way of organizing the works was originally the idea of David Riazanov, who got out some of series I and III in his *Marx–Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA) before he was liquidated. So this *Collected Works* is not original in using this division. The same idea is being used in the new MEGA currently under way, but that has also a fourth part consisting of Marx's notebooks.

This fifty-volume edition comprises 1,968 works, approximately half of these published in English for the first time. In addition there are 3,957 letters, most of which have hitherto never been published in English. Over the thirty years it has taken to complete the edition, world-historical events are mutely marked by the change in printer from the USSR to the USA! This *Collected Works* is the most complete in any language and is a most valuable resource for scholarship. (The notes and cross-referencing are generally first rate.)

However, there is something odd about publishing a *Collected Works* of two authors who wrote together only at the very beginning and the very end of their careers. Moreover, the fact that Engels put out many editions of Marx's *Capital* raises the issue: to just whom do these 'belong'? Take as an example the publication here of *Capital* Volume III (MECW 37). Engels's text is presented unchanged; then the results of consultation of Marx's manuscript are given in notes, even where what is involved is the decipherment of phrases Engels had declared 'illegible'! This is a curious way to edit Marx's text, but no doubt is justified in so far as this *Collected Works* is also Engels's, so that his editions have been treated with the same respect as Marx's original work – with *more* respect in fact, for it is often hard to disentangle the original from Engels's additions, and, as in the case

of this volume, sometimes impossible, for Engels often ‘forgets’ to say what he changed, added and omitted. But this indicates an underlying incoherence in the whole project of putting out a *Collected Works* of two people at once, and flows from the now overthrown assumption that they were of one mind. Clearly any attempt to issue Marx’s own *Collected Works* would have to go back behind Engels’s noble but inadequate efforts to edit Marx’s publications and manuscripts. This inadequacy was partly the result of the ordinary limitations of editing work, especially where Marx’s nearly unreadable hand was concerned, and partly the result of a more or less conscious attempt by Engels to ‘improve’ Marx, often prejudicial to Marx’s meaning. The absurdity of the peculiar editorial procedure used in this version of *Capital* Volume III is illustrated by the famous chapter on ‘The Trinity Formula’. As we were given it by Engels, it opens with three ‘fragments’ which Engels said he had found in various parts of the manuscript. Engels was right that Marx intended these to form part of this chapter, but the recent publication of Marx’s 1865 manuscript shows clearly that Engels put them in the wrong order. The *Collected Works* could hardly ignore this, but instead of giving us the correct text they have left Engels’s work intact, and tried (unsuccessfully in fact) to indicate the true order of the material in a note, following the principle that Engels’s edition is sacrosanct.

A crucial case in which Engels appears to have inserted a sentence without notice here relates to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. It has often struck readers that the ‘counter-tendencies’ listed by Marx are so powerful that it is not at all clear whether the tendency itself always wins out. The one place in which the text says something amounting to this is on page 228: ‘But in reality, as we have seen, the rate of profit will fall in the long run.’ This sentence is not in the manuscript and must have been added by Engels without notice. Another editorial disaster occurs with *Capital* Volume I. The English translation, edited by Engels, was made from the third German edition. Subsequent to that the fourth German edition appeared with additions inserted by Engels, notably passages from Marx’s French edition. It is standard practice for new printings of Engels’s English edition to add these passages from his fourth German edition. But here (*MECW* 35) the process failed. On page 37 Engels’s Preface to the fourth edition lists five places where he put in additions from the French, and here the editors give the corresponding pages to this edition. Unfortunately in only one of the five is the addition both correctly made and indicated. Nothing at all has

been done in two places; and, catastrophically, these are the two substantial ones. An addition of four pages is indicated at ‘pp. 582–83’, but at the relevant spot on page 583 nothing appears. An addition of two pages is indicated at ‘pp. 621–22’ but these pages give the old third edition material instead of substituting for it the new fourth edition expansion. In sum, this version of the English translation is neither the original 1887 text, nor a properly updated one.

