

What's left of biopolitics?

Patricia Ticineto Clough and Craig Willse, eds, *Beyond Biopolitics: Essays on the Governance of Life and Death*, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 2011. 400 pp., £75.00 hb., £17.99 pb., 978 0 82235 003 3 hb., 978 0 82235 017 0 pb.

François Debrix and Alexander D. Barder, *Beyond Biopolitics: Theory, Violence and Horror in World Politics*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2012. 184 pp., £80.00 hb., 978 0 41578 059 9.

Stephen J. Collier, *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2011. 320 pp., £48.95 hb., £18.95 pb., 978 0 69114 830 4 hb., 978 0 69114 831 1 pb.

Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011. 200 pp., £55.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 0 74564 913 9 hb., 978 0 74564 914 6 pb.

In 2007, Worldwatch Institute published a report on 'Our Biopolitical Future', outlining four scenarios of radical change brought about by new genetic technologies. Another site enjoined visitors to become 'commercial biopower agents'. Academic journals are now dedicated to biosecurity and bioterrorism, and bioethics commissions have proliferated both domestically and internationally. As biopolitics is claimed by experts on biodefence, biosecurity, bioethics and biotechnology, what critical terminology can be invented to grasp the political stakes of the present? If Foucault tentatively proposed the terminology of biopower and biopolitics to capture transformations that had not been named as such, what purchase can the concept of biopolitics have on the proliferation of biopolitical language today? Four recent books offer different answers to these dilemmas.

Two of these books both invoke and depart from the concept of biopolitics by asking what is 'beyond biopolitics'. Is 'beyond biopolitics' a temporal inflection, an 'after' biopolitics? Or is 'beyond biopolitics' a contemporary reinvention of power, a heterogeneous assemblage where junctures, jointures and transformations rely upon, relay and at times short-circuit each other? In thinking about what is left of biopolitics, questions of remains and remainders are inevitably present. At the same time, biopolitics seems to acquire a renewed vitality that insidiously seeps into, permeates and informs social and political life. Biopolitics as both remainder and reinvention is at the heart of both Clough and Willse's edited collection and Debrix and Barder's co-authored book, each of which is entitled *Beyond Biopolitics*. The arguments in these books are not, however, that biopolitics is dead and that we now live in a post-biopolitical world, but rather that biopolitics is becoming-different while preserving some of its rationality. In Clough and Willse's formula-

tion, the common theme for the essays collected in the book is 'the governance of life and death beyond biopolitics'. For Debrix and Barder, the stakes of the analysis emerge out of the 'biopolitical framing of life and death' and the need to go beyond the biopolitical frame of intelligibility to understand different manifestations of violence today. Both contributions are thus structured around the relations between biopolitics and necropolitics or thanatopolitics – or what Étienne Balibar has called positive and negative biopolitics. Balibar's distinction assumes an uneven and differential distribution of positive and negative biopolitics across the world, and the authors in the two books trace the formations of violence, the work of exclusion and the force of death-making globally: from the destruction of bodies through the selling of blood in China to narco-violence in Mexico, from radicalized detention in the USA to targeted assassinations of Palestinians by Israeli military, and from profiling of Muslim populations in the USA to the surveillance of Turkish immigrants in Germany.

The two other books under discussion engage biopolitics either as a grid of intelligibility for past and present regimes of practice (Collier's *Post-Soviet Social*) or as a concept that informs the philosophical thinking of the present (Esposito's *Immunitas*). In fact, although neither is explicitly located 'beyond biopolitics', both Collier's and Esposito's interventions also work with more or less explicit inflections of both 'beyond' and 'biopolitics'. In the context of neoliberalism beyond the Washington Consensus, Collier reminds us that 'beyond' is not equivalent to 'after', given the long histories that traditions of neoliberal thought have. For Collier, neoliberalism is much more elusive and contingent in its manifestations given the different ways in which the post-Soviet social is assembled: there is no 'coherency and

constancy across its articulation in diverse times and spaces'. If Collier's work is indebted to Ian Hacking's formulations of historical ontology and develops a method attentive to the historical conditions of intelligibility of both socialist biopolitics and post-socialist neoliberalism, Esposito's formulations on biopolitics could be seen as ontology *tout court*, even as both are preoccupied with the interaction between politics, history and thought. Esposito's conceptualization of biopolitics has already received careful exegesis in the English-speaking world, and, in fact, the third book of his Italian trilogy comprising *Communitas*, *Immunitas* and *Bios* was translated into English a few years ago (University of Minnesota Press, 2008). Although only one chapter of *Immunitas* is explicitly dedicated to biopolitics, Esposito's engagement sets out a different method and perspective on 'beyond biopolitics'. For him, the stakes of biopolitics play out in terms of philosophico-political logics rather than struggles over power and knowledge. The extensive medicalization that links states and body politics gains meaning through the legitimation of power as life protecting. The semantics of biopolitics, of life and the body politic to be protected is understood through the 'quasi-transcendental' of immunity. Immunity is thus always contaminated by the risks to life it attempts to contain, in a sense always already biopolitical, continually supplemented and reinforced rather than opposed.

The differences in the interpretations of 'biopolitics' and its 'beyond' that the four books propose emerge out of the different problematizations that each text attends to. For many of the authors in Clough and Willse's book, and for Debrix and Barder, the problem is that of excessive and ordinary violence, death and destruction. It is the 'negative' rather than the 'positive' biopolitics that dominates here. Therefore biopolitics is supplemented by either necropolitics or thanatopolitics to expose the co-constitution of life- and death-impulses in biopolitical governance. What characterizes these biopolitical spaces in which life is administered, monitored and surveyed is the drawing of boundaries, the hierarchization of life, the proliferation and intensification of violence. Under the guise of risk management, ethical limits and protection, the contributions to Clough and Willse's *Beyond Biopolitics* reveal forms of exclusion, ordinary exceptions, killing, and life destruction as value creation. Violence is also problematized in Debrix and Barder, who are particularly concerned with the transformation of enmity. On the one hand, war as global police action appears to invoke an understanding of enmity based on deviancy, abnormality, criminality and counter-

conduct. On the other, enmity is simultaneously projected beyond definitions of normality and abnormality that presuppose the framework of political order and meaning. Thus, their argument goes, biopolitical perspectives cannot capture enmity understood as 'a modality of gruesome maiming of humanity itself'. The distinction between normal and absolute enemy, taken from Susan Buck-Morss and a recent piece by Carlo Galli, does not negate biopolitical practices of normalization and regulation, but effects an implosion of biopolitics. Debrix and Barder draw on Adriana Cavarero's concept of 'horrorism' to analyse violence that is paralysing and repugnant rather than compelling and activating. Agonal violence and horror appear 'in excess of biopolitics'. The other problematization that traverses these two books, and is entwined with that of violence, is the problematization of racism within biopolitical governance. Sora Y. Han, for instance, suggests that 'biopower does not fully explain the history of race and the force of sexuality as they are implicated in the Japanese American internment camp'. However, Randy Martin points out, following Foucault, that '[r]acism is the governmental protocol for sorting population in response to the series of threats posed by the proliferation of forms of life'. Debrix and Barder also see race as the differentiated principle that introduces death at the heart of biopolitics.

Different problematizations inform Collier's and Esposito's books. Collier asks how the health and welfare of populations were constituted as objects of knowledge in Soviet urban planning, and later on through neoliberal reform. In tracing the changing contours of governmental interventions, his aim is to locate what one could call a 'minor biopolitics' of mundane regulations. Rather than exceptions, violence or pathology, Collier focuses on the infrastructures, regulations and ideas that are deployed to govern populations, thus tracing 'possible futures' within biopolitics rather than beyond it. Although at first sight he seems to offer a reading of 'positive' biopolitics – interestingly, violence, exception and death are not even indexed – in fact the distinction positive/negative biopolitics would be an unproductive lens through which to approach the book, in so far as Collier challenges this very distinction through his careful historical analysis. Esposito similarly problematizes the entwinement of life and death in the body politic and the biopolitics/necropolitics distinction, this time through a political-philosophical reading. Specifically, he is concerned with the generalized medicalization of political life and imaginary of disease and infection that traverses political philosophy, and explores

the organic metaphor of the body, of flesh and life at the heart of political modernity. His problematization thus entails semantic and etymological readings of biopolitics.

