Strictly come researching

Hans Radder, ed., *The Commodification of Academic Research: Science and the Modern University*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2010. 350 pp., £44.50 hb., 978 0 82294 396 9.

This thirteen-chapter volume claims to be the first book-length analysis, from a philosophical point of view, of the trend towards the commodification of higher education, combining philosophical analysis with empirical accounts of the current realities facing universities and academics. No longer do philosophers have the luxury of pretending that there might still be time to discuss threats to cherished values and practices before the worst happens. Damage beyond what was imaginable only ten or fifteen years ago has already occurred. Yet, as academia convulses with change, people in and around it have also found resistance remarkably difficult, perhaps because these changes are usually presented either as non-negotiable or as 'responses' to the pressures of what alarming numbers of people blithely talk of as a new 'knowledge economy'.

Those who write about these problems almost invariably start from personal experience and *The Commodification of Academic Research* is no exception. In its introductory chapter, Professor of Philosophy of Science and Technology at VU University Amsterdam, Hans Radder, writes that the dominance of economic thinking has made it possible for university administrations to completely ignore substantive arguments about what constitutes high-level international research. In preparation for restructuring the university, arguments put forward by philosophy faculty in Amsterdam, detailing why 'the proposed reorganization could not be expected to lead to an increase in the quality of the philosophical research', were simply overruled, as only supposedly economic criteria had any impact on the university administration. Radder's anecdote sets up the book's theme: that commodification isn't just about direct market transactions. Elsewhere in the volume, though, personal anecdote sometimes masquerades as 'ethnography' or inspires unwarranted claims.

It is good news that philosophers of science and social and political philosophers, as well as experts on research ethics, have risen to the significant philosophical, political and moral challenges posed by what is happening to higher education. Let me start, however, with some peculiar features of the volume. First, unlike other critiques of the current fix, the authors place great emphasis on – and maybe have even greater hopes for – Mertonian ideals of gentlemanly science; a stance that Radder elaborates upon in a chapter framed as a critique of the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK). Perhaps this tendency to turn its back on much of the recent sociologically inspired literature on science accounts for a second oddity in the book, namely how most of its authors seem to endorse ever more stringent ethical codes and other forms of regulating research – the proliferation of codes and regulations is rarely celebrated in this way by critics of the new academic conditions. At the same time, with intellectual property questions at the book's core, its authors do articulate some sophisticated critiques of how quality is 'translated' into quantity, exactly the manoeuvre exploited in audit. But given its practical concern to find better ways of regulating academic research, it also seems odd that the book ignores the ways in which audits are already promulgated as ways of injecting ethics as 'transparency' into potentially corrupt practices, and how they have made most universities into institutions that an accountant can understand, and so inflicted considerable damage in the process.

Despite this, *The Commodification of Academic Research* reads as a rather unusual but still valuable contribution to the wider critical debate. In his introduction Radder notes that the root of our problems lie in 'economization', his term for the world-view that sees and enacts life as a simple calculus of benefits and losses. But he also reminds us of what any observer of the real world knows: that life's 'patterns are never a matter or all or nothing'. Taking their cue from this, all of the book's contributors offer careful empirical as well as theoretical analysis. However normative it may be – and much of this book is outspoken about its ethical preferences – philosophy can still revel in all the straggly bits that 'economization' cannot or will not acknowledge. (In general, the book shows a refreshing insistence on grappling with older and slower questions by using philosophy's specialist tools, and by indulging – as it might appear from a social science

perspective – in a philosopher's privilege to meander.) Carefully spelling out what one hopes is self-evident for anyone interested in the transformation of academic research, Radder notes that 'a critique of commodified science need not presuppose the existence of, and a wish to return to, a paradise lost'. The other chapters indicate further that the shift towards commodification has not been imposed from the outside alone. Things are hence complicated where the 'economization' of academia is concerned, and in this book are thankfully treated as such.

If, then, its authors hardly agree on what the problems are, let alone what the remedies should be, the volume does productively limit itself to a fairly precise issue. It is concerned with the broad dominance of market thinking throughout the university and in its operating environment, rather than focusing exclusively on commercialization – that is, on practices that draw private money into the universities. In short, it offers philosophical perspectives on research as intellectual activity. Its authors take great care to differentiate between distinct activities and phases of research, bringing to the debate a precision that can sometimes be lacking in sociological analyses, not to mention commercialized science in the medical field. Several authors discuss the differences between applied science, vocational teaching and technology transfer; others develop their analyses by reference to concepts from the philosophy of science; a few even use the vocabulary of science and technology policy. Many of the chapters mention the usual complaints about commercialization in higher education (huge class sizes, the corrosive effects of commercially driven recruitment, and so on) but do not dwell on them. Many of the authors do tell surprisingly gripping stories. Equally, all the contributors, however obliquely, also identify new cultural conventions within research institutions that could be expected to affect epistemic quality as well as to alter the relationship between university researchers and society at large. Scientific research, the volume's chapters suggest in different ways, has become extremely responsive to its environment, but what constitutes that environment – the public good, society or the community, or business – is very much up for debate.

Most of the examples in *The Commodification of Academic Research* are drawn from the life sciences; that is, from areas of enquiry whose relevance to human well-being is not in doubt, and where economic benefit and public good are easy to confuse. Although I am familiar with the critiques, and aware of some of the realities of contemporary laboratory research, I was still shocked by some of the descriptions of routine practices offered here: outright manipulation of research outputs (David B. Resnik), restricting (by various means) access to significant data (Sigrid Sterckx, James Robert Brown, Sabina Leonelli), and the old but nonetheless deplorable corruption of medical research by the pharmaceuticals industry (Albert W. Musschenga, Wim J. van der Steen and Vincent K.Y. Ho). The somewhat bewildering concluding chapter (Harry Kunneman) concerns psychiatry, making some hopeful observations about the complexity of human life and the inadequacy of currently dominant ways of thinking. As illuminating as these examples are, however, it is a shame that so little attention is paid

here, except in more abstract terms, to the fate of the humanities or social sciences. For, as Radder's introduction argues, commodification involves everyone in academia. What Steve Fuller sees as the mutation of academic work into 'knowledge management' applies across the disciplines, not only in those fields where patents, licences, royalties and profits operate (even if the influence of the commercializable sciences is felt more clearly by everyone). Nonetheless, the book's examples are certainly eye-opening as well as eyebrow-raising. For example, Henk van den Belt's chapter explicitly concludes by observing how scientists' 'freedom to operate' is curtailed under current conditions, a conclusion drawn in various ways by many of the other contributions also. Through discussing the practicalities and the justifications for intellectual property rights, the book presents the reader with a a variant of the tragedy of the anti-commons (as developed in M. Heller and R. Eisenberg's *Science* article 'Can Patents Deter Innovation? The Anticommons in Biomedical Research'), where an over-eager application and development of property rights results in existing resources remaining unused.

Whether because of a patent, or because a scientist can't speak freely over coffee at a conference for fear of competitors finding out too much, the capacities of science are clearly being stifled.

The tragedy, of course, touches us all. Many authors in *The Commodification of Academic Research* note this in passing, and some – particularly Mark B. Brown – develop arguments against it using concepts from ethics and political philosophy. Coming towards the end of the book, Brown's chapter presages, I hope, a continued and increasingly confident engagement with these issues that manages to speak to a readership outside of philosophy. The volume may lack the catchiness of critiques elsewhere, and it is a shame so little positive acknowledgement is given to the systematic and often very inventive and epistemologically challenging research in science and technology studies (STS) and the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK). But by training its focus so resolutely on the university itself and on research work, the book nevertheless manages something quite radical: an incipient self-critique of academic work as such.

