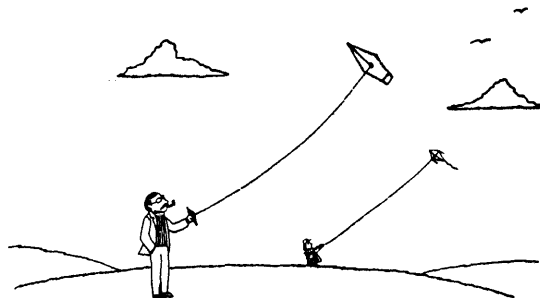


REVIEWS



LACAN AMONG THE RUBBLE

David Macey, *Lacan in Contexts*, London, Verso, 1988, xi + 322pp., £34.95 hb, £12.95 pb, 0-86091-215-9 hb, 0-86091-942-0 pb.

French books on Lacan still belong to the age of faith. They are hagiographic, or obscure, or both. Anglo-Saxon versions tend to hesitate between admiring importation of French fashion and nervous dismissal in the approved Podsnap manner. Dismissal is the mirror image of hagiography. Both attitudes treat the Lacanian corpus as a sacred text, all-coherent and ahistorical. Mahomet is either prophet or devil, and Lacan the author of a system.

With David Macey's book, we are entering the age of criticism. The question is at last raised of the whereabouts of the emperor's clothes, since it is becoming evident that they are not on his person. David Macey is probably the first author to treat Lacan not as a prophet but as a text, not as a system but as a complex of incompatible influences and shifting and contradictory positions. And, truly, how did we not think of it before? Or, to be more precise, for Macey is not the first author to have recognised the complexity of the corpus, how did we manage not to use this massive fact as our starting point? With Althusser, Barthes or Foucault, we have the impression that most of the corpus is available – a few essays still need retrieving from the obscure journals in which they were first published, certain manuscripts are still withheld by the author or by the terms of his will, but, on the whole, it is not too difficult to obtain a global conception of the *oeuvre*. Not so with Lacan: a large proportion of the *Seminars* is still unpublished, and at the present rate of publication only our grandchildren will have access to the whole. Lacan's writing life spans a period of fifty years: in the space of two generations, the *Zeitgeist* has changed, Lacan's culture has evolved, and he has had time to develop and change his mind. As indeed he did, more than once.

There are two ways of reading this development. One is organic and teleological, hinging on the Althusserian concept of epistemological break. There is a non-Lacanian Lacan, before the war, who can be read for signs of future glory: the essay on the family, and the thesis belong to this period. And there is Lacan's Lacan, to be enjoyed in the *Ecrits* and the *Seminars*. The only problem with this type of reading is that it is profoundly ahistorical. It produces what Macey calls 'the final state': a myth, the fantasy of a systematic opus – a fantasy which the master himself engineered, witness the very structure of his *Ecrits* (they begin with a fairly late text, the

seminar on 'The Purloined Letter', which provides a statement of the final state; they end on a formidable *index raisonné* by the faithful son-in-law).

The importance of Macey's book lies in the fact that he chooses to read Lacan's development in a truly historical fashion, thus deflating the myth of a systematic Lacan. There is no 'real' Lacan: only a network of developing positions, often incoherent and contradictory, without any determinable 'break' or final systematicity. We should be deeply grateful to Macey for his central insight: Lacan must be read in *contexts*. It is essential that the last word should be in the plural.

The myth claims that Lacan's only context is Freud, as Marx was Althusser's. The grandeur of their achievement lies in the single-mindedness of their return to the great origin. This, of course, is nonsense: the richness of Lacan's intertext, the complexity, and sometimes the obscurity, of his allusions, the extent of his conceptual borrowing, in short his astonishing culture, all indicate that his greatest achievement is the grafting on to psychoanalysis of the literary, philosophical and linguistic cultures of his time. David Macey follows this process with unfailing erudition and painstaking attention to detail. Thus, he convinces the reader that in order to understand Lacan (whose notorious incomprehensibility is not due so much to his euphuistic style as to the concealment of almost all explicit reference to these influences), we should learn something about the French psychiatric tradition, about Surrealist literature and painting, about the history of philosophy in France, and of course about linguistics (Macey devotes a chapter to each). The last influence is notorious, and indeed explicitly acknowledged by Lacan. But the others are not: all we have is a few words indicating his debt to Clerambault, his admiration for Dali, his interest in Lévi-Strauss. Macey's book documents them, tracing back textual allusions to Lacan's reading of Sartre or Heidegger, showing that his Hegelianism relies on Kojève's extraordinarily influential reading. Last, and least known so far, he shows the influence on Lacan of the Marxist critique of psychology by Politzer.

