Bioaesthetics

Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*, trans. A. Derieg, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2007. 320 pp. £11.95 pb., 978 158435 046 0.

This book offers a clear yet complex analysis of the conditions under which art (and indeed politics) could be understood as revolutionary. Yet it posits a distinction between the 'aesthetic' and the 'political' that finally reduces art to an appendage of politics, as a result of the fact that Raunig's account of the 'transversal concatenation' of revolution and art effectively relies upon an 'updated' concept of revolution itself.

The conept of 'Transversal concatenation' is one drawn directly from Negri's work, developed in the context of a rejection of the takeover of state power in favour of constructing an immanent and ongoing 'revolutionary machine' from the components of 'insurrection, resistance and constituent power'. Of these, the last is most significant, because it places constituent power as the ontological ground of 'revolutionary' aesthetic processes, and limits these processual expressions to collective experiments with 'alternative forms of organization'. These forms emerge from the political traditions of anarcho-syndicalism, the soviets and the various council movements. As Raunig puts it, he thus seeks an art that attempts 'to address the question of organization from a perspective of revolutionary politics'. Such attempts, he argues, 'confront directly' the 'central repressive operations of Empire' functioning biopolitically within both revolutionary groups and in the world. Consequently, Raunig's 'updated' concept of revolution seems to imply a similarly 'updated' art; one that emerges (following Foucault and Guattari) within activist groups that critique the limits – formal, economic, subjective and political – of the art institution.

While the critique of both individual expression and art's institutions is necessary to understanding the biopolitical controls of contemporary life, Raunig's privileging of the organization and intervention of the activist group as a liberatory 'collective' expression ignores the political potential of more traditional forms of aesthetic production. Although Raunig provides a valuable account of marginal artistic attempts at revolutionary activity, he does so under the assumption that 'art', as this is normally understood – and, more significantly, its own experiments in concatenating with life – are not capable of intervening effectively (i.e. politically) at the level of social production. Clearly attacking the avant-garde tradition here, Raunig suggests that art's only means of expressing constituent power qua life lies in the political practice of activism.

What is at stake in this is the philosophical understanding of life and the politics of its expression. While Raunig's position is consistent with Negri's, his appeal to the work of Deleuze and Guattari ignores their affirmation of art qua life as being expressed in a politics of sensation itself, a politics indiscernible from art. This would imply a 'bioaesthetics' as much as, and perhaps even prior to, a 'biopolitics'. Indeed, it is a strange version of Deleuze and Guattari that Raunig evokes here, and reading his book one would think they had no interest in art at all; something which may actually be more truly said of Negri. Indeed, it seems as if Raunig wants to evokes – in Negri's name – a 'political' Deleuze and Guattari against an 'aesthetic' one. This runs completely counter to Deleuze and Guattari's affirmation of art and the avant-garde, an affirmation that, for Guattari, makes the avant-garde a model for political action as such. As a result, Raunig's focus on the question of collective organization is at the expense of those collectives that the artist organizes as sensation, and which appear within the realms of painting, cinema, poetry and other supposedly 'traditional' arts. This is a problem that stems from Raunig's commitment to his 'updated' concept of revolution, which, in similarly 'updating' the tradition of institutional critique in line with contemporary political conditions, ignores Deleuze and Guattari's affirmation of art's fundamentally political power to produce the new (a power that is first of all aesthetic). To affirm an ontological vitalism that begins from art qua life would be to affirm a politics of creation, which is something quite different from Raunig's affirmation of politics qua life, which tends to separate art from politics altogether.

In this sense, the 'and' in Raunig's title is somewhat ambiguous, given that his argument not only denies art's autonomy, but derides art's own attempts to dissolve it. In the Introduction, Raunig compares and contrasts Wagner's essay 'Art and the Revolution'

and Lunacharsky's 'Revolution and Art' in order to dramatize the problems traversing – from the political Right to the Left – the avant-garde. Raunig argues that Wagner and Lunacharsky are two examples of a 'trans-historical pattern', where claims of the universal value of art's revolutionary power rest upon another universal – that of 'the *totalizing confusion of art and life*'. In other words, the avant-gardes fail because they locate art's revolutionary power in its ability to dissolve itself within an 'uncritical' (i.e. an aesthetic rather than political) concept of 'life'. This *confusion* defines the avant-garde and explains its inadequacy, inasmuch as its revolutionary idealism leads, according to Raunig, to the aestheticization of politics in spectacle, producing 'a uniformity of the masses through the means of art'. The avant-garde failed politically because its desire for 'life' does not resist the real political forces in play, particularly those institutions instrumentalizing aesthetics within the biopolitical policing of Capital's global Empire. This places art in an awkward situation, condemning its political aspirations as not only naive and inadequate, but complicit. Although the critique of art's instrumentalization is of pressing concern, and Raunig's book marks an important contribution to understanding its mechanisms, it pursues this through a harsh judgement on art that rests on the binarization of art and politics. Art therefore becomes revolutionary only when it overcomes itself, when it abandons its own mechanisms (including those of the avant-garde) in favour of those that are truly political.

The beginning of such a polarization appears in Raunig's account of the Paris Commune. Rather than upholding the Commune as the definitive model of revolution, Raunig wants to rethink it as inaugurating a 'long twentieth century' in which specific and singular 'revolutionary machines' constitute a genealogy of political self-organization operating in 'council-like systems' and 'grassroots movements'. Raunig draws out a non-representational and self-organizing form of collective expression that opens our contemporary period, and defines the conditions of revolutionary art. Although this *form* is radically non-representational, and to that extent connects to developments in the visual arts, questions of anarchism play a much more important role than those of abstraction here. While this makes of expression a collective and political process (a no doubt necessary development), Raunig's examples position this revolutionary activity *against* art's institutional organization. This is to devalue the inherent potential of sensation to catalyse subjective mutation, a potential serving as the basis of Guattari's 'ethico-aesthetic paradigm', in which both avant-garde as well as 'modernist' art practices are privileged as experimental processes operating on their own conditions (conditions both subjective and institutional). This means that 'revolutionary' aesthetic practices are

quite capable of emerging in the artistic production of sensation, rather than, as it seems in Raunig's account, sensation having to be assessed according to 'revolutionary' criteria by which they become 'political'.

