Remake, the sequel

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2009. xiv + 434 pp., £25.95 hb., 978 0 674 03511 9.

With *Commonwealth*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri bring to a conclusion the trilogy they began a decade ago with the publication of *Empire* in 2000. *Multitude*, the second volume, was published in 2004. Looking back, *Empire* remains the most theoretically innovative of the volumes, the most surprising and productive, as it set out for the first time (in English) a series of post-Autonomia concepts – including 'empire' and 'multitude' – that attempt to provide an account of the globalized present and its prehistory. It has captured the philosophical and political imaginations of many. *Multitude* and *Commonwealth* extend, exemplify and slightly recode what was set out in the first volume – and thus at times drag, despite the often interesting materials deployed (historical, sociological, philosophical and cultural). In their repetitions, they become increasingly melodramatic, both politically and theoretically, culminating in the final section of *Commonwealth* on the politics of laughter (that is, the political fantasy of 'instituting happiness'), the last two sentences of which read: 'And in the struggles against capitalist exploitation, the rule of property, and the destroyers of the common through public and private control, we will suffer terribly, but still we laugh with joy. They will be buried by laughter.' At what are, frankly, offensive moments like this, confronted with such a 'we', one cannot but think that the book might best belong in some kind of Ballardian nightmare.

There are a number of noticeable shifts in perspective and emphases in *Commonwealth*, when compared to *Empire* and *Multitude*. Most of these, however, although interesting in themselves, serve only to strengthen the political ontology that is set out throughout the trilogy. Since many of Hardt and Negri's political concepts – such as 'multitude' and 'exodus' – are quite well known, I will concentrate below on the major changes and their significance. One change is *Commonwealth*'s abandonment of the post-9/11 Schmittian stress on sovereign exception that frames *Multitude*. Hardt and Negri now insist that the 'excessive focus on the concept of sovereignty' in recent political philosophy (including, it transpires, their own) has generated a misrecognition of contemporary – mainly republican – state forms and has taken on an 'apocalyptic' tone that undermines political engagement, which is the main focus of *Commonwealth*. The idea raised by Agamben that exception has become the norm is, in this sense, both mistaken and disabling. More surprising, perhaps, is that *Commonwealth* also abandons the idea of 'post-modernity' to describe contemporary forms of cultural experience (of technological developments, flexible accumulation, migration and transnational forms of sovereignty), replacing it with a combination of a very general, historically weak notion of modernity, on the one hand, and a very strong, political notion of 'altermodernity', on the other.

The composition of *Commonwealth* is marked by a distinct will to scan, rather than to delve – much like Google Earth. This means that the authors move quickly through the materials (concepts, issues, events) it brings into focus; Hardt and Negri pass through history and theory at speed to produce a biopolitical totalization of the globalized present. In order to provide their accounts of 'modernity', 'antimodernity' and 'altermodernity', for example, the authors travel far and wide, especially to Latin America. This is not surprising, because they correctly make the historical experience of colonialism and slavery internal to their concepts of capitalism and modernity, but the latter proves to be so all-encompassing a concept that the theoretical gesture threatens to remain devoid of historical significance: the contemporaneity of processes standing in for actual historical determinations. Modernity, they say, 'must be understood as a power relation: domination and resistance, sovereignty and struggles for liberation'. In other words, it is whatever their position demands. Even though their idea of modernity presents itself as a periodizing concept, it is not clear what would *not* be modern. Hardt and Negri do, however, evoke the idea of the 'coloniality of power' (coined by the Peruvian Marxist sociologist Aníbal Quijano, whom they fail to mention) to give it some historical and political substance. However, their main purpose is immediately to biopoliticize (and re-baptize) it as 'the coloniality of *bio*power', incorporating it into their conception of modernity and preparing the conceptual way for introducing

both the 'resistance' that is its condition (and 'anti-modernity') and the concept that will sublate and replace it: 'alter-modernity'.

The importance of Quijano's rethinking of coloniality, which Hardt and Negri pick up on via the work of Latin Americanist critics Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo (a colleague of Hardt's at Duke University) is that it is not confined to historical processes of colonialism, but embraces postcolonial nation-formation too; especially the ways in which racism became fundamental to what were to all extent and purposes 'positivist states' throughout Latin America – a neocolonial anti-colonialism. To transform the idea of such power to biopower (in a Foucauldian vein), and to generalize it beyond Latin American so as to include Europe and the USA, is an important conceptual step: colonialism, postcolonialism and anti-colonialism are constitutive of the whole of the modern world, in a variety of forms (in his original formulation Quijano tends to presuppose 'Europe' as an already given colonial subject). However, according to Giovanni Arrighi in *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994), Spanish colonialism in the Americas might be best conceived of as anti-modern (medievalist) recoil, a reaction-formation against emerging forms of accumulation and modern forms of territorialism. Albeit helpful at one level, Hardt and Negri's concepts of modernity and anti-modernity are arguably too flat, abstract and overpoliticized to consider such historical complexity.

But what is *alter*modernity? As used here (rather than in its recent artworld manifestation, in Nicolas Bourriaud's 2009 *Altermodern*), it is a concept that links three distinct forms of anti-modernity – a line of radical enlightenment thought from Spinoza via Kant to Marx, workers' struggles that have been subordinated to ideologies of progress and development (including socialist ones), and anti-colonial/imperialist/racist resistance – so as to transform them into aspects of a new 'multitudinous' political project of social transformation that rests on the creation of a 'new humanity'. (This is Hardt and Negri's modified translation of Che Guevara's notion of the 'new man'.) Altermodernity is thus not an alternative modernity, in the sense of an exceptionalism, or a modernity or capitalism with, for example, 'Japanese characteristics', as in culturalist accounts. It is modernity 'otherwise', based on the history of resistance to modernity. '[T]he freedom that forms the base of resistance… comes to the fore and constitutes an event to announce a new political project', we are told. In other words, alter-modernity is always already present as modernity's critical counterpoint. It is here that Hardt and Negri envisage the role of the contemporary 'militant' intellectual, enlisted to translate 'the practices and desires of the struggles into norms and institutions … embarked on the project of co-research aimed at making the multitude.' As the sum of singularities, however, the multitude is also the subject of freedom and resistance (to modernity), of altermodernity, and thus of its own (biopolitical) self-production as event – in Hardt and Negri's anti-Badiouian perspective.

To exemplify, Hardt and Negri again turn to Latin America, specifically to political developments – the emergence of the 'multitude-form' – in Bolivia; although they truncate their narrative to fit, so as to not include its coming to power under the leadership of Evo Morales and Álvaro García Linera, the new vice-president, whose writings they rely upon for their account. Again, it a question of appropriating and transforming concepts – here, once more, the concept of 'multitude' – so as to make them their own. The problem is that the idea of multitude is already doing so much philosophical and political work throughout the 'Empire' trilogy that it becomes overburdened with content, and begins to capsize under its own weight. It was because it failed to deal with this problem philosophically that the book *Multitude* was such a disappointment (see my review in *RP* 130, March/April 2005, pp. 29–32). For in Bolivia, according to Hardt and Negri, the multitude is not only subject and substance (the producing product or subject–object of political history), but also the organizational 'means': 'a concept of applied parallelism', the multitude-form politically unifies *without* hegemony along the axes of class and race/ethnicity.

Hardt and Negri are right in this aspect of their version of García Linera's account of the new dominant organisational form of the working classes in Bolivia – the result of an expanded and recomposed process of proletarianization as a result of neoliberal globalization – but they are wrong to suggest it has a *non*-hegemonizing character. For García Linera:

> We … work with the *multitude* as a bloc of collective action that articulates autonomous structures organized by the subaltern classes around discursive and symbolic hegemonic constructions that have the particularity of varying in their origins within different segments of the subaltern classes (*La potencia plebeya/Plebeian Power*, 2008)

Hegemony is clearly fundamental to García Linera, as is the moment of 'intersubjective' unity that emerges in contexts of political crisis and resistance. García Linera produces his concepts in critical conversation with the late René Zavaleta, whose concepts of a 'variegated society' and 'multitude' Hardt and Negri also mention.

They dismiss the latter, again rather hurriedly, for its developmentalism, but deploy the former – a way of describing the uneven but un-combined development of Bolivia – to justify the use of their own concept of multitude. For Zavaleta, the notion of intersubjectivity comes into play to describe the moment of unity in a political crisis in such an *un-combined* context. As elsewhere in the 'Empire' trilogy, Hardt and Negri charismatically evoke 'political love' as their alternative.

The most obvious change of emphasis in *Commonwealth* is contained in the volume's title. In the wake of recent discussions of neoliberal 'accumulation through dispossession' (by David Harvey among others), the history of forms of 'constituent power' (in Peter Linebaugh's 2008 *The Magna Carta Manifesto*, for example), and Paolo Virno's quasi-anthropological reflections on the social significance of the communality and natural-historical character of language, Hardt and Negri bring their own notion of 'the common(s)' to the fore – all the way into the title of the book. The idea of 'the common' has two main aspects. The first is recognizably classical, and refers to 'the common wealth of the material world – the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all of nature's bounty… the inheritance of humanity as a whole, to be shared'. The second refers to 'those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledge, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth'. Life, in other words, begets common forms which beget life… This aspect is the most significant for the authors because it links the common to what they refer to as immaterial and affective labour and biopolitical production, the making and remaking of 'life' in both its objective and its subjective moments. The ways in which contemporary forces of production put to work cultural forms, virtuosity and the means of communication and representation (virtual networks, etc.) is fundamental to their conception. This 'common wealth' is appropriated and accumulated as capital, via forms of property and state command.

