Critique of love

Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2005. x + 159 pp., £35.95 hb., £14.95 pb., 0 691 12360 8 hb., 0 691 12361 6 pb.

At the beginning of a new millennium this is a book full of melancholy. Written between 1998 and 2005, it includes pieces on the end of liberal democracy, the darkness of current times, the mourning of the revolution within feminism and the impossibility of women's studies as an intellectually rigorous programme. The book is not organized around a single theme or thesis. Several of the essays draw conclusions and make recommendations that are mutually incompatible, perhaps a natural consequence of the fact that the pieces have been written for different audiences over several years. Nevertheless, there are reiterated topics. One is the possibility of critique and the future of political and critical theory; another is the revolutionary impulse in feminism; a third is a concern with some very specific issues such as patriotism or the importance of silence as a weapon of resistance.

On the first of these, Brown claims that 'critical theory in dark times is a singular practice of *amor fati*'. Invoking the work of Walter Benjamin and Friedrich Nietzsche, Brown is keen to emphasize critique as a break from the age's self-conception. Yet critique's untimeliness is understood as the fruit of historical thinking. Thus, critical theory is not utopian, quite the contrary. Although critique breaks with the times by taking as its object the limited range of possibilities and choices which are visible from the age's perspective on itself, nevertheless it is bound to affirm this time as *its* time. Thus, critique is *amor fati* because it is 'a practice of affirming the text it contexts'. Brown characterizes our dark times as the times of two powers whose currency is fear: empire and terrorism. Although she does not elaborate, these remarks indicate Brown's approval for Hardt and Negri's account of our current situation as one best understood in terms of the notion of a global empire. They also clearly date this claim as belonging to the post-9/11 era.

This dual role of critique as both affirming and contesting the current age seems to be lacking in the other essays in this collection. Instead, some use critique to affirm and others to contest. Hence the article on neoliberalism and the end of liberal democracy is focused exclusively on contestation. In this piece, Brown rehearses what I take to be well-known arguments about neoliberalism as a form of governmentality: neoliberal structures and powers re-shape all spheres of social life so as to be governed exclusively by instrumental considerations of costs and benefits. Brown also argues that liberal democracy cannot survive in the context of neoliberal political governmentality. The realization that liberal democracy is coming to an end has, for Brown, put the Left in an uncomfortable position. On the one hand, the Left never loved liberal democracy, preferring different democratic models. On the other, the Left is compelled to defend liberalism against its neoliberal antagonist.

In this essay Brown enjoins the Left not to give in to a melancholic attachment to liberal democracy. In her view, if the Left defends liberal democracy and civil liberties in liberal terms, it loses its own vision. The Left might wish to mourn the demise of liberal democracy, but it should not try to keep this form of democracy alive. Instead, Brown suggests that 'what remains for the Left … is to challenge emerging neoliberal governmentality in Euro-Atlantic states with an alternative vision of the good.'

Brown's suggestion is unsatisfactory for two reasons. First, given Brown's analysis of the current situation in several essays in this collection, it is extremely unclear how or even whether such an alternative can be developed and take hold. After all, in another essay Brown boldly claims that the project of 'revolution is unquestionably finished'. Second, Brown's description of this vision is extremely sketchy. She writes that 'a left vision of justice would focus on practices and institutions of popular power'; that it would treat rights merely as safeguards for the individual 'against radical democratic enthusiasms'; that it would take a 'long view' of 'the importance of both meaningful activity and hospitable dwellings to human flourishing'. This description is too brief to permit a serious assessment of the vision it hints at. It is nevertheless surprising to hear Brown use the vocabulary of human flourishing and of conceptions of the good. This is not the kind of vocabulary that is much in evidence elsewhere in this book with a single, but telling, exception. When

discussing the idea that revolution is now both dangerous and anachronistic, Brown remarks that 'all visions of the Good now appear to consort with fundamentalism'. Unless the capitalization is intended to bear an enormous weight, this remark stands in considerable tension with Brown's positive proposal for an alternative vision of the Left.

Both the remark about the death of revolution and that about the connection between fundamentalism and visions of the good appear in an illuminating essay on the relation of feminism to revolutionary impulses. I return to the main themes in this piece below, but here I want to note another tension with the opening manifesto about the role of critique in our times. There Brown warns us against utopian impulses; she urges us to realize that 'untimely critique that seeks to speak to our time is launched not from outside time, or indifferently to the times'. And yet elsewhere she enjoins us to recuperate a utopian imaginary. This imaginary would not be a mechanism of escape from the felt impossibility of social transformation. Instead, despite being stripped of the illusions of redeeming the past and being realized in the future, it would contribute to the making of social transformation. Perhaps Brown is deploying two different notions of utopia in these contexts. It is hard to say. But, like the previous invocation of an alternative vision of the good, this call for utopian thinking sits rather uneasily with Brown's views about the nature and role of critique.

Utopia or contestation does not figure prominently in an essay on political love of one's country and political loyalty for one's community. This piece, clearly written in the shadow of 9/11, attempts to dispel the equation of dissent with disloyalty which has become problematically prevalent in the North American context. Brown sets up her argument by means of two telling caveats. First, she claims not to be providing a universal account of the relationship between citizenship, loyalty and critique. Instead, she 'explores these relations as they are configured by a time of crisis and by a liberal democratic state response to that crisis'. Second, she 'considers the relation of love, loyalty, and critique within a political order, the existence and basic legitimacy of which is not called into question'. She does not mean to suggest that within these constraints it is impossible to argue for a radical transformation of one's own collectivity, but acknowledges that hers is 'a distinctly nonrevolutionary formulation of the problematic of dissent'.

'Fair enough', one may be tempted to say, 'even radical democrats are allowed to be strategic in their thinking'. And yet this is an odd approach for someone with Brown's convictions. Odd, first, because the whole point of critique is to put into question the assumptions behind the polity's understanding of itself. Odd, also, because she has stated elsewhere that the Left's defence of liberal democracy by liberal means is tantamount to political suicide. It is unclear, then, why she engages in the kind of strategic action which she appears to believe is utterly misguided.

