

She's just not that into you

Tiqqun, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*, trans. Ariana Reines, Semiotext(e), Intervention series 12, Los Angeles, 2012. 144 pp., £9.95 pb., 978 1 58435 108 5.

How best to describe the colonization of the body at this particular juncture of capitalist life? Much recent theorizing has focused on a kind of war of affects where depression, euphoria and other states of being are read not merely as signs or symptoms, but as directly produced by (and productive of) particular economic relations. Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's notion of 'semio-capitalism' has attempted to track the implications of cyberspace and cybertime for the increasingly depressed mind and body of the contemporary subject. Hervé Juvin in the recent *The Coming of the Body* (reviewed in *RP* 165, January/February 2011) has similarly attempted to describe what it means for contemporary life when the body has become the 'bearer' of all meaning, where every aspect of existence is exchangeable and where nothing is hidden or hideable. While the trajectory of this kind of analysis is not exactly new, even where it occasionally remembers the vast feminist literature on embodiment, affect and labour from the 1960s onwards, there is something novel about the peculiar combination of consumerism, despair, visibility and immaturity that characterizes postwar life in its later stages. It is this 'new physiognomy of Capital', where 'the generalized credit that rules every exchange ... strikes within the image of its uniform emptiness the "heart of darkness" of every "personality" and every "character"' that Tiqqun address in this short, wilfully fragmentary text first published in France in 1999. The question of gender is raised here, there and everywhere – from the title of the book, to the extracts from magazines marketed to women that Tiqqun scatter throughout the text, to something much more nebulous and disturbing at the heart of their endeavour.

Theory of the Young-Girl is a text that both parodies and mirrors the misogyny that resonates at the heart of a culture that celebrates youth and beauty above all else while simultaneously denigrating the bearers – young women, overwhelmingly – of these purportedly desirable characteristics. The translator of the text, poet Ariana Reines, has written of the visceral reaction the task engendered. The translation, she writes in the online magazine *Triple Canopy*, 'gave me migraines, made me puke; I couldn't sleep at night, regressed

into totally out-of-character sexual behaviour'. It is indeed a book that disturbs in its relentless depiction of the fully weaponized, consumerist body of a world in which '[a]lthough everyone senses that their existence has become a battleground upon which neuroses, phobias, somatizations, depression, and anxiety each sound a retreat, nobody has yet really grasped what is happening or what is at stake.' The language of colonization, immunization, meat and fluids seeps through the abstract framework of image-analysis, economic structure and ruminations on modernity: 'the Young-Girl doesn't kiss you, she drools over you through her teeth. Materialism of secretion.' If parts of the text read like a theoretically inflected revenge manual for male nerds, one assumes that this effect is – on one level – intentional. The quotation from *Hamlet* that appears at the beginning of the text, 'I did love you once', hints at past betrayals, as does the claim that 'the "male sex" becomes both the victim and the object of its own alienated desire.' But who is this 'male sex' if everyone is required to permanently 'self-valorise', that is to say, to be a Young-Girl? What is left of the body, love, personality when all life resembles a cross between a spreadsheet and a horoscope? 'Unhappiness makes people consume' reads one aphoristic statement, and yet unhappiness appears to be all there is, even as everything shrieks of fulfilment and perkiness.

But why 'Young-Girl'? Who is she, and what kind of 'theory' is presented here? Stylistically, Tiqqun operate in the speculative void-space created by situationist-style and Agambenian portentousness – *détournement* meets poetic ontologizing. The style is assertoric, even where the claims made are highly evaluative. Hundreds of sentences begin 'The Young-Girl is...' This grinding repetition is ameliorated only slightly by the use of varied font styles and the insertion of quotations not only from women's magazines, but also from Baudrillard, Witold Gombrowicz's 1937 novel *Ferdydurke*, spiritual instruction manuals and texts on eating disorders. To imagine that Tiqqun are talking about 'real' young girls would be an ontic grotesquery, of course, as the Young-Girl is 'obviously not a gendered concept' and besides, the book is little more than 'trash theory'. Tiqqun explain that every postwar consumerist subject, every 'model

citizen', every bearer of power is the Young-Girl: 'All the old figures of patriarchal authority, from statesmen to bosses and cops, have become Young-Girlified, every last one of them, even the Pope.' And yet the book is precisely not called 'Theory of the Wizen-Pope'. So what to make of the embrace of gendered rhetoric in the service of a theory of the 'total war' waged on the bodies of everyone? The political point is the claim that 'the process of valorization, in the imperial phase, is no longer simply capitalist: IT COINCIDES WITH THE SOCIAL.' Love has transformed from 'Fordist seduction, with its designated sites and moments, its static and proto-bourgeois couple-form, to post-Fordist seduction, diffuse, flexible, precarious and deritualized, which has extended the couple factory to the entire body and the whole of social time-space'. Tiqqun's equation of the social with 'youthitude' and 'feminitude' is, however,



oddly old-fashioned, harking back to stereotypes of women as fundamental bearers of sociability in the form of gossip: 'Chatter, curiosity, equivocation, hearsay, the Young-Girl incarnates the fullness of improper existence, whose categories Heidegger identified.' The Young-Girl is idle talk substantiated, inauthentic life made Queen: 'Precisely because of her nothingness, each of her judgements carries the imperative weight of the entire sovereign order, *and she knows it.*'

So, to remain at the level of the inauthentic, the temptation to read ontically, for a moment, is this a book about women, or about 'women' (or, rather 'young women')? The translator notes: 'the genderedness of French is not the only way to account for the fact that this book, as it accumulates, does become – in some sections more than others – a book about women.' It

is indeed impossible not to reify the critique as the book progresses, to map the claims onto real, if vague, images of particular kinds of bodies ('The Young-Girl sees herself as the holder of a *sacred* power: the power of commodities'; 'THE YOUNG-GIRL RESEMBLES HER PHOTO'; 'There is surely no place where one feels/as horribly alone/as in the arms of a Young-Girl'). While Tiqqun focus on women's magazines, much as Mary Wollstonecraft did two hundred years before, it is easy to expand their analysis to encompass developments in social media that have taken place since the book's original publication: the direct facial and self-valorizing imperatives of Facebook, the endless memetic re-postings of tumblr, fashion blogs, and so on. But what does this domination of the Spectacle really mean? The Young-Girl is 'Living Currency', Tiqqun claim, picking up on Pierre Klossowski's phrase. Her arse is a war-machine: 'The Young-Girl's ass doesn't possess any new value, but only the unprecedented depreciation of all values that preceded it.' But does the spectacular domination of Pippa Middleton's posterior, say, really tell us anything about the economy? 'In the time of the Young-Girl, woman becomes the metaphor of money' claim Tiqqun, and a thousand billboards would surely agree: yet this cover story masks rather more dowdy truths – women may be the metaphor of money, but they don't empirically have very much of it at the moment. Tiqqun come close at points to pinning the blame on the Young-Girl herself, even as the reader struggles in her mind to replace an image of a socially integrated teen with that of, say, Berlusconi (he is quoted here: 'They have offended the thing I hold most dear: my image'), the Pope or any number of male authority figures. But the Young-Girl is above all alienation in the sense of being profoundly unhappy – that the book finishes with a discussion of anorexia is no accident: 'She is a body without soul dreaming she's a soul without a body.' Anorexia is 'the desire to free oneself from a body entirely colonized by commodity symbolism'. The Young-Girl may be 'against communism' as one section has it, but she is well aware of the world she finds herself in. What, ultimately, would it mean to let the Young-Girl speak for herself and not through the categories imposed upon her by a culture that heralds her as the metaphysical apex of civilization while simultaneously denigrating her, or even the categories that Tiqqun mobilize to take her apart in a subtly different way? Behind every Young-Girl's arse hides a bunch of rich white men: the task is surely not, then, to destroy the Young-Girl, but to destroy the system that makes her, and makes her so unhappy, whoever 'she' is.

Nina Power

Flickers

Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis and Religion in Times of Terror*, Verso, London and New York, 2012. 326 pp., £19.99 pb., 978 1 84467 755 9.

Bruno Bosteels is probably best known to readers of *Radical Philosophy* as translator of and commentator on the work of Alain Badiou – most recently in his *Badiou and Politics* (Duke University Press, 2011) – and a contributor in his own right to contemporary debates on communism. But in his day job as a professor of Romance Studies at Cornell University he is also an erudite and trenchant voice in Latin American studies, a voice that speaks beyond the disciplinary boundaries of area studies and established canons. *Marx and Freud in Latin America* brings together (and in many cases expands) a number of essays, most of which have been previously published (bar one) over the last decade, and which engage with topics and figures within Latin America loosely organized by the names Marx and Freud. The texts are never less than provocative, wide-ranging, informative and copiously footnoted. There is a keen and magisterial intelligence at work here.

Bosteels describes his intention in various ways: in part it is a form of ‘counter-memory’ that the author himself compares to the exhumation of dangerous books rapidly buried during the 1976–83 Argentine dictatorship and photographed for an installation by the Argentine artist Marcelo Brodsky. ‘Counter-memory’ implies a memory that works against established periodizations, narratives and hierarchies, and Bosteels wants to reconstitute certain figures – notably the Mexican writer and philosopher José Revueltas – who have passed into a certain critical oblivion, or those like the Argentine psychoanalyst and thinker León Rozitchner, who were ignored, patronized or grudgingly acknowledged *post mortem* at home and little known in the Anglosphere (though readers of *Radical Philosophy*, the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* and *Sitegeist* will be familiar with translations of his work). He also wants to rescue certain political experiences, such as that of Maoism in pre-dictatorship Argentina, which he begins successfully in an article on Ricardo Piglia, novelist and ex- (though never self-disowning) Maoist and the influence of that politics on both literary production and the theorization of literary value. Similarly, he recovers the experience of the ‘Mexican ’68’, the confrontation of students and others with the state prior to the Olympic Games of that year in Mexico City, which led to the military’s cold-blooded slaughter of the demonstrators in

Tlatelolco. ‘Counter-memory’ restores a history that is erased by the state and misread by the Left, a process that haunts other instances, notably the *guerrilla* of the southern cone, and reactivates its potential for critique in the present.

Elsewhere, the thematic of ‘counter-memory’ is perhaps less obvious or less accurate as a description of Bosteels’s enterprise: an investigation of the *policiers* of Paco Ignacio Taibo that draws links with the latter’s biography of Che; the missed encounter between Marx and the nineteenth-century Cuban writer and fighter for independence José Martí; or the extended review of the Mexican drama *Happy New Century, Dr Freud*, by far the weakest essay, which turns less on counter-memory than on counter-interpretation, criticizing a culturalist account of Freud, which, Bosteels claims, suppresses the radical discovery and potential at the heart of the Freudian enterprise. Here the author’s other account of his project is probably helpful: the essays work in the ‘productive disjunction’ between cultural criticism and critical theory, or more precisely in the ‘productive disjunction within each of the two fields – neither of which lives up to its promise without the polemical input of the other’. Bosteels is keen that he ‘tease[s] out a theoretical framework from the texts themselves’, but that has to be slightly disingenuous as Badiou is often called upon to lend a certain imprimatur to what is discerned in the texts. Bosteels is a strong reader, with Badiouian inclinations, and this hardly seems a matter for disavowal, especially when, as in the best of the essays here, such as the one on Piglia and Maoism, and that on Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968), such readings generate real insight. At other times, one might wonder at the discovery of Badiou *avant la lettre* in Revueltas, or the latter’s echoes of Benjamin.

