

### Inside the factory, and out

Fredric Jameson, *Representing 'Capital': A Reading of Volume One*, Verso, London and New York, 2011. 158 pp., £14.99 hb., 978 1 84467 454 1.

Fredric Jameson's latest book, published hot on the heels of a monograph on Hegel's *Phenomenology* (*The Hegel Variations*, 2010) and a large collection of essays on the dialectic (*Valences of the Dialectic*, 2009), is a reading of the first volume of Marx's *Capital*. Together, they constitute what appears to be a late push into European philosophy by one of our most important Marxist literary and cultural critics, in the form of a defence of Hegel, Marx and their respective dialectics – against alternative, analytical, historicist and structural Marxist traditions, which variously sideline the notions of 'negativity' and 'contradiction'. For Jameson, 'to attempt to construct a model of capitalism', its reality and its reflection in thought, and to reconstruct Marx's dialectical representation of it, is to 'coordinate incompatible modes of thought without reducing them to ... one-dimensionality'. Because this is also a fairly good description of Jameson's own style, what we are presented with in his latest work is a kind of double mimesis: Jameson's contemporary performance of Marx's previous representation.

In *Representing 'Capital'*, Jameson thus insists that Marx's work is a heterogeneous and multiple text (similar to the *Phenomenology*), made up of a semi-autonomous Part One, centred on the commodity and money forms and the market; the historical Part Eight, given over to the multiple histories of the emergence of capital, and particularly of the commodity 'labour power'; and finally, and most significantly according to Jameson, *Capital*-proper, the core of the book made up of Parts Two to Seven and centred on the experience of capital accumulation, the factory and the industrial machine. Jameson's book thus also tracks and reflects the *figurative* dramas of *Capital*'s composition at a micro-analytic level, stylistic symptoms, he suggests, of the difficulties confronted by Marx in representing capital. In this sense, following in the footsteps of both Sergei Eisenstein and Alexander Kluge, Jameson productively foregrounds *Capital* as a kind of modernist montage, a 'specific proto-narrative form' which 'can be imagined as a series of interlinked problems or paradoxes (elsewhere he calls these 'riddles'), which, ostensibly solved, give rise to new and unexpected ones of greater scope'. Again, rather like capital itself

on Marx's account, it produces its own barriers to accumulation ('riddles'), which it then proceeds to surmount ('solve').

Jameson insists that Marx's *Capital* should not be considered a political work. It is 'not a book about politics'. This, he suggests, dialectically constitutes its contemporary political significance: 'the absence of a political dimension from Marxism', specifically from Marx's *Capital*, 'is one of its great and original strengths'. Moreover, he makes the 'scandalous assertion' (his own words) that it 'is not even a book about labour', but rather 'a book about unemployment'. Even more scandalously, perhaps, he excludes Parts One and Eight of Volume One from what he presents as *Capital* proper.

Drawing on the work of Karl Korsch, among others, Jameson repeatedly underlines the opposition and tension within Marx's text between two 'alternat[ing] languages or codes', those of 'class struggle' on the one hand, and of 'capital accumulation (or the law of value)' on the other, rightly pointing out that in *Capital* the former is 'only intermittently visible'. So, for example, in his account of Marx's chapter on the length of the working day, Jameson shows how initially politics seems to come to the fore: 'Suddenly, it is not the clunking of machines in the subterranean realms of production we hear ... but rather the noisy shouting of parliamentary voices and their interminable debates about the shortening of working hours.' This is the effect of collective workers' resistance to the vampiric demands of capital. Indeed, he goes on to suggest that as well as a 'refutation to our claim that *Capital* was not a political book', Marx's volume – already extensive – 'might have ended here with a powerful call for legislation'. It does not, however, and this account of 'class struggle' and the conditions of labour in *Capital* is immediately – and dialectically – reinscribed into Marx's ongoing account of 'capital accumulation'; that is, into Marx's analysis of the relations between variable and constant capital, of absolute and relative surplus value – all of which Jameson expounds – and to the industrial processes through which, despite the struggles over the working day (indeed, *as a result of* them), capitalist exploitation paradoxically expands

and increases through the development of new technologies. From this point of view – and here Jameson could be emplotting for his own purposes the work of Mario Tronti on the logics of workers' refusal and its subsequent generalization by Hardt and Negri into a philosophy of history – the workers themselves paradoxically become subjects of capital. Agency (and politics) is thus subsumed by Marx's focus on the systemic character of the dynamics of capital in which, writes Jameson, "system" is characterized as a unity of opposites, and it is the open system of capitalism which proves to be closed'. It is at such moments of theoretical tension and dialectical productivity in which Marx is attempting to bring different theoretical discourses together – agency *and* systematicity – that produce what Jameson refers to as Marx's 'figurations', a productive symptom here of his dialectic at work attempting to unify opposites in his representation of capital:

Thus, by a chiasmus that has become dialectical, everything bad about the qualification of the closed has been transferred to the open... Capitalism is thus what is sometimes called an infernal machine, a perpetuum mobile or unnatural miracle, whose strengths turn out to be what is most intolerable about it.

It is in such moments of his analysis that Jameson's experience and expertise as a literary and a cultural critic come to the fore, despite his attempts to distance his text from literary interpretation. For what emerges in his reading, among other things, might be more forthrightly described as an attempt – following here perhaps in the footsteps of Hayden White's deployment



of the idea of 'emplotment' in historiography – to discover and consider the necessarily 'figurative' (even literary) content of all dialectical thought, in detail. This means, for example, moving beyond Marx's use of literary quotation and characterization – including his use of allegory and gothic – to examine how certain key words – which are not quite concepts, but not now pure literary figurations either – work across different discourses, becoming *quasi-conceptual figurations* (in other words, transdisciplinary sites of conceptual production). In this respect, Jameson dedicates his extraordinarily condensed chapter on 'Capital in its Time' to the significance of Marx's use of the verb 'to extinguish', to great effect, so as to give an account of the layering of time(s) in (and of) capital: 'From this verb comes past and future alike, along with a view of the present as production whose originality lies in its negativity rather than in any positive or affirmative content.' Thus, in the fire of present production past labour is repeatedly resurrected as means and as value and immediately 'extinguished' in use in the capitalist labour process of accumulation. The secret of Marx's previous reflections on the idea of production as consumption is contained in his use of this word, in Jameson's view, as is the alienated character of workers' experience of 'real subsumption' to (constant) capital (in the form of machinery). Finally, it returns us to the retreat of the political in *Capital*, producing a real sense of 'having once been historical capitalism now becomes eternal', a continuous present. For, in extinguishing its past capital also appears to extinguish any other possible future. This constitutes one of the 'limits of Volume One', according to Jameson (suggesting, as might the title of his book, that he could write others on Volumes Two and Three), except, that is, for what Jameson calls its 'heroic' and 'comic' climaxes.

The 'heroic' climax is especially significant, for it insists on an idea that is almost anathema to the contemporary Left: that socialism is to be more modern and more productive than capitalism. Jameson is referring to the moment when, in Part Eight, Marx writes of the tendencies towards the 'monopoly of capital' of 'centralization of the means of production and the socialization of labour' become 'fetters' and the 'knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.' 'To recover that futurism and that excitement', writes Jameson, 'is surely the fundamental task of any left "discursive strategy" today.' The 'comic' climax is merely an image, an idyllic image of freedom from capitalist relations of production, captured by Marx in his story of a Mr Peel who takes both money capital and working people with him to

Australia. Once there, however, he was abandoned: 'Unhappy Mr Peel', writes Marx, 'who provided for everything except the export of English relations of production...' Others exported slavery. This, perhaps, constitutes Jameson's critique of 'exodus'.

However, one of the problems of occupying the in-between theoretical space described above, coupled with the relative shortness of the book, is that Jameson tends at times to riff, producing short bursts of thought that remain undeveloped. This has its creative moments. One may be found in the chapter on Part Eight of *Capital* that is concerned with 'so-called primitive accumulation' (and that contains the above-mentioned 'climaxes' to *Capital*). Jameson's chapter is called 'History as Coda', suggesting that Marx's Part Eight is a kind of appendage. It is, no doubt, the baggiest part, evoking the multiplicity of historical causes, processes and explanations of the emergence of capital (even becoming, subsequent to his reading of Deleuze and Guattari's own version, the favourite of the late Althusser). There is a really productive moment in Jameson's account: a kind of dialectical reversal of the temporal order of the text that folds the historical processes Marx associates with the separation of the direct producers from their means of production, and the coercive legislation that enforced the creation of labour power as a commodity, *back* into Marx's account of manufacture in Chapter 14 (Part Four). The looping effect produces continuity in apparent discontinuity. Jameson thus shows how Marx's 'figure of separation' is deployed to illustrate how capitalists need not only to displace feudal lords and their control of labour, but also 'to seize the *space of production* [here, the factory system] for themselves and to reorganize it'. The battle here is against the working traditions and regulations of the guilds and is one of the conditions for the subsequent rise of machinofacture. 'Dialectical history', suggests Jameson, 'is thus written in the discontinuous mode of successive negations, subtractions, separations and omissions ... which ... allow us to read the absent continuity between them.' It is, in other words, a montage.

