

Short life, long book

Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2014. 768 pp., £25.00 pb., 978 0 67405 186 7.

Many reviews of books on or by Walter Benjamin begin with a capsule description of the key events in his life. It goes something like this. Born in 1892 into a well-off assimilated German Jewish family in Berlin, Walter Benjamin failed to gain an academic career, just about getting by, instead, through journalism and handouts from his family, friends and the Institute of Social Research. He was drawn to Communism but never shook off his religious heritage. He died by committing suicide, after ingesting morphine, at the age of 48, in 1940, while held up at the Franco-Spanish border when attempting to leave occupied France for the relative safety of Franco's Spain, perhaps en route to the USA. Subsequently he became one of the present epoch's most celebrated critics and theorists and there is now a mountain of books devoted to his work.

Repeated often, these outlines have been enough to communicate the idea of Walter Benjamin, if not his ideas. The cursory details of a life – touching in a few lines on the descent from riches to rags, the contradictions of his ethnicity and beliefs, the tragedy of dying in middle age, with his life's work unfinished, his context being the worst that the twentieth century had to offer in fascism – are sufficient, and colourful enough, for many to understand all that they need to know about Benjamin the man. The upshot of these sketchy details came out frequently in one way or another as something like: Life is ironic and largely cruel and clever old Benjamin was not so clever after all. The outlines of a life which seems to be headed from the very off towards tragedy, and which appears emblematic of greater human and cultural losses in the twentieth century, led many to indulge in the game of what ifs. What if he had reached America, North or South? What if he had left France the following day when the visa situation was different and he would have been let across the border and not threatened with return to France and more internment? What if he had gone East, to Russia or Jerusalem? John Schad even wrote a counterfactual novel, *The Late Walter Benjamin* (2012), about Walter Benjamin, or at least someone who imagines himself to be Benjamin and

speaks only his (published) words, having reached a suburban council estate in his final years, in Oxhey, outside London.

There have been opportunities aplenty to fill out the historical-biographical picture. There has long been the availability of copious correspondence from Benjamin and his circles, which sits alongside Benjamin's memoirs and autobiographical writings, and the reminiscences of friends, lovers and acquaintances, as various forms of insider material. There are the contextualizing sections in the Harvard *Selected Writings* and elsewhere, and online biographies in various encyclopaedias. There are highly illustrated coffee-table books, including catalogues to various Benjamin-themed exhibitions in Germany and France, the *Marbacher Magazin* special on Walter Benjamin (1991) and the self-consciously fetishistic *Benjaminiana* by Hans Puttnies and Gary Smith (1991). There are partial biographies, such as that by Gershom Scholem and Erdmut Wizisla's story of the friendship of Benjamin and Brecht, and the focus on his time in the Youth Movement. There have been novelizations, films and videos. There have also been other book-length biographies – Werner Fuld's (1979), Bernd Witte's (1985), Momme Brodersen's (1996), my own (2008) – that have filled out the picture, showing in various more or less detailed ways the routes from one scene of Benjamin's life to another and the ways in which this formed a crucible for his writings and the development of his thought. But until now there has not been a vast biography, a blockbuster, one that draws into itself whatever details can be gained from any letter that was ever sent by, to or about Benjamin, any reminiscence uttered by a lover, any diary jotting, alongside explanatory passages on significant pieces of writing. Amassed here, such biographical and incidental detail fills a volume that stretches out to more than 700 pages. It is no surprise – there is abundant material to draw on. It could be longer. Even more details could be described from the letters. More letters could be quoted in full or part. More works could be introduced and interpreted. More than anything, the book, and its great length, made me wonder what makes a book the size that it is – and

whether this is something determined in advance, on the basis of other considerations, such as economics or time available to write, or does a book simply become a size that works itself out as it is written? Is the length of the book evidence that Benjamin packed a lot into his shortened life, or is it a testament to how well documented that life was, drawing as it does on the lengthy and well-archived letters of one who was a particularly adept practitioner of an art that is now on the wane? In any case, the book is, as is already clear, long and provides many details about Benjamin's life from start to finish. For the sake of leading one's own life, it almost makes one grateful that Benjamin's was not longer.

Whether all this detail helps us to understand Benjamin better is a question of who the 'we' is. Those who know little about Benjamin will find a detailed and clearly written narrative of his life and a good sense of the multiple strands of his work. They may be impressed by the portrayal of his sheer tenacity and ability to write and think under the most difficult of circumstances. They may be grateful for the wider portrait of European history through the excitable years of the first half of the twentieth century. They may appreciate the short and lucid summaries of significant writings by Benjamin, set in the context of his life, ambitions and the wider intellectual environment. They may be shocked by Benjamin's all-too-human pettinesses, his gambling, bitchiness, womanizing and the ill-treatment of his wife. They may find plentiful evidence for what Lisa Fittko, who helped him in his passage over the Pyrenees, years after the fact recalled as his twin nature: 'A crystal-clear mind; unbending inner strength; yet, a woolly-headed bungler.'

All this is there and well expressed by the two authors, who move firmly and methodically through the life and its terrain and times. The facts are given, or at least the details are given, the letters are quoted, the memoirs gleaned, and hypothetical questions of motivation, or the attribution of inner feelings – à la novelist Jay Parini's speculation in *Benjamin's Crossing* (1996) – are left out. Some may find jarring shifts of register between the discussion of intimate details of, say, a marriage under strain ('All he is at this point is brains and sex', notes his wife Dora in a letter to Scholem) and Benjamin's burgeoning fascination with Art Nouveau in the context of the *Arcades Project* – but the narrative must press on, and such is life and its weird *carambolages*. Those who already know well the correspondence and other biographies will find that there is not anything new here, but that

it is, rather, a diligent and systematic exposition of the already known. There are no conspiratorial or crazoid revelations, such as have grabbed attention in recent years, threatening to overturn the capsule life story: David Mauas's conjecture in the film *Who Killed Walter Benjamin?* (2005) that fascist agents had a hand in his death; Stephen Schwartz's thought-experiment that it was Stalinist GPU men who got him; or, less sensationally, the thesis of Ingrid and Konrad Scheuermann, who in 1992 collated new documents pertaining to Benjamin's death in Port Bou, in order to posit that perhaps Benjamin did not commit suicide there, but rather may have died as result of natural causes, a cerebral haemorrhage, the cause of death recorded on the death certificate. For the Scheuermanns, it was not necessarily a blow against the historical record to state this, but rather an opportunity for reflection on the desires of the 'industry' for another, more tragic story. Nothing of this type of speculation and re-evaluation is in the new biography (not even symptomatic reflection on its occurrence). It sticks with the acknowledged materials, the documents, and so reports, blankly, ambivalently, of the death in September 1940 that Benjamin was, according to Arthur Koestler, in possession of a large quantity of morphine, and that the death certificate attributed his death to a cerebral haemorrhage.

This is a presentation 'in full', 'beyond the mosaic and the mythical', as the publisher's press release puts it, seemingly turning against the Benjaminian predilection for the minuscule, the fragmentary, incomplete and the slight. For those who already know Benjamin, his biographies and letters, this reads like a greatest hits of the life and work, for each little event that might have lodged somewhere in our memory finds its place in the great narrative. Anyone writing about Benjamin must be aware of the passage in his 1940 'On the Concept of History': 'The chronicler, who recounts events without distinguishing between the great and small, thereby accounts for the truth, that nothing which has ever happened is to be given as lost to history.' For Eiland and Jennings, the ambition seems to be indeed to lose nothing to history, but to recover as much as can be found and laid out. We must, then, overlook the fact that Benjamin doubts the efficacy of this act before humanity has been resurrected, before the day of the Last Judgement. Many – not Eiland and Jennings themselves, but those who have reviewed this tome – have certainly made their last judgements on Benjamin: a liar, a cad, a cheat, hypocritical, confused, a wife-abuser,

hopelessly out of touch, neglectful of his only child, serving multiple masters, depressive, manipulative, 'duplicitous, bumbling, self-indulgent, navel-gazing, arrogant, demanding, ever-susceptible to spasms of personal and familial destructiveness', as one reviewer puts it in summary. It is not that there is really that much here on Benjamin as creep, or anything particularly awful to report – no murders or abuses of power, just some all-too human behaviours resulting from the efforts to escape privation and homelessness and the outfall of many difficult love affairs, as well as robust critical opinions and some intellectual bickering. Perhaps those spicy parts that there are jut out as more vivid than other bits, on publishing wrangles, illnesses, the search for work. Or perhaps it is just what people want to read whenever they read biography: idols with feet of clay and all that.

The authors have their bases covered. This is 'full' and 'complete', but life is never so, especially the life of Walter Benjamin, which unfolds in the book under the motto of a 'contradictory and mobile whole'. This was Benjamin's own phrase describing his thought – not his life – in the draft of a response to Gershom Scholem's outraged inquiry as to whether he was peddling 'communist credo'. Benjamin's response was effectively 'it is more complicated than that', or more dialectical. Mobilized here the motto seems to allow for endless equivocation. It means that for all the efforts to encapsulate a life, we cannot encapsulate this life or we can encapsulate it only as a contradiction. The subject shifts and eludes. We experience the vanity of biography as a mode of coming to know a subject closer. But Eiland and Jennings do attempt to distil the elements of this mobile and contradictory whole, a coagulation that is in place by 1929, they note, and pulsates through the whole rest of the life: 'The admixture of a radical leftist politics, a syncretistic theological concern that drew freely upon theologoumena from Judaism and Christianity, a deep knowledge of the German philosophical tradition, and a cultural theory adequate to the diversity of its objects under the fast-changing conditions of modernity.'

