

The reversal of authority

Alexandre Kojève, *The Notion of Authority (A Brief Presentation)*, trans. Hager Weslati, Verso, London and New York, 2014. xxxiv + 107 pp., £14.99 hb., 978 1 78168 095 7.

Since the publication of Arendt's essays on authority, the debate around authority has been mostly dominated by her diagnoses of its crisis. A different but recurrent stance views authority as synonymous with state institutions, either dismissing the particular legitimating force of authority or attributing it to any expression of power. Notwithstanding the shift enacted to current debates by Agamben's own recent take on authority, the publication of Kojève's *The Notion of Authority* brings fresh air into what had almost become a monophonic field, even if the essay itself was first written in 1942 (but first published in French in 2004), and is invested with a positive ignorance of the succedent literature.

Kojève is best known for, and read through, his classes on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which terminated some months before the deflagration of World War II. His considerations on authority were written during the conflict, prior to the publication of the manuscript that resulted from the classes (what later became the introductory text was the only published excerpt of the book thus far). Kojève started lecturing in the continuation of Koyré's 1932 classes on the religious philosophy of Hegel, taking seriously Koyré's final suggestion that Hegel's philosophy required the end of history. Kojève built most of his historical argument on the use of Hegel's *The German Constitution* to read the *Phenomenology* as a depiction of the path through which Napoleon became the provider of the historical end of history.

Although it became the most famous element of Kojève's thought, no serious consideration of the multiplicity of ends of histories across and within his works has yet been given. And although Kojève is currently overcredited with declarations of the end of history, in his considerations on authority we can find two main passages at which considerations on the end of history may be at play: one external, another internal. The external appears in his claim that law constituted the cadaver of authority – most of his other considerations on law in *The Notion of Authority* are directed at the dismissal of law as a form of authority. Nevertheless, in 1943 he decided

to write his *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right* (a book that was certainly already planned by the time he wrote *The Notion* but most likely still in an embryonic state). *Outline* presented law as leading to the creation of the universal and homogeneous empire, arrived at through the resolution of the anthropogenic battle for recognition, to be arrived at by the end of legal history. (I believe some odd readings of Kojève result from the English adaptation of Kojève's *anthropogénique* into 'anthropogenetic'.) Such an end of history would mean a burial of authority, and the later project certainly entailed a different course than the one pursued in *The Notion*.

The internal suggestion of the end of history first requires a consideration of the book's title. The original French edition carries the title *La notion de l'autorité*. Though the English adaptation of the title conveys most of the title's commonsensical meanings, several other interpretations might be given, most remarkable among which would be a sense of authority's possession over its notion. Even if it is unclear whether this was Kojève's intention, it provides one explanation as to why the chosen title wasn't simply *La notion d'autorité* (a title that nonetheless mistakenly appears on several French-language websites). Moreover, the possibility of such an interpretation is quite significant, since authority would, in this case, be that which would have authority over its signifier, whether that means to author or to authorize it.

Going back to the end of history, Kojève writes about a bourgeois era with two phases: from 1789 until 1848 as the revolutionary era, in which the bourgeoisie presents a revolutionary project that places it in opposition to the aristocratic past; and then from 1848 until 1940, when this alternative project fades away due to the proletariat assuming the role of the revolutionary class. Therefore 1848 marks a time at which the bourgeoisie establishes its domination in opposition to the aristocracy, as well as to the proletarian revolutionary project, assuming its domination as a presently determined time. It is thus an end of history, but it is a bourgeois end of history, in which bourgeois authority defines its

own time as a permanent present, in opposition to alternative historical forces. Consequently, it is an actual existing end of history, but only for as long as bourgeois authority keeps its authority; that is, for as long as it is able to define its own time it is an authority and through its authority it defines its own time.

The scope of Kojève's inquiry into authority is much broader than that which any presentation of it will reflect, mostly because it brings about a number of unconventional insights into most of the topics in the book. The richness of the text certainly comes from the multiple routes that it can establish. So one shouldn't be misled here by a note by the translator – who published in this journal a very significant contribution to Kojévian scholarship, in which she provides rather stronger support for her nonetheless debatable argument (*RP* 184) – which claims that when Kojève points to three of his chapters ('Phenomenological Analysis', 'Metaphysical Analysis' and 'Political Applications') as the most relevant, he was mostly concerned with the practical political application/influence of the book. If that was the case, one would expect the two concluding appendices reflecting current affairs to be in the list. In fact, to grasp the relevance of those three chapters one should pay closer attention to Kojève himself. At the beginning of the book he argues that the main emphasis of

most approaches to authority has been on its genesis and transmission, adding that the four theories he specifically refers to – namely those of Hegel, Plato, Aristotle and the scholastics – are most complete at the phenomenological level. Thus, when he points to the three specific chapters mentioned above he is referring to the phenomenological analysis as a presentation in which common interpretations of authority are laid out; the metaphysical analysis as a place where he adds a new layer to the already existing conceptions of authority (one that doesn't build on the sheer presence of authority); and the political applications as a place where he offers insights on the existing theories – several of which are already introduced in the phenomenological analysis – from his metaphysical reconsiderations on authority. The three chapters still carry value on their own, but Kojève emphasizes the relevance of the metaphysical analysis as it 'justifies' and 'rectifies' the phenomenological one.

So let us take a step back and start with the phenomenological analysis. It is here that Kojève proposes to present both the essential characteristics of authority and all the fundamental types of authority. This opens several different routes of inquiry, with the phenomenon of authority assuming several different shapes, although each of them is



built for the construction of a larger and cohesive general theory of authority. In this way, authority is presented as belonging to a realm of change; that is, a field in which motion is possible, thus making possible the recognition of a newly arriving authority, in which authority can also effect change. Nonetheless, an authority only produces change; it cannot itself be its subject. Therefore authority has to be able to effect a change that results in the absence of change for itself. This has several implications for any theory of authority: though authority belongs to a reactive field, no resistance can be offered to it; for the absence of resistance, authority needs to be recognized; authority needs to be able to exclude any additional source of change, as that necessarily constitutes a threat to authority's dominion over mutability, and consequently to its permanence. In other words, authority brings about a change that realizes itself by the suspension of (perceived) change. With regard to authority, he proposes four different types, each referred to a different source (though every source is recognizable, it is doubtful that any of the elements Kojève points to were thought by their authors to correspond to complete theories of authority): authority of the father/cause as being developed by the scholastics; authority of the master/risk as being developed by Hegel; authority of the leader/project by Aristotle; and authority of the judge/justice by Plato.

However informative and exhaustive a given list of characteristics of authority may be, Kojève does not see in it anything beyond an unending list of attributes. Moreover, the relevance of each aspect for an understanding of authority remains to be determined. Therefore a metaphysical analysis is required to structure the attributes gathered at the phenomenological level. It is here that Kojève's four types of authority are paired with four temporal forms that Kojève presents as constituting the complete spectrum: the authority of the father is paired with the past; the master with the present; the leader with the future; and the judge with eternity. Advancing this list of temporalities, Kojève intends to include all possible forms of authority. But this step also changes the way authority justifies itself and how it is recognized. The rhetoric of authority now becomes dominated by temporal forms, and its attempt to stop change clearly come forth in the form of the determination of the dominant structure of time in the polity. Consequently, the recognition of authority is not just an acceptance of a given authority, but the reception of its temporal reading. An

identitarian imprint of authority becomes obvious, the past proposed by authority becomes 'my past', the same creation of shared temporal readings applying to all temporal forms.

The reversal in the relation between authority and its notion actually ends up returning at the metaphysical level. Rather than being recognized by the subjects, as suggested by the phenomenological analysis, authority renders the identity of subjecthood in such a way as to produce its recognition. Thus, it is only at the metaphysical level that the absence of resistance to authority can be explained. As authority is distinguished from force, resistance to it can only be justified due to the subject's identitary link to authority, rather than to a voluntary repression of the act.

The picture drawn so far is not left untouched by Kojève. Although the above-mentioned bourgeois domination represented the arrival of the bourgeois end of history, in the form of a permanent present, that time ended in 1940 with the Franco-German armistice. Kojève's essay does not have a formal conclusion, though its two appendices offer some final reflections on authority while discussing the period of the post-bourgeois end of history. This period was first marked by an illusory presence of all forms of authority in Maréchal Pétain, but soon afterwards the bourgeois break with the past, the future and eternity (the last due to the retreat of the previous two, lapsed into class justice in opposition to the remaining authoritarian forms) came back with the addition of a despicable present. Therefore Kojève reads his own time as a moment when authority is escaping from its founding metaphysical structure. Authority is disconnected from all its temporal support, having nothing left to offer. Kojève thus foresees the inauguration of simulacrum as the justification of authority.

Having abandoned his considerations on authority, Kojève did not provide any guidelines for whether one should read his appendices as referring exclusively to the specific time at which the essay was written, or whether he would accept his diagnosis of 1940 as the end of bourgeois domination. Rather, Kojève left an open letter that allows for ample discussion. What the final appendices show is that even after the structure of authority is disrupted, declaring its death might still be a hasty move. And for as long as a determination of the coming times still has a role to play, a reprise of Kojève's text will remain timely.

