

Analogical nostalgias

Antonio Negri, *The Political Descartes: Reason, Ideology and the Bourgeois Project*, trans. Matteo Mandarini and Alberto Toscano, Verso, London and New York, 2007. 344 pp., £6.99 pb., 1 84667 582 3.

Antonio Negri's *Political Descartes* presents two thinkers at pains to make nostalgia productive. First there is Descartes, who, following an explosion of humanist fervour that promised to reconcile man and world (the Renaissance), seized upon this lingering hope to develop a 'reasonable ideology' that could provide solace and coherence to a nascent class – the bourgeoisie – whose very existence was independent of, and antithetical to, the absolutist state apparatus. But we also have Negri, who, following an explosive yet unfulfilled desire to reconcile man and world (Marxist communism), has seized upon this lingering hope to develop a 'reasonable ideology' for a burgeoning 'class' – the multitude – whose very existence is independent of, and antithetical to, the political apparatuses of the modern state. Readers who follow Deleuze in understanding Negri as a 'profoundly Spinozian thinker' may be surprised at the degree of identification between Negri and the object of this study, first published in 1970. As Matteo Mandarini and Alberto Toscano note in the introduction to their excellent translation, the work was more than a requisite exercise for the advancement of Negri's academic career; it was also a salvo in his quarrels within Italian Marxism over the putative 'autonomy of the political'. At the forefront of Italian workerism, Negri sought a coherent theory of spontaneity to justify his break with a Communist Party set on making inroads towards state governance through available political channels. Descartes' unlikely appeal for Negri drew from his ability to maintain in theoretical tension universal insights of an ontological or metaphysical variety alongside sober assessments of the socio-economic constraints that rendered the 'truth' of these insights impossible to realize in a given historical moment. The political utility of such an evidently esoteric 'project' lay precisely in its capacity, in Negri's view, to think, conceive and talk about the political without the intermediary of a political apparatus; indeed, to make the structures and proceedings of state administration – the domain of a 'politics' whose birth pangs were witnessed by Descartes – irrelevant to the historico-ontological nexus constitutive of 'the political' as such.

But if Descartes, situated at the inaugural hinge of the modern era, was the spokesperson for a politically homeless social stratum 'caught between a nostalgic fantasy of the past as a place of the absence of struggles and an uncertain and dangerous future', Negri presents himself as a spokesperson for an epochal transition in which the terms of this formula are reversed. The theoretical value of Descartes' reasonable ideology was that it did not forget its inaugural insight – that being is univocal – even as it articulated a programme which paradoxically allowed the nascent bourgeoisie to exist with confidence in its essential separation from the absolutist state on high. Negri suggests that Descartes' late writings intimate the reconciliation of state and civil society in Hegel's project; but it is deemed more urgent to preserve the ambiguity in Descartes' thought that permits ontological univocity and metaphysical separation to be equally 'true' propositions without reconciliation. In the end, Spinoza's dogged realism, which Negri would affirm with fewer reservations a decade later, would be no match for Descartes' accommodating pragmatism.

Much like the later study of Spinoza, *The Political Descartes* follows a biographical narrative tweaked to suit the metaphysical narrative that is Negri's chief concern. Its four long chapters correspond with the key moments in Descartes' philosophical itinerary. The general argument is that Descartes' metaphysics expresses the development of bourgeois ideology as a reconstructive project rooted in a metaphysical, and thus, in Negri's view, political failure. The *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (1628) reveals the persistence of a Renaissance faith in science's ability to articulate being directly. Despite evidences of rupture with this moment following the introduction of radical doubt, Negri argues that the memory of this faith informs all of Descartes' subsequent thought. The next major step is the *Discourse on Method* (1637). Negri focuses on this work's gestation period where memory becomes nostalgia and the search for a relationship between the terms of fractured separation – correlated as mind and world, and state and civil society – leads to an honest appraisal of the humanist project's failure

to reconcile them. The *Discourse* is part of a 'war of position' against the libertines that seeks to salvage a space for freedom from their mechanistic world-view. As the impossibility of science's actual possession of the world is increasingly taken for granted, nostalgia is emboldened and the 'exclusive valorization of the I' becomes 'the basis for the (distant but not impossible) reconstruction of a hope (untimely but active) of domination'. In the book's third chapter, political science is rejected in favour of reasonable ideology by way of the *Meditations* (1642). Reasonable ideology involves a projection of the I as a valorized ego onto a divinity that is at once the authorization for, and fully absent from, the *cogito's* efforts to make its way in the world. 'Cartesian ideology discovers itself as the political ideology of the epoch', Negri argues, precisely because authority – be it God or the absolutist state – gets bracketed as elsewhere and is thus unable to interfere in the bourgeoisie's (re)constructive project to make the world in its image. Ideology finds its highest expression as pedagogy in the *Principles of Philosophy* (1644), the main text of Negri's final chapter. There the affirmation of the soul points to a reformist project, and hope becomes faith in the 'actuality of potential'. The *Treatise on the Passions* (1649) serves as a coda, wherein the key passion *l'admiration* – usually translated as 'wonder' – names both 'the actual, immediate, liminal unification of essence and existence' and 'the fully retrieved humanist nostalgia'. Negri concludes with the observation that this reconstructive project, whose essence is productive nostalgia, is inherently unable to actualize itself fully in historical time.

Such is the basic narrative of Negri's work. Readers will see the conviction that all metaphysics is political and vice versa firmly in place; also recognizable is the image of the thinker of the epoch as one who deftly negotiates the 'truth' of his ontological insights with the exigencies of historical determinations. Each rupture or shift over the course of Descartes' philosophical development is qualified as immediately political, a qualification that is not so much argued as affirmed. Given that at one point Negri describes the political as the blend of a 'total, critical adherence' to humanist univocity and an 'appreciation of the surrounding reality', perhaps an argument is not necessary. How an adherence can be at once total and critical is not entirely clear. But since, for Negri, the domain of the political is tantamount to 'surrounding reality' his conviction that the political is never operationally autonomous nor absent becomes less puzzling, which is not to say more persuasive: if the political is everywhere, a discussion of politics *qua*

politics not only becomes moot; the very proposition of such a discourse becomes nonsensical.

And yet to read this work as merely an antiquated iteration of Negri's own metaphysics, prior to the Spinozist turn and lacking the Deleuzian vernacular, risks overlooking the merits attendant to the book's appearance in English thirty-seven years after its original publication. It is striking that a book whose central problematic concerns converting nostalgia into a productive theoretical project is, as its inclusion in Verso's latest classics series attests, effectively a nostalgia piece itself. More to the point, we see the roots of Negri's tenacious contention that 'metaphysics is political' in a dated research apparatus that itself will not fail to evoke a vague sense of nostalgia in many contemporary readers.

Navigating one's way through the book's scores of footnotes is like touring some hybrid museum with one wing devoted to mid-twentieth-century Western Marxist historical research and another to similarly dated French Descartes scholarship. The latter will certainly be the more exotic wing to anglophone readers, but it is an unexpected benefit of Negri's book to introduce the arguments of such French institutional dons as Henri Gouhier, Martial Gueroult, Jules Vuillemin and Ferdinand Alquie. Negri's recapitulation of Descartes' metaphysics is a selective mosaic of these various, often radically disparate, interpretations. In the main wing we find the theses of the *Past and Present* school concerning the socio-economic crisis of the seventeenth century; we come across affirmative references to C.B. Macpherson's 'balanced and comprehensive' reading of Hobbes, marshalled against Leo Strauss's 'violent' disentangling of natural and moral philosophy; Negri endorses the methods and conclusions of Lucien Goldmann's study of Pascal as a purveyor of a Jansenist tragic vision of the world. Each of these displays time-warps the reader back to the heyday of Marxist scholarship, and Negri's reading shows all the virtues and limitations of this moment. The situating of Descartes as a class actor, a product of the *robins* (effectively a cadre of French civil servants, and the bourgeoisie 'in embryo') watching their relevance dwindle before the rise of an absolutist politics, serves Negri's study well. The separation between state power and civil society's productive capacity felt so acutely by these *robins* finds a correlate in Descartes' effort to locate authority in an inaccessible God and productivity in an interior will become intellect. Moreover, this reading of Descartes reveals a concept of labour whose importance will become more important to Negri's critical project over

time. Cartesian method is indeed nothing less than 'analytic division and productive reconstruction'. The production of a 'reconstructed cosmos ... greater than the given cosmos' requires razing the indeterminate given to make way for the reconstruction of the will of the subject. This process can only be a matter of at once admirable resilience and disastrous usurpation. In a smart rejoinder, Negri suggests that, rather than the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the *Discourse on Method* 'is perhaps the first *Bildungsroman* of bourgeois thought'. Descartes' philosophy, like the bourgeois ideology it expresses, anticipates by two centuries Marx's own ambiguous relationship to the historically productive yet stillborn role of the bourgeoisie.