‘Productive disjunction’ might also characterize the form of the essays, which operate as montages of commentary, certain persistent preoccupations and lapidary nuclei of theory. ‘Constellation’ might be another name for this critical practice, where, for example, melodrama, underdevelopment, ‘the spectral’, the ‘ethical turn’ and other notions punctuate the field of the book, immanently deployed but never quite fully articulated. This is the problem with collections, especially of material written over time: the essay is always a sketch and the superposition of multiple

sketches need not produce a clearer figure. Clarity comes from the outside light: a certain understanding of the political that contrasts with a tendency to the melodramatic rewritten through Hegel. The insistence of Bosteels's accumulation is to draw the outline of a militancy that names itself after Marx and Freud, and holds a position of loyalty to a past under attack and erasure. So, counter-memory is really fidelity, Marx is the name for a tradition of communism and its insistent potential, and Freud the placeholder of a theory of desire: the communist variants of the virtues of faith, hope and love. Militancy – discovered or disjunct – is the austere mirror of sainthood with its cardinal character, courage, especially in its self-divesting version, analogous to Lacan's analyst. Austere involvement against the beautiful soul's refusal of *mains sales*, where melodrama is the political schema of the absolute scission of good from evil and allows the narcissistic pleasures of inaction. The figure of the militant, then, is the place where Marx encounters Freud in the void, under the sign of truth, but with spectral elements of the religious (the secularized version of Pascal's Jansenism here is intriguing).

Bosteels reclaims the Mexican October (1968) as the students' 'forcing' of the situation, showing a drive to exceed the system, but then says 'the task is to traverse the fantasy' but also to 'prescribe a sequence to found a new justice'. A curious instability of referent here (whose task?) is perhaps (un)clarified in the claim that the 'political subject has no ground to stand on, no stable identity or social link ... the lion's leap starts from anxiety'. The void is 'the starting point for a possible universalist project ... the passage in which a subject emerges from the void ... toward a declaration of a new universal truth' where 'total commitment, the entire process of militancy ... proceeds in intimate dialogue with [the registers of popular culture] ... where rumours [etc.] have a contagious force equal to the ubiquitous picture of Che's dead body'. Militancy here must be a stance rather than a programme: a wager in the void, rather than a calculation of the balance of forces. 'The ubiquitous picture of Che's dead body' might prefigure the more constant consequences of the actions of such militants, even though Bosteels wants politics to be 'practiced thought'. An extensive recovery of the events in Valle Grande might yield more than simply a reiteration of the value of courage.

Bosteels never quite specifies what Marx and Freud he wants to discuss, though he is clear that it is a Marx beyond orthodox Marxism (in crisis, and hence dismissable) and a Freud beyond the International Psychoanalytical Association. Whilst underdevelopment



haunts Latin America and Bosteels's text, the economics of dependency hardly figure at all: after Althusser, underdevelopment challenges the model of harmonious articulation of base and superstructure, and after Žižek, unevenness characterizes all social formations. But is there, then, nothing particular about the (post)colonial relation? Similarly, if a certain culturalist Freud, that is a Freud of a determinate time and place, is rejected in favour of the theoretician of a 'singular universal', what is left of the particularity of the subject in history and in personal history that the best psychoanalysis endeavours to preserve? This question of history and its possibilities takes on a weight and depth to which the notion of 'counter-memory' is inadequate. The internalization within a destitute subject of the relation to the past – the recuperation of the past void and its 'lion's leap' – both de-socializes a militant subjectivity (Bosteels is best precisely on those figures who illustrate the failure to attain revolutionary consciousness) and subtracts any content from its project. The past is a sequence of iterated possibilities-in-void, a reduction that is perhaps indicated by history being constituted by a staccato enumeration of incidents in the discussion of Mexico.

This is symptomatically played out in the readings of Rozitchner that both make him into a theoretician of militancy and allow a certain historicity to emerge at least onto the horizon. An uncanny, wavering transference of authority is at work in the text – only Rozitchner and Badiou speak in the majority of essays

– and what Rozitchner can speak against Badiou, what we might call fleshly materiality, is both invoked and repressed in a gesture that repeats Rozitchner’s own powerful readings of Freud. Notoriously, Rozitchner reads Freud’s ‘Group Psychology’ essay through its absent dialogue with Le Bon in order to produce a social Freud that positively invokes the mass subject; a reading that is at odds with standard readings of Freud’s text, and that depends in part on a claim for privilege in reading that flows from the colonial order of space. Rozitchner reworks Freud through the optic of the colonial and through the political demands for a mass subject, which leads to a complex reading of the figure of Che as both a militant who challenges the mortal threat of paternal power and a corpus, an incorporated moment of the mass. Most crucially, the body, the *forma cuerpo*, is the bearer of history and historical possibility as sensual engagement. Sexuality is fundamental to Rozitchner’s materialism. Bosteels perceives the discussion of militancy, though in another text – the book on St Augustine, the as yet untranslated *La cosa y la cruz* (*The Thing and the Cross*, 1996) – but not the stress on materiality. This emerges in the discussion of Rozitchner’s polemic on the Six Day War, *Ser judío* (*Being Jewish*, 1967), where the fact of history as the substance of identity is asserted: here it would be the ‘the full affective, corporeal and historical density of one’s being’ and the substance of revolution is ‘transit’: the old and the new are not scissioned, there is ‘no leap’; rather revolution is the mode of transit and the consequence of transit. Instead of a void we have ‘full density’, which echoes Rozitchner’s stress on the corporeal locus and content of rebellion: the theme of *Freud y los límites del individualismo burgués* (*Freud and the Limits of Bourgeois Individualism*, 1972).

So, against an abstract vision of militancy, Bosteels introduces a notion of the embodied and embedded revolutionary subject which flickers and then vanishes under a second Rozitchner brought closer to the Badiouian model of the militant as the ‘watchman on the edge of the void’ derived from a text which is itself moving away from the dialectic of repression and liberation as situated in a male subject (a necessary criticism of Rozitchner’s early texts) with the limning of the issue of the mother, as the *mater* in materialism. Bosteels’s reading of *La cosa* acknowledges the theme but is more concerned with failure to separate from the mother so characteristic of Lacan than with the transmutation of the mother, which is Rozitchner’s new direction. And in later texts his stress on the difference between the Jewish Oedipus and the Christian not only signals a critique of the progressivism entailed in

Christian apologetics (and apologetics for Christianity à la Žižek, as Bosteels notes) but also a critique of the origins of abstraction and money. The deep structure of Christianity is a fundamental voiding of the body of the mother to provide the form for social abstraction and capital. The Virgin and the Holy Ghost are coeval origins of the commodity and money.

This account is underdeveloped in Bosteels’s reading (though obviously the desire for history emerges, as we have seen, in almost fascinated quotation) and echoes Rozitchner’s own art of productive disjuncture, but leaves out precisely what was most productive in the Argentine’s later work. The social content of militancy is just what we would call culture, and which Rozitchner sees most profoundly at work in its religious forms, even nodding at the possibility of an Aymara Oedipus in a late article: such content provides concrete resources for a transformed future. All that said, Bosteels is to be particularly commended for bringing Rozitchner’s thought to the awareness of a wider public and more generally for producing a collection of eminent seriousness.

Philip Derbyshire

Transitional programme

Eden Medina, *Cybernetic Revolutionaries: Technology and Politics in Allende’s Chile*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2011. 312 pp., £22.95 hb., 978 0 26201 649 0.

Salvador Allende was elected as socialist-Marxist president of Chile on 4 November 1970. The USA soon after initiated an ‘invisible’ financial blockade, which would, when combined with a fall in international copper prices (Chile’s main export), ultimately cripple the Chilean economy, and provide the pretext, slightly less than three years later – on a very different 9/11 – for General Augusto Pinochet, supported by the CIA under instructions from Henry Kissinger and President Nixon, to lead a violent military coup, which ended the lives of Allende and thousands of others. Pinochet reversed the social gains achieved by Allende’s government in its short three-year life, and, as Naomi Klein describes so well in *The Shock Doctrine*, Chile became the site of the first experiment in neoliberal Chicago School economics.

The story of Allende’s Chile has since become an integral part of the narrative of the Left for several generations of activists. Yet much of the complexity

of the story is still to be told, and this new book by Eden Medina provides a welcome addition to the historical account. Medina's research focuses on the rather unlikely story of a collaborative endeavour between Allende, Fernando Flores – a leading cabinet minister in charge of nationalizing Chile's industrial sectors – and a British management theorist, Stafford Beer. The project, known as Cybersyn (Proyecto Synco), was an attempt to design a unique 'political technology', a transitional programme for implementing democratic socialist economic planning and 'one of the most ambitious applications of cybernetics in history'. As the organizational form and technological structure through which Allende hoped to achieve *La via chilena al socialismo* (the Chilean path to socialism), Medina suggests, Cybersyn was seen as a part of a 'new form of socialist modernity'.

Medina's account of this project is important for several reasons. As a piece of historiographic work it tells the intersecting story of two utopian visions – one technological and one political – within a distinctive Latin American context. All too often critical histories of cybernetics have tended to fall back upon almost conspiracy theory-type accounts, based upon US military funding of some US projects. Whilst relevant to some aspects of US cybernetics history, the formulaic projection of a standard critique to an entire complex and highly differentiated field has resulted in significant misreadings. Thankfully more nuanced accounts have begun to emerge, in for example the work of Andrew Pickering, who has focused on the distinctively radical characteristics of the British tendency (see the review of Pickering's book *The Cybernetic Brain* in *RP* 165, January/February 2011). Medina explicitly positions her work as a part of this new historiographic project, noting for example 'that Chile's involvement in the history of cybernetics dates almost to the origin of the field suggests that the history of cybernetics played out over a far wider geography than the existing literature has thus far recognized.' Indeed the fact that this Chilean cybernetic experience was ended by CIA intervention is itself worthy of further comment.

Allende's election was one of the most radical moments in an evolving Latin American political arena in that period. In the previous decade a Christian Democratic government led by Eduardo Frei Montalva had, under pressure from the Left, initiated a series of reforms, including partial nationalization of some industries and the beginnings of land reform. As these reforms failed in the face of resistance from Chile's bourgeoisie, the population moved further to the left, and Allende was elected as the leader of a coalition of

left parties, under the name Popular Unity. On election Allende announced that Chile would default on all debts owed to international banks and creditors, and the new government embarked on a programme of nationalization, collectivization and land redistribution, taking control of copper industries, finance, health, housing and education. Fernando Flores – a young engineer and academic, and leader of one of the smaller coalition parties – became a senior figure within the Chilean State Development Corporation, an agency set up to manage the nationalization process and its subsequent planning. Flores was already familiar with some of Beer's work on cybernetic approaches to operations research and management theory, and approached him for advice concerning the process of nationalizing and then reorganizing Chile's industries, stating in a letter to Beer that Chile was 'now in a position from which it is possible to implement on a national scale – at which cybernetic thinking becomes a necessity – scientific views on management and organization'.