Jorge Varela

The truth is a lemon meringue

Jacques Lacan, *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII*, trans. Bruce Fink, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015. 368 pp., £30.00 hb., 978 0 74566 039 4.

Bruce Fink, *Lacan on Love: An Exploration of Lacan's Seminar VIII, Transference*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015. 288 pp., £55.00 hb., £17.99 pb., 978 1 50950 049 9 hb., 978 1 50950 050 5 pb.

The title of Bruce Fink's new book implies that it contains an explication of Jacques Lacan's position on the subject of love. However, early on in the text Fink states 'There is, in my view, no singular theory of love to be found in Freud's work or in Lacan's work: there are only attempts to grapple with it at different points in their theoretical development.' It is no surprise, then, that Fink opts to provide an encyclopedic account of Lacan's various thoughts on love and related topics rather than a straightforward conceptualization of love from a Lacanian perspective. Drawing from a wide range of sources, including many of Lacan's seminars and several of his written texts, Fink's book seeks to give the reader a synoptic account of Lacan's views by addressing the subject of love from as many angles as possible.

Fink acknowledges that he is not being exhaustive, comparing his own book to Jean Allouch's *L'amour Lacan*, which discusses each of Lacan's mentions of love 'in turn'. Significantly, Fink seems to think that by adopting his approach he is being faithful to his subject, reading Lacan here as Lacan reads other thinkers. Of Lacan's method of reading, Fink writes, 'Although Lacan pays very close attention to the particular theory being adumbrated, insofar as there is one, in a text, he is nevertheless extremely attentive both to the letter of a text ... and to the general trajectory and at least apparent breaks in the trajectory of the text.' It seems reasonable, on this basis, to assume that Fink thinks his book is pursuing this same method in his approach to Lacan's discourse. It does not attempt to unify the things Lacan says about love, but rather highlights their fragmentation.

Fink begins by looking at Lacan's views on love from the perspective of each of his three registers: the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. Each of these offers a very different understanding of what love is. Within the symbolic, one's relationship with others is determined by what position one occupies and what role one plays. Writing of the hysteric, Fink says 'it is not the specific qualities or personality traits of the other woman that are so important to her; what is crucial is her *structural position* as someone who finds

a way to elicit a desire in a partner whose desire may well be experienced by the hysteric as flagging if not altogether dead'. By contrast, in the imaginary, love is narcissistic. Such self-love is integral to identity formation but can easily become self-destructive since, as Fink explains, 'insofar as love is the narcissistic aim to make one of two ... it aims at the annihilation of difference'. Finally, Fink indicates that it is love, for Lacan, that can link someone experiencing Other jouissance, the pleasure that destroys one's sense of self, which is associated with the real, with their partner in the symbolic. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate much on this idea.

After sketching love in terms of Lacan's three registers, Fink moves on to what he calls 'General Considerations on Love'. Here, Fink seeks to provide short expositions of Lacan's views on several subjects related to love. For example, courtly love – a subject which Lacan deals with most extensively in his seventh seminar – is, Fink argues, a particularly acute manifestation of the tendency to avoid the intractable difficulty of making a real connection with one's romantic partner. Elsewhere, Fink explains that Lacan considers Aristotle's notion of *philia* naïve because it presupposes that everyone wants and pursues what is good. Regardless of whether such characterizations are correct or incorrect, they do not seem to do justice to ideas that have incited the sort of vitriolic response that, generally speaking, Lacan's ideas have received in academic and psychoanalytic circles. If Fink makes Lacan's ideas clear, he also makes them digestible, unthreatening. There is no distinct discrepancy in terms of content between Fink and Lacan; it is formally that they diverge. Where Lacan is elliptical, Fink is direct; where Lacan equivocates, Fink defines. Lacan comments cryptically on philosophical texts like the *Symposium*, semi-obscure dramas like the Coûfontaine trilogy, and technical papers by historical and contemporary psychoanalysts; Fink peppers his text with illustrations from Jane Austen novels, allusions to contemporary pop music, and intuitive examples drawn from his long career as a psychoanalyst.

Lacan on Love also contains a two-part commentary on Plato's *Symposium*. It is here that the most interesting parts of the book can be found. As I have already noted, Fink is sensitive to the way in which Lacan reads texts. He recognizes, for example, that for Lacan 'love consists in the very transitions and paradoxes' of Plato's dialogue. It is odd however that, given this recognition, Fink seems not to have fully appreciated the implications that Lacan's approach to reading has for writing about him. Fink seems to think that it is enough to aggregate Lacan's comments on love and explicate them clearly. While this approach makes his book a useful tool for students and scholars, it contradicts Lacan's statements about reading in Seminar VIII, *Transference*, and elsewhere and it flies in the face of the very procedure that Fink himself so eloquently articulates. One source of this problem is indicated by the paucity of references made in *Lacan on Love* to two thinkers who had a pronounced impact on Lacan's method of reading: Alexandre Kojève and Leo Strauss. It is well known that Lacan regarded Kojève as his friend and teacher. What is less well known is that both Lacan and Kojève were influenced by Leo Strauss.

Early on in Seminar VIII, newly translated into English by Fink himself, Lacan mentions a conversation he had with Alexandre Kojève. He relates Kojève's claim that 'Plato hides from us what he thinks just as much as he reveals it to us.' Later, Lacan says,

to all ancient and especially modern commentators an attentive scrutiny to the dialogues shows that they quite obviously contain an exoteric as well as a hermetic element. The most peculiar forms of hermeticism, right up to and including the most typical pitfalls bordering on illusion [*leurre*], on difficulty produced for its own sake, have as their aim not to be understandable to those who should not understand.

This is certainly hyperbole. Relatively few Plato commentators admit that the dialogues have an esoteric dimension. The most famous contemporary exponent of this approach to Plato's texts is Leo Strauss, and although he seems to associate these views with Kojève, there is reason to believe it is actually Strauss's ideas that Lacan draws from here.

Kojève and Strauss were long-time correspondents and friends, and at the beginning of their correspondence there is a pronounced disagreement between them about how to read Plato. Strauss wrote to Kojève in 1957, 'I disagree with your procedure. The interpretation of Plato always grows out of the thorough interpretation of each individual Dialogue,

with as little reliance on extraneous information ... as possible.' By the time Kojève and Lacan had the conversation Lacan cites, it seems that Kojève has, however, adopted a much more 'Straussian' view. He tells Lacan that he must understand why Aristophanes had the hiccups in order to interpret the *Symposium* successfully. Here, Kojève is pointing to the argumentative function of action *within* the text. In a letter from 1959, two years before Lacan's cited conversation with Kojève, Kojève identifies himself as a 'faithful Strauss disciple'.

The connection between Lacan and Strauss is further supported by Lacan's citation of Strauss in his 1957 text 'The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud'. While discussing metonymy, Lacan suggests his audience read Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952). In this text, Strauss argues that ancient and medieval philosophers wrote so that they could communicate their views to their intended audience without running afoul of whatever political and religious authorities they were subject to. Lacan endorses the book not only because it provides examples of how language can say more than it seems to, but also because of the specific relationship Strauss articulates between the text's esoteric and exoteric dimensions. Lacan seems to agree with Strauss that the esoteric message of a text cannot be sought anywhere else except within the text's exoteric presentation. For Lacan, signification is produced when the metonymic slippage of the signifier is arrested by metaphoric substitution. This is also how a symptom is formed. A signifier (the symptom) replaces 'the enigmatic signifier of sexual trauma'. The symptom-signifier and the signifier of sexual trauma cannot be connected by the traumatized subject because there is a series of metonymic displacements in between the two. Like the symptom, the linguistic signifier does not derive its meaning from a signified or even from another signifier. Rather, meaning arises from the same condensation and displacement that create the signifiers themselves in their contradistinction from a traumatic intrusion. Consequently, texts are nothing but their surfaces, a collection of letters that are only meaningful due to their dynamic topography; that is, in their non-relation with what cannot be symbolized. Strauss seems to be making a very similar point when he says in his book on Machiavelli, 'The problem inherent in the surface of things and only in the surface of things is the heart of things.'

This coincidence of Lacan and Strauss will no doubt surprise some. Strauss is frequently castigated

for committing the intentional fallacy. He seems to do this quite clearly in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, where he appears to claim that philosophical authors write their texts so that their secret message can be understood only by attentive readers. However, 'political esotericism' is only one type of esotericism that can be found in Strauss's work. Strauss's friend and student Seth Benardete distinguishes, in his book *The Argument of the Action*, ancient (metaphysical) esotericism from modern (political) esotericism. According to Benardete, ancient esotericism 'says that it is in the nature of things that things are hidden', while modern or political esotericism 'says it is in the nature of the city as now constituted that this is so'. Lacan and Strauss both seem primarily to subscribe to ancient or metaphysical esotericism. In the twelfth session of the seminar, Lacan says,

It is, of course, characteristic of truths to show themselves completely. In short, truths are solids that are perfidiously opaque. They don't even have, it seems, the property we are able to produce in certain solids – that of transparency – they do not show us their front and back edges at the same time. You have to circumnavigate them [*en faire le tour*], and even do a little conjuring [*le tour de passe-passe*].

