

# The cunning of capital explained?

Neil Davidson, *How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2012, xxi + 812 pp., £22.99 pb., 978 1 60846 067 0.

In 'The Notion of Bourgeois Revolution' (1976) Perry Anderson wrote: 'Among the concepts traditionally associated with historical materialism, few have been so problematic and contested as that of bourgeois revolution.' Neil Davidson's book may be considered a long and exhaustive response to Anderson's more punctual reflection, in which he sets out to write the concept's life history – from beginning to end – while simultaneously recovering both its analytic saliency and its political relevance. Fundamental to Davidson's argument is thus not only the past historical significance of *bourgeois* revolution – that is, its social content in its various manifestations or forms – but also the continuing significance today of *revolution* itself, the more or less explicit political point of the book.

Anderson's earlier essay sets out a condensed history of the idea of 'bourgeois revolution', in which, for various reasons, it is always threatening to fall apart. This in part explains the main topics of Davidson's expanded monumental version. Anderson suggests, for example, that Marx and Engels rarely use the term, despite witnessing, after the failures of the popular revolts in Europe of 1848, the 'actual political revolutions of their time that inaugurated a new epoch in the life of capital': the Risorgimento in Italy, the Unification of Germany under Bismarck, the American Civil War and the Meiji Restoration in Japan that took place between the late 1850s and early 1870s. This is because, Anderson suggests, they were more interested in identifying the possibilities for a proletarian revolution; precisely because of the *bourgeois* failures of 1848. Indeed, the notion only re-emerges after their deaths, towards the beginning of the twentieth century (in the context of the failed 1905 anti-absolutist revolution in Russia, in particular), in the form of a 'retro-projection whose model was the proletarian revolution'. In this regard, it becomes a concept whose temporality is paradoxically over-coded by an emergent Bolshevism: even past bourgeois revolutions are read through a hoped-for future socialist one. Importantly, however, it is precisely out of this sequence of events from 1848 to 1905 that the idea of 'permanent revolution' – first

hinted at by Marx, later developed by Trotsky, and so important to Davidson's account – emerges.

Moreover, Anderson continues, when past bourgeois revolutions actually become the object of independent inquiry by professional Marxist historians, 'it proved difficult to locate an unequivocally bourgeois class, direct carrier of an ascendant capitalist mode of production, as the central subject of these upheavals'. This same difficulty led to an outright rejection of the existence of such a subject and epochal process by the various Cold War revisionisms that subsequently emerged in the UK, France and the USA; notably in the work of Hugh Trevor-Roper, for the English case, and Alfred Cobban and François Furet, for the French. These, Davidson insists, even influenced recent Marxist historiography, such as that of Anderson himself, but especially the work of Robert Brenner, Ellen Meiksins Wood and Benno Teschke, all associated with what has become known as 'political Marxism'. The latter (including Anderson in this respect) constitute the principal objects of Davidson's criticism – and ire, when it comes to Wood. An added effect of such revisionist interventions into history, Davidson maintains, is to question the existence of the subjective historical class 'consciousness' underpinning the notion of revolution itself, resulting in the undermining of the sense of agency it requires, and leading, for example, to its replacement by the socially weaker term of political 'rebellion'. Translated into the language of political Marxism: there may have been a *transition* to capitalism, there may even have been *political* revolutions in which regimes were indeed changed, but such change was achieved without *social* revolution – the sense of the bourgeois revolution that Davidson defends and attempts to reconstruct. For political Marxism, forms of capital accumulation either pre-existed revolution (as in England) or did not exist in ways sufficiently to determine it (as in France); and in any case, for both the bourgeoisie – as a social class (representing capital) *in* and *for itself* – was politically irrelevant. Such questioning of the bourgeois subject of revolution further entails the dis- or re-aligning of the political and the social dimensions of revolution with regard to the

state: who is wielding power, and for what, if *not* the bourgeoisie for its own purposes?

The problem, then, is not merely that in the relation between concept and thing there is always something left over, as in Adorno's version of dialectical thought, but that here the 'thing' – the social processes involved in epochal historical transformation – threatens to break its concept – 'revolution' – apart altogether, and reveal it as a mere subsuming imposition of thought. Alert to this problem already in 1976, Anderson produced his own 'alternative approach' to the conceptualization of bourgeois revolutions: an attempt, he says, 'to construct the theoretical



concept before exploring its historical incarnations'. Anderson adopted Althusser's thoughts on the revolutionary 'conjuncture' (Lenin's 'concrete situation') and succinctly suggested a quartet of 'necessary – not contingent – "overdeterminations"' of bourgeois revolutions: an overdetermination *from above*, an overdetermination *from below*, an overdetermination *from within*, and an overdetermination *from without*.

Although Davidson repeatedly refers to and leans upon Anderson's essay, he does not mention his theoretical construction as such. This is because, although he agrees with many of the criticisms aimed at orthodox Marxist history (which he conceives as a Stalinist production) that the post-revisionist heterodox version articulate, he no doubt rejects Anderson's theoretical formalism. The effect of this formalism – via the anti-historicist structuralism of Althusser's notion of 'conjuncture' – is both to over-politicize and de-historicize what Davidson, inspired rather by E.P. Thompson, conceives as the 'great arch' of capital's *social* history and its critical – and

necessarily lengthy – reconstruction (which his own work painstakingly assumes): an attempt to derive the concept of bourgeois revolution immanently, and dialectically, from its history, which includes the history of its necessary multiple overdetermination. Indeed, it is the latter that in large measure produces the conceptual contents of Davidson's own version of 'bourgeois revolution'. Be that as it may, Anderson's elegant suggestion acts as a useful conceptual mirror or counterpoint through which to review Davidson's argument.

*How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?* has four parts, and is composed in the classical form of a spiral, returning, almost in the premodern sense of 'revolution', to its point of departure, but only so as then – almost in the modern sense of 'revolution' – to transcend it. As the dialectical shape suggests, Davidson's working through is thus also marked by substantial repetition (which threatens over its hundreds of crammed pages so to wear the reader down as to welcome the site of its epilogue, a Scottish cemetery, from which it offers a final summary). The excellent first part sets out the emergence and subsequent disavowal of the modern bourgeois concept of social revolution against the background of the Dutch, English and French Revolutions via the writings of Hobbes, Locke and, most notably for the thinking of the social contents of capitalist transformation in England and France, James Harrington and Antoine Barnave, as well as Burke – revisionism's precursor – where, of course, the disavowal of revolution sets it. Crucial to the modern sense of revolution are the ideas of property, the right to resist absolutist monarchy (which marks the Dutch Revolution as an anti-imperial struggle), and thinking history as a line of development or secular progress through stages – in view, particularly, of the appearance of a society whose wealth is increasingly defined by commerce.

Ideologically, this period is marked by a shift from thinking history and 'revolution' through religion (and the Reformation) in the United Provinces and England to its increasingly 'scientific' interpretation in France – with the history of Scotland providing a useful counter-example to England throughout in these regards, as well as an illuminating example of uneven development. This history of the emergence and waning of bourgeois revolution is repeated over parts two and three. These are dedicated, first, to the historical interpretations of classical Marxism – from Marx and Engels, to the emergence of Bolshevism (the 'Russian Crucible'), its Stalinist encoding as 'orthodoxy' and critical reactions to it (by Trotsky,

of course, but most notably those by Gramsci, Benjamin and, most surprisingly and welcome, the young Lukács); and second, to various revisionist and post-revisionist alternatives, including world systems theory (very briefly), the above-mentioned political Marxism (most importantly), and Davidson's preferred version: 'consequentialism'. The latter then provides the background to the final part of the book in which Davidson reconstructs the concept of bourgeois revolution through its historical rewriting via the notions of passive and permanent revolutions; including the latter also in a 'deflected' form, exemplified in various kinds of 'state capitalisms': Soviet, Chinese, Cuban and so on.

The difficulty with Davidson's approach lies in its tiresome length. More positive are the ways in which it mines the Marxist tradition conceptually: instead of 'overdetermination from above', for example, we get 'passive revolution', the product here of the sequence from 1848 to the 1920s in Italy, rather than in Germany and Russia that produced, as mentioned above, the related concept of 'permanent revolution' – a possible version of what Anderson refers to as 'overdetermination from below'. For Gramsci, the term 'passive revolution' (intimately tied to his notion of 'hegemony') primarily refers to those cases, unlike the French one in his view, in which reforms leading to the consolidation of competitive capital accumulation and free wage labour (the key defining characteristics of the capitalist mode of production for Davidson) are introduced from above, mainly by non-bourgeois class and state formations – those witnessed but left uncommented upon by Marx and Engels: the Risorgimento in Italy, Bismarck's Germany and Meiji Japan. As in Anderson's version of overdetermination, this process of social transformation is politically advanced by a compromise alliance between semi-feudal and proto-capitalist 'agrarian rather than urban classes'. Passive revolution also provides an important key to the consequentialist approach outlined by Davidson, for from a Gramscian perspective the 'non-revolutionary road' (rather than the 'revolutionary road' exemplified by England and France in the orthodox accounts) becomes the modular form of bourgeois revolution, as analysed in the work of Geoff Eley on Bismarck and the *Junker*-led 'German Road' to capitalism. This, it seems to me, is a fundamentally important point. Despite Davidson's own repeated resort to the rhetoric of economic 'backwardness', it potentially contributes to the de-centring of Marxism's own internalization of bourgeois developmentalism in the name of 'revolution'.

Most important, from the consequentialist point of view Davidson adopts, however, is that the notion of the historical necessity of a preformed revolutionary bourgeois consciousness with a project – so important to the revisionist and political Marxist critique – is also undermined: the social logic of capital accumulation itself takes on this role, encouraging its state administration by non-capitalist classes. This is the sense in which an apparently absolutist state is also (or *really*) – in its consequences – a bourgeois state.

In this respect, the plebeian content of the English and French Revolutions further relativizes bourgeois agency, whilst nevertheless creating the conditions for the political anxiety experienced by the exploiting (feudal, tributary and capitalist) classes that produced the need for reformist passive 'revolution' from above in their attempt to forestall the dangers of capitalist social transformation being overtaken by collectivist democratizing demands. This is Anderson's overdetermination 'from below' of the bourgeois revolutions: the 'pervasive presence of popular classes' in them made up of 'peasants' and, with the increasing development of industrial capitalism, 'propertyless wage-earners'. As noted above, this is the context for the invention of the concept of 'permanent revolution' that, arguably, constitutes passive revolution's reverse side – overdetermination from above *and* from below – both of which Davidson tracks throughout *How Revolutionary*, including the latter in its 'deflected' form. The concept of 'permanent revolution' thus emerges (in Marx and Engels), as we have seen, with the perceived failure of bourgeois revolutions in 1848; and is further systematized – after the passive revolutions mentioned above, on the one hand, and the brief experience of working-class government during the Paris Commune, on the other – as a result of the experience of the failed bourgeois overthrow of absolutism in Russia in 1905.