Brown's discussion of political love and dissent begins with an exploration of Socrates' loyalty to Athens, and of Freud's account of group psychology. She uses these figures to argue that loyalty and love are necessary to bind a collectivity together. But this love is always directed toward an idealization. The conservative patriot idealizes the current state of things or the polity's past. The radical critic, whose dissent is a form of love for her community, identifies with 'a utopian version of one's polity'. Brown develops these considerations into a proposal about how internal critics of US foreign policy might wish to frame their interventions. She suggests that they might be 'tendered as an act of love'. Critique, she continues, 'might then inhabit the dignified and authoritative voice of belonging, rather than the moral screech of exclusion. It might also be proffered in the voice of love and desire (for a better nation) rather than the voice of rage, shame, or denunciation.' I find these suggestions deeply problematic. The critic, by declaring her love for her people, and identifying only with an ideal version of her community, frees herself of any responsibility for its actual shortcomings. She takes her community to be answerable to her dissent, but she does not take herself as answerable for her community's behaviour. And yet, it would seem that this is precisely what is required by Western critics. What is required is an acknowledgement of our own responsibility for the shameful behaviour of our own countries.

In lieu of a conclusion, I wish to discuss briefly the last two pieces that make up this collection. They are courageous and thought-provoking reflections on what has gone wrong with feminism. In 'Feminism Unbound' Brown reflects on the fact that historically there has been a deep connection between anti-capitalist revolutionary impulses and feminism. What was immensely liberating in feminism was the promise 'that we could become new women and men, that we could literally take in hand the conditions that produce gender and then produce it differently'. This promise has waned with the realization that capitalism per se does not require gender or gender subordination. It has tendencies to increase such subordination as well as to

attenuate it. The promise has disappeared with post-structuralist acknowledgements of 'the impossibility of seizing the conditions of making gender as well as the impossibility of escaping gender'. Thus, the question for Brown is what is left of feminism now that its revolutionary impulse is dead. This is a question she does not answer in this collection but it is certainly worthy of consideration.

Impossibility looms large in the last essay of this collection also, where Brown suggests that degree programmes in Women's Studies lack intellectual coherence, and have become a negative conservative force in academia. Most of Brown's penetrating observations about what has gone wrong with Women's Studies apply to issues that are specific to the North American academic context she discusses. But her conclusion deserves careful consideration. In her view, the political mission of Women's Studies is incompatible with its institutionalization as a degree programme in universities. Perhaps she is right. But the observation should not simply lead us to reflect on the shortcomings of such programmes, as Brown does, but also to entertain the possibility that something might be wrong with academia as such.

Alessandra Tanesini

Retreatment

Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2006. 296 pp., £34.95 hb., £19.95 pb., 0 8047 5269 9 hb., 0 8047 5270 2 pb.

By the end of the 1970s, Jean-Luc Nancy had already acquired a reputation as a brilliant deconstructive critic of classical philosophical texts. His books included an anti-foundationalist reading of Kant and a critique of Descartes, which argued that the criteria of clarity and distinction could apply only to thinking what was thought rather than to the process of thinking *thinking* per se. Following closely in Derrida's footsteps and working with his Strasbourg colleague Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy included among his other early targets the German Romantics and Lacan. In the 1980s Nancy began to exceed the genres of criticism or commentary, as he started to develop a systematic account of existence after the end of essence, and of meaning after the end of any original or ultimate 'Meaning'. Over the past fifteen years or so Nancy has refined and extended this account to cover a vast range of topics, including politics, community, freedom, literature, art, technology, ethics and Christianity.

The fundamental move that informs Nancy's approach to all these topics is a straightforwardly Heideggerian distinction between beings and being, or between *what* any presentable entity happens to be and its active *being* or 'presenting' as such. On the one hand there is the presented and thus describable entity or thing; on the other hand there is the process of its coming into presence, its being 'born to presence', which cannot itself be presented or described but only 'sensed' in its very withdrawal from all possible presentation. That is to say, there is whatever is disclosed, and there is the pure event or *Ereignis* of its disclosing as such. Nancy develops an elaborate series of variations on this theme, distinguishing between what is given and its giving, between what happens and its happening, between what is created and its creating, between what is meant and its meaning, between what is embodied and its embodying, between what is touched and its touching, and so on. In line with Heidegger's critique of presence-at-hand (and, more to the point, in line with Derrida's famous critique of Heidegger as himself compromised by the thematics of presence and proximity) he relentlessly tracks down any attempt to confuse one set of terms with the other. A presenting or 'presencing' makes present but is not itself presentable. A presenting comes to presence but *has* no presence; it is radically 'finite' in the sense that it can never (unlike Hegel's metaphysical infinite) complete, ground or encompass itself.

Nothing can be presented of a presenting as such, and, in particular, no presenting can present itself. This is the basic argument that emerges from most of Nancy's work, and that continues to inform both its critical and affirmative priorities. Negatively, it lies behind his critique of myth, conventional theology, communitarianism, philosophies of the subject, and so on, as so many deluded efforts to enable a presenting to present (and thus define, authorize, ground, establish) itself. Affirmatively, it has allowed him to develop perhaps the most sophisticated and congenial post-Heideggerian ontology of his generation. Since a presenting cannot present itself but only its lack of coincidence with itself, so then this account of finite or incomplete being is also an ontology of being conceived as being-*with* that which is other than itself; *Mitsein* can thus be acknowledged as the most basic existential dimension of being as such. Since presentings only present together, since they *are* only in common, Heidegger's fateful distinction between the exceptional and the everyday, between the proper

and the improper, between enowning and disowning, between *eigentlich* and *uneigentlich*, drops out of the picture, along with its disastrous political implications. Since the common world or shared space of presentings presents all that can be presented, without nostalgia for any original or self-sufficient presence, Heidegger's reactionary critique of technology and modernity can likewise be abandoned as apparently extrinsic to his own essential ontological concerns.

