Revolution is ordinary

John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, Pluto Press, London and Sterling, 2002. viii + 237 pp., £50.00 hb., £15.99 pb., 0 7453 1864 9 hb., 0 7453 1863 0 pb.

Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, London and Sterling, Pluto Press, 2002. ix + 257 pp., £45.00 hb., £15.99 pb., 0 7453 1607 7 hb., 0 7453 1606 9 pb.

In his recent anthology of Lenin's conjunctural writings of 1917, *Revolution at the Gates* (Verso, 2002), Slavoj Žižek insists on the present need for new 'forms of politicization' of the social, now globalized by network capitalism, which contemplate capitalism's end. Žižek himself looks, not quite to Leninism (a Stalinist invention), but to Lenin's exemplary 'full subjective engagement' in a moment of catastrophe he made his own, which was as much existential as organizational and theoretical. Žižek refers to this form of political engagement as a 'Leninist utopia'. Such quasi-normative reflections on revolutionary enthusiasm as a mode of individualized being and becoming (arguably, a culturalist intervention in the realm of the political, overcoded in the language of a philosophy of will) are widespread, suggesting a shared experience of political crisis.

As their titles suggest, both John Holloway's *Changing the World* and Steve Wright's *Storming Heaven* manifest this concern for thinking contemporary revolutionary political subjectivity. However each turns against not only institutionalized Leninism but also the exceptionalism of left-wing political individualism in either its charismatic or party modes, in different but salutory (that is, de-sacrilizing) ways. For Wright, the figure of 'militancy' produced by Italian autonomist Marxism suffers from the developmentalism inherent in most avant-gardist politics; whilst for Holloway, the struggle for power filtered through the exception and/or the party reproduces categorial fetishism – a form of 'power-over' that 'doing' (the fragmented sociality of practice present in resistance and struggle) that revolutionary practice should in fact release, as 'anti-power'. Whilst Žižek, Badiou and others are keen to rethink the question of *political revolution* in the absence of obvious agencies of social transformation, and thus in somewhat compensatory fashion ('more Will!'), Wright and, especially, Holloway suggest that the very notion may have become problematic.

Two particular experiences of militancy emerge in Holloway's and Wright's books that resonate strongly within the contemporary anti-capitalist movements across the world. In *Storming Heaven*, which is a history of theoretical ideas, Wright examines the Italian Marxism associated with the far left 'autonomy' movement of the 1960s and 1970s, present today in the work of Hardt and Negri, as well as in the lesser-known, untranslated work of Paolo Virno and Yann Moulier Boutang, amongst others. The continued influence of this tradition – the work of Mario Tronti proves especially important – is evident in Holloway's book too. *Changing the World*, however, is especially marked – perhaps overoptimistically now – by the experience of neo-Zapatismo in Mexico: the initial Chiapas armed revolt, its modes of self-presentation, and its subsequent stubborn resistance.

In the words of Mario Tronti, Italy's far left 'Autonomia' movement produced 'many flowers, but little fruit'. Wright recounts this history through an analysis of the writings of key intellectuals (especially Raniero Panzieri, Romano Alaquati, Mario Tronti, Antonio Negri and Sergio Bologna), weaving it convincingly into the story of the journals and newspapers which published their main theoretical and political interventions and investigations (*Quaderni Rossi* and *Classe Operaia* are the most famous, but also *Primo Maggio* and *Rosso*) and the history of their political organizations (the Italian Socialist Party, the Italian Communist Party, and Potere Operaia, the Gruppo Gramsci etc.). With Autonomia having been eclipsed in the 1970s by the influence of Eurocommunism, in its Togliatti–Gramsci articulation, and in the 1990s by the figure of Negri, *Storming Heaven* offers up a possible reconstellation of Italian Marxism for the English-speaking reader schooled in the concept of 'hegemony' that, surprisingly, has its origins in the margins of the postwar Socialist Party (Panzieri and Negri) allied to heterodox members of the Communist Party (Tronti) – the former resisting integration with

the Christian Democrats, the latter resisting corporativist social democratization. The question of the political representation and organization of 'labour' in parties and trade unions was fundamental to this new theoretical production – especially the postulate of labour's *self*-organization which leads to the figure of its 'autonomy' – as well as to their rivalries and conflicts. Wright expounds the political rationale of this history well. But there is another side to the story, which begins with the postwar economic miracle that transformed the experience of the Italian working class: rapid industrialization and the subordination of labour to the machinery of fixed capital, followed by the increasing socialization of capital in the mid-1970s, resulting (as elsewhere) in the emergence into dominance of post-Fordist regimes of production and the service industries. In Italy, however, this process was overdetermined by a drawn-out and violent 1968, on the one hand, and considerable internal migration, on the other. This is the history that produced the key concepts and figures associated with Autonomia: the 'factory' and the 'social factory', the 'mass worker' and the 'socialized worker', and, more particularly, 'class composition' – that is, working-class decomposition and recomposition in and beyond the factory.

Wright tells this history well, too. But the theoretical argument loses out. The concept of class composition is not given the space and time it deserves, so that its different political inflections – as, for example, we are told they appear in the work of Panzieri and Tronti, Negri and Bologna – are insufficiently drawn out. This is perhaps a result of Wright's antipathy to theory. Theoreticism is a fault which he perceives in Tronti – possibly the most inventive of the thinkers associated with Autonomia, at least before Negri. However, without Tronti's worker-centred philosophy of history, conceptualized as 'refusal', the idea of class composition would have been bereft of its particular autonomous political inflection. Like Althusser, writing in the early 1960s, Tronti wanted to make a science of Marxism. One way of characterizing his gesture is as an attempt to return politics (Lenin) to the analysis of capital (Marx), countering what Gramsci referred to as the Bolshevik 'revolution against *Capital*' that came to define modernizing political Marxism in contexts of uneven development.

Capitalist development in Tronti's view, and with it class composition, was the result of bourgeois *resistance* to the power of labour, and could be tracked in the tendential subsumption of labour to fixed capital in the form of machinery and planning, the attempt to do away with the labour it depended upon. In Wright's words, class composition refers to 'the material structure of the working class' as a *force of production* at the 'nexus of the technical and the political'; and Tronti et al. traced its transformations against the grain of its given modes of political representation in parties and trade unions. The idea of the factory – where in the labour process worker and capitalist meet, as value-producing variable and constant capital – was thus central to Autonomia thought, and has remained so subsequently in, for example, Negri's thinking of class struggle within the social factory and empire. But, as Wright suggests, the figures of the mass and socialized worker-militants become entrapped in the negative – technological and modernizing – image of labour's own historical positivity; that is, in a developmentalism that focuses only on the workers of the most 'advanced' sectors to the detriment of others. Uneven development between capitals, so crucial to any conception of accumulation, and uneven development between working classes, so crucial to thinking revolution politically, have not troubled Autonomia theoretical production.