These different readings also emerge from within particular understandings of what counts as knowledge, whether the knowledge of politicians, of experts, of the military, of ethicists and lawyers, of economists and urban planners, or ultimately of the philosopher-king, is constitutive of regimes of practice. For several contributors to Clough and Willse's *Beyond Biopolitics*, a concept of pre-emption appears as a needed replacement for that of biopower. Rendered infamous by the Bush doctrine, pre-emption is thought to capture a new modality of governance. As Brian Massumi argues in the book's first chapter, the temporality of biopolitics emerges in relation to an 'indiscriminate threat' understood as generic. For Parisi and Goodman, biopower needs to be understood through 'the intricate speculative operations of preemptive power'. If, for Massumi, pre-emptive power needs to supplement biopower, for Parisi and Goodman pre-emption appears to define biopower or, rather, to 'insert a temporal dimension into power'. Pre-emptive power is thus deployed in relation to a changing knowledge of threat as being capable of irrupting at any point in time and everywhere in space, with catastrophic consequences. It mobilizes intelligence, computer science, legal expertise and political strategy to act upon anticipatory futurity. While several contributions engage with modes of knowledge, Eyal

Weizman's chapter stands out in locating the conditions of possibility of targeted assassinations within networks of military specialists, security experts, legal committees and their knowledges. The extension of targeted assassinations as a pre-emptive and ordinary mode of Israeli attack in Gaza needs to be understood through the juncture of modes of technical knowledge and politico-military strategy. For instance, systems analysis changes the understanding of the enemy to an 'operational network of interacting elements', where targeted attacks can have wider implications for the network, while presumably reducing the risks of casualties. It is in relation to these forms of knowledge that the question of biopolitics is reformulated. If particular regimes of statistical, biological and economic knowledge had been constitutive of populations as an object of truth and power, the very techniques of risk, of statistical calculation and classification are supplemented and transformed by other modes of knowledge. One could inquire what happens to biopolitics when imaginaries of danger explode towards what François Ewald called the infinitely large and infinitely small-scale risks, when, on the one hand, risks to populations are environmental, thus taking away the very normality and regularity of the milieu upon which biopolitics was deployed, and, on the other, appear at the infinitely small-scale, in biological, genetic or food-related risks. Massumi, for example, tackles this explosion of life towards the infinitely large: life as a 'complex, systemic threat environment, composed of



subsystems that are not only complex in their own right but are complexly interconnected'. When complexity theory and systems analysis are increasingly brought within the remit of statistical, biological and economic knowledge, can immunity capture this recalibration of knowledge? It suffices to think of the ways in which protection has been increasingly supplemented by demands for preparedness and resilience where the infinitely large scale and small scale are concerned. In the understanding that life can no longer be protected, subjects are enjoined to become resilient, to bounce back in the face of unpreventable, unexpected and potentially catastrophic dangers and risks. However, not all knowledge is necessarily reframed through complexity theory or algorithmic processes, as Collier reminds us through a fascinating exploration of the role of economic knowledge in Russia's post-Communist 'transition'. Neoliberal knowledge about budgeting and fiscal systems is simultaneously present and absent; some elements of Russia's fiscal policy derived from neoliberal ideas while others were unrecognizable in a neoliberal thought-collective.

Together, these four books can be seen to canvass an undecidability about what biopolitics is. The interactions between biopolitics and sovereignty, present and future, positive and negative, life and death, normality and excess, terror and horror can support arguments about the transformation of biopolitics, its transgression or continued relevance. For Foucault, the distinction between sovereignty and biopower is not simply that the former works through repression and 'taking life', while the latter through productivity and 'making life'. As Collier reminds us, it is population rather than an undefined life that is 'a new site of veridiction'. Rather than individualizing, biopolitics is massifying, taking as its object a population through a period of time. Biopolitics captured the transformation of power from sovereign and disciplinary techniques to a technique which acts upon populations as collectives. Yet, Foucault himself had often placed populations in the continuum of human species, life and publics. Thus, Esposito can gloss on the object of biopolitics: 'he [Foucault] is referring to the only element that groups all individuals into the same species: the fact that each has a body'. Biopolitics is then pushed towards the pole of anatomopolitics, the disciplinary politics of making docile bodies. Readings of biopolitics reconfigure it not only through different problematizations and modes of knowledge, but also through the specification of its object: from populations to species life, from life to bodies, from bodies to affects, from affect to identity, identity to data, and so forth. Rather than disempower-

ing, this undecidability is the springboard for thinking the critical purchase of biopolitics.

The use of biopolitics has been suggestive of critical unease with the administration of life, the pursuit of protection, the transformations of capitalism, the development of biotechnology, the emergence of new modes of regulations of risk, and the making of neoliberal subjects. For Esposito, 'When politics takes life as an object of direct intervention, it ends up reducing it to a state of absolute immediacy.' For Debrix and Barder, biopolitics entails the proliferation of violence, not just as terror and war, but also as 'horror'. A similar unease is formulated by Eugene Thacker: with biopolitics, biological or political life has been replaced by a '*whatever-life* in which biology and sovereignty, or medicine and politics, continually inflect and fold onto each other'. For other contributors to Clough and Willse's *Beyond Biopolitics*, biopolitics is invested in the production and circulation of death. So what is left of critique, if we understand it in Foucault's terms as how not to be governed thus? Can critique embrace indeterminacy, when indeterminacy is now embedded in the modes of knowledge and regimes of practice? Can we reinvent immunity or other forms of life such as 'common life' or the 'good life' which are excluded through the 'irresistible tendency of political philosophy (and political practice) to incorporate social plurality' (Esposito)? Or can critique find its force in the actuality of practice, in asking 'how these values are elaborated in practical terms, and how they are at stake in particular reforms, institutions and forms of reasoning about the problems of distribution, substantive provisioning, and calculative rationality that have persistently preoccupied governmental reflection in modern states' (Collier)? Disciplinary affiliations may not be indifferent to the problematizations and critical operations that each text performs. Stephen Collier is an anthropologist, Esposito a philosopher, Debrix and Barder international relations theorists. Clough and Willse, both with disciplinary homes in sociology, introduce *Beyond Biopolitics* as a 'transdisciplinary effort to critically engage the multiple tendencies and trajectories that have both informed neoliberal governance and found expression in its reformulation today'. While disciplinary affiliations appear to carry particular orientations towards problematization and critique, all four books also carry a transdisciplinary impulse that takes analysis beyond and at times against disciplinary boundaries. It can be the beginning of a dialogue that takes not only biopolitics as a transdisciplinary concept, but critique itself.

Claudia Aradau

Elementary

Ben Watson, *Adorno for Revolutionaries*, Unkant, London, 2011. 217 pp., £10.99 pb., 978 0 95681 760 0.

In a much-cited March 1936 letter to Walter Benjamin, Adorno famously remarks of the separation between autonomous art and mass culture that, while both ‘bear the stigmata of capitalism’, and ‘both contain elements of change’, they are nevertheless only ever the ‘torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up’. Perhaps much the same could be said of the divergent modes of ‘critical’ reception that have attended these different forms of cultural production. In this case, however, the primary division would not so much be one between ‘high’ art and ‘low’ art themselves, but between the ‘academic’ and the ‘journalistic’ response to each. At its most extreme, this can still seem to follow the broad lineaments of a division set out in 1960 by Roman Jakobson between a journalistic ‘criticism’ which ‘is concerned with evaluation’, and operating according to the temporalities of ‘news’, and an academic model of interpretation focused on the far slower temporality of an ‘objective scholarly analysis’. And while claims to scientific status may only very rarely be heard within the contemporary academic humanities, a suspicion of the evaluative seems, in the wake of various post-structuralist ‘demystifications’, more pervasive than ever.

At the same time, this also reflects the force of different economic imperatives imposed increasingly on both journalism and the academy today – a progressive submission, on the one hand, to culture industry marketing schedules, ‘tie-ins’ and the commodity logics of fashion, and, on the other, the rebranding of all ‘serious’ academic work as a form of positive ‘research’ in an economic context dominated by the assessment and funding of ‘excellence’. What, at any rate, risks getting lost down the chasm opened up by such divisions is precisely what Benjamin and Adorno articulated under the name of *criticism* itself: that is, the interpretative engagement with those forms of social and historical experience ‘sedimented’ within the artwork’s own immanent movement, and the judgement of its historical ‘truth content’ according to a criteria set by what Adorno termed the ‘irresistibility of the modern’.