As is well known, this is the moment in which Trotsky, Lenin and the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party begin to theorize the *bourgeois tasks* (in Russia, essentially the 'freeing' of the serfs, but also including forms of national unification and democratization in other contexts) to be carried out and 'consummated' by the socialist revolution of the peasantry and proletariat. Such is the process begun by the Russian Revolution in 1917, which, with the 'self-annihilation' of Bolshevism after the death of Lenin and the rise of Stalin, Davidson argues (pushing his own party line), was eventually 'deflected' ('back') into state capitalism. Similar processes are at work in both China and

Cuba, but in these cases, Davidson controversially suggests, there is no 'deflection' back of permanent revolution since, unlike in the case of Russia, the revolutions in these countries did not involve a socialist transformation of the mode of production, merely a political change in regime of capitalist accumulation. (In *How Revolutionary*, 'Che' Guevara, for all his faults that are not mentioned here – his version of the 'new man' etc. – is portrayed as a company manager.)

There is no doubt much to question in Davidson's account of these historical processes, especially in so far as the notion of state capitalism is concerned. What is clear, however, is that in his renewed conceptualization of 'bourgeois revolution', there emerges a delinking of the social logics of capital accumulation from the bourgeoisie as a class, which maps more or less directly onto Anderson's quartet of overdeterminations. Overdetermination 'from within' and 'from without' have similar effects: the apparent autonomy – or abstraction – of capital from given class or political forms that seemed necessary to it. This reminds us, on the one hand, of the specificity of capitalist forms of exploitation (formally freed from the political compulsion essential to other modes of production) and, on the other, of the paradoxically real spectrality of its social inscription (as the fetishism of commodities). Capital may be a social relation, but it is also a 'thing', a self-valorizing 'automatic fetish' – as Marx says when analysing interest-bearing capital. In other words, the 'cunning' of capital's rule as it (in the inverted Hegelian sense of reason's 'unintended consequences') imposes itself qua subjectivizing machine even through the bourgeoisie's *others*. This enigmatic fact perhaps begins to explain the route of thinkers like Ernesto Laclau *out* of orthodox Marxism via the political implications of ideas such as 'permanent revolution'. Similarly, as Davidson notes, the work of Jairus Banaji on the history of hybrid 'trajectories of accumulation' into capitalism insists on the importance of dis-identifying relations of production with forms of exploitation, such that the Eurocentric emphasis on the defining character of the wage form – as in political Marxism – or on representing capital as essentially industrial is questioned. This is an important idea in the context of the financialization of accumulation today. The bourgeoisie in both Davidson's and Anderson's accounts is the least homogenous of classes when compared to the aristocracy and the proletariat: 'the pure circle of capital proper is virtually always too narrow to act alone as class force ... it must endow itself with another gravitational weight ... in some measure exterior to it.' This 'mass'

of administrators and functionaries – what Gramsci might have called 'organic intellectuals' – that depend on and serve capital, and that Davidson (leaning on Anderson, but referencing Hal Draper) refers to as the bourgeois 'penumbra' of the capitalist class proper, can be thought of as Anderson's overdetermination 'from within'.

According to Davidson, Trotsky's idea of 'uneven and combined development' is the most important concept of the twentieth century. It is not all that clear why, since all it seems to add to well-established accounts of uneven capitalist development, both within and between capitals and nations, is that they are mutually determining. In this precise sense of a combination, however, it does provide the means through which Davidson's concept of bourgeois revolution, unlike Anderson's, comes together *as a concept* in all its historicity: this version of 'overdetermination from without' combines all the others, especially 'passive revolution' (from above) and 'permanent revolution' (from below), as they are mutually mediated in each and every particular 'within'. At this point, finally, it is important to note that, against the grain of political Marxism, Davidson does attempt to reinstall a certain bourgeois revolutionary consciousness back into his concept, so that the *process* of transition to capitalism does not completely erase the violent *moment* of political change at the level of the state. In the light, for example, of Maurice Dobbs's and Rodney Hilton's work on the differentiation of the peasantry in England into a proto-bourgeois class (as well as a proletarianized one), he suggests the presence of a revolutionary class consciousness in the early Dutch and English Revolutions, which, however, for reasons of uneven and combined development, then wanes and is reconfigured in passive and permanent forms – except for the bourgeois revolution of the North against slavery in the US South, arguably, Davidson suggests, the most bourgeois and revolutionary of them all

Davidson emplots this history of revolutionary change into a philosophical narrative of the increasing adequation of consciousness to historical circumstances that makes it relevant to the political present; defined here by the *end* of the era of bourgeois revolutions, be they passive or permanent. According to this story, the transition from slavery to feudalism happens in ways that are free of class-conscious agency, whilst the bourgeois revolution that punctuates the transition from feudalism to capitalism has, as we have seen, *some*. The lesson here is that the socialist revolution has to be made,

Davidson suggests, rediscovering his orthodoxy, by a working class that is fully conscious of itself and its mission to make a society free of the exploitation that defined the others. The party-form, he weakly insists, is fundamental to its realization. Despite the obvious Hegelian source of such an idealist story, it appears ironically that in reconstructing it historically in considerable detail, Davidson may have momentarily forgotten the historical ‘cunning’ of capital so fundamental to his own concept.

*How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?* is a rich and comprehensive work of history and theory. It is one of a set of important but more or less defensive works of Marxism recently published by Haymarket Books, which are marked by times of crisis. On the one hand, and most obviously, they are marked by the ongoing crisis of capitalism; on the other, less obviously, but equally actually, they are marked by a crisis within existing forms of opposition to it, including that of the party to which Davidson belongs (the Socialist Workers Party). Like *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (2009) by Peter D. Thomas and *History as Theory: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation* (2010) by Jairus Banaji, it is characterized not only by a shared critique of the work of Perry Anderson, but also by both a marshalling of existing resources and an attempt at critically generating new ideas out of new versions of old ones – without the conceptual adventure required of a genuine contemporaneity. Thomas convincingly renovates and reconfigures Gramsci’s idea of ‘hegemonic apparatus’ – a valuable task, in the manner of Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s *Gramsci and the State* (1975) – whilst, less convincingly, arguing for the contemporary political relevance of Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis.

Similarly, Banaji’s excellent collection of heterodox essays reconfigures the historical relations between capital, accumulation and exploitation in inventive and analytically important ways, but in the process also threatens so to extend the geographical and temporal limits of capitalism as a historical epoch into the past as to make it almost impossible to work with. (There the source of the book’s weakness is, paradoxically, its theoretical strength.) For his part, Davidson insists on presenting his account of ‘bourgeois revolution’, both as concept and reality, as an education in historical materialism, engaging over and over again with key debates from its history. This includes, like many before him, being nobbled by Marx’s discussion of the relative determining weight of the forces and relations of production in the 1959

‘Preface’. Such a methodology provides for both the book’s highs (the recovery of Lukács’s reflections on uneven development and revolution, for example) and lows (an overt Trotskyism which even threatens to consume Walter Benjamin, for example). In this respect, the size of the book – and if the page format were the same as the rest of the series, it would extend to over 1,000 pages – is a reflection of the breadth and depth of the crises (social, political, intellectual) that it internalizes in the very structure of its composition.

John Kraniauskas

## And the ship sails on

Alain Badiou, *Cinema*, Polity, Cambridge, 2013.  
320 pp., £55.00 hb., £17.99 pb., 978 0 74565 567 3 hb.,  
978 0 74565 568 0 pb.

To call a book simply *Cinema* is to frame its contents as a contribution to the theorization of cinema, and thus, for a certain readership, to identify it as something other than film criticism. It is, in other words, to announce its apparent participation in, or proximity to, film theory. In an interview conducted by a former editor-in-chief of *Cahiers du cinéma*, Antoine de Baecque, for the original publication in French, Badiou himself seems however, by turns, relatively modest and occasionally self-congratulatory as regards any claim to make a major intervention in the field. His entertaining and informative account of his largely solitary *cinéphilie* of the 1950s and 1960s, as a ‘young provincial’ frequenting the Cinémathèque (a few doors away at that time from the École Normale Supérieure on the rue d’Ulm), through to his work as a ‘heathen’ infiltrating the Catholic journal *Vin nouveau*, and on to his engagement with cinema through politics, contains both moments of self-regarding comedy as well as statements which identify several of the key tropes that will recur throughout the volume. Hence, of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Film Socialisme*, in which Badiou plays himself in a scene aboard a cruise ship, he comments: ‘in just a few seconds, in the scene where I’m working at the desk, I’ve never before seen images where I am so much myself. So I’m pleased with the mode of presence attributed to me in that shot’. The observation has its more obviously serious counterpart in a comment made later on in the interview when Badiou states that Godard’s invitation to appear in the film touched him, ‘[b]ecause

it seems to mean that I'm part of the present time, in a film that incidentally deals with the hubbub of the world'. At face value both comments seem innocuous enough, suggesting a philosopher flattered by a director he has long admired, and who is indeed of central importance to several of the texts collected here. Taken together, however, the two comments distil several core concerns of Badiou's *Cinema* as a whole. In particular, what apparently pleases Badiou most is that Godard makes him part of that 'contemporary' which precisely furnishes the material that it is the role of cinema to 'purify'.

In the thirty-one texts making up the book, of disparate length, significance and occasion (several are lectures or seminars transcribed), cinema is defined in many different ways. It is, inter alia, and in no particular order, an art of 'general assembly', an art of 'the end of metaphysics', an art of identification; it operates via 'subtraction' and 'purification'; it comprises 'great figures of humanity in action', and, in its effectuation of a 'movement from love to politics', is an art in which one can, Badiou implies, locate a potential forum within which several of his own philosophical concepts might find themselves reflected or refracted. Cinema is an art of general assembly in so far as it is, in Badiou's terms, a mass art; it is a democratic art as opposed to an aristocratic art such as painting or music (although Badiou will absolutely insist on excluding what is referred to as 'the moaning of pop music'). Cinema, he tells us repeatedly, is something one goes to on a Saturday night; not requiring the apprenticeship or connoisseurship associated with other arts, cinema can be engaged with and understood by everyone.

The problem with this normative account of film viewing is that it leads Badiou, on the one hand, to propose some pretty dogmatic and indeed somewhat clichéd formulations regarding cinema spectatorship (no popcorn is mentioned, nor could it be, this being Paris), and, on the other, to an insistence on the presence in such mainstream films as *Titanic* or *Brassed Off* of the sort of 'truth' Badiou believes to be disclosed far more consistently in the work of 'modernist' directors such as Godard, Straub and Huillet, and Antonioni. Even these latter, he asserts, make films filled with the trite and the banal. Thus, in what is one of only three references to any other writings on cinema (by anyone), Badiou can affirm aspects of Bazin's ontology of the cinematographic image: the trite and the banal are merely the imprint of the real (as opposed to the Lacanian Real, which itself makes a somewhat muted but nonetheless notable

appearance, à la Žižek, in Badiou's many references to pornography), and is a feature as much of *Titanic* as it is of *À bout de souffle*. (In order to shake off some of the banality of the imprinted world on their films, Badiou's amusing proposal is that all great film artists should try to make films without cars, or else, as in some of the films of Godard and Kiarostami, employ them in a different way.)

