

Alterliberalism

Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979*, trans. Graham Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, 2008. 368 pp., £20.99 hb., 978 1 403 98654 2.

Six of Foucault's thirteen annual Collège de France lecture series have now appeared in English translation in the space of five years, including, in 2008, *Psychiatric Power* and now *The Birth of Biopolitics*. This latter series dating from 1979 constitutes the sequel to the previous year's lectures, *Security, Territory, Population*, which were published in English in 2007. The two series form a dyad, with a common theme: government. *Security, Territory, Population* looked at the 'governmental rationality' (or 'governmentality', to use Foucault's neologism) associated with what, in French, is called *raison d'état*: a historical movement concerned with the maximization of state power and, thereby, with the wealth and well-being of people. This constituted a considerable break with the logic of governance that had predominated in the Middle Ages, when there was no properly specific theory of the state or of statecraft. The newly released lectures, on the other hand, are concerned with a deliberately opposed governmental rationality, liberalism, which is of course concerned with maximizing wealth and well-being precisely by *limiting* the state, and which developed after the earlier form of governmentality and in reaction to it.

Foucault's intention was to investigate liberalism as a means to understanding contemporary biopolitics, the control of population. This explains the title of the lectures, but in point of fact he never gets to biopolitics here, rendering the title he gave the lectures misleading. In fact Foucault left us only scant remarks on the biopolitical – in his 1976 lectures, *Society Must Be Defended*, and in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, which appeared in the same year. This has in turn left the ground of biopolitics open to other thinkers, most notably Giorgio Agamben. In light of this fact, the title might have been rethought, for, as it stands, the book may both fail to entice appropriately those interested in liberalism and to waylay inappropriately those whose interest is in biopolitics à la Agamben (although this latter effect may be no bad thing). The German edition circumvents the problem by bundling the 1978 and 1979 lectures into a two-volume 'History of Governmentality', with the series

titles used as subtitles for each volume, and I think we might hope for a similar pattern in any subsequent English edition.

What we actually have in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, then, is Foucault's genealogy of liberalism, albeit one that is more disorganized than his classic genealogies. Foucault seems to have developed the course more or less week by week – the very reason for his failure to get round to talking about biopolitics – although this is fair enough, so to speak, given that the remit for lecturing at the Collège is only to share one's research with the public, and that the lectures were never intended for publication. Foucault begins the lectures where he left off the previous year, by showing how liberalism emerges out of *raison d'état* via political economy, which was initially simply a branch of *raison d'état* concerned with economic prosperity. There are two forms of liberalism, according to Foucault, namely an axiomatic form starting from the rights of man (the Rousseauian, French revolutionary tradition) and a utilitarian form starting from questioning the value of state power apropos of individuals (the English radical tradition). Foucault asserts that the latter form has quite clearly got the upper hand and increasingly dominates, albeit always while coexisting, to some extent, with the other approach.

From here, Foucault leaps to the twentieth century. This leap is the most extraordinary feature of these lectures, representing the most sustained treatment of twentieth-century history in Foucault's entire corpus. The central part of the book, in both thematic and chronological terms, Foucault devotes to *neoliberalism*. Even today, three decades later, this would seem a pre-eminently contemporary theme. Indeed, it is at first sight extraordinary that Foucault, who is neither an economist nor known for direct study of the present, should have been engaged almost thirty years ago in studying something that seems to have come to the fore only recently. While Foucault himself informs us of the intense interest in France at that time in American neoliberal thought, his analysis goes further than any simple interest in American fashion. In the English-speaking world we had yet to see the elections of

Thatcher and Reagan at the time Foucault delivered the lectures (Thatcher won power precisely a month after his last lecture of the year), but Foucault here already argues that neoliberalism is the predominant governmental mode. He specifically claims this in relation to France and Germany, two countries not normally noted for their neoliberalism in the 1970s. Foucault in fact sees the postwar Federal Republic of Germany as essentially founded on neoliberalism in its German form, 'ordoliberalism'. Thatcherism, this suggests, represents a relatively laggardly adoption of neoliberalism and abandonment of Keynesianism. Indeed Foucault argues that the persistence of Keynesianism in Britain, what we deservedly know as the 'postwar consensus', was due to a bargain made with the British population by the government during wartime – fight for us and we'll look after you from cradle to grave – which was of course absent in the continental cases.

Foucault insists on the interplay of the two great governmentalities – the police state (which is the name *raison d'état* has been given by liberals) and liberalism – and argues that neither has been entirely absent from statecraft in the last two centuries. At the same time, however, he insists on the specificity of neoliberalism, which is not simply a return of nineteenth century *laissez-faire*. Quite the opposite in the German case: ordoliberalism (under the influence, Foucault indicates, of Edmund Husserl!) rejects the naturalism of the old liberalism, which insisted that the market is natural and simply must be left alone. Ordoliberals know that the market is not natural, but insist upon it all the more: they insist that the market must be the very basis of the state, rather than an area left alone by the state, the principle at the basis of our economic, social and political life. Thus, the state is needed precisely to support the market, and must intervene to help fulfil its potential. Where the old liberals were concerned with fair exchange, the neoliberals are preoccupied with the notion of competition. The society they want to create is not that of classical bourgeois values, nor even the society of consumption, but a society based on enterprise. The ordoliberals wanted government policy to encourage the maximum proliferation of individual enterprises, a policy that Foucault astutely observes can only lead to regulation and the growth of judicial power to manage the increasing competition.

Foucault devoted four of the year's twelve lectures to ordoliberalism, followed by a lecture on the subsequent and related coming to dominance of neoliberalism in France. In these lectures a thoroughly unfamiliar picture of neoliberalism emerges. The

neoliberalism we are used to is not this continental European variant, but rather what Foucault goes on to describe as Austrian-inspired American neoliberalism, to which he devotes only the two lectures after his lecture on France. Here it's clear we are dealing with a different beast, an ideology not of the state administrators as in France and Germany, but of anti-state opposition. Rather than promising to use statecraft to support the fragile market mechanism, the American neoliberals apply the market as a grid of intelligibility for all human affairs, including politics. As has been said, they are indeed market fundamentalists.

What does it mean that Foucault spends so much time on the Germans and French rather than the Americans? Well, it makes sense given that he was a French intellectual writing before Reagan and Thatcher came to power. But what does this leave us with today? Lectures about neoliberalism would seem utterly timely. After a period in which much of the Left identified its enemy as 'globalization', it seems the Left has come to name its contemporary enemy precisely as neoliberalism. Yet, this refers to the American variant that has swept the world like a virus, as Samir Amin has it, in the decades since Foucault gave these lectures. Moreover, as Francesco Guala has noted in his review of Foucault's lectures in *Economics and Philosophy*, Foucault fails to distinguish strongly enough between the German and American neoliberalisms, thus potentially leaving readers confused about the nature of the latter. In particular, there seems to be an implication that ordoliberalism is the Ur-neoliberalism, although Foucault does not say as much, and indeed it is not so. Guala pointedly remarks on the unobjectionable nature of Foucault's treatment of the economic texts he surveys, but Foucault's selection is idiosyncratic, where it may be taken as definitive.

Here I think it may be fortunate that the lectures are appearing only now, in 2008. Had they appeared at a time when neoliberalism was less discussed, some may wrongly have taken Foucault's as a definitive account of the phenomenon. Today, however, there can be few indeed who will come to the lectures without some preconceptions concerning neoliberalism. What the lectures will then provide for most readers is a kind of corrective account of neoliberalism, focusing on figures, elements and connections in its history that are missing from popular accounts. We are presented here with a genealogical analysis of neoliberalism that differs from any of the other very important accounts, such as those of Axel Honneth and David Harvey, and raises important questions about the historical assumptions implicit in those accounts.

Left-wing readers may find it relatively difficult to handle the lack of normative judgements that is the hallmark of Foucault's research – his lack of condemnation has been taken to imply approval here, but it should not. The lectures are, in many ways, in fact intended as a confrontation with left-wing thought, including at a methodological level. The entire methodology set out at the beginning is explicitly a corrective to a certain view of the state, namely (although Foucault doesn't name it) that of structuralist Marxism, particularly of Foucault's old mentor Louis Althusser and of Nicos Poulantzas – that is, to state-centred views of the political and ideological that in turn refer back automatically to relations of production in explaining the form of the state. Foucault extends Althusser's thesis of the relative autonomy of the ideological to the point where the ideological is no longer in a superstructural relation to anything, and hence no longer properly ideological at all, but rather simply knowledge. At the same time, he builds on Althusser in attacking dialectical reason in favour of his own 'strategic' approach (where dialectics sees the unity of opposites, he sees multiple tendencies, which occasionally cooperate while remaining distinct).