Possibly the best compliment one can pay to Ben Watson’s *Adorno for Revolutionaries* – which collects together a number of short pieces from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, drawn variously from music journalism and contributions to leftist journals (including this

one), as well as unpublished conference and seminar papers – is to say that it precisely aspires to live up to the demands of criticism in this sense. Tellingly, by contrast to the feting of those public intellectuals who are often said to move *effortlessly* between academia and mass media – which by and large serves only to indicate the essential vacuity of their activities in each – not least among the virtues of Watson’s own traversal of the two is the degree to which it is anything *but* ‘effortless’. It is thus not a mere contingency of biography that it is to ‘non-classical’ music criticism that Watson should have devoted the majority of his writing. For it is in criticism’s (largely acritical) engagement with the post-1950s musical forms of jazz, rock, soul, hip hop, electronica, and the rest, that those kinds of division to which the ‘torn halves of an integral freedom’ attest have arguably been at their most extreme and most intense.

Adorno for Revolutionaries is the first in a projected series of books published by Watson’s own Association of Musical Marxists (AMM), formed in collaboration with Andy Wilson. As AMM’s manifesto relates, the association was founded in 2010 ‘after being subjected to a thirty-minute eternity of Bourdieu-style “objective” sociology of music’ at a *Historical Materialism* conference. Thus railing against the products of what is called the ‘popsicle academy’ of sociological ‘objectivity’ (Simon Frith, Sarah Thornton, Dick Hebdige), on the one hand, and those who Watson believes to have betrayed Adorno’s ‘revolutionary’ legacy in repackaging him for philosophical respectability, on the other, Watson’s criticism is, above all, that which is elaborated via the power it accords to *argument*. The desires and struggles manifested in the ‘proclivities and animosities’ that art generates are understood, in this way, to be directly relevant to those at stake in politics. ‘For US’, declares the manifesto, ‘music is a test of you and everything about you, and if you fail the test YOU ARE THE ENEMY!!!’ Or, as Watson puts it later, music ‘articulates itself around negation. If you can’t despise those idiots over there for liking that cack – what’s the point?’ (Although Watson is not, it has to be said, entirely consistent in his application of these Wyndham Lewis-style exclamations; certainly SWPers like Chris Harman get off fairly lightly.) In turn, it is precisely the lack of such negation – in favour of positivist ‘politeness’ – that is a major part of Watson’s

objection to any academic *sociology* of ‘pop’: its ‘fear that registering a direct response to music – anything tantamount, in other words, to a judgement – would slacken academic stringency’. As he puts it, ‘normative sociology applauds the mere act of description’. Moreover, in claiming to ‘explain’ social division, as Rancière has also argued, such Bourdieu-like description merely reproduces it, rigidly placing its ‘objects’ into class-defined boxes of different ‘taste’ groups. Against this, Watson asserts, it is precisely in Adorno that we find the necessary resources for thinking musical taste as itself a ‘political question’.

While *Adorno for Revolutionaries* functions successfully in its attempts to counter a common image of Adorno as a kind of German Leavis, a ‘shrill proselytiser for high culture depicted in the average Routledge “student guide”’, this seems a perhaps less pressing task than it did in the 1990s, when cultural



studies and ‘postmodernism’ were at the height of their influence (and Marxism at its lowest). More interesting, and far more theoretically enervating, is what might be described as Watson’s attempt to expand radically the field of the avant-garde itself, and hence – in an ‘*Aufhebung*’ of Adorno’s score-based aesthetic – to extend the latter’s own arguments beyond the relatively narrow cultural field to which he restricted them. Here, as opposed to sociology’s fixed stylistic and consumer-based classifications of the ‘popular’ and the ‘avant-garde’, Watson’s ‘materialist study of music ... finds antagonism and “avant-garde” postures at every level’. At the heart of this is, of course, a reworking of Adorno’s own claim to a ‘politics of form’, for which

‘the revolution and the cause of modern art go hand-in-hand’ in their respective commitments to the *new*. The avant-garde is understood in this sense both as a form of opposition and resistance – to be found as much in jazz’s ‘response to the brutality and tempo of a modern system of exploitation’ as in Webern – and, at times at least, as a quasi-utopian foreshadowing of alternate forms of collective practice and experience. Most importantly, Watson argues, it is that modern music which owes its existence to the technologies of mass production, and which Adorno himself largely failed to engage, that is, precisely because of its inextricable dialectical relations to a mass culture mediated through the form of the commodity, able to ‘inject the workings of commodity mass culture with an antagonistic principle’, inhabiting it as a form of ‘thwarted subaltern expression – a potential created by capitalism that its property relations deny’. As the book’s final piece succinctly puts it, if ‘[r]ap and jazz and rock are immediately *implicated* in capitalist relations of alienation and exploitation’, because of this they also render such relations ‘an area of conflict, political through-and-through’, the site of a struggle over the communicative power of new media and forms of collectivity.

This desire to rescue Adorno from that conformism which is always about to overcome him by representing his theory of musical modernism as a formally revolutionary conception of something like a ‘permanent avant-garde’ is broadly convincing. Watson’s complementary attempt to depict him as some *actual* Leninist firebrand in the field of politics itself is, unsurprisingly, considerably less so. (Although *Adorno for Revolutionaries* does a far more plausible job in this respect than did the other recent attempt to produce an ‘activist’ Adorno: John Holloway’s 2008 post-autonomist *Negativity and Revolution*). Watson tracks down some positive references to Lenin in Adorno’s writings of the 1930s, which, he argues, came to be subsequently submerged (but not forgotten) beneath a Cold War ‘Aesopian language’ that ‘rarely mentioned Marx by name’. However, accurate as this might be, it’s rather more of a stretch to take seriously the idea that, on this basis, ‘Adorno’s aesthetic’ can be regarded as ‘a musical version of the Bolshevik “all power to the workers councils” slogan which summarized Lenin’s 1917 pamphlet *State and Revolution*’. The troubled relations between radical art and politics that mark the history of the avant-garde, from Dada to free jazz, and which are interrogated throughout Adorno’s oeuvre, are not, I think, quite so easily dealt with!

At the same time, a healthy, politicized suspicion of the ‘passivity’ of the academic, and a concomitant desire for a materialist dynamics of expression, can at times all too easily turn into simple anti-intellectualism per se, reinstating all those dichotomies between *theoria* and *praxis*, action and reflection, that Watson is elsewhere so rightly keen to overcome. This is most apparent in the wildly over-the-top assault on Simon Jarvis’s 1998 book *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, reprinted here from the second issue of *Historical Materialism*, which is presented as little more than a form of ‘scholastic gibberish [mobilized] to justify ivory-tower inertia’. In fact, the review starts out from some not unreasonable concerns about a recent tendency to sever Adorno’s work from its specific historical connections to avant-gardism in the effort to assert its ‘properly’ philosophical credentials – though, as opposed to more recent studies by Brian O’Connor and others, Jarvis seems to me largely the wrong target in this respect. However, the sheer vehemence of the review rapidly sends it spinning off into the realms of fantasy. Perhaps one does not expect polemic of this type to ‘play fair’ – and, indeed, Watson misquotes, for example, Jarvis’s account of the concept as that which is ‘always more *and* less than what can be subsumed under it’, so that it becomes a wishy-washy liberal assertion of the fact that ‘everything is “more *or* less” accurate in the realm of epistemology’. Yet, even in light of an Adornian justification for ‘exaggeration as a means of reaching the truth’, can one really imagine Adorno himself endorsing a position for which, apparently, the only materialism worth attending to would be that which ‘can act collectively or build a picket line’? Too often the latter’s own complex accounts of philosophy’s complicity with social division and instrumental rationality are subjected, in this way, to a crude ‘materialist’ reduction – ironically reminiscent in some respects of Bourdieuan sociology – in which, for instance, ‘the domination of the concept’ can then be presented as a straightforward ‘shorthand’ for the domination of the ‘boss over the employee’.