This is why both Lacan and Strauss advocate reading texts 'to the letter' (*à la lettre*). The truth is disguised not only due to political pressure; it is self-disguising. The surface of the text displays the various masks the truth adopts for itself. Since it is nothing outside of these misdirections, it is only by tracing the truth's illusory manifestations that it can be grasped. The similarity between Strauss and Lacan here is evident in the latter's claim that

what Plato shows ... is that the contour traced out by this difficulty [the difficulty of speaking about love coherently, which the speeches of the *Symposium* together demonstrate] indicates to us the point at which lies the fundamental topology which stops us from saying anything about love that holds water.

Lacan's point is that Plato's position is not found in any of the speeches that appear in the *Symposium*, or in the structure of the text as a whole. Instead, Plato demonstrates the impossibility of articulating what love is, revealing something to us something about love *in the process*.

Despite their similar viewpoints on reading, Lacan writes very differently to Plato and Strauss, who both invite simplistic (mis)readings. These simplistic readings, when worked out thoroughly, point beyond

themselves. Lacan's style, meanwhile, is thoroughly difficult. There is no firm ground upon which to rest, even for a moment. It is not entirely clear why Lacan does things this way, but it seems likely that it has something to do with how he conceives the relationship between the symbolic and the real. The real cannot be symbolized by language; but, rather than limit language, this separation from the real allows language to function almost autonomously. Of course, the two are never fully distinct for Lacan: *das Ding* and, later, the *objet petit a* are 'that which in the real suffers from the signifier', as he puts it in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. However, this point of contact reinforces rather than lessens their separation. As Lacan says, 'the Thing in question is, by virtue of its structure ... the Other thing'. To speak of the real, then, requires that one speak lies: 'the subject asserts that the dimension of truth is original only at the moment at which he uses the signifier to lie'.

The problem is that this makes the truth vulnerable to the imaginary, the register of illusion. Lacan's discourse, then, seeks to avoid both the authoritarianism of the symbolic and the seductiveness of the imaginary. He does this by setting up chains of signifiers such that they self-destruct where they would otherwise become either meaningful and coherent or aesthetically pleasing. The real is none of these things. In this regard, Lacan's critics are, in a sense, correct: there is nothing to Lacan's words. His discourse is designed to give way under the reader's weight so that they are plummeted time and again into the hole of the real. Lacan's characterization of Socrates' essence is one of 'emptiness or hollowness'. Using Cicero's translation, Lacan explains that Socrates' *inscientia*, his emptiness with regards to knowledge, 'is non-knowledge constituted as such, as empty [*vide*] by the void or vacuum [*vide*] at the centre of knowledge'. The same description could be applied to Lacan himself.

Fink does not seem to agree. Like Kojève before his conversion to Straussianism, he seems to be under the impression that there is a message behind the signifiers of the text. This message is presented in an unclear manner, but it is not itself unclear. Therefore it can be translated into a simpler idiom. But Lacan indicates that this is not the case. Fink's text is undoubtedly valuable for those who wish to study Lacan's views on love. However, if those views are in any way related to the movement of the seminar's discourse then one would be better giving up the ease of Fink for the labyrinth of Lacan's own text.

Peter Libbey

History without history

Frank Ruda, *For Badiou: Idealism without Idealism*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston IL, 2015. xxiv + 200 pp., £32.50 pb., 978 0 8101 3097 5.

As anyone familiar with Alain Badiou's œuvre knows, a central tenet of his system is that there are no such things as 'philosophical events', 'philosophical truths' or 'philosophical subjects'. Philosophy testifies to events, truths and subjects – it retroactively declares and defends their existence – but it does not produce them (this is the exclusive domain of philosophy's 'extra-philosophical' conditions: love, science, art and politics). The ironic thing about Frank Ruda's *For Badiou: Idealism without Idealism* – a resolutely philosophical book, it is 'with and for philosophy' – is that, whilst seeking not to violate Badiou's own axiomatic difference between philosophy and its conditions, it mimics the formal structure of Badiou's desired relation between an event, truth and subject in its account of Badiou himself. Whether this is intentional or not is unclear, but for Ruda the name 'Badiou' undeniably functions as a philosophical event that has pierced our contemporary situation. This event has bestowed a body of philosophical knowledge which, despite not possessing the privileged status of a truth (it cannot, in so far as knowledge is for Badiou absolutely separate from truth), is presented as eternal and exceptional as the truths whence it came. And this knowledge demands fidelity on the part of its philosophical subject bearers.

Apart from his final call to question Badiou's decision to abandon Hegel, Ruda is militant in his fidelity to Badiou. There is barely a modicum of what one might identify as 'critique' in these pages (incredibly, Ruda states that 'any true pupil of a master can only be faithful to him or her by utterly betraying him or her at one point'). For all this, the breadth of Ruda's engagement with Badiou is impressive. This is a beautifully synthetic book, in many regards an exemplar of a close textual reading of a philosopher and his interlocutors (in this case Plato, Descartes, Hegel, Marx and Žižek). Its methodology reframes and extends that of Freud: the tripartite technique of 'remembering, repeating, and working through' is creatively doubled, yielding six chapters that offer concise but rigorous explications of, among other things, Badiou's identification of mathematics (set theory) with ontology (his identification of being with 'the void'), his account of different types of negation

(Ruda insists that '[his] whole œuvre can be read as a working through of dialectics'), his reconstruction of the finite/infinite relation and his well-known rendition of the 'communist idea'. However, the principal issue that underlies this book – the overriding framework through which Badiou's system is presented – is in fact quite conventional: the well-trodden distinction between idealism and materialism. Ruda's response is to insert this distinction into materialism itself, and thereby to transcode it into Badiou's distinction, in *Logics of Worlds*, between 'democratic materialism' and 'materialist dialectics'. Yet the impulse behind this move (one, to be sure, that Badiou does not make) is not to jettison idealism (this would affirm a self-sufficient materialism), but to *renew* it, albeit by 'subtracting' (sublating) it from the idealism/materialism distinction. This is Ruda's dialectical manoeuvre, one that stems from the conviction that contemporary materialism 'is not materialist enough', that it is precisely 'the empty remainder, the empty place left by idealism ... which makes materialism properly materialist'. What Badiou's work provides access to is an 'idealism without idealism'; a '*renaissance of idealism*' that promises – and this is the real provocation – to make Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach relevant to the twenty-first century.

Following Badiou, 'democratic materialism' is for Ruda the contemporary and thus historical result of the 'death of idealism' (which is itself the historical result of Cantorian set theory). The scope of this concept, in *Logics of Worlds* and *For Badiou* alike, is expansive, so much so that it is at times entirely unspecified, reducing its critical purchase to a negative backdrop against which the rebirth of materialism – materialist dialectics – is imagined. Broadly speaking, it can be grasped as 'a materialism without idea, a materialism without idealism' whose basic axiom is 'there are only bodies and languages' (occasionally supplemented with 'there are only individuals and communities'). In this regard (resonating with the late Heidegger), democratic materialism is 'a contemporary form of nihilism [that] implies a reduction of human being to its own animal substructure', which is to say that its 'hegemony' reduces

human life to the level of finite individual bodies satisfying their needs through particular languages and cultural forms 'translatable and exchangeable'. In Marx's terms, this is the alienation of the sociality of human need. It should come as little surprise that democratic materialism is for Ruda *the* contemporary form of ideology, whose political-economic basis is what Badiou calls 'parliamentary-capitalism'. In the terms of philosophy's conditions, to be a democratic materialist (one senses that this is the vast majority of humankind today) means: you are scientifically *naïve* (1, 2, 3, etc. are nothing but finite natural numbers); you are politically *indecisive* (you 'choose without choosing', because you foreclose the 'impossible possibility' of events, rendering your conception of freedom 'pure and simple indifference'); your love is largely *carnal* (you 'love sex in which one is allowed to freely consume the other, to express one's desires in the most direct manner', but 'feel threatened by love'); and you are artistically *poor* (one thinks of Max Tomba's 'advertising is our contemporary poetry, speaking directly to the most intimate of our desires').

In so far as it naturalizes the given, democratic materialism 'forcefully forgets, denies, represses, and obviates the very existence of dialectics and thereby consequently enforces an *amnesia of the idea*'. This is the crux of Ruda's critique of democratic materialism: it violates the indissociable unity of materialism and dialectics (significantly, Sartre's systematic examination of this in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is nowhere to be found); hence it resists '*the very conception of an*

idea'; that is, it only overcame idealism in the first place because it disposed of the 'materialist kernel of idealism itself' (and thus the idealist kernel of materialism itself). In short, it is easy to see how 'democratic materialism' functions as a ready-made antithesis to the groundbreaking construction of a new materialism, a properly contemporary materialism ('idealism without idealism'). In place of 'the predominance of a very specific, reactionary, and obscurantist interpretation of the two' ('there are only bodies and languages'), we are invited to think a 'dialectics of the exception' wherein 'the proper two is only graspable from the position of a three' ('there are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths', or 'yes, *there are* only individuals and communities, except that *there are* subjects'). As opposed to the democratic materialist regime of the possible (a 'stable ... statist regime that although it constantly seems to change, never truly changes'), materialist dialectics offers 'something that appears to be unthinkable and impossible ... a *materialism of the impossible*'. If democratic materialism is ideology, materialist dialectics is 'ideology critique'. And whereas democratic materialism feeds on 'the saturation of the communist hypothesis' within politics, such that its condemnation of communism 'is a condemnation of thought *tout court* and hence also of philosophy', materialist dialectics summons a philosophy that remembers 'the necessarily impossible, the impossibly necessary' and so true political action. (Badiouian) materialism is the communist idea.