Some of these methodological reflections achieve a clarity found nowhere else in his work, making them essential reading for Foucault scholars, as well of particular use in clarifying Foucault's divergences from Marxism. For me, the greatest challenge was Foucault's assertion that socialism has not discovered a distinctive governmentality. Thus, Foucault argues, socialists in power are obliged to utilize the governmentalities of

the police state and of liberalism – the former obviously characterizing one-party state socialism, and the latter social-democratic governments. Foucault argues that the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands was unable to take power post-World War II precisely until it had adopted neoliberalism. Clearly, it is imperative for socialists to be able to answer this criticism, either by explaining how their adoption of these governmentalities does not undermine their mission or by articulating a model of a properly proletarian governmentality.

While Foucault is directly critical of Marxism/socialism here, there is another related critical target that is in the background throughout the lectures, namely the fashionable argument of the 1970s that West Germany was essentially in continuity with the Nazi state. This question had come to have personal significance for Foucault in that his disagreement with the analysis of West Germany as fascist had been the occasion of his break with Gilles Deleuze, who up until that time had been a close friend, as is noted at one point in the meticulous editorial endnotes in this volume. The Federal Republic of Germany, Foucault argues, is founded on a reaction precisely against Nazism, in a unique attempt in world history to construct a society based around the market. Foucault's argument interestingly inverts the usual perception of the relation of fascism and liberalism, casting totalitarianism as an effort at eliding the state and the people, while ordoliberalism is in favour of the state as such.

This observation is part of a general critique of what Foucault mostly refers to as 'state phobia', which



consists in an aversion to the state that takes the form of an ‘inflationary’ claim that state power is always expansive, such that all forms of state tend towards fascism, including liberal states. This clearly describes the position of Deleuze, particularly via Foucault’s linkage of state phobia to paranoia (although Foucault does not say to paranoid schizophrenia), while Foucault’s caricature of the ‘inflationary’ state-phobic political analysis that identifies banal forms of state power with the concentration camp foreshadows Agamben’s work. Foucault is not, however, seeking to exculpate neoliberalism with this logic. Indeed, if anything, neoliberalism stands condemned here as the original inflationary state-phobic discourse. For the ordoliberalists, at any rate, Nazism is the inevitable alternative to a market-based society. The fascinating

paradoxical implication is, then, that the state phobia of Deleuze shares a fundamental kinship with neoliberal governmentality.

After spending most of the lectures on detailed discussions of neoliberalism, rather than returning to biopolitics, Foucault spends the final two lectures exploring the prehistory of neoliberalism, rounding out his study with excellent discussions of Adam Smith and the origins of the notion of civil society, which for Foucault is an essential element of liberal thought, and hence of contemporary political society. This takes him on to more familiarly Foucauldian territory. Moreover, it establishes the trajectory his researches would seem to follow after this point, namely back even further in time, ultimately to the ancient world.

Mark Kelly

Einflußkritik

Lin Ma, *Heidegger on East–West Dialogue: Anticipating the Event*, Routledge, London and New York, 2008. xii + 268 pp., £50.00 hb., 978 0 415 95719 9.

In a gnomic aside on the potential generated through a confrontation between Feuerbach and Levinas, Derrida writes: ‘We are speaking of convergences, and not of influences; primarily because the latter is a notion whose philosophical meaning is not clear to us.’ ‘Influence’ is a term that requires careful watch, particularly as it operates in the vexed relation between intellectual history and philosophy. Quentin Skinner sees in the concern to identify influences a ‘scholar’s game’ that is nearly devoid of explanatory power and, although his focus is on a form of quasi-causal relation, he touches upon the essential emptiness of tracing the same words without thought for the transformations wrought upon such terms when constructed into systems. Talk of ‘resonances’ or ‘connections’ might merely represent the shallow ‘reminiscences’ of a reader who has read more than one book.

In the context of Heidegger Studies, there has in recent years been increasing attention to the influence of Asian thought on the author of *Being and Time*. The claims emanating from these studies were the subject of Stella Sandford’s article in *Radical Philosophy* 120 (July/August 2003). Crucial here is the status of Reinhard May’s *Ex Oriente Lux* (1989), which is firmly positioned in the German *Einfluß* tradition criticized by Skinner. The claims presented there push the subtle code of unacknowledged influ-

ence, manifested in the decision to title the English version of May’s book *Heidegger’s Hidden Sources*, whose translator, Graham Parkes, suggests interpreting the resonances and congruencies as a model for productive engagement with Eastern thought and the necessity for transcultural dialogue. Sandford rightly criticized the weak comparative analysis that paid no attention to how the comments on Eastern ‘philosophy’ should be understood within a thinking which held an explicit investment in Europe and more specifically the German–Greek axis. The study of influence is bankrupt without a more robust emplacement within the facticity of Heidegger’s output.

Lin Ma’s book maintains a similarly sceptical interpretation. Its virtue lies in extending Sandford’s comments through thorough philological method – chasing down all references to ‘the East’, Eastern philosophy and citations of ancient Asian writings. He even locates previously undocumented references to the *Daodejing* in Heidegger’s correspondence. In addition, *Heidegger on East–West Dialogue* positions these references within the context in which they occur and within the broader claims of Heidegger’s writing after *Being and Time*. From this approach, three key claims are demonstrated.

First, all the references to Asian thought occur within a specific conceptual constellation: Heidegger’s

notion of the increasing enframing (*Gestell*) of contemporary life exemplified in an age dominated by consumption and world wars. Analysed into five components, the *Gestell* as an enclosure of beings and a forgetting of Being is marked by: the mathematical science of nature; machine technology; the loss of the gods; universal cultural formations; and the collapse of art into subjective aesthetic experience. It is an inauthentic, hypostatized and bankrupt metaphysics that is instantiated as a global ontic problem.

To be distinguished from 'positive' references to Asia are those that take the following two forms. One, the global inevitability of encounter with Asia at a time when Europe is weakened post-World War II and forgetful of its own cultural inheritance. In 1951, *Was heisst Denken?* worries that Europe may become the 'plaything of the immense, native strength of eastern peoples'. A form of thinking is to be developed which can shield Europe from the power of the Asiatic and, simultaneously, overcome the 'rootlessness of Europe'. This *Kehre*, 'turn', involves as cultural prescription a creative confrontation with its own history: a *Destruktion* of metaphysics and a return to the Greeks for what is currently unthought but which lies at the beginning of Western historicity. Two, Greece originated in separation from the 'Asiatic'. This differentiation involved breaking with a mythic understanding of Fate as an 'abstract, blind, unintelligible power' and introducing a destinal conception of time and history. Bound up with this notion of time and history is the philosophical separation of world-view or outlook from concern for truth and its conditions of possibility (both still unhelpfully named as 'philosophy'). That is, Heidegger repeats the general understanding of 'Asian time' as distinct in that it is an agglomeration of unremarkable passages through the world, as opposed to the Greek event, that must be understood as an event which transforms the sources and milieu in which it occurred; this is the meaning of the *ursprünglich* as transformation of the 'wisdom' gleaned from other sources by the Greeks. Far from being a gesture of syncretism or synthesis, for Heidegger, what we understand as philosophy is launched here in a qualitative leap. Such attention is already a reappropriation of Greece from the perspective of the Enlightenment desire for reasoned truth. The exclusionary, retrospective gesture is the archetypical gesture of canon-formation. The 'return' is not historiography's form of empathetic projection made possible by linguistic connection.

All these features are present in the following extract from 1953's 'Science and Reflection':

Whoever today dares ... to respond to the profundity of the world shock that we experience every hour, must not only pay heed to the fact that our present-day world is completely dominated by the desire to know of modern science; he must also consider also, and above else, that every reflection upon that which now is can take its rise and thrive only if, through a dialogue with the Greek thinkers and their language, it strikes root into the ground of our historical existence. That dialogue still awaits its beginning. It is scarcely prepared for at all, and yet it itself remains for us the precondition of the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world.