In his *Fragmentary Demand*, Ian James provides a thorough and illuminating overview of Nancy's general project. As his title implies, James adopts the motif of fragmentation and plurality as the organizing principle for his book: because it acknowledges no presentable unity or foundation, James presents Nancy's work as a series of shifting meditations on an incongruent plurality of topics. A first chapter considers Nancy's long-standing critique of the subject (the modern paradigm of a presenting that seeks to present itself). Further chapters then work through his conceptions of space, body, community and art as dimensions of being without essence, dimensions of an existential sharing or being-together in a disparately and elusively everyday world. In line with Nancy's own methodological orientation, James presents these topics 'less as thematic unities and more as a series of singular openings. Each motif is construed as an instance of opening onto, or of exposure to, the sense of Nancy's philosophy, in which philosophy itself is articulated as a series of exposures to the limit of sense.'

As an introductory overview to a major contemporary thinker, James's book is exemplary: the exposition is economical and clear, and combines useful contextual background with sustained sequences of detailed exegesis. James has a real knack for the concise presentation of complex ideas, and draws to good effect on Nancy's own tendency to work closely with and through other thinkers' work. The chapter on subjectivity includes fairly involved discussions of Kant's first critique and Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, prefaced by an admirably compressed summary of Derrida's 'Structure, Sign and Play'. Later chapters include equally detailed readings of Husserl and the phenomenological conception of space, Merleau-Ponty on embodiment, and Hegel on aesthetics, supplemented by pertinent comparisons with several of Nancy's contemporaries (Henry, Lacoue-Labarthe, Derrida again; Stiegler is a rare omission). James pays particular attention to Nancy's post-phenomenological account of the body and the interface between meaning, touching and writing, arguing that the particular 'strength of Nancy's thought lies in its emphasis on the materiality of sense and of embodied being-in-the-world *as* finite spatial existence'.

To my mind James makes about as good a case for Nancy's position as can be made, and it's hardly an exaggeration to say that this book may tell you just about everything you might want to know about Nancy's work. Nevertheless, unless you're already inclined to accept its broadly Heideggerian orientation, it may not make you want to know a great deal more about it. James repeatedly addresses the question as to how far Nancy, in the end, is 'merely' a Heideggerian philosopher, arguing that his insistence on the primacy of *Mitsein* and of sharing or being in *common*, his affirmation of the banal and of the 'inauthentic', his acknowledgement of technology and the originary 'impropriety' of body, and so on, all suffice to distance him from the neo-romantic pathos of *aletheia* and *Ereignis*. It might be more accurate to say that Nancy has extended the same basic logic of *Ereignis*, the same essential difference between a disclosing and the disclosed, to many of those dimensions of experience that Heidegger himself was inclined to abandon as unworthy of thought (many of these dimensions, I should say, though certainly not all: it remains hard to see how this ontology might ground viable accounts of science and mathematics, for instance). Nancy is the thinker who, working on the unquestioned assumption that Heidegger's questions should continue to set the contemporary philosophical agenda, has gone to the greatest lengths to distance this agenda from Heidegger's own most grievous mistakes.

The two most obvious problems that beset this agenda, however, persist more or less unchanged. In the first place, for all James's emphasis on the open, fragmentary and non-totalizable plurality of Nancy's concerns, it's hard to avoid a powerful sense of monotony, closure and *ennui*. The same basic problematic returns again and again in Nancy's rapidly expanding oeuvre, and James's own account does not preserve enough critical distance from his subject to escape a version of this same monotony himself. When he turns to art in his final chapter, for instance, he observes that 'art, in Nancy's thought, exists in, or as, a relation to the world, a relation to shared finite existence, and more specifically to that movement of sense which is, or opens up, world-hood itself in all its singular plurality.' Anyone who has read the previous four chapters will be thoroughly familiar with every word in such a sentence – but isn't this just another way of saying that according to this approach art simply *is* the world? Art is the world in so far as the world is nothing other than its coming into presence – that is, in so far as the

world is itself a synonym for the movement of 'sense', or finitude, or freedom, or community, or being-with, and so on. All these terms operate as little more than variations on the same essential exploration of existence without essence, contributions to one and the same thinking of being which only *is* in its withdrawing from whatever has or will have been. It is far from clear, moreover, how on this basis we might think of art as any sort of 'relation' to the world at all.

In the second place, then, for all Nancy's emphasis on the relational orientation of his ontology, since there can be no relation between a presenting and the presented, between *that* something is and *what* it is, his whole account of relationality remains radically abstract, a simple consequence of this ontology's 'finite' (or non-self-coincident) orientation. His account of the world as an open spacing or sharing precludes any consequential consideration of the relation between how the world is and what the world has been. Nancy encourages us to engage in the world without reference to any 'pre-given realities' and without aligning ourselves with any discernible project, struggle or community. Countering the objections raised by Nancy Fraser and others, James claims that Nancy's call for a 'withdrawal from politics and the concomitant "retreating of the political" is a deeply engaged gesture that does not intervene or make prescriptive/normative judgements about the present, but that demands that the present be *thought*.'

Let the present be thought, by all means. Rather than help us to think the historical urgency of the present, however, Nancy's great achievement may instead have been to develop new ways of rereading one of the most profoundly compromised thinkers of our recent past. A reformed Heideggerianism promises little critical purchase on the contemporary moment. Suspension of intervention or of prescriptive demands, the dismissal of pre-given realities, an indifference to inherited or cumulative forms of injustice and exploitation, together with an emphasis on fragmentation and deferral, on the undecidable and the indeterminate, and so on – this is precisely the way our present has long preferred to think of itself. It may well be that the suspension of prescriptive judgement has for some time now served above all to allow (what Nancy continues to call) 'the West' to come up with ways of avoiding thinking many of the things that the world itself might otherwise encourage us to think.

Peter Hallward

Face-off

Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen eds, *Radical Democracy: Politics between Abundance and Lack*, University of Manchester Press, Manchester, 2005. 288 pp., £55.00 hb., 0 7190 7044 9.