Flores did not, it seems, realize quite how timely his approach was. Stafford Beer had made a lucrative living applying cybernetic thinking to questions of industrial processes. In a precocious early career he had quickly risen to lead operations management at United Steel (then Europe's largest steel manufacturer), and later IPC (then the world's largest publisher). But by his early forties Beer's politics and research were taking a more radical turn. In a talk given a few months before Flores had contacted him, entitled 'This Runaway World: Can Man Gain Control?', Beer stated that 'What is needed is structural change. Nothing else will do ... The more I reflect upon these facts, the more I perceive that the evolutionary approach to adaption in social systems will not work anymore ... It has therefore become clear to me over the years that I am advocating revolution.' In fact, in the year prior to the invitation from Chile, Beer had started work on two innovative models for applying the thinking he had developed from working with industrial organizations to questions of government and social change: the Liberty Machine and the Viable Systems Model (VSM). The VSM in particular is a fascinating piece of work, which Medina takes some time to unpack. Cybernetics in general saw itself as a meta-discipline concerned with understanding the organizational principles of complex systems. It would abstract principles from one area and test them in another. Biological and mechanical systems were treated as paradigmatic sources of organizational metaphors, for example, and this method was a source of both great analytic strength and great potential danger.

In his 1959 book *Management and Cybernetics*, Beer had suggested that there were three kinds of organized systems active in the world: simple, complex and exceedingly complex. Simple systems – he gave as an example a window latch – are, typically, completely understandable in mechanistic and deterministic terms. Exceedingly complex systems by contradistinction could not be understood in those terms at all, and could only be grasped in probabilistic terms. Examples of exceedingly complex systems for Beer included the brain, the economy, and large social organizations like corporations and governments. Such systems, Beer insisted, could never be deterministically controlled. The challenge, rather, was to find ways of *managing* in such a condition.



Beer's VSM was an organizational model which attempted to address just such a scenario. Beer presented it as a diagram based upon the human nervous system, and even in this respect his diagram presents a significant proposition about the nature of planning in human consciousness. There are five primary levels within the VSM, although, as Medina rightly makes clear, whilst this is not a hierarchical model, it is absolutely no flat ontology either. Levels one and four are both connected to the external world, although in different ways (and each producing its own mappings and representations). There is a source of top-down planning in level five, but this is not so much a commanding centre as a semi-autonomous high order abstraction active in the space of the overall distributed system, in such a way that it adds complex organized adaptive feedback into its future possibility space. Medina shows that 'Beer's new thinking on management structures' thus 'embraced the tension between top-down and bottom-up decision making [and] used that tension to increase the stability of the overall organization.' These new organizational models were suggesting forms of ownership and power relations quite different to anything found in capitalism. It seems that Beer had concluded that global economic

and social relations had developed to a level of complexity such that capitalism was no longer a viable system according to his definition. Yet they were also very different to the command structures found in the Soviet Union. It soon became clear to Allende and Flores that 'from Beer's perspective, both the LM and VSM could be applied to address the tension between top-down and bottom-up decision making in Chilean socialism and the challenges Chile faced as a developing nation with limited technological resources.'

The actual Cybersyn project was itself a significant technological achievement. At the time US ARPANET was in its very early stages, and was driven to a significant extent by military interests. The USSR had failed in its attempts to develop a strategy for a computer system to help manage a planned economy, and Medina gives a good account of how the very political landscape of the Soviet Union, with the infighting among the swollen bureaucratic class, repeatedly precluded the kind of trans-disciplinarity and even basic trans-departmental technology and data-sharing necessary for functioning experiments. Beer's team produced the software to outflank both superpowers and developed a real-time communications network control system, organized as a distributed network of telex machines located in factories and community spaces across Chile. Medina notes that 'this technical system could be engineered in ways that would change Chilean social relationships ... presenting ways to increase worker participation in factory management.'

The project's lasting image is that of a futuristic communications room designed by the State Technology Institute Industrial Design Group (another of Flores' initiatives). Only one room was completed out of many ultimately planned. The hexagonal room contained seven chairs, each with a control panel which could bring up charts, graphs and images of Chilean production in real time. The interface was designed to be used by workers, and is not some kind of captain's bridge, as is often imagined. Beer stated that 'in Chile I know that I am making the maximum effort towards the devolution of power. The government made their revolution about it; I find it good cybernetics.'

Beer stated that he read 'all the Marxist literature' prior to his first trip to Chile, and whilst Beer's experience and conception of using cybernetics to understand social organizations had evolved in a northern hemisphere and Western context (that was, after all, what he was appointed to do), his thinking was transformed not only by the specific unfolding of the

Chilean revolution, but also through his encounter with Chile's own significant cybernetic research traditions, most notably that of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. In fact, their emerging conception of autopoiesis would be key both to the development of the VSM and to Beer's increasing critique of capitalism. (Beer would also write the key preface to their seminal 1973 publication *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*).

Beer attempted a sketch mapping of Marx's analysis of capital into a cybernetic framework, which, whilst naive at times, produced some fascinating insights. Notably perhaps, Beer considered that the class struggle as described by Marx 'represented the situation generated by the industrial revolution itself', but that by the late twentieth century the ability of capitalism to stabilize itself and autopoietically present an internal reality was the key challenge. Beer suggested that the class struggle had evolved through the development of 'new forms of work and new exploitative relations', and argued, again incorporating a conception of autopoiesis, that 'for Marx, capital was evil and the enemy. For us, capital remains evil, but the enemy is STATUS QUO'. It would be fascinating to read Beer's thinking here in the light of, for example, Lazzarato's conception of immaterial labour and, indeed, the wider post-operaist rereading of Marx's 'general intellect'. Medina does not approach such questions, but she does provide the material for starting such a project.

A struggle emerged between the technologists Beer was working with, whom he felt were excessively devoted to the actual technologies necessary to bring Cybersyn to reality, and were insufficiently focused on the political questions of organizational restructuring and his attempts to involve more Chilean workers in Cybersyn's development. Beer's political commitment to Allende's socialist project was total, and he became increasingly frustrated as the US-led financial blockage started to bite, and as it became increasingly clear, following a failed military coup early in 1973, that the Chilean military were effectively led by the CIA. He came to ask 'if the final level of societal recursion is capitalistic, in what sense can a lower level of recursion become socialist? ... It makes little difference if capital in that socialist country is owned by capitalists whose subject is state controls, or by the state itself in the name of the people, since the power of capital to oppress is effectively wielded by the metasystem.'

Medina notes that while 'the idea of control is commonly associated with domination', Beer in fact 'offered a different definition', and concludes that, although he 'was repeatedly criticized for using

computers to create top-down control systems', such criticisms 'were to some extent ill-informed'. Nor is it the case that this is an example of a Western military-industrial technology imported into and subverting a political movement. Rather, in an important respect the specific demands of the Chilean situation transformed the cybernetic ideas concerning management and organization – and in the process also transformed Beer himself. As Maturana put it: Beer 'came to Chile a businessman and left a hippie'. Referring to Marx's essay on 'The Possibility of Non-violent Revolution', Medina positions Beer's work with Allende's government as a genuine attempt to realize and work through such a scenario and project. It would have been interesting to see the project test it more thoroughly as a transitional programme. Cybersyn was not a futuristic control room, nor was it even an information management system. It was, rather, a study in re-imagining what democratic planning might be. Cybersyn was the means by which a workers' democracy was to be enacted, and an economy taken through a transitional programme from private capitalism to socialism. Cybersyn *was* the transitional programme, and to that extent perhaps contains important lessons for us today.

Jon Goodbun

The post-traumatic condition

Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*, trans. Steven Miller, Fordham University Press, New York, 2012. 268 pp., £60.00 hb., £18.99 pb., 978 0 8232 3967 2 hb., 978 0 8232 3968 9 pb.

Catherine Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread, Polity, Cambridge, 2012. 112 pp., £35.00 hb., £9.99 pb., 978 0 7456 5260 3 hb., 978 0 7456 5261 0 pb.

Whether discussing Hegel, Heidegger or contemporary neuroscience, Catherine Malabou's work circles around the theme of plasticity, a concept which she claims has three key facets: adaptation, creation and annihilation. The third term in her trinity, negative or destructive plasticity, is the focus of these two books newly translated into English. Malabou claims that this negative form of plasticity is overlooked by literature and both psychoanalysis and neurology. For Malabou, destructive plasticity represents absolute discontinuity, a total

annihilation of form. In *Ontology of the Accident* Malabou argues that the ‘western imagination’ – she focuses on Ovid, Kafka, Proust, Mann and Duras – has failed to represent total mut(ill)ation; metamorphosis of form is always accompanied by a continuity of essence, the ‘nature of being persists’. More radical transformations, she claims, can be observed in the ‘new wounded’, which gives her second book its title: people who have suffered a severe neuronal disturbance in the form of a traumatic shock, degenerative disease or brain injury. Neuronal plasticity usually implies creation, the ability of the synapses to forge new connections, to repair damage. But for Malabou, in its failure to acknowledge the possibility of total disconnection, this falls into the same trap as the literary examples she discusses. Malabou’s ‘new figures of the void’ are beyond recovery, and can thus only be thought in relation to destructive plasticity, a plasticity ‘that does not repair, a plasticity without recompense or scar, one that cuts the thread of life’. Following cerebral ‘accidents’, an entirely new subject emerges, totally cut off from any previous identity. And she insists that the new wounded, who share certain key symptoms – ‘coolness, neutrality, absence, and the state of being emotionally “flat”’ – are characteristic of the contemporary era.

Much of *The New Wounded* is devoted to a discussion of the limitations of Freud’s conception of trauma. Psychoanalysis, according to Malabou, is incapable of thinking the post-traumatic condition. Malabou is a meticulous and sympathetic reader of Freud, carefully teasing out the nuances and contradictions of his work. For Freud, the psyche shatters like a crystal, along predetermined fault lines; the accident for psychoanalysis is never totally destructive in that it never completely severs the subject’s relation to his or her own history. But the total rupture Malabou is attempting to describe cannot be anticipated or fantasized, cannot be integrated into the subject’s symbolic life, and cannot be thought in relation to the separation of castration anxiety. According to Malabou, the psychoanalytic obsession with the past is incompatible with the post-traumatic condition, which demands new forms of treatment that recognize the newness of the new wounded, their total separation from their former selves, the ‘intense cold of a barren life’. Unlike the unconscious, which can know neither death nor ‘no’, the psyche that emerges after an accident represents a true confrontation with the negative; the new wounded are literally the ‘living dead’. For Freud death is opposed to life, to Eros, whereas Malabou is attempting to think a life not just beyond but without the pleasure principle.

It might be the case that the psychoanalytic obsession with the past is unsuited to all psychic problems, that Western literature has not described the possibility of a total severance in subjectivity observable in some people with specific types of brain injury. But Malabou’s insistence on the pervasiveness of a subjectivity characterized by total disconnection is an attempt to make a much broader claim about contemporary subjectivity. Malabou discusses the impossibility of representing the total absence she sees as characterizing the new wounded. She criticizes clinician-novelists Alexander Luria and Oliver Sacks for what she sees as a false imposition of affect onto their subjects, for their attempt to ‘weave the patient’s coolness, indifference, and the disintegration of emotion into a narrative intrigue that must not be disaffected itself’. The question Malabou raises about what form might adequately convey psychic disturbance is an important one. The theatre director Peter Brook produced a stage version of Sacks’s *The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*, and Sergei Eisenstein’s interest in synaesthesia was inspired by meetings with the subject of Luria’s case history *The Mind of a Mnemonist* – comparing these formal experiments with Sacks’s and Luria’s literary case histories might be a fruitful exercise. Malabou identifies Beckett’s theatre with its ‘interruption, pauses, caesuras’ as coming closest to representing the post-traumatic experience. But she assumes that this experience takes only one form, that it is always characterized by ‘affective impoverishment’.