Certain ideas remain underdeveloped. None more so than Jameson's self-proclaimedly 'scandalous assertion' that *Capital* is a book about unemployment. This is important because it is a key argument for his assertion of the contemporary political relevance of *Capital*, despite the text's own systematic and anti-political dynamic – the point being to insist on the necessity today of both an appreciation and a critique of the logics of exploitation (including the power and hold of the commodification of labour and the wage form) and

accumulation. Jameson's assertion recurs intermittently throughout the book, mainly in his account of what he perceives to be *Capital*-proper; that is, when Marx leaves the realm of circulation and exchange (at the end of Part One) and enters the subterranean realm of the factory where exploitation and accumulation take place (which he leaves again for Part Eight). Here, he finds the capitalist 'identity of productivity and misery' – that is, *the absolute general law of accumulation*. According to Jameson, this is the 'centrepiece' of Marx's analysis, from where the system as a totality becomes visible. From this perspective, Marx's classic accounts of the real (machinic) subsumption of labour to capital, on the one hand, and the accompanying logics of pauperization and the creation of a more or less permanent 'reserve army of labour', on the other, become one. This is the moment at which, in the contemporary context of globalization and resistance to it, Jameson expands the (political) constituency of the exploited – and thus of capital accumulation – to include the unemployed. The objection here – to an argument I am nonetheless sympathetic with – is that such an expansion and inclusion surely demands an account of the forms taken by exploitation (and expropriation more generally) today and the ways in which these (for example, the wage form) have become articulated, or even subordinated, to other forms of capital accumulation: for example, the very well-known abbreviated financial and credit forms of M–M', or the more violent ones of 'accumulation through dispossession'. It is to this that various kinds of anarchist 'resistance', from which Jameson wants critically to distance himself, in fact respond.

These are the contemporary forms of exploitation that might be derived from what Jameson believes to be the extraneous inclusions, within *Capital*, of Parts One and Eight. As is well known, Part One centres on the analysis of the commodity and money forms, passing through the exchange of equivalents and the theory of value. It poses a problem – or riddle – that the other parts of Marx's work resolve: how does the exchange of equivalents generate more? The answer is to be found in the character of labour-power as a commodity: its use value to capital is to generate more – that is, surplus – value. Jameson believes that Marx's account, which he presents as a critique of the mathematical form of the equation, is merely an extension of his earlier *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* of 1859. And it is, as the subtitle of *Capital* – *A Critique of Political Economy* – makes clear. The crucial difference, however, is that by the time of the latter Marx had developed

a theory of surplus value centred on the specificity of the commodity labour-power. In the earlier book, 'abstract' labour is socially de-differentiated labour, the product of the division of labour, or a kind of labour 'in general'. In *Capital*, however, labour-power is transformed into a commodity and exchanged: this is what makes it abstract. This is what transforms the theory of value, set out in *Capital*. In other words, in Part One of *Capital* the commodity has always already been to the factory.

**John Kraniauskas**

## Radically private and pretty uncoded

Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds, *The Affect Theory Reader*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2010. 416 pp., £67.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 0 82234 758 3 hb., 978 0 82234 776 7 pb.

Affect theory emerged out of a set of dissatisfactions with dominant modes of analysis in the humanities. Beginning in the mid-1990s there was increasing consensus that the tools and principles of poststructuralism were unable to accommodate or even recognize central facts about human experience: those that did not rise (or fall) to the level of signification. The privilege granted to language in poststructuralism filtered out precognitive modes of awareness that were felt to be more basic, even more real than the ideated forms of linguistic apprehension. Affects constitute a 'level of experience [that] cannot be translated into words without doing violence', Anna Gibbs writes in the new *Affect Theory Reader*. Or, as Patricia Clough suggests in her account of 'The Affective Turn', citing Rei Terada, poststructuralism was "'truly glacial" in the pronouncement of the death of the subject and therefore had little to do with affect and emotion'. Clough's concern, of course, is not with a return to the subject, far from it, but rather to show how affect theory does 'death of the author' better than semiotics. 'Affect and emotion', Clough writes, 'point ... to the subject's discontinuity with itself, a discontinuity of the subject's conscious experience with the non-intentionality of emotion and affect.' Affect theory does discontinuity with a difference. According to Clough, the challenge of affect theory, against every other form of inquiry, is to show how 'bodily matter' bears 'information'. This bodily information overruns the information

contained in any linguistic system. Affect 'organizes itself', which means every other form of organization including perception, cognition, signification, meaning, language, representation, self and other are not only entirely separable from affects but secondary to them. You can't get from one to the other: language, no matter how intensely one deconstructs it, will never open onto affect. Affects are of a different ontological order from linguistic representation, so that even the most advanced modes of poststructural analysis end up privileging language and the subjectivity it generates.

*The Affect Theory Reader* shows how affect can be deployed in a range of frameworks, including the neurological, psychological, social, cultural, philosophical and political, and that there is room for debate among these various fields – above all between the Deleuze-inspired writings of Brian Massumi and his followers and those of the more scientifically minded followers of Eve Sedgwick, whose work was formulated in dialogue with affect psychologist Silvan Tomkins – but there is much more room for agreement among the various camps. (For a brilliant critique of the basic assumptions, and evidence, behind both Massumi's and Tomkins's claims about affect, see Ruth Leys's recent essay, 'The Affective Turn: A Critique', in *Critical Inquiry*). And the agreement hinges on a core claim. There is, Massumi declares, 'duplicity of form': every form or image is received by an agent 'spontaneously and simultaneously in two orders of reality, one local and learned or intentional, the other nonlocal and self-organizing'. In other words, humans apprehend the world along two separate *but not equal* tracks: intention and affect, meaning and sense, perception and experience coexist but do not merge or commingle (the latter term in these binaries is always construed 'outside consciousness'). According to Clough, affects are defined in terms of their 'autonomy from conscious perception and language'. So, despite persistent warnings throughout the *Reader* that 'affect and cognition are never fully separable', that there is 'no boundary yet between the body ... and the correlated sign', body and sign are nonetheless functioning, and analysable, on ontologically separate planes, as a matter of 'parallel processing'. The *difference in kind* between affect and meaning, experience and representation, sense and significance, is a categorical assumption of affect theory and one worth interrogating.

Part of the affect theory project is to go back precisely to those poststructuralist masters – at least some of them, Lacan and Derrida, for instance, are conspicuously absent – but more often it is to seek an alternate genealogy in the deeper past. Marx in the *Economic*

and *Philosophic Manuscripts*, Freud's *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, C.S. Peirce's pragmatism, Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, William James's radical empiricism, Walter Benjamin's writings on mimesis, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Primo Levi's memoirs, Henri Lefebvre's and Raymond Williams's sociology – I am citing both the usual suspects and some new arrivals – are redescribed as theories and theorists of affect. In their introduction to the *Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth cite Roland Barthes's late lectures, *The Neutral*, as evidence of an affective turn within the stale 'semiotic paradigm'. Barthes calls for attention to the 'shimmer' of an 'affective minimum' (the title of the introduction is 'An Inventory of Shimmers'). Affective states, Barthes writes, 'outplay the paradigm' of dialectics by referring to something 'unprecedented', something that slips through the net of dialectical analysis.

The fact that affects, whatever they are, are 'new' is a point raised by every author of the volume. Sara Ahmed characterizes a basic element of affectivity as being 'more and less open to new things'; Lauren Berlant writes of a 'new atmosphere of new objects'; Ben Highmore suggests that affects constitute 'new sensual worlds'; Ben Anderson describes how affectivity offers a 'promise of a new way to attend to the social or cultural in perpetual and unruly movement'; affects 'open unsuspected possibilities for new ways of thinking, being, and acting', they are for Gibbs 'envisionings beyond the already known'; for Clough affects are 'unexpected, new', contributing to the 'forging of a new body'; while Steve D. Brown and Ian Tucker see affects as affording a 'new space of liberty in the ineffable'. The word 'new' appears no fewer than 110 times in the fourteen essays.

The relentless pursuit of newness emerges from the most cited source in the *Reader*, the collaborative writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Brown and Tucker cite Deleuze and Guattari's definition of philosophy as an imperative 'always to extract an event from things and beings, to set up the new event from things and beings, always to give them a new event'. Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie take their cue from Deleuze and Guattari in their philosophical reading of a political incident. In 'An Ethics of Everyday Infinites and Powers: Félix Guattari on Affect and the Refrain' Bertelsen and Murphie consider the 'Tampa affair' of August 2001, in which the Howard administration refused permission for a Norwegian freighter, the MV *Tampa*, carrying 438 rescued Afghans from a distressed fishing vessel floating in

international waters, to enter Australian territory. A central fact of this 'event', for Bertelsen and Murphie, one that far surpassed the '[o]pinions and arguments' around it in importance, was that the boat was painted red. They write:

It becomes the mark, the possibility of a new *event* (a new *virtual potential* for things to happen differently), of a new set of *physical territories* ... and of a new set of *existential territories* (these include ... new modes of living, new laws, new sign systems, ... new emotions and feelings, new powers to affect and be affected). In sum, a new field of expression arises.