Many reviews collaborate with the publisher's desire that this be the last word: 'what looks like the definitive version', a 'thorough, reliable, non-tendentious, and fully developed account of Benjamin's life and the sources of his work'. The place of the biography in the canon of commentary is assured – and these places need to be fought for, for there is plenty else out there to catch the eye of someone who is Benjamin-curious. 'It will prove of enduring value

and will doubtless become the standard reference work' states the publisher's description on Amazon, and widely reproduced online, yet unattributed. This is doubtless true. Unless the mythical completed version of the *Arcades Project*, together with the missing last possessions – a pipe, watch, x-rays, glasses, photographs, letters and a bunch of other personal documents – turns up in a Perpignan skip one day, it is unlikely that another biography of such or greater length will be written. Those who write this have impeccable credentials. Eiland and Jennings have worked extensively as editors on Harvard's multi-volume *Selected Writings* and are intimate with the work, having been main conduits of its English-language translations from 1996 and through the 2000s (in volumes amounting to over 3,000 pages). But is there something else at stake here, something to do with publishers' politics? Perhaps this book stands as a certain bulwark at a moment when the Benjamin Industry is heading into freefall. The copyright has now expired on his writings in Germany, meaning that anyone can publish them, and new translations of his work, as well as translations of materials not previously published – such as the radio work and the fiction – are appearing or under way. How to remain at the core of the Walter Benjamin business? A recent interview with the director of the press, Lindsay Waters, a long-time champion of Benjamin in English, reveals as much, playfully claiming that 'This is what God put me on earth to do, to bring Benjamin to America', as he boasted about his role in bringing to fruition the 'definitive biography', a role that the authors acknowledge in describing him as the book's 'godfather and progenitor of the well-established faith in the work of Walter Benjamin prevailing at Harvard University Press'.

The rampant 'what iftery' that attends reflections on Benjamin flared up again in April 2014 in a widely tweeted article by Walter Lacquer for the online magazine *Mosaic: Advancing Jewish Thought*. Titled and subtitled 'The Walter Benjamin Brigade: How an Original but Maddeningly Opaque German Jewish Intellectual Became a Thriving Academic Industry', the rather ill-tempered essay, which was a review, though so much more, too, of the book under consideration here, drew an elaborate picture of what would have happened had Benjamin joined Scholem in the 'desert' of Palestine, or rather, as Lacquer puts it, 'the verdant and congenial Jerusalem neighbourhood of Rehavia', where instead of dying a miserable, self-administered death on the French-Spanish border, he could have spent time in 'a Rehavia café,

discussing philosophy with Natan Rotenstreich or photography with Tim Gidal or physics with Shmuel Sambursky, playing chess with the folklorist Emanuel Olsvanger, and debating with the three Hanses (Jonas on Gnostic religion; Polotsky on linguistics; Lewy on Greek philosophy). But he did not and there were many reasons why he did not. These might be discerned here and there in passing in this 'definitive' book, though it does not stop the punters dreaming of different outcomes. Really, what can the data of a biography, however big, do in the face of our desires, hopes, malignness and fantasies?

Esther Leslie

Althusser's perpetual war

Warren Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War*, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 2013. 246 pp., £62.00 hb., £15.99 pb., 978 0 82235 386 7 hb., 978 0 82235 400 0 pb.

The result of more than twenty years of engagement with Althusser's philosophy, Montag's book proposes a wide-ranging reading that engages both with the most famous works published in Althusser's lifetime and with the enormous amount of writings that have emerged since his death in 1990. Montag's explicit purpose is to call into question, on the basis of newly available materials, some of the most common interpretative stereotypes, specifically the reading of Althusser as a structuralist and 'philosopher of order' and as a theorist of the 'death of the subject'. The originality of Montag's approach lies in the fact that it raises to the status of a methodological principle the Althusserian definition of philosophy as a *Kampfplatz*: the site of a struggle about and for positions (concepts) that have to be won by means of confrontation with, and criticism of, those positions already occupied by others. Consequently, Montag locates Althusser in his 'theoretical conjuncture' in order to show the making of a philosophy conceived less as an abstract meditation than as a constant dialogue with his contemporaries – from Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Canguilhem, Cavailles and Bachelard, to other less fashionable figures such as Malraux and Camus – in search of a truly materialist position from which to attempt to provide Marxism with new foundations.

To be clear, this reading 'in conjuncture' is in no way historicist. Premised upon Althusser's agnostic conception of philosophy, it does not pursue a 'reduction' to an alleged zeitgeist conceived of as a unity or 'truth' of the times; on the contrary, as Montag points out, a historicist reading would label Althusser's work 'structuralist', thus reducing both his 'work' and his 'structuralism' to the fictitious unity of an imaginary entity supposedly immune from fractures, gaps and points of tension. In keeping with the Althusserian definition of philosophy as a struggle, Montag instead organizes his rereading around three 'theoretical objects' that are so many 'stakes' in Althusser's attempt to provide Marxism with new foundations: structure, subject and the couple 'origin/end'.

The first part of the book (chapters 1–5) focuses on Althusser's relationship with the concept of structure. Montag's underlying thesis is that Althusser, even in the moment of his deepest involvement with the (uneven and non-homogeneous) structuralist front, cannot be classified as a 'philosopher of order' or of 'structures' (here, the polemical reference is to the critiques of Jacques Rancière and E.P. Thompson). Rather, Althusser examines the concept of structure as a way to conceptualize 'a determinate disorder' of history. The specificity of his concept of structure is to be found in the Spinoza-inspired idea of the structure as a 'structure of singularities and as a form of causality entirely immanent in its effects'. Montag divides Althusser's involvement with structuralism into two moments: a first phase (1961–62) of initial enthusiasm and fascination, testified to by his reading of Foucault and Barthes, among others, and by a definite sense of being part of a moment capable, potentially, of bringing about a deep renewal in the field of the human sciences; and a second phase that begins with the seminar on structuralism that Althusser organized at the École Normale Supérieure in 1962–63, during which – tracing an 'unfamiliar' genealogy of structuralism back to Montesquieu, Hegel and Dilthey – he first endorsed some aspects of Lévi-Strauss's conception of structure before going on to criticize it as irredeemably flawed by formalism and functionalism.

Montag shows how Althusser, in spite of his criticism that the Lévi-Straussian conception of structure remained haunted by the spectre of the (transcendental) *order ordinum*, does not quite manage to completely avoid the conception of structure as 'latent order' in *Reading Capital*. Here, Montag stresses the importance of Macherey's Spinozist

intervention, soon after the publication of the collective book, on precisely this point. Montag shows that Macherey's comments and doubts, raised in some letters to Althusser, produce a certain Spinozist twist from structure as 'latent' order to structure as 'absent exteriority'; a rather obscure definition through which, according to Montag, Althusser attempts to think structure as 'an absent cause of a determinate disorder' and to bridge the gap between structure and the 'logic of the diverse' that he had already explored in 'Contradiction and Overdetermination'. This dialogue with Macherey was of crucial importance, as it led to a substantial revision of Althusser's contributions to *Reading Capital* (it should be noted that the only English translation available today is based on the second abridged edition – i.e. the revised one – so the English reader cannot gain a sense of the importance of these amendments); revisions that Montag analyses in detail and that show the extent to which Althusser was struggling precisely with the aspects that he so firmly criticized in Lévi-Strauss and in Deleuze's description of structuralism.

The second part of Montag's book (chapters 6–8) is concerned with the 'subject'; that is, with Althusser's quest for a new theory of ideology. The central thesis of this section is that Althusser's writings on ideology show a progressive 'shift in perspective' that leads Althusser from a still idealistic conception of ideology as a 'system of representation', in 'Marxism and Humanism' (1963), to an increasingly materialist conception: first through the ambiguous and problematic attempt to define ideology from the perspective of a theory of discourses in 'Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses' (1966), and then by assigning ideology to material apparatuses in the ISAs essay (1970). Unlike many of Althusser's previous readers, Montag avoids the temptation to read in the first essay only an anticipation of the theory later presented in the 1970 essay. Furthermore, Montag is certainly right when he argues

that in the 1963 piece Althusser is still relying on quasi-idealistic presuppositions and that this essay 'remained haunted by the humanism it sought to criticize'. In this light, Montag discusses Althusser's crucial – and so far virtually neglected – confrontation with Lacan in an ENS seminar in 1963/4, which he rightly privileges over the essay 'Freud and Lacan'. Although recognizing the importance of Lacan for Althusser, Montag stresses that in this seminar the confrontation between psychology (and, more generally, the human sciences) and psychoanalysis fades into a more radical confrontation between Descartes and Spinoza, concluding that the crucial step towards a materialistic theory of ideology is taken with the endorsement of the Spinozist (and not Lacanian) concept of the imaginary. This development allows Althusser to move beyond a consciousness-based conception of representation, so as to think it in trans-individual terms.

Montag is surely right to stress the importance of Spinoza for Althusser's theory of ideology, but he tends to underestimate the relevance of the problem of the unconscious – that is, of psychoanalysis. It is



not by chance that, when discussing the theory of ideology put forth in the famous ISAs essay, Montag reduces what is 'really innovative' in it to the 'most Spinozist part of a very Spinozist essay' – that is, the final section, 'On Ideology'. The emphasis on the Spinozist and materialist point of view that Althusser *eventually* reaches risks obscuring the main tension of the essay (and the main problem to be found in the 'Three Notes'): the problem of the articulation of ideology and the unconscious. Montag is aware of this tension, as well as of the question of how to reconcile the 'central thesis' of the essay, concerning the interpellation of individuals as subjects, with the thesis of the materiality of ideology. He attempts to circumvent this tension by means of a new (Foucauldian) redefinition of interpellation as 'the permanent production of a hold over the body'. The fact remains, however, not only that the notion of interpellation originates, as Montag recognizes, within Althusser's reflection on the theory of discourses, but also that Althusser, for all his Spinozism, situated the problem of ideology in between the space of the materiality of the apparatuses and the space of the unconscious (and did so until the very end, as some notes on the ISAs, dating from the 1980s, which Montag does not discuss, clearly show).

The third part is organized under the title 'Origin/End'. This final section does not measure up to the first two in terms of either length or level of detail. The first chapter is an interpretation of the posthumously published text 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter' (1982); the second is an analysis of another 'lost object', an essay written by a still Catholic Althusser in 1947, 'The International of Decent Feelings', which Montag presents as an early corrective of the messianic tension that emerges in the 'late' Althusser. In the first chapter, Montag argues that the materialism of the late Althusser moves in the direction of a philosophy of nothingness, positing an ontological conception of the 'void' as 'an original abyss from which all comes and to which all must return'. The positing of an origin, argues Montag, performs the role of a guarantee against the possibility that the actual order (capitalism) might not collapse, that a specific 'conjunction' of elements forming a structure might in fact not be 'haunted by a radical instability' and may, therefore, last indefinitely. For Montag, Althusser here posits a principle of nothingness in order to endow himself with 'a principle of hope, of anticipation'; he suggests that the concomitant emphasis on the notion of the

event should be read in parallel with the Benjaminian conception of a messianism without Messiah. Montag detects, however, another notion of the void, one that stands in contrast with the first: the idea of the void as something that must be produced by philosophy 'in order to endow itself with existence'. According to Montag, Althusser here does not pursue to its conclusion this definition of philosophy: if philosophy, in order to exist, must evacuate all the philosophical problems and concepts, even the ontological conception of the void must be evacuated.

