

'Human'

Louis Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, ed. François Matheron, trans. G.M. Goshgarian, Verso, London and New York, 2003. Ixii + 318 pp., £40.00 hb., £15.00 pb., 1 85984 507 X hb., 1 85984 408 1 pb.

Martin Halliwell and Andy Mousley, *Critical Humanisms: Humanist/Anti-Humanist Dialogues*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2003. 233 pp., £49.95 hb., £16.95 pb., 0 7486 1504 0 hb., 0 7486 1505 9 pb.

How are we to understand humanism today? Whilst the rhetoric of 'military humanism' continues unabated, philosophical thinking about the politics of humanism, post-humanism, trans-humanism and anti-humanism has reached something of an unhappy standstill. When not buried in dubious varieties of ethical discourse regarding biology or genetics, or displaced by an unstable *mélange* of psychoanalysis and philosophies of alterity, debates surrounding the term 'humanism' appear to have almost evaporated. Contemporary thought seems to be characterized both by a vague theoretical anti-humanism stripped of its political charge, and by a misguided post-Foucauldianism that seeks to avoid the question of 'man' or humanism altogether, wary of its unseemly and best-forgotten history.

Every form of humanism runs the risk of essentialism, or so we are told, and from justifications of colonial acculturation to Stalinism's 'everything in the name of man', the history of the abuse of the term is damning indeed. Thus, it appears, we must either accept our 'post-human future' (with some caveats, naturally) or transpose the question into religious registers or ever-deeper ontological recesses (Heidegger's 'Letter on Humanism' has a lot to answer for in this respect). In the wake of all these prohibitions, whether implicit or explicit, it is all the more pressing to seek ways of thinking about humanism and anti-humanism that are attentive to the specific manner in which these terms were originally problematized as well as the political possibilities they determined. In other words, to attempt to answer Dominique Janicaud's enquiry: 'why did the "question of man" quite suddenly in the 1960s, especially in France and in somewhat polemical terms ... crystallize into a critical reflection upon humanism?'

This extensively annotated collection of Althusser's studies from 1966–7, culled from François Matheron's edition of the *Écrits Philosophiques et Politiques*, is an essential document for anyone interested in the emergence of the 'humanist controversy'. (Goshgari-

an's lucid and helpful introduction contextualizes the complex series of debates from this period, including Althusser's relationship with the PCF, Garaudy and Stalinism.) The essay entitled 'The Humanist Controversy' from 1967 was written as a follow-up to Althusser's two short but explosive essays in *For Marx*: 'Marxism and Humanism' and 'A Complementary Note on "Real Humanism"'. In it, we find Althusser setting out the problem in a characteristically crystalline manner:

all of us sense that, riding on the small change of a few concepts or words that are now being sorted out, is the outcome of a game in which we all have a stake, of which this 'discussion' of Humanism by a few philosophers is an echo, close to hand and infinitely remote: the way we should understand Marx, and put his ideas into practice.

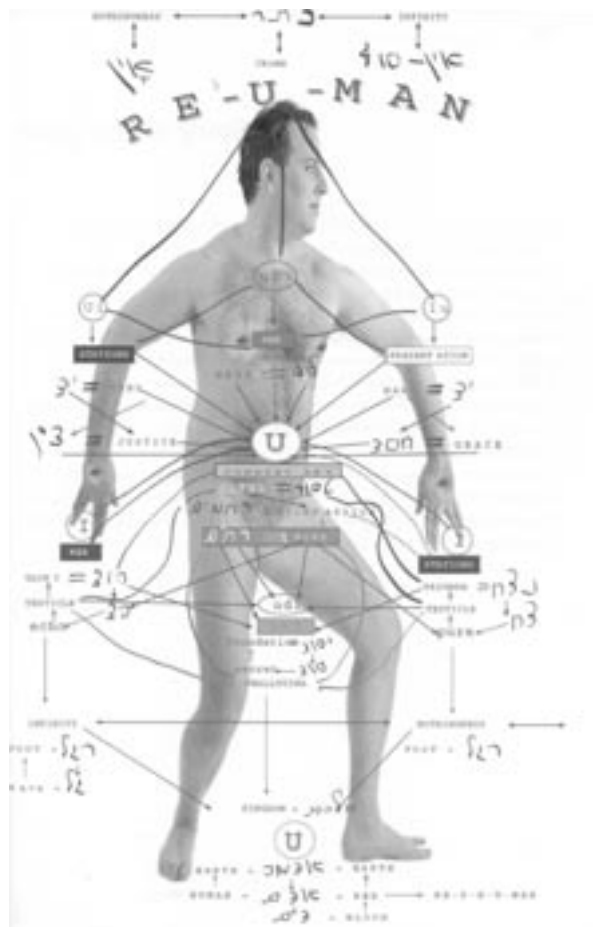
This is precisely what has been forgotten in the current bandying around of humanist and anti-humanist rhetoric: that Althusser's original claims were formulated in terms of the question of reading, and, more specifically, of reading Marx. The long essay 'On Feuerbach', taken from a 1967 course, allows us to confirm the extent to which an intricate and powerful analysis of Feuerbach underlies Althusser's notorious 'Bachelardian' claims regarding the 'ruptures' at the heart of Marx's oeuvre. The contemporary recourse to the rhetoric of anti-humanism, often accompanied by an ambiguous nod to Althusser and Foucault, wilfully neglects the conditions necessary for Althusser to formulate his reading of Marx, historical as well as philosophical. Furthermore, it overlooks Foucault's own attempts to distance himself from Althusser, whilst nevertheless acknowledging the inescapable character of many of the same questions – subjectivation, the emergence of the problematic of 'man', theories of discourse, and the rest.