Darrow Schecter, *Beyond Hegemony: Towards a New Philosophy of Political Legitimacy*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2005. 240 pp., £55.00 hb., 0 7190 6088 5.

In a quirk of sloppy copy-editing, one of the contributions to Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen's *Radical Democracy* bears the running header 'For an Agnostic Public Sphere' instead of the essay's actual title, which is 'For an Agonistic Public Sphere.' But this confusion between agnosticism and agonism is perhaps symptomatic of the problems afflicting the very concept of radical democracy. For though its proponents repeatedly invoke notions of political combat and engagement, they all too easily slip into quiescent indecision. Put it this way: it is far from clear what is 'radical' about radical democracy behind the rhetorical display of terms such as agonism, antagonism, pluralism, heterogeneity, and the like.

Is radical democracy a specific form of democracy, comparable to but different from (say) its Athenian, liberal, or neoliberal variants? And if so, is it a democracy still to come, to be fought for as a perhaps utopian horizon of democratic thought and struggle? Or is it, by contrast, a form of democracy in which some groups (new social movements, say) currently engage, in other words a counter-democratic actuality that has emerged since the end of the Cold War and the bad old days of class politics? On the other hand, could radical democracy be found less either in the future or the present, but in a return to the founding moment of the so-called 'democratic revolutions'? Is radical democracy then the rediscovery of a radicalism once inherent to democracy but now lost? In slightly different words, is radical democracy simply another name for what Simon Critchley here terms 'true' democracy? Or finally, is democracy always radical? Is radical democracy really a tautology, in that democracy properly understood and described, even as it is played out currently in the real world, is necessarily in some way radical?

All these possibilities crop up at one point or another in this collection, and often enough several contradictory positions are argued or assumed in more or less the same breath by the same author. To his credit, Ernesto Laclau at least confronts the fact that there are, as he puts it, a 'plurality of ways of radicalisation'. In his version of this plurality, these are: first, the universalization of democratic ideals leading to 'the internal democratisation of liberal institutions'; second, 'the constitution of the "people"' as a 'democratic subjectivity'; and third, a 'radical pluralism' as

a range of demands from diverse constituencies insist on being heard within the political arena. So radical democracy can be liberal; it can be populist; and it can also be what for want of a better word we could call postmodern. But in themselves neither liberalism nor populism nor indeed postmodernism are necessarily radical – often quite the reverse in terms of, say, their relations to capitalism, minorities, or the prospect of revolutionary change. So, albeit without wanting to lose the notion that these three possibilities are in fact radical in some way, Laclau concludes by arguing that what is truly radical is precisely their mutual incompatibility: '*The undecidable character of this interaction* [between liberalism, populism, and postmodernism], *the impossibility of conceptually mastering the contingent forms in which it crystallizes, is exactly what we call radical democracy.*' Yet surely this is simply making a virtue out of incoherence. What is more, the normative problem remains: for Laclau these incompatible democratic impulses necessarily intertwine in any politics; politics is therefore always incoherent; while the social is always political because it is always incomplete, in that it is defined by a constitutive lack. Once again, 'radical democracy' comes to be a tautology.

Tønder and Thomassen frame their collection as a kind of face-off between (as their subtitle suggests) theories of lack and theories of abundance – or more strictly, 'the ontological imaginary of abundance and the ontological imaginary of lack'. Essentially this means that the Lacanians confront the Deleuzeans in this version of a political philosophy World Cup. But the Lacanian team are almost without exception made up of players affiliated in some way with Laclau; there are no Žižekians, for instance, and Žižek himself gets rather a bad rap, not least from Critchley, who somewhat cattily suggests 'One might say, like Slavoj Žižek, pretty much anything you like, as there are so many contradictions in what he has said about politics over the years'. And on the other hand, the Deleuzeans are stymied by the fact that the chosen field of play is radical democracy, a concept so close to the heart of Laclau (and, perhaps even more so, his collaborator Chantal Mouffe) yet so alien to Deleuze. Paul Patton, for instance, purports to get around this significant obstacle only by means of a series of *non sequiturs* that rely mostly on what Deleuze did *not* say about radical (or indeed any other form of) democracy. Hence Patton's contribution is studded with rhetorical questions such as 'does this neglect of political reason in Deleuze's thought justify the charge that he provides an aesthetics or ethics but not properly a theory of politics?' Or, in discussing Deleuze and Guattari's critique of Rorty in *What is Philosophy?*, Patton's argument is based, it seems, on the assumption that Deleuze may have chatted to his friends from time to time:

> He is clearly opposed to the idea that the exchange of opinions is a means to create concepts, but not necessarily opposed to the pleasures of conversation as such. Moreover, nothing follows … about the exchange of opinions or the need for consensus in the political sphere.

Nothing follows; how true.

So we have a rather forced opposition between lack and abundance framed as a debate on the common terrain of radical democracy. Many contributors are keen to problematize the distinction between the two

philosophies allegedly in contention: Tønder and Thomassen themselves admit that 'the distinction between abundance and lack may itself be contestable'; while Nathan Widder convincingly argues that the point is more that a Deleuzean politics has little interest in the failures or otherwise 'of any identity or identification' and so in the pseudo-politics of hegemony. But on the whole the issue of radical democracy, and the desirability of either radicalism or democracy, remains unaddressed. If, after all, 'antagonism is and remains constitutive' in liberal democracy, as Yannis Stavrakakis argues, then surely celebrating this fact would be better described as conservatism? Moreover, though there are many nods towards internationalism, few contributors think beyond the notion of a territorially defined *demos* upon which democracy traditionally rests, and almost without exception all see the state as an immutable feature of political and social organization. For all the excitable proclamations of hope in a radical future, the prevailing sentiment is that summarized by Critchley: 'for good or for ill, let us say for ill, we are stuck with the state, just as we are stuck with capitalism'. In this context radicalism seems to be mostly a matter of trying to get people to be a little nicer to each other, and democracy to depend (in line with some of New Labour's flirtations) on faith groups and the like: 'local meetings, internet campaigns, church organization, film portrayals, celebrity testimonials' and so on in William Connolly's words; the revivalist atmosphere of a 'Rev. Battle' whipping his flock into 'a guttural "love jam" incantation with Corinthians: "LOVE … LOVE … LOVE"' in Romand Coles's account. Perhaps even worse, Jon Simons turns to what is surely now the thoroughly discredited cultural populism of cultural studies and its praise for 'consumer agency'.