This leads to Lin Ma's second main point: that Heidegger does not believe transcultural dialogue is yet possible. In a letter to Jaspers from 1949, Heidegger writes that the West is 'not yet strong enough' to risk emerging from its introspection and monologue. In its current condition, it is liable to be seduced by a shallow 'take-up' of Eastern thought, whose possibilities for transformation are rejected in the *Der Spiegel* interview of 1966. As things stood, Heidegger was troubled by the persistent translation of key texts through eighteenth- and nineteenth-century images and vocabulary (viz. 'mind', 'body', 'spirit', 'enlightenment', etc.). The dominant idea of the East is internal to Western self-understanding – only a critical, dialectical development is appropriate to overcoming the reception of East thought through Western categories (see his correspondence to Helmuth Hecker).

From these insights, Lin Ma constructs his third argument. Heidegger does not base any admiration for Asian thinking in the latter's lack of Western metaphysical concepts. Rather, it is in the consideration of ontological difference, the secret of Western thinking, covered over by metaphysics and its false opposition with empiricism, that can effect change (albeit over the course of a possible 300 years). The earlier explicit use of phenomenology was intended to recover 'what shows itself in the beginning of Greek philosophy': the difference between beings and Being. *Heidegger on East–West Dialogue* underscores the repeated question as to whether Buddhist writing, Sanskrit scriptures or the *Daodejing* operate with this fundamental distinction: is an insight into ontological difference articulated?

Heidegger's tentative pursuit of the possibility of dialogue is prompted by the well-documented, but still dramatic, interest in his work from Japan (first essay in Japanese in 1924; first monograph on him in 1933; first translation of *Being and Time* in 1939). It is hard to imagine the positive, and immediate, reception of 'What is Metaphysics?' there not motivating certain

ideas of contact with a different tradition. His attempts in 1946 to prepare a German translation of the *Dao-dejing* with the help of Paul Shih-Yi Hsiao, a Christian theologian, were however curtailed. Heidegger expressed his limitations – such an ambitious project would involve the development of language skills felt to be beyond him at that stage and possibly deformed by his forcing intention.

In the 'Dialogue on Language', a dialogue dramatized between Heidegger himself and a 'Japanese', he offers the thought that the languages are so different as to create different 'houses' between which 'a dialogue remains nearly impossible'. (The reticence here finds one exception in his enthusiasm for Japanese art which represents a stage at which Western thinking 'cannot arrive'.) Unlike Levinas, this difficulty faced by dialogue is not owing to the superiority of Western insight. The possibility is left open that non-Western culture, 'Russian' and 'Asian', might return to *their own* points of origination with the possibility that this might enable 'a free relation with technology'. In his 1959 'Elucidations on Hölderlin', he makes reference to 'the few other great beginnings'. It is not that the history of Being is Western, but that the Greeks 'broke through' to a new possibility; that there are other fruitful possibilities is not a question Heidegger himself feels able to answer; the possibility of a robust pluralism is left open. Note, Heidegger does not make Husserl's claim that the Greeks were the *first* to break through to the *essence* of humanity – *entelechy*.

It is somewhat disappointing that, having repositioned the question of influence, in its treatment of Heidegger's 'Eurocentrism' *Heidegger on East-West Dialogue* sanctions the neglect of a more fundamental problem. In seeking to combat the tendencies of 'Einfluß-Studien', whilst being adequate to 'Heidegger studies', the book suffers 'professional deformation' in that it is not able to devote space either to the *philosophical status* of Heidegger's writing after *Being and Time*, where all these references occur, or to the broader philosophical problem at issue: the status of philosophy within a world-historical perspective.

Even if the later Heidegger, in writing for transformation, may appear to have given up on the traditional philosophical problems of grounding, a certain reliance on phenomenological and hermeneutical protocols underpins the portentous creation of figures to direct thinking. The place of interpretation in *Being and Time* already pointed to a deep schism with the description and scientific aspiration of *Logical Investigations*. It is this tendency that is exacerbated in the later writing as interpretation moves towards poetics, but

the inheritance of tradition, along with the central role of language in expression and adequate, intuitive fulfilment, determines the commitment to Europe and Germany. Heidegger must start from 'here', the factic base, and work outwards.

Is philosophy one cultural formation and practice among others or do any of its products have universal validity? The problem is particularly acute for post-Husserlian phenomenology, formed in opposition to psychologism, yet reliant on the description of the reduction performed by the individual. The transcendental status of *evidential* descriptions depends on overcoming particularity through a peculiar form of *repetition*. (Hence the place of 'phenomenological exercises' in Husserl's teaching.) As such, the one performing the reduction is required to establish that 'I myself am the primal norm constitutionally for all other men' (*wie ich selbst konstitutiv für alle Menschen*) (*Cartesian Meditations*). Universality cannot be assumed (this would be merely an alternative form of Eurocentrism): for the description of Dasein's existential structures may only describe a circumscribed cultural group. The structures interpreted in Division Two of *Being and Time* are particularly at issue here since historicity and temporality, different experiences and productions of time, are held to be the decisive differences.

The possibility of linguistic and ethnocentrism has to be addressed in phenomenology as methodological necessity if its insights are to be extended. The problem of universality is the theme of *Origin of Geometry*, where the concern, missed egregiously by Derrida, is to demonstrate the universality of geometry as the fundamental, universal *Einfühlung* (not to be translated as 'empathy' or 'sympathy'). The objectivity of geometry lies not in ideality per se but in its status as universal, an ideality common to all humanity. *Being and Time*'s undermining of Husserlian *Evidenz* is at the heart of the subsequent charge and counter-charge of anthropology and psychologism.

Subsequent to Lin Ma's book, it is to be hoped that this particular sideline of research comes to a stop and that attention is paid instead to the broader issues outlined above. A certain conception of philosophy may be coming to a close, but the virtue of the critical and idealist traditions, of which phenomenology is a representative, lies in the opposition to empiricism and theology, both of which appear to be disguising themselves as philosophy today, though without troubling themselves with the responsibility of warranted assertibility or *Selbstbesinnung*.

Andrew McGettigan

Singularization (again)

Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2008. 358 pp., £19.95 hb., 978 0 674 02837 1.

Given that the practice of translation provides the context for many of the essays in this collection – which, as the author emphasizes, ‘is written throughout at the interface of German and English’ – the nuances of its title’s English rendering of a German suffix can be regarded as more than fortuitous. The ‘-abilities’ of the title indicates not only Walter Benjamin’s practice of adding the suffix *-barkeit* (-ability) to important verbs (a form of conceptualization which Weber associates with a specific process of singularization), but also the singularity of Benjamin’s thought in its ability to anticipate and problematize a number of contemporary theoretical concerns.

These claims are made in the essays collected in the first part of the book, where Weber argues that the particular form that concepts take in Benjamin’s writing reflects a specific kind of naming which, in opposition to the coining of new terminology, reinscribes established terms in such a way that they are implicated in a virtual sequence that is both unpredictable and incomplete. The most famous of these is the concept of reproducibility (*Reproduzierbarkeit*) in the context of works of art, although examples are abundant throughout Benjamin’s writings: communicability, criticizability, translatability, knowability, legibility. Weber describes this process as a nominalization of verbs that involves a transformation of the potentiality adhering to such concepts. In this way, the concept of reproducibility refers not to its actual realization in a future accomplishment – a becoming, in the sense of a coming to *be* – but to the virtualization of a structural possibility which entails the radical alteration of that which it names. Associating this form with the role assigned to concepts in Benjamin’s ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’ to the *Trauerspiel* study, Weber argues that the virtual rearrangement of phenomena by concepts simultaneously involves their singularization and (therefore) their salvation; a salvation that does not aim at similarity – either reiterating identity or dissolving into generality – but incorporates difference by driving phenomena to their extremities, to the very point at which they become something else.

Weber’s reflections on the medium in which such singularization takes place allows him to clarify the philosophical intentions of Benjamin’s project. This is particularly evident in the essay ‘Ability and Style’

– originally published as an entry in Oxford’s *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, and in many ways the kernel of this collection – where the Kantian context of Benjamin’s version of dialectics comes to the fore, with its focus on the possibility of a non-synthetic or disjunctive relation between concepts. Here, the contemporary singularization of Benjamin’s thought is explicated as the task of rethinking ‘identity’ outside of the parameters of Hegelian dialectics, with its ultimate exclusion of difference. Whilst for Weber this indicates some affinities with the Derridean practice of deconstruction, his accumulated references to disjunctive synthesis, virtuality, and a repetition that incorporates difference also indicate an anticipation of what Andrew Benjamin has elsewhere called the same ‘generalizable move’ performed today in the name of Deleuze. The inclusion of Weber’s essay on ‘Impart-ability’ therefore provides an opening gesture in the no-doubt-coming academic encounter between Benjamin and Deleuze. It is valuable for specifying the differences that separate their thought, but in doing so it immures Benjamin’s work from any transformation that the staging of such an experiment might promise.