I suspect that pieces like the Jarvis review (or the diatribe against Georgina Born, tactfully entitled ‘Born to Die’!) are ones that some readers will enjoy most – and, certainly, they’re very readable – but, to me, they don’t display Watson’s criticism at its strongest. The review of *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* engendered a spectacularly bad-tempered response from Gordon Finlayson, also reproduced here, that, with its high-handed defence of ‘academic respectability’, and patronizing accusations of ‘banality of truly undergraduate proportion’, hardly presented him in the best

light. But, then, Watson’s own rejoinder is not terribly satisfying either, putting him on the defensive in such a way as to reduce him to such clichés as ‘I am not a stranger to controversy’ (a declaration that makes him sound more like Liam Gallagher than Guy Debord).

Watson is on far stronger ground when he is more *practically* pursuing a different ‘legacy’ for Adorno. In a recent issue of this journal Drew Milne suggested, not without justification, that what he calls the ‘research paradigms gleaned from Adorno’s work appear now to be nearing exhaustion’ (‘Hegelian Leninism Today!’, *RP* 171). Watson’s retort, we might say, is to show that this rather depends on what one intends to do with them... It is for this reason that ‘Adorno’s philosophy of music’, Watson writes, ‘only makes sense once it is taken outside the confines of an academic, “actually existing” avant-garde’. Through an interrogation of the inadequacy of terms like ‘jazz’, ‘rock’ or ‘pop’ (or, indeed, ‘classical’), one can thereby seek to show the degree to which ‘mass culture’ is actually ‘riddled with *avant-garde* defiance of formal prescription’, in ways which continue to conform to the ‘abstract’ logic of the modern(ist) that Adorno most rigorously elaborated. From this perspective, as Watson puts it, ‘Britain’s initial forays into Black music’, in the 1950s and ’60s, ‘were all *experienced* as “avant-gardes”’.

In insisting upon this radical variability in what has the potential to be cognitively experienced or judged as *avant-garde*, depending upon differences within the fields in which it operates, it is also unsurprising that Watson should look to ‘reanimate Adorno’s dialogue with Walter Benjamin’. Still, this is not without its tensions. First, as I have argued in a review of Watson’s previous book on the guitarist Derek Bailey (‘The revolution will be live’, *RP* 128), while Watson places a Benjaminian emphasis on the *avant-garde*’s immanent engagement with new technological means of production as a prime site of any struggle for emancipation, there is a strong sense in which (much like Adorno himself in the early 1960s) the confrontation with advanced contemporary forms can reveal a blockage at this point. Watson thus writes disdainfully of an electronic music that would ‘surrender to the simple options supplied by capitalist technology (Cubase programmes running on Sony equipment)’, but it’s not terribly clear why, in principle, this is any less true of Fender guitars running through Marshall amps. (As with, say, acid house’s creative ‘misuse’ of the Roland TB-303 bass synthesizer, the real point of course is what is *done with* such technology, as Watson would surely concede.) As such, while Watson may disavow any ‘abstract commitment’ to the ‘human’ over the

'machine', it's not clear that Adorno's own objection to the ban on a use of recording for radio transmission, that it 'conserves more primitive forms of labour at the expense of more highly developed ones, thus chaining productive powers', is entirely registered here.

A second point would concern Watson's expanded conception of the avant-garde itself, in so far as, while this expanded field radically diagonalizes, so to speak, conventional demarcations between 'high' and 'low', it doesn't really tackle the very 'torn halves' of culture to which Adorno refers in the 1936 letter to Benjamin, but rather resituates the tear in new places. Watson rightly stresses 'the dialectical role of the unpopular in the genesis of Pop'. But he tends quickly to lose sight of the other side of the dialectic, and hence risks becoming undialectical himself. On what basis can we account for the capacity to find an 'explosive art' not only where we might well expect to find it (Coltrane, Beefheart) but also where we might not (The Beach Boys, Donna Summer); a moment of the 'true' to be found *within* the 'false'? This is where, one would think, Benjamin's own emphases on the 'traces of utopia' to be located inside the dreamworlds of commodity culture itself would need to be far more directly addressed.

There's a lot of silly, ill-informed stuff about French theory, not to mention New Order, along the way in *Adorno for Revolutionaries*. But in the face of pop sociology, on the one hand, and journalistic puff, on the other, Watson's commitment to the dialectical capacity 'to make musical judgements that leap the divide between subjective response and objective analysis' is a powerful one, even if, at times, the 'leap' can seem rather too smooth – Watson's own personal 'proclivities and animosities' matching up all too neatly to an objectively progressive 'truth'. Above all, however, and with inevitable slippages, what lies at the root of Watson's unquestionable power as a writer is his defence of judgement and of argument as a necessary means of elaborating critical praxis itself. Despite Watson's best efforts, the results of our testing out a 'historical-materialist understanding of the world' upon different musical objects may not cohere. (For me, there's more genuine 'formal innovation' and 'explosive art' in the first minute of Bjork's *Volta* than in the whole of Zappa's back catalogue.) But it is, first and foremost, this rebarbative desire to *argue* that makes Watson's return from his recent 'semi-retirement' so welcome. It hasn't stopped me loving Joy Division though.

David Cunningham

Deprovincialized Marxism

Tosaka Jun, *Ideologie, Medien, Alltag: Eine Auswahl ideologiekritischer, kultur-und medientheoretischer und geschichtsphilosophischer Schriften*, ed. Fabian Schaefer, Leipziger Universitätsverlag, Leipzig, 2011. 230 pp., €29.00 pb., 978 3 86583 581 9.

It is a paradox of Western Marxism that it insisted on its own geopolitical specificity – the West – and yet made its particularity a universal condition for the excluded Rest. In this manoeuvre, there appeared to be no difference between earlier claimants of a universalist and cultural Western unity like Max Weber and Erich Auerbach and those postwar Marxists who huddled together in the uncertain precinct of a Western Marxism dedicated to serving the Cold War struggle to preserve 'freedom' (the free market) against the challenge posed by the Soviet Union, now the embodiment of Non-Western Marxism. Yet, it is well known that, even before the war, Edmund Husserl had already anticipated this conceit when he declared that only the West knew philosophy – a legacy willingly continued by 'Western Marxism' down to the present. In this connection, we must thus recall the paradoxical effort of societies flanking the capitalist periphery to

appeal to either literary form (especially novelization) or philosophy, which offered them no place to explain to themselves their entry into and experience of capitalist modernization. This quixotic search for meaning in a philosophy that provided them with no place was led by Japan, owing to the good fortune of geography and a history that allowed the country to avoid colonization so as to become a contender in the imperial contest leading to World War II. But even colonized regions drawn into the capitalist desiring machine through involuntary submission and coercion turned to philosophy to grasp their contemporaneous circumstances. Most usually this looked to some form of Neo-Kantianism, phenomenological existentialism (notably Heidegger) or Marxism as the privileged lens through which to refract the meaning of their capitalist existence. This signified the transit to 'modernity' and the regime of the new, accelerated tempos of change

for societies which only recently obeyed different temporal rhythms.

While we must note conjunctural differences between the 1930s and the postwar era, it is still curious that the articulation of a Marxism belonging exclusively to the West actively resituated prewar European Marxian thinkers within the environment of the Cold War, turning to cultural analyses once they recognized the futility of wishing the state away. This abandonment of the revolutionary impulse was consistent with Cold War polarized politics that saw the West as a cultural unity signalling ‘freedom’ and actually constituted an inversion of a prior intention associated with Marxism. Moreover, the particular disposition of Western Marxism, safely insulated from colonization like modernization theory, and the disarray of decolonization, was made to resemble the cultural turn of the 1970s that sought to privilege representation and the centrality of cultural–textual production. This moment recalls for us a particular historical conjuncture that would willingly supply the demand for new ways to look at history, culture and politics outside explicit political arenas and offer new theoretical agendas capable of fulfilling this mission. Yet we must understand this turn – apotheosized in the formation of cultural studies as compensatory for a revolution that never happened – in the wake of the Vietnam War, mass political mobilization everywhere (symbolized by Paris, 1968) and the brief spectacle of Third World ‘triumphalism’ and the struggle against colonialism and Western developmentalist intervention.

It is thus ironic that in order to escape the exceptionalism now associated with ‘Western Marxism’ we must turn to precisely those Marxists on the periphery who were not conscripted by a subsequent provincialization but convinced they were involved in an undivided global effort to confront the contemporary conjuncture. With Tosaka Jun (1900–1945) and the group around the Society for the Study of Materialism in the 1930s, we have a powerful instance of how Marxism in Japan, far from being an exclusive ‘fight club’ valorizing cultural exegetics, saw itself as an inflection of a worldwide expression, exceeding national and cultural borders, that faced the challenge of fascism and imperialism. For Tosaka and his generation, and even those Europeans subsequently segregated and baptized as ‘Western Marxists’, the solution to the contemporary problem they encountered was not culture, but capitalism manifest in crisis, fascism at home and imperialism abroad, and the question of how ideological critique might yield a new way of articulating a relationship between politics and culture.