(The word 'new' appears eight more times two paragraphs later.) Bertelsen and Murphie support Guattari's claim that '*affect is all there is*', which suggests, they write, an '*aesthetic* approach to politics'. It's an object of aesthetic experience – the red paint on the side of the boat – that both initiates the event and that transcends the 'arguments' made about it. The arguments – about whether one should help the refugees or not, for instance – are always already an effort to 'capture and control affect'. At the bottom of every interpretation, understanding, analysis, meaning, was 'red'. The event meant many things but '*first* it was an uneasy and persistent redness sitting on the horizon'. Affects, that is, are not only ontologically parallel with cognition, they are *prior to it*. Cognition not only logically follows affect (although it is not connected with it), but that cognition doesn't affect affect. All thought is an afterthought. Gibbs simply calls this the 'dependence of cognition on affect and the senses'. Perhaps the most revealing foundationalist claim emerges when Bertelsen and Murphie provide a brief footnote declaring, 'We are not, of course, saying this [red] image was solely responsible for the events surrounding the *Tampa*.' Indeed. While affect 'subtends cognitively mediated representation', as Gibbs puts it, she similarly warns that affect does 'not ever entirely replace or supersede it'!

Even the sceptics of the affective reduction reiterate its terms. Lawrence Grossberg, for instance, wants to reject the aesthetic politics proposed by Bertelsen and Murphie (which he believes originate with Massumi's work), citing the idea that 'you flash these lights [of terror alerts] at people and there is some kind of bodily response.' Massumi's example in the *Reader* is a fire alarm rather than a flashing light. Fire alarms, Massumi writes, citing Peirce, 'act on the nerves of the person' yet they '*assert nothing*'. Grossberg's retort to Massumi's view of bodily response to lights and sounds is succinct: 'Well there isn't [any bodily response]!' Grossberg further warns that

affect is quickly becoming a formula for ‘everything that is non-representational or non-semantic’. And yet Grossberg goes on to describe affect as ‘excess’, something ‘not captured by notions of signification and representation’, something that escapes ‘theories of representation, of meaning, of ideology’. And again, ‘if something has effects that are ... non-representational then we can just describe it as “affect”’. (It’s unclear what kind of work the scare quotes are doing here.) As it turns out, Grossberg’s real objection is not to the notion of affect at all; rather, he believes we should be ‘specifying modalities and apparatuses of affect’ and discerning the difference between the ‘ontological and the “empirical”’ within affective experience. According to Grossberg, Massumi and co. are too quick to conflate the empirical (psychology and culture) with the ontological (the physical body). What’s at stake in this call for more ‘articulations’ and the ‘refusal of any reduction’? And how does this square with his declaration that ‘in the end, it all comes back to affect’?

Grossberg’s critique of the Left’s ‘elitist and vanguardist politics’, for instance, involves a critique of the Left’s prioritizing of economics over (popular) culture. Rather than talking about the ‘changing status, presence, representation, forms, effectivities of the economy,’ rather than trying to ‘diagnose what is new about capitalism’, according to Grossberg we should be seeing that ‘culture is ... a condition of possibility of the economic’. What this looks like is explicitly stated in Seigworth’s introductory discussion of Lefebvre. Rather than examine ‘institutions’, Seigworth writes (he is citing Greil Marcus on Lefebvre), we should examine affective ‘moments of love, poetry ... hate, desire’ because in them lie ‘entirely new demands on the social order’. Fighting to change the current economic system, Seigworth and Grossberg contend, is simply to use ‘its own already defined assumptions’, a denial of *virtual* realities – ‘the multiplicities and contradictions’ – beyond or within capitalism. Once you recognize that culture (love, poetry, rock music, desire), and not economics, is the real problem, then your theory is fit for the unemployed and the CEO alike.

Guattari’s ‘aesthetic approach to politics’ is further literalized in Berlant’s study of ‘Cruel Optimism’. Berlant’s analysis focuses on the moment in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in which Marx describes the ‘abolition of private property’ as signalling the ‘*emancipation* of all human senses’. No longer seeing objects as fetishes and nature as a matter of use, the senses, Marx says, become ‘theoreticians’. Berlant draws on this passage in Marx to understand the

poet John Ashbery’s untitled send-up of the American Dream. According to Berlant, ‘our senses are not yet theoreticians because they are bound up by the rule, the map, the inherited fantasy, and the hum of worker bees who fertilize materially the life we are moving through.’ The problem, for Berlant, is the suburban fantasy ‘of the endless weekend’, the ‘consumer’s happy circulation in familiarity’, and the ‘privilege of being bored with life’. (Gregg’s essay similarly takes up the regressive ‘politics of the cubicle’.) As a reading of Ashbery this might be right, but as an account of Marx it isn’t. For Marx, of course, the problem is the privilege of private property, not the ‘privilege of being bored’. One could safely eradicate boredom, without it bearing on the problem of capital. The anxious worker, after all, lacks (and perhaps looks forward to) the privilege of being bored. And affects, despite their ‘sensorium-shaking’ transformation of the ‘bourgeois senses’, begin to look a lot like the fetishized private property Marx scrutinized. Affects are, Berlant insists, ‘radically private, and pretty uncoded’, and, like the fetishized commodity, they make their dazzling appearance with the labour behind them obscured. These private experiences are in fact beyond analysis – an affect, after all, ‘is just a fact’.

Todd Cronan

## Of course... however

Michael Bailey and Des Freedman, eds, *The Assault on Universities: A Manifesto for Resistance*, Pluto Press, London, 2011. 200 pp., £14.99 pb., 978 0 74533 191 1.

The conceptual poles that orient the collection of essays edited by Des Freedman and Michael Bailey in *The Assault on Universities* are, on the one hand, an insistence on higher education as a public good, with public benefits and to be supported as a public service, and, on the other, a governmental policy – partially initiated prior to the current coalition government, but now pursued with an unprecedented speed, aggression and intensity – set on the thoroughgoing privatization of that sector. These poles are schematized in Freedman’s introduction as the ‘reformers’ towards privatization versus a campaign of ‘resistance’ that seeks to defend what is most progressive about the existing public education system.

That many of the essays in this book are marked by the ferocity of the transformations we are experiencing

is a testament to the speed and collaborative effort (involving students, researchers and academic staff) in accordance with which these essays were written and edited. Almost a third of the contributors work at Goldsmiths, whose staff and students both played an integral role in the student demonstrations at the end of last year and courageously defended the protesters – where other unions dared not – against the widespread media-led *fenestria* in the wake of the attack on Millbank Tower.

*The Assault on Universities* is thus a timely work in several senses. Across its pages, the government's justifications for the necessity of teaching cuts and fee hikes and its recourse to the logic of market competition are mercilessly dissected. Freedman rejects the rhetoric of austerity as counterproductive to economic recovery, and contextualizes the wider attack on public services in terms of the growing intrusion of the private sector in these services over the last decade, underpinned – as Nick Couldry points out – by Milton Friedman's seemingly anachronistic ideology of market liberalism. As John K. Walton notes, this infects the public sector with the representatives and values of corporate capitalism: the McKinseyist business model (things that cannot be measured have no value) of a new and often semi- or non-academic managerial class. This transformation is also usefully contextualized in relation to a growing dependence on the exploitation of a workforce of precariously employed teaching staff or graduate students (highlighted in detail in Marc Bousquet's *How the University Works: Higher Education and Low-Wage Nation*), to the history of the student movement, and to international changes in higher education in insightful essays by Natalie Fenton, John Rees and Marion von Osten.

The voices raised here are also historically suspended, poised between an enthusiasm for the student movement that took to the streets in November 2010, disappointment over the Commons passing of the motion to raise the tuition fee limit that December, and a hopeful uncertainty over the direction and resilience the 'resistance' would take over the course of 2011 and beyond. References to the closure of Philosophy at Middlesex in the summer of 2010 and the first wave of UK Uncut protests that winter could now be easily replaced with appeals to 'Free Hetherington' (which after seven months in occupation won a significant victory for its demands on the management of the University of Glasgow), civil unrest and rioting last summer, the internationally-inspired Occupy LSX movement that pitched camp in the shadow of St Paul's in October, and to the mass mobilization of the trade unions on 30 November.

This foregrounded timeliness is imposed not merely by the temporal conditions under which the work was published, but also by the conceptual terms of regressive 'reform' and progressive 'resistance' that to a large extent set the agenda of its debate. The collection's subtitle, *A Manifesto for Resistance*, expresses this apparently jarring mix of temporalities: a performance of futural intent towards making something manifest, directed here towards preserving and retaining a past institution, the public university.