Importantly, and unlike his presentation of democratic materialism, Ruda builds the concept of materialist dialectics through a detailed analysis of Badiou's chosen philosophical partners. As the thinker of the idea *par excellence*, whose writings exemplify the unity between the idea and dialectics – and thus the fact that '*the very nature of the idea is exceptional*' – Plato illuminates the real materialist task of philosophy: 'meta-critical anamnesis'. By 're-actualizing not only what has been forgotten but also ... the very means with which this anamnesis operates', philosophy is armed with the capacity to project onto the future and repeat the past in one and the same moment. A primary target of such anamnesis is unavoidably Marx, which means remembering and repeating his complex relation to Hegel and hence the idea of 'true' (universal) action. Faithful to Badiou, Ruda declares that true action 'upholds the permanence of classicism', which is to say that it 'is the concrete articulation of a *constantly perpetuated classicism* within a world'. True action, in other words, re-actualizes the 'determinate affirmation' (determinate negation) within dialectics: a political decision that corresponds to the classical logic of negation, the exclusive 'yes or no' (as opposed to the 'paraconsistent temptation' of 'yes and no at the same time'). This is the non-dialectical dimension of dialectics, its evental dimension. Materialist dialectics is thus 'a *dialectics of dialectics and non-dialectics*': it is fidelity to the contingent event 'as that which is not deducible from any dialectic whatsoever' but at the same time 'is what it will have been only through the dialectical unfolding.' An event cannot be substantialized, or 'there is the dialectical and there will have been the non-dialectical prior to the dialectical but only accessible after its emergence.' The influence of Žižek is clear: *For Badiou* matches *Less than Nothing* in its commitment to the logic of retroactivity.

Ruda also looks to Badiou's reading of Descartes to advance his materialism, a Descartes who shows that, despite our finitude, '*we can think that which we cannot think ... we can conceive of that which is but does not exist.*' Descartes' philosophy is a model for thinking the impossible possibility of the emergence of truths. It demonstrates, first, that truths are eternal, not because they have existed since time immemorial, but because they have been *created* (they are 'linked to ... absolute contingency'); and, second, that truths are exceptional – the Cartesian two is not originally internal to the domain of the 'there is' (it is at first not mind and body), but is rather this domain (thinking and extended substance alike) *and*

the domain of truths (which, like events, have no substance). In this sense, Cartesian dualism is exceptional, and at the heart of materialist dialectics. The difference between Descartes and Badiou lies in their conceptions of the subject: whilst the former locates the creation of truths in God's will – the 'absolute contingency of a free creative will', in Sartre's words – the latter sees the subject as 'a fragmentary agent of the creation of truths', a finite subject that is a *consequence* of the event but also that through which its truths are made. In Badiou, subject *processes* are the agents of truth *procedures* that 'always ... [take] place in a singular and historically specific situation'. The difference, it would thus seem, between Descartes and Badiou is *history*. If 'the event creates the God on which it will have relied', Badiou subtracts God from the creation of eternal truths and thereby dissociates himself (and presumably materialist dialectics) from any religious connotations.

This is important, because it constitutes a potential rebuttal to accusations of the mystical and therefore anti-historical character of Badiou's philosophy (see, specifically, the reviews of *Being and Event* by Jean-Jacques Lecercle in *RP* 93 and Peter Osborne in *RP* 142). Indeed, a feature of *For Badiou*, one that comes out most forcefully in Ruda's account of Badiou's critique of Hegel, is the historicity already generated by Badiou's system and theoretically enriched by Ruda's concept of materialist dialectics (in particular, 'true multiplicity ... for Badiou is the prerequisite to truly account for different historical situations and transformations occurring in them'). Yet for all its invocations of Badiou's historical bearings, *For Badiou* reproduces – in fact it exacerbates – what is truly an anti-historical philosophy. To put this another way, Badiou's philosophy, and with it *For Badiou*, is resolutely *historicist*. It systematically conflates 'historical specificity' with historical thinking, which above all proceeds from its association of ontology not with history but with set theory (which may have a history but, to paraphrase Marx, 'naturally does not know history'). In this regard, pure multiplicity can only account for historical situations and transformations *because* 'the true primacy of the two contains the *impossibility of totalization*'. Whether it is acknowledged or not, there can be no thought of 'history' absent the concept of totalization (Ruda operates with what Sartre would identify as the 'vulgar' concept of totality, one that forgets, denies, represses and obviates the *practical* identity between totalization and dialectics). Pure multiplicity, in other words, is historicism run amok.

This dovetails with the assertion, as earlier mentioned, that materialist dialectics (qua 'idealism without idealism') provides the means for a new reading of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, a reading that would, contra democratic materialism, affirm 'the existence of a (common) world before addressing the question of how to change it'. Behind this priority given to affirmation over transformation is an opposing vision, between Ruda and Marx, of the relationship between materialism, philosophy and the world. Whilst Ruda's materialism seeks a normative affirmation of the world, whereby philosophy is '*occupied with that which is not ... with exceptions to what there is*', Marx's materialism dictates – to invoke the well-known maxim from his doctoral thesis – that philosophy's worldly realization is at once its loss. This difference brings to centre stage the other ironic thing about *For Badiou*: it presents itself within the terms of a thesis that is a critique of the self-sufficiency of philosophy. The point here is not that Ruda misunderstands Marx, but that Badiou's philosophy is a self-sufficient philosophy; that its four conditions do not mitigate but in fact *secure* this self-sufficiency (his philosophy, after all, 'designates' its own conditions). This does not only cast doubt on the notion that Ruda's materialism fosters a new reading of Marx's eleventh thesis. It also suggests that this materialism – and with it Badiou's philosophy – has more in common with analytic philosophy than either Ruda or Badiou would likely admit.

George Tomlinson

Mao for now

Jacques Rancière, *The Method of Equality: Interviews with Laurent Jeanpierre and Dork Zabunyan*, trans. Julie Rose, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2016. ix + 201 pp., £55 hb., £17.99 pb., 978 0 7456 8062 0 hb., 978 0 7456 8063 7 pb.

As the preface of this book acknowledges, there is now no shortage of interviews with Jacques Rancière. Not only is the Internet bulging with them, but just three years before this recent book-length interview came out in French, many were collected into a volume running to almost 700 pages (an English translation is expected in 2017), while another short book of interviews appeared last year. If readers of Rancière don't seem to tire of hearing what their author has to say about his work, it is partly due to the nature of his monographs, which rarely state

their aims and principles directly, and which can often best be characterized as 'performative'.

Arguably, Rancière's thought moves in the present tense, constructing the principles it follows in synchrony with the encounters with its objects. These principles are then named and defined only retrospectively, often following engagement with some of his more demanding readers: 'All of a sudden, they ask you to explain your thinking by taking it out of its direct relationship with what it's trying to think, with what it's exerted on.' Rancière states that he never intended to develop a theory of politics or a theory of art. If such theories exist, he says, they have emerged as a consequence of such retrospective engagements, following invitations from different readers.

It is true that one needs to look beyond these 'theories' in order to get to the core of Rancière's thought, and the virtue of this collection is that it aims to do precisely this. Aptly named (by the interviewee himself), it focuses on the methodological principles underlying Rancière's thought in its different subject areas (history, historiography, political theory, aesthetics, literature, cinema). Thus, Rancière's main concepts appear less as ground-laying than as recapitulations of these principles. A central goal of the book, as Jeanpierre and Zabunyan state, is to address the danger, often present in the discussions of Rancière's work, that the more fundamental principles disappear behind the routine use of his technical terms.

The book is divided into four parts according to a loose classification of the different scopes of Rancière's work. It begins with an overview of the development of Rancière's position in its biographical context ('Geneses'), moving in the second part to question permanent currents running through the various fields of his work ('Lines'); the third part turns to potential critical points, or internal and external limits, of Rancière's thought ('Thresholds'), and the last part considers the ways in which Rancière's thought engages with the present, in the theoretical and historical senses ('Present tenses').

Rancière's 'break with Althusser' has become a misleading cliché in the secondary literature; in the foreword of this collection Jeanpierre and Zabunyan specify that this rupture was a 'political and methodological' one. However, the emphasis on a break risks overlooking the elements from Althusser that substantially contributed to Rancière's methodology. Rancière claims, for example, to have 'been more faithful ... than Althusser was himself' to the latter's theory of multiple temporalities, and several

passages in the present volume will add to our understanding of this theme and help determine the extent of Althusser's specific influence.

