

New forms, old problems

Colin Mooers, *Imperial Subjects: Citizenship in an Age of Crisis and Empire*, Bloomsbury, London, 2014. 152 pp., £14.99 pb., 978 1 44116 493 3.

This is a small book on the inner connections of global capitalism, the imperial system, and the form and content of contemporary liberal citizenship. Through the prism of 'imperial subjects' – conceived as a global if variegated condition stretching unevenly across the entire range of powerful and weaker social formations of the world system – Colin Mooers hopes to offer 'the temporary simplification and distillation of complex social realities in order to comprehend them more deeply'. Taking a cue from Fredric Jameson, this is a bold effort to cognitively map the totalizing power of capitalist social relations in the contemporary international conjuncture.

Imperial Subjects is one of the few major contributions to Marxist theories of imperialism of late which integrally incorporates the global South into its basic analytical apparatus. The Middle East, for example, features here as much more than a simple reservoir of oil, or the territorial backdrop of imperial war. Likewise, in the stirring concluding chapter on resistance and contestation, Mooers homes in on Latin America. He manages a subtle balance in his treatment of the region, seeing it as perhaps the most crucial site of social and political Left experimentation in the neoliberal era, while recognizing the strict limits of new centre-left regimes and refusing any crude romanticism.

Much of twenty-first-century Marxist literature on the 'new imperialism' has returned in the first instance – whether it be in a mode of repudiation, appropriation or rearticulation – to the classic texts of Lenin, Bukharin, Kautsky and Luxemburg. Mooers goes further back, preferring, above all, the method of dialectical inquiry on offer in the materials of Marx himself. The arc of chapter 1 masterfully carries the reader through Marx's treatments of primitive accumulation, the commodity form and commodity fetishism, and money and social abstraction, before forging links between these themes and the ideology of liberal citizenship (the 'citizenship illusion'), and the always racialized and gendered character of class – concrete labour is understood to be '*embodied* in the fullest sense of the term' and the 'myriad

humiliations and degradations of racism and sexism' are understood as constitutive elements of contemporary capitalism, rather than mere afterthoughts to which hand-wavy gestures are necessary.

A holistic theory of contemporary citizenship must refuse at the outset the common tendency to separate its content from its form. After all, the specific kinds of rights embodied in liberal capitalist democracies today – their content – have everything to do with limits imposed by the imperatives of capitalism as a system – their form. If bourgeois political economists mistook the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production for production in general, mainstream theories of citizenship 'seek to reify the bourgeois citizenship form as the *sine qua non* of human freedom'. Abstraction, meanwhile, is necessary for teasing out the inner connections of global capitalism and imperialism because their forms of appearance, seen from any individual vantage point, conceal their essential relations and processes, their underlying laws of motion, all of which are necessary for their reproduction at the systemic level. The subject, then, must be the totality of capitalism as a whole, and the specific forms assumed by imperialism and citizenship within that totality.

Following on the trail forged by one of his main intellectual mentors, Ellen Meiksins Wood, in *Empire of Capital* (2003), Mooers points to the analogous historical relationship between the distinct domestic social property relations of different dominant states in the world system over time and their forms of imperial rule, between the operation and expansion of the domestic social relations of capitalism particularly and the externalization of capital through capitalist imperialism. The empirical record demonstrates that there has been a tight historical association between both non-capitalist and capitalist societies, on the one hand, and their imperialisms, on the other. Non-capitalist colonial empires of the past – such as the Portuguese and Spanish empires in Latin America between the late fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries – like feudal lords in their relations with peasants, dominated territory and subjects through

military conquest, often direct political rule, and therefore extensive extra-economic coercion; in contrast, capitalist imperialism over time is increasingly dominated by non-territorial, market-based forms of coercion. This is part of what makes it possible to say that we continue to live in a world dominated by imperial relations, despite the vast processes of formal decolonization in much of Africa and Asia. It does not follow that capitalist imperialism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries dispensed with the need for coercive force, as any casual perusal of the daily newspapers in the present will attest. Indeed, as Mooers suggests, ‘force remains indispensable both to the achievement of market “openness” where it does not yet exist and to securing ongoing compliance with the rights of capital’.

Another central theoretical edifice of the text, the ostensible separation of the economic and the political under capitalism, also draws on Wood, this time from her *Democracy against Capitalism* (1995). ‘The liberal subject of modern capitalist citizenship, which emerged in the most developed capitalist societies’, Mooers writes, ‘was shaped by the separation between economics and politics made possible by primitive accumulation. And although the actual form of this separation has varied widely depending on the historical configuration of class forces in different societies, in its “classic form” this separation has been key to the coexistence of civic equality alongside class inequality’. Mooers notes how under liberal capitalism, formal democracy, civil rights and liberties, and representative governments simultaneously signify an improvement on less democratic political forms of rule, while also limiting ‘the substance of these rights in ways which make them compatible with the rule of capital’. Mooers’s critical distance from Wood and many other ‘political Marxists’ on matters of coercive labour forms under capitalism allows him to recognize that certain labour forms which are in appearance pre-capitalist can be, and have been, incorporated into the logic of capitalism (formal subsumption of labour to capital). ‘Historically speaking, capitalism has been quite promiscuous’, Mooers notes, ‘in its ability to coexist with and eventually conquer a variety of forms of surplus-extraction from slavery to handicraft and small-scale peasant production’. Analogously, although non-territorial and market-based forms of coercion are the dominant processes in contemporary capitalist imperialism, combinations of formal, territorial settler-colonialism and informal, market-based imperialism continue to exist in places such as Palestine, and in aspects of indigenous

peoples’ relationships to states and settlers in much of the Americas. Unfortunately, Mooers’s acumen is at times undermined, such as when he slips into presenting the tenets of formal liberal democracy as constitutive of the ‘civic forms more appropriate to capitalism’. Implicit in such slippage is the writing out of the history of global capitalism the fused character of the political and economic in many, if not most, postcolonial capitalist states until late in the twentieth century in Asia, Africa and Latin America. A cursory look at China since the 1980s, moreover, calls into question any straightforward association of liberal civic forms as the ideal-typical mode of capitalist rule, or any simple separation of economics and politics. There is also something of a tension, here, in his defence of the separation of the economic and political as conceived by Wood, and his critique of dual-logic approaches to contemporary capitalist imperialism.

Having sketched the specificities of capitalist imperialism, Mooers moves on to an exploration of their neoliberal expression over the last several decades. The uneven international unfolding of neoliberalism since the capitalist crisis of the mid-1970s has involved at its core the construction of ‘lean citizenship’, in which the production and reproduction of ‘flexible’, ‘mobile’ and ‘agile’ workforces are defining features. The collapse of the Soviet bloc necessitated a parallel transformation in imperialist language across the ideological plane. If the pliable category ‘Communist’ could conveniently envelop good parts of twentieth-century movements of resistance, the events of 9/11 allowed for a novel successor – the War on Terror and a new ideal bogeyman. The almost infinitely malleable threat of terrorism has allowed the possibility of imperial war freed of any anachronistic limits on its temporality or geography. The theatre of this latest war is endless and everywhere. In the global North, the lean worker of neoliberalism has been merged with the perpetually frightened and anxious citizen of the epoch of terror. Under an increasingly militarized neoliberalism, long-existing liberal civic rights – ‘freedoms of movement, speech, association, privacy, and in some European states, religion’ – are circumscribed in the historical-geographic core of capitalism, while ‘humanitarian interventions’ transform swathes of the global South into literal war-fields and laboratories of coerced market fundamentalism.

In the core middle sections of the text, Mooers attempts to hash out in more detail the ‘relationship between the basic dynamics of capitalism and

imperialism', which draws him more squarely into a series of debates on the 'new imperialism'. Drawing on David Harvey, the historical point of departure here is one of capitalism's actual uneven geographical development over time, whereas the founding theoretical premiss is that the 'capitalist circulation process requires that more and more aspects of social and natural life across the planet be subjected to its logic'. Individual capitalists are compelled by the imperatives of competitive accumulation to perpetually reinvest and expand their operations, or risk being snowed under by their competitors. This means a compulsion to deepen or intensify capitalist social relations, by perpetually drawing into the orbit of commodification everything from 'hand soap to health care, from land to leisure time and from human affect to the human genome'. The same systemic imperatives that lead capitalists to intensify capitalist social relations also motivate them to drive outwards in spatial terms, and to constantly reduce the temporal distance between locations – Marx's annihilation of space through time. The endless quest for new geographical terrains of accumulation is one expression, therefore, of capitalism's need to 'expand the range and nature of things which can be commodified'. 'Mature capitalism', Mooers argues, 'is inevitably imperialist; the outward push of capital, its search for new geographical sources of accumulation, is an inbuilt feature of the system'.

Rather than starting with a blank canvas, capitalist laws of motion emerged historically in and through an international system of states inherited from feudal society. The uneven geographical concentration of centres of capital accumulation locked in competition with one another has tended over time towards the mobilization of different national states in defence of the interests of national- or region-based capitals. Naturally, explaining the dynamics of inter-imperial rivalry – or, alternatively, moves towards inter-imperial cooperation and ultra-imperialism – across different historical epochs has been a mainstay of Marxist theories of imperialism since their origin. Mooers recounts how in order to avoid some of the pitfalls of the economic reductivism to be found in Bukharin's and Lenin's theories of imperialism, some of today's contributors, such as Harvey and Alex Callinicos, have sought to account properly for the dialectical relationship between the geopolitical competition and rivalry between states and the expansionary and competitive dynamics of capitalism. In so doing they have independently formulated similar dual-logic approaches to the

dynamics of the imperial system today – the separate but interacting logics of capitalism and territoriality, or economics and geopolitics.

While acknowledging that the dual-logics approach of Harvey and Callinicos 'has the advantage of not reducing imperialist rivalry between states or groups of states as always directly involving economic interest as well as allowing for the vagaries of political and military decision-making in different contexts', Mooers correctly emphasizes that these advantages are only worthwhile 'provided that the "internal relation" between economics and politics is not jettisoned in the process'. To the extent that dual-logics approaches to imperialism mean 'assigning completely separate logics to the state and capital' they fall into a neo-Weberian trap. This is perhaps where Mooers missed the opportunity to further interrogate the strengths and limits of Wood's separation of the economic and political. Nonetheless, Mooers's general conclusions on rivalry are much closer to Harvey and Callinicos than to, say, Sam Gindin and Leo Panitch in *The Making of Global Capitalism* (2013), or William I. Robinson in *A Theory of Global Capitalism* (2004). Expressing different twenty-first century iterations of Kautsky's basic theses on ultra-imperialism, for Gindin and Panitch, the US continues to rule over an uncontested empire in the interest of global capital in general, while for Robinson the key agents of the current period are a new transnational capitalist class and an incipient transnational state. Any focus on inter-imperial competition misses the forest for the trees for such thinkers. Although oddly avoiding explicit engagement with their work, Mooers draws sharply divergent conclusions:

While the deployment of US military might is the most attention-grabbing aspect of the new imperialism, imperialist rivalry between states and economic blocs is just as important, even if such competition remains for a time latent. Imperialist rivalry is the product of *systemic* imperatives resulting from competitive accumulation between different units of capital within a plural states system. The fact that no single nation-state or group of states, however powerful, can police the entire global economy means that military power and warfare will remain a key feature of the imperial system.

There are sound empirical reasons to believe, parallel to Mooers's basic line of inquiry, that processes of global accumulation lead to territorial and geographic concentrations of investment, markets and labour in specific paces of the world economy – concentrations of capital which privilege certain

areas at the expense of others and which tend to be reinforced over time. It also makes historical and theoretical sense to argue that while for a time a global hegemon may be able to act in the general interests of various imperial states, under global capitalism inbuilt processes of competitive accumulation and conflict, organized territorially into unevenly powerful states, are bound to lead to novel forms of confrontation and rivalry. As Mooers acknowledges, this need not mean the inevitability of imminent war between the most powerful inter-imperial rivals.

On theoretical and historical grounds, then, Mooers is on much more stable ground than the new theorists of ultra-imperialism. Unfortunately,

Mooers only very cursorily translates his logical abstractions into much of an empirical defence of their credibility in the present moment. Indeed, when Mooers does wade into the messy empirics of the conjuncture – as in his discussion of the motivations behind, and results of, the Iraq War – the narrative occasionally drifts into contradiction and ambiguity. It still remains necessary, therefore, to carry Mooers's impressive theoretical syntheses and advances into a series of much more concrete and historically grounded investigations of the different forms assumed by capitalist imperialism over the long history of capitalist modernity, all the way to the present.

Jeffery R. Webber

Palaver

Gabriel Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2014. 274 pp., £58.50 hb., £19.50 pb., 978 0 23115 200 6 hb., 978 0 23115 201 3 pb.

In 2006 an anonymous group of Art History PhD students published the first and only issue of *November*, an academic-looking journal whose cover bore the droll heading 'Art, Theory, Criticism, Palaver'. As was immediately obvious from its design, the target of this parody was *October*, the New York-based publication which spun off from *Artforum* in 1976 to become the most prominent US venue for the reception of post-modernist art and certain strains of post-structuralist theory. Between its sometimes haughty avant-gardism, the relatively rigid character of its aesthetic programme, and the various doctrinal mannerisms of its core contributors, *October* more or less invited the sort of satire it received in *November*, which concluded with a 'Round Table' discussion (an *October* staple) dedicated to the merits of the tables used in Ivy League seminar rooms.

Although one could dismiss this incident as a sophomoric prank – or deem *October*, which has changed little in the interim, to be largely outmoded – this would overlook a set of theoretical, discursive and institutional problems in which the journal is currently enmeshed. This problematic might best be grasped as the hegemony of a certain model of critical art theory whose key concepts have been consolidated almost to the point of reification. Within this readymade analytic, relations between art and politics are bound to conform to one of a small group of pre-approved theoretical formulas – namely, the versions of Marxism, psychoanalysis and

post-structuralism that have been used to compile the canon of officially 'critical' art history, together with whatever emergent theories and practices are deemed worthy of this legacy.