'Of course universities are not, and never have been, pristine sites of autonomous and intellectual labour', notes Des Freedman in the introduction.

However, like many other publicly funded institutions which do not always live up to expectations (the BBC and NHS spring to mind), a strong defence of the principle of public provision carries with it the possibility not only of 'holding the line' but also of invigorating and democratizing these institutions.

Examples of this backward/forward looking 'Of course... However' defence of the public abound across these essays. This may be strategically useful – even necessary – but it may simultaneously be indicative of what, in an essay on 'Achievements and Limitations of the UK Student Movement', Ashok Kumar, the LSE's 2010/11 student union education officer, singles out as 'the failure of the movement to draft an alternative to the existing system'. I don't mean to suggest we've simply neglected to draft such an alternative, but that the difficulty of even attempting to do so is symptomatic of a general political impasse, within which education (as the perennial site for problems of political transition) becomes overinvested as the sphere in which these problems are re-transposed, reduplicated and intensified. There is something miraculous in thinking that education – as one of the privileged reproducers of class inequalities – in itself harbours the germ of a resilient and assertive future citizenship, inhabited by intellectual truth-tellers as 'a cornerstone for the realization of an educated democracy', and the resources required for the reconstitution of the public good for a cosmopolitan global governance. The admission for entering into such a defence of higher education must be a frank, historical appraisal of the extent to which UK universities have competed against each other within a system of academic selection or even been capable of producing engaged, public intellectuals.

Although a range of viewpoints is represented in these essays, a reluctance to offer an explicit defence of the university outside the existing, largely liberal-democratic formulations of higher education must be confronted, as both indicative of a deliberate, attractive

and by no means ineffective political strategy, and a framing and fixing of the debate at the level of ideology critique and the crisis of a democratic political culture that might itself be problematic. The real risk of desiring to build a ‘counterculture’ defending the ideals of classical liberalism on the model of Wendy Brown’s ‘counter-rationality’, or Amartya Sen’s *Freedom and Rationality*, or Axel Honneth’s concept of recognition – even if constructed on the basis of the kind of knowing ‘counter-ideology’ proposed by Ronald Barnett (*Beyond All Reason: Living with Ideology in the University*, 2003) – is that of precluding precisely the broader kinds of inclusivity and relevance that the authors insist be built.

This fixing of the focus of debate is reflected in the list of demands made upon government and university management at the conclusion of the book, which quite



reasonably focuses on increases to public expenditure on higher education, including nationally agreed terms and conditions for staff negotiated by trade unions and a commitment to the Living Wage even for outsourced services, to be offset against increases in corporation tax and the highest levels of personal taxation, and by fixed salary scales for VCs and senior staff. These are the kind of ‘non-reformist reforms’ (André Gorz) that Alberto Toscano points out are nonetheless derided as impossible, and more difficult to achieve than the fleeting experiences of democracy afforded by the organization of protests and occupations. It is right that they form the starting point for a ‘resistance’ around which the broadest coalition can be organized. But they

should not preclude bolder, deeper, more unsettling questions about the very concept of public education.

In an occasionally sneering review of *The Assault on Universities* in *Spiked* magazine, Tim Black argues that to cling to the idea of the university as lever of social-economic mobility is now indefensible, given the rise of inequality that has accompanied the ‘massification’ of higher education. In its place there ‘now exists’, he insists, ‘the profound question as to what the purpose of the university ought to be’. Black’s answer clings to an even older idea of academic autonomy and Newmansque ‘in-utility’, singling out for praise Walton’s essay on ‘The Idea of the University’ because it returns to a secularized version of the ‘older, nineteenth-century notions of the intrinsic worth of knowledge and culture (embodied in J.H. Newman’s *The Idea of the University* and Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*)’. But on what basis is it possible to discard so easily Newman’s commitment to the transmission of Catholic truth, once regarded as central to universal learning, whilst insisting on the impossibility today of a university without philosophers? In the liberal-democratic defence of the Idea of the University, are those disciplines deemed essential – is *disciplinarity* itself – to be immured from historical transformation?

This touches on the larger theme of the ‘massification’ of the university and raises the question of the economic, social and technological transformation of education, especially in the last two decades. Neil Faulkner argues that ‘the expansion of the universities in the 1950s and 1960s created mass higher education for the first time’, whose central contradiction (between intellectual holism and social inclusivity) produced a crisis that was ‘dramatically revealed by the student revolt of November–December 2010’. From even a cursory historical materialist perspective, however, the central issue would still have to be confronted: to speak more generally of a ‘resistance’ on behalf of the public university would suggest the possibility of a non-contradictory harmonizing of these concepts, rather than any kind of dialectical transformation of the terms involved. A similar contradiction runs through the heart of Nietzsche’s transitional essay ‘On the Future of our Educational Institutions’, and in the name of producing a higher culture premised on the independence of the university, he is happy to discard the ‘massification’ of higher education and its corrosive association with the state as mere philistinism. It is at the same crossroads that Black’s defence of the university finds itself unwittingly conjoined to that of the coalition government as a counter-revolution



against the modern demand for accessibility and participation in the name of preserving the integrity of an older vision of academic autonomy (which will, we must imagine, be preserved in its current form by the coalition government, if only for the privileged elite).

The best of the essays in this collection remain alive to this contradiction and to the inversion of the perspective of ‘resistance’ it suggests. Its spectre haunts Toscano’s contribution (which in many ways stands in sympathy with, but also as a critical response to, Kumar’s demands), which asks at the outset, ‘Is it possible to democratize the university?’, and does not shrink from the difficulties involved: ‘And when autonomy, maturity and critical reasoning are components of the ideology of an institution (today we could perhaps add creativity, innovation, and even radicalism), it is not surprising that some of its inhabitants “over-identify” with them.’ In doing so, Toscano inverts the timeliness of a *Manifesto for Resistance*. Of course, he might have written, ‘a “transitional programme” for a democratic university would certainly need to table collective measures against the kinds of managerial power that acts as a crucial transmission belt for the implementation of government policies on education.’ However, he would add, issues of democratic content (*what* is to be done?) must take precedence over the fetishizing of democratic forms as solutions in their own right (*how* should we proceed?).

These questions come to bear on the function and possibility of the public university. If cuts to the public sector and the services they support are merely *ideological* (the result of choices about taxation versus welfare), it is assumed there is no underlying contradiction between the social-democratic ideal of the mass, public universities of the future and the systematic functioning of late capitalism. If, as Nick Stevenson argues, the ‘third way’ emphasis upon democracy and civil society sought to mask the extent to which the class structure and capitalism were inhospitable to these ideals, we must therefore go further than Nick Couldry’s insistence that neoliberal democracy is a paradoxical oxymoron and confront the possibility that a fundamental contradiction exists between capitalism (and not merely its *neoliberal* version) and a *mass*, modern and public higher education system. It may be *untimely* to formulate the experiment ahead in such starkly Brechtian terms, but if the concept of ‘higher education’ can no longer be applied to the thing transformed into a commodity, we may have to eliminate this concept with due caution but without fear, lest we liquidate the function of the very thing as well.

**Matthew Charles**

## Undressing the student

University for Strategic Optimism, *Undressing the Academy, or The Student Handjob*, Minor Compositions, London and New York, 2011, £5.00 pb. 72 pp., 2044–8589. Also available free online at <http://student-handjob.wordpress.com>.

The haste with which Parliament drove through its education reforms last winter left scant time for the student movement to react with much critical reflection on the system it was defending. The prevailing institutional setup, it was rightly held, was worth defending as such, being wholly preferable to that into which the government would fashion it. In the lull that has followed the failure to prevent the changes, the University for Strategic Optimism (UfSO) poses a vital and overdue question: ‘Just what is the university that we are fighting for anyway? And what perhaps could it be?’

Their response is a ‘dirty snapshot’ of UK higher education, compiled in the form of a mock student handbook that attempts to piece together university life in its present and imminent state. In *Undressing the Academy, or The Student Handjob*, many of the usual student-handbook topics – housing, mental health, internships, racism, and so on – are critically treated (or given a ‘belligerent mauling’) and developed into strategies of resistance or escape.

*Undressing the Academy* is noticeably influenced by the Situationist International (SI) and their paradigmatic (anti-)student handbook *On the Poverty of Student Life*. Following the SI, for whom ‘academic’ was a term of abuse, a ‘cretin’ whom the student must ‘go on listening [to] respectfully’, UfSO refer to the way in which the classroom engenders the ‘shitting [of] the desk’ – a reproduction of the fixed student–teacher power relationship which demands that students ‘passively smile and nod appropriately as the wise teacher defines knowledge’. Real knowledge begins, they write, when the ‘mastery of the student by the teacher is broken’. Henri Lefebvre’s concept of ‘lived space’, at the core of the SI’s experiments in psychogeography, appears in *Undressing the Academy* with a call to ‘explore space’, preferably on foot (Guy Debord called this a *dérive*), and to inhabit both the university and the city according to liberated passions by turning them into a ‘playground’. Though something of a clichéd strategy half a century on, it is important to remember how the recent student movement did

indeed turn Westminster into a playground, of sorts, during its most powerful manifestations: in utilizing sacrosanct monuments as swings, hurling produce at future monarchs and parading through government headquarters. The question stands, though, why such manifestations ultimately failed.

