

## Disposable time

István Mészáros, *The Challenge and Burden of Historical Time: Socialism in the Twenty-First Century*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2008. 479 pp., £16.95 pb., 978 1 58367 169 6.

In recent years there has been a surprisingly steady growth of interest in the status of time and temporality and the role accorded to them in studies of modern society and history. Much of this interest has been generated by left-leaning social scientists and philosophers, and a gradual recognition of the binding relationship between capitalism, time and history. Even so, this apparent upsurge of interest in the problem of temporality among the Left has too often been trumped by the predilection of cultural studies to privilege the spatial and static countenance of contemporary social life, at the risk of diminishing the role played by time in structures of determination. Spatial fixes invariably lead to calls for ending temporality. Among the disciplines, history has shown far less interest in the question of time than philosophy, despite its heralded dedication to chronology, dating and marking. Moreover, sensitivity shown by historians towards the temporal dimensions of history rarely exceeds the abstract measuring of time and the quantitative sanctity of chronology, contrasting dramatically with the commitment of philosophy, which, since Bergson's and Heidegger's projects promising a 'reckoning with time', had already embarked upon a search for qualitative time. While the philosophical intervention rarely assessed the relationship between time and capitalism (excepting Lukács's powerful critique of quantification and objectivity), more recent signs of interest have sought to make philosophy answerable to history and vice versa. This has meant addressing the central role occupied by capitalism as the temporal dominant of modern society and the effects of its structuring of time on history and politics. These writings have converged upon the incontrovertible observation that capitalism itself is, above all else, an immense organization of time that seeks, through the commodity relation, to regulate and thus dominate what István Mészáros has named in *The Challenge and Burden of Historical Time* a system of 'social metabolic control' capable of penetrating every aspect of society. Mészáros's book matches precisely the confirmation brutally experienced today that capitalism is an all-encompassing system devoted to ordering the rhythms of time with

an unrelenting and inescapable circularity that, accordingly, has truncated history itself.

Mészáros's purpose is to provide both an analysis of contemporary capitalist domination on a global scale (via the extension of US imperial power) and a detailed template for 'socialism in the twenty-first century' based on the recognition of capitalism's singular necessity to organize the social formation according to its conception of temporality – a bold outline of what socialism must do in the twenty-first century to capture this temporal ground and free humanity from its imperative form of accountancy. In this respect, this new book on the tyranny of historical time condenses arguments of an earlier study, *Beyond Capital: Towards a Theory of Transition* (1995), which contained a long meditation on the path socialism must pursue beyond nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of capital, in order to find a genuinely human alternative to the 'no alternative' policies of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. What he advised in the earlier book was ways to discard the social democratic aptitude (in both the USA and UK after the Reagan–Thatcher years) for reconciling capitalism with social welfare, which inevitably results in the wholesale elimination of the latter. It is said that Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez is an admirer of Mészáros and has apparently drawn from *Beyond Capital* to align his perspective with the move proposed by Mészáros to replace commodity exchange with communal exchange. By the same measure, Mészáros's hope for a socialist future is leavened by his admiration for what is happening in Latin America in states like Venezuela and Bolivia, which serve him as models for the concrete structuring of a socialist utopia.

Mészáros's critique of the imperative of capitalism's time accountancy restores to contemporary discussion one of the most powerful observations made by the mature Marx, and followed through by thinkers like Lukács, Gramsci and Uno Kozo. While taking his cue from scattered, lapidary passages attesting to the force of time ('Time is everything, man is nothing') and subsequent pronouncements by people like Gramsci that ratify time's primacy, his own reckoning with historical

time argues that capital's logic must 'annihilate history' because it is posited on the eternity of the present – as Marx himself had observed of the 'religion' of bourgeois political economy and its claims to have no history. Since capital can tolerate no challenge to its limitless reach, to its mode of 'social metabolic reproduction', any alternative conception of time is unacceptable to it. This promotion of a specific form of social metabolic reproduction implies the installation of an idea of culture that requires a corresponding conception of temporality and by extension a figuration of history adequate to it. Humanity is committed to an existence embedded in the passage of successive moments in an endless present, 'being-in time', being another name for endless accumulation, rather than realizing the promise of 'being-in-history', which Marx saw as the original dimension of human nature.

The putative history humans believe they live and write is nothing more than what Gramsci described as a 'simple pseudonym for life' under capitalism. Despite history's appeal to development, its experience coincides only with the time of capitalism, whose circular repetition serving expanded accumulation simply signifies completion and the eternity of the now. Capital must disavow history, seeing in it the 'enemy' of the eternal present. Accordingly, the 'apologists' of capital have resorted to every possible device to eliminate awareness of historical time in order to project the present as both eternal and natural. (Contemporary neoclassical economics still refuses to recognize that the production of crises like the recent one is historical rather than accidental.) Mészáros's account amply discloses the nature of capitalism's inimical relationship to history, considered as external to economic processes everywhere and in all times, which must be repressed and banished to concealment, waiting to be restored in an emancipatory act. Here, Mészáros risks simplifying Marx's own understanding of the relationship between historical temporality and the temporal logic of capitalism as distinct categories of time, whereby the latter undermines the former but fails to obliterate it.

Marx's conception of human time is that of a dialectical process involving the fundamental meaning of historical necessity, which, because it is historical, points to its own eventual disappearance and its definite differentiation from natural determinations. History thus appears in the natural order with the inaugural act of human cooperation, bringing with it a consciousness of time and a progressive preoccupation with 'meaning'. The origin of meaning is unveiled with the categorization of the 'meaningful life

time of the individual', which is deeply implicated in the productive capacity of humans and their struggle over time to remove the more 'brutish' constraints based on primitive forms of 'hand-to-mouth existence'. Mészáros finds in this historical development the revelation of the 'power of making genuine choices'. He also sees in this act the human community's capacity to transcend the time span of individual life with which it maintains a continuing dialectical relationship. And with this accumulation of historical time comes the identification of value. Yet he is sensitive to the temporal difference between the individual's time and the experience of humanity, which will constitute the objective foundation of *value* and *countervalue*. In time, various conceptions of civil society appeared to replace the social individual by imposing an imaginary composed of isolated individuals and their fixed human nature to make them 'naturally' capable of occupying an eternal present as a temporal habitus. The transformation also produced the figure of 'asocial sociability'. What has occurred is the familiar superscripting of the first order of mediation by a second order, whereby capitalist time comes forward as the natural state of social life, presenting no avenue of escape from the imperative of its time accountancy. In this way, Mészáros argues, capitalism's misrecognition of history opened the way for its social metabolic system of reproduction to become the ontological ground of the social formation.



Even though Marx designated 'disposable time' as a refuge from the constraints of the working day and its abstract measure of value, it was for him still a haven used by workers for their self-formation, depending upon their level of civilization. With Mészáros it is only a viable measure of time for the future, which requires rethinking and resituating in the register of a qualitatively different social metabolic order, namely socialism. Yet Marx attributed disposable time solely to workers, as the only time belonging to them in a regime dominated by socially necessary work. It was thus only through this narrowing corridor of temporality, which workers struggled to preserve, that the occasion was provided for them to assert and satisfy their role as historical subjects, controlling their life activity. Its meaning derived directly from the circumstances of their struggle to prevent the further encroachment of abstract labour and its time, even as it was undoubtedly mediated by these steadily delimiting quantitative constraints. As a result, Mészáros's recommendation to rethink the category of disposable time for a new socialist temporality raises more problems than it solves, because it overlooks the circumstances accompanying the tranche of non-commodified time and the consciousness of struggle it produced to prevent its further limitation. It is hard to know what disposable time would mean or even look like outside of the specific context of capitalism.

While these formulations calling for the rearticulation of older Marxian exemplars echo the complaints of a more familiar past, Mészáros, nevertheless, raises anew the question of history's status in Marx's meditations and its consequences for how it is practised under capitalist time accountancy. He dismisses the better-known historical practices linked to the earlier Internationals, with their productivist trajectories rooted in an evolutionarily driven stage theory. At the same time, following Lukács, Mészáros argues that the 'real enlightened historical conception of the bourgeois philosophical tradition' progressively succumbed to scepticism and pessimism after Hegel's death. Moreover, the dimming of the Enlightenment historical ideal seemed to inspire a penchant for affirming the present and worrying about the past, as reflected in von Ranke's insistence on the equidistance of all peoples in the eyes of God and de Tocqueville's advocacy of greater distance from the 'desolateness' of the human predicament. The great Enlightenment project upholding the powers of humans as historical subjects capable of making their own history and founding a historical knowledge on it collapsed into the 'meaningless nature' it had sought to overcome.