Althusser himself admits that at the time of writing the two earlier pieces on humanism he must have touched 'an extremely sensitive spot in the present

ideological, if not theoretical conjuncture'. His 'precise thesis', which he repeats here, is that whilst Marx, around 1843, may have added society and politics to Feuerbachian formulations, there was no theoretical innovation in Marx's work until the lengthy rupture occasioned by the 'Theses on Feuerbach' and *The German Ideology* and the setting out of the conceptual foundations of *Capital*. Furthermore, Marx had to struggle for a long time to break with the theoretical humanism of Feuerbach (interestingly, it is Althusser who repeatedly points out the importance of Feuerbach for Marx, something that is often overlooked). Theoretical humanism, he writes 'is the theoretical disguise of run-of-the-mill petty-bourgeois moral ideology.... Man is, in essence, the diversionary tactic of a reactionary ideology.' Furthermore, it is not 'the essence of man' or 'the human genus' that becomes the science of history for Marx, but rather 'the history of the forms of existence specific to the human species'. In Marx and Engels, this involved forging concepts of the mode of production, productive forces and relations of production, ideological superstructure, determination in the last instance by the economy, and so forth. It is precisely this entirely new 'continent' of thought that Althusser claims to be theoretically anti-humanist, or rather 'a-humanist'. This reiteration of earlier claims also involves a refinement of Althusser's identification of a 'break' in Marx's work, such that 'the break is never anything more than the beginning of an event of very long duration which, in a sense, never ends'. Almost forty years later, Althusser's claims continue to be taken up in an impoverished and caricatural way, something he predicts with accuracy: 'The verdict is in: I sacrifice "genesis" to "structures". I am in line for this endlessly repeated trial [*procès*].' This collection should hopefully go some way to undermining this simplistic, though common, approach to his thought.

Attention to the specificities of the 'controversy' is certainly lacking in the *Critical Humanisms* collection, which is structured under chapter headings such as 'Romantic Humanism', 'Pagan Humanism' and 'Technological Humanism'. For a collection that claims to present a survey of humanist/anti-humanist 'dialogues' there is no single reference to Althusser (though several to Foucault): a somewhat mystifying omission given both his influence and his specific insistence upon this debate. Instead, we are presented with an attempt to reclaim a form of post-theoretical 'baggy humanism' – an awkwardly named and suspiciously eclectic rubric for a series of non-chronological lineages that try to preserve the claim that 'The human ... is too amorphous to be easily defined, and to try

to name it in a prescriptive way is paradoxically to be anti-humanist, because it denies individuals the role of interpreting for themselves what being human means.' This is all well and good, but to ignore the entire panoply of reflections on humanism that attempt precisely to avoid reducing the debate to one about 'individuals' and 'definitions' (and we must include strands of radical Enlightenment thinking, Feuerbach, Marx, Althusser here) is to run the risk of evacuating any positive political role for humanism that would be opposed to the current neoliberal abuses of the term. Furthermore, by failing to pose the 'anti-humanist' aspect of the dialogue more pointedly and, in the end, reducing every philosophical position to some sort of shallow humanism of one kind or another (even



Lyotard and Baudrillard are described as being 'interested in the revelation of "the human" as something that we can have an idea about, but which exceeds thought and ultimately cannot be presented'), the book fails to indicate what might be of real worth in the critiques of humanism that exploded in the 1960s, particularly in France.

Nevertheless, via some unusual associations ('Romantic Humanism' runs from Shakespeare to Marx to Cixous; 'Spiritual Humanism' runs from Walter Benjamin to Martin Luther King to Kristeva),

the *Critical Humanisms* collection does sometimes rise above the shallow allusiveness to which it seems condemned. (Who, exactly, benefits from such necessarily condensed discussions of the twenty-four thinkers included in this collection?) The chapter on 'Civic Humanism' that runs from Wollstonecraft to Habermas to Stuart Hall introduces some important questions about the relationship between the state, its citizens, and Enlightenment ideals of human nature. It concludes that, 'while cultural politics continues to focus its attention on the rich, irreducible field of "identities, interests and values" that constitutes culture, practical politics may indeed get ignored'. Unfortunately, there is little follow-up to this discussion of 'practical politics', other than a fleeting reference in the conclusion to Naomi Klein, where she is somewhat perplexingly positioned as an 'immanent transhuman' thinker, since the story she tells about technology is critical ('US-biased advertising' on the Internet) as well as positive (you can organize protests more easily). As

timely and influential as Klein's analysis may be, there is little to suggest that without a more critical take on questions regarding such unfashionable (*pace* Žižek) notions as ideology, universality and political action (the central terms of the humanism/anti-humanism debate as originally conceived), we will not end up with technological euphoria masquerading as emancipation. This is not entirely sufficient when we are daily informed that the bombing of other countries is a thoroughly 'humanitarian' action. The question of whether to reclaim the rhetoric of humanity in the name of a new universalism, or to ditch such terms altogether in the wake of their historical redundancy, is thus a crucial one. It can only be addressed by a serious examination of the writings of those thinkers that posed it in this way in the first place: Feuerbach, Marx and, as the strength of the *Humanist Controversy* collection demonstrates, Althusser.

Nina Power

Three-point turn

Leonard Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism*, Continuum, London and New York, 2003. xiii + 154 pp., £55.00 hb., £15.99 pb., 0 8264 6802 0 hb., 0 8264 6803 9 pb.

The challenge of Bergsonism has been configured in various different ways during the recent resurgence of interest in Bergson's work over the past few years: John Mullarkey (1999) has emphasized the challenge to any theory that claims to be a 'first philosophy' through Bergson's refutation of static foundations; Keith Ansell Pearson (2002) has emphasized the challenge to the 'being' of the human through a thinking of Bergson's concept of the virtual; Gregory Dale Adamson (2002) has emphasized the challenge to science's knowledge claims through Bergson's conception of knowledge as a form of action rather than speculation; and in the collection *The New Bergson* (1999) the traditional interpretations of Bergson's philosophy as a kind of vitalism, spiritualism or phenomenology are themselves challenged. What all these 'challenges' have in common is that they take up and advance Bergson's work in order to emphasize what relevance Bergsonism may still have to contemporary philosophical debates. Within this climate of affirmation and redirection of Bergson's work to a range of different philosophical enterprises what, then, constitutes the specificity of Leonard Lawlor's contribution?