Weber’s motivations for this can be discerned in his own ‘style’. For whilst his practice of hyphenating verbs (in-communicability, trans-lation, ex-cite, extension, di-stance, per-haps...) expresses a Derridean indebtedness, it also serves to emphasize a process of spatialization – into, across, out of, towards and through – which illustrates one of Weber’s underlying concerns here, as in his writings on media. This is to challenge a conception of globalization as a global integration that eliminates local differentiation: ‘an all-encompassing immanence in which singular differences are absorbed into a generalized whole’. Weber’s splitting of words is therefore intended to emphasize spatial movement, but it also indicates the uniqueness of that which doesn’t simply *remain*, but becomes something other in the process – a world of ‘differentiation’ that can only ever produce disintegration, never ‘global integration’.

Weber’s opposition to Deleuze is therefore directed at the way in which Deleuze’s actualization of the virtual is supposedly conceived, ‘in however differential, singular, and heterogeneous a way, as the *global and integrative resolution* of problems’. In expanding on this, the real target of Weber’s objection becomes

clearer. However categorically Deleuze would have rejected such a term, he argues, such a concept of the virtual is amenable to a project of ‘humanization’ of the kind performed in Pierre Lévy’s *Sur les chemins du virtuel*. The strong anti-humanism of Weber’s Lacanian and Derridean positioning of Benjamin’s singularity always places him on the alert for onto-theological appeals to a unity and wholeness which smuggle in notions of identity and self-presence. It is the vitalist terminology of Deleuze’s writings that cause him to blanch here, and it is symptomatic of Weber’s privileging of language that such references to nature are too quickly assimilated to a supposed position of dependence on a whole that betrays a residual monotheistic privileging of the human subject.

However, this is to ignore the extent to which there is a concept of nature operating within Benjamin’s work that has already been distanced from such conventional associations – no less than in Deleuze’s philosophy – through its dialectical entanglement with a radicalized concept of history. Such a concept (which can be traced through Benjamin’s writing on Kafka, Kraus and back to Goethe) extends to a preoccupation with the ‘creaturely’, which – whilst opposed to the self-serving sterility of bourgeois humanism – is not identical with anti-humanism as such. ‘Humanity as an individual is both the consummation and the annihilation of bodily life’, Benjamin claims in his early writing, but this individuality pertains not to single embodied humans but to the ‘totality of all its living members’, including to some extent nature and tech-

nology. It is not inevitable that the totality associated with such collectivity be merely the universalized unity of the individual – as Weber has previously accused Fredric Jameson’s essay ‘Capitalizing History’ – just as the historical process it describes is not a teleological one. The movement of annihilation and fulfilment which Benjamin expresses here – elsewhere characterized as a messianic idea of nature – undermines any such assumptions, retaining as it does the conceptual form of the disintegrating body, with its Goethean emphasis on the torso.

What arises from Benjamin’s writings, then, is a *different conception of the subject*, which has to be understood within the political context of his work. This is also true of Benjamin’s ‘-abilities’ themselves, as a practice of conceptualization constructed with the potential or ability to resist integration into and assimilation by a specific status quo. Weber’s focus on presentational form acknowledges the continuity of a philosophical task that spans writings typically divided into early and later periods by Benjamin’s turn to Marxism in the mid-1920s. What it tends to obscure is the consistent political backdrop for such a mode of philosophizing, despite the variances in the proposed response.

For Weber, the generalized politics of deconstruction seem to provide enough historical leverage for such consideration, particularly if – as he has previously suggested – Marxism may emerge as the most significant counter-image to US neoliberalism, precisely because it privileges conflict as the medium



of historical activity. But for Benjamin, even prior to the dialectical materialist context of his later works, such a mode of philosophizing is not pursued as an end in itself, but in opposition to the particular historical circumstances of capitalist modernity. His thought emerges out of and takes a stance towards this specific socio-economic context, whether it be circumscribed from the perspective of pedagogical reform, anarchistic nihilism or materialist communism. The conceptual form that his thought takes opposes and resists the movement of subsumption that modernity calls 'progress', and to remove it from this context is to dehistoricize a specific politics of time.

Within the English reception of Benjamin's work, the importance of this study lies in the attention it devotes to, and the skill with which it illuminates, the

presentational form of Benjamin's philosophy. This reinvigorates it beyond the cramped confines of older debates about Benjamin's disciplinarity or more recent interest in his intellectual lineage (although Weber provides persuasive answers for both). Weber is exemplary when this presentational form is the specific concern of both his and Benjamin's attention, most notably where their shared subject is translatability, allowing him to clarify through demonstration both Benjamin's theory of translation and the particular problematic of ignoring it with respect to translating Benjamin's own work. Elsewhere though, too many of these essays rehearse the generality of this form across its various contexts, without thereby producing any distinctive contemporary content, not least of a political kind.

Matthew Charles

Operative history

Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture within and against Capitalism*, Buell Center/FORuM Project and Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2008. 88 pp., £14.99 hb., 978 1 568 98794 1.

Where contemporary architecture claims its autonomy from criticality, the Italian architecture of the 1960s and 1970s considered in Pier Vittorio Aureli's new book, that of Aldo Rossi and Archizoom, sought its autonomy, from neo-capitalism and its technologies, through criticality. In a context where the territory of the city was undergoing a process of extension into a potentially limitless form of urbanism, this architecture pitched itself against the political, economic and cultural forces driving its expansion. At the same time, figures within Operaism, such as Raniero Panzieri and Mario Tronti, attempted to forge a similarly autonomous politics in opposition to the analogous expansion of a proletarianized labour model beyond the workplace and into culture in general – the so-called 'social factory'.

Aureli's purpose here is to propose these two tendencies as joined within a coherent 'project of autonomy' that offers a salutary lesson for theory in contemporary architecture and politics, engaged, as both these tendencies are, in late capitalism's own conditions of extension through networked forms of urbanism and social experience. But Aureli's agenda is also corrective. Where Manfredo Tafuri is conventionally taken as *the* figure of critical discourse in the period under discussion, he is repositioned here in allegiance with the economic and territorial expansion of corporate

urbanism, and hence his criticism problematized as failing to grasp the significance of architectural form as a weapon against the practice of large-scale urban planning. Equally challenging is the author's claim that Autonomia, following in the wake of Operaism, represented the transition from a genuinely autonomist politics to one reconciled with late capitalist modes of social formation: 'If outside of Italy', he writes, 'the reference to "autonomia" evokes cutting-edge politics, inside it is still associated with the political disarming of the Left and the general depoliticization of post-modern society.'

Aureli opens his argument against Autonomia with an attack on the 'clever' vulgarization of autonomist politics practised by Hardt and Negri in the 'blockbuster' that is their *Empire*, and on its 'disarming' effects. Hardt and Negri's theorizing of 'Empire' and the 'multitude' represents nothing less, claims the author, than a complete accommodation with capital: a 'conformism with the "prevailing trends" of post-modern politics, from "pluralism" and "multiplicity" to the end of the working class'. This conformism, it is argued, is rooted in the origins of Autonomia's rejection of Operaism's workerist and communist politics as a 'grand narrative' which had become utterly unpalatable to postmodern political sensibilities by the 1980s. Autonomia are thus placed squarely and

unproblematically within this postmodern camp at the outset of this essay.

The Project of Autonomy does include passages where some of Hardt and Negri's basic premisses in *Empire* are incisively questioned. If, for instance, their political subject had evolved from the industrial worker to the social worker, and from there to the multitude, through the determining forces of capital's changing formations, then where might we locate the impetus for it to challenge the very processes that have shaped it as such? 'What kind of *telos*', asks Aureli, 'constituted the autonomy of this subject from the logic of power that subjugated it?' Elsewhere, and more often, however, *Autonomia* is straightforwardly dismissed through a Manichaean schema that brackets every position opposing Tronti's strategy of operating within the Communist Party as 'liberal' or 'postmodern'. The Marxist–Leninist position adopted by the editors of *Quaderni rossi* (Red notebooks, 1961–65), around which Operaism was formed, for example, is defended as 'theoretically daring' at a time when others were 'abandoning communism in the name of the liberties offered by liberalism'. Whilst Aureli briefly acknowledges the alternatives to Leninism explored by Cornelius Castoriadis and *Socialisme ou barbarie*, the implication is that all those forms of communism – council, left or libertarian – explored outside of the Leninist model, in the context of Hungary '56, and then May '68, were ultimately moves towards liberalism and 'postmodern politics': communists 'like' Negri and Guattari were not really communists at all, it seems.