It is often said that this *Collected Works* is tailored to the ideological requirements of its original sponsor in Moscow. An entry in the index to *Capital* is a prime example of this. The term ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat’ is honoured by two mentions. But in the text the term is in fact absent. Furthermore nothing remotely relevant appears on the pages in question. One might have thought that it could be taken for granted that a *Collected Works* on this scale would provide every word that Marx himself published. Alas that is not the case here. The reason for this failure to issue the *complete* Marx is that Marx himself published no fewer than three versions of *Capital* Volume I, significantly different from each other, namely the two German editions and the French. When I was discussing this matter with Maurice Cornforth of Lawrence & Wishart in 1970 he told me that there would be an entire volume in the *Collected Works* devoted to variations in Volume I. At some stage this plan was abandoned. This means that there are two lots of missing material that Marx himself published, which are essential for any serious research into the development of his thought, not to mention for their intrinsic interest. First, the French edition is virtually a work in its own right, since Marx himself said that he rewrote it in the course of correcting Roy’s translation. The material from it that Engels inserted into the third and fourth German editions (plus an extra sentence in the English edition) do not give all the extra material available. Second, there are significant differences between the first and second German editions; these include not only additions (which we have of course) but also deletions, for example the very last paragraph. Again the *Collected Works* has not seen fit to translate these deletions and variations. The best-known case of this relates to the first chapter, which was entirely rewritten for the second edition. Absent from the *Collected Works* therefore are the original first chapter and the even more important Appendix on the Value-Form.

Turning now to the book under review, this volume of Engels’s last letters contains much of interest. There are letters on historical materialism, continuing a theme begun in volume 49. There is testimony to the

enormous work undertaken to edit and publish *Capital* Volume III, which finally appeared in December 1894. There are numerous letters on the progress socialists were making in elections. Lots of Engels's energy was taken up mediating between the French and German parties, whose relations were prickly. Curiously the editors nowhere mention Engels's death and funeral (he died on 5 August 1895).

The publishers are to be congratulated for their achievement in bringing to a successful conclusion this enormous undertaking.

Christopher J. Arthur

Force decides

China Miéville, *Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law*, Brill, Leiden, 2005. xi + 375 pp., £51.68 hb., 90 04 13134 5.

One of the outcomes of the recent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the ongoing war on terror has been a surge of interest in international law. International lawyers have been at the forefront of debates about the legality and legitimacy of the actions, and others have turned to international lawyers looking for ways to challenge and criticize the actions by the US and the UK. Witness, for example, the popularity of Philippe Sands's book *Lawless World* (2005). In these debates much is taken for granted about international law: that its contours are well established, that it keeps states in check, that it protects human rights, and that all in all it is a 'good thing'. Most of the criticisms of international law have merely sounded a sceptical note, seeing it as a moralistic gloss on power politics, or as ineffective, or in need of fundamental reform in order to give more power and credence to international institutions such as the UN.

China Miéville's book takes a very different approach: it explores international law through an analysis of the legal form itself. In so doing it aims to develop a Marxist theory of international law through an imminent reformulation of the work of Evgeny Pashukanis. This distinguishes the work from other left critiques of international law such as those found in critical legal studies or even Marxist works such as Chimni's *International Law and World Order* (1993).

Pashukanis's importance lies in not relegating law to the 'superstructure' but, rather, in reading the

juridical relation as a relation between two wills which mirrors the economic relation. Miéville uses this to build an argument concerning international law and the shaping of modern capitalism. The essence of the argument lies in Marx's insight into the imposition of particular contents into the legal form. Capitalist and worker meet each other as equal subjects of law. In this meeting there is an antinomy of right against right. But 'between equal rights, force decides'.

This is not the same as saying that between equal rights, the state decides. In his essay 'International Law' (reproduced as an appendix to the book), Pashukanis excoriates bourgeois jurisprudence for the amount of ink spilt on whether the lack of an overarching sovereign authority means that international law is not law, an issue that remains central to current debates about international law. Coercion is clearly necessary for law, but an overarching and abstract coercion is extrinsic to the legal form itself. For Pashukanis, law developed out of the commercial relations between tribes which were not under a single sphere of authority. In other words, law itself, in its earliest and embryonic form, is a product precisely of a *lack* of such an authority.

