

## Krisis, what's krisis?

Neil Larsen, Mathias Nilges, Josh Robinson and Nicholas Brown, eds and trans., *Marxism and the Critique of Value*, M-C-M' Publishing, Chicago, 2014. li + 397 pp., £17.82 pb., 978 098954 970 7.

This publication presents the first translation into English of a compendium of texts from the German Marxist group *Krisis*. The critique of value pursued by *Krisis* is one variant of an approach that has become so influential among Marxist critiques of capitalist society that it has become known simply as *Wertkritik*, even outside of Germany. But, even in Germany, there is confusion as to what falls under this term. Therefore, a brief look at the genesis and evolution of *Wertkritik* is helpful in locating *Krisis* and the texts under review here.

As in other Western industrialized countries, a new reading of Marx emerged in West Germany in the 1960s. However, while in Italy this new reading was operaist, then post-operaist, and in France structuralist, then post-structuralist, the new reading of Marx in West Germany is best characterized as *the phase of the reconstruction of the critique of political economy*. These new readings and their impact remain influential in these countries and further afield today. In West Germany, the new reading of Marx began with the student movement, completely outside the traditional communist or socialist parties and organizations. As was practically obligatory until the late 1980s, it was influenced by German Idealism (especially Hegel) and by key figures of Western Marxism, especially the first generation of Frankfurt School Critical Theory. Indeed, one of the most influential strands of this new reading, the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* (NML) initiated by Alfred Schmidt, Hans-Jürgen Krahl and, especially, Hans-Georg Backhaus and Helmut Reichelt, formed an unofficial second generation of Critical Theory, radically distinct from the generational shift associated with Jürgen Habermas. This 'reconstructive' reading of Marx was both dissatisfied with traditional Marxism and motivated by providing what the first generation of Critical Theory's critique of capitalist modernity had been unable to reconstruct: their *ausgespartes Zentrum* (omitted centre), the economic kernel of the critique of political economy.

As might be expected from the term 'reconstruction', the new reading of Marx began with the first

chapter of *Capital*, in particular the double character of the labour embodied in the commodity and the value-form analysis. The goal was to determine not only the fundamental economic categories, but also their (dialectical) development, and the method and status of the resulting critique. As a consequence, after decades of traditional Marxism identifying labour and class as the central categories of critique and politics, the new reading now focused on perhaps the most elusive but pervasive category of *Capital*: value.

While some of the figures undertaking this reconstruction of Marx succeeded in pursuing university careers, they were unable to propagate a new generation of academics, and so the 'red decade' in West Germany burnt out in the universities by the late 1980s. *Krisis*, founded in 1986, was one of the circles that emerged from this conjunction, focusing on the critique of value in a non-academic environment. Another circle was the Initiative Sozialistisches Forum (ISF) and its publishing house *ça ira*. The ISF declared itself close to the tradition of some heterodox communists, as well as to the first generation of Critical Theory. It tried to radicalize the latter's notion of negativity and also went in the direction of what was to become a third circle, *Anti-Nationale*, now known as *Anti-Deutsche*, which focused on questions of politics, consciousness and ideology, especially structural anti-Semitism. A fourth circle was the *Marx-Gesellschaft*, which included some NML protagonists, and was closest to the tradition of the 'phase of reconstruction'. It published the best academic texts about value theory, in particular because of its close reading not only of Marx but also of the second edition of the MEGA. Meanwhile, perhaps the most cutting-edge work in the field of *Wertkritik* is being undertaken now by younger circles like *Rote Ruhr Uni* and a few quite isolated individuals.

*Krisis* started by breaking with the tradition of the so-called *K-Gruppen* (Communist Groups) of the 1970s, accusing them of pursuing the instrumental theory of Marxist-Leninist party politics, rather

than engaging in the critical theory of the fundamental categories of capitalist economy, to which *Krisis* dedicated itself. Since *Krisis* operated almost completely outside of academia and maintained a critical distance from social movements, it formed a reference point of its own and had the most influence on individuals in a similarly 'lost' situation. However, it was not really able to produce a second generation. In fact, its central figures remained nearly the same for thirty years: Robert Kurz, Roswitha Scholz, Claus Peter Ortlieb (who together formed the group Exit in 2004) and Norbert Trenkle and Ernst Lohoff (who are still in *Krisis*). In the 1990s, a number of younger intellectuals interested in French post-structuralism and an anti-essentialist critique of labour and value joined *Krisis*, but were expelled due to their perceived 'postmodernist' stance. In fact, with only a few exceptions, all strains of *Wertkritik*, not only *Krisis*, maintained a certain distance from the new readings of Marx originating in France and Italy.

With its inception, *Krisis* launched its publishing activities with the journal *Marxistische Kritik*. When the title was changed in 1989 to *Krisis*, it not only assumed the group's name but also its focus: the final crisis of capitalism. This final crisis was understood to have started with the third industrial or 'microelectronic' revolution, which 'melts productive labour after the short Fordist summer like snow in the sun'. The group's first monograph – Robert Kurz's *Der Kollaps der Modernisierung* (1991) – was closely connected to the idea of immanent capitalist limits and brought the group a certain popularity. Written around the time of the implosion of the Eastern European socialist states, Kurz claimed that 'real socialism' was mainly an industrial-Fordist accumulation regime, in which the centralized power of the state promoted modernization in underdeveloped circumstances, and that the collapse of this socialist 'recuperative modernization' presaged the end of its liberal Western version.

Even if Kurz claimed a kind of canon of original insights for *Krisis* – the critique of value, of labour, of the commodity-form and fetishism, a break with the tradition of *Arbeiterbewegungsmarxismus* (Workers' Movement Marxism) and, later, the *Wertabsplaltungstheorem* (value-dissociation theory) – the actual merits of *Krisis* were this: coming to terms with the debate of the 1960s and 1970s, carrying on certain strains under the strict and irrevocable character of the label *Wertkritik*, and aligning them with a dismissal of traditional *Arbeiterbewegungsmarxismus*. Yet these distinctions had already been formulated

in such books as Stefan Breuer's *Die Krise der Revolutionstheorie* (1979). This is also the case for a distinction that became programmatic for *Krisis*: the 'double Marx'. On the one hand, there is the 'esoteric Marx' with a radical negative critique of the abstract-repressive nature of capitalist socialization. On the other hand, the esoteric Marx gets withdrawn by the 'exoteric Marx', which asserts that this socialization by capital is a mere appearance leading to an unstoppable higher development and maturation towards socialism. *Krisis* followed this distinction by pursuing a critique of value-formed mediation that could be found in the esoteric Marx, developed especially in the value-form analysis and in the fetish chapter in *Capital*, Volume One, and by opposing this to the exoteric critique based on labour and class.

As mentioned by its editors in the Introduction to *Marxism and the Critique of Value*, this publication presents the 'first broadly representative book-length collection in English translation' of texts by *Krisis*. The Introduction goes on to provide a well-informed and remarkably helpful summary of the thirteen texts translated, contextualizing them alongside other important strains of *Wertkritik*. It also provides an overview of the important points in the development of the discussion around *Krisis*, while sidelining an explanation of the group's split in 2004 that resulted in the formation of Exit and its journal of the same name. Indeed, nothing is to be gained from considering the split, which resulted from little more substantive than personal quarrels.

Of course, an introduction has its limitations. It would have been helpful, for example, to mention that *Krisis* came in contact with other circles interested in *Wertkritik* over the course of several years, but ultimately followed its own way. The same goes for strains that are either suspicious of *Krisis*'s non-academic reading of Marx and understanding of value (such as the Marx-Gesellschaft), or who are openly opposed to *Krisis* because of its rationalistic reading of Marx and the determination of value (ISF dedicated an entire book to this accusation, *Der Theoretiker ist der Wert* (2000)).

With regard to *Krisis*'s own understanding of *Wertkritik*, the compilation of the texts included in *Marxism and the Critique of Value* provides a good overview from the beginning until 2010. Unfortunately, this stops short of significant later reflections by Kurz on money, such as *Geld ohne Wert* (2012) (*Money without Value*), or those by Trenkle and Lohoff on finance, such as *Die große Entwertung* (2012) (*The Great Devaluation*). The texts are not presented

strictly in the chronological order of their publication, but rather to reflect the systematic development of the group. The discussion starts with 'The Crisis of Exchange Value', Kurz's programmatic text written at the inception of *Krisis*. It continues with texts concerning the final crisis of capitalism, then the 'feminist intervention' by Roswitha Scholz, followed by texts against labour, and finally a couple of texts with rather sweeping criticisms of Enlightenment, modernity and the world market. As the development of these themes indicates, instead of reconsidering or deepening the basic categories of *Wertkritik* (like value, labour, commodity-form etc.), *Krisis* (and subsequently *Exit*) merely draw out the consequences of the initial formulation of their understanding of value.