Operating by a process of metaphorical links and a keen attention to form, the virtues of Marxist reading methods have been clear since Lukács's dazzling juxtaposition of the reactionary naturalism of a progressive Zola alongside the progressive realism of a reactionary Balzac. In each case, the form, not the intent, reveals the contours of the epoch. A similar approach informs Negri's *Political Descartes*. It is illuminating at points, banal at others, and farcical in certain cases. For Negri, metaphysics, like literature, can be deemed immanently political because it presents *formally* the tensions of the historical moment. Negri's interpretation of ideology as philosophy-become-constructive-project, for which Cartesianism is an ideal model, is compelling as a Marxist effort to theorize ideology as a self-perpetuating discourse. And yet, in order to contribute to a Marxist understanding of the political, Negri's analysis requires more than a formal similarity between the philosophical terms of Cartesian dualism and the divide between state and civil society. Negri pre-emptively critical responses to his anachronistic pre-dating of the latter, socio-political division with the claim that Cartesianism is the expression of a class that is only 'in embryo'. He concedes that Descartes' project doesn't really correspond to the *robins'* historical experience, but rather will provide the 'mnemonic content' of the bourgeoisie's collective class memory.

Labelling his analytical object 'mnemonic content' – thus making of Cartesianism a kind of dreamwork – permits Negri to skirt the relative dearth of political, or even social, concern in Descartes' texts and to pursue an analysis almost solely through metaphor, a method which is not only Marxist in inspiration, but is also, in Negri's view, authorized by Descartes' philosophy itself. This procedure produces some amusing moments evocative of a facile identification between forms, no less naive than the Marxist identification between base reality and superstructural ideology that

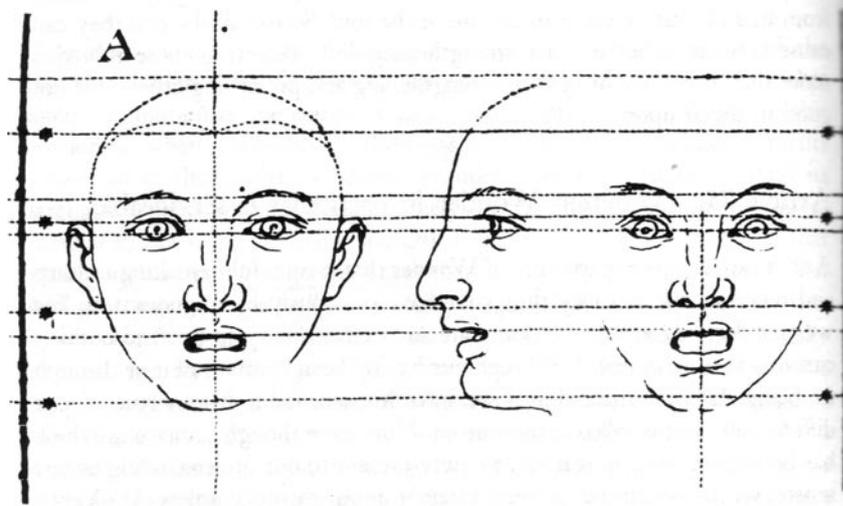
Negri purports to detest. At one point, suggesting that the example will give us some purchase on the existential angst of a not-yet-existent class, Negri cites from the *Treatise on Man* wherein Descartes describes having a limb torn from one's body and the mechanism by which this bodily experience is registered in the mind as pain. Negri's take: 'Here nostalgia clashes with separated reality. Pain is the sign of the one and the other.' Notwithstanding its admitted 'anthropomorphic resonances', this example is clearly a stretch.

Granting that metaphor might still be a plausible mode of political theory makes it all the more incumbent upon Negri to present a coherent version of Cartesian metaphysics. On this score, he maintains in the new Postface that his account can be squared with contributions to Descartes scholarship that postdate his study: Foucault and Derrida's dispute over the *cogito*, the 'limp' readings of the 'Popkin school', and Luce Irigaray's feminist critique. The exception is Jean-Luc Marion's work, berated as 'a re-emergence of reactionary thought that withdraws all progressive character from Descartes' philosophy, definitively confining it within theological dualism'. Regardless of one's take on Marion's disputed theological agenda, his trilogy on Descartes is formidable, as even Negri admits. To speak of scholarship in terms of its being geared towards withdrawing certain tendencies and activating others may suit Negri – it certainly seems to be an accurate description of his own procedures in the history of philosophy – but in the case of Marion's reading of Descartes, Negri's acid distaste seems little more than an excuse for refusing to engage with an interpretation of Descartes that is devastating for his own.

Negri criticizes Marion for the 'operations' he 'effects', chief among them the 'theological "whitening"' of Descartes' ontology, as if Marion's scholarly 'moves' were merely an ulterior agenda, rather than a powerful heuristic for making sense of theology's role in Descartes' philosophy. Indeed, Marion's concept of 'white theology' points to the deepest fissure between his and Negri's interpretations. The original French – *théologie blanche* – makes use of a pun apparent to anyone familiar with the expression *carte blanche*. The function of theology in Descartes' philosophy, according to Marion, is as a placeholder for an anonymous guarantor – a blank cheque – of radical contingency in a world manifestly inexhaustible through scientific purchase. Descartes' 'white theology' was the product of his own doctrine of the creation of eternal truths, first developed in his correspondence with Mersenne in 1630. It was this doctrine above all that would

render Descartes inaugural for modern thought by revealing the bankruptcy of the concept of univocal being. Marion argues that Descartes realized that the *formal* univocity of reason (univocal because universal in its application) cannot but lead to a concept of *ontic* equivocality (ontic, and not ontological, because at this stage we're dealing with facticity and not yet any metaphysics or logic of being) precisely because the foundations or 'authority' of reason cannot be inherent to reason itself. This is so according to the Cartesian principle *causa sive ratio*, the forerunner of Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason, which states that everything that exists must have a *reason for* – that is, a *cause of* – its existence. The key point is that, according to reason, reason itself must have a cause that makes it exist as reasonable. Indeed, Descartes'

case, however, the *causa sui* was a deductive *result* of the rationalist principle of *causa sive ratio* when, in his quest to secure the foundation of his own existence and reasoning capacity, he applied the latter principle to an inherited concept of God. In Marion's view, Spinoza represents a kind of regression from the Cartesian advance. Descartes' genius was to recognize that if the concept of God as a perfect being involves the capacity to create, then even God, as perfect and as cause, is not beholden to the 'eternal truths', including the mathematical ones, that he himself has created; he cannot, by definition, be coextensive with them. The result is the paradox that the integrity and veracity of human reason is only granted if its foundations, theological or not, remain in essence incomprehensible and inaccessible. To make God as guarantor



L'admiration—Wonder

– à la Spinoza, but in Marion's account à la the Scholastic Francisco Suarez – coextensive with eternal truths like a sun to its rays, straitjackets epistemology in an analogical procedure whereby every theoretical pursuit can be deemed futile given that it is always reducible to a singular pre-existent principle. In such circumstances, innovation is de facto impossible. More important, this critique of ontic univocity is inseparable from a critique of analogical thinking, the epistemic enemy of the geometrically inspired Cartesian method, not-

withstanding Descartes' own pedagogical recourse to metaphors. Analogy means saying the same thing in a multitude of ways; it is not so much an iteration of the novel or of the unforeseen as it is the reiteration of what is already believed to be the case. Marion's reading of Descartes' philosophy as a critique of analogical thinking is ultimately ruinous for Negri's interpretation, rooted as the latter is in a concept of univocal being that only permits a process of reasoning by metaphor – that is, by *analogy*.

break with Scholasticism was to move from an idea of God as an 'uncaused cause' to that of the *causa sui*, that which is self-caused; but he maintains that it is God that causes everything else, everything that is *not* God, which, in Descartes' view, is literally and truly *everything* available to human contemplation or human experience, the domain of science and philosophical thought. God as the creator of reason is also truly the 'exception' to reason, and thus the site of a potential contingency that cannot itself be 'reasoned' about or known in advance.

Negri's revulsion for Marion is thus no accident, and a comparison of Marion's Descartes with Negri's is by no means gratuitous. Rather, it sheds light on tensions in Negri's thought that go back at least thirty-seven years but still inform his contemporary project for the multitude. The political imperative for the multitude's move from potentiality to actuality is drawn from its ontological status as the essence of being as such, despite state power's or 'history's' rebarbative efforts

With Spinozism, the Cartesian order of reasons is effectively reversed. As Deleuze's and Negri's efforts have shown, Spinozism very much involves an affirmation of univocal being. For Spinoza, self-caused substance is the point of departure, and the impossibility of an outside is thus integral to the system as an article of faith; creator, created and creation are deemed coextensive from the outset. In Descartes'

to deny it. The argument, then, is that what already 'really' is, is *also* what should 'actually' be. The ontological reality of univocal being is 'true', despite its apparent epistemological dead ends and materially evidenced obscurity. The explanation for this paradoxical, if not outright contradictory, situation – in which what is 'true' is not yet what 'is' – must either confess its own theological underpinnings or reaffirm the concept that has been the trouble spot of Marxist theory for decades, and in our post-Althusserian world has become increasingly indiscernible from thought itself: *ideology*.