Still, there are some bright spots here and there. Despite the many kneejerk dismissals of Negri's concept of the multitude (and disparaging Negri and Hardt is clearly as fashionable now as adulating them was some five years or so ago), in fact Critchley's version of the political subject as a 'formless mass' is more multitudinous than he would like to admit, however much he wants to relegate such subjectivity to an 'empty space'; for to say that 'the people are missing' (as Deleuze has it) is not to say that they are some kind of non-entity. And fashioning a more expansive conceptualization of subjectivity and agency is also Jane Bennett's project: drawing on Bruno Latour she offers an 'enchanted materialism' that posits 'multiple sites of agency' in the human and non-human alike; it would certainly be good to cultivate the 'slight surprise of action' that she takes from Latour rather than the reiterated certainties of hegemony theory otherwise offered by *Radical Democracy*.

Darrow Schecter, by contrast, has so little time for either hegemony or hegemony theory that he hardly stops to define what he means by the term that appears in his title, *Beyond Hegemony*. He suggests, however, that hegemony is a 'fabricated consensus'. It is society's purported reconciliation either (in its liberal variant) by 'transforming the horizontal contract between private trading partners in economic exchange into a vertical contract between citizens and the state' or (in its post-liberal, socialist or social democratic variants) on the basis of legitimacy's trumping legality by positing particular subjects as the bearers of the general will. But in the end, he argues, these two variants are much the same: the problem with those who criticize liberalism, be they partisans of state socialism or civil society democratization, is that they neither go far enough beyond liberalism, nor do they really understand it in the first place. They merely substitute an overt legitimating subject (the proletariat or new social movements, say) for the covert (white, male, property-owning) subject that anchors the traditional liberal ideal. So *encore un effort*, Schecter tells us, if we are really to leave behind liberalism or its hegemonic compromises. Yet abandoning liberalism means also returning to its first impulses, before it became corrupted by its hegemonic pretensions.

For Schecter wants to rescue liberalism from its own disrepute. Rather than remaining content with the familiar observation that liberal universalism is built on particular premises, he argues for a return to the Kantian priority of legality over legitimacy. And so rather than tempering abstract legality with popular demands for legitimacy (this being, as he sees it, the long history of Western democracies passing through universal suffrage and the welfare state), he seeks instead to establish a legitimate legality, which would retain the virtues of universality and objectivity, without being in hock to the subjective needs of an ever wider cast of particularities. The position he stakes out is, then, what he terms a 'critical', 'radical', or even 'materialist' idealism that also, *inter alia*, promises to reconcile humanity with both outer nature, or the system of needs, and inner nature, or the system of the passions. This reconciliation will be instantiated by means of consumer councils and workers' cooperatives, which will further ensure that 'knowing becomes aesthetic and pleasurable rather than instrumental and strategic', leaving instrumental reason behind as an odd relic of a by-then-vanquished age of hegemony.

Schecter's critique of purported post-liberalism, as simply a warmed-over liberalism that conserves the worst rather than the best of what it claims to supersede, is a useful antidote to theories of radical democracy. His analysis of liberalism's paradoxes, while not always novel, is also sharp and to the point. However, he might have considered more the possibility that we are already living in a post-hegemonic age. Bush, Blair, and Co. hardly stir themselves much to fabricate consensus these days – indeed, Blair's main argument for the war in Iraq is now that precisely the unpopularity of his policies is a guarantee that he is not merely bowing to the court of legitimate public opinion. Moreover, is not Schecter's dream of a 'constant exchange of information between producers … and consumers' not already with us albeit in the form of questionnaires, focus groups, and the information derived from loyalty cards on the one hand, and advertising and the ideologies of business transparency on the other? We are already beyond hegemony, and whatever else radicalism might be, surely it does not involve rescuing liberalism, whether in its purer, idealist, form or in its corrupt, democratizing, incarnations.

Jon Beasley-Murray

Oi – come back!

Werner Bonefeld and Kosmas Psychopedis, eds, *Human Dignity: Social Autonomy and the Critique of Capitalism*, Ashgate, Aldershot and Burlington VT, 2005. 197 pp., £50.00 hb., 0 7546 4468 5.

This book brings together a group of like-minded thinkers to explore the theme of human dignity in opposition to capitalism. In many respects this represents a continuation of the *Open Marxism* series edited by Bonefeld and Psychopedis with Richard Gunn, but with a stronger theme running throughout. These essays are not works of Marxist political economy. They are less concerned with the inner workings of capitalism than its moral costs. Indeed, one could describe it as a kind of Manichaean Marxism, which counterposes the 'humanitarian' values of equality, dignity and autonomy to the alienation, inversion and perversion of these values by an autonomous economic system.

The primary moral assumption underlying this critical enterprise is that human beings comprise self-constituting agents in their own right. In this respect they adopt a Kantian account of 'Man' (as the editors unfortunately translate the term *Mensch*), grounded in the categorical distinction between: (1) *objects*, which possess no dignity and should be treated as a mere means to an end, and (2) *humans*, which possess intrinsic worth and comprise ends in themselves. In support of this normative stance Bonefeld and Psychopedis declare in the title essay, 'Human Dignity: Social Autonomy and the Critique of Capitalism', that 'Dignity cannot be sold, quantified or conferred. Dignity is a general human value that belongs to each concrete individual. It is an indivisible human value.' This contrasts with a Hegelian–Habermasian approach, which regards autonomy as a historically 'modern' phenomenon that agents intersubjectively confer upon one another. In contrast the authors operate with a *naturalistic* conception of autonomy, which comprises the moral basis of human dignity. This, however, raises two important questions: (1) to what extent does this comprise a valid interpretation of Marx's critique of capitalism, and (2) to what extent does it comprise a valid critique of capitalism. I want to examine each in turn.

