He preferred not to...

Rob Chapman, *Syd Barrett: A Very Irregular Head,* Faber & Faber, London 2010. 441 pp., £14.99 pb., 978 0 571 23854 5.

Julian Palacios, *Syd Barrett and Pink Floyd: Dark Globe*, Plexus Publishing, London 2010. 448 pp., £14.99 pb., 13 978 085965 431 9.

Michele Mari, *Rosso Floyd*, Giulio Einaudi, Turin, 2010. 273 pp., €21.00, 978 88 06 19544 1.

The death of Roger Barrett in 2006 did little to still the mythopoetic obsession that pursued him for most of his life. As 'Syd Barrett' he suspended his studies at Camberwell Art School to pursue a temporary 'job' as pop star and icon of the 1960s' underground. Five years later, still only in his mid-twenties, he walked back to his childhood home town of Cambridge leaving behind him a band – Pink Floyd – their debut album *Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, two solo albums, *The Madcap Laughs* and *Barrett*, and rumours of madness, excessive drug consumption and inexplicable eccentric behaviour. His exit from fame provoked feverish speculation confirmed by the monuments to the 'crazy diamond' or victim of 'the machine' erected by his former band, speculation that persisted for decades and, now, beyond his death.

At first sight it is hard to see why his action, or actions, should have provoked such obsessive fascination. Expulsion from the music business is the norm, survival the exception. Why was Barrett remembered and not allowed, as he wished, to slip into the near oblivion that is the destiny of most 'retired' pop musicians. The proximity to what Pink Floyd became is clearly important, but along with their compulsion to keep the memory of mad Syd alive, other powerful forces were at play. The fate of Syd Barrett was almost immediately moulded into a cautionary tale of the consequences of 'permissiveness' – holding up the spectacle of a brilliant young man reduced to a blank staring freak by excessive LSD use. Mobilized by the moral majority as a victim of the concealed cynicism of the counter-culture – the 'squalid truth' of its libertarian political and cultural aspirations – Barrett became an unwilling moral exemplar.

Yet even this is not enough to explain the enduring preoccupation with Barrett's exit from the business: added to it are doubts about the character of Barrett's gesture. While not quite living in a barrel, his actions during the last months of the first Pink Floyd seem classically cynical, recalling Bartelby's 'I would prefer not to' or even Hamlet's putting on of 'an antic disposition'. The testimony to his madness is continually haunted by claims that it was to some degree put on, consciously exaggerated or was something else altogether. If so, his resort to cynical reason in the twilight of the 1960s could account for his inspiration for the punk movement in the mid-1970s. The way Barrett made his exit and the rigour with which he then lived on, maintained his silence, pursued his art and refused any contact or compromise with his previous persona or world was worthy of Diogenes.

For the most part, writing on Barrett during his lifetime tended to chime with Pink Floyd's monumental threnody to his madness. The signal exceptions were the sober recording histories published by his producer Malcolm Jones, *The Making of 'The Madcap Laughs'* (1986), and later by David Parker, *Random Precision: Recording the Music of Syd Barrett, 1965–1974* (2001). They present a quite different picture of a young artist in difficulty having to work in unsympathetic and even hostile circumstances. Since his death the mythical approach to Barrett has reached what is hopefully a cathartic paroxysm in Alfredo Marziano and Mark Worden's *Floydspotting* (2008) and now Michele Mari's *Rosso Floyd* (2010), succeeded by the critical sobriety of the biographies by Rob Chapman and Julian Palacios.

Michele Mari's novel *Rosso Floyd* is an exercise in negative Barrettology that assembles 'fictional' testimonies to the absent one in the style of a papal dossier of miracles intended to make the case for sanctity (or its opposite). It frames a mythical drama of fraternal sacrifice through the eternal return of a struggle between the mythical beings 'pink' and 'floyd' (members of rock bands) and within the psyche itself. Blood is everywhere – Red Floyd – as is the biblical precedent of Joseph and his brothers, the dreamer apparently sacrificed by the jealous brothers, whom

he subsequently brings under his control. Taking to an extreme Pink Floyd's own mythology, Mari makes the members of the band into animals who are haunted by their sacrificed founder. The testimonies that make up the novel point to an omnipresent and omnipotent Syd, the willing, almost Christlike victim of a sacrificial logic that he himself sets in train and then remotely presides over.

It is hard to imagine a more extreme mythical version of the Barrett epic than this grandiloquent, compelling and not entirely ironic fiction of Saint Syd, nor is it necessary to since it already exists. Marziano and Worden's scary *Floydspotting* provides a guidebook for retrospectively stalking Barrett and to a lesser extent the other members of Pink Floyd. One of the most disturbing contributions to the genre of psychogeography, not only do the authors know where Syd Barrett lived, they also know where he went to school, where he took his walks, first took drugs, ate Italian food… Organized like a guidebook, it presents photographs and descriptive historical analyses of the places associated with the Passion of Syd Barrett: Cambridge station merits an entry as the place where Syd got the train to London; the Regal cinema Cambridge where Syd *missed* seeing the Beatles; and even a photograph and description of Cambridge crematorium. Following the model of a guide to the ruins of the ancient world, *Floydspotting* invests Barrett and Pink Floyd's traces with a bizarre and disturbing mythological charge.

The mythical investment is firmly resisted in Rob Chapman's biography *Syd Barrett: A Very Irreguar Head* and Julian Palacios's delicate and judicious *Syd Barrett and Pink Floyd: Dark Globe*. Both give an unadorned, revisionist account of what happened and are sparing with pretended explanation and moralistic comment. At the centre of their accounts is a fresh look at the counter-culture and above all Barrett's close relationship to the avant-garde in the visual arts. Both emphasize that Barrett considered himself primarily an artist, interrupting his work for an adventure in music that quickly got out of hand. Chapman's biography is rich in oral testimony to Barrett's time at Camberwell and the emergence of his painting from a matrix of abstraction, collage and destructive art. Both Chapman and Palacios point to the parallels and links between Barrett and the work of John Latham, Gustav Metzger and Yoko Ono and their shared association – direct and indirect – with the nascent institutions of the counter-culture such as the Anti-University, the Notting Hill Free School and the Destruction in Arts Symposium. These events/institutions provided the ecology for the emergence of Barrett's Pink Floyd as a multimedia experimental outfit made up of art and architecture students combining improvised sound and lights.

Chapman and Palacios complement each other admirably at this point. While Palacios patiently situates the emergence of Barrett's Pink Floyd within a thick description of the milieu of the counter-culture, Chapman works comparatively. He compares Pink Floyd to AMM – whose improvisations were more resistant to commodification – and Barrett's guitar playing to the experiments of AMM's Keith Rowe. Barrett's gesture of withdrawal is placed alongside AMM's Lawrence Sheaff, who ceased to play music in 1967. In visual art, Barrett's work is compared with John Latham's use of words and sounds as material, engaging in satire and parody and emphasizing the multimedia art-event rather than the artwork. Chapman draws important lessons from such parallels, showing why Pink Floyd were more vulnerable to commodification than AMM and insisting that Barrett's experiments, while readily identifiable in the art world, seemed to betoken insanity in the context of the music business. While Latham's *Still and Chew/ Art and Culture in 1966–67* (an event said to have had 'a seminal impact on Syd') cost him his job at St Martin's, his sanity was never put in doubt. Barrett's song 'Have You Got it Yet?' that changed each time it was played, his concentration on a single note during a performance and his sabotage of a *Top of the Pops* performance was enough to put his sanity into question.

In their different ways, Chapman and Palacios arrive at the conclusion that Barrett continued to pursue an avant-garde project while the milieu of the counter-culture, initially sympathetic towards it, changed and edged Pink Floyd towards EMI and the world of commodified music. Adorno's 'torn halves of an integral freedom' visibly ceased to add up in the pop trajectory of Pink Floyd. The band followed the counter-culture entrepreneurs first to the clubs, then to larger events and on to their first single 'Arnold Layne'

(produced by Joe Boyd) and finally out into the corporate world of EMI. Palacios chronicles the changes in the scene and the band, showing how the criterion of commercial success imposed itself remorselessly, if at different speeds in each.

At the outset Barrett proved an effective pop musician, writing two reasonably successful hits that still sound fresh and alive. The question of whether the singles represent a compromise with the commercial values of the music industry or the rare achievement of an integral freedom where avant-garde and popular culture briefly joined is also raised by the first album, *Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. The answer is probably both, with the problems of negotiating the gulf between avant-garde and pop worlds emerging initially in the studio in the shape of the mutual contempt of Barrett and the EMI enforcer/producer Norman Smith. A pop

group led by a painter with an interest in Joyce, Beckett and Berio, and for whom Rothko, De Kooning and Soutine were essential points of reference, seems an unlikely proposition and not surprisingly quickly ran into problems. Playing absurd venues in the provinces where improvisation was unwanted if not unheard of and repetitive performances of hits *de rigueur*, promotional appearances such as Top of the Pops, and pop star role-play in inane interviews proved increasingly difficult and oppressive for Barrett.