From Holloway's point of view, both the factory and the model of class it generates in the writings of Tronti and Negri have become fetishized categories. *Changing the World* contains a series of excellent critical readings – of Lukács and the Frankfurt School, of Negri and Hardt, of class composition theory, which provides Holloway with his basic model of thought, and of the flight of capital in crisis – which turn on the two-faced character of fetishism: doing and done, power-to and power-over. The story of value, for example, is not only the story of the capture of doing as abstract labour (producing surplus value and the accumulated as the 'done') but also the story of capital's fragility as it negates, in flight, the fundamental substatum of social doing on which it depends, to produce 'anti-power'. The experience of capital is the experience of violent separation (the private appropriation of the social through a continued process of primitive accumulation) and inversion (the fetishized imposition of 'power-over', the 'done' over 'doing'). The working class, in this account, is not a predetermined positivity – as it is, in Holloway's view, in class composition theory – but a product of 'class-ification' to be (and that is, continuously) resisted. Struggle, criticism and resistance are forms of practical negation of the 'done' beyond the impositions of identity-thinking. (Holloway quotes Adorno: 'Contradiction is non-identity under the aspect of identity.') In other words, they are articulations of the grammar of denied subjectivity present in 'the scream', Holloway's founding figure of

thought. The scream existentially grounds the negativity of anti-power as ecstatic subjectivity: it is indicative (negating the present) and subjunctive (in the name of the 'not-yet', as Bloch puts it). The struggle for power, for revolutionary state power, in this view, is an articulation of reified identity-thinking, institutionalized in the party-form that has had catastrophic consequences and is, says Holloway, to be 'refused'. This is where the example of the neo-Zapatistas in Mexico comes to the fore – not as a historical example, unfortunately, but as an *ethical* imperative. Revolution, a key term in *Changing the World*, becomes everyday, in Holloway's anti-heroic account of the realities of anti-power. One might even say that revolution is ordinary.

'The unity of scream-against and power-to can perhaps be referred to as dignity', writes Holloway post-Chiapas. 'Dignity is the refusal to accept humiliation, oppression, exploitation, dehumanisation. It is a refusal which negates the negation of humanity, a negation filled, therefore, with the project of the humanity currently negated.' *Changing the World* presents itself as an anti-academic work, contra what it calls the 'pose of reason' and 'the thinker', preferring rather to represent thought as born from 'rage'. Hence the scream. But it is at this point that its ecstatic two-dimensionality suturing future to present suffers from the lack of a third: the presence of the past, or history. This produces an over-rhetorical text that, in attempting to escape from academicism into the essay form, in fact instrumentalizes the subjectivity it claims to recover. Two very brief examples. First, the neo-Zapatista notion of 'dignity' rearticulated by Holloway as a radical humanist politics of mutual recognition comes from a colonial and postcolonial repertoire demanding of the state that it fully recognize and legitimate a particular identity-claim on behalf of the Indian population, and that this population's cultural and political customs be granted 'autonomy'. Some radical critics in Mexico, like the anthropologist Roger Bartra, have suggested that such demands may in fact rearticulate racist juridico-political norms imposed during the colonial period. Some reflection here on the historicity of concepts may have helped historicize Holloway's will to defetishize. Second, if fetishism is real, as Holloway insists, and grounded in 'separation' – for example, the separation of the political and the economic under capitalism – more reflection on the 'real' specificity of the political sedimented over time may have also illuminated the *state* fetishism so important to his critique of revolutionary politics. Holloway mentions Foucault in the regard, but what of the work of Abrams, Taussig, or Corrigan and Sayers?

In *Storming Heaven*, the logic of Wright's historical account leaves little room for sustained theoretical reflection. In *Changing the World* Holloway's insistence on theoretical and rhetorical argumentation displaces the opportunity for a historical illumination of concepts. However, a dialectical unity of history and its concepts would involve much more than a simple synthesis of these approaches.

John Kraniauskas

Fairy Nuff

Simon Critchley, *On Humour*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002. 132 pp., £40.00 hb., £7.99 pb., 0 415 25120 6 hb., 0 415 25121 4 pb.

Not many books have both Tommy Cooper and the *Critique of Judgement* in their index, as this one does. It is the incongruity of this which we find mildly amusing, and such incongruity is in Simon Critchley's view perhaps the chief source of humour. There are other sources, to be sure, such as feelings of superiority or sheer psychic relief; but for Critchley jokes are at root a kind of category mistake, a momentary derangement of our social rituals, a sudden defamiliarizing which returns us all the more deeply to the *sensus communis* of our world. Humour is the world with its causal chains shattered and its common sense in tatters, a sentiment bred in the gap between expectation and actuality, or between the way things are and the way they are represented. It is a 'form of practical abstraction' or 'socially embedded philosophizing' which secretes within it a certain redemptive or messianic power, changing a situation in the orgasmic liberation or sudden glory of laughter to bring new truth into being. One might claim, then – though this book does not in so many words – that comedy is political because it conjures a certain emancipatory power from frailty and failure, including a failure of expectations. Humour, in Critchley's fine phrase, involves 'a syntax of weakness'.

None of this sounds too true of the one about the Pakistani. Critchley, to do him justice, suspects that most humour is reactionary or aggressive, and he is entertaining about an imaginary outfit called Humour Solutions International (slogan: 'Laughter loves company and companies love laughter'), which lays on 'structured fun' for employees to crank up productivity. Quite how imaginary is a good question. But his heart is not really in this negative dimension of his subject, and his treatment of it is fairly perfunctory. He underrates, for example, the sheer virulence and malicious excess of Swift's embattled Anglo-Irish Ascendancy satire, about which there is nothing in the least congenial. Swift's humour is intimate but unfriendly. Critchley prefers to attend to what he calls 'true' humour, which seems to be not what most people find funny. Even here, however, one should note that not all incongruity is comic. There's nothing particularly rib-tickling about mistaking a snake for a mottled stone. Nor is it easy to see how 'I am a fairy; my name is Nuff; fairy Nuff!' disrupts our naturalized rituals in a flash of messianic illumination. Anyway, even if humour is essentially defamiliarizing, not all defamiliarizing is humorous. Some of it can be distinctly alarming.