From the point of view of theoretical procedure, such a view is arguably their re-vision – that is, their *biopoliticization* – of the well-known contradiction between the socialization of production and private appropriation, which is so difficult to unravel today in the context of the predominance of 'high finance' capital over industrial production, the model social form for classical Marxism. From this biopoliticized perspective, even finance capital represents and maps the commons negatively as appropriated accumulation. In other words, in the same spirit as the concept of 'multitude' (in a project already initiated by Negri in his *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the 'Grundrisse'* of 1979), *Commonwealth* provides a subjectivist counterpoint to Marx's *Capital*, reading the objective processes analysed there 'from below' – that is, from the perspective of 'living labour'.

Commonwealth thus suggests the need for 'a new theory of value' to replace Marx's, which it is judged surpassed by new forms of capital and, especially, new forms of labour that exceed capital's abilities to either appropriate or overcode it (it is outside 'measure'). Hardt and Negri refer here to the breakdown in the divisions between leisure time and work time, for example, and between private space and spaces of work, associated with immaterial and affective labour. Production and life have, they suggest, become co-determinous: capital is really a social relation, they insist, and now the social relations of production produce social relations. Skirting the spectral, but equally actual, existence of capital as form of value, Hardt and Negri thus 'prove' that there has been a biopoliticization of production. In such a context the account of value on which Marx's theory of capitalist exploitation is based has been historically surpassed, and what Negri and others have referred to as 'self-valorization' (now, the biopolitical production of common wealth), comes to the fore. Such a rethinking of exploitation could have proved a very

useful contribution – indeed, it promised to become the highlight of the book – but instead it remains scattered and without focus. In privileging the idea of 'living' labour over commodified labour (variable capital), for example, it refuses to take Marx's industry-centred conception into the streets, dwellings, fields and so on, where the new forms of labour – and of value – foregrounded here are to be found. In this regard, Hardt and Negri have very little to say about ongoing processes and experiences of primitive accumulation, industrialization and high finance capital in China, and its transnational effects – areas in which Marx's theory of value still seems applicable and pertinent. Rather, the authors simply assert the subjective dimension of the labour theory of value, categorically, reading Marx/Engels's 'technical composition of *labour*' from Volume 3 of Capital as 'living labour', against the notion of the technical composition of *capital*. As a result, they bypass both value as a critical concept and the well-known problems, insufficiencies and ambiguities of the labour theory of value itself. (The debate about the work of Chris Arthur, for example, in the journal *Historical Materialism*, is one port at which Hardt and Negri have yet to call.)

All three volumes of the 'Empire' trilogy thus present themselves as works of post-Marxist communism, founded in a common theoretical and political insistence: to render positive the concepts of 'the common', 'the multitude' and 'biopolitical production', and to hegemonize the field of theoretical production from which they derive, through survey and synthesis. Put succinctly, 'the multitude' is the political embodiment of 'the common', whilst 'biopolitical production' is what mediates them – the common as multitude, the multitude as common – in creative practice (conceived predominantly from the perspective of non-alienated or, more positively, 'living' labour) qua 'freedom'. In *Commonwealth* Hardt and Negri finally address the concept of freedom, absent in both *Empire* and *Multitude*, as the ground of their deployment and description of multiple acts of 'resistance' – an idea which, up until now, has been abstractly (even enigmatically) posited as somehow logically existing prior to the very forms of domination resisted. Unsurprisingly, such a concept of freedom is derived from Foucault, who by now has clearly become the authors' master-thinker. Having outlined Foucault's account of biopower and discipline, Negri and Hardt proceed to rescue and transform – that is, endow with subjective historical substance – his 'docile bodies', quoting him as follows: 'Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free.… At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom.' Hardt and Negri then draw their own conclusions: 'Biopolitics appears in this light … as a tightly woven fabric of events of freedom … [that] should be understood not only negatively, as rupture, but also as innovation, which emerges, so to speak, from the inside.' This productive freedom – the biopower (*potenza*) – of the multitude, which capital and state negate, provides Hardt and Negri with a historical logic, in a quasi-Hegelian form they philosophically disavow (spirit is materialized, not as capital, as for Marx, but as biopower), in which social emancipation is always already guaranteed.

There is no doubt, then, that *Commonwealth* attempts to reformulate what Badiou refers to as 'the communist hypothesis' at its core with regard to its original focus on property and the state – clearly an important theoretical and political task – via the 'biopoliticization' of all concepts. But, as a work of synthesis, it moves much too quickly, stumbling on the way, and arguably missing (as Žižek has recently suggested, in *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, 2009) what is really new within the new, despite the impression of relentless conceptual innovation. However much Hardt and Negri may grasp difference, for example, via the still-underdeveloped concepts of 'singularity' and 'multiplicity', as well as criticize identity-thinking as 'corruption', they remain blind to the new forms of non-synchronicity and unevenness within transnational capitalist development; and however much they may attempt to reformulate the concept of exploitation for new times, in their rush to consolidate a political ontology of the multitude they persistently miss the reconfigured persistence of the old (as new). In this they remain conventionally *developmentalist*.

Commonwealth is a work characterized primarily by an onward movement, rather than a reflective or constructive thought, as it takes readers on a world-historical tour of past and contemporary events and their reflection in theory and philosophy. It synthesizes at speed and so flattens concepts as they are either dismissed or quickly emptied out and reappropriated. When compared to the relative slowness of the intellectual labour, conceptual production and criticism that characterizes the works of those authors with whom Hardt and Negri are generally compared – Badiou, Balibar, Laclau, (Negri himself?), Rancière, Virno, amongst others – this work reads, with its prequels (*Empire* 1 & 2), like a generic work of literary or cinematic narrative: a Hollywood remake.

John Kraniauskas

Junk utopia

Adrian Parr, *Hijacking Sustainability*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2009. 224 pp., £16.95 hb., 978 0 26201 306 2.

At the time of writing the Copenhagen Climate Change negotiations are in full flow, with stories of breakthroughs and breakdowns circulating in equal measure. Whatever the final outcome of these talks – which, in a real sense, cannot be evaluated for years to come, in so far as any substantive action will require an ongoing process of industrial, economic and indeed cultural restructuring – it is worth noting that the most optimistic ambitions of the negotiations are to achieve an ultimate reduction in CO_2 which will, according to the stated aims of the summit, give the planet a 50/50 chance of avoiding runaway global warming. (Although many leading scientists, including Dr James Hanson, director of NASA's Goddard Institute, and Professor Kevin Anderson, director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at Manchester, have cast doubt on these assumptions, arguing that much steeper and faster emissions reductions than those hoped for at Copenhagen are needed to reach even a 50/50 position.) Of course, we should remember as well that the issues being addressed at Copenhagen – reducing industrial carbon emissions and disseminating renewable energy technology – represent just one part of 'the environmental question' confronting global culture more broadly. Workers in almost all arenas of human production are increasingly having to confront the demands placed upon their professions by both emerging and acute systemic stresses in our energy, food, material, waste and water flows, as the ecosystems across the planet upon which we feed and shit are degraded, with some already in the final stages of terminal collapse.

In recent years we have become increasingly aware of the sheer scale and irreversible impoverishment of *our* environment, an effect of what Marx described as the 'metabolic rift' between global capitalist growth and the broader web of ecological relations within which we are suspended. As the patterns of uneven development by which capitalism produces itself – and indeed large parts of nature – are played out as and through social relations, it is the world's poorest and weakest who suffer the most from environmental degradation. It is thus incumbent to reflect and act upon the very real problems posed by the socio-ecological crisis of capitalism, even whilst we also recognize the importance of, for example, T.J. Demos's observation that there is, today, a need to 'denaturalize the rhetoric of "sustainability", recognizing these buzzwords as deeply political, contentious and ideological'.

It is against the background of this range of issues that Adrian Parr's new book *Hijacking Sustainability* is published. Whether considering the ecobranding of consumer products, the greenwash of multinational corporations, or grassroots political activism, for Parr the re-emergence of environmental issues in political and popular cultural space over the last decade defines a new social discourse: *sustainability culture*. In much of Parr's analysis, the logic of sustainability culture is therefore found to be already active in contemporary culture and production, and in these situations she generally executes a reasonably sensitive and informative critique. However, elsewhere in her text Parr seems to refer to, or call for, a new and critically radicalized sustainability culture. There is an antagonism between these two different conceptions: one emerging at the leading edge of capitalism, supported by all kinds of innovative technologies, commodities and ecobranding ideologies; the other formed out of oppositional social structures and technologies.

Parr's thesis is built around this dual conception of sustainability culture, defining and describing it as a contradictory nexus of relations between production, ideology, state and society. This is often productive and useful. Equally, however, it is not always clear which conception of sustainability culture she is referring to, and, as a result, the text can at times seem both confused and confusing. It is not that conceiving of a set of relations as internally contradictory is a problem in itself. Indeed, the conception of a unity of relations as internally constituted through a network of contradictory internal relations and tendencies is a key moment in any process of dialectical thought. And although she lacks any explicit theory of dialectical process, Parr does, at times, make suggested moves in this direction – for example with a reference to the useful work of John Bellamy Foster. Overall, however, *Hijacking Sustainability* suffers from Parr's lack of any conscious acknowledgement and theorization of the fact that she is precisely working with such shifting and contradictory aspects of sustainability culture. More generally, it is a shame that Parr does

not position her work rather more clearly in relation to broader critical and historical conceptual work, perhaps drawing upon some of the theorizations that have emerged around, for instance, the intersections of political ecology and critical geography – thinking in particular of David Harvey and Neil Smith's theory of uneven development or Eric Swyngedouw's conception of urban metabolism.