Following the path of the earlier Lukácsian critique of Rickertian cultural history, Mészáros targets the British social and political historian Lewis Namier, who eschewed the force of ideas and ideology, even though he remained a Zionist, and aggressively valorized the act of grasping history only in terms of the immediacy of appearance. This proclamation of closure not only underscored the inclusive singularity of capitalist logic on a global scale but also robbed history (and its practice) of temporality, inasmuch as it counselled contemplation of a storyline already made and completed. After all, what other vocation does national history have? Here, chronology replaced considerations of temporality to denote only that things happened in history but not through it. The great consequence of this closure was to yoke the nation form to capital, like hand in glove, whereby the national narrative invariably came to stand in for capital's logic by embodying it. In his personification of the pitfalls of bourgeois historical practice, Mészáros concludes, Namier's work on the Hapsburg monarchy resulted in nothing more than serving the 'Intelligence Department' of another 'doomed empire'.

If, along his way, Mészáros sidesteps the problem of orthodox Marxian historiography, without recognizing that Foucault, and before him Walter Benjamin, once identified it with bourgeois history, he also falls short of providing an account of Marx's own understanding of the status of history in texts like *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. In these texts, Marx plainly distinguished historical time from capital logic, viewing them as separate domains with their own temporalities. Although acknowledging and even demonstrating that they were often implicated with each other, he still drew an unmistakable line separating the historical development of the categories of capitalism from the order of their relationship within the functioning system. History referred to the duration of a past in which the categories developed outside of and often before the achievement of the mature operating system, yet would come to an end when the capitalist mode of production emerged and arranged the order of relationships between its categories according to a logical sequence rather than temporal succession. Under such circumstances, history and its temporalities didn't really end but acquired another kind of existence in relationship to capitalism, reappearing in the form of residues and traces, 'readymades' taken over and utilized differently and illustrating the capacity of prior economic practices to coexist with different modes of production.

Mészáros's account inadvertently recalls Antonio Negri's confident presentation of the established reign of real subsumption, without taking into consideration the broader historical persistence of coexisting uneven and heterogeneous temporalities embodied in the presence of these 'readymades' and their residues and how, as Uno Kozo noted of modern Japan, they are often invented and reproduced. For Mészáros, there is the unjustified assumption that capital everywhere has reached the state of accomplished real subsumption and the final completion of the commodity relation on a global scale, even though the Latin American states he favours to provide concrete templates for his utopian vision are clearly marked by this continuing history of unevenness. Instead of attending to this problem, much of his book is concerned with instantiating the contemporary effects of the social metabolic system – implying the completion of real subsumption throughout the globe – as a condition for preparing the way for socialism in the twenty-first century. Like Negri and a host of 'Western Marxists', Mészáros still views much of the world outside of Euro-America through an impaired diplopic optic producing double vision of a single image.

The second area where history and capital collide is in Marx's reflections on the working day – the scene of real abstraction and the domination of the quantitative measuring of socially necessary labour power and its remaindered disposable time belonging to the worker. In Marx's mapping of the working day, there is already an interlacing of different temporalities, one belonging to the owner constituted of surplus labour, the other claimed by the worker outside the realm of real abstraction. What Marx managed to demonstrate was an accounting of how the everyday was reconfigured by the ceaseless effort to prolong the linear working day; by the same measure the domain of lived time was increasingly replaced by dead time to leave only a truncated remainder that was still able to exist outside of the regime of commodified wage labour. This excess representing disposable time was the object of struggle over the limits of the working day, even though it was allegedly reserved for the worker's self-development and cultural satisfaction. Ultimately, the recognition of an opposing and consequential dualism between this quantification of abstract time and a more human time would lead to a complex philosophical discussion in twentieth-century European philosophy. For our purpose, the Marxian observation of the conquest of the working day and the reconfiguration of everydayness paved the way for identifying all those efforts committed to regaining what many believed to be an

authentic historical time, not through a developmental experience involving a Hegelian negation of negation, but by praxis – concrete activity – directed towards an approximate recovery of the original historical nature of humans. Whatever else we might say of Marx's undertheorized conception of historical time, it could not be associated with time as empty and homogenous, or even a 'continuous and infinite succession of precise moments', as it showed that capitalist modernity – the regime devoted to the 'restless striving of the new' – had not yet been able to align an experience of time that is adequate to its conception of history.

To perceive in disposable time something more than the template of a future time, and to rescue the programme of 'making history' advised by Mészáros, would require the act of ascertaining the different identities between a history obeying the rhythms of capital logic within the nation-state form and the found source of historical time within the lived everyday; the former distinguished by eventfulness and great personalities far removed from daily life, the latter scarce in events and rich in the experience of living close to coexisting and mixed temporalities and contingent acts. Even though it is difficult to disagree with Mészáros's sentiment that disposable time represents the ideal model of temporality for a socialist accountancy to come, it defers the making of history to a millennial alteration announcing the advent of qualitative time. Yet while waiting for the moment to arrive, we still have available examples of completed action from different times and places where workers seized disposable time for their own pleasure and self-formation. Rancière has documented the activities of French workers in mid-nineteenth-century France who stole the nights for poetic composition. Peter Weiss narrated the endeavour of young German workers in the 1930s seeking self-formation through an aesthetic education capable of teaching them about politics. And Japanese historians have recently organized an archive related to the Workers' Circles in Japan of the 1950s devoted to producing literature, art and criticism within the narrow temporal confines of disposable time. Even more, we have the example of persisting mixed temporalities throughout the globe which continue to provide the temporal occasion for 'making history' in the everyday that departs from the repetitive temporalities of capitalism and national narratives that personify its logic. For, to quote from one of Mészáros's favourite poets, Attila József, 'Time is lifting the fog, we have brought time with us,/ we brought it with our struggles, with our reserves of misery.'

**Harry Harootunian**

# Ups and downs

Sandra Harding, *Sciences from Below: Feminisms, Postcolonialities and Modernities*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2008. 296 pp., £58.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 978 0 8223 4259 5 hb., 978 0 8223 4282 3 pb.

Social theory often reproduces a familiar geometry and a straightforward mathematics. The geometry is marked by an above and a below. The above is characterized by loftiness, of course, and can be associated mostly with rather abstract thinking. Below is where the real action is to be found. As New Order put it, 'thoughts from above and good people down below', and this captures pretty well social theorists' normative slant on this up/down division. While the knowledge production industry, be it Western science, Northern development theory, economics or philosophy, tends towards the hubristic, those below, and their knowledges and ways of life, look increasingly marginalized and dispossessed. Moreover, this above/below distinction maps onto and helps to perform other binaries including men/women, North/South, mind/body, and so on. The co-mappings are of course co-productive of uneven power relations. One of the purposes of social theory is to demonstrate the artificial and unjust nature of these divisions. Unlike those trapped in Plato's cave, lost in a world of shadows, this social theory speaks not of the enlightened versus the uneducated, but of a world of distributed knowledge and expertise. Empirically and theoretically it attempts to engage a world below that is characteristically experienced and knowledgeable. To ignore this world is not only unjust; it also misses opportunities for a better world.

The mathematics of this social theory is similarly divided. Social theory tends to focus on the one and the many. (One culture or multi-cultures, the public or publics, and so on.) In knowledge talk this translates into a confrontation between one enlightened truth and a plurality of knowledges. Either truth is singular and universal or there are plural truths, none of which can claim more than a modest spatial and temporal reach. While the uni-verse invites allegiances based on certain forms of rationality and shared characteristics (from human rights to the global environment), the pluriverse can claim the democratic high ground. There is something obviously authoritarian and anti-political about the uni-verse, despite or even because of its claims to non-social and therefore neutral verification, while the pluriverse needs to put its faith in forms of democratic politics in order to rise above a chaotic world of relativism and continuous inaction. The demo-

cratic 'many' is obviously, perhaps, preferable to the authoritarian 'one', although it is always tempting to bypass the slow and tortuous due process that is democracy with a claim to knowing what is best.