This is to pose the crucial question of how a work of art relates to its social conditions of production. Raunig finds the answer in Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Author as Producer' and its attack on the German intellectual Left, particularly the 'Activism' movement of the 1910s. Such leftist movements, Raunig argues following Benjamin, were revolutionary in attitude but not in action, producing a complicity with 'the bourgeois apparatus of production' that enabled it to assimilate and even propagate 'revolutionary themes' by placing the figure of the artist/intellectual beside or above the proletariat. Although this was an improvement on the individualism of Courbet, already rejected by Raunig in a previous chapter, the 'Activism' group nevertheless enables the nullification of their revolutionary desire by separating it from the real organizational activities that would express constituent power at the level of the multitude. Once more, and it is surely a point well taken in relation to many artistic 'networks' today, artistic political posturing is meaningless without a serious level of self-critique. Only through self-critique can artistic groups achieve real political effects through the double strategy of refusing to supply, and thereby changing, the production apparatus. Raunig argues that these two strategies can be updated through Deleuze's critique of representation and Foucault's attempt to constitute a new 'politics of truth', which together enable a genuine attack upon the media. This interesting suggestion defines the political value of artistic production according to its ability to disrupt the machinery of the spectacle, and its production of signs capable of leaving the museum and directly attacking the global networks of the sign-economy. Raunig's positive examples of revolutionary art all operate in this way, from the best aspects of Eisenstein's theatre of attractions, through to the Situationists, and finally in his key contemporary example of the PublixTheatreCaravan.

What is most interesting about this account is the way it outlines a genealogy of 'revolutionary' art according to our contemporary conditions of 'semio-capitalism'. Inasmuch as these conditions truly emerge in the 1960s, the direct confrontation by Situationism of real political processes introduces a contemporary model of 'revolutionary art'. This model has two major components: the Situationist involvement in the collective organization of the wider '68 'movement', and their strategic intervention in the circulation of signs that constituted the social realm. In this sense the Situationists avoid the problems of two other art movements of the 1960s, those of Conceptual Art and those of the Viennese Actionists. Raunig explicitly rejects the latter, while completely ignoring the former. His rejection of Viennese Actionism rests upon his argument against the avant-garde's complicity with Capital through its spectacularization of resistance. Indeed, he argues, the 'myth' of the Actionists' radical politics was almost entirely due to their demonization by the 'spectacular media machine' and its criminalization by the 'repressive state apparatus'. In this sense, and it is a distinction that is telling, Actionism only achieved a 'cultural revolution' because its outrages were not connected to any real political organization. This was all the more problematic inasmuch as the event 'Art and Revolution' held at Vienna University in 1968 was co-organized by an extra-parliamentary left-wing student group. This 'negative concatenation' of art and politics led then to a breakdown of cohesion within both groups, and meant that the most that could be said for Actionism was that its 'temporary wild process of politicization' made the operations of the cops publicly visible. This calling forth of the cops occurred not only outside but also within the Actionist group, and gave birth to what Raunig calls 'fascist' tendencies within the 'Actionist Analytic Commune' established by Otto Muehl in 1972. Raunig's offhand dismissal of the Actionist Commune is perhaps surprising inasmuch as it was a direct experiment with anti-bourgeois forms of the collective organization of life. But it is precisely the conceptualization of 'life' that is once more at stake here, inasmuch as the Commune's programme of *Selbstdarstellung Therapie* and free love, inspired by Wilhelm Reich, privileged artistic–sexual mechanisms of liberating life from 'the society of gnomes' (Muehl), and so avoided real political engagement in favour of what Raunig calls an 'embarrassing mania for self-expression'. Raunig's 'updated' concept of revolution clearly does not envisage it as the expression of a liberated unconscious, and nor does he associate an insurrectional 'life' with anything libidinal.

It might also seem surprising, then, that Raunig does not discuss Conceptual Art, which like Situationism followed the 'linguistic turn' of the 1960s into the newly emerging info-economy. Conceptual Art attempted to deliver art to the 'people' by removing any privilege to the artistic sign, and redeploying the readymade as 'information'. This strategy of 'dematerialization' imagined an entirely discursive artwork outside the reach of capital, for, as Carl Andre once argued, once there was no art object, and the artist

was anybody, what could be sold? If, then, Actionism failed because it tried to disengage from capital by immersing itself in an autonomous sexual utopia, Conceptual Art's problem was the opposite, as it tried to dissolve art in a sign economy it naively imagined was the beginning of a new democracy of artistic expression. This led, as Deleuze and Guattari snidely point out, to Conceptual Art's banality of examples being rivalled only by its philosophical inspiration – analytic philosophy and logic. Here anything could be art and anyone could make art; all it needed was the formulation of a 'concept'. But in the newly dematerialized economies emerging in the marketing and advertising industries, the 'art' of the 'concept' was already where it was at, and their executives saw no problem in collecting immaterial artworks, which, as long as they remained connected to a proper name, retained their value as commodities.

So while Actionism's understanding of a (sex) 'life' centred in the body and freed through the still-artistic processes of the Commune remained caught in an uncritical spectacle of exteriority, Conceptual Art went the opposite way and uncritically dissolved art into a 'life' that was increasingly managed through the circulation of signs within the 'affect-economy'. This at least would be the logic behind Raunig's championing of the Situationists as the forerunners to his positive example of contemporary revolutionary art: the PublixTheatreCaravan of Vienna. This group provides, for Raunig, a concatenation of 'art and revolution' in an anti-globalization activism, mixing 'the workers's theatre and the autonomist movement'. What is important is its engagement with the biopolitical dimension of late capitalism through a discursive activism that takes place both in the streets and through a rigorous process of self-critique. By their critique of representation – operating 'aesthetically' in the media, and 'politically' within the collective – PublixTheatreCaravan avoid their spectacularization and instrumentalization by the mass media and the culture industry to achieve what Foucault called *parrhesia*, or freely telling the truth.

Although Raunig's contention that artists have taken over the role of 'political *parrhesiastes*' in the second half of the twentieth century is a provocative and interesting one, it is a claim that privileges discursive 'work' over sensation in any political engagement. *Parrhesia*, in Foucault's account, involved 'crossing the lines' establishing and enforcing the sayable *and the seen* within social collectives. In this sense, Valesquez, Manet and Magritte are all, for Foucault, political activists. By contrast, although Raunig does not condemn painters outright, one gets the feeling that for him they have nothing to say that could be contemporary. This is a little ironic given that, at best, this offers an 'updated' version of the distinction between 'modern' and 'contemporary' art that emerged in the 1970s, and which was replayed in the 'postmodernism' debates of the 1980s. What is 'contemporary' in art, and not just in art, are those assemblages that are capable of 'crossing the line' to produce something new. A 'politics of truth' means nothing else.

Raunig's postscript gives his account another twist. Entitled 'After 9/11', it traces the overwhelming impact this event has had on the anti-globalization movement. It has led, Raunig argues, to a kind of massification and spectacularization on both sides of the conflict. The anti-globalization movement has increasingly been caught up with a mass-mobilization strategy that has played into the state's hands both practically, on the ground, and in the realm of the media, where such demonstrations are controlled by being turned into spectacle. This was the fate, broadly speaking, of the PublixTheatreCaravan participation in the anti-globalization movement, but it was a fate they then resisted 'nomadically' by shifting their energies to the development of the 'no border camp', such as the one at Strasbourg in July 2002. This move is read by Raunig as part of PublixTheatreCaravan's successful employment of self-critique that retained its commitment to techniques of *parrhesis*, but that refused the spectacularization of the movement after 9/11 to make the concatenation of art machines and revolutionary machines 'permanent and transversal'. This suggestion that a truly contemporary revolutionary art – an art that has, at last, employed the linguistic turn of the 1960s against our biopolitical conditions of 'life' – is an 'updated' political activism forms the conclusion of Raunig's argument.