If this approach reduces history to a kind of vanguardist catechism, it also ontologizes art and politics such that they become answers to be uncovered, rather than questions to be voiced or positions to be contested. As Grant Kester has incisively argued, such an approach limits criticism to a kind of subcontracting operation whose central feature isn't independent analysis, but the citation of whichever master discourse best reveals (and legitimates) the criticality of the artwork (not to mention the critic). In a moment when 'criticality' is often invoked to offset the ever more ludicrous excesses of the art market, criticism finds itself both in more demand and at increased risk. Those who value critique as an end in itself, thereby overlooking its new-found power to amplify exchange value, are especially susceptible to instrumentalization.

Within such a conjuncture, one welcomes ambitious, iconoclastic work like Gabriel Rockhill's *Radical History and the Politics of Art*. Rockhill's book aims to thoroughly rethink the concepts that typically structure discussions of art and politics, beginning with 'art' and 'politics'. Rather than define these terms from first principles, Rockhill argues that such operations hypostatize art and politics, mistaking contingent properties for invariant essences. In doing

so, they perpetuate the two linked fallacies that he terms 'the ontological illusion' and 'the epistemic illusion': the assumptions that we can somehow identify the fixed nature of art and politics or specify their determinate relation. These originary misconceptions in turn beget others, like 'the talisman complex' (the quasi-magical belief that artworks themselves possess political efficacy) or 'the social epoché' (the tendency to bracket out a work's multiform social determinations).

Against these foundationalist or transcendentalizing tendencies, Rockhill sets out to develop the concept of 'radical history', which proceeds from the contention that 'everything is historical'. This historicity is to be understood not merely chronologically but also geographically and stratigraphically. While it of course includes the artwork, especially its determination by or mediation of concrete social relations, it also encompasses the discursive structures we might use to define or comprehend art and politics. Because of this intensive immanence, it is almost oxymoronic to speak of 'art' and 'politics' rather than 'art and politics' or even 'art-and-politics'. The moment we isolate these as independent entities, we lose contact with their profound interdependence, which at times is manifest in the condition that Rockhill designates as 'consubstantiality'.

Such formulations will be familiar to readers of Jacques Rancière's writings on aesthetics and politics (some of which Rockhill has translated). Indeed,

perhaps the most concise way to grasp *Radical History* is as a Rancièrean critique of more orthodox schools of Marxian aesthetics. This tendency is most pronounced in the first half of the book, which addresses two of the central twentieth-century debates on cultural politics. The first of these concerned the relation between realism, formalism and commitment, and is often associated with the 1977 New Left Books collection *Aesthetics and Politics*, which introduced an anglophone audience to the exchanges between Adorno, Benjamin, Brecht, Bloch and Lukács. The second debate revolves around Peter Bürger's 1973 polemic *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, which famously chastized the post-1945 avant-gardes for their inability to learn from the failures of their early modernist predecessors. In an effort to revitalize these once-pivotal but now rather crusty discussions, Rockhill alters their coordinates. Instead of once more restaging the Adorno–Benjamin debate, he traces an arc linking Lukács with Sartre and the later Marcuse; rather than take Bürger on his own terms, he integrates the work of Renato Poggiali. The seldom-cited Cornelius Castoriadis makes an intriguing cameo appearance, as does the Wittgenstein of *The Blue and Brown Books*, whose functionalist pragmatics of language grounds Rockhill's 'praxeological' approach to art and politics. Echoing Castoriadis's attacks on political science, Rockhill maintains that his subjects can only be engaged in terms of 'phronesis', or practical wisdom. In other words, what we might



call the aesthetico-political can never be understood ontologically, but only historically and in some sense rhetorically. What matters is who makes a given claim for the politicity of aesthetics (or vice versa), and how they make such claims and why, and in what context and under what constraints.

This displacement poses serious, necessary challenges to the institutions of critical theory and art history. If art and politics cannot be grasped at their root or viewed from outside, they can only be thought within conditions of provisionality, contingency and immanence – a scenario contaminated by the ever-present threat of recuperation. Critique cannot be a matter of pseudo-Schmittian distinctions between ‘avant-garde’ and ‘kitsch’, ‘critical’ and ‘symptomatic’, and so forth. Rather, it must make space for what Rockhill, citing Brecht, calls ‘partial success’. This less programmatic, more ambiguous conception of criticality enables Rockhill to roll back some of the sweeping prerogatives that previous criticism has delegated to itself: the power to impose binary, normative judgements; the power to view the history of art as the progressive attainment of autonomy; and the power to frame artists and artworks in terms of their autarchy.

As above, the Rancièrean tenor of this argument is clearly evident, not just in its heterodoxy but in its tolerance for ambiguity and contradiction. In chapters 5 and 6, Rockhill carefully elaborates Rancière’s various theoretical positions, relating his conception of aesthetic regimes to Foucault’s epistemes and linking his account of immanence and homonymy to Deleuze. Rather than being an academic game of join-the-dots, these moves set up a critique of core contradictions in Rancière’s own thinking – a venture that leads to some of the book’s most productive interventions. Drawing on a deep knowledge of both Rancière’s corpus and his unconventional modus operandi, Rockhill deftly schematizes the ranging, unmarked and sometimes incompatible usages of the terms ‘aesthetics’ and ‘politics’, which in turn subtend the key concepts of ‘the aesthetic regime’ and ‘the distribution of the sensible’. To summarize, Rockhill unpacks various terminological slippages to demonstrate a clear contradiction between Rancière’s two core assumptions. The first of these posits the consubstantiality of aesthetics and politics, which are both active in the perceptual matrix that governs public appearance. The second differentiates the autonomy of the aesthetic (as a regime specifying the identity of art *qua* Art) from the similarly autonomous sphere of the political (as a space of dissensus).

The problem for Rockhill is not that Rancière does not acknowledge such contradictions – he does, relating them to the antagonism between the two opposed politics of aesthetics in the aesthetic regime (autonomy and heteronomy). Rather, it is that such contradictions are ultimately unproductive, in so far as they propagate a ‘cult of ambiguity’ while reintroducing a kind of back-door essentialism that ontologizes art and politics. In place of abstract definitions, which are arguably of much more use to philosophy than art, Rockhill outlines a number of hypothetical categories that would redirect our attention towards contingent encounters between art and politics.

It is at this point that the more contradictory aspects of Rockhill’s own project begin to assume focus. If philosophy has so little to contribute to discussions of art and politics, why devote such sustained attention to philosophers, instead of to the radical histories of specific practices? How are we to reconcile Rockhill’s demands for historical specificity with the more macroscopic analytical horizon that his project assumes? To posit a conceptual history linking Lukács to Bürger (let alone Rancière), one has to assume continuity between highly contingent manifestations of art, politics and theory, not to mention economics. For this continuity to be plausible, it would have to acknowledge and negotiate the manifold differences between the aesthetics (and mediums, and contexts) of Balzac, Rodchenko, Schoenberg and *Nouveau Réalisme*, among many others. The issue is not that such through-lines are unthinkable, but that they require a very high degree of mediation – one that Rockhill’s discussion cannot always provide. It is unfortunately ironic that this book, which does so much to counter the blind historicism of much so-called ‘critical art history’, is itself somewhat constrained by its limited contact with key critical and art-historical debates. Three of the book’s chapters – the two on Bürger and the avant-garde, and another on the cultural politics of the Cold War – concern debates that are widely thought to be played out, failing to register the decisive interventions of figures like Boris Groys, Manfredo Tafuri and Nancy Jachec. Readers are left wondering whether avant-gardism has anything to offer contemporary artists, who themselves tend to disdain the concept, or how we might understand its belated relevance in contexts like post-Mao China. One can understand why Rockhill might steer around the ever-ubiquitous Benjamin, but some attention to his work might have allowed a closer engagement with important topics that the book

largely skirts: technics, collective reception, consumer fantasy and the aesthetics of historical imagination. Compounding these problems is the fact that the philosophers featured here largely overlooked some of the most influential practices of their own time. In part because Adorno, Marcuse and Bürger ignored artists like John Cage, Joseph Beuys, Allan Sekula and Suzanne Lacy – Rancière does better here, but only by contrast – these pivotal histories remain at the sidelines of Rockhill's account.

As Peter Osborne has recently reminded us with his wry account of Deleuze's awkward meeting with Francis Bacon, there is a long history of missed encounters between aesthetic theory and contemporary art. For a certain type of philosopher non-contemporaneity is a mark of distinction, a badge to polish while awaiting the flight of Minerva's owl. It is not at all the case that Rockhill's book belongs to this dubious history; indeed, it thoughtfully develops a line of critique with considerable potential for the

analysis of many circuits now linking aesthetics and politics. Such efforts are rare, welcome and necessary. All the same, some will wish that Rockhill had made more effective contact with ongoing critical discourses on topics like post-Fordism, new media theory, anti-austerity movements and the politics of migration. While these discussions are common in art schools and the so-called New Institutions of the EU, they have received scarcely any attention from philosophers in the USA. These are the questions that drive many of the most trenchant attempts to critically articulate aesthetico-political theory with actual art practice – one thinks here of recent work by John Akomfrah, Hito Steyerl or Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato. It is at such sites where aesthetics and politics encounter each other most transformatively, and where the radical history of the current moment might be recognized, thought and contested.

Andrew Stefan Weiner

Etherized

Pamela M. Lee, *Forgetting the Art World*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2012. 248 pp., £27.95 hb., 978 0 26201 773 2.

Contemporary art from its inception has been framed by two mutually constitutive crises: an identity crisis and a legitimacy crisis. The implicit periodization of contemporary art commences roughly in 1970; that is, when Adorno posited that nothing about art could any longer be considered self-evident, not least its continuing right to exist. The dateline of contemporary art, then, seems to coincide with established accounts of 'neoliberalism'; itself often traced back to legitimacy crises in state control over labour, energy resources and the movements of finance. If in the early 1970s global instability generated challenges within and to the institution of art such as those mobilized by Adorno, Bürger, Werckmeister, Nochlin, and many others, not to mention organizing efforts like the Artworkers' Coalition, the current crisis has also generated a critical literature striving to delineate the internal links (and relevant repercussions) between the 'art world' and the totality of capitalist social relations. Debates around relational aesthetics, participation and socially engaged practice could be said to fall within this domain. However, more to

our purpose here are recent attempts at comprehensive theoretical inquiries such as Lane Relyea's *Your Everyday Art World*, Peter Osborne's *Anywhere or Not At All* (reviewed in *RP* 183, January/February 2014), or David Joselit's *After Art* (reviewed in *RP* 180, July/August 2013). It is perhaps the last, both in its scope and in its omissions, which is the most proximate to *Forgetting the Art World*.

Lee has published extensively on the work of Gordon Matta-Clark and on the role of time in the 1960s avant-garde in two previous books. In this volume, she sets her focus on the co-determination of art and globalization by developing an analysis of the continuity between the agents and objects of contemporary art and the social, political and economic conditions with which they are in structural complicity, and which it thus behoves them to 'forget'. This is, however, only one level of a multi-tiered or (perhaps in better keeping with the author's methodology) polycentric argument in which the objective subsumption of art institutions and practices by the forces of global capital investment in, tendentially, the

creative industries and ‘total design’ makes obsolete Arthur Danto’s and Lawrence Alloway’s conception of the art world as distant and self-contained with regard to the so-called ‘real world’. For Lee, we cannot help but ‘forget’ such a model of the art world to the degree that it fails to be reflected in our experience. Indeed, such a model becomes, paradoxically, a self-contained historical episode whose supposed relative autonomy cannot help but remind us of that famously enjoyed by the state in Althusser’s work. At the same time, forgetting is also something the art world itself performs, merging both thematically and operatively with the labour processes and signifiers of globalized capital. In this light, Lee wants to propose another conception of the relation between art and world, one in which world is transformed into a verb (with an affinity to Heidegger) and the artwork is a fully immanent process of ‘worlding’, both reflecting and determining the specificity of its embeddedness in the larger processes enumerated above. In other words, we must remember *that* we are forgetting; the forgetting must be marked, recognized in the lessons it can impart about this socio-historical moment in a globalized artworld both determined by and acutely oblivious to its loss of distinction from an increasingly deregulated continuum of production. The ontology of the artwork is to be reconceptualized as a world, or worlding, in order to more adequately convey the plenum of art’s context, still precariously bounded by specialized institutional markers but no longer, in an important sense, *special*. Art can no longer be afforded the pathos of distance that critical taxonomies of art practice continue to maintain to the present day, and thus it is up to the sympathetic analyst to carve its specificity out of its constitutive indistinction and not against it.

This hypothesis encounters several obstacles in the course of its elaboration, however, which are compounded as the book progresses. It never becomes clear whether (and, if so, how) the artwork and the artworld are distinctive phenomena in this scenario – the artwork may ‘world’, but the artworld also works. Are they in collaboration or in disjunctive synthesis? Do they have borders, or are they programmatically indistinguishable, each artwork embodying an artworld, like some erratic amalgam of Leibnizian monadology and an Andrea Fraser-style libidinized institutional theory of art? The problem of making such distinctions can be understood, in large part, as the stakes of the argument at hand, but it is unclear to what extent this is a problem projected onto the referents of the argument and to what degree it

inheres in the way the argument is constructed. This aporia is reproduced in Lee’s choice of ‘globalization’ as the backdrop to her story, a term whose purposeful multivalence and jargonistic promiscuity very nearly forecloses any chance of specificity, even the strictly minimal specificity attendant on a ubiquitous term like ‘neoliberalism’. One is reminded, no doubt unjustly, of a Cold War reticence about using politically charged vocabulary (think ‘market society’ for ‘capitalism’). The framework of ‘globalization’, however, does not end up as a politically overdetermined choice in Lee’s book so much as an index of a frustrating gap between the work’s stated ambitions and the diffuse, conventional quality of its claims as soon as they wander afield from close readings of specific oeuvres. The latter include ones that Lee proposes are emblematic of the aforesaid continuity between artistic production and social production: Takashi Murakami, Thomas Hirschhorn, Andreas Gursky, the Atlas Group and Raqs Media Collective. While the case studies are informative, each stages the central weakness of Lee’s project: the setting up of intriguing propositions – such as the one about ‘worlding’ – which are never developed in the detail it would take to flesh out their heavily telegraphed implications, either for a philosophy of contemporary art or for an analysis of contemporary capital.

