The Maoist march through the institutions

Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May '68 and Contemporary French Thought*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and London, 2007. 488 pp., £19.99 hb., 978 0 77353 199 4.

Julian Bourg's rich study of the fallout from May '68 in French political and intellectual life seeks to move beyond the narrative of fidelity or betrayal that has shaped much recent scholarship on the subject. Refusing the notion that the 'ethical turn' of French thought is best understood as a reactionary surge against the forces unleashed by the May events, Bourg signals his provocation with his title: *From Revolution to Ethics*. Ruptures and folds notwithstanding, the bedrock of history is continuous in Bourg's view, and the challenge to historians of postwar France is to explain how an explosive obsession with revolutionary transformation gave way to (or, better yet, itself *transformed* into) a variegated and extensive rumination on ethics. Though Hegel receives scant mention in this work, it is clear that Bourg grants all manner of cunning to history and its transformative powers. Also evident is the conviction that betrayal, though political or personal, is not a historical category. To borrow a keyword from the period, the revolutionary fervour of May '68 set in motion a profound *épanouissement* (blossoming). A renewed fascination with ethics was the result.

Bourg traces the transformation in question over four loosely connected episodes, or case studies, all taking place primarily within the 1970s: (1) the relationship between French Maoism and debates over prison conditions; (2) the institutional roots of the 'philosophy of desire' and its supreme expression in *Anti-Oedipus*; (3) disputes with feminist 'moralists' concerning sexual rights; and (4) the New Philosophy phenomenon. In addition to forming the larger narrative arc of the 'ethical turn', each case stands on its own as an example of contestation on the ground in the heady collision of ideas and practices, impulses and barriers, or – to use a key distinction for his interpretation – desires and limits. Bourg's claim is that the essential impulse of May '68 was antinomian – that is, against *nomos*, against *law*. By implication, this antinomianism could not but lead to a consideration of *ethos*, the quality of being together, and the attendant challenges of how that being together ought to take place in the absence of a transcendental guarantor. Bourg writes, 'The rhetoric of revolution often concealed non-revolutionary, democratic substance.' The assumption that 'revolutionary' and 'democratic' are oppositional categories is revealing. Is not the 'substance' of most revolutions democratic, at least in their initial impulses? German historians have referred to Bismarck as a 'white revolutionary' and to the Nazi 'revolution from above'. These qualifiers are added to the core term 'revolution' precisely to distinguish these historical developments from the redundant concept of 'democratic revolution'. One of the signal virtues of Bourg's study is to restore the emphasis on the democratic impulse of revolution in a singular historical context and to show that this impulse is not fleeting, but endures. This move is all the more valuable today, when partisans of either concept – democracy or revolution – tend, for reasons more polemical than persuasive, to disparage the other as its nominal opposite.

Bourg's effort to link revolution and democracy under the banner of 'contestatory spirit' is a rejoinder to the recent attempts of Mark Lilla and others to uncover a 'native' French liberal tradition that is at the very least concordant with, if not assimilable to, an anglophone model of liberalism. (It is not coincidental that Bourg is Claude Lefort's most recent translator.) On this score, Bourg's penchant for punchy phrases serves him well; the main title of the book's penultimate chapter is 'John Locke Was Not French'. Bourg distinguishes the French idea of democracy from its English counterpart, where it is often conflated with liberalism, and the autonomies of negative liberty (to borrow Isaiah Berlin's concept) are given pride of place. The specificities of the French concept of democracy are to be found, by contrast, in the *faux ami* of the French word 'institution'. The value of this term for Bourg's analysis is that it unites his two primary concerns in one concept: the revolutionary phenomenon of bringing into being, of instituting, and the ethical phenomenon of being together as part of a shared space, or institution (or *association*, to use another French term whose English equivalent is closer in spirit). Bourg argues that the phenomena of 'bringing in' and 'being with' should not, and cannot,

be considered apart from one another. The brilliance of the argument is that it presents this mutual implication as above all a *historical* phenomenon.

As a result of this conviction, Bourg tends to bracket political judgements in favour of historical ones. Indeed, a dogged ambivalence on political questions persists throughout, which is not without its own value for Bourg's scholarly enterprise since it is at the level of isolated historical processes in specific institutional contexts that his talents really shine. This is particularly apparent in his discussion of Maoism (addressed below). Bourg bristled his reviewer Patrick ffrench (see *RP* 134) when, in the introduction to his edited volume, *After the Deluge*, Bourg likened historians of postwar French intellectual life to janitors sifting the rubble after a huge ballroom party. In addition to being condescending (intentionally or not), the metaphor seems curiously self-defeating in retrospect. Bourg narrates an explosion of energy and activity infused with a seriousness that transcends the frivolities of a shindig. And yet, in a way, the party metaphor is apt for Bourg's account in that his bird's-eye view of the period in question locates various cliques and clusters of intellectual activity often interconnected by means of one or two interlocutors who travel between them.

In this regard, Michel Foucault is the belle of the ball. He channels the forces of the Maoist 'investigation' (*enquête*) into an institutional and structural assessment of the modern prison, a process that brings him into closer working contact with his Vincennes colleague Gilles Deleuze. Foucault's exposure to the machinations of immanent power in the prisons will colour his later endorsement of *Anti-Oedipus* as 'the first book of ethics to be written in France in quite a long time'. Maurice Clavel, 'uncle' of the New Philosophers and a curious figure in his own right – an erstwhile Resistant, close to de Gaulle, who swung to the far Left after his Catholic conversion and then devoted his scholarly energies to Kant – would laud Foucault precisely because he killed 'man', who had been unduly divinized since the prematurely declared 'death of God'.

In addition to the ethical turn, Foucault becomes implicated in the theological one as well. To take another example, Bourg ties some of Guy Hocquenghem's more distasteful disparagements of French feminism to the desire-without-limits of his colleague Deleuze. For all of the thematic connective tissues, not to mention shifting personal allegiances, there remains something speculative about the larger narrative links that Bourg forges between sections of his book, from the desire unleashed by *Anti-Oedipus*, to its channelling through the intermediary of Hocquenghem's 'dark homosexuality', and ultimately to the limits it faced in the French courts when feminists strove to have rape taken more seriously by the judicial system. But the question concerning desire is in this case more one of milieu than of the content of a specific volume, as Bourg himself concedes. Indeed, readers interested in grappling with Deleuze's philosophy more generally are advised to look elsewhere. Bourg is exclusively interested in *Anti-Oedipus* and its gestation.

And here Bourg has a fascinating story to tell, one that puts the emphasis on Félix Guattari and not merely for the sake of equal opportunity. Guattari's experiences at the La Borde clinic were formative for his creative relationship with Deleuze. Bourg traces a royal road from the shattering of subjective autonomy manifested in the experiments of institutional psychotherapy, to the nomadic lines of flight of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The emphasis on the institution here, and all of the attendant questions of relationality that inhere in an institution, is absolutely essential, as is the dissolution of the institutional context that takes place once Guattari teams up with Deleuze. If anything, Bourg reads Deleuze as the corrupting influence in the partnership. Though cursory and schematic, the assessment of Deleuze's 'Spinozist ethics' in this section is largely consistent with a critique that has been gaining traction. Bourg contends it was Deleuze's 'covert naturalism', derived from a Spinozist infinite, that exploded the provisional limits that ebbed and flowed within the 'transversal' institutional settings that Guattari had theretofore seen as essential.

The next section of Bourg's account, on 'French Feminist "Moralism" and the Limits of Desire', should be required reading. The shift from an emphasis on reproductive rights to judicial recourse for victims of rape was tantamount to a shift from an antinomian position '*outside* the law (abortion was illegal) to a feminist position operating *within* the law (rape should be criminalized and punished)'. In other words, a critique of external regulation gave way to an effort to elaborate more viable modes of internal regulation and participatory inclusion. The radical Left decried this position as complicit with a statism that subjugates us all. Guy Hocquenghem led the charge against the 'moral rearmament' of 'Mao-feminism', claiming that this feminism was merely the latest form of a regressive humanism. Hocquenghem condemned the 'transcendental qualities of the vagina' which fortunately were not bestowed upon 'the anus of the gay man'. 'Because', Hocquenghem wrote, 'who in the end has ever seen a fag complain about being raped?'

Such deliberately provocative remarks are even more disconcerting in their context, here following the conclusion of a rape trial in 1977 wherein efforts to exculpate the accused turned on the 'sexual misery' that resulted from his being an Egyptian student in France. Several years earlier, a flurry of debate had been set off when a student identifying himself as 'Mohamed' wrote a letter to the magazine *Tout!* to inveigh against the racism of French women who wouldn't sleep with him. Mohamed inveighed again in the same pages of *Libération* where Hocquenghem offered his two cents. Race, sex, and class politics all collided in these debates over the criminality of rape. Bourg negotiates a tight position here. His point is not to deny the institutional racism and prejudice in France at this time, but instead to show here the plural values of institutions as such. Where some would use the institution (of racism, of bourgeois interests…) as an alibi for unchecked desire, others would use the institution (of legality) to develop a broader concept of participation, in this case, a woman's claim to participate in decisions about her own body. Bourg is

hesitant to paint his own position into a statist corner, and he hedges his position as a result. Citing Cathy Bernheim's own citation of Jean-Marie Domenach's call for an 'ethics [*morale*] without moralism', Bourg writes, 'Where such a challenge touches upon desire and power in the form of violence … *it seems* that *at some point* ethics must involve the state and politics in a mundane sense' (stress added).