Linked to this (itself rather trite) claim that cinema is democratic because its banal *effets de réel* can be recognized (cinema is an art of identification) – though we will not find Badiou citing Barthes, or anyone else for that matter – is Badiou's assertion of the presence in film of a 'generic humanity' in another form. In the only early text reprinted here, a 1957 essay from *Vin nouveau*, he refers to how cinema achieves 'the presence of man'. The notion returns later, albeit shorn of its existentialist trappings, in the familiar guise of a humanity courageously persisting in the manner of a character from the world of Beckett. Badiou insists that this inherent aspect of cinema, played out on the screen in the shape of a 'central conflict' between characters and values, through which a 'hero' emerges, is very difficult to read as anything more than a snatch of some conversation one might participate in with any filmgoer whatsoever (on Badiou's fabled Saturday night perhaps). This is of course partly Badiou's point: the hero may fall or rise on the screen, but the viewer is by definition 'on the rise' (as he asserts in a text from 2005, originally published in the journal *Critique*, entitled 'On Cinema as a Democratic Emblem') by virtue of the very possibility of this mass democratic chatter itself.

Badiou's fidelity to such exchanges both between screen and viewer, and within the conversing masses, is connected, seemingly paradoxically, to the privileged status he accords to Godard – decidedly not a typical staple of the multiplex. There are many references to Godard as exemplar – like cinema itself, Godard is many things – and three texts devoted exclusively to his work. A consideration of the latter affords a way to think more generally about politics and cinema in Badiou's thinking as these are mutually articulated throughout this collection. The most recent of the texts on Godard is about a film already almost forty years old by the time Badiou came to write about it in 2005: *Tout va bien*, made in collaboration with Jean-Pierre Gorin in 1972. In Badiou's retrospective account of how 1972 marked the beginning of the ebbing of revolt, the film becomes an allegory of *gauchisme* on the wane, and includes the observation that its ironic title is in fact a version

of Mao's 'unrest is an excellent thing'. An earlier text, this time written closer to the historical juncture in question, finds much of interest in Godard's 1982 film *Passion*, which in a similar way to the film from a decade before, evokes with incisive precision, according to Badiou, both the coming to power of the Left in France and the 'Polish way' offered by Solidarność. By contrast, in a text from 1998 on Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, cinema is itself, Badiou writes, 'summoned before the court of its historical responsibility and artistic destiny', leading him to ask: 'Is this really fair to it?' Godard's film, he suggests, acts as a counterweight to that 'revisionist malady' of European cinema, which he castigates on several occasions, including, notably, *Lacombe Lucien* by Louis Malle and *The Night Porter* by Liliana Cavani (Badiou does not cite Foucault, who discussed both of these films in a 1974 interview with *Cahiers du cinéma*, translated as 'Film and Popular Memory' in *RP* II, Summer 1975). Yet it is, consequently, more than a little harsh, Badiou argues, in judging what he insists is still a mass art. Why? The reason lies in Badiou's insistence that in post-1972 cinema one finds 'a collection of precious victories', offering hope for the orphans of the revolution, for those who became weary, disenchanted or disengaged from the revolutionary path, or who (in this decidedly francocentric narrative) quickly realized that the coming to power of Mitterrand would not for long be the source of much hope.

In a collection of such diversity it is tempting to find unifying threads. One such is offered when the opening interview refers explicitly to the Badiouian concept of 'inaesthetics', and to the notion of cinema as the 'seventh art'. A central text, the longest in the book, serves to outline in what ways cinema might be construed as a distinctive form of 'philosophical experimentation'. The text was not written for publication but is transcribed from a seminar in Buenos Aires in 2005. It offers an account of all of the major concerns articulated elsewhere in the collection, and among its notable features is a clear (and largely uncontroversial) account of Deleuze's books on cinema. What Badiou describes, however, as five ways of 'thinking cinema' take as their own founding presupposition the (always unquestioned) claim that cinema is a mass art. In what is a rather comical slippage, Badiou makes no differentiation between what he thus proposes are five ways in which cinema has been thought (implicitly in the work of others, such as Bazin and Deleuze, as well as a great unnamed cast of film theorists) and the five ways in

which *he* thinks cinema. Thus we return to cinema as semblance of the real (Bazin), cinema as making time visible (Deleuze), but then also cinema as the democratization of the other arts, cinema as on the border between art and non-art, and finally cinema as affording what Badiou calls 'ethical genres, genres that are addressed to humanity so as to offer it a moral mythology'. What follows in the text is, finally, Badiou's own alternative to Deleuze's cinematic image, an array of provocations which, frustratingly, are not subsequently reconsidered in the light of Deleuze's concepts of movement- and time-images.

Badiou ranges far and wide, both explicitly in film history and implicitly (without acknowledgment) in some of the terrain upon which traditional film theory treads. In his discussion of how genre works as a democratizing force, for example, Orson Welles is of central importance. As Deleuze does in another context, Badiou gravitates towards Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai* and argues that montage is the 'destruction of metaphysics' whereas the still image is 'metaphysical'. Welles, he argues, is able to employ both. It is certainly true that Welles combines montage and a realism of the type affirmed by Bazin (the famed exploitation of depth of field, long takes, etc.). But, considered from the point of view of subsequent film history, he is hardly unique in this respect. More to the point: is metaphysics really what is at stake in *The Lady from Shanghai*? By Badiou's own account, is it not rather a matter of the worker-hero battling it out against the capitalist boss and the bored wife (played by Rita Hayworth)? It might, in this context, be suggested that Badiou's interpretation only rather arbitrarily focuses on the theoretical construction imposed upon the film. And even if this is perhaps not intended to be taken entirely seriously, the decision draws attention to the often rather thin nature of the material collected here when considered across the book as a whole.

That so much of it is made up of interviews, transcriptions of unpublished work, some unpublished short pieces on individual films, and quite a considerable amount of repetition, does not of course necessarily diminish this book's worth. In particular, those interested in gaining an appreciation of how cinema is located within Badiouian inaesthetics (and part of the book of that title is republished here), as well as of the notion of cinema as an 'impure' art, will doubtless find much to appreciate. Film scholars, however, may have to resign themselves to the fact that Badiou probably does not care too much about their objections. Instead, he is content to echo, as

he often does, inadvertently, the words uttered by Samuel Fuller (playing himself) in Godard's *Pierrot le fou*: 'The film is like a battleground: love, hate, action, violence, death.' Above all, and to judge from the introductory interview, Badiou appears simply to be pleased with the fact that the compiler of these diverse texts, Antoine de Baecque, has made him so much more visibly present, as Godard did in *Film Socialisme*, in contemporary discourse in and about cinema.

Garin Dowd

## Hunger games

George Henderson, *Value in Marx: The Persistence of Value in a More-than-Capitalist World*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2013. xxv + 171 pp., £50.50 hb., £17.00 pb., 978 0 81668 095 5 hb., 978 0 81668 096 2 pb.

Henderson's intention in this book is 'to explore what can be thought of as the lives of value in Marx's work, lives that are caught up in the capitalist moment but also take up residence beyond it'. To this end, the book focuses on the irreducibility of the concept of value to capital in Marx. It is therefore not an attempt to establish the definition of value as a specific determination internal to the concept of capital – distinguished, for instance, from 'exchange value', 'surplus value' or 'self-valorizing value' – but rather to establish a concept of value external to capital. As such, he takes issue with a powerful tradition of commentators who maintain that Marx's concept of value only applies to capital, and would not apply beyond it. In fact, Henderson does not oppose this tradition except in so far as it claims that there is only one theory of value in Marx. Marx's texts on value display ruptures and incoherencies, according to Henderson, and should therefore be read as the scenes of a tension between more than one theory of value.

However, the textual evidence for Henderson's reading is scant. Repeatedly he projects the concept of value onto passages where there is no mention of the word. Presumably it is in order to render all these absences as clues that we have to wait until the last chapter of the book before the primal scene of the investigation is disclosed in Marx's Letter to Ludwig Kugelmann of 11 July 1868. Here, irritated by his critics' demands that he prove the law of value, Marx

describes it as an elementary and transhistorical or 'natural' law that 'the amounts of products corresponding to the differing amounts of needs [in a society] demand differing and quantitatively determined amounts of society's aggregate labour'. Curiously, Henderson's quotation breaks off at the pivotal moment where Marx writes:

Natural laws cannot be abolished at all. The only thing that can change, under historically differing conditions, is the *form* in which those laws assert themselves. And the form in which this proportional distribution of labour asserts itself in a state of society in which the interconnection of social labour expresses itself as the *private exchange* of the individual products of labour, is precisely the *exchange value* of these products. Where science comes in is to show *how* the law of value asserts itself.

In other words, Marx attempts to show how, not whether, the law of value asserts itself.

This claim appears to contradict his treatment of the law of value elsewhere, especially in *Capital*, where it is ostensibly subsumed by the analysis of forms specific to capital, particularly exchange value and its bearers, such as commodities and money. But the Letter to Kugelmann suggests that Marx's definition of the law of value in *Capital* as the magnitude of socially necessary labour-time is not specific to capital, but rather a transhistorical law, which assumes the historical form of exchange value in capitalist societies. Communist societies would therefore also be subject to a calculation of socially necessary labour time, in so far as the cooperative production for social needs would still require a quantitative allocation of the total social labour to produce for different needs. This could no more be abandoned than could the production for needs in general. What could be abandoned is the organization of this total social labour according to exchange value or private property. Hence, communism is conceived as the social organization of the relation of a society's productive abilities to its needs. This is consistent with Marx's critique of various forms of 'crude communism' that maintain the presuppositions of political economy – for instance, his critique of 'the fair distribution of the proceeds of labour' proclaimed by the 'Gotha Programme', in so far as it ostensibly condemns those who cannot work to poverty, thereby revealing that it still treats labour as a form of private property.

Hence we have a coherent theory of the law of value in Marx's Letter to Kugelmann, as a trans-historical



law that takes historical forms. However, this coherence is not what Henderson sees. Rather, he sees an incoherence: ‘Marx does not have a theory of value. ... It is disrupted by a fault line and for this reason will never be bound to fully satisfy.’ Henderson judges that ‘Marx does not master the lives of value’, but it is Henderson who does not master the theory of value in Marx. He reveals a fault line by concealing a relationship, the relationship between transhistorical laws and their historical forms.