Even so, *On Humour* steps with admirable adroitness from Tommy Cooper to Kant, or more exactly from jesting to philosophizing. Despite declaring humour 'a nicely impossible object for a philosopher', Critchley manages to discern in it a sort of philosophical anthropology by stressing its amphibious nature, the way in which it exposes our doubled, divided nature as creatures caught on the hop between beast and angel, nature and culture, physical and metaphysical, 'souls and arseholes'. Pope's splendid phrase about humanity – ' the glory, jest and riddle of the world' – is apposite here, though the words apply even more accurately to the traditional perception of women. All humans, one might say, are eccentric to themselves, though the English are more eccentric than others. Humour signifies the contradiction built into our aspiring animality, the ambiguous truth (as Critchley puts it) that we both have bodies and are bodies, or (as I would prefer to put it myself) that it is not quite true to say that we have a body, and not quite true to say that we are one either.

This, as Critchley recognises both here and elsewhere in his work, brings comedy uncannily close to tragedy. Both genres are about confronting one's feebleness and finitude; it is just that in tragedy this means being dragged through fire, so tenaciously rooted is human self-deception. Tragedy, moreover, remains secretly faithful to the austere superegoic idealism or infinity of Reason which would buck human finitude, admiring this clenched absolutism while registering its dreadful destructiveness. It is about courageously wresting victory from failure, whereas comedy is simply about the victory of failure itself, the way in which a wry confession of our common weakness makes us much less killable. Comedy embraces imperfection from the outset, whereas Lear has to be bound to a wheel of fire before he will acknowledge that it is better to be a humbly determinate 'something' than the empty negativity of 'all'.

On Humour sees, too, that comedy and tragedy are somatic allies. The convulsive, frighteningly out-of-control spasm of laughter can hurt, just as, conversely, tragedy is classically considered to be the kind of suffering which edifies and delights. When Critchley

sees the comic attitude as practical but also as a sort of disinterested contemplation, he might well have pointed out that this for Schopenhauer is an aestheticizing response to the nightmare of history, not the fruit of a sense that all is ultimately well. As far as that goes, however, there is too little in the book (though its subject, after all, is humour) about comedy as a faith in ultimate well-being, Dante rather than Bob Monkhouse. James Joyce is comic in both senses of the word. Shaftesbury, with his blithe, debonair, patrician sense of *eudaemonia*, is perhaps the foremost English advocate of this vein of cosmic comedy, as opposed to the grim-lipped bourgeois tragedy of a Hobbes. Comedy versus tragedy, in English social history at least, is partly a matter of class conflict between the champions of the glorious pointlessness of humanity (of which art and the joke, or even better the non-cognitive *jest*, is symbolic), and the bourgeois ideologues for whom such purposive purposelessness is an intolerably privileged upper-class clowning. For the latter camp, sociability must have a point, whereas for Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson, conviviality is an end in itself, playfulness is the true condition of humanity, and humour is its most pleasurable signifier.

Critchley, while rightly claiming humour as an anthropological constant, is nonetheless alert to its context-specific nature. One can see this, for example, in the extraordinary range of class tones in English laughter, all the way from the guffaw, bray and cackle to the peal, hoot and titter. Smiling is of course equally contextual: it is well known that women smile more than men, but not so well known that Ulster males do not smile on meeting a friend or on being introduced to a stranger. Pygmies, so this book informs us, laugh easily, lying on the ground and kicking their legs in the air. Given that some of them are said not to see themselves as real people, this is both surprising and relieving.

Critchley draws especially on Swift, Sterne and Beckett, apparently without noticing that all of these writers are Irish. In fact, the Irish powerfully confirm his philosophical anthropology of humour. No trope is more common to Irish literary culture than bathos and savage debunkery. A society rich in native poetic and scholastic learning, and confronted in addition with the high culture of imperial England, was also wretchedly impoverished and dispossessed; and one can trace this lurching from high-sounding erudition to low-level farce, from soul to arsehole, in a whole set of Irish literary oppositions: Swift's Houyhnhnms and Yahoos, Sterne's Walter and Tristram Shandy, Yeats's heroes and Fools, O'Casey's morally idealized women and hopeless men, Joyce's Stephen and Bloom, Beckett's Pozzo and Lucky. Irish humour is typically both pedantic and carnivalesque, combining a crazedly fastidious classifying (think of Sterne, Joyce, Beckett and Flann O'Brien) with the rumbustious rebellions of the flesh.

Comedy is all about exposing the frailty and arbitrariness of our conventions, while restoring them in the end – for if all conventions are as groundlessly gratuitous as each other, then you might as well go Sophist and adopt whichever bunch lies most conveniently to hand. Nobody in Britain has been better placed for such an exposé than the internal émigré or insider–outsider, those who are at once familiar enough with its culture to adopt its patterns while sufficiently alien to cast on it an estranging eye. This is one reason why, from Steele, Sheridan and Goldsmith to Wilde, Shaw and Beckett, English stage comedy has been dominated by Irish exiles. Like Swift or Wilde, the Irish are so like the English that they are even more English than they are, and at the same time not like the English at all. As Beckett replied when asked by a callow French journalist whether he was English: 'Au contraire.'

Bertolt Brecht maintained that only those with a sense of humour could read Hegel, since nothing resembled the sudden switchings and doublings of dialectics so much as jokes. Only a cross-grained controversialist like Brecht could find Hegel a laugh a minute, though the comment is perhaps not as perverse as it sounds. The Shakespearian Fool, for example, is a thoroughly dialectical creature, who by acknowledging that he is nothing becomes in that very act something, raising the negation to the second power and thus converting it into positivity. Brecht's colleague Walter Benjamin observes enigmatically in his essay on Surrealism that when the revolutionary artist devotes himself to producing images, 'the jokes he tells are the better for it' – for the joke, in Benjamin's eyes, resembles the political image in exhausting its content in its representation.

The comic, Critchley remarks, is a matter of repetition, and so, with a vengeance, is his book. Even the illustrations weave minor variations on each other. What one might charitably call comic repetition might be more pointedly described as atrocious editing. *On Humour* is written in a laid-back, unphilosophical style answerable to its subject, but there are times when it lolls back rather too far. Its jokes are better than Freud's, but then so are Jimmy Tarbuck's. It is mercifully brief on the ubiquitous Bakhtin, and

has gratifyingly little to say of the carnivalesque. It passes over the question of demonic laughter – of that incredulous, derisive cackle at the pompous pretension of men and women to meaning and value which lies close to the root of evil. But it broaches a momentous subject with style and insight; there is no great writer who is not humorous for at least some of the time. Humour belongs to the domain of anti-philosophy, which is to say to those interrogations of orthodox philosophy which are philosophically interesting, as opposed, say, to what John Major might have to say about the subject. It is, to coin a phrase, a serious business. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche contrasts the 'stupidity of moral indignation' to what he calls a 'philosophical sense of humour', and reminds us that whenever anyone speaks 'badly but not ill' of human beings, as a belly with two needs and a head with one, then 'the lover of knowledge should listen carefully and with diligence'. Simon Critchley has certainly done that.