In many institutions – and not just among the global elite – the academic life is potentially a wonderful life, at least for a particular kind of person. It is, at its best, a remarkably comfortable existence, in terms of both practical arrangements (with the significant caveat that it does involve routine exhaustion) and how easy it is to keep a clean conscience, while feeling you are doing something worthy and important. By the same token, many academics are highly ambitious and creative people, and they can be good entrepreneurs and svelte operators within academia's reward systems, whether based on esteem or money. Not every academic finds scientometrics an insulting term, and, as the book indicates, a good many are adept at reaping advantage through it. For those who are, however, unhappy with scientometrics, this book at least begins to seek better grounds for making judgements about what is actually going on in contemporary universities. Decision-making by number, by establishing audits if necessary to render all things measurable and comparable, has seized the public imagination to the point of hollowing out politics as well as academia. The early twenty-first century offers us endless opportunities to judge; quickly and harshly, if pointlessly. Other people's ballroom dancing or parenting skills are as easy to damn by text message as rail services or medical care via a feedback form. As such, it really is time that philosophers sought to engage more openly with the implications of the current transformation of universities into human-fuelled economic machines. In contrast to their close colleagues in the social sciences, philosophers of science appear, however, to have been slow in taking up the issues that the commodification of everything throws up, including the commodification of academic research. New tools and good arguments are needed to defend other ways of doing things, and, while it may be a lot to ask, who better to promote the benefits of clarity of thought and stubborn rigour than philosophers?

Eeva Berglund

Carry on campus

Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ and Oxford, 2010. 178 pp., £15.95 hb., 978 0 691 14064 3.

The publication of Lord Browne's report on higher education last October and the British government's subsequent proposals to implement unprecedented cuts to teaching funding, alongside the trebling of tuition fees, threatens to place English institutions in the unenviable position of being at the forefront of the ongoing neoliberal experiment with the university, potentially leapfrogging the USA in the scale and depth of its ambition to fully privatize higher education. As proved by the recent closure of Philosophy at Middlesex University (as well as a number of other humanities departments across Europe and the USA), this transformation has been aggressively pre-empted by many institutions, mindful of the cuts to public spending that have been announced in Greece, Italy, Ireland and California. It has already provoked a range of theoretical responses from those seeking to defend the value and importance of the humanities: most significantly, if not uniquely, threatened by these changes.

What often unites these responses is the desire for a recuperation of the public function of the humanities (and philosophy in particular) on the basis of its civic potential, a desire which establishes the agenda for debates about the value and necessity of such disciplines within education. This can be seen in Britain, for example, in the University of Warwick's appointment of the first Senior Fellow in the Public Understanding of Philosophy and in the formation of The Philosophy Shop, a not-for-profit organization encouraging and facilitating the teaching of philosophy in schools; as well as, internationally, in UNESCO's Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy from 2005, which

promotes the study of philosophy at all levels of education through activities such as the introduction of a World Philosophy Day. It is also evident in Martha Nussbaum's polemical tract, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*.

Nussbaum situates her intervention in the context of a 'world-wide crisis in education', but singles out British education (even prior to the Browne report) for exceptional criticism for remodelling its universities according to the narrowest principles of economic growth – leading to the outright closure of humanities departments or mergers with more directly vocational courses – and for subjugating academic research to the demands of 'impact' borrowed from the natural sciences. For Nussbaum, in contrast, philosophy and the humanities educate students to be critical of tradition and authority, endowing them with the rational autonomy necessary for democratic governance. Her model of education is one structured not 'for profit' but 'for democracy'. Problems emerge, however, as she reveals the extent of the values essential for democracy and therefore the myopia of her democratic vision. Although she injects a more strenuous cosmopolitanism into the account, her developmental narrative largely conforms to a bourgeois pedagogic theory of late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century liberalism, starting out from the psychological assumption of an essentially narcissistic infant and orientated towards the political task of producing autonomous, responsible and tolerant citizens necessary for a stable global democracy. Drawing predominantly on aspects of the work of Rousseau, Nussbaum assumes a 'widely shared narrative of human childhood' in which the 'struggle for freedom and equality must first of all be a struggle within each person, as compassion and respect contend against fear, greed, and narcissistic aggression'. The function of education is to manage the infantile narcissism that results from our awareness of such helplessness, so that individuals mature into well-rounded human beings. This favours a liberal social democracy with a strong emphasis on fundamental rights, protections for political liberty, freedom of speech, association and religious exercise, and an entitlement to education and health. Democratic educational institutions should therefore promote the virtues necessary for good citizenship in such a society: primarily the capacity for rational autonomy and critical thought, social cooperation and sympathetic imagination, and aesthetic, sensual and bodily confidence and integrity. For Nussbaum, philosophy, the humanities and the arts are the cornerstone of such an educational project and as such remain essential for democratic society.

Yet Nussbaum's political understanding is rooted in a classical liberalism whose limitations have already been exposed in Marx's critique of the secular division drawn between political community and civil society in what he calls the 'perfect democratic state'. Of her narrative of pedagogic development we might therefore ask, with Marx: what kind of emancipation is demanded and what conditions follow from this? For Nussbaum inequality and exploitation are misconceived as primarily psychological disorders of the soul, rather than the economic order of the social. She supposes it is our practical weakness and insecurity that make us desire and need mastery over others, such that children who can negotiate well in their environment have less need for servants to wait on them. Conversely, she regards collective action as entailing a *de*-humanization which results in democratic disorder, rather than being the product of it. The activity that takes place in the space between individuals for Nussbaum is not work or politics, but play: 'the ability to imagine what the experience of another might be like'.

Her paradigm is the liberal arts model of US university education, where students are obliged to take a range of subjects in the humanities. Nussbaum identifies the pressure to close humanities departments in UK institutions with the absence of such a liberal arts model, but admits it cannot easily be implemented outside the USA. The difficulty arises because the state funding of higher education in the USA (already proportionally more than the UK) is generously supplemented through philanthropic donations and endowments (a revenue stream significantly higher than in the UK, which has increased during the recession, aided by tax incentives). Indeed, one wonders whether this is the essence of the active, humane and democratic citizenship that Nussbaum seeks to promote: private individuals giving generously to public projects. At one point, she gratefully praises the 'cultivation of humanistic philanthropy and basically private-endowed structure of funding' in the USA, and acknowledges a number of institutions which are either supporters or beneficiaries of such philanthropy.

The association between the *humanities* and *philanthropy* – etymologically linked via the Latin translation of those subjects in a Greek education that generate the love of humanity (*philos anthropos*) – resurfaces in the neoclassicism of the German Enlightenment, and was imported into the United States during the 'Gilded Age' of post-Civil War industrialism (where philanthropy is evoked as the complement of patriotism). In the UK, these values and the culture of philanthropy they endorsed became superseded

by the labour movement and the introduction of the welfare state, and their continued existence in the USA is predicated on the relative absence of such a movement. Margaret Thatcher's and David Cameron's more recent recuperation of the Victorian values of self-reliance, personal responsibility and voluntarism draw on the same civic virtues as Nussbaum in this respect. However, *Not for Profit*'s insistence that a liberal arts education is not the vestige of past elitism or class privilege is contradicted by the realization that philanthropy and the liberal arts are conjoined in either a 'virtuous' or a 'vicious' circle in Nussbaum's thought, and therefore predicated on the accumulation of wealth within a capitalist system.

Yet bursaries and subsidies for the poorest students are only the exceptional fig leaf to the perpetuation of existing class divisions. Whilst the Browne review regards philanthropic gifts as an important part of the future of university funding, this dependence will exacerbate not dissolve such divisions. There is no doubt that the Russell Group of elite UK universities can extract donations from wealthy alumni and use this to subsidize access for students from poorer backgrounds. The latter will become a strategic necessity given the levy being proposed for institutions that charge the highest rate of tuition fees, but will nonetheless create a financial disincentive for such universities to widen access for poorer students beyond agreed minimum targets. Ex-polytechnic institutions, however, that serve students from mainly urban and typically socially deprived backgrounds (who cannot 'choose' their university, dependent as they are on access to accommodation, childcare and work) cannot rely on the same philanthropic generosity, yet will disproportionately shoulder the cost of subsidizing the education of these poorer students.