It is the considerable achievement of Raunig's book to present this suggestion in such a strong and intelligent manner. But the price paid is the jettisoning of 'art' along with any concept of 'life' that could be understood in its terms. This seems, finally, too high a price to pay, both aesthetically and philosophically, for a 'politics' of art. In imagining the 'life' of constituent power to be expressed through the organizational interventions of activist groups, it denies to art its greatest weapon – sensation – just as it denies to life its creative 'nature', both of which are already political in continually creating new, and so contemporary, worlds.

Stephen Zepke

Enjoyment in the required fashion

Yannis Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2007. 328 pp. £60.00 hb., 978 7486 1980.

In his introduction to what is – as is so common these days – a collection of previously published papers which have been expanded or filled out, Stavrakakis poses the question: what is the meaning of the 'syntagma of the Lacanian Left'? It's a good question, which the book struggles to answer. In essence, what Stavrakakis does is to try and derive a political praxis from a Lacanian account of the subject, a task at which he is less than successful. What he fails to do is to establish why this praxis might be distinctively *left*, or indeed, what *left* might mean at this historical moment. Though Stavrakakis wants to have the 'Lacanian Left' as a site of articulation, much like its apparently kindred terms 'the Hegelian Left' and 'the Freudian Left', in fact 'Lacanian' is here more a gesture of subsumption: the Lacanian apparatus is foundational. The failure of the model of articulation lies in the fact that the political has no independent characterization outside the field of the psychoanalytic subject: as in his previous book, *Lacan and the Political*, Stavrakakis reduces the political to the working out of a particular operation of that subject. In the latter case, it was the moment of expulsion and homogenization that produced a field of consistency (and identity) and the threat (or promise) of the avatars of *objet a*; in the current contribution, it is the workings of *jouissance* and the nostalgia for fullness, which Stavrakakis discusses in relation to nationalism, European identity and consumerism.

If we compare Stavrakakis's project with that of Reich or Marcuse, the differences become manifest. Their problem was a deficiency in the political schemata of their different periods, which prompted a move to psychoanalysis to account for the failure of Marxism. The name of that failure was 'fascism' in the first case, and 'affluence' in the second. Stavrakakis, unlike them, and unlike his named objects of critique, Laclau and (more problematically) Žižek, looks to Lacan to found the possibilities of transformation as such. He quotes Jacques-Alain Miller approvingly: 'Psychoanalysis is subversive – it encourages distrust in all official ideals and institutions – but not revolutionary, since it also distrusts idealistic notions of a bright post-revolutionary future.' But there is not the least trace of critical engagement with Miller's tendentious banality, and then, endorsing Badiou's notions of negativity and the truth event (the revelation of being otherwise and possibility), Stavrakakis argues, or rather asserts, that the politically innovative is 'more Lacanian – Left Lacanian'. The equivalence of 'more' and 'Left' here is both audacious and undeveloped.

The form of the book also makes it difficult to assess sympathetically. Its first part settles some scores with Žižek and Laclau: the former for misreading Lacan and falling into a 'fetishism' of the act, the latter for being insufficiently Lacanian and separating the symbolic from affect. (This is a separation that Laclau moves to annul in his *On Populist Reason*, with drastic and damaging consequences for his account of politics, as John Kraniauskas argued in *Radical Philosophy* 136.) It also includes a critical dialogue between Castoriadis and Lacan over the issue of creation (Castoriadis loses) and a brief approving discussion of Badiou. Much of this material is strictly (and occasionally tediously) *ad hominem*, leaving the second part of the book to open out into something more theoretically general.

The central idea of Stavrakakis's account is that political identities, submission to authority, the workings of consumerism and advertising – indeed it could be claimed all contemporary social phenomena – find their primary support in the deployment of *jouissance*; a core, if varying, concept of the Lacanian corpus. Stavrakakis, like many Lacanians, pays fast and loose with the notion. Sometimes it is a synonym for libido, a sort of energy or force of investment. Sometimes it finds its equivalent in enjoyment, in some physical sense. At the end of its theoretical wanderings, it will name *another* sort of enjoyment. Thus, in its various incarnations it works to tie the social and the corporeal. In its ur-Lacanian version, *jouissance* is that which never was, an originary fullness posited as having once been prior to castration and the trammels of metonymic desire. Desire is not jouissance, but Stavrakakis will occlude the distinction.

In Laclau's current appropriation of the term, *jouissance* is what haunts the object as the trace of an impossible totality (or universal). This is projected (and I think the echoes of an earlier idealism in the Freudian/Kleinian operation are not coincidental) onto aspects of the social, granting them a value which anchors political action, understood as the workings of hegemony. Stavrakakis has this in mind when he discusses nationalism and its pathologies, or

rather nationalism as pathology, since it is just this unconscious attachment to the nation as the promise of totality (and social peace) that makes it so intractable, so worth dying and killing for. Yet the problem here is why it should be the nation as form that becomes the bearer of this trace, and not any other identity. Or, since Stavrakakis will explain all political identities as grounded in the promise of fullness, why this identity has been historically dominant since the mid-eighteenth century. The disclosure of a fundamental moment of subjective investment still fails to account for the emergence of the object of investment.

Oddly, Stavrakakis raises this problem in his discussion of the failure of a (*jouissance*-saturated) European identity: what is it about Europe that militates against it becoming the bearer of the trace of fullness? Or, more negatively, what allows Europe to be the object of the sort of exclusionary fantasies that 'Brussels' conjures? The problem here is precisely that of psychoanalytic reductionism: the complex of subjective engagements with 'Europe' and the particular structural (political-economic) features of the European Community, together with the various 'fatalities' – as Benedict Anderson has described the singularities of language and history – are all levelled to the moment of 'identity', as either misrecognition or obscene enjoyment. The famous 'No's in the French and Dutch referendums on the European constitution are read as evidence for the failure of a European identity, rather than an extremely crude summation of complex political, social and (well, yes) individual decisions. (Later, however, Stavrakakis will nuance this argument to allow that they may indicate a rejection of 'post-democracy', the empty forms of democracy that cover capitalist administration, without reflecting on what this does to his argument here.)

Similarly, *jouissance* is wheeled out to account for the workings of consumer capitalism (as, in the past, was desire, with similar levelling effects). The various investments in the objects of consumption endlessly produced by capital are not 'enjoyed' in some version of use value, but rather 'enjoyed', purchased as promises of fullness. Yet, as fullness is unachievable, the objects must be cast aside as failing to satisfy. Or, in another Lacanian move, the old prohibitions on consumption are cast aside to be replaced by their 'obscene underside', the imperative to enjoy. Either way, the only options are constant consumption, the treadmill of life in the mall, or nostalgic demands for repression, or the random acting out of violence. This really does rephrase the worst excesses of Marcuse's pessimism, but also his assumption of the non-contradictory articulation of the subject and political economy. That Stavrakakis cites Ballard here as the social portraitist of late capitalism is significant: Ballard's extraordinary social conservatism and his writing out the apocalyptic fantasies of that declining element of the English middle class, heirs to the fading wealth and constant fears of Empire, precisely limn not general features of the subject under capitalism but historical subjects in a particular configuration of political economy.