Nonetheless, Parr does generate some important new research into the way that the cluster of ideas and practices referred to as sustainability are operative within and around capitalism today. Hence, for example, she explores how sustainability culture is providing a discourse through which contemporary capitalism is playing out its inner contradictions, even whilst this same sustainability culture provides a new discourse of power. As she reminds us, 'sustainability culture is inherent to the logic of late capitalism.' She is particularly interested, in this regard, in exploring the practices and ideologies of the strands of ecological thinking that are able to engage with, or indeed are directly produced by, those sectors of capitalist production that are able to see potential for capital accumulation and investment as a result of shifts in environmental consciousness. Still, at times Parr can seem rather naive, as, for example, in her apparent post-autonomist faith that 'in the US it is not ideology that is turning sustainability into a cultural hegemonic: it is a socially and environmentally conscious multitude whose investment and consumption patterns are prompting multinational corporations … to develop a new image of corporate social responsibility.'

Parr begins the book by suggesting that there has been a shift in the meaning of sustainability: 'gone are the days when the word conjured up images of unapologetic veganism, dreadlocks, and mud brick homes. From eco-hippie to eco-hip, sustainability is the new buzzword.' This kind of formulation is a real problem, and typifies the weaker side of the book. Whilst we can certainly discuss the recent popular growth of ideas around sustainability in terms of 'eco-hip', it is surely a mistake to ascribe the term 'sustainability' to the hippies of the 1960s. The ecological movements of the 1960s certainly fed into contemporary conceptions of sustainability, but the two moments also represent two distinct social and historical forms of cultural engagement with the environmental question. The word 'sustainability', as Parr herself notes, only really emerges into mainstream environmental discourse following the 1987 UN *Our Common Future* report, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, which defined sustainability as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

It is a shame that Parr opens with such a lazy statement, as she soon progresses to a more sophisticated analysis of the matter. She notes that the Brundtland commission report has a distinctive multinational agenda, in which

> emphasis is given to a new international economic structure that fosters long term co-operation, one that assigns an important developmental role to multinational companies and multilateral financial institutions especially in respect to initiating sustainable development in developing countries.

As Parr observes, there is a 'stark contrast' between the top-down macro-approach of the Brundtland version of sustainability, and the bottom-up micro-form (and ideology) of most local environmental grassroots movements. It is in moments like this that it would have been useful to consider the contradictions inherent within sustainability culture in the context of the contradictions within modern environmentalism more broadly. As David Pepper has, for example, shown, ecology has, as a discipline, from its inception combined arcadian, commercial and imperial concerns. We surely need to see in 'sustainability culture' the latest unfolding of the historical contradictions within ecological thinking more broadly.

Hijacking Sustainability develops through a series of chapters which to some extent stand alone. Notable among these is a study of the way in which the White House itself has mediated different approaches to thinking about the building in the environment. This starts with an analysis of the original design, which featured basic strategies such as working with natural lighting and ventilation. Jimmy Carter installed solar panels – although, as Parr notes, these functioned primarily within a discourse of global energy resource control rather than an ecological systems approach, and, importantly for Parr, functioned within a militaristic logic – which Ronald Reagan then famously removed, a move that made little environmental sense, even whilst it contained a further clear military signal. Parr also deploys in some interesting ways Rem Koolhaas's concept of 'junkspace', using it to unpick different tendencies within sustainability culture (specifically working through the differences between eco-branding, greenwashing and sustainability culture proper). For Koolhaas, 'if space-junk is the human debris that litters the universe, junk-space is the residue mankind

leaves on the planet.' Koolhaas's key insight for urban thinkers is that the built 'product of modernization is not modern architecture but junkspace', or, as Parr puts it, 'the spatial patterning of consumption is junkspace'. Parr wonders whether, in so far as sustainability culture is progressive with respect to processes of modernization, it too must organize its production according to the logic of junkspace. She is concerned that, today, 'junkspace arises not so much from the values and actions of multinational corporate culture than as the effect of the multitude's green consumption habits.'

Culturally, one of the most interesting characteristics of contemporary environmental thinking is the way in which it frequently articulates its ideas through a utopian imaginary. This claim for Parr concerns not simply the many forms of environmental thinking that can be loosely described as anarcho anti-capitalist or eco-socialist, which she deals with, up to a point, in an analysis of the urban forms implied by both gated communities and ecovillages. (Here she would have benefited from some of the broader material that Carolyn Steele reflects upon in her recent book *Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives*, notably, her reflections upon Marx's well-known critique of Cabet's utopianism: 'a few hundred thousand people cannot establish and continue a communal living situation without it taking on an exclusive and sectarian nature'.) For Parr, rather, culture as a whole contains a utopian impulse, which 'arises when culture registers our current conditions (such as global climate change, militarism and capitalism) but then transforms these in the process'. This has been commented upon by several recent environmental thinkers. Indeed, as Steele has perceptively observed, 'utopianism represents the nearest thing that we have to a history of cross disciplinary thought on the subject of human dwelling.' Ultimately Parr claims that

> culture can promote a sense of dignity and care for the environment in ways that institutions, bureaucracies and governments cannot. This is because culture is an especially utopian practice … not in the sense that it creates an imaginary ideal; rather it exposes, develops, questions and abstracts the potential and concrete specificity of our present circumstances, all with a look to creating a future that is critically different from what currently is and has been.

Whilst the utopian impulses of sustainability culture can no doubt ultimately be subjected to the kind of ideological analysis articulated in, for example, Manfredo Tafuri's critique of modern architecture's broader relation to capitalist development, it remains refreshing that something can still be said on the matter. In this regard it is a pity that Parr does not take the opportunity to think more about the (anti-)utopianism of junkspace itself.

Parr is writing from a distinctively North American cultural viewpoint, and, it would seem, from a pre-banking crisis and recession perspective. Whilst as a non-North American I feel partly unqualified to assess developments in this region's culture, one can't help but wonder at the accuracy of some of her more enthusiastic accounts of the widespread popular support for sustainable thinking. Parr is also writing from an academic position within a school of architecture, and no doubt her concern is partly to shift the dominant discourse around sustainability in architecture onto a cultural rather than technical basis. Hence, she states, for example, that 'the benefit of looking to cultural production in the context of sustainable development is that culture is not simply ideological … culture not only promotes social awareness of environmental issues; as a practice it has the power to also put sustainable living to work'. Here Parr seems to advocate – although she does not spell it out clearly enough – a restructuring of production into something like what William McDonough and Michael Braungart call 'cradle2cradle' metabolic cycles (in which production would have to be systemically reorganized such that there is no waste, and where all matter is conceived as a part of either the biological or technical nutrient cycles). For Parr, the concern is that existing multinational corporations are increasingly organizing themselves into pseudo-sustainable entities operating according to a militaristic logic which is fundamentally in contradiction with what we might describe as the possibility of a *democratic metabolics*.

Hijacking Sustainability is finally a useful, though at times frustrating, contribution to the slowly growing new body of thinking around the environmental question. It does consider in detail how a cluster of conceptions of sustainability are currently producing a cultural discourse defining our relations to our environment. However, Parr leaves the reader with a lot of work to do in resolving both the contradictions within and as revealed by her text. Nonetheless, she reveals moments when real progressive and even utopian potential can be found to be at work in environmental politics today, even as an ideology and culture of sustainable development has given shape to new forms of accumulation at the leading edge of capitalism.

Jon Goodbun

Begin the Beguine

Gary Peters *The Philosophy of Improvisation*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2009. viii + 190 pp., £26.00 hb., 978 0 226 66278 7.

Mattin and Anthony Iles, eds, *Noise & Capitalism*, Artleku Audiolab, Donostia-San Sebastián, 2009. 194 pp., free, 978 84 7908 622 1, available at www.arteleku.net/audiolab/noise_capitalism.pdf.

With *The Philosophy of Improvisation*, Gary Peters has constructed a sprawling book that runs through numerous issues and philosophical references as it attempts to think spontaneous, unscripted, extempore production. He claims to have written the book in improvised fashion: producing half a page per day. As he notes, 'improvisation is by no means a guarantee of quality or an excuse for its absence.' Peters's solo gamble is to set off without reference to what improvisers think:

> the practice of improvisation is itself unable to invent a concept of improvisation – why should it, such a concept would not guarantee good improvisations. No, the task is for philosophers, not practitioners, and what is more, it is a task that requires invention and creativity, not discussion – philosophers and practitioners do not need to speak to each other.

His polemic has three main targets:

1. the view that improvisation can only represent a 'hack' (a temporary, makeshift response when the exigency of real-time response cannot be avoided);
2. the 'ideology' which celebrates the humanistic pleasures of jamming with friends and being absorbed in the moment;
3. the valorization of group improvisation as a site of authentic dialogue, autonomy and empathy.