Nussbaum's defence of the humanities has an implicit recourse to philanthropy that is not contingent but predicated on an outmoded and reactionary dependence on private–public philanthropy now largely eliminated from European countries and perhaps recoverable only with the deepening of the socio-economic divide. Its recourse to the language of public good and the democratic, civic virtues of autonomous, critical thought and playful, imaginative sympathy are anachronistically redundant for the shifting concerns of institutions within late capitalist economies beyond the USA. Bill Readings's excellent 1997 study *The University in Ruins* (a work that regains a topical vitality now largely absent from Lyotard's notorious essay on *The Postmodern Condition*, on which Readings draws), examines the way the modern university of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was predicated on the construction of a national identity rooted in language, history, culture and the arts, necessitating the ideological reproduction of a bourgeois class consisting in lawyers, doctors and clergy but also public intellectuals. As the contemporary university seeks in turn to reproduce the social relations of the globalized marketplace of late capitalism, this kind of public discourse has been rendered largely redundant.

On the one hand, Nussbaum's defence of education for democracy threatens to introduce a qualitative distinction within the humanities that may be deployed against contemporary disciplines such as sonic arts and the study of film, television and culture (*Not for Profit* makes no mention of these subjects). On the other hand, its rhetorical appeal to notions of public good and democratic citizenship render it increasingly irrelevant to the interests of corporations and governments that appear to be abandoning even the semblance of democratic responsibility and political accountability. If there is an element of political realism to Nussbaum's patriotic insistence that it is liberal democracy that needs the humanities (and this is evident in her corollary argument that business requires the humanities too, if it is to avoid a corporate culture of 'yes-people' that inhibits innovation and economic success), it is nevertheless unclear whether the socio-economic interests of late capitalism will continue to need or even desire the democratic legitimacy and active citizenship she promotes (as opposed to, say, global consumers).

Indeed, it is possible to regard Nussbaum's manifesto, like UNESCO's comparable proclamations on the necessity of philosophy for a cosmopolitan democratic order, as the manifestation of a more general anxiety over the perceived threat to the liberal-democratic values of a cosmopolitan capitalism from the destabilizing influence of so-called religious and political 'fanaticism' over the last decade. Those who seek to oppose the neoliberal transformation of higher education would do well not to retreat to the reactionary humanism of the classical liberal model of the university, since the arguments in defence of the humanities proffered by advocates of the liberal arts anachronistically seek not to overcome but to perpetuate existing inequalities, insolvable by any vision of 'humane capitalism'. We should not, therefore, seek apologetically to justify the arts and humanities as necessary for the goal of transforming immature students into mature world citizens, but perhaps, first and foremost, defend an imperative to education as an (undialectical) image of unalienated labour.

Matthew Charles

Walk this way

Susan Hekman, *The Material of Knowledge: Feminist Disclosures*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2010. xi + 148 pp., £45.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 978 0 25335 467 9 hb., 978 0 25322 196 4 pb.

This book is intended to bear witness to what Hekman claims is a 'sea change in intellectual thought'. The sea change is primarily a move away from linguistic or social constructionism and towards a new form of materialism. The first four chapters of the book are intended to describe this sea change in, respectively, the philosophy of science, analytic philosophy, modern European philosophy and feminist thought. The fifth and final chapter is intended to extend the approach to the ontology of the social sciences.

Whilst Hekman clearly succeeds in making the case that there is, in some quarters, a growing discontent with constructionism, she only describes in rather broad strokes, but never fully develops, the alternative materialist view that she supports. One reason for this shortcoming, perhaps, is her tendency to present us with little cameo summaries of the views of those philosophers and cultural critics who represent such a sea change. These summaries give a staccato tempo to the book, which fails to gel into a sustained defence of a position. Hekman also fails to specify fully the kind of constructionism that she rejects, leaving it to the reader to figure out the commitments of the view. She explicitly claims that both postmodernism and the strong programme in the sociology of scientific knowledge exemplify this position, but she does not say what about these views makes them exemplars of constructionism. My suspicion is that Hekman's target is a fuzzy cluster of claims that do not have much in common. I also suspect that to some extent she relies on a caricature of the position she rejects – one for which constructionism is the view that there is nothing outside language, in the sense that there are no entities or events that have both physical properties and causal powers to affect human beings. Yet I doubt very much that anybody has ever consciously held this position. Rather, constructionism, when it has been coherently articulated, has taken a rather different form.

In this different form it is best understood as the view that there are no natural kinds – instead, all manners of typing things and events into kinds make a reference to human conceptualization. Being a football or a pound coin are clear examples of socially constructed kinds. The supporter of social constructionism is committed to the view that, for instance, being an electron, being water or being a tiger are also in some way socially constituted kinds. As it has often been remarked, the view is most plausible when applied to so-called laboratory science, such as particle physics or genetics, rather than to sciences that are mostly based on observation, such as some branches of astronomy. In these areas most if not all of the phenomena under study only occur under some specific conditions which involve the use of a variety of apparatuses. In so far as their mode of production is definitive of what they are, these phenomena too belong to socially constructed kinds.

Once constructionism is characterized in this manner it becomes apparent that Hekman actually aligns herself to some of its supporters. In the first chapter of this book she lists both Ian Hacking and Joseph Rouse as defenders of the view she endorses; it is instructive that they are both supporters of the constructionist view I have outlined above. Further, constructionism, so conceived, is not opposed to agential realism, at least if the latter is defined as the view that things and phenomena have causal powers which make them able, so to speak, to kick back. It is perfectly possible for a thing – a football, a pound coin – to belong to a socially constructed kind and have causal powers, as when the football hits one in the face or the pound coin causes the vending machine to dispense a chocolate bar.

If, then, despite Hekman's claims to the contrary, social constructionism is not really the opponent of the philosophers of science she endorses in the first chapter of this book, what is their real target? They reject a conception of science as being primarily in the business of producing accurate or true representations of reality. Because of their opposition to representationalism, Hekman takes this approach to indicate a move away from epistemology to ontology. I do not find this characterization of the shift to be very helpful since social constructionism is also primarily a theory about ontology. More helpful is Hekman's characterization of the same shift as a move towards a conception of knowledge in terms of practices. So conceived, natural science is first of all a bundle of practices for intervening upon, manipulating and interacting with reality. Importantly, at least in the case of Karen Barad, whose work Hekman discusses in Chapter 4, this reconception of science as a practice leads to a new formulation of

the ontology of natural science. For Barad the world is not primarily made up of things and their properties but of phenomena which are patterns of the world itself. Hence, we can characterize what is novel in the view that Hekman endorses not as a shift to ontology but as a shift to a special kind of ontology: one that has doings and phenomena as the most fundamental kinds of what there is.

It is this broad approach to the constitution of the natural world and to our knowledge of it that is shared by many of the heroes of this book, who include Bruno Latour, Andrew Pickering, Joseph Rouse, Nancy Tuana and Karen Barad. Hekman claims to find similar developments in both analytical and continental philosophy. Her exemplary figures here are, respectively, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michel Foucault. Contrary to some popular interpretations, Hekman argues that Wittgenstein is not best read as a supporter of idealism and that Foucault does not endorse linguistic constructionism. Both claims are plausible. It is hard, however, to see how her treatment of these authors contributes to the development of the new approach she endorses. Granted, Wittgenstein thought of language in terms of the many practices in which we use it. Speaking, writing and understanding are, for him, all complicated forms of doings. Nevertheless, these considerations alone do not seem to take Hekman further in the development of an account of knowledge as something we do, and of doings as the most fundamental ontological category.

The fourth and fifth chapters are the core of this book. There Hekman presents the positions of several feminist thinkers as especially significative of the new form of materialism she endorses. In her view, it is feminism that, above all else, is pushing in a new direction and is the prime mover of the intellectual sea change *The Material of Knowledge* is intended to highlight. Some recent feminist accounts of the body and of natural phenomena, on the one hand, and of identity and other social categories, on the other, are presented as the most fully developed versions of the new approach Hekman supports. They are characterized by an insistence on interactions (as opposed to linear monocausal explanations) between human beings and material phenomena, and on the reality of social categories such as identity.