University students are the target audience of *Undressing the Academy*, being, for UfSO, the agents of the university's revolutionary potential. Yet the repeated declaration that students and their tutors stand in political antagonism towards one another is surely a poisoned inheritance from the Situationists. Today's marketization of the university system is indeed intensifying the commodification of student education into a consumable 'student experience'. But it is also turning the role of the academic into a fulfiller of student-consumer demands, not to mention a relentless fabricator of research papers aimed at attracting diminishing Research Council funding. In short, by postulating that 'without the student, the university is nothing', UfSO deny the *shared* position of students and academics in the university structure: both being among its necessary intellectual labourers (along with library staff, admin, etc.), both ever-increasingly compelled towards the consumption or production of market-defined knowledge. Perhaps, in order better to assess the relations of power involved in the university, the reified student/teacher categories should be transcended. Otherwise, calls for change that derive solely from the side of the student per se, no matter how radically phrased, risk amounting to mere consumer demands. (You want tutors who recognize you as an equal? Coming right up!)

The strategies of resistance or escape (it remains unclear which is preferred) that *Undressing the Academy* proposes are often more prescriptive than may have been intended, falling into problem-solution paradigms which, for a panacea, most often simply propound immediate, collective action. Conceding to the complexity of the situation might have sometimes been preferable. Also, at points *Undressing the Academy* betrays a certain class prejudice (the depiction of technical universities as 'academic ghettos', for example) and it neglects any sustained analysis of gender issues. But as an admittedly 'partially drawn' attempt to think the imminent condition of the university politically, UfSO's provocative aggregation of such a broad range of issues, its creative attempts to think their transformation, not to mention its initial problematization of the university structure itself, are certainly welcome.

**Daniel Nemenyi**

## Amour propre. Not

Deborah Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, Acumen, Durham, 2011. 198 pp., £55.00 hb., £18.99 pb., 978 1 84465 255 6 hb., 978 1 84465 262 4 pb.

Anyone offering to expound Adorno's concept of nature has assumed a fraught and difficult task. This is in part because his own commentary is so dialectically pleated, and in part because it is not clear, despite the coherence and lucidity of his specific discussions of nature-humanity relations, that the overall picture he offers is entirely convincing and self-consistent. In this scrupulous and densely argued text, Deborah Cook provides a lucid, thoughtful and scholarly guide to the detail of Adorno's argument. Her account is also well versed in the secondary commentary on it and offers a number of important qualifications and correctives to it. For those wanting a full and accurate guide to Adorno's position, this is certainly a text to go to. But for those – and I include myself here – who are already committed fans of Adorno, but troubled by the more aporetic aspects of his argument on nature, this is not, perhaps, as challenging a discussion as one might have wanted. Certainly key points of tension are noted, but there is a reluctance, it seems, to accord them a central place or allow them to unsettle the expository flow.

Cook rightly presents Adorno as stressing the historicity of 'nature' and its continuous cultural mediation, while also insisting on its ultimate exteriority to conceptualization, and the priority of 'matter' (or what the concept of 'matter' stands for) to thought. And in this context she pursues the points of comparison and contrast with Hegel and, perhaps most interestingly, with Kant (whose recourse to the noumenal is of course rejected by Adorno, but whom Cook persuasively presents nonetheless as a non-identity thinker *avant la lettre*). On the other hand, we are not offered much insight into how we are to understand the qualities of this non-noumenal yet immediate 'nature': a nature which is both the abiding stuff of cultural mediation and at the same time never accessible other than in its historic mediations. What, if any, relationship does it have to the object of the natural sciences? Is it, indeed, as is suggested, a nature that could exist or flourish independently of us – and what exactly would that mean? And if we are using concepts to understand 'natural' things, what concept of the 'natural' has been presupposed in their selection as 'natural'? Even if, as Cook says, Adorno's materialism 'refutes the idea of an unspoiled basic stratum because it stresses the constant interaction between nature and history', this

is a claim that only makes sense in the light of some fundamental conceptual discrimination between the two. It is true that Adorno aims to 'de-humanise nature and de-naturalise humanity as much as the reverse', yet this formulation of his project still presupposes some way of distinguishing the opposing categories.

In respect of human nature and environmental interactions, there is also surely an ongoing tension in Adorno's position between the emphasis on the always mediated quality of needs (and even instincts) and the discourse on their repression. Are we products of repressed need and instinct (a libertarian position that directs us to a view of emancipation as the lifting of repression), or is Adorno to be more aligned with Foucault in rejecting any redemptive return to some supposedly more 'natural' less alienated mode of being? Both positions find some register in Adorno's writing, and both are cogently argued for in themselves at various points – but there is no disputing the ongoing tension between them and the doubt it casts on how we are to understand the possibility of human freedom, or of what Adorno refers to



as 'the true society' or 'the right condition'. Again, Cook is quite justified in pointing to the centrality of the theme of instrumental rationality and the 'irresistible urge to subjugate nature'. But if both humans and nature are formed through mutual interaction, then the subjugation is not only of our 'inner' nature but of an already humanized environment, and the very notion of 'subjugation' as if of some pristine and alien otherness rather than of what is already our own work, begins to seem problematic.

In discussing Adorno's argument concerning needs and instincts, and Freud's influence on his thinking of these, Cook constantly returns to the theme of the struggle for survival and its dominance in Adorno's account. The instinct for self-preservation is indeed at the heart of Adorno's explanation of where we (or at least 'we' in the West?) have gone wrong. But given the excesses of consumer culture today, their role in the *creation* of scarcities in less fortunate areas of the globe, and the very high material standard of living

now enjoyed by many in the more developed societies, it seems a little odd for Cook simply to reproduce, without any critical qualification, the opinion of *Negative Dialectics* that 'autonomy will be achieved only when society has been transformed in such a way that we are liberated from the lifelong struggle to satisfy our needs.' What really needs to be brought into the picture here, one feels, is the role of *amour propre* rather than *amour de soi* and the devastating environmental and social consequences of its continued consumerist form of gratification. And there are, indeed, many conceptual pointers in Adorno's work, notably his discussions of narcissism, of hedonism, the manipulations of the culture industry and critique of commodity fetishism, that would seem to invite us

to read him as a critic of hyper-consumption rather than one whose main concern is still (as in Marx's vision) with the 'freedom' that can only be won through the struggle against scarcity.

The political rationale for any close engagement with Adorno's views on nature at the present time lies in its relevance to contemporary eco-criticism and

ecological concerns. Cook reflects this in the attention she pays in her final chapter to 'Adorno and Radical Ecology', where she provides a comparative engagement with the arguments of Arne Naess, Murray Bookchin and Carolyn Merchant. As a counter to Naess's vague recommendations for 'sustainable consumption' she defends Adorno's more realistic assessment of the obstacles in the way of a more rational ordering of society. But she also helpfully contrasts Adorno's dialectical openness on the future to Bookchin's teleological frame of thinking, and in that context offers a needed defence of him against the charge of pessimism. Merchant for her part is presented as at odds with Adorno because of her positive take on animism (which Adorno himself viewed as no less hostile to nature than enlightenment), and her anthropomorphic endowment of nature with 'voice'. And all three thinkers are criticized for their leanings towards an identification with nature that overlooks the distinctive role of human consciousness, and for their advocacy

of a unity in nature at the expense of the diversity emphasized by Adorno himself. These criticisms are telling and to the point, and it is good to have so robust a defence of a dialectical understanding as a counter to indiscriminate holistic approaches to the understanding of nature and human relations with it. One's only regret is that this engagement has not been extended to the more recent forms of posthumanist and new materialist thinking that now wield such influence in contemporary environmental philosophy.

Kate Soper

## Zombie philosophy

Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel, *The Death of Philosophy: Reference and Self-Reference in Contemporary Thought*, trans. Richard A. Lynch, Columbia University Press, New York and Chichester, 2011. 331 pp., £52.00 hb., 978 0 23114 778 1.

Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel compares her 'eccentric' historical–philosophical perspective to the anamorphic skull of Holbein the Younger's *The Ambassadors*. This self-professed eccentricity is not unwarranted given the sheer breadth of material contained in *The Death of Philosophy* at a time when we are more accustomed to essays by or about the latest master-thinker. Around a quarter of the book alone is given over to notes and the bibliography – symptomatic of its attempt to respond productively to an acute problem through an understanding of the history of that problem. Such an approach is preferable to the historically blind invocations of the next '-ism'. Yet the nature of the historical approach itself – inseparable as it is from the dominant style of philosophical studies in France – is not without its problems, in spite of the fact that the work was partly motivated against the attempt in France and elsewhere to snuff out living philosophy in the history of ideas.