The result of these influences is of course not a system. How could it be? Each appropriation is a betrayal (except perhaps the all-important link with the Surrealists: Macey's Lacan at times appears to be closer to Breton and Dali than to Freud), and these repeated misprisions, creative as they are, are deeply problematic. Thus, the analysis of the most celebrated concepts (the signifier for instance) in their contexts shows that they profoundly deviate from their intertextual origin, and that their use is vague or even contradictory (the

signifier is at times a Saussurean signifier, at times a sign, at times neither).

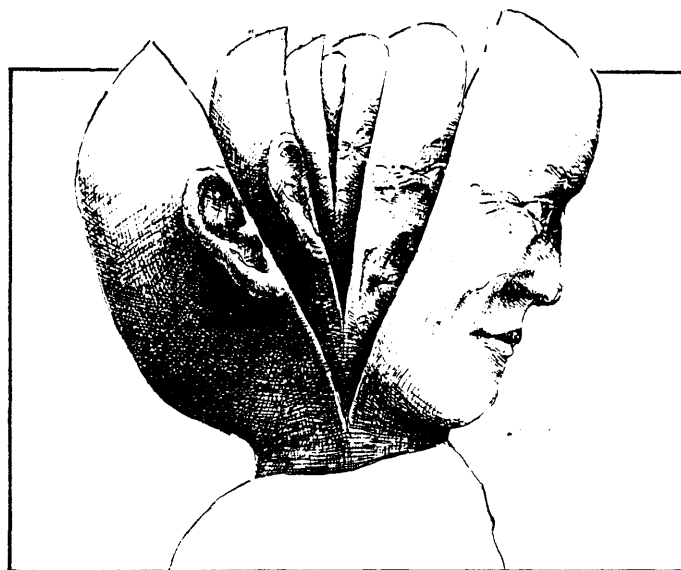
This is where Macey's method of reading – the usefulness of which is not in doubt – begins to raise questions. To use de Man's distinction, Lacan's creative errors turn out to be mere mistakes: there is more blindness than insight. The detailed account of the necessary incoherence of the text becomes reproachful. But the reproach is sometimes misguided. I shall just take one instance. In the course of his chapter on linguistics, Macey attempts to show that Lacan's use of linguistics and rhetoric is problematic, and takes the example of phonology, in the context of Lacan's analysis of the *fort-da* game. Here as elsewhere Lacan is seen to conflate and/or confuse the levels of analysis and to use the concept 'phoneme' inaccurately, or rather 'casually'. This type of criticism functions by opposing the coherence of scientific discourse, where concepts are univocally defined, and the *flou artistique* of their dubious importation into other fields. The trouble is that it takes the same blindness evinced by the inventors of the final state to ascribe that sort of systematicity to the discourse of linguistics. There are at least seven definitions of 'phoneme' in the specialised literature; not all phonologists would be interested in Jakobson's distinctive features; not all of those who are would like to keep the concept 'phoneme', etc. 'Linguistics', used by Macey as a standard, which Lacan's text falls dramatically short of, is exactly the same reconstruction after the event as the 'final state'. So that we have to invert the criticism and praise Lacan precisely for his slips and incoherences. Lacan's interest, as far as linguists are concerned, lies in the aporia of his relationship to linguistics as a 'science', and in his passage from positivist linguistics to *linguisterie*. His misprision of the concept 'signifier' must be interpreted (and welcomed) in this light.

Reading Macey forces two questions on us. We have to grant that there is no 'matheme', perhaps no master – what then is there to salvage among the rubble? The answer is: a text, a glorious proliferation of incoherent insights. But there is also a second question, which Macey does not address, but which is implicit in his treatment: how has such an incoherent text been able to exert such influence, in the field of psychoa-

nalysis and far beyond? For it is obvious that the snake-like fascination of the man (or of the latest Paris fashion) is no answer. The only answer, to my mind, is that the text is sufficiently rich and contradictory for every reader to find his way through it and construct his own Lacan. From each according to his reading to each according to Lacan's insights. The following is necessarily personal and sketchy. I suggest three aspects which must be salvaged: a theory of the subject (the role of language in the constitution of the subject, the distinction of the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic, the role of the Other, etc.); an agonistic view of the relationship of interlocution; and the whole of Lacan's *linguisterie*, as embodied in the concept of *lalangue*. It seems to me that the rubble is so solid and impressive as to be a monument.

