

The liberal international

David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005. 256 pp., £14.99 hb., 0 19 928326 5.

1917–21. 1944–48. 1968–72. Any accounting of the twentieth century worth its salt will hinge around the events – and ultimate defeats – of these pivotal years. No easy task, and one for forensic historians, since the forces of reaction buried the losers and the victims. Buried along with them were anticipations of a different world, glimpsed by the Kronstadt sailors, the council-communist partisans, and the autonomists of Mexico City and Bologna, among many. But whatever the effects of these quadrennial moments on individual human lives – and they greatly depended on accidents of place, family and generation – we are all living in their long shadow.

As for the aftermath of the 1960s, 11 September 1973 now seems a date pregnant with history. It is clearly time to gauge the enormity of that watershed, when the neoliberal counter-revolution was given its first airing with the assassination of Allende and the delivery of the Chilean economy to the ‘Chicago boys’. It is a foundational moment for David Harvey in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, one of the first sustained efforts to chronicle the new global landscape of capitalism.

In May 1968 a junior lecturer from Bristol, having spent a good part of the decade imagining the modernization of his discipline, turned in a hefty manuscript entitled *Explanation in Geography* and left on a trip to Australia. The book was an ambitious work of abstraction, which was certain to meet resistance among empirically and historically minded geographers like Berkeley-based Carl Sauer, who once said he was ‘saddened by model builders and system builders and piddlers with formulas for imaginary universals’. Indeed, the very mention of the word ‘theory’ could still scandalize senior inhabitants of some common rooms, among them, as we personally recall, University College, London and Cambridge, where the young David Harvey, trained in historical geography, had produced a thesis on nineteenth-century Kent as a hop-growing region. Australians can usually muster an interest in hops but what they really wanted at that moment was news of the political convulsions in Europe. Harvey confessed that he had been so involved

in theorizing geography as a quantitative science of space (in Kuhnian-revolutionary terms) that he had barely registered events outside his window. By the time of Allende’s death and the appearance of his next book, *Social Justice and the City*, Harvey was acutely attentive to the politics of the streets.

Harvey’s vision of a deductive science of urban and regional planning at the service of the welfare state did not long survive a voyage across the Atlantic the following year. He went to Baltimore to take up a position at Johns Hopkins University, a conservative institution, but very soon found himself working with the Black Panthers, in neighbourhoods still smouldering from the recent incendiary riots. When *Explanation in Geography* was published, Harvey responded to one review by saying that he had never read the book and had ‘no intention of doing so now’. What needed explaining in particular was the formation of American ghettos. Any theory construction to be done, said Harvey, had to be ‘validated through revolutionary practice’. If there was required reading in inner Baltimore, it was more likely Mao than von Mises.

At the instigation of a small group of graduate students, Harvey embarked on a close study of Marx. And – no surprise this – he read Marx *geographically*. So began his grand project of giving *Das Kapital* a spatial fix, or, to put it the other way, of giving spatial science a Marxist fix. The first fruit of his intense engagement with Marx’s work was *Social Justice and the City*, which appeared in 1973. Since then Harvey has changed the face of academic geography with a series of books exploring the themes of capitalism and the city, space and accumulation, modernity and postmodernity, empire and globalization.

Harvey’s baptismal immersion in Marx coincided with developments that we can now see as inaugurating the counter-revolutionary response to the falling rate of profit and the crisis of the 1970s, as well as to popular insurgencies of the 1960s – concessions, that is, to pressure from wildcat strikes and widespread sabotage, Black Power, minority and indigenous movements, feminism, demands for disability rights and for environmental regulation, and the prisoners’ movement, not

to mention mutinous elements in the army drafted for the imperialist adventurism of the war in Indochina. At the same time the Bretton Woods system, forged by Keynes and White in 1944 to coordinate international trade and finance in the wake of a global war, went into crisis. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* attempts to map the dismantling of the social-democratic world in which Harvey grew up – in his case the peculiar British form of national Keynesianism, which was inflected by the command economy of the Second World War, but whose roots lay earlier in the response of the managers of North Atlantic capitalism to the Depression, and which came in the form of welfare safety nets, income redistribution, domestic industry protection, state-financed public works, and capital controls – embedded liberalism of the Polanyian sort.

Harvey aims to describe and explain how it happened that capital's compromise was supplanted by the regime of neoliberalism, which has 'not only restored power to a narrowly defined capitalist class ... [but] also produced immense concentrations of corporate power in energy, the media, pharmaceuticals, transportation, and even retailing.' Harvey is especially attentive to the differential diffusion and range of the phenomenon, and to the specificities of local conditions. At the outset of the important chapter on 'Neoliberalism "with Chinese Characteristics"' Harvey notes 'a conjunctural accident of world-historical significance', namely the coincidence of Thatcher's ascendancy with Deng's economic reforms of the late 1970s. He tracks the uneven development of neoliberalism, which is defined in ideal-typical terms as an economic regime based on the sanctity of private property rights and dedicated to the unregulated global flows of money and goods, the sale of public assets, and the dismantling of workplace and environmental protections in favour of market-driven solutions.

The results, tabulated in the book, have been strikingly disadvantageous, and even disastrous, for a large majority of the world's population, not to mention planetary ecology. And this despite the promises made by the salesforce of neoliberalism. Harvey returns again and again to the notion of a 'contradiction' between neoliberalism *as a theory* and the actual practice of neoliberalization on the ground, which always seems to fall short of market-utopian, textbook, ideals (as in 'rising tide' or 'trickle-down'). The chapter 'Neoliberalism on Trial' reveals a shabby scorecard even in terms of capital accumulation.

Confronted with neoliberalism's atrocious record, Harvey understandably asks: 'How is it, then, that "the

rest of us" have so easily acquiesced in this state of affairs?' Apart from the ancient tactic of 'divide and rule' (by age, sex, ethnos, nation, etc.), and the sheer spatial isolation of the victims of neoliberalization, and, often enough, the persuasive presence of tanks or goon squads, what is there to say about the novelty and power of neoliberalism as a theory?

From evidence internal to Harvey's own account, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that neoliberalism simply does not rise to the level of 'theory' in any non-trivial sense. This is not to say that neoliberalism is completely vacuous; however, to presume theoretical consistency and coherence is seriously to mistake the beast. Thus, we agree with George Caffentzis that the neoliberal dream of unrestricted movement of capital *and* labour power is its own nightmare; in fact, border controls and immigration restrictions turn out to be a pervasive strategy for capital. (As we write, Hillary Clinton sees the wall-building efforts of the Israeli state as the model for the US–Mexico border.)

All this suggests that 'neoliberalism' should be approached – could this possibly come as a surprise to a Marxist? – *as an ideology*. Any adequate account of its rise to hegemony should not assume a pure body of neoliberal theory 'lurking in the wings' of history, as Harvey has it. Rather it has to begin from the premiss of a contested discursive field among whose keywords are 'freedom', 'market', 'private property'. It is perhaps the *déformation* of a theorist to grant 'neoliberalism' the status of theory, yet Harvey is fully aware that the assault on national Keynesianism in the name of the market was hatched and propagated in reactionary political think-tanks funded by oil and armaments fortunes. Just as Harvey, in 1972, looked back to the nineteenth century for intellectual bearings, the right, planning its capture of the institutions, also turned to the past.