The fantasy of fullness thus becomes the source of evil, and its malign influence is seen in the desire for radical social transformation, which as 'utopian' necessarily becomes nostalgic, and fraught with peril. Rather, what is left and endorsable by Lacanians must be the integration of lack and negativity, the recognition of perpetual antagonism and disagreement. Democracy is the name of this recognition, and here Stavrakakis approvingly cites Chantal Mouffe. However, an intellectual acknowledgement of the structural desideratum of democracy is insufficient: more than a symbolic engagement, there must be an affective commitment. But, *ex hypothesi*, such commitment cannot be one which mobilizes *jouissance*, since this would constitute radical democracy as utopian, a fantasy that offers the possibility that, in the institutionalization of antagonism, the reality of conflict would be overcome. Rather, Stavrakakis invokes an enjoyment of the not-all, a putative '*jouissance* beyond accumula-

tion, domination and fantasy', which would underlie democracy.

What might this be? For so crucial a component of the Lacanian Left project, this is cursorily dealt with, and emerges only at the theoretical level. In effect, this enjoyment is what is left after the subject has divested itself of a fantasy identification with the all, or the Other that is all. Now, if the transition of *jouissance* to desire in the neurotic subject is the passage of fullness to the hope of satisfaction in language, then the move to another *jouissance* is the abandonment of the possibility of satisfaction through, in the words of Joan Copjec, 'formalizing [*jouissance*] in a signifier that does not mean, but is, rather, directly enjoyed'. This is the Lacanian idea of *suppléance*, derived from his work on Joyce, and now brought into relation with feminine *jouissance*, as the *jouissance* of the not-all. Such enjoyment makes up for lack without becoming *objet a*. But how does this work for democracy, and more crucially for a politics: what might be those examples of such a *jouissance* at large in the world? Sadly, Stavrakakis, normally garrulous, is now taciturn. There is a reference to Sahlins and Clastres, and the possibility of things being (socially) otherwise, and a brief discussion of cooperative economic possibilities from a scattered list of writers – Unger, Santos, and so on – but the allegedly profound difference of this form of enjoyment remains unexemplified, and its possible generalization unexamined.

The suspicion remains that only the subject after psychoanalysis can be said to enjoy in the required fashion and that a project of social change with political actors remains untheorizable or unimaginable. There is also the suspicion that the anti-utopian thrust of Stavrakakis's Lacanianism misreads the history of utopia as social imagination, reducing it to a form of libidinal bad faith, and resuscitates the anti-totalitarianism of Popperian liberalism. The mournful (but mature) acceptance of partiality slips towards an affirmation of piecemeal transformation. To make sense of Lacan's possible relevance to the project of the Left requires more than this.

Philip Derbyshire

Another Isis

Christine Battersby, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, Routledge, London & New York, 2007. 226 pp., £60.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 978 0 415 14810 8 hb., 978 0 203 94561 2 pb.

Christine Battersby's latest book builds on aspects of her earlier critical engagements with Western aesthetics and metaphysics in *Gender and Genius* (1989) and *The Phenomenal Woman* (1998). But here her attention is specifically focused on the category of the sublime within this philosophical tradition and the ways in which it operates as a nexus between aesthetics, ethics and politics. As always with Battersby's work, the main argument is rooted in a deep engagement in the history of the category with which she is working. One of the delights of the book is the way it illuminates the emergence of the notion of the sublime from classical traditions of rhetoric, and its imbrication with a specifically alchemical discourse of sublimation. At the book's heart, however, is eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European philosophizing about the sublime as a mode of aesthetic response (whether to nature or art) that challenges settled modes of understanding and of being in the world. As Battersby demonstrates, the different ways of characterizing the sublime are always already morally and politically loaded as distinct ways of responding to, and accounting for, difference. The aim of the book is 'to explore the usefulness – and the dangers – of the concept of the sublime for dealing with the politics of difference, including sexual, racial and religious difference'. Philosophically, the key reference point for Battersby's exploration is Kant, in both his pre-critical and his critical work; politically, it is the aesthetic representation and reception of the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York on 11 September 2001 – although the author is somewhat ambivalent about this.

Battersby's account deals with two distinct philosophical responses to Kant's account of the sublime: Hegel's (terroristic) interpretation, associated here with the argument of Jonathan Strauss, and a postmodern, agonistic interpretation offered by Lyotard. The former sees the Kantian sublime as ultimately reducible to the subsumption of the particular object of experience under the abstract universal of the moral law. On this account, the challenge of what appears initially as ungraspable is met by the reassertion of the capacity of the judging subject to subsume the apparently 'other' under universal law. In this way the sublime experience becomes tied to the abstract autonomy of the universal subject that Hegel identified as underpinning

the ideology of the French Revolution and of its Terror. The problem with this account, for Lyotard as well as Battersby, is threefold: first, it renders the sublime a justification for political terror, in which the sacrifice of the individual for an abstract justice becomes permissible; second, it suggests the possibility of romantic transfiguration, in which the subject transcends his limitations in a kind of spiritual leap into the realm of pure reason; and third, it confirms the idea that there is only one description of an act or experience. In contrast to this, the Lyotardian reading of Kant recognizes that the sublime is not ultimately to do with the relation between subject and object, but rather with the conflict of the faculties within the subject. In his view the Kantian sublime affirms irresolvable conflict and difference in a way that prefigures his own account of the *differend* and paralogy.

Battersby finds Lyotard's reading of the Kantian sublime much closer to Kant's own argument than the Hegelian version. However, she argues that Lyotard draws back from an adequate exploration of the politics of a postmodern sublime, and risks withdrawing into an abstraction equal to that of the terroristic sublime characteristic of the Hegelian tradition of which he is critical. The problem is that Lyotard, like Kant himself and his Hegelian interpreters, does not take the category of empirical difference seriously enough. Speculating on a Lyotardian response to the 9/11 attacks, Battersby writes:

> The question that Lyotard's analysis raises is not simply whether there are multiple narratives that might be provided for this event (the answer is 'yes'); nor whether these narratives are incommensurable in terms of the framework of meanings ('yes' again); but 'why remain complicit with Kant's occlusion of materiality and questions of power from the domain of aesthetics?'