And that's where the problem lies. Having established an understanding of value and labour, most of *Krisis's* further considerations – foremost its theory of crisis – evolved from the implications of this understanding and, consequently, suffered from its oversights and shortcomings. From the beginning, *Krisis* was more oriented to I.I. Rubin's distinction between matter and form and to a discussion stuck in the contradiction between use-value and exchange-value, than to the discussions around value developed by the NML. It is also important to note that despite *Krisis's* harsh criticism of traditional Marxism, the group didn't really reject the left-Ricardian labour theory of value that grounded this tradition. *Krisis* broke with its ontology of labour, which makes labour into an ahistorical necessity in the history of humankind's self-creation and an insuperable mediation in the metabolism with nature. *Krisis* also broke with its political consequences, oriented towards a liberation of labour instead of the liberation from labour. But *Krisis* did not really break with the left-Ricardian understanding of value as a chronological-linear realization and expression of living labour, first embodied in the commodity and then represented by money like a quasi-physical substance. On the contrary, it is precisely this understanding of value that is the basis of the idea that the third industrial revolution has reached the limits of social mediation by value and productive valorization, because the reduction of necessary labour-time has decreased the amount of the substance of value. The difference from traditional Marxism lies in *Krisis's* transformation of these elements into a theory of capitalism's final crisis. Other important implications derive from this, including *Krisis's* interpretation of post-Fordism, financial capitalism and neoliberal development. In

short, most of *Krisis's* critique of capitalism stands and falls with its understanding of the linear, quasi-causal connection between living labour and the quantity of value.

Another step in the understanding of value that *Krisis* missed concerns this very same connection between labour and the commodity or the substance and the form of value. In order to grasp this connection, it is necessary to understand at a categorical level what first makes that distinction *possible*, and at the same time *mediates* it, while also vanishing in that mediation and becoming a blind spot: money. The necessity of this intrinsic connection between value and money is perhaps the main contribution of the NML in Germany, and *Krisis* partly ignored that discussion and partly missed its critical kernel. Money, in other words, became the blind spot in *Krisis's Wertkritik*.

If money appears in *Krisis's Wertkritik*, it is simply as a means of exchange. Money only obtains value by representing the living labour of the past, embodied in the commodity and realized in commodity exchange. Consequently, the less this labour is necessary or productive, the less substance there is for the social mediation, and the more money is without substance. Just as in an objective reflection of a linear process, money is only an *a posteriori* representation of value that has already been produced by labour-time, necessary only to determine the necessary average magnitudes of value. Meanwhile, according to the findings of the NML, a critique of value first of all means a critique of all pre-monetary value theories that attempt to derive value either from labour or from commodity exchange. Value must be reconstructed from the capitalist form of money and from the valorization of labour-power by the various forms of capital. As a consequence, value is not labour-time embodied in the commodity and expressed in exchange-value, but the quantification of the relation of labour to capital in commodity production. The relation is a *time* relation; that is, the relation of living/present and dead/past labour-time, and of necessary and surplus labour-time. In short, we must place the substance of value within this relation of time and its quantification by money.

The absence of the importance of money in the understanding of value is also symptomatic of another important reference work for *Krisis*: Moishe Postone's *Time, Labour and Social Domination* (1993), which the group translated into German together with *ça ira* in 2003. In Postone's work, the connection between labour, time and value is strangely conceived

as if time simultaneously existed as the universal measure for labour and as given in a value where labour has been measured through time. Yet exactly this connection between time, labour and value in capitalism is money. It is not the clock that measures labour through time by quantifying it in values. Rather, this measuring process lies in the function and form of money. Instead of regarding money as a means to exchange a value created by labour time, money has to be regarded as the technique to measure the valorization of labour and capital, and to determine in value the magnitudes for their further valorization. In this equation, money is to value what Kant's transcendental schematism is to the objectivity of experience, what in Hegel's speculative version of dialectic the concept is to thinking, or what in Derrida's deconstruction writing is to the presence of meaning.

In Germany, the most innovative development of this type of critique of value can be found outside the entrenched approaches to *Wertkritik* mentioned above, specifically in the deconstructive reading of *Capital* and value in Hans-Joachim Lenger's *Marx zufolge* (2004), in Harald Strauß's semiotic reading in *Signifikationen der Arbeit* (2013), in Achim Szepanski's Deleuzian–Laruellian reading in *Non-Ökonomie* (2014) and in the measure theory of value and capital in my own *Das Geld als Maß, Mittel and Methode* (2014). Unfortunately, none of these books has been translated into English. Nevertheless, *Marxism and the Critique of Value* is an important contribution to enabling the international dissemination and discussion of the German debates about value since the 1960s. However, there is much else besides. Let's hope it is just the beginning.

Frank Engster

## Truly extraordinary

Dave Beech, *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics*, Brill, Boston MA, 2015. x + 392 pp., £109.00 hb., 978 9 00428 814 0.

Dave Beech's fundamental claim is that art is not a standard commodity. Art is, rather, 'exceptional', in the sense that its production, circulation and consumption follow patterns that are aberrant from the perspective of capital accumulation. The authors of the present review are in complete agreement with this claim. Indeed, after reading the book, we find it hard to imagine how anyone could not be. It suffices to observe – as Beech does, at length – that works of art are not produced as a result of the outlay of capital, that artists are not wage-labourers, and that the market price of art commodities is not established through competition as it is with other commodities. The case for art's exceptional status vis-à-vis typical commodity production therefore seems open and shut. Alas, the (art) world is not so simple. Confusion reigns on this point, even – or especially – among Marxists.

Beech's accomplishment is to have irrefutably demonstrated artistic production's difference from capitalist production, and to have done so in a text that is distinguished by a higher level of erudition than anything heretofore published on the topic.

*Art and Value* is the definitive retort to congeries of speculation on the commodity character of art – a morass, to be sure, in which a basic handle on the critique of political economy goes a long way towards clearing the air. This is terrain where even specialists lose their way. Consider a 2012 article in the online journal *nonsite.org* by the literary scholar Nicholas Brown, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Real Subsumption under Capital'. The title gives the game away, of course. And the first sentence makes it explicit: 'Whatever previous ages might have fancied, we are wise enough to know that the work of art is a commodity like any other.'

By 'real subsumption', Brown means something like the following. In at least certain phases of history, artworks may be produced outside of the imperative to alienate the product of labour as a commodity, and thus to treat art as a use value rather than an exchange value. Real subsumption occurs when the production of artworks is, by contrast, oriented exclusively to exchange; subsumption is therefore synonymous with the 'closure of the world market'. Karl Marx was wrong, Brown says, to believe that art

possessed any special powers of resistance: the means of artistic production *have* been subsumed; Marx could not have foreseen that ‘whatever is genuinely inassimilable in artistic labour would cease to make any difference; that the artist, when not genuinely a cultural worker, would be forced to conceive of herself, in true neoliberal fashion, as an entrepreneur of herself; that any remaining pockets of autonomy would effectively cease to exist by lacking access to distribution and, once granted access, would cease to function as meaningfully autonomous.’

For Brown, real subsumption is equivalent to the collapse of art’s autonomy and critical power, which is a disaster; hope lies only in wrenching art free from the commodity’s grip. Beech would likely point out, however, that in his rush to arrive at a critique of capitalism, Brown has neglected to properly define what capitalist production *is*. And this is so because he gets his terminology wrong. ‘Subsumption’, in Marx’s usage, does not refer to the global extension of the market, but rather to capital’s functional superintendence of the process of production, hence over labour. No sane person doubts that artworks go to market, and only hopeless romantics would deny that they are often produced with that market in mind. This, however, is a different matter from the question that Beech asks us to consider: is it the case, even if artworks are sold and resold ad nauseam, that they are *produced* in a manner that can be described as capitalist? To this, Beech answers with a resounding ‘no’. Real subsumption, properly understood, would mean not only the dependence of artists on a market for their works. It would also mean their dependence on a market for their labour. It would mean the reorganization of artistic production in response to constant competitive pressure from other art makers. Only under such conditions could artworks represent crystals of socially necessary labour time – measured by the time needed, on average, to produce them at a given stage in the development of society’s productive forces. Beech points out that none of these dynamics is directly operative in the production of fine art. Capitalists do not purchase the labour-power of artists in order to employ it in a production process oriented to the accumulation of value. Nor do they generally attempt to rationalize the production of artworks in order to increase productivity. Perhaps most tellingly of all, artworks do not necessarily, or even typically, exchange at prices that bear any relation to the labour time necessary for their production. The fame and reputation of an artist can instead cause certain works to sell at prices

that are literally millions of times higher than those that comparable pieces by unknown, unpopular or ‘emerging’ colleagues can hope to achieve.

Brown’s perplexity springs from what Beech characterizes as a typical mistake in the Western Marxist tradition. For these writers, the fact that (what Beech calls) ‘money power’ exerts an unquestionable influence on the art world becomes confused with the notion that art as such has become merely another (unexceptional) sector of the capitalist economy. Figures as illustrious as Lukács, Adorno and Debord achieve this confusion by force of analogy, without truly reckoning with economics. That capitalist society exerts a determinative effect on art remains indisputable, and these writers have done much to manifest these effects; but they make a muddle of Marx’s categories when they attempt to argue that this determination has rendered art a line of capitalist production more or less like any other.