Another Althusserian aspect to which Rancière pays homage is the idea of 'theory' itself as a framework of immanent reasoning, detached (at least in principle) from institutional leadership. As Rancière has already pointed out in *Althusser's Lesson*, it was Althusser's theoreticism that allowed his *gauchiste* students to break with the Party. In principle anyone could grab *Capital* and claim on its basis authority exceeding that of the Party institution: 'You could do whatever you liked with Marxism. Yet whilst relatively detached from the authority of the Party, Althusserian theoreticism was nevertheless still tightly linked to scholarly authority: after stating that 'Althusser had sort of made Marxism available to everyone', Rancière immediately clarifies that this 'everyone' was not really everyone.

Here we might question whether such a democratization of theory would fit much better with another 'stage' of Marxism, in which the anti-authoritarian practice of reading appeared in a much more radical form. Later denounced as a vulgarization of Marxist theory, would the use of Mao Zedong Thought during the Cultural Revolution not capture the idea far better than Althusser's theory? About this, however, Rancière says nothing; it is a disappointing omission.

Similar questions concerning the (subterranean) persistence of Maoist elements in Rancière's work can be raised in relation to the use he makes of Joseph Jacotot, who appears as the most important predecessor of 'the method of equality'. Rancière describes the method he developed, before 'know[ing] its name', in the workers' archives as the *méthode Jacotot*. This consisted in connecting different sources in a more or less contingent fashion and letting a singular context form itself without the preliminary mapping-out of a field of research. Rather than a preformed context, there was 'a heap of fairly scattered leads that came ... from all sides'. Later Rancière discovered the principle of this method in Jacotot: 'learn something and then relate all the rest back to it'. But might we not hear in this intuitive application of the method an echo of Lin Biao's exhortation to 'creative application' of Mao's fragmentary and decontextualized quotations collected in the Little Red Book? And if Rancière was effectively applying this method before knowing about its explicit existence, was it not because, as a former Maoist militant, he was already familiar with the practices of the Cultural Revolution?

Neither Rancière's alleged break with Althusser nor his reluctance to discuss Maoism at any length should stop us from seeing signs of their ongoing influence upon Rancière's discourse. Rather than elements that he *has broken* with, their problematic relation to Rancière's approach should perhaps be understood in the way he himself thinks the history of art and its 'regimes': 'a system's contradictions don't shatter that system. A system rests on contradictions.'

This takes us to one central aspect of Rancière 'anti-systematic systematicity', characterized through the persistence of contradictory terms rather than a movement aiming at their dissolution or reconciliation. If Rancière's method is not easily pinned down to stable concepts, nevertheless one terminological cluster does describe it better than others, namely the vocabulary referring to inscriptions of spatial configurations (geography, cartography, topography). Jeanpierre and Zabunyan are well aware of this, and some of the most interesting moments of this book are the sequences that address the question of spatial analyses and especially the way these relate to time.

Rather than establishing temporal relations, Rancière generally models things according to space. Considered as a broad logical field with its own specific dimensions, space is free from the hierarchical or other ordering and organizing principles according to which relations in time tend to be understood (beginning, end, anticipation, origin, preceding, following). As he explains, in order to 'rethink time as coexistence' – as opposed to an ordering of differences – 'you have to in a way turn it into a metaphor, often through space'. The question which arises is to what extent Rancière's thought leaves room for *any* understanding of temporal–processual reasoning, or whether his consistently spatial approach to time is essential to his method.

The way in which specifically temporal operators are handled by Rancière draws attention to the importance of this question. Rancière, for example, is eager to distinguish his idea of 'coming after' from Badiou's post-evental decision (although Badiou is not explicitly cited in this passage) by suggesting it simply refers to a 'change that has occurred' together with 'the sensible world, the sensorium this change belongs to'. We cannot understand what emerges 'after' according to any consequential logic, but merely as a sensible configuration whose presence is articulated, and the notion of 'coming after' should in fact be thought as 'a kind of permanence ..., a constancy'. Such an understanding, however, renders the temporal term obscure.

A similar difficulty emerges in Rancière's discussion of his often-cited principle according to which 'politics is rare'. As he has done before, Rancière says he regrets this formulation, which fails to describe his ideas adequately and mark his difference from Badiou (this time named explicitly). Having explained that he means to refer to the exceptionality of political moments, Rancière states that '[a]t every present, the issue is to try to define [the] mode of reappearance' of such moments. Again a temporal modality ('rare') is reformulated in a way which risks rendering it meaningless, because a term which serves to introduce temporal differentiation is used to function 'in each present'.

When asked about the way the word 'institution' appears in his definition of politics, Rancière refers to the critiques that blame him for spontaneism, rejecting the claim that his thought wouldn't allow a proper understanding of political organization: 'Once again, as far as organization goes, it exists always and everywhere. No need to wear yourself out shouting about it from the rooftops.' There is a risk, however, that Rancière's insistence on the present, as well as the topographical understanding of time which serves to think it, render all time-determination based on the ordering of differential terms malfunctioning. For this reason, the problem not only of political organization but of any kind of processuality of politics deserves to be the most important critical question posed to him.

Jussi Palmusaari

Migrant struggles

Martina Tazzioli, *Spaces of Governmentality: Autonomous Migration and the Arab Spring*, Rowman & Littlefield, London and New York, 2015. 204 pp., £70.00 hb., £24.95 pb., 978 1 78348 103 3 hb., 978 1 78348 104 0 pb.

'The world is not mine or yours, it neither belongs to Obama nor to Berlusconi, it belongs to everyone. So, if I want to breathe the air of Italy, I can do it; if I want to breathe the air of Canada, I can do it. No wire exists for me. I'm here not to steal or to rob; I'm here to breathe the air of freedom.' These words, spoken by a Tunisian migrant detained at an Italian 'hosting centre', are evocative of the central themes of Martina Tazzioli's remarkable new book. In it, Tazzioli investigates the struggles for democracy in the wake of the migrations that followed the revolutions of the Arab Spring. The book eschews the traditional frameworks

for speaking about migration. The 'push' factors of poverty, unemployment, oppression and state failure are all, of course, relevant and recognized as enabling and constraining forces of migration. But what distinguishes Tazzioli's work is her theorization of the tense immanence between the practices of migration and the Tunisian and other revolutionary uprisings. The North African migrations are not so much side effects of the turmoil as democratic acts of freedom that were part of the fabric of the uprisings. The migrations are not a failure of democratic transition, but rather 'a way of enacting and continuing the revolutionary demands of freedom and democracy'. Migratory practices, in short, are also democratic practices of freedom.

The book's subtitle flags the contribution it makes to the autonomy of migration literature – still under-represented in anglophone publishing – with its emphasis on how migration involves the creative enactment of new modes of political subjectivity and connection. But the book's main title signals that the central analytical tools – governmentality, mapping and counter-mapping – are drawn from the work of Michel Foucault. The book seizes on the Foucauldian insight that power operates in spatial terms, through the management of spaces. Space, we know, is not innocent, neutral or inconsequential to social and political interactions. Space is produced through these interactions and, further, is key to the production and reproduction of dominant and contestatory power relations and identities. A dynamic central to this spatial production is the play of visibility and invisibility. While this dynamic is more associated with Foucault's earlier work on discipline, Tazzioli demonstrates its vitality with regard to governmentality studies as well. She does so by showing how the political technology of (in)visibility possesses a certain flexibility or doubleness. For example, in a fascinating analysis of the dramatic 'humanitarian' rescues of migrants found in peril in the Mediterranean Sea, Tazzioli shows how the logic of humanitarian protection is so easily flipped, with the migrant-victims suddenly discursively transformed into dangerous and threatening identities. 'The claim for a more efficient and legislated system of rescue', she says, 'easily slip[s] and reverse[s] into the strengthening of the mechanisms of capture'.

Spaces of Governmentality is an excellent example of how governmentality does not have to be studied in the grey world of repetitive acts of governance, with its propensity to highlight the power dynamics coming from state, institutional or otherwise

dominant power networks. In this book, freedom and control exist in an immanent field of encounter, interrelation and struggle. Critical of what she identifies as the reductive application of Foucault's concept of governmentality in migration studies, Tazzioli emphasizes how the practices of migrants are important to the constitution of what she calls 'spaces of governmentality', in which migrants challenge, contest, evade, ignore or otherwise resist the attempts to fully govern their lives, identities and movements. Equally at stake here are the possibilities for political subjectivity, which involves the struggle to have voices heard and achieve autonomy from governmental control – or, as Tazzioli puts it, the capacity to 'crack and exceed mechanisms of capture'.

While the book is most directly influenced by Foucault, I would say that it also is driven by a very Deleuzian orientation towards philosophy – that is to say, a creative ethos towards the creation of new concepts. There are plenty of such concepts in this work: dissident cartographies, interruptions, snapshots and, perhaps most powerfully, the idea of the *strugglefield*. These are not buzzwords meant to obfuscate, but are rather political concepts mobilized throughout the narrative to great analytical benefit. They also speak to a movement going on for some time now in critical studies of migration, refugees and citizenship, which is to invent new terminologies and vocabularies in order to speak about these fundamental figures of the political in new ways. At the same time, they speak to Tazzioli's efforts to contribute to a 'militant' form of research, engaging in counter-mappings to locate and name those subjects and practices that contest, resist or evade the dominant governmental mappings of migration. For example, the Conclusion's invitation to 'make space, not borders' represents a politically powerful call to reshape European space so as to accommodate a politics that is beyond the binaries of citizen and foreigner.