Anti-statism is a key theme of the book's final section, on 'the Main Event' of the New Philosophers. Here Bourg laments: 'We are faced with the historical significance of tedious books.' His precautions notwithstanding, Bourg's discussion of Christian Jambet and Guy Lardreau's efforts in *L'Ange* and its quasi-sequel *Le Monde* is particularly stimulating. Equally given to flights of fancy, it seems, there is still a rigour and seriousness that clearly separates the efforts of these scholars from the bombast of a Bernard-Henri Lévy. Just as Bourg took the spiralling out of control of *Anti-Oedipus* as the synecdoche for the philosophy of desire, each of the texts examined in this final section (which, in addition to those cited, include those from Clavel and André Glucksmann) serves as a stand-in for Bourg's larger claim about the historical significance of New Philosophy as the resurrection of Jansenism in French thought. The rejection of the state as worldly and thus compromised is the common idea linking the seventeenth-century theological cohort with the twentieth-century media phenomenon, as is the related notion that, given the state's worldly bankruptcy, it is in the name of something completely beyond the world and inaccessible that we must stake our claim – that is, *decide* or *wager* in the here and now. Bourg's own

claim for a 'revival' of Jansenism in the 1970s (only cited as such by participants through scattered references to Pascal) is a stroke of heuristic genius. The gesture forward to the 'discovery' of Levinas in the 1980s hardly needs to be stated.

Like much else in his study, the quality of New Philosophy as philosophy interests Bourg less than its historical significance on the level of collective intellectual activity. More interesting than its impact is its genealogy. Here we will conclude where Bourg begins, with French Maoism. An intellectual history of the meaning of Maoism in the French context remains to be written. Suffice it to say that the concept masks a plurality of French attempts to rethink the Marxist project following the collapse of the vulgar (Stalinist) base to superstructure model. We would venture here that what goes by the name of Maoism in France signals the paradox of a new privileging of the political above all, coupled with the very infusion and diffusion of the political throughout all aspects of social life. The 'betrayal' model of May '68's afterlives sees the erstwhile Maoists of the *Gauche prolétarienne*, such as Jambet and Lardreau, and their fellow-travellers, such as Sartre and Foucault, turning their backs on this moment in their personal political history in favour of a lukewarm, domesticated version of politics. But Bourg's aim is to show (and precisely *show*, for he only once says it) that Maoism was a democratizing impulse in France.

French Maoist political violence had a peculiar character, Bourg argues, in that it was defensive, largely directed against property, and, in a word, selective. There was no French equivalent to the Red Army Faction. The emphasis on the selectivity of 'political' tasks among Maoists jibed with the Maoist injunction that every situation required an 'investigation' (*enquête*) into that situation. The local and the specific were thus privileged. On the other hand, the expansion of the domain of the political – essential to Maoism – meant a consequential diminution of class as an economic category, and a resultant broadening of the sites of contestation. This broadening came to include prisons, as we have noted, but this move was not theoretical, for many Maoists found themselves in prison as a result of their activities. Through a smart contrast between Sartre's and Foucault's responses to these developments, Bourg affirms the transition from an emphasis on the plight of the autonomous prisoner to the wider view of a more general situation that includes each prisoner. For Sartre, 'the lives of *prisoners* were unbearable; whereas for Foucault it was *prison conditions* that were "intolerable".' Foucault would break with the Maoists over the issue of popular justice, but it is Bourg's ironic point that it was Foucault's impersonal emphasis on conditions, on situations, that was in its way closer to the essence of French Maoism. The word 'intolerable' appears often throughout Bourg's account, but it is important to bear in mind the moment when it is connected to the Maoist principle 'it is right to revolt'. Foucault's position at this moment, immediately preceding the ethical turn of his own work, is of the utmost significance as it resonates with this injunction. The revolt is in the name of nothing; the judgement of 'intolerable' requires no yardstick external to the situation at hand, turning nowhere for its justification.

This recognition of the 'intolerable' is a theme that reaches its apex at the 'wager' of the new Jansenism in the book's final section, with the caveat that 'nothing' is now deemed insufficient as a yardstick and the criteria of 'another world' take its place. And yet there is a line of continuity here in the nomination of the intolerable without recourse to discernable criteria of judgement at hand. Its value as an ethical judgement draws from two sources: its very impersonality, and, concurrently, its institutional mediation. Again, here institution does not refer to the state on high and its apparatuses, but to the association of individuals who discover through an experience of impersonality (or heteronomy) the foundations for a provisionally viable and interminable ethical discourse. Bourg is wise enough to note at his book's end that, though necessary, ethics is a 'thoroughly insufficient condition for social and political life'. But it is curious to find him still brokering such a distinction this late in the game, when his own powerful analysis has done so much to compromise the notions of ethics and politics as potentially exclusive historical categories.

But this is merely the final appearance of an ambivalence running through Bourg's larger account of the *institution* of Maoism in France, which is at times frustrating, but is by and large understandable. This ambivalence draws largely from the vacillation between *nomos* and *ethos*, the poles of Bourg's analysis, and the conviction that this vacillation is interminable. But one senses too Bourg's hesitation to alienate his own readers, even as he persuades them. Making manifest, as he does, the link between 'Maoist revolution' and 'democratic ethics' is a gesture likely to antagonize constituents of both parties, who are also among the most likely to read his book. They should. The political ambivalence lingering in Bourg's voice is also the mark of his study's quality as a valuable work of historical scholarship.

Knox Peden

The communist hypothesis

Alain Badiou, *De Quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom? Circonstances 4*, Nouvelles Editions Lignes, Paris, 2007. 160 pp., €14.00 pb., 978 2 35526 003 2.

A few weeks before Nicolas Sarkozy was elected president of France in May 2007, Alain Badiou gave a lecture in Paris, reminding his listeners of the reasons why he has always refused to participate in the 'irrational', 'passive' and 'impotent' ritual of popular vote. Ten days after some of his compatriots' votes had been counted, Badiou gave a further lecture in which he consoled those dismayed by the outcome by arguing that it promised, at least, to put them out of their misery: the long-moribund parliamentary Left had now collapsed beyond hope of repair, along with the whole political order that had prevailed in France since the end of the Second World War. Sarkozy was elected, Badiou explained, because he successfully presented himself as the defender of French wealth and privilege against a diffuse global threat. He had won the election on the basis of paranoia and fear. He had waged a campaign based on a dread of foreigners, workers, immigrants, youth, terrorists, outsiders of all sorts, coupled with a ruthless determination to use whatever force might be required to keep them at bay. His politics of fear had prevailed because his rival, the Socialist Party's Ségolène Royal, could offer nothing more than a 'fear of this fear' – a tepid reluctance to sanction the development of an overtly belligerent police state. Since the traditional Left had long abandoned any attempt to formulate an emancipatory project based on the direct mobilization of the exploited or oppressed, Sarkozy's election marked the end of a politics oriented by the old opposition of Left and Right, in favour of a disorientation manipulated by the rich in their assault on the poor and their exclusion of the oppressed.

The short book *De Quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom?* develops the text of these lectures, along with a more general diagnosis of the current political conjuncture in France and a welcome call to renew a 'communist' alternative. For the first time in over thirty years, Badiou's political views have struck a chord with a substantial current of national opinion. His *Sarkozy?* sold more than 25,000 copies in its first three months in print. Horrified by the apparent resurgence of an 'unreconstructed Marxism' in the midst of the French philosophical establishment, over the last couple of months commentators from both sides of the traditional political spectrum have lined up to denounce the book in the mainstream press.

It's easy to see why Badiou's book has gone down well with its domestic audience. Badiou mastered the art of the political pamphlet a long time ago. Like most of his polemical writing, *Sarkozy?* is a rhetorical tour de force. To those demoralized by the prevailing disorientation it promises trenchant clarity and conviction. It offers a compelling and beautifully distilled assault on everything that Sarkozy stands for. It denounces his government and the political moment it represents as the summit of reactionary cowardice and corruption, and it opposes these faults with a ringing affirmation of the 'incorruptible' virtue and courage of the French revolutionary tradition.