The strongest aspect of this collection is its interpretation of Marx. This maintains that the basic structure of Marx's critical enterprise remained unchanged from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* onwards. This rests upon a 'humanistic' core, which capitalism is condemned for inverting and perverting. In his essay 'Aspects of Marx's Concept of Critique', Hans-George Baukhaus argues that Marx's 'anthropological' critique combines the materialism of Ludwig Feuerbach with the activism of German idealism. In this respect, the notion of fetishism Marx develops in *Capital* represents a continuation of Feuerbach's critique of religion, with the difference that the inversion of subject and object that defines religion is grounded in the inverted (perverted) world of capitalism. According to Baukhaus,

> Marx defines all economic 'forms' or 'categories' as 'perverted' forms (*verrückte Formen*). Marx deploys the phrase '*verrückte*' (perverted) forms in its double senses, on the one hand, puzzling, mystical essence, and, on the other hand, as a sphere 'outside Man', displaced and transposed.

Similarly, Helmut Reichhelt concludes his essay 'Social Reality as Appearance' by stating that 'Human sensuous practice subsists through its supersensible existence in the autonomization of society as both the object and subject of its perverted (*verrückte*) social practice.

Psychopedis argues in 'Social Critique and the Logic of Revolution' that, for Marx, revolution comprises 'a kind of re-establishment of the sensual essence of the

species through the overcoming of its alienated capitalist form of existence'. Michael A. Lebowitz continues this theme in his short contribution 'Beyond the Muck of Ages', arguing that the task of Marxism is to make workers aware that they create the system which rules over them. In contrast, in 'The Untimely Timeliness of Rosa Luxemburg' Joseph Fracchia departs from this theme in his account of the contemporary significance of Luxemburg's analysis of class struggle. He criticizes Lukács (a little unfairly in my opinion) for treating workers as hopelessly mired in reification, arguing that Luxemburg was right to begin from the everyday experience of the working class. To this end, Fracchia emphasizes the role of struggle 'from below' in constructing a 'workers' public sphere'. That said, his account of the latter does not address the theme of human dignity or alternative conceptions of the 'public sphere' such as Habermas's.

Sergio Tischer's 'Time of Reification and Time of Insubordination' returns to the book's main theme and applies it to the question of time. This takes the form of arguing that 'the revolutionary struggle for human emancipation, for human dignity, has to produce a real alternative to capitalist time'. To this end, he champions a version of Benjamin's 'messianic temporality', which aims to restore the 'social autonomy of Man over his conditions'. This means rejecting the notion of progress, because it thinks the future as a prolongation of the present, in favour of redeeming the past in the present. Tischer calls for a restorative revolution grounded in the 'lost unity' of society. In 'Nationalism and Anti-Semitism in Anti-Globalization Perspective', Bonefeld argues that anti-Semitism comprises 'a senseless barbaric rejection of capitalism that makes anti-capitalism useful for capitalism'. By effectively identifying Jews with the highest level of capital fetishism – the valorization of value without passing through production – Hitler skilfully translated anti-capitalism into anti-Semitism. Bonefeld then warns against mounting a similar critique against the abstract monetary forms of capitalism as somehow independent from and parasitical upon productive capitalism. The danger here is that the anti-globalization movement will support national (industrial) capital over global (financial) capital. To guard against this he argues that the fetish form is intrinsic to capital, just as exploitation is intrinsic to productive accumulation. It follows that the only solution to the rule of capital is democratic self-determination by associated producers, on the understanding that the self-constituting status of capitalism is merely an 'objective delusion', which masks the role of human subjects in its production. Bonefeld concludes by citing Marx: '*Every* emancipation is a *restoration* of the human world and of human relationships to *man* (*Menschen*) *himself*.' The final essay in the collection is a short summary of Holloway's much discussed plea to 'Stop Making Capitalism'. It also promotes a 'recuperative' conception of revolution, which returns humanity to its essence, understood as a modality of creative self-determination upon which capitalism is parasitical.

While there is much to recommend this interpretation of Marx, there is unfortunately little attempt to engage with alternative interpretations of Marx's critical enterprise. This is a major omission. In the absence of debate with rival interpretations, the authors fail to establish the validity of their approach. This is particularly true of their account of fetishism. Rethinking fetishism in moral terms has much to recommend it. But this also goes against Marx's self-understanding of his critical enterprise, which eschewed moral in favour of scientific categories. This is symptomatic of a tension in Marx's writings between a scientific and a moral critique of capitalism. Unfortunately, there is insufficient discussion of this tension, or how it might be resolved. Emphasizing the dependence of Marx's critique of capitalism on moral categories is a good start. But merely exchanging a moral for an epistemological objectivism is insufficient to overcome this tension. A moral critique of capitalism grounded in an essentialist conception of humanity raises a number of problems that the authors fail to address. I want to consider three.

First, there is the question of where the 'true' subject of self-constitution resides. Given that capitalism dominates the social landscape, the capacity of human beings to constitute themselves through labour only appears in an alienated guise. As Lebowitz notes: 'Having sold their power to the capitalist, the social productivity of workers necessarily takes the form of the social productivity of capital.' This then renders the true source, substance and subject of capital *invisible* – hence the Rubin School's claim that value-producing labour takes an 'abstract' form under capitalism. But as there is no phenomenological basis for this claim why should we believe it? At best 'abstract labour' comprises a hidden placeholder for a normative critique of capitalism.