While the book adopts a spatial language – spaces of governmentality, strugglefields, counter-mappings – there is another story to be told about the temporal dimensions of these struggles over mobility, belonging and subjectivity. The experiences of Tunisian migrants are structured by technologies of control that are as much temporal as spatial. The temporal movement in and out of regimes of visibility and invisibility and the experience of a kind of precarious temporariness are central here. The migration regime establishes the *temporal pace* of mobility:

on the one hand, fixing periods of time in which migrants can be legalized as migrants and then translated into statistics of future expected migrants' flows; and, on the other hand imposing times of voids and suspension: when undocumented migrants live as invisible presences or when they wait for an indefinite time to get a permit to stay in a certain space.

What is significant about the migrations that occurred in the wake of the Arab Spring, Tazzioli argues, is that they challenged the rules of temporality by disrupting the efforts to control the pace of movement. The organized mass refusal of Eritrean migrants in Lampedusa to provide fingerprints to the authorities is one such example of migrants interrupting the temporal pace of efforts to contain and constrain their mobility.

The book is further significant for meeting a criticism that is commonly made of the autonomy of migration literature – that in such work, despite its emphasis on the migrant as a dynamic political figure, the everyday lives, experiences and desires of migrants themselves are often underrepresented. By contrast, Tazzioli's book is filled with accounts of the people she interviewed during fieldwork conducted in Tunisia and throughout Europe. Whether in the Choucha tent camp in the Tunisian desert or among the refugee action groups such as 'Lampedusa in Hamburg' or 'Syrians blocked in Calais', there is a fascinating mobilization of the voices of migrants, expressing their negotiations, evasions and contestations of the EU border apparatus. Nonetheless, a better account of the background or identity of these migrants would have benefited the analysis. We get little sense of the age, gender, sexuality or other aspects of these migrants. An intersectional perspective would likely reveal that the urgency of obtaining legal status is experienced unevenly by different people (for example, young able-bodied men versus unaccompanied children or the elderly). Over time, people may want more than to 'breathe the air of freedom'. Over time, migrants want – and make claims to – a range of other rights: the right to an education for their children, the right to health care and medicine for elderly relatives, and so on. A temporal perspective could have deepened our understanding of these subjects as they move through time, and not just space. Further, an intersectional analysis of these migrations would have situated their struggles more concretely within these counter-mappings.

Finally, the book challenges 'methodological Europeanism' by discussing the 'migrant crisis' with an

emphasis squarely on the experiences and struggles of the Tunisian migrants. In the wake of the democratic uprisings of the Arab Spring, the democracies of Europe tried to enact a kind of 'temporal distance' to distinguish themselves from the democratic movements happening on the other side of the Mediterranean. The nations and citizens of the countries involved in the Arab Spring uprisings occupy the time of the 'not yet'. A neo-orientalism underpins the claim that their democratic character has not yet reached the level of development found in the countries and citizens of Europe. But if they occupy the time of the 'not yet', surely they also simultaneously occupy the time of 'no longer' – as the institutions, practices and politics of the old order are no longer deemed credible or legitimate. The interstitial space-time of the 'no longer' and 'not yet' allows for the invention of new identities, commonalities and solidarities.

This Eurocentrism would be challenged further still if Tazzioli's perspective was applied to other contexts. Tazzioli insists upon a situated and contextualized theorization of migration. But how would the call to 'make space, not borders' play outside the Mediterranean-European space? How would the terms of the strugglefield shift if we stepped outside this context? For example, the strugglefields of other Western countries like Canada, the USA and Australia are complicated by their status as settler-colonial states. Here, the space made by displaced migrants exists alongside other historical and ongoing displacements of indigenous peoples. New border regimes can emerge in the indigenous struggles over membership, authority and sovereignty that cannot be reduced to a statist paradigm. Whether it is the struggle against the construction of oil pipelines on the unceded territory of the Unist'ot'en in northern British Columbia, or the claims of political sovereignty by Mohawks living in territories that span across 'Canada' and the 'United States', the political question becomes 'whose sovereignty' is being interrupted? In whose name do we 'make space, not borders'? Tazzioli's call for the production of 'common space in which no presence and movement is out of place or unauthorized' must be critically reinterrogated in the context of historical and ongoing colonial displacements of indigenous people in settler states. This is not to deny the urgency of inventing new spaces of commonality, but to understand the different forms of democratic engagement that will have to be invented in different contexts and locales. The friction between the citizen and the migrant is not the only politically salient tension at work in these contexts.

Spaces of Governmentality demonstrates that the traditional political concepts of state, citizen and territorial sovereignty are no longer adequate to understand the complexities involved in contemporary migrations. These migrations, Tazzioli argues, are democratic practices – democratic in a way that the traditional concepts could not recognize or conceive.

Peter Nyers

A net of rats

John Cunningham, Anthony Iles, Mira Mattar and Marina Vishmidt, eds, *Anguish Language: Writing and Crisis*, Archive Books, Berlin, 2015. 304 pp., £13.00 pb., 978 3 94362 030 6.

In 2007 the *Chicago Review* published a special issue on contemporary British poetry edited by Robin Purves and Sam Ladkin that is often read retrospectively as a signal moment in the oft-bruited revitalization of the British poetry scene. The younger poets featured – among them Andrea Brady, Sean Bonney and Keston Sutherland – are committed Marxists and the inheritors of a lyric tradition that draws on the millenarian screeds of the Levellers, Ranters and Muggletonians; Wordsworth and Baudelaire; the poetics of *Kapital*; the fierce, uncompromising modernism of first-wave British revivalist poets like J.H. Prynne, with whom Brady and Sutherland studied at Cambridge and about whom Sutherland wrote his PhD thesis.

In a recent lecture given at New York University entitled 'Blocs: Form since the Crash', Sutherland maintains that before 2008 the central political preoccupation of this group and its affiliates had been the war in Iraq, which was read in essentially Leninist terms as an imperialist reaction to market saturation, a martial sweeping aside of national borders in order to subject new territories to financialization. The poetic subject produced by imperial shock and awe was, according to Sutherland, a riven one: 'concentrations of passion and theoretical energy were ... polarized on the one hand into an aggressive, interiorized self-examination, an examination of trauma', and on the other into an attempt to 'describe the gruesomely over-mediated horror' of the conflict imaginary. Sutherland's example is Brady's poetic cycle *Wildfire*: 'Days after the encounter / skin still flashes like a refinery seen from the express, / like bargain fairy lights loose on their stolon.'

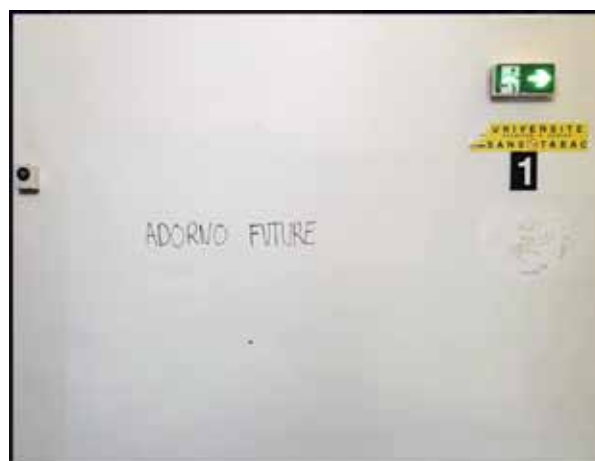
On Sutherland's reading, since the financial crash of 2007/8 these poets and younger fellow travellers such as Danny Hayward and Verity Spot have sought to 'recalibrate and identify permanent, less spectacular forms of damage' and structural violence surrounding us all the time. The formal priority became an articulation of 'a middle ground of proximate mediations'. This reprioritization required a different kind of Marxist poetics, one focused less on a critique of imperialism and more on a detailed engagement with the poetics of capital in order to 'understand more proximate forms of suffering'. *Anguish Language*, a book that emerged from a workshop on 'crisis language' held in Berlin in 2014, is a provisional and 'partisan' response to these 'proximate forms of suffering' that features a number of poets from this intake: Sean Bonney, Danny Hayward, Amy D'Ath, among them.