The most effective section of the book situates Sarkozy as the most recent variation on a deeper configuration whose roots go back to Thermidor and the Restoration of 1815. Badiou calls this reactionary configuration the 'Pétainist transcendental'. As Badiou explains at length in his *Logiques des mondes* (2006), the transcendental regime of any given world is the set of operations that serve to govern and order the way its elements generally appear, the way they appear as more or less in keeping with the dominant state of things. In its various historical incarnations, the Pétainist transcendental has enabled a situation of defeat or retreat to appear instead as a glorious victory for a threatened status quo. Pétain or his avatars intervene so that 'capitulation and servility' might be presented as 'invention and regeneration'. Pétainism redescribes collaboration with external powers – the triumph of European monarchy in 1815, of the Nazis in 1940, of US hegemony today – as the most honourable strategy of national self-defence. Bolstered by racism and jingoism, Pétainist profiteers seize upon political disorientation as an opportunity to preach a return to traditional moral values, a return to 'the virtues of hard work, discipline, and the family'. Drawing on foreign example (Pétain's emulation of Mussolini, Franco or Hitler; Sarko's admiration for Blair and Bush), they combine recognition of property and 'merit' with criminalization of the poor or excluded. They justify repression of the latter by associating them with the disastrous legacy of a past event, condemned as the immediate cause of the current crisis (the revolution and regicide, for the ultras of 1815; the Popular Front and the threat of a general strike, for the collaborators of 1940; the anarchic disruption of May 1968, for Sarkozy himself).

It is Sarkozy's artful manipulation of this ingrained set of right-wing political reflexes, Badiou suggests, that has allowed him to present measures that are anti-worker, anti-immigrant, anti-foreigner and anti-poor as essential to the restoration of a 're-energized' France to its rightful place of privileged influence in the world.

Badiou opposes the neo-Pétainist reaction point by point. To its brutal distinction of us against them, Badiou proposes a tolerant acknowledgement that there are infinitely many different ways of belonging to 'just one and the same world'. To Sarkozy's demand that immigrants 'must love France', Badiou insists that 'everyone who is here is from here'. Against the politics of resentment and fear, he formulates a brief series of purely affirmative 'points' concerning work, art, science, love, health, politics, the media and the world. In response to Sarkozy's call to have done with May '68, Badiou applauds it as the 'epicentre, as far as political novelty is concerned', of the whole revolutionary decade that began in China in 1966. Above all, to Sarkozy's right-wing nationalism, Badiou urges the renewal of what he calls the 'communist hypothesis'.

It is the way that Badiou formulates the contemporary moment of this hypothesis – starting with this very decision to present it as a *hypothesis*, rather than as a project or prescription – that is likely to divide readers who may otherwise agree with his assessment of Sarkozy and Bush. What is at stake is Badiou's general conception of politics as 'organized and principled collective action that aims to develop, in the real, the consequences of a new possibility repressed by the dominant state of things.'

Drawing on the canonical texts of Marx and Engels, Badiou defines the communist hypothesis as a wager on the possibility of action that might overcome 'the fundamental subordination of labour to a dominant class'. To act in keeping with this hypothesis is to pursue the 'withering away of the state', in accordance with principles that oppose any inegalitarian division of labour or wealth.

In the last chapters of *Sarkozy?*, Badiou distinguishes between two great historical moments or sequences in the development of the communist hypothesis. The first marked its establishment as a viable hypothesis. It develops, with and after Marx, as a disciplined theory of political practice linking the organization of a 'popular mass movement to the seizure of power, through the insurrectional overthrow of the existing order'. According to Badiou, this first sequence stretches from the radical turn in the French Revolution (1792) to the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871. After several decades of disastrous reaction and counter-revolution, Badiou dates the second sequence from 1917 to 1976, from the Bolshevik Revolution to the end of the Cultural Revolution. This second moment

> was dominated by the question: How to win? How to hold out – unlike the Paris Commune – against the armed reaction of the propertied classes? How to organize the new power so as to protect it against the onslaught of its enemies? It was no longer a question of formulating and testing the communist hypothesis, but of realizing it: what the nineteenth century had dreamt, the twentieth would accomplish. The obsession with victory, centred around questions of organization, found its principal expression in the 'iron discipline' of the Communist Party.

According to Badiou, however, the Leninist solution to the Communards' problem created further problems which eventually turned victory into defeat. The triumphant communist parties morphed into a new and newly repressive form of state, and their brutality facilitated the consolidation of a second counter-revolutionary interlude (which Badiou dates from 1975 to the present). Hence today's need for a renewal of the hypothesis.

Now you might have expected, from an author committed to a 'materialist dialectic', an initial articulation of this third sequence that in some sense retains and moves beyond the previous two. Instead Badiou seems to argue that it's now more a matter of neither… nor… 'Our problem is neither that of the popular movement conceived as the vehicle of a new hypothesis, nor that of the proletarian party conceived as leading it towards victory.' Rather than rework and strengthen central aspects of the previous sequences, Badiou seems to abandon them in favour of an axiomatic principle explicitly conceived on the model of a Kantian regulative idea. The price Badiou appears willing to pay for this move is exorbitant.

> Marxism, the workers' movement, mass democracy, Leninism, the party of the proletariat, the socialist state – all the inventions of the twentieth century – are not really useful to us any more. At the theoretical level they certainly deserve further study and consideration; but at the level of practical politics they have become unworkable.

Instead, Badiou hints, communism's reinvention may depend on 'a new relation between real political movement and ideology'.

Few readers are likely to argue with Badiou's critique of Stalinism, but his sweeping conflation and rejection of most actually-existing forms of popular mobilization and mass democracy is another matter.

Badiou doesn't explain how this approach might help to understand and strengthen recent mobilizations in countries like Venezuela, Haiti, Palestine, South Africa or Bolivia. He doesn't explain why political militants working in such places should abandon electoral politics and control of state policy to their adversaries. He doesn't explain why other militants, battling to affirm the rights of immigrant workers in places like California or Dubai, should embrace the hostility to trade unions and state intervention typical of Badiou's own post-Maoist Organisation Politique. He doesn't explain what is new about today's relation between politics and ideology or hegemony. More generally, he doesn't explain why political militants should approach our global present in terms of its purportedly obscure and experimental novelty, rather than in terms of a more conventionally mediated dialectic – a dialectic that grounds the invention of newly suitable ways of pursuing clear and intelligible demands for justice and equality in a strategic confrontation with equally clear constraints inherited from the past.

Of course, Badiou's little book is primarily a pamphlet, written for a specific purpose and intended for a specific audience. As a local polemic, *Sarkozy?* is brilliantly effective. As a contribution to a more general reconceptualization of politics it leaves many questions unanswered, and it reads as both parochial and abstract.

Peter Hallward

Smash and grab

Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Allen Lane, London, 2007. 558 pp., £25.00 hb., £8.99 pb., 0 713 99899 3 hb., 0 141 02453 4 pb.

Shortly before the election of Salvador Allende in 1970 Richard Nixon famously told Jesse Helms, the director of the CIA, to make the Chilean economy 'scream'. Of course, the economy was not the only thing that screamed in Chile in the years following Pinochet's coup. Indeed, it is this close relationship between physical torment and economic disruption that constitutes one of the dominant themes of Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*.

Klein is of course the author of 2000's enormously successful *No Logo*, a veritable manifesto for the so-called anti-globalization movement. That book peeled back corporate logos in order to expose the slums and sweatshops of the free-trade zones in Indonesia, China, Vietnam and elsewhere, as well as the preponderance in the First World of low-paid and non-unionized labour. It sketched in the connections between the goods enjoyed by Western consumers and, say, child labourers in Sumatra or the environmental catastrophe of the Niger Delta. The arguments in Klein's latest book heed *No Logo*'s concluding argument that, in addition to asserting what it is against, the anti-globalization movement needs to think through what it is actually for. And if it is against privatization and exploitation, then it should be resolutely for 'reclaiming the commons' – that is, dispersing power through participatory forms of democracy more accountable than state or corporate institutions. The alienation from transnational corporations and from global financial institutions is, she claimed, a symptom of a broad crisis of representative democracy, of an enormous disjunction between people and power. It is the task of activists to make that disjunction known, to explain the nature of that power and its effects, and to suggest alternatives. Another of the movement's tasks therefore is to designate its adversaries with much greater clarity; it needs, particularly in the wake of the American occupation of Iraq, to augment its critique of financial institutions and multinational corporations with an equally cogent analysis of the system as a whole and of its innate propensity for violence.

The Shock Doctrine is therefore a sequel to *No Logo* that expands and enriches the earlier work's arguments. Specifically, it investigates the way in which capitalism orchestrates raids on the public sphere after catastrophic events. Publicly owned industries, democratic institutions and local traditions and forms of ownership are all fair game in the wake of disasters like the Indian Ocean tsunami, after which uprooted villagers found their coastal communities supplanted by foreign tourism. According to Bob Woodward's *Bush at War* even the terrorist attacks of 2001 were described by Donald Rumsfeld, at a meeting of the National Security Council on the afternoon of 12 September, as an 'opportunity': to settle scores with Saddam certainly,

but also to privatize Iraq's state-heavy economy, to expand the corporate security complex at home and to transfer hundreds of billions of dollars of public money into the hands of private corporations via colossal hikes in military spending and no-bid reconstruction and supply contracts in Iraq. Similarly, in the years after the bloodbath in Tiananmen Square special export zones were opened across China, which, as Slavoj Žižek has observed, became at last, and ironically, a true workers' state: a nation of drudges by dint of its low taxes, wages and tariffs, its corruptible officials and enormous returns. Klein argues that Iraq was invaded and occupied not – or at least not just – to corner its oil and enrich Halliburton, but in order to restart its economy from scratch. This was the goal of the politicians who hatched the invasion, as well as of the consultants, contractors and Republican Party hangers-on who descended on the 'green zone' in its aftermath. They viewed Iraq not as a large, complex and multifarious society with an autonomous will and with a history of its own, but as a static and helpless backwater, or else as an enormous laboratory in which to undertake an experiment in corporate expansion. What Klein calls 'disaster capitalism' does not just *exploit* disasters therefore; it is dependent on them and works to bring them about. Capitalism prepares for and even creates disasters in order to swoop on the victims and privatize their public assets before they come round.