Descartes' ideology in particular is 'reasonable ideology' not only because it proves efficacious, but because it is smart enough to recognize that it is *only* ideology, that it functions as a gauze over the truth of singular being that Descartes will never forget. It is ultimately ironic that Negri charges Marion with evacuating Descartes' method of historical sense, because

Negri denies any true historical development to Descartes' thought *as thought*; it becomes a dramatized series of strategic and palliative moves that obscure his thinking's essential reducibility to the painful grasp of an (historically) impossible truth. Instead of realizing the inadequacies of univocal ontology and inaugurating modern philosophy with an intense theoretical effort – certainly a plausible scenario – Descartes' 'philosophical' development becomes an illuminating exercise in damage control.

The Political Descartes is a sophisticated work of Marxist scholarship whose conclusions are reaffirmed in the current English edition. It is a testament to the intensity of Negri's own nostalgia and the intransigence of his faith in the univocal truth of the multitude that even the philosopher who did most to decimate that concept's ontological foundations can still be read, assimilated and ultimately enlisted in its cause.

Knox Peden

Abstract art

Pascale Casanova, *Samuel Beckett: Anatomy of a Literary Revolution*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, London and New York, 2006. 119 pp., £12.99 hb., 1 84467 112 7.

Andrew Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2006. xii + 322 pp., £50.00 hb., 0 19 920775 5.

Last year's centenary of Samuel Beckett's birth saw an especially frenzied flurry of activity around the work of an author who, nearly twenty years after his death, still inspires a level of respect, even affection, among both artists and critics that is almost unique in postwar literature. Appearing at the very end of 2006, these two books are among the most substantial outcomes of such birthday celebrations. First published in French in 1997, Pascale Casanova's text is already known to many. Coming in the wake of the success of her study of 'world literature', *The World Republic of Letters* (1999, trans. 2005), this typically lucid and stylish translation by Gregory Elliott will hopefully assure it of a wider readership. Andrew Gibson's book, which follows a number of essays published in the last five years or so, yokes Beckett to the fashionable name of Badiou, while surreptitiously undoing at least some of the latter's own much-debated claims concerning the Irish novelist and playwright. Each makes a compelling claim that, as Gibson puts it, 'though he has his rivals', Beckett's remains 'the most important of the serious post-war [European] literary oeuvres'.

Beckett has, of course, long been the late-twentieth-century philosopher's writer of choice – he is the only primarily 'literary' author to be honoured with an obituary in *Radical Philosophy* – and both these books appear in the context of an ongoing revival of explicitly philosophical readings of his work. Simon Critchley's *Very Little... Almost Nothing*, published in 1999, with an extensive final chapter on Beckett, no doubt bears some responsibility for this, as does the 2002 Palgrave collection *Beckett and Philosophy*, to which Gibson was a contributor. The question of the status of 'philosophy' in current Beckett scholarship underpins the key arguments of both these new books, in markedly opposed ways. For Casanova, Beckett's distinctive *artistic* revolution has been misunderstood precisely to the extent that it has been subject to 'annexation by philosophers'. Maurice Blanchot's influential early reading of the *Trilogy* stands in here for the sins of philosophy in general, though the fact that, as Leslie Hill has pointed out, Casanova takes Blanchot to task for a set of views – an odd melange of sub-existentialist and pseudo-romantic forms of pathos

– that are pretty much the opposite of what he himself proposes does not exactly inspire great confidence in her grasp of philosophical argumentation. The relationship of literature to philosophy set out in Gibson's book is altogether more complex than Casanova's, as indeed *Beckett and Badiou* is on almost every level. The difficulty here, for Gibson, is how to defend Badiou's tendency to read his favoured Beckett works (specifically *Worstward Ho*) as 'short philosophical treatise[s]', while registering what in the rhythm of Beckett's writing escapes such a reading – the point at which, as Gibson puts it, 'the philosopher's account of art as thought falls short'.

Interestingly, both critics approach this problematic of literature's relation to philosophy through what each describes as a powerful 'will to abstraction' in Beckett's work. (*Beckett l'abstracteur* is the original French title of Casanova's book.) Beckett once remarked in a rare interview that, like Schoenberg in music or Kandinsky in painting, 'I have perhaps turned towards an abstract language'. Yet Casanova and Gibson interpret such a process of 'abstractivation' – which both also equate to the 'quasi-mathematical' – in very different, even opposed, ways. Where they concur is in the observation that this most clearly manifests itself in Beckett's apparent 'evacuation of history from his world', 'the vigour with which he expunges or holds at bay the density of specific, historical time', in Gibson's phrase. But this is where any agreement comes to an end. For in Casanova's account, if Beckett's texts amount to a 'modernity at the level of form' they do so, necessarily, as a form of specifically *literary* abstraction – one which she explicitly relates to a 'pictorial abstraction' in painting – that certainly marks a turn away from 'the world', but that leads not towards the austere logical form of the 'philosophical treatise' but emphatically away from it. Where philosophy appears in Beckett's texts – and Casanova devotes much energy to tracking its presence as parodic allusion or 'latent framework', particularly via Beckett's interest in the Flemish Cartesian Arnold Geuclinx – it does so merely as a 'literary operator', in which philosophemes are only ever 'employed' in specifically non-philosophical ways. Thus what are taken by Blanchot among others as 'philosophical questions' – 'Where now? Who now? When now?', for example, in *The Unnamable* – are in fact solely 'technical' ones.

It is not clear why such questions cannot (indeed might necessarily) be *both* 'literary' and 'philosophical' in some way. (In actuality, this was part of Blanchot's point.) However, such rigid distinction is

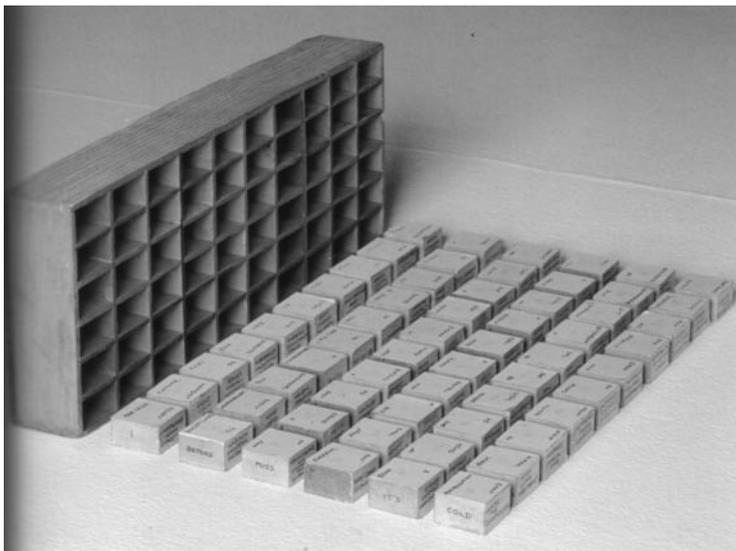
essential to the kind of clarity that Casanova seeks in pinning down the 'revolutionary' significance of Beckett's 'aesthetic modernity'. This clarity is one afforded by what appears to be a somewhat belated *formalist* approach to Beckett's writings, in which his 'project' is presented as one directed towards 'an absolutely self-sufficient writing' in a 'pure space of the text', although this is seemingly complicated by Casanova's strong insistence on the merits of what she calls 'historical inquiry'. Nonetheless, while this may well distance her from the kinds of explicitly anti-historical approaches associated in an Anglo-American context with New Criticism (and which has its fairly hegemonic equivalents in the French academy), in the end it's not so far from someone like Clement Greenberg in its assertion that, 'historically', Beckett's 'greatness consists in his confrontation with the set of aesthetic issues and debates that were contemporaneous with him'. 'History' here is, in other words, simply the 'history of a literary space' – one which Casanova (very expertly) reconstructs in a lengthy examination of both the Irish and Parisian scenes from which the mature Beckett's art emerged.

Fittingly, Casanova is at her strongest in her close readings of the texts, particularly *Worstward Ho*, which (like Badiou, intriguingly) she sees as the summit of Beckett's career. Underlying these readings is an understanding of Beckett's self-appointed task as working towards 'autonomous form, self-generated by [a] mathematical matrix and attaining a kind of abstractive purity'. This is then manifested in what Casanova terms a 'mechanism of *ars combinatorial* in the mathematical sense ... [which] attempts, on the basis of the minimum number of elements ... all the operations and combinations that can be syntactically realized'. Whether or not one accepts their ultimate interpretation here, the tracking of such processes through the later Beckett's work is masterful and overwhelmingly persuasive in its attention to textual detail.