Sandra Harding, who has done more than most to challenge the elevated and singular version of an authoritarian and masculine world of science and technology, clearly positions herself below and on the side of the many. Building on her previous work and that of other feminist science studies scholars, *Sciences from Below* is an argument for more than one science and for recognizing the hybrid nature of what is often taken to be purely Western science (which has always grown and developed through numerous and unequal borrowings). It is a call for a recognition of the distributed expertise that exists outside and below the normal confines of Western knowledge institutions and for an understanding of that science as historically dependent upon what are now read as other (traditional and non-modern) knowledge forms. Harding rightly lampoons the exceptionalism and triumphalism of Western science, the belief that 'the West alone has developed the scientific and technological resources to achieve modernity and its social progress'. Triumphalism here refers to the tendency for techno-sciences to accept no part in the categorical failures of Western societies to take care of their own and other people's health and welfare, and the inability to produce flourishing human and nonhuman environments. Harding reminds us of the wonderful lyric from the Tom Lehrer song which had the rocket scientist Werner von Braun singing he was just responsible for getting the rockets up (science), not for where they came down (politics). For Harding, of course, such a distinction between science and technology, knowledge and politics, is largely untenable. Science's failure should not be glossed over with an imagined divide between truth and context. This argument should not, however, be confused with an anti-science position. Harding's feminism is clear enough on the benefits of good knowledge and good science. Rather than a disembodied body of knowledge, good science is made by working with, not against, a context. It's not that science makes truths which are then let down by those who use the science. It's that science is already deeply contextual and therefore a

more radical approach is needed which reconfigures knowledge as broadly distributed.

Harding thus aims to radicalize the real progress that has been made by the scientific study of science (often referred to as Science and Technology Studies, or STS for short). STS has given us the means to question the 'given' authority of Western science, and has demonstrated with painstaking empirical detail that truths are made in context, that knowledge is always situated and partial. However, for Harding, the science studies community has become rather too uncontroversial. Arguably, the strange peace that followed the Science Wars has been bought by STS and related areas becoming rather tame. Compared to the radical science studies of the 1970s and 1980s, there is something, many argue, rather antiseptic or disengaged about current work, which seems to have lost some of the emancipatory verve (and certainties) of that earlier period. Against this, Harding seeks to bring together a number of more radical strands of work that together form a 'below'. The book, which starts out with brief and partial reviews of three quite different but individually important contributions to current understandings of science (Latour, Beck, and Nowotny and colleagues), then aims to draw in a variety of related and progressive tendencies in studies of science and of culture. The contention is that the transformative insights from feminist scholarship and postcolonial studies in particular have not been satisfactorily taken up by mainstream science studies. This book thus offers something of a corrective, urging scholars and students to engage with a range of studies from South as well as North, from 'traditional' practice as well as 'modern' laboratories and science field study sites. Rather than simply adding more insights from below, the book argues for taking up standpoints, noting that the world will look and be performed quite differently once we learn to see it and do it from below.

It's worth dwelling on the last point about addition. Addition is important, Harding argues, as we need always to consider what adding does to the centre. Adding women's or Southern voices to studies of scientific knowledge starts to challenge our understanding of Western science. And by researching and/or taking up standpoints of those positioned below, academics can further undermine the pretence of the centre to speak for all. And yet, despite talk of calibration of STS with feminist and postcolonial science studies, I couldn't help notice that this was a rather one-way exchange. Many of the real gains from science studies, and its theoretical offshoots like actor network theory, are not here asked to add to the transformative poten-

tial of feminism and postcolonial studies (especially those versions of feminism and postcolonial studies that exist outside science studies). In the main this is a book about adding to science studies and not about using science studies to add to these other literatures. My point is not that science studies has all the answers (far from it), and certainly I am supportive of a project that aims to increase understanding of, and engagement with, areas of scholarship that are systematically ignored or undervalued in academia and in political circles. However, there is a radical project being written in some parts of STS (not only, but certainly not least, in feminist and postcolonial versions) which combines the transformative potential of feminist and postcolonial challenges to modernisms with an engagement with some of the more theoretically and empirically disturbing elements within the science studies literature.

I can only be indicative here, but there are a few candidates from the broad spectrum of STS that might help to develop an even more progressive area of engagement. I will start with the easy maths that I mentioned at the outset. There are many in science studies who are working to refuse the one-or-many choice that seems to inform most social theory. Or, more to the point, while single versions or truths have been largely given up by social theorists, there are those who find the insistence on plural truths to be both philosophically problematic and politically unhelpful. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of this problem is in the work of the Dutch philosopher Annemarie Mol, who refuses current liberal versions of knowledge politics that beset the medical world. Rejecting the notion that a disease can be plural, and arguing against perspectivalism (for example, there being a patient's experience or perception of disease, a clinician's reading of that disease, and a pathologist's or laboratory assessment, and that the patient should be free to choose which version of the disease they can believe), she has ethnographically explored how a (diseased) body is simultaneously more than one but less than many. By looking at the care practices that go on within a clinic, within nursing, in the laboratory and in other places, Mol shows us how such practices are unlikely to produce a coherent whole, but they are and can be assembled together to form something of a working body of knowledges that can be used to devise good treatment. This is a normative account, one that is interested in better knowledges, but it isn't satisfied with plurality, with patient choice or even with dialogue, but with the expertises involved in devising practical means to get on with lives that are complex

and always unfinished. It is worth noting that authors like Mol (and John Law has done something similar and just as challenging) talk of multiplicity rather than plurality. While plurality refers to the many (and also implies a reduction through due process to the one), the multiple refers to the realization that there will be an ongoing politics, an onto-politics, that attempts to live with this more-than-one but less-than-many world. There is no presumption either that the many or the one can be ever realized. The multiple speaks to the need to live with things being made by more than one practice in more than one place but in ways that don't lead to fragmentation, to a world that more or less coherently holds together.

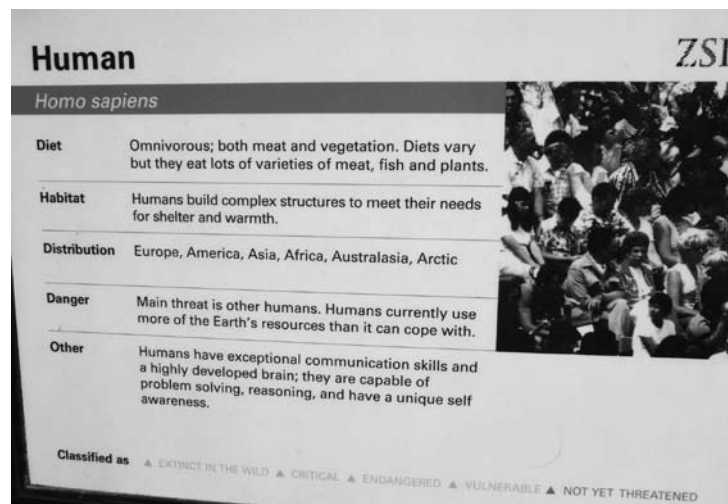
The multiple has effects, too, on the geometry of social theory. Instead of arguing for reversals of the above and the below, by for example supporting patients' right to choose (choose what?) over doctors' right to diagnose, Mol's politics is about providing resources for good practices that are located in the whereabouts, the patchings, the overlaps that improve clinical practice, inform patients and develop a more caring and careful medical science. It is worth comparing this spatial complex-

ity with the more limited spatial imagination that is 'below'. Harding ends her book with a call for scholars to study below, by, in her example, using households as a key knowledge production site. This is certainly justified as a strategy. It would be wrong to assume, I think, that any politics of knowledge and material practice that approached issues like climate change, for example, could afford to ignore households. Climate change is certainly done in households and to focus only on energy supply would miss the demand side issues of dealing with this issue. Nevertheless, we need to understand households as not simply 'below' but also as patched up, thoroughly networked locales which do climate change in ways that more or less coherently map onto all the other locales (from the heating engineer who fixes a new boiler to energy companies, and so on) that also make change. While climate change, to continue the example, is certainly done in households, it won't, as Barack Obama is said

to have remarked, be solved by people simply changing light bulbs. It will be necessary to look at how climate is practised at many sites and how they make a more or less coherent object in order to start to see how climate is an onto-political issue. How might such an insight into the practical politics of technoscience change our current attempts to engage a broader range of places and forms of knowledge practice? How could this move us forward from a rather hopeful and underspecified 'pluricentric global dialogue' to a politics not only of who but also of wheres and of what?