Ultimately, Battersby challenges both Hegelian and Lyotardian readings of the Kantian sublime by digging deeper into the question of how the pleasure in the sublime encounter is generated, and the nature of the subject for whom such pleasure can be generated. In doing so she unpacks the politics of the Kantian sublime as both gendered and raced: the sublime encounter emerges as an experience of radical difference which is itself premissed on a difference that is given as a norm, a norm that is explicitly identified with a certain subcategory of empirical subjects, namely white, European men. For Kant, it turns out, pleasure in the sublime is bound up with the affirmation of a particular experience of manliness in the encounter with others. Contrary to the claims of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, this is an experience that is neither universally grounded nor universally communicable.

As Battersby goes on to demonstrate, the incommensurability of the subject and its other encountered in the sublime is to do with neither abstracted particularity nor abstracted universality, but with flesh-and-blood bodies and histories. Battersby shows how Kant identifies women as emotional, fearful and lacking autonomy in relation to men – they are not excluded from moral agency, but their moral duties relate primarily to their domestic and reproductive role. Women have a duty to avoid the experience of the sublime, Kant argues, because even if they were to be able to cope with the experience, it is necessary for women to be educated to retain their fearfulness and dependency if they are to fulfil their role as women. Battersby goes on to explore Kant's ambivalent attitude to people of non-Christian cultures. On the one hand, he associated Judaism and Islam with the sublime, both being religions in which the unrepresentability and incomprehensibility of transcendence is central. On the other hand, Kant's rather eccentric categorization of 'other' (i.e. non-European) races and peoples stresses their limitations as both moral and aesthetic subjects. Those that Kant classifies as Oriental demonstrate their inferiority as aesthetic subjects by the focus on ornamentation in their art, which indicates their attachment to particularity. Battersby's point is not simply that Kant's sexism and racism unfairly exclude women and people of other cultures from the experience of the sublime; rather, that the experience of the sublime he outlines is the product of a specifically sexed and raced history. So this then opens up the possibility of producing or appreciating the sublime in ways that are differently sexed and raced, as in Gilroy's account of the 'slave sublime'.

In her later chapters, Battersby explores this possibility in the idea of the 'feminine sublime', elaborated through an examination of how Romantic accounts of the sublime have been confronted by women writers and artists – such as Dickinson, Günderode and Hartoum – resulting in alternative models for thinking of self and transcendence. But Battersby is insistent that we should not fall into the trap, characteristic of feminist thought influenced by psychoanalytic or Levinasian ideas, of identifying a feminine sublime. As Battersby sees it, the idea of a feminine sublime *confirms* rather than subverts the ethics and politics of the masculine Kantian subject, by identifying the feminine with 'unrepresentable excess', beyond the ken of thinking beings, rather than with the specifi-

city of the female embodied subject. Here Battersby draws on her argument in *The Phenomenal Woman* to counter the romantic tendency to identify the feminine with transcendent otherness whilst excluding women's embodied subjectivity from aesthetic and political realms. Her argument is that positioning either women or non-European peoples as an unrepresentable 'other' blocks, rather than enhances, our imaginative capacities, effectively letting privileged subjects off the hook of reckoning with material difference.

> My approach does, however, involve looking at the *specificity* of the exclusions relating to human differences, and considering, for example, how *women* artists and writers have responded to their positioning as 'other' and as barred from the sublime by virtue of their all-too-material bodies, as well as at the new modes of the sublime that have emerged out of these tensions.

The metaphor of the 'veiled Isis' offers a further discrimination between Kant and German Romanticism. Kant is highly critical of Romantic ideas of access to the absolute through an act of intellectual intuition, such as Novalis's contention that it is possible to encounter the sublime 'other' directly, thereby raising the veil of Isis. He identifies the sublime encounter as that between a masculine subject (active, rational) and his feminine counterpart (passive, natural); however, the masculine subject's capacity for the sublime is bound up with the impossibility of ever penetrating the veil. These different but overlapping accounts both identify the other with a radical difference that is itself highly abstract and undifferentiated. In contrast, Battersby interprets the work of certain women artists and writers as being premissed on an encounter with an otherness *within*, one that is bound up with the embodied, historical experience of being part of something (an aesthetic, political, philosophical tradition) by which you are also silenced. For example, in her discussion of an installation by Hartoum, Battersby suggests that it makes us 'more aware of ourselves as physical beings, whilst emphasizing also the fragility of the body and the non-autonomy of the "I"'.

In the final chapters of the book Battersby tackles the question of how to conceptualize the sublime in ways that avoid the pitfalls of Kantian and Romantic accounts. To do this, she draws on Nietzsche. Battersby first traces Nietzsche's critique of the Romantic and Kantian sublime, in particular in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and then argues that he usefully reconfigures the notion of sublimity in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, even though he does not necessarily use the language of the sublime in order to do so. For Nietzsche, on Battersby's account, the sublime is not about encountering an ungraspable externality in such a way as to confirm the dominance of the judging subject. Instead, the sublime encounter is the disruption of unifying conceptual frameworks by acts of forgetting that condition the possibility of those frameworks and that unity. This is exemplified by Nietzsche in the example of how the actuality of a specific leaf confounds the abstractness of the concept 'leaf' that we use to describe and understand it. As Battersby observes:

> This shattering of conceptual understanding via the remembrance of forgotten differences – differences that don't relate to a truth hidden beyond the veil, but that concern the forgotten 'other' within – is, in effect, the role that Nietzsche gives to his reconfigured sublime in his late works. And it is this aspect of his theory of the 'sublime' and of the 'event' that can help us to think more productively about those 'others' who are not outside the symbolic order, but who nevertheless vanish inside its folds.

Even though Nietzsche's ontology assumes that the norm is male, his linking of the sublime encounter to an immanent otherness fits well with the renegotiated sublime Battersby finds in Hartoum and others. In both cases there is an 'unfreezing' of taken-for-granted understanding provoked by an encounter with difference, a difference which is not understood as transcendent and undifferentiated otherness, but rather as material and historically specific. In her final chapter, Battersby compares this way of thinking the sublime with the 'inhuman' in Lyotard's work, arguing that it remains too close to the depoliticized and dehistoricized Kantian and Romantic traditions. Battersby returns to the example of the destruction of the Twin Towers as a historical event that could have the same unfreezing (sublime) effect on our understanding as that brought about by looking at art or nature. But this could only be possible if we don't allow this shaking of our existing modes of understanding and identity to become the reaffirmation of 'our' subjectivity in relation to the radically other 'them'. Battersby's reconfigured sublime challenges the idea that there are identities and actions that are in principle and forever behind the veil of Isis. Instead it challenges us to think about how to think difference differently, in a way that doesn't pretend either to give an exhaustive account of multiplicity or to bind understanding to a given and unchangeable set of limits.