In these chapters also Hekman hints at two significant features of her new materialism. The first is the idea that reality is able to show itself. This is what Hekman means by 'disclosure'. The second idea is not foregrounded by Hekman herself but is an important theme in some of the authors she champions. It concerns the pervasiveness of norms. Whilst Hekman, unfortunately, does not say a great deal about either idea, it is possible to see how they combine to give rise to a novel conception of the cognitive relation between human beings and reality. The best expression to date of this conception can be found in Barad's work, which is correctly identified by Hekman as truly groundbreaking. For Barad, human practices and actions are co-constituted with what they produce. Natural phenomena, as ways in which the world is, emerge as a result. In this way reality discloses itself by means of interventions that

constitute both the doer (which could be human or not) and what is being intervened in. Further, actions make the world determinate, that is to say conceptually articulated. In this way, the natural world itself is normative because it is constituted when, as a result of interventions, it comes to matter. It matters both in the sense that it becomes matter, since objects only come into existence as being parts of phenomena, and in the sense of becoming intelligible (conceptually articulated) because the intervention has constituted it as a pattern of normative significance.

In so far as Barad takes nature itself to be normative, she has produced a genuine alternative to the version of social constructionism which I have described at the beginning of this review. Her departure from this position consists in the idea that nature itself is the locus of norms; social constructionism, instead, tends to be committed to the view that only human beings are capable of creating conceptual articulations. Whilst, in my view, Hekman does not takes her reader beyond Barad's work, nevertheless this book offers a useful pointer in the direction of some new and exciting developments in feminist philosophy of science which certainly deserve to be explored further.

Alessandra Tanesini

What would Jesus deconstruct?

Dawne McCance, *Derrida on Religion: Thinker of Difference*, Equinox, London and Oakville CT, 2009. xvii + 122 pp., £45.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 978 1 84553 275 8 hb., 978 1 84553 276 5 pb.

Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008. xii + 256 pp., £34.50 hb., £18.50 pb., 978 0 23114 632 6 hb., 978 0 23114 633 3 pb.

Steven Shakespeare, *Derrida and Theology*, T&T Clark International (Continuum), London and New York, 2009. xi + 233 pp., £55.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 978 0 56718 664 5 hb., 978 0 56703 240 9 pb.

Perhaps the most prominent figure in the engagement between deconstruction and Christianity in the United States, John D. Caputo now approaches in his seminars at Syracuse the contemporary continental philosophies of Badiou, Laruelle, Malabou, Marion, Meillasoux, and others. However, if Caputo has thus sought to engage a turn towards 'speculative realism' or 'radical materialism' in recent European philosophy, in order (following Meillasoux's affirmation of a speculative grasp of reality in itself figured by the 'archifossil') to ask the question of whether différance is a principle of reality or of a 'correlation' with reality, it has also been in order to *return* to the relation between deconstruction and religion itself. The familiarity that now accompanies any such move – as yet another return to the theological – and the suspicion that it may perhaps have reached a certain point of exhaustion, is already made clear though by the publication of a number of survey books in Caputo's chosen field, including Steven Shakespeare's *Derrida and Theology* and Dawne McCance's brief *Derrida on Religion*. These are both texts that aim for comprehensiveness in terms of different religious (and to a lesser extent counter-religious) readings of deconstruction, with an essentially Christian rather than Judaic or Islamic focus, and for a delineation of Derridean texts that have subsisted such thinking. Both are, however, also defined, to some degree, by a circumspect retraction (at least, in their own judgement) from straightforwardly identifying the two discourses: it is Caputo who, generally speaking, stands as the strongest proponent not only of an identity between the two, but of the priority of their equation; as in his claim that '*deconstruction is structured like a religion*'.

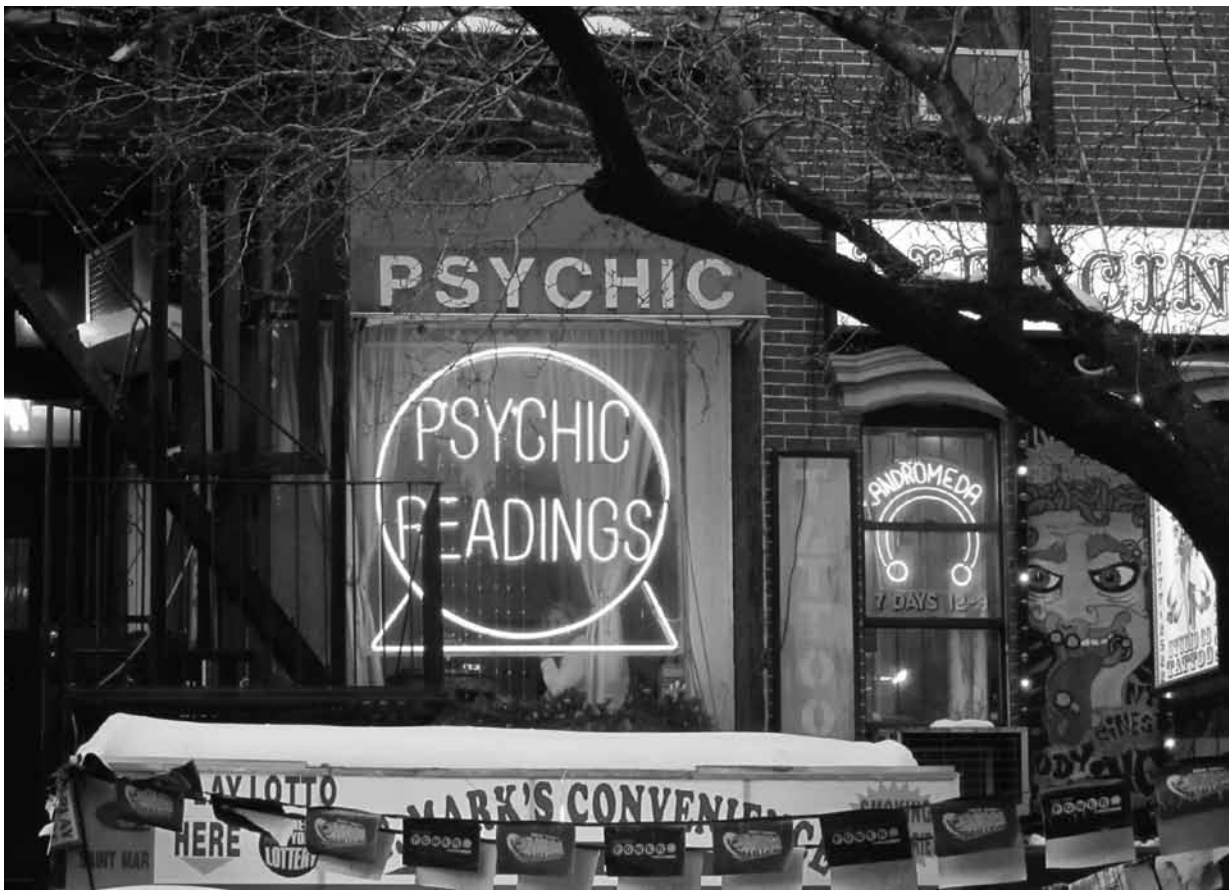
That the 'reality' under consideration in such texts is primarily immaterial is indicated by the ways in which both McCance and Shakespeare tend to approach deconstruction through Derrida's multiple 'nicknames' for différance (khora, pharmakon, gift, animality, etc.), which are then treated as more or less abstract *ideas* – that is, as objects of thought divested of their material dimensions or as schemas that might be attached to religious conceptuality. They thus obviate those aspects of deconstruction attending precisely to materialities of, for instance, writing, memory or social institutions. There is therefore very little in the way of an understanding of the materiality of language considered in terms of the politics of its institutional forms – as archival mnemotechnics – in either book. In this sense, both Shakespeare and McCance follow that purportedly 'deconstructive' conception of the religious, outlined in Caputo's own *On Religion* (2001), as an impossible reality beyond reality. In the 'religification' of deconstruction's 'impossible', if Badiou's Paul is an event of the universal, and Laruelle's Christ is a radical immanentist, Caputo's Jesus is then a deconstructor – in that sense given in his 2007 book entitled *What Would Jesus Deconstruct: The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church*. Yet while postmodernism, in its weakest and most relativist forms, might be germane to the Church, things get trickier where post-structuralism and, within it, deconstruction are concerned.