Mol's work is both theoretical and empirical. It is also interested in materials and materialities. Perhaps my biggest disappointment with *Sciences from Below* is that, paradoxically, it steers clear of the messiness of empirical and political work, and, perhaps as a result, does not engage with the material complexities of science in society. This is a survey of texts, a study

in plural epistemologies. And yet one of the most important insights from STS over the last few decades has been an insistence on the need to re-distribute knowledge not only outside of conventional knowledge institutions but also outside of humanist framings of who can be knowledgeable. It



is not only people that matter but the people, things and people-things that go to make the world. Harding does not engage in this book with the distributions of agency that are of concern for many of her colleagues within STS and within feminist science studies. The political injunction of *Sciences from Below* is to claim that all people are 'fully human', irrespective of sex, gender, race, location, and so on. That such a claim should be necessary is perhaps all too obvious. Go to any airport or border crossing and you can witness a dehumanization of some people forced to account for their movements while others pass freely. However, such vital politics must not be allowed to obscure the ways that other lives are also, as both Derrida and Haraway have reminded us, made killable and expendable. And nor should concern for people render invisible the complex relations between ourselves and a host of heterogeneous others (from animals to landscapes, from microbes to climates). Indeed, such concern needs

to see people alongside their objects, their materials, their nonhuman companions, if it is to have any chance of making a better and more radical political contexture. The politics that follows from a more worldly world isn't just about giving voice to those who have been marginalized (important though that is). 'Ecologies of practice', 'multi-naturalism' and 'thing power' are just some of the terms that have been mobilized by recent feminists, postcolonial anthropologists and science studies scholars and that speak to a more than human world. This is where feminism, postcolonial studies and understandings of modernity have really challenged science studies (including, I would argue, Latour, through his engagement with philosophers like Stengers), and where science studies has duly amplified the 'what' of what's at stake, but it is not something that is dwelt on in this book as a source for a different kind of politics. It may be the case that some of the real problems that scholarship is facing in this area, and that rightly concern Harding, are only now starting to be addressed in quite radical, interesting and productive ways. This book should help us to see the issues and then prompt us to find some partial answers.

**Steve Hinchliffe**

## Escape from reality

Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson and Vasilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the Twenty-First Century*, Pluto Press, London and Ann Arbor MI, 2008. xx + 300 pp., £17.99 pb., 978 0 745 327785.

'Escape' alone, according to the authors of *Escape Routes*, constitutes the real foundation of all social transformation. This transformation does not consist in the revolutionary 'event' but is located within the 'imperceptible politics' of the everyday; within processual, pre-personal becomings and the responses these force upon mechanisms of control: 'The thesis of the book is that people escape: only *after* control tries to recapture escape routes can we speak of "escape from". Prior to its regulation, escape is primarily imperceptible.' While social transformation, on this account, has always proceeded along such lines, the authors claim to address their analysis to the unique historical juncture of contemporary forms of escape and the emergent configurations of power attempting to absorb them. Hence they argue that we are currently witnessing a transition from neoliberalism to

what they call 'postliberalism'; from the 'horizontal' control space of transnational and globalized forms of governance, which themselves followed in the wake of the centralized power of the nation-state, to the new 'vertical aggregates' of control. These vertical aggregates operate as clusters through which strategic alliances composed of government, business, research centres, the military, and local informal economies are bundled together. Analysing first the conditions leading to this historically significant moment of transition, Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos then turn their attention to certain fields in which contemporary forms of escape are met with these new forms of postliberal control: those of 'emergent life', 'mobility and migration' and 'labour and precarity'.

Staking out their position in *Escape Routes*, the authors open with their assertion of the primacy of 'escape' as the constituent moment of all social change: 'Escape comes first! People's efforts to escape can force the reorganization of control itself; regimes of control must respond to the new situations created by escape.' As they acknowledge, they are following here the lead of Antonio Negri and his plea that the 'history of capitalism' be written 'from the perspective of worker's mobility' – as well as that of Italian Workerism and Autonomia more broadly – in according autonomy to 'people' rather than forms of sovereignty, governance or capital. Yet here 'escape' is pushed to the status of an absolute, a self-sufficient and unconditioned essence which drives all change in the first instance. 'Escape' is to be understood, they argue, not as 'escape from', but as 'escape', full stop. The broad thrust of the position they adopt from Negri is clearly employed to argue for the agency of the processes and subjects that they attend to in their case studies, and to elaborate the necessarily reactive role of control in response to these. But 'escape' simply will not stand up on its own as a non-relational term, either grammatically or historically, and it is not long before the contradictions inherent to the maintenance of this position appear.

Hence we read of the social movements and 'refusal of work' of the Italian experience of the 1960s and 1970s that these were an '*escape from* the subject form of Global North Atlantic societies', or of the '*escape from* feudal immobility' (my emphases), represented by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century vagabondage. Of this latter example the authors assert that the peasants were 'forced' from their land and into a condition of exile, and subjected as a consequence to the most severe forms of punishment, yet they wish to maintain, at the same time, that 'we cannot understand social change and people's agency if we always see them as



already entangled in and regulated by control'. It might be argued, on the contrary, and using the evidence of the same events that they cast as examples of 'escape' – including those referred to above, as well as those of the Paris Commune and the German revolution of 1918 – that 'people's agency' can *only* be understood within the context of their entanglements with control. If the point here is, as it appears to be, to argue for the agency of people, of their creative capacity to produce forces which put control on the back foot, compelling it to reinvent its mechanisms and reabsorb these forces, then this can surely be achieved whilst acknowledging too that control also acts, at times, as a historical agent, or that capital too is productive, and not merely reactive. However, in their telling of the feudal seizure of the commons and land clearances, the development of wage labour and early capitalism appear as forms *forced* upon governance as a means of controlling peasant mobility.

A similarly one-sided picture appears in the authors' treatment of neoliberalism. Fredric Jameson, David Harvey et al. have it wrong, it seems, in understanding neoliberalism as a 'new mode of economic regulation' or a 'new relation between culture and production'. Instead it can be explained, from the perspective of escape, solely as a response to the 'wild anomaly' of new forms of subjectivity produced within the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s. 'There is only', they write, 'the necessity to tame the imperceptible and escaping subjectivities', and this necessity alone defines the project of neoliberalism. To choose only one example from any number that would trouble this reductionism: how would we even begin to understand Thatcher's showdown with the NUM and the miners' strike of 1984 within this perspective alone?

Whilst certain theoretical tools are thus reworked by Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos in light of their 'escape' thesis, other positions appearing to contradict them are, in places, dismissed through crude, inaccurate caricature. Their own concern with what they call the 'imperceptible politics' of the everyday, of the unseen creative agency of the people, for instance, renders both Marxism and Foucault irrelevant at a single stroke: 'The imperceptible politics of escape eschews the Marxist obsession with the state as well as the Foucauldian paranoia about control pervading the whole of society.'

From the positions outlined here the authors then turn their analysis to the ways in which escape operates through certain fields of practice and experience. Here, at least, there are moments where their discourse

is made more convincing through reference to their research, though even this is at times problematic in its methods and conclusions. In their treatment of the conditions of escape pertaining to 'emergent life', for instance the shift from the horizontalized forms of transnational governance and neoliberalism to the strategic 'vertical aggregates' of postliberal control, is exemplified around the issue of influenza vaccination. Whereas the internationalist response would be met through the function of the World Health Organization, the 'supranational' character of postliberalism is exemplified for the authors in the new alliances being wrought between the pharmaceuticals industry, national governments and NGOs around such matters, and problematized around the inequalities of access which follow from these new arrangements.

Drawing upon their own 'militant research' project in analysing contemporary forms of migration and mobility, Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos identify a similar movement from the neoliberal to the postliberal. Faced with the current extent of people's mobility, of their desire to escape and their refusal to be constrained by the borders or identities of nationality, they argue, control is forced to abandon the types of international agreements on immigration it has recently established. The European Community's Schengen treaty on immigration of 1985, for example, is succeeded by what they term 'liminal porocratic institutions': forms of mobility control 'which lie and operate beyond public negotiation and beyond norms and rules instituted through governance'. The role of the 'shadowy' alliances composing these liminal porocratic institutions is to work with, rather than against, the conditions of porosity produced through the mobility of migrants. Hence borders are constructed on a strategic and contingent basis in respect of 'security', but also made to work for the fluctuating demands of the labour market within given territories, whilst at the same time absolving that market of any responsibility towards its employees. Of the temporary camps in which migrants are detained they assert that they 'facilitate the entrance of people into the regime of labour and at the same time they outsource any responsibility for the maintenance of their life conditions to the detainees themselves'.

Where the authors turn to the issue of 'labour and precarity' as a form of escape, they find the accounts of figures such as Sennett or Boltanski and Chiapello unhelpful, based, as they allege they are, on a pessimistic reading, according no agency to the force of precarity itself. Such thinking victimizes the experience of precarity, and in that very process shapes it

into a convenient form of subjectivity, one which can then be 'represented' within the union, the party or the remedial discourse of cultural studies. Precarity should not be understood, they continue, as the basis for the identity of either a new subject position or a class composition – the so-called 'precariat' – but as an 'embodied experience' containing within itself the potential to challenge the subjectifying practice of governance and the 'embodied' forms of cognitive capitalism itself. This potential, again following Negri, supposedly resides in the *excess* of sociability produced under conditions of precarity, and the ways in which this surfeit might be rechannelled into forms of existence escaping control and representation altogether.