Aureli is also able to divide neatly Operaism from *Autonomia* only by framing the latter as a homogenous movement represented solely through the thought of Negri. Whereas the differences between Panzieri and Tronti are accounted for within the former, similar tensions in the latter, between Negri's optimism and the more sober perspectives of Paolo Virno, for instance, are entirely absent. The division between the two movements also has the effect of obscuring the real continuities that can be found between them in less partisan accounts such as Steve Wright's *Storming Heaven* (2002), or Nick Thoburn's *Deleuze, Marx and Politics* (2005). One unfortunate effect of this forced division is to produce unnecessary, and unacknowledged, contradictions in Aureli's thesis. 'Autonomists', he writes, 'still depended on the logic of capitalism, which in its deepest essence is the stimulus for the unlimited desire of production supported by the mastery of technological development as a way to create and re-create the conditions of its own reproduction. Autonomy was thus de facto transformed by the autonomists into its

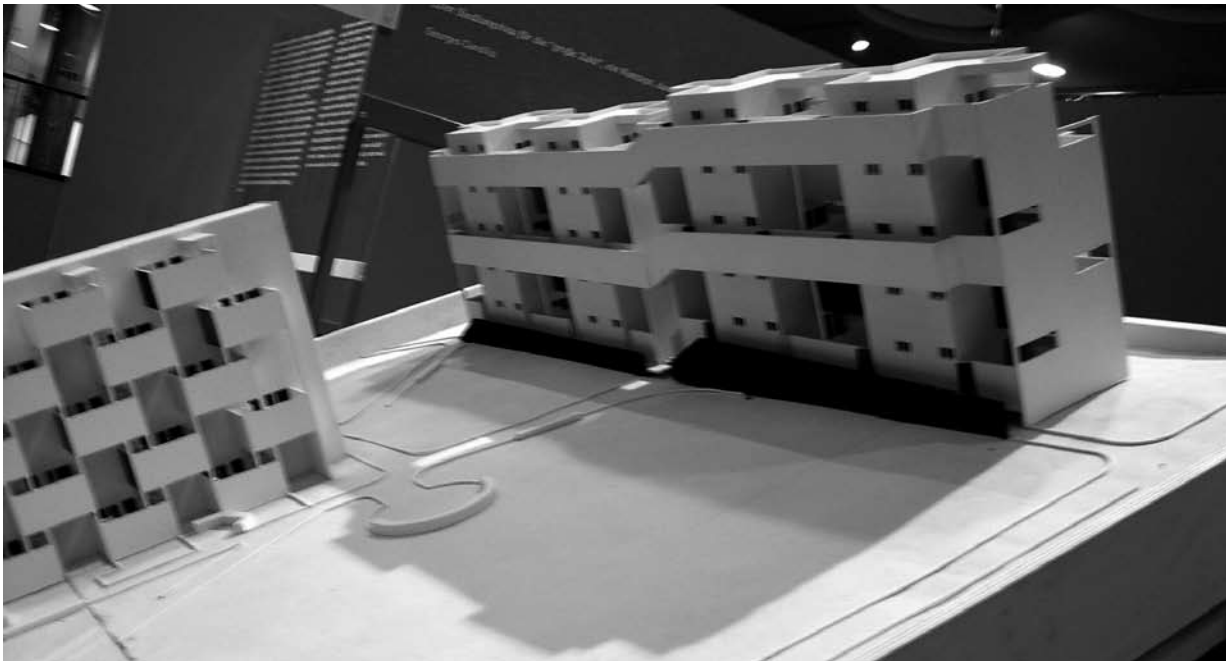
opposite: heteronomy'. Yet, elsewhere, we find given as an example of political autonomy Tronti's strategy, outlined in his *Operai e capitale* (1971), whereby workers make demands of their bosses which are free from any ideological 'content' and stated solely in the economic terms of more money for less work so as to 'make the brain of the system mad'. Where *Autonomia* attempts to drive the 'logic of capitalism' towards its own dissolution through the production of desire, then, it becomes heteronymous, but where Operaism pushes the logic of purely economic valuation it achieves autonomy. The more pressing question in all of this, of what or who produces the so-called 'logic of capitalism', and how, or even if, it might somehow be driven to produce something beyond itself, as it operates now, is obscured through Aureli's apparently neat separation of the 'good' Operaism from the 'bad' *Autonomia*.

Where the first half of *The Project of Autonomy* is principally concerned with the political dimensions of its subject, the second is focused on the relations between architecture, urbanism and theory. Aureli observes the correlation between the processes of economic and social restructuring in Italy to which Operaism responded and the impact of these upon architectural practice and theory in the same period.

In the context of postwar Italian architecture the more radical elements of modernism had been tamed and integrated within a neo-capitalist programme of corporate social progress exemplified by firms such as Olivetti. Aureli convincingly identifies this 'nexus of liberalism, democracy, and modernism', associated with figures such as Bruno Zevi and Ernesto Rogers, as a force reshaping the city in its megastructural projects, and extending its reach into a nascent form of networked urbanism that would ultimately dissolve the boundaries between the town and the city. Countering this annexation of architecture to corporate urban restructuring the author identifies the figures of Tafuri, Rossi and Andrea Branzi.

Of the three, it is Tafuri who is most problematic for Aureli. In particular, Tafuri's allegiance to the 'city-territory' model and his exploration of the radical potential in the extension of urbanism renders him, for the author, not the radical Marxist with which are familiar, but a figure of the 'Centre Left':

Viewed within the political framework of the increasing expansion of capitalism to the entire social spectrum, this category of the city-territory – presented by many leftist planners and architects (including Tafuri and Piccinato) as the ultimate destiny of urban evolution – was not politically neutral. Underlying it was an affirmation of the mutated



modes of production created by the transition from a purely competitive to a more organized ... form of capitalism.

Tafuri's implicit 'affirmation' of neo-capitalism's mode of production is contrasted with Rossi's contestation of urban expansion through resistant architectural form and his theory of the 'locus'. In his *Architecture of the City* (1966), Rossi had argued for the autonomy of architectural form from the heteronymous determinants of technology and urban planning. In Aureli's account of Rossi, architectural form stands as a material residue attesting to the historically contested and contradictory nature of the city: 'a concrete geography of places irreducible to the totality and continuity of urbanization'. In contrast, Tafuri was later to critique the purely symbolic mobilization of architectural form as an ineffectual form of urban politics in his account of 'Red Vienna' and its monumental *mise-en-scène* of socialist housing. In response, and joining Rossi's architectural autonomy to its political formulation, Tronti had replied that Tafuri's narrow perspective, in which only the large-scale planning of the city *tout court* could achieve its radical transformation, had missed the symbolic power of the urban fragment to suggest how the socialist city could be built 'within but against the forms of the bourgeois city'. Aureli's purpose in recounting these debates is to side with Rossi and Tronti to suggest that the power of architecture, in the face of the expansive, fluid and networked forms of capitalist urbanization, remains in its resistant autonomy from these processes; of its situation 'within and against' them.

The second example of architectural autonomy discussed here, that of Andrea Branzi and Archizoom,

similarly contests the processes of limitless urban expansion, though its means are an exact inversion of those employed by Rossi. Rather than propose form as a means of architectural autonomy, they abandoned it, and architecture per se, in favour of a purely theoretical strategy. In their diagrammatic representations the city is reduced to a pure grid of infrastructural relations in an attempt to drive this capitalist logic to the point of its logical absurdity: to 'exasperate' the system, to 'make the brain of the system mad'. Though using a diametrically opposed strategy to that of Rossi, Archizoom join him in achieving, according to Aureli, an autonomy that works from 'within and against'.

Ultimately, however, Aureli's insistence upon this 'within and against' model of autonomy, and the castigation of all other modes of engaging with the very real conditions in which capital continues its urban, social and cultural expansion into ever more extended territories, as by definition apolitical, liberal or post-modern, disarms the possibility of finding strategies which are up to the challenge of these conditions as they exist today. It is not enough to recount a certain history of approved architectural and political autonomies, and to point to their superiority over the alternatives in the black-and-white terms of the discourse presented here. To do so obscures the potential to consider the very real insights of the various and numerous thinkers of *Autonomia*, as well as *Operismo*, alongside others, as well as the possibility of discovering and inventing new modes of engaging with the conditions, both of architecture and politics, that Aureli laments here.