The problems lie elsewhere. Eagleton does a manful job in his rather generous introduction to the book, but no amount of finessing can convincingly claim Casanova as some latter-day Lukács or Adorno, 'remind[ing] us [that] there is no more truly historical phenomenon in art than form, which is quite as much saturated in social significance as so-called content'. Casanova may well, as Eagleton glosses it, understand Beckett's writing as exemplary of a modern situation in which, '[f]reed from social function, art can now unfurl its own inner logic', but she has no real conception of such autonomy as *itself* a social fact, nor any ambition

to understand what specific marks it may leave upon the form of modern artworks themselves. Casanova is simply not interested in form as *immanently* historical in this way – as, in Adorno’s phrase, that to which ‘social contradictions’ return as ‘immanent problems’ of the work. Mobilized without any attempt at actually mediating between them, the formal and historical dimensions of Casanova’s readings thus become merely formalist and historicist in turn.

There is little doubt that, like many such works of single-mindedness, Casanova’s short text nonetheless has a luminous and often seductive clarity to it. The same could not quite be said for Gibson’s book, at nearly three times the length. Yet, in fact, *Beckett and Badiou* is all the better for its inherent difficulties, and even uncertainties, for its ultimate twisting and turning in on itself. What it lacks at times in elegance – and the book feels in parts, unlike most of Gibson’s other criticism, almost self-denying in its stylistic dryness – it makes up for with a nuance and rigour that make it a far more richly satisfying and productive account of Beckett’s oeuvre than Casanova’s, for all that its



fundamental aims are ones to which I find myself profoundly unsympathetic.

While Casanova reads Beckett’s ‘turn towards an abstract language’ as a turn towards linguistic form as such, for Gibson this abstraction is precisely akin, in some way, to the characteristic abstraction of philosophical form. Hence, the legitimacy – up to a point – of Badiou’s confidently ‘philosophical’ reading of *Worstward Ho*. At the same time, Gibson argues, this ‘will to abstraction’ suggests a specifically ‘aesthetic’, and ‘radically heterogenous’, grasping for ‘truth’ in Beckett’s work – a kind of *ethico-political* ‘faith’ in ‘quasi-mathematical’ abstraction pitted against a ‘world apparently surrendered to the logic of embodiment’. If

philosophy plays a far more affirmative role here, this is hardly surprising, given that the ‘novelty’ of Badiou’s own contemporary position rests, in good part, upon his emphatic claims for a ‘return’ to philosophy *qua* philosophy, against apparently more ‘sceptical’ currents of post-Kantian thought. Nonetheless, from the very beginning, Gibson rightly notes that Badiou’s own Platonic conception of what the true affirmative ‘theme’ of philosophy should be hardly implies an obvious connection to Beckett. Briefly put, then, what allows for this seemingly unlikely conjunction are the repercussions of Badiou’s (famously anti-Deleuzean) assertion that the ‘event’ has only a ‘rare existence’. It is this very rarity, and the ‘bleak light’ that it casts ‘into the shadows it does not transform’, which generates, in art in particular, what Gibson calls a ‘pathos of intermittency’ (the subtitle of his book) apparent in ‘the gap between events and their remainder’.

This notion of intermittency – a term that Gibson takes from Daniel Bensaid’s *critique* of Badiou – is certainly a productive one, and allows for some remarkably original readings of Beckett’s work. (I found the very striking account of *The Unnamable* as a fundamentally ‘aggressive’, even ‘furious’, text, powered by a ‘sheer rage against doxa’, particularly unexpected and compelling.) At the same time, it resonates, as Gibson points out, with the most immediate and familiar aspects of Beckett’s work, encapsulated by the world ‘without events’ of his most famous play, *Waiting for Godot*, in which ‘Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful.’

Yet, even given its ‘legitimation’ in the basic idea of the event’s rarity, the connection this establishes to Badiou is a rather odd one, to say the least, in which the latter’s work is deployed in the form of something like a photographic negative, whereby everything that is left dark in Badiou’s philosophy becomes the light under which the distinctive shapes of Beckett’s world are revealed. It also means that, despite the dutiful (and no doubt sincere) admiration expressed for Badiou’s own readings of Beckett, Gibson most often finds himself heading in an almost completely opposed direction. ‘Pathos’ does not, as Gibson acknowledges, play a great role in Badiou’s writings, and, as such, he ‘tends to skirt around such Beckettian moments in favour of those he finds more affirmative’.

It may be this tension that explains why by far the least convincing part of Gibson’s book is its attempt to

enrol Beckett in a more directly Badiouian enthusiasm for the mathematical sovereignty of set theory. Gibson is clearly correct, like Casanova, to see the 'bleached world of mathematics' as a certain model for Beckett's forms, but it is surely stretching matters to suggest that an 'irony' that 'strikes specifically at Pythagorean mathematics and Euclidian geometry' indicates some actual affinity with 'developments in contemporary set theory'. Even allowing that Gibson is careful not to overdo the implication of some direct influence here, the analogies are forced. For while it is one thing to dispute that Beckett merely indulges in an 'ironic mockery' of mathematics in his writings – this seems right, and Gibson does a good job of demonstrating the problems with such a straightforward reading – it is quite another to somehow find an affirmation of the mathematical (as 'ontology') per se in the manner of Badiou himself.

The relationship to philosophy itself is, as one might expect, a good deal trickier to negotiate. I am myself upbraided, at one point in *Beckett and Badiou*, for the 'by now almost conventional' distrust of 'the clarity of a philosophical reading', apparently displayed in my review of the English translation of Badiou's *On Beckett* (*Radical Philosophy* 126, July/August 2004). Yet, the complications of Gibson's encounter with Beckett require an admission on his own part of the problems generated by the fact that, in the end, the philosopher cannot quite 'conceive of an aesthetic trajectory, whether the artist's or the work's, other than within the frame of a philosophical logic, or as having a logical structure'. Whether this might in fact be *intrinsic* to what Peter Osborne has called the 'neo-classical' character of Badiou's conception of philosophy itself (see *Radical Philosophy* 142, March/April 2007) is not something that Gibson is inclined to ask. Instead, it means that his text finds itself progressively marked by a series of qualifications regarding each of the terms that it takes from Badiou's formidable system. Most interestingly, I think, it is precisely some kind of *historicization* of this negation itself that comes to be gradually sketched in the later sections of the book.

Rather generously (as always), Gibson suggests that Badiou's work 'contains the seeds' of some theory of modernity that might be mobilized here. But, in fact, given his principled 'evacuation' of all history (not only, that is, *historicism*) from thought – and the straightforwardly disastrous separation of 'truth' and 'knowledge' upon which it insists – it's hard to see how any such adequate theory could be developed from such arid ground. Gibson makes as good an

attempt as could be imagined, but it requires decisive supplementation from elsewhere – specifically, the work of Benjamin, Rancière and Françoise Proust – in ways that shift the terms of Badiou's thinking to a rather larger degree than Gibson is prepared to acknowledge. As its intriguing by-product, this also entails the revelation (previously noted by Christian Jambet) of a far more 'melancholic' conception of Badiou's own thought than would be customary; one which is, I think, not so unconvincing as might be supposed. 'Vestigial modernity' is the term that Gibson proposes as 'useful' in this respect for 'characterizing the work of both Badiou and Beckett'. For if the event, like 'politics', is 'intermittent' for Badiou, this has, Gibson writes, as its 'logical corollary', a certain 'melancholy', albeit one that should not be 'confused with pessimism'.

This may well push 'the mood of his [Badiou's] thought far closer to, say, Adorno and Benjamin than he would ever find permissible', as Gibson argues in his preface, but it then begs the question of why, given what is at stake in the text, one might not approach the vital issues it raises via such thinkers in the first place. If one wants the melancholia of 'vestigial modernity', Adorno is a rather more obvious resource than Badiou. More to the point, Adorno's remorseless focus upon (even, at times, damaging obsession with) the kind of 'pathos of intermittency' that is, for him, life under the administered society of 'late capitalism', means that he, at the very least, actually has some account of its precisely *historical* and *social* force and character.

At one point, in the context of a reading of *Endgame*, Gibson cites Benjamin's concept of the 'prehistoric' from his writings on Kafka. I would be inclined to draw attention to a rather different passage, from the essay on 'Max Brod's Book on Kafka', in which Benjamin quotes from Eddington's *The Nature of the Physical World*. 'In all of literature', Benjamin writes, 'I know of no passage which has the Kafka stamp to the same extent.' It is in this sense that Kafka's *work* is 'the exact complement', Benjamin argues, of 'that reality of ours which realizes itself theoretically, for example, in modern physics, and practically in the technology of modern warfare'. It is in such terms, too, that Beckett's 'interest in mathematics' might be understood as *neither* simple mockery *nor* simple affirmation, but as an 'interest' formed around a sense of quasi-mathematical abstraction as a significant index of the *social* forms of 'real abstraction' constitutive of modernity itself. It is this that allows Adorno, taking much from Benjamin, to read Beckett's 'abstraction' as

itself a form of realism in its relation to the tendencies of advanced capitalist social form.

Gibson is surely right to argue that '[a]dvanced capitalism breeds and intensifies the experience of intermittency as the irrevocable underside of the myth of plenitude.' Yet, it is precisely here that Badiou has, as a matter of principle, little to say. The irony is, then, that while Gibson probably takes us further than any other recent reader of Beckett – certainly further than Casanova – in the direction of grasping the full social and critical form of his art, the Badiouian system that provoked the work is also what prevents it from pursuing this reading as far as it requires. In the end, no less than Casanova's formalism, it fails to engage abstraction itself as a means by which the work of art engages with socio-historical reality and form.