Whilst such arguments may bear repeating, they raise a question mark over the 'originality' of the thesis proclaimed on the book's back cover blurb by no lesser figures than Negri and Saskia Sassen. It is now almost thirty years, after all, since Deleuze and Guattari wrote, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, that 'A social field is always animated by all kinds of movements of decoding and deterritorialization affecting "masses" and operating at different speeds and paces. These are not contradictions but escapes.' Certainly the authors add some flesh and contemporary resonance to this position, but, in working so strenuously and uncompromisingly to essentialize it around the figure of 'escape' alone, and in this placing 'escape' *before* all forms of control, they devalue critical positions which remain valuable assets to theory, whilst obscuring from consideration, and hence critique, the active, and not merely reactive, agency of capital itself.

**Douglas Spencer**

## The canon is the solution

Mark Neocleous, *Critique of Security*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2008. 256 pp., £60.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 978 0 74863 328 9 hb., 978 0 74863 329 6 pb.

A critic of C.B. Macpherson once wrote that this Canadian political theorist knew but one big thing. This remark was offered both as a criticism and as a compliment. The reviewer remonstrated that Macpherson in a lifetime spent on writing about liberal political theory never moved beyond his initial conception

of possessive individualism. On the other hand, that same reviewer allowed that the theory of possessive individualism which Macpherson worked and reworked was an invaluable contribution to the study of political theory. The same can easily be said of Mark Neocleous. A prolific writer in political and social theory, Neocleous returns time and again to the theme he first explored in *Fabrication of Social Order*, specifically how the state is responsible for creating and sustaining a social order appropriate to the needs of capitalism. In his newest book, *Critique of Security*, Neocleous focuses on the materialization of national security as the dominant question in contemporary liberal politics. His aim is to explain how this security agenda has been constituted and to critique the ways in which it has colonized the minutiae of everyday life.

Whilst liberal critics of the emergent security state decry its threat to liberty, Neocleous refuses to engage this now familiar dispute about the relative value of liberty and security. Indeed, his argument is that this liberal debate is a sham that can be traced to the philosophical underpinnings of classical liberalism found in the writings of Hobbes and Locke. On his view, classical liberalism is really a theory that upholds the value of security first and advocates liberty only in so far as it serves the needs of capitalism. To make this case, Neocleous closely examines Locke's argument about prerogative power, in the process debunking the idea that the philosophical champion of the Glorious Revolution is somehow fundamentally different from Hobbes. This conceptual history is meant to show that the real liberal project aims at security, albeit security wrapped up in a discourse of individual rights, which in turn is wrapped up in a myth of individual emancipation. According to Neocleous, Locke's conceptual manoeuvres obscure his all-important discussion of prerogative power. While Locke averred that the exercise of prerogative power is incidental to the social contract because it is only to be used in emergencies, Neocleous points out that in fact Locke's conception of occasional crisis easily gives way to a constant state of emergency that normalizes the quest for security. This is so not only at the level of theory but and especially at the level of practice. For example, Neocleous shows how martial law, which originally only applied to military personnel, gradually began to be used for purposes of general 'security' and 'order'.

Neocleous proceeds to draw on insights from his brief conceptual history of classical liberal theory together with observations from social history, IPE (International Political Economy) and securitization studies to argue that the best way of comprehend-

ing the postwar development of the national security state is to link it to the prewar emergence of the social security state. Both social security and national security, according to Neocleous, serve the same goal of economic security for which capitalists are always striving. This political project of linking social and national security was exemplified by innovations in American policy during the Roosevelt and subsequent Cold War years and became the model for a new international capitalist order developed under American hegemony.



One of the most interesting parts of *Critique of Security* is the chapter in which Neocleous explores the fabrication of what he calls the ‘security–identity–loyalty complex’. Central to this discussion is the idea that while national security typically is evoked as a ubiquitous interest of all states, it is in fact, particularly in its postwar manifestation, a deliberate construction meant to normalize the security needs of capital.

To illustrate this point Neocleous explores, at some length, the way in which loyalty to the state feeds national identity and how these two nurture the concept of security. Neocleous argues that it is through this process that liberal security gets fused with the notion of national security. Exploring the already well traversed ground of American (dis)loyalty during the McCarthy era, Neocleous argues that the spectre of national insecurity is used again and again to induce citizens to become ‘orderly’. In so doing, perfectly pliant capitalist subjects are created who do not question their ideological force-feeding but instead continue

to work and consume. There is definitely a profit to be made in patriotism.

‘Canons, rather than cannons’, writes Neocleous in his final chapter, is a way for the security industry associated with the emergence of the security state to rationalize and vindicate its existence. By turns ironic and polemical, Neocleous attempts in this concluding chapter to show just how complicit academic disciplines are in the production and reproduction of the security discourse. Scornful of the way so many academics have contributed to the reification of the concept

of security, Neocleous insists throughout that this supposed material gift of the state is entirely illusory. It is time, Neocleous says as he brings his book to a close, to return the gift.

There is no doubt that this is a book rich in ideas. Neocleous eschews the regimented approach of the traditional historian of ideas in favour of sweeping conceptual analysis that is boldly interdisciplinary. His writing is accessible and can at times be riveting. Neocleous’s research in this as in his other books is impressive (fully a fifth of the text is given to footnotes). His anecdotes and asides are invariably interesting and often amusing. And it goes without saying that the central contention of his book about the way in which security has been fetishized in the service of a modern capitalist order is important. At the same time it should be noted that Neocleous frequently relies on allusions where demonstration is called for. Too often his conclusions are question-begging, and the reason for that is that the causal relations that the reader is looking for are not always spelled out as precisely as they could be. For example, Neocleous depicts the relationship between the state and capitalism in this process of the formation of a security discourse in at least two different ways. Time and again he tends to frame this relationship in a functionalist and reductive manner as evidenced by the following quotation: ‘Global order has come to be fabricated and administered according to security doctrine underpinned by the logic of capital

accumulation and a bourgeois conception of order.’ At other times, however, Neocleous offers us a more nuanced portrait of this relationship, as for example when he asserts that ‘it is through the combined effect of “social” and “national” security that security per se has come to be one of the major mechanisms for the fabrication of the political order of capitalist modernity, a nexus of power conjoining capital and the state.’ In this latter formulation Neocleous implies that the state system has at least some independent history from the social formation engendered by capitalism, and that their interaction is one that involves autonomous as well as interdependent institutional logics. The difference in these two depictions is consequential to his overall argument. Whereas the functionalist account leads Neocleous to indulge in his own fetishization of the state as a unitary actor imposing precisely the order called forth by capital, his alternative narrative suggests a state–society nexus that is more complexly constituted by multiple institutional logics. This latter approach, though never really developed systematically by Neocleous, points to what has now become a rather vigorous debate among Marxists about how to conceptualize a non-economistic historical materialism that, among other things, acknowledges the abiding legacies of pre-capitalist state systems for contemporary capitalism (see, for instance, the work of Wood, Brenner, Bonefield, Sayer, Lacher).

Had Neocleous chosen to engage directly this debate about the legacies of the pre-capitalist state system, it is unlikely he would have been so quick to identify the modern security discourse so unequivocally with what he posits as some rather abstract requirements of capitalism. Still, his own counsel about how we should respond to this security discourse is certainly worth considering. In his conclusion, he calls on us to be bold enough to be ‘open to debate’, to be brave enough to ‘accept that insecurity is part of the human condition’ and to ‘tolerate the uncertainties, ambiguities and “insecurities” that come with being human’. What we need to do, he avows, is ‘to fight for an alternative political language’ and ‘to develop a new political language more adequate to the kind of society we want’. One is tempted in the circumstances to remind Neocleous of the oft-cited line from Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach* where he chided the so-called Young Hegelians for the practical inadequacy of their contemplative materialism: ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.’ This particular charge follows upon an earlier admonition Marx had penned as he tried to come to terms with his own intellectual forebearers in

*A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*: ‘The weapon of criticism cannot in any case replace the criticism of weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force.’ Perhaps it is a telling symptom of just how entrenched the liberal discourse of security has become that so eloquent a Marxist censor of the capitalist order as Neocleous no longer imagines it possible to identify the social forces that might oppose it but instead fastens on the strategy of critique and normative wish as the way forward.