Fabian Schaefer has given us the first translation of Tosaka’s key writings in a European language (apart from the earlier postwar Russian translation of *The Japanese Ideology*). Together with a thoughtful and informative introduction, discussing Tosaka’s contexts and the production of his texts, Schaefer explains the dazzling diversity of his writings in a short life and the reasons behind it.

Tosaka was educated in the famous Kyoto School of Philosophy in the 1920s by luminaries like Nishida Kitaro and Tanabe Hajime, principally in the philosophy of science within a Neo-Kantian framework. In the late 1920s, he moved away from Neo-Kantianism towards Marxism and especially the problem of envisaging a ‘scientific critique’. Once committed to a dialectical itinerary he embraced a full-blown materialism that persuaded him that the dialectical structure of ‘historical and social existence’, founded on the predominance of the ‘problem’ over ‘positionality’, ‘content’ over ‘form’, is grasped through the ‘theoretical structure of the characteristic logic’. Without the benefit of having available Marx’s *Grundrisse*, Tosaka approximated Marx’s conception of a methodological procedure ‘arising from the abstract to the concrete’ by showing how ideology reversed the order from the concrete back to the abstract motivating it. What he wished to elucidate was the ideological character informing theory and logic. After the Japan Communist party was abolished early in the 1930s he became active in establishing and implementing the Society for the Study of Materialism (1932), which lasted until 1938, when it was finally shut down by the state. Yet in its short span, its journal and publications combined to sustain a rigorous exposition of questions relating to philosophical materialism (resembling Gramsci’s use of a philosophy of praxis) and explicit anti-fascist activity and struggle at the discursive level. Tosaka was at the centre of this intellectual vortex: on the one hand directing his attention to envisioning a comprehensive theory of science and on the other to mounting a powerful assault on liberalism, its abdication of political and economic freedom for ‘cultural freedom’ and its inevitable complicity with fascism and capitalist cultural ideology, called ‘Japanism’ in *The Japanese Ideology* (1935). At the same time, he opened up a critical front against fascism as it had permeated everyday life in the 1930s through collections like *Thought and Custom* and *Japan as a Link to the World* that demonstrated how conditions in contemporary Japan simply inflected broader, global circumstances.

Behind this critique lay the conviction that philosophy’s materialist vocation conformed to the demands

of a new capitalist everyday environment rather than preoccupations with transcendental metaphysics and otherworldly religious thinking. Some of Tasaka's most striking essays called attention to the logic of journalism (in newspapers, radio and film) and its unacknowledged reliance on hermeneutical philosophy that informed the representation of events. But it was precisely for this prescience that he was forced to succumb to the forces of state fascism, first to a silencing in 1937 and then to imprisonment, where he eventually died of malnutrition (and impossibly cramped quarters of detention), a week before the war ended. Unlike Antonio Gramsci, he was never permitted to have books, paper or pen in his prison confinement and was thus unable to leave any last reflections, apart from the body of his work; a victim of state murder.

Schaefer's selections were prompted by his belief that the introduction of British-style cultural studies to Japan in the 1990s placed a new value on Tosaka's vast range of writings, especially those concerned with new media. Moreover, this prefiguration also put him in close proximity to the contemporaneous Frankfurt School, especially the kinship they seemed to share regarding the 'actuality of journalism'. It is true that with few exceptions Tosaka's writings were virtually forgotten until the 1980s. But interest was provoked less by the introduction of cultural studies, which paid scant attention to him, than to the relationship of Tosaka's texts to newer formulations after the war and the rediscovery and identification of a Marxist in Japan who had managed to escape the constraints of national and cultural exceptionalism. Reducing Tosaka to a cultural studies *avant la lettre* risks making him look like the Cold War representation of 'Western Marxism'. His work is less concerned with meditating on culture than showing how a dissembling of its claims leads to a proper 'actualization' of politics. The clue to this critique, moving from the abstract to the concrete, lay in the status of 'custom', which, like the commodity, announced its eternity but concealed what lurked behind it. Custom was the 'skin of society', surface 'social phenomena' that appeared as concrete manifestations but are driven by the 'thought' (abstraction) that lay beneath it. In this regard, thought attains 'bodily reality in society through the form of custom'. Tosaka demonstrated this classic conversion in his reflections on academic philosophy and journalism, between a practice dedicated to the eventful immediacy of the everyday and transcendental thought – hermeneutic philosophy – that underlay it.

In *The Japanese Ideology*, Tosaka's critique moved from the material manifestation back to the (bourgeois) idealist philosophy it embodied as a reversal of the real materialist method, from 'custom' to its 'philosophic character' – that is, the 'content of a relatively unified world view'. Whereas journalism was bonded to the 'daily' and contributed to the formation of an ideological basis of the 'everyday life of humans', academic philosophy ignored everydayness altogether in its aspiration to transcend both the movement of the 'real' and contemporary events. If the true calling of journalism was to report on 'real movements' and 'contemporary events', disclosing its faithfulness to practical and political purpose, academic philosophy committed its energies to the culture of diverse disciplinary and specialized sciences, enabling it to act as a metadiscipline charged with the responsibility of integrating knowledge according to a unified world-view. Yet, Tosaka observed, both had failed to realize their respective vocations under contemporary capitalism: philosophy forfeited its basic function as a metadiscipline and journalism forswore its obligation to public opinion and submitted to the lure of commercialization. As a result, journalism deserted its own ideological purpose to supply daily criticism of the events it reported and philosophy fell short of providing positive proof and verification. Moreover, a philosophy dedicated to the timeless and extramundane world of metaphysics ended up endowing a temporal and mundane everyday with the interpretative means for grasping meaning.

At the heart of this embourgeoisement of the philosophical formation was Nishida Kitaro's 'logic of nothingness'. Tosaka perceived in Nishida's logic the quintessence of bourgeois philosophy and disputed usual accounts explaining that its method rested on the standpoint of nothingness rather than on being. Rather, it was a philosophy preoccupied with 'self-awareness' or self-consciousness. For Tosaka, Nishida represented a completion of a 'romantic' philosophical tableau stretching back to eighteenth-century German thinkers. What bothered him was how a 'dialectical' philosophical method founded on the logic of nothingness resulted in clarifying only the meaning of that which had become dialectical. Dialectics, he proposed, was absent in Nishida's philosophy, which appeared driven by a logic concerned solely with 'interpreting how to consider the meaning of dialectics (itself)'. Hence, the logic of nothingness was a falsification, a 'camouflage', which exchanged the examination of things for the meaning elicited by the facts. The real question raised by Nishida's method related to how meaning is constituted separately from the facts, directed to deciding

not what things are in ‘actuality’, but in determining how what conveys meaning is ‘valued in the name of these things’. Convinced that Nishida had failed to recognize the separation of ‘existence’ from the meaning assigned to it, Tosaka concluded that his philosophy had no capacity to think through existence, as such. Ultimately, it was a philosophy of self-awareness that supplied a habitat for the homeless and culturally free consciousness of the bourgeois self.

Schaefer has provided a real service to the current literature on philosophical Marxism by making available the texts of one of its most original practitioners anywhere before World War II, who, despite his remote location on the industrial periphery, envisioned his task as consistent with, not apart from, the global struggle at hand. It reminds us today of the singular and undivided vocation of Marx’s philosophy.

Harry Harootunian

I am the fly

Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 2010. 320 pp., £56.00 hb., £18.50 pb., 978 0 81666 739 0 hb., 978 0 81666 740 6 pb.

‘Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.’ An early entomological injunction comes from the Bible. And the book of Proverbs demands not that the sluggard turn to the ant, but specifically to the ‘ways’ of the ant, to antish forms of behaviour. It is through ethological considerations – if we take ethology as the scientific study of animal behaviours – that wisdom will be found. Jussi Parikka also thinks looking at insects might be productive. He sets out to consider insect ethologies within a time frame set by the advent of ‘the age of [communications] technology’. The starting point is a certain convergence: the late nineteenth century saw the rise of Darwinism and evolutionary theory (and the end of the absolute dominance of a certain biblically inspired order of things), and the invention of technical media (the telegraph and on). Moreover this was also a period notable for ‘the emergence of insects as a special topic of interest’, a time when insectology came alive.