*Art and Value* refuses this elision. The author focuses instead on a genealogy of theories of art’s exceptionalism with regard to capitalism in order to draw up a balance sheet and propose conclusions of his own. Although Beech is clearly in the Marxist camp, it turns out that he finds a number of unexpected allies in the early history of economic thought. Classical economists such as Adam Smith, Jean-Baptiste Say and David Ricardo developed a surprisingly robust account of art’s exceptionalism, emphasizing a range of factors that limited the power of market forces to balance supply and demand in the case of art objects (and other rare goods). Part I of Beech’s book, which surveys the history of thinking about the economics of art from the eighteenth century to the present, offers a narrative of decline. Despite the promising start represented by Smith and Ricardo, subsequent discussions of the economics of art increasingly attempted to assimilate art to economic models developed for understanding fully capitalist production. This is especially true of neoclassical economics, with its mathematical hypostatization of the market and its lack of interest in the conditions of production. Part of Beech’s motivation in writing this book is, then, his sense that Marxism has joined neoclassical economics in refusing to acknowledge art’s exceptionalism, despite the fact that Marx himself critically reworks the inheritance of classical economics and seems to acknowledge in several places the inapplicability of his critique of political economy to the case of art. After this summary, Beech prepares the way for his own reconstructed Marxist account of art’s

exceptionalism through an able, if needlessly comprehensive summary, of Marx's theory of value, labour and capitalism.

But here we immediately confront a problem: if the point of Marx's mature theory is to describe the dynamics of a fully capitalist economy in order to transcend it, then it is also possible that this theory is unable to offer a satisfactory account of exceptional economic orders. Whatever the virtues of Marxism, Beech's desire to claim a theory of art's exceptionalism for it gets him into trouble, making his book more of a beginning than a sufficient account of the economics of art.

The first sign of difficulty is his confusion about the commodity character of art, and his vacillation around the question of whether commodity production implies capitalism. For us, this is a simple matter: not all commodities are capitalist. A commodity, in Marx's definition, is a good produced for exchange. It



is at least theoretically possible to imagine a market society composed of owner-operators or artisans who produce goods for exchange but who do not employ wage-labour, and for whom the sale of products is not a means to the end of accumulation ( $M-C-M'$ ), but merely a means to realizing consumption needs, indirectly. Beech seems to agree in his opening pages, noting that 'the evident "commodification" of art is not proof that art has become capitalistic'. But later he equivocates, insisting on the necessary connection between capitalism and commodification, and explaining art's exceptionalism by stating that 'art has been commodified without being commodified'. What he means by this becomes clear in part II, when

he asserts that art is not *produced* as a commodity, but *becomes* one when it is sold. He correctly quotes Marx's definition of a commodity as something that is produced for exchange and, rather impossibly, argues that this doesn't apply in the case of art – as if the sale of paintings by a painter were something accidental rather than planned in advance, when a cursory glance at the behaviour of artists over the last centuries clearly proves otherwise. Later, however, he makes what is the cardinal error in these discussions, confusing commodification and subsumption, and offering an entirely different definition of the commodity: 'artworks are not already commodities since their production has not been subsumed by capitalism'. By this argument, if I choose to make a necklace with my own labour and sell it to someone, I have not produced a commodity (even though I clearly did it with the intention of exchange).

Beech's terminological equivocation muddies his otherwise robust account of what capitalism is and isn't, but it also points out a limit to his approach. For Beech, a Marxist account of art's exceptionalism means testing art's economics against a series of normative categories found in the pages of *Capital* (such as wage-labour, commodity, real subsumption, capital), rather than developing a full exposition of the dynamic of a capitalist economy as it interacts (or fails to) with exceptional art economies. For example, although Beech discusses the luxury status of art commodities and the fact that they are paid for out of revenue earned from the

exploitation of labour, he misses the opportunity to think systematically about the relationship between art and accumulation. Given that the money spent on art is money withheld from reinvestment in surplus-value-generating sectors of the economy, does art consumption act as a drag on accumulation? Or, alternatively, does it provide an outlet for surplus value unable to be invested profitably, for instance, in conditions of overaccumulation? This lack of a focus on dynamics means that Beech can argue, convincingly, that art is exceptional, but he can't really tell us why. What is missing is an emphasis on the very competitive forces that are at the heart of the classical theory of art's exceptionalism, and which

Beech apparently abjures for not being sufficiently production-centric. Yet capitalism involves a particular kind of production, a production for market, in which market prices and competition from other producers compel capitalists to engage in continuous cost-cutting practices – extending and intensifying and mechanizing labour – as a matter of survival. As capital – and with it labour – is moved from line of production to line of production, seeking out the best rate of return, a continual process of heightened exploitation is enforced. None of these dynamics is operative in the case of art economics, since each artist is effectively a self-contained line of production, incapable of being undersold by anyone else. No one can produce Gerhard Richter paintings except Gerhard Richter or his proxies. Even if one of Richter's assistants were to produce a painting that is identical to an authentic Richter, she would not be able to sell it *under her own name* for anything approaching Richter's prices (as Beech himself notes in an illuminating discussion of artists' assistants). The right to produce and sell 'a Richter' is Richter's alone. This is not a natural feature of art, but rather a historical one: it depends on notions of authorship and the uniqueness of the artwork that have emerged only in the last few centuries. Beech seems to take it as *a priori* that art (or more accurately, artistic labour) cannot be subsumed to capital. True enough, in practice. However, this fact is not an explanation of art's exceptional status, but is rather the historical anomaly that remains to be explained. It is this historical work that Beech is unable or unwilling to do.

Perhaps it is asking too much to expect a thorough account of the genesis of art as a separate sphere in a book that is hefty enough as it is. All the same it would have been useful to dedicate more attention to the specific cultural, institutional and/or technical barriers to capitalist investment in the production of fine art, and thus to be more specific also about how the fine arts differ from 'culture industry' sectors, such as film production, that are in fact prey to real subsumption, as well as from borderline cases such as theatre or the publishing industry, in which enterprises may be organized along either capitalist or non-capitalist lines. It is tempting to say that there is something about the material qualities of artistic procedures that makes them resistant to subsumption. But if so, this begs the question of *why* these procedures were set apart – and thus allowed to survive – in the midst of capital's thoroughgoing transformation of the forces and relations of

production. In fact, it is only possible to account for the phenomena that Beech describes in terms of the historical relation between 'pre-industrial' technique and the social and cultural – rather than abstractly categorical – fact of art's exceptionalism. A full account of exceptionalism would therefore require a more nuanced consideration of art's social bases and its historical development within bourgeois society – precisely the Western Marxist territory that the author is determined to avoid.

Admittedly, Beech does treat these matters in his chapters on the impact of welfare economics on art. His concern, here, is to describe what happens to theories of valuation when artists become dependent primarily on the state rather than the market. Nonetheless, 'art', in these pages, can too often appear to be an undifferentiated, invariant category, the production and circulation of which is simply inflected by shifts in the political order – for instance from the postwar Keynesian consensus to the triumph of neoliberalism a few decades later. Part of the problem is Beech's mode of presentation. Rather than give a systematic definition of what art is and how it behaves in the economy, he proceeds immanently through examination and critique of existing economic categories. As a result, concepts tend to cascade on top of each other instead of resolving into a coherent order. Art evidently is, depending on how you look at it, a commodity, a non-commodity, a public good, a merit good, a luxury, a commons, and more. What exactly all of these things have in common remains somewhat obscure.

Beech's book is most important as a critique of would-be Marxist orthodoxies in the fields of art history and cultural commentary. In this it excels. It is less successful, however, as an attempt to provide a comprehensive Marxist approach to the problem of exceptionalism, though perhaps through no fault of its own: Marx's *Capital* simply was not built to explain production of this particular sort. *Art and Value* undoubtedly leaves us in a much better position to formulate a proper economics of art. Ironically, though, the very theoretical resources that allow Beech to debunk the reigning doxa perhaps blind him to the way forward. If art is exceptional to capitalism, it might also be, in some regard, exceptional to the theoretical thrust of Marx's critique of political economy. Those who would be Marxists might do best to begin again with Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

**Jasper Bernes and Daniel Spaulding**

# The green herrings of realism

Devin Fore, *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2012 hb and 2015 pb. 416 pp., £26.95 hb., £17.95 pb., 978 0 262 01771 8 hb., 978 0 262 52762 0 pb.

According to Roman Jakobson, writing in 1922, realism 'is an artistic trend which aims at conveying reality as closely as possible and strives for maximum verisimilitude. We call realistic those works which we feel accurately depict life by displaying verisimilitude.' Acknowledging the diversity of artistic movements which have made claim to exactly this sense of realism in their works – futurism, expressionism, various modernisms, as well as the nineteenth-century movement known as 'realism' – Jakobson notes the 'extreme relativity of the concept of "realism"'. Hereafter, further ambiguities unfold. The most poised is perhaps that summarized by Jakobson under the heading B (as if issued from the position of an author's intention to be realistic):

- B1. I rebel against a given artistic code and view its deformation as a more accurate rendition of reality.
- B2. I remain within the existing limits of art expression as that is realistic.