Henderson tracks this supposed fault line – following Vinay Gidwani’s *Capital, Interrupted* (2008) – through Marx’s texts in which he appeals to communism or associated production in order to demonstrate how the problems of value within capital would be resolved by communism. As Henderson puts it: ‘it is *sort of true* that value exists only in associated production, but is its *also sort of true* that value exists in capitalism.’ This is the second key point Henderson derives from Marx’s Letter to Kugelmann. (Again, it helps if we start the quotation a sentence earlier than Henderson.)

The vulgar economist has not the slightest idea that the actual, everyday exchange relations and the value magnitudes *cannot be directly identical*. The point of bourgeois society is precisely that, *a priori*, no conscious social regulation of production takes place. What is reasonable and necessary by nature asserts itself only as a blindly operating average.

In other words, the law of value applies to capital but is concealed, for instance, by fluctuations of price. This is endemic to the form of exchange value, in so far as private property does not enable the social regulation of production. Such a regulation – communism – would thereby disclose the law of value in so far as it discloses the relation of total social production to social need. Now, if we collapse the law of value into its form as exchange value, then it is possible to arrive at the contradiction Henderson wants to see, namely that communism realizes the law of value of capitalism. But if we do not, then it is not, since communism does not realize the law of value in the form of exchange value.

Henderson’s problems with Marx’s theory of value derive from the peculiarity of communism’s historical existence, namely the extent to which it has a qualitatively distinct relation to human history from other modes of production. Thus, whereas Marx suggests in his Letter to Kugelmann that the transhistorical or natural law of value exists only in specific historical forms, constituting the historical modes of production, his allusion to what is ‘reasonable and necessary

by nature’ suggests that communism would be a return to nature, to a transhistorical state in which the law of value would have no form, or perhaps only a form that is identical or transparent to its law. As such, communism would appear to stand outside of history, as a transcendental state, perhaps even a theoretical or meta-theoretical framework, which would offer a certain explanation of its utilization in *Capital* and elsewhere to analyse other modes of production. However, Marx did not conceive of communism as either just another historical mode of production, or as a transcendental logic, or even a regulative idea, but rather as a qualitatively new historical epoch, indeed the end of human ‘pre-history’, in which the nature of human society would not be alienated from itself. This does not demand that the law of value in communism would take no form. It would take the form of associated production, as opposed to the form of private exchange or exchange value. Hence, contra Henderson’s contradiction: communism realizes the law of value in the form of



associated production; it does not realize the law of value in the form of exchange value, or even the law of value as such. Associated production does not conceal the social constitution of value in the way that private property does, and to that extent it does not produce the alienation or fetishism of value characteristic of capital.

Henderson wants to read Marx’s texts without this conception of communism. This underpins the final arguments of the book that attempt to construct a ‘political imaginary of value’, or, more specifically, ‘the possibility that value, *in explicitly involving a limit point*, would be desirable because it could be pleasurable’. Henderson’s proposition is that the quality of value within capitalism – that it is unrealized, a ‘limit point’ that stands on the horizon of society – should be sustained as the basis for a political imaginary

of post-capitalism or communism. This is opposed to Marx's claim that communism would overcome alienation. For Henderson, alienation and fetishism should be revalued as forms of value's unrealizability, providing the possibility of a communist desire and pleasure.

Surprisingly, it is Marx's discussion of Greek art in the *Grundrisse* that provides the privileged scene for this argument, since, or so Henderson wants to argue, Greek art and value display an equivalence: '[Marx] assigns this art ... to the childhood of humanity but also posits it as a historically continuing norm – and so it verges on being a sort of exchange value, a measure across time, if you will.' Henderson here announces his collapse of value as a 'historically continuing norm' into 'exchange value', directly contradicting Marx's Letter to Kugelmann. This is entrenched by Henderson's attempt to then equate Greek art with commodities and money. These equivalences are crude at best, if not simply erroneous, forced through hastily by the desire to

establish a precedent in Marx for an unrealizable value that should persist after capitalism:

Any future worth having would have its own Greek art and its own capacity to be charmed by it. As a quality differentiated from the ordinary metabolism of social and individual becoming ... it is like a meal that cannot or dare not be eaten, an offering made by people to themselves, learning to hunger for hunger itself, or like an organ without a body.

For Henderson, a communism worth having is a communism of desire, of a hunger for hunger itself. But what Henderson calls value is what Marx calls exchange value; what Henderson calls communism, Marx calls capitalism; what Marx calls the fulfilment of need, Henderson calls desireless. Capitalism already has a political imaginary of value that takes pleasure in desire. Moreover, it already has an artistic culture that inculcates the displacement of satisfaction by desire.

**Stewart Martin**

## Choose zoe

Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2013. 229 pp., £50.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 978 0 74564 157 7 hb., 978 0 74564 158 4 pb.

The central task of *The Posthuman* is to craft a politics that is capable of confronting ecological, economic and academic crises alike. On the macro-scale Braidotti asks what form of politics is needed when humans affect all life on the planet, with potentially devastating consequences. This overarching problem then leads to more specific analyses of shifts in the capitalist logic that has triggered these threats, such as the intensification of processes through which human and nonhuman forms of life are reduced to sources of surplus value. Punctuating all such discussions, however, are questions about the place of theory in addressing these problems when the humanities have been colonized by this very logic of economic productivity and when critique is increasingly marginalized. In response to these issues Braidotti aims to develop ethical frameworks that are not reliant on humanist conceptions of political subjectivity. This is in line with her assertion that responsibility for these crises can – at least in part – be attributed to anthropocentric humanism, which has historically framed all life as a potential resource to be exploited

for the benefit of humanity (or at least for privileged groups of humans). Though the text does, therefore, provide an overview of debates in posthumanist theory – and the ramifications of this theory for the subject, the species and the academy – its loftier aim is to develop new modes of non-anthropocentric ethics, to ground the posthumanist political praxis that Braidotti contends is so urgently needed.

To develop this form of praxis, however, Braidotti is forced to confront persistent arguments that the notion of a 'posthuman politics' is an oxymoron, due to its dissolution of liberal-humanist ethical concepts (such as 'rights' or 'freedom') that have conventionally acted as a foundation for political subjectivities. As she points out, these tensions replay debates surrounding the rise of post-structuralism and 'anti-humanism' in the 1980s when humanism was being challenged as a foundation for ethics by feminist and postcolonial theory (due to its narrow conception of who 'counted' as a political subject). Her argument is that the resultant anxiety over what could replace humanism created the theoretical extremes of high

postmodernism, on the one hand, and the attendant 'theory wars' of the early 1990s, where theoretical work was attacked for its perceived detachment from political reality, and 'recuperative humanism', on the other hand, where dominant concepts of rights were simply extended to marginalized social actors (ironically strengthening the humanist logic that these projects sought to overturn). *The Posthuman* aims to overcome these tensions, arguing that posthumanism offers a means of jettisoning liberal-humanist rights frameworks without descending into apolitical theoretical conjecture. The text's key contribution to the field is, in this sense, Braidotti's use of posthumanism to underpin a conception of political subjectivity that would be in line with her argument that whilst some form of subject is still necessary to act as a 'site of accountability', it must not reinstate the epistemological hierarchies bound up with liberal humanism. Each chapter of *The Posthuman* then sets out the hurdles in the way of realizing this posthumanist ethics and mode of political subjectivity – in relation to questions of species-being, economies of life (and death), and contemporary challenges facing the university – before offering a series of solutions to these problems.

The bulk of the theoretical arguments about subjectivity and anthropocentrism are mapped out in Chapters 1 and 2, where Braidotti develops her argument that challenges to the liberal-humanist subject are vital in crafting a non-anthropocentric politics that is capable of responding to both ecological and economic crises. In the first chapter, after tracing the lineage of her brand of critical posthumanism from 1980s 'anti-humanism' (in order to distinguish it from celebratory posthumanism, which focuses on technology's capacity to enhance the human, or what she – perhaps unfairly – labels the descriptive posthumanism of science and technology studies), her posthuman theory of the subject builds on her previous work on nomadic subjectivities. Braidotti's nomadic subject is 'materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded': a counterpoint both to the liberal-humanist subject and to post-structuralism's dissolution of this subject. Grounding for this nomadic subject is then provided in Chapter 2, where it is related to recent theoretical discussions of materiality in order to emphasize the irreducible relations between humanity and its environment. Akin to Hara-way's work in particular, she suggests that mapping 'transversal connections' between human and non-human actors – in specific cultural contexts – is vital in decentring the human and framing subjectivity as

not confined to the liberal-humanist individual, but as a constantly evolving assemblage. This conception is designed not only to engender ethical responsibility towards the non-human, but to extend the concept of political subjectivity to encompass all forms of life that are part of these assemblages. This leads to what Braidotti describes as a 'zoe centred egalitarianism', which departs from liberal-humanist conceptions of subjectivity by treating life itself as the 'base unit' for ethical accountability.

This approach is fleshed out in Chapter 3, where Braidotti attempts to recuperate *zoe* from Agamben's framing of it as bare life – always under the threat of death from sovereign power – and frame it instead as the fundamental unit of commonality between human and non-human life, as that which pre-exists epistemological frameworks that privilege the human. This approach is posited as vital in a context where life is the locus for capital and untrammelled bio-capitalism has led to environmental and economic disasters that leave entire populations vulnerable to death. She contends, therefore, that 'we need to actively and collectively work towards a refusal of horror and violence – the inhuman aspects of our present – and turn it into the construction of affirmative alternatives'. In other words, the chapter argues for a monistic philosophy and posthumanist politics that are not grounded on the negative basis of relations forged through the shared vulnerability of human and nonhuman actors which has been engendered by the anthropocene, but through creating a more affirmative politics based on ethical concerns that are shared by all forms of life.

However, while Braidotti acknowledges that uneven power dynamics might shape the human-nonhuman relations that she celebrates, what her zoe-centred approach does not deal with directly are concerns about how to combat exploitative or harmful encounters that could arise *between* these actors: an issue that is emerging as a key area of debate within animal and environmental studies (as dealt with most recently by Cary Wolfe's *Before the Law*). This is particularly the case when faced with encounters that are potentially exploitative (such as how to defend against the use of nature as a resource by biotech industries) or even dangerous (Wolfe's key question being where do we draw the line to protect ourselves, or other actors, from entities that might threaten our very existence). Debates over how to distinguish between productive and dangerous relations, within this form of zoe-centred ethics, suggest Braidotti's critical posthumanism does not

quite meet its aim of resolving the difficulty of how to ground challenges to exploitation when conventional ethical frameworks have been destabilized.

Whilst the solutions proposed by Braidotti are often theoretically rich or provocative, therefore, they do not consistently redress the politically problematic tendencies of posthumanism. Two issues are of particular note here.

First, her critique of 'recuperative humanism' sidelines a range of politically engaged criticisms of anthropocentrism that are *also* suspicious of the wholesale demolition of rights frameworks (specifically ecofeminism and animal rights theory, but also other approaches that she dubs 'social constructivist', which include certain strands of cultural studies and feminist theory). Dismissing these positions for clinging on to the tenets of liberal humanism not only misrepresents their often nuanced critique of rights rhetoric, but is becoming a worryingly commonplace strategy in posthumanist thought and 'mainstream' animal studies that allows these fields to avoid political criticism.

