REVIEWS

Of princes and principles

Graham Harman *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, Re.Press, Melbourne, 2009. 247 pp. £16.00 pb., 978 0 9805440 6 0.

Unlike those of some of his compatriots, the name of Bruno Latour is not one to have graced the pages of *Radical Philosophy* with much frequency. It is not just that he is more usually considered a sociologist than a philosopher; his research concerns and theoretical proclivities, even as a sociologist, are somewhat distanced from the critical thinking that marks many of the concerns of the journal.

Latour made his mark with his early writings on the sociology and philosophy of science – books such as *Science in Action* (1988) and *The Pasteurisation of France* (1993) are remarkable for their insights into science in the process of its making or doing (action, in any case). They are also noteworthy for the witty and slightly irreverent way in which they are written, a characteristic trait of Latour's work that has never disappeared. These early accounts – one of the ways in which scientific claims succeed in making themselves immune to controversy, the other of the ways in which Pasteur's theories about the microbial origins of disease came to dominance – were faulted by some for what was seen as a quasi-Machiavellian portrayal of the processes by which scientists recruit allies and engage in trials of strength. But although the 'black boxes' that controversial claims become as they gain acceptance are described in one place as 'machinations', these essays develop an 'associology' that makes one crucial point clear: the social is not a given but something in a ceaseless process of construction involving both human and non-human agents. Invocations of 'the social' as some homogeneous substance operating behind the backs of actors could henceforth be construed as magnificent feats of 'explaining away'. Although we perhaps benefit here a little from hindsight, it is difficult to place such books unequivocally in the 'social constructionist' camp that Science and Technology Studies in general, and Latour in particular, have been taken to task for having developed, and that has sedimented so deeply into critical sociological common sense.

It is perhaps not surprising that in a number of subsequent book-length studies – *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993)*, Aramis, or the Love of Technology* (1996), *Pandora's Hope* (1999), down to the more recent *Politics of Nature* (2004) and *Reassembling the Social* (2005) – Latour spends a considerable amount of time correcting many of the mistaken readings of the 'actor-network theory' with which his name is most closely associated. But read as philosophical texts exploring the *construction* of reality, books such as *Pandora's Hope* go some way to supporting the characterization in Graham Harman's book of Latour's work as metaphysics. Given more recent essays on William James, and on unabashed advocates of pre-critical thinking (such as Tarde and Whitehead), and exemplars of what he calls the 'second empiricism', not to mention philosophers who are all but unknown in the Anglo-American traditions (Étienne Souriau, for example, to whose small book on modes of existence Latour has devoted an essay), Latour's philosophical proclivities are becoming much more evident. *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* is, then, a very timely text.

We Have Never Been Modern, perhaps Latour's best-known work, exemplifies his largely unwavering argument about the philosophically problematic nature of modernity and the critical rationality it so frequently vaunts. The withering claim that the book develops about modernity, which sees a separation of politics and knowledge that emerges most clearly with Hobbes, translates more generally into a series of dichotomies (modernity and tradition, theory and practice, and so on) that exemplify Latour's concerns about the subject-centred thinking of the modern settlement.

We Have Never Been Modern offers the closest thing to a conspectus of Latour's work, and Harman considers it the most 'original piece of philosophy in the last twenty years'. The critical dissection it offers of the 'intellectual Munich of 1781' forms the starting point not only for *Prince of Networks* but for Harman's continuing investigations of the possibilities of an object-oriented metaphysics more generally. Both Harman and Latour share the conviction that new forms of thinking are required to overcome the capitulation to the caricatures of scientific reductionism/materialism that characterizes philosophies of access and their

acceptance of the human–world split. (They also share a refusal to take the linguistic turn.)

This brief recapitulation of some of the key points of Latour's œuvre indicates the uncommonly broad nature of his research interests. But it does not, perhaps, serve as adequate notice for the core concerns of *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, a book whose title implies, at the very least, a surprising articulation between entities that many – social scientists above all – might have been inclined to place in safely separate universes. *Prince of Networks* is a book, as they say, of two halves. In the first, Harman develops an exposition of what he sees as the metaphysics that is embedded within four of Latour's best-known texts: *Irreductions*, *Science in Action*, *We Have Never Been Modern* and *Pandora's Hope*. Following an interpretative strategy that will be familiar to readers of *Tool-Being* (Harman's book on Heidegger), the account develops by extracting an argumentative core of four principles guiding Latour's work. These principles, Harman argues, remain more or less unchanged from the early essay *Irreductions* to the recent ruminations of *Reassembling the Social*.

Prince of Networks contends that *actants*, *irreduction*, *translation* and *alliance*, subtended by another principle, that of *utter concreteness*, form the basic principles that 'guide [Latour's] vast empirical labours'. The universe is made up of innumerable unique actants, events that do not endure and are utterly specific. There is no Aristotelian distinction between substance and accidents here, as actants don't endure by themselves. Because every actant is nothing other than what it actually is, it cannot be reduced to anything else (although there is equally nothing to stop anything or anyone from trying to reduce one entity to another). But as no thing can be reduced to anything else, translation is always required, active mediation that adds to and modifies what it mediates (unlike a 'transparent intermediary', which would presume reducibility). And, finally, since actants are utterly concrete events, articulated by their relations with each other, reality is a function of collective processes of alliances between actants.

Much of the first half of *Prince of Networks* is devoted to exploring the metaphysical implications of these principles in Latour's work. Critical-sociological notions such as power are interestingly reworked within this framework: power is a function of relations between actors, and a result rather than an explanatory starting point (a view Latour shares with Foucault, although this is quickly forgotten when one starts talking in terms of generalities such as 'surveillance society', for example); and the alliances between actors that are exemplified in relations of domination always consist of much more than just relations between humans (yes, chewing gum, nuclear technology, Elvis Presley and the Marshall Plan are all elements of post-1945 US hegemony). Evidently, a crucial element of Latour's philosophy lies in the centrality it accords to relations: with actors or actants having no endurance, no hidden depth, they are necessarily deployed in external relations, failing which they cease to be real. Harman is quick to make the link here with Whitehead, who has been an important reference point for Latour for many years now. (There are some parallels between the former's 'actual occasions' and Latour's actants.)

However, the crucial point for Harman (who does not discuss the sociology much, and is a little cursory in his appraisal of Whitehead) is that this metaphysics of actors assembled in networks of external relations seeks to overcome the modern rift between primary and secondary qualities that informs the 'intellectual Munich' of modernity, and with it the categorial distinction between human and world. But it does so by seeing rifts absolutely everywhere: between humans and humans, humans and world, object and object, and so on. Reality thus here becomes a discontinuous construction, the product of trials of strength between innumerable actors human and nonhuman.

The second half of *Prince of Networks* develops a more critical analysis of the limitations of this relational metaphysics, offering an extensive discussion of a series of questions designed to support Harman's claim for a more fully object-oriented metaphysics (the lineaments of which have been explored extensively in his other work). The claim here is that for a metaphysics finally to become adequate to the autonomous reality of objects, without succumbing to the correlationist supposition that every datum must be a datum for a human, it must yield to a conception of objects as bearers of 'cryptic essences', split from both their qualities and their relations. Latour's critique of substance–accident thinking – the subject–predicate metaphysics that Whitehead considers as itself an achievement of abstraction – precludes his metaphysics from giving a good account of change, and whilst his relational thinking offers a largely effective counter to the human–world split, it nonetheless has a tendency to forget that in its more exigent manifestations, realism demands not only that we deal adequately with the distinction between primary and secondary qualities but also that things exist independently of us 'whether we like it or not'.

The nub of the argument in the second half of the book turns around the difficulties that relational ontology has with this aspect of realism, developing the position that Harman takes in his earlier books, *Tool-being* and *Guerilla Metaphysics*. Indeed in some respects, as he acknowledges, *Prince of Networks* represents an attempt to synthesize the surprisingly realist Heideggerian phenomenology of those books with an equally surprisingly metaphysical Latour. 'Not the easiest of tasks' he drily observes. However, these later chapters offer an interesting reworking of Heidegger's odd conception of the fourfold and of the notion of vicarious causation, which, qua *local occasionalism*, Harman argues, is one of Latour's most crucial metaphysical innovations.

Harman's reading of Latour is largely generous: he takes the position, as he puts it, of the critic who wants to see Latour *succeed*, rather than fail. He shares with Latour and a number of others a dislike of the kind of criticism that takes a pride in its relentless irony and scepticism and is adamant in his dislike of the self-imposed abnegation of philosophies of access, which he holds responsible for philosophy's reticence to deal with the very objects that form the bread-and-butter of scientific research. *Prince of Networks* is littered with examples of a hyperbolic reading strategy, putting the author in a position of 'maximum strength' in order to explore the new areas of the map his (or her) claims light up. However, such an ambitious piece of work is not without its shortcomings. For the most part, these criticisms revolve around what gets left out in Harman's account of Latour's metaphysics.

The first and perhaps most difficult issue concerns what is entailed by the processes involved in drawing out and condensing Latour's metaphysics into the statement of a series of core arguments or basic principles. The approach that Harman adopts here is both *Prince of Networks,* greatest strength and its greatest weakness. It is a strategy that he employs to brilliant effect in his reading of Heidegger, and anyone who has endured the lofty pronouncements of Heideggerians casually dismissing the merely ontic concerns of empirical investigation cannot fail to warm to it. Indeed, that Harman can defend a form of philosophical actualism *via* Heidegger is a delightful irony for anyone who has tired somewhat of clever textual play and fatalistic historicist pronouncements about the end of this or the end of that to which Heideggerians can be prone. However, the decision taken in *Prince of Networks* to neglect the myriad empirical divagations of Latour's work in order to focus on what Harman takes to be the guiding principles of his metaphysics is a more difficult translation.

To abstract out *the* metaphysics of actor–network theory is a bold move, which will hopefully shock a good many social scientists (and it is not without an ally-recruiting effect all of its own), yet to focus so resolutely on basic principles ignores many of the peculiarly and properly *mundane* empirical issues, particularly those revolving around reflexivity that Latour the social scientist evinces. Whilst it is certainly true that metaphysics could and should be able to talk about anything and everything from distant galaxies and subatomic particles to fairies at the bottom of the garden and nursery rhymes, the fact of the matter is that Latour *does* focus on social scientific issues. Equally, he vindicates an *experimental* metaphysics, about which Harman has surprisingly little to say.