The term 'disaster capitalism' is strictly speaking a tautology; capitalism is by its nature disastrous. Hence Bertolt Brecht's belief that it is not socialism but capitalism that is revolutionary, with its history of periodic crises and its need ceaselessly to uproot settled traditions and forms of production. In the same spirit Klein proves the connection between affliction and accumulation, or, put differently, between violence and capitalism. First in the laboratories that were Chile, Argentina and Bolivia, then in the UK under Thatcher and the US under Reagan, in Russia and Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism, in post-apartheid South Africa, in China and now in Iraq, the introduction of unfettered free markets has invariably required the violent restriction or prevention of democratic liberties. Obstacles to the new order have been removed to make way for economic policies that are very far from being, as neoliberalism's creation myth asserts, popular alternatives to failed and discredited models of social protection. Because only a browbeaten population will tolerate avoidable recessions and structural unemployment, neoliberal policies must be brought about by chicanery and, if necessary, by military force and political terror. 'Klein's theory fits well', as Michael Hardt has observed in *New Left Review*, 'with a long theoretical tradition on the intimate link between capital and violence'. Just as *No Logo*'s critique of corporate branding re-enacted Marx's analysis of reification at the start of *Capital*, so *The Shock Doctrine* reprises the study of 'primitive accumulation' undertaken in *Capital*'s final section. It recalls Marx's view that 'conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, play the greatest part' in turning peasants and small artisans into a landless proletariat, and also in quelling the resistance offered in the colonies by modes of production based on the independent labour of the producers. Capital comes into the world 'dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt'. For Marx this process of expropriation constitutes capitalism's prehistory; for Rosa Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital*, however, as well as for *The Shock Doctrine*, capitalism's violence is intrinsic and ongoing: 'Force is the only solution open to capital', according to Luxemburg; 'the accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon, not only at its genesis, but further on down to the present day.' The infliction or exploitation of shocks and crises in Iraq and New Orleans are not the whims of a particularly reactionary White House, but the latest manifestations of capitalism's reckless and insatiable drive for accumulation.

So-called shock therapy is a specific method of disorientating 'patients' with electric charges developed by Ewan Cameron in the labs of McGill University in the 1950s. It was funded by the CIA in the hope that it might unearth a method for rebuilding prisoners' personalities, then outsourced to Latin American juntas who used it to torture communists and trades unionists, and recently inflicted on detainees at Guantánamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and other stockades and 'black sites' around the globe. Klein calls shock therapy 'a metaphor for the shock doctrine's underlying logic'. Economic and bodily shocks both aim to addle their subjects, before sapping their resistance and remaking them. It was Milton Friedman who first used 'shock therapy' as a metaphor to describe the attempt to galvanize economies with the abrupt privatization of public wealth. Klein adduces texts in which Friedman, the ideologue who led the intellectual counter-revolution against the Keynesian ambition to combine capitalism with spending on social welfare, sets out his view that the free market is the basis of political liberty. Governments intent on removing restrictions to the market's unhindered operation should, Friedman

argued, see disasters of various kinds as opportunities to privatize the functions of the state and to slash taxes and welfare spending. Though they might be painful in the short term, such shocks would serve to jolt sluggish economies out of their lethargy. This for Klein is the shock doctrine. Its central irony was pointed out by Orlando Letelier, the Chilean dissident who was killed in Washington DC in 1976 in a car bomb planted by the Chilean secret police. It is, to say the least, curious that in the mid-1970s Friedman, the author of *Capitalism and Freedom*, should act as an adviser to a fascist regime that was crushing every type of democratic freedom. (The so-called Chicago Boys, graduates who had studied at that university under Friedman, also occupied key positions in Pinochet's government.) On reflection, however, and as Letelier recognized, this combination of unbridled capitalism and unbridled oppression is perhaps not so curious after all; despite Friedman's bluster about the free market being the central arena in which political liberty is exercised and therefore working to undermine political centralization and control, the introduction of sweeping free-market measures has everywhere required a cowed, distracted or traumatized population. Indeed, if freedom for the Chicago School is exercised solely in the marketplace, then it follows that political freedoms are incidental, even unnecessary. While the Chicago Boys sent shocks through the Chilean economy, the army and secret police administered them with electrodes in the regime's torture cells.

Klein's real targets therefore are not the abominations perpetrated at Abu Ghraib, which are a symptom of the problem and not the problem itself. She is not even taking aim at the world-encircling (albeit, as Michael Mann and Immanuel Wallerstein have both shown, limited) political and military supremacy of the United States. The true target of her ire is an entire economic system that compels depredations such as those inflicted on Chile and Iraq. *The Shock Doctrine* bears comparison with Ellen Meiksins Wood's insights into the global economy's dependence on military power, with Luxemburg on the violent accumulation of capital, with Samir Amin on unequal development, with Giovanni Arrighi on the connections between capital and state hegemonies, with Andre Gunder Frank on the underdevelopment of Latin America, and with David Harvey on 'accumulation by dispossession'. What distinguishes Klein's book from theirs, however, are its popular method and circulation. This journalistic approach need not, I suspect, involve any slackening of analytical rigour. Nor does her book's reliance on the metaphor of shock entail any mystification of the true nature of capitalism and its dependence on violence. On the contrary, I would argue that the metaphor of shock in particular, and Klein's popular approach in general, actually serve to illuminate this connection and make investigation of it more rather than less likely. *The Shock Doctrine* challenges the rarefied idiom and restricted audience of academic and Marxist scholarship about economic globalization. Less a theoretical exposition than a series of vivid journalistic accounts, *The Shock Doctrine* is impelled by a belief that when it comes to explaining economic globalization, readability and making contact with a large audience are at least as important as comprehensiveness, purity of execution or conformity to the argot of Marxist economic analysis.

The use of electric shock to encapsulate the workings of the global economy is as much a metonym as a metaphor. That is, it employs one part of capitalism's intrinsic violence to exemplify the whole. Yet it is mainly as a figure of speech used to describe the way in which capitalism disorientates and terrorizes men and women into quiescence that shock is deployed in Klein's work. The utility of that figurative approach demands reflection. Metaphor, needless to say, is not an optional stylistic device. That is, we cannot choose *not* to use metaphors or to reject them on account of their tendency to distance us from the true nature of things. Rather, metaphor is something like a basic principle of human understanding; it operates in all forms of symbolic communication including, of course, in language. Thought and meaning, in other words, are not possible without metaphor and therefore without some degree of alienation or abstraction from the subjects of one's thoughts and meanings. One conclusion that can be drawn from the inescapably figurative nature of language is Nietzsche's: that there is no longer knowledge just metaphor, that so-called truths are just metaphors fixed by time, habit and forgetfulness. Another and more enabling conclusion is reached by Paul Ricoeur in his classic *The Rule of Metaphor*: because all representations are second-order imitations of another object they are all unavoidably but, crucially, not equally distanced from the objects they seek to describe. The first part of this formulation is uncontroversial, for if a representation was no different from the thing it seeks to represent then it would actually *be* that thing; a perfect description of an apple, for example, would be an apple. In other words, a representation that could collapse the gulf between the cryptic reality of things and the distancing, figurative abstractions of language is inconceivable. The second part of Ricoeur's claim is more controversial because it entails a conviction that

metaphors can enhance our descriptions of the world. Ricoeur rejects Nietzsche's theory that all language is dead metaphor, just as his book contests Jacques Derrida's contention in 'White Mythology' that language, because inevitably metaphorical, constitutes an insurmountable barrier between mind and world. Metaphors for Ricoeur are capable of suspending our ordinary ways of describing their referents in order to provide imaginative and refreshing ways of experiencing them. Metaphors, in other words, can regenerate meaning; fresh metaphors encourage new and inventive ways of perceiving their referents. Intrinsic to metaphors is the obligation they place on one to interpret them. The reader of *The Shock Doctrine*, for instance, is compelled to ask him- or herself how global capitalism resembles shock treatment. Thus the creative use of metaphor goads us into reflecting in new ways upon our world; in Ricoeur's words, it 'forces conceptual thought to *think more*'.