David Cunningham

Maybe it was something he ate

Massimo Montanari, *Food is Culture*, trans. Albert J. Sonnenfeld, Columbia University Press, New York, 2006. 168 pp., £14.50 hb., 0 231 13790 4.

Some readers of *Radical Philosophy* will remember, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, that moment in the early 1980s when books and articles on the topic of 'pleasure' began to appear. Suddenly, the myriad ways in which people have fun – in bed, at amusement parks, listening to music, dressing up – were thought worthy of critical attention, and in particular the attention of intellectuals of the Left. But for all the initial variety, it was clear from the outset that the queen of all enjoyment was sex, the paradigm case of 'the body and its pleasures'. Sex had a reasonable claim to being, well, just more pleasurable than even the best day at Blackpool. It had the not inconsiderable edifice of psychoanalysis as its superstructure. And it put issues of sexual identity, critical to the feminist movement and to gay politics, front and centre. All in all, it was the pleasure with the best prospects.

Reading Massimo Montanari's eloquent and shrewd little book, however, it's hard not to wonder whether we might have been better off if eating, rather than sex, had provided the template for thinking about pleasure. While sex is a *necessary* pleasure from the perspective of the species, at once labour and recreation, the process of producing and consuming food is a necessary pleasure for each and every one of us.

While sex is an everyday pleasure only for the lucky few, eating is everyday for all, for every conceivable society, and its centrality is only underlined by the shameful fact that so many die, also every day, for lack of it. As a form of popular culture, food has no rival. Montanari points out that many of its greatest achievements are 'common subsistence foods' – the tortilla in Mexico, couscous in North Africa, pasta in Italy – that demanded 'hour after hour of highly specialized labour carried out daily by women (the eternal heroines of the kitchen and custodians of the techniques that define cooking), all this handed down by practice and imitation'. In what other sphere can 'the people' claim to have left so inventive, so impressive, and so intensely pleasurable a legacy?

More compelling than all these considerations, however, is the fact that the satisfactions people take from food represent a unique nexus between 'production' and enjoyment. 'The fascination of culinary history', Montanari notes, 'is basically this: to discover how mankind, with effort and imagination, has sought to transform the pangs of hunger and the anguish of nutritional privation into potential occasions for pleasure'. Discussions of pleasure over the last thirty years have tended to narrow to analyses of 'leisure' and recreation, disquisitions on the means and methods of ideology and its distinct apparatuses. But food, even when reduced to multicoloured splodges on a large, white plate, is inevitably tethered to agriculture, fishing and the raising of livestock, commanding heights of the economy that are covered over – often literally – by heavy industry and Big Oil. No other pleasure is so immediately bound to production and reproduction; no other pleasure is haunted so remorselessly by the suffering and death that attend its absence.

Although *Food is Culture* contains the kinds of discussions one might expect from such a title – on the 'grammar' of cooking and of meals, the social formation of taste, the role of food in the construction of national identities – its analysis continually harps on the fact that in this case 'culture' is first and foremost a matter of staying alive. For the 'nature' to which food responds is not a resource or an environment, but hunger and the fear of hunger. When Montanari, quoting the sociologist Giralomo Sineri, remarks that 'Canning is anxiety in its absolute state', he reminds us that 'culture', whatever its etymological roots, is not a pacific tending of nature, but a desperate attempt to transcend the animal state. Hence the tenacity with which ancient and medieval societies insist that agriculture and cooking stand for the irruption of civilization itself. *Food is Culture* is an assertive title,

but by the end of this book the reverse claim seems just as plausible.

In Europe it is through bread, above all, that culture is wrested from hunger. Montanari locates the origin of European cuisine in Greek and Roman agriculture, which robbed the cultivation of grain in the myth of Persephone and bequeathed to Christianity the holy trinity of bread, wine and oil (rice played a similar role – real and mythical – in Asia, as corn did in North America). '[B]read does not exist in nature and only man knows how to make it', and as a consequence it is endowed with enormous symbolic value. This value, however, is (as we have known since Saussure) dependent on its place in the grammar of European cuisine, the food system through which products are combined first into dishes and then, syntactically as it were, into meals. Those who think such grammatical niceties are only superficial elaborations of real needs can look at how the European peasantry responded to wheat shortages. The predominant reaction was *substitution*, that is the preservation of the grammar of bread by merely varying its 'lexical' ingredients, replacing wheat with inferior grains, fava beans, chestnuts or – as things get worse and worse – acorns, grass and dirt. Under the severest pressure imaginable, consumers of food try to maintain continuity with conventionalized food practice.

When hunger, pleasure and production sit cheek by jowl, subtle changes in food syntax can have explosive effects. Montanari's examples show how market crises and the introduction of foods from the New World restructured the food system in various Italian regions, but a more instructive illustration lies closer to home. E.P. Thompson's famous article on the 'moral economy' of pre-industrial England demonstrated that the popular food riots of the period were calculated responses to disruptions in 'the eighteenth-century bread nexus' ('The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present* 50, 1971). Thompson wanted to prove that the rioters were motivated by a cultured understanding of economy – not just hungry plebeian bellies – but the bread nexus was also the sign of a cultured understanding of food itself. For popular agitation enforced not only a fair price for the stuff of life, but also a sense of how it should be made and from what. Given today's culinary sensibilities, it's amusing to note that the 'Brown Bread Act' introduced by the British government in December 1800 – which commanded millers to make whole wheat bread only – had to be abandoned two months later after a furious popular response.

While tin miners rioted over bread prices, Kant was busy distinguishing 'the taste of the tongue, the palate, and the throat' – tastes of sense – from the taste of reflection. Objects of the former merely gratify inclinations; objects of the latter please by virtue of their form. Kant considered the pleasure drawn from food to be both private and fleeting, an incommunicable experience with no durable effect. Montanari's grammar tells us that the pleasures taken at mealtime are neither inchoate nor private, but it is his history of food culture that does the real damage to Kant's prejudices.

While few will expect a plate of tortelli di zucca, however sublime, to awaken our moral feelings, the historical intimacy of gustatory pleasure and bodily well-being suggests that food culture might be more than a matter of temporary excitation. The first printed cookbook, written by Bartolomeo Sacchi and published in 1474, was titled *De honesta voluptate et valetudine* (On Honest Pleasure and Good Health) because, as Montanari argues, premodern culinary thinking bound mealtime pleasure directly to the welfare of the body. Physical well-being in an age before cheap industrialized food was assured by 'the construction of a gastronomic culture', not by stomach stapling and the Atkins Diet. In Kant this link is clearly broken, leaving the pleasure of food, as it were, stranded in its moment. 'Of a dish which stimulates the taste by spices and other condiments we say unhesitatingly that it is pleasant, though it is at the same time admitted not to be good' (*Critique of Judgement*, §4). Kant's blind spot may tell us more about the limitations of modern – and, dare one suggest, Northern European – cuisine than anything else. It could be an instance of his 'ocularcentric' prejudice against taste and smell, but maybe it was just something he ate.

Kant's unhappy experience with spicy food tells us something else as well. Landowners and their kin could distinguish their food from that of the peasantry by the mere fact that they had a reasonable amount of it, but, not being content with being content, they naturally devised strategies for maintaining the symbolic distinctiveness of their food culture as well. When spices were a rarity they became the means through which common foods could be 'ennobled'. As they became more generally available, even to philosophers, the wealthy and powerful turned to different means for distinction: the use of butter, the presentation of fresh fruit, the eating of game, the arrangement of meals at which one *could* eat voraciously, but didn't.

None of this is news, of course: Bourdieu laid out the pattern of gustatory distinction in one of his

inimitable diagrams over thirty years ago. But the lines are drawn differently today. Coffee, Montanari's 'beverage of bourgeois intelligence and efficiency' and now the world's second most valuable export, is available widely, but in such a bewildering multitude of varieties that its purchase seems to demand the exercise of theoretical, ethical *and* aesthetic judgement. Overeating is no longer a sign of noble virility, but of proletarian self-indulgence, and the bond between physical well-being and diet is in danger of becoming a middle-class hobby. As talk about food clutters the airwaves, and supermarket shelves groan under the weight of every piece of exotica agribusiness can think of, it's tempting to conclude that discussion of 'pleasure' should focus on something simpler, like sex.

It's a temptation worth resisting. The over-elaborate intricacy of our food culture cannot be decoupled from the no-longer-natural hunger suffered by so many of those at the producing end. To that extent, a radical aesthetics of food, one that tied the formal features of a food system to a long-term politics of physical well-being and happiness, would also have to be a plan and method of food production, a plan in which no one goes hungry (and, ideally, no one dies of overeating, either). Few pleasures carry so great a burden. In food one confronts a form of culture that is not only arguably a way of life, but its means as well.