To say that international law historically predates domestic law is not to make any claim about the ontological primacy of the international sphere. It is, rather, to suggest that because law is thrown up by, and necessary to, a systematic commodity-exchange relationship, it was between organized groups without superordinate authorities rather than between individuals that such relationships developed. This means two things. First, that what Miéville calls *proto*-international law predates capitalism and the bourgeois state. When the bourgeois state becomes the central subject of the relations is when the 'international' is born. But *the form of the relations* already existed. And, second, this means that for the commodity-form theory, international law and domestic law are two moments of the same form.

Central to this is a colonial disempowering of non-Western subjects by independent sovereign powers. For Miéville, colonialism is not just a relation of content. Colonialism is in the very *form* of international law. Present at the end of the fifteenth century and now central to international law, this 'colonialism-in-equality' – which allows that Grenada has exactly the same right to intervene in the United States as the United States has the right to intervene in Grenada, as Jorg Fisch once put it – is predicated on global trade between inherently unequal polities with unequal coercive violence implied in the very commodity form. The question, then, is not so much

the international law of colonialism, but the colonialism of international law.

The outcome is a compelling argument concerning the role of force in law or, better still, the role of law *as* force. Force and law are often counterposed; this is why so many have recently sought recourse to 'law' to stop the use of 'force'. But Miéville's argument shows not only that every use of force can be (and has been) defended from a legal point of view. He also reminds us that force is intrinsic to the legal form; that law is constituted by relations of violence. In pursuing this line Miéville weaves a rich argument concerning the history of international law, from states, markets and the sea, to 'civilization', imperialism and sovereignty, and incorporates or critiques the work of a wide range of writers from Grotius to Schmitt.

There are some aspects of the book with which one might wish to argue. As well as using Pashukanis to make sense of international law, Miéville aims to use international law to make better sense of Pashukanis. But one might question whether this actually takes place in the book. Debates about Pashukanis's work have long centred on whether his work can account for the rise of administration, administrative law, and labour law. Miéville's discussion of these is not as original as he thinks: it reiterates some of the main contours of the debate, restates the importance of work by Geoff Kay and Jim Mott, and ignores other contributions that have ploughed the same field.

There was also scope for broadening the argument out to perhaps explore more examples from recent debates in international law. The first section of the Introduction is called 'International law has become important' – a quotation highlighting the importance of the attempt by international lawyers to make sense of the legality of the British government's war on Iraq. But one might point to other events which show just how important international law has become. For example, the House of Lords' first judgement concerning the Pinochet case, on 25 November 1998, was broadcast live on CNN, on the BBC and on radio across the world, and on the following day was on the front pages of most national newspapers. It may have made a more compelling book (and been more convincing to non-Marxists) if popular cases such as this had been discussed.

But these are minor criticisms of what is an important book. By far the most compelling Marxist theory of international law, it is also a significant contribution to Marxist theory of the law more generally.

Mark Neocleous

Unreconciled and unconsoled

Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, Routledge, London, 2004. 239 pp., £60.00 hb., £18.99 pb., 0 415 33599 X hb., 0 415 33600 7.

Benita Parry's influential and invigorating contributions to the field of postcolonial studies now appear in a very welcome edition. Together her essays demonstrate the consistency in her arguments throughout the rapidly developing period of approximately fifteen years during which they were written. As polemical and creative interventions in an unstably demarcated discipline, Parry's essays argue for a materialist and critical treatment of topics such as globalization, anti-colonialism and 'postcolonialism', whose concrete, historical and conflictual dimensions have often been neglected and replaced by textualized inquiries.

Postcolonial Studies is divided into two sections, each introduced by a new essay that sums up the field's achievements and perspectives, while positioning it within a contemporary debate over global capitalism. The first part consists of theoretical, meta-critical essays, of which several have justly achieved canonical status, while the second part contains critical readings of metropolitan, high-imperialist novels, within an overall discussion of the imperial experience and its inscription onto the Western imagination. The book concludes with an extended version of an earlier published article, in which Parry, using a more anecdotal mode, restates her critical position, which seeks to remain 'unreconciled to the past and unconsoled by the present', a position that was inaugurated by Marxist critics such as Trotsky, Benjamin and Adorno.