Harman acknowledges that his text has no ambitions to perform the kind of scholarly labour of describing influences, tracing sources, following links and so on that one associates with commentaries, and there

is no reason why the construction of a metaphysics need follow this pathway. However, such labour is undoubtedly a critical element not just in scholarly commentary (philological concerns need not be the sole concern of nerds and book-fanciers), but also in the construction of the self-evidence of terms like 'metaphysics'. Latour makes persistent reference to the meticulously documented reconstructions of the emergence of philosophy in the work of Barbara Cassin (and more recently to the phenomenal work of Reviel Netz, *The Shaping of Deduction in Greek Mathematics*), both of which emphasize the practices involved in the construction of things that we now take as virtually self-evident. Concept-words like 'principle' are black boxes like everything else, and whilst they may be difficult to dissociate from their allies, this is not a decision that *Prince of Networks* takes (although it is certainly willing to consider the difficulties of disengaging Kant's arguments from their allies, in an amusing thought experiment about Karl Rove).

One can understand Harman's reticence to engage in these issues: after all, it was disregard for textual niceties that he deployed against the Heideggerians to such good effect in *Tool-Being*. And in any case, why should one bother tracing the provenance of an argument, a concept or a word, when you are merely concerned to avail yourself of the force it has acquired over twenty-five centuries of philosophical (and non-philosophical) history?

However, a closer consideration of such matters – along with a more nuanced engagement with Latour's Whitehead (the importance for the latter of negative pretensions, the irreducible role conferred on 'societies' in his metaphysics, and the indissociability of both empirical and rational considerations in the construction of a conceptual scheme) – might have cast more light on Latour's work and some of the genuinely puzzling things that he says. Equally, it might have allowed for a more nuanced discussion of his recent invocations of notions like that of *plasma* as a way of thinking about the 'reserve army' of actants absent from the 'articulated social world of relations'.

However, *Prince of Networks* is an excellent book and the concerns expressed here are tangential to its stated aims. Harman is an astute thinker and a witty writer and we can be glad that his singular philosophical trajectory has brought him into such close orbit with Latour. It will be interesting to see how Latour's own book on metaphysics (rumoured to be in preparation) will deal with the issues that Harman raises.

Andrew Goffey

Orthographic ageism

Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation*, trans. Stephen Barker, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2009. 267 pp., £25.50 pb., 978 0 8047 3014 3.

Bernard Stiegler, *Acting Out*, trans. David Barison, Daniel Ross and Patrick Crogan, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2009. 93 pp., £17.95 pb., 978 0 8047 5869 7.

The first volume of Bernard Stiegler's *Technics and Time*, *The Fault of Epimetheus* (1994; trans. 1998), was quickly recognized as an ambitious work that synthesized deconstruction, Heidegger's existential analytic, André Leroi-Gourhan's anthropology, and media/technology studies. Stiegler opened his multivolume project by asserting that technics was the 'unthought' of philosophy and that philosophers had failed to recognize that humans are necessarily prosthetic beings. Because of the 'de-fault of origin' that left humanity without qualities, the essence of humanity is to be always outside of itself, to be always already supplemented by technics. Through the prehistoric co-emergence and structural coupling of humanity and technics, humanity has become a unique form of life that evolves through means other than life: the evolution of its 'programs' has been transferred from genetic memory (which is now relatively stabilized) to 'epiphylogenetic' memory, or technics. A *transductive* relationship binds together humanity and technics so neither can exist without the other, resulting in human evolution taking the form of the endless negotiation of socio-genesis and techno-genesis, the former 're-doubling' and re-appropriating the developments of the latter.

Over the course of *The Fault of Epimetheus*, Stiegler established a formidable philosophical position from which he could fault virtually any philosopher for failing to recognize the default of humanity, the fact that technics is originary. Stiegler concluded the book with an exemplary reading of Heidegger, demonstrating that Dasein's mode of access to the past and

therefore mode of anticipation of the future was always already determined by technics. According to Stiegler, Heidegger's attempt to secure an 'authentic temporality' for Dasein fails, and its failure illustrates that any analysis of temporality 'must take into account the prosthetic specifics conditioning access to the already-there'. *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation* concludes with a similar philosophical critique, this time of Husserl's *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*. Reversing Husserl's efforts to protect the immediacy of the transcendental ego's 'living present', Stiegler argues that primary retention and secondary recall are 'contaminated' by what he terms 'tertiary memory', the technical memory of that which one has not lived. Capitalism is therefore able to exploit the synthesis of retentional finitude by producing industrial temporal objects that coincide with the flux of consciousness and homogenize the criteria for memory's selection and recall. Stiegler's reading of Husserl has already attracted a number of criticisms (from Mark Hansen, Jean-Michel Salanskis and John Leche, among others), but it remains a compelling recovery of a philosopher who is far too often summarily dismissed for his idealism or undeconstructed metaphysics. Yet in the chapters that lead up to that reading, *Disorientation* operates on more empirico-historical terrain, tracking *how* human consciousness and temporality have been prosthetically synthesized throughout history. Surveying the emergence of writing and the transition to analogic and numeric media, Stiegler offers a 'history of the supplement' that takes the form of broad generalizations about different eras of media. As a result, however, *Disorientation* comes perilously close to repeating info-age clichés about the deleterious impact of new media on society, and Stiegler's techno-deconstructive method reveals its inherent limitations when applied to the particulars of media history.

One of the first tasks of *Disorientation* is to establish the distinction between *phonological* and *orthographic* writing (though the former is always also the latter) and to identify the specificity of orthographic writing within the history of arche-writing. Reactivating grammatology's quasi-foundational problem of phonological writing, mere mention of which may scare off those with little patience for Derrida's fixation on language, Stiegler opens up a new horizon for deconstruction that should be of general interest. According to Stiegler, deconstruction's effort to expose phonological writing's by-now-familiar 'metaphysics of presence' (the simulation of *phonē*, self-presence of voice) and Derrida's desire to make the notion of arche-writing irreducible to any empirical case of writing have blocked recognition of the specificity of orthographic (from *orthos*, right) *exactitude*. The novelty of linear, alphabetic, orthographic writing 'is the exactitude of the *recording* of the voice rather than the exactitude of the recording of the *voice*'. In fact, phonological presence is merely a reality effect derived from the exactitude of orthographic inscription. Because the dependence of the phonological on the orthographic leads to their confusion, Stiegler paradoxically begins his investigation of writing by discussing photography, which, without any phonological tendencies, exactly records the past as past. Stiegler's readings of Barthes's *Camera Lucida* and Fellini's film *Intervista* are not exactly revelatory, but the detour into photography and cinema at least makes immediately clear that his investigation of writing has consequences that reach beyond writing in a restricted sense.

Stiegler derives the question of exactitude from Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences* and 'The Origin of Geometry', two texts that also guided Derrida's early works. (Stiegler's intervention might be understood as an internal reorientation of deconstruction through a return to those texts whose reading was at the 'origin' of Derrida's programme.) Husserl described the *construction* of ideal geometric objects from the fluctuating and approximate shapes of empirical intuition. Yet the ideality of geometry's objects could not be assured until they were 'sedimented' in written language. The exact inscription of ideal objects made them available for inspection at other times and places, generating a process of 'communitization' through which other geometers could reactivate – but always with a difference – the original intentional meaning of geometry's objects. For Stiegler, this process of communitization and différant reactivation of meaning should be extended to all of orthographic writing. According to Stiegler, iterability – the ability of a text to be legibly repeated in the absence of its sender and any determinable addressee – is only fully accomplished through the reification and decontextualizing that characterize orthographic writing, though all writing tends toward such iterability. But the iterability of orthographic writing is paradoxical. The certitude made possible by the ability to re-access the exact inscription opens up incertitude. Since neither the original nor any context of reading can ever be repeated, with orthographic writing the 'textual experience arises from the principle of identity as marked by différance'. In other words, greater exactness produces greater potential for variation, or 'identity (re)produces difference'.

Stiegler titles his chapter on writing 'The Ortho-graphic Age', but it might equally well have been named 'The Golden Age', since the subsequent account in *Disorientation* of the rise of new forms of analogic and numeric media narrates the history of the decline of 'literal' différance. Addressing every-thing from real-time broadcasting to cognitive science to genetic engineering, Stiegler paints a picture of a society in which the suppression of temporal delay, ethnic and individual differences, and even (the effects of) différance itself has progressively weakened the capability of humanity to 're-appropriate' the effects of techno-genesis. Whereas the deferred temporal-ity and différant identity of writing made possible *knowledge*, the real-time capabilities and industrial ownership of new forms of media favour the ever-faster production of unrepeatable *information*. Writing generated active participation and encouraged indi-viduation because it required a 'minimal reciprocity that connected the reader of a text with its author, namely, that they share a techno-logic competency'. Analogic and numeric technologies instead sever that relationship, setting centralized and specialized media production against a passive 'media consumerism' that consists of only the purchasing power needed to buy output devices. Most dramatically, the transmission of information at near the speed of light transforms the conditions of 'event-ization', destroying locality by making what happens 'there' seem to instantaneously happen 'everywhere' and eliminating any discernible delay between an event's recording, transmission and reception. Stiegler pessimistically concludes that new media technologies threaten to suppress différance, or at least to reduce it to a scale below the threshold of human perception.

Stiegler's diagnosis of the situation of contemporary media will appear all too familiar to many readers. Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of the culture industry, Marshall McLuhan's infamous definition of the media as 'extensions' of man's nervous system (formulated around the same time as André Leroi-Gourhan, whom Stiegler excessively quotes in *Disori-entation*, argued that technics is the 'exteriorization' of man's nervous system), and Paul Virilio's apocalyptic descriptions of the effects of 'light time' all make their way, either implicitly or explicitly, into *Disorientation*. Of course Stiegler reconfigures all of these ideas to account for the default of humanity (Adorno and Horkheimer even receive an explicit critique in the as-yet-untranslated third volume of *Technics and Time*), but one would expect more detailed engagements with discrepant forms of contemporary media from the

founder of the group *Ars Industrialis* and former director of the experimental music centre IRCAM. A more serious problem is whether deconstruction can serve – as Stiegler wishes it to – as a foundation for these kinds of critiques of media culture. In the inter-view between Derrida and Stiegler that is transcribed in *Echographies of Television*, Derrida was willing to admit that there are different 'modalities' of différance. But, in general, Derrida deflected Stiegler's assertions about the radical difference of new media, arguing that différance is still at work in real-time technologies and that the feeling of 'no future' (a punk slogan which Stiegler is fond of repeating) still involves an opening to the future.