If Jakobson's framework establishes a polarity between the conservation of stable codes of art and the necessity to break down and renew them, over which realism mediates, Devin Fore's ambitious book presents an argument about realism which synthesizes and complicates these two positions. Fore's argument develops from the view that, during the interwar period, movements of international modernism exhausted themselves and effected a 'withdrawal'. In modernism's wake there was a return not exactly to 'realism', but to a transformative revival of tropes, devices, representational modes, genres and subject matter drawn from earlier artistic periods and movements before modernism. Fore claims that what united these apparent archaisms was the return to the human figure. Yet his contention is that, although these forms may appear archaic, their use in the period immediately after modernism is characterized by fragmentation and rearrangement of the coordinates of their signifying power, constituting an unprecedented transformation. Invoking Walter Benjamin's 'negative mimesis', Fore intends to define the sensitivity to man's eclipse, which had faded from the anger and anti-rational revolt expressed in Dada, into something more immanent, perverse and alienated, smuggled under realist dress – not

seeking freedom from modern alienation and 'mute reality', but an immanence akin to Adorno's 'mimesis of the hardened and alienated'. Through examples crossing a series of representational renewals – of figuration in painting and photography; perspective in photography; gesture and filmic documentation in theatre; representation, myth and autobiography in fiction – Fore presents a case for the deepening of both 'realism' and 'modernism' as innovative forms of epistemic enquiry. This, he argues, is especially the case for figuration, since the return to representation of the human form depended upon an object/subject that had entirely changed: a new kind of human being. In sum, realism was not the *same* after modernism. As Fore puts it: '*Realism after Modernism* argues that the manifest resemblance between interwar art and the art of the previous century confirms nothing so much as the ineluctable fact of their historical non-equivalence.'

As such, Fore's book revisits, without precisely acknowledging, Benjamin Buchloh's controversial thesis in his 1981 essay 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression', in which, surveying European modernist painting in the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s, Buchloh established a schema with which to connect the rise of fascism and state-political orientations towards authoritarianism in the 1920s and 1930s, with the abandonment of abstraction and the return to figuration across the European avant-garde. This reductive account ironically provides the ground upon which Fore develops a far richer and more circuitous route through the aesthetics and politics of the interwar years. Against Buchloh's characterization of the 'bleak anonymity and passivity of compulsively mimetic modes', Fore's approach is analytically nuanced and conceptually rewarding. Rather than making mimicry a derogatory accusation, Fore opens mimesis itself to historical thought, tracking its aesthetic modalities through artistic techniques as they grapple with representing the human figure: 'Even where it was not evident in the content of the artwork or text, the human figure organized the very codes and conventions of realist representation.' Instead of making artistic technique a matter of mere volition or commitment, Fore's conceptual framework, partially derived from Russian Formalism, allows

for the interaction of volition and chance, involuntary forms of expression and voluntarism, truth to materials, complex technological articulation and mediation, and the inscription of the subjective in objective form. This peripatetic materialism, detouring through the internal motivations of artworks to explore their encoding of the world, in a way which is part of the world rather than merely mirroring it, presents a formalism misunderstood by many of its 'Marxist' adversaries. Fore's approach hereby presents a serious challenge to attempts to periodize modernism and realism from a Marxian perspective, but it does not amount to, in itself, a periodization.

The Introduction to *Realism after Modernism* establishes a framework for thinking the achievements of the early-twentieth-century avant-garde in broadly anti-humanist cultural terms: 'the shared modernist aspiration to achieve conditions of perception and consciousness outside of what is customarily arrogated to the human'. Allied within this constellation are: the formalist, Dadaist and futurist detonations of human-centred language; Erwin Panofsky's theorization of the artificiality and historicity of multiple forms of perspective; Dziga Vertov's non-human camera eye; Cézanne and cubism's phenomenological approaches to vision. The broad movement José Ortega y Gasset characterized as a 'dehumanization of art' triggered, in Fore's words, a 'countermovement' of 'rehumanization', established on the 'paradoxical' and 'conflicted' ground of the human figure. The fragmentation of human language and the human

body, both outcomes of the 'destruction of experience' in the maelstrom of World War I noted by Benjamin in his 1933 text 'Poverty and Experience', was followed in Germany, France, Britain and the USA by a period of extended economic crisis as mechanization, inflation, rationalization (Taylorism), unemployment and international debt repayments eviscerated social roles, bonds and communities – described brilliantly, in the context of late-Weimar society, by *The Salaried Masses*, Siegfried Kracauer's study of the rise of a white-collared and service class. Fore glosses lightly over these wider political economic conflagrations in order to emphasize the physiological implications: 'the individual becomes indistinguishable from the technical objects around him'; the 'crisis of culture', as the front page of *Die Literarische Welt* put it in 1931, 'is but the symptom of ... the crisis of man himself'.

Fore's primary resources for thinking this 'crisis of man' are situated within a tradition of philosophical anthropology heavily indebted to two figures he claims as 'leading voices of German critical theory today', Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge. Their concept of man as a 'deficient mutant' – a 'life form which, according to its metabolism, is not autonomous, but enters into concrete associations with others' – is derived from Arnold Gehlen's definition of man as a 'deficient being'. This grounds not only Fore's understanding of the human as social and co-dependent on forms of technology, but also his understanding of artworks as technical objects among others, facilitating new and self-reflexive forms of



vision. But Fore's somewhat optimistic appeal to man's 'deficiency' is haunted by the political defeats surrounding every artistic practice engaged with by his study. The apparition of what, in *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodor W. Adorno termed 'the subject as congealed technology' is notable by its absence. (Indeed, a darker reading of Negt and Kluge is possible. See, for instance, Stewart Martin, 'Political Economy of Life: Negt and Kluge's *History and Obstinance*', *RP* 190.) Fore brings us incredibly close to a recognition of the embedding of the subject in productive forces, only to steer clear of such difficult mediations in order to grant wholesale autonomy from them. This is reflected in Fore's relation to Marx. Inspired by Negt and Kluge's 'pre-historical' conception of labour (or perhaps a misunderstanding of it), Fore explicitly endorses the search for answers in the 'remote past', pitting Braudel against Marx. Capital's 'anti-natural temporality' is opposed to the 'natural' temporality of human reproduction, for example women's labour. Yet, this would appear to ignore the fundamental binding and integration of capital and labour in their mutual reproduction – something Marx named the *Zwickmühle* or *double moulinet*. If the capital-labour relation is not understood historically, then one can barely conceive of an ending to it. Moreover, we then find difficulties specifying man as a historical animal in anything other than the most general sense.

Fore foregrounds singular works or series, often a counter-movement within the artist's oeuvre, which present a critical perspective on the general movements of the work of their contemporaries, standing out of and against their time. Fore's chapters focus on seven bodies of lesser known and sometimes minor works by interwar Weimar artists. In chapter 1, it is Lázló Moholy-Nagy's contrarian photographic re-engagement with perspective after modernism. Chapter 2 is possibly the most rewarding, presenting three 'industrial novels' under the sign of capital's anti-natural temporality: Franz Jung's *The Conquest of Machines* (1923), Erik Reger's *The Union of the Strong Hand* (1931) and Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Novel* (1934). Chapter 3, '*Gestus Facit Saltus: Bertolt Brecht's Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*', attempts to rescue Brecht's transition to hybrid theatre forms and his efforts to make legible the gestures (*Gestus/Gesten*) of a collective agent from the clutching impositions of Lukács's humanistic advocacy of social realism and the Popular Front. Chapter 4 attempts to present cubist critic Carl Einstein's unfinished rewriting of his expressionist novel *Bebuquin* in terms which undermine established polarities between

autobiography and modernist literature, and bring them into alignment with the countermovement towards figuration and allegory in the visual arts. Chapter 5, 'The Secret Always on Display', explores the status of caricature and the commodification of the human figure through the enigmatic collages of John Heartfield. Finally, in place of a conclusion, the final chapter forms a 'coda' on Ernst Jünger's post-World War II science-fiction novel *The Glass Bees*.

Only at the end of *Realism after Modernism* do more grating contradictions reveal themselves. The promise of the Introduction is simply left suspended as we come to realize the book is not an unfolding argument but a series of excellent and well-researched essays. There is a theory of modernism and realism here, but it tends to fall to pieces or disappear from view in the treatment of the artwork. That there is no general theory or system might be excused or even embraced, but this could have been stated clearly at some point. Early on in the book Fore rails against a 'conspicuously anti-collectivist' statement by El Lissitzky, suggesting that singling out individual artists is problematic, but, by the end, this objection has turned on Fore himself. Fore is clear that all his studies concern exceptions to disprove the rule of a return to figuration in the 1920s and 1930s. But these exceptions cannot disprove the rule. Fore's initial premiss and Introduction demand a more encompassing study than the rest of the book delivers. We are bound to disappointment from the start.