But we should be thankful to Macey for forcing us to do this salvaging. By historicising Lacan he has made it possible to read him as we have never read him before. Even his own partial blindness is a form of acute insight.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle



WHITE RACISM?

Joel Kovel, *White Racism: a Psychohistory*, London, Free Association Books, 1988, 302pp., £10.95 pb., ISBN 0 946960 40 2 pb.; Joel Kovel, *In Nicaragua*, London, Free Association Books, 1988, 240 pp., £25 hb, £9.95 pb, 0 946960 90 9 hb., 0 946960 917 pb.

White Racism is a book you're either with, or you're not, with few halfway houses. Of its kind, it is better than some – but what of the kind?

There is a considerable history of discussion about the place of the 'irrational' in racism, and it is hardly surprising that there have been repeated tryings-out of Freud, especially to try to make sense of recurrent elements of sexual fantasy. Kovel's book, first published in 1970, is a sophisticated and provocative application of Freud to racism. It is intensely aware of the obvious traps awaiting a naive psychoanalytic reading of social phenomena: overschematised reductive explanations ('black' = bad = repressed anality); the disappearance of history into timeless categories ('we all externalise an Other which is alien and sinful'); and a resultant

tendency to see racism as inevitable ('it is so deeply embedded in conflicts of id and superego, that it is bound to recur in some form'). Kovel is aware of the dangers. Where you stand on the book is probably in large measure a function of whether you think he can possibly escape them while remaining within psychoanalysis.

Kovel's sophistication lies in his attempt to produce a psychoanalytically informed history of racism. He distinguishes three phases: dominative racism, in which whites used black bodies, both male and female, directly, and in that use, symbolised them as amoral, sensuous and dangerous animals. This was typically Southern States field slavery. (But there are real problems in taking that 'peculiar institution' as a typical case of racism; the same problem recurs in O. C. Cox's traditional marxist account. One such problem is actually mentioned by Kovel, in a footnote: field slavery was economically a self-defeating system.) If the American South is the model for dominative racism, the North, post-slavery, does for his second category 'aversive racism', based on the 'repressed coprophilia' of bourgeois society. Here blacks are

to be avoided as 'dirt' and 'shit'. (Again, 'the North' is a large category.) Finally comes 'metaracism', that apparently anti-racist, administrative attitude which colludes with the sheer fact that black people are still subordinated/discriminated against, without apparently using a category of 'blackness' any more.

Kovel does not go for strict historical periodisations – for example he sees elements of dominative racism recurring in twentieth-century fantasies of KKK racists. But he does take his types very seriously, for example postulating ideal types of racist personality based on them. But more significantly, he believes it possible to explain kinds of culture from the same roots. His view of culture needs careful consideration. It is a complicated mixture of functionalism (all parts interdependent, and tend to return to stasis), and Hegelianism (there is a 'drive' to move to more advanced, complex positions). Culture is recapitulating psychic processes, at the same time as producing their specific forms.

As I say, you're either with it or you're not. What do I do, for example, with the statement that 'we know that cannibalism is a universal infantile wish arising in the oral sadistic phase of development'? The book is not exactly rich in evidence, or even argument in traditional senses. It is a pretty speculative exploration, within dominant psychoanalytic assumptions, of how racism might be looked at from there. But it is extraordinary how often it just sounds like other positions in different language. What is the following, for example, but a renewal of a 'mass society' critique? 'Thus in modern times ... culture grows both in material power and superego control. The balance of forces gradually shifts to the cultural superego which, aided by technology, gradually obliterates individual personality in its efforts to weld mankind into a gigantic machine.'