Palacios is especially sensitive to the ways in which the repetitive routine of 'the job' wore Barrett down, leading to fatigue, sleep deprivation and a growing air of despair. The gestures such as refusing to mime on *Top of the Pops* – Lennon also let his guitar hang loose at this venue – and occasionally preferring not to play or write new hit singles can be understood less as signs of drug-induced madness than a growing reluctance to compromise coupled with the inability to see a way out. Palacios cites Barrett explicitly discussing Hamlet's 'antic disposition' with Anthony Stern (one of Chapman's key sources) as the context for a claim in a 1967 interview with journalist Tom Lopez that 'if I wanted to say nothing or if I want to act in an extraordinary way, then I feel that that too is justified'. For his colleagues in the band, such behaviour was interpreted as inexplicable betrayal or sabotage and attributed to drugs and mental illness. Understandably, they could not see how these actions might at the limit be interpreted as a refusal or even a attempt to reintroduce the experimental or the auto-destructive values of the avant-garde back into the band. Their hostility and dependence – they were waiting for the third single – further served to exhaust Barrett.

Chapman's experience as a *Mojo* journalist serves him well in searching out bootleg recordings of concerts and television appearances and producing a revisionist account of Barrett's legendary 'breakdown'. He shows how Barrett's performances through 1967 were uneven, but far from the consistent disaster remembered by some of the band. This is corroborated by Palacios's careful reconstruction of the pressures of 1967, especially the American tour during the autumn of that year. He shows how Barrett first stopped playing after a large electric shock onstage. In subsequent concerts Barrett detuned his guitar, blew on a tin whistle and disrupted the band's routine: 'very Dada', 'very modern' commented Waters and Mason. While not playing down the contribution of drugs, Palacios emphasizes the effect of changes in Barrett's habits, dope as a constant, LSD in the early years and, while in the USA, STP, the substitute for the recently outlawed LSD, with all 'the glory and the doom sealed up in it' in the words of its inventor. During the late 1960s Barrett moved to the prescription sedative Mandrax and in the early 1970s, with the most physically devastating effects, to alcohol. Yet it seems that these added a horrific complication to an already impossible predicament rather than being its sole or even main cause.

Chapman and Palacios give full accounts of Barrett's departure from Pink Floyd and sensitive analyses of the making of the two solo albums. They manage to liberate Barrett's work from the crude symptomatology that identifies the material and style of the songs as the direct expression of mental breakdown. Barrett's songs of disassociation, ambivalence and paranoia do

not have to be immediately identified as symptoms of their author's mental distress, but are explorations of these states in the medium of pop music. The biographers show how they were produced under conditions of great stress, giving just credit to the solidarity of some of Pink Floyd. They also show a Barrett who was beginning to withdraw from the world of pop music and drawing a conscious line under his career as a musician. Once again the two biographies complement each other, with Palacios offering consistently illuminating analyses of Barrett's musicianship and Chapman his use of collage and his debts to Shakespeare, Shelley and Clare.

Even when released from the burden of psychopathology, the songs on *The Madcap Laughs* and *Barrett* testify to damaged life. It is striking how often becalmed 'life' itself is, as addressed in the refrain of the sublime 'Dominoes' – 'Life that comes of no harm / You and I and dominoes / A day goes by'. The biographers tread carefully when the private Roger Barrett leaves the public Syd behind him. The testimony of family and neighbours emphasizes the dignity of Barrett's new life, consistent with the old in making art and destroying it. In a sense the very rigour with which Barrett separated himself from most of his past – learning the ability to become indifferent to it – and the rare exceptions that he permitted to this rule or habit in its turn runs the risk of becoming interpretable and even exemplary. Yet Chapman and Palacios avoid this. Both end on the note of difference: the one with humour, the other with hope.

Howard Caygill

OMG

Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2004 and 2010. 266 pp., £32.99 hb., £17.99 pb., 978 0 253 34248 5 hb., 978 0 253 22189 6 pb.

The new (and long awaited) paperback edition of Martin Heidegger's *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, first published in hardback in 2004, supplies a translation of Volume 60 of the *Gesamtausgabe* (1995). It contains transcriptions and notes pertaining to the 1920–21 lecture courses 'Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion' and 'Augustine and Neo-Platonism'. Most of this material has been available second-hand to an English readership since the publication of Theodore Kisiel's *The Genesis of Heidegger's 'Being and Time'* (University of California Press, 1993), who produced a seventy-page summary of the courses based on lecture notes taken by students attending.

Heidegger had been working closely with Edmund Husserl at Freiburg since the end of the war and had been nominated by the latter as the 'phenomenologist of religion' from among his junior researchers. The course announced for the winter semester of 1920/21 promised to introduce some of the findings of this work to students. These lectures, two hours per week, were not prepared for publication by Heidegger and the archives have not yielded a full manuscript. The editors of *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Matthias Jung, Thomas Regehly and Claudius Strube) build the account of the course, like Kisiel, by organizing material from five extant student transcripts, relying primarily on that in Oskar Becker's hand, whilst also providing an appendix of notes and sketches prepared by Heidegger. When comparing the two accounts, there are crucial differences in collation and structure. Kisiel has far more sensitivity to the presentational form through which the material is developed and has ordered the course more coherently, preserving its thrust. Not least, he appreciates the way in which Heidegger summarizes the previous hour at the end of each lecture and espies when and how questions are set up and answered, whereas *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* introduces thematic headings which occlude this; particularly disappointing is the failure of what ought to be a scholarly resource to date the individual lectures.

As underscored by the editors of the German text, the first part of this course is important for its introduction. In particular, it is the only place where Heidegger presents in concerted fashion the notion of 'formal indication' (*formale Anzeige*), which is indebted to Husserl's notion of 'categorial intuition' from the sixth *Logical Investigation* and Emil Lask's work. In the course of the exposition, the distinction between generalization and formalization as two distinct types of 'universalization' is explained, before the subtractive power of the second is positioned as a hermeneutic method to suspend the tendency (most developed in the sciences) to contextualize and synthesize contents into a prefigured domain of understanding (*Verstehen*). Were *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* the only source for this material, one would sympathize with those students who complained to the dean and forced the interruption of the course at the end of November. The technical difficulties are exacerbated

by a translation which does little to help the reader: at a crucial point in the technical explication, both *Generalisierung* and *Verallgemeinerung* are translated as 'generalizing' so that the intended distinction between the two is lost. Second, the specificities of *Objekt* (object) and *Gegenstand* are obscured by translating the latter as 'thing'. Kisiel chooses 'counterstance', which has its own drawbacks; better would be something like 'feature' to underscore that it covers whatever can be made to 'stand out' as attention moves. 'Thing' is acceptable in its generic sense, but given the legacy of German Idealism in phenomenology it has to be contrasted with *Ding*, which is also translated as 'thing' by Fritsch and Gosetti-Ferencei. It becomes impossible to follow the movements in argument when both appear in the same paragraph without indicating which 'thing', *Gegenstand* or *Ding*, is meant. (For more on this technical distinction in phenomenology, see the very useful article by Dominique Pradelle in *RP* 139).

As Kisiel presents convincingly, Heidegger hastily switched to an improvised lecture on Paul's 'Letter to the Galatians' and moved on to Thessalonians after the Christmas break. Heidegger's umbrage is recorded by Fritz Neumann: 'I shall lecture to you on history and, without further consideration of approaches and method, take a concrete and particular phenomenon as my point of departure. This I do under the assumption that you will misunderstand the entire procedure from beginning to end.' Kisiel is correct to emphasize that the lecture 'dissipates in loose ends'. That said, the discussion of Paul's writing post-conversion illustrates the manner in which formalization is used to uncover a distinct form of religious life and experience. Resolutely opposed to traditional theoretical approaches, phenomenology attends to moments of radical origin lost to explication and conceptual systematization. Instead, the attention to modes of prayer and devotion allows for a distinct phenomenological correlate to be reconstructed as the 'genuine situation'. This entails the destruction of the history of religion and especially the proofs for the existence of God ('not originally Christian').

In the following semester, summer 1921, Heidegger offered a course on 'Augustine and Neo-Platonism', which concentrated on Book X of *The Confessions* to such an extent that very little mention of Plotinus is made. *The Phenomenology of Life* transcribes nineteen handwritten sheets of Heidegger's plus two appendices – some notes and sketches on related material found in a bundle marked for a later lecture course on Augustine's philosophy of time (Book XI) and some supplementary selections from Becker. It is here that the edition suffers from the absence of any index or means of cross-referencing for the three sets of materials provided. It is a fragmentary read. In contrast, Kisiel's account of this is thorough and coherent, though it is based only on the Becker transcript. It supports his contention that a straightforward account of the *course delivered* is superior to the undifferentiated inclusion of Heidegger's own notes thematically connected but added at various times.