The historical specificity of Fore's readings is admirable compensation, but not without its limits. He often isolates his protagonists from the immediate political and artistic milieu of which they were a part without historical justification. For instance, Carl Einstein's involvement in the 'collective syntax' of the Durruti Column is leant on by Fore to moderate his more reactionary-sounding aesthetic positions, such as his advocacy of a return to myth. Yet, Einstein's political writings from the years 1936–40, contemporary with *Bebuquin II*, are only sampled lightly. Did Einstein really understand this as an extension of his artistic-critical work, as Fore implies? Or did he simply shelve it? Fore's analysis is inconclusive. Fore establishes regular dialogue between Soviet and Weimar artists, appropriately in the case of Tretyakov and Brecht, but almost never between German figures themselves, or with other European counterparts. The debate on Proletkult raging on the German Left throughout the 1920s is neglected by Fore, but should have been of some significance for his studies of Brecht, as well as of

Reger and Jung. Fore's study of Heartfield would have benefited from considering the composition of the KPD, Heartfield made election posters for in 1930. By this date, the KPD was entirely Stalinized and hell-bent on confrontation with the rest of the workers' movement, whether it be the then-ruling SPD, or the groupuscules and associations to their left. The KPD gained 23 seats in the 1930 elections, but the Nazis (NSDAP) gained 95 to become the second party. If the judgement of Heartfield's posters weighs upon how well it communicated with the masses, how much it represented and fulfilled the promise of communism, then either they didn't want communism, or not in Stalinist form, or Heartfield wasn't doing a very good job.

Finally, for me, the biggest elision: the question of representation was a central debate in communist and anarchist scenes on the German and European Left, yet this basic conflict between communism and representative democracy never sees the light of day in *Realism after Modernism*. There is no 'realism' in communist circles in Europe in 1920 and 1930 without the question of political representation being at the fore. Brecht, Jung, Eger, Einstein and Heartfield were each close enough to the political Left to have been conscious, if not wholly involved, in these debates. As a conservative revolutionary, Jünger was anathema to these scenes, but even he was touched by these discussions. Singling out Jünger's *The Glass Bees*, first published in 1957, as the only post-World War II book under discussion, suggests two things. The first is that Jünger's science fiction provides a bridge between interwar 're-humanization', postwar conservative humanism, and our own period of nanotechnological disorientation. The second, less explicit, is that Jünger's philosophical-political orientation should now be found sympathetic. Fore's analysis yields to Jünger's vision of a postwar and technocratic society, which retains strong pre-modern and hierarchical elements. 'Has there ever been at any period in the history of the world so many dismembered bodies, so many detached limbs, as in ours?' That man is in pieces, Jünger understood, from his experience of World War I. He thought it then a necessary state from which to develop a new mankind in step with 'de-anthropomorphizing' technology. Captain Richard, hero of *The Glass Bees*, partisan of this 'armoured vision', and veteran of the massacre of a whole generation of working-class bodies, appears to connect the investment in growing fixed capital with the piles of dead people, but the novel ends happily, perhaps ironically. In the final

scene, Richard, ill-suited for the management of new technology, returns to civil human life and traditional gender relations, taking on a more 'human' role working as an arbitrator of disputes between employees. He buys his wife a dress; 'It fit her like a glove; I knew her measure precisely.' It is, as Fore notes, a bathetic note on which to end. Yet, if this is true for *The Glass Bees*, sadly it is also true for *Realism after Modernism*. Richard's arbitration is merely at the management end of the process that will continue to churn out mutilated human parts and synthetic worker bees. Despite taking a more even view of the negative effects of high-tech development, *The Glass Bees* remains consistent with Jünger's brand of reactionary elitism, extending his vision of the worker as the civilian-engineer corollary of the warrior-soldier striving for the reproduction of a community of the elect. If more 'human' is here only an index of calculative domination, it remains unclear if Jünger would agree. By emphasizing those elements that are most objective in works of art, *Realism after Modernism* exposes that what is bracketed off as subjective also bears the deforming trace of social relations of production.

Anthony Iles

## Bare life

Beatriz Preciado, *Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy's Architecture and Politics*, Zone Books, New York, 2014. 288 pp., £20.95 hb., 978 1 93540 848 2.

'It is time', writes Beatriz Preciado, 'to read *Playboy* outside of legal and moral considerations, but also outside of the sex wars and the endless traps of the feminist pornography debates.' Setting aside moral concerns, *Playboy* can be read for its articulation of the 'biopolitical mutations' of space and subjectivity that characterize the late twentieth century, mutations for which Hugh Hefner and his enterprise are themselves identified here as largely responsible. *Playboy* can, after all, be read 'for the articles', specifically those on architecture. Noting that in its pages there 'were more architecture plans, interior-decoration pictures, and design objects than naked women', Preciado argues that 'Far from being simply an erotic magazine, *Playboy* forms part of the architectural imaginary of the second half of the twentieth century.' As much as in its centrefolds, the erotics of *Playboy* lay in Hefner's vision of a new 'male domesticity', and in the way in

which its spaces were exposed and publicized on the magazine's pages. *Playboy* was as much 'pornotopic' as it was pornographic.

Preciado's approach, indebted in equal parts to Foucault and theorist of architecture-as-media Beatriz Colomina, reads *Playboy* as a medium for the expression of an architectural project to refashion male subjectivity. *Pornotopia* aims to chart the emergence of a new mode of power, through which this subjectivity is produced, one succeeding that characterized by Foucault as disciplinary. The default candidate for this mantle, Deleuze's 'society of control', is mentioned in passing, but Preciado generally prefers the self-coined neologism the 'pharmacopornographic regime', which the book describes as 'characterized by the introduction of new chemical, pharmacological, prosthetic, media, and electronic surveillance techniques for controlling gender and sexual reproduction'.

Hefner appears to Preciado as the archetype and pioneer of a new masculine subjectivity – the 'indoor man'. Turning the stereotype of the out-of-doors man of action on its head, Hefner is dressed, always, for a life lived and enjoyed in the confines of his apartment – pyjamas, dressing gown, slippers. His bed is his office. Rather than retiring from the world, though, from here he is able to orchestrate his enterprise, to gather information, to monitor and to broadcast. Hefner's bedroom – equipped with radio and television, film projector and telephone, rotating bed – is an 'electronic boudoir' that mediates between the universe of its occupant's own devising and the external world, a 'space for the endless transformation of privacy into publicity (and vice versa)'. In its reconstruction of the domestic as a space of masculinity, *Playboy*, Preciado observes, had to work hard to avoid the inevitable connotations of feminization and homosexuality that would have jeopardized its promotion of male domesticity. It had to promote a 'masculinization of domestic space, not just a "womanization" of the urban bachelor'. *Playboy*, argues Preciado, 'considered the restructuring of gender and sexuality codes as a semiotic and aesthetic battle, fought through information, architecture and consumer objects'. One of its chief weapons was heterosexual pornography: 'The association between domestic interiors and naked girls ensured that *Playboy* was not simply a women's or queer magazine.' The real reason *Playboy* featured female nudity in its pages, it seems, was so as to inoculate itself from homosexual connotations (an argument that throws a rather new light on its recent,

widely reported decision to stop publishing such pictures). Put forward as the main motivation for the inclusion of its pornographic content, rather than as a fringe benefit, this is less than convincing, however, especially given that the magazine's massive sales figures – noted elsewhere in *Pornotopia* – were surely secured, historically, on such content, rather than from its architectural editorials. The straightforward profit motive for *Playboy*'s exploitative imagery seems too easily discounted here.

In its account of how *Playboy*'s battle for the masculinization of the interior was fought for through architecture and consumer objects, the argument of *Pornotopia* is more persuasive. Following the precedent set by Colomina, in her *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture and Mass Media* (1994), Preciado attends to the ways in which modern architecture seeks to refashion the relations between the private and public, between the domestic interior and the mass-mediated space of publicity. Indeed, Hefner and *Playboy* seem the ideal case for this kind of approach. Hefner fancied himself as the Le Corbusier of the 'Love Palace'. His designs for the Playboy Apartment, Playboy Mansion and Playboy Club speak of his architectural ambitions. These are featured in his magazine, promoted as ideals for living for the modern bachelor. His short-lived television show – *Playboy's Penthouse* – was set in a mock-up of his real apartment, decorated with modern furniture and ornamented with Bunny Girls, into which he welcomed celebrity guests.