Douglas Spencer

Zoped

Mastaneh Shah-Shuja, *Zones of Proletarian Development*, Openmute, London, 2008. 354 pp., £15.00 pb., 978 1 906 49606 7.

A common misconception concerning academic work in the old Soviet Union is that it was always held hostage to Stalinism. While this might have been the case with much of the work, it is certainly not the complete story. For it is also the case that a number of intellectual figures were working in the Soviet Union who, in their own ways, developed and applied a sophisticated analysis of Marxism to different areas of social life. One need only think of the theory of aesthetics, language and literature of the Bakhtin Circle, the philosophy of Ilyenkov, the social psychology of Vygotsky, and the legal theory of Pashukanis.

It is to Mastaneh Shah-Shuja's credit in *Zones of Proletarian Development* that she recognizes the important contribution of some of these Soviet thinkers in understanding the link between theory and practice. In particular she focuses on the work of the Bakhtin Circle, Vygotsky, Ilyenkov, and Leontiev in order to examine various social struggles against dominant relationships of capitalist power. But Shah-Shuja also uses the ideas of this set of thinkers in combination with more recent theorists. One advantage of doing so is that the theorists discussed are not simply celebrated and then applied to make sense of contemporary struggles, but, rather, their respective ideas and insights are critically developed and extended. To help her in this line of thinking, Shah-Shuja organizes the various theoretical discourses discussed under three broad strands: Vygotskian psychology, Bakhtinian psychology and Activity Theory.

The book is divided into five chapters. The Introduction maps out what Shah-Shuja argues are the three registers of contemporary global capitalism. First, there is the 'intensive' register, which refers to the modes of surplus extraction from labour. According to Shah-Shuja, Marx's notion of the formal exploitation of labour, in which capital exploits labour in any form it finds, and the real exploitation of labour, in which capital exploits *wage*-labour through advanced industrial technology, has been complemented in recent years by two further modes of surplus extraction. 'Pre-formal' surplus extraction is based on what were once seen as outdated modes of exploitation, such as slavery, child labour, forced prostitution, and so on. 'Post-real' surplus extraction is based on computing,

biotechnology and cyber-technology, resulting in the production of immaterial and hyper-material labour.

Second, there is the 'extensive' register, which refers to the specific form capitalism has taken in our present era of globalization. According to Shah-Shuja, globalization can be defined as a series of capitalist enclosures that have occurred throughout the world since the 1970s, and that have been propelled by three types of primitive accumulation. 'Classic' primitive accumulation refers to the forcible removal of peasants from their land by capital. 'Displaced' primitive accumulation refers to the playing out of 'classic' primitive accumulation in other countries. 'Primitive accumulation revisited' refers to when 'a particular enterprise or sector of the economy has to restart accumulation from scratch'. This might occur, for example, when capital faces resistance from workers in a particular locale, or when new advanced technology is introduced. Globalization, for Shah-Shuja, signals the increasing interrelatedness of these three types.

Third, there is the 'ideological' register. While Shah-Shuja acknowledges the ideological power of neoliberalism, she also integrates this with two other ideological themes that she suggests have become prevalent in the global world. What she calls liberal fascism is associated with a belief in transhistorical principles of humanistic virtuosity combined with the belief that external threats to one's liberty ensure the stability of a political order. Such ideology finds a home in Bush's neoconservative political agenda. This is combined with another ideological theme, that of 'open conspiracy'. Here, it is 'openly' acknowledged by dominant political leaders around the world that they conspire to invade sovereign countries. In the process, however, these very same leaders attempt to influence public opinion by suggesting that invasion of other sovereign territories is a righteous path to take, supported by sections of the media.

Having provided the wider context for her study, Shah-Shuja explains her epistemological standpoint (what might be termed a dialectical monism in the Marxist tradition), her methodology (working from the oppressed) and methods (ethnography, participation action research and discourse analysis). She then proceeds to look at a series of case studies where groups

have come together to resist the overlapping strands of capitalist power relations. Chapter 2 applies Vygotskian psychology to May Day activities by radicals in London between 1999 and 2003. In many respects, Vygotsky's work frames the theoretical parameters of the book as a whole, via the category of the 'zone of proximal development', or 'zoped' for short. Vygotsky originally coined the term 'zoped' to explain the distance between how a child learns through independent problem-solving and how a child learns through problem-solving by guidance or in collaboration with a teacher or with capable peers. Vygotsky favoured the latter route to learning. The zoped should thus be a reciprocal and open-ended learning relationship between a child and his/her teacher or peer. Learning is emergent from this relationship and a child develops intellectually through joint learning with others. Shah-Shuja broadens out the inter- and intra-psychological dimensions of Vygotsky's definition in order to understand London May Day activism. In this respect Shah-Shuja stresses that 'the zoped is not just a space. It is also an activity. The zoped is the creation of an environment or an engagement where emotions, philosophy and consciousness can develop.' When looked at in this way, zoped becomes a useful theoretical device to make sense of how demonstrators at the May Day events facilitated problem-solving among radical activists during the protests themselves, and consolidated existing activist knowledge about the aims and goals of this particular protest. This is a bottom-up process based on collaborative learning across a range of activists.

However, Shah-Shuja does not simply condone all types of radical learning. She is well aware that some learning by and among radical activists is often based upon coercive tactics informed by excessively vanguardist ideas. More importantly, Shah-Shuja introduces a more abstract (normative?) standpoint with which to judge collaborative learning. This revolves around her distinction between 'Zones of Proletarian Development' (ZPD) and 'Zones of Bourgeois Development' (ZBD), a distinction she adapts from Holzman and Newman's book *Lev Vygotsky: Revolutionary Scientist* (Routledge, 1993). The former, ZPD, denote those zopedes that aim 'to negate money, wage-slavery, the state and spatio-temporal abstractions (such as God and nation)'. In other words, ZPD represent collaborative learning among radical activists who are conscious of the need to negate the topsy-turvy fetishisms associated with capitalism. By contrast, ZBD are associated with the hegemony of strictly cognitive acts divorced from real-life activism and everyday

communities, preferring instead to stay within the university system.

Chapter 3 moves into an exclusively inter-psychological dimension by employing the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin to look at the dynamics of crowd behaviour. The empirical focus here is Iranian football riots. Of particular importance for Shah-Shuja is Bakhtin's notion of the 'carnavalesque'. For Bakhtin, the carnivalesque is a moment when crowds can transgress and invert acceptable and dominant codes of behaviour. There are many ways in which this can occur and typical gestures include bawdy jokes thrown in the direction of authorities, riots, grotesque bodily behaviour, popular music, and so on. The important point is that the carnivalesque represents festive oppositional acts from within popular culture towards and against figures of authority. Shah-Shuja nicely brings out this element in relation to how Iranian football crowds subvert the conservatism of the Iranian clergy's 'etiquette' with their 'mob-like' behaviour (for example, drink binges by football supporters during football marches), although, again, she does not condone football riots in themselves, but rather analyses them within the remit of ZPD.

Following on from this, Chapter 4 places the observations made so far within a wider social context via Activity Theory (AT). Emerging from the work of one of Vygotsky's colleagues, A.N. Leontiev, AT usefully relates intra- and inter-psychological relationships already discussed in previous chapters to a macro-level of collective behaviour. For example, AT is interested in how the object of activity is related to the motives, tools, division of labour, milieu and rules in generating specific outcomes. In this respect, 'activity' is different to 'action'. Whereas 'activity' is interested in the object/outcome of behaviour as this is carried out over time by a number of people learning and sharing knowledge in a specific milieu, 'actions' are relatively short-lived events carried out through clearly defined goals. By focusing on 'activity', AT highlights how long-drawn-out processes of learning enable individuals and groups to talk through, understand and overcome various contradictions within a milieu. Shah-Shuja uses AT to look at how radical social movements develop ZPD through their continuous learning activity within a wider set of circumstances. The final chapter brings the discussion to a close by looking at different types of revolutionary political organizing.