Second, tensions also emerge in Chapter 4 between Braidotti's critique of neoliberal capitalism and her discussion of how scientific and technological developments could revolutionize the university. Whilst she develops a powerful critique of the marginalization of the humanities from the academy and the increasing detachment of university and community life, her analysis of scientific innovation and digital media's role in countering these problems perpetuates some problematic trends within posthumanism. Whilst she develops some powerful critiques of technology and is wary of adopting the overly celebratory stance she attributes to 'high cyber studies' (as she labels the work of N. Katherine Hayles and early Haraway), her work still has affinities with the structure of Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman*, and results in some problematic conclusions. Like Hayles, Braidotti's posthumanism is situated as part of a particular historical moment and as being born of technological developments and the theoretical responses to these developments (as opposed to thinkers such as Haraway and Latour, who attack humanist thought on epistemological grounds and suggest dualisms have *never* 'existed' in an ontological sense). This results in a residual sense of celebratory posthumanism – which is most obvious in the discussion of the university – where embracing scientific insights is seen as a means of moving towards post-anthropocentric knowledge and digital media are lauded for their potential to de-territorialize and

globalize the university. A specific instance of this is her praise of MOOCs, which fails to address their links to the neoliberalization of the university or the range of critiques that have been levelled at them from feminist or critical-pedagogic perspectives.

Overall, *The Posthuman* does mark a move beyond merely celebratory accounts of posthumanism, into a more sustained engagement with what a genuinely non-anthropocentric posthuman ethics could look like. On the other hand, the text illustrates the need for care in how this politics is realized and emphasizes the danger of sidelining political groups that are already grappling with these issues in practice, or of placing too much ontological faith in the digital as either a disruptive or a positive force. Some decisive moves towards a posthumanist ethics are made in *The Posthuman*, but their potential to support radical political praxis remains significantly less developed.

Eva Giraud

## Here's one I reviewed earlier

David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, Hurst, London, 2013. x + 342 pp., £20.00 hb., 978 1 84904 324 3.

There's a story told about Osama bin Laden by close members of his family, concerning the long walks he used to take through the mountains. On such walks he would apparently memorize every rock and step on the routes taken. When asked why he did this, he liked to remind his fellow walkers that 'we never know when war will strike' and so 'we must know our way out of the mountains'.

It's a story told by David Kilcullen in his new book, upon which he bases an argument about the coming age of the urban guerrilla. Kilcullen is probably not high on the reading list of many readers of *Radical Philosophy*, but he is worth reading occasionally. He was once a political anthropologist with the Australian army and then conducted a PhD on insurgency in Indonesia, before rising through the ranks and into the higher reaches of the US state, becoming adviser to Condoleezza Rice and collaborating on a major defence review. At that point the US state had recognized the need for rethinking and restating its counter-insurgency strategy, and so produced a new *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, which would be

the foundation of its strategy in the 'war on terror'. Kilcullen advised on this and some of his work was incorporated into the *Manual*. He then became senior counter-insurgency adviser to General Petraeus during the period of heightened struggles in Iraq in 2007 and went on from there to advise the NATO Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

As well as being a practitioner, Kilcullen also produced a series of influential articles, leading to two books: *Counterinsurgency* and *The Accidental Guerrilla*. On the one hand, this writing has given Kilcullen a certain intellectual cachet in counter-insurgency circles: for the counter-insurgency strategist he is the key 'intellectual'. On the other hand, for many 'intellectuals' he is the key counter-insurgency thinker. To get a sense of the ways in which he occupies such a space and operates in this double manner one might note the very different writing styles in *Out of the Mountains*. One finds long passages along the following lines:

As our column snaked down the valley, a car going the other way pulled onto the dusty shoulder of the road. We were lumbering along in a slow-moving convoy of mine resistant vehicles called MRAPs that look like large coyote-brown garbage trucks. A

yellow bicycle leaned against the concrete barrier on the left-hand side of the bridge, no owner in sight. The leading MRAP reached the bridge, drew level with the bike, and passed it. At that instant the ambushers opened fire from the hillside with rocket-propelled grenades, long bursts from two machine guns, and rifles firing in support.

Yet one also finds long passages of this kind:

as rural-to-urban migration continues, the newly urbanized populations that cluster in periurban settlements around an older city core may look marginalized ... but electronic communications, media, and financial systems connect them with people in their home villages and with relatives and friends overseas. And because large transportation nodes (such as airports, container hubs, or seaports) are often in transitional or periurban areas and tend to draw much of their workforce from these areas, periurban populations are closely connected with international trade and with transport and migration patterns, both internal and external.

Think of a book jointly written by Andy McNab and Saskia Sassen and you will get an idea of the overall style, designed to appeal to both the more hard-line counter-insurgency strategist and the theorist of



urban space. Indeed, the book's back cover has both Sir David Omand (former UK security and intelligence coordinator) describing it as definitive and Mike Davis calling it 'brilliant'.

The book is in fact far from being either definitive or brilliant, but there is one reason – and probably only one reason – to read it. Kilcullen's argument is that 'classical' counter-insurgency theory needs updating, to account for the urban littoral. The reference is to the growth of large coastal cities, but as the book proceeds it is clear that it applies to any and every large city, and the main argument becomes clear: existing counter-insurgency models don't work because they fail to address the growth of the megacity and the increasing urbanization of the global population. The future of counter-insurgency lies in the city, and every city will be included in the theatre of global counter-insurgency. Counter-insurgency thinkers 'need to get ... mentally and physically, out of the mountains'. But because the city is the place of insecurity and disorder in the form of crime, drugs, gangs, so the war on terror as a security project folds into the problem of police wars against drugs, gangs and criminals. So, for Kilcullen, the move to the city means that for counter-insurgency purposes 'the distinction between war and crime ... effectively disappears'. The core of counter-insurgency is 'urbanized conflict' in general, and included in the problem of counter-insurgency is the Arab spring, youth unrest in Paris and London, and 'feral cities' in general. 'Whether we call it [the conflict] "war" or "crime"' is less important, says Kilcullen, than the fact that at the heart of counter-insurgency has to be community policing, preserving security in the urban flow, in order to defeat the enemy.

This is hardly new. The urban question has played a role in the whole history of counter-insurgency theory and practice. To give just one example: in 1848 French general Thomas Bugeaud turned from his task of the pacification of Algeria to the pacification of Paris, writing a pamphlet called *The War of the Streets* on that very issue. And anyone who has only just noticed the importance of the 'urban question' to counter-insurgency has probably spent too much time in the mountains. But Kilcullen certainly talks as though it is new. That, however, is not what makes the book interesting. What makes it interesting is that Kilcullen makes much of the fact that 'a city is a living organism that flows and breathes'. He talks about the 'metabolism' of cities, resorts to 'urban social metabolism' models, comments on the idea of 'feral cities' being drawn from concepts

in biology, says we might consider insurgencies as 'biological systems' and the theatre of operations – that is, the city – as a conflict ecosystem. Recalling the idea of the city as an ecosystem in this way is significant, because it opens the space for an appropriation of one of the key themes to have recently emerged from debates about ecosystems: resilience.

I have recently argued (see 'Resisting Resilience' in *RP* 178) that resilience as a category is now doing a large amount of work for both state and capital, and suggested that we need to resist the rise of resilience and resilience-speak. Kilcullen's book is worth reading for its contribution to and extension of this logic of resilience, for his claim is nothing less than that future counter-insurgency will rest on the resilience of the counter-insurgency effort and, in effect, the resilience of the liberal order as a whole. To this end, it is remarkable how easily he is able to incorporate all of the major themes of resilience-speak into the counter-insurgency effort. The logic of 'stability' is no longer enough, he says, adding that 'we might be better off focusing on resiliency'. 'Thinking of resiliency in this way makes more sense than focusing on stability', because it concerns 'helping actors in the system become better able to resist shocks and bounce back from setbacks'. As with all resilience-speak, counter-insurgency is going to rest on 'bouncebackability': cities must 'build resiliencies that help them bounce back from crises'. This in turn plays on another perennial theme of the chatter of resilience: planning for crisis and the ability to bounce back from those crises. What we have to do is to 'design cities for resilience'. The point to note is that the design in question is to be performed by 'our teams' – that is, the design of cities should be led by counter-insurgency teams.

In my earlier claims about resilience in 'Resisting Resilience', I noted that in many ways the concept of security is being increasingly subsumed under the logic of resilience. Kilcullen's book only serves to reinforce that view. The reason to read Kilcullen's book, then, is to understand that future counter-insurgency measures carried out for capital and the liberal state are to be conducted in and through the logic of resilience. The coming age of the 'urban guerrilla' – that is, the coming age of the unruly subjects of the bourgeois order – is to be an age in which resilience is used against those unruly subjects. Resilience is the new pacification.

**Mark Neocleous**

# He-Yin Zhen!

Lydia H. Liu, Rebecca E. Karl and Dorothy Ko, eds, *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2013. 328 pp., £62.00 hb., £20.00 pb., 978 0 231 16290 6 hb., 978 0 231 16291 3 pb.

In 1908, *Tien Yee* (*Tianyi bao*), or *Natural Justice*, a feminist journal published in Tokyo by the Society for the Restoration of Women's Rights, was responsible for the first Chinese translation of the *Communist Manifesto*, publishing the first chapter years before the founding fathers of the Chinese Communist Party discovered Marxism. Edited by the anarchist-leaning feminist He-Yin Zhen and her husband Liu Shipai, *Natural Justice* became, over the brief two years of its life (1907–08), the most influential outlet of the time for debates about feminism, socialism and Marxism. He-Yin Zhen was one of its main contributors, and her extant writings (all of which were first published in the journal) – six of which appear for the first time in English here – reveal extraordinarily incisive feminist analyses of the state and patriarchy, women's labour rights, political economy and global capitalism, suffrage and international politics. They also reveal an intellectual practice which was as rigorous in its theorizations concerning (our) contemporary categories of gender, sexuality and class as it was challenging of accepted distinctions between past and present, East and West. Combining a theoretical lucidity and polemical daring with a profound scholarly knowledge of China's classical heritage, as well as of international affairs, her essays offer rich new insights into our understanding of the multidimensional character of early Chinese feminism as a part of global feminist history.

Yet few outside students of China's modern history will be familiar with He-Yin Zhen's name, and even fewer with her work. Apart from a 1988 article by the historian Peter Zarrow in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, and a couple of others (including a piece by Liu-Huiying in *Positions*, 2003), little has been published in either English or Chinese about her or her ideas. For predictable reasons, political theorists, historians and feminists associated with the main political tendencies of China's twentieth-century history, whether of the time or since, have shown little interest in her ideas, and scholarly identification of the mainstream issues of reform and revolution – increasingly defined by Communist and Nationalist politics – has consistently overlooked her work. Political controversy over her critique of liberal constitutionalism and universal suffrage on the eve of the 1911 revolution, ideological

marginalization of her radical feminist and anarchist ideas, and misattributions of authorship – many of her essays were written under a pseudonym – have, over time, conspired to deny her the critical attention she deserves.