The spaces of Hefner's lifestyle publicized in these media are designed to wrest control of the domestic interior from feminine control. *Playboy* conceived the female counterparts to the playboy as the 'Playmate' and the 'Bunny Girl'. The magazine's 'rabbit subjectivity' presented sex as play, radically decoupling it from the procreative act and the nuclear family that served to define its place of propriety. The game, for the playboy bachelor, was about the 'maximization of sexual encounters', and this logically precluded any situation in which he would have to share his space with one particular woman, beyond the time needed for seduction and copulation. In keeping with the book's pornotopic thesis, Preciado understands the imperatives of the new male subjectivity as articulated in these specifically spatial terms: '*Playboy*'s definition of the Playmate was not sexual but topographical. Placed right at the threshold of the bachelor's own house, accessible and yet separated from his own domestic environment, the "girl next door" was to become

the new raw material to build the ideal Playmate.' When the 'girl next door' crossed the threshold of the bachelor apartment she passed into an apparatus through which she was to be processed: 'The Apartment works like a male externalized organ that attracts women and, just as effectively, as a household appliance that gets rid of them afterward.' Gadgetry served as the bachelor's chief instrument in this procedure. The mechanization of the kitchen made him self-sufficient in catering, dispensing with the need to detain the Playmate in the exercise of traditional duties. His rotating chairs, sliding screens and his 'flip-flop' sofa/bed – 'at the touch of a knob at its end, the back becomes seat and vice versa' – served to enable the bachelor's apartment to operate as a processual machinery. As Preciado puts it, this mechanization of the interior 'enabled the bachelor to transform his female visitor, with charm and delicacy, from the vertical to the horizontal position, from woman to bunny, from dressed to nude. With just one more flip-flop movement, the playboy could take his guest/prey from divan to platform bed – the "final trap," the ultimate apparatus.'

The relationship between sex and gadgetry made evident here suggests to Preciado the character of James Bond as a counterpart to Hefner's playboy. It might also call to mind the parodic figure of Quagmire from the television series *Family Guy*, with his expression of abject horror at the thought of the conquest who stays overnight, and his house full of devices ready to transform suburban lounge to S&M dungeon at the flick of a switch. The opportunity to establish a more substantial connection between the apparatus of the playboy figure and the emergence of neoliberalism – a term that Preciado reaches for at times, without ever really addressing in any depth – is missed here though. The processing of the subject through a space of environmentally embedded apparatus is, after all, a characteristically cybernetic operation, a form of managerial steering that appealed to neoliberal theorists such as Friedrich Hayek, who had, in the postwar period, cultivated strong ties with the early pioneers of cybernetics and systems theory. Their universalizing models of self-organizing and self-correcting systems answered to neoliberal ambitions to manage society by having it manage itself, to replace the overtly hierarchical and political exercise of power with forms of managerialism that, as Foucault noted, operated environmentally. The same processing of subjectivity as Preciado finds in the playboy's apartment, that

is, is not confined to or originally located in this instance alone, but symptomatic of broader transformations, evident for example in new models of workplace management. Even if these aren't the focus of Preciado's concerns, they might usefully have been afforded more attention in a book concerned with the 'biopolitical mutations' of subjectivity.

This points to a larger issue with the method employed in *Pornotopia*. The book seems, in general, intent on making what is central to the concerns of Preciado's own research central to the biopolitical mutation of subjectivity in the second half of the twentieth century as such. The disciplinary regime is supposedly succeeded by a pharmacopornographic regime over which Hefner rules as sovereign. Where Preciado does attempt to relate the analysis of *Playboy* to wider social and cultural transformations, Hefner's enterprise is typically seen as establishing and spearheading these, rather than as being one, among many, of the sources from which they sprang. This results in some awkward episodes in theorizing, particularly where Preciado seeks to locate the heart of the *Playboy* empire, and thus of the pharmacopornographic regime, in a lengthy and sustained analysis of Hefner's rotating bed. This bed, we read, can be read in the terminology of Paul Virilio as a 'capsule of high "dromospheric pressure"'. At the same time it is, among yet other things, a 'manifesto, an exultant, pop critique of the Fordist segregation of space, of the distance separating workplaces from places of recreation'. In the analysis of Hefner's bed Preciado alludes to the precedent of Sigfried Giedion's *Mechanization Takes Command*. The key difference between their projects, however, is that Giedion sought to understand the life of society through its everyday objects, whereas Preciado is straining to read the very origins of a new regime of power in an absolutely singular one, as if it were the locus from which this power radiated outward and onward into the twenty-first century. Foucault's genealogy of power, however, understood disciplinary society as already displacing the centralization of sovereign power, its operations dispersed amidst a multitude of discourses and practices. In neoliberalism it seems even more pressing to understand that while the nature of power might be grasped through its particular manifestations, we cannot expect to isolate, localize and identify this power within any one historical episode or specific figure. The instance should not be taken as the paradigm.

**Douglas Spencer**

# Hostis humani

Amedeo Policante, *The Pirate Myth: Genealogies of an Imperial Concept*, Routledge, London and New York, 2015. 266 pp., £90.00 hb., 978 1 13879 731 4.

Pirates have long captured the popular imagination, evoking a phantasmagoria of plunder and violence at once heroic and ruthless. Celebrated by some as daring rebels against an exploitative social order, they have more often been condemned as a monstrous scourge against which all states must coalesce. How is it, Amedeo Policante asks, that this littoral figure came to be excoriated as the enemy of humanity, to be hunted down and eliminated from the world's pelagic spaces? Studies of piracy are numerous, but popular histories rehearse a résumé of horrors, while legal tracts sanction contemporary efforts at suppression. The pirate's identity as *hostis humani generis* is taken, almost without exception, for granted.

*The Pirate Myth*, like its subject, does not fit easily into any one discipline. Drawing on a range of literatures, from the epic poetry of Habsburg Iberia to the legal history of Carl Schmitt, Policante offers an ambitious and erudite genealogy of the concept of piracy and its constitutive role in international relations. He traces the arc of enmity from antiquity to the present day to reveal a 'structural relationship', across historical epochs, between empire and piracy. Empire, according to Policante, has always required the pirate, an untameable Other against which imperial power is called to action. 'Over and over again in history', he writes, 'hegemonic forces have tried to legitimize their claims to some form of global Imperial authority by appealing to the existence of pirates.'

Policante begins his genealogy in the Mediterranean of antiquity. Central to Roman imperial ideology was a claim to uphold a universal *ius gentium* across the Mediterranean world so as to maintain a realm of peace and order for the benefit of a united community. Groups which rejected the validity of these universal laws – the Cilicians, for instance, for whom littoral raiding was customary – threatened this unity. Labelled pirates, they were to be eradicated for the benefit of all, transformed into *hostis communis omnium*: the common enemy of all communities. It was precisely through the suppression of piracy, Policante suggests, that Rome justified its hegemony: 'by taking upon itself the burden of fighting [pirates] ... Rome claimed an Imperial role throughout the Mediterranean.' In the writings of Cicero and other

ideologues, imperial violence became the necessary, even benign, bulwark against anarchy and disorder and the keystone of peace and prosperity.

From Rome, we jump forward in time to the seventeenth-century Atlantic. The 'discovery' of the Americas in 1492 had been followed by the systemic plunder of wealth by Spain from the New World. By the early sixteenth century a Catholic empire had emerged on both sides of the Atlantic. Habsburg imperialism, though, was not merely a matter of territorial aggrandisement. The 1493 papal bull *Inter Caetera* had called for a universal mission of enlarging the Christian Commonwealth and had drawn the *raya* establishing respective Spanish and Portuguese missionary zones. Supported by papal authority, the Iberian monarchies claimed an *imperium* over the Atlantic Ocean so as to realize the evangelization of the Americas. Christianity, however, was no longer the close-knit community of the Middle Ages. The Protestant countries of Europe and their mariners preying on the Spanish colonies and plundering Spanish galleons had little respect for papal bulls. To the Spanish, Protestant penetration represented not simply a disregard for the Iberian monopoly, but a challenge to Habsburg pretensions to a single 'imperial cosmopolis' uniting humanity under the Catholic faith. Like the Cilicians of antiquity, Policante argues, these Protestant pirates were denounced as *hostis communis omnium* and served once more 'a fundamental role in Imperial ideology' with Spain cast as 'the last bastion of Christianity and protector of humanity' against the heretical pirates.

If the raiding voyages of Francis Drake and his contemporaries were condemned by Catholic Spain as piratical, they were viewed more favourably at home where the early English, French and Dutch states backed plundering ventures central to the primitive accumulation of capital in northern Europe. Yet by the late seventeenth century, the exigencies of capital had changed and piratical plunder had become incompatible with the systematic exploitation of the colonial world and the commercial circulation on which it depended. The interests of long-distance trade became paramount. The development of a world market required the transformation of the world's

pelagic spaces into 'a smooth surface of circulation', a highway made safe for the movement of capital. The freebooters who had once raided the Spanish Main were now suppressed, condemned by a concert of European states as pirates and irredeemable outlaws. The universality of a Christian Commonwealth of Habsburg ideology made way for the universality of natural law, adumbrated by imperial ideologues such as Hugo Grotius, with a newly discovered universal right to engage in unimpeded trade.

