NEWS

God Bless You, Mr Rosewater

Feminist Fortunes in the New Latvia

Booking my ticket for Riga, I had not expected a discussion on the shifting geographical boundaries of Europe. Where were the Baltic States, I was asked, and, for insurance purposes, could they be said to be safely European? Qualification for membership was a more straightforward matter for the travel agent than current political debate would have us believe - it depends on whether you find yourself east or west of the Urals. So Latvia, bordered in the north by Estonia, in the south by Lithuania, and to the east by Russia, reached via Copenhagen or Stockholm, is undeniably part of Europe. It is a fact that demands from Latvians at present a considerable suspension of disbelief.

On the plane to Riga was an odd selection of invited 'experts', from a Danish educational psychologist and some health service managers, some American captains of business, to a large Norwegian contingent heading for a Lutheran conference on 'Spiritual Homelessness'. One of the most worrying trends in the countries of the former Soviet Union, I was told, was the success of religious cults who have moved rapidly into the vacuum with much-needed hard currency, peddling their own brand of hope. The Scientologists are funding an academic chair in Moscow. Latvia already has an English-speaking religious television channel.

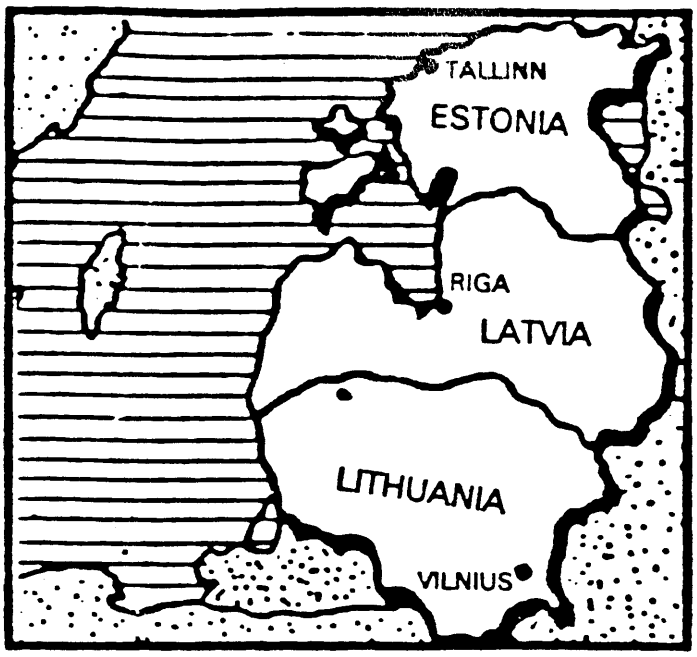
For my part, I had been invited in an exchange scheme to give four lectures on feminism and literary theory at the University of Latvia. A Latvian American escorting his ageing mother to meet her sister for the first time in 53 years since the latter's deportation to Siberia - so many families are reuniting now - thought there would be a great deal of interest in the phenomenon of feminism: it is women, after all, who rule the Latvian family. I wondered uneasily how adequate what I had to tell would be.

The lack of years of information is so palpable that any visitor is put in the position of spokesperson. The heady cocktail of new ideas and contradictory advice flooding through from the 'West' - with little economic support - seems a disturbingly unstable one. It was no surprise that the most popular and translated of writers - indeed one of the only contemporary foreign writers widely available - is Kurt Vonnegut. He 'expresses our post-war experience', I was told.

There is no doubt that women bear the brunt of the economic shock that has followed the euphoria of independence in Latvia, though many feel it is simply more of the same. The barricading of Parliament, the shooting of civilians and a cameraman in a central park - part of the moment of 'Awakening' - are still close to the bone. But what has followed this action and sacrifice is grindingly tough. In public places, with winter coming on - the market, the station with its underpass vendors selling clothes, cassettes, pornography, on the crowded trolley-buses - the atmosphere is tense with worry. There is a sense of people competing for space. Food is available in the markets, but wage levels make it impossible to make ends meet without some form of private economy. An academic salary is about £15 a month, and is generally supplemented with another job.