Interestingly, Stiegler relies less strongly upon decon-struction in *Acting Out*, a small volume whose transla-tion accompanies and might serve as an introduction to *Disorientation*. In the two short pieces collected in *Acting Out*, Stiegler persuasively makes use of Gilbert Simondon's theory of the co-individuation of the *I* and *We* (which has not received adequate recognition due both to the lack of translations and to Deleuze's specific assimilation of it) to support his analysis of contemporary disorientation and to explain his dis-covery of the vocation of philosophy while in prison serving a sentence for armed robbery. Stiegler claims his time in prison was 'spent in philosophical *practice*, in *experimental* phenomenology, and in passage to the limits of phenomenology'. This biographical 'passage' *through* phenomenology is not to be underestimated. Indeed, the continuous negotiation of the transcen-dental and empirical throughout Stiegler's philosophy is reminiscent of Husserl's investigations in *Ideas*, which occurred prior to Husserl's dogmatic equation of the phenomenological method with idealism. The solitude of incarceration, Stiegler claims, led him to 'deduce' the phenomenological *epokhe*, the isolation of the transcendental ego from belief in the world. But rather than opening up an infinite field of trans-cendental experience to be studied, the *epokhe* revealed to Stiegler only the default of humanity: the fact that there is no 'interior' milieu without the constitution of an 'exterior' one. Stiegler writes therefore that he strove to reconstitute the world through the disciplined cultivation of the signifying practices of reading and writing. Far from being a self-indulgent memoir, this narrative of individuation explains why Stiegler so fervently attacks contemporary media culture, offering hope for the development of that critique in future volumes of *Technics and Time*.

Brian Rajski

You've been framed

Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, Verso, London, 2009. viii + 193 pp., £14.99 hb., 978 1 84467 333 9.

Tarik Kochi, *The Other's War: Recognition and the Violence of Ethics*, Birkbeck Law Press, London, 2009. 278 pp., £70.00 hb., 0 41548 270 4.

Judith Butler's book has one of the strangest titles for a book ever. Not strange in itself, that is, but strange in that one might be led to believe from the title that the book is about war. A couple of formulations in the book even suggest that this might once have been part of Butler's intention: she claims that we might need to rethink freedom from coercion and formulate a sexual politics in the context of a pervasive critique of war, and that this might help reorient the Left beyond the liberal antinomies on which it currently founders. Yet the book itself is far from offering even the rudiments of such a pervasive critique. In fact, the dominant theme, if any can be found, is in the idea of the 'framing' in the title. Even then, the book falls short.

Beginning with a discussion of 'frames of recognition', a discussion which centres on precariousness and has little to say about war, Butler suggests that frames are constructed around one's deeds. In particular, and playing on the other meaning of 'to be framed', a frame is constructed such that one's guilty status becomes the viewer's inevitable conclusion. Later in the book this is used to make sense of the photographs of torture produced during the war on terror, yet the point that is ultimately made is hardly new or original: that the photos were 'framed' in such a way and that through this framing the state works on the field of perception and representability. In other words, a long account of 'framing' leads to little more than the rather well-known point that the state seeks to structure interpretation.

This tendency to dress up an argument that barely goes beyond stating the obvious occurs again and again, so much so that one wonders if a footnote or two might have gone missing from the book. 'We are at least partially formed through violence', Butler tells us, as though this hasn't been clear since – take your pick, according to taste – Marx, or Hobbes or Machiavelli, or Plato. 'Very often, we do not see that the ostensibly "domestic" issues are inflected by the foreign policy issues', Butler suggests, managing to ignore a few decades of left work in international relations and international political economy. 'To be protected from violence by the nation-state is to be exposed to the violence wielded by the nation-state', Butler claims,

failing either to reference the essentially Lockean nature of this 'dilemma' or to admit to holding on to this particular liberal antinomy.

Given these weaknesses, it's hard to know quite what the point of this book is, exactly. One chapter, 'Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time', is reprinted from the *British Journal of Sociology*, where it appeared with responses from five other people. Butler's rejoinder to the responses, in the following issue of the *BJS*, appears here as a chapter on 'Non-Thinking in the Name of the Normative'. Yet as a chapter in this book, without the original responses in the *BJS*, it makes little sense. Worse, the only part of the chapter that speaks to the intended theme of the book as a whole, namely a (mild) critique of Talal Asad's book *On Suicide Bombing*, is in fact a section which did not appear in Butler's original rejoinder.

Symptomatic of the lack of clarity concerning the book's central purpose is the number of rhetorical questions that appear again and again through the text, with some rhetorical questions actually containing more than one question. Over just four pages alone (83 to 86) I counted fifteen. One is tempted to respond with a version of that item of 1980s' corporate bullshit directed at workers who bring their bosses problems when they should be bringing solutions: 'Don't give me questions, Judith, give me answers.'

What 'answers' do come are far from helpful. Chapter 1 suggests that 'aggression can and must be separated from violence … and there are ways of giving form to aggression that work in the service of democratic life, including "antagonism" and discursive conflict, strikes, civil disobedience, and even revolution.' The opportunity to say any more about a potential revolution that is aggressive yet not violent is passed over. In the final chapter, however, Butler expresses her 'doubt that non-violence can be a principle'. This is sustained through the claim that non-violence involves an 'aggressive vigilance over aggression's tendency to emerge as violence'. So: aggression and violence are to be distinguished, but non-violence is not the principle to be held. Yet because aggression has a tendency to emergence as violence we have to have an aggressive vigilance over aggression.
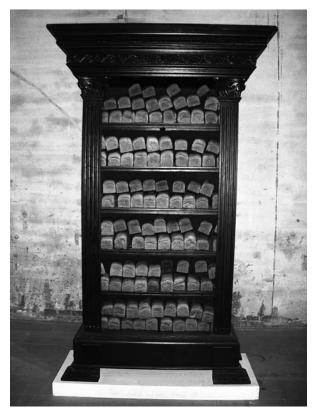
One of the issues flagged early in Butler's book is recognition: 'the point will be to ask how norms operate to produce certain subjects as "recognizable" persons', despite the fact that 'precariousness itself cannot be properly recognized'. Yet the category is not really utilized in what remains of the book. In contrast, where Butler raises recognition only to let it drop, Tarik Kochi uses the category as the starting point of a detailed, lengthy and critical interrogation of several standard positions and major thinkers in what passes as 'war studies' and military–political thought.

The strength of Kochi's book lies in its attempt to connect war as understood in the traditions of military thinking or strategic studies with a more general account of the social violence of capital in general and imperialism in particular. The early chapters thereby critique a variety of ways of thinking juridically and morally about war. Understood as various ways of 'ordering' war, these accounts have a tendency to legitimize certain types of state violence and delegitimize other, non-state forms of violence. In making this argument Kochi takes up and challenges the work of thinkers from Vitoria through to Habermas, and situates his challenge in both the particular context of the war on terror and the wider context of the failure of international organizations to bring about anything approaching the 'peace' they claim to desire. In so doing, Kochi teases out the ways in which the criticisms of war made by the legal and moral thinkers in question are always undermined by their simultaneous justifications for certain types of 'legal' or 'moral' wars.

In contrast to the juridical and moral ordering of war, Kochi engages what he calls the political ordering and disordering of war, using Hegel's ethics of recognition as a stepping stone to move from his critique of the 'classic' thinkers and on to the work of Marx, Lenin, Schmitt and Benjamin. One omission here, however, is the work of Ernst Bloch, whose insights into the history of natural law theory permeate Kochi's earlier chapters but who fades from view once Kochi starts articulating his own account of war. Nonetheless, his work on and with these thinkers allows him to read Marxism both within the tradition of thinking about war and also very much against it. On this view, war needs to be understood not just in terms of state violence, as happens in both the consensus that has built up around the Westphalian model and the Clausewitzian assumptions that still permeate so much of the thinking about war, and much more in terms of a global intra-state civil war. Through Marx, the justification of state violence in terms of the traditional notions of sovereignty or ethical life is reformulated via an account of global economic relations, thereby 're-framing' (there it is again, this time Kochi's) the concept of war as class struggle. It is precisely *this* war, Kochi suggests, that better explains why political ideas are always already militarized, and it is also very much *this* war that proves Marxism's more general relevance to political thinking about war beyond its supposed stock-in-trade contribution to guerrilla warfare.

As a provocation this is powerful, and Kochi's book deserves the kind of wide readership that its publisher's price tag seems designed to preclude. However, it is undermined a little by Kochi's closing position, which gives up any account of war as class violence and class violence as war in favour of an ethics of Others. In his final chapters he outlines a 'praxis of recognition' as the basis for a judgement on war. Such an attitude 'involves suspending the constant demand to condemn the other's violence and instead engage in the effort of recognizing the ethics of the other's war'. But how this connects with or develops the argument about the social violence of capital is not made clear. Worse, there is a danger that it could be used against the very political implications of Kochi's argument as a whole. The danger might best be illustrated with comments made by the military historian Michael Howard in his work on war and the liberal conscience, first published in 1978, which Kochi does not discuss despite liberalism being a constant target in his own book. Against the American practice of 'dehumanizing' the enemy

in the Cold War and Vietnam, Howard encourages treating the enemy in a more 'humanized' fashion as a figure with 'fears, perceptions, interests and difficulties all of his [sic] own'. Howard is well known as a deeply conservative specimen of the generally conservative tribe of military historians, yet such a comment resonates with Kochi's recognition of otherness and might well hint at a rather conservative use of the idea of precariousness. As well as being a hint as to the fundamental tension in Kochi's work, this potential to rethink the enemy in terms of an ethical other in a variety of political ways is also a useful reminder of the more general danger in all moves from politics to ethics: that an intended political radicalism runs the risk of being turned into an ethical conservatism.