The year 1944 saw the publication of both Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* and Friedrich von Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*. Hayek, a native of Vienna who trained as an economist at the feet of Ludwig von Mises but is forever associated with a largely non-economic corpus produced at the London School of Economics and the universities of Chicago and Freiburg between 1940 and 1980, is widely recognized as the intellectual architect of the neoliberal counter-revolution. It was Margaret Thatcher after all who pronounced, at a Tory Cabinet meeting, 'This is what we believe', slamming a copy of Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* onto the table at 10 Downing Street. His critique of collectivism – that it destroys morals, personal freedom and responsibility, impedes

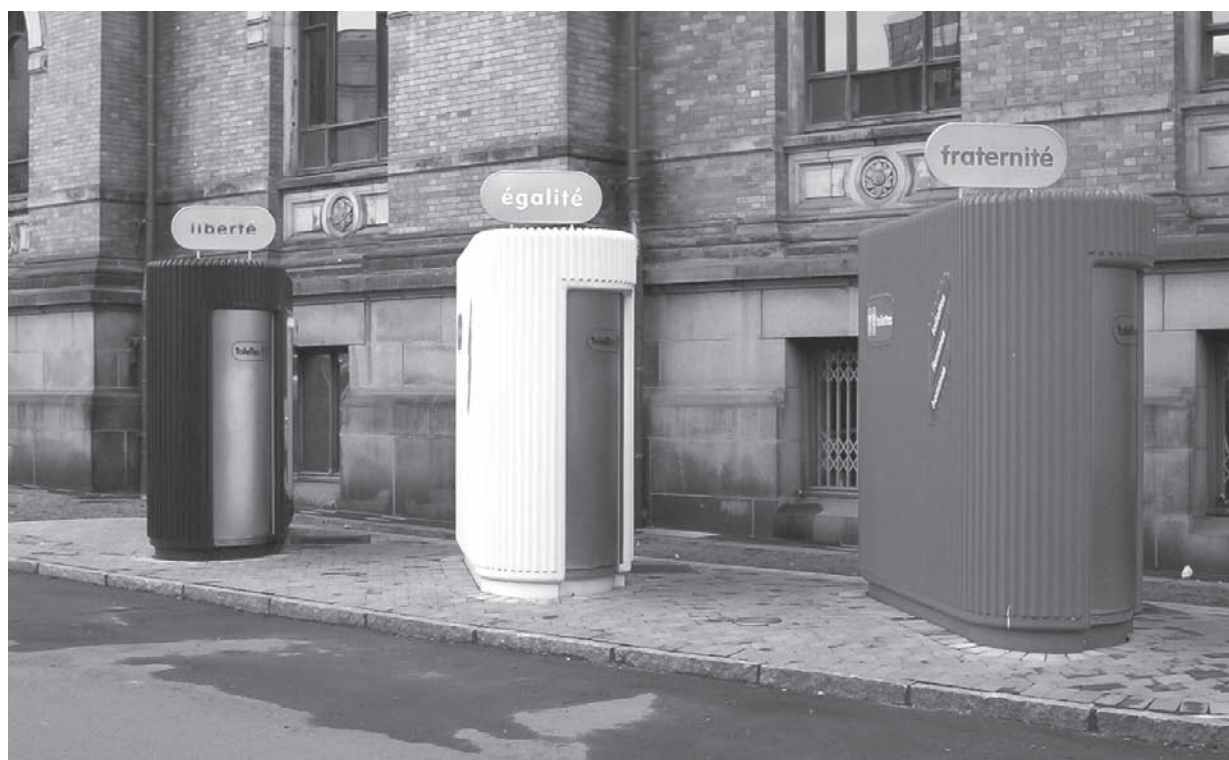
the production of wealth, and sooner or later leads to totalitarianism – is the ur-text for market utopians. Collectivism was by definition a made rather than a grown order – that is, a *taxis* rather than a *cosmos*. Collectivism was, Hayek said, constructivist rather than evolutionary, organized not spontaneous, an economy rather than a ‘catallaxy’, coerced and concrete rather than free and abstract. Its fatal conceit was that socialism (and social democracy for that matter) admitted what Perry Anderson described as the ‘reckless trespass of *taxis* onto the proper ground of *cosmos*’.

The other half of Hayek’s project was an apologia for Western civilization, conceived of as liberty, science and the spontaneous orders that co-evolved to form modern society (‘Great Society’ as he termed it). It is a defence of the liberal (unplanned) market order from which the preconditions of civilization – competition and experimentation – had emerged. Hayek, like Weber, saw this modern world as an iron cage constituted by impersonality, a loss of community, individualism and personal responsibility. But, contra Weber, these structures, properly understood, were the very expressions of liberty. From the vantage point of the 1940s this (classical) liberal project was, as Hayek saw it, under threat. Indeed, what passed for liberalism was a travesty, a distorted body of ideas warped by constructivist rationalism, as opposed to what he called ‘evolutionary rationalism’. The distance between ‘actually existing’ liberalism and Keynesianism was, on the Hayekian account, disastrously slight. What was necessary, as he made clear at the foundation of the

Mont Pelerin Society in 1947, was a grand purging, a restoration of true liberalism by way of the removal of ‘accretions’. There was to be no compromise with collectivism; all the ground ceded to creeping socialism had to be regained.

In his writing and his promotion of think-tanks such as the Institute of Economic Affairs in Britain – a brains trust for the likes of Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher – Hayek aggressively launched a cold war of ideas. He was one of the quartet of European theorists (Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss and Michael Oakeshott were the others) whose ideas, while in a tense relationship to one another, have come to shape a large swathe of the intellectual landscape of the early twenty-first century. Hayek was not in any simple sense a conservative or libertarian; nor a voice for *laissez-faire* (‘false rationalism’ as he saw it). He identified himself with the individualist tradition of Hume, Smith, Burke and Menger and provided a bridge which linked his short-term allies (conservatives and libertarians) to classical liberals in order to make common cause against collectivism. To roll back the incursions of *taxis* required a redesign of the state. A powerful chamber was to serve as guardian of the rule of law (striking all under the age of forty-five off the voting rolls, for example) to protect liberty against popular sovereignty. As Anderson notes, the correct Hayekian formula was ‘demarchy without democracy’.

Karl Polanyi, from the other end of the empire, was a Hungarian economic historian and socialist who believed that the nineteenth-century liberal order had



died, never to be revived. By 1940, 'every vestige' of the international liberal order had disappeared, the product of the necessary adoption of measures designed to hold off the ravages of the self-regulating market – that is, 'market despotism'. It was the conflict between the market and the elementary requirements of an organized social life that made some form of collectivism or planning inevitable. The liberal market order was, contra Hayek, not 'spontaneous' but a planned development, and its demise was the product of the market order itself. A market order could just as well produce the freedom to exploit as the freedom to associate. The grave danger, in Polanyi's view, was that liberal utopianism might return in the idea of freedom as nothing more than the advocacy of free enterprise, in which planning is 'the denial of freedom', and the justice and liberty offered by regulation or control just 'a camouflage of slavery'. Liberalism on this account will always degenerate, ultimately compromised by an authoritarianism that will be invoked as a counterweight to the threat of mass democracy. Modern capitalism contained the famous 'double movement' in which markets were serially and coextensively disembedded from, and re-embedded in, social institutions and relations. In particular the possibility of a counter-hegemony to the self-regulating market resided in the resistance to (and reaction against) the commodification of the three fictitious commodities – land, labour and money – that represented the spontaneous defence of society.

There has been a Polanyi boom lately, not because Polanyi vanquished Hayek or because his hopes for a decommodified world were realized, but precisely the opposite, because his warnings went unheeded and the disembedding of the market intensifies around the globe. It is of course the Hayekian vision that is triumphant; the Liberal International has come to pass. Yet paradoxically there has been a less careful reading of the Hayekian ideas that spawned them.

The Long March from Mont Pelerin to the collapse of the Berlin Wall took about forty years, by way of the Chicago boys in Chile, the IMF/IBRD complex, and the Reagan–Thatcher dispensations. As Gramsci might have put it, there has been a Hayekian 'passive revolution' from above. We have witnessed what the Left's great pessimist Perry Anderson has dubbed a 'neoliberal grand slam'. The 'fluent vision' of the Right has no equivalent on the Left; embedded liberalism (let alone something called socialism) is now, we are told, as remote as 'Arian bishops'. Neoliberalism rules undivided across the globe and is the most successful ideology in world history.