Malabou relies heavily on Antonio Damasio’s cases, which conform to her singular definition of post-traumatic subjectivity. But she treats his descriptions as transparent representations of his patients, focusing solely on their *content*, ignoring the formal literary conventions he employs, which are much closer to the linear narratives of Sacks and Luria than the modernist discontinuities of Beckett. But one need not fully buy into Sacks’s mawkish meditations on the human condition or Luria’s incongruous reflections on the endless bounty of the earth to accept that the mental conditions they are describing might have some foundation in empirical observation. Indeed, Luria’s *Man with a Shattered World* at least purports to be based on his patient’s own notebooks; writing, weaving the frayed strands of a life back together, becomes a form of therapy for the patient, rather than a violent external gesture performed by the psychologist-novelist. Although this case history provides a vivid description of the devastation caused by brain injury (Luria’s patient Zazetsky survived World War II with shrapnel lodged in his brain), destruction here is combined

with creation; something of the past *is* recovered. The subject of Luria's other major case history, *The Mind of a Mnemonist*, on the other hand, may conform to Malabou's description of the new wounded in his incapacity for emotional engagement, but here the subject suffers from an *excess* of memory; emotional paralysis, far from being the result of a radical separation from the past, comes rather from too much connection to it. Malabou's insistence on the homogeneity of the post-traumatic subjectivity risks suffocating the specificities of psychic damage beneath a singular conceptual blanket.

Not only are these symptoms generalized but the 'accident' itself is a similarly capacious term, encompassing literal brain injuries and 'all traumatic injuries, of whatever type'. In *The New Wounded*, Malabou justifies the alignment of traumatic events with brain injuries in neurological terms: 'All trauma of any kind impacts the cerebral sites that conduct emotion.' Yet in *Ontology of the Accident* her discussion seems far more figurative. Here her references to literal brain injuries seem to serve as a metaphor for all disjunctions in subjectivity, which she claims are equally as complete. The 'deep cut' in a person's biography may be 'a result of serious trauma', but might equally be 'for no reason at all'. She discusses ageing as an instant event rather than cumulative process, for example, drawing evocatively on Proust and Duras to demonstrate 'the undatable bifurcation of destruction, sharp as a claw, unpredictable, throbbing, magnificent'. And surely even the most biology-enamoured positivist would be unlikely to read the strangely banal and bathetic examples Malabou gives of accidents that might create 'new people' in straightforwardly neurological terms:

The couple unable to recover from an infidelity. The well-off woman whose son suddenly and inexplicably abandoned his family for a squat in the North of France. The colleague who upped and left for Texas believing he would be happy there... Teachers in underprivileged areas.

What these people have in common with Alzheimer's patients or people with brain lesions, according to Malabou, is their disaffiliation; the lack of meaning attached to their experiences. These figures 'begin to resemble each other' because of the cold indifference she claims they all display. Also included in this list are 'all those people who at the age of 50 lost their jobs in the economic crisis of the mid-1980s', indicating suggestively that the disconnection she identifies might often have an economic origin. Here politics and nature become indistinguishable. Malabou makes the urgent and pertinent observation that 'political oppression,

today, itself assumes the guise of a traumatic blow stripped of all justification.' But she misses a trick: she observes this tendency without attempting to critique it properly. She positions herself *within* the dominant hegemonic conception of trauma, rather than attempting to dismantle it.

Malabou lavishes none of the careful critical attention she pays to Freud on contemporary theories of trauma. Of course, this is probably not unrelated to the continued dominance of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic practice in France, and her own position within the psychoanalytically informed tradition of Continental philosophy. But the anglophone world has long operated under a different paradigm, and Malabou is generally amenable to it. (Both Allan Young and Roy Porter identify a shift from the psychogenetic theories of Freud to an organic orientation indebted to Emil Kraepelin. This shift ushered in a new emphasis on external diagnostic criteria based on the assumption that mental illness was biological regardless of the empirical evidence necessary to accurately prove it.) Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Malabou claims, is capable of thinking the accident in a way that is impossible for psychoanalysis, in that it 'allows for the existence of events that, unto themselves, are their own origin, and that, by virtue of their specific power, occasion a new psychic life'. Malabou approvingly cites Ruth Leys, but fails to take on board Leys's pointed criticisms of PTSD. Malabou treats traumatic events as 'pure hits', as literal, unsymbolic and external 'accidents stripped of any signification'. This conforms precisely to the anti-mimetic positivism identified by Leys as characteristic of the reigning definition of trauma enshrined in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, defining trauma, in her book *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000), as 'an event that comes to an already constituted ego to shatter its autonomy and integrity.... The result is a rigid dichotomy between internal and external such that violence is imagined as coming to the subject entirely from the outside.' Malabou criticizes psychoanalysis for putting too much emphasis on the subject's past, but she conceives of this as an entirely *internal* realm. The accident, on the other hand, is conceived of as an absolute outside, akin to the Lacanian real, something so radically external to the subject that it cannot be internalized or interpreted, but simply shatters the sealed borders of the subject altogether. Malabou fails to think beyond the apparent inaccessibility of the external in the understanding of trauma she is adopting. But it is precisely this that allows the confusion of nature and politics to occur.

Malabou persuasively declares that

We have entered a new age of political violence in which politics is defined by the renunciation of any hope of endowing violence with a political sense... traumatic events tend to neutralize their intention, such that they assume the unmotivated character of the chance, uninterpretable event. The enemy, today, is hermeneutics.

But she fails to historicize trauma properly, and this history is directly related to political violence. Following the Vietnam War, veterans troubled by their wartime experiences were too numerous to ignore, and this eventually led to their categorization as sufferers of PTSD, which entered the *DSM III* in 1980. The current *DSM IVR*, like Malabou, brackets all traumatic experiences together, regardless of their origin. Trauma's official medical classification as PTSD encourages the confusion of political and natural events. Placing traumatic events beyond interpretation, neutralizing their intentions, plays into the hands of the powerful, as by medicalizing trauma the American military succeeded in naturalizing the experience of the veteran,

endogenizing it into the experience of war. Rather than protesting at the events provoking these extreme responses, the huge volume of troops diagnosed with PTSD are now accepted as a necessary part of the sacrifice of supposedly just wars.

If anything Malabou's equation needs to be reversed: politics may assume the appearance of nature, but the natural is always political. Earthquakes, tsunamis and Alzheimer's may be natural 'accidents', but their impact cannot be neatly divorced from the interests of global capital. Unlike Malabou, who identifies but fails to challenge the naturalization of trauma, refusing to treat wars, hurricanes, rapes and earthquakes as identical events might reconnect traumatic experiences with meaning, allowing for the specific political implications of different extreme experiences to surface.

The 'new wounded' might be united not by their identical *internal* experience of psychic disconnection or indifference as Malabou claims, but by the external brutalities of a totalizing economic system, coupled with a psychological nosology that functions by fitting people into neat categories defined in advance.

Hannah Proctor

Your hair is a mess

Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, with a preface by Slavoj Žižek, Continuum, London and New York, 2011. 218 pp., £65.00 hb., 978 1 44115 693 8.

In a short but decisive passage in his *Philosophy of Right* – in a subsection tellingly titled 'The Police' – Hegel identifies an intractable disorder lurking at the heart of civil or bourgeois society: the rabble. '[D]espite an *excess of wealth*', Hegel notes in a puzzled conclusion, 'civil society is *not wealthy enough* – i.e. its own distinct resources are not sufficient – to prevent an excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble.' If the task Hegel sets himself in his analysis of the 'system of needs' is to exhibit its immanent rationality and to demonstrate how it draws upon its own resources and dynamics to reproduce itself, then the emergence of the rabble (*Poëbel*, a deformation or decomposition of the 'people') within this system represents an insoluble contradiction that threatens this order as a whole: a sign of its crisis, symptom of its 'corruption', perhaps even agent of its future collapse. Civil society and its distinct resources alone not only cannot prevent the emergence of a 'large mass of people' from sinking below a certain standard of living; civil society left to its own devices *necessarily* produces such a surplus population. This surplus can

be managed only by recourse to a range of supplementary fixes to bandage and, ultimately, simply to defer the crisis this rabble represents or is. And yet Hegel is also quick to underline that the objective measure of poverty cannot alone give rise to these masses. The rabble is, to the contrary, the name for a subjective disposition 'associated with poverty', defined, on the one hand, by a tendency towards tumult and riot, and, on the other, by a thoroughgoing hatred of work: 'Poverty in itself does not reduce people to a rabble; a rabble is only created by a disposition associated with poverty, by inward rebellion against the rich, against society, the government, etc.' The subjective transformation necessary for the advent of the rabble occurs when the poor lose the habit of work, and the honour and integrity that come, he argues, with the autonomy that is won from the capacity to provide for oneself. In place of such integrity, the rabble constitutes itself as a social layer that is resolutely asocial, withdrawing from the inherent 'civility' of a society founded on work and revolting against not only the rich and the state, but the social itself.

Frank Ruda's *Hegel's Rabble* takes up this crucial theme in Hegel's political philosophy, in a study at once intensely focused in its analysis of this conceptual and social anomaly, and wide-ranging in its exploration of the way the figure of the rabble sheds new light on aspects of Hegel's thought – matter, the will, necessity and contingency – beyond the *Philosophy of Right* and the sphere of objective spirit. Ruda therefore attempts, as all ambitious readings of Hegel do, to redeploy and even transform the entire breadth of Hegel's thought through the examination of a seemingly minor but in fact decisive moment in Hegel's account of the formation of the ethical sphere (*Sittlichkeit*). The book sets out from the distinction Hegel makes between poverty as an ineluctable result of the dynamics of civil society and the more enigmatic question concerning the emergence of a rabble: the crystallization of a supplementary subjective or spiritual privation (a *depravity*), the taking hold of an attitude of indignation and revolt among these impoverished masses. Beginning with an account of the Lutheran 'profanation' of poverty as a historical condition for Hegel's own treatment of this theme – the 'repudiation of work', unlike the Franciscan tradition, can no longer be sanctified and is subtracted from an economy of salvation founded on work and activity – Ruda demonstrates the way in which the poor produced within and by civil society form not a class or estate among others, but an 'unestate' threatening to undermine the entire social articulation of class layers. Hegel proposes, in fact, a series of possible solutions to this unavoidable problem of the poor, ranging from outright begging to the colonization of new markets, from the redistribution of labour to the formation of an all-purpose *Polizei* who, not to be confused with the skull-cracking thugs haunting the life of the contemporary metropolis, are tasked with everything from the maintenance of infrastructure and the regulation of labour markets to the education of children and the health and welfare of entire populations (whence Rancière's invocation of the 'police' in *The Disagreement*). And yet this array of schemes fail in their attempt to contain poverty and prevent the emergence of a rabble, not least because what is at stake in the making of the rabble is not only an objective contradiction but the contingent crystallization of a subjective disposition that transforms the habit of work into its repudiation, demands a right to subsistence from a society of which it no longer forms a part, and gives rise to an indignation that is set off into open revolt at the least provocation.

Much of Ruda's analysis is concerned with the genesis and content of this subjective disposition,

including a reconstruction of what he calls the 'logic of the poor rabble' (for there is also a 'rich' rabble that plays a role in Ruda's and Hegel's analysis), underlining the contingent nature of its formation while also demonstrating the manner in which a becoming-rabble is a latent possibility necessarily threatening every member of civil society. These investigations occasion the re-examination of a whole series of fundamental concepts in Hegel's thought, among them contingency and necessity, habit, the will, and subjective attitude or disposition. At the centre of these often intricate and fascinating constructions Ruda lays out what he calls a *theory of laziness or foulness* of the rabble, the German *Faulheit* – laziness, idleness – echoing through a semantic field that includes stagnation, rotting, decomposition and decay. Ruda's exploration of this network allows him to identify the rabble with the unorganic and with a severed organ detached from the social body, as well as an 'absolute putrefaction' that constitutes the rotting material substrate of civil society and ethical life more generally. The rabble is the 'matter of ethical space' that both rots and makes the social itself decompose.