The Phenomenology of Life provides an additional third section entitled the 'Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism'. The material included here is presented as the basis for a course that was announced for the winter of 1919/20 but cancelled. Kisiel disputes this claim, stating that this is an incomplete selection taken from working notes begun much earlier: only a third of it relates to mysticism (see his overview essay on recent Heidegger translations in *Studia Phænomenologica* V, 2005). Less sophisticated than the material in the other parts, they reflect Heidegger's earlier proximity to Catholicism – where the Church preserves what is true – and his shift towards a Protestantism which goes back to religious experience. Religious life would then be the renewal of original experience; the perpetual endeavour 'to lead oneself back to that first inner unity' – religiosity rather than the articulated concepts of theological dogma. The inclusion of this third part does, however, allow the reader to see the preceding trajectory before Heidegger moves on towards the 'atheism of philosophy' – a legacy that can still be found in the footnotes of *Being and Time*. The complex interrelation of phenomenology, religion and philosophy is underscored in correspondence from 1927 with Rudolf Bultmann where Heidegger offers that book as the 'ontological founding of Christian theology as science'. The ambiguity of this line can be filled out by considering the content of these earlier lecture courses in relation to the central concerns of Dasein's factical life (care and falling) and historicity.

In a footnote to *Being and Time* (H199, n vii), Heidegger writes: 'The way in which "care" is viewed in the foregoing existential analytic of Dasein is one which has grown upon the author in connection with his attempts to interpret Augustinian (i.e. Helleno-Christian) anthropology with regard to the foundational principles reached in the ontology of Aristotle.' In 1920/21, this philosophical anthropology is positioned against the rival neo-Kantian approaches, which aim at a typology or classification of 'spiritual' or cultural forms – crucially, again, understanding (*Verstehen*) is consistently criticized, since it can only *comprehend* the history and multiplicity of life and not grasp what

prompts that effort and activity. For Heidegger, this problem underlies all contemporary philosophies of history, including Marburg neo-Kantianism, Spengler's *Decline of the West* and *Lebensphilosophie*. They all generate derivative notions of history, which are only concerned to adapt it to the 'cultural needs of the present'. According to Heidegger, the phenomenological approach, reading historicality from out of the sense-structures of living Dasein, will 'blow up' the traditional system of concepts and demand entirely new categories.

Paul and Luther had already been read as new forms of experience, arising *only* out of Christian life experience. It is from lectures on Augustine that a materialist basis for care can be seen – how desire structures and ties us to life. (Here Heidegger used the term *Bekümmerung*, rather than *Being and Time*'s *Sorge*). Every basic experience involves forms of enjoyment (delight) and, in describing the manner in which it seeks to repeat and strengthen the associated satisfactions, Augustine develops a precursor to Spinoza's conatus: 'life seeks more life' in Heidegger's gloss on this 'snare of desire'. Since these desires and wills pull in different directions, addicted, greedy life is marked by dissipation, distension and temptation of which the dominant forms are: desire of the flesh (lust), desire of the eyes (curiosity), and secular ambition. Each offers a distinct way for Dasein to lose itself. For example, the ambition to be loved, feared and recognized leads to domination by others in a way which prefigures the later analysis of the 'They'. The resulting 'troubles', *molestia*, describe the 'disquiet of the heart' (*inquietum cor nostrum*). In contrast to pagan ascesis, which would 'cut off and throw away' this as reified characteristic and non-essential burden, for Heidegger *molestia* is an 'opportunity for seriousness': 'the radical possibility of falling, but at the same time the "opportunity" to win itself'.

This 'factical analytic' presents the originary form of Christianity directed to the *vitam beatam*, happy, or, better, 'blessed' life marked by the 'joy of truth', whose goal is rest, repose and quietude. Seeking to overcome the existential condition generates a temporality based on Philippians 3:13: 'forgetting what lies behind and straining to what lies ahead'. Not only distinct, Heidegger suggests that this is fundamental – Paul's primitive Christian experience *is* Dasein's most radical possibility. In the notion of the *parousia* – awaiting the return of the already appeared Messiah – Heidegger claims Christianity lives temporality *as such*. Paul cannot count the days to this future return: he is witness to a distinct form of waiting for that which comes 'like a thief in the night'. While the strength of this claim may be qualified by *Being and Time*, the manner in which the Christian waits, 'beleaguered and steadfast' for what can arrive at any moment, again anticipates the resolution with which authentic Dasein comports towards death.

The cursory treatment of these themes, to which Heidegger does not return, should indicate that these

lecture courses provide an important perspective on *Being and Time*. Unfortunately, it is difficult to recommend the purchase of *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* itself, which suffers from the faults of the *Gesamtausgabe* as well as introducing its own. It contains little by way of the standard scholarly apparatus – there are no indices and the idiosyncratic glossary is barely more than a page. Given that the lectures include Greek and Latin as well as German this is unsatisfactory. Moreover, the translation is cumbersome with serious lapses in syntax, whilst decisions on technical terms are not consistent with current scholarship and mean that, as noted above, important sections are very difficult to follow. A few examples of infelicities: *Verweltlichung* becomes 'worldization' rather than 'secularization'; reference is made to Luther's 1518 Heidelberg *Dissertation*, rather than Disputation; a reference to Luther's 'dogmatic fundament' offers an occasion for humour where none was probably intended. Despite these limitations, specialists will probably be keen to pick up a copy for the primary materials alone. For non-specialists, your fifteen pounds would be better spent towards a copy of Kisiel's excellent book.

Andrew McGettigan

Properly modern

Bruce C. Clarke and Mark B.N. Hansen, eds, *Emergence and Embodiment: New Essays in Second-Order Systems Theory*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2009. 296 pp., £66.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 0 82234 581 7 hb., 978 0 8 2234 600 5 pb.

Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2010. 536 pp., £35.50 hb., 978 0 22666 789 8.

In these two new books, both Andrew Pickering and Bruce Clarke and Mark Hansen argue for the need to retrieve an idea of 'cybernetics' as the basis for an approach best able to understand and critique the nature of modern systems, whilst simultaneously insisting that the legacies of its earlier twentieth-century forms need to be thoroughly thought through, and critiqued, today. Clarke and Hansen open the collection *Emergence and Embodiment* by stating that 'the imperative to theorize operational closure has, arguably, never been more urgent', in so far as it is only through such theorization that 'cultural theory can rescue agency – albeit agency of a far more complex variety than that of traditional humanism – from being overrun by the technoscientific processes that are everywhere transforming the material world in which we live today'. Although he is a very different kind of book, Andrew Pickering presents a new historical and critical re-theorization of British cybernetics, suggesting that one may find here a distinctive and radical outline for a new 'nomadic science', a 'forward-looking search … [for] a vision not of a world characterized by graspable causes, but rather of one in which reality is always "in the making"'. There are of course important political reasons not to want to give up on the prospect of assigning causes to conditions – those of capitalism for instance – and Pickering does emphasize that this is not a replacement exercise. But, as he writes, what he is concerned with is describing how 'cybernetics drew back the veil the modern sciences cast over the performative aspects of the world, including our own being'.

One of the major problems with writing about cybernetics today is that the word has been used to refer to a series of related but very different concepts and objects. Indeed, Clarke and Hansen note that 'a definitive history of cybernetics would be an impossible project' given the radically transdisciplinary conditions of its emergence and historical unfolding. The term, in its more historically specific disciplinary sense, refers to several stages ('first' and 'second order') of a distinct 'trans-discipline', most famously associated with the Macy Conferences (1946–51), which included figures such as Norbert Weiner, Warren McCulloch, John von Neumann, Gregory Bateson, Margaret Mead and Heinz von Foerster. The latter three in particular were associated with developing what became known as second-order cybernetics – a self-reflexive critique of cybernetics that theorized the role of the observer, and attempted to problematize the tendency towards instrumentality and control. Clarke and Hansen usefully propose the term 'neocybernetics' to refer to the contemporary continuation of this project, incorporating within it associated theorists such as Francisco Varela, Niklas Luhmann and Evan Thompson.

The Macy conferences focused on understanding through abstraction the organizational or cognitive component of material systems, whether physical, chemical, biological, social or psychological. This research, it has frequently been observed, developed in part out of programmes funded by the military during the Second World War, and various combinations of state and industry funded research in the immediate postwar period. Later research did not have such patronage, and indeed became characterized, in its more radical

forms at least, as increasingly anti-institutional and counter-cultural. Pickering argues that the marginality of neocybernetics comes from its very practice and the properly trans-departmental behaviour of its protagonists. Yes, it has strong connections with psychiatry, but as anti-psychiatry. Yes, it had a shared knowledge base with systems theory, but as a critique of command and control. Yes, as a science of interconnections it is profoundly ecological, but it recognizes no distinction between natural, human and social systems.

Exactly what the term 'cybernetics' refers to is itself, then, a site of struggle and contestation, and in many recent commentaries its meaning has been rendered unhelpfully ambiguous, associated with specific critical-theoretical positions, and specific historical legacies, that also have powerful and often wildly misleading 'pop-cultural' representations. So, for example, whilst, for Donna Haraway, the concept of the cybernetic organism, or cyborg, describes a move beyond any simplistic appeal to the natural, and is a reminder that to be human is always already extended and post-human, for Katherine Hayles, writing at the height of the 1990s' imaginary of an immense virtual reality *separate* from material reality, cybernetics came to be described as a dangerous immaterialization, a privileging of information over substance, the pattern over the matter. If the urgency of Hayles's 'immaterial' commentary, at least, can seem increasingly dated, there are nonetheless other critiques of cybernetics that do need to be considered here. Notable would be Bill Nichols's 'The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetic Systems' (1988), Peter Galison's 'The Ontology of the Enemy' (1994), and perhaps most energetically Tiqqun's 'The Cybernetic Hypothesis' (2001). All of these are based around the proposition that cybernetics describes a shift in the social form of technology, from tools as extensions of the human to a condition where non-human networks of tool-systems instrumentalize the human. Often in these accounts, cybernetics, and systems theory in general, signify little more than what Cary Wolfe describes (in Clarke and Hansen) as a 'grim technocratic functionalism'.