Joseph Stiglitz's accusation in the *New York Times* that Klein's popularizing approach is guilty of 'oversimplification' strikes me as unfounded. Likewise Michael Hardt's worry that *The Shock Doctrine* suffers from 'a significant divide between journalistic methods and theoretical argument' is uncalled for. Hardt is concerned that a focus on relationships between individuals such as Friedman and Pinochet, though it may make Klein's tale more gripping and comprehensible to the common reader, contradicts the book's central theoretical insight that the violence of neoliberalism is not the result of a conspiracy hatched by powerful men but an intrinsic feature of capital accumulation. But I am arguing that we should see *The Shock Doctrine* as an invitation to its readers to reflect on capitalism's propensity for violence and not as a definitive exposition of that propensity. It encourages us to 'think more' about the relationship between capitalism and violence, even though an authoritative account of that relationship cannot be found between its covers. Hardt is also anxious that the absence of an extended theoretical analysis of the inseparability of accumulation and coercion leaves the reader unsure whether one should be opposed to capitalism per se, or just to particularly brutal variants of it. Admittedly Klein fails to clarify whether capitalism is unavoidably coercive and whether therefore the alternative to 'disaster capitalism' is a more virtuous form of capitalism or an entirely different form of social and economic organization. Yet this reluctance to decree an alternative path is less an omission than an expression of the book's deliberately open-ended character, since one of the central principles of the movement Klein's work inspires is that thought, initiative and authority should all be local, democratic and uncoerced.

Klein is at pains to point out the ineffectiveness of the shock doctrine. Alternatives to it, one infers from her account, are germinating in the recalcitrance and ultimately the indignation and resistance of populations subjected to this trauma and pillage. The minds of Dr Cameron's victims were not erased and begun anew, but mangled and fractured; his experiments were a total failure. Similarly, those societies assailed by the shocks of neoliberalism were definitely not made over into peaceful and profitable adjuncts of the global economy but subjected to ever greater poverty and inequality. Moreover, the effects of shock eventually wear off. Klein is evidently thrilled to be able to document the persistence of memory and self-confidence as well as the increasing manifestation of popular efforts at reconstruction from the ruins and scorched earth left in capitalism's wake.

The case of Iraq exemplifies the shock doctrine's failures. The closure of state-run factories, the firing of hundreds of thousands of state employees, the rewriting of Iraqi law to favour big business, the repatriation of profits by American firms, the inhibition of trade unions and the exclusion of Iraqis from reconstruction contracts were all intended to bring about a free-market utopia in Iraq. Instead, this litany of mismanagement, all of which is contrary to the

Fourth Geneva Convention's expectations of an occupying power, has triggered unemployment and scarcity. Combined with the casual violence of the occupying forces, it has served only to fuel the resistance. Israel's recent history is also instructive. Huge increases in military spending, cutbacks in social services, the specialization of Israel's export economy over the past decade and a half in armaments, counter-terrorism and security products, have brought only a superficial prosperity restricted to elites and dependent on fear and continual conflict. We should be forewarned, Klein argues, by this image of a high-tech fortress protected by fences from the surplus humanity of the disinherited and disposable poor.

It is capitalism's spectacular failure and destructiveness, as well as the almost miraculous vitality and ingenuity of its victims, that ultimately frustrate every effort to remake our societies into neoliberal utopias. From the ruins of neoliberalism have sprung campaigns against privatization in India, South Africa, Latin America, even China. They are testament to recently shocked societies' powers of endurance and recovery. The war in Iraq has made obvious the violence of capitalism, just as our increasingly gated and inequitable world has exposed the myth that the wealth hoarded by elites eventually trickles down to their dependants.

Klein writes eloquently in conclusion of the need to combat this colossal privatization of public space by encouraging democratic organization and self-determination, as well as more far-reaching coalitions of resistance. Currently democracy means little more than profitable corporations, a tightly circumscribed range of permissible debate centred on personalities rather than fundamental choices, as well as a limited role for the state in social provision, but ever more tasks for it to perform in criminalizing dissent, maintaining 'security', surveilling citizens and underwriting corporate profits. The message of Klein's book is that democracy actually entails a popular rethinking of our social and economic priorities. *The Shock Doctrine* is a work that pleads for the democratic initiative that its popular circulation enables and that its thought-provokingly figurative approach engenders.

Robert Spencer

A Duchamp for the Left?

John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*, Verso: London, 2008. 256 pp., £60.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 1 84467 163 2 hb., 978 1 84467 167 0 pb.

The Intangibilities of Form is an important and ambitious book that rewrites the history of twentieth-century art through a concern with work. As the title suggests, this vision of a 'labour theory of culture' for modern art revolves around the work of Marcel Duchamp, with Lazlo Moholy-Nagy holding a subsidiary spot. However, these figures are principally deployed to account for contemporary art. Roberts elaborates on skill and deskilling in art and their relation to deskilling in wage-labour; why the demise of craft skills do not amount to the end of skill in art; 'copying after copying' (mimesis without craft skill) and its inverse, the 'craft of reproducibility' (work with automatic copying devices); the role of prosthetics and surrogacy in contemporary art; the 'mongrelization' or 'miscegenation' of art; amateurism as aspiration for encultured artists and expanded conceptions of authorship or composite artistic entities (the artist-as-engineer or technician, the artist-curator, the surrogate-artist, collective authorship, etc.). It is a central claim of this book that Duchamp's readymades make visible the mutual imbrications of autonomous and heteronomous labour (though I'm still unclear how it does so, or for whom it does this). It also offers a fine account of 'Situational Aesthetics' (although, oddly, there is no reference to Victor Burgin, who developed the idea); one of the best available dialectical descriptions of the role of the contemporary museum; powerful critiques of conservative defences of the aesthetic; an important reworking of aesthetic autonomy beyond Adorno, and much more besides.

This superabundance of ideas comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with the author's work. Roberts is one of the most inventive writers on contemporary art working today, and he has an uncanny knack of picking up on art trends and coining a telling phrase-cum-concept to pin them down. Much of this perspicacity stems from having made it his business to stick close to the intensive critical talk of the studio (or post-studio). It may not be immediately apparent to many readers just how much of the current book draws on ideas that have emerged from debates within, or on,

the expanded network of *Art & Language*: amateurism, blindness, collaborative practice, deflation, deskilling, mistakes (botching), surrogacy, ventriloquism…. Roberts is a kind of non-embedded critic of *Art & Language*: he uses their practice as a 'think-tank' and employs their insights to account for radically different forms of avant-garde practice.

In mapping these concerns onto an engagement with Adorno's aesthetics and contemporary Marxist theory, Roberts breathes new life into the idea that art should be seen as a prefigurative form for the free ('ecstatic') labour of the communism to come. As he asks on the first page: 'Why is it that artistic labour is taken to be an exemplary form of human activity and, as such, is judged by some writers to be the basis for the emancipation of all labour?' While he does not mention alienation and carefully avoids reference to 'creative labour', *The Intangibilities of Form* involves a reworking of some old debates on art as non-alienated work. Principally, this is achieved by holding together Adorno's vision of autonomous art with the concern – developed in Italian Operaismo and later Autonomism – with building active spaces and practices of (worker) autonomy from capital. In this way, he gives Adorno an activist turn and applies autonomy to contemporary anti-visual art, rather than Adorno's tired high-modernist canon. In this book, autonomy and heteronomy face each other as mutually determining forms of *labour*. There are clear echoes of Jacques Rancière's recent aesthetic writings here, but Roberts insists that autonomous art carries its critical charge as a way of continuing to imagine the refashioning of work beyond capitalist subsumption. This utopian claim for autonomy – the insistence that art's critical power emerges when it is confronted with wage-labour – is the book's most important achievement. However, the argument is somewhat impaired by the use of concepts from *Capital* as a kind of rhetorical glue. In particular, Roberts doesn't seem entirely certain if art can be described as a commodity. To be fair, there is a great deal of confusion and conceptual slackness in the debates on the commodity-status of art. Roberts certainly can't be blamed for this: we need much more work in this area and detailed reflection that doesn't just fall back on the known axioms of Lukács, Benjamin and the Frankfurt School. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, as an orthodox exponent of the labour theory of value, the account he offers *is* contradictory. At points he recognizes this is difficult terrain, citing Marx and I.I. Rubin, but then continues to speak of art as a commodity, deploys Adorno on art as 'absolute commodity' and refers to the infant's drawings in Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* as a form of commodity exchange.

It is not at all clear that this book required an anthropology of the hand to cement its argument. Roberts presents an account of the phylogenetic development of the human hand as the basis for a 'labour theory of culture' drawn, via Charles Woolfson's book of that title, from Engels. It is quite possibly the case that the development of the opposable thumb played a decisive role in the emergence of human tool use over 2 million years ago, but I'm not sure how this helps with a labour theory of culture under advanced capitalism. It probably makes more sense just to say that work is a collective human power. Roberts tends to follow current debates on digital circuits of production and immaterial labour and thus demotes the sheer physical graft involved in much labour today. The muscles of the human back are surely as important for work as opposable thumbs; the same might be said about binocular vision. This leads to all manner of complexities as he attempts to reinsert the hand into immaterial labour practices. However, the key problem is that 'the hand' figures in *The Intangibilities of Form* as a kind of metaphoric shorthand allowing Roberts to sidestep the need for detailed analysis of historical labour processes.