Mark Neocleous

Black meteorology

Peter Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2009. 109 pp., £9.95 pb., 978 1 58435 072 9.

Jonathan Swift's Gulliver first becomes aware of Laputa when it occludes the sun, enveloping him in its strange shadow. The levitating island, kept aloft by means of a magnetic lodestone at its core, is a kind of parodic New Atlantis, an aristocratic society of scientists and their balloon-carrying retainers who are sustained by the tributes of those unfortunate enough to live below. If these are withheld, so Gulliver learns, Laputa will hover above the offending region, turning itself into a climatological weapon that prevents sunlight and rain reaching the ground, thus causing famine and impoverishment below. Fast-forward now to 1996 and we find a Pentagon-produced paper titled 'Weather as Force Multiplier: Owning the Weather in 2025' that envisions a future in which the meteorological milieux of battlezones and enemy territories are shaped, manipulated, and indeed designed to military advantage. Recently there has been much media coverage of geo-engineering proposals put forward as possible responses to climate change, such as those discussed in the just-published report by the Royal Society ('Geo-engineering the Climate: Science, Governance and Uncertainty'). These typically involve scenarios such as the technological production of clouds to reflect solar radiation away from the earth's surface. But it will come as no surprise that projects of weather domination or design serving other interests – and

intended for more Laputa-like habitat or environment destruction – are also well under way.

Laputa's ecological terrorism does not appear in Peter Sloterdijk's short book *Terror from the Air*, although it might well have done. First published in 2002 as *Luftbeben* (literally 'airquake'), the book is marked by 9/11 and its aftermath but is also closely tied to Sloterdijk's extensive and long-standing work on atmospherics (presented in his *Sphären* trilogy). Although Laputa might look like an early-eighteenth-century presentiment of atmoterrorism, Sloterdijk identifies the latter's primal scene in the release of chlorine gas on 22 April 1915 at Ypres, when it was used as a weapon against French-Canadian troops. With this, the hitherto principally ballistic technologies of combat – which implied precise spatial targeting and so, the argument runs, were able to keep alive something of the military honour system predicated upon the struggle of individual protagonists – were transformed in an environmental direction with the effect that the attack on the soldier became in the first instance an attack on the ability of his immediate atmospheric milieu to sustain life. As it is an aerial rather than a punctual weapon, the calculations attendant on the use of gas involved wind speed, direction and concentration, while its immersive enveloping characteristics negated the simple topographical defences of ballistic-era warfare. Defence was no longer a matter of getting below firing lines, but rather of entering a protectively sealed environment, that of the gas mask, which Sloterdijk argues thus represents the Ur-form of air-conditioning, at least in its modern sense as an optimized breathable interior sealed against a malign exterior environment.

For Sloterdijk the gas attack at Ypres marked not just the beginning of atmoterrorism, but also the beginning of the twentieth century itself in so far as what he claims to be the three key features of the era – its 'operative criteria' – were interwoven in it: environmental thinking, product design and terrorism. The use of gas as a weapon supposed and demanded the idea of an environment which it both targeted and contaminated, while the refinement of the properties and performance of both the gas itself and its delivery system was the task of product design, initiating a line of atmotechnic engineering endeavours that the book traces through pesticide production to the gas chambers to the 'air design' of contemporary scented shopping environments in which the atmosphere is literally infused by commodity marketing. Terror and terrorism emerge in the argument in what are claimed to be particularly twentieth-century forms in that they 'pass through a theory of the environment' and are

directed towards it. Yet at the same time, despite this distinction, all terrorism for Sloterdijk will in fact turn out to be environmental or atmoterrorism insofar as what he describes as its 'basic idea' consists in the targeting of the enemy's environment – that is, in the making-dangerous of a milieu. In a general sense one can see the argument that Sloterdijk is trying to make here, but the way in which the concept of terrorism – whatever the book says about its 'precise definition' – is tethered to twentieth-century atmotechnologies seems unduly restricted and limited, and the argument circular.

In Sloterdijk's account, atmoterrorism is predicated upon a constant unfolding or breaking open of latency, whereby previously unseen, unrecognized or concealed 'background' conditions of life become suddenly exposed and problematized. Thus modern technical manipulation comes to extend into atmospheric media, and the prior innocent and unquestioned relation to air is both thematized and becomes the subject of an unhappy and anxious consciousness. Here Sloterdijk, who relates Being-in-the-world to Being-in-the-air, parallels Heidegger's 'absence of homeland' (*Heimatlosigkeit*) to the denaturalization of air and the loss of its tutelage.

Research and development driven by atmoterroristic interests result in what the book describes as a 'black meteorology' under whose pressure air and atmosphere become for the first time, Sloterdijk suggests, topics of explicit consideration for a range of concerns from aesthetics to politics to medicine and beyond. But the argument seems much too tightly drawn at this point and many of the historical complexities, which Sloterdijk at other times seems to acknowledge, are sacrificed to an overly insistent epochal rhetoric. Air, atmosphere and, indeed, breathing, have an ancient, intricate and manifest cultural history. Counter-examples flood in here: one thinks, for instance, of the miasma theory of disease, which presumed that contagion was carried by foul air; or of the Pneumatic Institution, established to investigate the therapeutic effects of gases, whose 'chemical superintendent' after 1798, Humphrey Davy, had his friends – including Samuel Taylor Coleridge – experiment with the inhalation of nitrous oxide; or of the atmospheric preoccupations of Ruskin's work, such as the pneumatological aesthetics of his idiosyncratic study of the Athena myth, 'Queen of the Air', or his late lectures on 'The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century'. It is hard to see how any of these cases can be comfortably related to the terroristic model set out in the book. Likewise, encounters with dangerous and unbreathable milieux led to examples of air-conditioning's encapsulative principle earlier than the gas-mask – Cornelis Drebbel's submarine, for instance, which was to be seen on the Thames in the early 1620s and on which James I apparently travelled. That said, something of the sub-marine does, however, surface in Sloterdijk's wry account of Salvador Dalí's 1936 lecture at the New Burlington Galleries in London. To give this he appeared, as an 'ambassador from the depths' (of the unconscious), dressed in a deep-sea diving suit in which – to great effect upon the audience and to Dalí's subsequent delight – he was nearly asphyxiated.

Embedded in this book is a call for a meteorological turn in cultural theory in response to the challenges posed by the fast-accumulating developments in atmospherics that have thus far outpaced it. As atmosphere becomes an ever-increasing preoccupation of culture – as a source of anxiety and thing to be modified, and thus subjectivized, by means of design – so it becomes a leitmotif of its interpretation: as Sloterdijk writes, 'Cultures are collective conditions of immersion in air and sign systems.' Certainly there can be no doubt that the politics, production and stabilization of atmospheres will be key issues and pressure points of the immediate future, and Sloterdijk's often brilliantly elaborated reflections provide crucial philosophical resources for thinking about them. The atmospheric and weather-mediating aspirations of earlier visionary projects – such as Buckminster Fuller's proposal to cover midtown Manhattan with a geodesic dome – have been subject to extraordinary escalations of scale and degree. On the one hand we have the expansion into climate design and engineering at the level of the planet, and on the other we have a kind of hyberbolic intensification of air-conditioning that results in a radical differential between adjacent conditions that is itself produced as a consumer attraction: recent development proposals in the Gulf provide exemplary cases of this – Dubai's 'Sunny Mountain Ski Dome', which, although now on hold, was to contain an artificial mountain range and a revolving ski-slope together with other, as the official website puts it, 'Arctic experiences'; or the 'Hydropolis' underwater hotel with its bubble-shaped suites, also planned for Dubai. At the same time there appears across broad and diverse areas of cultural production to be a drive towards ever more immersive – and in this sense atmospheric – forms, a movement supported and promoted by contemporary technologies of representation such as high-definition television or the innovative 3-D system used by James Cameron in his soon-to-be-released film *Avatar*. Typically descriptions of what audiences can expect change

to imply participation rather than spectatorship: that is, being inside something that, in turn, is characteristically described as 'another world'.

While the importance of the study of culturally produced atmospheres and their implications (their conditions of production, the way they are sustained, their effects, and so on) to which Sloterdijk directs us is, I think, incontrovertible; what I understand to be the other side of his cultural meteorology, which would be the atmospheric interpretation of culture, seems to me to raise some questions. Specifically, I wonder to what extent the atmospheric trope or thought-image – no matter how broken down into 'atmospheric multiplicities' it becomes – builds-in in advance a tendency towards interpretive totalization and closure in so far as it will always involve ideas of envelopment. Gaps, fractures, breaks, slippages or destructurings tend not to be part of the language of atmospheres. Sloterdijk's characterization of cultures as conditions of immersion can make them sound akin to encapsulated and air-conditioned entities. While this may be an appropriate diagnosis of the contemporary cultural condition, at the same time it can also look like a result of the theoretical model itself.

Mark Dorrian

Prison notebooks

The 1891 introduction of the Architect's Registration Bill to the House of Commons sparked a debate in *The Times* over the merit of that profession's regulation. Asking would-be architects to pass examinations and secure assurances that they would follow a code of professional conduct offered the public a safeguard from a range of unscrupulous behaviours not unknown, then as now, among the construction sector's more artful and inventive members. The counter-argument was one that called for a form of public criticism, as opposed to institutional governance, by means of which architects would speak openly about the work of other architects, thereby regulating the work of poor architects through a series of more-or-less natural exclusions. Bad architecture would be named as such, and an informed public would be better aware of the terms under which architects judged the work of their peers; good architecture would be met with public

praise framed by the didactic mission of educating the citizenry. Strong criticism and open discussion would offer a more transparent and organic form of control than the rules of any governing body could enforce.