The decision to devote the last chapter to an essay written by 'Althusser before Althusser' is interesting for the effect of chronological inversion that it produces, as Montag returns to a moment of Althusser's career scarcely known, let alone studied. Montag analyses here the criticism levelled in 1947 by the young Althusser against post-war apocalyptic tendencies, responsible, with their appeal to the unity of mankind against the evil represented by the Cold War superpowers, for preventing the organization of real class struggle in the 'here and now'. It appears, Montag concludes, that Althusser had already endowed himself with the means to criticize every messianism and every religious conception of time. Beyond the effect of inversion, however, and beyond the interest of the writings analysed in this third section, this final part appears perhaps too reductive. The theme 'Origin/End' can hardly be reduced to two single essays written in 1982 and 1947, ignoring what happens in between – for instance, Althusser's criticism of idealism, his concept of 'process' and the important reflection on the notion of commencement (as opposed to origin) as an attempt to think, with Machiavelli, the reality of political practice.

Beyond the specific points on which one might agree or disagree, this is a much-needed book. It extricates Althusser from the 'gnawing criticism of mice' and paves the way for a renewed interest in his work, one that takes into account the unpublished materials that emerged after his death – not only to make possible an analysis of the 'late' Althusser (the Althusser of the aleatory materialism explicitly elaborated in the 1980s), but also for a reconsideration of the Althusser of the 1960s and 1970s. As to whether Althusser's philosophy can still produce effects today, in a very different historical conjuncture, Montag appears hesitant. But if it does, it will be thanks in some degree to his research and to the analysis proposed in his book.

Stefano Pippa

Mixed salad

Justin Clemens, *Psychoanalysis is an Anti-Philosophy*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2013. 200 pp., £80.00 hb., £24.99 pb., 978 0 74867 894 5 hb., 978 0 74868 577 6 pb.

At first blush, Justin Clemens's new book seems to bend to a gathering orthodoxy. Ever since Alain Badiou declared Lacan's reconstruction of Freud an 'anti-philosophy', a term indecisively used by the psychoanalyst himself, an increasing number of articles and books have affirmed or contested the designation. Whether for him or against him, Badiou, it seems, is, for better or worse, our new French master(-signifier). Continental philosophy has long hitched itself to the waxing and waning fortunes of its key thinkers, and the concession to celebrity seems only to have been redoubled as the glory days of 'theory' fade ever quicker from our collective memory. At present, the choice can appear stark: ally oneself with a Badiou or a Rancière, or take the plunge into 'speculative realism' or 'object-oriented ontology', where full-blooded metaphysics returns, if most often at the expense of historical and political attentiveness and a sense of rhetorical proportion.

That Clemens's book affords a glimpse of an alternative to such a meagre menu has much to do with its wholesale refusal of the constricted genre of the continental philosophical 'commentary', the tendency to treat the writings of European philosophers rather as theologians regard the holy writ. Clemens fastidiously avoids exegesis and the hushed tones of discipleship, and while he doesn't quite reset the broken spine of philosophical readings of psychoanalysis, he at least puts pressure on the right points. He does so by treating analysis not as an end in itself, but rather as a resource for thinking a plethora of wider problems, including the relation of slavery to love, the ethical status of desire, and the co-dependence of psychoanalysis and literature.

The last is at once the most compelling of Clemens's concerns and the least adequately elaborated in the book. We read much of the importance of courtly love poetry, for example, in 'stag[ing] not just the trials and tribulations of the experience of love, but the absolute impossibility of the relationship itself', and Clemens's claim that 'if psychoanalysis is in love with literature, literature is not in love with psychoanalysis' carries an aphoristic plausibility. Nonetheless, I would have liked to see more direct engagement with the specificity of literary texts, especially as they may interrupt rather than confirm the

claims of psychoanalytic metapsychology. Clemens cares deeply about the figural excesses of both literary and psychoanalytic language and what he calls the 'zones of opacity' that both practices reveal, but this impressive if short book will, one hopes, be only the prolegomena to a fuller articulation of its often eclectic concerns.

What, then, is 'anti-philosophy', and why might it be useful to treat psychoanalysis as an instance of it? Clemens's limpid introduction argues that anti-philosophy is not a straightforward negation of philosophy; it is 'not anti-philosophical in the sense of being non-philosophical'. Anti-philosophy and philosophy per se may well even share the same objects. Nonetheless, anti-philosophy, whether in a psychoanalytic or literary guise, attempts to 'draw attention to forms of knowledge that philosophy cannot know, by affronting philosophy and subverting its claims'. As I've already suggested, this is not a new claim. The only thing that substantially divides Clemens's characterization from Badiou's is the former's willingness to assert the *priority* of anti-philosophy over its more respectable other, at least on questions that pertain to the imbrication of language and desire, ethics and literature. Philosophy, Clemens writes, has as its 'therapeutic aim' the curbing of the 'pathos of *poiesis* with the impassivity of *logos*', while analysis by contrast 'tries to tear the mask from *logos* and testify to the deranging suffering of the animal subjected to language'. It's a neat construction as far as it goes, although, as with any such antinomian claim, it appears less satisfactory the more one allows its initial rhetorical effect to recede. It may be that the rubric of 'anti-philosophy' is the vehicle Clemens required to reach his often counter-intuitive readings, the best of which combine an admirably encyclopedic knowledge of Freudian and Lacanian theory with a bracing passion for surprising paradoxes and unanticipated interpretative leaps.

Perhaps the best of those readings, and the most athletic of those leaps, is to be found in the first chapter of the book, 'Listening or Dispensing? Sigmund Freud on Drugs'. Here, Clemens demonstrates how, even after his turn away from medical intervention upon his discovery of the theory of

dreams, Freud's writings are peppered with figural leftovers from those earlier preoccupations, especially his calamitous early-career commitment to cocaine. The point is less to demonstrate an empirical or theoretical continuity between two apparently divergent points in Freud's career than to highlight how a seeming failure – in this case, Freud's staking of his career on the medical promotion of cocaine – has constructive effects that persist even after the conceptual overwriting of such a moment. One often reads of grand failures that have constitutive consequences in theoretical and psychoanalytic circles, failures and effects most often articulated in quasi-ontological terms; think of the Lacanian claim that the subject itself is a kind of failure of full subjectivation. But here Clemens deftly combines such a distant theoretical optic with a strikingly original close reading of Freud's case histories, demonstrating that Freud's own inability to understand the impact of his early interventions reveals analysis itself as 'post-(not pre-) pharmacological'. 'Freud himself', Clemens continues, 'ought to be considered a key figure in the development of modern psychopharmacology, in his failures as much as in his success'.

Elsewhere, one finds a compelling reading of Agamben's ambiguous relation to psychoanalysis. Agamben both takes for granted and fails to fully acknowledge the building blocks of Freudian theory, precursors that enable, for instance, his early interpretation of melancholia. 'Agamben's contribution', Clemens writes, 'is to show how the reacquisition of the allegedly lost object ... is not the ultimate nor even the real goal of the project of melancholia'. Rather, the melancholic withdraws from the world and finds comfort in the creative sublimation of art. It is here that Clemens performs another of his characteristic leaps, for it is Agamben's initial interest in melancholia that, it is claimed, leads to his famed later theories of sovereignty. But whereas the link made between psychopharmacology and Freud's discovery of the unconscious makes a kind of baggy sense, the columns and struts of Clemens's argument begin to creak when he insists that 'the melancholic includes the object as that which is excluded from his grasp. Sovereign power includes bare life as that which is excluded from its grasp'. It's a tenuous analogy at best, and it feels unearned. Clemens continues, anticipating the obvious criticism: 'these are more than simply analogies, precisely because what they share is clearly due to Agamben's own obsession'; that 'clearly' betrays a justified uncertainty in the strength of the claim even as it is meant to signal an attitude

of boldness and invention that the best of the book certainly lives up to.

A better attempt to broach the political implications of psychoanalysis comes in a chapter entitled 'Torture, Psychoanalysis and Beyond'. Here, Clemens cements a claim that courses through the book as a whole, namely that psychoanalysis, more than philosophy itself, bears witness to the slave's speech, against the imperatives of the master. Engaging once again with the work of Agamben, we read of torture as the 'originary landscape of the political'. In a characteristically sudden reverse zoom, Clemens then links this speculation with psychoanalysis's recognition of the resistances of subjects made to speak, subjects forced against their will to embody the dehiscences of language. What may initially seem like a crass conflation of political suffering with abstract theoretical speculation is redeemed through an admirably angry indictment of the *jouissance* pregnant in those contemporary justifications of torture that have scarred the political landscape in recent years. Neoconservative exponents of torture and their liberal opponents are shown to share a common argumentative horizon, namely a commitment to individualistic case scenarios typified by the ticking-bomb scenario, the thought experiment that is now, lamentably, the defining genre of analytical philosophical ethics. In so far as Clemens's book is a book about ethics – and its enduring focus on the relation of desire, love, pain and responsibility speaks to a kind of politicized ethics beyond liberal limits – it is also a firm critique of any ethical inquiry that would disembodied its subjects, denying them the irreducible complexities that the possession of an unconscious affords.