One of the overall purposes of the book, it seems to me, is to provide a link between activist writing and critical academic work. *Zones of Proletarian Development* is peppered throughout with drawings,

cartoons, (reformatted) photographs and diagrams that illustrate the arguments put forward. This lends itself to a style that breaks up the text in a manner similar to that of a newspaper or a magazine, and visually grabs the attention of the reader. For example, many of the reformatted photographs are very funny and momentarily shift attention away from ‘just reading’ the main text. Images are conjured up that relate the words on the page with the ‘real’ word. This provides an innovative way of drawing in the reader’s attention, and also gives a constant reminder of the link between theory and practice. The various drawings and other images similarly add to the clarity of the writing. Theoretical concepts, for instance, are thus clearly relayed and Shah-Shuja takes time to explain how such concepts can be put to analytical work in making sense of activist case studies. Indeed, one of the real advantages of the book is to introduce the reader to the theories of Vygotsky, Leontiev, and so on, and to develop their respective insights to a wider (non-psychological) field of study. For this reason alone, reading the book provides an intellectually stimulating experience.

Nonetheless, it would have been useful if the discussion of contemporary global capitalism in the Introduction had been more fully integrated with the later

chapters. Sometimes the level at which the various case studies are analysed is too ‘concrete’ and the various mediations of activity therein, by global capitalism and the state, are not highlighted as fully as might have been the case. Also, Shah-Shuja has a tendency to criticize occasionally other leftist groups and institutions without appropriate examples or evidence. Trade unions are dismissed as being ‘reactionary’ without saying exactly why. Indeed, this type of rhetorical strategy could in fact be turned back onto Shah-Shuja herself, especially since she utilizes what might be conceived of as some rather ‘bourgeois’ theories herself. For example, Lave and Wenger’s idea of ‘communities of practice’ is used to make sense of radical activist practices, and yet this particular idea has been applied by others in managerial contexts to foster more compliant working relations in organizations.

Overall, though, Shah-Shuja’s novel way of exploring social movements and ‘ordinary’ radical protest is convincing. Rather than merely apply the ideas of, say, Deleuze and Guattari or Hardt and Negri, as so many social movement theorists do, she demonstrates how the rich legacy from the work of some Soviet writers, in conjunction with more contemporary thinkers, can be developed to provide an innovative and valuable analysis of radical activism.

John Michael Roberts

The touch of the invisible hand

Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation*, Zone Books, New York, 2007. 386 pp., £21.95 hb., 978 1 890 95176 4.

The apparently autobiographical ‘Case of George Dedlow’ relates the story of a quadruple amputee, who, in the absence of both arms and legs, succumbs to a creeping loss of the sensation of being alive. Initially haunted by the more common sensation of phantom limbs, ghostly hands and feet living on beyond the end of his stumps, in the years that follow, these spectres fade away against the presence of a new sensation. What haunts Dedlow is no longer a surplus of unwanted feeling, but a once unimaginable lack thereof. Deprived of the habitual relations to the outside world, the former civil war soldier – later revealed to be an invention of the American neurologist Silas Weir Mitchell – experiences a dissolution of internal cohesion, which drives him to conclude that ‘a man is not his brain, or any one part of it, but all

of his economy, and that to lose any part of it must lessen this sense of his own existence.’ The story ends on an insubstantial promise of recovery. Attending a séance, Dedlow is briefly reunited with his legs by a psychic and manages to stumble across the room before his fantastically restored equilibrium gives way to an exorcistic return of reality.

Weir Mitchell’s use of the term ‘economy’ recalls what the stoic Chrysippus called *oikeiosis*, the sense of self-relation and familiarity that, in the words of Heller-Roazen, ‘can hardly be distinguished from the subject as such, for the *oikeiosis* of the Portico signifies the process by which a living being comes to be appropriate to its own nature’. But, crucially, ‘economy’ in this classical sense has less to do with reason and the utilitarian, calculated act of (self-)appropriation than

a simple feeling of existence, which does not equate with modern conceptions of consciousness. Beginning at around the time of Aristotle, who uses the word *sunaisthesis* to describe a kind of ‘common sense’, underlying yet irreducible to the other five senses, the notion of a ‘coenaesthetic’ and sensory, as opposed to cognitive Cartesian, basis of existence thrived in both classical and Islamic traditions, but figures only fleetingly in European modernity. The rise of consciousness and the privileging of logical self-relation coincides with the decline and eclipse of an entire paradigm, which is traced quite brilliantly here as a prelude to its putative resurrection.

Heller-Roazen depicts Dedlow as something of a paroxysm, the faltering last stand of a sensation on the brink of collapse. By the time of his story’s publication in 1866, the French physician Jules Cotard had already begun to document deliria of ‘missing’ internal organs, or body parts devoid of all sensation. The nineteenth century bears witness to a normalization of the kind of deficiency of feeling dismissed by Aristotle as nothing less than inconceivable. Later reworked by Pierre Janet as symptoms of depersonalization, ‘coenaesthopathic’ disorders of the common sense spread from the margins of the madhouses to the heart of working society. In making the transition from medicine to ontology, they never quite lose their sense of pathology, however. (Dis)embodied in Walter Benjamin’s workers, who, cut off from all sense of self, experience life in terms of unrelenting and traumatic shock, alienation becomes an enduring philosopheme of industrial society.

Rather than dwell on its multiple variations, played out through Hegel to Heidegger and Levinas, Heller-Roazen looks back to Aristotle, via Agamben, to suggest the sensation of not-sensing as the starting point from which to affirm our anaesthesia. ‘Any ethics worthy of the name must confront the promise and the threat contained in the sensation that we may no longer, or may not yet, sense anything at all.’ In other words, contemporary ethics must begin with the absence of essential self-sensation and proceed to recognize the idea of an originary economy as the site of the phantasm. Only by accepting the absence of an essential natural economy, of a circuit of sensation running from self right back to self, will we be awakened from our fantastic slumbers, opened onto the non-sensation one can never quite put one’s finger on – namely the untouchable feeling of life itself. Turning full circle on the Cartesian cognitivism by which concern for this feeling was superseded, we even glimpse the possibility of a way out of dualism. Is the feeling of not feeling, which is analogous to

Descartes’s thought of not thinking, not also the point at which thought and sensation become indistinguishable, the thought of feeling and feeling *as* thought?

The answer is posited as being just out of reach, as it was by Jacques Derrida, whose *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* makes broadly the same point about the supra-haptic nature of existence and the spectrality of matter. Indeed a Derridean language haunts Heller-Roazan’s book, offered suggestively to those who know where to find it, but never brought into any explicit or direct exchange. Characteristic of the book as a whole, such suggestiveness translates for the most part into effortless elegance, but occasionally teeters on the frustrating. In the twenty-fifth and final chapter on the ‘Untouchable’, for example, one is left wanting for the labours of an engagement with Derrida that never quite takes place. Heller-Roazen himself seems almost aware of this, hinting in one of his beautifully gothic subheadings that the conclusion ‘may’ only ‘perhaps’ contain what the reader expects to find in it. But if a reluctance to engage is facilitated by subtlety, the same subtlety at least enables the author to avoid the heavier-handed conclusions upon which the less daintily angelic are naturally and problematically inclined to touch.

At the risk of negative teleology and metanarrative, the argument lends itself to a thinking of history as the gradual ungrounding of some *archo-aisthesis*, a slow reversal of the mirror stage in which the absent unity of sensation is not so much revealed as encountered through in its increasingly discernible fractures. The essential completeness and identity recalled by the spectral limb passes from reality to a neurologically enhanced fantasy concealing the defectiveness of everyday life, to the point where what remains is a promise of feeling to come, a realization that if it isn’t intrinsic, our sense of life must stem from others. Can history say more without succumbing to History? More, one suspects, could be made of (Chrysippian) economics. Published just twelve years before the ‘Case of George Dedlow’, Thoreau’s *Walden* serves similarly as a limit case. Espousing a minimalist ‘economy’ of natural living whose nostalgia is just as tangible as Dedlow’s, Thoreau’s own brand of (transcendentalist) puritanism stands in contrast to the prevailing (puritanical) belief that the invisible hand of the market substituted for the unknowable touch of the divine. The relation to *oikeiosis* is neither as intangible nor as tangential as might seem. If economics once described the home, the dwelling place of identity and sensation, did it not somehow migrate outwards, externalized in a way that also spells the

externalization of feeling, the shifting of life away from what once passed as its origin? In place of the dualist notion of metempsychosis, the transmigration of the soul, can we not now speak deconstructively of *metemoikeiosis*, the transmigration of the economic, of the *oikos*, whose outward journey vacated and, in so doing, numbed the limbs, before emptying out the very heart of our being-at-home? Reluctant to stray too far beyond the bounds of comparative literature, Heller-Roazen's brief mention of Benjamin is as close as he comes to discussing the economic and technical causes of coenaesthopathy.