As attractive as the latter option may sound, as we know, or can surmise, the Bill passed (see Deborah van der Plaat's essay 'Architectural Ignorance and Public Indifference', *Fabrications* 2009). Architecture followed the path of legislated professionalization alongside medicine and the law, and this gave rise to many of the conditions in contemporary architecture against which Jeremy Till rails. *Architecture Depends* is an impassioned and very personal plea for a culture of contingency in architecture: an architecture of soft disciplinary and professional edges, of social and civil relevance, of technical and ecological common sense, of breakable habits and deposable heroes. Till's architecture is a practice informed by conditions in the world that have little if anything to do with the things that architects have been taught to think about by schools and tradition. He rightly resists describing what that practice (or education) might look like, but I'd be surprised if his own work as an architect and educator did not somehow model this contingent architecture.

I have never heard Till speak, but I can imagine that reading *Architecture Depends* is a little like following his lectures. He writes as if for a crowded room. Before an audience bewildered by the problem of how contemporary architecture came to be what it is, he unpacks his library (which includes a good number of books by Zygmunt Bauman alongside the classics) to demonstrate how little architecture understands its place in the world, and how much it would benefit from opening the doors wide to that knowledge of society and politics that it systematically overlooks or defiantly – to borrow Till's tone – sets aside. In its own way (and this book *is* super-idiosyncratic along the lines of, for example, Paul Shepheard's meditations on architectural themes), Till's volume contributes to the current wave of literature reflecting on the conditions of architecture's claims on disciplinary or artistic autonomy and the conditions under which that autonomy is undermined. Like many of those books and articles, especially of the critical/post-critical debate, it returns us to the 1970s. Till does not do this explicitly, but his target is the same monumental legacy of modernism against which postmodernism set itself; his criticisms are levelled at a monolithic legacy of Vitruvian order; and his discomfort is with the perpetuation of a model of architectural education and practice that survived unscathed from the nineteenth century – indeed, which

despite a few significant makeovers remains in essence about induction into an artistic and professional circle, and about transmission of knowledge from master to student. Till shares the understandably common distaste for architecture's postmodern moment – the formal plays and eclectic historicism – but, like so many who are now drawn to it with the benefit of hindsight, he looks to see what might be recovered from the 1970s in aid of the present return of an aesthetic neo-modernism that out-stripes any respectable zebra – neo-functionalist, neo-regionalist, neo-traditionalist, neo-expressionist, neo-baroque, and so forth.

To the extent that this is Till's ambition, I applaud him for it. I side with Manfredo Tafuri's assessment, to which Till refers, that architecture sets itself up as a model prison. Whether one prefers to think of architecture in strong terms, as a discipline, art or profession, or in productively weak terms, as a practice, discourse or field, the exercise yard of this prison is witness to all manner of gymnastics. Be its fence made of chain link or concrete blocks, a prison it remains. Till argues that more architects should apply for parole, more should welcome visitors (and most should hope for cakes secreting files and chisels with which they might slowly and daringly work towards escape). He calls for architects to get over architecture, to understand how irrelevant most ideas about architecture are for the realities of architectural practice and production.

That said, it is important to understand that this book is not written for outsiders. It is a prison diary, written for other prisoners: students of architecture, those who teach them, and those who have moved from the university to the world beyond. Vitruvius and Le Corbusier are transformed into giant mallets with which to beat home the lessons that order and the modernist hero have run their course and shown themselves to be mere husks kept alive by those members of architectural culture who need them. The problems he confronts are largely internal to the way architecture is taught and practised. Even more specifically, Till's beef is with modern architecture's legacy in Britain: with education, with the rhetorical devices instilled in and exercised by architects young and old, with form, with academe, with the establishment of which (we learn, again and again) he is reluctantly a part. There is a great deal of self-deprecating humour and a good number of instances in which we learn how Till has stumbled his way through his career to this point – well-intentioned, often confused, but nonetheless moved by a sense that architecture qua architecture was only ever part of the answer to the problems of the contemporary professional practice and education of architects. These become rhetorical devices in their own turn, of course, and for their constant repetition we become all too aware of them.

Till concludes with an expression of hope that I find naive, namely that architects might let go of their hang-ups of their own accord, realize the opportunities outside of the traditional bastions of a formally regulated architectural practice, behave ethically in the term's proper sense, and welcome entropy along with time. He writes of this early on in the book: 'My hunch is that architecture is the contingent discipline par excellence, and if we can deal with rather than deny that contingency, architecture may be seen as an exemplary form of transformative practice and lessons as to how to cope with contingency may be learned from its practice.' His proviso is that 'architects will deserve this attention only if they give up their delusions of autonomy and engage with others in their messy, complex lives'. Historically, however, architecture has not yet done this, even when, as in the past, it was more relevant and central to those things that mattered beyond architecture: religion, society, family and community, commerce, and so forth. Change happens from without, and those who make buildings and (since the fifteenth century) who work with ideas about architecture, take those extra-artistic and extra-disciplinary cues or move aside. This is not to suggest that architects and those who think about architecture are (entirely) at the mercy of external factors and forces, but the mandate for fundamental and widespread change is inevitably delivered to the profession.

My main criticism of *Architecture Depends* is not, then, with regard to its central ideas, but with regard to its role in the present-day scope of a combative critical culture concerned with architecture. This is, of course, another legacy of the 1970s, and like historical eclecticism much criticism and critical theory is performed in its own prison yard – connected by an underground tunnel to that of architecture itself. Till is willing to perform his own kinds of gymnastics here, and follows many of the conventions of writing of the later theory moment. He would also have us follow him on a voyage of critical consciousness awaking. I worry that his strongest ideas and most penetrating observations and criticism are watered down by anecdotes, diversions, bibliographical ballast and knot-worrying. I wonder, how would a 30,000-word version of *Architecture Depends* read? And how would it sell? Would more students add it to their shopping cart, take it to school and wave it at their lecturers and tutors? Would those architects who long ago gave up reading academic

books be willing to crack its spine? My hunch is that the book as published will not affect the discussion as it should, that it will be read by academics who agree with it. (World peace? Excellent idea!) I would, however, very much like to be wrong.

Andrew Leach

Constantinian materialism

John Milbank and Slavoj Žižek, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*, ed. Creston Davis, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2009. 416 pp., £18.95 hb., 978 0 262 01271 3.

In this clash between proponent of Catholic 'radical orthodoxy' John Milbank and Lacanian Marxist Slavoj Žižek, the startling mastery by Milbank of the recent canon of continental philosophy – alongside the flood of references to an arcane array of medieval thinkers from Meister Eckhart to Nicholas of Cusa – may well throw the unwitting reader out of their comfort zone. Indeed, in a particularly cruel twist, what Milbank excels at is precisely turning in on itself the subversively conservative aspects of Alain Badiou's and Žižek's own materialist theology, so that their rejection of contemporary 'liberal multiculturalist tolerance' is rendered into a properly conservative advocacy of intolerant, authoritarian paternalism. Or in other words: Milbank takes the recent turn to 'Paulian materialism' in some recent continental philosophy and heads off in the direction of an impassioned plea for a return to the Church itself.

In the Milbank–Žižek confrontation, then, the stakes are raised unexpectedly higher than the seemingly obscurantist Christological frame of the discussion would indicate. Milbank has argued elsewhere that with the current weakness of the Left 'the sort of young person who might once have been Marxist' can now be turned to religion, and that

> many of us are beginning to realize that old socialists should talk with traditionalist Tories. In the face of the secret alliance of cultural with economic liberalism, we need now to invent a new sort of politics which links egalitarianism to the pursuit of objective values and virtues: a 'traditionalist socialism' or a 'red Toryism'.

This marks out, quite simply, one of the great dangers for the Left today: the recuperation of the anti-capitalist critique by those who would turn its emancipatory mission in on itself, whether that be in the form of respect for Gaia, and a return to pastoral lifestyles; its moral denunciation in reactionary forms of Islamism; or in the noxious traditionalism of aristocrats and 'Conservatives with a conscience', to which Milbank's school of thought is linked, through his student Philip Blond, to David Cameron's Conservative Party.

Milbank is thus at the centre of *The Monstrosity of Christ*: quite literally – sandwiched between two essays of Žižek's unending prose – and figuratively, in that even if we might now be familiar with Žižek's own Christian turn, this text represents something of a 'coming out' into the mainstream for Milbank's 'radical orthodoxy'. What is 'radical orthodoxy?' Much like the Socratic posture that thought points beyond itself, underlying so-called 'controversies' such as 'intelligent design', where supposedly only the most contemporary insights from molecular genetics reveal its irreconcilability with evolutionary materialism, Milbank's 'radical orthodoxy' uses Žižek's Lacanian-Hegelian fusion to paint a picture of a secular (inherently Protestant) modernity which has retreated into nihilistic 'gloom', originating in the Reformation that he also argues led to the spread of global capitalism, and that his critique positions as a Fall beginning with Luther.

According to Milbank, Protestantism took an entirely contingent wrong turn, which has since been reified in the separation of reason and the transcendent, and the subsequent elimination of the transcendent – of which Hegelian dialectics represents the apotheosis. He asks: 'Why is it not legitimate to imagine "another" Christian modernity that would be linked to the universal encouragement of mystical openness and productivity, rather than the separation between a forensic faith and an instrumentalizing reason?' In order to play the philosophical equivalent of the historical genre of 'What if?' speculation, it is thus important for him to discredit the teleology of Hegelian dialectics, to which he rightly considers Žižek's Christian turn to owe the majority of its commitments. On the one hand, this debunking procedure involves undermining the secessionist reading of Christianity, where the Protestant Reformation expresses the necessary dialectical unfolding of the truth of the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit); on the other, it has to demonstrate how dialectics themselves are simply a contingent expression of Protestant thought and are inadequate next to the 'metaxological' (paradoxical) Catholic conception of the universe.

On the first point Milbank adopts what he calls an 'Anglo-Saxon empiricist' critique of the chronology of

Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestantism to undermine its necessary unfolding; this Žižek correctly dismisses as misunderstanding Hegel's relationship to history. On the second point, Milbank's more substantive and original argument pertains to how dialectics cannot think the infinite and its relation to the finite. Adopting an Anglicized version of the romantic phenomenological imagery of Alain Badiou's *Logics of Worlds*, Milbank asks us to imagine driving through a misty wood in which the mist stands for the univocal and the objects that emerge from the mist stand for the equivocal. In the paradox of how both sustain one another, without mediation, we have the supposedly pre-Reformation Catholic disposition he links – via Eckhart's thought – to the presence of infinitude in finitude. In this way, he can claim that matter is more than inert, 'boring' substance. Moreover: 'Materialist materialism is simply not as materialist as theological materialism.' And in consequence, matter itself proves

'the eternally paradoxical existence of God as pure relationship'.