For Peters, these approaches understand neither 'the real situation of the improviser [nor] the ontological significance of improvisation'. A telling contrast is provided when he refers to Ben Watson's book, *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation* (reviewed by David Cunningham in *RP* 128).

> Page after page … is devoted to detailed accounts of specific improvisations, tracing over and over again, with the obsessiveness of a true fan, the microcosmic disasters and triumphs of an endlessly shifting personnel caught up in the trials and tribulations of these little dialogues. This makes for engaging reading, but for all its promotion of and enthusiasm for its subject, never quite manages to bring to the fore the real ontological force of free-improvisation, which is its incomparable ability to present the beginning of art and its glorious failure to hold this beginning before our eyes.

Peters sees it as his contribution to identify this 'real ontological force' (a force which has escaped the improvisers themselves, not just Watson). It is here that Peters recruits the ontological hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger to address the 'real predicament of the artist at work'. An understanding of improvisation begins here in what Peters privileges as a 'tragic task': the performer does not aim at the production of works – outcomes are not heralded; instead, improvisation plays out the necessary sacrifice of originary freedom in the unfolding production. Heidegger combines with Kant, as this beginning is glossed as the occluded but 'never lost' *sensus communis*, which art helps recall to us. The 'double' tragedy of the performer would then be that art is 'rooted in a common sense that is universal but incommunicable … the tragic silence of its beginning is forgotten in the working out of the artwork: the tragic loss of tragedy'. Peters argues that this approach rejects any vanguardist attitude to improvisation: 'it is not a question of being original that is essential but the manner in which the origin of art can be kept in view.'

Peters has no interest in providing improvisers with a theory that would help produce better improvisations, defend the merits of improvisation against composition, or frame judgements about particular improvisations and improvisatory practices. No actual practice is discussed: his 'model' of improvisation models the abstract moment of aesthetic production. He refuses to discuss recordings of improvised performances, since this would consider a produced work not the performing.

Let us pause. Surely it is impossible to say anything further philosophically without consideration of actual practices and productions. Peters writes of musical free improvisation that it is the 'exemplary aesthetic form because it manages to offer a glimpse of this double tragedy and it does this to the extent that it resists the *work* of art being destroyed by the artwork'. How does one judge or espy such resistance without familiarity

with the ways works work or not? Peters offers regular asides about poor improvisation: for example, 'there is a good deal of work that could barely be described as innovative or improvised'. The categories supporting these judgements cannot be developed from out of his theory; his attenuated criterion cannot distinguish 'proper' improvisation from any garbled racket or hackneyed jig. Nothing would entitle one to say, or decide, one way or another whether or not 'we held the beginning before our eyes'. 'Proper' improvisation cannot be determined this way.

The concluding suggestion is that the aim all along was 'to arrive at a concept of improvisation that, if nothing else, would allow Derrida himself … to recognize his own improvisation'. This hope is dashed by turning to Derrida's parodic demolition of a similar structure in the essay translated as 'At this Very Moment in This Work Here I Am' and recalling his repeated opposition to any such use of 'origin' to determine the 'proper'.

The use and abuse of individual philosophers is justified to the extent that something valuable is produced and the charge of dilettantism avoided. It is possible to quibble over the interpretations of Kant, Heidegger, Derrida and Benjamin, but Peters's mistake is of a different order. Philosophy is not simply about neat ideas and inventions (conceptual or otherwise); it is concerned with how it generates the resources to back up what is written. Philosophy is written and composed – its authority is to be demonstrated by virtue of the procedures it evinces and the form it adopts. Peters ornaments his pages with philosophers in a manner that fails to distinguish itself from the scholastic invocation of figures of authority. Since there is no reference to actual improvisation, one is left only with a *bricolage* whose applicability to the phenomenon it is meant to model is nowhere justified. We are offered a kind of pseudo-philosophy.

As a supplement to the abstract theories of Peters, *Noise & Capitalism* devotes six of its eleven contributions to concrete discussion of 'free improvisation' in music. It treats both the complex relation to jazz and its reaction to the dominant forms of musical space and experience. Peters is opposed to the valorization of jazz as an interstitial political practice dreaming of communion and empathy. However, by explicitly positioning free improvisation as a deliberate attempt to create an environment 'free from the tradition of bandmasters, composers and notation as well as the emerging spectacular culture through which popular music was beginning to circulate', this collection is better able to assess the stakes, successes and failures of that attempt and its continuation into the present day.

Eddie Prévost summarizes well the position he has developed in other publications. He presents free improvisation as an alternative cultural form (marked by working relations between the musicians, which 'counter the ethos' characterizing capitalism). Two key features of 'normal music' are emphasised, against which improvisation is distinguished: the score as the notation determining performance; composition and rehearsal as the point at which the technical problems of musical production are resolved in advance of performance. Improvisation eschews both, with the corollary that the hierarchical relations of production are displaced – performance is then a dialogical process of discovery for all participants. No longer hidebound to the creative genius of the composer, '*we* have to decide on the meaning of the practice'. In this way, its politics can be seen in its opposition to authority and celebrity: the marketing of named composers is resisted. In the 'Social Ontology of Improvised Sound Work', Bruce Russell produces a theoretical supplement to Prévost. He too rejects the figure of the composer, the place of the score, and the

dominant modes of production and reproduction in performance. Unlike Peters, he is keen to assert that a coherent theoretical understanding of the activity can boost the practice; he mediates the claim through the tradition of radical thought, so we have discussions of Lukács, Lefebvre and Debord rather than Heidegger. It is heartening here to see a considered reclamation of 'praxis' as the relevant term.

The translation of Matthieu Saladin's 'Points of Resistance and Criticism in Free Improvisation' opens a different perspective on the supposedly oppositional or resistant techniques of free improvisation. The article investigates how the contemporary, corporate desire for 'hyper-flexibility' combines with the new fondness for 'horizonality' in structures to mimic the practices of self-organization championed by Prévost and Russell. Indeed, the gathering of a changing bunch of musicians at Derek Bailey's Company Week series looks to a certain perspective like the manner in which management consultancies rotate their staff on 'projects'. Saladin underscores the point that the political positions or opinions of performers do not prevent their practices being the forerunners of contemporary capitalist practice: form abstracted from historical conditions is apolitical.

David Toop has noted that it would be possible to listen to freely improvised performances and not hear it as music. In this way, improvisation is part of the confluence understood as 'noise'. There is little head-on consideration here of the other components: volume, cacophony or noisiness; resistance to signification; the incorporation of non-art materials into art; field recordings; production of new compositional elements free from traditional instruments and their techniques; dissonance; splicing, sampling, and so on. What is meant by 'Noise' varies across texts assembled without editorial oversight. The title is recognized to be an afterthought and there is a general feel of opportunism and *pistonage*. Several of the contributions are very slight: Mattin offers a loose anecdotal discussion of recording copyright and the commodification of improvised music; Matthew Hyland, in a recycled review of Watson's *Derek Bailey*, expresses some surprise that Bailey 'of all people' was involved in founding a record label, Incus. Both are idealists, failing to appreciate the centrality of the record as commodity to the history of improvisation in the twentieth century.

Jessica Rylan, who builds her own commercially available synthesizers, is hardly the female pioneer Nina Power presents in her short essay – originally an interview. The history of electronic music includes figures such as 'Bebe' Barron, Delia Derbyshire, Eliane Radigue, Pauline Oliveros and Wendy Carlos. Rylan does not stand comparison with them; she records for Thurston Moore's Ecstatic Peace label and I suspect she would count as one of the hipster, 'noisemaker muffins' whom Ben Watson targets in his essay, 'Noise as Permanent Revolution'. Roused into comment by an overblown article in *The Wire* about great gigs, Watson is acutely aware of the manner in which noise can come to operate as a fashionable, niche category to be sold to poseurs. He persists in disputing *The Wire*'s insistence on neutral description, so as not to upset advertisers and big names or alienate purchasers. For him, music's value lies in its 'refusal to play the subservient role of ornament or *divertissement*: authentic music's relation to truth, its antagonism to a merely pleasant night out'. Much noise fails this test – Watson seeks criticism that explains why particular efforts can be held to be radical as a 'reasoned response to an unreasonable situation'.

Ray Brassier offers this form of sustained engagement with two case studies in his essay, 'Genre is Obsolete' (an earlier version appeared in *Multitudes*). He is also alert to the dangers:

> Like the 'industrial' subculture of the late 1970s which spawned it, the emergence of 'noise' as a recognisable genre during the 1980s entailed a rapid accumulation of stock gestures, slackening the criteria for discriminating between innovation and cliché to the point where experiment threatened to become indistinguishable from platitude.

He presents a brief, but illuminating discussion of Tom Smith's activities such as *To Live and Shave in LA* and the performance actionism of Runzelstern & Gurgelstock, where the discrete sonic events 'leaven the freakish with the cartoonish'. Although Brassier opposes 'genre', what is really at stake is the transformation noise effects on our understanding of music and its relation to other arts and media. Do Runzelstern & Gurgelstock organize crazed *Gesamtkunstwerke*? I expect such a question would produce a bristling response, but Brassier's insistence on the 'unprecedented' density and complex structuring of Smith's *The Wigmaker in 18th Century Williamsburg* prompts the further question as to whether this form of composition (and the manner in which it challenges modes of reflection) places it at the edge of a different trajectory, extending Mahler's Romantic conception of the symphony as the musical form which endeavours to encompass everything.