In the Tiqqun commentary, in particular, cybernetics is used as a catch-all description of broader developments in postwar capitalism – specifically post-Fordism and associated increasing networks of communication, control and capital – and perhaps even signifies the very essence of the absolute subsumption of life by capital. In a not untypical passage they state that

> cybernetics is not, as we are supposed to believe, a separate sphere of the production of information and communication, a virtual space superimposed on the real world. No, it is, rather, an autonomous world of apparatuses so blended with the capitalist project that it has become a political project, a gigantic 'abstract machine' made of binary machines run by the Empire, a new form of political sovereignty, which must be called an abstract machine that has made itself into a global war machine.

Clearly, what Tiqqun are referring to as 'cybernetics' is the broader intensification of the systematic and militarized character of capital itself that we have seen over the course of the twentieth century, and would not seem to be in any way reducible to the postwar transdisciplinary research project that is the subject of Clarke and Hansen's and Pickering's books. At the same time, arguably, much of what Tiqqun term 'the cybernetic hypothesis' has clear historical roots in all kinds of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century moments, and in the emergent forms of global networked capitalism itself – in its fundamental condition *as a relation and a process* – and the ever more complex and recursive forms through which it is mediated, as it does with cybernetics proper. Whilst, then, to be sure, many new technologies and organizational forms of post-Fordist capitalism can be traced directly to the innovations and spin-offs of cybernetic research, the thesis that 'cybernetics' is in any simple way *responsible* for contemporary capitalism seems implausible (and even a confused form of idealism). Capitalism itself has always been radically systemic, and has consistently shaped the dominant forms of systems theory to its own ends, even whilst the knowledge and legacies of historical cybernetics have fed back and intensified these very processes of capital.

Equally, however, it is important to note that the 'philosophical' project of cybernetics has, through various routes, fed into many 'radical' forms of contemporary critical theory and social science. As Clarke and Hansen note, a range of

> recent thinkers such as Michel Serres, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers, have deployed neocybernetic discourse extensively and transformatively. Neocybernetic discourse is central to current historical, interpretive, and theoretical investigations using concepts such as narrative, medium, assemblage, information, noise, network, and communication to remap the terrain of knowledge with reference to the operational boundaries of systems and their environments.

Several chapters in the Clarke and Hansen collection touch upon these influences. (Cary Wolfe's essay even extends this list to consider Jacques Derrida's engagement with neocybernetic thinking.) Latour's

work in particular tends to be seen as speaking to (or from) a neocybernetic move beyond the nature/culture dualism that for Latour characterizes modernity, a point that both Hansen and Pickering make much of. For Latour, famously, modernity has played out a dualism of people and things, which is now institutionalized as the natural and social sciences. Pickering notes that 'our key institutions for the production and transmission of knowledge thus stage for us a dualist ontology: they teach us how to think of the world that way, and also provide us with the resources for

acting as if the world were that way.' In contrast to established disciplinary knowledge, for Pickering 'cybernetics inevitably appears odd and nonmodern … [it] stages a nonmodern ontology in which people and things are not so different after all.' Of course, one might equally suggest that the dualisms that have characterized post-Enlightenment bourgeois thought are actually 'not yet modern', whereas cybernetics proposes and performs a properly modern new form of knowledge.

Pickering, who started as a quantum physicist, has written about the social forms of scientific practice, and the effect of these forms upon the knowledge claims made by science. He argues that the modern ideology of science is fundamentally representational, and claims that the experimental work of British cybernetics (in which he includes Bateson, R.D. Laing, Stafford Beer, Gordon Pask, Ross Ashby and Christopher Alexander) stages a non-representational approach, a 'reciprocal coupling of people and things' and 'an understanding of science as a mode of performative engagement with the world'. Clarke and Hansen open their collection of essays on a similar theme, developing a remark made by Varela some three decades ago (yet still, they suggest, accurate) that 'the operational closure of cognizing systems' was the key idea capable of initiating new research programmes able to challenge 'our current models about cognition … [which] are severely dominated by the notion that information is represented from an out-there into an in-here, processed, and an output produced'. A consideration of operational closure thus characterizes many of the chapters in *Emergence and Embodiment*, including a useful interview with Heinz von Foerster, a memoir piece by Varela, and a previously unpublished translation of a Luhmann lecture series. For Maturana and Varela, operational closure describes the way that any autopoietic system (for them a biological organism) produces itself through producing a boundary: a specific metabolic interface, through which it 'perceives', 'cognizes' and 'brings forth' a world. Whilst autopoiesis, strictly defined, only refers to living entities (indeed defines them), in informational systems it can describe social and mental 'autopoiesis' too, even if, as Luhmann emphasized, these systems have their own specificities. Neocybernetic discourse offers different modes of conceptual engagement with such operationally closed systems. Bateson's proto-rhizomatic approach focused on the ways in which the boundaries of a system or 'self' are simultaneous produced and breached though metabolic and informational loops that extend far out into the environment: an internalization of external relations. Maturana and Varela by distinction focused on the ways that autopoietic or self-producing systems are informationally closed to non-metabolic flows.

In addition to the question of operational closure, or theorizing how self-organizing systems relate to their environment, there are several other themes that appear throughout *Emergence and Embodiment*. George Spencer Brown's idiosyncratic work *Laws of Form* – so influential on the generation of cyberneticians and ecologists around Bateson and Varela in the 1970s – appears in several pieces. His proposal for a new calculus based upon an innovative approach to thinking whole–part relations (as a distinction that re-enters itself) remains just as appealing to thinkers today as then (Michael Schiltz and Edgar Landgraf in particular). Elsewhere, the importance and range of Varela's thinking in particular stands out in several essays. Evan Thompson usefully unpacks the relationship between autopoiesis and neurophenomenology in his later writings, whilst John Protevi considers the politics of Varela's work and life. Neocybernetic thought, Clarke and Hansen suggest, is ultimately

characterized precisely by 'its new questioning and eventual overcoming of classical substance/form distinctions' which it 'de-ontologizes' and supersedes with a 'distinction between form and *medium*'. This is the reasonable response to the charges levelled by Hayles and others regarding the way that early cybernetics *did* prioritize form over substance, pattern over matter, and in so doing reinscribed familiar gendered dualisms ('pater' over 'mater'). However, even these charges are surely somewhat overstated; think of Weiner's early description of the human as 'whirlpools in a river of ever-flowing water. We are not stuff that abides, but patterns that perpetuate themselves.' Whilst Weiner is valorizing pattern over matter, it is still nonetheless a fairly embodied and sensuous metaphor. If, as Clarke and Hansen note, 'cybernetic methodologies draw out the virtuality correlated with actuality', neocybernetics can be understood as a re-materialization, describing the recursive passage of organizational pattern through an embodied system, and paying 'a new level of attention to the media of its forms or, more concretely, to the environments and embodiments of systems'.

Heinz von Foerster noted that in the early 1960s 'my American friends came running to me with the delight and amazement of having made a great discovery: "I am living in an Environment!"' The turn towards a conception of the environment is the correlate of operational closure, but also, of course, mirrored broader developments in ecological thinking and its cultural dissemination during this period. The engagement of neocybernetics with the environment was developed in particular through Bateson's ecological work, and von Foerster and Stafford Beer's work on biological computing. But it also took on some other perhaps more surprising forms, in particular through an engagement with architecture and design, producing a body of work that Pickering spends much time with. Operating at the margins of schools and practice, a radical experimental cybernetic agenda was pursued in this context, drawing together Gordon Pask with experimental architectural theorists such as Cedric Price and John Frazer, which continues to this day. Pickering suggests that this research stages 'an experimental approach to design as a process of revealing rather than enframing' and 'points us to a notion of design in the thick of things, plunged into a lively world that we cannot control and that will always surprise us'.

The disjunction between Tiqqun's 'cybernetic hypothesis' and what Pickering, Clarke and Hansen are proposing might seem staggering. Do we just need new terms to define more precisely what are actually very different tendencies and projects, theories and phenomena? Or do we need to grasp *dialectically* the necessary relationship between them? Certainly, when Tiqqun state that 'attacking the cybernetic hypothesis … doesn't mean just critiquing it, and counterposing a concurrent vision of the social world; it means experimenting alongside it, actuating other protocols, redesigning them from scratch and enjoying them', it seems that they could be describing the radical cybernetic critique of enframing systems that Pickering himself describes, but while arguing for a transformation of terms. One of the more useful aspects of the Tiqqun text, in this respect, is its identification of the complex relations between socialist and Marxist traditions and what they call the cybernetic hypothesis. A critical re-evaluation of such moments of conjunction – for example Stafford Beer's metabolic planning system developed in Allende's Chile – would certainly appear important today. An exchange between neocybernetics and neo-Marxism might be more productive still. For Clarke and Hansen,

> the human has always been a *for-itself* complexity imbricated with the environment … In stark contrast to any naive conception of autonomy as the absolute self-sufficiency of a substantial subject, this concept demarcates the paradoxical reality that environmental entanglement correlates with organismic (or systemic) self-regulation. Thus a system is open to its environment in proportion to the complexity of its enclosure.