Lee’s close readings are mainly astute, traversing production methods, ideological slants and critical reception. In several cases they are the results of ongoing dialogue between the author and her case studies, and adeptly integrate the artists’ self-narratives into the critical accounts. Each discussion outlines one or several relevant *au courant* theoretical categories (post-Fordism, immateriality, the collective), and zooms back and forth between glosses on these and insights into the practice in question. We thus understand Murakami’s notion of the ‘Superflat’ to be indebted equally to the global strategies of outsourcing and flexibilization which are the current face of ‘Factory’-style production in and out of art, the ultra-scalability of vector graphics, and Bill Gates business manuals. Andreas Gursky is the post-Fordist descendant of his teachers Bernd and Hilla Becher’s industrial typologies, with his panoptiscapes of unpeopled sites of production and consumption, the ‘ether’ of digital compositing pervading every colour-saturated reality effect. His vast-format images are positioned as both a registration and a rehearsal of the abstraction of value that Lee contrasts with the concrete labour re-vindicated in the critical realism of the late Allan Sekula. This refrain concerning



works that both register and reproduce a tendency of globalization points to an equivocation about the critical potential of the practices under scrutiny that pervades Lee's discussion throughout. In her chapter on Hirschhorn, this is negotiated via the Spinozism advocated by the artist himself and via the category of 'immanent causality', primarily as it is elaborated in the work of Antonio Negri. The material elements of Hirschhorn's protean assemblages may exhibit the accelerated de-valorization of the commodity cycle, as Benjamin Buchloh suggests; they may also recapitulate the abject juxtapositions of the Internet. Ultimately, however, they are about the 'cumulative and affective capacity of information' which is traced back to the artist's abiding fascination with Spinoza as the master philosopher of immanence. Immanence, however, appears to require the supplement of communication, presenting Lee with another opportunity to make an analogy between Hirschhorn's practice and the Internet. Mediation is posed as a contradictory extension of immanence. This interest in mediation, as seen in the artist's extended event structures in public housing projects, such as *Spinoza Monument* or last summer's *Gramsci Monument* in New York, cannot, on this account (mainly the artist's), be conflated with social work or, even more balefully, 'interactivity'. (This positioning is one whose structural blind spots have recently been shrewdly unpacked by Kari Rittenbach.) The

disavowal of extrinsic factors to the autonomy of the artwork uses the filter of Spinozian 'immanent causality' to discuss the particularity of Hirschhorn's social effects. Immanent causality, then, licenses not only Hirschhorn's claim to the political but also Lee's own methodology of establishing the continuity between artistic strategies and the social totality: a non-systematic totality where distinctions are eradicated at the level of the object as they are in the application of the critical method.

It is perhaps in the final section that the analytic purchase of Lee's approach stumbles most evidently. The 'pseudo-collective' is the rubric Lee adopts to describe the constitution of ambiguous artistic entities such as the Atlas Group and Raqs Media Collective. The appropriation of debates around collectivism in twentieth- and twenty-first-century politics and aesthetics fuels strategies of anonymity, opacity and refusal of authorship called upon by them and other post-collectives (including pseudo-corporations, such as the Bernadette Corporation and Reena Spaulings). This also underscores the increasing porosity between cultural practice and activism. In order to ground her analysis, Lee calls upon two singular and reified instances of what she calls, after Stimson and Sholette, 'collectivism'. These are the Soviet Union and the World Social Forum; understood as the exemplary moments of modernist and post-modern collectivism, respectively. It

is, however, the Invisible Committee that ties it all together, in their theorization of the systemically disruptive potential of refusing singular identity. Yet, besides the paradoxes entailed by casting anonymity as pivotal to projects consistently attracting a high degree of institutional recognition, Lee encounters problems in relating the analytic levels of her claims about collectivity in general to the specific issues surrounding collectivity as an artistic strategy. She positions collectivity unmistakeably in the sphere of *consumption*, as a counter to the consumer sovereign self whose tyrannical sway has biopolitically reshaped our conditions of existence; in this she is in accord with the Invisible Committee, albeit not in a position to confront some of the more normative implications of such a lifestyle politics. More worryingly, the issue of the collective would seem to afford an ideal opportunity to introduce class analysis into a narrative that has up until then come across as a sequence of decontextualized summaries of world-system shifts. The discussion of the Atlas Group especially flags a missed opportunity to engage an interlocutor who has consistently written on their work and also the condition of contemporary art as a mover and an index of globalized capital, Peter Osborne. Osborne's account of the Atlas Group aligns with Lee's in its emphasis on collectivization and fictionalization; yet his reading has the distinct advantage of enabling us to follow the social contradictions of globalization as an effective fiction via a subject position materialized by the work itself, rather than the kind of simple opening of history to contingency which the work is literally performing, and where Lee's analysis is content to remain.

Overall, it is in the very sweep of Lee's formulations, couched as they are in the potted reconstructions of theoretical trends and periodizations, that one truly begins to feel something like an emulation of Lee's diagnosis of 'forgetting' in the architecture of the diagnosis itself. If the artworld forgets its conditionedness by 'real-world' factors such as hot money and super-exploited labour, then it is the terminology of globalization that partly licenses this forgetting, posing the expansion of the bourgeoisie over the whole globe (Marx) as the spread of progress in both time and space, while the global division of labour that makes this possible is cast into the shadows. Gestures to this divergence are made in a discussion, early on in the book, about biennales as both manifesting the entrance of peripheral actors onto the stage of globalized art industries and ensuring new kinds of marginalization. But in the absence of

class analysis, or even an account of the kind of 'work' art ostensibly does, Lee's critical vision of globalization, as it manifests in particular art practices, reproduces these material conditions as ideological figments in line with the non-committal juxtaposition of aesthetics and politics so institutionalized by now in the artworld itself (while, at the same time, repeating its propensity for the shotgun inflation of philosophical vocabularies). In this light we can conjecture that forgetting the art world in favour of the real can only be a formal demand and a formal constraint which acts to optimize the pursuit of business as usual: as Harun Farocki wrote, echoing the provisional character of all prior history for Marx, it is not a matter of 'touching the real' but of changing it: 'reality will have to begin'.

Marina Vishmidt

Old idea

Andrew Feenberg, *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Lukács and the Frankfurt School*, Verso, London and New York, 2014. 252 pp., £16.99 pb., 978 1 78168 172 5.

Andrew Feenberg has not ceased reflecting on the question concerning the adequate philosophical foundations of contemporary critical theory since the appearance of his first book *Lukács, Marx and the Sources of Critical Theory* in 1981. Its new, radically revised edition is a clear indication of this intellectual persistence. The first edition of Feenberg's book was published in a transitional period for radical social critique, when the political and ideological impetus of the New Left was diminishing, leaving behind a number of scattered claims to liberation that still remain unsatisfied. In the same year, Habermas's magnum opus *The Theory of Communicative Action* appeared in German – a book that established formalism's preponderance in the field of critical theory. Habermas's communicative reformulation of the old Critical Theory promised a realistic compromise between the instrumental imperatives of the system and the democratic-communicative demands of civil society for more individual and collective freedom. As a result, the claim that the old Critical Theory Feenberg was trying to update had been irreversibly left behind became a widespread conviction.

But many things have changed since then. Habermas's theory was formulated at a time when state-interventionism was harshly attacked by the rising

ideological and political power of neoliberalism. The latter's dynamics proved to be strong enough to transform the world radically. The economic power of multinational corporations grew enormously, while the communicative power of civil society decreased significantly. The new supranational economic elites systematically took advantage of the abolition of social control over national economies, and of unprecedented technological progress, to establish their control over fragmented resistances occurring from below. More recently, the unchecked dynamics of neoliberal modernization and technocratic rationalization have, however, met their limit in two interrelated objective processes: the global economic crisis that erupted in 2008 and the imminent ecological catastrophe caused by global warming. In view of such global risks a new awareness of the inadequacy of the dominant 'rationality' is growing. With still no cogent alternatives in sight, an urgent need for theoretical elaboration of the negative experiences of the victims of austerity and ecological devastation arises. It is this need that Feenberg's *Philosophy of Praxis* seeks to meet on a philosophical level.

Feenberg has reordered material from his first book, reformulated central points, and added many new sections, even whole new chapters, to bring his views up to date. The reflections on science and technology he has developed during the last thirty years serve as a background hinge that gives unity to his historical reconstructions. Feenberg's reconstruction of the origins of what he terms the 'philosophy of praxis' shows that, although as a figure of thought it has some basic traits and a general orientation, there have been different versions of it in accordance with changing historical conditions. According to Feenberg, the philosophy of praxis takes its cues from Marx's metacritique of idealist philosophy to show that the latter's main concepts and their antinomial relations are nothing more than philosophical sublimations of real moments of social life. Subsequently the philosophy of praxis aims to transcend the limits of idealist philosophy by shedding light on the only real possibility of a resolution of philosophical antinomies: overcoming them practically through social change.

Feenberg shows how this general theoretical structure takes on particular forms in the work of each of the founders of the philosophy of praxis, pinpointing, at the same time, the specific inner problems of each one of them. As an intellectual heir of idealist philosophy, the philosophy of praxis retains some of the basic ideas of the Hegelian approach in a demystified

form: the transcendence of the epistemological standpoint by an ontological notion of the primordial unity between man and the world, which takes on various (inadequate) historical forms, and the dialectical relation between subject and object (hence, also, between form and content, mind and body, value and fact, etc.). However, the dialectical unity of opposites can't be restored in mere thought – it can be accomplished only through the application of the 'principle of practice' in revolutionary action. Thus revolution becomes the hallmark of the successful mediation between subject and object – in this sense it represents the 'realization of philosophy'. Of course these ideas raise several difficult questions. Who is the 'real' subject of practice and in what sense can it be supposed that the object, with which it is mediated through revolution, encompasses both the social *and* the natural world? What is it that urges the subject to pursue a practical reconciliation with the object? And how should the relevant practice be understood?

In his early philosophical work Marx conceptualized labour and the human senses as the main ontological categories of the mediation between man and the world, while criticizing formalism for concealing the power of life's content to induce the changing of the social forms of its mediation. However, this radical idea led to the highly speculative corollary that the new society stemming from the revolutionary action of the oppressed workers would necessarily imply a new form of scientific knowledge, based on men's lived experience which is suppressed under capitalism – a romantic idea that Marx abandoned in his later work.

Lukács's early Marxist philosophy is presented by Feenberg as a more elaborate version of the philosophy of praxis. Lukács's great contribution is, according to this reading, the cultural understanding of capitalism and its overthrow. His theory of reification rests on the idea of the historically contingent prevalence of a certain 'form of objectivity' – that is, of a cultural pattern of the relation between subject and object, based on formal calculative-instrumental rationality. However, this one-sided form of rationality, which is rooted in the generalization of the commodity form, is inadequate for mediating social needs. As such, the world it shapes is permanently shaken by successively erupting crises, resulting from the unresolved conflict between form and content. Nevertheless, it is precisely this inadequacy that provides a possible solution, since it motivates the proletariat as a collective subject to change the social form of objectivity through revolutionary praxis.

In a heretical interpretation that opposes the superficial readings of Lukács's early Marxism proposed by Adorno, Habermas and even the older Lukács himself, Feenberg demonstrates why revolutionary change, as described in *History and Class Consciousness*, cannot be comprehended as a singular act of absolute production of a new, harmonious and transparent reality. It must, rather, be understood as a long process of struggles, a process of consecutive precarious dialectical mediations with no final solution. In this sense de-reification would be the continuous removal of institutional and cultural impediments to an open process of emancipative social change and not an idealist-theological creation of all objectivity by a mythical collective subject. Feenberg works out how Lukács saves his argument from reverting to metaphysics by exempting nature from de-reification, thus retaining its otherness. However, this salvation causes a tension in his theory, since he admits that de-reification can never concern the *totality* of the world. Lukács's 'absolute historicism' seems to meet a discernible limit here, which implies the apparent danger of reverting to the antinomies of bourgeois thought.

After the frustration of the hopes for the immediate continuation and success of the socialist revolutions in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, the Lukácsian philosophy of praxis faced an additional problem: the mediation between theory and praxis through the constitution of the proletariat as a revolutionary subject did not seem to be possible any more. The experience of the failure of revolution constitutes the starting point for the Frankfurt School. Adorno and Horkheimer drew upon the Lukácsian critique of reification to formulate a totalizing critique of instrumental reason and domination over nature without the guarantees of a future reconciliation through social praxis. Adorno in particular tended in his postwar work to a merely negative critique that demonstrates the inner link between formal/instrumental rationality and domination over nature and society. Although he could not avoid implicitly presupposing the perspective of reconciliation with 'fallen nature', he systematically eschewed presenting it as a practical possibility. Here lie the grounds for his distanced, if not hostile, relation to the revolt of the 1960s.