So, what *would* Jesus deconstruct? Despite the possibility of this question for Caputo, and the structural, philosophical and conceptual complexity of the copious writings such questions have produced in attempts to bring together deconstruction and religion, imagine the brevity of the Agony in the Garden had Jesus actually been so inclined: its monologue curtailed, God quickly dissolving in the recognition that the *image* of the transcendental other out there is just that – a spectral product of that other 'origin' of all things, différance. In fact, deconstruction precisely militates against the division of the sacred and profane governed by the classical opposition of the infinites, developed by Hegel in terms of the absolute infinite of the theological Idea and the endless series of the ad infinitum – an opposition that is maintained by theology, metaphysics and (in permutational or structural form) the majority of contemporary continental thought. Indeed, deconstruction poses what might be considered as an *axiomatic* resistance to such thought: if, as indicated in *Dissemination*, 'infinite différance

is finite', then the polar infinites are spectral products of that more archaic spectral in-differentiation – not transcendental, and neither empirical, but their condition of im-possibility, *and not the reverse*. Thus, to take Caputo's question literally, and seriously, would be to end traditional Christianity's sense of the origin at *its* origins, and thus to curtail an entire tradition before its own historical emergence.

Deconstruction, in this sense, and as a form of post-structuralism, develops the secular notion of language in structuralism given, for example, by Montessori in *The Absorbent Mind* (1967), where the 'mystical value' of language emerges from its separation of and construction of communities. The sense of something above and beyond the individual and group emerges from *langage*, rather than from any transcendental exteriority. If language, generally speaking, as the *Course in General Linguistics* points out, is finally unmasterable, then prohibitive laws regarding, for example, fixed gendered roles are, in deconstruction, to be understood as symptomatic of such meanings' essential instability. Thus, in its legalizing and normalizing function, 'God' is one of the names *relating* to (and latterly produced as a counter to) such slippage. But this does not mean that the name 'God' then *becomes* différance, other than in the sense that all religious thinking is itself deconstructible. That deconstruction does not obliterate the image of the absolute is clearly the lure for many of those discourses attached to it, but, put simply, the deconstructibility of religious systems of meaning does not entail that such systems, in their affirmation of the absolute qua primordial impossible, are themselves deconstructive, since such primordiality cannot be maintained. In so far as both McCance and Shakespeare intersect briefly with the issue of animality, it might thus be worth mentioning here the moment where the other is, for Derrida, sunk into the eyes of a cat: the *tout-autre* is not transcendentally beyond, and its distance, given species deconstruction, is not infinite. In terms of such problematized quotidianism, faith 'as such' must be seen as a product of those supposedly 'mediate' forms of exchange – communicative, familial, monetary and so on – that are said to be the secondary forms of the transcendental. In this situation, a 'passion' for the impossible *tout-autre* is in fact a form of nostalgia, and hence, as *Specters of Marx* would have it, a kind of endless mourning.

Concomitantly, attempts to connect deconstruction and religiosity often appear to operate through an endless efflorescence of detail, interstice or narrative turn – as if there was, at some point, some unspotted secret recess that would open back onto religion. Yet it hardly matters whether one turns to



'trace', 'pharmakon', or 'autoimmunity' – as Caputo has done by privileging 'the gift' – in order to unearth the possibility of a link between deconstruction and religion that might elsewhere be absent, because, in problematic conjunction with their difference, such terms also share a consistent logic; a logic that cannot but refuse a return to any traditional notion of the transcendental as origin. (If one did want to find some macrological meeting point between such exclusive discourses, it might perhaps be sought in claiming the co-originarity of difference and things – as Mark C. Taylor does – but such would no longer be deconstruction.) Nor, as it is not a form of relativism, can deconstruction be invoked in order to bolster postmodernist ideas concerning the proliferation of religions and gods, in a manner which extends the equation of religion and consumerism marked in William James's 'many finite gods' – a proliferation generated not essentially by the multiplicity of the social, but by the supposed ad infinitum of capital. The historical relationship between capital and certain understandings of religion is no doubt significant for opening up questions of the terminology that could be employed in describing religion's relation to deconstruction: as renewal, redefinition or colonization, territorialization, and so on. But such a relationship operates at a more general and systemic level: capital, like any other system, including religious systems of thought, cannot be other than characterized by the collapse of the ad infinitum and the absolute (as should be clear from the spectrality of the commodity elaborated in *Specters of Marx*). Furthermore, all systems (which function 'as languages', for Derrida, since there is no outside-text), whether 'natural' or 'cultural', 'material' or 'ideational', or, indeed 'mathematical', while different, are determined by the axiomatics of différance.

The relation between capital and the ad infinitum, as a figure of deferral, is of course key to Badiou's rejection of deconstruction, for one, which appears, on this account, as a discourse of endless procrastination, sunk into the encyclopaedia of existing knowledges that perpetuates the indeterminacies of bourgeois thought, and which contributes to a pathetic situation in which the existence of God cannot be ascertained. Such a characterization of deconstruction in terms of endless deferral is also, for example, a component of Malabou's and Meillasoux's thought, among many others. In this sense, the pseudo-deconstruction of an endless religious mourning for an impossible transcendental can only contribute towards the association of deconstruction not only with endless deferral but also with an endless miring in a stultified present and an inertial past. In so far as the current situation is characterized by some sense of a becoming-after of the 'theological turn' – and, through this, of an 'after' Derrida – and, hence, of a return to philosophy characterized by an affirmation of axiomatics and decision, this will no doubt serve only to contribute towards deconstruction's institutional and critical demise. Yet this would be to forget the axiomatic character of deconstruction in terms of that injunction 'infinite différance is finite', which might be thought of as a rule, if it were not also the undermining of sovereignty; a given posited violently, if it were not also the undoing of violence; a law, if this were not also justice. This crystalline consistency of the axiomatic has been maligned in some affirmations of deconstruction, as if it would deny or close off difference; but to ignore such consistency would be to singularize deconstruction's implacable and nonsynthetic tensions – here, then, between deferral and decision. The complexity of the axiomatic needs to be thought as (dis)conjunction (a complexification itself subject to necessary simplification) with simplicity.

Attention to the issue of decision clearly structures Mary-Jane Rubenstein's new book *Strange Wonder*, where *thaumazein* (roughly translatable as 'wonder') operates as a differential principle for the (non)origin of thought that both suspends and calls for judgement. Indeed, such attention is indicated in its chapter structure: Wonder (Socrates), Repetition (Heidegger), Openness (Levinas), Relation (Nancy) and Decision (Derrida). In its genuinely detailed, cogent and knowledgeable discussion of such figures, *Strange Wonder* is informed by an awareness of the overall structure of the infinites, but the way in which their problematic relation is seen to operate in a similar way from the beginning of the book to its end risks dehistoricization, just as, in some ways, the earlier chapters' conformity to a deconstructive logic appear presupposed by the methodology employed. For example: the Socrates reconstructed here through *Theaetetus*, as a proponent of wonder, might have been contrasted to those far more didactic aspects of the dialogues and the context of their socio-political formation.