Philosophical terrain is opened up between Watson and Brassier through the concept of 'experience'. Brassier rejects it as a commodified category which

is here disrupted; Watson, following Adorno, sees such 'system-breakdowns' *as* experience, 'the concept-busting crisis which allows idea to change and new concepts and production to flourish'. Good editors would have spied this fruitful conflict and asked for more, perhaps at the expense of Csaba Toth's essay, which bombards the reader with citations and names, often without concern for syntax or structure. It would be nice if this had a performative dimension, but I fear it is just another manifestation of bad academicism.

Brassier hesitates to connect to the titular theme of capitalism, since socio-economic factors 'are easier to invoke than to understand'. Howard Slater's 'Prisoners of the Earth Come Out! Notes Towards "War at the Membrane"' would have benefited from such reticence. He delights in the word 'abreaction', and at times seems to suggest that a daily, cathartic dose of noise boosts our modes of resistance towards 'endocolonial capital'. It must make life more exciting to think one's listening habits are per se engaged in a war over instincts and perception:

> Our willingness to abreact *en masse*, to decathect the 'bad objects' of capital and sift through affect, in order to take control of our own becomings as we counter the use of ourselves and our desires as bio-productive materials of an anthropomorphised capital, is the most pleasurable music there is.

This is a fantasy.

Noise & Capitalism is a little too improvised, in the slapdash sense, to come together as a coherent book. As a symptom of what is produced by the new school ties of virtual circuits, one might worry that this is as good as it gets, intellectually. Though the articles by Brassier, Watson, Prévost and Saladin are worth reading, the remainder, often recycled without warrant or acknowledgement, is poor. It is available freely as a download so it cannot be judged too harshly, though Cox and Warner's *Audio Culture* (which I reviewed in *RP* 133) is far superior. Regarding improvisation, Derek Bailey's own book, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* (1980), is still the vital reference.

Andrew McGettigan

Liquid paths

Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All: Piracy and the Law of Nations*, Zone Books, New York, 2009. £21.95 hb., 978 1 89095 194 8.

On 15 November 2008 the supertanker MV *Sirius Star* was seized by Somali pirates, making it, so far, the largest ship ever captured by pirates. It was carrying a full load of 2 million barrels of crude oil worth an estimated $100 million, and was released in January 2009 after a ransom of $3 million was parachuted onto the deck of the ship. Pirates were back, no longer confined to the realm of popular culture – Johnny Depp channelling Keith Richards to portray Disney's Captain Jack Sparrow – or to the more sober field of historical studies, best exemplified by Marcus Rediker's reconstruction of pirates as proto-proletarians in works such as *Villains of All Nations* (2004).

This makes Daniel Heller-Roazen's *The Enemy of All* a particularly timely work. It is not, however, concerned with either the history of piracy or, directly, with the post-Cold War return of the pirate. Instead, it is a work of what Heller-Roazen calls 'philosophical and genealogical' investigation focused on the definition of the pirate as archetypal 'common enemy of all' (*communis hostis omnium*). This definition, made by Cicero in his work *On Obligations* (*De officiis*), thought to have been completed in early December 44 BCE, is reworked in modern law to define the pirate as 'the enemy of the human species' (*hostis generis humani*). The result, contends Heller-Roazen, is that we can reconstruct the 'piratical paradigm', which consists of four characteristics: (1) the definition of a space of exceptional legal status, commonly the sea and the air; (2) the construction of the pirate as a legal agent hostile to all; (3) the collapse of the distinction between the criminal and the political, with the pirate at once figuring a common criminal, but one who exceeds the category of 'lawful enemy'; (4) the transformation of the concept of war that results from battling the pirate, such as in the blurred concept of the 'police action'. What most concerns Heller-Roazen is how the pirate, as 'the enemy of all', has become 'a crucial contemporary figure', and particularly the resonance of the pirate with the figures of the 'terrorist' or 'enemy combatant'.

His chapters trace this paradigm across a dizzying range of historical moments: from Homer's *Odyssey*, in which even Odysseus is suspected of piracy, to the seizure of the *Achille Lauro* by the Palestinian Liberation Front on 7 October 1985 off Egypt. There is no doubt that much of this 'genealogy' is fascinating. Heller-Roazen has a talent for probing Greek and Roman sources in particular that provokes envy in the non-Classicist. The discussion of the debates around submarine warfare, for example, moves elegantly from the mythical descent of Alexander the Great beneath the waves in an 'iron cage', to Carl Schmitt's justification of the U-boat as a political, and therefore not piratical, weapon. On the other hand, this kind of 'Plato to NATO', or perhaps 'Cicero to the UN', inquiry arouses suspicion. With its lack of any substantial methodological warrant, the obvious conclusion is to regard this work as a coda or pendant to Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1995), of which Heller-Roazen was the translator. Heller-Roazen indicates the unstable position of the figure of the pirate in Cicero's expanding circles of obligation, at once human and so supposedly within the widest circle of obligation to 'the immense fellowship of the human species', but also outside that circle as the 'enemy of all' to which no obligation need be paid. And, here, the echoes of Agamben's *Homo sacer* defined by 'inclusive exclusion' are deafening. The pirate makes an obvious addition to the gallery of figures of 'bare life' (*nuda vita*) that concluded *Homo Sacer*, alongside what Agamben terms the neomort (left brain-dead on life-support to be harvested for organs) and the *Muselmann* (the concentration camp victim reduced by hunger and mistreatment to the status of 'living dead'). What is more remarkable is that in his discussion Heller-Roazen coyly makes no reference to Agamben's work.

If, despite this disavowal, Heller-Roazen owes a heavy debt to Agamben, then his work suffers from some of the same problems as the latter's 'genealogy' of 'bare life' itself. As in *Homo Sacer*, Heller-Roazen establishes a strong historical continuity and teleology through a philological inquiry into particular legal and political concepts. There is no doubt that there is a striking continuity in legal formulations concerning the pirate, but the relation of these formulations to particular historical realities requires more attention to historical differences. This is rendered ironic because, in the hands of Nietzsche and Foucault, genealogy was an anti-teleological 'method', which through a philological nominalism tried to inscribe a counter-history of ruptures and reversals posed against the usual Whig narratives of history. In contrast Heller-Roazen tells a sweeping story of the concept of the 'pirate' emerging from an initial historical and political confusion, the continuing struggle to render this concept distinct, before the 'pirate' plunges into a contemporary 'zone of indistinction', to use Agamben's phrase. With the emergence of the legal concept of humanity in the twentieth century, as in 'crimes against humanity', the pirate, as 'the enemy of all', gains a new salience in terms of generalization. We are all (potential) pirates. The difficulty of such a narrative, which extends to Agamben, is that this world-historical narrative of indistinction and dispersion can appear self-serving. Is it really true that our contemporary political moment is more disoriented than any other?

Certainly while Heller-Roazen remains close to the Agamben play-book – classical references to Roman law, erudite philological reconstructions of classical sources, rapid transit to contemporary resonances and political debates, usually authorized through Carl Schmitt – he fortunately remains somewhat more sober in style. He at least refuses the epochal-messianic gesture so prevalent in Agamben, one which combines the worst elements of Heidegger and Benjamin, in which the figure of the worst, of absolutely denuded life, becomes the site of reversal and messianic 'saving'. Also, unlike Agamben's narrative of the multiple figures of 'bare life', Heller-Roazen's focus on the more precise figure of the pirate does allow him to engage with historical, technological and political shifts. The difficulties of teleology remain, however, as does the question of the privilege of this particular figure of the pirate as the key to contemporary geopolitics. While not doubting Heller-Roazen's deftness in bringing the pirate into focus as a site of philosophical and political inquiry, we might well question why this is *the* figure of the political today.

In question here is the desire to provide a 'figure' of the political. The narrative of indistinction and dispersion incites a desire for stabilization, even in a figure that summarizes the supposed instability of the present. Here Heller-Roazen rejoins, in an uncomfortable fashion, the work of Carl Schmitt. The unstable status of the pirate, as the enemy who cannot be a worthy enemy but only an 'unjust antagonist', is parallel to Schmitt's distinction, articulated clearly in *Theory of the Partisan* (1963), between the 'real enemy' and the 'absolute enemy'. In Schmitt's work this was an attempt to account for the figure of the partisan who, he argued, disrupted the usual friend–enemy distinction which defined politics and warfare. This distinction preserved the enemy as one who defined political conflict, while the partisan disrupted this security and raised the

spectre of the 'absolute enemy' who respected none of the usual contours of the political and warfare. Schmitt engaged in a rearguard operation by distinguishing between the 'good' partisan, linked still to the telluric and the national, and the 'bad' partisan, delinked from the earth. Displaying his typical reactionary views, the 'good' partisan was identified with the Spanish resistance to Napoleon and with Raoul Salan, one of the organizers of the OSS and of resistance to the decolonization of Algeria. The 'bad' partisan was, of course, the Leninist or Maoist militant, beholden to the international form of the party and with a limited or attenuated connection to the national political space.