The process by which neoliberal hegemony was established, and its relation to forms and modes and sites of resistance, remains a story for which, even with Harvey's synoptic survey at hand, we still have no full genealogy. The cast of characters may be lined up – from the school of Austrian economics to the Reagan–Thatcher–Kohl troika – but this explains very little, or rather it poses more questions than answers. Let us recall too that Hayek believed *The Road to Serfdom* had ruined his career and marginalized his entire project. By the mid- to late 1970s many of neoliberalism's intellectual architects claimed that nobody took their idea seriously; it was the inflation of the 1970s, said Friedman, that revealed the cracks within the Keynesian edifice.

Neoliberalism was a class reaction to the crisis of the 1970s (Harvey talks of a 'restoration of class power'); on that much Milton Friedman, David Harvey, and Robert Brenner are agreed. The TNCs and the Wall Street–Treasury nexus imposed brutal forms of economic discipline – 'structural adjustment', in the jargon – to eradicate for ever any residue of collectivism in the Third World. The fiscal crisis and bankruptcy of New York City in 1975, Harvey convincingly shows, 'pioneered the way for neoliberal practices both domestically under Reagan and internationally through the IMF in the 1980s'. But beyond such descriptions, which Harvey lays out clearly enough, we are still left with many paradoxes and puzzles.

Why, for example, did the LSE and Chicago – once the respective centres of Fabianism and a certain version of (American) liberalism under Robert Hutchins – become the forcing houses of neoliberalism? What were the facilitating conditions that fostered the arrival of the maverick Ronald Coase in Chicago, marking a neoliberal turning point? How did the Chicago boys come to occupy the commanding heights in post-Allende Chile and how did they live down the fact that their effects were, to use the language of the World Bank, 'disastrous'? How did the World Bank – a bastion of postwar development economics and, it must be said, of statism – become the voice of laissez-faire? Harry Johnson, who held chairs at the LSE and Chicago, is a spectral figure in the liberalization of the World Bank, but how can we explain the capture of key sectors of the Bank (often by second-rate economists) against a backdrop of robust Keynesianism? How can we grasp the fact that 'shock therapy' in Eastern Europe was more the product of the enthusiastic Hungarian reformers than of the more reticent American neoliberal apparatchiks?

It is sometimes noted that the 1991 *World Development Report* (shaped by Lawrence Summers) marked a neoliberal watershed in its refiguring of the role of the state. But was not the foundational moment a decade earlier with the 1980 Berg report on Africa, named after Elliot Berg, a Michigan economist to whom it seems nobody paid much attention for twenty years? It was Africa (not Latin America or Eastern Europe) that proved to be the first testing ground of neoliberalism's assault on the overextended public sector, on physical capital formation and on the proliferation of market distortions by government.

So the neoliberal grand slam seems to have been preceded by a some pretty mediocre hitting and a good deal of pessimism. Harvey is right to emphasize the unevenness of neoliberalization. Certainly the process by which a measure of consent was manufactured was contested all the way. In general, resistance to neoliberalism – if we are to chart the larger landscape – is heterogeneous and worldwide. The revolts in France, the factory occupations in Argentina, the oil nationalization in Bolivia, and the insurgencies in Iraq are all symptomatic, even if the national and local dynamics differ greatly. The historical 'map of resistance' compiled by Davis, Rowley and Yuen for *Confronting Capitalism* (2004) shows the range and depth of WTO protests dating back to the mid-1980s. Here there is perhaps reason to be less gloomy than Anderson's prognosis might suggest. The triumphalism of the 1990s is gone; the WTO is now a shambles, and ferocious fights within and between the IMF and the IBRD all suggest that the neoliberal project is itself in crisis. Whether the movement of movements represents (at this moment) a serious Polanyian 'global double movement' is an open question. Malcolm Bull's ruminations on the limits of the 'multitude' and the question of political agency show us how complex the issues are. For example, there is a startling observation at the conclusion of Andrew Gamble's book on Hayek (*Hayek: The Iron Cage of Liberty*, 1996), to the effect that Thatcher's old guru has something to offer anticapitalists. His own elitism and classical liberal temperament predisposed him to political despotism, yet his analysis of dispersed knowledge, horizontal coordination and spontaneous orders revealed that the most effective forms of social organization were decentralized and democratic. What is beyond question is that current neoliberal policies are producing radical inequalities concentrated in vast new human settlements which are, as Mike Davis puts it, 'sociologically UFOs'.

A Brief History was doubtless written as a sort of provocation – and indeed it provokes in a manner that

has been characteristic of Harvey's influential texts such as *The Condition of Postmodernity* and *The New Imperialism*. One central assertion – that the neoliberal project is a restoration of class power – provokes the question: is neoliberalism in fact at heart 'restorative'? Surely in many parts of the global South it has been as much about the consolidation of power by crony capitalists or the emergence of an entirely new class that stands awkwardly in relation to the market. Is the extraordinary history of China post-1978 really a case of 'Chinese neoliberalism'? The road from the New Household Responsibility System to the Township and Village Enterprises to Shenzhen seems like a very different trajectory of capitalist development than can be accommodated within the neoliberal counter-revolution. Here systematic comparison of early and late neoliberal reforms (Chile and France, Britain and France) may have much more to offer, in particular, about the way conjunctions of class conflict, the ideological origins of neoliberal ideas, the class basis for reform, and the velocity of the 'international opening' shape the forms – the unevennesses – of neoliberalism in practice.

In the years since that epiphany long ago in Baltimore, when the interpretation of ghettos seized David Harvey's imagination as a pressing priority, the neoliberal counter-revolution and the new enclosures have produced drastic revisions to the gazetteer of the globe. The figures are hard to comprehend; in the final buildout of humanity the new megacities will perhaps contain 20 billion people by the year 2030. These sinks of informal labour, says Mike Davis, constitute the 'fastest growing and most unprecedented social class on earth', and he poses the questions: 'To what extent does an informal proletariat possess that most potent of Marxist talismans: "historical agency"? ... Or is some new, unexpected historical subject, à la Hardt and Negri, slouching toward the supercity?'

Here surely lies a theoretical task adequate to the times, one grand enough to engage the doyen of radical urbanists. But there are signs at the end of *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* that Harvey does not relish the prospect of theorizing this new landscape. His somewhat perfunctory roll call of 'the movement of movements' suggests his heart isn't really in it; the 'variety of these struggles is simply stunning, so much so that it is hard sometimes to even imagine connections between them'. When the old Fabian modeller has finished his conspectus of the world that the Wall Street-IMF-US Treasury nexus had wrought, and looks out over the shambles, he pins hope on a 'rejuvenated class politics', which is no sooner invoked

than immediately glossed as ‘alliance politics on the left sympathetic to the recuperation of local powers of self determination.’ This might seem to be a gesture to the myriad forms of resistance to neoliberalism, but Harvey ultimately falls back into the old lesser-of-two-evils logic – ‘a strong and powerful social democratic and working-class movement is in a better position to redeem capitalism than is capitalist class power itself’, which he frankly acknowledges ‘sounds [like] a counter-revolutionary conclusion to those on the far left’.

As well it might, if the ‘far Left’ includes those who have taken direct action in the face of the lethal depredations of the IMF and the WTO. In any case, the worldwide resistance – on the receiving end of neoliberal nostrums administered as often as not by social democrats like Gordon Brown – is hardly going

to wait upon the theoretical insights of ‘histgeomat’. Of course, we understand the magnitude of the wager by strategists of horizontalism in the global anti-capitalist coalition who are gambling on changing the world without taking power. One can surely understand Harvey’s scepticism, but then he is committed to a wager of his own. That is, there are other Austrian ghosts haunting this book – the left logical positivists in Vienna who gambled that the canons of rationality and scientific inference (and the nomothetic models that inspired the young Harvey) could be a bulwark against the rise of fascism, its mystifiers and paralogists. There are no illusions now on that account. It remains, however, to shed remaining illusions about the long, and extreme, history of liberalism. Harvey’s immensely generative book helps us in that task.