Russian concern - expressed by Yeltsin at the United Nations - for the well-being of the Russian inhabitants of Latvia (at least 50% of the population, the majority working class) is met with scorn given the history of Soviet demographic policy and the deportations of the 1940s. There is considerable fear at the presence of Russian troops and tanks that have not yet been recalled, and at the possibility that Yeltsin himself could be toppled by hardliners. Yet new citizenship laws include a test in the Latvian language which will undoubtedly exclude many Russians, who are by no means a homogeneous grouping nor a recent phenomenon, as will new regulations establishing entitlement to property. Racism is endemic. By the end of your stay, I was told by a Latvian colleague, you will be able to recognise whether someone is a Russian or a Latvian just by looking at them, their clothes, their body language and manners, how loudly they're speaking.

What are the opportunities for feminism in this context? Politicians are at this moment exhorting women to stay out of Latvian politics, which is, they say, a 'dirty business'. And while the older generations might concur, venerating the importance of women as 'the spirit of the house, which gradually expands to the spirit of the whole nation', younger women are not taking this on board. There are several initiatives springing up in Riga, which, for all the hardship is also a place of enormous creative energies. There are numerous small exhibitions of new art, photography, textile design, and previously underground performance poetry circles are flourishing. The possibility of developing a centre for women's studies at the University has tentatively been suggested. Women are hoping to set up a feminist journal, but face such basic problems as the availability of printing paper and ink.



The women I met - Russian and Latvian - were working to orientate themselves in a rapidly changing context where their established rights were being eroded even as a whole range of other possibilities open up. We discussed the issues of widespread abortion and the non-availability of contraception, pornography, domestic violence and alcoholism, the relation between feminist politics and social democracy, women's access to jobs, domestic labour and childcare, the need to reclaim a language for the left.

The women I met desperately need information - journals, articles, books, news of networks and campaigns - that they can use, and especially, that they can translate from freely. At the moment Latvia has not signed an international copyright law and the only access to feminist material and news from abroad is through ad hoc translating in newspapers, and the single British Council copy of *Spare Rib*.

Please send women's studies material to: Dr Irina Novikova, Maskavas Str. No 260/3-17, Riga, Latvia

And information useful for a feminist journal to: Irina c/o Janis Elsbergs, Kristaps Str. 18-51, Riga LV1046, Latvia

Or via: Carol Watts, Department of English, Birkbeck College Malet Street, London WCIE 7HX

It is important not to send parcels in bulk as the recipients will be charged custom duty, which they will be unable to pay.

Carol Watts

The Lost Map of Atlantis

Deleuze in Conference

The night wind coming down from the tundra had told me it was still winter as I arrived at the campus on the edge of the vast Canadian forest at 2:30am on Thursday 15 May. There were spring buds on the trees the next day, and I left a leafy campus in the mid-morning summer heat five days later. Deleuze was too ill to travel to the conference, but our host at Trent, Professor Boundas, opened the final session with Deleuze' surprise contribution, a characteristically fluent account of the way philosophy must make language itself stutter, as it breaks open the old circuits and rhythms of words and thoughts, to give the raw material with which to construct its new and foreign language in the old.

I'd been taken aback on a number of occasions over the previous days by the way words sometimes came out of my mouth in the wrong order, as I tried to explain that the conclusion of Deleuze' latest book, *What is Philosophy?*, marked the way he was still caught in a French tradition of abstract subjectivism going back to Descartes. As I listened to Deleuze' paper I saw my trip to Canada as an empirical exploration of the Neo-Cartesian schematism running from Deleuze' first book, on Hume, through to *What is Philosophy?* According to some of Descartes' scientific heirs, the pineal gland coordinates our biorythms at various levels, from sentence formation up to the passing seasons and the human life-cycle, explaining jet-lag on the way.

And explaining, perhaps, how difficult it sometimes seemed to follow the complex written orchestration of the various papers as they were read out to the conference. It was easier to engage with schematic differences of viewpoint as they came out in the rhythm of unprepared dialogue, in discussions that followed each paper and extended into the dining room. Deleuze has in the past defined his philosophical perspective as a schematism of difference, a 'transcendental empiricism' that turns inside-out Kant's idealist schematism of identity: 'beginning in the middle' of conflicting schemes of experience in order to experimentally map out the primary dimensions of difference, rather than beginning in a systematic identity, outside experience, in order theoretically to reconstruct all differences within that unitary frame.