In his preface, Lawlor makes clear that he is following his 'own line' through Bergson's work by linking two books that Bergson himself did not: *Matter and*

Memory (1896) and *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932). The latter book, in its focus on processes of social differentiation, was conceived by Bergson as a continuation of his project in *Creative Evolution* (1907), which focused on processes of biological differentiation. The almost complete absence of any consideration of *Creative Evolution* constitutes both the distinctiveness and the extreme difficulty of the challenge of Bergsonism as Lawlor constructs it. In fact there are three challenges, corresponding to the book's three chapters, and each is rooted in a particular concept that Lawlor identifies in Bergson. Hence, the concept of the image, from *Matter and Memory*, provides a challenge to phenomenology, the concept of memory, also from *Matter and Memory*, provides a challenge to ontology, and the concept of sense, the identification of which distinguishes Lawlor's reading of *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, provides a challenge to ethics. Lawlor then supports the challenge to ethics in an appendix that provides a rare and much needed thing: a detailed and sustained engagement with *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*.

A second appendix provides a translation of Jean Hyppolite's 1949 essay 'Various Aspects of Memory in Bergson'. This essay is valuable in its own right as

an examination of Bergson's conception of memory, emphasizing the indivisibility of a personal past, its role in the creation of the present and its ontological independence from the present. In essence, Hyppolite's essay emphasises the aspect of Bergsonian memory – that it is not a psychological record of past action but an ontological condition of present action – that will come to characterize Deleuze's Bergsonism. It is also specifically relevant to the book it is appended to, for Lawlor acknowledges that he relied heavily on it for his reading of *Matter and Memory*.

The first chapter develops the challenge of Bergsonism to phenomenology through an engagement with Bergson's concept of the image. Lawlor recalls Derrida's definition of 'presence' in phenomenology as presence to consciousness, and points out that this is equivalent to what Bergson calls representation. For Bergson, consciousness is not *of* something, but *is* something. Lawlor distinguishes the Bergsonian image from both 'things' and representations by prioritizing a term that is often passed over by Bergson scholars: vibration. The concept of the image is a part of Bergson's demonstration of the reality of matter as an indivisible continuity like consciousness, and it is essential to this indivisibility that images are conceived of in terms of vibration rather than location. Lawlor emphasises this activity of images (he gives the example of the activity of a perceived colour as vibrations of light) as a model of perception that does not decompose the material vibration into two localized elements, thing and representation. In this way Bergson allows perception to remain an indivisible material process, rather than an immaterial reproduction.

In the second chapter, Lawlor develops the challenge of Bergsonism to ontology through an engagement with Bergson's concept of memory. He reminds us of Heidegger's charge that, like Nietzsche, Bergson merely reverses Platonism without twisting free of it. Rather than a challenge to ontology, though, Lawlor aims to find in Bergson a satisfaction of the Heideggerian criteria for ontology. He does this by arguing for a primacy of memory in Bergson, through a long discussion of Bergson's 'cone' symbols from *Matter and Memory*. The 'pure memory' that the cones symbolize is analogous to the unconscious, in that it is a complete personal history, always infusing the present through a 'rotation' and 'contraction' of the whole, a kind of focusing – sometimes towards the current situation, but sometimes capriciously. Lawlor makes a sufficient case that Bergson does twist free of Platonism, by not simply reversing it into a subjectivism in the present, but conceiving of an ontological being of

the self as memory, in the past. Unfortunately, in this Lawlor goes too far towards reintroducing the barrier between consciousness and matter that his explication of the vibrations of images in Chapter 1 had started to overcome.

At this point we can see Hyppolite's emphasis on memory tempt Lawlor away from, and limit somewhat, his appreciation of Bergsonian perception. When Lawlor claims Bergson defines being with this personal past, this is actually a reference to Deleuze's *Bergsonism* and far from Bergson's own conception of being, which is produced in the mutual interpenetration, in the present, of the past (as memory) and the future (as perception). Lawlor perhaps overemphasises the cone diagram of pure memory, whereas Bergson explicitly 'corrects' his purely theoretical conceptions of perception and memory by showing how the two interpenetrate and mutually reaffirm one another. The concept of the motor-diagram by which Bergson explains this interpenetration is not discussed by Lawlor, and the constant implication of memory in matter in *Matter and Memory* is underemphasized.

In Chapter 3 Lawlor presents the challenge to ethics through a concept of sense, opposing the 'common sense' that works with reference to practical action to the affective sense that is the source of that action. Hence, the *alterity* of common sense is referred to the original *alteration* of sense, to which Bergson's method of intuition gives us access. However, Lawlor only applies intuition to memory – that is, to the inner but not the outer continuity of the self – and he says we must be cautious of Bergson's concept of sympathy because it 'suggests intersubjectivity'. This is one of several instances where even a glance towards *Creative Evolution* would facilitate a much stronger presentation of Bergson's philosophy, for therein sympathy suggests a pre-subjective continuity between individuals, and hence provides a basis for an external, as well as an internal intuition. The relevance of all this to ethics is that a Bergsonian ethical enterprise would seek experience at its source, before what he calls the 'turn' at which it becomes subjective. It would identify and understand experience in terms of the vibrations of matter and memory. A difficulty of Lawlor's priority of memory, then, is the implication that this pre-subjective experience can be sought in memory alone. In principle, though, the challenge to ethics that Lawlor identifies holds good, and is also a challenge to humanism (although Lawlor doesn't say this), for the ethic is not based on human common-sense experience, but on the sources of that experience, the pre-reflective sense from which it emerges.

The appendix provides Lawlor's most interesting encounter with Bergson, as he leaves aside his problematic interpretation of *Matter and Memory* and elaborates in detail a Bergsonian ethic in terms of the pre- and post-representational emotions of joy and pleasure that Bergson describes in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. A Bergsonian ethic would be based not on human experience, but on the identification of the sources of that experience. Lawlor evokes a range of terminology in order to distinguish Bergson's ethical potential, describing the tension between habituation and the emotions which follow

and resist it, the two frenzies (aphrodisia and asceticism) that the necessity of sexual reproduction gives rise to when pre-representational *joy* is habituated into representational *pleasure*, and the difference between the charlatan's purely representational fabrication of mythical and static religious narratives and the mystic's dynamic pre-representational love of all creation. Lawlor's appendix sustains a detailed and intuitive pursuit of Bergson's thought which surpasses that of the preceding chapters.