Iain Boal and Michael Watts

Kant, Kant, Kant

Katerina Deligiorgi, *Kant and the Culture of Enlightenment*, SUNY Press, Albany, 2005. 248 + xi pp., £45.00 hb., £16.50 pb., 0 7914 6469 5 hb., 0 7914 6470 9 pb.

Elisabeth Ellis, *Kant’s Politics: Provisional Theory in an Uncertain World*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2005. 260 + xii pp., £25.00 hb., 0 3001 0120 1.

Paul Saurette, *The Kantian Imperative: Humiliation, Common Sense, Politics*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2005. 305 + xiv pp., £48.00 hb., £22.50 pb., 0 8020 3882 4 hb., 0 8020 4880 3 pb.

The Kant of the critical and post-critical ethical and political writings has returned repeatedly, in a variety of spectral forms, over the past two hundred years. In the volumes reviewed here, the returns of the Kantian ghost are in many ways frighteningly familiar. At the same time, however, they demonstrate (again) that there is always difference in repetition, and one may still find elements of the strange in the well-known spirit of the Königsberg sage. Kant figures within these three volumes in three different guises: as agonistic critic; as pragmatist; and as sadist. We’ve seen these before, but in each case the reader is provoked to look at them again and re-evaluate them in relation to a particular reading of the philosophical and political woes of the present. Above and beyond the merits of the particular readings offered by these authors, their work also serves as a reminder of the tremendous powers with which Kant’s ghost is imbued; he is still being invoked (whether as inspiration or as warning) in order to settle the complaints and contradictions of liberal modernity.

Deligiorgi is concerned with Kant’s political thought not for its substantive claims, but for the light that it sheds on the idea of enlightenment reason. Her book

aims to provide a defence of this idea in the face of twentieth-century onslaughts from critical theory (Adorno and Horkheimer), poststructuralism (Foucault) and feminism (Gilligan). However, the majority of the text is taken up by a careful analysis of Kant’s response to the critiques of reason that were already internal to enlightenment thinking in the eighteenth century. Deligiorgi considers the work of Diderot and Rousseau, contextualizes Kant’s arguments in relation to these debates, and goes on to argue that Kant’s notion of a ‘culture of enlightenment’ deals with the problem of reason’s hubris, without undermining its authority. It is the emphasis on publicity and plurality that Deligiorgi sees as crucial to how Kant understands enlightenment reason. Reason is not egoistic: the call to think for oneself in Kant’s essay on enlightenment is a call to be willing to put the claims of one’s reason to the touchstone of public scrutiny and debate. This means that in order for the authority of reason to flourish, a culture of enlightenment is required: ‘A culture of enlightenment is simply a culture in which people are free to make public use of their reason.’

On Deligiorgi’s account, the culture of enlightenment is expounded and defended in Kant’s political

essays rather than in his philosophy of right. Crucial texts include 'An Answer to the Question "What is Enlightenment?"', but also the essays 'On Theory and Practice', 'Contest of the Faculties' and 'On Perpetual Peace'. Whereas Kant's philosophy of right deals with the authority of law, these other writings deal with the authority of reason. These are two different kinds of authority: the former is externally imposed; the latter requires both subjective agreement and 'the structural freedom and open scrutiny of communication'. This distinction between different aspects of Kant's thought enables Deligiorgi to interpret Kant's public sphere as much more open and inclusive than his account of property and citizenship in the theory of right would suggest. Deligiorgi is in no doubt that women and servants are invited to be part of the public sphere, even if they do not count as active citizens, since women are not delimited in principle in the same way as servants. Other troubling aspects of Kant's political thought, such as his philosophy of history, are dealt with in a similar way. Notoriously, Kant suggests that certain natural mechanisms of 'unsocial sociability', working through history, will deliver an end of history according to nature's plan. Deligiorgi offers an interpretation of this aspect of Kant's argument that reduces its strong teleological claims, arguing that Kant's own premisses would forbid the kind of closure involved in an end of history.

Having expounded and defended Kant's view of enlightenment reason and a culture of enlightenment, Deligiorgi goes on to examine critiques of Kant, including a chapter on Schiller, and, in the final chapter, an examination of the twentieth-century critics mentioned above. Schiller is accused of falling into the abstract utopianism with which he charges Kant, and each of the modern critics is seen as falling into some kind of performative contradiction, in which it turns out that they require the principle of reflective critique of which they are critical. Deligiorgi suggests that while this is something not properly recognized by Adorno, Horkheimer and Foucault, it is taken on board in Gilligan's ethic of care.

Deligiorgi's Kant is an agonistic critic, committed to reason as a public process of ongoing testing and revision. Ellis's Kant, although it is also the Kant of the political writings on enlightenment, publicity and history, is a peculiar kind of pragmatist. A pragmatist who, contrary to Deligiorgi, has already exhausted the work of reason, in the sense that he already knows what the ideal world must look like, but who recognizes the imperfect nature of the actual world and therefore formulates a series of maxims of right that

are *provisional*. Whereas the targets of Deligiorgi's account are the critics of enlightenment reason, in Ellis's case the targets are the kinds of Kantian political theory that ground themselves in his moral rather than his political philosophy.

In spite of the reference to an 'uncertain world' in the title of her book, there is little uncertainty in Ellis's account of Kant's political theory or, indeed, in her account of the world. In both cases, the fundamental premiss is that there is a split between real and ideal: 'Kant locates the motor of progress toward a more enlightened politics in the tension between commonly held ideals and pragmatic political reality.' In this situation, it is necessary to work out how to deal with a less than ideal world without undermining the possibility of progress towards that ideal, even though progress is not guaranteed. This provides a neat way of reconciling seemingly contradictory elements of Kant's theory, such as his outlawing of revolution in practice, whilst apparently approving of it in theory. In order to maintain this reading, as with Deligiorgi, Ellis dismisses Kant's teleological account of history and makes a distinction between Kant's theory of right and his writings on enlightenment and publicity. The former is dismissed both on grounds of internal inconsistency with the rest of Kant's work and of its intrinsic implausibility. The latter distinction between the theory of right on the one hand, and Kant's account of the public use of reason on the other is sustained by the argument that the philosophy of right deals with provisional rights, whereas the public use of reason is the way in which the gap between 'commonly held ideals and pragmatic political reality' may be substantively bridged.

For Ellis, the theory of right establishes the kind of political architecture best adapted to sustaining the possibility of progress. The foundation stone of this architecture is the guarantee of contractual relations, not because it is right in itself, but because without this, in an imperfect world, there can only be anarchy and therefore no progress at all (hence the primacy of obedience to the sovereign in Kant's requirements of political actors). The public use of reason is the sphere in which ideas can be disseminated and, over time, become part of common-sense culture, which can then in turn influence 'pragmatic political reality'. This will, however, be a long-term (potentially infinite) matter. Ellis castigates deliberative democrats for seeing the effects of good argument purely in short-term and individualized terms, rather than in terms of long-term collective learning. She does, however, find support for her position from some of the work currently

being done on the institutionalization of norms in, for instance, the case of human rights regimes. Ellis present a familiarly liberal and cosmopolitan Kant, with the emphasis on process rather than outcome, on gradualism rather than revolution, and on the crucial importance of civil society as an independent source of change. The book ends with a consideration of Marshall's threefold account of civil, political and social rights, and the argument that these need to be supplemented in order to enable citizens to be as autonomous as possible in the face of state power.