But, just as crucially, Clemens would have us take sober cognizance of how the analysability of earlier societies premised on an unacknowledged articulation of politics and violence may now have been rendered moot. For, '[w]e no longer live in active polities, but in administrative waste-management societies ... Contemporary torture is no longer about the *extraction* of speech from the body, but the absolute and irreversible *separation* of speech from the body.' As a result, Clemens's final chapter – in a mere twenty-four pages – seeks to produce a new understanding of contemporary biopolitical subjectivity, one that may be more amenable to psychoanalysis's insights. Clemens begins, as any good Lacanian should, with a pun – *Si*, the matheme for Lacan's master signifier, when spoken in French, resembles *essaim*, the French word for 'swarm'. Tracing the figure of the swarm

through Kant and Freud, we find the German word *schwärmerei* in the glossary to Lacan's *Écrits*, and this game of etymological hide-and-seek ends with a close reading of passages from Lacan's Seminar XVII, where it is in the figure of the unary trait, in particular, 'that one can discern ... the "one" of repetition, that is, of what I am arguing becomes the one-multiple of the *essaim*'. In fact, Clemens has yet to make that argument, and often in this book he waits a little too long to reveal his hand. But here, at least, the payoff is suggestive: the S₁ or master-signifier, given its most extensive treatment in Seminar XVII, is understood to be a response to the loss of political and symbolic authority characteristic of late capitalism; '[w]hen it is no longer possible to define the foundations of signification on the basis of a primordial diacritical difference ... Lacan is forced to come up with a new response ... For the S₁ is not a diacritically defined signifier' but is rather the 'originary multiplication

of unary traits into a swarm, i.e. an equivocal mess of foreign lines of imaginary identification that have been cut into the body.' There's much going on here – perhaps *too* much – but the key point is that, for Clemens via Lacan, the de-suturing of the figure of the father from the figure of the master produces in late capitalist polities an endlessly proliferating series of quasi-identities, particularities without a universal to illuminate them, to render them three-dimensional. Such a proposal has many, if not more, of the problems that have been amply shown to inhere in Hardt and Negri's figure of the multitude, but there's something of a research programme outlined here – one that, with Clemens's highly promising if as yet not fully fulfilled care for the intertwining of literary, philosophical and psychoanalytic resources, we may anticipate with some excitement.

Tom Eyers

No cigar

Marcelo Hoffman, *Foucault and Power: The Influence of Political Engagement on Theories of Power*, Bloomsbury, London and New York, 2013. 232 pp., £65.00 hb., 978 1 44118 094 0.

What is the relation of theory to practice? Scarcely any question is more important for radical politics, and none is more important for radical intellectuals. In a 1972 conversation with Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault argues that a historical conjuncture had been reached in which 'theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice.' Specifically, it is for Foucault one of many forms of resistance directed against power. Marcelo Hoffman's book proposes to examine the relationship of Foucault's own extra-theoretical political practices to his political theory. In doing so, Hoffman emphasizes radical commitments often disregarded in recent scholarship that reduces Foucault's thought to liberal banality. By seeing his radical practices juxtaposed with his radical thought, we get a convincing portrait of a radical Foucault. Hoffman's account of each of these two dimensions is excellent. I will suggest, however, that Hoffman falters in his treatment of their interrelation.

Foucault and Power proceeds in six chapters. The first is an introduction, and the last is the conclusion, with four specific chapter studies in between. Hoffman conceives of the relation of Foucault's

theory to practice as 'dialectical'. He does not define what he means by 'dialectics', but it appears simply to imply a reciprocal relationship, which seems unobjectionable. The problem, however, is that in each of his four studies he gives a unidirectional account of the relation of practice to theory, with the former leading directly to the development of the latter. His first study, chapter 2, deals with Foucault's prison activism and writings about the prison. As Stuart Elden indicates in his back-cover blurb, Hoffman's book provides the most substantial work of scholarship to date on Foucault's participation in the Groupe d'information sur les prisons (GIP – Prisons Information Group). This organization of intellectuals sought to expose conditions in French prisons by soliciting and publicizing information from inmates. Hoffman artfully reconstructs Foucault's involvement in the group. Having dealt with Foucault's prison practice, Hoffman moves on to Foucault's prison theory. This segment of the book amounts largely to a precis of *Discipline and Punish*, which, like all Hoffman's readings of Foucault, is extraordinarily sensitive and efficient. Having covered both practice and theory, Hoffman proceeds to link the two.

Yet, while it is clear that it was Foucault's involvement with GIP that triggered his academic interest in the prisons, Hoffman wishes to go further than this, claiming that the GIP experience was decisive for Foucault's development of the specific concept of discipline. Hoffman's evidence for this claim is unconvincing, however. Though the evidence from the GIP surveys accords with Foucault's theory, there is no indication that this evidence led Foucault to any specific conceptualization. Instead, the copious archival data that Foucault himself cites in *Discipline and Punish* provides an adequate explanation for this development. Rather than arguing that the GIP project found a fulfilment in the development of a theory, I would argue, in accordance with Foucault's own conception of the relation of theory to practice, that his writing and his activism constituted parallel, complementary, mutually influential, but distinct political interventions in relation to the prison. The broader point at stake here is that a scholar does not *need* to be militantly involved to reach radical conclusions. The two tasks, intellectual and activist, may certainly overlap and inform one another, and indeed do in Foucault's case, but there is no necessary connection. Foucault himself insisted on a distinction between the role of the intellectual – which he nonetheless conceived as thoroughly political and aimed towards producing tools for mass movements – and that of the masses of people involved in resistance. While it is surely acceptable to approach Foucault with a methodological framework that is not Foucault's own, one should, it seems to me, mark this difference and justify it.

The third chapter of *Foucault and Power* deals with Foucault's conceptualization of power as war. Once again, Hoffman presents Foucault's writings superbly, in the form here of a penetrating precis of *Society Must Be Defended*. Hoffman considers the writings of Henri de Boulainvilliers as a possible source of Foucault's views, since, on his own account, Boulainvilliers seems to have the same views as Foucault himself. Hoffman rightly discounts this possibility, however, noting Foucault's tendency to ventriloquize his own views onto others. Hoffman instead sees the influence of his practical experiences of the belligerent Parisian Left as the source of his theoretical position. However, while it is true that Foucault's basic fascination with power is inseparable from his



political involvement, once again I find Hoffman's aetiology of Foucault's specific views unconvincing, for the simple reason that others with the same or more intense experiences did not develop such a conceptualization of power. The key question, I think, is why it was that Foucault alone developed his distinctive interests. The answer is that he had different philosophical influences to most others in his milieu, most decisively Nietzsche.

Chapter 4 deals with Iran, a different case inasmuch as in this situation Foucault operated as a journalist rather than as an activist per se. Thus the connection to be drawn is not between theory and practice so much as between one type of writing and another; a much less problematic proposition. Still, as in previous chapters, the same pattern is posited by Hoffman: Foucault's experiences lead him to a conceptual development. The chapter begins with a lucid account of the transition from the theme of biopolitics to that of governmentality in Foucault's thought. I do not accept, however, Hoffman's conclusion that Foucault abandoned his notion of biopolitics. There is ample evidence that Foucault understood himself to be developing rather than

rejecting his analysis in later work. Hoffman interprets Foucault's neglect of the theme of biopolitics after 1976 as evidence that his explicit intention to continue to study it was hollow. Hoffman does not mention the fact that Foucault maintained as late as 1983 that he had to write a genealogy of biopower, which seems to imply at the very least that he did not consider the problematic redundant.

Foucault's visits to and engagement with Iran fall in between *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, which Hoffman sees, despite its title, as representing the decisive abandonment of biopolitics as a theme. Hoffman's treatment of Foucault's writing on Iran is insightful; particularly incisive is his brief counterposition of Foucault's position with Fanon and Žižek. However, while Hoffman is clear that he diagnoses a connection between Foucault's Iranian experience and his supposed rejection of biopolitics, it is unclear to me precisely what this connection is supposed to be, beyond that Foucault saw something non-biopolitical in the Iranian Revolution. Since Foucault's concept of biopolitics was never meant to be all-encompassing, I cannot see how this would have been a revelation.

Lastly, in chapter 5, Hoffman juxtaposes Foucault's campaigning against martial law in Poland with his work on the concept of parrhesia. Once again the treatment of Foucault's thought is solid. For once, I think the connection of the theory to practice is relatively uncontentious, and clearly proceeds in the order Hoffman thinks it does. That is, Foucault clearly seizes on the ancient concept of parrhesia, a form of courageous truth-telling to the powerful despite the danger this runs, because of how it relates to his own intellectual practice over the preceding decade. The problem, however, is that Hoffman's method of juxtaposing near-contemporaneous activism and thinking means he posits a special connection of Foucault's concept of parrhesia to his immediately preceding political activity, namely his protestations about martial law in Poland, when in fact there is no direct relation. Hoffman claims there is, on the basis that Foucault's advocacy on Poland is a peculiarly parrhesiastic practice of his, in which he spoke directly to the French government and elicited action from them. It is true that most of Foucault's political activity, be it his activism or his writing, did not previously address itself directly to power in the mode of Greek parrhesia. GIP was, for example, not quite parrhesiastic, because it was a conduit for speech rather than a matter of Foucault speaking; nor was it particularly addressed to the

government. But Foucault's comments on Poland were not strictly parrhesiastic either, because parrhesia entails personal risk. Foucault took no risk whatsoever in calling on the French government to condemn a Communist government. Hoffman argues that Foucault risked his good relationship with the new Socialist government in France by making these statements, but it is clear from his pronouncements that Foucault never aimed to maintain any close relationship with that government, even if he did view the Socialist victory somewhat favourably. Much closer to a case of parrhesia was, for example, was Foucault's 1975 denunciation on Spanish soil of the Franco government's execution of dissidents. Then at least he ran some risk, though as a prominent French intellectual it was always likely that he would simply be expelled from the country, as indeed he was. Hoffman might also have suggested a more direct connection between parrhesia and Poland by suggesting that the risk-taking of the Poles themselves influenced Foucault's interest in parrhesia. Still, in any case, I think it is overblown to make a special connection to any particular event: parrhesia interested Foucault for general reasons.

I will end by saying something about the appendix to the book, which is close to one-third as long as Hoffman's main text itself, and comprises the first of four reports made by GIP. This is mostly composed of edited material from the responses of prisoners to the GIP survey. The material is certainly revealing about the conditions in French prisons circa 1970, but is perhaps primarily of historical interest by now, even if it is moving and one can imagine that conditions of imprisonment have not changed so very much. Foucault's preface to this 'report' is, however, perhaps of more general interest. I find particularly compelling its concluding four-point use of the notion of the institution of the criminal record to show that prisons do not function as they are supposed to: if they really rehabilitated, there would be no need to keep such records, and moreover these records prevent ex-convicts from moving on to new lives after prison. One can see with hindsight traces of Foucault's later position on discipline here. However, the preface is more Marxist than Foucauldian, using the term 'ideology', and setting things out in terms of class oppression. It is worth noting that, even if written by Foucault, that the statement is signed 'The GIP', and as such is meant to represent not Foucault's views but the shared views of the group.