Roberts draws his account of the labour process from 'anti-technicist Marxism' (Marx, Harry Braverman and Raniero Panzieri, though he misses other sources for this argument in the journal *Radical Science* and the myriad studies written by social historians). His coordinates supply useful and suggestive theoretical pointers, but he leaps from Marx to Braverman without pause, providing no description of the actual transformation of work that Duchamp might have known in France, Argentina and America, or the labour processes that Moholy-Nagy might have encountered in Hungary and Weimar, or, for that matter, the organization of labour in the USSR (Kevin Murphy's work would have helped with the last). Work in these places was highly differentiated and in transition. In some of them it is questionable whether real subsumption had been achieved. The account of the contemporary museum as a site of production is admirably dialectical; in contrast, the modern artist's outsourcing of manufacture is viewed from a single perspective. The readymade, Moholy-Nagy's 'telephone paintings', and so forth, are deemed to represent a site of 'rendezvous' with heteronymous work, so as to bring it to the fore and challenge it with the autonomous labour of art. But this needed to be set against the inverse image of the artist as gaffer, technocratic manager or suited

executive. Roberts does considerably better with recent labour practices, though the sources are familiar and, as I have indicated, despite the caveats, he exaggerates the role of immaterial labour in the current global economy.

As this suggests, the central weakness of this book is the tendency to rely on cultural-theoretical generalization rather than detailed and carefully sustained conjunctural analysis. Moholy-Nagy and the Soviet Constructivists/Productivists are seen as followers of the readymade – Moholy-Nagy's 'telephone paintings' are said to 'register the trauma of the readymade' – but it is doubtful whether these artists could have known Duchamp's readymades, which were hardly public until the 1950s. Here, Roberts accepts too much of the Duchamp myth circulating in art theory, or rather he remodels the myth for his purposes. Here, a little of *Art & Language*'s scepticism would have helped. For Roberts, the readymade is a concept and not a historical practice, but this introduces problems into his argument when he does engage, in limited fashion, with historical interpretations.

I find Roberts's account of Duchamp unconvincing. He notes that he does not want to recast Duchamp as a radical Productivist, but effectively proceeds to do so. Duchamp emerges here as *the* critical intellectual of art and work in the first half of the last century. This is a Duchamp for the Left, but it requires overlooking the cool detachment at the core of his work, particularly as he moved among the aloof ironists around Arensberg. Roberts dismisses Molly Nesbit's argument on Duchamp's games with the emergent culture of consumption in France, and doesn't refer to her work on Duchamp and 'the language of industry', or her insistence that Duchamp was looking for a way out of art. Similarly, he goes out of his way to distance himself from Jeffrey Weiss's account of Duchamp as *blaguer*. However, Nesbit's *Their Common Sense* and Weiss's *The Popular Culture of Modern Art* strike me as the best interpretations of Duchamp's work; certainly they seem more credible than Duchamp as a strategic theorist of capitalist work (though this *is* just as credible as Thierry De Duve's Duchamp as practitioner of aesthetic modernism in the face of 'generic art'). Roberts would have been on altogether stronger ground had he argued that the readymade is one incarnation of 'copying without copying' rather than the reverse. In any case, the question of what generated the turn against authorship *across* the avant-garde is left unaddressed. In this regard, we still very much need an account of the labour of avant-garde art then and now.

This inclination to stretch arguments is part of Roberts's tendency to ventriloquism. He throws his voice onto others as well as making, or at least bolstering, trends in support of an argument. Topics of discussion are projected onto Benjamin or Habermas, and artists are routinely attributed unlikely forms of critical awareness and self-consciousness. It is not that the claims are wrong, but they tend to be overextended on the basis of the evidence supplied. In one discussion of collaboration he suggests that in the mid-1970s the 'opening up of the circuits of authorship to social and familial relations in which the self is intersubjectively embedded was important for a second generation of feminist artists'. Mary Kelly is the artist in question here and the argument seems convincing until we ask: who besides Kelly would this description fit? Perhaps it could be extended to Martha Rosler and Alexis Hunter, possibly to Susan Hiller's *'10 Months'* or *Riddles of the Sphinx* (though the section in question again turns on Kelly), but candidates soon run thin on the ground. The same point applies to the suggestion that Moholy-Nagy was a radical practitioner of 'second technique' as a critique of the capitalist labour process, which I find singularly improbable; ditto the idea that the Soviet avant-garde belongs solidly in the anti-technicist camp. Once you try to supply determinant content for the argument it often seems to dissolve before your eyes.

The Intangibilities of Form is a pioneering book and in its way is even a brilliant one. Its real strength is in revitalizing questions that have been off the intellectual agenda for too long and in opening new avenues to critical thought. The sheer theoretical inventiveness of the argument compensates somewhat for the lack of detailed analysis, but only somewhat. This book desperately needed a sustained analysis of the labour process both inside the studio and beyond its walls. It is significantly under-referenced, and a less emphatically declarative tone would have lessened the impact of some jarring errors and misreadings (the date for the first unassisted readymade, the account of the 'haptic'). But perhaps this is the wrong way to engage with Roberts's work. We probably shouldn't look to *The Intangibilities of Form* for a history of art and labour, but for ideas that might help to spark the development of such a history. In this sense, in spite of its shortcomings, this book provides a much-needed impetus to re-release the critical charge of avant-garde art from the straitjackets imposed by its current detractors, as well as by quite a few fans. Roberts demonstrates that this task will require an encounter with labour.

Steve Edwards

A real surprise

Matthew Beaumont, Andrew Hemingway, Esther Leslie and John Roberts, eds, *As Radical as Reality Itself: Essays on Marxism and Art for the 21st Century*, Peter Lang, Bern, 2007. 473 pp., £45.00 pb., 978 3 03910 938 8.

Andrew Hemingway, ed., *Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left*, Pluto Press, London and Ann Arbor, 2006. 276 pp., £60.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 0 7453 2330 8 hb., 0 7453 2329 4 pb.

The phrase 'as radical as reality itself' was a response to a provocation. It derives from the meeting between Valeriu Marcu and Lenin which took place during the First World War while the latter was in exile in Zurich and the former, like most of the artists and poets congregated around the Cabaret Voltaire, was seeking to evade call-up and refuse the warmongering ideologies of their nation-states. The young Dadaist poet, full of the urgency of taking revolutionary positions, accused the Bolshevik leader of not being radical enough. 'I do not know how radical you are', Lenin is supposed to have replied. 'I am certainly not radical enough. One can never be radical enough; that is, one must always try to be as radical as reality itself.' Their discussion had turned on the position to take on the war: Marcu advocated pacifism; the Bolsheviks argued for turning the guns against the bourgeoisie. In the hands of today's theorists of a politicized aesthetics, this friendly debate around a Swiss café table in 1917 is pregnant with the problems of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It figures the conjunction of art and politics, of poetic with revolutionary praxis; the problem of the avant-garde's desire – and much-reported failure – to bridge this divide; the efforts of later artists to make good that failure, and the struggle of many art activists today to generate practices of collectivity or sociality.

The title of *As Radical as Reality Itself* should not be read as claiming to match contemporary social materiality. Rather it is best understood as articulating an intellectual (and political) challenge to be faced. It is a provocation to those who would evade that challenge, sidestepping it by self-complacently appealing to the critique of 'the master trope'. The collection of essays, which has its origin in the conference 'Marxism and the Visual Arts Now' held in London in 2002, is a rejoinder to the prevailing orthodoxies in contemporary art and cultural theory, especially when they parade decked out in the robes of emancipation. Each of the four editors (also the conference organizers) contributes his or her own introduction to the volume. The sense of the overarching project is best grasped through these pieces. Esther Leslie deploys Marxism against contemporary 'cultural studies' and its degeneration into an advisory role for New Labour public policy; Matthew Beaumont dispatches with the tired remnants of postmodernism; John Roberts, with the 'Marxism of the old binarisms' and 'liberatory textual Marxism'. The desire of *As Radical as Reality Itself* is to move on from the (now not so) *nouveau mélange* and to escape the trappings, complacencies and political dead ends of the post-New Left. As Roberts neatly puts it, the inheritances of various intellectual tendencies of the late twentieth century, including some associated with Marxism, 'no longer quite fix what needs fixing, or unfix what is fixed'.

The sixteen contributions to the volume are highly varied in choice of object, approach and tone; the authors including artists, historians of art, literary theorists and scholars of aesthetic theory. Topics addressed range across a number of subjects, including the recent developments at Chicago's Millennium Park; the promotion work for Soviet state enterprises designed by Alexander Rodchenko and Vladimir Mayakovsky in the 1920s; the figure of the Watts revolt for the Situationist International; recent theorizations of digital software; and a critical assessment of the role of cultural difference. 'State and Revolution', 'Communist and Post-Communist Aesthetics', 'Situationist Thought and the Ends of the Avant-Garde', 'Subjectivity and the Commodity Form', and 'Politics and the Problems of Contemporary Practice' provide the sub-theme around which the collection is organized. The absence of section introductions – not least for themes of this sort, carrying as they do some highly charged histories – could have been a severe drawback for the collection. However, the essays in each section manage to convey a comprehensive (if not exhaustive) map of their terrain, and to evidence distinctive methodological approaches to, and constitutions of, their objects of study. That the reader is not left disorientated by the various voices and topics, but instead emerges with a strong sense of the terms of current debate, is quite an achievement.