Milbank thus offers the argument that a certainty in excess of evidence (empirical and/or ultimately probabilistic) concerns something like recognition of intellectual forms. Not unlike Quentin Meillassoux, Milbank radicalizes empiricism so the complexity of the concrete always already points towards a transcendence which functions as the common medium between non-cognitive/non-reflective being and the mind that receives truth as a gift, and through which truth is transferred and sustained. On the one hand, this makes him a bona fide 'correlationist', and thus vulnerable to the kind of attack developed by Meillassoux; on the other hand, like Meillassoux, Milbank has

gone a step beyond strong correlationists in his refusal of the probabilistic argument for 'hard evidence' or basis. Crucially, if this is the case, then Milbank, more than Meillassoux himself, could be considered the first post-modern strong occasionalist.

For occasionalists – not just Malebranche but also Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and Berkeley; some of whom Milbank rejects – God intervenes at every moment in order to connect body/things and mind, thus making possible and sustaining the communication between the cognitive and the non-cognitive. Ultimately, this position entails the ontological assumption that the 'minimally basic' elements of reality exist side by side without any connection of their own with one another. The connection must be, therefore, 'external' (some sort of transcendent ground that need not be empirical itself). Interestingly, this puts Milbank on the same team with Islamic philosophers like Al'Ashari and Al-Ghazali, and Christians like Malebranche and others. But perhaps more paradoxically, the side-by-side argument is precisely what guides the sceptical empiricism of Hume and his medieval predecessor Nicolas d'Autrecourt. The crux of the matter is that strict occasionalism is impossible (it would result in an utterly indifferent multiplicity of side-by-side elements with no communication whatsoever). This is why every occasionalism has to allow itself a single hypocritical exception to the otherwise widely spread ban on interaction: for Christian and the Muslim philosophers, now including Milbank, that exception is God. And so, in Milbank, God as relation turns out to be God as exception, as residue or 'excess'.

In response to this critical claim Žižek can only clarify: 'for Milbank's Catholic view, the contradiction is that of the opposite poles which coincide in a higher third element encompassing them both, their unknowable Origin and Ground; while for me, as a Hegelian, there is no need for a third term.' This Žižek squares: 'because, for me, there is no transcendent God-Father.' However, we might ask whether Žižek hasn't missed a trick here in simply repeating his Hegelian credentials? For although some of Milbank's theoretical debts to Alain Badiou are neatly tucked out of sight (we know

of them through his exceptionally extensive reading of Badiou's philosophy in a recent article in *Angelaki*), essentially the paradox to which he refers is analogous to that which kick-starts the movement of *Being and Event*. For Badiou, as with the scholastic theologians of the time, Georg Cantor's theory of the transfinite (infinities of infinities) signalled an undermining of God through the collapse of the One, or the absence of a master-set ordering all the sets within. However, for Cantor the 'Absolute infinite' was an inconsistent multiplicity that he related directly as participating as an abstract thought in the 'otherworldly being' in which it was realized fully. Where others saw only the absence of God, Cantor saw only God.

The point is that the paradox of inconsistent multiplicity cannot logically point to the existence or non-existence of God. In the same way, the sole quasi-respectable text of the 'intelligent design' movement, Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box*, comes unstuck at this aporia. Even after Behe has made what to a layman appears a convincing critique of how 'irreducibly complex' molecular systems could not arise through standard evolutionary processes, there is no logical movement to positing 'intelligent design'. In fact, Behe rattles through numerous other research paradigms before simply choosing to opt for 'intelligent design' as the one suiting his *a priori* preferences. Milbank's Catholic logic of 'paradox', then, is solely one which creates the possibility to choose to believe in transcendence, not one that in any way creates any logical ground for transcendence; which is why his ontology is frequently argued for in terms of historical, moral and normative criteria, materialist materialism being just 'boring' for example.

We are therefore fully justified in judging Milbank's philosophy in a one-to-one correspondence with the kind of politics he is advocating. When he argues, 'Would it not be more plausible to suppose that one needs to modify paternalism with a greater humility and attentiveness to populist feedback than to remove it altogether?', Žižek rightly shoots back by accusing him of a 'soft fascism'. For what Milbank is harking back to are the days when the Vatican ruled the roost and the paradoxical nature of a reality made us indifferently content to cede authority to an enlightened, paternalistic elite. This is the essence of 'radical orthodoxy' and its political correlate of 'Red Toryism': united in denouncing Marxism, 'terroristic' attempts to better the situation of the exploited and oppressed through collective action, and all forms of emancipatory thought. It is unsurprising, too, that with the dichotomy Milbank establishes between religious conservatism and secular emancipatory politics, he finds no place for liberation theology: an influential movement that has since the 1968 Medellín Conference been at the forefront of socialist and indigenous movements in Latin America. Indeed, in a debate last year with Enrique Dussell – a prestigious scholar of liberation theology – Milbank was forced to take out of the closet one of those old chestnuts of the medieval Catholicism he so admires. He denounced Dussell with just one word: 'heretic'. The good old days, apparently.

Nathan Coombs and Oscar Guardiola-Rivera

The purloined bible

Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, trans. J.T. Swann, Verso, London and New York, 2009. 304 pp., £14.99 pb., 978 1 84467 394 0.

We are not yet done with the arguments of the 1830s and 1840s; if anything, we have moved backwards. The pressing political need to bring Hegelian idealism back down to earth, to make concrete the universal, whether in the form of humanity as a whole (Feuerbach) or as a class (Marx) meant confronting the relation between religion and the state, forcing the Enlightenment project to apply concretely to the religious and hierarchical forms taken by political and social institutions at every level. 'The criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism' Marx wrote in the Introduction to the 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law'. Today's 'public' debates about religion are a hysterical parody of the concerns of the mid-nineteenth century: Sarkozy issues statements denouncing the niqab (misleadingly referring to it as the burka), despite the fact that perhaps only 700 or so women in France wear it. More seriously, the 'secular' reasoning behind the invasion of Afghanistan (to liberate 'oppressed' Muslim women) and the wars waged against those Muslims at home who don't understand our 'way of life' has brought a particularly impoverished version of the atheism-versus-religion debate to the fore, throwing a glibly invoked Darwin against a purported mass of relentlessly unsubtle fanatics. For all the fervour on both sides, there is very little discussion of what religion means politically, and how to read religious texts in a political context.

Ernst Bloch's *Atheism in Christianity*, originally published in 1968, translated in an abbreviated version

by J.T. Swann in 1972 and reissued in this (sadly) curtailed form by Verso, is a timely corrective to the spectacular and superficial dyad of smug atheism against hardline fanaticism. Offering a suitably complex yet convincing reading of the Bible and Christian motifs, Bloch, above all, is attentive to the question of method. This, too, takes us back to the 1840s. In 1841, the first major fictional detective, C. Auguste Dupin, appeared in Edgar Allan Poe's 'Murders in the Rue Morgue', and Bloch was, in a sense, as much an heir to Poe as to Feuerbach and Co. In a section entitled 'Bible Criticism and Detective Work', he argues that his method aims to 'identify and save the Bible's choked and buried "plebian" element'. But who did the choking and burying? Bloch's detective hermeneutic – *CSI JC*, if you will – uncovers the crime perpetrated against the Bible by 'defied despotism', pointing out the ways in which, historically, there have always been two Bibles: 'A Scripture for the people and a Scripture against the people.' Just as detectives inhabit the mind of the killers they track, by turns empathetic and yet absolutely certain of the iniquity of their quarry, so Bloch, the atheist, can relentlessly pursue signs of a socialist future to come amidst the catechisms and commandments of history's most dogmatically treated text. Atheism thus becomes meta-religion in the name of a politics of the dispossessed: 'only a Christian can be a good atheist' reads Bloch's famous epigram.

The first of the 'Biblical Marxists', as Roland Boer puts it, Bloch provides a critical reading that is on a continuum with his earlier works *Spirit of Utopia* and *The Principle of Hope*, and is thus eschatological from start to (non)finish, the system as a whole akin to, as Jameson puts it, 'an aerolite fallen from space'. But Bloch is not concerned, as Peter Thompson points out in the Introduction, with the 'privatized eschatology' of a figure such as Rudolph Bultmann. The end of time will be collective or it will not be at all. Indeed it is the great unwashed who better understand the subversive pull of scripture than the institutions who try to prevent the contradictions of the text unravelling in a direction that might be deleterious to theology altogether. 'There is only this point', writes Bloch, 'that Church and Bible are not one and the same'. With his emphasis on the book as the anti-hierarchical repository of clues for a new world order, Bloch's most obvious descendant is thus not Badiou (or Žižek), but Rancière, despite what Thompson claims in the introduction (because, among other things, Bloch is not particularly interested in the formal characteristics of fidelity). Bloch's emphasis on the Bible as pedagogical tool – 'In Protestant countries it was even responsible for teaching its followers to read' – and as emancipatory object is reminiscent of Rancière's claims in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. As Bloch writes: 'both the Bible and fairy-tales are "hoaxes for children and nurse-maids". But the common factor … is rather their closeness to children and to ordinary folk … The Bible speaks with special directness to the ordinary and unimportant.'