They go on to note that 'this equation remains in force even – and indeed must remain in force especially – in the face of today's massive incursions of technics into the domain of the living'. In fact there is much in neocybernetic considerations of the ways in which technical objects and systems mediate our relations with the world that can bring something to (and take much from) Marxian conceptions of labour, metabolism and technology – especially perhaps in the emerging area of urban political ecology. The conceptions of metabolism and circulation deployed in, for example, Erik Swyngedouw's recent work are borrowed from nineteenth-century systems biology. Yet it is not just a case of bringing conceptual metaphors up to date by reference the latest systems biology – Swyngedouw is in any case establishing a strong continuity with Marx's use of these concepts. It is, above all, the fact that neocybernetics has theorized a conception of abstract *metabolism in general*, in its conception of operational closure, that may well be most valuable for radical thinkers today.

Jon Goodbun

Of worlds flickering and unstable

Richard Menary, ed., *The Extended Mind*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2010. 424 pp., £29.95 pb., 978 0 26201 403 8.

In 1541, in his famous letter of dedication ('To the Most Holy Lord, Pope Paul III') and preface to *De Revolutionibus Orbium Caelestium*, the man usually regarded as the father of modern astronomy, Nicolai Copernicus, issues three implicit but unmistakable concessions that are surprising to find in a text widely regarded as ushering in a revolution responsible for overturning 1,600 hundred years of cosmological 'truths'. They are also, I want to suggest, analogical to the development, today, of an ontology inaugurated by the philosophical thesis of what – following an increasingly influential 1998 essay by Andy Clark and David Chalmers – has been called 'the extended mind' (EM).

Copernicus's first concession is historical. Copernicus explains that while *De Revolutionibus* makes a definitive astronomical contribution, in certain respects there's nothing particularly revolutionary about its thesis: as Copernicus readily concedes, not only is he *not* the first astronomer to suggest that the Earth is in motion, but providing proof for such a thesis isn't really even his principal objective. Copernicus made no apology for exclusively directing his work to a small group of mathematically adept professional astronomers (as he put it: 'Mathematics are for mathematicians') who were, like himself, working on the problem of the planets; as a result, his assertion that the Earth was in motion was little more than a peripheral conclusion he had inadvertently backed into as a necessary analytical step towards resolving such a problem.

Relatedly, then, is a second, analytical concession. Not only is the extended impact of the reality of the Earth's motion of secondary importance to Copernicus; in point of fact, most of the popularly celebrated 'revolutionary' features of Copernicanism – the disrepute of epicycles, the relegation of the sun to the status of a commonplace star, the simple and parsimonious computations of planetary positions, the profound cosmological consequences of an integrated, infinite universe, and so on – are not actually present in *De Revolutionibus*, but rather are features of the 'Copernican' system that are left for others to derive. Moreover, to the degree that *De Revolutionibus* is actually revolutionary in and of itself – as opposed to *revolution-inducing* – by modelling his text on Ptolemy's *Almagest*, reproducing the error of celestial spheres, and decentring the Earth from its place only to re-centre the sun as the centre of the *universe*, Copernicus had already – to paraphrase Jean Laplanche – built in his own Ptolemaic counter-revolution from the very beginning.

The third concession is methodological. Copernicus is decrying to his 'Holiness' the failure of 'the mathematicians' to 'determin[e] the motions of [the Sun and the Moon] and… the other five planets', when he then suggests that – although impossible to observe empirically from our terrestrial vantage point – 'by *assuming* some motion of the Earth, sounder explanations than theirs for the revolution of the celestial spheres might so be discovered'. Copernicus argues that the error in earlier Ptolemaic attempts to resolve the problem of the planets was their simple reliance on the evidence of sensible intuitions, which is why he claims that only by suspending our common (but incorrect) intuition that the Earth is fixed and without motion in space, by severing our domestic sense perception from an approach to understanding reality, and therein by adopting a realist *but* non-empirical method of scientific analysis, can we speculate on the revolution of heavenly spheres such as to disclose their law-like regularity.

Now, the ontological heritage shared by Copernican cosmology and the nascent theory of cognition forwarded by active externalism is perhaps nowhere clearer than in *The Extended Mind*, a collection of essays whose various authors' general theoretical concerns are inspired by Clark and Chalmers's original 1998 essay of the same title (republished and included as the first chapter in the book). The basic position set forth in the essay is the following: while the standard reply to the question of 'where does the mind stop and the rest of the world begin?' invites two distinct philosophical approaches to cognition – (1) the internalist argument that what is outside the body is also outside the mind, and (2) the passive externalist argument that meaning out in the world carries over to a meaning in the head – there is yet a third approach to the problem, which is, namely, 'an *active externalism*, based on the active role of the environment in driving cognitive processes'. Clark and Chalmers thus argue that while the brain, of course, performs crucial aspects of cognition, we cannot legitimately draw an exclusive

skin/skull boundary for cognition, simply because the human organism is always already involved in the manipulation *of* and manipulation *by* external media (whether linguistic resources or physical objects), and therefore in a very real sense is always thinking with and through the world. Hence their advancement of two concepts, the first of which is a kind of guiding principle, the second an epistemological assertion of fact.

First is *the parity principle*, according to which, 'If, as we confront some task, a part of the world functions as a process which, were it done in the head, we would have no hesitation in recognizing as part of the cognitive process, then that part of the world is (so we claim) part of the cognitive process.' Second, which is really a derivative thesis of EM, is a conception of 'the human organism [a]s linked with an external entity in a two-way interaction, creating a *coupled system* that can be seen as a cognitive system in its own right'. Clark and Chalmers argue that once we grasp the formative role of our contingent and portable environment in constraining and fostering the evolution and development of cognition, 'we see that extended cognition is a core cognitive process, not an add-on extra'.

That this applies to cognitive processing is clear enough. However, Clark and Chalmers propose to take this a step further by contending that systemic coupling applies to all mental states (whether conscious or not) – such as beliefs, experiences, desires, emotions and so on – and that 'All the components in the system play an active causal role, and they jointly govern behaviour in the same sort of way that cognition usually does. If we remove the external component the system's behavioural competence will drop, just as if we removed part of its brain.' To elaborate neatly the parity principle and systemic coupling as a so-called 'normal' instance of belief embedded in memory, concomitant with the mind's extension into the world, Clark and Chalmers invoke the thought experiment of 'Inga and Otto': A friend tells Inga that there is an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, which Inga decides to go see. After thinking for a moment, and then recalling (from memory) that the Museum is on 53rd Street, Inga proceeds to walk to 53rd Street. Presumably, Inga believes that the Museum is on 53rd Street prior to retrieving from memory the location of the Museum, for although it was not an *occurrent* belief, the information in the belief was nonetheless sitting somewhere, simply waiting to be accessed by Inga. Now consider Otto, who suffers from a mild case of Alzheimer's disease, and, like so many who do, greatly relies on environmental information to help him structure his life. Otto keeps a notebook of information that he carries around, and when learning new information, carefully records it therein for later retrieval – which is to say that Otto's notebook is coupled to his person such that it plays the same role Inga's biological memory plays for her. Otto too decides to go to the Museum upon hearing of the exhibition; he consults his notebook, which tells him that the Museum is on 53rd Street. And, like Inga, Otto then proceeds to walk to 53rd Street.

The point here is not only that in relevant respects the cases of Inga and Otto are analogous (i.e. Inga's biological memory and Otto's notebook both function as the retrieval of a belief), but, more importantly, the case of Otto serves as a mere particular example of the manner in which the human organism is constantly coupling with the external environment by extending its mind out into the world to perform crucial cognitive functions. Whether counting on one's fingers, or with a ruler or calculator, brainstorming with others around a table by 'throwing out' ideas, manipulating physical and computational artefacts (whether as children fitting objects into like-shaped sockets, or rotating computer-generated geometric images, as in the game of Tetris), or simply performing mental activity through words and symbols: in all of these cases, the external, portable and contingent features of our environment are coupled to the human organism in a manner that effectively usurps the internalist's skin/skull boundary definition of cognition. And this fact does ontologically matter. As Clark and Chalmers rightly argue, decentring cognition and other mental states from the brain and body 'is not merely making a terminological decision; it makes a significant difference to the methodology of scientific investigation. In effect, explanatory methods that might once have been thought appropriate only for the analysis of "inner" processes [must now be] adapted for the study of the outer' as well.