Second, there is the related question of how capitalism can be both self-constituting and constituted by human labour. The authors stress – and this is the strongest aspect of their analysis – that capitalism comprises a self-constituting, self-valorizing, self-positing system in its own right. And it is this that

renders capitalism unjust, invalid and immoral. But they also argue that the autonomy of capitalism is merely an 'objective delusion', a mere 'mystification' of the true state of affairs, whereby human beings constitute themselves in an alien guise. In which case, capitalism is not a self-constituting system after all. It only *appears* to be. In reality capitalism comprises an alienated act of self-creation on humanity's part, even though the subject of this act is 'buried' under the system. And yet the appearance of self-constitution on the system's part is also real – hence the 'objectivity' of the putative illusion in question. Herein resides the paradox. This suggests we have reached the limits of an epistemological critique of capitalism – namely, that which counterposes the true, real and factual to the false, illusionary and fictional – while failing to advance a fully normative critique that would counterpose the just, valid and ethical to the unjust, invalid and unethical). If we are to overcome this paradox, we need to rethink the normative ground of the critique of capitalism in social and historical terms, rather than the naturalistic and transhistorical terms preferred by the authors. Only Fracchia addresses the role played by working-class struggle in creating an alternative to capitalism. But, as noted above, he does not engage with the naturalistic conception of human dignity that his colleagues find so compelling.

Third, there is the related question of the normative status of self-constitution. Rather than viewing self-constitution as a social practice whereby agents arrive at valid moral rules, the authors view self-constitution as a natural capacity we exercise whether we realize it or not. Given that capitalism usurps this capacity by assuming a self-constituting guise, it follows that it is not only immoral but also illusory. This relieves the authors of the need to establish the validity of their normative standpoint. Having discovered – through a process they do not explain – the essence of humanity, they then claim the authority to speak on its behalf. Anyone that disagrees with them is, by definition, not only guilty of 'anti-humanism' but also the victim of 'false consciousness'. In this way the modern right of agents to constitute intersubjectively their own norms is transformed into an essential capacity from which an objective account of morality is deduced. Needless to say, this represents a perversion of the modern norm of autonomy. Rather than allowing agents to determine their own moral identities, in line with the modern norm of self-constitution, the authors treat the latter as a natural state of affairs from which they deduce an objective morality. This authorizes them to impose their morality upon everyone else, in the name of what's good for humanity. Indeed, it transforms this 'good' into a universal moral obligation that we all have an objective duty to redeem. To ignore this categorical imperative is to collude in the dehumanization of humanity. Needless to say, from a modern perspective, such an account of morality appears authoritarian. As Charles Taylor has noted, 'any theory based on an antecedent notion of the good as prescribed by nature – is profoundly repugnant. It does not exalt the freedom of the subject as one ought, but rather preempts it.' Having placed Marx's critique of capitalism on a moral foundation, the authors follow Marx in placing morality on a naturalistic one. Like Marx, they can afford to denounce modern norms as 'bourgeois' because they have privileged access to an objective set of moral principles, which are neither conferred upon nor alienable from humanity. But this not only gives

their critical strategy an authoritarian character, it also gives it a conservative one. Rather than aiming to free human beings from the impediments of capitalism, to create their own moral identities, the authors call for the 'restoration' of 'Man to himself', on the grounds that the moral essence of humanity not only pre-dates capitalism but is also usurped by it. The drive to overcome capitalism is then grounded in the moral imperative to bring our alienated social existence *back* into correspondence with our pre-constituted essence. From this perspective, revolution reverses the 'inversion' of capitalism and restores the natural order of things upon which capitalism is secretly parasitic. In short, rather than grounding the critique of capitalism in the struggle of social agents to constitute their own moral identities democratically, the authors ground it in a pre-constituted moral identity to which they have privileged access, having parted the veil of fetishism to discover the true subject of self-constitution at work. Human dignity is 'restored', but only at the cost of reducing human beings to mere means for the realization of objective moral ends of which they are the unconscious bearers.

Bob Cannon

The new holy family

Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005. 240 pp., £30.50 hb., £12.00 pb., 0 226 70738 5 hb., 0 226 70739 3 pb.

Carl Schmitt's notion of 'political theology', the idea that central concepts of political thought are secular versions of theological concepts, has been the object of much recent critical work. If the positive critique inspired by such work seeks to eliminate the theological in some properly secular re-foundation of the political, a more malign deconstructive 'tarrying with the theological' – as in the essays here – travels in the opposite direction, attempting to refashion the political around a revivified theology, seeing a Derridian unavoidability as the occasion for positive affirmation.

All three essays depart from the notion of the neighbour in Freud's work. For the Freud of the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, the neighbour is the first 'other' the subject encounters, the locus of satisfaction and resistance to satisfaction. This split is famously emphasized in Lacan's *Ethics* seminar, where the neighbour is the place of the obdurate and obscene Thing, that which lurks in the other and threatens the subject. For the later Freud of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, the neighbour is the object of the impossible injunction 'love thy neighbour as thyself' – the ethical imperative *tout court* – and also the other which is both object of domination and menace of subjugation. The neighbour is thus an essentially transitional site, where the political and ethical emerge and overlap.

Ken Reinhard pursues the notion of the neighbour onto other terrain. He sees a secularized avatar of the theological notion of the neighbour in Adorno's reflections on Kierkegaard's idea of the 'dead neighbour' which maps the impossibility of neighbour–neighbour relations under capital, and Arendt's account of the vanished neighbour of totalitarian society, the mark of the impossibility of the political under the fusion of the social in dictatorship – although it is difficult to see what is theological about this latter, and what constitutes the passage to secularity. More problematically, he sees 'a political theology of the neighbour' as a positive programme, something that would be a supplement to the 'political theology of the sovereign'. This is opaque. What it seems to mean is that where Schmittian sovereignty lies in the power to decide what constitutes the exception, and thus what lies within and outside the law, Reinhard is looking for a space of contiguity not organized by the logic of inside and outside, nor by the structure of totality and exception that generates it. Rather than abandon the contaminated notion of sovereignty, he identifies it with Freud's primal father and then develop Lacan's readings of the neighbour as object of traumatic encounter, together with his later account of sexuation, to set this identity against another logic. This is the logic of the neighbour, which as well as being the source of anxiety and threat occupies the space of the feminine within Lacan's account of sexuation. The neighbour is the site of the non-totalized set of instances, which can only be counted one by one ad infinitum: the set that has no signifier and no common denominator. Ontologically, then, the neighbour eludes the logic of totality and confirming exception – the set of masculine subjects according to Lacan – and obeys the logic of Badiou's generic set; that is, it allows for the possibility of the union of entirely disparate sets joining together in unnatural union. The neighbour is the name of the place where love passes into politics, where the rule of 'equality and sameness gives way to the singularity and difference of love'. Reinhard's move is thus to generate from Lacan and Badiou an account of the site of the neighbour as the place of a non-sovereign politics. Now, the use of psychoanalysis to limn the space of an alternative political subjectivity is hardly new. What is difficult to understand here is the status of sovereignty after such a discovery, and more crucially the name of God, which suddenly emerges within the final Borromean knot at the end of Reinhard's article. Here an unanalysed God is a necessary moment, triangulating neighbour and self, jouissance and love, politics and psychoanalysis. Theology with a vengeance.