In the first, theoretical section, which in an overall perspective attempts to counter the poststructuralist debacle within postcolonial studies, Parry argues – in essays like 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', and 'Resistance Theory/Theorizing Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism' – for the importance of staying true to the field's original concerns with concrete historical confrontations. She advocates a renewed discussion of nationalism, anti-colonialism and liberation movements, and the endeavours to channel and reformulate those antagonistic and revolutionary energies that are capable of resisting colonial exploitation. In the second section, Parry goes on to develop a series of analytical case studies of novels by Kipling, Conrad, Wells and Forster, in which she demonstrates a sensitive attention to the asymmetrical

relationship between the social and the literary within an ideologically inflected horizon. Unlike many other postcolonial critics, Parry has the virtue of searching for 'a Marxist criticism which understands literature as interacting with and internally marked by other social practices', which to her implies 'an insistence that textual significance cannot be properly experienced or adequately explained without engaging with narrative structure, diction and linguistic usage'.

In 'The Content and Discontent of Kipling's Imperialism', Parry proposes an analytic procedure which, in a dialectic of dismantling and reconstructing, actively attempts to emphasize the more concerned, uncertain and troubled voices within the landscape of the imperial imaginary, a method that makes it possible for her to read Kipling's fictions as expressions of imperial ambivalence, despite authorial or authoritative intentions. Elsewhere, Forster's seemingly conventional fictive forms, whose 'vital harmony' is often seen as opposed to the more traditional characteristics of aesthetic modernism, like representational 'rupture' or 'crisis', signal to Parry an 'anxiety about the impasse of representation'. By detecting signs of *A Passage to India's* self-reflexive admission of its formal incapacity to bring an 'alien realm into representation', Parry sees a subversive or negative dimension in the novel, which undermines the text's unity, and thereby opens up a much more heterogeneous and discursively playful mode of representation.

It is Parry's attention to the specific semiosis of the literary imaginary that allows her to observe 'defiant material' aporias in the selected texts, which reject Western epistemological categories of representations, thereby indicating an aesthetic postponement of finality and formal totality that promises an as yet 'unrepresentable future', beyond the disorientations of negations and impasses within a colonial world. This emphasis on the dimension of future prospects as an inherent strategy within contemporary criticism is evident throughout the collection, for example in her well-argued criticism of Homi Bhabha in 'Signs of the Times'. Bhabha's pessimistic discourse theory, according to Parry, excludes the possibility of constituting a 'principle of hope animating political action in the interest of constructing a different future', something one is able to find in the socially engaged manifestos of anti-colonial and liberation movements.

Although aesthetic postponement, as a mode of negation, indeed constitutes one of the vital concepts in her readings of metropolitan fiction, *Postcolonial Studies* would perhaps be more rounded if Parry engaged more extensively with problems of contem-

porary, anti-colonial aesthetics. Her urgent call for a more antagonistic position within the theoretical debate of postcolonial studies seems to be accompanied by a more hesitant stance towards a sustained investigation of the role of the literary in anti-colonial fiction. She refers only in passing to anti-colonial literature, like Aimé Césaire's poetical construction of self-representation, while other postcolonial literary writers, who subscribe to a more conventional realist mode, receive a rougher treatment. While she generally endorses the critic Abdul JanMohamed's attempt to read African fiction from a counter-discursive position, through an emphasis on historical, material circumstances, she criticizes his readings for being committed to 'mimeticism', thereby neglecting the 'polyphony' of a literary text in which 'emergent discourses initiating new modes of address to construct not-yet-existing conditions' can be located. Within this perspective one does, however, sense the contours of Parry's grappling with an anti-colonial poetics, one that emphasizes the radical potential of innovative forms of expression.

Eli Park Sorensen

Being-responsible-for-one's-unconscious

Kelly Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis MN, 2004. xxiv + 245 pp., \$59.95 hb., \$19.95 pb., 0 8166 4473 X hb., 0 8166 4474 8 pb.