Mark Kelly

Student as producer

E.P. Thompson, ed., *Warwick University Ltd: Industry, Management and the Universities*, Spokesman Press, Nottingham, 2014. xx + 170 pp., £9.95 pb., 978 0 85124 829 5.

Next year the University of Warwick celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of its incorporation. It is the most upwardly mobile of the English universities built in the 1960s (the number includes Lancaster, York, East Anglia, Sussex, Kent and Essex). Pre-empting that semicentennial celebration, Spokesman Press has reissued the book – long out of print – that recounts the most infamous episode of its early years. *Warwick University Ltd* was produced by an anonymous collective of students in 1970 under the editorship of E.P. Thompson, then professor at Warwick, though shortly to resign in protest at what transpired. The book documents the events of February of that year, which centred on the repeatedly delayed provision of student facilities on the ‘sprawling, fragmented campus’ a couple of miles outside Coventry. J.B. ‘Jack’ Butterworth, the inaugural vice chancellor, had reportedly stated that ‘The Student’s Union shall never have its own building.’

Matters came to a head after students occupying the Registry building discovered confidential ‘political’ files kept in the vice chancellor’s office. Although occupiers had an injunction imposed preventing the circulation and publication of material unearthed, eventually *The Times*, *Guardian* and *Birmingham Post* printed reports on what was contained within, including the surveillance of a visiting professor by a governor, frank discussion of the ‘growing student menace’, and a letter from a headmaster in North London advising the vice chancellor of the political activities of an applicant: ‘Reject this man’ was Butterworth’s instruction to the admissions team.

Following an article by Thompson in *New Society* (‘The Business University’, 19 February 1970) Penguin made the approach which saw an instant book produced: drafted in one week, edited in another and published at the end of March. Its chapters cover: the background to Warwick’s founding; the issues faced by staff and students on the campus; the unusual governance structure and practices; the relation to the local car industry; and an account of the events and subsequent injunction. It concludes with a dossier of relevant documents and a ‘personal conclusion’ from Thompson.

The reissue opens with an introduction by Hugo Radice, professor emeritus of economics at the

University of Leeds and one of the original authors as well as coordinator for the book’s reappearance. Also new are personal recollections from original protagonists Ivor Gaber, Jude Conlon and Ron Rose. Two of them reveal that they had suffered unsuccessful and unenjoyable starts at more established universities before thriving at Warwick; Rose tells us that he went to Warwick because it was the only university not to demand Latin O-level and that his grant of £12 per week was more than his father made as a delivery man on a 48-hour week. At this point I should declare my interest: I am a more recent graduate of Warwick and also played a tiny part in the reissue. The story had little relevance for me in the 1990s; arguably it is the recent gusts of privatization that give the book renewed timeliness today.

Commencing in the late 1950s, a plan was formed to bring a university to Coventry that could have seen ‘co-ordination and co-operation’ with the city, including a mooted merger with Lanchester Polytechnic (now Coventry University). It was, though, in the words of one councillor, ‘swamped by [the] dominating business interests’ of the local car industry. Readers under 40 may need to search online for the histories of Rootes, Riley, Healey and Siddeley, but at the time these were some of the largest employers in the country, who sought new kinds of graduates and were keen to fund academics investigating operations research, business economics, applied psychology and the relatively new field of management theory. Butterworth, who had been bursar at New College, Oxford, was appointed in 1963. He began planning and fund-raising along the lines that ‘no one would want a new university in Warwickshire to be a liberal arts college’. Visions of an MIT in the English Midlands led to the launch in Britain of the first business undergraduate degrees – Management Sciences in 1967 – and the first full graduate school of Business Management. Thompson saves some acerbic asides for the presence of these subjects in a university and the passing off of training for job-ready loyalty as higher education. He is affronted by the notion that a piecemeal undergraduate degree would be sufficient to see middle-class youngsters placed in charge of skilled

workers. The main charge, however, is that the presence of eight businessmen on the university's Council (out of nine co-opted members), and the influence they exerted on key committees, had compromised the governance of the institution. The first full chapter contains biographies of three governors, the most prominent being Gilbert Hunt (Rootes) and Arnold Hall (Hawker Siddeley), the pro-chancellor and chair of Council.

The backdrop, then, is the changing place of manufacturing in the British economy: Hunt's company, Rootes, had been taken over by Chrysler in 1969; Hall had been implicated in a public procurement scandal in 1967; Hunt also appears to have been connected to the activities of the Economic League, an organization whose legacy today is the continuing scandal of blacklisting. The League had been founded to 'foster free enterprise' and to oppose 'all subversive forces ... that would seek to undermine the security of Britain in general and British industry in particular'. It maintained files on union activists, especially in the building trade. After its demise in the early 1990s, it sold its database to successor organizations such as the Consulting Association, a Midlands-based firm backed by construction companies. Allegations persist that the databases continue and are implicated in hiring practices at recent projects such as the Olympic Stadium and Crossrail. In 2013, eight firms, including Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd, admitted their involvement, apologized and offered compensation to those affected. Two documents from the League found in Butterworth's files had been passed to him by Hall: they focused on the 'growth of extreme left-wing activity amongst students'. Gaber reports being banned from the USA and the BBC after graduating, owing to membership of a revolutionary socialist group at Warwick.

In the preceding years, Butterworth had sought powers to make it easier to sack 'radical staff', while those on administrative contracts could lose their jobs for 'impertinence or insubordination'. It is in this context that 'Gilbert' (Hunt) wrote to 'My dear Jack' (Butterworth) with something that 'I felt it would be advisable for you to have for your confidential files'. Hunt had sent a Mr Catchpole, the Rootes Motors director of legal affairs, along with a 'security officer' to a meeting of the Coventry Labour Party. The assignment was to report on a talk by a visiting professor at Warwick, David Montgomery, who was over from the USA; he had a knowledge of shift patterns and automation in American factories. Michael Shattock, then the

newly appointed registrar at Warwick, indicates in a recent letter to *Times Higher Education* (1 May 2014) that Montgomery had been observed at a trade union meeting at a Rootes plant by security staff, 'who reported his attendance to Hunt'. This is not described in *Warwick University Ltd*, is not supported by its dossier, and is denied by the authors.

Catchpole's even-handed account of the address to eight local members noted that Montgomery 'was careful not to associate himself with' suggestions made by members present from the All Trades Union Alliance, but that he could be considered to show 'bias' against employers in general and that this might manifest as the 'undesirable indoctrination' of his students. Hunt seemed intent on catching Montgomery 'promoting industrial action', illegal under the terms of the Aliens Restriction Act. Catchpole's document, kept by Butterworth, was the first found by student occupiers. They phoned Thompson, who in turn contacted Montgomery, then back in his home country and never informed by Warwick of these 'files'. Thompson oversaw the copying of the letter and ensured that it was circulated to every academic employed by the university by the next morning. Students systematically worked through the files available. It is hypothesized that these were only a small portion of Butterworth's 'intelligence': porters had removed boxes when the students entered and there was evidence of a separate cache located in the vice chancellor's lodge on campus.

On Thursday, 12 February at 5 p.m. a mass meeting of staff and students was held in the 'Airport Lounge' at Rootes Hall. Over 1,000 attended, even though the student body at the time amounted to only 2,000. Although they called for a public inquiry, what they received was one conducted by the chancellor, Lord Radcliffe. His terms of reference were narrow, inviting submissions of evidence on the 'receiving and retaining of political information' by the university. The first edition of *Warwick University Ltd* appeared before Radcliffe's findings were published. It is a regrettable omission of the new edition that what happened next is not recounted. Radcliffe found there was no systematic wrongdoing and Butterworth remained vice chancellor until 1985. The book's authors concluded at a recent launch event in London that the immediate repercussions of this episode for Warwick was an improvement in governance, more transparent relations with business and greater academic involvement in decision-making, which returned Warwick to something closer to 'sector norms'. At the same

event, David Davis MP pointed out that Radcliffe, a law lord, had overseen an inquiry into offences under the Official Secrets Act a decade earlier.

On a similar note, Thompson's original *New Society* article would have made a welcome supplement to his concluding chapter. That said, what is contained therein speaks to today, in particular when certain transformations of finance are taken into account. Even in 1980 universities received 80 per cent of their annual funding from public coffers. That figure may now be below 40 per cent depending on how one counts tuition fees funded by student loans with their larger than anticipated public subsidy. The relations between business and universities are far more complex, with 'supply chains' and all manner of contracts, not just funded chairs and governors. That 'enmeshing', in Thompson's phrase, includes new forms of transnational and domestic competition plus strategies premised on larger capital expenditure. All these increase demands on the generation of surpluses and add emphasis to Thompson's final question: what will universities inflict on themselves before abandoning the current pledge to untruth, 'serviamus'?

The faultline is still governance and the idea of 'self-governing *academic* institutions'. Thompson was appointed by Butterworth as professor at Warwick after seventeen years teaching in 'extramural' education. His scorn is palpable for his colleagues – *Academicus superciliosus*, 'the most divisable and rutable creature in this country' – and, indeed, himself (Butterworth's cabinets also held a sheaf of Thompson's 'fatuous and long-winded' attempts to resign):

Collectively, all of us – all we liberal academics – were struck with a paralysis of will as the system not only grew round us, but built us into its own body-walls. Once inside there it looked as if we were running our bit of the show: but the show itself was being directed towards other ends.

Warwick's Academic Senate voted in support of the injunction and demanded internal disciplinary action against the occupiers. It had repeatedly delegated or deferred to Council decisions that were meant to rest with itself. As Thompson notes, the ludicrous sense of propriety and institutional loyalty displayed by Warwick academics 'would have astonished medieval Oxbridge undergraduates'. The patronage and *pistonage* underpinning Butterworth's activities echoed the 'log rolling' sustaining their own academic careers (further atomized now by PhD and research culture,

we might add). Here he invokes the *trahison des clerics* and asserts that it was left to students to defend the university's 'intellectual integrity' with the means available to them.