Santner's essay is explicitly devoted to a 'post-secular thinking' and, as in his recent book *The Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, recasts the work of Benjamin and Freud within the language of Rozensweig and, now, via Badiou, St Paul. The central concern here is ethical self-relation and the emergence of a 'proper' subject out of the repetitions of creaturely existence. This is accomplished through the miracle – a notion that derives in part from Benjamin's idea of the recognizability of possibility within history, but mostly from Rozensweig, where it signifies a traumatic event that has a paradoxical structural effect: the miracle shifts the personality to the self. Santner identifies the personality with Freud's drive-destined individual (the individual of repetition) and the self with Badiou's post-evental subject. The individual prior to the event is already engaged in interpretation of an essential lack (Santner borrows from Laplanche here) but the effort

of remaining faithful to the event involves an ethical consistency: drive-destiny becomes metaethical self, personality becomes subject. Crucially, the miracle becomes the site of the break with superegoic attachment, with the social and the sovereign: the miracle breaks with 'mere life' and Schmitt's political theology of sovereignty – 'but using the resources of theology'.

Rozensweig thus becomes a reinscription of St Paul as understood in Badiou. Badiou's idea of death as an evental site where new possibilities can emerge is the point at which resurrection can occur, or, in Rozensweig's terms, where the metaethical self can emerge. The possibility of the new is not guaranteed: something must happen. This transformation of drive-destiny is achieved by way of grace or love, and such love must be understood not as oblatory or sacrificial, but as the infinite dissemination of the capacity for loving the neighbour. Paul of course reduces all commandments to 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' and Badiou glosses this as directed towards the most thing-like element of the other – his drive-destiny. Santner follows Agamben in criticizing Badiou for his universalism, and uses Agamben's account of Paul to argue for a subterranean influence of Paul on Benjamin, but also to argue that it is only now that Paul is legible.

And what positively does Santner take from Agamben's Paul? That Paul's notion of the law allows for a cut into the latter's fantasmatic underside which can, if only momentarily, free us from drive-destiny and repetition, and thus shift us from a fantasy of exception to a proper and exposed relation to the neighbour, who only becomes visible in such a shift. The opening to the neighbour as a consequence of the miracle of grace is inscribed in a law that is not the law of prohibition and enjoyment but of love.

Exposure to the neighbour is the starting point of Žižek's contribution, which I shall deal with in less detail, in part because as ever the components of the text crop up elsewhere – most notably in the new 'book' *The Parallax View* – and between the digressions of the essay, it is not clear how really different his account of the neighbour is from the views outlined above and elsewhere.

Criticizing Butler by way of an attack on 'postmodern' concerns with not being vulnerable, with not being exposed to ethical violence, Žižek outlines the Lacanian typology of the other: the imaginary other of competition and recognition; the symbolic big Other of language and institutions and the real other, the impossible thing at the heart of human existence – ours and the neighbour's. This typology is deployed in a critique of Levinas, which essentially separates the 'gentrified' other of the face from the abyssal horror of the real other: the encounter with the face, the seeming opening to infinite responsibility, is in fact the avoidance of the encounter with the real other of the neighbour. Again engaging with Agamben, Žižek uses the figure of the *Muselmann* (from the Nazi extermination camps) to draw the limit of Levinas's other, who here is faceless, who cannot say 'Here I am' and thus is the zero-level of the neighbour. This faceless other is just the monstrous 'Thing', and Levinas's face then itself becomes monstrous, inhuman, excessive. The 'Law' is there to keep this monstrosity at a distance, not to gentrify it. Against Levinas, then, love is a moment of cutting into an indifferent multitude, privileging the other against all others. (Oddly, this is Freud's exact legitimation of the impossibility of 'loving my neighbour as myself', though Žižek doesn't mention it). Justice is the memory of all those others, the Third in Žižek's terms. We suspend the hold of the face of the other, and choose the Third, which is always already there behind our responsibility to the other, in fact its condition of possibility. 'The face is the ultimate ethical lure.' Here Žižek defends the Jewish law as that which eliminates the lure of the neighbour to produce him as pure subject. Thus love of the neighbour is the obverse of the law, just as love and law coincide – only differing in the point from which they are viewed. Žižek's Hegelian parallax (how does he do so much with so little?) blithely identifies Christian and Jewish deities and magically eludes once besetting contradictions: *his* tarrying with God looks facile and deeply disingenuous.

Such wholesale restitution of theological motifs is daunting and depressing. The notions of miracle and grace, groundless moments of conversion, turn back to the Augustinian notion of predestination, only now devoid of determination. Some are elected to subjecthood, but the elect are consequences of contingency. The deity is pure indeterminacy, yet determinant. Love and law are mobilized just at the moment where the theory of the subject voids the ground of a coherent politics or ethics, reduced as in Reinhard's case to a decisionism without decision. The form of the neighbour shifts from that of the imaginary other, the *semblable* of liberalism, to be replaced by a notion of the real other revealed by love and law, and held in check by God. *Pace* Žižek, politics is made into ethics again by a curious, revived vanguardism of the spirit, bizarrely in tutelage to a resurrected deity. This does not seem to be a useful direction to follow.

Philip Derbyshire