Parikka thus begins with a moment where, as he sees it, ‘biopower and insect technics’ become ‘intertwined’. His argument is that developing an insect technics based on rereading media technologies as a (non-disciplinary/non Foucauldian) form of biopower,

where the later adumbrates the endlessly creative and intensive qualities of life of all kinds (Spinoza via Braidotti), we will become better able to read the nineteenth- and twentieth-century history of new media systems and their theorization, and also (partly as a result) will be more knowledgeable – even understand more correctly – their current and future operations, dynamics and significance.

Beginning work on this project Parikka sets out first to ‘dig into’ a ‘field of insects and media and cultural theory’. This produces a definition of insect technics, explored through consideration of two propositions: nature as a force towards perfection, and nature or life as having no *telos*, but rather operating as a mode of creative differentiation (drawing on Bergson, James and Grosz). Adopting the latter approach enables the distinction between natural and technical operations to be unpicked and the priority of nature as a storehouse of invention, as *better* at creative differentiation, can thus be asserted. Second, it involves tracking the recurring entomological influences – the insects scratching in the writing of a series of critical thinkers (including notably Bergson and Deleuze) and media theorists (e.g. Maresy), whose work later informed post-humanist explorations of media technologies. Third, the perspectives this media-archeological move provides are deployed to read contemporary media formations entomologically (media are insects/insect technics) and ethologically. That is, they are deployed to understand media operations and network assemblage characteristics in terms of insect behaviours and becomings – and in this sense perhaps are to be viewed as prioritizing logics of instinct and intensity rather than reason, intent or geometry.

It should be noted that *Insect Media* does not set out simply to draw parallels between the Victorian enthusiasm for insects and its location within contexts of rapid changes in biological and technological fields and the contemporary moment – although insects clearly *have* found recurring salience as figures for contemporary digital network ecologies. This is well captured in Kevin Kelly’s *Out of Control* (1994), which caught a certain 1990s’ web zeitgeist, and in writing by Resnick and Mitchell’s on human and non-human swarms, and has also been explored by figures such as Eugene Thacker, as Parikka notes. Here, though, the intention is track the figure of the insect, which binds up various ‘insect’ activities and characteristics, to be understood in terms of a more or less originary technicity, as it translates across a series of fields, or perhaps as it vectorizes. Thus, we are told, to talk of insect media is not to speak metaphorically (either of

chitin-based media forms or of silicon-based insects). This is not a linguistic operation. The 'hegemony of the signifier', somewhat abruptly adumbrated, is rapidly discarded by Parikka in favour of 'neo-material cultural analysis', which might be a variant of new materialism.

This opens up the proposition that entomology, now becoming a study of insect technics, can be read as media theory. Thus deployed it can produce a new cartography for media studies, enabling the perception of 'a whole new world of sensations, perceptions, movements, stratagems, and patterns of organization'. What is distinctive about this new world is above all that it operates 'beyond the confines of the human world' – a claim made repeatedly throughout *Insect Media*. As a consequence, it can be used to transform and extend both *what* is to be investigated (media, defined via Kittler in terms of 'facilities of transmission, recording, and connecting') and *how* this investigation might be undertaken – notably it implies that an insect ethology, a rethinking of media in terms of insect behaviours and at insect scales can be productive.

In the first half of *Insect Media* these lines of inquiry are elaborated through the examination of a series of engagements with insects/entomologists by philosophers and thinkers influential in the development of various forms of post-humanism, most obviously Deleuze and Guattari, and (largely through Deleuze) Bergson. Reading these works with an attentive eye for the instances of insect interest (which is not quite consistent with an insect-based ethological approach) tends to produce an insect-led genealogy of these forms of thinking rather than a genealogy of insect media. Parikka himself appears to recognize this when he declares that

[the] insect becomes a philosophical figure for a cultural analysis of the nonhuman basics of media technological modernity, labeled not by the conscious unity of Man but by the swarming, distributed intelligence of insects, collective agents, and uncanny potentials of the 'autonomy of affect'.

It seems useful to note that the 'philosophical figure' of the insect generally remains at some distance from the insect itself – or from the entomologist. While insects and insect behaviours (social architecture, swarming, instinctive rather than intelligence-led behaviours) are variously introduced as the subjects of specific chapters, they appear fleetingly, and only as they emerge through the work of philosophers or media theorists, where – despite the claims for material translation – they have become somewhat abstracted and largely theoretical figures. Thus a chapter on social

insects and their 'architectural creations', focusing on geometrics and those exploring the 'potential radicality' of the swarm through a focus on intensities, looks at Von Frisch's dancing bees, but remains at a rather rudimentary level in entomological terms. This is followed by a discussion of Uexküll's *Umwelt* (selective perception) and his work on ethology, explored largely through its deployment within Deleuze, in which, it is true, a sleeping tick appears, but only briefly. Finally, there is a consideration of Callois and insect game theory. Thus while Parikka tells us that he is exploring 'curious' matters of insect activity (the word appears



with the regularity of a June bug in June), a *more* curious thing here is actually a certain absence of insect life, and certainly any sense of its vitality or strangeness in this section of the book: it is not clear quite how closely Parikka really *is* considering the ways of the ant – or even the ways of the entomologist here.

Two potential consequences of the above might be briefly pursued. First, reading insects as they are compiled through theory in this way means the material distinctiveness of insect forms of non-human activity is not pursued as far as it might be. So a question arising about insect-media concerns specificity: what is the distinction between 'non-human basics' or perhaps an 'animal media' approach and what might be termed insect specifics? There is, after all, nothing new in demands to decentre the human or set aside the centrality of the human perspective in accounts of digital technology, nor in demands to think technology in terms beyond language or representation – a starting point for software studies, code studies and other more hybrid forms of material analysis. So what does the insect media approach provide – either in relation to theory or in relation to new media formations – that is distinctively different from a series of existing attempts to look at new media outside of anthropomorphic or humanist approaches?

A second issue is that Parikka's method here – particularly the lack of distinction made between the theoretical and material body of the insect body/world – has implications for the genealogy he constructs; this threatens to become not merely non-linear (which would be considered desirable within this approach) but a closed circle, where what is configured in the earlier stages of an archeology becomes the inevitable precursor, because it is essentially already installed in theory, of the final outcome. This position is antithetical to media archeology's goals – it is an approach that seeks explicitly to avoid such teleological positions – but is nonetheless a hazard that tends to be entailed in its operations.

Some of these issues are worked through in the second half of the book, where insect technics are put to work more directly. Here the focus shifts towards contemporary forms of media technology, once again explored in insect terms; here are to be found cybernetics, boids and AI, and biodigital sex – explored through a female scientist and her non-human clone sisters in Lynn Hershman-Leeson's film *Teknolust*, already much analysed as a piece of media critique (see, for example, Kate O'Riordan in *The Genome Incorporated*, 2010, for a different take). These are familiar objects, but, as noted, Parikka is not arguing that he is the first to think about digital media technologies in insect terms. What he does lay claim to having done – and this is justified – is to have successfully undermined the 'supposed newness' of this coupling of 'supposedly simple animal behavior with media technologies'. And this has been achieved through the (albeit somewhat problematic) production of the archeology of insect media that precedes it, which shows that in a certain sense we were already 'becoming insect', perhaps indeed we always were.

It is also in these sections that the figure of the insect travels furthest and most successfully changes its material. One brief example of this arises in relation to the final chapter on *Teknolust*. Here we are notably far from the biological insect (we are in fact looking at four iterations of Tilda Swinton, taking on the role of a scientist and her clones) but come nearest to getting at what Parikka means by thinking about media forms in insect ways. Here the perspectives given by ethologically informed media theory are used to understand the clones not as almost human (in their instincts or intelligences), nor as humans caught up in technology, nor in terms of prosthetics (they are not 'equated' with the human avatar experience), but, on the contrary, to explore their situation in insect terms where assumptions about identity and individuality,

boundaries between environment and instinct, and relations between social and individual actions can be read in different ways. If here it becomes productive to explore how the Tilda species, which might be considered to 'swarm', being multiple, being a part of the environment and responsive to it in non-human ways, can be thought of as insect media: not least because it allows a fresh series of questions around the bioethics of new forms of life to be raised.