Terry Eagleton

Democracy, rational and affective

Iris M. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, 2000. 314 pp., £21.99 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 1982 9754 8 hb., 0 1982 9755 6 pb.

It is hard not to be impressed by Iris Young's sustained critique, over the years, of the false impartiality of reason and rationality in contemporary political philosophy. She relaunches this critique in her new book from the straightforward premiss that everyone whose basic interests are affected by policies should be included in their production and deliberation. However, Young's treatment of this issue aims to transcend standard solutions given in theories of participatory or deliberative democracy. Individuals and groups often claim that decision-making processes are dominated by some societal interests and perspectives to the point of excluding others. Hence, she considers the forms of inclusion that might generate more appropriate political practices on the levels of democratic communication, representation and association, and a more inclusive scope of political jurisdiction. Addressing the concept of deliberation specifically, her argument aims to provide a more generous and pluralistic account of public reasoning in contemporary democratic theory. It is thus continuous with, and an expansion of, her previous writings in feminist philosophy, *Throwing like a Girl* (1990) and *Intersecting Voices* (1997). It also builds upon her illuminating study of group oppression in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990).

Young has never aimed to forsake the ideal of deliberative reason. She accepts its value, but nevertheless seeks to emphasize its internal plurality and 'affective' dimensions. In fact, this new book evinces a twofold claim regarding the importance of affective conditions in promoting the ideal, or most rational, form of democracy in the context of the pervasive fact of deep diversity. In the first place, Young claims that diverse human beings seek affective democratic bonds, namely trust, co-operation, solidarity and loyalty. Public reasoning is importantly consequent on these bonds. Second, it appears that these bonds are sustained by individuals with an affective or psychological capacity for *self-development*. While the latter claim remains undertheorized in the context of deep cultural and sexual difference, Young nevertheless advances a nuanced way of thinking about the problem of political exclusion, and its potential remedies.

Her strategy is first negative, in that she shows how democratic theorists have failed sufficiently to attend to the ways in which processes of deliberation can marginalize individuals and groups. Most notably, norms of political discussion are, she claims, biased against some forms of expression. What follows is an innovative broadening of democratic communication, which will be welcomed by those dissatisfied by the inherently monological form of, say, Rawlsian public reason. Her account highlights the value of narrative, rhetorically situated appeals and public protest. Reconstructing concepts of civil society and the public sphere in light of this wide conception of communicative reason, Young transcends the problems arising from the work of other critics of deliberative democracy by providing substantive alternatives to 'thin' forms of public reason. The alternative modes of expressing minority claims she outlines are, she claims, instrumental in enhancing mutual understanding and in challenging systematically disadvantageous stereotypes.

Hard questions arise from this, however, regarding the mutual translatability and intelligibility of the claims of different cultures. How can a pluralistic conception of public reason guarantee mutual understanding if our languages of justice diverge radically? Young evades these complex questions. Instead, in seeking to justify the desire for inclusion with reference to the psychic or internal preconditions for

individual self-development, she revisits her debate with Nancy Fraser on recognition and redistribution. Young argues, with Fraser, that democratic equality cannot be achieved on the level of redistribution of resources alone. Rather, it is a question of redefining power relations that enable dominant languages of justice to prevail over others, and that render some individuals socially and politically 'voiceless'. Exclusion and misrecognition imply disrespect; they imply a psychological harm, namely the inability to express oneself freely and creatively in public. The remedies, she argues, lie importantly beyond the things that we have or do not have. The remedies lie rather in bonds of trust and relationships of mutual recognition, which, in a plural public sphere, 'motivate me to include you, to understand where, on the level of beliefs about value, you are coming from'.

The claim is therefore that redistribution and recognition are *complementary* democratic concerns. Inequality is not reducible to a lack of income and wealth, nor to the absence of formal opportunities to compete for positions of power. Yet neither can we sever the causal link between inequality and the lack of these assets. On the one hand, the 'logic of distribution' forestalls important discussion of symbolic (power) relationships that render a person more or less free to 'self-develop'. On the other hand, however, in a non-ideal society in which resources are always limited, problems of distributive justice will be important for both political theorists and practitioners alike. Distributional differences indicate, minimally, the *degree* of a person's freedom or unfreedom to self-develop. Empirically, structural, cultural and symbolic inequalities are often manifested as material, socio-economic disadvantages.

Young restates the classical Marxist claim regarding the interdependence of material and symbolic inequality for specific purposes. Her discussion is innovative in showing why it misses the point to speak of the political demands by gays, women and other minorities purely as claims for 'recognition'. The term is meaningless if not understood as a demand to participate freely alongside the majority without suffering social and economic disadvantages on account of one's group-based difference. This suggests that the individual's internal capacity for free self-development can be enhanced in different ways – first, by an 'array of assets' (such as residence, high-quality education and 'cultural supplements'). Second, these conditions can be enhanced through the public recognition of different identities, which involves a pluralization of modes of public reasoning.

Young's sensitivity to the redistribution–recognition nexus motivates her conceptualization of 'difference' as a 'resource'. The claim is made in response to liberal nationalists such as David Miller, who are worried that group-specific claims for justice will pose threats to national unity and identity. She argues, against Miller, that the explicit recognition and inclusion of group differences increases the likelihood of promoting justice for the whole, by increasing the 'store of social knowledge' available to all participants of democratic debate. The claim is that the person's affective capacity to self-develop requires a political culture in which diversity is viewed as intrinsically valuable. Furthermore, narrow identity politics (of which Miller is suspicious) essentializes and reifies groups, and is therefore an unattractive basis for social policy. By way of an alternative, she uses Sartrean concepts of 'facticity' and 'seriality' to provide an internally differentiated conception of group membership. As a result, a theoretical response to the potential conservatism of the justice-claims of cultural groups is advanced. Simultaneously, Young defends the value of belonging to a diverse political community.