Although today's readers might see this as the take-home message of the book, the lessons of *Warwick University Ltd* lie elsewhere: in the 'operative' journalism its form and content evinces. The pace and collaboration of production, the telling of the tale and the informative mappings of governors, their backgrounds and their place within the university, all still give a steer to the kind of activity largely lacking today. More complex dossiers are required and a different level of activity: reading accounts, Freedom of Information requests, cataloguing the industry and business press for deals, financing and off-balance sheet activity, and so on. When universities will act to suppress evidence and protest, rather than justify their actions, there is still power in getting the truth out, but that requires investigative activity – 'militant' rather than REF-able research. From that perspective, the governance initiative run by the UCU branch at Royal Holloway deserves much more attention.

Thompson jibed at the 'pomp' of academics. Here, for some, operative, investigative under-labour may resemble too closely the administrative chores already levied in the name of efficiency and administration. Instead, the advantages offered by new media and communications technology are squandered: we get the more familiar, more ambiguous activity of moral and existential position-taking, which offers very little for politics: too many opinions, not enough 'ammunition'.

Thompson believed that the outcome of the Warwick episode might shape not only the role of universities within society but also the 'next British future'. He sought a dynamic renewal that would end a 'subordinate relation' to industrial capitalism, to profits and giant firms seeking controlled environments in which to operate. It may be hard to sustain such claims for today's university and college struggles, but any opposition to the creation of new asset classes from out of higher education may be central to the resistance against generalized financialization. Shares in universities – charitable status is increasingly seen as an impediment by university heads – and 'investment grade products' concocted from graduate earnings securitized give an inkling of what that might mean.

Andrew McGettigan

A is for apocalypse

David J. Blacker, *The Falling Rate of Learning and the Neoliberal Endgame*, Zero Books, Winchester and Washington DC, 2013. 319 pp., £15.99 pb., 978 1 78099 578 6.

Amidst the recent flood of lachrymose reports on the neoliberal assault upon education, this book stands out for its unflinching survey of the extent of the impending catastrophe and the astute way it gleefully sets about puncturing the few remaining life rafts. The consolation of Blacker's philosophy? '[E]ducational activism does not matter and is a waste of time', and 'those within educational institutions have very little choice but to strap themselves in ... for a continuation of a very scary and uncertain ride that probably ends in death'.

This conclusion is based on an extension of what the book terms an eliminationist project inherent within our current phase of capitalism to the specific domain of educational institutions too tightly bolted on to escape the same fate. It is extrapolated primarily from Marx's hypothesis of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall within capitalist production: the long-term structural propensity to replace human labour costs with technological fixtures that constantly leads to a decline of surplus value in production, coupled with a crisis of underconsumption. This failure of 'normal' capitalism to durably turn profits has for a long time been masked by various counter-forces, now approaching their limits. With the automation of the manufacturing and services industries and rapid advance of globalized communications and transport technologies, Blacker argues we have reached what is seen as a 'tipping point' beyond the reliance on human labour, especially in the global North. Under such circumstances, capitalism undergoes a fundamental shift from an 'era of exploitation' to a desperate 'era of elimination', as increasing numbers of the precariously under- or unemployed are no longer required as a 'reserve army' to ensure competition for work keeps wages low but join the masses of a lumpenproletariat: 'no longer seen as resource to be harnessed ... but more a mere threat' to be eliminated.

Crucially, Blacker does not recognize any revolutionary necessity to the playing out of this neoliberal endgame of capitalism, either in Marx or in his own prognostications: what is terminal for capitalism may well be terminal for humanity. This general situation impacts upon the specific analysis

of educational eliminationism, defined as a 'state of affairs in which elites no longer find it necessary to *utilize* mass schooling as a first link in the long chain of the process of extraction of workers' surplus labour' but instead 'cut their losses and abandon public schooling altogether'. The introduction suggests this occurs 'across a number of fronts: crushing student debt, impatience with student expression, the looting of vestigial public institutions, and ... an abandonment of the historical ideal of universal education', subsequently elaborated in three central chapters on 'Educational Eliminationism' subtitled 'I. Student Debt', 'II. Student Voice', and 'III. Universal Schooling disassembled'. It is significant that there is no specific chapter on the third 'front' – the looting of public institutions – since it is here that the book's eliminationist thesis becomes most ambiguous.

Blacker suggests economic eliminationism impacts upon the domain of education either directly, as austerity-driven cuts to public services, or indirectly, as an increasingly haemorrhaging system enters a desperate 'smash and grab' raid on those sectors not yet leached of exchange-value, in order to leverage capital for investment elsewhere. The ruthless marketization of education is therefore perceived as a 'world historical act of desperation' and 'an intensely pathetic phase of the post-debt bubble', equivalent to shaking down the sector for any loose change. Here, Blacker is forced to play down the possibility of what could instead be a period of massive educational *expansionism*, one that corresponds to a broader pedagogization of society and culture, such that not only educational institutions but also galleries, corporations and charities compete with each other over pedagogical outreach projects as a now fetishized ideology of education increases its stranglehold.

If this is the case, it may well be that we will see a complex transformation of the primary functions of education rather than their elimination. If modern, public schooling instilled industrial discipline, privatized education will be required to teach resilience towards increasingly precarious employment. But educational expansionism may in the shorter term also represent a solution to underemployment, however unsustainable, as more students pay off higher fees through services connected to the Education Industry itself. Under such conditions it might even be that certain aspects of commodified education – far from becoming vocationalized, as many currently fear – assume autotelic form as a way of increasing its exchange value: *l'éducation pour l'éducation* (just as bourgeois culture's marketability

has been partially equated with its semblance of imperviousness to exchange value).

When it focuses on student debt, the book suggests that 'the financialized drive to commodify education ultimately resolves itself into a commodification of *oneself*'. Here, the notion of eliminationism is no longer employed literally but corresponds to the metaphorical removal of 'the *human* in human capital', as what Blacker describes as 'existentially indebted' students (because the education they have purchased is inalienable) are tied with their whole being to a production process in which they increasingly resemble the constancy of fixed capital rather than the autonomous labourers of variable capital. This shift contradicts the book's own rejection of what it calls the implicitly neo-Kantian framework of 'canonical left critiques' of education as something



instrumentally dehumanizing. This kind of critique becomes redundant, Blacker argues, when 'the new kind of non-recognition involves not merely reducing people to means but simply wishing them away'. The focus on student debt reverts to a similar kind of *dehumanizing* framework, but one that also implies that the expansion of student debt has to ensure *some* kind of relationship between education and a service to capitalist production which pays off those debts.

In addition, although Blacker argues that capitalism no longer needs skilled and semi-skilled labour because 'the higher the tech, the dumber the worker can be and, ultimately, in the best case neoliberal scenario, phased out altogether where possible', it is also possible to argue, as Carl Cederström and Peter Fleming have recently done in *Dead Man Working* (reviewed in *RP* 180, July/August 2013), that with the growth of service work and new forms of control an increasingly moribund and desperate system is forced to repurpose 'living labour' as it becomes increasingly reliant on human qualities such as social intelligence, imagination and resourceful initiative. Contra shifts towards automating call centres or relocating them

abroad, for example, it is feasible that we will witness a new trend to *rehumanize* (and re-localize) the worker on the end of the line, encouraging them to be more charismatic, spontaneous and off-script in order to better sell their services. Although Cederström and Fleming focus on the new managerial techniques designed to harness human life, it is also possible that the social, creative and critical thinking skills of traditionally 'non-vocational' types of education – most obviously, the humanities – will be re-evaluated for this purpose, and not just in the worst-paid jobs: the UK's minister of state for universities recently celebrated the fact that a third of the chief executives of our top FTSE companies have humanities degrees.

In this context, what is most obviously being eliminated is *public* education. But this concept, as Blacker acknowledges, is itself a relatively recent historical anomaly and an ambiguous one at that (fee-charging 'public schools' in England were independent from both religious restrictions and the residential restrictions of local endowments and were therefore 'public' by virtue of being 'private' in the contemporary sense). At times he suggests that the current infrastructure of public education, largely dependent on cheap fossil fuels, will disappear (here technological experiments in 'flipped classrooms' and MOOCs reveal the advantages of 'home schooling' in the age of austerity), at other times that whilst 'compulsory education as a *mass* phenomenon will ... be eliminated', educational eliminationism may actually involve the continuation and expansion of their infrastructure even as 'these institutions lose any independence and direct autonomy'. As the young no longer require 'education in any substantive sense', the book suggests, so-called 'educational institutions' may transform into sites of mere surveillance and incarceration. At its core, then, the 'falling rate of learning' is about a conceptual elimination of *education*, and Blacker is right to insist that any future substantiation of such a claim depends upon the continued capacity to philosophize what such a concept means, without – it should be added – essentializing any specific historical formation.

The value of the book's analysis throughout is the recognition of modern educational institutions as one of the counterforces that propped up capitalism; its only recourse to nostalgia comes with the recognition that the exploitation which underwrites the traditional system may soon appear preferable to the eliminationism which replaces it. As a result, Blacker is structurally hemmed in to merely legalistic objections to the eliminationism he identifies: student

debt should be written off as *illegitimate* in accordance with the 1956 UN convention against ‘practices similar to slavery’, which includes ‘debt bondage’ of an unlimited or undefined nature and length, while moves to reduce the framework of free speech rights in schools are rejected as *unreasonable* in accordance with the foundational imperative of legal reasoning to stand by previous legal judgments. This nonetheless permits Blacker to develop the most bracing and controversial part of his critique: not of capitalist eliminationism per se but of those educational activists whose idealism provides ideological cover for the broader crisis at hand: ‘One constant thought is that we can *educate* ourselves out of the predicament, the more the better, primarily via an augmented and more equitable distribution of higher education.’ The vanity of educators has to be wounded, Blacker insists, because this heroic gesture is pointless: the education system of late capitalism isn’t fit to be patched up in this way.