However, the significance of the uprising and the forming of the New Left was recognized by a third representative of the Frankfurt School. In his early work Marcuse was already interested in an ontological interpretation of the relation between man and

the world and in the diagnosis of its distortion by an inadequate, historically situated form of rationality in capitalist society. Following Adorno, he showed that 'one-dimensional' rationality serves control over nature, which is phenomenologically 'projected' as a value-free matter to be rationally dominated. Thus, this rationality negates the various potentialities inherent in beings. But at the same time Marcuse recognized in the protest of the New Left the traces of a new experience, an aesthetic relation to nature, capable of fostering a consciousness of the repressed potentialities, thereby anticipating a subversive culture of pacification, respect for otherness and reconciliation with nature.



Feenberg criticizes Marcuse's fascinating but problematic return to Marx's idea of a totally new science based on new experiential foundations. However, he advocates Marcuse's idea of a new technology as much more convincing and reasonable. Technology rests not only on scientific rationality but also on design that mediates between scientific knowledge and its technical applications by forming a 'technical code' – the latter can therefore incorporate life-affirming values to replace the current 'formal bias' of technology that favours domination and control. In spite of its shortcomings, the Marcusian philosophy of praxis opens the way for a theoretical conceptualization of the continuing resistance against reification in an epoch of fragmented oppositional struggles. New

social movements make demands opposing racial and gender discrimination, the socially disastrous effects of austerity policies, the ecologically dangerous, unrestricted exploitation of nature, and centralized, anti-democratic control over technological progress.

According to Feenberg, the Lukácsian notion of mediation can help us understand these movements as a moment in the dialectics of reification and de-reification. Further on, resistance to reification may still be politically weak and scattered; however, it operates on the deeper level of changing the capitalist *a priori* of everyday experience, drawing upon the cultural resources of a ‘new sensibility’, informed by aesthetic experience, as Marcuse would like to have it. The contribution of Feenberg’s new book is its critical reappropriation of an important theoretical tradition of modernity, showing cogently that it possesses the theoretical potential to conceptually articulate the new cultural consciousness gradually formed by the new social movements, and to delineate a positive emancipative perspective of present struggles. It can thus give rise to fruitful dialogue on the necessary re-radicalization of social critique in the face of the deep and multifaceted crisis of contemporary capitalism.

Konstantinos Kavoulakos

All trousers, no shirt

Fred Moseley and Tony Smith, eds, *Marx’s Capital and Hegel’s Logic: A Reexamination*, Brill, Leiden and Boston MA, 2014. vii + 336 pp., £98.00 hb., 978 9 004 20952 7.

The twelve chapters in this volume consider the place of Hegel within Marx’s critique of political economy, specifically the place of the *Science of Logic* within the various drafts of *Capital*. Collectively, they constitute a referendum on what in the Marxian literature has come to be variously labelled as the ‘New Hegelian Marxism’, the ‘New Dialectics’ and ‘Systematic Dialectics’. Whilst this reading of Marx (which has been around for over two decades now and whose status as ‘new’ would thus seem to be waning) takes in a wide variety of accounts of the Hegel–Marx confrontation, it is unified to the extent that it specifically emphasizes the influence of the ‘late’ Hegel on the ‘late’ Marx. In other words, it is not Marx’s early, explicit critiques of Hegel in the *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, the *Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy in General*, and so on, but his implicit

appropriation of the *Logic* within *Capital* that defines the systematicity of his work.

Some proponents of the New Dialectics stress the ways in which the *Logic* provides not only a methodological but an ontological model for Marx’s ‘exposition’ (*Darstellung*) of capital as self-valorizing value. This dovetails with the so-called ‘homology thesis’: namely, the three Doctrines of the *Logic* (Being, Essence and Concept) are homologous to the systematic development of the value-form in *Capital*, from the commodity to money to capital. The work of Chris Arthur, included in this volume, is an emblematic example of this standpoint. (For a more extensive treatment, see Arthur’s *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, reviewed by John Kraniauskas in *RP* 122.) Others associated with the New Dialectics take a more cautious approach, underscoring what they see as Marx’s highly selective and changing use of the *Logic*, whilst still others contend that the intelligibility of Marx’s dialectic must ultimately be based in his rejection of the inescapably idealist character of Hegel’s dialectic. The critical function of this volume is attributable to this diversity of positions. There is a palpable tension between the chapters, but this is precisely what makes it a contribution to our understanding of Hegel and Marx.

The axes around which the debates turn are familiar. The well-trodden ‘opposition’ between Marx’s materialism and Hegel’s idealism, including Marx’s declared ‘inversion’ (*Umstülpfen*) of the Hegelian dialectic, consistently surfaces in the chapters. For Tony Smith, this is a false opposition, rendering the metaphor of inversion both misplaced and misleading. Quoting Marx against his own reading of Hegel, Smith suggests that “absolute thought” refers ... to anyone’s thinking in so far as it “cognize[s] the immanent soul of [the] material and ... concede[s] to it its right to its own proper life”. In this sense, Marx’s ‘systematic reconstruction in thought of the essential determinations of capitalism’ should be viewed as exemplary of the Absolute Idea: it is wholly accountable to the objective content of the world. This materialist Hegel also features in Mark Meaney’s and Roberto Fineschi’s analyses of, respectively, interest-bearing capital and capital in general, both of which insist that Hegel’s dialectic is completely internal to the self-development of the determined content it articulates. On the other hand, the chapters by Juan Iñigo Carrera, and Gastón Caligaris and Guido Starosta, toe the orthodox Marxist line that Hegel’s dialectic is in fact inverted. For Caligaris and Starosta, the *Logic* is ‘inherently flawed’ because its systematic

dialectic ‘begins with the simplest *thought-form* (*that is, with a purely ideal or formal abstraction*)’, and, consequently, it cannot register the inner movement of ‘real material being’. Similarly, Carrera claims that Marx begins *Capital* by ‘confronting the commodity as a real concrete and not as a category or a concept’. The pro-inversion camp is not strengthened (although it is perhaps well represented) by these two chapters. Both operate with a rigid dualism between ‘ideal’, ‘abstract’, ‘thought’, ‘concept’, ‘category’, and so forth, on the one hand, and ‘material’, ‘concrete’, ‘the real’, and so forth, on the other. Such dualism does not just impoverish the dialectical interplay between these categories in Hegel and Marx, but conflates the meaning of different categories within each opposing side. An upshot of this (a problem, to be fair, which the materialist Hegel camp in this volume also fails to address) is that, whether intentionally or not, ‘matter’, not ‘sensuous human activity’ or ‘labour’, becomes the implicit ground of Marx’s concept of materialism.

The relationship between Hegel’s ‘Concept’ and Marx’s ‘capital’ takes centre stage in many of the chapters by the economists. The crux of the matter here is whether the moments of the Concept (universality, particularity and singularity) correspond to those of capital in general, many competing capitals and interest-bearing/finance capital in *Capital*. Meaney, Fineschi and Fred Moseley each stress different dimensions of this homology, but all agree that this structure is in place. (This is not true of all the contributors. For instance, Smith insinuates that Hegel’s ‘singularity’ potentially corresponds to Marx’s ‘social individual’ in communism, but certainly not to bank capital.) These chapters meticulously chart the changing course of this homology through the ten years of drafts of *Capital*, but what they offer in close textual and philological exegesis does not make up for the fact that there is actually very little critical engagement with the *Logic* or with *Capital* in themselves, relegating the Hegel–Marx confrontation to a simple framework of one-to-one mapping. The critical power of interpreting capital as a manifestation of the Hegelian Concept is subsequently limited.

Matters are more complex – and much more promising – with those chapters that integrate the *Logic*’s Doctrine of Essence, which is to say the essence/appearance (*Wesen/Erscheinung*) relation, into their analyses of *Capital*. There is no consensus on the precise contours of Marx’s use of the Essence-Logic, but each reading adheres to what Patrick Murray calls a ‘disruptive overlap’ between the Essence-Logic and the Concept-Logic. Smith declares that Marx grasps

the structure of capital – qua self-valorizing value – as ‘precisely isomorphic with the structure of Hegel’s *Absolute*’, but ultimately the most consequential (Hegelian) aspect of *Capital* is that ‘*the social ontology of generalized commodity-production is defined by two completely incommensurable Essence-Logics in Hegel’s sense of the term.*’ This is the conflict between money as the adequate form of appearance of value, and money as the fetishized form of appearance of the social, such that value is ‘the reified and alien form sociality takes when it is in the historically specific mode of dissociated sociality’. This foundational contradiction (never overcome in capitalism) constitutes for Smith the meaning of Marx’s *critical* systematic dialectic, as against Hegel’s *affirmative* systematic dialectic. For his part, Riccardo Bellofiore prioritizes the semblance-appearance (*Schein–Erscheinung*) distinction, not the universality-particularity-singularity structure, as the crucial homology between the *Logic* and *Capital*. He then – quite convincingly – extends this distinction to that between ‘fetishism’ (*Schein*) and the ‘fetish-character of capital’ (*Erscheinung*). Bellofiore’s and Smith’s accounts are both enriched by Igor Hanzel’s close reconstruction of the circular movement from *Schein* to ground (*Grund*, the central category of *Wesen*) to *Erscheinung* in *Capital*.

Not coincidentally, these are the same chapters that weigh in on the relevance of Hegel’s concept of subject to Marx’s concept of capital. With the exception of Bellofiore (and Arthur elsewhere), the standpoint of this volume is that the ‘self-moving substance’ – the substance-subject – does *not*, as Hanzel puts it, ‘contribute to Marx’s conceptual grasping of the very *real ground* of the social relation characterized by ... “capital”’. The hang-up, in a nutshell, is the production process. For Smith, because the Doctrine of the Concept lacks an adequate concept of capital, the substance-subject does not register ‘how coercion, alienation and expropriation pervade modern society’. The outcome of Murray’s examination of surplus-value and profit is that Marx uses the Concept-Logic in order to explain capital’s *pretence* to be a self-valorizing subject and the Essence-Logic in order to expose this subjectivity as fraudulent. Keying into Marx’s well-known depiction of value as an ‘automatic’ and ‘dominant’ subject, Hanzel argues that the precise location of these passages – in Chapter IV of *Capital* Volume 1, and hence before Marx’s journey into the ‘hidden abode of production’ – dictates that capital only masquerades as a Hegelian subject, that capital’s subjectivity can only be comprehended at the level of false appearance

(*Schein*), not real ground (a ‘historically specific social relation of production’).

It is possible to disagree with these conclusions – Bellofiore makes a compelling case that the “linear” exploitation of workers and *class-struggle in production* does not preclude us from understanding capital as an instance of the Hegelian subject. However, the issue is not the conclusions themselves, but rather the framework through which they are read. We need to be wary of the premiss – which not every contributor in this volume necessarily holds to, but which not one single chapter critiques – that the systematicity of Hegel’s and Marx’s ‘systematic dialectic’ is defined by its separation from, and opposition to, a ‘historical dialectic’. This is a basic tenet of much of the literature in Systematic Dialectics: history and historical

time must be excluded from the domain of the systematic. There are many problems with this. For one, it exempts the *Logic* from being held accountable to its own historicity. It also rejects the fact that history and historical time are *immanent* to the systematic development of the value-form in *Capital*, a fact that undercuts Hanzel’s claim that the passages on value as subject do not express the category ‘real ground’. These problems coincide with a constitutive tension at the heart of Systematic Dialectics: it is predicated on the *historical* specificity of capitalism, not to mention categories of the philosophy of history like ‘the modern’ and ‘the contemporary’. There are a number of things to take away from this volume, but the false opposition between systematic and historical dialectics is not one of them.

George Tomlinson

The man who almost leaped over his own shadow

Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life*, Liveright Publishing, New York and London, 2013.
672 pp., £25.00 hb., 978 0 87140 467 1.

It has been revealed recently that Chinese premier Zhou Enlai’s iconic 1972 statement ‘It is too soon to tell’ did not refer to the French Revolution of 1789, but to the May days of 1968. This is perhaps a sign of the times: a recent trend in historiography attempts to understand the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on their own terms rather than through the prism of the twentieth century. Jonathan Sperber embodies this trend. In the same way that Blackbourn and Eley, in *The Peculiarities of German History*, do not depict the so-called ‘failed bourgeois revolutions’ of 1848 as initiating the inexorable path to Hitler, neither does Sperber cast Marx under the shadow of Stalin. Nevertheless, Sperber’s disassociation of Marx from twentieth-century communism also comes at the cost of denying his relevance for twenty-first-century capitalism:

Putting Marx into that era means remembering that what Marx meant by ‘capitalism’ was not the contemporary version of it, that the bourgeoisie Marx critically dissected was not today’s class of global capitalists, that Marx’s understanding of science and scholarship, contained in the German word *Wissenschaft*, had connotations different from contemporary usage.

Sperber is but one in a long line of commentators to assert this. Marx, it seems, is perennially irrelevant.

Hegel once said that each individual is a child of their time. We can no more think beyond our historical period than jump over our own shadow. Yet, while Marx clearly has one foot in the nineteenth century, Sperber overemphasizes it to the detriment of that other foot which, leaping forward, has yet to come down.

Sperber contends that historical developments have superseded Marx. The world of service-sector work and joint-stock companies are ‘outside Marx’s intellectual universe’. This neglects Marx’s discussions of these phenomena in, among other places, chapter 16 of *Capital* Volume I or chapter 23 of *Capital* Volume III. Contemporary Marxists like Ursula Huws have shown that Marx’s theory of the working class is no less applicable to contemporary service-sector workers than to industrial factory workers, or, like Guglielmo Carchedi, have shown that Marx’s conception of the capitalist class can be fruitfully applied to recent developments in the corporate firm. Sperber calls such updates ‘Marxology’ and deems them ‘singularly useless pastimes’. He says little, however, about the extent to which the processes Marx identifies as essential to capitalism – exploitation, class struggle and crisis – remain despite these historical developments. Sperber cites the standard criticisms of the ‘transformation problem’ and the theory of

the falling rate of profit, but does not assess the comparative merits of the neoclassical economics he takes as given:

Marx's basic economic principles, his views about the main lines of economic development, and his conception of the place of his particular economic vision in the public sphere, had all been shaped by the intellectual trends and economic and political circumstances of the first half of the nineteenth-century. When his ideas finally percolated into a broader public domain, a good decade after his death, in part as the result of the tireless and painstaking editorial labours of Friedrich Engels, all these circumstances had changed. What was once economic orthodoxy had become outdated and unscientific to the economic mainstream; or, if one prefers, dissenting and unorthodox. What was once the future of economic developments had become their past, and what were once common assumptions of bourgeois society had become the prized possession of a labour movement distant from and hostile to that society.