The most useful clarification of these claims is given in the account of plural associational activity in Chapter 5. Here the key distinction is made between two capacities that social and political bonds can constrain or enable: 'self-determination' and 'self-development'. The associational life of civil society can do much to promote self-determination, in the sense that cultural groups and institutions such as the free market can do a great deal to define and determine our interests. Hence, these structures promote our self-determination. But many oppression-causing structures have their source precisely in these economic processes and cultural groups. Therefore, state intervention will be necessary to correct the resultant inequalities and to promote 'self-development'. By this Young means the capacity to act on and potentially revise one's values. Thus, while her overall theory challenges the neutrality of the standard deliberative model (namely, the norms of dispassionate and orderly reason-giving), at the same time her account of the state itself remains dispassionate or impartial in the sense that it seeks to regulate the *effects* of our various associational activities. The claim is important – she is surely right to say that, by reinforcing unequal opportunities for developing talents and skills, our non-public associations can sometimes inhibit or destroy the conditions for our development and growth. Indeed, the importance of this issue has been highlighted in the recent debate about whether multiculturalism and pluralism are bad for women.

Even if the state should actively neutralize culture- or market-based inequities, however, a number of serious questions arise from Young's claim. Her focus on group-based justice means she is inevitably concerned with the conditions of deep cultural and gender differences. How, in these conditions, can she justify the *priority* given to (what she defines as) self-development? I do not suggest here that she is inevitably led to a metaphysical debate about universalism and cultural relativism. There is, of course, the problem that some groups or identities may not value self-development at all, which may indeed give rise to an irresolvable metaphysical dispute. But such outright rejection of broad democratic precepts may be uninteresting for Young, in that the conflict may take the form of a zero-sum game. The more pressing difficulty for her theory is that a certain culture, tradition or gender may espouse a different interpretation of self-development, or its members may prioritize solidarity over this value. I cannot see how these conflicts can be resolved by the democratic framework she proposes. Moreover, this is not only a problem for her account of the public demands of groups. It is equally unclear how she proposes to understand the trade-offs in value that people in internally diverse societies have to make continually in the course of defining their individual identities.

The predominant focus on institutions in later chapters gives the sense that Young has dodged some central problems in her theory as a whole. For example, there remains the issue of giving content to the capacity for self-development. Does it, for example, imply a list of universal constituents of flourishing, following thinkers such as Nussbaum? Rather than dealing with this issue, the final chapter on self-determination and global democracy shifts to larger-scale institutional questions about responsibility and redistribution. My criticism here is not that the global questions are unimportant. On the contrary, they are urgent because of their magnitude. However, the scope of these questions intensifies the reader's sense that some basic premisses remain underexplained. At least some defence of the universality of the desire for autonomy, self-development and action according to cultural values would have helped. For in conditions of deep cultural plurality, claims about human nature or psychology cannot just be stipulated; they need explicit argumentation.

These issues notwithstanding, Young's book is a timely intervention urging an enlargement of political vision. *Inclusion and Democracy* is an important text, which will rightly generate a deal of provocative debate.

Monica Mookherjee

Interpreting the interpretivist

Mark Redhead, *Charles Taylor: Thinking and Living Deep Diversity*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2002. 259 pp., £57.00 hb., £18.95 pb., 0 7425 2126 5 hb., 0 7425 2127 3 pb.

Nicholas H. Smith, *Charles Taylor: Meaning, Morals and Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001. 296 pp., £50.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 7456 1575 9 hb., 0 7456 1576 7 pb.

From his early investigations into the nature of behaviourism to his recent work on post-secularism and 'the spiritual situation of the age', Charles Taylor has charted and challenged the main currents of intellectual life throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and into the new millennium. In an age of increasing specialization and the hardening of disciplinary boundaries, Taylor skips across this terrain not only by *telling* us how to avoid the effects of the disabling segmentation of contemporary thought but also by *showing* us how to analyse modern life outside of our cosy cadres.

The breadth of Taylor's work, however, is not always recognized. From within specialist subjects we see Taylor the champion of interpretivist approaches to the social sciences, or Taylor the philosopher of language, or Taylor the communitarian critic of liberal-ism without necessarily seeing the other parts of his work; or, if we do, without seeing how they fit together. If we add to this the fact that Taylor has been thoroughly engaged in political life throughout his career then we can recognize the challenge facing those who aim to summarize the many layers of his life and work in a single volume. Is it possible to locate a guiding thread that runs through Taylor's life-work without reducing its complexity or transforming Taylor's diverse studies into an overbearing philosophical and political system? These two books show that this is not only possible but highly desirable.

Of the two, however, Smith provides the most convincing account of the underlying project that animates Taylor's work. While Redhead clearly articulates the importance of the idea of deep diversity to Taylor's response to the problem of political fragmentation (as befits a book in a series on '20th Century Political Thinkers'), Smith digs deeper in his search for the foundations of Taylor's work. What emerges is a deftly handled hermeneutic analysis of one of contemporary philosophy's great hermeneut-icists. Where Taylor has searched for the sources of our modern sense of self, Smith searches for the sources of Taylor's own understanding of the tasks of philosophy and social criticism.

Surprisingly, for those who tend to see Taylor as a stalwart of contemporary Anglo-American thought, Smith finds the essential problematic of Taylor's writings in his early encounter with the work of Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's claim that 'because we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning' is shown to be the guiding theme of Taylor's critical and constructive encounters with philosophy, the human sciences and politics. However, while many of the philosophers who drew inspiration from Merleau-Ponty followed a path straight to what we now call 'continental philosophy', Smith reminds us of the context of Taylor's reception of Merleau-Ponty within the burgeoning environment of Oxford-style linguistic philosophy. From the very beginning, then, Taylor marked out his own path between the dusty halls of Oxford and the café culture of Paris. As Smith puts it, 'the upshot was that during the 1960s and 1970s Taylor came to assume the paradoxical role of the leading analytic exponent of Continental philosophy'. This paradoxical role is wholly absent from Redhead's presentation, despite his recognition of the importance of Hegel and Heidegger, among others, to Taylor's thinking about the public sphere and language. The result is that Redhead's version of Taylor, for all its subtlety and breadth, misses out on a series of connections between Taylor's approach and that of much contemporary continental philosophy. To give just one example, Smith makes a brief but convincing case for the importance of reading Taylor alongside Levinas. Connections such as these help to open up Taylor's work to a broader audience as well as (hopefully) broadening the minds of those who see Taylor's explicit appeal to continental thinkers as unimportant to the main thrust of his work.