Of course, Heller-Roazen is not endorsing Schmitt's overt politics. The pirate, Heller-Roazen notes, disturbs even more radically Schmitt's tellurian politics, which tries to hold the partisan apart from the pirate. In the liquid element of the sea the distinctions Schmitt held dear threaten to dissolve. This would become even worse with the arrival of aerial piracy, and the divide between pirate and partisan can no longer hold good. The difficulty is that Heller-Roazen's closing invocation of a state in which Kant's perpetual peace is indistinguishable from perpetual war, a planetary state of indistinction of 'mobile zones of transitory violence', again risks conceding to the quasi-Schmittian desire to re-establish the integrity of the political. What goes missing, in Schmitt, Agamben and Heller-Roazen, is any real consideration of *capitalism* as a global horizon of 'real abstraction' as that which threatens any stabilized figure of the political. Refusing to really think any counter-politics of abstraction, say in terms of a radical politics of equality, we are instead encouraged to cling to increasingly ambiguous figures of politicization. While the 'liquid paths' of the pirates make for a fascinating journey, the elevation of the pirate to world-historical figure drains any real consideration of the relation of the pirate to the circuits of capitalist accumulation, and to any real grasp of the political coordinates of the present.

Benjamin Noys

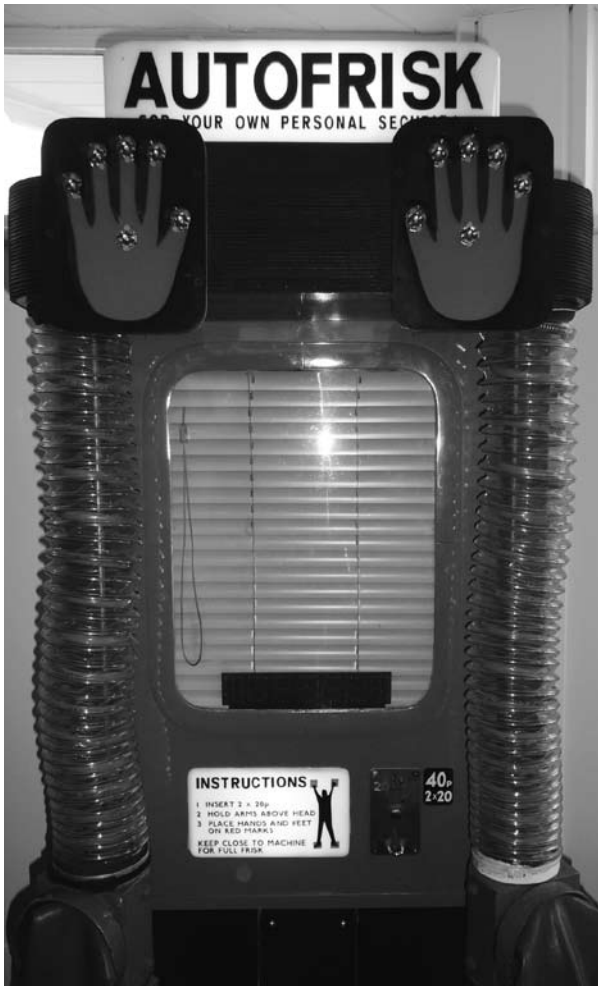
Emergent emergency

Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Let Live*, Routledge, London, 2009. 208 pp., £75.00 hb., £22.99 pb., 978 0 41595 299 6 hb., 978 0 41595 300 9 pb.

The Liberal Way of War responds to two events: one political and one philosophical. With its attention to the paradoxical necessity of war within the liberal ethos of universal freedom, the book offers a genealogical reflection on the current war on terror and on the ongoing interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, the study is also one of the first to respond fully to the philosophical challenge of Foucault's recently published late seminars, *Security, Territory and Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, delivered at the Collège de France, in 1977–78 and 1979–80 respectively, which offer important challenges to current political thinking on liberalism, security and war. While most responses to these seminars have focused, for obvious reasons, on Foucault's prescient insights into economic neoliberalism, Reid and Dillon offer up a powerful reflection on the twentieth-century mutations of the liberal way of war. Their work is particularly illuminating on the period of triumphant liberal universalism that has followed the end of the Cold War. The 'global governance' of freedom celebrated by liberal international relations theorists has certainly enabled, although not exactly coincided with, the rise of neoliberalism as a dominant economic discourse (Reagan's Star Wars programme was the last bang of Cold War belligerence). Dillon and Reid's work goes some way towards explaining the necessary relationship between the global diffusion of neoliberal economic doctrines and the proliferation of humanitarian wars, 'complex emergencies' and other mutations of military intervention over the same period.

More than one critic has commented upon the relative elusiveness of biopolitics as a site of investigation in Foucault's later work. Foucault introduces biopolitics as the guiding theme of his following years' lectures in the last two courses of *Society Must Be Defended* (1975–76). The thematic recedes somewhat in *Security, Territory and Population*, where power relations are articulated through the prism of event–circulation–security, and appears only fleetingly in the promisingly titled *Birth of Biopolitics*. For Reid and Dillon, however, the elusiveness of the term only calls for further elaboration. The political theorization and institutional organization of liberalism, they assert, 'has always revolved around some understanding of the human as species being'. Unlike the ontopolitical

theologies of medieval Europe, liberalism wages war in the name of life; its strategic calculus of necessary killing is predicated on the notion that certain forms of life must be destroyed in order for life to flourish. Having established this point of departure, Foucault's genealogy of 'biohumanity' is relatively narrow in its historical focus. Closely informed by the work of his teacher Georges Canguilhem, the French philosopher and historian of the life sciences, Foucault's historical horizon extends as far as the neo-Darwinian synthesis between the statistics-based science of population genetics and the probabilistic methods of Mendelian genetics in the first decades of the twentieth century,



but offers very little analysis of the multiple developments of post World War II science. His genealogy of public health points toward the mid-twentieth-century welfare state, in both its liberal-democratic and its national socialist forms, as the culminating event of a long series of experiments in actuarial approaches to population. Only briefly (although compellingly) does Foucault address the question of neoliberalism's challenge to the political ideals of the Keynesian–Fordist alliance. The question of contemporary liberalism (or economic neoliberalism) and its 'strategic calculus of necessary killing' remains to be thought through.

In order to grasp fully this evolving configuration of liberalism and war, and thus to pursue Foucault's problematic beyond the later Foucault himself, the authors suggest that we must also develop an understanding of the mutual exchanges between the contemporary life sciences, the new digital technologies and complex systems theory. As Reid and Dillon pertinently argue:

> The story of the life sciences … including not only the biological sciences but also … the information sciences, computing, digitalization and the so-called sciences of complexity as well, has … not only changed substantially during the course of the last three centuries. It has, in particular, changed dramatically during the course of the last 50 years.… We do not simply live in the age of information, as military strategic thinkers of the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) of the last 20 years, along with so many other management and social scientists, have proclaimed. We have entered the age of life as information.

Responding to the challenge of these multiple developments in the life sciences, Reid and Dillon offer an incisive account of the epistemic shifts brought about by molecular biology, post-World War II systems theory and the complexity turn of second-order cybernetics, while also exploring the ways in which these various sciences have contributed to, challenged and enabled the evolving forms of liberal interventionism over the same period. Here, *The Liberal Way of War* significantly displaces Foucault's problematic by suggesting that in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, biopolitics has shifted from a focus on individual species and the vertical logic of hereditary transmission to the transversal processes of circulation that animate genetic recombination across species boundaries and the systemic conditions of life's emergence. As they put it: 'contemporary liberal biopolitics is necessarily drawn to the generic conditions of life production and reproduction – the heterogenesis of morphogenesis – independent of the individual features of specific forms of life.' There has been a correlative shift in the ways in which liberalism configures the terrain, methods and scope of legitimate violence: attention moves away from the specific forms of life rooted in the biological nation to the generic conditions of life as such, represented for example by transnational networks of vital or 'critical' infrastructure. The figure of enmity also undergoes a subtle change in shape, taking on the abstract form of 'the emergency of emergence'. Lest this interpretation of Reid and

Dillon's work suggest too linear an intervention into the historical problematic of biopolitics, it should be noted that their argument, while departing from the perspective offered in *Society Must Be Defended*, resonates strongly with Foucault's reflections on the politics of circulation, event and security within early modern urbanism (*Security, Territory and Population*). It also enters into productive conversation with contemporary political philosophies of the 'event', particularly those that identify Machiavelli's theory of Fortuna as a turning point in modern conceptions of state strategy. The liberal way of rule, they assert, does not simply govern through freedom but through contingency. With its startling proximity to notions of contingency in the contemporary life sciences, risk analysis and biometrics, the aleatory materialism of the later Althusser here appears as much a diagnosis of the contemporary as historical method.

The force of Dillon and Reid's theoretical manoeuvre is particularly compelling in their account of the 'Revolution in Military Affairs' or RMA. Initiated by the US military in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War and later pursued by the Office of Force Transformation, the Revolution in Military Affairs prescribed a far-reaching internal transformation of US defence extending to the logistics of military operations, long-term strategy and the organizational structures of defence. Taking its lessons from the management dogmas of the Clinton era, the RMA brought the precepts of flexible organization, innovation economies and outsourcing to the traditional defence establishment. It also followed the example of Santa Fe school economists in applying the logic of complex systems theory (particularly adaptive ecological systems) to military planning. In the doctrine of 'network centric warfare', the field of battle came to be conceived of in the same terms as a complex adaptive ecosystem. The influence of such complex systems models on military strategy, civilian defence and counter-insurgency was most evident during the years of the Bush administration, when the vital conditions of urban life (critical infrastructure protection) and their ongoing ability to adapt and regenerate ('resilience') came to be figured as key elements in the war against terror. The specific form of terror, Dillon and Reid insist, is less important than the systematicity of its threat to the complex order of liberal rule – the 'emergent emergency' is as likely to arise from an extreme weather event as from an ideologically motivated terrorist attack.