This conception of philosophy as the empirical mapping of difference is reflected in his frequently repeated view that philosophical discussion in general, and conferences in particular, are a waste of time: driven by a dynamic of 'consensus' within which interlocutors assume they're using word's like 'concept', 'difference', 'war-machine' and so on to talk about the same identical thing 'behind' provisional differences of interpretation. Whereas in fact they're talking about different things, the different inscriptions of these words within their own incommensurably different schemes of 'the world'.

Let me sketch the impact of Deleuze' writing on current anglophone philosophy by giving my own schematic view of the difference between the Trent conference and another 'Deleuze Conference', at Warwick the following weekend.

The Trent conference, *Pluralism: Theory & Practice*, was by contrast to Warwick's *Deleuze & the Transcendental Unconscious* a very academic affair. I was the only participant with no university address, and the papers were largely expository, drawing different theoretical lines through the Deleuzian textual corpus, or through the theoretical space of experience and practice as mapped by Deleuze over the years. A number of the papers suggested lines of 'immanent' critique of the residual theoretical abstraction of Deleuze' own maps from the space which they had mapped. Thus, in the 'ontological' opening session Todd May questioned whether Deleuze' language of difference was still held in dialectical thrall by a syntax of identity; Bruce Baugh claimed, in contrast, that Deleuze was the only French thinker to have radically broken with Hegel. In the second session, Australian materialism turned to examine other possibly dialectical tensions in the relations between Deleuzoguattarian 'war-machines' and recuperative state machinery (Patton), in sexuality (Grosz), and in gender (Braidotti).

A special session was taken up by Jean-Clet Martin's masterly exposition of Deleuzian aesthetics. He spoke not only French, but the *langue dans la langue* which is 'Deleuzian', as a native, and from this point on was often called upon to give authoritative pronouncements on disputed questions of interpretation (Asked if he differed from Deleuze on any point, he reflected for a few moments: '...Non, je l'aime'). Eight of the remaining eleven papers continued this aesthetic theme, with further expositions and 'applications' (Maghrebian popular theatre: Bensmaïa; Cajun dance: Stivale; Baudelaire: Holland). Mark Fortier explored the tension between Deleuze' theory of theatre and the concrete theatre of theory in Bene, Blau and Müller, and Zsuzsa Baross questioned just where Deleuze was standing (in his text?) as he watched Bacon paint.

Ronald Bogue echoed these questions as he contrasted Deleuze' unitary theoretical account of Foucault's work with Foucault's practice of theoretical intervention, and I closed the proceedings by asking how the conference itself worked (or didn't) as theatre. There seemed to be an implicit consensus that Deleuze' theoretical maps of experience could be collated and (immanently) revised within the abstract textual space of theory and disembodied discussion, even when what was being discussed was the 'embodiment' of theory. (Braidotti's paper was read *in absentia auctricis*). At Warwick, by contrast, a number of speakers were using Deleuzoguattarian texts as atlases from which to abstract rough sketch-maps of where they or we might be, and where we seemed to be heading, provisionally collating these with schemes borrowed from Schopenhauer, Freud, recent newspapers and elsewhere.

When Professor Boundas (taking a holiday at Warwick after his labours at the Council of Trent) expressed surprise that Schopenhauer had such authority in England, he was told by a member of the Warwick faculty that Nick Land, (chief and prophet of the marauding band of Warwick intellectual nomads who dominated the proceedings), had taken the old pessimist as a key staging-post on his lecture-route from Kant through Nietzsche and Freud to Deleuze & Guattari, and on to a cyber-punk apocalypse where our mythic human identity dissolves in a life-force called Intensity.

The most academic paper at Warwick was Tim Murphy's opening demonstration that the transition from Kant's schematism of identity to Deleuze' schematism of difference in *Difference & Repetition* itself enacts Deleuze' scheme in the rhythm of the text. One might in turn see the transition from the abstract temporal logic mapped by Deleuze down to 1968 to the schematic universal history of *Capitalism & Schizophrenia* (1972-80) as Guattari's rhetorical *mise-en-scène* of his collaborator's transcendental aesthetic, to produce a 'war-machine' disrupting the repressive capitalist and oedipal coding of experience.