Michael Vaughan

Enemy of the state

Mark Neocleous, *Imagining the State*, Open University Press, Maidenhead and Philadelphia, 2003. vii + 174 pp., £50.00 hb., £15.99 pb., 0 335 20352 3 hb., 0 335 20351 5 pb.

With the rise of 'new times' during the 1980s, the emergence of new objects of theoretical and political concern (consumption, identity, globalization) and the final collapse of historical communism, theoretical reflection on the state by the Left waned. This was also perhaps an effect of the ideological anti-statism of neoliberal regimes. Prior to that, under the influence of Althusser and Gramsci, state theory had been one of the most dynamic areas within the Marxist tradition. Interestingly, there are signs that we may be witnessing a 'return of the state' in left political theory, revitalized by new perspectives, including the Foucauldianism with which Poulantzas (perhaps Marxism's most persistent state theorist) was involved in a headlong collision. Mark Neocleous's book is part of this revival; it also represents something of a 'cultural turn'.

Imagining the State builds on three previous publications: *Administering Civil Society: Towards a Theory of State Power* (1996), a study of the ways in which states constitute, fashion and manage civil society (rather than merely represent or resolve its contradictions); *Fascism* (1997), a study in reactionary modernity and state form; and *The Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power* (2000), a study of a general state function, policing, as well as a specific apparatus, and its role in the fashioning and control of wage labour. Following in the footsteps of Corrigan and Sayer's interpretation of Marx's and Weber's political writings (*The Great Arch*, 1985), Neocleous regards states, although absolutist in origin, as essentially modern bourgeois social forms, founded on violence and, however democratic, tendentially fascist. Statecraft has become autonomous

and developed a logic specific to itself. Neocleous is also interested in what states say (or 'state'); more specifically, in what they say they are, and in what they say they do. In this sense, *Imagining the State* is a work of ideology critique, a study of the capitalist state's self-presentation.

Neocleous reminds us of Bourdieu's warning against the danger threatening all critiques of the state form: that the concepts deployed may in fact be statist concepts, ways in which states have politically and philosophically imagined themselves. Neocleous takes this warning seriously, for such symbolic replication is precisely *Imagining the State's* key concern: it develops a critique of the state by way of its imagining, and it tackles it, via Hobbes's *Leviathan*, by engaging, on the one hand, with a key statist image (the state as an artificial person) and, on the other, with one of the most important of statist juridico-political concepts – sovereignty. Sovereignty has been written about extensively in recent years, by philosophers such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Derrida, but in a way that either ignores the state form and/or has the idea of sovereignty stand in for it. The importance of *Imagining the State* is that it reconnects sovereignty back to the state through an analysis of the metaphors of corporeality.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first investigates the way bourgeois ideology imagines the 'body of the state'. Here Neocleous reads *Leviathan* in the context of the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the 'disorder' produced by an emerging bourgeoisie and private property in land. The idea of 'the body politic' connotes unity and order and functions as a strategy of containment as the idea

of sovereignty shifts from the body of the absolutist monarch representing God on earth to that of a secularized, abstract state involved in both external and internal relations. The key conceptual transformation here is a new temporalization of sovereignty that, in overcoming death, makes the 'body of the state' perpetual (as in the formulation 'The King is dead, long live the King'). Monarchy was thus reconfigured so that 'the body of the king had become an omnipotent political body-machine, an inhuman body with a force and will of its own'.

Chapter 2 sketches a second shift that is crucial to Neocleous's argument with followers of Lefort, for whom the modernization of state sovereignty involves a process of *disincorporation*, and the return of the body politic is, therefore, a sign of totalitarianism. This is important because of the continuity between liberal democratic and fascist states that Neocleous wants to establish. It involves an extension of the sovereign body metaphor of the abstract state to society as a whole: this is the 'social body', based on the creation of citizenship through the incorporation of 'the people' (Rousseau) and of labour (Abbé Sieyès) into the democratized nation-states of Europe following the French Revolution. The final section of this chapter is dedicated to exhibiting the medicalization of the social body by both fascist and liberal democratic states, in order to protect what turns out to be 'grotesque' – a body full of holes, shaped by exits and entrances to be policed. Here, Neocleous echoes Agamben's definition of fascist biopolitics as one designed to secure the biological future of a people.

But the sovereign state is much more than a grotesque body for bourgeois ideology; it is an 'artificial person' (Hobbes again) that thinks – has a 'mind' – and acts as 'the possessor of knowledge ... engag[ing] in an immense labour of organization, standardization, recording and reordering ... of the social body'. Neocleous sets out the core of his argument in Chapter 3, where he discusses the 'personality of the state': a created entity which turns against its creators. This is the political space in which sovereignty works. It is the site of a possible theory of state fetishism modelled on the parallels between the commodity form and sovereignty. Neocleous, however, turns to another parallel, that between the corporate personality of the state and the emergence of the company (or corporate) form 'as the legal personality of capital'. From this perspective, capital and state share a common corporatism, their 'fictive' legal identities endowing them a kind of subjectivity. (As Balibar has suggested, here the fictive is at its most real.)

Each chapter has the same structure, combining engagements with the history of the statist imaginary (a kind of genealogy of the corporate form) with criticisms of contemporary state practices: security and information systems (the state is 'an epistemological project' for Neocleous), the production of the figures of the foreigner, the refugee and the illegal immigrant (the state dehumanizes those who do not belong, as non-citizens), the violence of cartography, as well as a liberal politics organized around the defence of a state-defined privacy. All are implicated in this 'corporeal model', which, moreover, Neocleous insists is 'a dead end for any critical politics of radical transformation'. For all its historical research and philosophical interpretation, *Imagining the State* is thus a pedagogic text directed at the present.