John Cunningham, who edited the book along with fellow *Mute Magazine* stalwarts Anthony Iles, Marina Vishmidt and Mira Mattar, thinking of the terrible writing machine from Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*, writes of a 'crisis language apparatus' that works on its victims both affectively and somatically in terms of 'extra work extracted, benefits cut, increase in food bank visits, or the cigarettes smoked at the arrival of yet another officious looking letter'. It is this crisis language that in turn produces an 'anguish language' in response, the most direct example of which here is the sample from Bonney's *Letters against the Firmament*, where he writes that he wishes he 'could think of something to say that was hopeful, that was useful, that was not simply a net of rats blocking the force of the sun, till it crawls on its fists and its knees, screaming like a motherfucker'. In much of the work here the failure of this wish turns inwards onto the poet's or writer's subjectivity or onto poetry itself, which is lambasted or questioned for its exceptionalism or its enfeeblement, most directly perhaps in Anne Boyer's 'Questions for Poets' where she asks

Does it take the form of inquiry? Does it throb with live interrogation? Does it immortalise when the poet lay in the green field with his head against the tree and Caesar's predecessors conquered the earth or does it immortalise when a woman writes *I have always been with the wretched and never given a living soul up for Caesar?*

That last line, quoting from Pound and Louise Michel, sets out the stakes starkly: does poetry serve fascism or the commune; patriarchy or gender liberation; the luminous lyrical particular or the prosaic universal?

Although his work is only addressed directly here in Jacob Bard-Rosenberg's elegant essay 'History in Darkness', the figure who haunts and challenges this work is Theodor Adorno, whose 'On Lyric Poetry and Society' is, in a sense, the assumed but avoided interlocutor text. Anthony Iles, besides a short footnote, certainly avoids Adorno in his interestingly symptomatic framing essay 'Anguish Language: Crisis Literature, Speculation and Critique'. Iles's fragmentary and flawed essay is nevertheless interesting for the way in which it hesitantly approaches a series of complex questions surrounding poetics, aesthetics and identity politics that are very much alive. Iles begins by trying to situate the formal questions of contemporary poetics within the frame of the Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky's concept of estrangement or *ostranenie*, coined in the short article 'Art as Device' (1917), where Shklovsky writes that 'as perception becomes habitual it becomes automatic [and] devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war.' Habitualization and



automatization are seen to be, in Douglas Robinson's words, 'psychologically alienating [and] anesthetizing, and [the] reader therefore stands in need of some kind of aesthetic "shock" to break him or her out of [this] anesthesia'. This shock is provided by the capacity of literary form to 'make strange'. Shklovsky writes that shock or defamiliarization is 'found everywhere form is found' and serves to 'recover the *sensation of life*'. Art's aim, as he famously put it, is to render the 'stone stony', to bring the object flush to perception in its radical particularity. For Iles, then, the Formalists reveal the 'axiom that what is contemporary about new literature is its innovative departure from the norms hitherto established for it'.

This is a concise statement of modernist negation: in order to be 'modern', art must formally negate the old. Of course the old lives on in the new via the very

act of this negation. Indeed, throughout the book the signal moments to which the present is compared are those of post-revolutionary Soviet Russia and crisis-era Weimar Germany, and the avant-gardes of those particular historical moments – from Mayakovsky and Tretiakov to Kracauer and, of course, Benjamin. From this it looks as though Iles is going to proffer a cultural logic of avant-gardism interpreting contemporary writing practices in terms of ‘shock’ or ‘estrangement’ or ‘negation’. However, history itself catches up with him.

Towards the end of the essay Iles writes that ‘Late in the process of editing this book in 2015, the North American poetry scene began to experience a year of crisis.’ This crisis was prompted by Kenneth Goldsmith’s now infamous reading of a poem based on the autopsy report of Michael Brown, the unarmed black man shot by police in Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014. Iles favourably quotes from Cathy Park Hong’s article published in *Lana Turner* in the wake of the backlash against Goldsmith: ‘The avant-garde’s “delusion of whiteness” is the luxurious opinion that anyone can be “post-identity” and can casually slip in and out of identities like a video game avatar, when there are those who are consistently harassed, surveilled, profiled or deported for who they are.’

Goldsmith’s po-mo rerun of the avant-garde will not do, then; nor will his call for writers to become managers of language. The problem for Iles is, what will do? He ends by quoting Danny Hayward, who writes that ‘those working in culture are too often compelled to think their situation individually and think their production in the separation in which it has been fetishized – considering content and not dissemination as the proper place for complicated conceptual thinking.’ Indeed. (Although this is not really a valid criticism of conceptual writing, since a large part of its project has concerned questions of dissemination as opposed to ‘content’.) In the end Iles’s essay and the book collapse into a series of questions:

Could it be that the class generating an ‘autopoiesis of rebellious political culture’ reflects upon its own dissolution and decomposition in crisis conditions? That the historical fluctuations of struggle, domination and language require close and detailed attention rather than slick analogy? These questions are those of our time; they are raised but not decided by contemporary poetic matter.

Surely; but the problem with the book and with Iles’s essay is that the questions are not really raised in any coherent way. The frame of reference in terms

of poetry is largely ahistorical and, outside of the coterie of recent British (in fact English) political poetry and its tastes, there is very little other context that might have helped articulate a more coherent notion of how language, the institutions of literature, writing and crisis might be understood to operate, resist and interpenetrate with each other. This is not to say there is not exciting material here. Besides a conversation between Mattin and Karolin Meunier about a performance that they were invited to do at the original Anguish Language workshop in Berlin, more or less everything is of interest. It is just that, given the scope of Iles’s ambition for the project, it remains deeply provisional. Indeed, it might have benefited from Iles’s own essay being dropped and published elsewhere, leaving the reader a series of texts between which to build connections and inferences. It is to be hoped, then, that the project will continue in some form, and that when the *Mute* critical apparatus withdraws its harrow from the body of contemporary poetics there will be more left than a bloody mess.

John Douglas Millar

Not crude enough

Antti Salminen and Tere Vadén, *Energy and Experience: An Essay in Nafthology*, Chicago and Alberta, MCM Publishing, 2015. 170 pp., £13.20 pb., 978 0 9895 4971 4 pb.

Antti Salminen and Tere Vadén start their book by noting the necessity of supplementing the understanding of ‘structures of ownership or the technological understanding of Being’ – Marx and Heidegger, in other words – with the understanding of oil (*naphtha* in Greek). The great theories of alienation have ignored the central question of what enables machines to do their work, of what enables modernity to be modern. Marx, after all, sees the origin of value exclusively in human labour; Heidegger would return us to a Being freed from the alienation of enframing and the standing reserve. But neither, according to the authors, considers the value accrued from the addition of fossil-fuel-derived energy inputs to the machine; the production of wealth and social inequality, as well as the production of a reality defined by technology and quantified raw material, depend on the powerful addition of energetic inputs. Technological productivity,

in other words, is inseparable from the use of oil. Without fossil fuels the alienation analysed by Marx and Heidegger would not even be worth discussing, because it would not exist. Oil itself in a sense generates class conflict and the forgetting of Being, while up to now remaining hidden from analysis: much contemporary theory derived from either Marx or Heidegger, or both, manifests a 'blind spot or lacuna with regard to energy itself'.

How is oil so special? This is precisely the field of study of naftology. Rather than regarding fossil fuels and their energy inputs as simply the origin of value, as energeticists (Ostwald, Soddy, the Technocrats, and so on) have done for more than a century, Salminen and Vadén see them as the origin of alienation as well. But alienation from what? According to the authors, we are facing an era, much like the one Ernst Jünger proposed in his book *Der Arbeiter* (1932), of 'total mobilization', in which all social reality is subject to the demands of ever greater production. As happened in mobilized societies during World War I, which Jünger sees as the model for all future social and economic life, individual identity and will are made subordinate to this collective demand for production and productivity. The 'point' or goal of this productivity is irrelevant; the end is a purely formal signifier, an empty integer. During World War I it was 'victory'; today it could be 'freedom' or 'happiness'. What counts is that the collective will be subordinated to the goal of maximal production. This is the sole means of escape from bourgeois alienation, or from any other problem one would wish to identify.

But for Salminen and Vadén total mobilization – Jünger's fantasy; our reality – is less about an escape from alienation than it is the constitution of a higher alienation, the total alienation of oil itself:

The disappearance of fast vantage points, of measure, of overall Gestalt is not only the dissolution of synthetic overviews in favor of the multi-centered and dark non-humanity of oil, but more specifically of the dissolution of localities, of bioregions, of landbases. The mutability of oil, its alchemical ability to be transformed into virtually anything and its pancratic ability to move virtually anything, shatters the recognizability of localities as localities, whether they are conceptualized as natural areas, cultures, or a nexus of skills. When feedback loops are long enough, they disappear from human view.

Oil both homogenizes reality in general *and* mutates into virtually anything, while feedback loops – the

connections between origins and ends – are broken. Everything is the same, in other words, even in a multiplicity of seemingly radical differences. Oil is not mobilized for war; war is mobilized for oil.

At the heart of a larger societal alienation is 'con-distancing', the separation, effected by oil, of origin and effect, energy expenditure and its consequences: 'For instance, when carbon dioxide emissions, waste, and the production of raw materials are removed far enough from consumption, they vanish into blind spots.' Ecological and social degradation, in other words, are the effect of oil's ability to separate us from what we do, what we consume and, above all, our conscious modes of interaction with other people and with 'nature', when we make things and consume them. Con-distancing is the movement by which everything is the same (production, consumption, disposal) and yet everything is separated, since nothing is comprehensible or connected. A kind of generalized abstraction takes place, in which the world is covered with precisely equivalent waste, but waste that doesn't allow connection, that can't be rendered comprehensible, or even fully recognizable, in its multitude of deformed forms. The model here is plastic, derived of course from fossil fuels:

A genuine plastic thing is already trash. The choicest petrochemical product is always already abandoned. The things of oil do not exist without the movement that disperses the raw material, the half-finished parts, and the final products around the world. Traffic and logistics are inscribed into things as con-distancing, where the offset between production, use and refusal [*sic*] are not felt but rather gathered together as ease and comfort.