In the concluding chapter Blacker proffers a ‘compartmentalized and political pessimism that is direct intra-institutionally’, philosophized via a collectively repurposed version of Stoic fatalism. This is loosely developed through the idea of a ‘counterfactual pedagogy of negative visualization’, which opportunistically builds upon increasingly prevalent experiences of actual loss – but also the trauma imagined via the

zombie dramas and apocalypticism of popular culture – as the best kind of teachers to prepare for the worst and to cling to what remains of the best. In such experiences, he suggests, we collectively confront our own status as the ‘living dead’ of a surplus humanity to be eliminated. We might, however, draw a different lesson from popular culture’s current fascination with zombism: as the expression of capitalism’s fear not of the human life that remains but of an inhuman and undead labour that is immune to educational interpellation and neoliberal vampirism. The ‘survivalism’ the book counsels might therefore have unconsciously adopted capital’s humanist perspective rather than succumbing to the unfathomably new experience of the ‘walking dead’ that stalk the land.

Ultimately, the catastrophic prophecy that animates *The Falling Rate of Learning* is the pedagogical equivalent of such negative visualization. It is a refreshing and effective tactic, making this one of the most readable and radical of recent books on the ‘crisis of education’. Apocalypticism is like comedy, however – all about timing. Even if we ultimately share Blacker’s dark vision of the capitalist endgame, we might have to prepare ourselves for the more worrying possibility that reports of education’s demise have been greatly exaggerated.

Matthew Charles

Kiss ass

Lynne Huffer, *Are the Lips a Grave? A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2013. 264 pp., £62.00 hb., £22.50 pb., 978 0 23116 416 0 hb., 978 0 23116 417 7 pb.

This book offers an impassioned response to the contemporary rift between feminism and queer theory through the marshalling of what may seem like a paradoxical set of allies. While Huffer’s feminism is inflected by the work of Michel Foucault, a figure often dismissed by feminists (due primarily to his denial of the violence of rape), Huffer’s queer thinking is inflected by Luce Irigaray, an equally suspicious figure in the orthodoxy of queer theory (due to what Craig Owens notoriously describes as her supposed homophobia). Ignoring these orthodoxies, Huffer develops a vision of ethics as a process of desubjectivation, of unmaking and remaking the self through narrative practices that require careful listening and close reading as much as speaking and writing. In these encounters, finding the balance between

feminism and queer theory involves an ethical commitment both to a capacious and inclusive queer identity that ‘excludes exclusion’ and to a feminist ethics of care that acknowledges harms.

Ironically enough, according to Huffer, the split between feminism and queer theory is at least in part due to the successes of queer theory and to its institutionalization upon the founding myth of its origins. As Huffer retells this myth, ‘a metanarrative has developed in which the fluid, destabilizing queer performance stakes out its difference from that which came before by setting up a stable, fixed feminist narrative as its nonqueer identitarian other’. Rooted in this myth of the anti-identitarian vs identitarian, self-creating vs self-shattering, queer theory has established a new set of binary pairs of old and new,

queer and feminist, stodgy and chic, policing and liberating. Huffer's Foucauldian genealogy narrates the silences within this myth by questioning both the 'foundationalist feminist tradition' and 'the normative force of queer antinormativity'. Behind this normative force, Huffer identifies – in a deeply Irigarayan gesture – 'a constitutive forgetting at the heart of queer theory that is itself forgotten'. As founded upon this constitutive forgetting of sexual difference, queer theory has fallen short of its own political project to exclude exclusion.

Huffer does not deny that there is a significant set of divergences between feminism and queer theory. Rather, her strategy is to employ a phrase that appears repeatedly throughout the text, one of 'rift restoring'. Restoring rifts does not entail repairing a once unified whole, but instead restoring the rift as rift within a whole that was *always* rift-riven. This process is best captured by Irigaray's figure of lips, which represent the irreducible difference within sameness that marks the common political task of feminism and queer theory. Folding Irigaray's lips into queer theory is representative of Huffer's approach in not seeking to reject a supposedly moralistic feminism in the name of queer emancipatory politics, but instead 'to interrupt the shouting match' in order to bring the two fields into an ongoing process of retelling their own intertwined history.

In taking this stance, Huffer takes aim at Janet Halley's influential book *Split Decisions*, which argues for a break from feminism as a political strategy in order to explore theories of sexuality that might not be directly aligned with the goals of feminism. Huffer responds to Halley's 'unhelpfully dualistic' approach with a queer-feminist stance that expands the terms of feminism, while also avoiding any of the superficial liberatory practices of the strands of queer theory that take it to be a profound political act to 'talk dirty in theory'. If Halley calls for a break from feminism, for Huffer, the productive figure of the rift cannot flourish if reduced to mere separation.

In restoring the lips to queer theory, Huffer levies a wounding critique against certain strands of queer theory by applying Simone de Beauvoir's classic analysis of the Other in binary gender structures to this constitutive exclusion. If man is constructed as both the neutral and the positive in Beauvoir, then woman is in the impossible position of being a lack. Analogously, if the gay (white) male is both the positive and the neutral within queer theory, then the lesbian is left in the impossible position of being a lack. Huffer's point is that queer theory

has not only constructed itself against feminism as its other, but it has also done so against the lesbian. Adopting Huffer's language from the third chapter, 'There is No Gomorrah', where Gomorrah stands for the silent voice of the lesbian, we can say that Sodom has spoken, even from its grave, while the voice of Gomorrah has not yet been heard. The voice of Gomorrah is heard most clearly in chapters 4–8, which constitute what one might call 'narratives from Gomorrah'. These chapters primarily deploy the strategy of reading a canonical queer text through a voice from Gomorrah in order to identify the ruptures in the genealogy of queer normativity through which the lips speak.

This strategy is applied in an exemplary fashion in two chapters that are especially worthy of looking at in detail. In 'Are the Lips a Grave?', Huffer creatively appropriates the title of Leo Bersani's foundational queer essay 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' The chapter is indicative of Huffer's scepticism with regard to those strands of queer theory that fall short of the ethical mandate of excluding exclusion. For Huffer, behind any attempt to 'talk dirty in theory' there lurks a reactionary force of a Foucauldian sexual apparatus that uses that very speech to expand the grasp of power/knowledge. The implication of Huffer's approach is that much of queer theory misreads Foucault, or at best reads him selectively, finding in Foucault a call to arms that overlooks his careful archival methodology. Huffer suggests that, while various theorists have run wild with Foucault's call for 'new bodies and pleasures' in *The History of Sexuality*, taking up fisting as the watchword for new sexual practices, they have not sufficiently heeded the Foucauldian suspicion of transgressive speech and acts as incitements produced by and folded into the sexual apparatus. Huffer does not openly reject this strand of queer theory but instead, in a performance of her own ethics, listens to, responds to and retells what it elides. In these readings Huffer's approach is perhaps best described as a genealogy of structures of silencing.

In her retelling of the story of Foucault's fist, Huffer rewrites the fist as a story not only of the rectum, but of the lips as well. In Huffer's retelling the fist serves as both the hypermasculine object par excellence symbolizing the dominance of white gay males in queer theory and as the site of a lesbian erotics of self-shattering. As Huffer boldly pronounces: 'It is not a utopian blueprint I offer, but a heterotopian willingness to be undone.' If for Bersani the self is shattered through anal sex, for Huffer the most radical act of shattering is situated within a

genealogical practice that shows how we have always already been shattered. Huffer, much like Bersani, finds the promise of queer theory in an ethics of self-shattering, yet is sceptical of any naive shattering of the self that is not informed by a rigorous genealogy of what selfhood means in the first place. Hence Huffer concludes: 'But as my Irigarayan glimpse into Bersani's rectum has shown, there's nothing "good" in sex for Irigaray either: this sex which is not one is her exposure of the same masculine ideal of proud subjectivity which Bersani wants to explode with anal sex.... If the rectum is a grave, so is the vagina.' Sodom, in other words, does not have a monopoly on self-shattering. Indeed, as Huffer indicates, the most radically fractured self might be found in the forgotten lesbian voice of Gomorrah, and this is because she has never thought of herself as one.

In the chapter 'Queer Victory, Feminist Defeat? Sodomy and Rape in *Lawrence v. Texas*', Huffer addresses the landmark 2003 US Supreme Court case overturning sodomy statutes in the United States. Here she finds an intriguing instance of what Jean-François Lyotard referred to as the *differend*, which Huffer describes as 'unacknowledged harms and unheard voices whose claims are incommensurable with the idiom of the law through which disputes are negotiated and resolved'. Huffer locates the *differend*, in this instance, in the voice of the plaintiff in *Powell v. State*, a 1998 Georgia state Supreme Court case overturning Georgia's sodomy statute – a case which has been reduced to a footnote in the celebratory history of *Lawrence*. Huffer shows how the prosecutors in *Powell* took recourse to the Georgia sodomy statute to prosecute Powell of heterosexual rape of a minor in the absence of sufficient evidence for the use of force. The victim in the case kept silent, but

did not overtly refuse Powell's advances. Huffer finds the *differend* in this silence, which the court can only formulate as 'incoherence'. Powell thus signifies the 'law's failure to deal with sexual violence and the use of sodomy as a fallback measure for punishing perpetrators in cases where juries are not willing to believe that the act was committed "with force and against the will" of the plaintiff'. *Lawrence* indeed is a queer victory, yet for Huffer it is essential that it also be recognized as established upon the background of violence against women. Huffer is ethically committed, not merely to granting speech to such voices, but to tracing the silences that mark such voices as incoherent. This process of narration draws liberally from both queer theory and feminism according to the demands of any particular instance of silencing.

Huffer's commitment to this theoretical capaciousness raises a number of questions about the direction in which Huffer seeks to guide queer theory. If Irigaray is brought into the fold of queer theory as an ally in the project of desubjectivation, then who will count as queer if queerness is above all indexed to continuous unmaking of the self? Is queer theory eviscerated through such a capacious definition of queer, or enlivened anew? Does indexing queer to processes of desubjectivation deprive queer of any specificity, or is that precisely what is demanded of an ethics that excludes exclusion? Huffer's intention is not so much to answer these questions, but to incite them, to hold them continually open in a set of rifts that must first be restored. For Huffer, the generative essence of queer thinking is the space of undecidability opened up through such questions – an undecidability that is opened without the desire for closure.

Adam Knowles



Cast out in the seventies

Warren Carter, Barnaby Haran and Frederic J. Schwartz, eds, *Renew Marxist Art History*, Art Books, London, 2013. 520 pp., £45.00 hb., 978 1 90897 011 4.