At this point, it might be tempting, as it would be with Rancière too, to point to a distinct lack of class analysis in Bloch's reading. But this would be premature: Bloch's true innovation is to identify the common formal features of the universality of both communism and Christianity, and to use the latter's utopian excess to fill out the positive content of a world to come, '[s]o far', as he puts it, 'as it is, in the end, possible to read the Bible with the eyes of the Communist Manifesto'. It is certainly true that there is typically a wide gap between the concrete nature of communism and the analysis of what it takes to get there, but performing Bloch's own detective method on his own text, it becomes clear, as Boer rightly notes, that Utopia is Bloch's 'codeword' for socialism. Not the far-off dream of heavenly peace, but the concrete emergence in the here-and-now of flashes of another world: 'Man's works against inhumanity, his attempts to achieve Utopia, his plan for what is-not-yet – do they not call for some corresponding factor at the heart of the world?' Why, Bloch asks, is the realm of freedom 'not suddenly there'? If Bloch can be criticized, then it is for claims like these as well as for the related idea that 'there is always an exodus in the world, an exodus from the particular *status quo*'. Bloch's relentless teleology of hope fails to allow for the possibility that there are perhaps times where acknowledging the power of one's enemy means being extremely suspicious of the slightest glimmer of a hope: all that glitters is not gold. Bloch can, despite his dialectical subtlety, be overly optimistic: 'For all its outward pomp, the Roman Empire is as irrelevant and unessential as an overnight stay in an inn which one is going to leave at daybreak', he states casually, but it is not quite clear that the Empire ever ended.

It is in the twin figures of Job and Christ, and not in God the father, that Bloch finds true atheism and concrete, revolutionary utopianism. Christ is both rebel and martyr, transcending the limits of man and the commands of God. For him, Christ is Che rather than Prince of Peace. Bloch, unsurprisingly, makes much of the phrase 'Son of Man'. It is, he states, 'the highest title, and it means that man has got a very long way indeed: he has become a figure of final, all-conquering strength'. The transcendence of Christ is not a question

of going 'beyond' the world, but a subversive hint of a world to come. Bloch's revolutionary humanism can *only* run through Christianity. It is not the negation of religious belief that he is concerned with, as are so many of our current cheerleaders for secular imperialism: 'The Enlightenment … will be all the more radical when it does not pour equal scorn on the Bible's all-pervading, healthy insight into man.' Job, too, is understood in the context of his humanity: 'it is really in the Book of Job that the great reversal of values begins – the discovery of potency within the religious sphere: that a man can be better, and behave better, than his God.' As in Feuerbach, from whom Bloch nevertheless seeks to distance his rather more intricate reading, Christianity is to be redeemed, but not until we have more fully understood Job's struggle – in other words, not until we have understood how religion both provides insights into oppressed humanity and maintains hope, even in the face of abandonment: 'All really *tested hope* … and all really *militant optimism*, must go through the ever more searching and destructive experience of the historical process, brought about by the powers of anti-Utopia ranged against those of the Utopia of light.'

Bloch's argument ultimately works in two directions: to convince Christians that their good book is in fact a repository of strategies for revolution, and to convince Marxists that in order to understand the form of universal culture that underpins their own analysis they need first to understand where that universal form came from. It is not that Marxism is a kind of religion, as its glib detractors would have, but that both Marxism and Christianity, on Bloch's reading, are attempts to salvage the utopian in the concrete for all who labour under the mark of oppression. Our age is filled to bursting with those promulgating a kind of moral atheism, in which people are chastised for their 'ignorant' beliefs, but it is Bloch's political atheism that truly could be of use today, and not just for Christianity. Both the New Atheists and those who rail against abortion and gay rights in the name of a 'literal' reading of the Bible would be well advised to rethink their method of reading the text, and, at the same time, look beyond the grim, mortal hope for a world to come towards a better world in the here-and-now, as paradoxically distant as the latter might seem.

Nina Power

Heidegger's doom patrol

Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze and Aesthetics*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2009. 192 pp., £18.95 hb., 978 0 26219 576 8.

Steven Shaviro's book is the second in the series 'Technologies of Lived Abstraction', which, according to its editors Brian Massumi and Erin Manning, aims to explore how, inter alia, the facets of 'thought and body, abstract and concrete, local and global, individual and collective … come formatively, reverberatively together, if only to form the movement by which they come again to differ.' That Shaviro is well placed to contribute to such debates will be no surprise to those familiar with such essays as his tribute to the band My Bloody Valentine (in the 1997 collection *Doom Patrols*), whose music is said to take place 'neither in the noise itself, nor in the performance, nor even in the bodies and minds of the audience; but somehow in *between* all these'. Nonetheless a book on Whitehead, Kant and Deleuze initially appears to be a surprising addition to the output of this energetic chronicler of postmodern and post-postmodern cultural subversion.

As is made clear in its first chapter, *Without Criteria* is concerned to establish the alternative focus on Kant that Whitehead's post-Kantian philosophy partly

enables to emerge. The essential innovation in this creative re-fecundation *dans le dos* of Kant, already conducted in quite a different register and to quite different ends by Deleuze, is to examine the role of beauty as opposed to that of the sublime in terms of how this concept in particular might speak to our current era. Beauty in Kant's formulation comes into the subject from elsewhere. The essential difference between Kant and Whitehead, when it comes to a reading of this shared conviction, is that while, for Kant, the world emerges from the subject, for Whitehead, by contrast, the subject emerges from the world. It is this 'superject', in Whitehead's terminology, which Deleuze and Guattari find to be so useful in their own account of creation and novelty in *What is Philosophy?* The Whiteheadian subject is renewed by the inputs it receives from the world. Kant, Shaviro argues, had in fact already paved the way for this in the Third Critique where the aesthetic subject does not impose its form on the world. He thus follows Whitehead in wishing to push the *Critique of Judgement* stage centre

in its premiss that affect precedes cognition, but, in what will be a refrain in the remainder of the book, he also seeks to show the ways in which Whitehead extends and radicalizes this Kantian position.

Shaviro's second chapter, 'Abstract Entities and Eternal Objects', begins by concurring with Deleuze regarding the importance of Whitehead's thinking of the event. In his 'flat ontology' there is no ontological difference between physical objects and mental or subjective acts. This essentially non-anthropomorphic and non-anthropocentric metaphysics nonetheless allows a significant place for discordance. Moreover, Whitehead's conception of the event recognizes no special privileges for the human or the rational. First, despite the model of *prehension*, with its suggestion of synthesis and incorporation, whereby one actual occasion takes up and responds to another, the responses allow the novelty which ensues to be disjunctive and affirmative of the difference between the complex precursive 'base' (or, one might venture, 'bass') and the emergent articulation. Second, we cannot separate the question of *how* we know from that of *what* we know.

The second half of the chapter turns to Kant and specifically to that which separates Kantian from Whiteheadian categories. Whereas for Kant these are universal and intrinsic to the mind which imposes them, Whitehead's categories are immanent to the data out of which they arise by abstraction. A strikingly original section sets out to show the ways in which Kant's transcendental realm prepares the ground for Deleuze's 'virtual'. What Shaviro calls the 'incorporeal special effects' formulated in the concept of the event adapted by Deleuze from the Stoics in *Logic of Sense* are very close, he asserts, to Whitehead's generative conditions or final causes. Hence Shaviro argues that we can substitute Deleuze's virtual for Whitehead's potential. Even the surprising 'eternal objects' of Whitehead are not actual entities. The chapter ends with a Deleuze and Whitehead in agreement in the call for a renewal through belief in this world – the world of novelty through a superject open to encounter – which is also the world of novelty through the creation of concepts in philosophy and art.

Chapter 3, 'Pulses of Emotion', takes as its focus Whitehead's idea that there should be a critique of pure feeling. Kant had always, despite his key insights into the possibility of the open and generative encounter, kept the 'transcendental unity of apperception' as a corrective, and thus subordinated emotion to cognition, and empiricism to epistemology. The influence of William James on Whitehead here is essential and marked by Shaviro. The chapter concludes with

another renewal, this time identified as Whitehead's espousal of the 'emotional experience of aesthetic destruction'. The phrase serves as a reminder, and Shaviro is aware of this, of how striking, and, in some quarters perhaps, how surprising, this formulation is. Whitehead here is not promulgating emotion recollected in tranquillity. This is a decidedly post-Romantic and anti-Heideggerian programme. It also prompts us to reconsider the use made of Whitehead by Guattari in his *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* and *Chaosmosis*, where Heidegger is one of the three steamrollers to have imposed stultifying modelizations on modern thought.

The remainder of Shaviro's book advances more comprehensively into the correlation of aspects of Whitehead and Deleuze. Chapter 4 is entitled 'Interstitial Life', and considers in particular the Kantian Copernican revolution discussed at length by Deleuze whereby movement is subordinated to time. Our interiority, in an insight which paves the way for Bergson's *durée*, has been temporalized. However, in Deleuze's response to Kant this insight has far-reaching and radical consequences, as he shows in his essay on Kant's four poetic formulas in *Essays Critical and Clinical*. A striking section sees Shaviro discover Deleuze's concept of counteractualization already in Kant. Likewise Whitehead's decision or final cause is a kind of 'mime', but it is also how novelty, in the guise of self-production (whether of a human, a guitar riff or a stone), enters the world. In one of the more extended applications in the book the idea of life which thinking without criteria can offer (life is 'originality of response to stimuli') is opposed to neo-Darwinian approaches to biology that continue to construe life as essentially conservative.

The fifth chapter turns to the great anomaly of Whitehead the secular prophet – namely, the role played in his thought by the figure of God. For Shaviro, 'Whitehead seeks to establish a God without religion, in the same way that he seeks to articulate a metaphysics without essentialism.' Shaviro amplifies the discussion here with some important and innovative contextualization, referring Whitehead's God to the Baphomet, which for Pierre Klossowski's novel of that name is the 'prince of modifications', the antichrist alternative to Kant's master of the disjunctive syllogism. Such a provocative simile is of the sort some readers of Shaviro's previous work may have expected. However, here the author patiently and persuasively uses the example to show how neither Deleuze's 'disjunctive synthesis' nor Whitehead's 'conversion of exclusions' can be 'defined in terms of negativity and contradiction'. In addition

Shaviro, here as elsewhere, explores and underscores the importance of Leibniz to the debate. (Eric Alliez, it should be said, has already done some groundbreaking work on the conjunction of Deleuze, Leibniz and Whitehead in his 1993 *Signature of the World*.)