Both Smith and Redhead make much of the fact that throughout Taylor's philosophical career he has also engaged in a life of politics. Smith brings to light the central role Taylor played in the New Left movement that flourished in Britain in the late 1950s, during his days at Oxford. This included being the first president of the Oxford University Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and one of the founders of *Universities and Left Review*, a forerunner of *New Left Review*. Despite such notable beginnings, Taylor's lasting involvement with political life has been in Canada. He has contrib-

uted influential reflections on the nature of democratic socialist politics in a country with deep-seated issues about its own identity. Redhead's focus on the political implications of deep diversity in Taylor's work means that the twists and turns of debates surrounding the Canadian constitution and sense of identity come to be presented in a way that animates the roles played by a number of key participants absent from Smith's book. This will be of particular benefit to those interested in Canadian political studies and the normative problems peculiar to deeply diverse societies. Redhead neatly sums up Taylor's contribution to such problems: 'The insight we have gleaned is relatively simple: an adequate approach to political fragmentation needs to be open-ended in nature and focused on articulating points of commonality.' In contexts where solutions to the problem of political fragmentation are increasingly proposed in ways that reify the identities of the disputing parties, this is a rather more radical claim than it may it appear at first sight.

As both Smith and Redhead recognize, the point of excavating the main themes that have shaped Taylor's work is not simply to valorize his approach but to show how the development of his ideas is often in conflict with the foundational sources from which it draws. The hermeneutic enterprise, we are reminded, is as critically oriented as it is concerned with thick description of social and political identities. Through-out both books, therefore, we are constantly presented with moments in Taylor's thought where the articulation of central ideas within his œuvre requires a more subtle reflection on the original project than Taylor himself engages in. For instance, Smith presents a variety of responses to Taylor's account of the relationship between the self and the good to show how many of these responses miss the point of Taylor's project. But he also alerts us to a tension within *Sources of the Self*, between Taylor's insistence that a meaningful life must have direction and his claim that modernist literature takes us beyond the confines of 'a life of continuity'. Smith argues that this is indicative of a larger tension in Taylor's philosophical anthropology. Given human diversity, Taylor's philosophical anthropology must rely upon a minimal ontology of the human, but if his project is to carry much normative weight there is the need for a more substantive account of basic human constants.

In Redhead's more explicitly political reading, the critical focus is on developing Taylor's analysis of deep diversity into a 'nonontological approach to moral reasoning; a rooted cosmopolitan outlook; and a less polemical, more nuanced critique of procedural liberalism'. There is a need for these revisions, for Redhead, 'because at crucial points the political, intellectual and spiritual facets of [Taylor's] existence have generated forms of closure that stand in tension with his commitments to openness'. Such critical interventions give both books a good sense of distance from the man himself. Whereas Ruth Abbey's *Charles Taylor* (reviewed in *RP* 108) deliberately side-stepped critical engagement with Taylor's work for the sake of a clear presentation of his ideas (an approach that pays dividends for the student beginning to grapple with Taylor), Smith and Redhead get further inside Taylor's work with a view to exposing its limitations as well as its strengths.

Smith's capacity for critical distance is particularly impressive, located as it is in knowledge of the full range of sources that have spurred on Taylor's intellectual and political life. While the political philosopher interested in Taylor will find Redhead's analyses useful, those who read Smith's book will find that they also learn a lot about late-twentieth-century philosophy more generally. In this sense, Smith has written a book that serves as more than an introduction to Taylor, more even than a critical review of his project. It is a good introduction to the themes and debates that have invigorated much of both analytic and continental philosophy over the last fifty years.

Iain MacKenzie

Refusnik

Arnold L. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2002. xvi + 254 pp., £27.50 hb., 0 674 00459 0.

There is déjà vu and then there is, in Yankee catcher Yogi Berra's wonderful phrase, déjà vu all over again. Not only is this collection mantrically repetitive in asserting that the concept of the homosexual originated in nineteenth-century psychiatry, an argument which is itself an elaboration of the author's 1987 *Critical Inquiry* essay on 'Sex and the Emergence of Sexuality', but this argument is, as its author repeatedly observes, a restatement of Foucault's endlessly quoted *La Volonté de savoir.* As is so often the case, Davidson's repetition compulsion may be attributed to trauma, here the reaction of his analytic peers to his first attempt to argue that perversion and the pervert 'did not exist before the latter part of the nineteenth century … When I first made these claims, over a decade ago,

I remember all too distinctly the incredulity with which they were greeted by certain Anglo-American historians of philosophy.' These are apparently the same Anglo-American philosophers who haven't yet 'learned from Wittgenstein that concepts cannot be divorced from the practices of their employment', or from Ian Hacking that 'different styles of reasoning … emerge at definite points and have distinct trajectories of maturation' – let alone read Foucault.

To persuade them of these propositions, Davidson produces a predictably apolitical Foucault, whose famous refusal to be asked who he was or to remain the same is marshalled explicitly against those troubled by the inconsistencies in his arguments and implicitly against the extensive lesbian and gay scholarship which has developed out of his work. Thus there is no allusion to Jeffrey Weeks, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, Leo Bersani or Jonathan Dollimore. And none to those moments when Foucault himself acknowledged his debt to such scholars (John Boswell on early Christian attitudes to sexuality, for example) or expressed his own indignation at the intolerance of the 'bourgeois milieu'. But since, as Davidson argues, styles of reasoning are not 'simple expressions of social interests', such social history is declared irrelevant.

Instead, Davidson's essays remain steadfastly in the zone of medical, theological and art histories,

with all the lore and esoterica that have popularized such studies. Thus we are given discussions of Saint Francis's stigmata, the Elephant Man's deformities and paintings of Christ's penis, as well as the sexological speculations of several of Foucault's sources, such as Tardieu and Krafft-Ebing, in addition to less known figures such as Charcot's collaborator Paul Magnan and the French clinician Paul Moreau, who proposed a psychically based 'genital sense'. In charting this medical history, Davidson argues for a sequence in which certain sexual practices are successively conceived as genital disease, neurological abnormality and psychical malfunction. Following Hacking, the truth or falsity of such descriptions is deemed to be internal to each system of explanation and meaningless outside it. In Davidson's formulation, a statement's conditions of validity must be distinguished from its conditions of possibility. What can be claimed (and is, over and over again) is that psychiatry emerged in the late nineteenth century as an autonomous medical discipline that declared perversion to be a deviation of the sexual instinct from the natural function of reproduction. And, following Foucault, the articulation of the medical category is said to have elicited the social identification.