The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference is rich in argument and insights. The book sets out a tantalizing set of possibilities for making the link between the aesthetic category of the sublime and addressing

ethical and political questions in modernity. In this respect, however, the argument of the book never quite fulfils what it promises. The example of a contemporary terrorist attack appears at both the beginning and the end of the book, with intermittent references between, but it is never quite clear to the reader how to make the connection between this event and the sublime encounter. As Battersby herself recognizes, the spectacle of '9/11' has been experienced more in terms of the 'picturesque' than of the sublime. And because of this it becomes hard to see how it is that it could do the 'unfreezing' work that is accomplished by her reconfigured sublime. The danger is that rather than recognizing '*human* differences and the blind spots of *history*' as the ground of the sublime encounter and as resources for new thinking inherent in our experience of events such as 9/11, Battersby's reconfigured sublime may collapse into an abstract ethic, as opposed to a politics of difference. In this respect, whilst Battersby makes an extremely powerful case for the political underpinnings of aesthetic experience and creativity, the case for the aesthetic experience of the sublime as a resource for politics is less well developed.

Kimberly Hutchings

Mind the gap

Jacques Bidet, *Exploring Marx's 'Capital': Philosophical, Economic and Political Dimensions*, trans. David Fernbach, with foreword by Alex Callinicos, Brill, Leiden and Boston MA, 2007. xxiv + 328 pp., €129.00 hb., 978 90 04 14937 3.

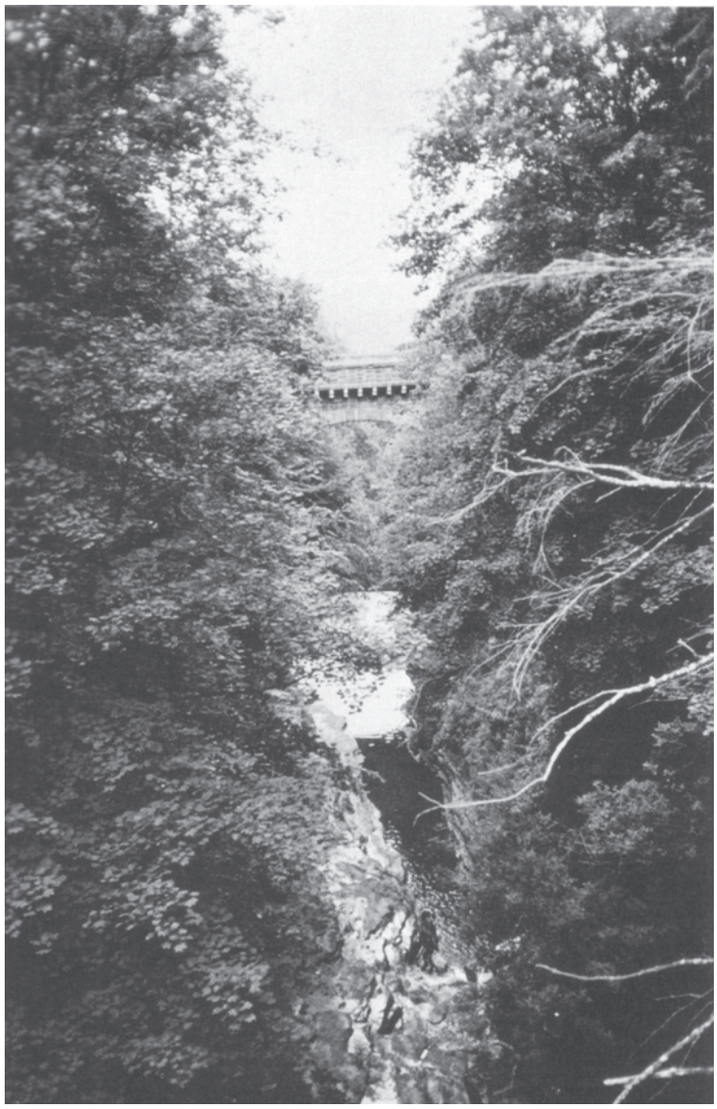
This book was originally published in French in 1985, but, despite the twenty-two years that have passed, it remains a relevant discussion of the theoretical system of the critique of political economy that Marx developed in the period 1857–67, from the *Grundrisse* to the French edition of Volume 1 of *Capital*. Its theoretical significance derives from Bidet's efforts in attacking some of the 'open questions' of Marx's œuvre, which still divide Marxist theoreticians into opposing camps.

The first of these questions concerns the 'sources' and theoretical content of Marxian theory, particularly Marx's relation to classical political economy (especially Ricardo) and the philosophy of Hegel. The traditional assumption was characterized succinctly by Gramsci: 'the philosophy of praxis equals Hegel + David Ricardo'. But this was famously challenged by Althusser's claim that '*Capital* represent[s] … a theoretical revolution, simultaneously rejecting the classical political economy and the Hegelian and Feuerbachian ideologies of its prehistory.' Bidet identifies Marx's break with political economy in the fact that he 'inaugurated a theory in which the wage *relationship*, as a relation of domination, is a constituent moment, which was not the case for "political economy"'. Regarding Hegel, Bidet argues that the *Science of Logic* initially functioned as an epistemological support – it 'provided Marx with the most elaborated form of a thought that conceived society as a totality and this totality as developing on the basis of its contradictions' – but that the principal concepts on which Hegel focused ultimately became an obstacle to Marx's project.

The second point of contention is the relation between the different texts written by Marx in the period under consideration, especially between the *Grundrisse* (1857–58) and *Capital*, Volume 1 (1867). The contraposition of these texts is fairly well publicized. For example, Hans-Georg Backhaus argued, back in 1970, that a vulgarization of Marx's theory of value by Marx himself took place after the *Grundrisse*, as he abandoned his dialectical development of concepts (see his 'Zur Dialektik der Wertform', in *Dialektik der Wertform*, 1997); whereas Antonio Negri, in his *Marx beyond Marx* of 1979, saw in the *Grundrisse* a theory of workers' revolutionary subjectivity that had been suffocated by the 'objectivism' that prevails in *Capital*. Bidet argues that *Capital* constitutes a 'correction' of the previous texts, including the *Grundrisse*. As he undramatically puts it: '*Capital* proposes a construction in which the elements are logically arranged into a coherent theory, in the light of which the earlier expositions appear relatively artificial.'

The third issue is the transformation of values into production prices. This 'problem' is that, if one conceives of value according to classical (Ricardian) political economy, as a quantity of labour embodied in a commodity ('labour expended'), then the theory of value is incompatible with the existence of a uniform rate of profit in the capitalist economy. When the same amount of labour power (thus producing the same amount of value per year and being equally remunerated) is employed in corporations of different constant (fixed) capitals (capital intensive vs labour intensive), then the profit rate (profit per unit of capital employed) in the labour-intensive enterprise will be higher. If one assumes a uniform profit rate, then the value produced

in the labour-intensive enterprise must be lower. Ricardo considered such cases to be 'exceptions' to the 'law of value'. However, Robert Malthus commented (in 1822) that these exceptions 'are both theoretically and practically so considerable as entirely to destroy the position that commodities exchange with each other according to the quantity of labour that has been employed upon them'. Marx attempted to solve the problem in the second part of Volume 3 of *Capital*, working with mathematical relations deriving from the hypothesis that the sum of values equals the sum of production prices (i.e. prices ensuring the uniform profit rate) and simultaneously the sum of profits equals the sum of surplus values: the double invariance principle. The discussion which started soon after the publication of *Capital*, Volume 3, and which continues up to the present, shows that Marx's hypothesis can hardly be supported. The whole discussion on the 'transformation problem' gained a new momentum after the publication of Piero Sraffa's *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* (1960). Sraffa presented a model of calculating production prices without any reference to values. In accordance with this model, which was described as neo-Ricardian, Ian Steedman formulated the view, in *Marx after Straffa* (1977), that the Marxist theory of value is redundant for analysis of the capitalist economy. In fact, Steedman asserted that the Marxist theory of value is 'a major fetter on the development of … the project of providing a materialist account of capitalist societies'.