The real question here, after alienation, is the ontology of oil. As the non-human origin of value through machinery, oil is the source both of 'ease and comfort' (in their ironic plenitude) and of the con-distancing that serves as the destroyer of any larger comprehensibility. Oil becomes virtually demonic: 'As base matter, energy spreads its night far and wide, like a film of oil on water.... Because of its high EROEI and big volume, oil is a potent narcotic, sedative and smokescreen.'

'Base matter' refers to Georges Bataille's conception of a cursed matter, the left-handed sacred stuff that carries a dangerous and destructive charge. Such matter, according to Bataille, serves as a basis for society in its exclusionary acts: the elevated sacred might justify all social life and productive activity, but it can only do so through the exclusion of the base, low sacred. Yet the latter periodically erupts

in collective violence, war, orgiastic or transgressive sexuality; in delirium, eroticism, laughter and death. Bataille sees the base sacred not in service to the rational but as the profoundly irrational void that subtends society and threatens its very existence.

Cursed matter puts in question the banal homogeneous routines of daily life – where all that is expended must be accounted for in usable and tangible results (the ‘closed economy’) – but, in its heterogeneity, it is nevertheless tied to the matter of the elevated sacred: disgusting shit is never that far from the untouchable and glorious host. Bataille stresses this in his analysis of fascism (‘The Psychological Structure of Fascism’, 1934): the fascist leader is a *crapule*, trash from the gutter, but he, heterogeneous to the world of work and utility, is elevated to the transcendent power of the ruling eagle who soars above all banal social routine. By classifying oil as base matter, Salminen and Vadén revise Bataille in an interesting way. For Bataille, writing in the 1930s, the real political threat was of base materialism being co-opted and transformed into the elevated sacred. For Salminen and Vadén, writing in the 2010s, the threat (or rather the reality) is of a base matter literally powering the world as we know it, co-opting all that comes before it.

Base matter for Bataille was a semiological category: it was a threat, to be sure, but its very instability indicated that its charge was a matter of classification, or rather the disruption of all coherent classification. It was only when one shifted to a higher level – that of the ‘origin’ of disruptive energy – that one saw the fundamental primacy of the general economy (of excess) over the restrained economy (of conservation). This was the limitless, always excessive, energy from the sun. By associating this always-excessive solar energy with oil – oil is, after all, preserved solar energy from millions of years ago – Salminen and Vadén recognize oil in a way that Bataille never did. It is nonetheless a very Bataillean move: from the elevated excessiveness of solar energy, we move to the base matter of oil, its chthonian, abyssal power and death-dealing force. If solar energy is the diurnal power of the heterogeneous, oil is the nocturnal and cursed power of the heterogeneous.

By classifying oil as base matter, however, Salminen and Vadén revise Bataille in a fundamental way. Oil literally powers the world, in a way that no base matter did for Bataille. Unlike Bataille’s base matter, however, which, though liable to co-optation, nevertheless fundamentally disrupts the alienation caused by the elevated sacred (God,

fascist leader, father), oil, according to Salminen and Vadén, powers the world exclusively in its blindness, its con-distancing alienation. They see no positive (no matter how ‘transgressive’) in the power of this negative. It is not so much unemployable as endlessly employing. Indeed, oil for the authors seems always to lead to a unitary ‘focalization’, a centralizing and homogenizing power not unlike that of Bataille’s fascist chief. Hence, for them, what counts is not the affirmation of the baseness of this base matter, but rather a displacement in which oil is simply negated: that is, they would set it aside for other forms of locally produced, and presumably renewable, energy. This is a powerful move, but quite different from Bataille’s insistence on returning base matter, including the sun (and its offshoot, oil?) to its heterogeneous roots.

The final pages of *Energy and Experience* focus on latter-day efforts to live a more holistic life, outside the purview of con-distancing, in a ‘forest of foci’. If oil leads to a single focus – life centralized and turning around (or under) an incomprehensible and pointless centre – a return to renewables means a world in which feedback loops are restored and life becomes local and meaningful. Not one point of focus but many, and all presumably susceptible to coordination but not domination. Following Franco Berardi, the authors here valorize a life that might seem utopian only to those who, in the famous words of Fredric Jameson, can easily imagine the destruction of the world but not the end of (nafthist) capitalism (although Salminen and Vadén also note the dangers of a nafthist socialism):

Ecovillages, permaculture, transition movements, community-supported agriculture, resilient communities, and so on: all are characterized by a non-individual training and experimentation toward post-nafthist sustainability.

By arguing that the focus should be on oil as much as or even more than on alienated labour or the forgetting of Being, Salminen and Vadén have, in their important book, sought to fundamentally displace the terms of the debate when it comes to sustainability. One looks forward to many more studies focusing on the implications of energy-oriented critique (fossil fuels, pollution, depletion) for the Marxist, Heideggerian, and – why not? – Freudian, Derridean, Deleuzian traditions.

Allan Stoekl

Hey, youz there!

Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party*, Verso, London and New York, 2016. 288 pp., £16.99 hb., 978 1 78168 694 2.

Jodi Dean's book *Crowds and Party* is poised to ruffle some feathers among theoreticians and activists on the left who seek a mode of doing politics in ways that downplay or denounce the apparatus of the party and the vocabulary of collective emancipation. Dean sets out to 'intervene' politically – in a way akin to the party that calls for a degree of discipline and clear delineation of short- and mid-term goals – into the current state of affairs marked by haphazard challenges to the existing order. However, Dean's prose is free of the counterproductive, worn-out jargon of consciousness-raising and party-building that often features among groups with missionary pretensions. Instead, Dean's analysis departs from the challenges and exigencies that she has observed within social movements, providing a distinct angle into the debate and revealing how political strategy can draw imaginatively from a variety of unexplored fields.

The underlying problematic of Dean's discussions is what she perceives as an excessive and misplaced commitment to individuality, a corollary of the dominant ideology that should be staved off from left politics. Dean demonstrates that the individual form does not have an inherently emancipatory potential with the example of the historical individualization of the commodity form in the slave trade. Furthermore, individuality is invoked as a selling point: viral marketing campaigns, such as the 'custom' Coke cans with individual names, preserve the ubiquity of the brand while vesting it in a 'unique' veneer.

The more troubling aspect of individualism is the resonance it finds in left political practice. The social upheavals of the last decades rejected clearly delineated leadership procedures and concerted action, not to mention the notion of a common and actionable programme, but by agreeing to play within the individualistic terrain underlying the current form of capitalism, leftists lose sight of individualism as a social pathology that idolizes those who do 'whatever it takes' to achieve what is really a precarious livelihood to begin with.

Dean goes further in arguing that the individual form is an ideological construct conceptualized as the basic unit of subjectivity, drawing from Althusser's formulation that ideology interpellates the individual

as the subject. For Althusser, ideology summons the individual to 'subjectify' her in the name of the Subject, as citizen, national, believer, and so on. Dean proposes an inversion: the subject is interpellated as an individual. Thus subjectivity is untethered from the confines of the individual, the ontology of which is problematized. This move allows for a formulation of subjectivity that does not reduce itself to the individual level, while reinstating collective subjectivity and consciousness against conservative portraits of 'the crowd' as an irrational mob.

This inversion also has the consequence of assuming that a sort of subjectivity pre-exists the individual, in an essentialist vein that goes against the premisses set out earlier. This does not inherently compromise Dean's argument, yet it would be more theoretically coherent to connect the internal fragmentation of the individual at a psychological level with the antagonism between capital and labour, invoking the problem of individuality in Marx. It might be objected that a theory of individuality as such is absent in Marx, yet it is pertinent that in *The German Ideology* Marx differentiates between personal and class individuality, between the individual *as a person* and what is 'determined by some branch of labour and the conditions pertaining to it'. This observation anticipates the fragmented nature of the individual within capitalist society, as alienated and opaque to herself. It is at this point, to return to and supplement one of the central points of Dean's book, that the party (or association, commune, society) is useful as a wedge within the flow of capitalist relations, and a space of autonomy that binds individual vantage points to enable a transcendent collective vision.

Regarding the ideological obstacles in the way of emancipation, Dean is categorical that the Left needs an avowedly communist organization, as this is the only concept uncompromisingly intransigent to capitalism. On this point, while Dean is correct to make a call to unfurl the banners of a positive revolutionary project, she does not appreciate that in many parts of the Majority World individual liberties have a progressive connotation, and while communists take pains to underline their differences with bourgeois elements, they find themselves compelled to engage with the institutions of the status quo along these lines, precisely in order to hold open and expand a gap for the collective, emancipatory discharge. It would have been more than prudent, therefore, to be more mindful of the regionally differential manifestations of class struggle.

Onur Acaroglu