Here the Foucauldian 'reverse discourse' is made more tenable for analytical philosophy by the citation of Hacking's 'dynamic nominalism' to propose a process by which a psychiatric diagnosis – for Hacking, multiple personality syndrome – constitutes new subjects. But, as Hacking recognized and Davidson acknowledges, this process of 'making people up' is not wholly conducted by experts: 'Different from this is the vector of the autonomous behaviour of the person so labelled, which pressures from below, creating a reality every expert must face.' Every expert save Davidson, who claims to have only marginal access to non-medical evidence, and not surprisingly, since what he calls 'social history' has been ruled out from the beginning. Thus, in a chapter whose citations go forward to at least 1994, there is simply no consideration of the vast historical literature suggesting that self-conscious homosexual identities, bonds and communities may date back to Boswell's early Christians, nor that – in respect to Davidson's tautological nominalism – the term 'homosexual' was not coined by psychiatry.

Instead, its originator, Karl Maria Benkert, was a writer and polemicist who employed it in two 1869 pamphlets arguing for the repeal of the Prussian Penal Code's Paragraph 143 outlawing sexual relations between men, and a year earlier in a letter to another

defender of *mannmannlichen Liebe*, the legal campaigner Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. Although a later paper by Benkert was published in a popular science book under the pseudonym 'Dr M', neither man was a scientist or medic. Ulrichs, however, employed a knowledge of embryology to argue in several volumes from 1864 that homosexuality was a natural development of the sexually undifferentiated foetus combining mental and physical elements of both sexes, the oft-quoted *anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa*. Both of these formulations antedate Davidson's first psychiatric reference, Westphal's 1870 paper on 'the contrary sexual instinct', which repeats Ulrichs' description of a man 'physically a man and psychologically a woman' as well as his congenital characterization of the condition. Davidson's single-sentence reference to this 'Hanoverian lawyer' dismisses his speculations as autobiography and moves quickly on to the properly psychiatric *Psychopathia Sexualis*, the first edition of which was published some twenty years after Ulrichs sent Krafft-Ebing a copy of his *Researches*.

Such an alliance, between homosexual emancipationists and the medical authorities to whom they turned in vain pursuit of legal tolerance, might better describe this discursive regime than yet another restatement of the proposal that homosexual culture was inaugurated by psychiatric fiat. As John Addington Symonds, who himself collaborated with the psychiatrist Havelock Ellis in an attempt to articulate and defend a homosexual identity, wrote in 1892 of Davidson's medical sources: '[their] ignorance … is only equalled to their presumption. They not only do not know Ancient Greece, but they do not know their own cousins and club-mates.' Davidson, of course, would be equally dismissive of nineteenth century psychiatry's objective validity, but the demonstrable priority of the homosexual emancipationist discourse also undermines his account of perversion's historical conditions of possibility. Contrary to his own injunction to 'look patiently for dialogic discrepancies, divergences and misunderstandings', he refuses the dialogue with queer histories and historiographies essential to any epistemology of sexuality.

Mandy Merck

Homocon

Richard Goldstein, *The Attack Queers: Liberal Society and the Gay Right*, Verso, London, 2000. 108 pp., £14.99 hb., 1 8598 4678 5.

I suppose we cannot have too many exposés of the incoherence and malignity of the gay Right in the USA. Richard Goldstein makes mincemeat of the likes of Andrew Sullivan and Camille Paglia, showing how they concoct a crude fetishization of masculinity, fitting neatly into right-wing agenda and boding no good for most lesbians and gay men. He calls them 'homocons' and 'attack queers'. Not much of this is new, however (see, for example, Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, 1999, and Alan Sinfield, 'Virtually Undetectable: The Andrew Sullivan Phenomenon', *RP* 97), although it is amusing to learn that Sullivan retreated from his advocacy of gay marriage and began trumpeting the virtues of rampant masculinity when it was revealed that he had been advertising for unsafe sex on the Internet.

In Goldstein's account the environment for queer politics in the USA is composed of conservatives and liberals. The latter, and implicitly or explicity the Democratic Party, have seemed the natural home for US lesbians and gay men; a million voted for Bush, three million for Gore. However, this connection appears to be under threat, from both gay timidity and liberal deviousness.

Meanwhile conservatives, despite fears that the gay movement is undermining the family, are allowing some lesbians and gay men – the homocons – to join the normals. The condition is that they forswear all signs of sexual dissidence. The rightist tendency to separate out the good gays – who form stable couples, do up their houses and walk the dog – from undesirables who make their deviance explicit has been noted by Anna Marie Smith in *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality* (1994). Goldstein's homocons legitimate this process by attacking lesbian and gay styles and institutions: there is a place at the table, but only for those who have deserved it.

Goldstein derives current gay activism from a progressive tradition, running from Edward Carpenter and Oscar Wilde through Magnus Hirschfeld and the Weimer Republic, into the founding of the Mattachine Society after World War II by communist Harry Hay, and on to Harvey Milk who got assassinated. One of Goldstein's declared goals is to resuscitate this tradition. However, it would take more than four or five lines on each of these heroes to display the scope of their contribution to readers who do not already know about them.

The central idea of the gay tradition – a Marxist idea, Goldstein says – is that oppression can be over-

come only (only?) through the creation of an alternative identity and through development of a community. Such community is the main achievement of the gay movement. It is an affront to, and is threatened by, conservative insistence that everyone is an individual, destined to struggle for resources with other individuals. Further, community is our bulwark against a revision to our pre-Stonewall customs of bitchiness, hierarchy and racism. This comment, surely, is rather hard on our forebears. Also, it appears inconsistent with the inclusion of pre-Stonewall men in the progressive tradition, and complacent about the degree of harmony and integration that has been achieved lately.

The tradition has also been developed through literary fiction. Goldstein posits the links between Whitman and Ginsberg, Proust and Jeanette Winterson, Carson McCullers and k.d. lang, and Tennessee Williams and just about everyone – Rufus Wainwright, Dusty Springfield, Eve Sedgwick, Whitman, Armistead Maupin and *Queer as Folk*. A lot could be done with this list, especially the pairings, but Goldstein is content to be suggestive.

Liberals may be expected to recognize and appreciate the gay tradition, but unfortunately they cannot be relied upon. Indeed, Goldstein says, their embrace may be fatal. They like to be seen as endorsing diversity, but in practice are fearful of where a true pluralism might lead them; by insisting that all people are fundamentally the same they require us to deny our difference. This is the crisis in the USA: can the alliance between liberals and sexual radicals be sustained in the face of its intrinsic contradictions and conservative blandishments?