The nature of the axiomatic as such is itself of course subject to history and difference. Thus axiomatics always require for their sense of the decisive a complex historical armature of explanatory context, discourse, knowledge (indeed, by inverse ratio: the more minimal, the more maximal), and thus they are strictly neither performative nor constative. Likewise, permitting a relation between the axiom and the performative and the decisive, for deconstruction, as

Rubenstein indicates, decision is fractured by opposing demands: to know everything of a situation and to act regardless. As Rubenstein glosses in the penultimate sections of the book: 'every decision must begin by accumulating as much knowledge as possible', but 'justice … must not wait'. If this describes the heteronomy of archive and action, reason and decision, history and the present, it also pushes towards the instant of decision as madness. Rubenstein's separation from the argument of Derrida's *The Gift of Death* occurs precisely over this point: 'Derrida flattens Kierkegaard's Abraham into a subject in this text by resolving his undecidability, installing him and God as discrete and sovereign subjects, and converting faith in the absurd into "faith" in the economy of heaven.' However, this is, it seems to me, not, as Rubenstein argues, a denial of *thaumazein*, but a refusal of the equation of the incalculable with the transcendental, and an opening for a reorientation of wonder's locations in the 'mediate': something like 'the archive', say, cannot be, for Derrida, a site of pure ratiocination – it too is differential, and thus also of the incalculable.

Rubenstein's traditionally philosophical attachment to thought as against mnemotechnics also characterizes, as indicated, both McCance's and Shakespeare's books. In this sense, these texts tend to reinscribe the privileges of philosophical idealism, which are, for Derrida, attached historically to phonocentrism. Derrida's practice, however, from the 'early' to the 'late' work, is always characterized not only by a deconstruction of thought per se, but by an attention to various ways in which 'materiality' might be implicated in such a deconstruction. In contradistinction to that association of deconstruction with endless deferral, it might be in that very institutional form associated with such delay – the archive, and its engagement, broadly thought – that its counter might be sought. If this is, for the Derrida of *Archive Fever* and of *Echographies*, for example, to plunge into the texts denied by *the* Book, the archive is not only of the past, but of the current – and, in its différance, concerns not just the archiving of the event, or the event of this archiving, but potentiates the event of the future: the possibility of thought, difference and decision. For, if différance differs and defers, it must differ from deferral. The failure to think this aspect of différance, in this context, is perhaps one of the great failures not only of deconstruction's detractors but of many of its adherents to date. It is thus still one of its great possible futures.

Sas Mays

Speak to me

Nick Couldry, *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism*, Sage, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, 2010. 184 pp., £60.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 978 1 84860 661 6 hb., 978 1 84860 662 3 pb.

The issue of voice – who is allowed to speak and what weight their account carries – is clearly crucial to politics, and has been brought into sharp focus once more by the student militancy at the end of 2010. I write this review in the wake of a furious online debate triggered by the Labour Party's promise to 'give a voice' to student protestors.

Nick Couldry's central claim in *Why Voice Matters* is that neoliberalism can be defined by its suppression of voice, which he characterizes as a 'reflexive form of agency'. The book draws upon a dizzying range of references, but Couldry's theory of voice is built from four main sources: Judith Butler, whose *Giving An Account of Oneself* is echoed in Couldry's definition of voice as 'the process of giving an account of one's life and its conditions'; Paul Ricoeur's theories of narrative; the economist and philosopher Amartya Sen's account of freedom; and political theorist Axel Honneth's neo-Hegelian concept of recognition. Couldry maintains that, under neoliberalism, the market has trumped all other narratives. Indeed, it has replaced narrative itself with what is presented as an inexorable and unanswerable 'logic': in the UK and the USA neoliberalism has been 'embedded as the "new politics", the "way things are", "the modern"'. In these conditions, the idea of 'neoliberal democracy' can only be oxymoronic, since it aims at the foreclosing of politics as such. Neoliberal ideologue Richard Posner makes this explicit, disdaining what he calls 'jawing in the agora', and celebrating political 'apathy' because it signals a broad acceptance of the 'system that we have'. This kind of bullish confidence might have taken a serious knock with the financial crises and bail-outs of 2008, Couldry argues, but neoliberalism is very far from disappearing. Governments, workplaces and the media are still controlled by neoliberal thinking, and as such the philosophical struggle against neoliberal ideology remains as urgent as ever.

Couldry gives a succinct and persuasive history of neoliberalism. The worry, though, is that he ends up opposing neoliberalism with a new form of liberalism: one in which, instead of being suppressed, 'voices' are allowed to speak. Yet this approach tends to underemphasise the ways in which ideology and the class structure not only stop people from speaking but

deny them the conditions for developing an 'account of themselves' in the first place. The very manner in which neoliberalism has naturalized its own programme means that it disappears as an object of experience and becomes the frame within which experience takes place. Couldry refers to the work of Richard Sennett, but it is not clear that the political value of a book like *The Corrosion of Character* consists in the way that it 'gives a voice' to those whom Sennett interviews. Instead, the narratives that Sennett records point to structural conditions of which they might only be vaguely aware.

Couldry goes out of his way to say that '*voice requires a material form which may be individual, collective or distributed*' (stress in the original), arguing that '"voice" as a value does not involve individualism'. Despite this – and perhaps inevitably given the way that Couldry constructs 'voice' as a concept – the book is unable to distance itself decisively from such individualism. Couldry wants to disassociate himself from the post-structuralist attack on interiority and agency, but it could be argued that, if anything, the post-structuralist assault on interiority didn't go far enough in the context of a neoliberalism that, as Couldry himself demonstrates, has colonized the 'private' realm of emotions. Throughout the book, Couldry is forced to keep distinguishing his version of 'voice' from the voices that neoliberal culture continually solicits. After all, isn't neoliberal corporate culture endlessly inviting us to participate, to 'join the debate', to make ourselves heard?

The most convincing and compelling section of *Why Voice Matters* – the chapter on media and reality television – reflects upon neoliberal culture's insistence on participation. Here, Couldry traces the 'overlaps between performance norms of contemporary work cultures and those of reality TV'. Drawing upon the research of the journalist Madeleine Bunting, Couldry shows how work increasingly involves the performance of a certain kind of emotion. Ann-Marie Stagg, chair of the UK Call Centre Managers Association, told Bunting that 'service sector employers are increasingly demanding that their employees deep act, work on and change their feelings to match the display required by the labour process.' Or, as the head of Human Resources at supermarket chain Asda more demotically put it,

> We do have the sense that people in the Asda family live the values – it's gregarious, off the wall, a bit wacky, flexible, family-minded, genuinely interested in people, respect for the individual, informal.

> That's what makes the business go – *we've gone into personality, a family and a community feel.*

Couldry draws parallels between these kind of demands and those imposed on participants in the reality-TV 'gamedoc' subgenre that includes shows such as *Big Brother*. Like workers in neoliberalized institutions, gamedoc contestants are subject to an absolute external authority; they are forced into paradoxical forms of performance which demand that they 'reveal their real selves'; they must always be 'positive'; and they are simultaneously required both to display 'team conformity' and to compete against one another.

For all the merits of this kind of analysis, Couldry didn't persuade me that his concept of 'voice' was crucial to the struggle against neoliberalism. That is partly because there is always a slightly strained quality to his account of voice itself. The synthesis of Sen, Honneth, Butler and Ricœur never quite achieves a crisp conceptual consistency. Another major problem is that Couldry uses the word 'voice' in an essentially metaphorical way. Despite the book's title being a play on Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, Couldry pays little attention to the materiality of voice: to how voices actually sound. In the UK, the charismatic power of both Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair – the ways in which they persuaded *and* irritated people – was bound up with accent and voice. Couldry's approach, however, continually collapses voice into narrative. In line with those orthodoxies in contemporary theory

which Alain Badiou has labelled 'democratic materialism', Couldry nevertheless insists on the importance of 'embodiment', with Descartes positioned in his familiar role as the master villain of Western philosophy. But some theorists of the voice, such as Mladen Dolar and Michel Chion, have argued that reflecting on the voice actually entails a form of dualism. (Dolar argues that, instead of being reducible to the body, the voice actually functions much like the pineal gland did for Descartes, as the means by which mind and body are related to one another.)