One can see clear links between Deligiorgi's and Ellis's Kants, although their portraits of a philosopher who made a principled link between politics and open democratic communication are very differently grounded. In comparison, Saurette draws Kant as a sinister Sadean figure, whose apparent commitment to the inviolability of the person masks a rather distasteful kind of disciplinarity. According to Saurette:



'Kantian autonomy thus not only fundamentally relies on a *philosophical conception* of humiliation to defend its theoretical cogency. Kantian morality requires practices that actively seek to cultivate an *affective experience* of humiliation as well.' Like Ellis, Saurette is concerned to critique the ways in which Kantian moral theory influences much contemporary ethical and political theory; unlike Ellis, his critique is based

on a reading of Kant's moral philosophy rather than his politics. At the centre of the argument is a passage from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, in which Kant refers to how respect for the moral law is inspired by the way in which it humiliates the moral subject through comparison with his or her debased carnal nature. For Saurette, this passage provides a thread with which to unravel what he terms the 'Kantian imperative' (reminiscent of Connolly's Augustinian imperative) – that is, the strategies through which Kant seeks to ensure that morality is understood in universal and necessary terms.

The 'Kantian imperative' incorporates four elements. At its basis is the view that morality takes the form of universal, necessary law. Saurette suggests that Kant's desire to defend this conception of morality against alternative views, such as those of Hume, is what drives the whole of the critical project. He also argues that Kant provides no convincing philosophical argument as to why his understanding of morality should be treated as self-evident. In place of philosophical demonstration, Kant turns to the second element of the imperative, the appeal to common-sense recognition. Saurette is not referring here to common sense as it is invoked in Kant's third *Critique*, or even in the account of political judgement in his political writings, but to the ways in which common sense figures in the moral philosophy texts, particularly in the *Critique of Practical Reason* but also in *Metaphysics of Morals*. In these texts, Saurette argues, the self-evident power of pure practical reason is 'demonstrated' via the claim that it is recognizable by common sense in individuals and in established norms and rules of morality. At work here, according to Saurette, is a third characteristic of the Kantian imperative, a kind of sleight of hand in which scepticism in theory ('if') becomes translated into dogmatism in practice ('must'). However, this translation does not remain at a purely philosophical level. The fourth characteristic of the Kantian imperative is a commitment to moral cultivation, using the power of humiliation to instil respect for the moral law. In effect, these techniques of moral cultivation are designed to create the common sense that Kant is elsewhere assuming as self-evident. Without them the production of moral subjectivity would not be possible.

Saurette links his reading of Kant to Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of enlightenment reason in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (a strong contrast with Deligiorgi's interpretation referred to above). As with Adorno and Horkheimer, Saurette sees himself as unmasking the coercive dimension of enlightenment

reason, but with a Foucauldian emphasis on the technologies of subjectivity that such reason requires. He goes on to apply the analysis of the Kantian imperative to contemporary political theory, which he exemplifies in the work of Habermas and Taylor. Although these thinkers supposedly engage in alternative modes of political theorizing (liberal versus communitarian), Saurette argues that one can see in both the debilitating work of a universal and necessary conception of morality, and a reliance on common sense to do the work that philosophical reason is unable to do. Saurette traces these implications to the politics of humiliation exemplified by the notorious events at Abu Ghraib. In more constructive mode, Saurette argues, following Connolly, for exploring notions of moral cultivation from an assumption of deep pluralism about the form that morality must take.

So, which of these Kants do I like best? They all have a certain appeal. Deligiorgi's argument is scholarly and based on a deep and attentive reading of certain texts, though I remain unconvinced that Kant's ghost has managed to banish the equally troublesome spectres of Adorno, Horkheimer and Foucault. Ellis's argument is freshly put, confident and really does take the whole of Kant's *political* thought seriously, though I find her understanding of concepts of nature, freedom, ideas and progress worryingly simplistic, both philosophically and politically. Saurette's Kant provides a welcome counter to the more liberal versions, and raises important issues about morality and disciplinary power. However, it is based on a tendentious reading that risks falling into caricature, and exploits the Abu Ghraib example in a way that is becoming somewhat tiresome in supposedly 'critical' political theory. A more fundamental difficulty with these readings, in my view, is that, in spite of some cursory acknowledgements to the contrary, these books present Kant's ghost as having a single identity that is the basis of his power to sort out contemporary philosophical and political problems.

Deligiorgi knows that the truth of Kantian reason is agonistic and communicative, but also reliable. Ellis knows that Kant's political thought is pragmatic and provisional. Saurette knows that Kant is an inflictor of pain. But if we know anything about reading Kant, then we know that any claim to capture Kant's meaning will depend on exclusions that double Kant's haunting of our ethical and political imagination. This is not just a point about the exclusive effects of any reading, but relates to the ways in which each of these authors wants to intervene in the theorizing of our own time. Kant can be used as a basis for defending

reason, liberalism or pluralism (whether positively or negatively), but if he is then questions will always be raised about the relation between the Kant that is explicitly invoked and all the other Kants that are thereby occluded. In the case of Deligiorgi, it is the Kant of the second *Critique* and the theory of right that hovers at the margins of her story, with a legislative account of pure reason that threatens to undo the Kant of the culture of enlightenment. Ellis's account, in contrast, is most obviously haunted by Kant's teleological reading of history, and the ways in which its paradoxes dramatize the difficulties of thinking about history in terms of a duality of material and ideal determination. And the most obvious ghost in Saurette's particular machine, given the significance of 'common sense' in his argument, is the Kant of the *Critique of Judgment*. Whether it is being used as solution or as problem, Kant's is an unquiet spirit.

Kimberly Hutchings

Alchemico-historiography

Esther Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry*, Reaktion Books, London, 2005. 280 pp., £25.00 hb., 1 86189 248 9.

Esther Leslie's *Synthetic Worlds* emerges from a fascinating question: what happens to art when science begins to compete with it in the production of a second nature, a fabricated parallel universe, a product of human hands? It finds its answers between Adorno's dour suspicion of science and Benjamin's more enthusiastic embrace of it. Leslie insists that industrial capitalism is rife with contradictory trends, raw material for staging the dialectical conversation that she unfolds in her book. The nineteenth-century development of a modern chemical industry, she explains, participated in an 'increasingly calamitous entwinement of natural and synthetic worlds', enacting a rupture between humans and nature as scientists inventing laboratory-produced substitutes for natural materials such as dyes, cotton and rubber expressed hopes of securing a human domain independent of nature. But this process cannot be taken for the whole story, since there is also, Leslie reminds us, evidence of convergence between art and science, nature and the human, during the same period in Germany, which she offers as a paradigm for the workings of industrial capitalism more generally.

Chemical science, she emphasizes, initiated quests for reciprocal human relations with nature as well as attempts to control it. Moving between Adornian pessimism and Benjaminian optimism, *Synthetic Worlds* brings together the well-known story of science's project of mastery with a less familiar story of its search for an empathy between humans and nature in order to foreground utopian possibilities suppressed by the capitalist form of science's development.

More specifically, Leslie shows that romanticism, dialecticism and experimental science cross-pollinate in German thought, at times resulting in assertions of a necessary imbrication of humans and nature, and even a recognition of the 'magical' aspect of a natural world endowed with purposes of its own; there were artist-scientists, as well as influential friendships between artists and scientists, encouraging such views. Leslie further suggests that alchemy's dream of a transmutation of lead and other base metals into gold resurfaces in the industrial project of transforming waste into use values, or superabundant resources (such as coal) into ersatz versions of resources Germany lacked. Spurred by necessity – specifically the paucity, and, after World War I, total loss of colonial holdings to pillage – German researchers would force out of coal tar, a by-product of steel production, a myriad of colours: blackness yielding its opposite, and trash transformed into value. Throughout her account, Leslie dredges up marginalized tidbits of the history of chemistry to insist we take a fresh look at influential theorizations of 'nature', such as the dialectic of enlightenment or the fetishism of the commodity. Since 'nature' is a concept that art and science share, a site of struggle between them, she is able to move back and forth between the implications of changing views of it to both. Her style is associational and dialectical, combining logical argumentation with a figurative play that repeats in form the entanglement of science and art, the rational and the aesthetic, that the book takes as its topic. I despair of adequately representing the range of examples or the subtle allusiveness that resonates through these chapters, but I will map out here some of her principal moves.