This volume attempts to right the historical record, and much more besides. To begin with, it sets out the political issues at work in the rendering of her name. It explains why China's leading anarcho-feminist, until now best known as He Zhen, should be known as He-Yin Zhen, a name that includes her mother's maiden name. As He-Yin makes clear in her 'Feminist Manifesto', translated in this volume, the patrilineal surname was embedded in a history and politics the significance of which it was crucial to grasp in order to articulate 'how a feminist space for activity and practice in the social and political worlds of the time could be claimed and shaped'. The main concepts He-Yin Zhen formulated to explore her feminist commitment were *nannü* and *shengji*, neither of which, as the introduction explains, are translatable into the theoretical categories of contemporary Western thought. *Nannü* was a concept which He-Yin Zhen claimed had been central to patriarchal discourse in China for centuries, and which she reinscribed as an indivisible combination of (our) contemporary categories of gender and class across boundaries of past and present, global and Chinese. As the editors put it in their introduction, *nannü* emerges, in this way, as 'an always already gendered time-space of social activity, production and life', long before 'social constructivist' departures from essentialist views of gender and sexuality. Her linked concept of *shengji* ('people's livelihood') centred on the idea that autonomous labour was fundamental to life itself, both for women and men, but in its commodified form under global capitalism signified the enslavement of all for material gain. Reclaiming autonomous labour was therefore fundamental to the liberation of women and of all humankind. Yet the new constitutional state for which revolutionaries of the time struggled continued to reproduce the fundamental global structures sustaining the exploitation of labour, particularly female labour, across all social and economic relations of production and reproduction.

One of the first clues this volume gives to the bold clarity of He-Yin Zhen's thought appears right at the beginning of the introduction, in a quotation from her 1907 article 'On the Question of Women's Liberation':

Chinese men worship power and authority. They believe that Europeans, Americans and the Japanese are civilized nations of the modern world who all grant their women some degree of freedom. By transplanting this system into the lives of their wives and daughters, by prohibiting their practices of footbinding, and enrolling them in modern schools to receive basic training, these men think they will be applauded by the whole world. ... In the past when traditional ritual prevailed, men tried to distinguish themselves by confining women in the boudoir; when the tides turn in favor of Europeanization, they attempt to acquire distinction by promoting women's liberation. This is what I call men's pursuit of self distinction in the name of women's liberation.

For He-Yin Zhen, Chinese men's support for women's education and suffrage was, as such, inspired not by a concern to liberate women but by a crisis of masculinity articulated as a desire to emulate the white European male. Chinese men, in He-Yin's understanding, were caught between vulnerability to colonial assaults on their gender and accusations of their enslavement of women. Her critique of the gendered subjugations of colonialism invites a radical reinterpretation of the rise of feminism in China and the world; her attack on her progressive male contemporaries turns the standard narrative of the birth of Chinese feminism, and its inception in the liberal feminist commitment of men struggling for nationalist modernity, on its head. It also implies a crucial challenge to the binaries of 'East' and 'West', 'tradition' and 'modernity', as categories used to explain the early beginnings of Chinese feminism, highlighting the plurality of feminist ideas circulating as China's early revolutionary movement was taking shape.

He-Yin Zhen's feminist critique of labour added to her unique profile among her liberal feminist contemporaries, virtually none of whom seemed either aware or interested in the economic hardship endured by labouring women. The leading feminist reformer Liang Qichao, for example, whose famous essay 'On Women's Education' is included in this volume, made no reference to the condition of ordinary labouring women. In contrast to dominant contemporary emphases on the Confucian marriage and family system as the source of

women's subjugation, He-Yin Zhen argued that the enslavement of women was rooted in inequalities of wealth sustained by a transnational system of capitalist accumulation that targeted the labour and bodies of poor women. It was but a small step from this position to a critique of contemporary political calls for suffrage, since, as represented in the Western political systems of Finland, Norway, Italy and England, this depended on the maintenance of unequal property rights. By the same token, she was sceptical about demands for marriage reform to replace the 'feudal' system of polygamy with a monogamous system based on freedom of marriage, since, as practised in diverse European societies, monogamous marriage was 'no different from the property-based marriages of savages'. For her, 'the bitterness of having both labour power and the body swallowed up is concentrated in the bodies of the women of the poor'. The liberation of women was an empty concept if it did not include an elucidation of how women were constituted through unequal social relations across time and space, as well as through the discursive practices of law, scholarship and Confucian ritual.

He-Yin Zhen's essays bring a multidimensionality to dominant narratives about the birth of Chinese feminism and its role in shaping China's national modernity that takes our understanding about the formation of Chinese feminism way beyond received understanding. Her insistence on the global character of women's and human oppression alone is striking in its contrast to the standard view that Chinese feminism was a by-product of liberal commitments to women's quality, drawing on thinkers such as J.S. Mill, and largely articulated by enlightened men of the time. A review of this brevity cannot hope to do justice to the complexity of He-Yin Zhen's ideas, nor to its significance for feminist theory in producing a historicized category – *nannü* – that troubles the common use of 'gender' to analyse a political and historical moment from which the category was absent. Nor cannot it do justice to the scholarly precision of the editors and translators of this book – three of the most eminent feminist historians of modern China. In resuscitating He-Yin Zhen's work, they have produced a volume that challenges long-established views about the birth of Chinese feminism and repositions it as a pluralist and global event, the theoretical significance of which continues to resonate today.

**Harriet Evans**



# Religion as capitalism

Federico Campagna, *The Last Night: Atheism, Anti-work and Adventure*, Zero Books, Winchester, 2013. 106 pp., £9.99 pb., 978 1 78279 195 9.

In attempting to explain how the ideology of work has come to stand in for the 'traditional religions', as these appear 'to have lost their hypnotic powers', Federico Campagna settles on what seems, at first, to be an appropriate comparison. Writing of the function of success – or, at least, the possibility of it – in driving the perpetual call to work harder and longer, Campagna draws attention to the idols that are held up to faithful 'workers under capitalism', and that are intended to drive us on towards our ultimate goal. Success at work will bring us glories unknown to the everyday individual, leading us to the fame and fortune experienced by a Steve Jobs or Bill Gates. Such individuals, Campagna suggests, 'incarnate the perfect capitalist equivalent of the Catholic Saint. They used to be common mortals like us, until Success – like a happy martyrdom – transcended their bodies into the thin air of the Ideal.' The comparison is a powerful one. Anybody who has been through secondary or further education, or has had to suffer the ignominy of an enthusiasm-building training course or 'team-building' day, will know the way in which figures like Jobs and Gates are used as symbolic references, aspirational targets intended to weed out the compliant from the non-compliant. Do you *really* want to be like them? Then get to work.

The opening sections of *The Last Night* are its most powerful. Here, Campagna ruthlessly tears apart this new faith in work, suggesting that work has become, for Westerners (a category he does not pause to expand upon), 'another God of sorts, or ideology': a new faith replacing traditional religions, worn down as the latter have become in the face of 'capitalism's pretence of being the only rational, global system'. Faith works as a kind of reassurance; something that people have become convinced they need in order to be able to go about their daily lives. *The Last Night* thus wishes to shake people – particularly the young, as its dedication to teenagers makes clear – out of their reliance on faith and to direct them towards what he terms a radical atheism.

This conception of a radical atheism is grounded, primarily, on an analysis of the role of work in hyper-developed capitalist societies: a role that Campagna astutely recognizes as being about something more than simple economics. Products and services

become only the 'most spectacular outcome' of the regime of work, but 'no longer its core aim' as such. Instead, Campagna draws attention to the ways in which work itself serves to constitute the subjectivities upon which capitalist power relations are based. There is, he suggests (presumably following André Gorz, among others), an evident paradox in the fact that we are today more able, thanks to technological advances, to ensure that we work less, and yet 'the discourse over work is now more obsessive than ever'. Human worth itself has come to be defined by the jobs we do. Work, as Campagna recognizes, has become 'the main platform for the exchange of social recognition'.

It is worth pausing, for a moment, to ask about the extent to which this divide between the decreasing technological requirement for work to be organized in its present manner and the ramped-up rhetoric which drives us all to commit ourselves ever more devoutly to its accomplishment is really quite the paradox that Campagna suggests. For, in fact, when one takes account of the *political* and *economic* forces whose power is derived directly from the present mode of production, it should come as no surprise that work itself is fetishized as something without which our lives are incomplete. Moreover, there are real material interests that keep people working, namely the relief from poverty offered by the temporary respite of the wage.

Campagna's analysis seems to derive some of its force from the work of Mario Tronti, and especially his discussion of the 'strategy of refusal' as a core mode in which working-class struggle has persistently challenged capitalist oppression. For Tronti, working-class resistance to capitalist oppression manifests itself prior to the generation of class consciousness as such, through small everyday acts of refusal, in which the worker demonstrates to the capitalist the true potentiality of their collective power. As Tronti puts it,

Exploitation is born, historically, from the necessity for capital to escape from its de facto subordination to the class of worker-producers. It is in this very specific sense that capitalist exploitation, in turn, provokes workers' insubordination. The increasing organization of exploitation, its continual reorganization at the very highest levels of industry

and society are, then, again responses by capital to workers' refusal to submit to this process.

The reliance of capital on workers and their labour power means that capitalism as a mode of economic and political organization is, on Tronti's reading, subject to the working class itself. The working classes thus become capital's antagonists, rather than its mere victims. Yet whereas Tronti was prepared to talk openly in terms of classes and particular social categories, whilst remaining alert to their constant refashioning and reshaping, Campagna's political project derives much of its impulse from a desire to abandon such categories altogether. Consequently, whilst Tronti saw in the workers' strategy of refusal the early stages of the move towards a communist future, Campagna's analysis disavows any call for organized struggle.

Campagna attacks the normative abstractions – 'an idea or set of ideas which individuals or collectives place above themselves as the ultimate frame and scope of reference for their earthly existence' – that have enabled the functioning of the ideology of work. Among such abstractions, he takes on Career, Work, Success, Religion, Culture, Society and Revolution. In place of these normative abstractions, Campagna suggests that struggles against work articulate themselves through the individual subject of what he calls the Adventurer. Adventurers are 'antisocial', in that they 'refuse to recognize Society as a legitimate abstract entity to which they could swear allegiance'. They squander, and demonstrate a 'disrespectful opportunism', playing the role that is expected of them when watched, and 'stealing the teacher's purse' when unwatched. Yet such adventurers, upon whom Campagna places the burden of building alternative worlds, 'restrain from taking part in any collective gatherings around any totem dedicated to dominant abstractions such as ethnic, national, gender or class identities'. Instead, they make alliances as a 'union of egoists', and will always remain 'disloyal, hypocritical allies', even for those most closely aligned to the 'egoist individualist anarchism' that animates Campagna's politics.