Couldry has some worthwhile suggestions about what a post-neoliberal politics might look like and how we might get there. He puts the emphasis on institutional change, but does not underestimate how difficult and prolonged the struggle to wrest media and political institutions from neoliberal control would have to be. As he puts it, 'Such institutional structures cannot … be changed overnight by will or imagination. But this should not discourage us from considering the "small acts" and new "habits" from which, even within those structures, a different form of political life can be built.'

Mark Fisher

No such thing

Randall Williams, *The Divided World: Human Rights and Its Violence*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2010. 192 pp., £45.00 hb., £15.00 pb., 978 0 81666 541 9 hb., 978 0 81666 542 6 pb.

It is hard to imagine how even the most ardent supporter of a human rights framework could fail to be challenged by Randall Williams's erudite portrayal of the epistemic violence of liberal international human rights discourse. *The Divided World* shows how human rights discourse is embedded in neocolonial relations that not only privilege interpretations of justice and injustice that derive from the global North, but also reinforce racial and class-based inequalities that underwrite the expansion of global capital. In doing so, the book fluidly connects a range of different examples from NGO practice to film and literature in order to capture the varied techniques of liberal ideological production, and while Williams mounts what is in many ways a radical critique, he does so with a clarity that will engage readers both sympathetic and not.

Williams begins by asking whether human rights can provide the basis for a progressive politics that can weigh in against the vagaries of global capitalism. His answer is a resounding 'no', arguing by contrast that the postwar institutions of international law, and the human rights framework they promulgate, are 'part and parcel of an imperialist directed reorganization of relations within and between contemporary state and social formations: the colonial, the neocolonial, and the neoimperial'. *The Divided World* thus claims that we need to be far more critical of the ways in which human rights frameworks generate and perpetuate injustice, and that we need new conceptual tools to map violence on a global scale and evolve strategies to resist it. The situation calls for what he terms a 'non-juridical reckoning' – that is, extra-legal strategies for acknowledging, naming and counteracting the complicity of international law and human rights discourse in grave injustices at the local and global levels.

Williams presents his most compelling case study in the first chapter, which recounts Nelson Mandela's disqualification from Amnesty International's list of prisoners of conscience. Mandela's disqualification was based on his refusal to disavow the use of violence as a legitimate tool against the South African apartheid regime. Amnesty International was determined to maintain its own credibility by only backing prisoners of conscience who were unambiguously non-violent. Williams mounts a convincing argument that the international NGO's apparent political neutrality was hence based on the necessity of historical decontextualization, and, more specifically, a decontextualization that obscured the specific experience of colonial oppression, whereby no platforms for non-violent negotiation existed. The effect was to depict Mandela (and, by extension, anti-colonial struggles more broadly) as open to violence in general, rather than to accept Mandela's more nuanced explication of the legitimacy of violence as a last resort. Williams effectively depicts the discrepancy between international normative orders that sanction state violence but disallow the taking up of arms in popular uprisings, regardless of how just the cause might be. He shows, moreover, how Amnesty's actions instituted the 'prisoner of conscience' as a subject category built on a normative order that is deeply tied to the racist and ongoing legacy of colonialism.

Other chapters carry his argument into a range of contexts, from the advocacy of a Northern-based International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (Chapter 2) to narratives built around liberal internationalism and colonial subjects in the films *Hotel Rwanda* and *Caché* (Chapter 3), to the extra-legal reckonings of injustice as depicted in the chronicle of

Argentinean commandos who assassinated the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle (Chapter 4). Williams is a fine storyteller and these highly diverse subjects, in terms of both genre and geography, are pulled together skilfully to make his overall case against human rights norms and for alternative ethical frameworks. No doubt, not everyone will agree with his reading of the narrative messages in the films and texts he discusses. His take on *Caché*, for instance, in my view understates the effect of the passivity which he identifies in the colonial subjects depicted – although they may be passive in the way Williams describes, the passivity also works in an active sense to maximize the psychological impact on the film's central 'northern' character. Elsewhere in the book, there is also a tendency to reify decolonization as a singular social struggle against a somewhat simplistic reading of Empire or US imperialism. While these are not the book's core focus, such references obscure a far more geographically complex and disaggregated operation of global power – something that similarly radical critiques posed by Hardt and Negri or the Autonomy of Migration scholars, for instance, have identified, if not always succeeded in portraying.

Williams's book is at its best in critiquing the false idealism of liberal internationalism, in insisting that there is in fact 'no such thing as non-violence', and radically unsettling adherence to absolute ethical principles. What is less well developed is his advocacy of alternatives that draw on the Zapatistas' philosophy of struggle ('from below and to the left') or Franz Fanon's defence of violence as a legitimate tool of anti-colonial resistance (Chapter 5). I couldn't help wondering whether these alternatives, taken to their extremes, would ultimately result in arrangements that avoided injustice, even though it may be injustice of different kinds, served out to different people. And this led me to wonder if the imperfection of international law and human rights norms (and it is indeed a *profound* imperfection) is enough to warrant its outright dismissal, thus rejecting the various progressive ends to which human rights norms can be put, as Williams himself acknowledges. The argument ultimately left me unsatisfied as to what is to be done; though this may be less a criticism of Williams than a reflection of the ambition of his project and the limitations of a single volume.

After reading Williams's book it becomes more difficult to dismiss those who are violent without asking what reasons they have to take up arms – an important critical task in today's context as ever. Williams compels his readers to consider whether an injunction to non-violence can be maintained consistently with the effects of liberal humanism that defends such an injunction.

Anne McNevin

World of warcraft

Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin, *War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2010. 300 pp., £55.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 0 74563 849 2 hb., 978 0 74563 850 8 pb.

Addressing the tangled multimedia web of reporting through which most of us experience conflicts such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, *War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War* is a timely book that facilitates our understanding of contemporary media ecology, along with our role as spectators and consumers within such ubiquitous media. While war coverage is an increasingly urgent topic in film, television and new media studies, Hoskins and O'Loughlin's interdisciplinary contribution to this line of inquiry allows for a mapping of the multifaceted ways in which reporting is conducted, observed and consumed. The authors begin with the example of the Crimean War, now understood as the first 'media war' given its dissemination through embedded front-line reporting as well as the photography, works of art and war-themed attractions that it spawned for curious and horrified nineteenth-century spectators. What Hoskins and O'Loughlin aim to uncover in their genealogy is precisely how the waging of warfare is shaped in such a way as to be 'always already' produced, banishing any hope of 'authentic' or 'original' experience.

If reporting on the Crimean War signalled a major shift in how war was experienced, in so far as it came to audiences though a fully fledged apparatus of front-line observation assisted by artists and photographers, the current possibility of crowd-sourced reporting has still more profound consequences. As the book aims to show, the mediatization of war through active as well as passive spectatorial practices now gone global gives rise to more diffuse relations between action and effect, and creates greater uncertainty for policymakers. The chaotic and subversive flow of information through an ever-widening spectrum of sources such as WikiLeaks makes flows impossible to control, while at the same time rendering information flows and their affects more radically reflexive. For example, attempts to prevent the diffusion of jihadist materials online ultimately has serious ramifications for the structure and functioning of the Internet as a whole, since any measures taken will invariably affect actors occupying any and all positions in the conflict. At the same time, the random and unexpected movement of people, things (money, viruses and so on) and images makes social order entirely contingent rather than given, while the resulting connections between ostensibly discrete phenomena set up unpredictable shock waves, and yield unexpected results.

The diffusion of war through an ever more complex mesh of everyday sources such as television news, YouTube, Facebook, podcasts, blogs and video games also raises questions concerning spectatorship. How cynical, for example, is the experience of warfare mediated though game interfaces such as *America's Army*, at once a massively multiplayer online game and a military recruitment tool? How 'genuine' is televisual reporting that relies on a presentational stylization of events, and a self-reflective mechanism that relies on celebrating stories already covered ('remember when we brought you…')? What does it mean to glean the details of human suffering by always necessarily observing what the media observe, and what role does mediation play in the process of compassion fatigue whereby audience sympathy for any given atrocity becomes measurable and predictable? Has the spectacle of suffering become a new source of pleasure, a sort of catharsis of being moved, and, therefore, a more insipid form of sentimental self-interest and voyeurism? In this case, shouldn't users now bear a 'vicarious responsibility' as partial collaborators when they click through to catch glimpses of horror that contribute to a particular experience of the sublime? And, finally, how are we to understand the memory of trauma when it becomes prosthetic, coded or templated on the basis of previously reported genocide or massacres?