This brings us to three quasi-Copernican concessions implicit in the various essays in *The Extended Mind*, the first of which is historical. While Andy Clark ('Memento's Revenge: The Extended Mind, Extended') and Robert A. Wilson ('Meaning Making and the Mind of the Externalist'), among others in the book, clearly view EM's proposition of the decentred mind as making an important scientific contribution, in 1998 Clark and Chalmers had already conceded that in certain respects there was nothing particularly revolutionary about its original thesis: the reason for this is that not only is Clark and Chalmers's *not* the first attempt in the broader science of the subject to

break with an internalist conception of the mind by decentring mental states from the biological brain (Clark and Chalmers had readily listed 'a growing body of research' that points to EM; and indeed, the entire tradition of psychoanalysis is premissed on the exocentricity of nonbiological mental states), but providing proof for such a thesis wasn't even their principal objective. Anyone who has read Clark and Chalmers will know that with the exception of some preliminary and passing mention of portability, contingency, extended desire, and the like, the text is clearly (and understandably) directed to cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind who were, like C&C, working with the problem of individual cognition. As a result, the truly radical assertion of the mind's contingent decentring (rather than simply the mind's extension into and causal coupling with the world) is little more than a mere peripheral conclusion they had inadvertently backed into as a necessary analytical step towards resolving such a problem. Richard Menary ('Cognitive Integration and the Extended Mind') and several other contributors in *The Extended Mind* make this point by distinguishing first-wave EM, which in certain respects is more conservatively concerned with the parity and causal coupling between 'inner' and 'outer' resources, from second-wave EM, which emphasizes complementarity and cognitive integration as a hybrid process, whereby cognition is constituted by manipulation of and by environmental vehicles.

Related, then, is a second, analytical concession. Despite the ostensibly radical impact of decentring the mind from its skin/skull-boundary for a number of disciplinary approaches to cognition (e.g. cognitive science, philosophy of mind), historically marked by their *common intuition* that consciousness is an exclusively intrinsic process that only ever takes place within such a boundary, and despite an obvious improvement over the latter's strict quasi-Ptolemaic ontology – whereby the brain is the engine of cognition, cognition the centre of the mind, and the mind qua brain the centre of the cognitive world – it seems that Clark and Chalmers are charged with the task of not merely warding off attacks from the more traditional adherents to internalism (such as those versions forwarded by Fred Adams and Ken Aizawa in 'Defending the Bounds of Cognition', and Robert D. Rupert in 'Representation in Extended Cognitive Systems'), but, like Copernicus himself, had perhaps already inadvertently built in their own hidden Ptolemaic counter-revolution from the beginning. Don Ross and James Ladyman ('The Alleged Coupling-Constitution Fallacy and the Mature Sciences'), for instance, object to the surreptitious metaphysics infusing the language of a certain Clark and Chalmers-inspired version of EM, itself a relic of what they call (relying on the work of George Lakoff) 'the implicit doctrine of containment', whereby the world is conceived of as a kind of container of fixed, finite objects that alter their location and properties over time. In this respect, both internalism and first-wave EM are symptomatic of what Ross and Ladyman label 'the metaphysics of domestication'; and, as they put it, 'our view is straightforwardly opposed to any thesis that minds are, as a matter of fact, partly located outside people's heads. We don't think that there is any such matter of fact, as a special case of there being no fact about where minds are located at all.' Of course, by implication, many of the contributors to *The Extended Mind* share Ross and Ladyman's critique that an analytical problem with first-wave EM is its Ptolemaic relics, which is to say that – by virtue of emphasizing the *extension* of the mind (notice here: a surreptitious presupposition that the mind is *initially* intracranial) 'out' into the world, and therein requiring a factual, functional parity between an 'inner' and 'outer' world for causal coupling to occur – it sought to depict an ontologically radically decentred (Copernican) and infinite subjectivity, in which the whole empirical ruse of internal–external boundary breaks down, in egocentric, finite, fixed, Ptolemaic terms.

The third concession, then, is methodological. John Sutton ('Exograms and Interdisciplinarity: History, the Extended Mind, and the Civilizing Process'), for instance, demonstrates what a further commitment to the inaugural spirit of EM's Copernican revolution might look like, by elaborating the principle of complementarity and the manner by which otherwise disparate biological and non-biological resources become integrated into extraordinarily complex, socially distributed cognitive systems. Indeed, its methodological impact for our traditional, egocentric conception of the mind – which is a standard premiss from the inaugural (Cartesian) moment of modern philosophy all the way through contemporary (and so-called 'cutting edge') economic behaviouralism – is difficult to overstate. What are the true ontological consequences of suspending (what internalists, such as Adams and Aizawa, and Rupert, defer to as) our common, sensible intuitions that the mark of the cognitive is exclusive to nonderived intrinsic content, when developing a scientific approach to understanding the conditions of possibility for the reality of our mental states? Sutton alludes to a preliminary answer: 'Seeing the brain as a leaky associative engine, its contents flickering and

unstable rather than mirroring the world in full, forces attention to our reliance on external representations in the technological and cultural wild.'

And so here we arrive at one of the extended, fascinating ontological consequences of adopting such a methodology. If, as Clark and Chalmers argue in their original essay, 'external coupling is part of the truly basic package of cognitive resources that we bring to bear on the world', and if systemic coupling is a particular instance of the more general matter of cognitive integration, the unreliable portability of such integration presents to us an image of our cognitive world that is infinite *but* flickering and unstable. That is to say, if an integrated system is both the definition of the cognitive *and* provides the conditions of possibility for cognition, as such, and yet if such integrated systems are not contained, insulated, fixed and stable, but rather portable, contingent, (at times) unreliable and infinite, then Otto surely isn't the only one horrified at the prospect of deintegration. Herein lies the truly fascinating ontology to be derived from EM: it reveals the world of the subject as a special form of outer darkness, filled with potentially portable but often unstable nonbiological vehicles, not only subject to incessant manipulation, but wholly manipulative in-themselves. Can it be that the originally analytic disciplines like cognitive science and the philosophy of mind – with their seemingly incessant search for law-like regularity – now speak to us of a world of the subject that is flickering and unstable? And if so, is not the true mark of the cognitive a sort of perpetual anxiety, as the subject stands in the face of the contingency of the infinite?

Benjamin James Lozano

Martian poet

Tim Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2010. x + 163 pp., £29.95 hb., 978 0 674 04920 8.

In what he calls (with some nod or wink, one supposes, to originary delay) a 'prequel' to his earlier work of ecocriticism, *Ecology without Nature*, Tim Morton here ventures further into the domain of 'dark ecology'. Still very much present are key themes of the earlier work: the dismissal of the concept of Nature as a misleading ideology and the film noir version of environmental thinking. But as the title of the new work indicates, we are now also invited to acknowledge the all-pervasive shadow cast by what he calls 'the ecological thought'. In contrast to 'environmental rhetoric', which Morton rejects (although without providing any examples of it) as altogether too 'sunny, straightforward, ableist, holistic, hearty and "healthy"', the 'ecological thought' is 'intrinsically dark, mysterious, and open, like an empty city square at dusk, a half-open door, or an unresolved chord'. We are also told that the ecological thought is a 'virus' that infects all other areas of thinking, and that it has to do (along with much else) with: love, loss, despair, compassion, depression, psychosis, amazement, wonder, openmindedness, doubt, confusion, scepticism, space, time, delight, beauty, ugliness, disgust, irony, pain, ideology, critique, self, society, consciousness, awareness, coexistence, art, philosophy, literature, music, culture, science, gender, sexuality, factories, architecture, economics, you, me, and the interconnection of all beings.

It is, then, a 'Big' and very embracing thought, and one whose thinking is presented as a condition of salvation or redemption. But I have to confess that coming upon this kind of condensed account of it at an early stage in Morton's book was for me not propitious, indeed put me rather too much in mind – fittingly, perhaps, for a 'dark' ecology – of one of those long nights in which all cows are grey. The mist descended and I was left groping around for conceptual guidance. Some of the more particular discourses that go into the making of Morton's thought about the 'ecological thought' do, however, eventually take form, beginning with the argument that we must do ecology without 'Nature'. I have a lot of sympathy with this claim, particularly when construed as an invitation always to be alert to our ideological constructions and conceptual mediations. Morton is right to rubbish simplistic endorsements of a nature viewed as either 'cute' and 'cozy' or as something 'wild', wholly pure and separate from us. He is also right to note the historic role of the idea in shoring up oppressive and hierarchical social arrangements. However, these are not very novel criticisms. And he himself discriminates too little. He does not, for example, discuss the formal and logical reliance of his own argument on *some* concept of the 'natural' in contradistinction to those of the 'artificial', the 'cultural' and the 'human' that he employs quite

happily throughout his book. Nor does he address the normative tensions in ridding his version of ecology of any idea of nature while continuing to invoke such terms as 'alienation' or 'pollution' or 'authenticity', and while moving regularly into elegiac mode about the fate of the earth and 'our' (specifically human?) responsibilities for it. Nor does he appear to want to recognize 'nature' conceived as the physical and biological powers and processes presupposed in any 'interconnection' of organisms. In his discussion of Kim Stanley Robinson's trilogy about 'terraforming' Mars, we are told that there is no Nature on Mars, nothing pre-given, everything in the way of water, atmosphere and plant life has to be 'artificially' created by the 'terraformers'. But this kind of talk completely overlooks both the 'nature' that is 'pre-given' in the very existence of Mars in the first place, as it does the natural provisioning instantiated in air, water and photosynthesis whether introduced by us onto Mars or not.