Surely the main dangers of a psychoanalytic reading of racism are, first, fixing it in such deep tendencies that it becomes ineluctable and, second, stripping away the aspects of power and exploitation. There is no doubt that Kovel avoids the latter danger. A fine rage against the destructive force of racism invests the book. But the former? Kovel distinguishes between primary and secondary symbolisations. The primary directly express the id's overflowing, categoris-



ing and valorising segments of the world; the secondary are the cultural forms these take. The primary energise and have priority over the secondary; without them, there could be no racism. But also, the bridge between them, he suggests, is a universal 'everyone fears darkness'. If this is the case, racism is surely not only inevitable, however many forms it may take; it must also be internalised by black people themselves. Down that gang-plank lurks many a crocodile.

Kovel's book on Nicaragua is quite another matter. It is a marvellous, loving but not uncritical, account of a visit to the Sandinistas, capturing both the strengths and problems of a country besieged by Reagan. Wholly to be applauded, since it takes courage to be an explicit supporter of the Sandinistas in New Right America: at its best it seems to me ironically to knock holes in the theorisations of the other book. In one marvellous chapter, for example, he tells of the fall in the amount of mental illness in Nicaragua, even as conditions got worse and worse. Surely he is right to relate this to the new forms of collectivity of its people – but these find no space in the dry places of *White Racism*.

Martin Barker

MICROFEMINISM

Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (eds.), *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1988, 246 pp., £11.95 pb., ISBN 1-55553-033-8

This collection of articles, some already published elsewhere, is an encouraging attempt to use contemporary political ideas to enhance feminist thinking. Foucault's work lends itself well to such an appropriation.

Foucault himself presented his analyses of power as a 'toolbox'. The 'tools' which the authors of *Feminism and Foucault* regard as useful are taken mainly from *Discipline and Punish, Sexuality and Truth Vol. 1* and his late essays and interviews. They are then put to work on a wide choice of topics, ranging from current feminist theory to the 'micro-physics' of power in highly specific contexts.

In the first section, 'On Initiating a Dialogue', Biddy Martin introduces Foucault's genealogical method, which considers and interprets discourses and patterns of behaviour

in the historical contexts from which they arose and in which they currently occur – for instance hospitals, schools, prisons and universities. She argues that his approach to the interrelation of knowledge, power and discourse circumvents the inhibiting effects of the monocausal explanations offered by Marxism and Freudianism. Moreover, his postulation of power as diffused throughout the social body, and his advocacy of decentralized resistance is seen as converging with feminist conceptions of 'personal politics'. Nevertheless Foucault is not an easy ally. His investigations also reveal the close interdependence of strategies exerting power and strategies resisting it, their tendency to become interchangeable, and the productivity of their relation. His suspicion of any pure voice of liberation is heeded by all the authors of this book, who reexamine the female subject not only as oppressed, but also as a product of the very structures within which she attempts to resist. Thus Meaghan Morris re-evaluates the notion of 'feminine writing', while Frances Bartkowski remains sceptical as to whether Foucault's findings are

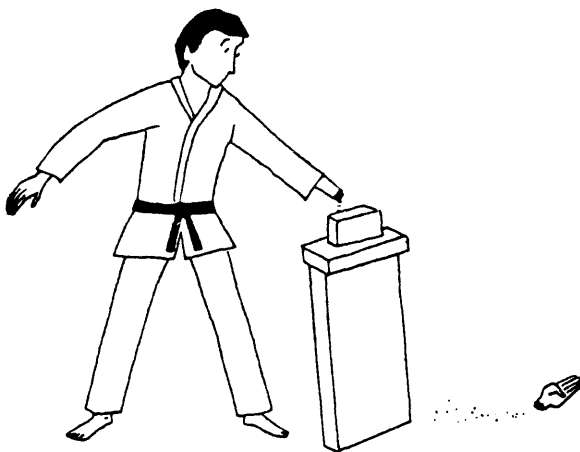
worth the feminist effort after all.

Under the heading 'Discipline and the Female Subject' Sandra Lee Bartky and Susan Bordo present an excellent discussion of femininity as a disciplinary 'set-up'. With the help of Foucault's concept of 'normalization' as a modern form of power distinguished by the lack of public punishment, they analyze the modes of discipline that operate in feminine body-language, the use of cosmetics, and fashion. The depths of shame experienced by the anorexic woman become the pathological epitome of feminine identity in the context of normalizing power. Kathleen Jones, Mary Lydon and Peggy Kamuf look at the discourses that produce and systematically limit the concepts of truth, identity and authority. The authors turn to Molly Bloom, Penelope, and Virginia Woolf to illustrate their claims.