Ken Hirschkop

Voodoo materialism

Dave Boothroyd, *Culture on Drugs: Narco-cultural Studies of High Modernity*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2006. 219 pp., £50.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 7190 5598 9 hb., 0 7190 5599 7 pb.

The motto of this book comes from Nietzsche's *Gay Science* (#68): 'Who will ever relate the whole history of narcotica? – It is almost the history of "culture", our so-called high culture.' Dave Boothroyd's aim is to present a series of reflections on the role played by illicit psychoactive drugs in the work of some of the central figures in modern Western thought. After an opening 'Deposition' stating his methodology, the two first chapters are devoted to Derrida's thought – implicit and explicit – about the relationship of deconstruction to drugs; a third is devoted to a deconstructive reading of Freud's ambivalence about his professional and personal involvement with cocaine in the 1880s and 1990s. The second half has chapters on

Walter Benjamin's writings on hashish, the relationship of Sartre's theory of hallucination to his own brief experimentation with mescaline, and Foucault's and Deleuze's various remarks about LSD and other drugs. The book tails off with a rather loosely organized chapter on the role played by heroin in cinema. Theoretically, all this is rooted in Derridean deconstruction and British cultural studies analyses of 'subculture'. Boothroyd wants to claim that drugs play a persistently ambivalent role in the thought of all these writers. His aim is to engage in an 'experimental affirmation of the reciprocal supplementarity of deconstruction and drugs ... [in order] to discover whether drugs can serve as an "ally" in the deconstruction of the rational normality Reason imposes on thinking in general'.

On the one hand, Boothroyd takes very seriously Derrida's remark in a 1995 interview entitled 'The Rhetoric of Drugs' that 'there is not any *single* world of drugs'. Drug experience is always placed within a cultural context, even and especially when it claims to be outside it. All knowledge about drugs is 'ultimately subject to culturally specific epistemologies, taxonomies, conceptual frameworks and so forth'. Taking what he calls a 'post-anthropological perspective', Boothroyd rejects all 'pharmaco-anthropologies' that harbour 'underlying transcendentalist assumptions'. The notion that drugs might offer some kind of 'transcendental experience' is rejected as a species of the metaphysics of presence.

On the other hand, Boothroyd situates other aspects of his analysis within a quasi-Foucauldian analysis of the ubiquity of 'narco-power'. In recent times, he argues, specialist knowledge about drugs (by pharmacists, lawyers, drug educationalists, criminologists and physicians) has been illegitimately generalized, and used as a means to 'control and regulate the modern subject', with the result that '*we are all modern subjects of narco-power*'. The thinkers discussed are presented as dynamically resisting the encroachments of this global, governmental narco-power. Boothroyd connects this shift to the emergence of a 'chemical generation', for whom taking drugs is allegedly of no greater moment than having a cup of tea. As a result of these social changes, "'recreational" and "lifestyle" drug use' has become 'a pandemic phenomenon and "addictive" drug use is becoming increasingly widespread in all Western societies'.

Perhaps because Boothroyd is most concerned with reading individual thinkers, these Foucauldian historical speculations are left somewhat undeveloped. While he is right to contend that the sheer proliferation of consciousness-altering substances in contempo-

rary Western capitalist culture – substances both legal (Ritalin, Prozac, etc.) and illegal – indicates that we are entering a phase where culture appears to be inescapably ‘on drugs’, the historical conditions of this shift require further examination. He does not comment on the fact that the global prohibition of drugs in the 1920s paradoxically coincided with the emergence of a model of capitalism based on the ‘production of consumption’. From a Marxist perspective, there is a clear contradiction within consumer capitalism on the issue of drugs. If the desires of the young are to be stimulated for profit, where does the line get drawn? The truth is that Boothroyd’s methodological deconstructionism leaves little space for the identification of clear historical contradictions.

Boothroyd’s book is part of another discourse. It is hard not to think that the cultural studies discourse of ‘technologies of the body’ has long been converging on this problematic zone. Over the last decade or so, a steady trickle of books has been making this tendency ever more explicit. Avital Ronell’s *Crack Wars* (1992) set the tone and David Lenson’s *On Drugs* (1995), Sadie Plant’s *Writing on Drugs* (1999), and Anna Alexander and Mark S. Roberts’s collection *High Culture: Reflections on Addiction and Modernity* (2002) proceeded to push this convergence further. In Boothroyd’s book, the problem of drugs arrives in cultural studies with all the violence of a symptom.

For him, drugs are the most potent ‘technology of the body’ available for resisting and challenging the sovereignty of ‘Reason’. He bluntly suggests that

There are indeed good reasons to suppose that LSD, and no doubt other drugs, can function as ... technological agents of individual creative becoming. They have this power by virtue of the linkages they make and unmake between the intensive body ... and the surface of discourse. And, it is therefore reasonable to suggest that drugs could serve the undertaking of making the subject-life of ‘oneself’ a work of art.

Boothroyd takes evident pleasure in depicting Foucault’s decision in ‘Theatrum Philosophicum’ – his review essay on Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense* – to render explicit Deleuze’s allusive remarks in those texts about psychedelia and LSD. This latter substance, Foucault boldly asserted, ‘eliminates the supremacy of the categories’ and frees thought from its ‘catatonic chrysalis’. Boothroyd says



that ‘where to idealist thinking drugs appear as the enemy of truth and the friend of artifice, to materialists like Foucault and Deleuze drugs and drug-effects are at least potential means for countering “regimes of truth” and the self-assertion of Reason’.

However, when Boothroyd asserts that ‘taking the drug LSD allows direct experimentation on the nerve centres of the self and on its singular connection with Reason’, his position risks collapse into a sort of voodoo materialism. Does the *self* have ‘nerve centres’, and, if so, how? And what is their ‘singular connection with Reason’? These are the questions one wants tackled, but the uneasy vacillation between deconstructionist method and Foucauldian approach to ‘narco-power’ blocks further enquiry.

Boothroyd’s gestures towards a ‘materialist’ account of the effect of drugs on the mind are in conflict with his deconstructive position. He states that

the idea of the good use, or ‘good repetition’ of drug use is not exhausted by medical expertise, whose prescriptions aim only at health understood on the basis of the *medical body* and the use of drugs may be measured independently of their medical use ... The use [of ecstasy] may also be ‘measured’ in relation to its stimulation of the *dancing body*. Opium may be measured in relation to dreaming, amphetamines in relation to energy,

hashish in relation to the imagination, nitrous oxide in relation to laughter, Viagra in relation to sex and so on. The technology of drug design and manufacture today presents the possibility of future drugs used for optimizing various species of aesthesiological experience.

In this vision of a future 'aesthesiological' drug culture, mental and physical faculties are capable of discrete enhancement according to one's desires. But here we seem to fall out of deconstructionism and into a quasi-biological and essentially hedonic account of drug experience.

A different historical perspective generates an alternative Deleuzian approach to the problem. Even before the global prohibition of the 1920s, drug use was referred to in veiled terms and related to a predilection for sleep (Mordecai Cooke's 1860 *The Seven Sisters of Sleep* being a good example). It developed its own language of sleep and dreaming, and perhaps found a niche as a compensation for the attention-sapping and energy-draining procedures of industrialized labour. (Compare Anson Rabinbach's *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity*, University of California Press, 1990, for an account of the cultural and intellectual background to what became identified as 'Taylorism', the 'scientific management' of the labour process.) In France, where Bergsonian vitalism had gained some influence, Taylorism was resisted in quasi-Bergsonian terms as homogenization incarnate. For this line of thought, independent of Marxism, drug experience was to be opposed to industrial labour *tout court*, and identified with a slackening of attention to the present.

Since Boothroyd omits any distinction between the drug experience and communication about that experience, an important channel of transmission between drugs and philosophical thought in French culture is overlooked. In late-nineteenth-century Paris, there were strong connections between drug use and a self-styled 'esotericism' that systematically cultivated a 'clandestine' approach to drug experimentation, wreathing it in symbols, rites and reference to 'eucharists', viaticums and 'regenerative' substances. One of Deleuze's first articles was on one of the initiators of the nineteenth-century revival of 'esotericism', Johann Malfatti de Montereggi, a 'Brunonian' physician who attempted to develop the connections between Schellingian *Naturphilosophie* and Indian theosophy. The focus of Brunonian medicine was the use of intoxicants such as opium and alcohol in regulated doses to restore 'vitality'. Deleuze's own interest in drugs may well have arisen within such 'esoteric' contexts.

These Bergsonian and 'esoteric' perspectives were compatible with qualified affirmations of the notion that drug experience has 'transcendental' aspects. As mentioned, Boothroyd is dismissive of the notion that drug experience can provide what is called 'transcendental experience', for deconstructive reasons. But he overlooks the real problem, which is that this notion of 'transcendental experience' is derived from a diffuse, uncritical idiom. From the post-Kantian perspective of modern philosophy, this term is obscure and ambiguous, as it conflates the transcendent and transcendental. Is it that drugs offer a perception of transcendent or 'spiritual' realities, or that they offer a privileged reflexive insight into the conditions for consciousness? Bergson's account of the mind's oscillation between the 'poles' of dream and action permit the development of a properly transcendental approach. In *The Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley explicitly derived his theory of consciousness as a 'reducing valve' – with drugs as a trigger for a reverse expansion of the mind – from Bergson's theories about the mind in *Matter and Memory*. According to Bergson's theory, says Huxley, 'each one of us is potentially Mind at Large', but to make biological survival possible, this mind 'has to be funnelled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system'. By tearing consciousness away from its biological function, drugs such as mescaline allow it to rediscover this Mind at Large.