But it is not only that Morton is resistant to pursuing the implications of his own rhetoric into these conceptual regions. He also targets a straw version of environmental thinking that is belied by the actual sophistication, complexity and diversity of contemporary eco-discourse. Morton tells us that he won't be doing any 'close green reading' in his book, and one can approve his reluctance to get bogged down in academic citation. But given how thin his text is on examples of the errors he so confidently dismisses in others, some readers will wonder about his own status as a guide. They may also question his conjurings of mythical constituencies to suit the axe he wants to grind: who, for example, are these people who associate Wordsworth with 'green Wellington boots, muddy Volvos, and quaint nooks of mythical Olde England'? Who are the 'we' who want ecology 'to be about location, location, location'; or who think of 'interconnection' as 'warm fuzziness'?

A further curiosity is Morton's passion for the Google Earth and Apollo optics on our blue and fragile planet. Very keen though he is to steer us away from any Cartesian thinking of 'Nature' as an object from which we ourselves are removed, Morton favours the bird's eye view on the 'totality' that you can only get from a distant and separated perch in space. And it is because Milton provides this 'immense viewpoint', he tells us in one of his less felicitous poetic references, that he wants to use him 'to kick off the discussion'. In the same context he recommends us to Buddhism and the mind-blowing extraterrestial insights of Tibetan cosmology. But the ethnocentric presumption of Yankee power to push other cultures around is itself fairly stunning when we find him alighting on the thought that 'should we wish to send astronauts to Mars, we could do worse than train Tibetans and other indigenous peoples for the ride. They would only have to learn to push a few buttons.'

In line with a dominant tendency of American environmentalism, Morton is inclined to identify ecological sanctity with sorting out our attitudes to other living creatures – and learning to love the 'inhuman' in all its more repellent and 'evil' aspects. The main focus, in other words, is not on the ravages of turbo-capitalism and high-speed shopping-mall culture (although these are occasionally noted as culprits in passing), but on getting us to appreciate the ongoing evolution and interaction between all biotic beings, however offensive we may find them. In this context, he introduces the idea of the 'strange stranger' (a development of Derrida's *arrivant*) to replace that of 'animals' with its difficult connotations. Drawing on Levinas to mediate Darwin, he tells us that we are all entangled in the web of intrinsically strange life forms – a web of 'strange strangers' who become stranger the more we know about their interconnection with us. Though sketched rather than developed, the idea prompts some of the more thought-provoking and sustained passages of the book, where Morton reads Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and some of the Wordsworth ballads as reflecting the poetic intimacy with 'strange stranger' thinking that he sees as intrinsic to the 'ecological thought'. Here, too, however, one misses any real discussion of the now varied and substantial body of eco-critical commentary on the English Romantic poets.

Equally, there is too little discussion of how the recognition of 'strange strangers' and their interconnection is supposed to bear on the resolution of ecological crisis. There are aspects of Morton's argument where he appears to distance himself from any posthumanist dissolution of human distinction and accountability. But for the most part he sounds very posthumanist in his emphasis on the unexceptional or nugatory qualities of human beings; in his readiness to consider AI and robots as part of the 'mesh'; and his defence of other animals as having previously excluded 'human' capacities, notably those of language and aesthetic response. Sentient beings, he tells us, may well be machines, and vice-versa. AI could have personhood, humans might be nonpersons. And despite all his emphasis on the need for the 'ecological thought', Morton suggests that consciousness should be downgraded, and considered as a quite lowly activity. The imagination

is probably not unique to us either. Marx is just wrong to distinguish between 'the worst architect and the best of bees'. Sweeping and highly contentious as these claims are, none of them receives more than a very cursory discussion.

Problematic, too, is the general invitation to endorse socio-biological naturalism when it comes to thinking about our current condition and how to move beyond it. Ecology and its 'crises' are frequently talked of as if they were simply manifestations of the evolutionary web of life within which all creatures are equally meshed, and humanity is but one of the species caught up in the tangle. This is not to say that there is no political advice, although that given seems inconsistent and often rather peculiar. We are warned off recycling for fear of fending off the immensity of ecological crisis. On the other hand, recycling can, it seems, illuminate 'the mysterious curvature of social space–time' marked by the bend in the tube beneath the toilet bowl, by showing us where our shit goes… Elsewhere, we are told that 'things will get worse before they get better, if at all' and that 'we must create frameworks for dealing with a catastrophe that, from the evidence of the hysterical announcements of its imminent arrival, *has already occurred*'. But we are also briskly advised that the real job of saving the planet belongs to 'sound science and progressive social policies'. And out of the melancholy comes quite a lot of confident, not very ironic, and 'ableist' advice to the effect that we shall cope. Indeed, Morton tells us, 'everything is ultimately workable', and 'the ecological society to come will be much more pleasurable, far more sociable, and ever so much more reasonable than we can imagine.' What could be more jolly than that?

Kate Soper

Weightwatchers

Hervé Juvin, *The Coming of the Body*, trans. John Howe, Verso, London and New York, 2010. 188 pp., £14.99 hb., 978 1 84467 310 0.

Hervé Juvin, economist and president of Eurogroup Institute, a management consultancy firm, has written a strange, urgent essay that tells us, in no uncertain terms, that Europe has 'just invented a new body' and that we are living through 'the first civilization of well-being'. The recent cuts might lead us to question the second proposition, but the first might bear some thinking about. We are by now used to the idea, filtered down through Foucault, Agamben, Hardt and Negri (via, it should be said, a neglect of second-wave feminist theorizing about the body), that we live in a thoroughly biopoliticized age, in which the body is a criss-crossed site of regulation, legality, potentiality and conditioning. Yet Juvin's claim has little to do with this particular set of topics, and far more to do with a kind of paradoxical future-oriented nostalgia for the bodies of ages past in an age when life-expectancy (at least for some) has massively increased, and where these new bodies can be tweaked, cut and medicated into some sort of quasi-permanent youth. What, in other words, are the social and political ramifications of a life lived without the imminent fear of death?

Live slow, die old: Juvin attempts to explore what this biological-environmental trend might mean, when, for example, relationships begun in one's twenties might conceivably last (or not last) for the next eighty years, when there are, apparently, 'many, men and women both, who do not know what to do with the dragging days of a life that has forgotten how to end'. The earlier, omnipresent, reminders of finitude, both representational and literal – war, serious illness, heavy labour – have, for many, vanished, and humanity (at least the richer part of it) has become seemingly invincible: 90 per cent of the French aged 60–80 apparently say that they are in good health and enjoy life, 'at an age when most of their recent ancestors were dead'. And why shouldn't they? Recent cultural critiques have seen the baby boomers held in contempt for their apparently selfish behaviour and their

squandering of revolutionary ideas (free education!) in the name of greedily hoarding all the houses, even if it means their own children will labour under massive debt and an inability to live anywhere. But this kind of generational bad-mouthing misses the structural shifts in postwar economics, preferring to blame those fortunate to live in a period of relative prosperity for doing the obvious and taking advantage of it. (It's not yet clear, however, what the libidinal investment in taking it away from everyone who comes after might be – an attempt to preserve a feeling of historical specialness?) Nevertheless it is this generation, the one that 'conquered co-education, that made May '68 and voted Doors, Beach Boys or Deep Purple' that has become 'the vector for the advent of the body'; that is, the 'last' generation (the role of the USA in this generational thesis is strangely opaque; Juvin barely discusses it).

Juvin's book, if not then a biopolitical treatise, exactly, does share certain themes with a peculiarly French approach (Levinas, Baudrillard, Debray) to the problem of historical nihilism, and exhibits signs of a by now familiar worry about the absence of religion, or at least of religious structure:

> Religion maintained a vertical connection between God and humans … and it regulated the horizontal links between humans. The market came to substitute its universal and accountable reason as rule, language and mode of exchange. It also linked what had never been linked before, connected those who had never thought that they had anything in common. That link is broken. The market still deals with the horizontal link but now it is the body that connects with other things, that establishes frontiers and reinvents separateness; because it is complete, and so long as it is complete, it becomes the face of God, of otherness, of the same and the other.

This brave new world of the body, then, is mildly horrifying. 'My skin says everything about me; it is me' says Juvin, sounding like a slogan for face cream. If this dermal theory of value is proved true, however, and if this is the only truth, then this measure will indeed cancel out all other virtues: we have entered into, thinks Juvin, the final stage 'of the dictatorship of desire as a driving force behind the market and growth'. (It is hard on occasion not to think of Juvin's argument as a kind of theoretical systematization of the novels of Michel Houellebecq.) Yet there is a peculiarly Marxisant moralizing at play here too: family ties have been broken in favour of the sexualized couple, and work too has removed men and women from any 'natural' link to reproduction (as if there ever were one). The body becomes the only real 'asset', our 'whole inheritance', a kind of 'physical capital' against a backdrop of a casual indifference to big ideas or the meaning of our own mortality. Juvin addresses the gendered dimension of this centralizing of the body to some small extent (women are prey to being understood in terms of their bodily presentation somewhat more than men are, admits Juvin), but there is little discussion around the complex web of arguments that make up the 'feminization of labour' debate, for example, or of the asymmetrical way in which women are massively more likely to be mistreated precisely when they are regarded as little more than the sum of their parts. The essay begins, on this point, with a paean to the peasants of rural Brittany who were 'worn out, broken by hard labour, at sixty. Let's not even mention the women: after the age of thirty or thirty-five, what remained to them of what we call womanhood?'