By means of this patient genealogical labour, Shaviro is able to undertake fuller explication of the conjunctions named in his title. Who is this Deleuze and how is he known and apprehended? This would be a Whiteheadian question in keeping with the spirit of Shaviro's account. For Deleuze and Guattari, following on from the response of Deleuze to Klossowski (published as an appendix to the *Logic of Sense*), disjunctive syntheses (the second of the three syntheses

of *Anti-Oedipus*) can veer in either direction, namely towards God or the Antichrist. The important thing is that in neither case is the movement completed. What follows is Shaviro's demonstration of how both Whitehead's 'God' and Deleuze and Guattari's 'Body without Organs' are figures of 'induction, circulation and communication'. They are, he claims, 'structurally parallel' concepts. Shaviro may be reproached for not heeding the warning implicit in this, namely the pragmatically distinct occasions for each concept (more of this in a moment). The important point here is that in his secularizing notion of God, Whitehead posits God on the basis of aesthetic experience rather than morality. If God must be encountered, he is encountered as a datum: 'In his very relentlessness and restlessness, God figures the way that difference can emerge in

an ostensibly deterministic cosmos.' In opposition to Leibniz and Kant, then, this God remains, for Shaviro, strikingly relevant 'to the social, political and ecological concerns of our postmodern world'.

The final chapter, 'Consequences', expands on the warning mentioned above: the pragmatic distinction between thinkers who may otherwise pursue lines of reasoning which run parallel. Shaviro continues not to subject his own conjunctions to the scrutiny suggested by this warning. He points to the limitations of Whitehead's philosophy. For example, it does not give us any grounds – and Shaviro would want this – to condemn capitalism. Nonetheless what is perhaps Whitehead's great topic resonates in our time: the radically new emerges out of the prehension of already existing elements. As Shaviro argues, this is philosophy in a modest mode, the dryness of Whitehead's writing hiding for the author the unexpected which emerges out of its interstices. Whitehead's philosophy makes no great overarching claim for itself: this is why it is an aesthetics and not an ethics. Shaviro himself explains how he has made certain decisions, closely related to the themes of the series in which the book is published, to examine Whitehead *now*. This is a Whitehead prehended by a Shaviro who had previously prehended the films of Cronenberg and the music of Sonic Youth and My Bloody Valentine, but also one whose singularity is given 'concrescence' by his encounter with Whitehead. Thus this experiment is worthwhile from the point of view of Kant, Whitehead and Deleuze studies. There is an element of the unexpected for all three constituencies.

There is also perhaps the occasionally contentious issue. It might be objected that, in some ways, the merely structural parallel of Whitehead and Deleuze is not negligible: surely they are pragmatically distinct after all? Nonetheless Shaviro, rather than confront this question head on, seems to perform a stimulating and rewarding evasion. If Whitehead is rare among modern thinkers of importance in not presenting his thought as therapeutic (Shaviro's contention) then the fantasy which Shaviro claims in his preface was the pretext of his book – a twentieth-century philosophy with Whitehead instead of Heidegger occupying a central zone of reference – would, in promoting an alternative, not be attempting to present a repressed cure for a malaise. It would, rather, be making a certain *decision* with regard to potential. It is this potential which Shaviro attempts to feel in himself as author. In a flat ontology this would be just like listening to My Bloody Valentine.

Garin Dowd

Molls

John Mullarkey *Refractions of Reality: Philosophy and the Moving Image*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009. xviii + 282 pp., £55.00 hb., 987 0 23000 247 0.

The current academic conjunction of film and philosophy is one of the few ecumenical spaces in the contemporary scene where those who would otherwise have little contact bond over a shared love of cinema. John Mullarkey's *Refractions of Reality* provides an overview of the ontological and epistemological issues enlivening the debates. What is film? What does cinematic experience reveal about consciousness? How does film relate to philosophy? Can film think?

In relation to this 'burgeoning' subdiscipline, his endeavour involves producing a metatheoretical overview of currently fashionable voices. Chapters are devoted to Bordwell, Žižek, Deleuze, Cavell and Badiou, and Rancière, alongside a couple on general themes. *Refractions of Reality* could constitute a prolegomena to a subsequent book, putting forward its general, theoretical position before approaching the particular issues set out in Chapter 8 – six themes 'that refuse to stand still' in film: affective embodiment; new media technology; differential spectatorship; cinematic sound; realism in acting; the screening of animals. Opposed to 'Grand Theory', its criticism targets three aspects: the lack of pluralism in these approaches; the denigration of 'ordinary' cinematic experience; the selection of and use to which examples are put to support certain claims. Although, in the exposition, there is some hint of a lecture course turned into a book, the tack through the material is presented with a positive vision. 'Film is too resistant to one theory alone. Which is to say that film-philosophy should be catholic rather than puritan, a messy mix of methodologies and eclectic, random examples, rather than exemplars that illustrate one's point perfectly.'

Parataxis gets at the idea of the evasive whole: 'The relative failure of each theory is also a partial success, each one catching a glimpse of what it is trying to explain so that, when mixed together, allows a new view to emerge.' Each theorist in turn has a necessary blind spot. So, Žižek in his focus on movie texts *must* ignore the materiality of the image; Deleuze *must* disregard narrative and the performances of actors. Mullarkey evokes the abandoned French project of 'Filmology' while aiming to avoid the pitfalls of synthesis and syncretism. Yet without such speculative ambitions it is not clear how Mullarkey's 'meta-theory'

is distinct from the rather less grand notion of the literature survey. There is a lot of material covered in the book, but it is necessarily partial given the constraints of space, and it is not clear if any chapter can claim to cover the current 'state of the art' regarding both the scope of each figure's output and the differences of interpretation in the secondary literature. A lot depends on the cogency of Mullarkey's co-opting of the work of François Laruelle to produce a 'non-philosophy of film', which describes how film repeatedly effects the failure of thought to capture its essence, so that nobody knows 'what film fundamentally is, and also thereby what any one film essentially means'. Film has an *élan cinématique*, rather than an essence that would be amenable to philosophical capture.

Although I have some sympathy with the endeavour, and agree that a certain approach in 'Film-Philosophy' needs to be closed down, I am less sure that this book is able do what it sets out to do. Chiefly, it is not clear that there is a subdiscipline sufficiently well established such that it can close itself off from the earlier work on film, and, in particular, from analogous work on art and literature. Owing to its presentational decisions, the book asks to be tested from a different angle: can a philosophical approach to film evade mediation through previous philosophical writing on art? What is excluded from the book is the problem itself.

Despite the ecumenical approach to philosophers writing about film, Mullarkey conveniently ignores both other disciplines and non-institutionalized discourses. This is a strangely old-fashioned idea: that only those writing from within philosophy departments have anything to say about whether film has 'indigenous philosophical value'. The book itself evinces no plurality of methods: its reading of theorists grants very little space to critics, film-makers writing about their own practice, or individual films. This largely accounts for the failure to differentiate film as medium, film as means and modes of production, a history of films, the sum of all films, and individual works. Indeed, one has to ask whether there is any film here at all, or whether, occluded by the theory of theory, it persists only in attenuated form. For instance, although discussed, Godard is allowed no comeback to theory, despite the opening polemical engagement with Deleuze in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and its insistence on including the filming of history in the history of film. Similarly, that set of films is itself treated as an inert, unresisting object for commentary in so far as its presentation in Rancière's *Film Fables* is left unchallenged.

Whether Laruelle's non-philosophy has its own merits, *concesso non dato*, its presentation here, allied

with Wittgenstein and an advocation of ecumenical-ism, smacks of mollification for the domestic market. In championing 'an ecstatic naturalism of thought', Mullarkey argues that film is not merely illustrative of philosophical themes, but thinks in its own manner; a manner that exceeds and escapes the modes of thought with which philosophy is familiar. He sees *contemporary* philosophy of film as more democratic in so far as it is not beholden to the 'chauvinism' of earlier approaches which took philosophy as the benchmark or the mediator through which its content might unfold. (Mullarkey classes Hegel and Adorno as examples of the latter, outmoded approach.) Consider the following extract, which reveals the book's assumptions about its polemical target:

> Thinking is everywhere. For some, this will be unacceptable. For some, the true philosophical horror is not that we are not (yet) thinking, but that we have *always* been thinking. Given the view that philosophy must have an essence and so an exclusivity, then what is (philosophically) unthinkable is that thinking might be found all about us.

Who is this 'some'? Who holds that philosophy has an essence that monopolizes thinking? The 'non' in Mullarkey's non-philosophy of film is developed in relation to a restricted notion of philosophy, where a philosophy *of* film is characterized as concerned exclusively with a potential object of knowledge, attempting to identify, 'what is *x*?' Although this may be the analytic approach (privileging the first from the fact/value separation), exemplified by someone such as Bordwell, it is not what is at stake for Deleuze or Žižek. The contours of *Refractions of Reality* are determined in relation to the idea that 'a transcendent (philosophical) typology ought to accommodate all films descriptively rather than prescriptively.' It is this model which is questionable in a manner distinct from the necessary failures and exclusions discerned by Mullarkey. In other words, there is an excluded middle: film as cultural and artistic production has a history that reduces to neither an *élan* nor an idea of essence more appropriate to the objects of natural sciences. Despite some astute comments on the Bourne movies and their visceral impact on perception, these are let down by a failure to consider different forms of judgement: the evaluation or favouring of particular films. Perhaps because the main figures discussed are based in philosophy departments, the issue of preference and its institutionalization in canonical and pedagogical forms is absent. It is because of this omission that Mullarkey undervalues the achievements of 'theory' (feminist and otherwise) in opening up the canon to new objects by challenging humanism's appreciation. The struggle here was around what is worth attention. Similarly, it is incumbent on the philosophical consideration of film to negotiate the generic concepts associated with art. Unfortunately, Mullarkey deals only with the atrophied form these concepts take in the analytic tradition, rather than the richer strain drawing from German Idealism. The brief references to art are disappointing: the Bourne films 'obviously fail the "test of time" criterion of art' but, as what is to be negated, this depiction is inadequate to contemporary thinking.

The currently dominant conception of philosophy reduces it to abstract 'questioning' or 'thinking', parasitic on others for content. In latching on to film, it reveals the true fear of academic philosophy today: intellectual life is elsewhere. Here, in contrast to this enervated, historically circumscribed form of self-understanding, a 'non-philosophy of film' appears as positive, but only as a reaction formation. From a broader perspective, the idea that we need 'non-philosophy' to appreciate that thinking occurs outside of philosophy departments will come as a surprise to many. Those already engaging with the arts have no need of this book.

Andrew McGettigan