In Part I (of III) the author sets out her problematic by drawing together prominent philosophical positions – across both analytic and Continental trends – so as to expose the 'performative contradiction' of the implicit or explicit claims to philosophy's expiration. These conjunctions are intended to be surprising: for instance, post-analytic relativism (Rorty) and positivist scientism (Quine), or ordinary language philosophy (Austin, Searle and Cavell) and phenomenology (Levinas). In various ways, each position proclaims the death of philosophy – either because philosophy cannot found

knowledge, or because it must be subsumed under, on the one hand, a master natural science (biology, physics or neuroscience), or, on the other, literature. But they come to these conclusions only to rely unwittingly upon philosophical aporias of their own, ones that share forms of naturalism (so pre-eminent today). Being philosophical positions of their own (scepticism and scientism), the aporias performatively refute that which they declare: there is an incongruence of the saying and the said. On the basis of these results, Thomas-Fogiel finds that contemporary philosophy suffers from a lack of self-reflection, or self-reference, since it remains unaware of these internal contradictions. Reference has, since the rise of neo-Kantianism, been considered largely in relation to the putative or real object, not the philosopher (the self). Hence, in Part II, *The Death of Philosophy* proceeds to identify an overlooked 'model' of reflection, to be brought to bear upon the 'reflexive deficit' of the present anti-philosophical consensus. This model is not to be found in *neo*-Kantianism but rather in *post*-Kantianism.

Fascinating aporias within contemporary philosophy are thus identified by Thomas-Fogiel. But what of her professed Fichtean 'remedy to the aporias'? At this point, a myriad of problems and questions arise. What would it mean to apply Fichtean self-reflection to a subsequent development in the history of philosophy – to Habermas ('The Antispeculative View'), for instance? Presumably, Habermas would see the error of his later turn to naturalism and retire for good. But would this hypothetical remorse on the part of Habermas et al. leave *us* any the wiser? The worry remains that we are simply encouraged to return to an unreconstructed Fichte – one that, in spite of his undoubted superiority to Habermas in the pantheon of Teutonic master-thinkers, fell towards the wayside for some good reasons (of which Habermas himself was aware) – and apply his concepts *externally* to a contemporary philosophy that is already *internally* incoherent. *The Death of Philosophy* does not follow up these limits to Fichtean reflection, save for a brief discussion of transcendental arguments – it does not reflect, to paraphrase Friedrich Schlegel, upon the concept of reflection itself. This is surely due to the partial account of German idealism as a whole, though Thomas-Fogiel is by no means alone in this partiality.

At the crucial moment of transition to Part II the author introduces the idiom of German idealism in terms of Holbein's eccentric viewpoint. Within contemporary thought, Fichte and Hegel are deemed unfashionably metaphysical. This is precisely where we *shall* find an alternative to the death of philosophy

thesis – a strangely compelling logic. Thomas-Fogiel remains attentive to the sense by which these figures revolutionized philosophy by considering consciousness (*Bewusstsein*), knowing (*Wissen*) and science (*Wissenschaft*) as constitutively intertwined. The author prefers to think about this intertwining in the terms of the ‘congruence between the saying and the said’, so as to correct the concepts of reference and reflection in the language philosophies of Part I, and to counter the performative contradiction. There is no transcendent standpoint of reflection (or reflected), and each claim to the death of *Wissenschaft* accordingly results in self-denial. Thomas-Fogiel is on strong ground here: the German idealist model offers a radical alternative to the familiar paradigm of representational philosophy. After all, the merely phenomenalist ‘representation’ of Reinhold provided one motivation behind Fichte’s turn from the ‘fact of consciousness’ to the ‘act of consciousness’. Hence, *The Death of Philosophy* forcefully argues that it is a pre-Fichtean, pre-critical concept of reflection that holds sway today, both in form and in content.

The problem is, however, that – as with the post-analytic reception of Fichte – Thomas-Fogiel does not follow through the implications of Fichte’s insight *via* Hegel, but rather remains stuck in the no-man’s-land of the *epistemological act of consciousness*. The unresolved stance on Hegel can be sensed when she attempts to pre-empt some methodological criticisms: ‘have I covertly advocated a return to ... Fichte and probably Hegel?’ Some differentiation within German idealism is required here, not least because Hegel was spurred into philosophy against Fichte’s practical philosophy (in the *Critical Journal*). It is the earlier Hegel who knows the significance of Fichtean reflection, since substance is now explicitly brought into play with subject. Philosophy as *Wissenschaft* ceases to be contemplative. Unfortunately, Fichte remained lost in the infinity of the task (reflection as a mirror of mirrors), leaving the finite world untouched. Similarly, it is not clear how any language philosophy, reformed or not, can live up to Hegel’s sense of determination, or of mediation. There is no acknowledgement of this issue in *The Death of Philosophy*, nor of the historical materialism that was, theoretically at least, made possible by Hegel’s intersubjective breakthrough (contra scepticism). With the negation of the negation, *Wissenschaft* becomes a matter of history. And all of this remains an important omission, because the fate of reflection in and after German idealism suggests that the revolutionary project of *Wissenschaft* remains incomplete or flawed, in the sense that history itself



remains incomplete or flawed. The idealist concept of reflection deployed by Thomas-Fogiel is eminently rational, certainly not methodological or pragmatic, in a manner that is challenged, but not necessarily falsified, by historical suffering. Without this historical dilemma, Thomas-Fogiel’s self-reflection remains meta-historical and hence naturalist – the last thing she wanted.

Added to this, there is no analysis of the various manners of philosophy’s dying in *The Death of Philosophy* – notably, the *Aufhebung* of Hegel and Marx that cancels *and* preserves. Something of philosophy – its speculative claim to the whole – is preserved in its death (‘end’ and ‘supersession’ are actually conflated on p. 70, though this may be an issue of translation). There remains a more general denigration of death, even, since death is tacitly assumed to be a matter of regret, a matter of melancholy and never mourning – hence the invocation of life and, tellingly, infinity at the end: ‘the model [of reflection] allows us to overcome the ostensible death of philosophy in order to return to an affirmation of its always renewed life.’ Presumably, the ‘task of thinking’ of Heidegger – another culprit in *The Death* – that which must follow ‘the end of philosophy’, is no matter of regret to the thinker (who actually says *Aufhebung* in the *Spiegel* interview). The study would have benefited from other terminological definitions: is the author discussing ‘the death of philosophy’, or do not the diverse philosophical positions rather represent ‘deaths of philosophy’, plural, given that Levinas and Quine mean very different things by ‘philosophy’ in the first place? The affinities regarding self-contradiction are more or less clear, but what exactly, in each case, is the philosophy that is professed to have died? Again, some outline of what is at stake – metaphysics, grounding science, the whole – is too often peripheral to the discussion, leaving the suspicion, once again, that what is to be resurrected is long dead, resulting in a zombie philosophy. Similarly, although Thomas-Fogiel touches upon this, the relationships between modern science and *Wissenschaft* in the time of Fichte – before the explosion

of the modern sciences – would benefit from further discussion, as would the place of the humanities. It is too easy to project a plural and organic notion of *Wissenschaft* onto the current system of specializations (philosophy as queen of *which* sciences, and *how*?).

A couple of points must be made regarding mode of presentation. The author's combative style is nothing if not refreshing. But this sometimes slips into an overbearing scholarliness – partly a result, no doubt, of the imperative to contest liberal-minded relativism, partly due to intellectual-cultural differences: 'Before judging that I have accomplished my entire task', she surmises towards the end of the book (this may equally be a consequence of reading Fichte, who penned such memorable titles as 'An Attempt to Force the Reader to Understand'). As to structure, while the transition from Parts I to II is successful, the turn to Part III, to 'the source of the reflexive deficit', seems to be going over old ground, since this forms the prehistory of the problem itself.

**Wesley Phillips**

## Davos

Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2010. 426 pp., £29.95 hb., 978 0 67404 713 6.

Philosophy, it could be said, constructs itself in retrospect; thought acquires meaning by means of its memories. Indeed, writes Peter Gordon, perhaps what all philosophies have in common is that each 'comes to understand itself by telling itself stories about where it has been'. From the trial of Socrates to Wittgenstein's poker-wielding quarrel with Popper, such stories form the fabric of 'philosophical memory', a kind of cultural-cognitive process whereby concepts are coded with historical content. In the so-called 'Continental' tradition, few remembered moments have come to seem more meaningful than the 1929 'Davos dispute' between Heidegger and Cassirer. At the time, the two men ranked among Europe's most eminent intellectuals. The theme of the meeting that brought them together was the ambitious question, 'What is the Human Being?' Accordingly, their encounter was seen as broadly symbolic of everything from the then nascent crisis within neo-Kantianism to a conflict between, in Karl Mannheim's sense, culturally irreconcilable 'generations.' In the eighty years between then and now, the Davos exchange has played its part in some of the grandest narratives of modern intellectual

history – not least Michael Friedman's influential account of a 'parting of the ways'; a supposed separation of analytic from Continental philosophical styles.