Sperber's real focus, however, is on Marx's politics. Unsurprisingly, Sperber downplays the extent to which Marx was concerned with the long-range tendencies of capitalism in comparison to the more conjunctural issues of European affairs. This is most evident in his depiction of Marx's participation in the 1848 revolutions, the area of Sperber's greatest expertise. He asserts that, from the outset, Marx embraced an impossible politics:

He pressed for a democratic revolution to destroy the authoritarian Prussian monarchy. At the same time he aspired to organize the working class to carry out a communist uprising against a capitalist regime he expected such a democratic revolution to establish. In effect, Marx was proposing a double recurrence of the French Revolution: a repetition of its 1789–94 phase in mid-nineteenth-century Prussia, and also a workers' seizure of power at the end of the 1840s modeled on the bourgeois seizure of power at the end of the 1780s. These two efforts, as Marx would discover in his interactions with the workers, democratic radicals, and True Socialists of Cologne, would prove noticeably more difficult to implement simultaneously in practice than in theory.

For Sperber, this is why Marx vacillated violently between the advocacy of proletarian dictatorship and of radical democracy. Although the *Manifesto* had just declared the 'spectre of Communism', Marx's newspaper during the 1848 uprisings, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, lacked accounts of the labour movement or of communist politics. Initially, the paper praised

the June uprising in Paris. For Marx, the beginning of barricade fighting between republicans and workers announced the first step towards communist revolution. According to Sperber, however, because Marx's paper was funded by Cologne democrats who rejected these views, he gave a speech on 4 August 1848 that repudiated his own recent ideas, including the revolutionary dictatorship of a single class, advocating instead a revolutionary government made up of heterogeneous classes and parties. Although later Soviet compilers refused to believe in the authenticity of the speech, Sperber contends that Marx made no attempt to correct any possible misquoting or misapprehension of ideas that, after all, were consistent with the democratic perspective of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. After the revolution ebbed in 1850, however, Marx made another abrupt about-face, declaring that workers must organize independently of radical democrats and republicans. Sperber's account illustrates his broader point about the narrowness of Marx's political considerations:

Marx did sometimes make radical statements about a communist future, for example in the *Communist Manifesto*, with its concluding comments about communists disdaining to conceal their goals, or in his endorsement in the *New Rhinelander News* of the Parisian workers' uprising of June 1848, or his description in *The Civil War in France* of the Paris Commune as the model of a future society. But for most of his major episodes of radical political practice, in Cologne during the Revolution of 1848–49, and in the [International Working Men's Association], Marx was far more reluctant to provide a picture of a communist regime, and either downplayed his advocacy of communism or cloaked it in ambiguous language. When he openly came out with communist aspirations, it was at the end of two periods of intensified political activity, and a sign that he was contemplating abandoning these activities altogether. By contrast, he never moderated his hostility toward either Russia or Prussia.

Sperber misinterprets Marx's activities in 1848–50, which were less about vacillating between two political goals and more about an attempt to balance both at the same time, albeit unsuccessfully. As Hal Draper has noted, the audience of Marx's newspaper was the broader democratic forces because he believed that communism was not yet possible in Germany. Nevertheless, Marx's political group engaged in constant educational work for communism through the Workers Association and sent organizers throughout Germany to establish similar organizations.

The speech of 4 August, known only through an unreliable newspaper report, was a formal rebuttal of an earlier speech by Weitling, who routinely denounced democracy for the sake of a messianic dictatorship of intellectuals. Furthermore, Marx's advocacy of a democratic revolution in Germany was not inconsistent with his support for a proletarian revolution in the more advanced conditions of Paris. It is true that Marx's strategy of what Sperber calls the 'double recurrence' was based on the experiences of the British and especially French 'bourgeois revolutions', which proved to be exceptional episodes in comparison to the typical patterns of subsequent state liberalization, such as Bismarck's 'revolution from above'. Nevertheless, that Marx came out of the revolutionary cauldron arguing for independent working-class organizations is not an indication that he was contemplating abandoning political activities, but, rather, that his political strategizing adopted a much longer range. In many ways, his thought is not limited to but rather by nineteenth-century conditions. Marx could not leap over his own shadow, but some shadows cast longer than others.

Despite these shortcomings, Sperber's biography is a valuable contribution. He provides an important corrective to the way in which Marx's ideas, strategies and activities are often abstracted from their societal context. He also exposes some of Marx's crucial mistakes. For example, in 1870, unaware that Bismarck was using diplomatic manoeuvres to provoke France into declaring war, Marx temporarily joined the German nationalist ranks, going so far as to say 'The French need a thrashing.' There are better accounts of specific periods in Marx's life. For example, the best English-language account of Marx during 1848–50 remains Hammen's *The Red '48ers*, and not only because he has an entire book for what Sperber covers in a single section – Hammen is not hamstrung by attempts to prove the purely historical interest of his subject. Nevertheless, with regard to Marx's entire life, Sperber has provided the definitive English-language biography to date. This is in spite of his curiously self-defeating thesis about Marx's irrelevance.

To this day, the frequency with which Marx, like Hegel before him, is declared a 'dead dog' belies the assertion. Why dig up their bones just to bury them again if not because their bark still echoes? Although we are centuries apart, we have in common the capitalist epoch. What Foucault says about Hegel can just as easily be said of Marx: he is a 'phantom-like shadow' who prowls through the nineteenth century,

and yet is 'insidiously' close to us. As Foucault puts it: 'We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism [or anti-Marxology?] is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands motionless, waiting for us.' Yes, Marx is of the nineteenth century, but in profound ways so are we. It is the lingering *durée*. And, still, it is too soon to tell.

Paul Christopher Gray

Analyse what?

Fabian Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013. 298 pp., £60.00 hb., 978 1 10703 654 3.

Fabian Freyenhagen's latest book is a precarious balancing act: on the one hand, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy* aims to defend Adorno against the gripes of prominent detractors like Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, whose allegations of pessimistic quietism have become all too familiar in recent years; on the other hand, his defence inadvertently underwrites many of the presuppositions shared by these authors as well as their Anglo-American counterparts. That is to say, for Freyenhagen (as for his interlocutors on either side of the Atlantic) broadly analytical questions about the normative weighting of Adorno's philosophy loom large. Accordingly, he asks: how can Adorno provide clear, grounded and above all practical directives for living 'less wrongly', despite his famous verdict that there can be no 'right' way of living – and hence no positive moral philosophy – in the current social order?

Freyenhagen explores this question with reference to a variety of sources. Besides *Minima Moralia* and *Negative Dialectics* these include Adorno's pedagogic works for German radio, his sociological debates with Arnold Gehlen, and his seminal lectures on the problems of moral philosophy. The book's opening wager is threefold: first, Freyenhagen assures us that Adorno has a tenable ethical commitment – a point that is widely disputed by so-called 'second' and 'third' generation Frankfurt School thinkers. Adorno's ethics, then, allegedly gives rise to substantive norms that can be philosophically vindicated, albeit only in a highly qualified, 'minimal' – indeed 'ecumenical' – sense. (As we will find, substantiating this claim takes up most of the book.) Second, Freyenhagen argues that Adorno's ethics depend on a quasi-Aristotelian

account of ‘human potential’, whose fulfilment is thwarted by ‘the present social world and its institutions’. As such, we are assured, Adorno’s thought contains an injunction to *resist* these de-potentiating structures – a ‘negative freedom’ to oppose the ills of capitalist modernity. Third, Freyenhagen argues that although we do not ‘positively’ know what this human potential is, we can nonetheless learn something about it ‘indirectly’, *via negativa*. Far from being trapped in a ‘performative contradiction’, then, Freyenhagen portrays Adorno’s negative moral philosophy as a ‘serious contender for our allegiance’: as a plausible and – most importantly – justifiable ordinance to resist the pitfalls of the present.

The entire inquiry takes place against the backdrop of ongoing debates concerning the putative ‘Problem of Normativity’ – a favourite watchword of Adorno’s analytically minded critics from Seyla Benhabib to Andrew Bowie. The standard objection, to which Freyenhagen responds, is that Adorno’s philosophy depends on certain ‘norms’ of judgement, which are believed to be at odds with his thoroughgoing ‘negativism’. On this reading, Adorno’s ‘hyperbolic’ account of damaged life is taken to require knowledge of its opposite: the good. (By what standard would we otherwise know what is ‘bad’?) By denying that such knowledge is available to us, however, Adorno is seen as running into contradictions. His claims appear ungrounded and unfit to back up the pragmatic demands for social reform advanced by the current crop of Critical Theorists. Ostensibly, then, the polemical thrust of Freyenhagen’s book is that he rejects the liberal consensus regarding the actuality of Adorno’s thought. ‘In particular’, he argues, ‘we *can* account’ for the normativity of Adorno’s work ‘even in the absence of knowing the good, the right or any positive value’. That is, ‘the bad is normatively sufficient on its own, and it is only by implicitly – and ... illicitly – assuming otherwise that the Problem of Normativity gets going.’ In short: although Freyenhagen resists the view that ‘the normative part’ of Adorno’s theory is ‘separate from the explanatory one’, he is nonetheless adamant that the ‘project ... aims for vindication in the sense of being able to explain better the social world (and its ills) than alternative theories’. If this view is accurate, he stipulates, ‘then such vindication requires a comparative study of various explanatory frameworks that demonstrates the superiority of Adorno’s theory over others.

Freyenhagen does not follow through on this proposal. Instead, he explores a variety of ways in which

Adorno’s ‘epistemic negativism’ might be seen to ‘vindicate’ his normative claims in terms that will satisfy his analytical detractors. Accordingly, he proceeds to illustrate two overarching theses, which connect the nine short chapters of his book: first, Adorno’s account of ‘the bad’ does not require an account of ‘the good’ in order to be normatively binding; second, although Adorno does not provide any account of ‘living rightly’, he does leave open ‘the possibility that there are forms of living the wrong life which are preferable to others’.

With regard to the first point, Freyenhagen insists that the effort to discursively ground ‘normative claims’ is misguided because ‘morality, according to Adorno, can have ... practical effects only in virtue of relying on non-discursive and non-deducible elements, namely, our impulse-based reaction to suffering and injustice.’ That is, ‘Adorno thinks that only by building the bodily abhorrence of physical agony into the moral outlook does morality have the kind of foothold in human beings that ... Enlightenment culture and Kantian ethics lacked’, at least on certain readings. Skirting the wider issue of Adorno’s materialism, Freyenhagen explains that any effort to discursively ground Adorno’s ‘normative claims’ misrecognizes that a ‘particular situation’ – for instance, Auschwitz – ‘*by itself* contains normativity’. Adorno’s peculiar brand of *éducatio sentimentale* is said to be sufficient to legitimate the normative purchase of his thought.

With regard to the second claim, Freyenhagen argues that even though Adorno is explicit that there can be no ‘right’ way of living under capitalism, ‘there continue to be evaluative differences between’ different ‘ways of living’. That is to say, ‘even if the wrong life cannot be lived rightly, it can be lived *more or less wrongly*.’ Accordingly, he writes that ‘striving to live less wrongly’ means ‘avoiding direct participation in any gross misconduct ... and mitigating as much as possible the bards produced by our social world’: a plea for individual ‘decency’ in a corrupted world. For Freyenhagen, then, living ‘less wrongly’ means living a ‘suspended form of life’, eschewing ‘any claims to legitimacy or meaning’: it means living according to an ‘ethical ideal’ whose demands may prove impossible to meet. At the same time, however, it means committing oneself to ‘critical reflection’ as the ‘necessary precondition’ for transformative praxis: ‘showing solidarity with others and their suffering’ – indeed, ‘cultivating a sense of modesty’. Echoing J.M. Bernstein’s *Disenchantment and Ethics* (2001), Freyenhagen claims that living ‘less wrongly’

means living ‘as one believes one should live in a freed world’, even though ‘we will almost inevitably fail’: to do one’s best, fail, try again and fail better.

In view of this short gloss, Freyenhagen’s book provokes at least two serious objections. First, by tirelessly arguing that Adorno’s thought in fact contains (however qualified) a normative, ethical core, Freyenhagen inadvertently plays into the hands of the critics he seeks to counter. That is to say, despite his self-professed ‘allegiance’ to Adorno, Freyenhagen’s investigation stays firmly within the Habermasian paradigm. Although he rightly emphasizes Adorno’s resistance to the view that ‘normative’ and ‘descriptive’ claims can be neatly distinguished (as if there were non-evaluative forms of speech), he underestimates the degree to which the putative ‘Problem of Normativity’ is, for Adorno, emphatically a *Scheinproblem*. This comes out in the book’s concrete analysis. For example, Freyenhagen describes the following scenario to illustrate his view that ‘the bad’ is in itself sufficiently normative: ‘when faced with a group of youths who are pouring petrol over a cat and are about to set it on fire’ one does not need ‘to make positive suggestions about how they could spend their afternoon in order to intervene’. Given that this hypothetical is invoked to support the claim that one does not need to reasonably ground the horror of Auschwitz, Freyenhagen’s illustration betrays a deeper problem: his pervasive formalism. The effort to defend Adorno using the jargon of analytical ‘language-games’ tends to lose sight of an important point acknowledged earlier in the book: that Adorno is not devising abstract behavioural guidelines to be applied at will to any given situation. There is a qualitative difference between burning cats and burning human beings; to treat Adorno’s work in terms that do not recognize this difference is to arbitrarily apply an inappropriate standard to the issues it concerns. This is not just a presentational qualm. By forcing Adorno into an analytical framework, Freyenhagen fails to recognize that his ‘style’ is coextensive with an unabated concern for the gravity and specificity of historical suffering. In any case, Adorno’s thought is not about mitigating ‘the bad’; it’s about squarely facing it.