In the most interesting chapter Goldstein, a gay Jew, explores the familiar comparison of gays and Jews. We are similar because most of us can choose how far to manage or flaunt our deviance. Goldstein's sensitivity to the nuances through which the terms of (in)tolerance were established when he was a boy is illuminating. 'What is a kike?', the joke ran. 'A Hebrew gentleman who has just left the room.' Gays are still fighting this kind of prejudice.

But it is unclear finally whether Goldstein means us to renew the alliance with liberalism, or to repudiate it. He argues that the respect in which Jewish Americans are now held shows that advances can be made, and that lesbian and gay gains since Stonewall demonstrate this as well. This sounds like liberalism to me, as does his version of what it will be like when we have succeeded: 'Each of us would mix and match to create a persona. The result would not be the disappearance of masculinity and femininity, or hetero- and homosexuality, but the evolution of these categories into something more nuanced and less hierarchical.' This still seems likely to leave out those people who are regarded as extreme. Indeed, Goldstein speculates in his conclusion that gender dissonance may be the rebarbative issue, rather than object choice. So while gay men and lesbians may pass as unexceptional, transsexuals will be left as unassimilable.

The Attack Queers shows signs of haste. There is some repetition, with topics introduced as if they had not already been broached. There is no index, and there are some notable errors. (The Black Panthers did not embrace the Gay Liberation Front: Eldridge Cleaver attacked it and Huey Newton defended it. It was in the 1990s, not the 1980s, that 'queer' was appropriated by sexual dissidents.) Nonetheless, it is a lively, intelligent and readable polemic with many amusing moments and a sharp commitment to queer politics. The point that if you don't fight you won't get anywhere is still worth making: 'The cure for stigma is politics.'

Alan Sinfield

Tout-monde

Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2001. xxii + 433 pp., £55.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 0 7190 6125 3 hb., 0 7190 6126 1 pb.

On the back cover of Peter Hallward's *Absolutely Postcolonial*, Slavoj Žižek writes that this is one of 'those few [books] where one cannot but exclaim: "Finally the word we were all secretly waiting for!"' The book, we are told, is a 'major advance', a 'monumental study', a 'new bench-mark', a 'singular intervention.' Difficult after such claims even to dare propose another reading.

I am sympathetic to several of Hallward's concerns: a sharp distinction of politics from culture, together with a reaffirmation of the limited autonomy of the literary sphere; a strong desire to adopt a specific local political position with respect to global trends; a suspicion towards the position that 'the age of incisive political invention is over'. However, although the author states that 'this is emphatically a book about literature and postcolonial theories of literature' – a point he reiterates throughout the work – I am sceptical about his more philosophical concerns.

Absolutely Postcolonial looks at four authors: Edouard Glissant, Charles Johnson, Mohammed Dib and Severo Sarduy. Their works can be compared because, 'despite radically different backgrounds', they provide variations on 'our most elementary questions regarding individuation and relationality. What qualities must an individual have in order to remain distinct from other individuals? How does one individual relate to another?' Glissant, Johnson, Dib and Sarduy consistently suggest, Hallward writes, that the 'only genuine individual is unique, one of a kind'. Hallward wishes to suggest a 'specific alternative to the singular postcolonial mode'. This is the crux of his argument: a conceptual distinction of the singular as opposed to the specific. In his first chapter, Hallward explains why the distinction is important, why it matters to postcolonial theory. 'We become specific', he argues, 'we become subjects as opposed to objects … to the degree that we actively transcend the specified or objectified.' The specified is the realm of the essence, of the passive or the objectified. The specific comes to exist at a critical distance from the specified. It is a process of de-specification.

Hallward turns to Fanon to explain that process: the 'subject qua subject comes into being through and as a result of the militant process of decolonization as such'. It is a relational process, an ongoing relation. The specific leads to the universal (a political universal), which is barred by the specified and the singular. The subject is tied to the specified, to a series of specificities dictated by the colonial (or any other order). However, the elimination of colonial (or any other) constraints, though it is a necessary step, does not itself produce the specific, which comes into being through the process of de-specifications – that is, through the 'conversion of specified relations into specific relations'.

Fanon is specified in so far as he is a black Martinican; he becomes a specific subject through his years as a *compagnon de route* of the FLN, during which he understands that eliminating colonial power in Algeria is not enough, that the specific subject must take sides, in the most active and deliberate sense. From the specified Martinique, Fanon attains the universal that a process of de-specification produces. But is this not another version of the alienated self freeing himself from the shackles of alienation through political commitment and practices? Is it fair to apply secularized theologies to concrete, empirical situations? In other words, is the specific subject not just another expression for the free universal subject?

The chapters on Glissant, Johnson, Dib and Sarduy provide a clear and thorough analysis of the writers' work and thought. Each chapter is followed by an 'excursus' in which Hallward reviews his preceding argument and introduces the following author. The successive excursuses create a respiration in a very dense text. I was particularly interested by the chapter on Glissant. Hallward rightly argues that Glissant's *Tout-monde*, for all of its affirmation of plurality, nomadism and rhizomatic subjectivity, ends up implying a 'univocity beyond mere integration'. Hallward is suspicious of notions like 'cultural hybridity' and 'cultural mobility' and of what he sees as nation-bashing in postcolonial theory. He asks why Glissant's approach is so popular. He wants to maintain the possibility of political choice, of taking sides, of divisive political action and fears that a position like Glissant's forecloses that possibility (a concern shared by many postcolonial critics). Contextual analysis in this case might have been useful: when and how has Glissant become a reference in postcolonial studies?

I agree that to explain an event by its context – to argue that it only reveals what was already there, hidden, implicit – negates the reality of the event. The other main explanation – that the event is a construction – is also reductive: it implies that the event as event never really exists, since the deconstruction of the fiction that constructs the event as an event unveils its fictional character. To avoid these two problems, it is necessary to restore to the event its specific temporality. However, to go back to the example of decolonization: if it is true that the elimination of the specified constraints imposed by the colonial order does not in itself produce the 'decolonized subject' (whatever that is), and that there is a process of 'becoming', I am not sure how that helps us understand what is happening in postcolonial countries – what decolonization constituted as an event. Or have I misunderstood Hallward's project?

This is an impressive book with many insights, providing a sum of careful readings of postcolonial writers and critics, demonstrating a wide knowledge of postcolonial theory, which will interest students and scholars who seek to elaborate a philosophy of postcolonial subjectivity. But, sadly, it is not quite the 'major advance' that Žižek promised.

Françoise Vergès