Whether it all adds up to 'Marxism and Art *for* the 21st Century' is premature to say. Indeed, one

sincerely hopes that it does not; that is, that the book does not so much serve summative findings as offer paths for explorations in what for far too long has been something of an intellectual wilderness. Despite its off-putting price tag, *As Radical as Reality Itself* deserves a wide readership. It is indicative of, and a contribution to, the revival of interest and growing confidence in forms of Marxist theory that has been a feature of the past decade, although the editors remain anxious not to be caught defending 'dead concepts' or advancing theoretical 'purity'. (Interestingly, the contributing essays are remarkably free of such self-conscious hang-ups.) To an extent such worries are inevitable in a field where debates have, to say the least, been intense, and where this intensity has often degenerated into the debilitating effects of sectarianism. Today's Marxists are hypersensitive to this history and to Stalinism. (Leslie's introduction alludes to some of the conference's internal political tensions.) The concern is to build an open Marxism (recall Sartre, 1960) and to emphasize its heterogeneity as an intellectual tradition. I sympathize and agree, but there is a nagging doubt left unaddressed: that however well-intentioned the desire for openness, it figures a distance from engagement; the utopian truce depends on not addressing serious and troubling questions, such as how to organize resistance, how to sustain struggles through setbacks, or how to constitute a working radical democracy – issues that present themselves, if not always consciously in these terms, as pressing for the anti-capitalist movement, for microtopists no less than for vanguardists.

'Nostalgia' – that is, a nostalgia for intellectual 'relics' – is what Andrew Hemingway also hopes to avoid, in his introduction to *Marxism and the History of Art*, and again the ambition expressed is for Marxism's 'critique and renewal'. This opening is unnecessarily apologetic. 'Nostalgia' itself (or, more precisely, what is accused of being nostalgic) is neither always, nor necessarily, retrograde, and is often a charge laid at the door of those who refuse the dominant present, who choose not to forget alternative historical possibilities. In this sense, it can be a force for maintaining critical distance and future ambition. Moreover, one might reasonably expect a book on the history of the history of art to be looking backwards – if not wistfully, then perhaps with an eye to the historical, with the intention to work over its 'relics' actively and to seek out their *contretemps* with our moment. But this collection's objects of study become, unexpectedly, peculiarly prescient for today's concerns.

The bookends of the volume – William Morris and the New Left – have a certain currency. Even Morris – for so long taken as the bearer of a specifically English breed of pastoral socialism, and of simple nostalgia for artisanal labour – has been reworked as a critical-aesthetic lever for our era of global finance capital. Meanwhile, looking around today, one would be easily forgiven for thinking the New Left is the new black. Renewed attention to the radical politics of the 1960s and 1970s – or at least to the recent pronouncements of figures that emerged as key players at that time – has emerged with the shakiness of the neoliberal agenda and a renewed politics of resistance. Historically, the New Left figures as an important hinge: encompassing the dissolution into *nouveaux*

philosophes at its one end and, at its other, the recovery not only of Marx as a philosopher of social praxis and a political critic of the value form, but also of Lukács, Luxemburg, Korsch, Rubin, and, easy to forget, Lenin. Three thematic essays on the impact of the New Left, its role in the anti-fascist campaigns in postwar Germany, and the Warburgian turn in the academy of the DDR, form the book's concluding chapters (although, within this book, these chapters seem to open up another programme of research).

The essays in *Marxism and the History of Art* are varied in mode and in degree of sympathy for their subjects' politics. Nine of the twelve chapters are monographic, addressing intellectual figures whose projects are decidedly 'Old Left', and, with the exceptions of those on Walter Benjamin and Henri Lefebvre, they would seem far less promising material for those readers seeking out contemporary relevance. Indeed, the work of Mikhail Lifshits, Frederick Antal, Francis Klingender, Max Raphael, Meyer Schapiro and Arnold Hauser might seem to be of little interest even to specialist scholars in the intellectual history of Marxism; and, Schapiro aside, still less to those in art history. They seem to be little more than historical curiosities for those interested in the history of Marxist approaches to art (a topic that not all Marxist art historians value). Whether one thinks of the orientation, typical of art history until the 1960s, around the category of style, or of the particular political histories within which many of these figures were caught (such as the machinations of the Comintern, the resistance to Lysenkoism or to the philosophy of the Second International) one might expect that such factors would set these figures in the permafrost of their respective moments. That this does not happen is the real surprise of *Marxism and the History of Art*.

Intellectually nimble and politically inquisitive readers will not only find a history of political and aesthetic ideas, but will also encounter material of relevance to debates on philistinism in contemporary art, relational aesthetics, post-relationality, activistic models of art practice, through to recent photography and video work where realism and form are brought together as significant critical projects. The essays address expected themes, such as the reflectionist theory of class belonging and the correspondence theory of truth – and realism emerges as far more heterogeneous an idea than ever imagined. They also work through the various efforts to move from a contemplative to an active and critical philosophy (also a move away from philosophy per se); tensions between dialectical and naturalistic understandings are explored, as are those between seeing the aesthetic as an ideology or as a cognitive or critical category (whether transcendental, historical or social in constitution), and between seeing art history as an aesthetic or philological endeavour, or in terms derived from the philosophy of history. The reader can glean the different ways of conceiving and responding to aesthetic autonomy; of what might be constituted by materiality and materialism: all extremely pertinent to current radical discussions in aesthetics and politics. Prism-like, each case study distinguishes the components that make up a complex intellectual and political biography.

Without intending to, *Marxism and the History of Art* provides one of the most accessible and incisive outlines of the type of art history generated in central Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Gottfried Semper, Aloïs Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin and Max Dvořák. It is the filtering of these approaches through the critical perspective and direct concerns of specific Marxist intellectuals that brings to life and illuminates the distinctive projects of the discipline's 'founding fathers'. The discussions of Hauser, Antal and Benjamin, for example, address their efforts to develop means of studying art whilst resisting both the overwhelming influence of neo-Kantianism and the underpinning vulgarized versions of Hegelian philosophy of history. They share this project, as they share an engagement with Lukács (as do many of the other figures addressed in this book) and commitments to historical materialist analysis. But it is the differences in the approaches each advances for the study of art that are particularly instructive.

There is a current vogue to dispatch with the social-historical approach to art by identifying it, mistakenly, with Ranke's 'how it really was'. *Marxism and the History of Art* paints a much more complex picture. The emergence of a social-historical conception of art history, for example, can be situated with respect to the earlier art historians' resort to *Weltanschauung* or *Geist* as a means to historicize their subjects, and, more specifically, with the extension and revision of Dvořák's contribution by Antal and Hauser. The 'second wave' of the Marxist social history of art – that associated with the New Left – found the approach of Antal and Hauser to be far too generalizing; yet this is exactly what Antal said of Dvořák, what Dvořák had said of Wölfflin, and what even Wölfflin himself had claimed to be criticizing. Reaching for the usual binarisms clearly won't help establish the shifting ways of constituting art's sociality and historicity. Place into this history Schapiro's engagement with both the Central European tradition and Deweyan pragmatism,

his frustration with the Frankfurt School exiles, or Hauser's own increasing emphasis on contingency (a similar trajectory that, incidentally, could be tracked in Siegfried Kracauer's writings), and the tensions between broadly 'historical' and 'philosophical' approaches to art become compelling challenges to thought rather than the stuff of routine stand-offs. It is not as if, for example, Hauser was unversed in aesthetic thought and did not appreciate what might be at stake in making transcendental claims for art; quite the contrary. But his rejection was for determinate reasons, and his promotion of the 'sociological approach' cannot be dismissed as 'mere sociology'. Indeed, the whole question of contingency and its confusion with historical specificity, and, in turn, the confusion of historical specificity with a narrow historicism, needs much more intelligent handling than the nostrums of debates on the relation between the social and aesthetic allow.

I have posed the problem from the side of social history, but equally we might consider, say, Lefebvre's fears that his aesthetics had failed adequately to capture art's universality. Or we could reflect on the tension between Benjamin's sense of the historical permeability of the fragments of culture, by way of 'blasting' out of the false continuum and constructing constellations, and his monadological conception of the artwork, closed to 'external' influences, irreducible to its 'historical context'. Even when considering the singularity of the artwork, the projects of the individuals addressed in *Marxism and the History of Art* invariably lead us to consider broader social questions. To press the point further: even when insisting on the empirical facticity, materiality, sensuous particularity, radical nominalism, monadic nature or singularity of the artwork (terms that cannot simply be treated as interchangeable), or worrying that this itself might constitute no more than 'mere facticity' or 'abstract particularity', these discussions open onto questions of social totality. Marxism not only enables such issues and difficulties to come to the fore, but insists that they do, demanding a dialogue between what is often considered irreconcilable.

Those readers seeking neatly delineated philosophical heroes to emerge from the volume will be disappointed. Those interested in how philosophical engagements are made into and through active intellectual and political histories, how they are put into productive relationship with actual objects and events, and how, even in the act of addressing the Quattrocento or the Romanesque carvings at Moissac, they are thought as pressing, as present, will be fascinated.