To conclude, two brief criticisms. First, the state forms discussed in *Imagining the State* all seem to be nation-states. (The final chapter discusses how all communities constituted by states are mapped, territorialized and nationalized to produce a 'home'.) But, just as Benedict Anderson says very little about the state in his account of nationhood in *Imagined Communities* (1983; 1991), Neocleous says very little about nations in his account of statecraft. This is particularly important for his final reflection on globalization, where the slippage between state and nation-state impedes a discussion of the emergence of non-national state functions. Nations are intimately connected to the constitution of 'peoples' and may thus have illuminated the discussion of citizenship and of what Neocleous refers to as the 'social body' as it emerged from the French Revolution. Furthermore, are we not now witnessing an abstraction of the sovereign state away from the nation, reterritorializations of sovereignty both upwards (transnational) and downwards (regional)? This is the kind of question that lies behind much of the recent discussion of sovereignty, but it is one that is resisted by many of the Marxist Left, such as Ellen Meiksins Wood. This suggests a further question: what does such resistance say about the statist imaginary of that Left?

Second, how does contradiction appear in and constitute this statist imaginary? Althusser insisted, for example, that all state apparatus are sites of class struggle. Neocleous only discusses the idea of imagination briefly, as bourgeois ideology, but the question that emerges here is: if the metaphors of the sovereign body are *constitutive* of state form (including its subjects), does this mean that this imaginary is a fundamental part of the state? A positive answer would perhaps require an expanded definition of what states

are, along the lines suggested by Gramsci's notion of hegemony. But this would have entailed an engagement with state theory, which is notable for its absence. Neocleous opts for relevance instead.

John Kraniauskas

Paradigm found?

Stanley Aronowitz and Peter Bratsis, eds, *Paradigm Lost: State Theory Reconsidered*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002. xxvii + 298 pp., £20.50 pb., 0 8166 3294 4.

The intellectual clash between Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas in the early 1970s dominated much of the political debate among Marxists in that period, and continued to do so for some time after. Being labelled an 'instrumentalist' or a 'structuralist' became an important signifier of political identity, almost as important as membership of this or that particular party. The fact that this distinction, and the debate itself, was always a little artificial given the different targets each writer initially had – Miliband was trying to challenge Anglo-American pluralism, and Poulantzas the official communist tradition – is perhaps less relevant than the fact that here, again, was another set of labels either to wear or to throw around accusingly. But the intensity and importance of that debate has now worn off. Who reads Miliband or Poulantzas today?

The editors and contributors to this collection clearly do. 'Paradigm lost' is how the debate is presented, as though it needs to be retrieved from history. Most of the chapters began life as papers for a conference on the two writers, held in 1997 and sponsored by the Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies at Queens College, New York. So perhaps even those still interested in the debate sensed something a little Byzantine about it.

With the air heavy with the smell of ancient texts, this collection appears to have two related starting points. On the one hand, it rests on the assumption that in fact very few of us do read either Miliband or Poulantzas, and that this is our loss. (On both scores they are probably right.) On the other hand, there is an implicit assumption that state theory has been in such decline since the debate between Miliband and Poulantzas that it is more or less dead, to the extent that 'the main goal of the collection of essays here is to assist state theory in its resurrection'. This is

surely wrong. Far from being dead, there has been a fair amount of Marxist 'state theory' since the 1970s. Some of it has been excellent, some good, and some poor. Some of it has travelled so far down roads paved by bourgeois social science that it has been neither particularly productive nor politically useful (just consider the mass of literature now available on 'international relations'). Most of it, of course, hasn't been particularly concerned about describing itself as 'instrumentalist' or 'structuralist'. But if, as Leo Panitch notes in his essay, the popularity and decline of state theory are directly related to the vicissitudes of class struggles and political conditions, then reconsidering one classical debate might well be useful in learning something about our own times.

The debate between Miliband and Poulantzas centred around the nature of the capitalist state. In *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969) Miliband argued that the capitalist class is engaged in a particular relation with the state, rendering the state an *instrument* for the domination of society. The state, on this view, is a committee for managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie. In reviewing the book and, in the process, beginning the debate between them, Poulantzas suggested that Miliband nowhere deals with 'the Marxist theory of the state as such'. In other words, while Miliband may well have been successful in debunking the bourgeois myth of 'the pluralist state', his position was in direct conflict with that developed by Poulantzas, which points to the relative autonomy of the capitalist state as its distinguishing characteristic. For Poulantzas, the divisions internal to the capitalist class are embedded within the structure of the state, providing structural limits to state activity. Poulantzas argued that the 'Marxist theory of the state' has to deal with precisely this relative autonomy of the state from any class or class fraction.

It is fair to say that although the editors and authors of this book seek to revisit the debate, to open up the question of its relevance today, and thus somehow to 'referee' between Miliband and Poulantzas, the latter comes out the 'winner' – the book presupposes Poulantzas's suggestion regarding the theory of the state and constantly highlights Poulantzas's insights. Where it is a question of which writer provides more insights for today's debates, Poulantzas virtually always comes out on top: for example, in his 'extraordinary prescience' at characterizing authoritarian statism as a project implicit in the bourgeois state form and his approach to globalization, which is 'theoretically more sophisticated and strategically more relevant' than much of the contemporary globaloney around. Where

it is a question of relative strengths and theoretical sophistication, Poulantzas is also held up as the more thoughtful and insightful of the two writers. But then if, as it often appears here, the 'choice' between Miliband and Poulantzas is, in a sense, the 'choice' between the *Manifesto* or *Capital* as the grounding for a Marxist political theory, then Poulantzas is bound to win. It is also clear that what drives the collection is a strong sense among the authors that Poulantzas deserves to be more widely read than he is; one doesn't get the sense that they feel the same about Miliband.