While the authors address questions concerning media impact and spectatorship, their analysis of viewer input is equally detailed and troubling. As systems of mass media become porous – that is, interactive and open to any number of random inputs volunteered by audience members – the question of credibility becomes paramount. Throughout the book the authors return to the reporting on Saddam Hussein's execution, first in the official Iraqi government video, and then in the form of mobile phone footage that was uploaded to websites and sold on videotapes. While on the one hand the official report sought to convey a relatively orderly execution, and came with viewer warnings concerning violence, the mobile footage offered a more chaotic image of Hussein's

death, and the cautionary statements that had framed the official footage were dropped when the mobile video was picked up on mainstream television. Not only does this particular example raise questions of authenticity and credibility while alerting us to the potential of media to become weaponized within a larger political-military context, it also begs the question of acceptable levels of violence for viewers as they become both acclimatized to and fatigued by troubling events such as real-time executions.

Although *War and Media* covers a good deal of well-rehearsed territory – spectatorship, mediation, premediation, and so on – it also does so in a way that makes this a particularly useful volume. For example, while Jenkins, Grusin, Kline, De Peuter Kücklich and others have been writing for some time now about intermediality, group sourcing, premediation fan-based Internet content and the like, *War and Media* both narrows and broadens currently available accounts. By providing a thoroughgoing and meticulous study of one particular kind of reporting from a number of perspectives, and by incorporating a variety of disciplinary insights, the book is able to revisit familiar topics while moving us further into the digital age.

Joyce Goggin

An ordinary philosopher

Stanley Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2010. 548pp., £31.50 hb., 978 0 80477 014 9.

What is the story of a life? And where is the place and what is the form in which to tell it? These are questions given a careful hearing in Stanley Cavell's recently published autobiography. Renowned as one of the most influential and prolific of contemporary American philosophers, Cavell has moved in his meditations from Shakespeare's *Othello* to the late poetry of Wallace Stevens to the dance routines of Fred Astaire. In a philosophical career spanning sixty years, this idiosyncratic philosophical voice has inspired both cultish devotion and disciplinary censure. *Little Did I Know* is, in part, an accounting for this idiosyncrasy. Given Cavell's career-long obsession with avoidance, with the disappointingly human tendency always to shrink from offering accounts of ourselves, *blocking* ourselves from exposure, this accounting is doubly significant.

Cavell grew up in Atlanta and Sacramento, California. The only child of an artistic mother and an entrepreneurial father, his childhood was marked by constant movement and upheaval as his father's business ventures consistently failed. Of every place he moved to with his parents, it seemed to the young Cavell that 'we existed with bags packed and stuff near our hands, poised for departure'. Something of this itinerant upbringing translated to his initial searches for a profession, an intellectual and artistic home. Cavell first studied at Juilliard, before giving up music for philosophy. He enrolled in UCLA as a 'special student' then progressed to Harvard, where he found his philosophical calling in the lectures of the visiting Oxford professor John Langshaw Austin. The significance of Austin in Cavell's philosophical development cannot be overestimated. It was, *Little Did I Know* suggests, an influence of life-changing, indeed life-giving, proportion. Austin's stress on the philosophical importance of the ordinary, of careful attention to our words as and when we say them, registered for Cavell as morally and epistemologically crucial touchstones for life and learning. The ordinary-language philosopher attends to words and phrases in contrast to language that is, as Wittgenstein says, merely 'idling'; language theoretically spinning its wheels outside any actual language games that people engage in with each other, in actual things they do in the world. As Cavell practises it, in readings of Shakespeare, Beckett, Emerson, Thoreau, Capra, Astaire and Austen, ordinary-language criticism attends to the specific plight of mind and language within which a human being gives voice to his condition, to the importance of *what we say when*. Even Cavell's choice of autobiographical form in *Little Did I Know* (dating his depiction of events as diary entries) takes guidance from this philosophical inheritance, faithfully remembering Austin's emphasis on the context of every utterance.

Returning philosophy to the concerns of ordinary human persons and showing how it might speak across disciplinary lines of inquiry are not easy tasks, and it is characteristic that Cavell should struggle with his own procedures. Straining to allow even the most incomplete idea or figuration its due and careful elaboration, his philosophy has always held itself open to the fear of inexpressiveness and the anxiety of exposure. Cavell is nonetheless aware of the dangers of over-expression, the pitfalls of obscurity, the many charges (first voiced by Austin, interestingly, who commented that an early prose extract of Cavell's was 'a bit purple') of philosophical self-indulgence. Finding a voice of his own

to live with, or to live by, is Cavell's own accounting for the heavy difficulty and sometime *resistance* of his prose, which is not simply explained, as Cavell suspects of Blanchot (or as Cavell's own critics might claim), by the philosopher's 'horror of understanding'. *Little Did I Know* both acknowledges this self-imposed difficulty and works to find a way beyond it.

In *Little Did I Know*, the awkwardness of living (a fact Cavell associates with the accidentally decisive) is registered at several moments. Cavell sees human lives as inherently interrupted, things chronically occurring at unripe times or in the wrong tempo. He tells the story of his father, then eighty-three, waking up after heart surgery and asking about all the commotion in the hospital room. It's ugly, his father says, to run around as if an old man's death were an emergency and not a natural occurrence. Cavell then wonders whether his father might question his philosopher son on the responsibility of a doctor, a wife, or any family member. This is, after all, the concluding paragraph of a memoir encouraging its reader to expect some form of reconciliation between father and son. Cavell had already praised his three children for 'curing, or curbing, this vindictiveness, this recurring self-destructive longing to consign his father to hell'. This father, however, falls back to sleep; this son walks out to find his mother. There is no rumination on life and death, no dialectical exchange on duty. Perhaps Cavell offers this final vignette as a kind of empty punchline, a commentary on the perpetual lack of sophistication in everyday events.

The great themes of Cavell's career – avoidance, disappointment, exile, fradulence, grace, redemption, therapy, the ordinary – are taken up and taken further in this, his most recent attempt at autobiography. The first attempt was occasioned by the foreword to his 1994 *A Pitch of Philosophy*. Of necessity more pointed and more concise than *Little Did I Know*, this earlier work was but one of many that urged philosophical writing, in general, to follow lines of the personal and the intimately revelatory. Indeed, we might say that Cavell's writing has always been for and from the private imagination. A tone of moral urgency (Cavell describes the attendant state of mind as one of 'psychic emergency') permeates *Little Did I Know*. There is also a quiet poetry to the book. Writing of his six-year-old daughter, and his own sense of inadequacy as a divorced parent, Cavell pictures father and daughter 'together lifting the mild sadness for the wind to take out of our hands'. Reminiscences of his children are touching and revelatory, perhaps the most instructive comments, indeed, on the philosopher's relationship with his own parents. What is perhaps most striking is the enlivening sense that the philosopher has, in his own words, finally escaped from his work's judgement of him. It would be misleading to suggest that the judgement of others (though painful to witness) had ever constrained his philosophical voice. Still, perhaps Cavell needed the full licence of autobiography in order to move surely into the poetic register anticipated by *The Senses of Walden* (1972). There, as in *Little Did I Know*, the importance of accounting for oneself, of returning one's own actions to the grounds and tribunals of the everyday, is itself offered to others as a philosophical gift. Cavell's memoir is the private achievement of a single figure, passing by 'just this edge of things in just this broken light'; but, most crucially, in fully *meaning* what it says, it also enters a claim to speak for others.

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