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Joanna Hodge, *Derrida on Time*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007. 256 pp., £60.00 hb., 978 0 415 43091 3.

How can one address time? How can one write on time? At one point in her book, Joanna Hodge quotes Derrida's own acknowledgement of the problem. On the one hand, there is a will to name time, a determination to think it, and, on the other, there is the very activity of thinking time, the time spent articulating time. There is, then, according to Derrida, a 'gap between, on the one hand, thought, language, and desire and, on the other hand, knowledge, philosophy, science… a gap between gift and economy'. Now what interests Derrida in this gap is neither an adoring abdication to what exceeds the limits of experience, knowledge, science and economy, nor to dwell in an astringent philosophical logic about time unconnected and unconcerned with the body that desires, names and thinks this logic. On the contrary, his aim is at once to give and to know. As he says: 'Know still what giving wants to say, know how to give, know what you want and want to say when you give, know what you intend to give, know how the gift annuls itself, commit yourself even if commitment is the destruction of the gift by the gift, give economy its chance' (*Given Time*, 1992). What is then Hodge's gift? How has Hodge managed to bridge Derrida's gap? How has she managed to involve her body, her desires, and the logic of her and Derrida's articulations in order to achieve an unexpected and yet logically conclusive articulation of, or on, time today?

Derrida on Time is an exploration of Derrida's understanding of time as a series of responses to Kant and Husserl. This exploration also highlights other sources in Derrida's thinking of time: Freud, Heidegger, Levinas, Blanchot, Benjamin, and so on. These references are not classified or analysed individually; they are understood as chance encounters in Derrida's continual reading of Kant and Husserl. Hodge's analysis is therefore a way of revealing how these other sources have helped Derrida to block, deflect and reroute more conventional interpretations of both Kant's and Husserl's work on time. Overall, this attention to Derrida's reading of Husserl and Kant aims to show that he spent a surprisingly large amount of time erasing their very significant influence on his own understanding of time. In doing so, Hodge shows that these previous philosophers often remain a 'scarcely erased trace' in Derrida's writings.

In order to give an idea of the complexity of Hodge's undertaking, I shall focus on three particular issues, which I feel are crucial to her book. These should be seen as three arguments or questions to Hodge, a way to invite her readers to reflect on how she has explored Derrida's understanding of time.

First, one of Hodge's main claims is that, with Husserl and Derrida, 'time is to be thought no longer as linear, but as curved, and … matter and its materiality are organized in accordance with asymmetrical relations arising from such curvature.' Now what can 'curved' actually mean and should we not reflect further on the meaning of this curvature?

The idea that time is no longer understood as a surmised line of continuous development from some notional beginning to some equally notional end point is not contentious. Husserl's phenomenology has helped us understand that no thinking, and therefore no thought content, can take such a form. We are always already thinking by making loops, hesitations, precipitations, reversals, and our thoughts not only have to follow these unruly turns, they also have to take into consideration chance encounters and contingent events. One of the best-known characteristics of Derrida's writing is precisely how it follows these loops, hesitations, swerves, changes of speed, and u-turns; and that any attempt to reconstitute his work without them is futile. The issue is therefore: how can one characterize Derrida's notion of time as being singularly curved? What does it mean that time has now a rounded or bent shape, instead of a linear strategy based on a before and an after and a transitory 'now'? Even curved, does thinking still follow a 'before' (before Derrida), an 'after' (after Derrida) and a middle point (Hodge) from which one can contemplate a curve?

The issue is a difficult one and Hodge tries hard to make sure that the syncopation of non-simultaneity characteristic of Derrida's work never returns to a linear figuration that would undermine her carefully constructed arguments. But the question remains. Are we not now finally at a stage where we should really be asking whether Derrida's strategy of loops, changes of speed and u-turns is not in desperate need of deconstruction? Do we still need another repetition of Derrida's textual strategy? Should we not think of a radical reinvention that would prevent us from thinking time simply as curved, precisely in order to remain faithful to Derrida's deconstruction of time?

My second argument or question to Hodge: the title of her book is *Derrida on Time* without comma, hyphen or colon between proper name and topic. This is not a book about the timeliness of Derrida's views on time, but about Derrida's views on time. The scope is thus enormous. Not only does it bring together Derrida's work, it also puts forward his many predecessors' attempts to make sense of this topic. The question is simply this: isn't 'Derrida on time' an impossible task?

This is not a textbook or a book suitable for undergraduates. The complexity of the prose, the difficulty of the arguments, the subtlety of the articulation remains inaccessible to most non-Derridean/Husserlian scholars. As such, it does not claim to be a comprehensive and accessible account of such a complex topic. It therefore can only claim to reconstitute Derrida's views on time in one interweaving set of arguments bound in a small black book. Derrida's extraordinary textual proliferation on such a diverse topic is thus reduced to various

distinct domains of entities (mostly grounded in interactions with previous philosophers) that aspire to be fully retrievable from Derrida's finite articulations on this topic. The title and Hodge's undertaking therefore put forward the idea that there is in Derrida's work, and indeed perhaps in the wider philosophical remit of deconstruction, an eidetic structure of time that is potentially comprehensible by all.

Should we not, then, here raise certain doubts about the possibility of thinking Derrida on time? Does anyone have the capacity to coordinate the divergent strands of Derridean thought that open up a different understanding of time and its mode of presentation? This does not mean that the corpus of Derrida's work is infinite and unaccountable. This simply means that there must be a fundamental impossibility of thinking Derrida on time, not because of its diversity, its incoherencies, its betrayals, or its unacknowledged sources, but because his work stands opposed to the very possibility of pinning down what 'on time' might actually mean. At one stage of her mediations, Hodge rightly quotes Heidegger's famous reflection on the impossibility of addressing the essence of time in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*:

> All these descriptions of time, known both to the common as well as the philosophical understandings, cannot have been simply arbitrary fabrications and inventions. The essence of time must itself make these kinds of conceptions possible and even plausible. Yet none of them touches exactly the metaphysical essence of time.

Is Hodge not trying to do exactly what Heidegger feared: writing and thinking in terms of an eidetic reduction of time to an essence: on Time? Hodge is obviously aware of this problem. The quotation itself is proof enough. However, her solution remains questionable. Although it is true that Hodge is not claiming completeness or comprehensiveness, there is still under the naming function of 'Derrida on time' a desire for totalization, even if this totalization is deliberately structured in an open and non-finite series of redeployments and rereadings.

My third argument or question: Hodge's tacit conclusion appears to be that, in his work on time, Derrida always sought a middle ground, 'a neutral position', between all his predecessors' moves to make sense of time. This conclusion comes back with an insistent regularity throughout Hodge's book, but is never developed – understandably – in an overarching conclusion. Now, is it fair to reduce Derrida to such neutrality?

The accusation of neutrality is common among detractors of Derrida, especially when it comes to politics. The litany is, without fail, that Derrida remains merely neutral between the religious and non-religious, between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and, worst of all, between various philosophical engagements and arguments. So when it comes to his account of time, this generally accepted view of his neutrality is on well-prepared ground. Hodge writes:

> It is the refusal to choose between these three accounts of time, which positions Derrida's notion of time and impossible possibility, as neither that of Heidegger nor that of Levinas, nor that of Blanchot; neither *Dasein*, nor *Ereignis*, nor infinity, as an intimation of the divine, nor writing as a death, revealing the impossibility of dying.

The problem with such a view is that it reduces Derrida's work to an attempt, not so much to neutralize opposites, but to bridge all these contradictory positions. Derrida thus ends up being understood as the philosopher who attempted to bring together, through deconstructive moves, both literature and philosophy, theology and Marxism, Judaism and Negative Theology, and so on. The rationale for such neutrality is obviously that deconstruction and its 'themes' (undecidability, différance, etc.) prevent the very possibility of a demarcation between these traditional classifications, leaving us stranded, if not in a dead end, at least in a no-man's-land of abstract neutrality.

However, is this accusation or this use of the term 'neutral' by Hodge justified? Should this term not be prone again to reinvention? If neutrality is the end point of deconstruction, and specifically of Derrida's work, then it cannot mean not belonging to any side in a war, dispute or controversy. It must mean something else. Neutrality must be about overturning the cycle of opposites; it must actively pursue an exteriority that would be transcendent but without relation; it must be able to invent that which puts economy in motion. In other words, it must remain a gift – that is, something which cannot be confused with presence or its phenomenon. Only when neutrality stops being negative will it make sense of Derrida's notion of time. And in this way, neutrality will indeed allow us to understand Derrida's contradictions, disaffections and escapist gestures, not as a refusal to take sides or as a desperate attempt to bridge the unbridgeable, but as the gift of invention, the pure act of giving unconditionally. So if Derrida does not try to make or evade connections between negative theology and political theory, between messianism and Marxism, between time and history, then is it really fair to say that he remains 'neutral' like Switzerland, or that he is only a 'mediating instance' like Kofi Annan between the philosophers he reads?

Jean-Paul Martinon