The institutions of art history have an uneasy relation to critical theory, even if that relation is also, historically, mutually constitutive. One of the editors of *Renew Marxist Art History*, Fred Schwartz, demonstrates the relation in his own contribution to the volume, 'Aby Warburg and the Spirit of Capitalism' (a kind of addendum to his book *Blind Spots*) in which he argues that 'in his works on the Florentine bourgeoisie and on pagan-antique prophecy at the time of the Reformation, Warburg had wandered into a large debate on the origins of capitalism he wanted absolutely no part in'. A number of the essays in the volume deal with North American painting and the history of left-wing art in the United States, a mark of the influence of art historian Andrew Hemmingway (formerly of University College London), for whom this volume is in part a Festschrift. Consequentially, many of the essays in the volume also attempt to grab the legacy of Warburg roughly by the shoulders, and turn it towards a debate concerning not the origins of capitalism, but the fate of communism. In this regard, a distinction should perhaps be drawn between art history which pertains to Marxists, and that which is undertaken in the spirit of Marxism itself.

One concern of this latter project ought be an engagement with the most advanced Marxist theory. Nonetheless, while the thought of a number of critical theorists does weave itself through the book, it is less as a guiding spirit and more as a terrifying serpent which would appear, for some, to threaten to suffocate the discipline altogether. Stewart Martin's contribution on Marx's reliance upon Feuerbach's theory of sensuousness is, for example, extremely welcome, but it contains no reflections on art works themselves, as if to protect the works from any possible stranglehold at this point. At the same time, those essays which do concentrate on art works do not approach philosophy with the same sensitivity and rigour. (Although in so far as this is a consequence of the histories of the different disciplines, it is perhaps not an issue merely to be corrected.)

The overture to the collection, provided by Warren Carter's introduction, presents a polemical history of the history of art, which, once again, tilts at the windmills of postmodernism. The postmodern

theory of Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster and the rest of the *October* journal is pushed aside, this windmill deemed to be spinning dangerously out of control. The blame for this is put down to their disconnection from the struggles of '1968–1973'. But the observation that this period ended *forty years ago* might have led Carter to reflect that since that grand moment there have been other points of antagonism between capital and the global proletariat. Worse, Carter goes on to claim that 'a purported feminist historical materialism – as [Griselda] Pollock later defined her project – in which gender is not substituted for class, but instead shown to be somehow coterminous with it, and with race as well, is not actually any form of Marxism at all.' Apparently only the working class has a fundamental relation to production and labour; one which the categories of race and sex do not express. Not only does this display a worrying ignorance of nearly half a century of development of Marxist thought (never mind the writings of Luxemburg, Zetkin and Reich), which might have hindered the flow of Carter's gliding sweep, but also the lessons of centuries of material struggle. Where Carter succeeds in renewing a certain Marxist tradition, he fails, then, in opening his eyes to the world as it is.

One contemporary artist whose work literally enframes the book is David Mabb, whose designs are used for the book's endpapers. The piece consists of Constructivist designs in red and black printed over a William Morris wallpaper. The palimpsest evokes a conversation between machine and handicraft: Morris's designs evoking a bygone age of production, though reproduced mechanically, while the Constructivists' mechanical designs are hand-printed by Mabb via an imperfect bold ink block. But there is a third part of the design unintended by Mabb, which is the projection of all these techniques through the technology of the digital age. The whole image is overlaid with the graininess and cloudy imprecision of a JPEG file, as well as the impression of faint haloes around all the edges within the image resulting from the compression process. The most contemporary aspect of the visual world seems to intrude upon the image, blurring the iconographical citing of English trade unionism and Russian Bolshevism. There is more to Marxism than the citing of these traditions,

and the technologies of both ruling and working classes in the world here and now will continue to assert themselves in the critique of artworks, both new and old, whether Marxists in the academy like it or not. The challenge is to change the world as it exists, not to demand that the world find its appropriate gear, look over its shoulder, and passionately reverse into the distance.

Fortunately most of the essays in the collection do not follow Carter in this respect. But there is an unnecessary correlation between the comprehension of contemporary theory and contemporary art, which is broken only by Caroline Arscott's essay on a biopolitical reading of William Morris's work – ironically an essay which owes little to Marxism in the final analysis. Even here the reader is made privy to a citation of different political theorists whose names have become synonymous with a period of struggle, rather than the struggle itself. That is, the philosophers and their writings substitute for the class struggle and the development of its contradictions: hence, Kersten Stakemeier's argument that the analyses of Mario Tronti and Silvia Federici are shared by the art works of their time, and Frances Tracey's relating of Castoriadis's class analysis to that of the Situationists. What these essays lack, for all their strengths, including their rejection of Leninism, is an appreciation that the relation of artists and writers (or art theory and art practice) might come not out of a shared intellectual history but out of a shared history of struggle and its expression.

The essays that come closest to recognizing this are actually those which are least Marxist in their self-description. Brian Foss's essay on Homer Watson's *The Pioneer Mill* may not be the most exhilarating twenty pages, but it contains a careful unravelling of the iconography of the abandoned mill, showing it to be wrapped up in a more general history of Canadian colonial expansion and its deleterious effects on the working class. Although the description could be accused of a conservative iconographical approach (with shades of Warburg and Panofsky), it also demonstrates one aspect of the persistence of critical theory in the institutions of art history: the close attention to 'formal analysis', also displayed in exemplary fashion by Arscott's detailed descriptions of Morris's vegetative designs. That is, it respects and subverts the formal autonomy of the work. Stylistically, this can itself be no more than a rhetorical display of art historical expertise, but it strikes me as having the kind of sensitivity to the transformation

of image into word required by any writer who is alert to the material history of both. *Pace* Hemmingway, Marxism is only a 'totalizing theory of society' if it is understood that society itself is totalizing, and that 'theory' entails practical critical activity. It is this that must be understood both as the principle of the formation of the art work under examination, and as the purpose of writing here and now, so that the works themselves become alive again in our present conjuncture.

Richard Braude

Nyet

Bini Adamczak, *Gestern Morgen. Über die Einsamkeit kommunistischer Gespenster und die Rekonstruktion der Zukunft*, Unrast Verlag, Münster, 2011. 153 pp., €12.00 pb., 978 3 89771 465 6.

This is a book about 'communist desire' – that is, about the deep-seated moving force within people which impels them to strive to give their lives self-chosen collective meaning, by opposing oppression, arbitrary coercion, abolishing hierarchical structures, and ending the various forms of alienation. The attempts to act on this desire in the twentieth century were a series of colossal and catastrophic failures. What took place in the huge region of Eurasia that was once organized as the Russian Empire and then became the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1939 provides an instructive instance of the way in which utopian hopes, energies and aspirations can turn against themselves, becoming more destructive the more well-founded and disciplined they seemed to be. How in the face of this can it be at all reasonable even to try to keep any kind of grip on the utopian contents of communist desire?

Part of the answer, Bini Adamczak argues in her new book, must lie in a reflection on the history of the failures of the communist project in the twentieth century. We can only reasonably hope to retain and cultivate a 'communist' desire for a utopian future if we understand the nature of past utopian desires and the specific ways in which they failed. Each of a series of chapters in Adamczak's book is devoted to exploring one historically concrete situation in which this failure became manifest: the Hitler–Stalin Pact, the Terror of 1937–39, the failure of the Left in Central Europe to stop the advent of National Socialism, Stalin's rise to power, Kronstadt. Adamczak puts

particular emphasis on the way in which agents in the past did, or did not, realize while it was happening that their commitments were turning against themselves, transforming them into their opposite, and becoming destructive. The failures, the author holds, are *real* failures, and although much can be said about how they are to be best understood, nothing is to be gained cognitively, morally or politically by closing one's eyes to them, pretending they did not occur, or trivializing them. If we cannot confront this past, humanity has no future. In fact, *only* people on the left can really mourn the victims of these catastrophes appropriately; liberals, neoliberals, 'democrats', libertarians, adherents of 'republicanism' or of traditional religions (and others) may well say 'I told you so', but, because of the poverty of their conception of human possibilities, have had no attractive alternative future to offer, and so have been incapable of fully understanding or of mourning the disasters of the last century. Only communism itself provides the criteria relative to which it is possible to attain anything like a correct judgement and proper appreciation of what happened. It is also essential to the



future survival of (or revival of) hopes for a better future that the work of understanding and mourning be completed in such a way as not to give succour to those who would systematically root out communist desire.

The order in which the failures are presented and discussed in Adamczak's book is the reverse of the historical order in which they occurred (the Hitler-Stalin Pact first; Kronstadt last). This is part of a conscious strategy of the author, who thinks that those who broadly share the ideals and aspirations of the major agents and victims in this story have

a natural tendency to think of the history of this period in this way, looking back from the present and locating at some point in the past a moment of unmitigated 'good' which, however, passed, was lost and initiated a historical process of degeneration. The natural question to ask is, 'where and when did it go wrong – when Stalin signed the Pact with Hitler, or *already* in 1933, or with Kronstadt?' Part of the point of the book, as I understand it, is to reject this as the right way to understand and come to terms with what happened. There was *never* a single moment in the past in which an aboriginally pure revolutionary will or pure unsullied communist desire was fully present and on the point of realizing itself, which then passed, was lost and was perverted or corrupted. When you peel the layers of the historical onion back, you come not to a 'pure' onion at the heart, but to nothing. This does not mean that an onion is not an onion or that 'nothingness' is the core of the onion, but rather just that one must think about the onion in a different way.

Although the above description may give the impression that this is a book of 'history', it is in fact a particularly admirable feature of the book that it does *not* fall into any of the usual categories. If I had to describe it, I would say it is a lyrical and philosophical reflection on history in the service of a rekindling of utopia desire. 'Lyrical' is not a word that is automatically associated with sober analysis, realism or scholarship. This work has *all* of those virtues, but also a remarkable lightness of touch and an unsentimental ability to enter into the mental and psychic worlds of those who are now dead and present their world (including the non-world of their unfulfilled aspirations) in a way that retains its full human vitality. The author sums up her topic as 'Mourning, dreaming, trauma' ('Trauer, Traum, Trauma'). 'Real history' – the story of what did happen – and the history of utopian desire – an account of what people at any given time thought ought to happen – are not only compatible, but require each other if we are to retain any hope for the future at all.

Raymond Geuss