Hazarding that the untouchable isn't quite so ungraspable, one less literarily inclined might step in to note the birth of economic man at broadly the time when, through the emergence of capitalism, the classical, Chryssipian economy of sensation is left behind. The tragic – or is it farcical? – repetition of this irony is that economists have now begun to speak, albeit in a very different sense from the stoic, of a living economy, of the economy as a living system – just when it seems to be dying. The latter death (if that is indeed what it is) has been caused in no small part by collective attempts to stretch ever further beyond ourselves, groping at the untouchable, in order to buy back the feeling we can apparently sense, without ever quite managing to reach it. In another confounding of teleology, will the collapse of the outer economy herald a return of some common sense? 'Only the untouchable can be touched with pleasure', Heller-Roazen elliptically states in *The Inner Touch*'s closing paragraph. If so, one dreads to think how boring life would be if self-touchy-feeling came crashing back. The pleasure is nonetheless perhaps more of a *jouissance*, fantastically tinged with what feels like hypochondria.

Gerald Moore

Bareback

Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *intimacies*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2008. 144 pp., £12.00 hb., 978 0 226 04351 7.

'Psychoanalysis is about what two people can say to each other when they agree not to have sex.' Leo Bersani quotes Adam Phillips's aphorism both with a certain relish and reverence ('acute', 'brilliantly truncated') and with a certain dissatisfaction; a dissatisfaction that reflects badly on himself. 'I confess to feeling pedantic', he tells us, after pointing out the limits of such an aphorism. Later, in Adam Phillips's

rejoinder to what turn out to be three chapters written by Bersani, he cites Bersani as claiming that 'love is always the problem', and that it always has to do with 'boundary violations', one of the central preoccupations of contemporary psychoanalysis. *intimacies* (like ee cummings the title's typographical humility draws extraordinary attention) consists of three essays by Bersani where the psychoanalytic encounter is extended outwards as a model for everyday interactions, bracketed by an introduction and a more extended commentary by Phillips, with a final set of remarks by Bersani. But it is also clearly about a certain version of psychoanalytic encounter between two eminent practitioners of psychoanalytic discourse: transference and the unconscious of the session are on display here, even as a certain theoretical production moves on apace. Love (problematic love) is at work here, as well as the boundary violations of genre and author.

Bersani's essays address what we have come to see as his terrain. There is a discussion of a Henry James story about the failure of life turning out to be the life, and of the film by Patrice Leconte, *Intimate Strangers*, where a relationship which is a mistaken 'treatment' serves just as well for the 'real thing'. There is a commentary on a French memoir and an American sociological study of 'barebacking', the practice of gay men having unprotected anal sex. And finally there is a disquisition on Platonic pedagogy, slightly bizarrely emerging from a meditation on Jeffrey Dahmer and the nature of evil. Bersani's essays are mellifluous and provocative, but also somehow deferential. Phillips's commentary is both more wide-ranging and more narrowly focused: his concern is always psychoanalysis itself, but, as with much of his work, a psychoanalysis whose parameters are less clear than they might once have been. In a way for Phillips, psychoanalysis is becoming more and more identified with writing as such, and his production of psychoanalysis is a literary endeavour. Similarly, Bersani's privileged site of development of psychoanalysis is the psychoanalytic commentary on the text. We might see this as a shift from the case study to the essay as the paradigmatic space of writing of psychoanalysis, or, echoing Laplanche, the transference of transference. *intimacies* is, then, an interesting example of the continuing reconfiguration of psychoanalysis as a discourse of culture. Or, as Phillips remarks at the opening of the book, 'psychoanalysis seems [*sic*] to be about the things that matter most to modern people, even to those people who think that psychoanalysis should matter less than it did in the past' – a locution which points to some of the problems of his view.

Indeed, what is compelling about the text is the dissonant yet transformative aspects of the transferential encounter. Increasingly for Phillips, as his star as celebrity psychoanalyst has waxed, the text is where he performs his gaze at himself. His style, with its particular contortions and repetitions, and the white space that surrounds his aphorisms, become a will to style that reveals Phillips as the ‘writer’. Bersani, by contrast, has mined a vein of self-demolition within psychoanalysis, inflected by his concern with French *écriture*. He has performed a curious askesis of dissolution that has clearly become theoretically problematic: his anxiety around the topic of ‘barebacking’ is manifest and he explores it defensively, in mediated fashion, through the texts of others reportedly engaged in it, with a clotted discussion of death, *jouissance* and community. This is a long way from the existential writing of ‘Is the Rectum a Grave?’ all those years ago.

In their mutual gaze, something interesting happens: Bersani’s conservatism and diffidence, hidden by the spectacular rigour of his destruction of self, finds a shape under the ‘holding’ gaze of his psychoanalytic (Kleinian/Winnicottian) interlocutor; and Phillips, spared the need to establish his own opinion of himself, produces some of his least mannered writing about psychoanalysis, in writing about the limits of Bersani’s models. The text is full of the transferences between one and the other and reveals both the possibilities of enlightenment within the psychoanalytic dyad and the ways in which the talking cure can become a specular *folie à deux*.

Two examples, one positive, one negative. Positively, the model of respectful education outside the bounds of parenthood that Bersani hymns in his discussion of Plato is rather gently chided for its occulting of the figure of the mother. Indeed Phillips could have been harsher, and pointed out how, at a theoretical level, Bersani tendentially privileges a masculine subject, echoing Freud’s (and how many others’?) engagement with women as addendum or supplement. But, as with all texts whose theme is narcissism, the self-reflexive desires of the subjects engaged in their production are to the fore: the erotics of this contractually non-sexual encounter between Bersani and Phillips are both pedagogic and *jouissant*. More negative is Phillips’s vicarious entry into the phantasmatic space evoked by Bersani in his discussion of ‘barebacking’ and his assertion of ownership of that space. ‘Barebacking, whatever else it is, is the attempt to recover, to re-create – but more realistically *in my view* – something of [the] process of impersonal transformation’ (my

emphasis). In fact, barebacking becomes Phillips’s central example of ‘impersonal narcissism’, which is the theoretical innovation that emerges unsystematically from the essays.

If Bersani, with his French theoretical and literary exemplars, once saw the ego as the enemy, he now sees the forces needed to dissolve the ego as excessively violent (something previously acknowledged but contained aesthetically). He has become concerned to utilize the ego somehow, in some more productive enterprise beyond its mere reinforcement. The notion of impersonal desire figures this beyond, and ‘impersonal narcissism’ names its instance. Phillips takes Bersani’s idea of barebacking as the askesis that will perform a ‘self-divesting discipline’ (seemingly in the transference erasing a set of deep anxieties) and he sees it as an extraordinarily prefigurative practice: ‘a picture of what it might be for human beings in relation to each other not to personalize the future’, an example of ‘the most inconceivable thing: to believe in the future without needing to personalize it’.

Here a complex phenomenon, already mythically reduced in Bersani’s appropriation of a pair of textual readings, is further appropriated as a univocal confirmation of Phillips’s tendentious opinions. He is enjoying the fantasy of what is even for Bersani a deeply problematic practice, while constituting it as an example of a new ethical ideal. Perhaps ethics is once more being invoked to justify the enjoyment of destruction. It is as though the move beyond the ego (which seems incapable of encountering different forms of collective subjectivity) can only arrive at the impersonal, rather than the transpersonal. Phillips finds an example within a collective experience that he only experiences at a fantasy level, suggesting (with an interpretative leap that is only slightly more excessive than Bersani’s) that there is also an element of revenge, for threatening theoretical innovation, within Phillips’s own transferential relation with Bersani.

What is certainly curious is that Bersani does not challenge Phillips’s appropriative animus. He sets up the compound text as an attempt ‘to formulate alternatives to the violent games of selfhood’, citing Phillips’s own definition of the encounter as an ‘experience of exchange of intimacy, of desire indifferent to personal identity’. Such simultaneous self-exhibition and self-abnegation is perhaps illustrative less of openness and possibility than the desire and violence evaded and yet always inscribed within the agon of the psychoanalytic encounter, and the strange exchanges of two psychoanalytic dyads.

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