How can psychoanalytic theory be transformed into a social theory that accounts for the psychic dimensions of oppression? This is the challenging question that Kelly Oliver asks and skilfully answers in *The Colonization of Psychic Space*. According to Oliver, individuality and subjectivity cannot be explained apart from their social contexts; hence psychoanalytic theory must also be social theory. And in turn, social theory, especially that which confronts issues of oppression, must reckon with the role of the unconscious and processes of repression and sublimation in social life. Hence social theory needs psychoanalysis. How, then, to bring the two fields together? Oliver's goal in this book is not merely to apply psychoanalysis to social situations of oppression, because doing so tends to leave intact concepts such as melancholy, desire and

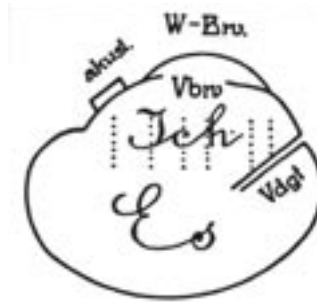
abjection that initially were formed with regard to relatively solitary individuals. What is needed instead is a transformation of psychoanalytic concepts that will allow us to rethink the notions of the individual and the psyche as thoroughly social. Only then can forms of oppression such as racism, colonialism and sexism be adequately understood and challenged.

The Colonization of Psychic Space contains four parts: 'Alienation and Its Double'; 'The Secretion of Race and Fluidity of Resistance'; 'Social Melancholy and Psychic Space'; and 'Revolt, Singularity, and Forgiveness'. In Part I, Oliver examines existentialist and psychoanalytic notions of alienation with the goal of distinguishing between what she calls originary and debilitating alienation. Originary alienation is inherent to the human condition, and it occurs when human beings find themselves living in a world that is not of their own making. This form of alienation is very different from debilitating alienation, which occurs in oppressive situations that posit a person either as incapable of making meaning or as a being whose meaning is less than fully human. Using the work of Frantz Fanon to challenge Marx, Sartre, Heidegger and Lacan on the issue of alienation, Oliver criticizes the notion of originary alienation as the perverse privilege of European subjects who generally do not experience debilitating alienation. Even worse, the notion of originary alienation tends to cover over the fact of debilitating alienation, and the abstract anxiety of the former can operate as a screen for the latter, camouflaging anxieties concerning racial and sexual difference. Building on her previous arguments – in *Family Values: Subjects Between Nature and Culture* (1997) and *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (2001) – that violence is not necessarily constitutive of subjectivity, Oliver challenges the idea that (debilitating) alienation is a universal feature of the human condition. She argues instead that it is a social phenomenon produced by oppression and colonialism that undermines, rather than constitutes, the subjectivity and agency of the alienated.

Part II continues the transformation of psychoanalytic concepts by focusing on projection and affect. In contrast to a psychoanalytic notion of projection that would enclose the process within the ego, the socialized version of projection developed by Oliver is fundamentally related to economic, material and bodily conditions that link subject and object, colonizer and colonized. Fanon again plays a key role. Oliver uses his analysis of affect in a colonial situation to show how the anger and perverse desire of colonialists are projected on/into the psyches and bodies of

the colonized. This projection (or abjection) allows the colonizer to establish rigid boundaries between self and other. What is needed in its place is a fluid notion of human being that challenges fixed borders, rigid ownership and sovereign subjects. Along with Fanon's analysis of the shifting meaning of the veil for Algerian women, the fiction of Julia Alvarez allows Oliver to show how identity and subjectivity need not be built out of rigid and exclusionary borders. Power is fluid, which means that the debilitating effects of domination on the oppressed sometimes can be used as tools of resistance.

While Parts I and II focus on racism and colonialism, Part III turns to the effects of sexist oppression on women. Women's depression is often seen and



treated as an individual illness, but many times it is a manifestation of culture-wide patterns of sexism. Oliver develops a notion of social melancholy to account for the characteristics of women's clinical depression ('lack of activity, passivity, silence, moodiness, irritability, excessive crying, lack of sexual appetite, and nervousness'), which are remarkably similar to those of stereotypical femininity. Social melancholy as manifest in depression operates in very different ways from the traditional psychoanalytic notion of melancholy. Freud, for example, characterizes melancholy as the internalization of a lost love by means of the incorporation of that love into the individual's ego. Oliver's concept of social melancholy, in contrast, attends to the social factors that contribute to depression by characterizing melancholy as the internalization of the loss of a lovable self. This problem tends to afflict mothers in particular, since very few positive representations of mothers as active, meaning-creating beings are available in the Western world. Maternal melancholy also has negative effects on female and male children, who can become masochistic and sadistic, respectively, through identification with a depressive mother.