The suppression of piracy at this juncture was, Policante argues, central to the juridification of the world's oceans, the prerequisite for free commercial circulation and, looking forward, the contemporary processes of globalization. This is the key moment in Policante's narrative and yet it is precisely here that the empire-pirate dyad of his theoretical edifice breaks down. The suppression of piracy appears at this juncture less the legitimating concept of imperial ideology and more the material requirement of a newly emergent system of capital accumulation. What, indeed, is the empire against which the pirate now plays foil? The holder of *imperium*, Policante argues, was no longer one state, but rather the 'community of states' with humanity constructed not as a 'community of faith but a community of trade, a multiplicity of individuals, peoples and nations kept together by their common interest in trade and exchange'. As *hostis communis omnium*, he explains, 'the pirate was represented as a systemic enemy of the entire international system of states centred in Europe' – a 'Commonwealth of modern nations' with the pirate the 'common enemy of the nascent community of modern, civilized states'. Certainly any European power might now invoke a universal right of commerce to justify violence in the extra-European world, but the image of a Europe united by their 'common interest in trade and exchange' and the security of capital's pelagic highways seems overdrawn. Of inter-imperial rivalry Policante has nothing to say. Certainly the constant inter-European warfare that closed the seventeenth century ceased briefly following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, but it is less convincing to imply that inter-imperial conflict ended *tout court* and that the 'imperial forces of order' were pitched against the 'chaotic vitality of the pirate' alone. The sudden outlawing of private violence in favour of the pacification of the seas similarly lacks nuance. The line between privateers and pirates remained fluid throughout the eighteenth century and privateering was abolished only with the Paris Declaration of 1856.

Where Policante is convincing is in identifying a new concept of piracy as emerging from this juncture and the 'fundamental transition from the Universalism of Christian theology to the cosmopolitanism of market liberalism'. If Grotius himself was concerned primarily with Dutch imperial interests rather than those of an imagined 'Commonwealth of modern nations', quickly reversing his defence of the freedom of the seas when it suited his sponsors, the natural right to trade that he theorized had world historical import. Commerce displaced religion as the basis of a universal order; humanity was no longer identified with a community of faith but rather a much broader community of trade encompassing the entire world. The pirate, violating now the universal laws of nature, began to be defined not simply as the enemy of a civilized community, but an enemy of humanity itself: *hostis humani generis*. Once again, on Policante's telling, the persecution of pirates is conceived in imperial ideology as the necessary task of 'a benevolent Empire, enforcing the Universal laws of nature even in the remotest corners of the world, killing in the name of humanity'.

In the nineteenth century, such a concept was central to British imperialism. Extra-European polities that opposed commercial integration were condemned as pirate communities, their persecution and destruction transformed into a service to humanity. In the Mediterranean, the condemnation of Barbary States as 'pirate dens' laid the ground for European colonization, while in East Asia the genocide of entire Malay communities was justified by their identification as 'piratical people'. The legitimization of imperial violence by invocation of pirates and 'enemies of humanity' continues today, the military campaign against piracy in the Horn of Africa and the so-called War on Terror both embodying the same imperial logic. These, a trenchant Policante shows, are merely the latest instantiations of Kipling's 'savage wars of peace', fixtures in the contemporary imperial order in which war has been 'recoded and presented as an endless confrontation between "pirates", "international criminals", "disturbers of the peace" and "peace enforcers"'.

Yet there is a tension at the heart of *The Pirate Myth* between the historical continuities in piracy's relationship to empire that Policante wishes to emphasize and the fundamental discontinuities in the juridical constructions he describes. At the discursive level, certainly, empires have consistently couched their violence in a rhetoric of service to humanity. The thread that connects political

communities on the margins of the ancient Mediterranean, Protestant adventurers challenging Catholic hegemony in the New World, a denationalized Atlantic proletariat, and indigenous Malay communities subjected to colonial genocide, is just that: discursive. As Policante's detailed historical analysis itself reveals, however, the juridical identity of pirate and the legal concomitants attaching to that identity has been marked by fundamental discontinuities and transformations coeval with the political-economic upheavals of the past millennium. Indeed, his most important contribution is to demonstrate convincingly how the distinctively modern construction of pirates as enemies of a universal right to trade and the attendant licence to extirpate them through the unfolding of a universal jurisdiction was the juridical concomitant specifically to the making of a capitalist world economy. Piracy's material relationship to empire has also shifted markedly. As Policante himself argues, piracy – or 'lawless plunder' – played a central role in early-modern imperialist ventures, including the accumulation of mercantile capital, before proving inimical to later imperial formations in the era of free trade. And yet, in describing nineteenth-century British hegemony, Policante wants to

map classical imperialism onto past forms. Roman efforts to suppress Cilicans, as epitomized by the institution of the *persecutio piratarum*, we learn, were part of the very same nineteenth-century paradigm of violence 'concerned with the perpetual securitization of the world-market'. In seeking to interpret the Imperial Rome of antiquity, the Habsburg Empire of the 'discoveries', the classical imperialism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and American hegemony in the advanced capitalist world all in terms of his empire–pirate dyad, Policante elides the fundamental differences between imperial formations, their contrasting logics dissolving into the background against which a supposedly transhistorical paradigm stands in sharp relief.

*The Pirate Myth* rescues the pirate from the marginalia of international relations, throwing a light on his role as empire's constitutive antagonist. While his juridical identity may have changed, the pirate has nonetheless remained a constant lodestar in a fluid seascape of imperial violence. A fuller theorization of imperialism could only strengthen Policante's already impressive account.

**Tor Krever**

## Tangled up in blue

Brian Massumi, *The Power at the End of the Economy*, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 2015. 136 pp., £52.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 978 0 82235 824 4 hb., 978 0 82235 838 1 pb.

The question of how to understand the relationship between neoliberalism and the great French philosophical texts from the late 1960s and early 1970s is a very complex one. Radical philosophies of difference, complexified identity and immanence, opposed to universals and absolutes, emerged in these texts, often in exciting dialogue with each other. It is hard, however, to be very precise about exactly what kind of world these texts envisaged. They combined abstract, technical argument with complicated and sometimes ambiguous literary styles, as well as many cultural and social historical references which were not meant to be illustrative. They also deliberately resisted the programmatic, seeking a middle voice in the classical Greek sense, neither an active forging of one's way nor a passive going with the vibe. Such a middle voice is very hard to pin down, and can easily

be confused with the many fag ends of postmodern rhetoric that continue to float around in the contemporary neoliberal world. This is not helped by the fact that Deleuze and Foucault, especially, wrote very perceptively on neoliberalism themselves, and indeed their later ideas may well have been influenced, in at least some respects, by it. Yet, while Deleuze (with or post Guattari) might be said to have homogenized the plane of immanence in his later writings, it is important to recognize, if this is not simply to be conflated with an emergent neoliberalism, the extent to which concepts such as *littérature mineure*, *peuple à devenir*, *nomadisme* and *fabulation* mitigate against any such 'affiliation', providing these are explored with sufficient complexity (as, for example, Philippe Mengue has done) and with an awareness of their potential for producing densely individual becomings.

In the first two chapters of his new book, *The Power at the End of the Economy*, Brian Massumi draws on Foucault's remarkably prescient biopolitics lecture series, delivered in 1979, and Deleuze's famous 'societies of control' essay from 1990, to describe how the neoliberal relational field functions. He does this well, except for one crucial slip: he fails to distinguish between the neoliberal relational field and the actual plane of immanence itself. However much its advocates may wish the former to dominate the latter, even to be mistaken for it, the two are not the same. This is important because there is still enough radical heterogeneity in the plane of immanence as a whole which can be accessed to creatively disrupt or subvert the neoliberal relational field, which is ultimately only a part of it. By failing to realize this, Massumi ends up becoming as entangled with neoliberalism as Brer Rabbit did with the Tar Baby: he never escapes from it, and the value of his book is seriously compromised as a result.

Insights from Niklas Luhmann on the functional equivalence of trust and distrust in neoliberal economic activity and experimental data connected with deliberation without attention and blind choice are intermingled with references to Deleuze and Foucault in Massumi's text. Here the intention is to undermine the neoliberal belief in a rational subject able to make fully conscious decisions in her own interest. As Massumi suggests, the neoliberal relational field is in fact far too complicated for her to ever be in full possession of the relevant facts when making a decision, while its vast, globalized, superconductive quality makes her vulnerable to the impact of very distant, unforeseen occurrences. Most importantly, human choice always involves a mixture of affectivity and reason, and this happens within what Deleuze terms the *dividual*, *infra-* or *pre-individual* (all synonyms); that is, a self that is not a unified *cogito*. Massumi puts this complexified self at the end of the economy: it is the 'rabbit hole' down which the forces of the neoliberal relational field go to be 'irrationally' churned, only to come back out again into the field. However, this feeding back into the economy need not be relatively passive survival – just surfing the wave – but can inflect the field in a more proactive way. Indeed, it may have a considerable impact because of transindividual connectivities, hence the (counter)power at the end of the economy.

The latter half of Massumi's second chapter, and much of the third, develop this positive side of non-conscious thinking–feeling. In particular, there are brilliant, immensely detailed, if slightly

obsessive-compulsive, analytical descriptions of the participation of the self in the event – Massumi uses the situation of escaping from a bull in a field – and affective process, making use of concepts from Hume (sympathy and passion) and Whitehead (intensity). However, there are real problems here for the book as a whole. 'Flight or fight' episodes in cognitive psychology or neuroscience may have a pedigree going back to William James, but they are not that useful for the political event, where colour, texture and belief are often what bring about a paradigm shift. The impersonal, autonomous decision made through me need not be anonymous or neutral. Significant events in public or private life involve an individual or collective self that is soaked in memory or culture, even though they function best when they are not reified as a fully conscious, logically coherent identity.