In the last section, 'The Uses of Foucault for Feminist Praxis', the discourses in which feminists involve themselves are scrutinized. If sexuality and the discursive production of desires have been used to restrict the constitution of the female subject, then what is Foucault getting at when he suggests 'desexualization' as a strategy of resistance? Winifred Woodhull critically examines feminist efforts to achieve the legal categorization of rape as a crime of power rather than of sex. Jane Sawicki points out the ambiguity of the discourse on identity politics and sexual freedom, and the editors analyze the 'language of control', with which women have traditionally claimed rights over their own bodies. Addressing the theology of liberation, Sharon Welch finally argues for a concept of truth and knowledge that supports resistance in specific discourses and power structures while abstaining from the repressive claim of universality.

Knowing Foucault obviously helps, but it is not a necessary prerequisite for enjoying the well argued, diverse and often unorthodox articles collected in this book. You will appreciate them even more, though, if you have already been irritated by the frequently undifferentiated treatment of gender in *Sexuality and Truth Vol. 1*. Many of these shortcomings are here corrected and complemented, although systematic criticism of Foucault's work is neither the aim nor the strength of *Feminism and Foucault*. Moreover, the 'dialogue' is far from exhaustive. Hardly anything has been made of the important Foucauldian concept of 'bio-politics' for instance, which might bring to mind current family planning policies or the controversy about surrogate motherhood.

Ute Berns



CHILD'S PLAY

Cathy Urwin and John Hood-Williams (eds.), *Child Psychotherapy, War and the Normal Child. Selected Papers of Margaret Lowenfeld*, London, Free Association Books, 1988, 405pp., £30 hb, 1-85343-035-8

In her lengthy and detailed introduction to the life and work of Margaret Lowenfeld, Cathy Urwin notes that, despite their concern with the history of individuals, child psychotherapy and related disciplines pay little attention to their own history. Lowenfeld is one of the victims of this neglect. She was an innovator in the treatment of emotionally disturbed children, and the founder of the pioneering Children's Clinic (1927) and then of the better-known Institute of Child Psychology in 1931. But her influence and importance have often been overlooked despite the tributes paid to her by Winnicott in *Playing and Reality* (1971).

The twelve papers presented here, some of them previously unpublished, span the period 1927 to 1967, and their content ranges from a discussion of medical aspects of lactation (surely of specialist interest only?) to fascinating contributions to child psychotherapy. The basic and recurrent thesis is that play is an intellectual and emotional activity, and a means of self-understanding. The therapy developed by Lowenfeld centres on the building of 'Worlds', using sand, water and toys to express the entire content of the mind at a given moment. The World enables the child to express ideas and fantasies and thus to clarify aspects of the personality which cause problems or difficulties. There is some similarity with the Kleinian play technique but the differences may be more significant. Lowenfeld consistently refuses to interpret or to reduce everything to expressions of infantile sexuality, and argues that Klein's approach implies the rigid application of a dogmatic and a priori theory. In her response to a paper read in 1937, Klein accuses the founder of the ICP of precisely the same thing. The exchange has a somewhat absurdist flavour, but it is, perhaps, a serious index of the difficulty psychoanalysis and related disciplines have in establishing a fruitful exchange rather than a dialogue of the deaf. At a more theoretical level, the notion of the protosystem, or a pre-verbal level which cannot be translated into words but which implies an innate drive to create patterns and which may lie at the origins of the aesthetic, indicates some similarity between Lowenfeld's thinking and Bion's work on the emotional life of small children.

Lowenfeld's theories seem to be a curious mixture of the ancient and the modern. The insistence that an infantile neurosis cannot be understood unless the therapist has a full knowledge of the family background looks forward to contemporary forms of family therapy. Her descriptions of the playroom at the ICP in 1931 have an almost libertarian feel which would not have felt entirely alien in the 1960s: the worker works under the direction of the child, and must learn not to react if water is squirted in her face or when water is poured down her neck. Others of Lowenfeld's theories may now seem outmoded, even naive. No psychoanalyst would accept that it is possible, or even desirable, to avoid any element of transference in a therapeutic relationship. And whilst it may be true that society is the child grown up, can it still be argued that there is a direct link between psychological disturbances in the individual and war, or that improved educational methods will help to preserve peace? Yet these were the assumptions of the progressive education and child-guidance movements.