Bidet's response to this third issue is to conceive these neo-Ricardian approaches as belonging to a different discourse to historical materialism, whose object is the capitalist mode of production. Rather, these approaches belong to a discourse of 'production in general' or 'pure economics', which have as their object 'the *functional generalities of economics*, categories to be found in all modes of production: production, consumption, distribution, circulation'. Bidet further argues that Marx's texts also include this second discourse – and, besides this, even a third one: 'a "normative" theory of planning' – and that even the cardinal Marxian notion of abstract labour belongs to this second discourse of pure economics: 'We cannot follow Marx when he makes this "abstraction" into a category specific to commodity production as such.'

I will focus my criticisms of Bidet's book on this last point, because I consider it to be crucial for the comprehension of the overall theoretical status of Marx's œuvre, and especially his theory of value. Let me start by saying that the 'classical' theory of value – whether in the Smithian version of 'labour expended', or in its Ricardian version – *did* possess a theory of exploitation of the workers by the capitalists, as it argues that the incomes of the capitalist and the landowner derive as mere *deductions* from the value produced by the labourer. Thus, Smith writes in his *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*:

> As soon as land becomes private property, the landlord demands a share of almost all the produce which the labourer can either raise, or collect from it. His rent makes *the first deduction from the produce of the labour* which is employed upon

> land. … Profit, makes a *second deduction from the produce of the labour* which is employed upon land. [emphasis added]

What distinguishes Marx's theory of value is his conception of the *value form*. According to Marx, the social relations of production exist only under a specific form; he does not claim simply that 'there is exploitation', but rather explains why this capitalist exploitation attains its specific form, a commodity and money economy. Marx neither comprehends profit as a 'deduction' nor allows for a theory of 'pure economics'. Profit is the aim and the regulating principle of the whole production process in capitalism.

Marx attacked the 'classical' notion of labour as the 'substance' of value as early as 1859. Where classical political economy believed that it was giving a conclusive answer – qualitatively different use values are rendered economically commensurate because they are all products of labour – Marx simply sees a question which has to be answered: just how can different kinds of labour be made equivalent? In this framework, the Marxian notion of abstract labour refers solely to the common quality of all labour expended under the command of capital – that is, in the process of *capitalist* production-for-the-exchange and for-profit.

Bidet's affirmation that circulation can be grasped as a functional instance of the 'economy in general' is to my view not correct: non-capitalist modes of production do not presuppose commodity production and exchange. Only, to cite Rubin, in capitalism, 'exchange is the form of the whole production process or the form of social labour' (Rubin, 'Abstract Labour and Value in Marx's System', *Capital and Class* 5, 1978). It follows, then, that value produced in the capitalist process of production can be measured solely in terms of its form of appearance – that is, in terms of money. In order to elucidate money as the form of appearance of value (and thus capital), Marx introduces the scheme of the 'simple form of value': '*x* units of *commodity A* are exchanged for *y* units of *commodity B*.' Classical economists have thought this scheme to be barter; Marx shows, however, that in this scheme we do not have two commodities of pre-existing equal values exchanging with each other. Instead, we have *only one commodity*, the commodity acquiring the 'A' position or the 'relative value form', whose value is measured in units of a different use value – the 'commodity' acquiring the 'B' position of the equivalent, and thus serving as the 'measurer of value' of the commodity in the relative form. The 'B' 'commodity' is not an ordinary commodity – a unity of exchange value and use value – but plays simply the role of the measure of value, of 'money', for the first commodity. The value of the relative ('A') is being expressed *exclusively* in units of the equivalent ('B'). The value of the latter cannot be expressed; it does not exist in the world of tangible reality. The relation of general exchangeability of commodities is expressed only in an indirect, mediated sense, namely through money, which functions as general equivalent. The essential feature of the 'market economy' of capitalism is thus not simply commodity exchange but monetary circulation and money: 'The social character of labour appears as the money existence of the commodity and hence as a *thing* outside actual production' (Marx, *Capital*, Volume 3, p. 649). Marx's monetary theory of value demonstrates that value and prices are not situated at the same level of analysis. The difference between values and production prices is thus not a quantitative one, but a difference between two non-commensurate and so *non-comparable* quantities, which are, though, intertwined in a notional link, which connects causal determinations (values) and their forms of appearance (prices).

The neo-Ricardian approach cannot target Marx. It simply shows that a non-monetary theory of value is redundant. Apart from this, it is situated in the category of pre-monetary, theoretically 'vulgar', approaches, since it takes as its point of departure a system of equilibrium between material quantities (use values) and then introduces 'prices'. Bidet himself accepts that 'value is not "measured" but *established* in the confrontation of the market'. However, this formulation becomes ambiguous when correlated with his approach to the notion of abstract labour. In reality, it is not Marx or the Marxist theoretician who 'abstracts' from concrete labour, but the *capitalist* production process itself!

What Bidet seems to ignore is that, in Part 2 of Volume 3 of *Capital*, two theoretical discourses exist: both the Marxian and the classical. When dealing with the transformation of values into prices of production, Marx distances himself from the implications of his own monetary theory of value (non-commensurability between value and price) and draws *a quantitative comparison between values and production prices*. In this way he retreats to the classical viewpoint that values are qualitatively identical and therefore quantitative comparable with prices. Between the two discourses there exists a notional gap. They are incompatible with each other.

John Milios

Flat and grey

John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Freeman, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2007. xix + 476 pp., £17.82 hb., 978 0 674 02492 2.

From the mid-1960s until he retired in 1995, John Rawls regularly lectured on the history of political philosophy to his Harvard students in his course 'Philosophy 171'. These lectures have been reconstructed from his notes and from some recordings and are now published in this volume. The style of the written version is flat and grey; one gets little sense of what Rawls was like as a lecturer. But they record the intense and sustained engagement of one of the most important modern political thinkers with some of the greatest philosophers of the past. Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hume, Mill and Marx were staples every year, occasionally supplemented by Sidgwick as an example of pure utilitarianism and/or Butler as a representative intuitionist. Given Rawls's strong Kantianism, it may seem surprising that Kant is not included, but that is because Rawls also taught a course on the History of Moral Philosophy in which Kant was the main subject (Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, 2000, reviewed in *RP* 110).