The obvious question is how any of this can actually lead to the building of other (non-capitalist) worlds. It is hard to see how Campagna's adventurers might overcome the tremendous power of the political forces aligned against them. And herein lies the flaw in Campagna's analysis, in so far as he refuses to acknowledge that capitalist politics can be considered political at all. Politics, for him, has one aim only, namely 'the universal provision of free

public services'. Anything else – neoliberal welfare-slashing and austerity, for example – belongs not to the field of politics, but to that of warfare. Yet to divide these two so simplistically is to ignore the old adage, derived from Clausewitz, that suggests war is itself the continuation of politics by other means. It also underestimates the precisely political and intellectual apparatus that has been constructed in order to provide cover for what is, undoubtedly, a military-style assault on the poor and disadvantaged.

This brings us back, finally, to Campagna's analysis of the political economy underlying the ideology of work. For him, this ideology is a matter of faith, something that has been adopted by the amorphous entity that is 'Western civilization'. The material and structural forces – complex networks of state and non-state entities – that have forged a currently dominant global capitalism, and the resistance struggles that have paralleled them, are sidelined entirely. There is no scope here for a dynamic interpretation of capitalism as formulated by competing and contested forces that have driven the march of the ideology of work, nor for the dynamic interplay between the sheer unhappiness experienced by many workers of all strata and their everyday resistances to the ideology of work.

Despite these criticisms, Campagna writes with a real lyrical beauty, animated with suitable rage, about the potency of the ideology of work. Take, for example, this passage:

The meagreness of our salaries ... presents the Work universe to us as what it really is: a humiliating, exhausting process which currently seems to be the only way for a person who doesn't come from money to gain the necessary means to live. The violence of working poverty and semi-poverty, while utterly paralysing if pushed to the extreme, helps us to rip the veils that often cover the martyrdom of a working life. It destroys Work's offerings of hope, its manicured landscapes and its heavenly promises.

Although Campagna's subsequent suggestions of alternatives to such a 'Work universe' fail to integrate any adequate analysis of the political economy underlying an ideology of work, all who hope to transcend the hegemony of work ought to read this powerful short essay, if only to argue for something other than an individualist anarchism that is not merely a continuation of present, barely existing challenges to the hegemony of work.

**Daniel Whittall**

# Against asymmetrical polarity

Gyanendra Pandey, *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2013. xv + 243 pp., £55.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 978 1 10702 900 2 hb., 978 1 10760 938 9 pb.

The SSG – Subaltern Studies Group – was founded in India in the early 1980s by Ranajit Guha, who wrote its manifesto and edited the first six volumes of its journal. Initially, the primary inspiration was Gramsci, supplemented by British interpretations of his writings and ‘history from below’, but later on French post-structuralist thinkers, critical of the Enlightenment, such as Foucault, Barthes and Derrida, became increasingly important: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was a key figure here. Some commentators feel that this created a bifurcation in the group’s work.

In reality, the two currents reinforced each other’s subtlety, and the possibility of *both* is to be found in Guha’s two classic studies, *A Rule of Property for Bengal* (1963) and *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983), although strictly speaking the former preceded the SSG by some twenty years, while the latter, which took nine years to write, was integral to its inauguration. Clearly, *Peasant Insurgency* is social history from below, but the way it captures an emergent, directional energy in subaltern movements is very close to modern French philosophical explorations of the event and more fluid and porous modes of individuation and identity. Related work by the same philosophers on a divided or autocritical self, usually in relation to a critique of the autonomous, bourgeois self of modernity and the Enlightenment, is of obvious relevance to *Rule of Property*, where Guha examines the complex debate involved in the application of Enlightenment ideas enabling the transition to capitalism to the feudal society of Bengal by British colonial administrators. What Subaltern Studies has had to offer modern European philosophy is an intellectually sophisticated but hands-on engagement with praxis, an essential dimension of any materialist thought, and a highly nuanced integrity. On the one hand, the subaltern reader never feels like the thick one in the room being talked about but unable to participate because of an excluding discourse (however many degrees she may have),

while, on the other, Subaltern Studies exhibits a very subtle grasp of the internal contradictions of the dominant subject and the ruses and desires of power. A new space linking master and slave begins to develop from which a new world might emerge.

Gyanendra Pandey was a founder member of the SSG: he was one of the joint editors of the seventh volume of *Subaltern Studies*. He has produced impressive books on communalism in colonial north India and the way in which Partition has been remembered, as well as many perceptive articles on aspects of subalternity. However, he has spent roughly the last fifteen years living and teaching full-time in the United States, thus contributing to the important worldwide spread of Subaltern Studies, but also giving him an opportunity to compare the Dalit and African-American emancipation struggles within the context of their respective countries. Of course, this meant that a new area of study had to be mastered, with its specific problems and intellectual strategies for tackling them, but Pandey has done so admirably, which makes *A History of Prejudice* a truly remarkable book. Comparative studies often only find the generalized essences one might expect rather than the novel, ‘thicker’, more intuitive ones that come from juxtaposing carefully observed concrete situations that are close but not precisely parallel. The latter is what happens in *A History of Prejudice*. Its method has many affinities with Deleuzian disjunctive synthesis.

Pandey’s first two chapters establish the framework of the comparative study and deal with some theoretical issues: first, the oblique nature of the evidence for a history of prejudice; second, the different types of difference employed in ‘justifying’ prejudice and the claims made to overturn it; and, third, two different modes of prejudice, which he calls ‘vernacular’ and ‘universal’. There are two types of difference: one is the otherizing difference (or asymmetrical polarity) associated with prejudice, the mixture of sameness and difference (or equality and diversity) put forward by movements against it; the other is a homogenization of differences, in particular those of gender, within such movements. This last phenomenon is connected with universal prejudice: both have their origins in the contradictions of bourgeois liberal democracy and the Enlightenment values of modernity. The latter may deal with ‘old-fashioned’, ‘normal’ vernacular prejudice, but they establish a new mode of intolerance of difference and imposition of uniformity, which is universal prejudice. The exploration of these contradictions in Enlightenment

modernity is one of the most profound and sustained aspects of *A History of Prejudice*. Pandey is also aware of how his types of difference (or non-difference) are bound up with political discourses. (Here, Lyotard's concepts of gaming and the *différend* might prove useful, not because everything is 'just gaming' but because distinguishing what is gaming helps one to perceive or at least intuit what could be a purely ethical space.)

The middle four chapters are the book's heart, both its meaty core and its emotional centre: Pandey manages to combine immense sensitivity – he made this reader cry on a few occasions – with exemplary intellectual rigour. He examines the public and private dimensions of the Dalit and African-American emancipation struggles, concentrating on a detailed account of two specific moments for the public dimension: the Dalit conversion to Buddhism



initiated by Ambedkar and the Double V Campaign in America during the Second World War. For the private dimension he mainly uses the unpublished autobiographical material of Viola Andrews, a little-known but very interesting southern black woman, and two published Dalit autobiographies by Baby Kamble and Narendra Jadhav, both Mahars from Maharashtra (sharing Ambedkar's caste and state). Pandey is an excellent narrative historian and literary critic, and his grasp of the specificity of each struggle in its particular national context is very assured, but important here are the theoretical issues he raises, which stem from his discussion of different types of difference and modes of prejudice in the first two chapters.

Above all, *A History of Prejudice* explores the homogenization of difference within both subaltern groups and the strong element of masculinism in both movements. Of course, the latter varies from India to America. The dominant political discourse

in India after 1947 was a kind of paternalistic Brahmanic secular modernism, with a strong belief in technocracy: the martial races were really a hangover from the colonial period, and the Hindu right only emerged as a serious political force rather later. In America, however, the red-blooded, honest, resolute, defiantly unintellectual, white heterosexual male, ready to step up to the plate and defend his country's way of life, has been a key political construct since at least the time of Andrew Jackson. This means the corresponding Dalit or African-American political construct varies: the intellectually impressive Ambedkar with two doctorates, or the black male military hero. But in both cases there is a very public, progressive, indomitable quality, which tends to marginalize those in the subaltern group who are not heterosexual males and ignore the more vulnerable, private, day-by-day negotiation of relationships that is equally important in combatting prejudice. Pandey explores this other dimension of emancipation, its 'inner voice', through the three figures mentioned above, two female and one male, with the last being a relatively masculinist foil to the other two. With Andrews, he provides a very sensitive reconstruction of her life based on her manuscript papers and letters, while with Kamble he is dealing with an aesthetically very sophisticated published work that draws on the exceptional richness of early modern religious writing from the subcontinent. Rescripting the subaltern body is an essential concept here, with Jadhav – the male author – producing a rags-to-riches story that pretty much mirrors the public dimension of the Dalit struggle, while the female writers communicate something that is at once more abject, refusing to relinquish the pain, and more transfigured by spirituality, perhaps offering a greater possibility of transcendence. The limitations of Jadhav's rescripting are indirectly shown in the book's last chapter, where continued prejudice against middle-class Dalits and African Americans is examined in detail with further reflections on modern bourgeois democratic values.

Pandey is a historian, but his subtle analyses of the past contain possible theoretical lessons for the future, which the reviewer – male-to-female transgendered – would like to explore via recent personal experience. While working on *A History of Prejudice*, she was touched up and psychologically humiliated in a clinical examination by a male consultant neurologist. Clearly, it hurt. Her response was to 'unpick' the Lyotardian move of the neurologist and make

an indirect counter-move through her female GP. It worked and was probably more effective than a formal complaint, but what is more important is that by keeping the strategy separate from some kind of projected ego ideal or defence, the self could maintain its spontaneity, sensitivity and connectivity. Prejudice shuts down these qualities, but so in a certain sense does toughing it out. However, pain is a necessary correlate to keeping in contact with those qualities, and to bear that pain there must be some recourse to an intellectual or spiritual discipline. Nevertheless, that is the only way to allow the self to remain open to the new combinations that will produce a different world. That Gyanendra Pandey's *A History of Prejudice* should give rise to such thoughts, so important for so much of the world's population, only goes to show what a wonderful work it is.

**Nardina Kaur (Guy Callan)**

## Rotten in Kaliningrad

Peter K.J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830*, SUNY Press, Albany NY, 2013. 253 pp., £48.32 hb., £19.97 pb., 978 1 4384 4641 7 hb., 978 1 4384 4643 1 pb.

Peter K.J. Park homes in on a conspicuously brief period during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when European historiographers recast the history of philosophy. In this new title for SUNY Press's Philosophy and Race book series, he recounts a time of rapid transition that changed the way the history of philosophy was studied. Until the end of the eighteenth century, the history of philosophy began with what was then known in Europe as 'the Orient'. Within a mere fifty years, however, this history was rewritten to exclude non-European parts of the world. How, Park asks, did the history of philosophy become the exclusive story of Europe, the Greeks and the West?