Between Murphy's paper and Land's intense and exemplary closing direction of schemes drawn from *Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, nine of the eleven remaining papers prefigured the final apocalypse as so many partial *mises-en-scène* of this universal history that was hardly mentioned outside the 'Australian' session at Trent. Alphonso Lingis described his worldwide search for intensity in far-flung pockets of primitive ritual that still resisted capitalist encoding and recuperation; Brian Massumi and James Williams mapped the end of history all around us as capitalism reached its postmodern limit.

The problem with the discussion at Warwick was that conflicting inscriptions of various schemes in different maps led to some intense encounters, but ultimately to irresoluble differences over where we were and where to go. If Deleuzoguattarian schemes are used primarily to name and rhetorically articulate pre-theoretical orientations, then conflicting interpretations ultimately mark political and ethical divergences which can't be mapped in any common theoretical space. We are thrown back into untheorized 'practical' considerations that are a direct converse of the equally untheorized consensual 'academic' orientation at Trent, toward a single theoretical space derived from Deleuzian transcendental aesthetics. One can only dream that, somewhere between Warwick and Trent, Atlantean philosophers have a theory of the *mise-en-scène* of theory, echoing the abstract circularity of Deleuze' 'practical philosophy' down to 1968, but going beyond the undramatic inscription of the philosopher in the world as a disembodied brain in *What is Philosophy?*, whose remarkable chapter on aesthetics doesn't once mention theatre.

Martin Joughlin

Aesthetic Novelties

International Conference for Aesthetics, Hanover, 2-5 September 1992

In six thematically divided blocks 44 speakers addressed 3000 participants on 'Aestheticization and...': the Everyday World, Media, Politics, Nature, the Arts, and Science and Scholarship.

The theoretical framework was set in the opening papers by Karl Heinz Bohrer and Wolfgang Welsch. Through categorial musing spiced with references to authority Bohrer (Professor of Literature at Bielefeld) sought to map 'The Limits of Aesthetics' – a self-limitation that turned out to be the self-revelation of a traditionalist. Where Bohrer stopped, Welsch started. With the rhetorical nonchalance of the postmodern, the Professor from Bamberg unfolded the panorama of the 'aesthetic boom' as a 'hyperaesthetic scenario'.

TV editors, art historians, advertising and industrial designers, political scientists, neurophysiologists, culture theorists, publicists, design theorists, biochemists, lifestyle researchers, film critics, media and communication specialists, hermeneuticists, sociologists and philosophers talked about everything from 'The Involution of the Present' (H. Lübbe) to 'the basic tension of the double helix' (F. Cramer), via 'dematerialised techno-spaces' (W. v. Bonin), 'The Gender Connotations of The Beautiful and The Sublime' (C. Klinger) and 'regional brain circulation' (E. Poeppel).

In view of the variety of themes and perspectives on offer, philosophical concerns tended to fade into the background. But one theoretical dilemma shone through: the denial of the orthodoxies of the Modern – originally welcomed by postmodern thinking as a playground for new possibilities – now, after almost twenty years, has become an epistemological chaos. Solutions based on chaos theory invoked a familiar techno-fascination, but remain wholly unsatisfactory for dealing with aesthetic problems, in view of the entirely different status of complexity in science and philosophy. In the mean time, the much mourned *lost sense of order* seems to have resulted only in intellectual helplessness or indifference. Views from other worlds – like Eastern Europe, or at least the east of their own country – were carefully avoided by not inviting any speakers from there in the first place.

So, in the end, everybody was WAITING FOR LYOTARD, who was to close the conference, hoping that he could show us the way out of the dilemma. But his esoteric annunciation of 'the salvation of the soul by Art' was lost in the chaos of the arbitrary, and the general turmoil of departure. Thus the mind stayed clouded and the soul confused.

Kersten Glandien

Virtually Real

Realism and the Human Sciences Conference, Oxford, 24-26 July 1992

Roy Bhaskar's opening paper indicated concerns which were to characterise the conference as a whole. He argued that Critical Realism needs to take on Hegelian concepts to bolster its existing epistemic mapping of the world. The notion of totality, for example, could provide a deep structure of non-objectified reality. This sense of a need to rethink was reflected in Manicas's discussion of intersubjectivity as a naturalistic phenomenon, in Soper's account of gender, nature and constructivism and in Hilary Wainwright's comments on the workers' movement as an enduring, *sedimented* structure within a culture.