First Leslie takes up a 'poetics of coal': the preoccupation of Romantics, such as Novalis, Goethe and Schelling, with the close observation of nature, and their interest in mining in particular, which makes an easy division between science and poetry difficult. Against the alienating mainstream scientific view of a nature to be subdued and forced to yield to man's will, the romantic philosophy of nature emphasized instead continuities of the human and natural, as well

as the magical, fantastic possibilities that inhere in the world's various life forces – by no means only human – waiting to be released like riches from a cave. The second chapter comes at this problematic from the science side, offering a case study of Goethe's friend Friedlieb Ferdinand Runge, who pursued his chemical researches on a foundation of romantic philosophy and dialectical assumptions about the natural world as mutable, ever-changing from one form into others. Not only did he extract the first synthetic dye from coal tar, but, in the course of his research, he came to view chemicals as endowed with 'life force', which he studied in a series of experiments, dripping various chemical combinations onto blotting paper to produce remarkable eye-like configurations, which 'grew' themselves from a point of origin in patterns determined by the components in relation to each other; these revealed, according to Runge, their 'inner will'.

Leslie considers the chemical factory not only as the site of such experimentation but also as a site for the exploitation of labour, and segues to Marx's own complex theorizations of nature: his critique of the suspect transmutation of gold and other natural substances into synthetic ones as money, as well as the fetishization of the commodity form, which seemingly gives life to the inert and steals it from the human – but also his early speculation on a desirable 'metabolism' between man and nature in the 1844 *Manuscripts*. Capitalism's culture of substitution, so amply illustrated by the chemical industry – and the questions about authenticity raised by it – left a deep mark on Marx's thought, provoking some of his most significant theorizations as well as speculation about a rapprochement between alienated nature and man under different conditions of production.

Leslie proceeds to consider the implications of the development of photography – a chemical process – as well as utopian architectural schemes, such as Scheerbart's 'glass architecture' fantasies, which manifested themselves as a collective dream in the early years of the Arcades, with their glass roofs that allowed twinkling stars to appear as part of their structure, seeming magically to bring the heavens closer to earth. Later, as electrification of the cities removed the stars from view, photography attempted to capture heavenly bodies, reclaiming them for the human eye in synthetic form; but photography, like the Arcades, is also eventually diverted from utopian to regressive uses, becoming part of the aestheticization of war. Following this history of man's changing relation to the heavens mediated by technology, we move into

the hell of the dangerous nineteenth-century factories, and the history of worker actions to better their lot. In this case also utopian aspiration is stymied by the power of capital.

A substantial part of *Synthetic Worlds* explores the Nazification of the chemical industry and official art production in Germany. The war effort required a steady supply of rubber, oil and other materials difficult to come by under combat conditions. Nazi officials moved swiftly to make sure not only that Jews were pushed out of the chemical industry but also that its quest for synthetics was strongly supported. The big capitalist firms such as I.G. Farben, predicting large profits from war, were swift to fall in line. Abundant coal was celebrated with religious fervour – it was the potential origin of all things – but human control over nature was celebrated even more. The push to develop a synthetic world was eyed with suspicion and awe by commentators outside Germany as the war got under way: the technical creativity demanded respect, but the wholehearted embrace of the ersatz garnered a disgust that Horkheimer and Adorno would eventually theorize as the attempt to control nature redounding on man, who finds himself imprisoned in an administered world taken to terrifying extremes. The reduction of human remains to literal raw material in the concentration camps – the relegation of Jews and other ostensible social ‘waste’ to an exploitable equivalent of coal tar – and the eagerness of German firms to profit from death, destruction and the inhumanities of Nazi notions of racial purity as well as the war machine, are only the most graphic demonstrations of this self-imprisonment.

At the same time as ‘nature’ was subjected to control and rendered seemingly superfluous in the factory, however, official artists were urged to fight the trends of ‘degenerate’ art by conforming to a supposedly pure ‘nature’ of blood and soil – Volkish and eternal. Against this project, a tiny outpost of the chemical industry, Herberts and Company, provided refuge and employment for a handful of artists rejected by the dominant Nazi aesthetic. This resistant gesture did not impede the same firm from simultaneously deploying slave labour from the camps in its regular production facilities, nor did the dubious origin of the workers in other parts of the factory appear to deter the artists. Under cover of chemical experimentation, they alacritously continued their avant-garde projects in this industrial setting, working with new colours, lacquers, and, above all, attempting to allow a dialectic between materials and artist to determine artistic production, harking back – but this time from the side of ‘art’

– to Runge and his view of chemicals as having a life force of their own. At one and the same time, then, this marginalized contingent of artists indicated the utopian possibilities of chemistry, and its limits under conditions of fascism. The small, potentially liberatory, collaboration between chemistry and disparaged art was overshadowed by the massive collaboration of chemical industrialists with the Nazi war machine, including the development of rockets in slave-dug underground caverns that returned chemical production back to the earth, but in a diabolical form.

The final chapter looks at postwar developments, after the Nazi-sponsored synthetics innovations had been divided among the victors, and thus takes the story beyond Germany. A section on pop fascination with cryogenesis – freezing of human remains at death in hopes of future regeneration – at the height of the Cold War flows into the situationists’ critique of such techno-plots to extend the *quantity* of life without similar attention to its *quality*, which they viewed as degenerating precipitously daily. From here we slide back in time to Adorno and Benjamin’s theorizations of aura – ‘the experience of distance’ – and their sense that it had slipped from a ‘natural’ to a ‘synthetic’ mode under conditions of industrial capital, a trajectory Leslie finds critiqued in the poetry of J.H. Prynne as well. Then, picking up the thread of colour in particular, a short history of fluorescence follows, in which its military and commercial applications find their antithesis in the punk embrace of the artificial, the plastic and florid, as a critique of ‘hippy’ affirmations of the ‘natural’ which had become mainstream pretensions. Leslie tracks these 1970s emergences into the more recent burning of a million pounds – the reduction of ‘value’ to tr(ash) – by the ‘K foundation’ (techno-situationists Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty) and the content of the novels of Iain Sinclair, chronicler of contemporary urban second nature and decay.

A brief conclusion describes the simultaneously fascinating and tacky offer of the corporation LifeGem to transform human cremation ashes into diamonds. Their pricey service reprises the book’s themes of alchemy and transformation, while further documenting the human aspiration to produce simulacra of natural substances. It also illustrates, however, that technology’s promise to deliver a utopian second nature is continuously hijacked by the profit motive and realm of appearance necessary to capital’s reproduction. The rift between nature and the human thus remains. Just the same, Leslie’s own book attests that the attempt to bridge it persists as well.

A cultural theorist who previously produced a book on Walter Benjamin's concept of 'Technik', and then a second on animation, Leslie is particularly well positioned to tease out the relations of chemistry and art in all its complexity. She writes the kind of dizzying, sweeping, idiosyncratic cultural history that has too rarely been inherited from the Frankfurt School. *Synthetic Worlds*' contribution to this genre consists in exposing utopian possibilities of science and technology through an examination of marginalized sites in which such possibilities were pursued in earlier moments. Instead of a monolithic story about the progressive or regressive trajectory of science, she indicates its dialectical rhythm: the emergence of redemptive energies and their suppression, followed by the re-emergence of utopian possibilities in another location, and so on.