Caroline Bassett

Vorsprung durch Technik

Arthur Bradley, *Originary Technicity: The Theory of Technology from Marx to Derrida*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 224 pp., £50.00 hb., 978 0 23057 692 6.

Originary Technicity is a selective philosophical history of modern attempts to move beyond what its author identifies as an Aristotelian tradition that considers technology to be a prosthesis subordinated to human ends. The book focuses on a group of thinkers – Marx, Freud, Lacan, Heidegger, Derrida and Stiegler – who recognize the constitutive role of technology, whether the word is taken to refer to actual techniques and devices, or to a more general sense of a 'technicity' that conditions biological, intellectual and semantic processes in the generation of life, nature and the human being. Bradley's 'guiding hypothesis' is that 'continental philosophy of technology from Marx onwards has consistently embraced a generalized technicity as the empirico-transcendental condition not only of human life but also of life more generally.' Marx begins this tradition, but the book receives its primary impulse (and title) from Derrida, although, despite its subtitle, the book does not end with Derrida but goes on to consider several post-Derridean figures.

The argument that technicity is originary, that there is no pre- or non-technological life, is developed in the course of Bradley's engagement with the various thinkers represented in the book, rather than fully formulated at the outset. This is probably necessary in a work of this type, which, while recognizing that its subjects share a common problematic, also presents a careful historical genealogy of the emergence of its theme. The introduction, however, sketches out the basic argument with reference to Derrida's well-known deconstruction of the opposition in the *Phaedrus*

between genuine recollection, *anamnesis*, and artificial memory, *hypomnesis*. Derrida contends that *anamnesis* always depends on *hypomnesis*, and that, therefore, at the heart of life, thought or self-presence there is always materiality, automatism and alterity.

Bradley's book is also a critique of modern philosophers of technology for failing, in one way or another, to think technicity radically enough. Each thinker attempts to go beyond humanism or anthropocentrism, but each nevertheless indexes his or her thought of technology to the human being, even if the latter is only summoned as an inessential and, indeed, impossible witness to its own effacement. There seems to be an irreducible human remainder that the discourse of originary technicity can never succeed in wiping out; the thematic history Bradley tells is aporetic through and through, as technicity seems to be inseparable from what Bradley, quoting Agamben, calls the 'anthropological machine'. Even as the proper sense of the human is effaced in a thoroughly technological thinking, a sort of negativity remains as the specific difference of the human being, to which technicity remains teleologically indexed. Ultimately, therefore, Bradley is led to question whether a thinking of originary technicity runs aground on its own premisses.

After the introductory chapter, Bradley devotes a chapter to Marx, whom he identifies as the inaugurator of a new way of thinking about technology. The key distinction between Marx and previous thinkers is that for the former 'we can no longer simply oppose humanity and technology as if they were entirely separate ontological entities: each ... comes into existence through, and as, the other.' Whereas the early Marx remains a humanist, in *The German Ideology* humans are defined by the fact that their activity is technologically mediated. Therefore Bradley is probably correct to claim that a pure, non-technological human essence 'cannot, strictly speaking, be found *anywhere* in Marx's own work after the Paris manuscripts'. However, Bradley suspects that in trying to liberate human beings from the domination of technology, and the alienation that it brings, Marx has shifted the idea of a pure humanity and of free, non-technical time from a mythical past to an equally mythical communist future (the question of time is considered more closely in the section on Stiegler). For Bradley, there is thus an atavistic humanism in Marx that finds itself in conflict with his more radical thinking of technicity; Marx holds on to the theme of alienation, even though it is no longer clear *what* could be alienated from *what*. Bradley's analysis, however, would have benefited from an engagement with the notion of value, which tries

to account for the systemic imperatives of capital as a particular technological regime. If it is the case that it is capitalism, rather than technology per se, that Marx seeks to liberate us from, perhaps it is not a question of delimiting a purely human temporality in distinction from technological time, but rather of affirming a singular flourishing in the face of the totalizing demand for surplus value. In any case, Bradley concludes that Marx does not shrink back from his more radical insights due to flawed reasoning or a loss of nerve; rather, Marx's contradictions display 'the aporia of originary technicity itself'.

The third chapter considers Freud and Lacan. Freud uses the metaphor of a 'mystic writing pad' to describe the psyche, but reserves for the latter a certain spontaneity that the former does not possess. He also flirts with a machinic notion of the psyche in his account of the uncanny. Here too there is a moment of recuperation reminiscent of Kant's theory of the sublime: in the end, the experience of the uncanny lies in a moment of recognition when the psyche confronts its own mechanical nature. Although Lacan radicalizes Freud's thinking of technicity, he arrives at a remarkably similar conclusion. While he figures consciousness as a screen onto which a mechanical unconscious projects itself, our specific difference is now our *knowledge* that we are not different, that we are machines after all.

In the chapter on Heidegger, Bradley gives a nuanced account that recognizes the radicality of a thinking that identifies technology with the unveiling of being, while at the same time marking the inadequacy of its reduction of ontic technologies to 'passive carriers of an ontological donation'. Here it must be asked whether Heidegger did not at least indicate a path for thinking more attuned to the ontic in those writings, which Bradley does not consider, that locate the event of disclosure in the play of world and thing. Bradley follows his section on Heidegger with a citation of Derrida's assertion that deconstruction always begins 'by calling into question the dissociation between thought and technology'. Derrida's logic of the supplement indicates that what is taken to be human, the interiority of self-presence, never pre-exists what is machinic, exterior, and other. Bradley invokes various critics of Derrida that accuse him of transcendentizing technicity at the expense of existing technologies; on the other hand, these critics are shown to be in danger of positing a simple externality that Derrida has decisively problematized. Although Derrida's thinking of technicity is more radical than that of his predecessors, Bradley still identifies a humanist remainder, a function of deconstruction's

dependence on what it deconstructs. Thus, originary technicity remains indexed to a vanishing human subject that is still legible under erasure.

The last chapter-length discussion of a single thinker is devoted to Stiegler, who identifies an essential relation between technology and time. For Stiegler, technology opens up the temporal ekstases, which are actually forms of exteriorization. Because projection and retention – hence, inheritance and transmission – always depend on technical devices, there is no originary phenomenological time that would subsequently be contaminated by technical time, and hence no human interiority that isn't already technological. However, Stiegler remains committed to an account of subject-formation, and critiques the temporality of modern technologies as curtailing a critical relation to technology.

The final chapter considers various trans-, post- and anti-humanist thinkers, assessing the strengths and

weaknesses of each. In every case, a certain humanistic residue is identified, which undermines the attempt to radically think technicity. Bradley identifies a certain normativity at work when we grant human thinking the power to deconstruct itself. Ultimately, he suggests a truly technical thinking will have to relinquish 'technology' altogether, in the name of a sublimated technicity. Perhaps what Bradley has shown, however, is an impasse that cannot be overcome by further radicalizations of the problematic of originary technicity: if there are reasons to accept the dehumanizing arguments that the various thinkers in Bradley's book present, then there is a normativity inherent in thinking which cannot be reduced to automatism, without obliterating both thinking and automatism in one paradoxical stroke. Unless a thinking of originary technicity can grapple with this aspect of thinking, it may find that it has strayed into a circle from which there is no escape.

Christopher Ruth

Wag, wag

Costas Panayotakis, *Remaking Scarcity: From Capitalist Inefficiency to Economic Democracy*, Pluto Press, London, 2011. 224 pp., £18.99 pb., 978 0 74533 099 0.