Urwin's introduction portrays not only an important pe-

riod in the history of psychology and education, but also a remarkable woman. Of Polish-Welsh extraction, Lowenfeld qualified as a doctor during the First World War – in itself no small achievement – and was active in relief work in post-war Poland. Her interest in child psychiatry dated from an encounter with orphaned refugee children and from her astonishment that they could survive and even flourish after such traumas and extreme experiences. The interest in children and adolescents was to remain undiminished almost half a century later: in a paper written in 1966, when Lowenfeld was 76, she is discussing the appeal of the Beatles. The history of child analysis and psychotherapy is in a large part the history of women of astonishing tenacity and courage, Klein and Anna Freud being the obvious examples. The portrait of Lowenfeld that emerges from this collection is a major acquisition for a gallery of unrivalled interest and importance.

David Macey

MARX AND HEGEL

Hiroshi Uchida, *Marx's Grundrisse and Hegel's Logic*, edited T. Carver, London, Routledge, 1988, xiii + 163 pp., £30, 0-415 00385 7

As Carver remarks in his Introduction to this book, Aristotle, Smith, Hegel and Marx would not consider it 'surprising to link philosophy and logic, on the one hand, with history and economics on the other'. These days, the subjects have drifted so far apart that it is hard for people to grasp Marx's problematic. Carver explains:

Firstly, Marx adapted Hegelian logic in order to analyse the economic categories crucial to modern society. But, secondly, Hegel's logical categories were themselves reflections of the productive process, even the economic categories, of contemporary commercial society. Thus Marx's critique of the political economists is simultaneously a critique of Hegel and other idealist philosophers, and his critique of Hegel and idealism is simultaneously a critique of political economy and contemporary commercial practice.

We know from Marx's letter of January 1858 that he found it useful to look at Hegel's *Logic* when working on the *Grundrisse*. We also know from a letter of December 1861 that *Capital* 'is assuming a much more popular form, and the method is much less in evidence'. Uchida concludes that the *Grundrisse* is the most suitable text for studying the relation of the critique of political economy to the *Logic*. (It is, however, perfectly possible to go direct to *Capital*; see e.g. Jairus Banaji's contribution to *Value* edited by Diane Elson.)

It should also be mentioned that a sub-theme of Uchida is that Aristotle is also important. He refers to Alfred Schmidt's view that Marx used Aristotle to construct a materialist basis for his theory, and Hegel to inquire why and how modern life is alienated and appears in an idealist form.

Uchida's project is undoubtedly a worthwhile and important one. He has made a heroic effort to accomplish it. However, the results are not always convincing. It has to be said that this book will not be accessible to those unfamiliar with Hegel's *Logic*. But even those who are will have difficulty making sense of the numerous correspondences Uchida claims to find with the *Grundrisse*. Rather than challenging any particular gloss I will register some general doubts about

the approach.

At the structural level his mapping is too rigid and peculiar; thus 'the chapter on money' is equated by Uchida with 'the doctrine of being' while that on 'capital' is associated with 'the doctrine of essence'; yet he himself begins the discussion of money with several telling references to the doctrine of essence. And whither 'the doctrine of the notion'? That is equated with the Introduction! A further feature is that he often collapses the correspondence to an identity, stating



for example that in the *Logic* 'Hegel asserts that the product becomes a commodity in private exchange'. The uninformed reader may be confused by all this and end up believing Hegel explicitly discusses political economy in the *Logic*. In reality, of course, Uchida holds 'the *Logic* is the most abstract philosophical expression of the bourgeois spirit or consciousness of value'. Thus 'By reading Hegel's "idea" as the intersubjective value-consciousness of the bourgeoisie, Marx uncovers the capitalist economy itself in the *Logic*.' But does not this put too much stress on *consciousness*? After all, in chapter one of *Capital*, Marx stresses that the participants in exchange are unaware of the real meaning and results of their behaviour. It is only in chapter two that he mentions their consciousness of being subjects of a certain sort. Exchange, therefore, is first of all a *material* process of abstraction generating an *objective* sphere of value-relations. (See Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*.)

This problem is linked with that of the division of labour. According to Uchida the natural 'unity of physical and mental abilities is ... separated by the bourgeois value-relation'. Hence 'the capitalist appears as a mental labourer and the wage-worker as a physical labourer'. But this cannot be right because, as Uchida himself admits, production has a mental component; there are indeed specialist mental labourers but they too are subordinated within the value-relation. This division of labour does not map neatly onto the class relation grounded in the capital relation.