Boothroyd's reading of Deleuze is in any case undermined by his use of a series of mistranslated passages from *A Thousand Plateaus*. Although he stresses Deleuze's ambivalence towards the problem of drugs, he contends that the section on drugs in that book (in the 'Memories of a Molecule' subsection of the 'plateau' on 'Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible') concludes with an 'overwhelming rejection of drugs as a fuel for "becoming"'. However, although Boothroyd is right to note Deleuze and Guattari's vivid depiction of the dead ends, 'black holes', paranoidias and dependency produced by drug addiction, they do not by any means reject the use of drugs as a means for becoming. Massumi's English translation has it that

Drug users have not chosen the right molecule or the right horse. Drugs are too unwieldy to grasp the imperceptible and becomings-imperceptible; drug users believed that drugs would grant them the plane, when in fact the plane must distill its own drugs.

However, it should read:

Drug users have not chosen the right molecule or the right horse. Too coarse [*gros*] to grasp the

imperceptible, and to become imperceptible, they believed that drugs would give them the plane [or plan], but it is the plane which must distil its own drugs.

It is not *drugs* that are too ‘unwieldy’, but the drug *culture* of advanced Western societies that is too ‘coarse’ to be able to master the subtle and differential processes made possible by these substances, and to understand that becoming-imperceptible also demands the cultivation of secrecy. Massumi’s translation has it that ‘Drugs do not guarantee immanence; rather the immanence of drugs allows one to forgo them’, but ‘forgo’ is an erroneous translation of *s’en passer* – to pass through, move beyond or transcend. Drugs have their own special ‘immanence’, in so far as they immanently lead towards their own overcoming.

As to how this passage is to be achieved, Deleuze and Guattari retreat to the position of clandestinity (the ensuing section after ‘Memories of a Molecule’ is ‘Memories of a Secret’). One of the avowed aims of *A Thousand Plateaus* was to reconnect the apparently isolated space-times of drug users, creative artists, masochists, schizophrenics and nomads by showing their ontological identity in a shared field of ‘intensities’. These groups are all implicitly complicit with each other in attempting to subject the body to aims other than evolutionary and collective social norms. Deleuze and Guattari’s aim is to get these distinct ‘subcultures’ to realize their complicity with each other. From *this* Deleuzian perspective, in the light of Boothroyd’s analysis, the question becomes whether it is possible for future subcultures to re-emerge from the milieu of our generally drugged culture, and define their own practices collectively, at a distance from the state.

Christian Kerlake

It’s space Jim, but...

Noel Castree and Derek Gregory, eds, *David Harvey: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge MA, 2006. ix + 324 pp., £20.99 pb., 0 631 23510 8.

Kant’s thoughts on how left- and right-handedness only make sense as a spatial relation served as a rejection of the Newtonian conception of space and reinforced the rival Leibnizian view, namely that space was not a void but a relation constitutive of objects themselves. Alexander’s edition of the *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence* celebrates the Newtonian victory in this particular philosophical tussle and the consequent

scientific revolution, but, as Harvey’s work demonstrates, the Newtonian hegemony was something of a poisoned chalice. The debates in *David Harvey: A Critical Reader* highlight the importance of thinking about space as something materially produced and in process, which allows capital to be accumulated, destroyed and relocated where there is greater productive potential. The discussion also leads to considerations of the urban as a way of life. The tension between these two strands makes this anthology fertile ground for attempts at a synthesis.

Harvey uses a complex philosophical repertoire to push the boundaries of Marxism. The notion of a ‘spatial fix’, the coalescence of factors of production with mutually reinforcing logics, a kind of elective affinity, clearly owes something to the Leibniz/Deleuze continuum and its focus on particularity. And, indeed, Harvey makes the point that monadologically the social can be broken down into ever smaller constituent parts which, following Whitehead, have some spatial permanence. Some of Harvey’s critics in *A Critical Reader* read him as a holist and reductionist, where economics flattens out any sense of the heterogeneous. Melissa Wright, for example, suggests that a consideration of gendered differences gets lost among this economism. Gender must also be a constitutive factor in the way capital is accumulated, a point reinforced by Nancy Hartsock’s focus here on dispossession as an accumulation strategy where female agricultural labour is central. Some of these issues might be squared when Noel Castree mentions that Harvey’s dialectic operates in the Althusserian mode – that is, via displacement – such that gender is simultaneously a relation of production and something which translates into the irreducibly different, its particularity. There is here an emphasis on the particular as something which *unites*, brings together discrete or opposed positions. Inter-relationship has the effect of drawing things together in a resembling mode. And, of course, paradoxically, this resembling is what gives meaning to difference. Hence the ‘spatial fix’ is Harvey’s monadology where use values move towards rhythmic coalescence as complementary temporal logics and in so doing express their difference.

However, in one of the more critical contributions, Bob Jessop argues that Harvey’s spatial fix sloughs off the world of concrete things, in that through the fix they are voided and exist only as abstractions in the valorization process. Hence the fix is, on this view, purely internal to capital logic and ignores the concrete circumstances in which accumulation occurs. Capital in general operates in this context as a perpetual

motion machine, propelled between fixes and crises by over-accumulation. With no concrete geographical-historical means of support, capitalism looks like an illusionist's trick of increasing magnitude which allows no exit strategy.

As Marcus Doel points out, there is a constitutive ambiguity at the heart of capitalism where value as 'value-in-use' is also concrete labour. Here Marx becomes a Derridean *avant la lettre*, and the endless dissimulation of value-in-use mirrors that of the fix. Harvey's own notion of relational space – based on Ollman's philosophy of internal relations – may provide a way out of what seem to be two parallel yet incommensurable worlds. Jessop sees the relation of capital accumulation to use value – for example, the specific geographical locations to which capital migrates – in terms of a 'constitutive outside'. But Harvey's rejection of Euclidean space might take us further. If use value is nothing to capital and hence incommensurable with it, nonetheless, as capital's (spatial) void, it is *something* – Leibnizian material space, if we are to be theoretically consistent about internal relations. However, Harvey does not pursue relationality in this context. If he did it would be reasonable to argue that concrete labour and other use values are value's absent presence, a kind of negativity or space of resistance within the functioning of capitalism. Elsewhere David Cunningham has noted such a move in Massimo Cacciari's criticism of the idea of space as full presence in Heidegger's 'dwelling place'. Cacciari's phenomenology of non-dwelling offers a way of thinking about abstract labour as differentially spatialized, an 'almost-void', so to speak, a site of utopian promise. Again, this might offer Harvey a way of thinking the outside of the abstraction process inherent in, for example, the structuring impact on urban space by property values. One is reminded of that utopian promise of the everyday in Lefebvre's *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, where the everyday serves as the verso of modern capitalism, and vice versa, something humdrum, barely registering and yet potentially explosive. Similarly, in *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre argues that the abstractions of urban space can be modelled by analogy with linguistic structuralism's presence-absence relation, where absence denotes virtual presence.

It is with this in mind that we can pursue the 'urbanism as a way of life' theme, much in evidence in Harvey's own contribution to the volume, 'Space as a Key Word', which covers the routine organization of the everyday, the cultural life and aesthetics of urban space to which Lefebvre's 'spaces of representation', as the domain of 'lived experience', proves central. Here

space is clearly overlapping but discontinuous, visited by its absences. The past of spaces as collective memory haunts their present and the built environment provides a ground for this. For Harvey the materiality of buildings as occupying physical ('absolute') space suggests settled networks of relationships, a kind of permanence after the fashion of Merleau-Ponty's 'institution', which gives both objective shape and directionality, and therefore a kind of authority that is sedimented in lived experience. In other words, this permanence shapes discourse. Harvey provides a couple of examples of the relational nature of spaces and the way that its heterogeneity produces the surprises simply missing in his treatment of the geography of valorization. The Basilica of Sacré Cœur is a building which constitutes a kind of irruption in the landscape, its very exoticism a cover story for a narrative lacuna, which leads us to excavate its meanings as the displacement of the site of the last stand of the Communards. Ground Zero also provides a locus both for the recuperation of memories and for multiple contesting readings. The discourse of the World Trade Center as a centre of world-economic power and US imperialism was not something thought up by bin Laden, but a commonplace idea given flesh, for instance, in Don DeLillo's *Mao II* where it is a terrorist target. The point here is that the hegemonic readings and constructions of urban space offer a resistance, a 'practically untellable' (Lefebvre) but imaginatively reconstructable space of representation.