Despite developments in classical scholarship and postcolonial studies, the notion of a purely Greek origin still persists. When it comes to other disciplines, the picture of pure Greek origins has waned ever since Martin Bernal's tendentious three-volume *Black Athena* appeared, shining its light on a generalized neglect of ancient Egypt and Asia in academia. Recent work on the flows of communication between

Greece and the Near East to be found in books by the likes of Walter Burkert (*Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis*) and Martin West (*The East Face of Helicon*) have done much to enhance understanding of Greco-Egyptian and Greco-Indian contact and intercultural transmission in the first millennium BCE. Philosophers, however, are inclined to avoid addressing philosophy's own Eurocentrism. This often means dismissing any mention of non-Greek origins and opting for a monogenealogical, purely Greek history. The chief exception is the work of Robert Bernasconi, and Park locates Bernasconi's writings as the launch pad for his own investigation. Co-editor of the Philosophy and Race series, Bernasconi has long recognized the problem of racism in contemporary philosophy, and, most importantly, encouraged philosophers to do something about it, asking them to explore the racism to be found within their own traditions, whether continental or analytic.

This is the central concern of *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy* too. Consequently, Park does not merely pose the question of racism in philosophy. That Kant advanced a theory of monogenesis, in which he attempted to explain human differences by defining races based on an understanding of skin colour as a permanent marker of race, is well covered in the previous literature. Bernasconi has written widely on it, as have Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze and Mark Larrimore. Park's is not, then, a book that simply denounces Kant and Hegel. Instead, it seeks a fuller picture of the context and reasons for their discussions of race. (In this, Park's book is proximate to an earlier edited volume in the same SUNY series entitled *The German Invention of Race*, which gives special attention to Kant's concept of race in particular.) What makes Park's volume distinctive is the author's proactive approach. With a narrow emphasis on changes in the writing of the history of philosophy beginning in the 1790s, he investigates how and why these changes came about at the specific time they did. Park takes sedulous care in exposing cracks in the history of philosophy's foundation, and digs deeper to examine how each crack is connected. His research is based on texts from the early modern period to the early nineteenth century, recounting how prevailing attitudes among early modern historians of philosophy held 'the Orient' as the source of philosophy.

In looking into Hegel's motives for excluding the Orient from the history of philosophy, for example, Park shows then that Hegel's statements were, first and foremost, a defence against historical claims

made by his more 'theologically motivated critics', particularly Friedrich Schlegel. In an earlier publication on Schlegel as a Sanskritist, Park argues for a re-examination of Schlegel's comparative historical work on ancient Indian philosophy, noting that Schlegel pioneered a comparative, cross-cultural history of philosophy which explored Asian philosophy along with European philosophy in one historical context. Here, Park discusses Schlegel's opposition to the opinion held by some historians of philosophy that the ancient Orient had no knowledge of philosophy. Although Schlegel acknowledged a lack of adequate documentation of Oriental philosophy, it did not follow that the Orient had no philosophy at all. Indeed, he believed Plato's doctrine of transmigration was taken from Egypt and was characteristic of Indian thought: 'In arguing that the Indians had real philosophy in respect to both form and method, Schlegel opposed himself to the nascent opinion among some historians of philosophy that the Orientals did not know philosophy'.

In fact, only a tiny minority of eighteenth-century historians of philosophy claimed a Greek origin of philosophy. It was Kantians like Dietrich Tiedemann and Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann who argued for an exclusively Greek beginning. The Kantian School thus changed the rules for writing the history of philosophy so as to exclude Africa and Asia. A combination of *a priori* construction and racial Eurocentrism would come, in this way, to define modern histories of philosophy, initially justified with racial-anthropological arguments taken from Christoph Meiners. Park draws a connection between Meiners and Kant, suggesting that the two influenced each other in their concepts of race. Indeed, more than either Kant or Hegel, it is Meiners whom Park credits with the exclusion of Asia and Africa from the history of philosophy.

Although Kant never published on the history of philosophy per se, his own lectures on logic promoted a history of philosophy that excluded any Asian or African legacy. Before the Greeks, Kant opines, people thought through images and not through concepts. Therefore no one philosophized before the Greeks: 'It is said that the Greeks learned their wisdom from the Egyptians. But the Egyptians are children compared to the Greeks. They have various cognitions, but not sciences. The Greeks first enlightened the human understanding.' As Park notes, this position seems incongruous within its eighteenth-century context, and hence Park finds it peculiar that Hegel should take up the Kantian position and incorporate

it into his own history of philosophy. Certainly, the exclusion of Egypt and Asia was not characteristic of the school of Absolute Idealism. As Park puts it: 'It was a wayward step from Absolute Idealism, with which Hegel was united in many other ways.' Yet, in fact, Hegel's abhorrence for Egypt and Asia went beyond even Kant's disdain for the Orient. Park's final chapter explores the reasons for this antipathy, focusing on the controversy between Hegel and the theologian August Tholuck, in which Hegel defended himself against charges of pantheism or theosophy (and potentially atheism). It is this defence that is offered by Park as an explanation for Hegel's insistence on the exclusion of Africa and Asia from his history of philosophy.

In *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, Park looks ahead to a day when the history of philosophy might no longer be taught with such exclusions, yet does not lose his focus. Nor does he directly appeal to his readers to confront philosophy's racist history or to challenge Europe's self-identity and its relation to the history of philosophy. But in his reconsideration of the history of philosophy, Park seriously engages the racism still to be found at work in philosophy today.

Carrie Giunta

## Is Marxism really a Eurocentric and Western ideology?

Gilbert Achcar, *Marxism, Orientalism, Cosmopolitanism*, London, Saqi Books, 2013. 176 pp., £9.99 pb., 9 780 86356 793 3.

This remarkable little book is a collection of four essays, most of which deal with issues raised by Edward Said's *Orientalism*. The first essay, 'Religion and Politics Today from a Marxian Perspective', is an attempt to compare Christian liberation theology and Islamic fundamentalism: while both contest the prevailing social order, their political orientation is radically different. While the first has become an important component of the Latin American Left, the second is a hostile competitor to the Left, harking back to a medieval reactionary utopia. A superficial Orientalism would explain this by a supposedly 'natural', ahistorical, inclination of the Muslim peoples towards fundamentalism. In fact, historical

evidence contradicts this thesis – and just to give one example, the largest non-governing Communist Party in the world developed in the largest Muslim country, Indonesia. The difference, Achcar argues, can be better grasped by the historical context of both movements: while liberation theology emerged after the Cuban Revolution, Islamic fundamentalism grew on ‘the decomposing corpse of progressive movements’ in the Middle East.

The second essay deals with ‘Orientalism in Reverse’ (first published in *Radical Philosophy* 151), a concept proposed by the Syrian radical thinker Sadik Jalal al-‘Azm to describe (mainly French) authors who reproduce the Orientalist dichotomy (‘The West vs Islam’) but with inverted values. For some, this leads to a rejection of Marxism, secularism, democracy and/or women’s liberation as ‘Western ideologies’. For most, it results mainly in a celebration of political Islam, presumed to be the necessary popular culture of the Muslim world. One example of this approach was Michel Foucault’s uncritical and enthusiastic support for Khomeini’s ‘Islamic Revolution’ in Iran (1979–80). Others recent French thinkers, such as Olivier Roy, Olivier Carré and François Burgat, sought to argue that ‘Islamism’ is really an agent of modernization.

Is Marxism really a Eurocentric and Western ideology? This is the topic of the book’s third essay, ‘Marx, Engels and “Orientalism”’. Achcar begins by paying homage to Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. But the book has its limitations: focusing almost only on literature, it ignores philosophical Eurocentrism (not least Hegel!); moreover, without seriously engaging with Marxism, it summarily repudiates Marx as ‘Orientalist’ – an assessment sharply criticized by some ‘oriental’ Marxists, such as Aijaz Ahmad and Sadik al-‘Azm.

Were Marx and Engels Eurocentric? According to Achcar, they were not European supremacists, but did remain hostages to the limitations of their times. This seems to me a fair assessment, but I’m not convinced by Achcar’s use, here, of Foucault’s concept of *episteme*, a sort of common matrix of knowledge in a historical period, to help characterize this aspect of nineteenth-century thinking. It is true, as Achcar persuasively argues, that the ‘progress of civilization’ was the dominant perspective of the first writings of Marx and Engels, which implied a degree of contempt for pre-industrial societies, European or not. It also underlay their assessment of English colonialism as criminal, but nevertheless an ‘unconscious tool of history’. However, after 1857, their writings

will become increasingly critical of colonialism. The struggle of Ireland against English domination was the starting point of this change in perspective: as Achcar observes, in a brilliant summary, ‘Ireland provided them a key for India and Algeria’. Engels describes, in 1857, the French conquest of Algeria as ‘bloodshed, rapine and violence’, and Marx in the first volume of *Capital* denounces colonialism as a gigantic rapacious plunder. Moreover, departing from their previous quasi-positivistic and ‘anti-Romantic’ stance, they became increasingly interested in pre-capitalist collective forms of production, such as the Russian *obshtchina*. In conclusion, what is lacking in Achcar’s otherwise interesting critical comments, is an assessment of the decisive evolution of the ideas of Marx and Engels.

The last section of the book is devoted to ‘Marxism and Cosmopolitanism’. From early on, Marx and Engels saw communism as a *world-historical* movement, and in some of their writings of the years 1846–47 they opposed communist cosmopolitanism to the hypocritical and egotistical bourgeois cosmopolitanism of free trade. However, in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) they seem to celebrate the ‘civilizing mission’ of the bourgeoisie, which creates a world market and imposes the cosmopolitan character of production against local narrowness. Their optimism of the progress goes as far as believing that thanks to these developments national differences and antagonisms are already disappearing. In the next decades, these illusions will disappear and the concept of *internationalism* will replace, in their writings, that of cosmopolitanism.

Interestingly enough, Antonio Gramsci will present working-class internationalism as the inheritor, in Italy, of Roman Catholic cosmopolitanism. A few decades later, in the USSR, the anti-Semitic Stalinist campaign of 1948–50 will be waged in the name of the fight against ‘bourgeois cosmopolitanism’. One could add to this Soviet example discussed by Achcar the sinister Stalinist trials in Prague and Budapest (1949–50), whose victims – mostly Jewish Communists who had fought in the International Brigades in Spain – were denounced as traitors and ‘rootless cosmopolitans’, and executed.

Achcar’s own powerful conclusion for this essay brings together the two concepts of the Marxist tradition: insurgent and internationalist cosmopolitanism. It is this combination, rather than postcolonial nationalism, that is the true antithesis of neoliberal cosmopolitanism.

**Michael Löwy**