This problem is in turn linked to the question of the dynamic *subject* of the process. Uchida often speaks as if it were bourgeois consciousness. But the bourgeoisie too are under the sway of the reified value relation. Marx generally speaks not of capitalists but of the capital-subject as dominant. So too sometimes Uchida: 'In Hegel's idealism Marx sees the abstract reflection of modern civil society or capitalism where the ideal subject, i.e. increasing value, is dominant.'

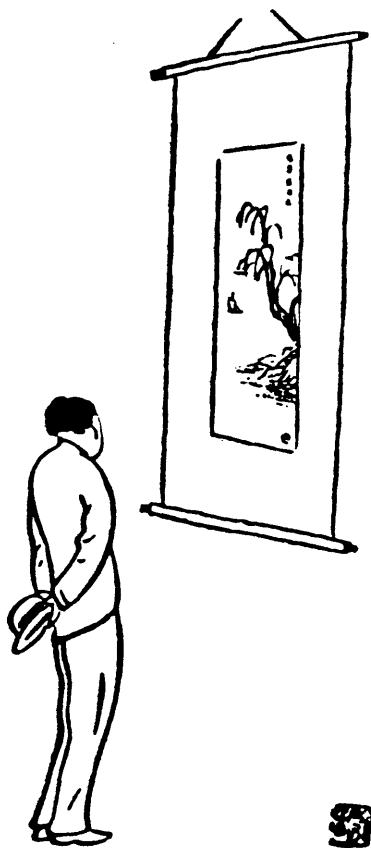
In Uchida's work the stress on value *consciousness* exists in uneasy and unanalysed combination with the ideal value subject in a more *objective* sense.

Chris Arthur

FOR THEORY

Christopher Norris, *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology*, London, Routledge, 1988, 218pp., £25 hb, £8.95 pb, 0 415 90079 4 hb, 0 415 90080 8 pb

De Man's allegedly collaborationist articles for the pro-Nazi newspaper *Le Soir* – written in the early 1940s, rediscovered in 1987 – hang like a shroud over this useful critical exposition of this most controversial of American 'deconstructionists'. There is a lengthy 'Postscript' devoted to these early writings which successfully distinguishes de Man's undoubted flirtation with National Socialism from Heidegger's longer-lasting absorption with Nazi ideology. Norris men-



tions in the introduction to the book that he hopes his careful placing of the young de Man's dangerous swerve to the right in the context of a lifetime's critique of such mythologies 'will go at least some way towards establishing more useful and productive terms for debate'. In my view, Norris's book does indeed help to move us away from the partisan polemics which have, thus far, dominated the assessment of de Man's life and work.

The chapters in this first full-length introduction to de Man take us much further than Norris's cryptic comments in his 1982 primer on *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. The present book is a thorough-going critique and review of de

Man's brand of 'deconstruction' and its (radical) implications for disciplines such as history, philosophy, and even law.

The chapter on 'Critical Legal Studies' and its critics (entitled 'Against A New Pragmatism: Law, Deconstruction and the Interests of Theory') is, in fact, the most satisfying and far-reaching of the whole book. Norris has himself been actively engaging in debate within the UK Critical Legal Studies Conference (set up in 1984) and, in this chapter, provides a brilliant summary of part of the burgeoning work from the USA Conference on Critical Legal Studies, and trenchant critics such as Stanley Fish and James Boyd White. For Critical Legal Studies, as Norris points out, 'theory still has a role to play, though not the same reassuring role that it plays in more conservative forms of juridical thinking'. But the way in which legal deconstruction has developed in American law journals has, on the one hand, led to a crude nihilism on the part of its proponents and, on the other, given ample support to those pragmatists who *deny* that theory 'can be anything more than ... *post hoc* rationalisation'. Norris's subtle appreciation of the usefulness of de Man and Derrida in the sphere of legal studies may yet prevent the European Critical Legal movements from getting into the cul-de-sac of their American counterparts.

Overall, this book will be deservedly widely read by undergraduates, postgraduates and teachers in a variety of disciplines. Recommended for specialists *and* newcomers to de Man's work.