Olena Kobzar

## Losing the war

Thomas C. Hilde, ed., *On Torture*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2008. 228 pp., £16.50 pb., 978 0 8018 9026 0.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 2001, Cofer Black, former head of counter-terrorism at the CIA, told a congressional committee: ‘All you need to know: there was a before 9/11 and there was an after 9/11. After 9/11 the gloves came off.’ Or as Tony Blair, eager to back the US ‘war on terror’, put it: ‘Let no one be in any doubt. The rules of the game are changing.’ The sporting metaphors were transparent: in the international struggle against al-Qaeda and its myriad offshoots, the end justified the means.

The fifteen essays gathered together in this special issue of *South Central Review* examine aspects of what happens when the gloves come off and when the rules change. The contributors are mainly American-based, and although the essays look at precedents from Nazi Germany, France’s colonial wars in Algeria, Colombia (a particularly grim but compelling contribution from Margarita Serje) and Gaza, the main focus is, perhaps inevitably, Bush’s America. If there is a philosophical issue involved in debates about torture, its terms are well outlined by Hilde in his introduction. A crude instrumentalist utilitarianism or cost–benefit analysis argues that, whilst it may be distasteful, torture works: it allows intelligence to be gathered. Moral absolutism contends that it is an assault on human dignity and therefore cannot be justified in any circumstances. Carlos Castresana, a public prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Spain, refutes the instrumentalist argument by citing Hobbes, writing in 1651: ‘What is confessed in such a situation tends only to relieve the pain of he who is being tortured, not to provide information to the torturers.’ Few, surely, would accuse Hobbes of being

a liberal with an over-squeamish concern for human rights. That torture is a poor way of obtaining reliable intelligence is widely accepted. It is also recognized to be an effective way of terrorizing populations. But terrorized populations subjected to repression are rarely passive victims, and torturers can become effective recruiting sergeants for the very cause they claim to be fighting. When mass internment without trial was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1972, recruitment to the Provisional IRA increased dramatically; a measure intended to end a conflict probably prolonged it.

In terms of international law, and the national legislations of all democracies, torture is, quite simply, illegal: severe pain, whether physical or mental, applied as a punishment or in an attempt to extract information. No exceptional circumstances can be invoked as a justification of torture. International law and conventions notwithstanding, the 'ticking bomb' scenario is still evoked: you have a suspected terrorist in your hands, and he knows where the bomb is. What are you going to do to extract the information that will save innocent lives? No one has ever produced a convincing instance of this scenario, and this fiction betrays a failure to understand how most terrorist organizations are structured. In the classic cell structure, the prisoner will almost certainly be ignorant of

where the bomb is and of who will trigger it, even if he or she was involved in its manufacture or transportation. He or she may well talk, but the talk is likely to be nonsense and intended only to relieve the pain.

One way to circumvent legal niceties is, of course, to define them away. For the Bush administration, in particular, guerrillas captured in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere were redefined as 'illegal enemy combatants' who did not enjoy the protection of the Geneva Convention; they became non-people to be held in non-places. Under the terms of a 2002 US memorandum, torture is redefined as the infliction of pain so severe that death, organ failure or permanent damage is likely to result. Sensory deprivation, beatings, waterboarding, sexual humiliation, rape, simulated executions and all the other tricks of the trade are, by this definition, not torture. The Bush administration's legal advisers may have been good at semantics, but there is nothing new about such casuistry. FLN suspects were never tortured by French paratroopers in Algeria; they underwent

'muscular interrogations'. Unfortunately, some died as a result but they were not tortured to death.

Better still, torture can be 'outsourced' as though it were just another unpleasant service industry or a form of pollution. Suspects from battlefields in Afghanistan can be rendered to Guantánamo, a non-space on Cuban territory that appears to come under no definable legal jurisdiction, or the secret prisons or 'black sites' operated by the CIA that appear on no maps (closer to home, they can be placed under control orders and effectively removed from public view). They can be rendered to other countries and handed over to authorities who make no pretence of abjuring torture. For Western governments, this has the advantage of 'deni-



ability', though it takes a vast amount of credulity (or cynicism) even to suggest that anyone handed over to the intelligence services of Syria or Pakistan is going to avoid a very muscular interrogation indeed. To move away from the American perspective of this collection, British governments habitually argue that they neither participate, solicit, encourage nor condone the use of torture. Yet there have for some years been repeated claims that terrorist suspects have been rendered from Britain to Pakistan, where they were tortured with the full knowledge and complicity of British agents. When such claims were voiced, the mantra of 'we do not condone' was repeated. The second line of defence was to invoke a 'national security' defined in terms so nebulous as to cover anything and everything. Discussion of policies intended to defend national security could be curtailed on the grounds that it was a threat to the said national security. On 7 July 2009, Conservative MP David Davis, speaking under parliamentary privilege, described how a terrorist suspect who was

allowed to travel from Manchester to Pakistan was arrested and tortured. The Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate had been tipped off by MI5 and the police. After thirteen months in custody, he was returned to Britain – minus several fingernails – prosecuted and jailed for life after being found guilty of directing a terrorist organization. The jury was not told that he had been tortured, and some details of the counter-terrorist operation that led to his arrest were heard *in camera*. Presumably, a trial in an open court can now be construed as a threat to national security. As so often, the British state wraps itself in layer after layer of secrecy and talks of the need for transparency.

This is an important collection and deserves to be read widely. Some doubts must, however, arise. Barbara Ehrenreich's contribution (originally published in the *Los Angeles Times*) describes how the picture from Abu Ghraib 'broke my heart': they showed women performing sickening forms of abuse. They destroyed what she calls 'a certain kind of feminism or ... a certain kind of feminist naivety', namely the belief in the innate moral superiority of women. It now transpired that 'women can do the unthinkable'. Ehrenreich need not have been surprised: two of those hanged for war crimes after the Belsen trial of December 1945 were young women. When it comes to torture, nothing, it would appear, is ever new. It has all happened before. The attempts made here to explore 'representations' of torture also raise certain doubts, some of them relating to Darius Rejali's discussion of 'torture and manhood' in Algeria, or rather in a novel about Algeria. Larteguy's *Les Centurions* (1960) deals with the infamous Battle of Algiers, sings the praises of French paratroops (the 'centurions' of the title) and uses the ticking bomb trope to justify the use of torture. It also invokes tropes of masculinity: are you man enough to use the torture that will save the innocent? In the context of colonial Algeria, the issue easily becomes sexualized, and Rejali relies heavily on the Sartre–Fanon analysis of colonial sexuality. For Fanon, in particular, torture is one of the ways in which white men can act out the fears inspired by the sexual imaginary of colonialism. The victim is the sexually powerful black man who haunts the dreams of the colonist; the white torturer is abusing the figure on which his dreams feed and kills him in a bid to outdo his supposed hyper-virility. Fanon's analysis is at times as confused as it is powerful. Whether he is talking in his last writings about Algeria or a generalized (and mythologized) Third World is never entirely clear; memories of Martinique and the Caribbean fuse uneasily with images of Algeria; white fantasies

about blacks are projected onto North African Arabs, and so on. The writing is immensely powerful; the analysis less clear than one might wish. To use this as a general model for a phenomenology of torture is perhaps misleading, even dangerous. Torture was commonplace during Argentina's dirty war (1976–83), but these sexual–racial fantasies were not part of it: Argentines tortured not a racialized other, but 'fellow' Argentines. If there was a sexual element, it was not that analysed by Fanon, and it was, if anything, still more perverse: the babies of pregnant young women who were disappeared were adopted by officers in the forces that disappeared their mothers.

To argue that there are no circumstances that justify torture, extrajudicial killings off the battlefield, disappearances or extraordinary renditions is not to justify or condone terrorism. Terrorism, not least in its Islamist guise, is a real threat. The individual in the case discussed by David Davis was guilty. Certain Islamist organizations that reportedly act as recruitment pools probably should be banned. The danger is that the way in which the 'war on terror' is being waged may well help to reproduce what it is trying to eradicate. France 'won' the Battle of Algiers, but the way in which it won it helped it lose the war in Algeria.

David Macey

## The horror, the horror

Adriano Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008. 168 pp., £21.00 hb., 978 0 231 14456 8.

On 12 June the *Guardian* newspaper told the story of Samira al-Jaseem, a 52-year-old Iraqi woman accused of training eighty women as suicide bombers, twenty-eight of whom went on to die in attacks. Although she now denies the charges, she confessed to them in a video in February, after her arrest – a video that, as journalist Martin Chulov reported, 'shocked a war-weary Iraq, jaded by the most extreme and indiscriminate violence of the last six years, where snuff videos, taped beheadings and the rampant slaughter of civilians have become commonplace'. Suicide bomb attacks by women have escalated in Iraq, from thirty-three between late 2007 and late 2008, as opposed to only two or three in the few years before that. These female bombers seem to be especially disturbing, and

the figure of Samira al-Jaseem, as the person who allegedly persuaded young women to use their bodies as weapons against defenceless crowds, heightens our disturbance considerably. Where women are ‘manipulated’ into carrying out such attacks, a core assumption is that they are manipulated by men. That the key manipulator here – the ‘evil genius’ behind the attacks – is also a woman deepens our disorientation.