The second problem is that Freyenhagen’s Kantianism leads him to unwittingly echo another familiar indictment of Adorno: namely, Jacob Taubes’s and Giorgio Agamben’s plaint that his thought amounts to an ‘as if’ philosophy. For Taubes and Agamben, Adorno sins against his own

commandment to abstain from painting pictures of redeemed life. (How does Adorno figure the ‘standpoint of redemption’ invoked in the famous closing aphorism of *Minima Moralia*?) At the same time, however, the authors charge that Adorno displaces the possibility of redemption into an ineffable beyond. His philosophy is, thus, forever doomed to contemplate an aestheticized variant of the ‘messianic’ promise (that all will be redeemed) without ever being able to realize it: a letter of resignation written on stationery from the Grand Hotel Abyss. At best, Taubes and Agamben argue, Adorno must content himself with acting ‘as if God, the kingdom, truth, and so on existed’ (as Agamben quotes Hans Vaihinger), in keeping with the time-honoured Kantian/Neo-Kantian maxim of regulative judgement: an infinite striving towards betterment in the spirit of social democracy. At worst, he is a bourgeois mandarin with little to offer but empty lamentations and aesthetic escapism. But if Taubes and Agamben condemn Adorno’s putative Neo-Kantianism as pseudo-Messianic, then it is telling that Freyenhagen makes the ‘as if’ into a central term of his *defence*. Although Freyenhagen does not refer to either Taubes or Agamben, their shared belief that Adorno proposes to live *as if* ‘the good’ were attainable errs on the same issue: given Adorno’s unflinching critique of ‘progress’, tying his thought to the infinite task of striving for betterment seems thoroughly ill-advised.

In sum: Freyenhagen’s book attempts to defend Adorno’s subterranean ethics from the common charge that its demands amount to little more than empty hyperbole. The view that, although Adorno cannot offer guidelines for how to live ‘rightly’, he can provide directives for how to live ‘less wrongly’ is no less problematic. If Adorno’s *ethical* objective is to provide clear, reasoned instructions for how to live ‘less wrongly’ (despite the fact that living ‘rightly’ remains eternally deferred), then *politically* this situates him, squarely, among the movers and shakers of the liberal-democratic postwar consensus in West Germany – a reading that hardly appears likely given Adorno’s debt to Nietzsche, Benjamin and Marx. In the end, Freyenhagen’s effort to mobilize Adorno for an analytical readership is quietly pragmatic in a way that might satisfy liberal pundits from Frankfurt to New York; however, his portrayal runs the danger of missing what is most enduring in Adorno’s work – the ruthless criticism of everything that exists.

Sebastian Truskolaski

Driven to extraction

Forensic Architecture, ed., *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2014. 744 pp., £22.00 pb., 978 3 95679 011 9.

The US military has become so adept at gathering data that it is now, according to an article in the November 2014 edition of *National Defense Magazine*, 'drowning' in its own digital morass. The promised bailout comes in the form of so-called 'computer vision' technologies that relieve human operatives from having to process visual information by eye. Instead of rooms full of people cleaning up fuzzy images frame by frame, new software is able to sharpen video in real time. With so much imagery, claims Sean Varah, CEO of Silicon Valley-based video analytics company MotionDSP, 'you have to use computer vision technology to extract information.' The automation of image analysis clearly raises a number of troubling issues regarding the substitution of human interpretive capacity with algorithms, but the broader assumption grounding Varah's efficiency claims is that images are data reservoirs from which stuff can be extracted – literally, drawn out.

Whether or not people or machines are doing the extracting, the hinge here, it seems to me, is the question of what it means to be drawn out. Is information dragged out of data, like a body from a swamp hoisted into visibility by the hook of the penetrating gaze, human or otherwise? Or is it produced – drawn out, drafted – through the act of capture and conversion into meaningful forms? The notion of writing with light gave photography its name, the shapes of things rendered by what Henry Fox Talbot called the pencil of nature. But do the forms need to precede the drawing? This is not posed as a philosophical query as such but as a question regarding the nature of evidence. Computer vision does not fix a blurred image but makes a clear one out of blurred data – blurred in the sense of there being not enough received data to make a clear image without adjustment. The object is not the issue; the form of the image is what matters. While this is patently disturbing if we subscribe to the notion that evidence is made up of the unadulterated facts of the matter, the question remains as to whether the room full of human analysts is any less engaged in the construction – as opposed to the discovery – of information than the computer program. Computer vision, we might say, is simply quicker on the draw.

Varah is clearly not troubled by any semantic slippage in his use of the term 'extraction' and simply means to say that technology can meet the objective better and faster than its human equivalent. He certainly does not intend to suggest that evidence is made rather than found. Yet it is precisely in the making, the drawing or marking out of evidence, and in the capacity of technology to render making as finding, that the visual presents itself as a vital space of opportunity for Silicon Valley and military R&D. The real-time production of information through computer vision is a means of manufacturing a pristine image realm within which the referent is no more than the sludge left over from a dematerialized high-def picture process. Computer vision promises the fulfilment of the dream of information as commodity-form, the labour and struggle of interpretation zapped to oblivion by massive processing power, where the image is always already its own interpretation, rinsed of conflict or challenge that might inhibit its endless circulation as self-evidence.

An achieved computer vision-enabled utopia would have no need for a public forum for debate and negotiated truth-finding since data and truth would be coterminous. Until then, there is enough blur in the images to require critical forensic examination. 'States and corporations', Eyal Weizman writes in the introduction to the dauntingly data-heavy collection *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, 'can mobilize large resources to construct their claims. But the nature of struggles for justice is that they must run counter to dominant and dominating narratives.' In order to challenge as lies the 'well-constructed facts' of technocrats in the employ of rich states and corporations, the technologies of surveillance and intelligence-gathering must be 'mobilized in order to engage with struggles for justice, systemic violence, and environmental transformations across the frontiers of contemporary conflict.' Hence the dual valence of the term *forensic* as pertaining to the public forum and to the crime scene.

The book, published on the occasion of an exhibition at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, presents the work of the architects, artists, filmmakers, lawyers, and theorists directly involved in or otherwise associated with the Forensic Architecture project in the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths College, University of London. It gathers forensic investigations undertaken by the project and its collaborators, research and essays that situate contemporary forensic practices within broader political, historical and aesthetic discourse. Case

studies include citizen-video analysis of the shooting of Palestinian demonstrators by non-lethal munitions on the West Bank; an investigation of death camp sites in the former Yugoslavia; an inquiry into the use of white phosphorous munitions in Falluja and Gaza; an examination of covert drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Gaza; an interrogation of environmental violence and genocide in Guatemala during the early 1980s; and a forensic oceanographic study of the so-called ‘left-to-die’ boat carrying migrants fleeing Tripoli in 2011. In each case the investigation necessitates the production and analysis of mountains of, among other data, maps, charts, diagrams, infographics, screengrabs, satellite images, architectural drawings and numerous forms of photographic evidence.

Faced with the apparent seamlessness of state and corporate ‘well-constructed lies’, the major challenge for these forms of counter-hegemonic forensic research is to locate moments of ambiguity in the evidence, the ostensibly irrelevant or irritable noise in the signal. It is precisely in what Weizman calls the ‘weak signals, often at the threshold of visibility’ – the blur that computer vision and other corporate techno-fixes would erase at source – that activists must pursue the ‘fragility’ of their truth claims ‘against the flood of obfuscating messages, of dominant narratives, fabricated noise, and attempts

at denial’. The investigations often turn on a crack in a building, a faint line in a single video frame, a few scattered pixels, a fugitive blur. For Weizman, the proliferation of digital technologies has produced ‘new visibilities’ uncontaminated by corporate and state machineries and new, accelerated modes of dissemination via phones, clouds and social networks. These technologies, he writes,

have expanded the capacity to bear witness, but they have also transformed the meaning of testimony, and to a certain extent eroded its sanctity. Today there are many photographers and spectators but only a few witnesses in the traditional sense. While the number of images and available information in the public domain has been amplified, bringing new sights, sounds, and issues into the eyes and ears of an extended polity, these images also call for new practices of trawling through, looking at, and looking again, interpreting, verifying, decoding and amplifying messages and broadcasting them further.

The result, as the work collected in *Forensis* shows, is a kind of counter-torrent of ‘other’ information extrapolated out of ‘material and media flotsam’. Nothing is irrelevant; every hair, flake, particle and pixel is mobilized as the unruly excess of science, gathered to leverage its ‘aesthetic power’ to refute ‘state-sponsored mechanisms of denial, obfuscation,



and manipulation that were established by those that control not only the depth of space, but also its interpretation'.

It is the emphasis here on the aesthetic power of the critical forensic project that distinguishes it from 'peer-reviewed science' with its superior firepower and arsenal of 'hard evidence'. In this asymmetrical struggle, connecting aesthetic practice, activism and science is intended to open up pockets for public debate in fields otherwise dominated by state- and corporate-funded experts. Here, the making of truth – as opposed to objectively locating it – is acknowledged at the outset as an intrinsic part of any investigation rather than something to be denied or erased. Truth, for the critical forensic investigator, is multiply performed, staged, constructed, pieced together, shaped, narrated and dramatized. Sensitivity to form – forms of matter, representation, dissemination – reflexively includes the process of truth-making as part of the project. Furthermore, matter itself is grasped in its sensorial capacity, able to 'detect, register, and respond not only to contact

and impact, but to influences in its environment and to remote presence'.

This is where architecture is positioned as the 'kernel' of the multidisciplinary field that *Forensis* elaborates, since for Weizman it is the building surveyor who properly understands that a building is responsive to all manner of external influences; architecture, then, is '*aestheticized* to its environment'. The job of forensic aesthetics thus becomes a process of bringing matter to the forum through various modes of prosopopeia – giving form to the language of things. If this sounds much like the way conventional forensic evidence might be used in court – letting the evidence speak – the key difference lies in a commitment to aesthetic modes of apprehension; to ambiguity, excess, performativity and theatricality. The non-conclusive, improvised, transformative energies of data are conceived not as a resource to be mined but as a medium through which new modes of understanding might be created.

John Beck

Fun and games

Richard Barbrook, *Class Wargames: Ludic Subversion against Spectacular Capitalism*, Minor Compositions, Wivenhoe, New York and Port Watson, 2014. 444 pp., £25.00 pb., 978 1 57027 293 6.

In 1965, Guy Debord of the Situationist International patented a tabletop wargame, The Game of War, which he had invented ten years previously. Just over a decade later, he went into partnership with his friend, the film producer and radical publisher Gérard Lebovici, to produce this and other wargames commercially. Another decade on, and after Lebovici's assassination, their company finally published Debord's game and its accompanying handbook. In 1991, three years before his own suicide, Debord demanded that all of his books, including The Game of War, be withdrawn from publication and pulped.

For many critics, Debord's turn to boardgaming during the self-imposed isolation of the later years of his life has remained a biographical oddity, even an embarrassment in relation to his fierce theoretical output from the 1950s to the 1970s. More recently, other critics have allowed The Game of War a place in a narrative of Debord's life's work, normally as part of his late emphasis on strategy and the theory of warfare. The game and its handbook were republished in French in 2006 and in English in 2008;

around the same time, Alexander Galloway and the Radical Software Group reinterpreted the game for the digital age – their version is available online. Debord seems to have anticipated the multivalence of his game, its richness for biographical speculation as well as theoretical inquiry. 'The surprises vouchsafed by this Kriegsspiel [sic] of mine seem endless', he writes in his autobiographical *Panegyric* (1989); 'I rather fear it may turn out to be the only one of my works to which people will venture to accord any value.'

Class Wargames: Ludic Subversion against Spectacular Capitalism documents the efforts of Richard Barbrook and the Class Wargames group to play, share and discuss Debord's game. The group plays other wargames, but focuses on Debord's version, of which they have made a short film and a reproduction of the modernist board and pieces manufactured for Debord. Since 2007, the group has played the game at exhibitions and conferences around the world; reports from these matches serve as the primary structuring device of *Class Wargames*. Importantly, the function, lesson or significance of the game is

not pre-established; nor is the game submitted to an existing body of knowledge or mode of inquiry such as Game or Systems Theory. Instead, Barbrook treats the game as an enigma: why did Debord's critique of spectacular capitalism culminate in a boardgame?

Games, Barbrook recognizes, occupy a central place in the avant-garde tradition of the twentieth century. *Class Wargames* offers an account of the Situationist International's ludic inheritance from Constructivism and Surrealism, and contends that the English inheritors of the Situationists have exacerbated the role of play in its practice. The Class Wargames group positions itself as a continuation of the English Situationist tradition that runs from 1960s' groupuscules, through punk, to contemporary 'culture jamming'. These English practitioners have developed their own strain of what punk-turned-Situationist historian Tom Vague calls 'Pop Situationism', which recognizes four key tactics drawn from the Situationist International: provocation, *détournement*, psychogeography and participatory creativity. Debord's Game of War, Barbrook argues, invokes each of these tactics.