This is a book of great historical and philosophical complexity, as well versed in the transformations of liberalism's rule as in the contemporary languages of complex systems theory, biology and military strategy. It is symptomatic of the book's conceptual effervescence that it raises as many questions as it satisfies. The issue, for example, of the ontotheological challenge to liberalism, both as that which early liberalism defines itself against and that which it re-encounters in the late modern age, runs throughout the book, and seems to be crying out for further investigation. It is surely not incidental that Foucault was writing about the political challenge of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the very year in which he delivered his lectures on the rise of neoliberal economic doctrines in North America and Western Europe. Today the question of the relationship (both antagonistic and complicit) between the neoliberal doctrine of freedom, risk and security, on the one hand, and the neo-religious appeal to fundamental value, on the other, seems to demand as thorough a study as the one Dillon and Reid have accomplished here.

Melinda Cooper

No communicating left

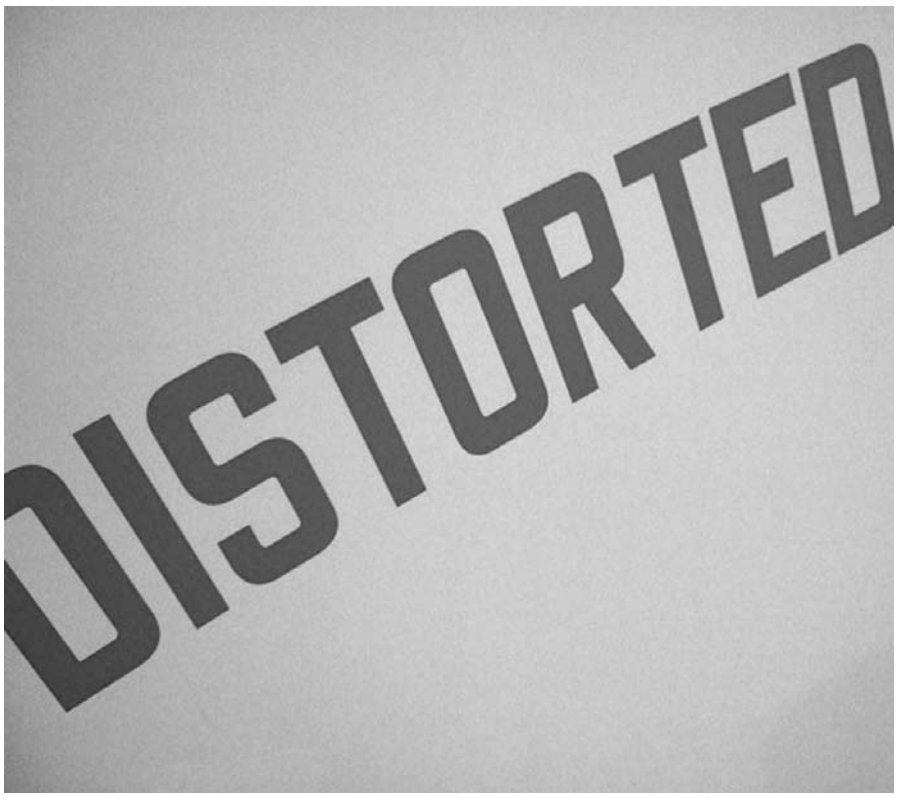
Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2009. 232 pp., £55.00 hb., £13.99 pb., 978 0 82234 492 6 hb., 978 0 82234 505 3 pb.

In *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* Jodi Dean pulls few punches in her critique of the American Left, for both its complacency and its limited capacity to (or even lack of awareness of the need to) offer a stand of political resistance to power. This is how she concludes her book:

> The eight years of the Bush administration were a diversion. Intoxicated with a sense of purpose, we could oppose war, torture, indefinite detention, warrantless wiretapping, a seemingly endless series of real crimes … such opposition keeps us feeling like we matter.… We have an ethical sense. But we lack a coherent politics.

Dean brings out clearly here the disintegration of the collective Left and its simulacra in the individuated lifestyle politics of today's depoliticized radicalism, where it appears that particular individual demands and identities are to be respected but there is no possibility of universalizing them into a collective challenge

to the system, no possibility of a Left which stands for something beyond itself. Indeed, she argues that rather than confront this problem, the Left has instead taken refuge in the fantasy that technology will itself overcome its inability to engage and that the circulation of ideas and information on the Internet will construct the collectivities and communities of interest which are lacking in reality. For Dean, this 'technology fetishism' marks the Left's failure: its 'abandonment of workers and the poor; its retreat from the state and repudiation of collective action; and its acceptance of the neoliberal economy as the "only game in town"'. In this, she uncovers the gaping hole at the heart of the Left, demonstrating that US radicalism today is based less on changing the world than on the articulation of an alternative oppositionalist identity: a non-strategic, non-instrumental, articulation of a protest against power. In a nutshell, the Left is too busy providing alternative voices, spaces and forums to think about engaging with mass society in any organized, collective attempt to achieve societal transformation.



For Dean, this is fake or hollow political activity, pursued more for its own sake than for future political ends. It is a politics of ethical distancing, of self-flattery and narcissism, which excuses or even celebrates the self-marginalization of the Left: as either the result of the overwhelming capacity of neoliberal power to act, to control and to regulate; or as the result of the apathy, stupidity or laziness of the masses – or the 'sheeple' – for their failure to join the radical cause. Unsurprisingly, Dean thus suggests that the Left needs to rethink its values and approaches, and her book is intended to be a wake-up call to abandon narcissistic complacency. In doing this, she highlights a range of problems connected together around the thematic of the Left's defence of democracy in an age of communicative capitalism. She argues that the Left's focus on extending or defending democracy by asserting its role in giving voice and creating spaces merely reproduces the domination of communicative capitalism, where there is no shared space of debate and disagreement but the proliferation of mediums and messages without the responsibility to develop and defend positions or to engage, and no external measure of accountability. Communicative capitalism is held to thrive on this fragmented, atomizing and individuated framework of communication, which gives the impression of a shared discourse, community or movement but actually leaves reality just as it is, with neoliberal frameworks of domination, inequality and destruction continuing unopposed.

Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies is not, however, merely a critique of the US Left; it is also a powerful demolition of its claims for a collective existence. Dean suggests this most strongly in her chapters on 'technology fetishism' and on the '9/11 truth' movement, in which she analyses how individuals come together not on the basis of a collective political project, challenging power, but on the basis of an invitation for individuals to affirm their alienation from power and to produce, or to 'find out for themselves', their own personal 'truths'. These are not projects to change or to transform the external world but mechanisms whereby individuals can find meaning through their ethical individual actions and beliefs. She describes powerfully how '9/11 truth' movements are all about individual affirmation rather than collective engagement. In this they can easily be equated with the mass anti-war demonstrations where individuals marched under the banner of 'Not in My Name', seeking personal affirma-

tion in distancing themselves from politics rather than taking responsibility to engage in political struggle by the building of any collective movement.

The same atomization of left politics is analysed in Dean's critique of the radical individualism at the heart of the displacement of politics by ethics in much recent theory. Here Judith Butler stands in as the exemplar for a Left which is alleged to have given up on conviction and political struggle and instead retreated into emphasizing 'generosity to difference and awareness of mutual vulnerability' so as to focus upon 'micropolitical and ethical practices that work on the self in its immediate reactions and relations'. Dean argues that such an ethical turn appears as a reflection of political despair and celebrates both a denial of political struggle and strong subjectivity. She also, correctly, links this defeatism to a misconstruction of Foucault's work that understands power as operating free from politics. Using Butler, again, as an example, she argues that the latter 'reads governmentality *as replacing* sovereignty', rather than as a discursive framing for the operation of political power. The intimation is that in seeing power as having shifted to the global level, free from states, political opposition is merely expressed in the ethical terms of engagement in 'discourses that shape and deform what we mean by "the human"'. This strongly resonates with the technological fetishism of the 'global politics' of networked communication which encourages the transformation of politics into the ethics of virtual participation.

So far so good. As a description of post-political radicalism Dean makes some fine points regarding the dead end that has been reached. The psychological framing of the responses and problems of the Left is, however, the book's fundamental weakness. Dean focuses here on Lacanian analysis, typically laced with a bit of Žižek, and includes a repetition of this methodological framing across the chapters (which were originally penned as self-standing journal articles). This does the argument no favours and appears both as evasive and as unnecessarily abstract and distancing. At the same time, Dean's principal target of what she calls the US 'academic and typing Left' seems too vague and its material too thinly spread, from the '9/11 truth' campaign to Judith Butler to advocates of Internet freedom. The deeper problem is that the vague and abstract target of the 'US Left' appears to be merely a stand-in for a psychologized critique of US society itself.