What is resurrected in this book, then, is less a paradigm and more Poulantzas's conception of the Marxist theory of the state. In one way this is entirely fair: Poulantzas's theoretical sophistication meant that he was far more attuned than Miliband to some of the subtler issues in political theory and the seemingly contradictory practices of the capitalist state. But in another sense it merely replicates the artificiality of the original debate and runs the risk of underplaying just how crucial Miliband's work was in developing the critique of pluralism (and, one might add, the myth of parliamentary socialism – of which virtually nothing is said here). In that sense, the idea of a 'paradigm lost' is a little far-fetched – certainly as far-fetched as the idea that one really does have to choose between the *Manifesto* and *Capital*. Rather, what emerges from the book is a salutary reminder of a powerful set of texts which could well be revisited for their use as strategic tools for the development of Marxist thought on the state.

Mark Neocleous

If dogs could fly

Ben Watson, *Shitkicks and Doughballs*, Spare Change Books, London, 2003. 228 pp., £10.00 pb., 0 9525744 8 9.

Ben Watson has an alter ego, Out to Lunch (OTL), who has published a string of excellent, high-energy, ranting poetry and related material. OTL was conceived in the time of punk, and has continued down the years to evince a fondness for a home-made fanzine style of collage and contrarihood. Ben Watson himself is the music critic familiar from *The Wire* and elsewhere, and the author of several high-class raids on the inarticulate nature of most cultural and ideological critique, notably *Frank Zappa: the Negative Dialectics of Poodle-Play* (1994) and *Art, Class and Cleavage* (1998). It was only

a matter of time, I suppose, before the two personae collided, or at any rate colluded. Now it has happened: Ben Watson has written a novel starring (among many others) Out to Lunch. All the old favourites of both writers are here – negative dialectics of poodle play, esemplastic zappology, quantulumcunques on materialist esthetix, not to mention sliverfish macronix and the expansive Thong Rind notebooks – but all revamped as fast-talking porno-fictional adventure.

Shitkicks and Doughballs, as it is evocatively called, is 'the sordid and shocking tale of one man's journey through erotic humiliation, Marxist political philosophy & gourmet curries', and at first glance seems to be a rewrite of the passionate critique of *Art, Class and Cleavage* (hereafter ACC) as Camden Town nightmare s/m indulgent picaresque fantasy. And so, in a way, it is. The cast of characters will be familiar to many readers already: some slightly disguised, like Stewpot Hauser, Professor Semen Froth, Egg Tingleton or Iain Sinkle, many others more opaque or (just as likely) completely transparent, they flit in and out of the disconnected sections of the narrative like fragments of argument, which is mainly what they are. OTL is probably the most argumentative character in the whole of fiction, and can't meet anyone without happily trumpeting his contempt for their views, except in the case of a few partially or completely right-headed characters whose ideas turn out to be close to his own. In this he is complicit with his author, whose satiric method is closely allied to OTL's outlook. The satire contains stock figures, transgression of genre, and an insistent, utterly confident tone. This is Wyndham Lewis rewritten for the latter days, a combination of *Tarr* and *Apes of God* cranked up with Burroughs and s/m fun, ending up like the *Apes of God* in a spectacular party that brings all the narrative strands together in a sparkling set-piece finale heralding the birth of the Cleavage promised by Materialist Esthetix.

Merleau-Ponty once said that the novelist's job was not to discuss ideas systematically but to give them the same sort of independent life as things have, and this novel certainly throws itself into the business of making ideas concrete. A fair amount of the text also recycles passages or arguments from ACC, though not always straightforwardly. The novel, for example, begins with OTL contemplating (a person's) cleavage in an art class, a procedure which signals one aspect of Watson's transformation of argument into fiction while at the same time drawing attention to the polyvalence of the terms themselves. The word 'cleavage' itself can be argued to return thinking to the concrete in a way that terms such as 'dialectics' never can. It has a



deep-rooted historical existence in the language (or rather the various contradictory senses of 'cleave' do: cleavage itself entered the language early in the nineteenth century as part of the new geology that provided the conceptual vocabulary that in turn made possible the thought of Marx, Darwin and Freud) and a range of reference which allows for multiple intersections with actual lives. Or, as we are told at one point fairly early in the book,

In suggesting Cleavage as an organizing principle, Esther Punck wishes to provide criticism with a focus learned from revolutionary politics and sexual arousal: the rift in the boredom from which we learn! Instead of looking for an ideal representation of our values, a trophy to atrophy on the mantel-piece, we want to penetrate the cracks and fissures that cleave the edifice.

And equally, I suppose, our task as readers is to cleave to every cleft in *Cleavage*, challenging it and denying it to see what happens. So metaphors and their re-literalization, from art class to arse-licking, provide some of the narrative buzz of *Shitkicks*. More comes from its sheer exuberance and an exultant fictionality which allows for unbridled juxtaposition of philosophical, political and aesthetic positions, as in the knee-trembling exchanges at the seminar in Chapter 3. Among other pleasures, there is the spectacle of OTL using a rolled-up copy of *Radical Philosophy* itself as a megaphone to trumpet the principles of materialist esthetix. (This reminded me of the cartoon strip inserted into *Radical Philosophy* 3 which concluded its attack on the pretensions of the newly founded journal with the cry 'When Radical Professionalism makes its essentially conservative appearance, the guardians of the Status Quo rejoice!!!')

The dominant tone of the novel stems from its insistence on conjunction and disjunction as a mode of critique alongside a continuing recourse to sexual response. Rather like the recaptioned photos in the issues of *Internationale Situationiste* (the famous Asturian Miners one, for example), which were designed to create 'subversive bubbles of thought', Watson's pitiless parodying of Kantian Marxists relies on manufactured incongruence for its effect. The congruities, whether measured (occasionally) or excited (more frequently) are mediated by the narrator, who is usually the author, though there are moments like Proust's narrator's naming himself as Marcel which complicate the relation between Watson and OTL. Some passages of narrative are in the first person, for instance, and the distance between Watson and Lunch is curiously elastic. Nor does Watson eschew self-conscious narrative interventions, as in 'Gamma noted with relief the arrival of a break in the text' when he needs to switch his attention elsewhere. Flann O'Brien is not a tutelary spirit to the book, but it does have a (coarser) philosophic wit to it as well as being quite funny, or at least jokey, in parts. And it is extremely readable. It reads like a proper novel, written by a real writer (which Ben Watson clearly is), with complete and admirable fluency. A bit surprising, that, when there are so many chunks of what ought to be indigestible intrusions, of more or less gaudy or persuasive polemic, from ACC or Marx or somewhere, but even the stuff about Josef Dietzgen turns out to be quite adequately riveting as part of the ongoing sexual/intellectual story. In fact I think this is what stops the novel from tipping over into Stewart Home territory. The penumbra of self-justifying argument that surrounds Home's glib production of consciously