The story of the Class Wargames group and its inheritance from a longer Situationist tradition is set within another narrative that is altogether more world-historical in scope. The problem to which Debord's game might provide some answers, Barbrook suggests, is that of the recuperation of historical revolutions. The original and paradigmatic recuperation is Napoleon Bonaparte's co-optation of the French Revolution that began in 1789; the Bolsheviks' recuperation of the Russian Revolution of 1917 is read as a repetition of much the same process. In relation to the former recuperation, the book considers the responses of Jacques-Louis David, Hegel, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Clausewitz, and the father and son who invented the original *Kriegsspiel* in 1812 to educate Prussian and later German officers in military strategy. Into the twentieth century, the book considers how academics at RAND and MIT also utilized wargames and simulations, as well as the importance of military strategy in the various manifestations of Maoism.

The conception of history that Barbrook sketches is one that repeats itself, and history's victors have become such through their superior knowledge of strategy. The promise of Debord's Game of War is to impart that knowledge to a new generation of revolutionaries, who can defend their future revolution from recuperation. More specifically, Barbrook presents recuperation as a consequence of vanguardism,

'the dangerous problem of charismatic leadership within the proletarian revolution'. Even more recent revolutionary situations, often celebrated for their leaderlessness, have seen unofficial and unaccountable leaders emerge: Daniel Cohn-Bendit from May '68, for example, and the 'choreographers of social media protests' of the Arab Spring. Class Wargames aligns itself with the council communist alternative previously heralded by the Situationists. 'Instead of the leaderless revolution', Barbrook writes, 'everyone should be a leader in the next iteration of the proletarian revolution.' To play Debord's game is to experience direct democracy and to learn revolutionary leadership.

To impart knowledge that will change world history is, of course, quite a big ask of a boardgame. Indeed, as *Class Wargames* progresses, Debord's game and the others played by the group become rather overdetermined. At times, the games serve symbolic functions: they allow their players to pay respect to military victories of the past, or even to shrink despotic generals down to size. At other times, the games' functions are more discursive: they get people talking, or serve as visual accompaniments to impromptu lectures from Class Wargames members. The group's practice is explained as a ludic alternative to 'the Left's stultified debates over the tragic fate of the 1917 Russian Revolution', a *détournement* of merely hobbyist wargaming, and the continuation of an avant-garde tradition. Ultimately, the function of both the Class Wargames group and Debord's game is pedagogical: to play the game is to learn the skills of military combat ready for the next iteration of proletarian revolution. When left activists play at war, Barbrook writes, they gain 'the specialized knowledge of how to beat the masters of war at their own game'.

It's all made to sound so easy. In fact, it's difficult to separate Barbrook's celebration of punk provocation from his more grandiose conclusions about the game's pedagogical function, and the seriousness of his proposals is brought into question by his book's idiosyncratic style. Barbrook's primary research consists of playing and touring the game, and his extensive lists of secondary and historical sources are rarely quoted directly. He combines first-person narrative, military and political history, and forays into cultural theory. It is tempting, therefore, to read the book itself as an exercise in Pop Situationism: like Tom Vague's radical history pamphlets, Barbrook writes 'speed history' that accelerates through the contingencies and complexities of world-historical events with singular intention; like Stewart Home's

novels, Barbrook repeats clichéd formulations (the phrase ‘most wonderfully’ appears thirteen times; ‘most gratifyingly’, six), and fosters the type of sectarianism that characterizes much Situationist discourse (his targets include Bolsheviks, anarchists, autonomists, ‘semiotic structuralists’, ‘celebrity academics’). However, these qualities – *détournements*, perhaps, of more recognizably academic modes of inquiry – add to the book’s ludic and eclectic character. In one passing but revealing moment, Barbrook writes of the Barbus, ‘the primordial avant-garde movement’ of Jacques-Louis David’s students, ‘Like the Surrealists, Constructivists and Situationists in the 20th century, one of their greatest creations was their own personalities.’ As well as being gloriously eccentric, this book is deeply personal: it documents the experiences of a particular group of people in playing wargames as much as it discusses the games themselves.

As such, I wonder how far the various layers of significance that Barbrook attributes to Debord’s game in particular are inherent to its form, or whether they were contingent on his group’s playing of it. For example, in *The Sight of Death* by the former Situationist T.J. Clark, the particular conditions of the days of his visits to the gallery affect the details that Clark notices in Poussin’s paintings. In Barbrook’s book, which is also a diary of a steadfast focus on a specific aesthetic object, the particular places where they play the game affect the significance that it assumes. When they play the game in the Winter Palace, it honours ‘the Situationists’ discovery of [an] escape route from the dead end of Bolshevism’. Is the game equally as meaningful when I play it at home? Likewise, doesn’t the suggestion that the Game of War teaches ‘collective revolutionary leadership’ assume that the game is played collectively? When played one-on-one in private, as Debord played it, the game’s format and logic seem to privilege the figure of the heroic General, the Great Man of History, and reduce rank-and-file involvement to sacrificial abstractions. Debord also claimed that his game had achieved a close fidelity to ‘the workings of real warfare’, and was not ‘simply the latest in the long series of simplified re-creations of battles past’, yet Barbrook struggles to reconcile his belief in the singularity of Debord’s game with his own recognition that future proletarian revolutions won’t be subject to the conditions of ‘horse and musket’ combat that it simulates.

The response to these queries about the wargame form is surely ‘play the game’ – ideally, in public

and collectively. The lessons of participatory creativity can only come from participatory creativity. In the book’s detailed reports and diagrams of specific matches, the limits of commentary become apparent, but the central lessons of *Class Wargames* relate to collective activity and playfulness, above and beyond the rules of any game.

Sam Cooper

Crabwalk

Frédéric Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire*, Verso, London and New York, 2014. 224 pp., £60.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 1 78168 161 9 hb., 978 1 78168 160 2 pb.

In one of his documentaries, Louis Theroux visits a brothel in Nevada. The women working there don’t appear overly joyous about their job, and that’s of course to be expected. Still, many of them seemed to have worked out a way to separate their work personas from their more intimate and private senses of self. They had come up with ways of emotionally disconnecting themselves from what they were compelled to do; rather like Annie Hall, leaving her body in the bed for Woody Allen to have sex with while taking a seat at the opposite end of the room, reading a book and waiting for the act to end. This emotional disconnect was the greatest fear of the boss, the brothel’s own madam, who ceaselessly trained the women in the art of becoming authentic. ‘Don’t stand there like a plastic Barbie doll’, she instructed the uncomfortably stiff girls as they practised new poses. The job of the madam was to turn forced smiles into genuine laughs and fake feelings into seemingly real expressions – this is, after all, what customers want, at least those who had come to the brothel to experience affection, not to buy sex.

One such customer was Humping Hank. He was a regular at the brothel, yet different from most other regulars. He did not have sex. Instead he would spend the evenings with a woman imagining that she was his girlfriend, a perfectly authentic girlfriend, which he could kiss and hug. In short, he was there for the girlfriend experience, ‘the GFE’. What can Humping Hank tell us about the drudgeries of modern work life? Many scholars have tried to find a suitable metaphor for contemporary work. During the 1990s, when corporate gurus stumbled on the new and intriguing word ‘culture’, the metaphor of choice was ‘family’;

proposing that being part of a culture was the same as being part of an extended loving family. Then, to catch up with the next trend, scholars started using new metaphors to capture the relation between employer and employee – the favourite being ‘short-term relationships’ or simply ‘affairs’ – suggesting that the new generation of career-focused youngsters would be faithful to no one apart from themselves, the market and their CVs. When the market turned out to be a rather inhospitable terrain, offering fewer opportunities to screw than to be screwed, critical voices would point out that work had become unmistakably similar to prostitution. And then things went south.

According to Frédéric Lordon, we presently find ourselves in ‘the world of the *girlfriend experience* ... in which the prescribed emotions are no longer merely outwardly enacted, but “authentically felt”. As such, today’s workers are not just prostitutes offering their bodies, but sex slaves required to offer a genuine



behavioural performance. Even though money is the reason many appear at work (for some the *only* reason), they are nevertheless required to keep that truth to themselves, and to maintain a sincere and authentic appearance. Humping Hank emerges here as the new boss, a particularly ugly figure who first asks the employees to do what they least want to do and then, in a sadistic turn, forces them to pretend otherwise: as if they act out of passion and their own free will. According to this logic, workers are not exactly forced into this role, because they must at all times conceal the involuntary basis of their involvement and actively display their willingness. Nor are they ‘interpellated’ or ‘hailed’, in an Althusserian sense, because they don’t necessarily believe

in the role that has been assigned to them. A better word to capture this configuration, Lordon suggests, is ‘enlistment’, which he describes as a cunning way to exploit the enlistees’ affective sensibilities.

In the last couple of years, a number of books and essays have confronted the ideology of work: Federico Campagna’s poetic anti-work essay *The Last Night*, Roland Paulsen’s empirical account *Empty Labor*, Peter Fleming’s social analysis *Resisting Work*, and of course David Graeber’s essay ‘On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs’. Lordon’s philosophical essay is more distinctive, however. It follows, or tries to follow, the paranoid and infinitely strange logic of enlistment and co-linearization, where the fake emotions of workers need to be transformed into seemingly real passions and then domesticated and repackaged so that they can be smoothly aligned to the interests of the boss, who is described as a menacing and evasive figure, existing somewhere between our darkest imagination and the office. The book is set against the background of financial capitalism and the deregulation of markets. This has paved the way for a new kind of violent and unscrupulous corporation that puts its employees under extreme pressure. Meanwhile, work has come to concentrate more on the employee’s ability to express emotions, build relations and cultivate an upbeat attitude. Mere compliance is not enough in an environment where constant innovation is a prerequisite for survival.

Many of the themes in Lordon’s analysis are familiar. It describes the nature of present-day capitalism in which the labour market expects a completely fluid and reversible workforce, one that can easily and swiftly adapt itself to ever-changing demands. As Lordon rightly observes, echoing what others have said before him, this has created ‘a world of extreme uncertainty for enlistees’. Lordon insists that what we are up against is nothing short of a ‘new political form’ – one not so far away from totalitarianism, albeit not in the classic sense. It is totalitarian in that ‘it aims at the *total* subordination of employees, more precisely, at their total *investment*. Subordinates are expected not only, according to the common formula, to “fully invest themselves”, but also to be fully invested – invaded – by the enterprise.’ When the subordinates have become ‘invaded’ in this manner they become increasingly vulnerable to the sadistic inclinations of the boss. As workers, they are constantly and violently terrorized, yet at the same time compelled to maintain a cheerful countenance, pretending everything is perfectly fine. Lordon cites Camus’s Caligula: “You’re looking grumpy. I wonder,

can it be because I had your son killed?" Caligula asks Lepidus, who ("choking", note the stage directions) has no choice but to respond, "Certainly not, Caius. Quite the contrary". The allegory is perhaps slightly exaggerated, Lordon admits, but suggests that it is a premonition of where we might be heading. When the desire of employees has become co-linearized with that of the boss, we enter a new domain of terror, where the employee is caught in a painful double bind: 'desire it yourself but only as I say; be autonomous but under my guidance.'

Lordon's analysis is original, mordantly funny, and for the most part very perceptive. Throughout the book, Lordon is unapologetically imprecise and equivocal. We move in and outside of workplaces, but the locations are tantalizingly unclear. Are we trapped inside an open-spaced suburban office filled with white-collar ghosts, overlooking a rainy motorway? Or do we find the enlistee cruising around on a skateboard in a hip media agency? Or is this just the brutal reality of the precarious service workers emotionally assaulted in a Pret A Manger or bullied by a sadistic boss at McDonald's? 'The desire of the enlistees', Lordon explains, 'must be *aligned* with the master-desire', or the 'boss's desire (whether the latter is an individual or an organization)'. But we never get to meet the boss, and the enlistees are also anonymous, without face or history, which makes it hard to get any insight into their desires. Another pressing question is whether enlistees appear only at work, where they are up against 'real' bosses, or if we find them also outside of work, floating around the 'flexible labour market', where they are perhaps enlisted in coaching sessions to learn how to enhance their personal market value?

The list of questions goes on, and they will remain unanswered, because this is not so much an empirical study based on a specific research question as a philosophical essay – and a French one at that. In style, it is not entirely different to the works of Pascal Bruckner or Hervé Juvin, although the political orientation is somewhat different here. It is sweeping and unsubstantiated, yet seductive and insightful. Lordon frequently consults Marx and Spinoza, but not in a systematic manner. Rather, they appear as edited voice-overs to accompany Lordon's allegorical readings of neoliberal capitalism. And it is these allegories that give the book its inimitable flavour. Take the following sentence, for example, where he likens employees' ways of expressing their willingness with that of crab walk: 'The crab walk will be their lot, first, because few will be able to case themselves

entirely and without the slightest reserve into the project of the full colonization of their being proposed to them by the neoliberal enterprise.'

One may accuse Lordon's essay of being hyperbolic in its claims, sweeping in its analyses and arrogantly silent on its sources (by the end, 'radical democracy' is briefly discussed as a possible way forward, but without mentioning Laclau and Mouffe). Even so, this is a compulsively readable analysis that perceptively captures the paranoid state of being employed, or unemployed, or both at the same time.

Carl Cederström

Banff boardroom blues

Marina Gržinić and Šefik Tatlić, *Necropolitics, Racialization, and Global Capitalism: Historicization of Biopolitics and Forensics of Politics, Art, and Life*, Lexington Books, Lanham MD, 2013. 321 pp., £59.95 hb., 978 0 73919 196 5.