Juvin's essay walks a tightrope with the pits of reactionary moralism on one side and misplaced nostalgia on the other. The centre cannot hold. We cannot really be wistful for an age of brutalizing work (as if that work had disappeared anyway, as opposed to moved beyond the borders of eternal-life Europe), nor can we constantly tell people off for attempting to make the most of themselves in a world in which we are told to be constantly networking, selling ourselves, and making the most of it. Juvin hints that the New Man (and Woman) of Communism has found its unnatural home in the endless creation of new desires under capitalism, is created and sustained by these desires, yet the political analysis is too often gestural, albeit tantalisingly so.

The Coming of the Body is ultimately the attempt to argue that the body has become the site, the last site, of all value:

> After gods, after revolutions, after financial markets, the body is becoming our truth system. It alone endures, it alone remains. In it we place all our hopes, from it we expect a reality which elsewhere is leaking away. It has become the centre of all powers, the object of all expectations, even those of salvation. We are those strange, hitherto unknown humans: the people of the body.

No more history, no more personalities, no more religion. Postmodernism has finally found its home, and it turned out not to reside in architecture, art or cinema, but in the strangely taut skin of a plastic-surgery patient. (The work of David Cronenberg, Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* and the television series *Nip/Tuck* might thus be better examples of Juvin's fleshy end of history than a Calvino novel or a Philip Johnson building.)

The futurological dimensions of Juvin's argument are perhaps the strongest, even if it is here that the more dubious elements of his argument fall out. Freedom, democracy and the state are all 'at risk' from this new transformation: the new moralism of the body, the all-consuming imperative to enjoy. There appears to be little room for attempts to reclaim such *recherché* things as personality and character, those old humanist hallmarks, not least because souls have dissolved into skins. Little room either for collective politics, as the collective has, according to Juvin, been mobilized entirely by the demand to enjoy one's own body 'until its dying day'. Do we need a new group *momento mori*? Juvin suggests madness might be 'the only freedom left' (certainly, if madness means not shaving your legs or brushing your hair – which these days it probably does). In a slightly Hobbesian turn, Juvin suggests that 'the fierce joy of drawing blood, the good fortune of killing an enemy' might be enough to remind us that we exist. Perhaps he has a point, so long as we're talking about class war. For Juvin, however, there appears to be little hope in this direction: the body has squished all else ('Dreaming about revolution is as forbidden as making it'). Only a morbidly obese God can save us now.

Nina Power

Sticks and stones

Thomas Müntzer, *Sermon to the Princes*, trans. Michael G. Baylor, introductions by Alberto Toscano and Wu Ming, Verso, London and New York, 2010. 176 pp., £8.99 pb., 978 1 84467 320 9.

Thomas Müntzer didn't mince his words: 'donkey-cunt doctor of theology', 'hell-based parsons', 'whore-mongering priest', 'diarrhoea-makers', 'little straw doctors of theology', 'evil clergy' and 'snakes' are just some of the labels he reserved for his opponents in the church. As for his erstwhile comrade-turned-sworn enemy, Martin Luther, by the time of the Peasant's War in 1524 Müntzer was describing him as an 'overlearned scoundrel', a 'shameless monk', 'a basilisk, a dragon, a viper', 'Father Pussyfoot', a 'malicious black raven' and 'Doctor Liar'.

From our contemporary political vantage point where ad hominem attacks like these are generally equated with censorious, fascistic tendencies, there is something shocking about the vitriol of Müntzer's denunciations, especially from the pen of a theologian. Indeed the decrying of such 'fanatics' (*Schwärmer*) in the early modern world has recently been discussed

by Alberto Toscano as a pivotal moment in what would become an enduring trope of anti-revolutionary discourse. And even though by the time of the peasants' insurrection Luther was himself imploring the Princes' armies to 'stab, smite' and 'slay' every one of those involved in the 'intolerable' rebellion, the weight of negativity continued to rest on Müntzer's side, as he marshalled his sharp tongue to spur the peasant masses into revolt. As such, it was not just because of Müntzer's insurrectionary actions but also because of his violently intolerant language deployed against the existing institutions on earth – the absolute partisanship of his demands on behalf of the oppressed – that he was so decisively condemned.

Yet, is there actually more here, other than this rhetorical short circuit between radicals past and present, which would really justify placing Müntzer alongside compendiums of the writings of figures such as Robespierre, Mao and Castro in Verso's Revolutions series? There are two levels on which one could doubt that there is – an anxiety seemingly built into Verso's presentation of the text itself. First, and most strikingly, the book contains not one but two introductions, by Toscano and by the Italian collective Wu Ming, as if to attempt to add extra value to the release and buttress the impression of the book's relevance. Second, these two introductions read at odds with one another, precisely on this question of the historical specificity of Müntzer and of 'fanatical' discourse.

To take the introductions in order of their presentation, Toscano's scholarly contribution draws on his recent book, *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea*, and places Müntzer in light of his appropriation by later revolutionary writers such as Engels and Bloch, but also in regard to his notoriety within the anti-fanatical canon. In this respect, Toscano's critique presents the accusation of fanaticism inaugurated in response to Müntzer's rebellion as an ahistorical cliché regurgitated ad nauseam by conservatives of all stripes, from Edmund Burke to the ideological cold warriors of the twentieth century. At the same time, Toscano's answer is not simply to adopt the flip side of the antinomy and forward a strident historicism in response. Rather, by working broadly within the paradigm of the communist invariant proposed by Alain Badiou, Toscano describes Müntzer as a 'communist precursor' to the Situationists and the alter-globalization movement. His response, then, is a tempered historicism which alleges an ideological determination to immediate elisions across time and place, yet also wants to hold on to the anachronistic, anticipatory character of a universal longing for equality instantiated in Müntzer's rebellion: at once utterly modern in its radically egalitarian ends, but framed within the theological, discursive world of the sixteenth century. Poignantly, Toscano's account of how Müntzer's name is continually resurrected at revolutionary junctures in European history refrains from simply cheering the glorious – failed – rebellions with which his name has become associated. He ends with the observation that '"Red Müntzer days" may still lie ahead. Whether they will be breathtaking anticipations or doomed anachronisms remains to be seen.'

The poignancy of this reflection is brought into sharper relief by Wu Ming's contribution. Wu Ming is an Italian writing collective responsible (under the pseudonym Luther Blissett) for the 1999 historical novel *Q*, featuring Müntzer as a central character. At the peak of the alter-globalization movement they were close to the Mexican Zapatistas and the protest movements which gathered in response to meetings of international organizations like the G8 and the IMF. Their introduction is not just an attempt to explain their appropriation of Müntzer during that time, but also a reflection on the rights and wrongs of a movement culminating in the death of Carlo Giuliani in Genoa in 2001.

In many ways Wu Ming's contribution reads as frozen within the era of 1990s' 'New Times'; shot through by the pervasive cultural desire to avoid the 'hopelessly worn-out twentieth-century modes of thought', a refusal of the 'old dichotomies such as Reformist vs Revolutionary, Vanguard vs Masses, Violence vs Non-violence' and the rejection of 'linear, traditional left-to-right scale thought'. In place of these 'worn out' political modalities, through Müntzer's story Wu Ming explain that they attempted to foster a new activist mythology around his story. The concomitant of this sense of radical disjuncture from twentieth-century certainties is their adoption of a broad historical levelling, in so far as they claim 'If we listen to what the sixteenth century has to say, we encounter anarchists, proto-hippies, utopian socialists, hardcore Leninists, mystical Maoists, mad Stalinists, the Red Brigades, the Angry Brigade, the Weathermen, Emmett Grogan, punk rock and Comrade Gonzalo'. And vice versa. Reflecting on the alter-globalization movement, they argue that 'Müntzer's ghost appeared at the centre of the mobilization because a general metaphor was taking shape in its midst: empire was described more and more often as a castle besieged by a manifold army of peasants.' Although adopting a direct historical short circuit, they also concede however – in the fatalistic register of post-modern activist despair – that 'There was no real siege going on, as you can't besiege a power that's everywhere and whose main manifestation is a constant flow of electrons from stock exchange to stock exchange.' In that one line is encapsulated all the contradictions of a movement that already seems so long ago: the release from twentieth-century limitations of thought unleashing an extraordinary creative outpouring, but accompanied by a level of political analysis lacking transformative potential. As such, it is not surprising that they end by retreating to vaguely religious moral platitudes: 'Salvation lay in being open-minded, honest and comprehensible. Salvation lay in keeping away from sectarianism.'

Is there, then, a value in reading Müntzer for more than the historical specialist today? Yes and no. Beyond the informative introductions the reader might be disappointed by the lack of historical or conceptual content in Müntzer's writings – the fact that they give us literally nothing to work with today in thinking about politics. Yet the text does serve as a reminder of the proximity of the expression of radical politics, whilst, simultaneously, drawing attention to the gaping historical chasm separating actual political situations across time and place.

Nathan Coombs