For all this, though, what if such retroactive readings have misrepresented the event's real import? After all, in philosophical as in other forms of memory, the associative (not to mention emotive) act of remembering all too often colours a memory's content. In this way, by extension, it's easy to see how entire disciplines could end up overdetermined by their own self-descriptions. What's more, a measure of interpretive violence is done when a debate like Davos is made to serve as a sign of broader political significance. A case in point would be Bourdieu's take on it in his *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*. Here the conceptual core of the encounter is crudely hollowed out in order to portray philosophy as an allegory of social power. Surely, to analyse Heidegger's (or Cassirer's) arguments by way of such a sociology is already to instrumentalize them? Instead, reasons Gordon, the best bet for both philosophy *and* politics would be to divest the fetishized memory of Davos of any such 'allegorical function'. With Davos, what was once a dialogue has long since ossified into a fixational fable. Hence, what history requires is a reflexive, disenchanted reading, in which all second-order stories (be they sweepingly socio-political or insularly professional) are briefly bracketed out, at least to begin with. Space is then cleared for a more careful contextualization, where meaning may be gradually reconstructed from the ground up.

For Gordon, what in fact grounded the Davos debate was a conceptual conflict between 'two normative images of humanity'. Hence, while Heidegger's arguments were animated by an image of humanity's 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*) – for which Dasein was inescapably finite, situated inside its existential horizon – Cassirer, by contrast, clung to a neo-Kantian notion of mental 'spontaneity', of man's expressive ability to structure his field of experience, pressing beyond the condition of 'being there' towards a truly objective symbolic order. All this could look like a simplification, of course, in so far as it boils down to a binary gloss – Enlightenment humanism versus existentialist fatalism; metaphysical angst against anthropological agency – but it serves Gordon well as a way of concretizing the exchange's conceptual framework. With the stage thus set, what happened next (and what Davos perhaps demonstrates par excellence) was a process that Gordon calls 'ramification'. If we recall that to operationalize a concept is to set limits to its extension, to watch it 'ramify' is, Gordon says, to see it 'branch out into the wider world', amassing a freight of

associations which ‘magnify [its] rhetorical force and cultural-historical significance’. This is the slow slip-page from normative image to narrative; the process of diffusion by which Davos became a mythical *point of reference*.

Gordon’s ‘ramified’ concepts appear roughly similar to what Niilo Kauppi has called ‘power-ideas’ (see Edward Baring’s review of Kauppi’s *Radicalism in French Culture* in *RP* 170). One common thrust of both of these theories is that the more associative links an idea can consolidate for itself, the more leverage it will have in the intellectual field as a whole, mobilizing its clusters of connotations so as to achieve a ‘meta-preferential’ priority over competing concepts. In the Heidegger–Cassirer conflict, this comparison is borne out by the ways in which both philosophers tried to ramify *negatively* each other’s habits of mind. Cassirer implicitly classed Heidegger as an outdated metaphysician, while Heidegger ‘inscribed’ Cassirer into his own ‘larger and more ramified cultural-metaphysical narrative’: that of the *Seinsvergessenheit*, philosophy’s forgetting of Being. Thus, each subjected the other’s stance to adverse ramification through ‘historical redescription’. Gordon seems to claim that such moves are not philosophically valid, but this begs the question of why historicity should not (indeed, how it cannot) be at stake in argumentation. In any case, a degree of ‘philosophical one-upmanship’, as he puts it, clearly does appear to have taken place. Throughout the debate, both speakers’ statements were rhetorically underwritten by ‘arguments for priority’, consisting not only of conflicting narrativizations (that is, each placed himself at a more advanced stage in philosophical *history*) but also of vying metaphilosophies. In that of Cassirer, ‘the transcendental method must serve as *the general point of departure for all philosophical problems*’, whereas for Heidegger, of course, that privileged part was played by fundamental ontology. In this sense, then, each opponent positioned his own ideas as conditions of intelligibility for those of his interlocutor.

Gordon’s close attention to the rhetorical implication of the Davos debate is deeply illuminating. Unlike other analyses, it pinpoints the problem of the participants’ failure to find a ‘common language’ in which to formalize their disagreement. That is, in symbolic struggles like the one described above, every layer of figuration further obstructs the constructive conduct of dialogue. If, as Gerald Graff has argued, ‘making intellectual culture coherent ... requires foregrounding points of controversy’, then one could say of Davos that the rapid ramification of the conver-

sation’s content was precisely what prevented a fully adequate foregrounding. Instead, and especially in the decades that followed, the disagreement was displaced onto the indeterminate domain of ‘ideological effects’ and ‘cultural consequences’ (as in later indictments of the elective affinities between Heidegger’s *Existenz-philosophie* and his Nazism). What was lost in translation during this interpretive shift ‘from conceptual truth to pragmatic efficacy’ was any way of distilling a soluble philosophical conflict from the attendant set of insoluble symbolic ones – the unwieldy idea of an epochal clash between Cassirer’s cosmopolitanism and Heidegger’s irrational nationalism, for example.

Clearly, the methodology displayed in *Continental Divide* creates some complex entailments. At one point, Gordon explains that the book has been guided by a drive to ‘sustain the distinction between philosophy and history’. He then goes on to reflect that

one might say it is a desideratum for philosophy that its arguments should be resolved by philosophical means only and without reference to the nonphilosophical world. On this view, philosophy would seem to demand a kind of *askesis*, the principled attempt to hold thought apart from all that is mundane.

As a formula for doing philosophy, the value of this ascetic ideal seems far from self-evident; a more honest desideratum might ask for quite the opposite. Anyway, as Gordon goes on to point out, the principle may well be unrealizable, as every philosophical concept ‘begins to ramify the instant it is conceived’. Thus, the kind of distillation described above can’t quite be accomplished, since ‘there is no moment of pure thought that does not immediately take on a further meaning.’ But perhaps we could posit that the pursuit of such a pristine moment does remain a latent aim of Gordon’s, at least *at the level of method*, existing in a slightly unstable tension with his detailed reading of Davos’s long arc of ramification. Whether or not that criticism carries weight, what *Continental Divide* successfully demonstrates is that the essence of Davos was irreducibly philosophical. And even if that essence isn’t historically isolable, Gordon firmly establishes that it can’t be explained away as an epiphenomenon of some deeper, prior political cause. Nor can any dispute’s outcome be decided on the evidence of subsequent allegorizations. In its level-headed argument against these misleading myths and memories, *Continental Divide* clears the ground for new and more thoughtful ways of rendering philosophy’s richly entangled relationship with its history.

**David Winters**

Sean Sayers, *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011. 216 pp., £50.00 hb., 978 0 23027 654 3.

What is the most fruitful approach to Marx's social and political philosophy? In response to this question, the two dominant branches of Marxist philosophy have paid surprisingly little attention to Hegel. Analytical Marxists, such as G.A. Cohen and Jon Elster, have 'reconstructed' Marx's writings free from their Hegelian roots; whilst Althusserians have argued for a sharp break between the juvenile writings of the young Marx, still in thrall to Hegel's philosophy, and the 'true' Marx of *Capital*, who ultimately rejected Hegelian philosophy *tout court*. Sean Sayers rejects both of these approaches. His new book, a collection of stand-alone essays, is an argument for the deep-lying Hegelianism of Marx's thought, and a spirited defence of that outlook.

Sayers's topic is 'alienation' – a term Marx uses extensively in his early writings but which he drops in his later work due, in part, to its Hegelian associations. The book defends the argument that the idea of alienation continues to be of importance to Marx's later outlook, even when the term itself is no longer used. The first group of chapters offer an interpretation and defence of Marx's philosophical anthropology: that is, his view of man as a creative being, for whom work is a deeply meaningful activity. Chapters 4 and 5 take a broader view of the idea of alienation, and consider how it relates to the other key normative foundations in the Marxian framework: community and freedom. Chapter 6 considers exactly what type of criticism 'alienation' entails, while the final chapters deal with various aspects of Marx's vision of a post-capitalist society – a vision that is potent, but also strikingly unspecified and opaque.