This is a book mostly, but inconsistently, about the politics of art culture in the former Southeastern Europe. It is co-authored, divided into two parts, each written by one writer, first the mentor Marina Gržinić, and then her protégé Šefik Tatlić. Some of the book's shortcomings must be faulted up front. It is poorly edited. Each chapter reintroduces topics at length that have been presented in previous chapters, sometimes even previously within the same chapter. This gives the impression of a collection of separate essays, even though the authors depict their work as a composed historicization of 'politics, art, and life'. Tatlić's writing is dismally laboured. It includes a 149-word sentence on the second page that competes with L.M. Montgomery's famous 150-word first sentence in *Anne of Green Gables* (although only in length; Montgomery's is by far more elegant). It is in no small part for this reason that my review focuses on Gržinić's chapters. The words 'precise' and 'precisely' are unsuitably overused throughout to the point of exasperation. Often, there are so many brackets, rebounds, loops and returns in the writing that sense gets lost. Yet, despite the book's overambition, its claim about Southeast European coloniality provokes further thought. And Gržinić's writing indicates a proficient curation of others' scholarship that renders easy dismissal disingenuous.

A common weakness in Gržinić's chapters is that they are referentially overladen. They whirl from Santiago Lopez Petit's event-based structure

of capitalism and Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, presented as the logic at work within the European Union (chapters 2 and 3), to Brian Carr's racialization and dehumanization as vanishing mediators between biopolitics, necropolitics and colonialism, in which the last two are understood as 'entangled' regimes of power in Europe (chapters 4 and 5), to Marie-Hélène Bourcier's transfeminism and Luzenir Caixeta and Beatriz Preciado's 'dissident feminism' as discourses elaborating new struggles in neoliberal capitalism (chapter 6), to a Lacan-inspired reading of Analyst Discourse as 'the social bond that structures' global capitalism (chapter 7). This could have amounted to creative retelling, but the final impression is rather of a disoriented, angry index of recent scholarship on oppression.

In the third chapter, Gržinić seeks to show how necropolitics is becoming active as assemblages in Southeast European contemporary art. Gržinić first turns to the case of the Erased – 30,000 residents who were denied Slovenian rights of residency in 1992 for being judged to have ethnicities other than Slovenian. Although this case has been quite well studied, it readily seems to carry the necropolitical logic of letting live and making die. However, Gržinić's interests lie elsewhere, in an argument about the artistic replay of events. A 2008 special issue on the Erased in the Slovenian *Journal for Critique of Science, for Imagination and New Anthropology* is compared to the performance art of a trio called Janša, Janša, Janša (JJJ). JJJ names itself after the erstwhile Slovenian prime minister Janez Janša and incorporates a hyper-mimicry of Janša in its performance, down to each member's taking 'Janez Janša' as a legal name. From his time as leader of the parliamentary opposition in the 1990s, Janša was infamous for his ultra-nationalist speeches, which included demonization of the Erased as inherently un-Slovenian. For Gržinić, the special issue 'presents a gesture of radical fidelity' to the event of the Erased, while JJJ forecloses 'the cultural and political space of Slovenia' by its over-cynical, uncritical mimicry of Janša.

The performance by JJJ surely merits critique, but is it a necropolitical assemblage? The reader is told that by 'neutralizing the capability of the Institution of art, theory and critique' to critically analyse Janša, JJJ is part of a necropolitical machine within contemporary art. JJJ, according to Gržinić, grounds the pre-eminence, the *auctoritas*, of Janša by uncritically mimicking the politician as an 'authoritarian-charismatic' force, as *paterfamilias*, even after Janša

lost the 2008 election and was no longer legally in power. JJJ therefore performs an artistic 'state of exception' by capturing Janša's charisma from his days in power only to sustain it even after the politician has lost his election. The law has decreed Janša is no longer endowed with *potestas*, but JJJ sustains his *auctoritas* beyond the law. With JJJ's popularity in Slovenian society – popularity mediated by generous newspaper reviews and government funding – Gržinić sees JJJ's performance as a societal state of exception accomplished by art.

Art may take effect as a relay in power relations, but it remains to be seen how JJJ, the fawning newspaper reviews and the government financing make up a necropolitical assemblage. Gržinić's stance is that the JJJ-review-finance assemblage renders art 'dead' as bare art. Art and life (bare art and bare life), we are told, together with 'law and power', are the outcome of 'a process of the articulation of neoliberal global capitalism'. The reasoning here seems to be that when bare art surfaces to Gržinić, then surely the processes in place are the same as those that produce bare life: necropolitics. If the Erased are the product of necropolitics, then so is the impoverishment of art. Gržinić does not stop here, but adds that the political task is to separate art and life. The unity of art and life must be shown as a fiction, 'not as a simple fiction but as the *real*'. By the manoeuvre of equating the Erased and the impoverishment of art, Gržinić re-presents these two as identical beyond the symbolic, as necropolitical products whose separation is impossible to imagine. Thereby, Gržinić ensures that ethical critique of JJJ is destined to be hampered by the vanishing point at which it becomes ethical critique of the Erased for enabling their erasure.

A thread of doctrinality emerges intermittently throughout Gržinić's writing, betraying a selective logic in her use of normative critique and attribution of agency. JJJ is bad and the truth of its performance is truth 'in Alain Badiou's term' as something 'important that happened'. The special issue on the Erased is good and its truth is as Walter Benjamin would see it, 'something suppressed from the past'. Such selection similarly appears in Gržinić's reading of a participant retreat that took place in Banff (a Canadian ski resort) following the dOCUMENTA (13) art exhibition. For Gržinić the indulgence of a Banff retreat is further evidence of the impoverishment of art institutions. The retreat participants, including Catherine Malabou, Bruno Bosteels and Franco Berardi – those materialists are at it, again! – are busted for their Banff boardrooming. For Gržinić,

their behaviour is indicative of a mode of coloniality and persistent racial theory at the heart of Western power structures. While those who do not adequately undertake the political task can only see a Banff break as ‘a deserved holiday after important “social curating”’, those who know better are aware that it is a product of ‘a regime of curating’ that ‘hides the conditions and constraints of an invigorated global capitalist over-exploitative conjuncture’. Surely, we are given to understand, Mbembe would baulk at the idea of accompanying Malabou, Bosteels and Berardi to Banff. Mbembe, argues Gržinić, is well aware that the forms of curatorial activities are just as important as their content. But these materialists have apparently not read their Deleuze long enough to get to where the destruction of philosophy by activity that enjoys its own destructiveness is introduced as *bêtise*.

Gržinić’s writing expresses a certain obstinacy. An intuition that necropolitics is at work in Southeastern Europe is turned into a principle underlying the art culture of which Gržinić is a part. Respect for Lacan (or is it Žižek?) becomes the basis of exclusionary

practices. This obstinacy leaves one unable to see much force in Gržinić’s arguments, and sceptical of claims that they add to the array of works referenced. An alternative argument might place Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics rather nearer to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of anti-production in *Anti-Oedipus*, so as to draw out other routes for interrogating how a mode of coloniality operates in Southeastern Europe. Both concepts share a lineage from Georges Bataille’s *dépense*, expenditure. Setting the trio JJJ aside, perhaps Janša’s ‘charisma’ is itself the product of strategically summoning a racist, despotic system of anti-production. The strategy of summoning a despot to whom a nation’s debts are owed counteracts rebellions instigated when multitudes are made to weather the storms and eddies of global capitalism. Racism is always an infinitely divisible, coarse-mesh response. The fine mesh is that cared for life is indebted life, but getting out of debt to both despot and capital renders one a foreigner to all nations.

Tahseen Kazi

+ 1

Rodrigo Nunes, *Organisation of the Organisationless: Collective Action after Networks*, Mute, London, and Post-Media Lab, Lüneburg, 2014. 53 pp., £4.25 pb., 978 1 90649 675 3.

There is much that distinguishes the 2011 movements that overthrew Ben Ali in Tunisia from those that deposed Mubarak in Egypt. Perhaps more still marks the difference between these uprisings and the Occupy movement, or Spain’s ‘15M’ protests and encampments. The mass protests that erupted around Gezi Park in Istanbul, across Brazil in 2013 and in Hong Kong in 2014 were each informed by their particular national contexts, histories and discourses. But it has also been recognized by many – and the participants in these various events were often the very first to do so – that they have much in common. First, most have been composed at least in large part by a young, highly educated, precariously (if at all) employed, urban and technologically savvy demographic. Second, we have seen the circulation of what social movement theorists call a shared protest ‘repertoire’, specifically that of encampment and occupation. And third, while questions of inequality, property, democracy and rights have been central to many of these uprisings, they have tended to characterize themselves as being of (and mobilizing)

‘the people’ or ‘the 99%’ rather than ‘the Left’ or its traditional constituency, ‘the working class’.

Rodrigo Nunes’s short yet rich essay focuses on a further, oft-noted commonality: that it is the network that constitutes these recent social movements’ primary organizational form. This is no great surprise, he suggests, since the ‘everyday reality’ of protest participants – including those who favour more traditional forms of organization – is itself characterized by network organization; ‘[it] is literally what “comes naturally” to them’. (It is worth remembering that Manuel Castells’s influential writings on the emergence of ‘the network society’ were published in the mid-1990s, around the time many of those that have animated recent revolts were born.)

Neither an uncritical celebration of networks, nor its opposite – and we have certainly seen enough of both of these – Nunes’s substantive claim begins with the affirmation that absolute ‘horizontality’ is a myth: ‘networks are not and cannot be flat’. The individual nodes that compose a network never possess the same amount (or even type) of connectivity or influence:

DANS LES PAYS ET LES PARTIS

COMMUNISTES

de Isidore Isou

CHAPITRE I

ES DE LA DICTATURE DE
~~(LA LIGUE)~~
DANS LE PARTI COMMUNI-
STE, première version, à corriger

not in a General Assembly (the sovereign body often established by Occupy movements worldwide), not in the realm of social media, and not among the groups that typically make up a campaign. Drawing on the network theory of physicists Albert-László Barabási and Réka Albert, he argues instead that as networks grow they display a tendency towards producing a small number of 'hubs' (essentially, highly connected nodes) 'followed by a sharp drop to a long tail of nodes with slowly decreasing node degrees [or ties]'. Recent network-based movements, as a result, have been characterized not so much by 'horizontality' as they have by '*distributed network-systems* ... subject to continuous internal differentiation'. So, while powerful, highly connected hubs often exist, as in Barabási and Albert's account, 'the proliferation of ties constantly produces *redundancy*, creating alternative paths between nodes that counteract the tendency for hubs to become critical to the network's functioning' in the long run. While horizontality can productively function as an important 'regulative principle', the effect of this is generally the emergence of what he calls 'distributed leadership' operating 'at different scales and on different layers, at any given time'. Not, then, a 'leaderless' movement, but a 'leaderful' one.

Social media and digital technology have an important role to play here in enabling 'real-time diffusion and amplification', transforming this 'distributed leadership' – although what precisely

constitutes leadership is left relatively undefined in the essay – into 'a *diffuse vanguardism* in which initiatives can snowball exponentially', going viral. This is not the vanguardism of the classical Leninist tradition but rather 'akin to what Deleuze and Guattari call the "cutting edge of deterritorialization" in an assemblage or situation; opening a new direction' which can then be taken, diverted or opposed.

The ease with which hubs, (distributed) leaders and (diffuse) vanguards can be navigated around or rendered obsolete subjects them 'to a process of *continuous legitimation*'. They must function effectively, of course, staying active and providing useful connections. But because the times we live in are – quite rightly – so 'suspicious of representation', vanguards must also continually demonstrate their *network ethic*', being seen to act cooperatively, in the interests of what Nunes calls 'the whole network-system' rather than simply 'with a view to securing and enhancing their own power'.

This notion of the *network-system* is defined in part by its contradistinction from a *network-movement*, and the pair provide one of the book's most useful conceptual tools. The former stands in many ways for 'a movement as it exists *in-itself*, its capacity to produce effects', whether or not it understands itself as doing so. It is a system of networks: groups and individuals; spaces digital and physical. Events like the occupation of Gezi or Zuccotti parks, Nunes argues, produce network-systems by generating

new ties, nodes and hubs. This is another way in which social media perform an important function, producing ‘affective charges’ that travel along with information and opinion about occupations and protests. A ‘performative dimension of digital media’ emerges, where expressions of indignation become read as a need for action, and ‘[t]he more people manifest a disposition to act, the more widespread it becomes’. Paolo Gerbaudo, in his recent book *Tweets and the Streets* (2012), has made a similar argument: social media can generate ‘a great power of emotional attraction’ to occupied squares, serving as ‘crucial emotional conduits through which organisers have condensed individual sentiments of indignation, anger, pride and a shared sense of victimhood and transformed them into political passions driving the process of mobilization’. The moment such individual indignation transforms into a collective affect, and into something with material effects, is often difficult to pinpoint. The notion of network-system, however, names the *locations* from which these affects and effects emerge.

The network-movement, in contrast, stands for a movement that has become *for-itself*: ‘the conscious, self-reflexive understanding held by some that the multiple elements and layers assembled in the network-system constitute an interacting system of actors, intentions, goals, affects etc., however heterogeneous these may be’. Any account of the workings

of a social movement, Nunes insists, must begin by grasping the broader network-system in which the network-movement is embedded: the latter can only be properly understood in terms of its existence as a sub-network within the former. But there is another reason those interested in movements should be attentive to network-systems: while they are themselves dynamic rather than static, they tend to be less ephemeral than network-movements. It might be true, then, that Occupy Wall Street (a network-movement) is dead, but the persistence of an Occupy network-system of relationships, knowledge and resources meant ‘Occupy Sandy managed to organize a highly sophisticated disaster response operation in very little time’. So, while it is right, as Nunes explains, that in ‘trying to identify “the movement” ... counting beyond those who count themselves in seems dubious’, he shows how privileging those involved in self-conscious political activity often obscures what sociologists have sometimes called the ‘weak ties’ a movement has, which can occasionally be mobilized to great effect. To me, attention to what might remain of network-systems after a network-movement subsides appears to provide a more optimistic – as well as accurate – answer than many have so far been able to provide to the common question: what did Occupy really leave behind?

Ben Trott

radical philosophy subscriptions

our subscriptions service is changing...
– please use our new email address
to contact us with any queries

subs@radicalphilosophy.com