This suggests that we need to make sense of urbanism as a practice in which buildings function *processually* as both symbols and tools of a practice of incomplete space, as embodiments of historical traditions and spatialized movements. Despite acknowledgement of the processual, Harvey moves between the symbolic, hermeneutic and the specific materiality of buildings to a generalized aesthetic here; as in his *The Condition of Postmodernity* where he does so via an account of flexible accumulation, which, as Wright notes, when combined with the theory of uneven development becomes a powerful analytic. The problem is that there is no mediating term. Urbanism may be a way of life, one which organizes capitalism through everyday, routine activities, but it has no specificity in the manner of Simmel or Lefebvre. Hence the dreaming spires of Oxford and the Manhattan skyscrapers represent different modes of economic organization but not historical forms of urbanism *as such*. There is a displacement here: whilst for writers such as Marshall Berman the urban *together with capitalism* has come to represent modernity, Harvey's elision of the urban with evocativeness of place serves

to suppress the logics of both the urban and the modern in *modern capitalism*, which is essential to the way that Lefebvre, among others, frames ‘the urban’.

Bruce Braun’s response is to view capitalism as constituted through Deleuzian networks and hence as *rhyzomic* rather than *rooted* in an underlying logic. The ‘outside’ is thoroughly incorporated, but at the same time constitutive of whatever logic emerges from the articulation of networks. However, if the networks are to preserve their Deleuzian heteronomy there must be at least two logics operating here, an implication which undermines the coherence of accumulation strategies. Alternatively, Castree picks up on Harvey’s references to the rootedness of capitalism in everyday life. On this account, capitalism itself becomes a ‘way of life’ – that is, the agency which organizes otherwise disparate activities into the routine structure of the everyday, whose hidden logic requires a ‘detour of theory’. In this Althusserian formulation capitalism both articulates everyday life and is in turn an economic activity constituted by this articulation. The logic of capital is nothing other than its interconnectivity with the other aspects of the social formation that it articulates. The flip side, as with Harvey, is that through perpetual displacement capitalism becomes the logic of *difference*.

Harvey’s own thoughts on the place of everyday life in the unfolding of capitalism – see his recent *Spaces of Global Capitalism* – indicate a dialogue with Lefebvre’s writings on the everyday. Harvey characterizes the everyday as the locus of critique, a space where reality challenges ideas and vice versa. It is here that transformations occur in the routine order that is built on but also contested in its geographical unevenness. Urbanism is here a way of life where cities develop *individually*, not abstractly. Here, too, theory is transformed as a ‘representation of space’ by its internalization within the particular.

Despite its appeal to the concreteness of a ‘way of life’ this reading lacks Lefebvre’s concern with the ontology of the everyday – that is, its existence as a general feature of the social world, as something with its own temporal structure which both represents the virtual existence of capitalism and is virtually represented in the objectifications of modern capitalism. Its tendency to absorb whatever is thrown at it signifies a weak ontological force through which the everyday transforms itself by appropriating the structures of economy and state, which Lefebvre encapsulates by counterposing the *cycle* of the carnivalesque to the *repetition* of (re)production. Transformation depends on the recouping of collective memory – that Benjaminian

moment in Harvey – which is precisely the repetition of the ‘practically untellable’. Harvey’s discussion of Sacré Cœur and Ground Zero inter alia demonstrates this potentiality well enough and shows his work to be a ‘journey into space’ of intergalactic scale.

Howard Feather

Unequal and uneven humanity

Pheng Chea, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2006. 336 pp., £29.95 hb., £16.95 pb., 0 674 02295 5 hb., 0 674 02394 3 pb.

Are current discourses of the human capable of helping us to understand actual forms of the inhuman? This is the central question raised by Chea’s ambitious book. It frames several objectives: to criticize regimes of human rights which seek to humanize the field of instrumentality rather than offering a radical critique; to criticize (what Chea sees as) a too rapid burial of the nation-state in so far as it still offers a normative source for defending peoples; and, finally, to criticize a cosmopolitanism that celebrates a unified world produced by globalization, ignoring its central tenet: unequal and uneven development.

Chea’s goal, however, is not simply to develop a critique of European reason. Rather than seeking to ‘provincialize Europe’, he attempts a (provisional) universalizing of one corner of postcolonial Asia. From this position, he explores the notion of the ‘cosmopolitical’, rejecting the idea that the nation-state is *passé*, that the nation is simply an ideological instrument of the state. But first he returns to Kant, whose vision of a common humanity was neither anti- nor post-nationalist, but a framework for regulating the behaviour of states. He then moves to Marx, who defended an anti- and post-nationalist cosmopolitanism because of his contempt for nationalist feelings. However, from the point of view of anti-colonial Asia, progressive nationalism is an ally of genuine cosmopolitanism. Current forms of globalization have given a heightened urgency to the debate on the national and the global. Is the global really weakening the national and is it a positive move for democratic struggles? Are we really witnessing the emergence of a strong transnational political network of cosmopolitan solidarities or are we exaggerating their importance in our frantic

search for a new form of 'internationalism'? To Chea, the answer is closer to the second hypothesis. He does not think that a 'popular global consciousness' exists. Why? Because of the 'partial and uneven character of globalization' that hinders its formation. Samir Amin's account of uneven development is mobilized to challenge a cosmopolitics that chooses to ignore or dismiss the field of material forces, and the role of the nation-state in protecting peoples against the violence of transnational capital.

To develop his argument, Cheah reviews the work of seminal contemporary authors of cosmopolitanism: Habermas, Bhabha, Clifford. He argues that it is Habermas's elision of the postcolonial world that enables its 'utopian projection of a model of global political regulation from a prototype derived from the republican welfare in the economically hegemonic'. European populations' welfare rests on the deprivation of similar rights and entitlements in the so-called 'South'. Homi Bhabha's and James Clifford's ideas on cosmopolitanism are, for their part, predicated upon an understanding of 'culture as the human realm of flux and freedom from the bondage of being-in-nature'. Both ignore the role of material conditions in the making of consciousness and culture. According to Cheah, the belief in the autonomy of the human condition that national liberation leaders like Amílcar Cabral (and Fanon) advocated, and the claim that cultural activity precedes and lays the ground for liberation from political, economic and social oppression, cannot be sustained because they ignore or marginalize the role of economy. We must never forget, he insists, the consequences of uneven development.

In the three following chapters, Cheah turns to concrete examples to illustrate his argument. He first shows the shift from a mutual reinforcement of nationalism and cosmopolitanism among the Chinese diaspora in Asia to a new form of mercantile Chinese chauvinism. In the following chapter, he examines human rights practices by NGOs susceptible to 'co-optation by competing states on both sides of the North-South divide', arguing that an all-inclusive universality is an illusion. In the third, he explores the strategies of bio-power of labour-receiving states and of sending states through the case of foreign female domestic workers in Singapore. Throughout the book Chea seeks to prove why and how the inhuman consequences of capitalist globalization upset the idea of freedom. In fact, the inhuman is constitutive of the human; inhuman techniques generate the soul of humanity. Yet, we should not confuse this argument with a statement on the impossibility of finding a common humanity. Cheah,

as a good dialectician, concludes that we must learn to track how this 'inhuman field (of global capital) induces effects of humanity'.

I said it was a challenging book. Indeed, its insistence on the materiality of life, on the role of material conditions in identity formation, networks of solidarity, ideas, re-engages the reader with the debate on the *economy* of current globalization: what kind of 'humans' does it produce? What kind of inhuman conditions does it entail? How have the illegal 'alien', the disenfranchised and disposable immigrant worker, become the latest figures of an economy of predation that justifies *both* techniques of bio-power and abolitionist practices? This surprising marriage existed already under imperialism, and before that under slavery. The inhuman conditions of our times, the precarious lives of those who are not remembered in public stages of national mourning, hark back to the figure of the slave, who did not 'matter', was a 'thing', condemned to social death, to the figure of the colonized, of the native. They all speak of the long history of this condition: being made inhuman because of being human.

Young men and women drown every week in the Mediterranean, on the coasts of the Canaries, of Senegal, of Morocco, because ships' captains are warned by their bosses not to rescue them, and no country agrees to receive them. Hundreds of men and women, coming from as far as the Congo and Mauritania, are expelled every week from South Africa. 'Immigration' has become everywhere a central question: who can be allowed as a 'full human', unthreatening and productive, and who represents a danger to society and to themselves? 'France cannot welcome all the poor of the world', declared Michel Rocard some years ago, a former socialist prime minister of France. The line was drawn between the 'poor' and the others whose better conditions of life rested on the deprivation of the former. Poverty traces across states and nations a political, cultural and economic frontier, but, if political discourse must learn again to articulate the demands of the poor so that they are not left to the vagaries of the West's charity or the temporary warmth of religious communities, it is not clear that the answer will be found in a renewed alliance between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, as Cheah argues. The word 'poverty' itself is difficult to use to describe the conditions of billions of people: it reeks of paternalism, seems to deny agency. Perhaps we should relearn how to speak about this poverty and its inhuman condition.

Françoise Vergès