In providing a psychological analysis of the attraction of the self-centred communication of left protest, opposition or awareness, Dean neither politically grounds the collapse of externally orientated collective struggle nor indicates how or why this collapse may be only a contingent rather than a necessary one. She seems to hint that prior to communicative capitalism and the expansion of networked information technologies there was a possibility for the Left to take up a democratic politics based upon open, shared engagement and contestation, whereas today critical intervention in the public sphere is asserted to be no longer possible. In fact, to engage publicly appears, in itself, to engage on the terrain of the enemy:

> The ideal of publicity functions ideologically, serving global capitalism's reliance on networked information technologies and consumers convinced that their every blog post, virtual march, or YouTube upload is a radical act rather than an entertaining diversion. Communicative capitalism mobilizes the faith in exposure animating democracy as the perfect lure. Subjects feel themselves to be active even as their every activity reinforces the status quo.

Dean seems keen to argue that the Left achieved only its own defeat in its 'victory' in the 'Culture Wars', which established the basis of neoliberal communicative capitalism, and which shares the Left's assumptions regarding 'assertions of difference, singularity, and the fluidity of modes of becoming' and the politics of consumer choice. We thus seem caught in a double-bind, whereby the very success of the Left has resulted in the hegemonic ideological discursive practices of communicative capitalism, while communicative capitalism has undermined the possibilities of the construction of a public sphere and possible radical or universal collectivities capable of democratic contestation.

However, if there is no public sphere in which collective identities can be formed, it would appear that 'radicals' have little option but to engage in 'global' individuated ethical protest. Dean's own 'technological fetishism' and abstract psychological framing appear, ultimately, to close down possibilities rather than open them; installing communicative capitalism as the agency of power rather than as an ideological framework which reflects the vacuum remaining after the demise of the political Left. In which case, she could take a leaf out of her own book and consider whether her thesis 'erases its own standpoint of enunciation' in its dismissal of our public and democratic capabilities. In the end, it seems she has no way out of the double-bind beyond making one more contribution to the information overload which is her communicative capitalism.

David Chandler

Plum

Mark Bould and China Miéville, eds, *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*, Pluto Press, London, 2009. 282 pp., £65.00 hb., 978 0 74532 731 0.

As I write this on my laptop, a robot from Earth which has spent the last six years roving the deserts of Mars feeding on sunlight is struggling to escape from the quicksands of Troy, just north of Husband Hill in the Gusev Crater, while age-related amnesia erodes its flash drive. Meanwhile, back on Earth, scientists have restored the sight of a blind man using stem-cell technology, and a team of scientists led by a Puerto Rican ex-space shuttle pilot has made a major breakthrough on the VX-200 ion-plasma drive. If scheduled tests on the International Space Station in 2013 prove successful, the VX-200's successor will reduce travel time between Earth and Mars from nine months to thirty-nine days. One could easily have made this stuff up, because, like New York to a first-time visitor, it's already somehow vaguely familiar; nevertheless it is all actually happening, and it is in this context that the current rebirth of science fiction – not as retro-styling but as a current and expanding field – has now to be addressed. One has only to reflect upon SF's periodic submergences and re-emergences over the last century to begin speculating on what might be at stake for a genre with such ambitious stakes in a specifically *historical* account of futurity. In many ways, this interesting anthology of essays, edited by two established voices in the genre, could scarcely be more pertinent.

Assessments of SF as a historical form are of course back in vogue, epitomised for many by the 2005 publication of Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future*. Yet one would scarcely expect serious Marxists to view treatment of a genre as historical form as a point of closure, and, thankfully, Mark Bould and China Miéville do anything but. SF has long made an *ahistorical* object of science, whilst at the same time being the historical site of what Miéville aptly calls 'capitalist science's bullshit about itself'. Given this, the predominant fictions of science inevitably give rise to a sense of urgency and precipitous opportunity on the Left. Imminent catastrophe has a natural home in the imaginary of any once-and-future avant-garde: the formulation of inestimable but pressing tasks that, on the one hand, pain the imagination and, on the other, are called to account, ever more urgently, at the bar of reason, conflate the ethics of the *Augenblick* and the aesthetics of montage in a sort of neo-Leninist sublime. This is reflected in a fine chapter here by Philip Wegner on Ken McLeod's *Fall Revolution* novels, but, more generally, it would seem to be in this spirit that Bould and Miéville have assembled a collection of essays which collectively recoups SF historically whilst, at the same time, robustly reinscribing an aesthetics of futurity for the Left.

Nonetheless there are traces of something less strident also. Writing in 1980, in an introduction to William Morris's *The Wood Beyond the World*, Tom Shippey highlights two useful points here: first, the sense in which Morris introduces 'a note of baffled yearning' to even his most escapist fantasies, epitomized by Morris's lines about an 'ancient glimmer', seen from a distance across 'the waste that has no way' (i.e. history), and, second, Lukács's argument that what is distinctive about the historical novel, namely 'derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age', is equally applicable to science fiction. Unsurprisingly, then, there are several notes of such baffled yearning elsewhere in this collection, not least, for example, in the recuperative labours undertaken by John Rieder and Iris Luppa, in their respective essays on Wim Wenders's *Until the End of the World* and Lang's *Frau im Mond*.

The anthology is split into three sections, the title of each being taken from cinema: *Things to Come*, *When Worlds Collide* and *Back to the Future*. Nevertheless, around three-quarters of the book focuses on the literary rather than cinematic, with, sadly, no space given either to television or to other contemporary forms such as gaming. Nor is the key role illustration plays in the genre covered. This is in part because the authors remain focused on Darko Suvin's groundbreaking literary criticism in the field, but it is also perhaps indicative of a lack of confidence to go much beyond the legitimizing sphere of literature and feature-length cinema. What the authors refer to as 'the Suvin Event' – effectively a series of defining essays by Suvin on what, by any other name, would be science fiction's modernist moments – is impressively dissected by an exchange between Carl Freedman and Miéville. Suvin's definitive description of SF as 'cognitive estrangement' through the advent of a *novum* becomes the point at which a distinction is made between Freedman's revised 'Suvinism' of how a text 'does' the 'cognition-effect' versus Miéville's bit-too-quick-off-the-mark point that the text-as-object does nothing, it's all in the social.

This might seem to be a debate of two halves. In the first half it is about the specific claims of genre, the demands this makes on its reader–author, and the contracts which genre offers to the amateur imaginary,

and is no less important for that. If scientific as well as political revolutions throw up demands, then SF is about the yearnings of the 'weekend radicals' of the natural sciences, their loves, fever dreams and half-baked reveries. At its best, science fiction does this by responding to the language and purview of science by pairing mimesis with montage. Whether of the left or the right, SF's suspensions of disbelief tease and excite in so far as they lead us through the apocrypha of speculation with fleeting promises of transformation. What Jameson has termed 'piquant montages' in fact point to a peculiar ocularity in SF, which is exemplified by the literary yearning for a visual account, through description, or, cinematically, by the disastrous current obsession with CGI effects in place of conceptual ambition or narrative complexity, as well as, of course, by the significant presence both of illustration and of the graphic novel form within the genre. Yet, at the same time, much of the radical capacity of science fiction is to be found in the 'piquancy' as much as the montage. This is what, on occasion, gives SF's often mediocre prose its transcendently disruptive descriptive visualization and *ostranenie* effect. Compelling aspects of this montage effect – 'the coded presence of an almost unimaginable reality' – is ably explored by Matthew Beaumont in his fine essay 'The Anamorphic Estrangements of Science Fiction', which takes Holbein's double portrait *The Ambassadors* as its starting point. As Beaumont observes, Holbein, a contemporary of Thomas More, whose *Utopia* is widely seen as a progenitor of science fiction, lived, like More, precipitously under the same conditions of paranoid Tudor tyranny and intrigue. Yet, potentially, the link goes further than that. As Suvin observed in his 1974 essay 'Science Fiction and Utopian Fiction', utopian fictions, characterized by an interest in socio-political constructs, fall within the form and tradition of 'anatomy' (dealing more with states of mind than people per se), a characteristic element that continues across into science fiction itself, albeit combined with semi-novelistic aspects typical of romance. This argues, then, for a closer look at the particular role 'envisioning' description plays in science fiction – the tendency, in Suvin's words, to create a 'vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern'. Such unifying framings are often the necessitated corollary of rupture and juxtaposition. Yet, curiously, for such an erudite collection of essays as this – and despite Beaumont's starting point in Holbein – such ocularity is not explored to any great extent here, even though, arguably, it is a constitutive element in a genre in which, even in its literary form, things are constantly being glimpsed, gawped at, coolly regarded or, *via negativa*, in which lacunae and descriptive blindspots build dramatic effect.

The second half of the debate described above might be identified as SF's epistemological justification, its right to call itself *science* fiction, and it should perhaps be no surprise, but is welcome nonetheless, that Marxists should focus on such a question. Still, perhaps another avenue could have been explored further here – namely, what is at stake in the 'fiction' part as much as the 'science'. On occasion this imbalance seems to give rise to confusion over purpose. For example, Darren Jorgensen, in his chapter 'Towards a Revolutionary Science Fiction', argues, understandably, that an alternative to the long critical shadow cast by the failures of 1968 is long overdue, but, curiously, in reviewing the role of right-wing SF authors in driving Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative during the 1980s, goes on to ask 'could left wing SF writers also be taken seriously, and consulted on the direction of the world?' This might seem akin to Victor Serge hoping he'd get a plum role as a UN goodwill ambassador. It also begs the question of what can be expected of engagements with popular forms by critical art or literary practices which, unlike the Freedom-lovin' conservative popularizers who lobbied Reagan, aim to be disaffirmative of capitalist culture by working radically with one of its most widely consumed forms.

John Timberlake