Adriano Cavarero takes us some way towards an understanding of this disturbance through the idea of ‘horrorism’. She wishes to introduce the idea of horror into our contemporary understanding of ‘terrorism’, and uses the word ‘horrorism’ specifically to capture the point of view of the victims of terrorist attacks. From the military perspective we are witnessing terrorism, from the ‘insurgent’ point of view martyrdom, but from the point of view of the helpless victims, she writes, ‘the picture changes: the end melts away, and the means become substance. More than terror, what stands out is horror.’ Cavarero thus argues that we must place the perspective of the victim at the centre of our account: ‘the viewpoint of the defenceless must not only be adopted here, it must be adopted exclusively; that is what really matters’. We are terrified of what we cannot see, and when in a state of terror we are on the edge of flight or actually fleeing; but horror has to do with feeling frozen with repugnance at the spectacle of violence. To the extent that contemporary ‘terrorism’ involves the spectacle of beheadings on the Internet, and pictures of bodies dismembered by suicide attacks, then, she asserts, we should learn to speak of ‘horrorism’. Conceptualizing the violence in this way thereby ‘helps us to see that a certain model of horror is indispensable for understanding our present’. But what pushes Cavarero further towards the discourse of horror is the presence of the female suicide bomber in particular. For ‘what is new’, she writes, ‘is the way in which the massacre is now perpetrated: a body that blows itself up in order to rip other bodies to pieces. And more than that, a female body as happens ever more frequently.’

While the word ‘horrorism’ may be new, Cavarero acknowledges that she is drawing on a history of violence against the helpless, and the repugnance it invokes, which ‘has been known ... for millennia’. In Greek mythology there are scenes of extreme horror, as bodies are graphically tortured and dismembered. And here, too, the presence of women is especially disturbing: ‘when a woman steps to the front of the stage of horror, the scene turns darker and, although more disconcerting, more familiar. Repugnance is heightened, and the effect is augmented: as though

horror, just as the myth already knew, required the feminine to reveal its authentic roots.’ Drawing on the image of the gorgon Medusa and the alleged child-killer Medea, Cavarero concludes that, ‘according to mythology, horror has the face of a woman’.

This special repugnance is replayed in our experience of the contemporary figure of the suicide bomber. Whatever the circumstances, ‘a female body thrust into the foreground of the scene of violence ... still remains particularly scandalous’: ‘Whatever the emancipatory or military value assigned to it, the female body that explodes in order to rip apart innocent bodies is always, symbolically, a maternal body.’ There is something childlike about the condition of the defenceless, and so ‘violence stands out more forcefully because it is from the mother that care is expected’. It is in this light that, for example, Cavarero cites Julija Juzik writing about the Chechen female suicide bombers, and her reaction to ‘the scandal of female bodies that make themselves into instruments of death rather than sources of life’.

On the cover of *Horrorism* is a photograph of a woman howling in desperation. Cavarero refers to the ‘howl of Medusa’, in the moment of the gorgon’s horror at being dismembered by Perseus, which develops into a universal howl of horror at the spectacle of the innocent bodies dismembered by military and political violence. The book is an expression of the desperate and outraged howl of the innocent against their torture; a howl, for Cavarero, which expresses a moral outrage, an ethical judgement upon those who have carried out such attacks. But the point cannot be that there is something morally repugnant in *women* engaging in violent resistance, and while the repugnance Cavarero describes concerns female suicide bombers, there is an ambiguity in the text over whether she is claiming that there is a general psychic disturbance when women engage in this violent activity – which, judging by the *Guardian* report, seems to be true – or whether she is claiming we *ought* to be disturbed by it. Should we be *morally* outraged that women engage in such violence, and if so who should be the target of that outrage: the women themselves or those who ‘manipulate’ them?

The fact is that the woman in the front cover photo is not howling at the spectacle of horror – she is a Palestinian suicide bomber whose bomb has failed to detonate, and she is desperately trying to activate the explosives. And so while the book is written to express horror at the vulnerability of the defenceless against military or ‘terrorist’ attack – which, at various moments, includes all of us – this image in fact asks another question: why would a woman howl in

despair at her failure to blow apart defenceless bodies alongside her own?

Cavarero is clear that her concern is not with the motivation or the strategy of the bomber, but at the same time it is an unavoidable aspect of the discussion. Where she does address this she does so in terms of an extreme Islamicism, such that the motivation is expressed through an idea of religious martyrdom. She also discusses the work of Carl Schmitt, writing in the 1960s, and his distinction between two kinds of 'partisan': the tellurian partisan, who fights a real enemy in terms of resisting an invading force, and the partisan who fights an absolute enemy. The latter, writes Cavarero, 'cutting loose from the "tellurian" dimension, wages a struggle that aims at world revolution because he [or she] identifies his enemy as a class or as the characteristics of any kind of identity (including the Western lifestyle, to give an up-to-date example)'. This partisan, according to Schmitt, wages a new kind of war characterized by a 'pure means of destruction', weapons of absolute annihilation to be used against an absolute enemy.

In a footnote detailing the number of suicide attacks between 1980 and 2003 (just over 300), Cavarero refers to Robert Pape's book *Dying to Win: Why Terrorists Do It*, published in 2006. In that book Pape and his team investigated all the cases of suicide bombers they could find during that period, and of the 38 Hizbollah suicide bombers they investigated, only 8 could actually be regarded as Islamic fundamentalists; 3 were Christians, and the rest were members of left political groups. In a newspaper interview following the book's publication, Pape commented:

There is not the close connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism that many people think. Rather, what nearly all suicide terror campaigns have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: the compel democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland.

To use Schmitt's distinction, the majority of suicide bombers remain 'tellurian', whether in the Palestinian struggle, Chechnya or Sri Lanka. This of course may have changed since the publication of Pape's findings in 2006. The suicide bombers who attacked Londoners in 2007 were British citizens and so cannot be understood in these 'tellurian' terms. Equally, many of the attacks in contemporary Iraq are directed against other Iraqis rather than occupying forces, as the story of the female suicide bombers trained by Samira al-Jaseem suggests. Nonetheless, as Pape observes, while religion is no doubt often used as a recruitment tool, and while

it would be naive to suggest that it plays no role in the motivations of suicide bombers in a country such as Iraq, it is not the root cause. And so while Cavarero may be right that the context for understanding suicide bombings has changed, it may still be that the occupation of Iraq by foreign, and specifically non-Muslim, forces remains that root cause.

These questions of motivation are complex, and, for Cavarero, fall outside the scope of her book, with its focus of the phenomenology of the defenceless, which is for her 'what really matters'. Yet if an aspect of that consciousness is that we believe we are under attack by religious martyrs because of their radical rejection of 'Western' lifestyles and because they conceive of 'us' as an absolute enemy to be exterminated, rather than because of the invasion of 'Islamic' lands by 'Christian' armies, then we have to consider whether there is a radical gap between this consciousness of the 'Western' victim and the reality of the strategy and motivation of those actually carrying out the attacks. If we do not hear the howl of despair of the Palestinian woman pictured in the cover of Cavarero's book, we are ourselves in danger of reducing her and others like her to an absolute enemy, who must be exterminated by the use of weapons of absolute annihilation.

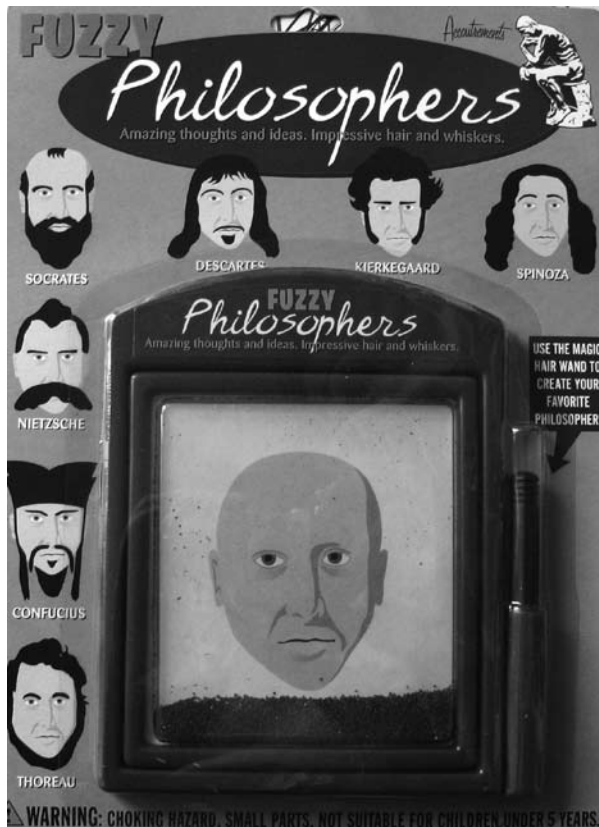
Phillip Cole

## A unified field of fiction

Annalisa Di Liddo, *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2009. 211 pp., £42.99 hb., £21.99 pb., 978 1 60473 212 2 hb., 978 1 60473 213 9 pb.