Hegel's Rabble represents one of the more remarkable books on Hegel's thought to have appeared in the past decade or two, alongside the likes of Catherine Malabou's *The Future of Hegel* or Slavoj Žižek's recent *Less than Zero* (Žižek, moreover, gives his imprimatur with a preface here). This alone is an enormous accomplishment. But like any transformative analysis of this sort, *Hegel's Rabble* is not only a meticulous reconstruction of an historical object; it is the reactivation of a force that shapes our own present and opens onto the future. The 'problem' of the rabble is a contemporary one, more ours than Hegel's in fact – although the latter was brilliant enough to put and keep his finger on this nagging symptom, even at the possible expense of what Ruda calls the 'failure' of his own system. Ruda's reading of Hegel, while rigorously immanent to its own logical and textual order, nevertheless constantly

engages with an entire range of contemporary political thought, measuring recent conceptual formations – Agamben’s *Homo sacer*, Rancière’s ‘part of no-part’, Badiou’s ‘singular multiplicity’ and ‘inexistent’ – against this encounter with the rabble that irrupts into Hegel’s thought. To these references one might have added other theoretical constructions, whether it be the figure of the *plèbe* that emerged in para- or post-Marxist circles in the late 1970s (including, problematically, Rancière and Foucault, and that has recently been taken up by Tiqqun), the more recent emergence of the theme of poverty and the poor in Italian thought (Agamben, Negri), and, in a different direction, the writings of the Italian autonomia movement, with its slogan ‘the refusal of work’, or the recent reflection among certain Marxist thinkers on ‘surplus populations’, to name a few.

The real stakes of Ruda’s book are identified, however, with what he calls the ‘transition’ from Hegel’s encounter with the rabble to Marx’s isolation of the modern proletariat as the destructive point of exception necessarily produced by bourgeois society and capitalist accumulation. As with any ambitious reading, Ruda scrapes away all of the interpretative sedimentations that have encrusted around and over this problem in order to start from scratch – or at least that is the ‘fiction’, as he calls it, that gets the book going. The first order of business is therefore to disabuse readers of the assumption that this relation amounts simply to two different, opposed or otherwise, philosophical perspectives, positions or orientations on a localized object, the political. What the rabble names or marks in Hegel’s thought is, to the contrary, the irruption of what Ruda calls, in an emphatic and seemingly redundant formulation, a ‘*peculiarly singular logic of politics*’ into the field of philosophy (and, *a fortiori*, political philosophy). The looming up of this figure does not simply mark an impasse for Hegel’s philosophy of right and its task of exhibiting the immanent rationality of the ethical order, or even for his philosophy as a whole. Rather, it deforms the relation between philosophy and politics more generally, a torsion that necessitates, in turn, what Ruda calls a ‘restructuring’ and ‘transformation’ of philosophy.

Ruda’s transformation of Hegel’s rabble into Marx’s proletariat, however convincing in its demonstration, nevertheless does little to assuage the suspicions of readers who see the figure of lumpenproletariat in its stead, this classless class – this ‘unestate’ to use Ruda’s term – that Marx and Engels both relentlessly smeared with the term *Verfaulung* (the ‘passively rotting mass’ of the *Manifesto*). And yet this figure only appears once in Ruda’s book, tucked away in an endnote. More

importantly, perhaps, while Ruda’s mapping of this transformation remains limited to an examination of the so-called early Marx, he will nevertheless speak more broadly of a ‘Marxian transformation’ of philosophy oriented, he says, by three concepts: ‘subject, justice, equality’. These formulations give me pause. Even for the earliest Marx, and certainly after the post-1845 ‘break’ (to use that uncertain but at times useful distinction), what happens to philosophy in the field of thought named ‘Marx’ is a tricky question, but certainly cannot be written off as a mere transformation or restructuring. The classical formulas are well known, and generally Hegelian (philosophy must be negated, surmounted) or Kantian (a critique of political economy) in their coinage. This riddle of Marx’s intimate and yet conflictual relation to philosophy, moreover, is unlikely to be resolved through recourse to terms – subject, equality, justice – that seem to hail less from Marx’s thought than that of Badiou. While residues of these terms knock about in some of Marx’s earliest work, to speak of a general ‘Marxian transformation of philosophy’ would require noting how those terms are largely swept away in this transformation, or positioned as variously juridical or ideological categories (the only ‘subject’ in Marx’s late work, argues Moishe Postone, is capital: that ‘automatic subject’). Even Badiou’s early *Theory of the Subject*, which refers exclusively to Marxist politics and not the critique of political economy, identifies the ‘four fundamental concepts of Marxism’ to be the more familiar class struggle, revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat and communism: justice being, rather, an ethical category, even if it has a certain relationship to Marxist concepts.

These hesitations in no way diminish Ruda’s achievement. They are intended rather as a challenge, or a hope: that Ruda’s future work will perform the task he sets out for himself here, namely the reconstruction or production of a Marxian ‘philosophy’, oriented, if need be, by the concepts he identifies. But it is my conviction that what really matters for Marx is neither the transformation of philosophy nor even the question of the political. It is rather what in his early manuscripts Marx calls – and Ruda himself perspicaciously builds his entire coda around this formulation – ‘actual communist action’ (or, in other translations, ‘real communist activity’). The relevant passage, which Ruda does not supply in its entirety, is in fact: ‘In order to supersede the idea of private property, the idea of communism is enough. In order to supersede private property as it actually exists, actual communist action is necessary.’

Jason E. Smith

Animal stories

Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012. 190 pp., £19.00 pb., 978 0 23114 809 2.

Samantha Hurn, *Humans and Other Animals: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Human–Animal Interactions*, Pluto Press, London, 2012. 266 pp., £18.99 pb., 978 0 74533 119 5.

The study of human–animal interactions has broken out all over the humanities and social sciences in recent years with a rash of new English-language journals at least. These include *Animals*, *Animal Studies Journal*, *Antennae*, *Critical Animal Studies*, *Humanimalia* and *Between the Species*, as well as a rejuvenation of somewhat older ones such as *Society & Animals* and *Anthrozoos*. Then there have been numerous special issues of other journals from *Parallax* and *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* to *Hypatia* and *Worldviews*, to mention just a few. Symposia have been held by organizations too numerous to recount, whilst sessions on animals regularly appear in the main annual conferences in history, anthropology, geography, sociology and beyond. The emergence in 2010 of the organization Minding Animals International has sought to draw many of these conference events into an overarching group, with roving ‘executive officers’, building connections and networks among those who seek to research and write on animals across many disciplines from veterinary sciences to history and English literature. Minding Animals has put on two triennial international conferences, with the latest one in Utrecht in 2012 attracting over 700 delegates. J.M. Coetzee opened the latter with an unpublished ‘update’ on Elizabeth Costello – the now retired academic who featured in his novella *The Lives of Animals*.

There are many good things in such organizing and bringing together of diverse people and disciplines in conversation, seemingly allowing room for a broad range of perspectives. Arguably, the predominant approach is, as the objectives set out by Minding Animals suggest, one of advocacy and welfare, reflecting dominant ways of engaging with animal–human practices in Anglo-European academic disciplines such as those making up the humanities. So, we might ask: where is all this work on human–animal interactions going, and why is it occurring now?

Kari Weil does ask the question ‘Why animal studies now?’ – a question that calls for issues of politics and ethics to be addressed. For Weil this is done through an engagement with Kafka’s ‘A Report to an Academy’, in her opening chapter entitled ‘A Report on the Animal Turn’, a now well-used text in

literature studies on animals, but one that is cogently tackled and approached by Weil. As such, her answer to ‘why animal studies now’ is put succinctly:

It has become clear that the idea of ‘the animal’ – instinctive beings with presumably no access to language, texts, or abstract thinking – has functioned as an unexamined foundation on which the idea of the human and hence the humanities have been built. It has also become clear, primarily through advances in a range of scientific studies of animal language, culture, and morality, that this exclusion has taken place on false grounds. As our improved understanding of animal lives and cultures changes, so must we change our view of the human and of the humanities. Thought, consciousness, and language are not the exclusive property of humans ... Much like the ‘women’ in women’s studies, the ‘animal’ in animal studies must be placed under erasure.

Weil goes on to quote approvingly Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan’s claim that Coetzee and Derrida are the major thinkers of our time – a view that is reflected in the directions her book takes in discussing animals. Weil also seeks to make connections with studies of human–animal interactions and feminist studies – again approvingly noting how Adams and Donovan have theorized the ways in which oppressions of gender, race and species are interlocked. Examples used to draw out better ways of thinking (‘of’ or ‘with’, I wondered) animals include Thomas Mann’s short stories ‘Tobias Mindernickel’ and ‘Man and Dog’, and Virginia Woolf’s *Flush*, which are used to ‘test’ the theories of Haraway and Vicki Hearne that pet–human relations work as models for relating empathically and linguistically to otherness. Bill Viola’s video work *I do not know what it is I am like*, the ‘critical anthropomorphism’ that it is argued is to be found in Frank Noelker’s portrait photographs of chimpanzees, and Sam Taylor-Wood’s video *A Little Death* are all also discussed in differing ways through and against philosophy and theory. Yet, it is Derrida and Coetzee (in particular his novel *Disgrace*) that are the most obvious constants in Weil’s searches for this better thinking among engagements with pet love, sacrifice, animal death, animal liberation and freedom. Unsurprisingly, animal death features largely in this book as regards

the works discussed, especially Coetzee's *Disgrace*, and in the suggestion that animal deaths and killings are perhaps the dominant human relation with animals nowadays (though this is better covered in Nicole Shukin's recent book *Animal Capital*).

If the humanities have generally skipped into animal studies in more numbers recently, it cannot then be ignored that this is due, in some respects at least, to the recent work of Derrida or Agamben, as well as to writers like Coetzee, which seems to have given it more legitimacy – for some. Indeed, several scholars have been mildly irritated by the recent rush into human–animal studies from those who seem to pay little attention to others who have been working in the area for some time. It is good, therefore, to see in Lori Gruen and Kari Weil's recent edited issue of *Hypatia* that they meticulously draw out existing feminist engagements with animal rights and wider human–animal studies, and the ways in which eco-feminisms have worked to critique animal rights discourses especially.

Samantha Hurn's book *Humans and Other Animals* functions as something of a run-through of how animals have been treated in the history and current work of anthropological theory and practice. In doing this it includes discussion of primatology – often incorporated in US anthropology departments – but focuses more on mainstream social and cultural anthropology in terms of domestication and food, conservation, hunting, pets, and more besides. It is a wonderful piece of work in the main, readable, concise and knowledgeable in a way that is always understandable, and works as a very entertaining and thought-provoking introduction to an anthropology of life. Hurn does not want to use the term 'animal studies', arguing that since anthropology is based on the study of the human, then even an incorporation of animal lives in better ways than has hitherto occurred in the history of anthropology should still be done whilst holding on to the primacy of the human. For Hurn, animal studies as a focus of study is too advocacy and animal rights focused. She does not reject advocacy, but it is not, she argues, a signature of the move to take animals more seriously. Therefore she prefers the term 'anthrozoology', although by the end of the book, following on from descriptions of the work of Tim Ingold, Eduardo Kohn and others, the central call seems to become more one of bringing life back into anthropology itself, in more ways than one.