Some may find Leslie's cultural studies too poetic and allusive. Suggestion and rhetoric, as well as the sheer diversity of topics and examples adduced, can override argumentation. But the very qualities now celebrated in Benjamin's own writing are less often appreciated in those who write *about* him. Despite moments of local doubt about the argument, cumulatively the book is very powerful, provoking fresh thought about the relation of art, nature and science. At a moment when science has entered a phase in which it has managed not only to synthesize extra-human nature, but is moving towards reproducing the 'human' as such – through robotics, artificial intelligence, cloning, prostheses, and so on – a book that puts into play a compelling 'afterlife' of the Frankfurt School's discussions of the 'human' and the 'natural' is well worth the reading.

Crystal Bartolovich

Qui n'est pas arrivé

Michel Kail, *Simone de Beauvoir: philosophe*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2006. 155 pp., €12.00 pb., 2 13 054101 1.

This short but rich book begins by implicitly situating itself in a new wave of writing on Beauvoir unburdened by the defensive obligation to justify the idea that she counts as a philosopher. This leaves the way clear for the identification of the central concepts and problems in Beauvoir's philosophy, its specificity and its originality. The challenge, according to Kail, is to understand Beauvoir's innovative and mysterious

claim, in the Introduction to *The Second Sex*, that the dependency of women on men '*n'est pas arrivé*' – that is that, having always been the case, it is not the result of an historical event or an evolution (*devenir*), it is not something that 'happened'. This dependency which 'did not happen' – that is, which did not come about as the consequence of antecedent conditions – is, Kail says, an unprecedented object of analysis in any kind of theoretical discourse. Its elaboration in *The Second Sex* is based on a distinctive form of phenomenological existentialism indebted to, but different in important respects from, both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.

Kail's argument shows that a great part of the effort in expounding Beauvoir's philosophy consists in rendering explicit the inaugurating moves that animate its manifest content. Most commentators, Kail writes, recognize the strong anti-naturalist current in Beauvoir's work, and tend therefore to identify it as part of the tradition of Enlightenment criticism concerned to distinguish between nature and 'man' and his culture. But the assumption of a natural world from which the human distinguishes itself by transforming it – in brief, the distinction between nature and culture – is from the very beginning bypassed or annulled, according to Kail, in Beauvoir's assumption of the phenomenological–existential concept of the 'world'. The world, in this sense, is chronologically but not logically anterior to me; it exists 'before' me and yet is dependent on me. The world and 'the subject' are strictly contemporary, and thus the 'subject' and the 'object' can only be understood in their constitutive relation to each other. The world *is* only the world of men. There is no 'natural' or original world behind the scenes, subsequently veiled by ideology or interpreted by culture. Further, Kail claims, the world is, for Beauvoir, quite specifically, the world of *men*, in the sense that it is a masculine world or a world of masculine 'values' (remembering the extended meaning that word enjoys in French existentialism). The distinction between nature and culture is the organizing principle of this world. Accordingly, man affords himself the privilege of the subject, transcending nature or the object, the latter identified with woman, the Other. In implicitly refusing the co-originality of its terms (in effect positing nature as the given upon which culture works) the nature–culture distinction is itself a naturalist thesis. Beauvoir's anti-naturalism (or 'anaturalism') then consists not in the privileging of culture over nature, but in the refusal of the nature–culture distinction as internal to naturalism, with naturalism now identified as a presupposition of the masculine world.

Kail's account of the importance of this anaturalism in Beauvoir's work, from her earliest philosophical essays, entails a defence of her appropriation of Sartre's concept of consciousness and an attempt to explain how her enduring commitment to a concept of absolute freedom is distinct from certain idealist notions of the detached, empyrean (and 'masculine') subject that many feminist critics of Beauvoir have claimed to find in her work. Kail agrees with the now-common view that the originality of Beauvoir's work consists in part in her repeated attempts to think, beyond Sartre, the relation between freedom and situation. And he stresses that the spur, for Beauvoir, was the need to understand and indeed justify the political concept of oppression. (In this sense Beauvoir's philosophy may be seen, according to Kail, as primarily a political philosophy.)

Beauvoir's preoccupation with and attempts to understand the oppressive situation have been interpreted by many commentators as a criticism of Sartre, on the basis that her analysis is incompatible with the thesis of absolute freedom. But as Kail convincingly demonstrates here – via a critical reading of Sonia Kruks, one of the best-known exponents of this view – this presupposes precisely that separation of freedom and situation that Beauvoir's ontology denies. The situation does not 'limit', and hence relativize freedom, 'as if freedom waited in its own private box before being plunged into the scenery of a situation'. Freedom and situation are strictly contemporaneous, neither existing outside of the relation which constitutes them. The situation is not therefore the ensemble of external 'objective' conditions confronting the subject, not least because the world is a world of other freedoms and our relation to these freedoms. The idea that the situation could limit freedom makes the naturalist mistake of confusing 'the given' with the mythical idea of the *naturally* given and leads inevitably to deterministic explanations of oppression, when it is rather oppression that explains the tendency towards deterministic explanations: 'nothing better characterizes an oppressive situation than the fact that it is interpreted by the consciousness that exists in it in deterministic terms, and when it seems to them to be a matter for a causal explanation.'

The distinctiveness of Beauvoir's philosophy, Kail argues, is in the attempt to think the given outside of naturalistic categories, through an existential ontology of the human, in order to understand the specificity of the oppression of women that 'did not happen'. In Beauvoir's philosophy the given emerges as already 'inhabited' by the meanings with which others have

invested it. The given is composed of both subject and object or, better, the relation between them: 'The given is relational, the given is relation itself.' Accordingly, the oppressive situation is characterized by the network of relations that constitute it and not by any objective elements in themselves. The relation between oppressor and oppressed determines the latter's relation to all the other elements of the situation, dictates the meaning that the situation can have for the oppressed, and thus circumscribes their possibilities. The oppressive situation is one in which the transcendence which constitutes the subject is not limited or annihilated but condemned to fall back upon itself uselessly, as Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*.

If the subordination of women must be understood in these terms this explains, according to Kail, why it 'did not happen' – that is, cannot be explained in terms of an objective cause. On the basis of this understanding Beauvoir famously criticizes three types of naturalistic explanation – or discourses of justification, as Kail says – the physio-biological, the psychoanalytic and the dialectical materialist. The first, the most obviously naturalistic, is insufficient and dubious for having overlooked the fact that the 'givens of biology' are revealed by and hence dependent for their meaning on the subjects who allegedly discover them in their objectivity. Psychoanalysis makes up for this deficit in foregrounding the role of symbolization but is compromised by its reductive sexual monism – specifically, the assumption of an evolutionary or developmental model of sexual functioning onto which meaning is subsequently grafted – abstracting human existence from its world. Historical materialism (that is, Engels's *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*), in its turn, does not fail to consider the worldly context of human existence, especially its social and economic dimensions, but it reduces men and women to economic entities and collapses into a naturalist economic determinism. In each form of explanation something is gained and something is lost, but all three ultimately put the 'cause' of female subordination – and hence its possible overturning – out of human hands.

Kail's reconstruction of Beauvoir's various positions is achieved through a strong philosophical interpretation. This is what recommends the book. It is most obvious in the discussion of the givens of biology, where, for Kail, the contradictions in Beauvoir's argument cannot be reconciled simply through a choice of emphasis. According to Kail, Beauvoir's exemplary analysis of Sade – in which sexuality and sexuation are treated as part of existence (expressions

of freedom) that invite, rather than provide, explanation – anticipates the problems with the sex–gender distinction that are central to one recent strand of philosophy. In claiming that the spirit of Beauvoir’s critical discussion of biology paved the way for the critique of the metaphysics of sex found in Delphy’s materialist feminism and Butler’s deconstructive epistemology, Kail treads familiar ground with less familiar steps, insisting on the centrality of the basic existentialist elements in Beauvoir’s analyses. And yet, Kail argues, Beauvoir’s trenchant insistence on ‘the facts of biology’ and her uncompromising presentation of those ‘facts’ fall prey to precisely that error with which she charged Freud: the assumption of a functional, reproductive model of sex difference ‘behind’ gender. Thus Beauvoir, in what is perhaps the most important chapter of *The Second Sex* for recent philosophy, succumbs to the idealist, naturalist assumptions of the prevailing socio-philosophical ideology that, Kail argues, it is her main achievement to have put into question. Even so, the general conclusion of this chapter ‘conforms to the principles of existentialist philosophy’ and contains Beauvoir’s

essential teaching, providing the groundwork upon which her successors could build.