Bhaskar's new preoccupation with non-objectified reality was echoed in Yilmaz Oner's paper on 'virtual' (possible) realities in particle physics. However, Oner's views on real possibility also incorporated the idea that agency structured particle ontology, thus cutting across the domains of Critical Realism.

Papers by Judit Kiss and Alex Callinicos stressed the non-progressive character of the developments in East Europe, the stranglehold still maintained by bureaucratic layers, and the 'sideways' character of change. Gregory Elliott defended the value of labourism in exposing the excesses of capitalism in the UK.

The eclecticism of the conference revealed tensions in the project of Critical Realism. Participants seemed to be demanding from it a more 'naturalised' social world and a more 'socialised' nature than it was prepared to deliver.

Howard Feather

LETTER

Dear *Radical Philosophy*,

Wal Suchting's paper 'Reflections upon Roy Bhaskar's "Critical Realism"- (*RP* 61) makes a number of serious criticisms of Bhaskar's philosophy. I shall focus here on one of them only, though a central one: I feel that it cannot be allowed to pass without immediate comment, since it attributes to Bhaskar views that he rejects.

The criticism that I want to take issue with is that Bhaskar's philosophy is a new version of foundationalism. Suchting does not register the fact that Bhaskar repeatedly rejects foundationalism and argues for such rejection (see, for example, the postscript to *The Possibility of Naturalism*). Granted, it is one thing to reject a position as erroneous, another to avoid falling into that error oneself. I would argue, for instance, that Wittgensteinian philosophy, which purports to be anti-foundationalist, falls into a foundationalist trap by its assertion that philosophy is not about truth and falsehood but about sense and nonsense; this lets the old foundationalist concern with certainty and dubitability in by the back door (one might call it 'negative foundationalism'), for that of which the contradiction is nonsense, appears as indubitable. However, if I were writing a critique of Wittgensteinian philosophy I would have to show how this happened *despite the Wittgensteinians' intentions*. To allege foundationalism without such a reservation strongly insinuates either explicit commitment to it, or at least unawareness of its dangers.

In fact, Bhaskar's philosophy does not seek to assign certainty and dubitability, nor yet sense and nonsense, but contingent truth and falsehood. Why then does Suchting regard it as foundationalist? The charge arises out of a discussion of transcendental arguments, which ask what must be so in order for some cognitive activity to be possible. For of course Kant *did* use such arguments in a foundationalist way, to establish synthetic *a priori* truths. So if Bhaskar's transcendental realism is just a realist inversion of Kant's transcendental idealism, must not his transcendental arguments do the same? For anyone familiar with Althusser's work on Hegel and Marx, this question gives a sense of *déjà vu*: if Marx's dialectic is just a materialist inversion of Hegel's, must not Marx's totalities express their economic essence just as Hegel's expressed their ideal essence? No indeed, they must not, for material totalities must be structured quite unlike ideal ones. Likewise, once transcendental arguments are transposed into a realist context, they become unlike idealist ones. (On the relation of Bhaskar's views to Kant's, see Bhaskar's *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, Chapter One, and also Chapter One of my forthcoming *Critical Realism: an Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*.)

In fact, Bhaskar's transcendental arguments differ from Kant's in at least the following ways:

1. They take as their premises, not knowledge in general, but specific, historically actualised scientific practices.
2. Their conclusions are about features that the world contingently has, not about features that our minds necessarily impose on it.
3. Their conclusions are not *a priori* in the absolute sense, though they are relatively *a priori* in that they explain the possibility of some other knowledge.
4. Since they are not, as Kant's are, about something that 'reason produces entirely out of itself', they are fallible.
5. They are vulnerable to the competition of alternative transcendental arguments based on the same premises. While it may be possible to refute all but one extant account of how something is possible, new accounts may always be discovered. Hence the conclusions of Bhaskar's transcendental arguments share with science a provisional character. They do not claim (as I take it Kant's do) to be final revelations.

Such transcendental arguments are surely not guilty of foundationalism.

Andrew Collier