trashy, free-association occult-porno novels of post-punk social critique is marginally more interesting than the actual experience of reading them. They are conceptual art without the digestive work that produces real, nourishing rubbish. *Shitkicks and Doughballs* is a more substantial read than Home, and the problem of incorporating thought into engaging narrative is dealt with much more effectively. Its relation with the tradition of the philosophical or artistic novel is less problematic than it looks, and Watson's novel can take its place in the tradition beside writers as disparate as Sartre, Diderot, Robert Pirsig, Kierkegaard, Hesse, Unamuno, Iris Murdoch and the Marquis de Sade, as well as William Burroughs and Wyndham Lewis.

Yet Watson is aggressively opposed to the banalities of what he calls the Popsicle Academy, as he made clear in *ACC*; there he argued that the banalities of reductive analysis are simply unrealistic. 'What kind of "realism" results from supposing that human beings have no unconscious drives?' he asked, and went on to claim that 'totality must be reserved for the totality of everything in the universe, wielded as concept rather than dressed up as system': thus

[Iain] Sinclair's schizophrenic art tears up the contract of novelistic realism in order to lay bare a reality that scotches the liberal 'we', inviting instead a prurient, voyeuristic, guilty gaze. Materialists are not afraid to face reality, and therefore welcome any psychic drives which rend the tissue-skin on which the picture's painted.... Nihilism in art is a precondition for a politics that can allow the working class to speak.

Shitkicks is his attempt to put that theory into practice as an act of literature, pulling in related arguments, such as that 'sex must happen within society.... The sexual act is no more biological – and no more social – than eating lunch'. Like Trotsky, one of the book's hero-reference points (others include Dietzgen, Sinclair, Zappa, Schwitters, Marx, Wyndham Lewis, Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, Derek Bailey, Hegel, Joyce and Fourier), Watson sees everything as symptomatic and thus in need of analysis, which he carries out on the model of a Benjaminian theory of correspondences, determined to 'collate the hot points of the culture, not cleanse a field and issue title deeds'.

Some readers may come away from an encounter with *Shitkicks* uncertain about the relative positions it accords ethics and epistemology; others may want to argue with its anti-Kantian stance. But its boldly sloganizing attempt to re-imagine cultural critique and revolution and simultaneously to insist on the post-populist readability of its *Finnegans Wake*-like verbal

cartooning has produced a comic-strip complexity located within an uncertainty about what to make of the book in our hands. If it recalls Joyce and Wyndham Lewis, it does so without the modernist insistence on experiment creating new forms of investigative writing. Watson has described Iain Sinclair as creating a prose that is 'a permanent show trial of the poetic impulse', and the obsessive quilting of his own cultural 'hot points' combined with a sort of schizo-paranoia (or Zapparanoia, as he calls it at one point) makes for a similarly unstoppable read. My only regret at the end of the book was that poodles and other dog figures are always so irrecuperably slavish: even Unamuno gave a dog its say in *Mist*. Not that I like dogs – I don't, at all. But these ones wouldn't even bark in the night. On the other hand, they might take wing at dusk...

Ian Patterson

Fetishism is real

Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2003. 233 pp. £36.00 hb., £13.70 pb., 0 252 02832 5 hb., 0 252 07118 2 pb.

Bertell Ollman has been a lively presence in the field of Marxian studies for over thirty years. His most distinctive contribution lies in his elucidation of Marx's method, specifically dialectics. Here he gives us 'the best of my life's work on dialectics'. The various chapters are (lightly revised) reproductions of earlier published material: four chapters from his first (and best, I think) book *Alienation* (1971), three from his *Dialectical Investigations* (1993), plus five more occasional pieces. The whole forms an ideal introduction to his thought for newcomers, and a useful compendium for those renewing their acquaintance with it.

Ollman's book has two major themes: the philosophy of internal relations (first expounded in *Alienation*) and the method of multi-variant abstraction (the central chapter of *Dialectical Investigations*). These I will summarize in a moment; but first let us attend to what Ollman thinks about dialectic in general. One is struck by its epistemological and methodological characterization:

Dialectics is a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occur in the world. As part of this, it includes how to organize a reality viewed in this manner for purposes of study and how to present the results of what one finds to other people.

Dialectics is a method one 'puts to work', not the way reality works, although to be sure it is useful because of the prevalence of 'changes' and 'interactions' in the world. Only in a late chapter does Ollman become self-conscious about this peculiar modality of his dialectic, and make a gesture towards ontology. But much more could be said.

Of course 'change and interaction' is a banal phrase on its own. What makes Ollman's work interesting is when he insists that these features determine what a thing is. Strictly speaking there are no things, only processes and relations; interactions are 'inneractions'. So he gives us a full-blown philosophy of internal relations. He introduces this idea with an acute observation on Marx's writing regarding the impossibility of finding in it neat definitions, because the meaning of a term shifts with its context. Here is Ollman's explanation:

The philosophy of internal relations ... treats the relations in which anything stands as essential parts of what it is, so that a significant change in any of these relations registers as a qualitative change in the system of which it is a part. With relations rather than things as the fundamental building blocks of reality, a concept may vary somewhat in its meaning depending on how much of a particular relation it is intended to convey.

This approach certainly clarifies much that is obscure in Marx's discourse. (However, Ollman makes an exegetical slip in citing a poem of the nineteen-year-old Marx containing the line 'I but seek to grasp profound and true that which in the street I find' as evidence for Marx's realism, missing the layers of irony – beginning with the scatological implication of what is found 'in the street'. This is one of a set of poems written by a Hegelian persona forced to speak against himself. This prior not only to Marx's materialism, but to his conversion to Hegel later the same year, cited by Ollman.)