As Kail’s project in this book is reconstructive, he is primarily concerned to correct various criticisms of Beauvoir by insisting on the nuances of her existentialism, thus enabling us to appreciate the distinctiveness of her analysis of oppression. It is not his aim to ask, further, whether she was right. While Kail therefore convincingly demonstrates the critical force of much of Beauvoir’s work, and fruitfully suggests an interpretative reorientation around her anaturalism, even its most obvious deficiencies remain unaddressed. For example, Beauvoir herself was nothing if not reductive in her analysis of ‘historical materialism’, and the residual idealism in her account of oppression is not hidden by repeating the mantra of the primacy of the relation. Nor does Kail consider what happened to the specifically existentialist theses that make up Beauvoir’s ontology in the materialist and deconstructive philosophies of her successors. After all, there has been no significant tradition of existentialist feminism after Beauvoir and an alternative Beauvoirian feminism has proved difficult to define.

Stella Sandford

Feeling abstract

Stephen Zepke, *Art as Abstract Machine: Aesthetics and Ontology in Deleuze and Guattari*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005. 318 pp., £45.00 hb., 0 415 97155 1.

In the ongoing evaluation of the legacy of the thought of Gilles Deleuze there has of late been an increasingly clamorous assessment of the precise role played in his career by his collaborations with Félix Guattari. The caricature by Žižek of the ‘guattarized’ Deleuze, who needed Guattari as an ‘alibi’, is complemented by Alain Badiou’s determination to edit Guattari out of Deleuze’s curriculum vitae. Other voices, while they differ in their estimation of its value, correctly identify the salient role played by Guattari in orienting Deleuze’s thought after the still ‘structuralist’ *Logic of Sense* towards the ‘machinic’ ontology of the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Among the most vociferous defenders of the jointly authored books has been Éric Alliez. Alliez has convincingly argued that *What is Philosophy?* is far from the sell-out, about-turn or conservative portrait of philosophy for which some have taken it. Following on from this, then, comes the publication of Stephen Zepke’s study of Deleuze and Guattari’s ontology and aesthetics. Not only does Zepke – who attended Alliez’s seminar at Vienna – afford Guattari an equal billing in his title

– this despite the fact that Deleuze’s output in the form of books devoted to art far outstrips that of Guattari in terms of quantity – in one chapter he affords Guattari the central position in the development of his own argument regarding ‘Songs of molecules: the chaosmosis of sensation.’

The book begins by stating that the notion of the abstract machine (initially developed by Guattari independently) as it appears in the work of Deleuze and Guattari issues what Zepke calls ‘an imperative’. This is identified as the first principle of the notion of art as abstract machine in its generality: namely that the abstract machine is real and not a representation. As Zepke reminds us, for Deleuze and Guattari, on the one hand (in *What is Philosophy?*) neither sensation nor art of any sort has ever been representational, while, on the other, specific artists seem to practise a resistance to the representational more than others. The abstract machine itself is, Zepke points out, *against* representation. As Mireille Buydens put it in her 1990 study of Deleuze’s aesthetics, ‘the abstract machine is ... “before” every form or beyond these, hooked into

an intensive molecularity in a variable manner depending on the artist which it characterises.' (Indeed there is one quibble in this regard concerning the protocol of citation adopted here: surely Buydens's enduringly persuasive study, complete with the imprimatur of its subject, deserved some attention.)

The range of artists selected by Zepke for consideration in separate sections following expository material are either already those favoured by Deleuze (Antonioni features as the exemplar of the cinematic abstract machine for example, Pollock in relation to sensation, Bacon 'hapticity', and so on). Such rereading has been a feature of several recent books on Deleuze, not least the three volumes of Ronald Bogue. Zepke goes somewhat further in extrapolation, presenting, for example, his misgivings concerning the limitations of Guattari's reading of Duchamp. The work of Pollock is positioned, as is Deleuze and Guattari's thought on it, in relation to other important canonical statements on the artist (thus the writing of Clement Greenberg and of Michael Fried is discussed in a depth never entered into by Deleuze and/or Guattari). However, this is less true of the analysis of Deleuze's reading of Antonioni, which does not venture as far into contiguous debates in film theory and film history. The method, rather, is to produce a montage of the various scattered statements on Antonioni throughout *Cinema II* and to present a coherent survey of these as amounting to a systematic account of the specificity of his abstract machine.

On this level, then, the book succeeds in being a fresh contribution to the growing body of work engaging with Deleuze and Guattari's approach to art theory and aesthetics. Moreover it positions their work in a way which brings it into insistent dialogue with the tradition of critical reflection on art in the twentieth century and beyond. Thus, for instance, Zepke makes a convincing case that Worringer's empathy and abstraction are rewritten by Deleuze and Guattari as the smooth and striated of *A Thousand Plateaus*. The lack of reference to music is justified by the lack of any systematic exposition of it in Deleuze and Guattari's writing. The emphasis on Greenberg and Fried, while understandable from the point of view of anglophone art history and aesthetics (explicitly announced as an aim of one of the chapters) is at the expense, however, of any reference to the influence of, for instance, Henri Maldiney, who was especially influential on Deleuze.

The imperative of what Zepke identifies as Deleuze and Guattari's 'anti-Platonic physiology of art' puts the work of art in a position which he describes, in quite an

unDeleuzian idiom, as ethical. By invoking this term, Zepke makes a move towards a kind of translation, for which his foregrounding of Spinoza's 'mystical atheism' (in Chapter 2) serves as the catalyst. While Zepke concurs with other commentators in stressing the 'great identity Spinoza–Nietzsche' in respect, say, of an ontology, he is original in his insistence on a central role for Spinoza in respect of an onto-aesthetics which the latter might facilitate. Indeed, so much does the idiosyncratic emphasis hold sway that the concept of the abstract machine (of Zepke's title) in fact operates as the understudy to 'atheistic mysticism' in the book's cast of concepts. For Zepke, the mysticism of Spinoza, presented as a radical alternative to negative theology, is at the core of the onto-aesthetics made possible in his wake, including in Nietzsche, whose own invocation of what Deleuze will come to call 'the powers of the false' is already, as Zepke asserts in a footnote, an atheistic mysticism.

Zepke helps in the move from the generality of aesthetics to a particularity of art criticism: 'Art as abstract machine therefore involves an ethical choice, a selection and conjugation of those matter-flows which are in the process of escaping from themselves, it must affirm only that which is the most deterritorialized.' Art as abstract machine, then, is not just any art – even if all art is in some sense the abstract machine because no art has ever been representational. The (Nietzschean) processes of choice, selection and conjugation may be located on the plane of the artist, the work or the viewer. What each of these planes have in common with one another is the imperative, one aspect of which it is now clear is: *experiment*. Art, in its generality, is the privileged site for corporeal experimentation.

Zepke ends by invoking the leap of faith which is the adjunct to the imperative with which he began. The book then comes to an end on the very interface which is so often invoked by the very concept of the abstract machine, that between aesthetics and ontology: 'To believe in the break, to affirm a disjunction in which product and production are in absolute immanence, to affirm, finally, a plane of abstract machines, is the very condition of art's possibility, the very condition of its *actuality*.' If this latter term has a particular resonance in the thought of Deleuze considered separately from Guattari – specifically in the concept of *counter-effectuation* – *Art as Abstract Machine* may be considered as subjecting the thinking of each to a counter-effectuation beyond their jointly authored work.

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