Rawls's approach is outlined in a helpful brief Foreword by the editor, and by Rawls himself in an initial introductory lecture. Rawls claims that he is going to pose philosophical problems as the philosophers he is studying had themselves seen them. He is fond of quoting a dictum by Collingwood: 'the history of political theory is not the history of different answers to one and the same question, but the history of a problem more or less constantly changing, whose solution was constantly changing with it.' In fact, Rawls is a lot less interested than this suggests in the historical specificity of the ideas he is considering. His account is unified by the concerns that he himself brings to it.

Rawls focuses particularly on the liberal tradition of political philosophy, and, indeed, on one strand of this tradition, the social contract theory. This is portrayed in a surprisingly Hegelian fashion as developing progressively, with the suggestion that it culminates in his own social contract account of justice. Rawls at first included his own theory as the conclusion of the lecture series, but later preferred to cover it in a separate course (published as *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, 2001). However, it is frequently a point of reference in these lectures.

Rawls takes the social contract theory to be central to the liberal tradition as a whole. For fundamental to liberalism, he believes, is the idea that 'a legitimate regime is such that its political and social institutions are justifiable to all citizens – to each and every one – by addressing their reason, theoretical and practical.' All the philosophers included are considered for what they can be seen to contribute to this idea, whether they support it or not.

Unsurprisingly, this approach works best with those philosophers who do support it. There are meticulous and illuminating discussions of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau in which Rawls traces the progressive development of the central ideas of the social contract theory. The reading of Hobbes is particularly suggestive and sympathetic, stressing his adherence to the social contract approach and the idea of rational consensus. Above all, Rawls focuses on what he can salvage from Hobbes to develop his own account of rational agreement as the basis for political right. But Hobbes himself, of course, has other concerns as well. The result is a rather lopsided picture which downplays the less liberal aspects of Hobbes's philosophy: including his materialism, his radical individualism, and his decidedly illiberal views on the nature and extent of sovereign power.

The results are less satisfactory when Rawls deals with opponents of social contract theory. He does not engage with their criticisms in so far as he can manage to avoid them, preferring instead to focus on what can be retained from them for the social contract theory. The charity of this approach is admirable but its results are not always productive. Criticisms of the social contract theory are all but ignored (whether they come from within or from outside the liberal tradition). Utilitarianism as an alternative philosophical foundation for liberal values gets short shrift.

Hume suffers particularly from this treatment since he is an out-and-out critic of the whole social contract idea. All that Rawls manages to salvage from Hume is his idea of the 'impartial spectator' – slim pickings indeed. Otherwise, Hume's criticisms are rejected with uncharacteristic impatience. Hume attacks the social contract theory for attempting to base political authority on the palpable fiction of an 'original contract'. This is not only false, it is dangerous, Hume believes, since it can all too easily lead to the 'anarchical' view that established governments are illegitimate and can rightly be overthrown and replaced by ones that have the support of the people.

These are important arguments, both historically and philosophically; but Rawls has little time for them.

He rejects the idea that social contract theorists are talking of an 'original contract' as a misunderstanding. Be that as it may, it is a misunderstanding that is widely shared, even by some of the authors of these theories themselves. The argument that the social contract theory can lead in dangerously radical directions was widespread in the eighteenth century, in the shadow of the English Civil War and of the American and French Revolutions. But Rawls's determination to see these ideas in their historical context deserts him when he gets to Hume. For all Hume's worries, Rawls argues that Hume agrees with the social contract theorists when it came to practical politics – they are all good liberals at the end of the day, no matter how much they may disagree about philosophical foundations. There is some truth in this, but that hardly discounts the point that thinkers like Hume were making. In the eighteenth century, the social contract was indeed a revolutionary doctrine – see the US 'Declaration of Independence', for example.

With Mill, Rawls takes a different approach. On Rawls's reading he is quite simply 'not a utilitarian'. This is not as strange as it may sound. Rawls is right to stress that Mill tries to move away from the narrow and doctrinaire utilitarianism of Bentham and of his father, James Mill. Yet this reading ignores the undoubted utilitarian commitments in his thought. A fuller discussion of utilitarianism comes with the lectures on Sidgwick in an Appendix, but even here there is little engagement with utilitarianism as a critique of the social contract approach. Again Rawls stresses that the utilitarians and the social contract theorists are broadly within the same liberal political tradition and pretty well agree on substantive political matters. The implication would seem to be that philosophical foundations don't much matter in practice, an uncomfortable position for Rawls to take since most of his work concerns the philosophical foundations of the idea of justice.

A noteworthy feature of the lectures is their sustained and sympathetic account of Marx. Rawls says that he is going to treat Marx as a critic of liberalism, but this is not how things work out. Most of the lectures on Marx are taken up with the controversy about whether or not Marx criticizes capitalism for its injustice. This debate has unduly dominated analytical Marxism for the last two decades. A naturalistic and utilitarian reading of Marx has been pitted against accounts which claim that his critique of capitalism relies on the concept of justice. The argument between utilitarianism and justice is thus played out yet again. In the process Marx is assimilated to familiar liberal positions and his criticisms of liberalism are ignored.

Rawls provides a useful summary of the arguments on each side. Not surprisingly, he then comes down with those who maintain that Marx appeals to universal principles of justice, even while admitting that Marx himself explicitly repudiates them. Marx is thus incorporated into the social contract tradition and Rawls misses the opportunity to engage with the one philosopher he discusses who not only rejects the social contract idea but the liberal tradition more generally.

For example, there is no mention of Marx's criticisms of the individualist assumptions of traditional liberalism as developed in the critique of 'natural rights' in 'On the Jewish Question' (1843) and elsewhere. Moreover, saddling Marx with the notion of universal justice obscures the fact that Marx questions the idea of 'rational agreement' upon which, as Rawls insists, this notion is based. 'The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle' say the well-known opening words of *The Communist Manifesto*. Conflicting classes have different and conflicting notions of justice. When those conflicts become intense, out goes rational consensus. In short, the rational agreement of 'all and every citizen' is not the reality of liberal society but only an ideal, an imaginary construct of liberal theory. Moreover, Marx maintains, it cannot be achieved within liberal society because the economic system of private ownership on which liberal society is based itself generates fundamental conflicts.

Though Rawls does not engage with Marx's criticisms of liberalism, he is sympathetic with much of Marx's critique of capitalism and with the aims of socialism. Even so, he cannot go all the way with Marx in envisaging a 'full communist' society in which the market is eliminated and which is 'beyond justice'. There will always be a need for the idea of justice, Rawls argues: 'The absence of concern with justice is undesirable as such, because having a sense of justice is … part of understanding other people and of recognizing their claims.'

In these lectures we see how Rawls's reading of the history of political philosophy has contributed to this conclusion. This reading is most valuable when it is showing the development of the social contract account of justice. In other respects it is limited: the history of political philosophy becomes a mirror in which only Rawls's own ideas are reflected. For a more balanced and critical approach one will need to look elsewhere.

Sean Sayers