Oliver argues that whether the result of racism, colonialism, sexism, or some other form of oppression, debilitating alienation and social melancholy require a social form of sublimation in response. In traditional

psychoanalysis, sublimation is the process by which an individual makes meaning by translating affects and drives into words or some other form of signification. But, as Oliver claims, 'the ability to sublimate has everything to do with social context, support, and subject position', which is why a social theory of sublimation is needed. Without sublimation, repression and depression (social melancholy) are the likely results. It is significant, then, that women and other oppressed peoples have been denied social support and space for the meaningful expression of their bodily drives and affects.

Part III concludes with the claim that social sublimation necessarily involves revolt against the established order. Part IV continues by developing the idea of revolt against society that creates a sense of belonging to it. For Oliver, 'Entering the social order requires assimilating the authority of that order through a revolt by which the individual belongs to the world of meaning.' The revolt of social sublimation, then, is more of a relocation of social authority than a complete violation of the social order. In contrast with much of existentialist philosophy, revolt does not necessarily result in an individual's alienation from the social. It instead can help produce a community to which a person belongs as a singular meaning-maker. Central to this process is forgiveness. Being able to revolt in such a way that one is accepted into a social order presupposes that one will be forgiven for contesting it with her singularity. For Oliver, forgiveness is more of a psychical feature of the oppressed than an action on the part of the oppressor. Forgiveness does not primarily concern forgiving the perpetrators of colonialism, racism and sexism, but rather restoring a kind of confidence in the oppressed that they can creatively assert themselves in singular, individual ways which will be welcome (or 'forgiven') even though it challenges the established social order.

What is particularly significant about Oliver's notion of forgiveness as part of the process of social sublimation is that it operates unconsciously. While language and other forms of signification are the vehicles through which forgiveness occurs, forgiveness is not a conscious operation. And, to the extent that intersubjectivity presumes conscious subjects in relationship with one another, forgiveness also is not intersubjective even though it is social rather than individualistic. Forgiveness is best described as a movement of affective energy between bodily beings that transforms them in ways of which they are not consciously aware. It is a mode of acceptance that legitimizes a person's access to the social.

The final result of Oliver's psychoanalytic social theory of oppression is what she calls a radical ethics, which entails being responsible for one's unconscious. While Oliver does not elaborate this important idea here as much as I would have liked, it is clear that, on her account, adding the unconscious to an account of social or political forgiveness (such as that of Derrida) does not mean the abandonment of accountability or responsibility. For responsibility to be really radical – which is to say, really ethical – we must think of ourselves as responsible for our unconscious wishes, desires and fears, especially as they revolve around issues of race and racism, sex and sexism. We might not be able to know fully or control our unconscious lives, but we can and should be responsible for their effects on other people. How do I unknowingly contribute to the debilitating alienation and social melancholy that others experience? How am I responsible for the forgiveness that does or does not occur in other people's lives? These admittedly are difficult questions of accountability and answerability, and attempting to answer them is likely to be an endless task. But it is a task that is necessary to the overcoming of domination and oppression. Just as psychoanalysis needs to be a social theory if it is not to cover over oppressive power relations, a truly responsible ethics and politics must reckon with the role of the unconscious in the creation and maintenance of domination.

Shannon Sullivan

§113

Michael Quante, *Hegel's Concept of Action*, trans. Dean Moyar, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004. 216 pp., £45.00 hb., 0 521 82693 4.

Michael Quante's *Hegel's Concept of Action* is a sustained effort to survey a nexus of seemingly incongruous concepts: Hegelian thought and contemporary 'analytic' philosophy. Its methodology is shaped by a commitment to demonstrate that, on the one hand, the contemporary philosophy of action provides the theoretical terms by which much that is mysterious in the Hegelian dialectic can be explained, and, on the other, Hegel's approach to agency can be correctly understood to anticipate and even clarify much of what is at issue in this philosophy of actions. With Brandom, McDowell, Davidson and Chisholm among its most essential sources and disputants, it approaches agency in terms of concepts of personality, subjectivity, inten-

tionality, attribution, universality and infinity, as well as crime, responsibility and the mind–body problem.