For both Hurn and Weil, 'animal studies' therefore has a pejorative edge: it calls for change in the ways animals are rendered, engaged with, used, and in how studies are done. In the humanities, and in particular

literary studies, this leads to some interesting questions. For if social studies of sciences, geography, anthropology and other disciplines have been touching on questions of how animals – and wider forms of life, and other 'things' – affect the ontologies and epistemologies of interpretative practices in our more-than-human worlds and the stories told of how we make our worlds, then how does literature deal with this, especially in the analysis and criticism of fiction writing? Weil takes the arguments of Philip Armstrong and Jonathan Burt to make the claim that even in film or literature there are unintended effects often produced by animals and of the mutual gaze between the human and animal that allow us to speak of the way in which an animal may regulate its symbolic effects. As Weil then argues, in literature this gaze is filtered through words:

it is possible to speak of the unintended effects on narrative that are produced by dogs or horses, who, according to Vicki Hearne, have their own stories about what, for example, fetching a ball or being caught might mean. And their stories, if we acknowledge them, can induce us to change ours.

It must be said this is not a major point of Weil's book, but it seems to be argued that people's experiences with animals can thereby somehow creep into the stories we tell and write, and that agency, as such, might be an effect that is generated in multiple and unpredictable ways from these networks of interactions.

Anthropology, like geography, has a wide disciplinary range, from 'culture' or the 'social' to the more 'biological', a diversity that becomes of much interest as animals begin to be taken more seriously as entangled parts of peoples' lives. Indeed, anthropology has witnessed various recent calls for multi-species ethnographies. In its best guises this seems to develop in invigorating ways the kind of anthropology of animals called for by Barbara Noske in 1989 that sought to challenge the discipline's own anthropocentricity. But anthropology always has been, to some extent, multi-species; it is just that nonhuman animals have tended to be treated somewhat as flattened totems or metaphors, often used to justify social evolutionist or similar views of 'primitive' peoples in almost childlike or simple relations with animals and environments. Whilst there have been exceptions to this general trend, what is now being witnessed is a call to take animals and their entanglements with people much more seriously and in ways that begin to outline more intersubjective entanglements.

Both Hurn's and Weil's books seem a little flat on what is to be done with work in human–animal studies

in its various forms that critique the illusory notions and practices of an autonomy of the human – of where, that is, this kind of work may be going. We are left with some sense of an ethical and, at times, a practical form of doing research, but little sense of a political practice. And in this sense, these works do rather mirror what is happening with the Minding Animals International grouping. In Weil's book we get a confession that this journey through discussing animals has led to personal and familial changes in eating and cooking. Yet, beyond such personal forms, or modes, of interdisciplinary sharing, we are still left with the question of what is to be done with human–animal studies? And that is not meant as a criticism of these engaging works.

Chris Wilbert

Flipping the script

Albert Atkin, *The Philosophy of Race*, Acumen, Durham, 2012. 194 pp., £50.00 hb., £15.99 pb., 978 1 84465 514 4 hb., 978 1 84465 515 1 pb.

George Yancy, *Look, a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2012. xiv + 207 pp., £57.00 hb., £17.99 pb., 978 1 43990 853 2 hb., 978 1 43990 854 9 pb.

Still a young field, critical philosophy of race is nevertheless becoming well established. In addition to various books and articles on race and racism published each year, the field has a new journal: *Critical Philosophy of Race* will make its debut in spring 2013. These two recent books on the scene advance the field in different ways. Albert Atkin provides a solid introduction to many of the main issues in critical philosophy of race, while George Yancy focuses on the phenomenon of whiteness to uncover and critique white people's complicity with their racial privilege. Each book has a pedagogical side to it.

Atkin devotes the first half of *The Philosophy of Race* to helping his readers understand the concept of race: what is race, and what should we do with the concept given that it lacks biological credibility? In chapter 1, he reviews and debunks the assumptions made about race in everyday usages of the term, especially the ideas that race is marked by bodily difference, is inherited, and is marked by particular geographical regions. He concludes that 'our ordinary concept of *race*, judged by the standards of science and scientific study, is not real.' The phenomenon of race

nonetheless continues to thrive socially, historically, politically, economically and otherwise, and thus Atkin investigates three social constructionist positions in chapter 2. While Atkin presents a fair account of the strong social constructionist position that the socio-historical aspects of race make it real, he favours a weak social constructionist position that denies that the socio-historical aspects of race are reality-conferring. However, it is the third position, reconstructionism, that he finds most interesting. Reconstructionism takes up the future-directed question of what to do with the concept of race and argues that it should be transformed according to today's social (presumably anti-racist) needs. Extending his discussion of reconstructionism to chapter 3, Atkin first explains the debate between eliminativists, who would like to abolish the concept of race, and preservationists, who believe that the concept of race should be retained. Providing a way out of the eliminativist–preservationist debate, Atkin argues that reconstructionism allows people both to avoid beliefs in empty concepts and to recognize the utility of the concept of race for pursuing racial justice.

Chapter 4 turns squarely to the topic of racism, exploring in particular the differences between direct and indirect racism, overt and implicit racism, and racism at individual, institutional and cultural levels. Chapter 5 then examines some of the quotidian ways that race and racism operate in the twenty-first century, focusing especially on the practice of racial profiling. Somewhat surprisingly, Atkin argues that a strong case for racial profiling can be made as long as safeguards against racist usages of it are put in place, but he also acknowledges that considerable problems with the practice exist (e.g. by contributing to pre-existing harms based on race) even in the presence of such safeguards.

Given its relatively positive account of racial profiling, chapter 5 is bound to be somewhat controversial, but it nonetheless includes appropriate material for a timely debate about the role of race in everyday life. Another strength of *The Philosophy of Race* is its use of examples outside of North America, in Brazil, Australia, Great Britain and the European continent.

George Yancy's *Look, a White!* is not an introductory book, but its rich offering of examples of white privilege from university settings would make it particularly attractive to college students, as well as faculty. As the title of his book suggests, Yancy turns the tables on white people, making them the object rather than the subject of a racializing gaze. Yancy calls this practice 'flipping the script', reversing the usual story about whose existence is disturbing and

recalling the stunning question posed by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1903, 'How does it feel to be a problem?' Yancy acknowledges the challenge to white people that his book presents – indeed, the book is written expressly for (perhaps even 'at') them. But he also aptly characterizes his flipping of the script as an important opportunity for white people, even a gift to be welcomed by them. White people's seeing themselves as white in the way that African Americans and other racial minorities often see them could be the beginning of a process of maturity in which white people take responsibility for the harm that their white privilege has caused and continues to cause. Even as the target of Yancy's criticism, however, white people have to guard against reverting to the same old script. After characterizing his book as a kind of gift, Yancy addresses his white audience directly, insisting 'the gift is not all about *you*. As white, you are used to everything always being about *you*.' Flipping the script should have a positive effect on the lives of non-white people, and thus the benefits that it can confer are collective. To refuse white people a fantasy world, as Yancy calls it, in which whiteness is seemingly non-existent at the same time that it privileges white people, is to help create a world in which people of colour also can survive and thrive.

Yancy's first chapter examines whiteness phenomenologically from the perspective of his own identity as a black man. In particular, Yancy demonstrates how a white world gives him back to himself as dangerous, suspicious and hypersexual, and this in turn reveals whiteness as normatively upstanding, pure and good. Whether in popular films, such as *The Heartbreak Kid* or *Big Stan*, or in daily encounters with white authorities, such as police officers, African Americans live their race daily in confrontation with a white world that stereotypically views them as a threat. This is something of a surprise to his white students, as Yancy explains, and it is a challenge to get them to recognize their feelings of comfort and security in the world as products of racial privilege. Yancy continues to focus on white university students and predominantly white classroom spaces in chapter 2. Drawing from bell hooks in particular, he explains the pedagogical practices he uses to critically interrogate whiteness – and, more concretely, white students in his courses. Yancy envisions philosophy as a kind of love of wisdom that can push people over the cliff – in this case, white people – engaging their racial identities 'though the *passionate* deployment of critical interrogation [that] can cause suffering, great disappointment, and creative vertigo' (emphasis in original).

As Yancy explains, the result need not, and hopefully will not, be despair or depression, but instead a kind of transformative undergoing that could remake white people's relationships to their whiteness.

Chapters 3 and 4 take up literature and film, respectively, to examine white domination and power in both the United States and through European colonialism. Yancy analyses Caribbean poet and literary figure Kamau Brathwaite's reading of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to show how Prospero is a product of white colonialism and thus poorly understands the world in which he lives. Yancy then turns to *White Chicks*, directed by Keenen Ivory Wayans and written by Wayans and his two brothers, who also play the lead characters, to demonstrate how the film's use of reverse minstrelsy reveals significant moments of white power and privilege in the United States. As the Wayan brothers humorously depict black men 'whitened up' as white women, they subvert white people's performances of whiteness and call for moments of self-recognition (via self-criticism) on the part of white people. As Yancy explains, however, the film also operates with stereotypes of black male sexuality, and for that reason its ability to challenge racism and racial essentialism is limited.

Finally, chapters 5 and 6 return to Yancy's experience as a black instructor in predominantly white classrooms. He explains how 'doing philosophy-in-black' can be existentially and professionally dangerous, not just for himself but also for black graduate students who choose to pursue the whitest discipline in the humanities. Yancy challenges his white graduate students to mark the profession as white, both historically and presently, and thus to trouble their relatively comfortable fit within it. As Yancy recounts, this way of doing philosophy often renders him 'an angry black professor' in the eyes of white philosophers. Yancy explains that white people tend to interpret his passion for exposing the lived reality of white racism as expressions of black anger and hostility. Why do white people so often experience black people in this way? This is a question that white people need to tarry with, as Yancy argues. To spend time with, rather than rush past, racial situations that expose white people as raced (and often racist) beings is not to choose abstraction over concrete action. Nor is it to attempt to plunge white people in paralysing guilt. For Yancy, it is to attempt to open up new existential possibilities for white and non-white people alike. While Yancy is not Pollyannaish about prospects for white people, he believes that they can become self-critical and thus begin to change. They will have to do so, however,

from a 'site of [tremendous] paradox, tension, frustration, and descriptive complexity', and for that reason there are no guarantees of success.

Both *The Philosophy of Race* and *Look, a White!* include something of a hopeful note concerning race and racism. 'Optimistic' would be too strong a description for either author's perspective, but just as Atkin invokes the reconstruction of the concept of race so that it can better challenge white racism, Yancy creates space for white people (and especially white students) to accompany him as he does philosophy-in-black. The result in both cases is compelling. Each is a beneficial addition to the growing field of critical philosophy of race.

Shannon W. Sullivan

Gathering Europe

Ash Amin, *Land of Strangers*, Polity, Cambridge, 2012. 205 pp., £50.00 hb., £15.99 pb., 978 0 74565 217 7 hb., 978 0 74565 218 4 pb.

Contemporary government policies on social integration emphasize the importance of shared aspirations, individual and collective responsibility, and tackling 'extremism', as well as participation in local communities. This stance is based on the premiss that countries are too crowded and that cosmopolitan and multiculturalist programmes have reached their limits. With the consent of citizens, including already settled minorities, strangers have been presented and treated as a potential threat to gender equality, freedom of expression and civic peace. Undocumented migrants, asylum-seekers, Roma and Muslims can be spoken of as subjects out of place, destabilizing the meaning of national identity and of liberal values. In offering a critical response to this rather contradictory approach to cohesion, which places particular emphasis on segregation, Ash Amin attempts to deconstruct an often unexamined contradiction of our times – that of the symbiosis of liberal values and xenophobia.