The French philosophical texts from around 1970 upon which Massumi draws contain innumerable cultural references that provide the colour and texture of the event. Indeed, in a philosophy of immanence, they *are* the event. By contrast, the analytical descriptions in *The Power at the End of the Economy* are so abstract that they are akin to the instructions for a vacuum cleaner (of course essential in their way), but they are never the plastic reality of the vacuuming itself. Nerval's description of features passing back and forth between his female ancestors in 'Aurelia' is Massumi's individual–transindividual

dynamic, while the way Artaud describes the poetic anarchy and revolt of the Marx Brothers' films in 'The Theatre and its Double' is his superposition of different outcomes in chaotic interaction.

This bloodless approach to the event is not helped by the use of Hume, who could be described as a very sophisticated proponent of normalizing sociality. The enrichment of the ideas from the first two chapters with Humean concepts of sympathy, passion and the communication of affection from other to self gives them a much-needed social dimension, while the substitution of Spinoza's joy and Whitehead's intensity for Hume's pleasure and taste is very effective, although the complexities of Hume's idea of taste could certainly have been examined in more depth. The key problem is that Massumi does not go beyond Hume's relatively benign and conformist notion of human sentiment. This really matters when he finally gets to actual political movements near the end of the third chapter. He refers, for example, to the Arab Spring, which has had almost no enduring effects outside Tunisia, while the genuinely viral contagion in the region is Islamic State. That does not mean that one should condone the latter in any way, but it points to the fact that what goes into the event needs to have real compelling force and marked contrastive dynamics. As such, it can come out 'dark' as well as 'joyous'. This makes the other meaning of Deleuze's *sens* – a kind of directionality from within – essential if one is neither to go back to a controlling reason from without nor tiptoe delicately along the surface of sense as if made of eggshells.

The latter is what many Deleuzians do. In reality, however, the surface of sense can yank in elements from both the heights and depths and make them work powerfully in a complexly compacted way that is still immanent. One can see this, for example, in an astonishing scene from Bimal Roy's 1963 film *Bandini*, where a freedom fighter is hanged in a prison during the time of British rule. There are the voices 'from below' of the other prisoners praising the motherland and the anguished faces of the women, there is the 'transcendent' song of the freedom fighter imagining future independence, and there is 'contagious' intercutting, as with a jump cut from the body about to be hanged to the fainting mother. There is such a densely textured yearning for possibility here: by contrast, in *The Power at the End of the Economy*, Massumi seems only to be shaking a snow scene and watching its plastic flakes fall.

**Nardina Kaur**

## Kant contra Kant

Bryan Wesley Hall, *The Post-Critical Kant: Understanding the Critical Philosophy through the 'Opus postumum'*, Routledge, New York, 2015. 230 pp., £90.00 hb., 978 1 13880 214 8.

It is still remarkably little known that Immanuel Kant, Königsberg's meticulous delimiter of reason, left at his death a pile of drafts towards a major new work: one that apparently overturns central tenets of his own philosophy. These notes constitute the *Opus postumum*. The titles Kant gave to the project(s) in these drafts range from the 'Transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics', to the 'Transition to the limit of all knowledge – God and the world', to 'Transcendental philosophy's highest standpoint. God, the world, and the thinking being in the world (man)'. No surprise, then, that they were dismissed, unfairly, by many Kant scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the product of Kant's late senility or dementia.

Even today, the *Opus postumum* is terra incognita for many Kant commentators. Bryan Wesley Hall's book is only the second monograph in English dedicated entirely to the *Opus postumum*, alongside Eckart Förster's *Kant's Final Synthesis* (2000). Given the state of Kant's text, this relatively restricted interest is understandable. Kant's sentences regularly tail off, he writes countless corrections and additions around the main text, and makes repeated attempts to articulate single passages, to the point of offering over 150 definitions of 'transcendental philosophy' in the last-written pages. Despite (or perhaps thanks to) its fragmentary nature, however, the *Opus postumum* contains great untapped resources for understanding and rethinking Kant's philosophy.

Hall sets out from comments that Kant makes in two letters in 1798: he has felt 'a pain like Tantalus' on realizing that there is a 'gap' in the critical philosophy. What is this gap, and how does Kant attempt to fill it in the *Opus postumum*? Hall's first chapter argues that the gap can be identified in Kant's conception of 'substance' in the Analogies of Experience in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Is substance an eternal, omnipresent substrate of all things, or an individual substance that only relatively endures, that which persists in an empirical object? Hall contends that there is an unresolved ambiguity between these notions of substance in Kant's critical period. Kant seeks to rectify this, Hall argues, in the main 'transition' project of the *Opus postumum*: the transition from the metaphysical

foundations of natural science to physics itself. Hall locates Kant's solution to the problem in his concept of the *ether*. This fundamental physical substrate was a scientific commonplace in Kant's time, posited as the carrier of heat, gravity, magnetism and other forces (it was only decisively disqualified in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). In the transition project, the ether is both a formal condition for experience, like the *Critique's* more familiar conditions of experience (space, time, the categories, apperception), and also a *material* condition: a real, physical substrate.

As with the categories in the *Critique*, Kant attempts to provide a *deduction* of the ether. Hall's reconstruction and analysis of one of the ether deductions is a particularly valuable part of the book. Whereas Förster attempted an overambitious reconstruction of Kant's argument from all fourteen versions of the ether deduction, Hall discusses with great clarity what he sees as the paradigmatic example of the proof. Chapter 4 of *The Post-Critical Kant* outlines the consequences that Kant's ether, as a new formal/material condition, has for the fundamental structures of the first *Critique*: the forms of intuition, the categories and apperception. The final chapter then seeks to use the results of this supplemented critical philosophy to solve the problem of 'double affection' identified by early and neo-Kantian readers of Kant (Vaihinger, Adickes and Kemp-Smith).

Hall's book is clear, well-argued and impressively well-situated in the literature, thus providing the best point of entry into the current debates for the English-reading student of Kant's last drafts. However, Hall's encyclopaedic treatment of the existing commentaries also exhibits the book's main weakness. Hall evaluates previous interpretations of the *Opus postumum* according to four criteria: (1) their consistency with Kant's text; (2) the extent to which they make Kant consistent with himself; (3) the philosophical plausibility of the reconstructed position they ascribe to Kant; (4) their reflection of Kant's intention for the *Opus postumum*, that of filling an important gap in the critical philosophy. Bar the first, there are problems with all of these interpretative principles.

Criterion (4) appears to beg the question of Hall's interpretation. Hall presupposes that Kant's intention is solely to fill the gap in the critical philosophy, and so dismisses interpretations that do not conclude that this is what is at stake. But Kant outlined multiple, often divergent, accounts of the aims and content of his final project. It is far from clear that

Kant's worries about the 'gap' in his letters of 1798 provide the only, or even the most important, intention for the *Opus postumum*. Förster points out that Kant began the transition project many years before mentioning a 'gap', and there is clear conceptual distance between 'gap' and 'transition'. Other important contexts include the development of the third *Critique's* attention to organic beings, the incorporation of empirical physics into the critical system, and the possibility of a post-critical metaphysics of nature.

Particularly problematic is criterion (2). 'Making Kant consistent with himself' stems of course from Hall's emphasis on the 'gap', but it has the effect of neutralizing the radical departures that Kant is at least proposing to take from his critical positions. The critical architecture is not unsettled by the *Opus postumum*, on Hall's reading, but merely supplemented, in order to address an outstanding issue. This was also the thrust of Förster's interpretation, although the issue was different: in Hall, the *Critique's* notion of substance must be rectified; in Förster, the validity of the *Critique's* categories must be secured for objects of outer sense. These perspectives overlook Kant's capacity to radically rethink his own most hallowed doctrines.

The most conspicuous example is the final transition project of the *Opus postumum*, to a doctrine of ideas: God, the world, and man-in-the-world. These passages, among Kant's most opaque, are completely absent from Hall's book. But even the 'transition' central to Hall's account – from metaphysical foundations to physics – represents a greater departure from critical doctrine than Hall allows. One significant issue is the very notion of a *material condition*, as represented by the ether. Kant's *transition* project is crucially concerned with bridging *a priori* conditions of possibility and *a posteriori* physics, with the latter incorporated into a comprehensive post-critical metaphysics of nature. His attempt to effect this transition through a *physical* ether apparently threatens fundamental critical distinctions such as the subjective and objective, *a priori* and *a posteriori*, and constitutive and regulative.

For all Hall's fine scholarship, it is unfortunate that he downplays the heretical nature of Kant's unfinished work. The *Opus postumum* surely shows us a philosopher at work, in the act of *philosophizing*, where even Kant's own critical conclusions are at risk of being exploded by his 'all-destroying' intellect.

Stephen Howard