This work is best read with the *Philosophy of Right* open beside it. While offering no novel theses, it strives to unpack the logic of Hegelian agency from a contemporary perspective. Quante's primary thesis is that the concept of 'moral' (subjective) agency presented in the *Philosophy of Right* is central to the Hegelian dialectic in general. It is in that work that a genuine agent-theoretic perspective, contributive to a rigorous understanding of the dialectic of self-hood in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, can be found. Rather than utilizing the dialectic to justify the objective movements of history in which human beings are implicated, Quante isolates the human person as a particular moment of the universal viewed from the anonymous position of the historical dialectic. Quante emphasizes the importance of explanations of personal agency (and thus personal identity) in terms of internally descriptive intentions and freely volitional agency (and not merely 'purposive activity'). In other words, rather than examining agency within the objective determinations of an external account of the dialectic of persons and deeds, he analyses the dialectic of internally descriptive attributions of intentional action. The 'morality' of an action, then, is not merely some contingent aspect, but its most vital internal determinant.

Most of the book is dedicated to unpacking a single quotation from Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (§113) in which the 'determinations' of an action are: (a) the action is known by the agent to be its own, (b) obligation is the relation between an action and its concept, and (c) the action has an essential relation to the will of others. For Quante's Hegel, agency is understood primarily in terms of intentional action as a realization of a subjective and freely chosen end, answerable to its own internal universal obligation, and known to be exposed to the judgement of others. Each instance of intentional agency is an exercise of the subjective will in which there is a conceptual unfolding of a free decision that accompanies (but does not 'cause') such agency. An explanation of intentional agency must involve a description that includes the perspective and self-understanding of the agent at the time of the performance.

Quante's book, perhaps like Hegel's philosophy, is dominated by various dichotomies through which a dialectical account of agency, legality and morality is played out. In Hegel these are intertwined in a logic of reflection, not separately spread out, as in Kant. The 'transitional' dichotomy marks a passage from legality

(in which the agent is taken to be a 'person' whose conduct can be described without emphasis upon any internal perspective) to morality – in which the agent is taken to be a 'subject' for whose action a description of internal perspective is laden with motives, intentions, opinions and reasons. This passage, he insists, should not be understood as a theoretical movement from one extensive concept describing a substantial entity (the legal 'person') to another (the moral 'subject'), but rather as distinct perspectives on a single activity of a subjectivity of will. Interestingly, in order to elucidate this transition, he effectively utilizes the notions of crime – as a disavowal of absolute principles of right that produces only emptiness of rational content – and punishment – as punitive form of justice in which the criminal is 'honoured' inasmuch as the emptiness of his/her crime becomes an expression of rational will. Legal punishment raises the criminal act to a certain dignity, one might say, because it bestows on it a significance it does not itself possess.

For students of contemporary 'continental' critiques of Hegel, *Hegel's Concept of Action* confirms suspicions that Hegel's later 'conservative' work offers insights into the dialectical nature of subjectivity. Between the Hegel of the anonymous forces of history and the Hegel of 'moral' initiative, there is little to choose from if one is committed to anti-Hegelian notions such as non-dialectical negation, sentient bodies, the multitude and supplementarity. This book strips the dialectic of the mysticism Marx discerned in it, but without offering an equally compelling interpretation that would avoid contemporary critiques and without conceiving the terms of an alternative relevance for the Hegelian project.

Although the book's scholarly apparatus is very impressive, it has a few shortcomings. First, by either 'continental' or 'analytic' standards, its composition is unnecessarily turgid and repetitive in a way that is hardly likely to inspire the reader's excitement. Second, some of the distinctions and formulations fail to clarify the interest of competing theoretical positions, leaving it unclear whether a particular notion will resurface significantly in later passages. Third, although the argumentation fulfils promises made in the introduction, the lack of a conclusion might abandon the reader to wondering whether he or she has actually grasped the work's intended achievement. It merits repeating that this book's primary contribution is a close textual reading that might enable us to adjust traditional interpretations without offering altogether new perspectives.

B.C. Hutchens