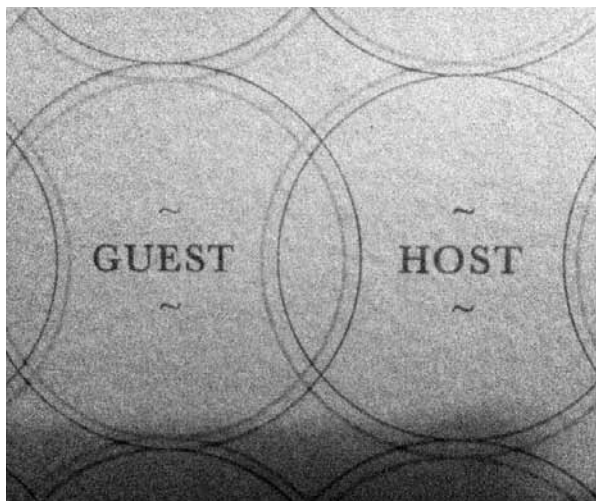
Drawing on Foucault's pronouncement that 'society must be defended', Amin is leery of the way social sciences have assessed the impact of modernity upon social and communal ties. Migratory flows, technological advancements and the gradual weakening of institutions challenge established notions of identity and social cohesion. Despite the fact that certain commentators have attempted to present such unrest as an opportunity to reorganize the social beyond

the limitations dictated by the traditions of bounded communities and nation-states, recent inward-looking political campaigns seem to favour once more a society based on ethnic homogeneity and 'strong' ties. Amin attacks this parochial yet dominant social imaginary, and defends the idea of a 'land of strangers', by turning to Bruno Latour's anti-essentialist understanding of the human subject and of society. For Amin, any possible consideration of the modern subject in its various manifestations such as citizen, worker or migrant needs to extend beyond consciousness, feelings and flesh by paying particular attention to material inputs, and technological advancements and objects. Identifying a gap created by the interplay between oppositions of singularity and plurality, purity and impurity, where certain subjects are identified as insiders or outsiders, legal or illegal, *Land of Strangers* illustrates how strangers are constructed as such, and the conditions and mechanisms for their subsequent exclusion or domestication.

The book coheres around three major themes: the playing of bodies in urban everyday life and the way difference is negotiated; the meaning of race and how it is transmitted both generationally and culturally; and the operations of biopolitical machinery with respect to the constitution of society and its defence. First it considers the means by which strangers become collaborators in working environments such as workshops and professional communities. According to Amin's ethnographic account, trust, obligation and a sense of collectivity are the products of, and not the precondition for, collaborative engagement. What is considered strange or different can be made familiar through practices of connectivity involving human and non-human intermediaries. Not only can strangers be integrated through these practices but their presence is imperative for the production of new knowledge. Amin is quick here to highlight the distinction between cooperation and co-presence. He accepts there are policies and initiatives that support the fusion of diverse elements in working environments for the maximization of creativity and profit. However, such policies remain a top-down affair, which systematically neglect everyday life as the arena of affective impulses and interaction. State interventions that 'seek to either clean out the spaces of co-habitation, or engineer contact', are informed by the mentality that plurality and heterogeneity can only be managed by fear, order and discipline. Amin's antithesis to these interventions does not aspire to set guidelines for the transformation of urban inhabitants into ardent cosmopolitans but rather to put forward a proposal for an urban infrastructure responsive to the

politics and anxieties of living with difference. The urban environment and its constitutive parts such as buildings, public services, transport and communication networks determine encounters with strangers and shape sentiments towards them. The availability and functioning of these parts thus play a vital role not only in the domestication of immigrants but also in public feelings towards them. As soon as national subjects and established urban inhabitants start to perceive urban infrastructure and public services as theirs, the stranger frequently gets labelled as demanding and undeserving.

An important reason why the city remains an assemblage of sequestered places is the persistent use of race as a classificatory medium. Amin explains the failure of multiculturalism as proclaimed by European political leaders, and the sharp rise in xenophobic sentiments, as the result of an interplay between casual racial judgements informed by a mythology of white superiority ingrained in all racial differentiation discourses, and the contemporary politics of fear and surveillance dominated by paradigms of suspicion and discipline. Amin cites here Arjun Appadurai, for whom minorities constitute a metaphor and a reminder of the



failure of the national project to create and sustain ethnically and culturally homogenous communities. On the other hand, Žižek locates the fear of strangers in a post-political biopolitical sphere, in which ideological struggles informed by social class have been replaced by the managerial task of maintaining a constant state of anxiety over issues of national identity, security and cultural purity. As soon as old ideological struggles are characterized as parochial and ineffective, the task of every political administration is the administration of life and of citizens' well-being. However, it would be a mistake to assume that such politics necessarily lack the passion and mobilization of past ideological struggles. Fear – and in particular fear of unemployment,

crime and diminishing public services – not only determines the character of political parties and the electoral behaviour of citizens but also becomes the constitutive element in contemporary subjectivity as regards both citizens and strangers.

The last two chapters of the book, which concentrate on Europe and on the security state, develop the argument that contemporary manifestations of an aversion towards the stranger should not only be viewed in terms of the success of the New Right and populism in Europe, but also the wholesale acceptance of anti-immigration rhetoric by liberal parties. Even though it can be argued that the recent European financial crisis and the subsequent lack of democratic procedures for the imposition of austerity measures have provided a fertile ground for appeals to homelands and to notions of national superiority, Amin does not believe, however, that economic reform and growth are enough for reversing vehement sentiments and hostile behaviours. Instead, he argues for the constitution of new sentiments of collectivity and collaboration where the stranger will cease to exist as an enemy at the gates of European civilization. The politics of fear can be overcome by the constitution of a post-nationalized European public sphere that enables participation for both European and non-European citizens and will contribute to a 'felt community' instead of a mere 'functioning commons'.

Land of Strangers critically engages with two theoretical positions regarding this participatory European model. The first one requires the existence of common values and principles to hold it together. This generates an idea of Europe that is historically selective and politically enervated. Not only does it neglect a long history of wars, ideological divides, minority oppression and colonialism which results in a fractured vision of Europe; it also fails to motivate political participation and a sense of a felt community in a Europe defined by a multiplicity of traditions, memories, ideologies and ethnicities. The second position, as outlined by Europhile theorists such as Delanty, Beck and Balibar, draws attention to the need to define a new terrain of communication that can accommodate a mutual recognition between different nationalities and ethnicities and move beyond the formation of a singular positive identity. Despite the fact that this acknowledges the limitations or even the impossibility of promoting common values, a common identity and, in short, an idea of Europe as an end in itself, it has failed to tackle the diminishing popularity of Europe both as a political project and as an idea, and the rising influence of corporate and political elites with respect

to its organization and character. For Amin, by contrast, the concerns of European citizens over immigration welfare, security and unemployment as expressed in opinion polls and in national and European elections are mostly generated by the deficiencies of Europe itself and should not be dismissed as irrational. Contrary to functionalist and federalist arguments which perceive (and occasionally imagine) Europe either as the aggregate of already formed national and legal entities and traditions or as a transnational formation with its own distinctive political, cultural and financial structures, Amin argues for a Europe that transcends fixed values, identities and teleological narratives, and hence facilitates 'a gathering of strangers'.

Several issues arise from Amin's proposal for the constitution of a land of strangers. Even though Amin wishes to dismantle linguistic, political and naturalistic binaries, which inevitably lead to the labelling of the stranger as a potential threat, he maintains a view that unnamed political and corporate elites straightforwardly exist *in opposition to* unnamed masses, and that it is the former that can determine the status of the stranger. Such a view does not enable an understanding of xenophobia and nationalism as diffused phenomena accepted and practised by citizens from all social and professional strata. Equally, Amin attempts to defend the idea of a people's Europe where corporate and political interests disrupt the materialization of necessary conditions for a European unification based on the principles of social democracy and at the same time contribute to the fragmentation of people into legal, economic, cultural and ethnic categories. His view of Europe as an important stage along the route to a politically constituted world society might possibly explain his reluctance to engage, however, with specific policies and directives such as the repatriation of third-country nationals, the intensive policing of European borders and the imbalance between the imperative of the markets and the regulatory power of politics, illustrated in the imposition of technocratic governments which inevitably lead to what Habermas has called 'post-democratic executive federalism'.

This weakness in Amin's otherwise meticulous study places him, however, close to thinkers as diverse as Kant, Nietzsche and Appiah, who see cosmopolitanism as an emancipatory project that transcends classificatory elements and definite associations, and realizes the absence of an overarching idea of identity not in pessimistic terms but instead as a creative experience of freedom and disengagement from the dualism of exclusion and domestication. Amin's unabated curiosity and inquisitiveness allow him to

reinvigorate established social and political theories that aspire to formulate inclusive identities and spaces for the integration of the stranger, while acknowledging that the current economic and political conditions of imposed austerity measures and the rise of the Far Right do not favour this much-needed experimentation and disengagement. If, then, the 'land of strangers' may appear, finally, as a utopian project, still Amin wishes to conclude on an optimistic and, importantly, realistic note. While political leaders are fond of stressing the need for integration, a concept that is hard to understand and even harder to realize, Amin shows that actual integration has always been the product of popular struggle. The struggles for civil society and political participation in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and in the south European countries, today, indicate a historical and political moment, albeit a brief one, in which solidarities among strangers facilitated by common interests, by digital forums as well as by the reconfiguration of urban public spaces, can be forged.

Kostas Maronitis

Literally conceptual

Lisa Siraganian, *Modernism's Other Work: The Art Object's Political Life*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011. 272 pp., £40.00 hb., 978 0 19979 655 7.

When Olafur Eliasson recently spoke of seeing 'potential in the spectator – in the receiver, the reader, the participator, the viewer, the user', he may have thought he was seeing something new. Marcel Duchamp saw something similar in the 1950s when he thought to 'attach even more importance to the spectator than to the artist'. He had pursued this idea as early as *The Large Glass* (1915–23), a work whose medium (glass) is defined by its transparency to the world around it. Duchamp was part of a generation of artists that included Man Ray, Mina Loy, Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, which came to reject the frame as a conservative device that blocked the 'flux of life' (as Loy put it). Duchamp's paradoxical tack was to literalize the Renaissance notion of art as a window onto the world, producing a work that was almost all frame. Producing a 'picture' that was a window functioned as a critical gesture intended to undermine the frame's enforcement of the difference between art and life. Allan Kaprow, writing in 1973, got the point when he said that the 'best part' of *The Large Glass* was that it was 'a window pane to look through; its actual

configurations are forced into accord with the visual environment beyond them, for instance, a chocolate grinder superimposed on a kid picking his nose.' But if Kaprow was still slightly cynical about the value of that 'environment', artists and writers at least since Duchamp have positively revelled in the spectator's incorporation into the work. This is one half of the story Lisa Siraganian tells in her brilliant reappraisal of modernism.