For Ollman, it appears, all relations are internal relations. This view is implausible; a mind, a society, a solar system, are different realms of being with the 'parts' having differing status in relation to the whole. With an all-embracing philosophy of Ollman's kind there is a double danger: first, of 'thinning' out the concept of internal relation such that it can indeed cover 'everything', at the cost of being uninformative; second, of overextending the range of a 'thick' concept to cases where it does not really apply, at the cost of mysticism. I do not doubt that much of Marx's work, especially *Capital*, treats with great sophistication totalities characterized by internal relations. But in my opinion this derives not from a general philo-

sophical position, but from the peculiar character of his object. At all events, given that 'everything' forms a totality, discrimination of parts necessarily involves 'abstraction' in a strong sense (a whole constituted by external relations must also be studied through abstracting parts, but in this case one simply reads off the relevant unique distinctions from the reality). Ollman considers the chapter on abstraction to be 'the most important chapter' of his book. To think 'change and interaction' in an adequate way requires 'the process of abstraction'. Thought must abstract from the whole categories identifying the key relations and these must be capable of prioritizing movement over stability and interaction over isolation. (In an otherwise unexceptional passage on Marx's interest in change, Ollman mistakenly cites as evidence the frequency of the term 'moment'. However, this is not a temporal moment (*der Moment*) but a mechanical one (*das Moment*). Marx follows Hegel in using this metaphor. Thus when he says circulation is a moment of production he does not refer to a temporal phase but to the leverage it exerts on production. The ubiquity of the term is relevant less to the temporal than to the systemic relations of capital.)

The two aspects of Ollman's philosophy are connected in so far as

it is the philosophy of internal relations that gives Marx both license and opportunity to abstract as freely as he does, to decide how far into its internal relations any particular will extend.... Since



boundaries are never given and when established never absolute it also allows and even encourages re-
abstraction, makes a variety of abstractions possible,
and helps to develop his mental skills and flexibility
in making abstractions.

Ollman distinguishes these conjoint aspects to abstraction: 'extension, level of generality, and vantage point'. The first refers to the temporal or spatial range covered by the abstraction. The second brings into focus a specific level of generality for treating the material thus designated. The third aspect refers to the perspective on it flowing from the research agenda.

Ollman's discussion of abstraction in general and of these three aspects is very useful. It should be taken into consideration by all social scientists aiming to achieve clarity about the salience of their study. Ollman is also certainly correct in pointing to the flexibility and fertility of Marx's use of abstraction. But in so far as Ollman's concentration is on the methodological process of abstraction in theory, this means the ontological issue of abstraction is relatively neglected. He briefly notes that Marx recognized that there is something strange about capitalism in this respect:

Abstractions...exist in the world. In the abstraction, certain spatial and temporal boundaries and connections stand out, just as others are obscure and even invisible, making what is in practice inseparable appear separately and the historically specific features of things disappear behind their more general form.... Marx labels these objective results of capitalist functioning 'real abstractions', and it is chiefly real abstractions that incline the people who have contact with them to construct ideological abstractions. It is also real abstractions to which he is referring when he says that in capitalist society 'people are governed by abstractions'.

Even here, once again Ollman stresses the epistemological consequences and fails to follow up the significant remark by Marx that 'individuals are now ruled by *abstractions*'. It is around this issue that the differences between Ollman's approach and my own turn. Ollman devotes a chapter to 'a critique of systematic dialectics', a view attributed to 'Tom Sekine, Robert Albritton, Christopher Arthur, and Tony Smith'. He characterizes this interpretation of Marx's method as follows:

(1) that Marx's dialectical method refers exclusively to the strategy Marx used in *presenting* his understanding of capitalist political economy; (2) that the main and possibly only place he uses this strategy is in *Capital I*; and (3) that the strategy itself involves constructing a conceptual logic that Marx took over in all its essentials from Hegel.

Ollman does not deny that this interpretation offers important insights into Marx's expositional strategy, but he wishes to take 'Systematic Dialectic' to task for the following reasons: (1) Marx had other aims in *Capital* beside the presentation of a categorical dialectic; (2) Marx employs many other strategies of exposition, especially in other parts of his corpus; (3) it is wrong to restrict Marx's dialectical method to that of presentation instead of combining ontology, epistemology, inquiry, intellectual reconstruction, exposition and praxis.

Speaking for myself, the short reply to these criticisms is that I have never doubted any of these points. Systematic dialectic addresses itself to a very *specific* problem: the exposition of a system of categories dialectically articulated. I never said this was all Marx did, or needed to do. However, a longer answer is required to point (3), which in turn refers back to the reasons why exposition is so important, why – apart from the obvious – the focus of research is on *Capital*, and why Hegel's logic is so relevant. It is simply incorrect to state that ontology has been ignored in Systematic Dialectic. Indeed, the guiding principle is the need to identify the logic proper to the peculiar character of the *specific object*, as Marx himself recommended in his 1843 notes on Hegel. There is no universal method guaranteed to unlock all secrets.

Capital is characterized by an ontology peculiar to itself in so far as it moves *through* abstraction. Theory must follow this *real* process of abstraction, and elucidate what is negated in it. I argue for the relevance of Hegel's logic because capital grounds itself in a process of real abstraction in exchange in much the same way as Hegel's dissolution and reconstruction of reality are predicated on the abstractive power of thought. The task of the exposition is to trace capital's imposition of abstraction on the real world. Once this has been done it is perfectly possible to change the vantage point and present it as a system of alienation, reification and fetishism. But, once again, fetishism is *real*, not just how things are 'viewed'.

Ollman has a distinctive position worthy of attention. Much that he says about the relevance of the philosophy of internal relations to Marx's work is certainly illuminating, and much of the methodological advice about the handling of abstraction is to be taken on board. But there is also a certain one-sidedness: the pertinence of internal relations is overgeneralized, and the discussion of abstraction is primarily from the vantage point of method, whereas Marx's ontological insight about the rule of abstractions leads us into a dialectic of capital itself.

Chris Arthur