After an introductory chapter on the idea of alienation, Sayers tackles Marx's concept of labour. His starting point is Marx's opaque claim that 'the importance of Hegel's *Phenomenology* ... lies in the fact that ... it grasps the nature of labour.' Following the interpretation proffered by Alexandre Kojève – and popularized by Jean-Paul Sartre – it is usually thought that Marx is referring here to the master/slave dialectic, in which the slave develops himself through his labour and ultimately achieves a higher stage of human existence than his master. Sayers challenges this interpretation. There is, he suggests, no reason to think that the master/slave dialectic had any special significance

for Marx. Instead, he argues that the key to a clearer understanding of Marx's indebtedness to Hegel can be found in the latter's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, in which Hegel develops several themes that are essential to, but underdeveloped in, Marx's philosophy. These include the idea of work as the fundamental activity of the human species; the idea of work as a transformative process where the natural world is stripped of its foreign character; and the idea of work as an educative activity, where the worker develops his needs, powers and sense of self through his labour. Sayers makes a good case for filling out this underdeveloped aspect of Marx's philosophy with Hegel's more developed writings. The exegesis of this difficult aspect of Marx's thought is admirably clear, and the focus on the *Aesthetics* is novel and illuminating.

Chapter 3 continues in a similar way, though this time the focus is on defending Marx – specifically, from the view that his concept of labour presupposes a particular paradigm of nineteenth-century labour. This argument is made both by writers like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who argue that Marx works with a conception of labour specific to nineteenth-century industrialism that does not make sense of work in a post-industrial economy, and by Jürgen Habermas and William Adams, who argue that Marx's concept of non-alienated labour relies on a Romantic model of craft/artistic production. Sayers rejects both arguments. On his view, Marx's concept of labour, broadly understood as a form-giving activity, can usefully be applied to a variety of different types of work, including those found in a post-industrial economy. This argument is convincing. However, I was less convinced that there was not some tension in Marx's account of labour in a post-capitalist society. True, Marx is fiercely critical of the craft ideal and optimistic of the possibilities that industrialism creates. But in those rare passages where Marx does talk of non-alienated labour the model he continues to draw on is that of artistic production. So, in the *Grundrisse*, for example, Marx speaks of the composition of music as being 'really free labour' that can be a vehicle for 'truly attractive work, the individual's self-realization'. There is a tension here that Sayers's interpretation smooths over.

The fourth chapter considers Marx's depiction of alienated community in light of the communitarian



critique of liberalism of the 1980s. Broadly speaking, communitarians make two different, potentially contradictory arguments against liberalism. The first argument, associated with Alasdair MacIntyre, states that liberal philosophy theorizes the modern social world as it really is, as a world lacking in communal belonging and togetherness. The second argument, made by Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer, states that liberal philosophy misrepresents the true nature of the modern social world, as it fails to recognize the way in which we remain 'encumbered' with strong communal ties and attachments. Sayers argues that both accounts are one-sided, and that for Marx, as for Hegel, people in the modern social world are in fact both detached from society and embedded in it: detached because they conceive of themselves as 'persons', separate from their social roles, and with interests that are independent from their community; and embedded because they are deeply interdependent, connected to and reliant on one another in all sorts of ways in the modern economy. Where Hegel celebrated this modern development, seeing it as reconciliation of individuality and sociality, Marx thought this reconciliation was a chimera. The real forms of individuality and sociality, and their reconciliation, lie beyond the modern social world in a communist society of the future.

Though Marx himself developed a communitarian critique of liberalism, there has been very little work on how his ideas relate to the modern strand of communitarian thought – with more attention being given to Aristotle and Hegel than Marx – and Sayers does a good job in situating his ideas in this contemporary discussion. Nevertheless, in putting forward the superiority of Marx's views over those contemporary communitarians, Sayers is unduly uncharitable in the exegesis of the views he is criticizing. He argues that 'there is a dimension of social criticism in Marx's theory which is entirely absent from the communitarian critique of liberalism.' This is unfair. MacIntyre has criticized capitalism for the way that it tends to corrupt social practices, while Walzer's robust account of social justice contains a penetrating critique of the marketization of public goods. Both develop critiques of capitalism that draw heavily on Marx's social criticism – a point that Sayers's interpretation overlooks.

Many commentators – Cohen, R.N. Berki and John Plamenatz among them – have argued that Marx changed his views on self-realization in work. In the early writings, it is said, Marx argues that though work is currently alienated, it need not be so; work can provide an immense source of meaning and enjoyment to the worker. In his later writings, however, when

he developed a broader understanding of economics, Marx appears less optimistic. Socially necessary work – that is, work done to sustain basic human needs – now seems to be viewed as inescapably alienating. According to Sayers, however, this influential account rests on a misconception of Marx's views. For Marx, freedom is not an 'all or nothing affair'; rather, there are a number of different aspects of freedom, some basic and one-sided, others more complex. On this view, there is freedom in necessary work – it is not inescapably alienating as Cohen et al. maintain – but it is not the fullest form of freedom, for that can only be achieved in work that is free from the exigencies of need altogether. This distinction makes good sense of Marx's writings. However, it does not fully resolve the conundrum of Marx's views on self-realization, as Sayers himself acknowledges. For two divergent strands of thought can still be distinguished: the first states that there will always be a distinction between the 'realm of necessity' and the 'realm of freedom', where the highest form of freedom will be enjoyed outside of necessary production, in leisure; the second states that the distinction between the realms of freedom and necessity will eventually wither away, so that people will 'realize' themselves producing for others, in work itself. It is an interesting question – though one that Sayers does not attempt to answer – as to which one of these accounts of self-realization is the more plausible option.

That Marx uses the term 'alienation' to criticize the modern social world is well known. But what type of criticism does this involve? For many commentators it expresses unrelenting criticism of the capitalist economy for the way in which it estranges human beings from their nature, their 'species-being'. On Sayers's view, however, alienation is 'not a *purely negative or critical*' concept, based on a timeless, universal standard of human nature; rather, it is a dialectical concept that expresses 'positive aspects'. Alienation is a necessary and progressive stage in human history, and though it is a stage of great disharmony – not one to 'rest in' as Hegel puts it – it ultimately creates the conditions for its own supersession. For the Marxist account of history, capitalism is the key period of alienation that, despite being a period of great turmoil and fragmentation, is also one of unprecedented progress – progress that creates possibilities that a socialist society will build on and develop in a non-alienated way.

*Marx and Alienation's* final three chapters deal with some of the most important aspects of Marx's vision of a future communist society, including the future

of property and the overcoming of the division of labour. Once more, Sayers argues that Marx's thought develops out of a Hegelian way of thinking about these issues – a way of thinking that does not view these features of the modern world in purely utilitarian or economic terms, but takes a much wider, at times even spiritual, view of their significance. This is illuminating. However, it is disappointing that very little attention is given to the brute differences that separate Hegel and Marx on these issues. For whilst Hegel sees private property and the division of labour as essential for the development and realization of individuality and freedom, Marx viewed them as being inimical to it, and argued that they must be overcome. Indeed, in showing how Marx and Hegel shared the same philosophical outlook, the book as a whole fails to show how these thinkers came to adopt such strikingly different positions on the concrete points of social and political theory. Nevertheless, Sayers provides a powerful argument for the deep-lying Hegelianism of Marx's thought, sheds new light on some well-trodden areas, and writes in an accessible style that much Marx scholarship still lacks. What he proves, above all else, is that whilst a great deal has been written on the Hegel–Marx relationship, this way of approaching Marx's philosophical ideas remains the most fertile field of inquiry for Marx scholarship today.

**Jan Kandiyali**

— HEAD  
HAUTE ÉCOLE D'ART ET  
DE DESIGN GENÈVE  
GENEVA UNIVERSITY  
OF ART AND DESIGN

CCC

**research-based master programme  
critical curatorial cybermedia**

**applications 2012 – 2013**

a cross-cultural and transdisciplinary programme which founds its practices on political thought, postcolonial and gender theories, the art of networks and internet culture

a bilingual education (english & french)  
developed by an international faculty of visiting artists, researchers and theoreticians

a program open to applicants with previous education in science, humanities, political studies, economics, polytechnics, law, arts as well as other fields of research

**application deadline: 11 May 2012**

research-based master programme CCC  
<http://head.hesge.ch/ccc> – [ccc@hesge.ch](mailto:ccc@hesge.ch)  
HEAD – Genève, Switzerland  
[www.hesge.ch/head](http://www.hesge.ch/head)

**Hes-so**  
Haute École Spécialisée  
de Suisse occidentale  
Fachhochschule Westschweiz  
University of Applied Sciences  
Western Switzerland

**The London Conference in Critical Thought**

Birkbeck College, London  
June 29th and 30th

\* Critical Pedagogy \* Deleuzian Theory in Practice \* Critical Art \*  
\* Cosmopolitan and the City \* A Transdisciplinary Approach to Law and  
Anthropology \* The Question of the Animal \* Common Life \* Critical Human  
Rights \* Developments in the Productive Power of Critical Theory \* Critique  
of Critical Theory \* Marx and Marxism Today \* Radical Political Rhetoric \* The  
Object, Between Time and Temporality \* Zizek and the Political \* Thinking  
Egalitarian Emancipation \* Sovereignty at the Margins \*  
\* Textual Space/Spatial Text \*

**[londonconferenceincriticalthought.wordpress.com](http://londonconferenceincriticalthought.wordpress.com)**