The other half of her story revolves around an unexpected but persuasively defined group of writers – Gertrude Stein, Wyndham Lewis, Williams (in part), William Gaddis and Elizabeth Bishop – who were fundamentally committed to the 'irrelevance of the spectator to the meaning of the artwork'. In the author's boldest formulation: 'The meaning of a poem [for these writers] is entirely indifferent to the reader's emotion, the reader's context, or, for that matter, any type of judgment or perspective the reader could deliver.' But it would be wrong to extrapolate from this view that these writers construed their work as indifferent to the world. There is a deep, if allegorical, sense of the political that haunts their practices. Writing against the increasingly dominant vision of politics as the expression of particularized bodies, these writers embraced a broadly universalist vision of the liberal subject. In a series of striking reversals of conventional notions of the political temper of her favoured writers, Siraganian discovers the bonds between Stein's refusal of punctuation and her commitment to universal suffrage and civil liberties; between Lewis's critique of time-philosophy and his (tempered) embrace of representative democracy; between Williams's concrete poetry and his commitment to maternal progress and personal liberty; between Gaddis's vision of 'disciplined nostalgia' (or forgery) and Bishop's aesthetics of bricolage and a resistance to corporate capitalism.

These authors' shared vision of meaning's autonomy was aggressively challenged by a group of artists and writers asserting the 'necessary involvement of the spectator in the production of the art object's meaning'. The latter group – including Duchamp, Loy, Williams (in part), Charles Olson, Amiri Baraka, as well as a range of communitarian critics of the liberal subject (discussed in a superb coda) such as Paul Gilroy, Juliana Spahr, Hayden Carruth, Leslie Marmon Silko, Charles Taylor, Judith Butler and Alain Badiou – points to the deep continuity between modernism and its postmodern critics. The latter writers also conceived a link between their formal poetics of the body and the political such that Olson's effort to 'literalize the presence of the poet's syllables' was simultaneously

an effort to give voice to the immigrant body while Baraka's vision of the poetic voice was 'an aestheticized technology of racial community'.

And if Siraganian convincingly shows how modernism anticipates the major post-1945 debates about the relationship between a work of art and the world, her central task is to retrieve a lost sense of the political dimension of autonomy. If for Adorno autonomy had to be defended and analysed as a special (and crucial) form of politics, Siraganian asks us to see how the Critical Theory version of autonomy might 'misrepresent the modernist ontology of the art object' it ostensibly defends. For Adorno, writing in *Aesthetic Theory*, 'the resoluteness of [the work's] distance [from the world] ... concretizes the critique of what has been repulsed.' Which is to say that for Adorno 'what looks at first like indifference to the world transforms instead into total engagement.' Writing against both Adorno and the New Critics (who also project a notion of critical 'resistance'), Siraganian shows how a work's meaning *couldn't* be altered by its users, because it wasn't an object like other objects in the world. Any work that fails to maintain its autonomy, like any object, 'is forever available to the perceptual experiences (as opposed to interpretations) of readers, spectators, or enterprising poets'.

Moreover, Siraganian argues that the work's social immunity was the condition for the possibility of politics in general. Stein, Lewis, Williams, Gaddis and Bishop all understood their formal poetics, their commitment to the ontological difference between artworks and their reception, as a means to facilitate, if not produce, political results. By preserving the *reader's* autonomy, by letting their readers alone to respond (or not) to the work, these writers embraced a form of civil liberty. Stein's desire to 'let each [reader] attend to their own business' was an effort to 'protect the reader's particular, bodily interests and pursuits of private pleasure when faced with the author's interests'. By the same token, those authors committed to the incorporation of the spectator's meaning into the work were logically committed to the 'complete end to politics in any recognizable form'. The latter claim emerges most forcefully in her closing chapter on Olson and Baraka, where both authors, despite their different ideological allegiances (immigrant embodiment for Olson, racial difference for Baraka), 'share the same theory of and commitment to a poetic particularism as a way to safeguard, represent, and then share a perspective on the world, whether racial, ethnic, or political'. When politics becomes a matter of perspectives, then the classical liberal claim to universal human justice

becomes the problem to be solved rather than the ground of shared political action.

In a series of remarkable textual analyses Siraganian tracks the thematic status of frames in modernist texts between Stein and Olson. Stein's overlooked essay on 'Pictures' from *Lectures in America* raises many of the central claims of the book as a whole. Pictures, on Stein's account, are airless things, each of which contains 'a life of its own'. A picture, Stein says, both 'does and does not' belong in its frame. It does not belong to the *literal* frame, while it absolutely belongs to its *conceptual* frame. This is what Stein means when she describes the 'problem of all modern painting' as the achievement of a work that 'would remain out of its frame ... even while it does not, even while it remains there'. While most paintings exist within a literal, physical frame, they are not defined by that frame but rather by the artist's intent. Stein similarly sought to destroy the literal frame in her own writing by her notorious rejection of punctuation marks, nouns and proper names. These grammatical functions, like a literal frame, told the reader how to read (and to breathe). By removing superfluous grammatical functions, and removing bodily cues, her works are able to 'mean what they mean regardless of her readers'.

Like Stein, but in a satirical vein, Wyndham Lewis confronted the fashionable desire to bring art closer to life by eliminating the frame. In books like *The Childermass* and *Time and Western Man*, Lewis derides various materialist visions of the work of art as 'breathing materiality', something containing 'real blood and tears'. Lewis's dissatisfaction with this anti-representational impulse ultimately merged with a deepening commitment to representative democracy, opening up a striking reversal in his political thinking from his earlier affinity with fascism.

Siraganian's chapters on Williams and Gaddis and Bishop take up the problem of the conceptual frame through an exploration of Duchamp's readymade and Picasso's and Juan Gris's collage aesthetics. A close reading of Williams's 'IV' from *Spring and All* shows how Williams sought to break the literal frames of language, those deadened conventions that emptied words of their meaning. Williams's vision of concrete poetry – 'No ideas but in things' – is not an effort to escape representation, as it has usually been understood, but rather an attempt to renew its terms from within. Like Williams, Gaddis (or his projection as the forger Wyatt in *The Recognitions*) sought to renew deadened forms through a retrograde mode of 'disciplined nostalgia'. Wyatt's acts of forgery are, together, a desperate attempt, in a world become

commodity, to 'create something new'; it is 'an act of appropriation instead of plagiarism or counterfeiting'. As Wyatt and Gaddis see it, copying an old master is a perverse act of preservation and renewal through a painstaking 'act of recognizing, transforming, and placing a cultural artifact into [one's] personal memory and conceptualization'. Similarly, Bishop plays the role of a forger in a series of astonishing literary and poetic reflections on kitsch. In poems like 'Large Bad Picture', 'In Prison', and 'The Monument' Bishop acts as a 'bricoleur, making a new, more valuable art object (her poem) out of a found and often kitsch object'. What Williams, Gaddis and Bishop inevitably show is the historical constraints on the pursuit of autonomy. If Stein and Lewis denied the relevance of the beholder's share, then for this later generation – a generation that confronted the ubiquity of kitsch, a commodity defined by its appeal to consumers – one had no choice but to engage in a tactical warfare with the newly democratized spectator's demands. But it is this turn to the historical dynamics of anti-theatricality that stands in some tension with the more basic claim to a conceptual picture of intentionality. At times Siraganian's narrative is driven by an account of the 'battling forces' between literal and conceptual frames, but more often we read of the difference between frames as a difference in its 'source'. Before Marianne Moore 'even picks up her pen' her work is constituted as poetry – the battle is won before it begins. Of course resolving the differences between anti-theatricality and *non*-theatricality would require another book in itself, one I presume less gripping than this one.

Todd Cronan

Coeval

Alex Loftus, *Everyday Environmentalism: Creating an Urban Political Ecology*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2012. 208 pp., £56.00 hb., £18.50 pb., 978 0 81666 571 6 hb., 978 0 81666 572 3 pb.

Revolutions always happen in particular geographical locations and historical conjunctures. That they are possible at all, as clearly they are, means that we have the burden of melding philosophical modes of understanding with the particularities of everyday political praxis to reflect upon them. Within the domains of environmental politics and urban politics, recognized independently, there are important gestures towards these kinds of vigorous theorizing. However, when

considered together, in terms of 'urban environments', we are only beginning to imagine the possibilities for radical political praxis. Taking on the topic of 'urban political ecology', Loftus argues succinctly that urban environments are always the historical and geographical product of uneven human and nonhuman power relations that are in constant tension, motion and change. He dislodges the shibboleth of much contemporary anti-political urban environmental discussion that too often frames these problems as global population growth. Instead, Loftus argues that private property, enclosure, marketization and other free-marketizing processes, as bound up within the uneven geographical processes of neoliberalization, pave the way for greater dispossession, greater inequality and greater suffering within urban environments.

Central to the book's argument is a logic that Loftus distils from a cadre of mostly Marxist thinkers, including Neil Smith, Henri Lefebvre, Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci and Marx himself. The social and natural assemblages of interrelated and interconnected urban environmental processes that Loftus unearths and articulates helps to illustrate more than simply the production of urban environments; it illuminates the terrains of possibility of a more egalitarian urban world. Loftus mobilizes richly detailed ethnographic insights from South African water politics as they continue to unfold throughout the informal settlements of Durban to embody his theoretically inflected narrative. This inclusion of empirical detail necessarily animates the politics of possibility within the interrelated and interconnected flows described as urban political ecology. The everyday lived experience of necessity, possibility, emancipation and survival swirl together to bring ontological meaning and texture that help us see planetary urbanization in a different way.

While Loftus brings a range of intellectual actors into conversation, the central organizing logic of the book is most closely allied with Neil Smith's articulation of 'the production of nature' as laid out in his 1984 book *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*. Smith's main aim there is to spatialize Marxist theory, but its account of the centrality of capitalist ideologies and modes of production and accumulation that have remade nature in the image of a capitalist system has nuanced ramifications for understanding the production of space writ large. Smith destroyed the Enlightenment dualism of nature and society in favour of a recognition of their mutual constitution across the terrain of uneven spatial development. To this end, Loftus suggests,

Both on epistemological and ontological grounds, dualistic understandings of nature and society should be rejected. They harbor deep conservatism and fail to capture the way in which life is made through defying such mythical boundaries. Stating this is the easy bit. Figuring out what it means for an environmental politics, and understanding of the urban, and for a program of political change is a far more complex problem.

Using Smith as a pivot, Loftus digs backward, then, through the notion of the social production of nature to elucidate and put into dialogue with each other a series of ideas that Marx had long ago posited as necessary for understanding the dialectical processes through which we are able to see through the false dichotomy of nature and society, and see them as increasingly urbanizing. In so doing, Loftus reconsiders several notions central to Marx, including alienation, metabolism and species-being. Drawing on agentic notions from Gramsci in chapter 4, he suggests that 'through producing nature, humans and their environments coevolve. Consciousness of this co-evolution emerges through active involvement in the process.' Such an idea of a consciousness of these processes of coevolution, according to Loftus, remains only implicit in Marx, but their explicit specification by Gramsci allows him to stress 'the conditions of possibility for radical change that might emerge through interactions with nature'.

The last chapter in the book is reserved for Henri Lefebvre. After distilling Lefebvre's particular brand of Marxism, Loftus continues to build towards a theoretical understanding of the coevolution of urban nature and society by demanding that we recognize that this process occurs through a metabolizing cultural praxis in which 'we' are always present in the process. To this end, following Lefebvre, he writes,

In recognizing how the city is produced, reproduced and transformed by socio-natural processes, praxis is extended to what is, at least potentially, an urban environmental politics. This, to reiterate, is a politics rooted in quotidian relationships and in which consciousness of the socio-natural is immanent to these sensuous practices. It differs profoundly from dominant environmental movements in which an environmental vanguard is responsible for instilling new ways of working on an otherwise unthinking populace.

We have the ability to recognize our role within coevolutionary processes to resist the dictates of capital and to continue to reshape a more egalitarian urban world filled with emancipatory possibilities.

Nik Heynen