In her essay 'Notes from the Front Line', Angela Carter famously said that she was in the business of demythologizing, interrogating regulatory social fictions by dismantling what Blake called 'mind-forg'd manacles'. Such an approach also characterizes Carter's near contemporary, comics writer and Northampton 'mage' Alan Moore, whose work encompasses revisionary superhero epics such as *Marvelman* and *Watchmen*; the metaphysical examination of the Whitechapel murders in *From Hell*; the regionalist psycho-history of the prose novel *Voice of the Fire*; the polemical poetry of *The Mirror of Love*, originally written in response to the homophobic section 28 amendment of the British Local Government Act; and





multi-media performances inspired by his commitment to both magic and anarchism.

Moore has been publishing for the past thirty years or so, having started out writing and drawing in fanzines, progressing to strips for the now defunct music paper *Sounds* before he joined that university for British comics' creators, *2000AD*, in the early 1980s, having decided to concentrate on writing. To say that Moore has had a fraught, and at times bad-tempered, relationship with mainstream comics' publishers Marvel and DC would be an understatement. Similarly, he has dissociated himself entirely from the various substandard film adaptations of his work – he had his name removed from the cinema versions of *V for Vendetta* and *Watchmen* – and is currently published by independent Top Shelf. Given this, it seems surprising that it has taken so long for a critical monograph to appear (James Keller's *V for Vendetta as Cultural Pastiche* from 2007 actually focused on the Wachowski brothers produced film), though there have been plenty of fannish celebrations, annotated bibliographies and numerous interviews, as well as a growing body of journal articles which tend to concentrate on *Watchmen* or *From Hell*.

*Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel* by Annalisa Di Liddo, who completed an M.A. thesis on Carter and a Ph.D. on Moore, is published by the University Press of Mississippi as part of their 'Great Comics Artists Series' that includes studies of

Disney artist Carl Barks, satirical cartoonist Garry Trudeau, and manga godfather Osamu Tezuka. The publication coincides with that of the anthology *The Comics Studies Reader* by the same publisher, which also features an essay by Di Liddo on Moore. Such an alignment of critic, subject and publisher is serendipitous. The field of comics criticism is now well established, particularly in Europe and the States, with numerous journals and annual conferences evidence of a vibrant multidisciplinary concern.

Di Liddo rightly acknowledges that Moore's prodigious canon precludes any comprehensive analysis of his work and her study is pleasingly thematic rather than schematically chronological. Divided into four chapters, the first seeks to examine formal qualities; the second presents an interesting argument for considering the Bakhtinian chronotope as a model for reading comics; the third, and by far the most revealing, focuses on constructions of English regional and national identity; and the fourth is something of an odd one out, spotlighting a single text, the extravagant pornotopia of *Lost Girls*. Thankfully Di Liddo avoids hagiography, as is evident in her analysis of *Lost Girls*, a polymorphous, dialogical narrative in which female characters from classic children's fiction swap sexually explicit stories, and which she reads as lapsing into tired postmodern pastiche. For Di Liddo, this makes the text an artistic failure in comparison with the more critically parodic *Watchmen*.

Any consideration of Moore's extensive work would of necessity need to consider the often hyperbolic citational tendency his writing exhibits, and Di Liddo places much emphasis on this propensity for allusion, quotation and irony, arguing that Moore's texts 'are built on a proper web of references that are not only mentioned or suggested but challenged and recontextualized in order to convey new meanings'. Such intertextuality is theorized in a discussion of *Watchmen* and the intradiegetic pirate/horror comic – *Tales of the Black Freighter* (the title is a deliberate referencing of Brecht) – which one of the comic's characters reads within the story. As Di Liddo points out, this *mise en abîme* micronarrative is an ironic juxtaposition to the main frame and at times appears to invade the diegetic world, the separate visual and verbal elements intentionally misaligned. This leads Di Liddo to draw on Genette's notion of transtextuality from *Paratexts*, a move which promises much. Regrettably, however, such a line of argument falters before it has really had a chance to get going and her reading settles for merely pointing to perceived correspondences between primary text and theoretical model. This is indicative

of the general tone of the book, which too often lapses into explicatory cataloguing of the events of the narratives discussed and to the referential connection suggested. Genette is never mentioned again, and what looked like a potential development is jettisoned prematurely.

More promising is Di Liddo's original employment of the chronotope as part of a narratology of comics. Bringing Bakhtin together with comics formalists such as Scott McCloud and Will Eisner seems on the face of it so intuitive that it is surprising that no one has attempted it before. The chronotope, the spatio-temporal figuration peculiar to different genres, could have been formulated with comics in mind; as McCloud and Eisner contend, comics literally spatialize time in frames and page layout. Di Liddo returns to the chronotope at various points, but unfortunately it is employed in an overgeneralized way, though this may be in part due to the vagueness of Bakhtin's own theorization of the term. Discussing the underrated *Ballad of Halo Jones*, Di Liddo proposes a chronotope of science fiction without ever really defining what it is. Given that intertextuality is so important to her account, more perhaps could have been made of dialogism and heteroglossia, which receive only brief references. Similarly, Di Liddo places great emphasis on performativity in the title and in her introduction, but this largely disappears until it re-emerges in her conclusion, and then only to be considered in literal theatrical terms.

Di Liddo largely skirts the issue of the alleged postmodernism of Moore's texts, acknowledging the problematic nature of the term but settling early on for Linda Hutcheon over Fredric Jameson. This means that Moore's writing is associated, above all, with the forms of what Hutcheon calls 'historiographic metafiction', allowing Di Liddo to read and place Moore alongside literary writers such as Carter, Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd. The claim is that Moore's writing dissects the literary canon as well as, if not more than, the comics tradition. But while there are undoubtedly relevant connections to be made here, there is also a danger in overemphasis and special pleading that comes at the expense of in-depth materialist consideration of Moore as part of a genealogy of comics writing. This

results in lacunae in Di Liddo's thesis. For example, she acknowledges the importance of the Northampton Arts Lab in influencing Moore's aesthetic, but she makes almost no mention of comix, an alternative tradition that grew out of the 1960s' counter-culture (the 'x' denoted adult content, either sexual, violent or political, often all three). Comix mixed radical politics with the recontextualization of copyrighted icons and clearly prefigured Moore's work. Anti-establishment cartoonists such as S. Clay Wilson and Spain (whose revolutionary anti-hero Trashman, 'Agent of the Sixth International', anticipates Moore's terrorist V) are obvious forerunners. Comix were also contemporary to the New Wave of science fiction, another stated influence on Moore, and Di Liddo's argument could have been further strengthened by engaging with genre criticism as well as literary models. A good place to start would have been Jameson's writing on science fiction. If Moore has a literary equivalent then surely it is Michael Moorcock, whose anarchist politics and transgeneric narratives look forward to the post-Imperial steampunk of *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*.

The most successful and interesting chapter of the book is on the crisis of English identity and its representation in Moore's comics and prose writing. One subsection is enticingly entitled 'Alan Moore vs. Margaret Thatcher', and Di Liddo does an excellent job of reading examples of Moore's work in the 1980s against a background of social reaction, unemployment and disenfranchisement. She is equally good at selecting underrated or forgotten texts. Her reading of the *2000AD* serial *Skizz*, about a sympathetic alien stranded in Birmingham, for example, makes for a topical allegory on immigration and assimilation, and she suggests a fascinating connection between Moore's Northampton-set prose novel *Voice of the Fire* and Raymond Williams's unfinished *People of the Black Mountains*, allowing for an incisive comparative reading that emphasizes place, history and agency. This theme of 'Englishness' could certainly have been extended further, which, if nothing else, bodes well for future studies of Moore by others who will no doubt follow in Di Liddo's steps.

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