Steve Redhead

NORMAL CRIMINALS

Elie A. Cohen, *Human Behaviour in the Concentration Camp*, trans. M. H. Braaksma, with a new preface by the author and a foreword by Dinora Pines, London, Free Association Books, 1988, xxiv + 295pp., £9.95 pb., 1 85343 047 1

Based on a doctoral thesis and originally published in 1952, this is one of the earliest detailed accounts of life in the Nazi concentration camps. The author, a Jewish doctor from Groningen, was initially held in a transit camp in the Netherlands and was then deported to Auschwitz. His wife and young son were both gassed; Cohen himself survived by assisting the camp doctor who selected further victims for the gas chambers. Two thousand five hundred Jews were deported from Groningen, and Cohen was one of the ten who lived to return.

Cohen provides a narrowly objective description of life and death in the *Anus mundi* (the phrase was coined, aptly enough, by the camp Commandant), of the meticulous organization of the system and of the obscenely pointless medical experiments that were carried out by camp doctors. Although he was a medical doctor and not a psychoanalyst, he brings Freudian theory to bear in an attempt to understand and explain the incomprehensible. The result is a book which has to be ranked alongside Bruno Bettelheim's *The Informed Heart*. The notorious passivity of concentration camp prisoners is explained in terms of their brutal apprenticeship to the system, and their resultant regression to a state of infantile dependence on the guards who, in a ghastly parody of normal development, become father-figures capable of alternating between 'kindness' and savage cruelty. In Cohen's view, the key to the psychology of the SS guards lies in the phenomenon of the criminal super-ego and in their identification with one another in a classic group formation. The thesis that a criminal super-ego was created by authoritarian education

and by the inculcation of the ideal image of Hitler has one important implication: the SS were not, in the main, sadists but normal criminals obeying the dictates of an internal agency. It then becomes possible to understand their ability to combine cruelty with normal behaviour in the private sphere. Wisely, Cohen does not really venture into the political-economic domain, and does not attempt to explain fascism itself. Arguably, psychoanalysis cannot elucidate the social origins of Nazism, but it can help us to understand some of the horrors it unleashed (and some of the more recent work produced in Argentina as it recovers from its 'dirty war' goes further in this direction). The literature that came out of the Holocaust is still stomach-churning and almost intolerable reading. Which is precisely why we must go on reading it.

David Macey

Contemporary Social Philosophy Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988, viii + 184pp., £25 hb, £7.95 pb, 0-631-15705-0 hb, 0-631-15966-X pb

The preface to this work states that 'in places it will appear that the book takes sides in a way that an introduction should not'. This understates matters. In fact this book is written from a consistently libertarian-individualist position. By the beginning of chapter four, Graham thinks he has established individual freedom as the cardinal social virtue. We have seen, he claims, that a free society 'is not merely compatible with a just society, but identical with it'. If Graham had brought off this trick in the first seventy-nine pages of an introductory text it would indeed be remarkable. In fact, he

offers a set of rather tendentious arguments with a repeated *assertion* of 'a belief in the individual as the touchstone ... of social value' at their core. Once 'established', this libertarian position is used to attack, for example, public health care. We are offered the view that 'there is no justification in a free society for compulsory systems of health care financed out of taxation'. In the absence of any real grounding of the underlying libertarianism, all that can sensibly be said of this is that it is an opinion likely to be shared by the libertarians now in government, but not, if we are to believe the opinion polls, by a majority of the electorate. Graham thus offers us a minority opinion on social policy, based on an assertion of the primacy of one possible social value among others. This seems a curious thing for an introductory text on contemporary social philosophy to do. In fact the whole book is curiously 'a-social'. The majority of the chapters deal with matters of social policy, but there is a marked absence of references to contemporary social theory. Marxism is briefly and airily despatched as irrelevant to social philosophy (no attempt to engage with Gerry Cohen's work, for example; no mention of Habermas). The introductory chapter, 'What is Society?' is simplistic. It fails to engage with contemporary theories (Giddens's, for example) which address the complex ontological problems this question raises. Even more disturbing is the description of the family as 'a natural formation, not an artificial device'. Add to this examples which begin 'Consider a game of Monopoly...' and Graham's distance from the lived social reality of the majority becomes apparent. In short this book is not an introduction, it does not deal with the contemporary, nor is it properly 'social'. Philosophy it may be, but of the sort that this journal was established to challenge.

John Tomlinson

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