One of the tragedies of the so-called boom years of the 2000s was that the collective picking of the fruits of an apparent – but now clearly mythical – abundance distracted us from unpicking the forces that created the false hope of endless growth. Worse, it blinded us to the consequences of such a headlong rush. Primary among the consequences is the rise of 'scarcity' as the defining feature of our economic, social and ecological lives. Everywhere we look, we find scarcity, or rather, as Costas Panayotakis makes clear, *constructions* of scarcity, shaping our horizons. Scarcity is being used as a cover to justify the programmes of economic austerity that are currently further widening the gap in social equality in the Western world. In the environmental arena, scarcity of fossil fuels is being used to justify the exploitation of natural resources such as the Canadian tar sands and fracking, which only go to produce their own toxicities and environmental degradation. Land grabs in Africa by China, the USA and other developed countries – 70 million hectares in the last ten years under the charming gloss of 'agricultural investment' – are allowed in order to safeguard future global supplies of food, while at the same

displacing the indigenous populations and threatening their own food supply chain. And so on. Scarcity is conjured up as a spectre to legitimate corrupting actions. The Reverend Malthus's shadow still casts long, with his simple arithmetic that scarcity (of food) would restrict human progress (in terms of population growth). Under the guise of scientific reason, Malthus's fanciful description of scarcity allowed others in the nineteenth century to enact a deeply ideological programme, most obviously the repeal of the Poor Laws (because the granting of welfare to the poor only meant they bred more, which in turn fuelled future scarcity). But scarcity, as a weapon of fear, is still very much with us today.

Given the centrality of scarcity to both the production and understanding of the contemporary condition, it is surprising how few books there are that help us better navigate the complex nature of the various constructions of scarcity. Nicholas Xenos's *Scarcity and Modernity* (1990) and Lyla Metha's edited collection *The Limits to Scarcity* (2010) are among the few that have directly addressed the issue. They are now joined by Costas Panayotakis's useful overview,

Remaking Scarcity. Xenos locates scarcity as the child of modernity, both philosophically and economically. Panayotakis follows this logic, but more firmly describes scarcity as the product of capitalism. Capitalism hides itself behind the mask of delivering the most efficient distribution of resources, but, as Panayotakis shows clearly, behind the mask of economic rationality a very inefficient, and very inequitable, distribution takes place resulting in ‘configurations of scarcity’ that exacerbate social, economic and ecological imbalances. In trenchant language, he lays the ills created by scarcity firmly at the feet of capitalism, arguing that the problem is not scarcity per se, but ‘rather the inhumane and ecologically unsustainable configurations of scarcity that capitalism creates’.

From Malthus onwards, neoclassical economists have attempted to naturalize scarcity, describing it as an inevitable condition that drives the economic machine, most obviously in Lionel Robbins’s famous statement: ‘Economics ... is concerned with that aspect of behaviour which arises from the scarcity of means to achieve given ends. It follows that Economics is entirely neutral between ends.’ There is something shocking in the nonchalance of Robbins’s conclusion of neutrality, which, although arguably far less certain than he would have us believe, sets out a very particular path in terms of the establishment of economics as a detached science. *Remaking Scarcity* points clearly to the inadequacy of this approach; far from *Homo aeconomicus* being caught in the ‘inevitable’ battle between lack (scarcity) and want (desire), capitalism manipulates these poles in a manner that both drives the market and creates further scarcities. Importantly, Panayotakis shows that these scarcities have profound effects beyond the purely material and economic. Yes, things are actually running out, but scarcity extends its grasp beyond the limits of stuff and into the heart of

social and ecological relationships – of time, of family dynamics, of work, of environmental degradation, and so on.

The book is convincing at a general level of describing this extended reach of scarcity. Yet time and time again I wanted more grounded examples of how scarcity is actually constructed (as Mehta and her contributors to *The Limits of Scarcity* supply), rather than just the repeated refrain of ‘capitalism’s configurations of scarcity’, which always leaves the specifics hanging in the air. It is hard to disagree with the thrust of the book – after all, capitalism has done a pretty good job recently of exposing its own fault lines. Yet the argument often overreaches itself by applying scarcity to a societal condition, but then describing that relationship in generalized terms. Part of the problem is that there is a very big tail wagging the dog throughout the book. Right from the beginning Panayotakis asserts that the solution to the problem of capitalist-induced scarcity is what he terms ‘economic democracy’: ‘the principle that all citizens should have equal voice over the goals and operation of the economic system’. Again, it is hard to disagree with this as a sentiment. Equally, however, too often it feels as if the conclusion has been written before the rest of the book. In particular, it is difficult to see how the specific configurations of scarcity lead us so clearly to the solution of economic democracy, especially in the pure post-capitalist version that Panayotakis proposes. This means that big claims are made – ‘this book identifies economic democracy as the condition for a use of scarce resources that is consistent with ecological sustainability, the elimination of unnecessary human suffering and a richer life for all human beings on this planet’ – but are never really delivered upon. Panayotakis’s model of economic democracy may have much to recommend it – in particular an acknowledgement that it works best through a combination of state intervention and autonomous action – but in its displacement from the specifics of scarcity it does not clearly provide pointers as to how we might better deal with its various contemporary guises.

Right at the end of the book, Panayotakis returns to the nub of the argument. The social construction of scarcity by the processes of capitalism, he argues, does not imply it is an illusion; it creates very real, and very degrading, social and ecological effects. Take but one example referred to by Lyla Mehta in her work, that of water. By fanning the flames of fear of water scarcity among the growing urban populations in India, multinational companies have worked with the Indian government to push through large-scale water



engineering projects, in particular dams (the Sardar Sarovar in Gujarat being the best-known example). Of course profit and global reach are the drivers for the companies, but water scarcity is a convenient cover. The result is not only that local populations are displaced, and with it their livelihoods lost, but also, tragically, their embedded knowledge as to how to deal with seasonal drought, how to marshal limited supplies, and so on, is lost. A complex local ecology that is already dealing with scarcity is obliterated in the name of 'absolute' scarcity. These local ecologies do not deal just with the material aspects of scarcity – in terms of water storage and saving – but also with the social and spatial aspects, in terms of societal organization and cooperation; they are thus political ecologies, and as such provide essential pointers as to how to address the various constructions of scarcity. There is as much to learn from the nuances of these individual responses to scarcity as there is from the wider perspective that Panayotakis presents. Describing scarcity so steadfastly as the product of capitalism means that the only way out is an alternative to capitalism such as economic democracy. But in the cracks in the system that grounded investigations of scarcity open up, there may be potential for manoeuvre by critiquing the system from within as well as from without.

Jeremy Till

Sorting the humans from the rest

Dominic Pettman, *Human Error: Species-Being and Media Machines*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2011. 336 pp., £56.00 hb., £18.50 pb., 978 0 81667 298 1 hb., 978 0 81667 299 8 pb.

The anthropological machine churns out humans and non-humans, men and animals. Not perhaps so much in flesh and blood, but as scientific papers, research results, images, narratives, claims, arguments and various other ways of demarcating a border. In *Human Error: Species-Being and Media Machines*, this notion of the production of 'the Human' is picked up by Dominic Pettman from the work of Giorgio Agamben. The error comes first, and in Pettman's book – part of the University of Minnesota Press's Posthumanities series edited by Cary Wolfe – involves a double meaning: designating, in part, the grim history of Man's elevation as radically distinct from Others,

as a supposedly superior feeling/thinking entity, but even more so, for Pettman, the idea of failure as *a capacity*. This latter idea comes in only at the end of the book, where, in the conclusion, Pettman turns towards articulating this notion that perhaps the error and failure that define the human condition are actually a capacity, and hence 'the key to adaptation, survival, and – yes – learning'.

Using a cultural and media studies perspective, Pettman maps the terrain of human–animal relations through both popular culture and philosophy. *The Human Error* engages with the works of Bernard Stiegler, Agamben and Jacques Derrida, as well as with Werner Herzog's film *The Grizzly Man* (2005), along with a plethora of other examples. As already indicated, Pettman's approach here can be best understood through his adaptation of Agamben's concept of the anthropological machine – a machine of production, 'an abstract apparatus comprising all those potent symbols, figures, and tropes of belonging and exclusion' that produces the difference between humans and animals. This concept of a symbolic production of uniqueness works as a differentiation machine, which allows Pettman to refer to it as a similar conceptual aid to that of the Maxwell demon in statistical physics. Instead, however, of the demon sorting out the hot from the cold, the anthropological machine sorts animals and humans into different categories with a number of epistemological and political consequences. Indeed, the productive level of the anthro-machine operates as the framework of reference for a variety of other discourses, as Pettman argues – for instance, policy-making. The 'what', 'where' and 'when' questions defining the human are such coordinate gravity points that offer cognitive and affective horizons for our world. As such, this aesthetic-epistemological production is what Pettman is after – something also indicated by his use of the term 'media machines' in the book's subtitle.

Pettman's concept of the media machine is mobilized as a way to grasp the effectiveness of various theoretical and cultural expressions used to frame the human–animal binary. Indeed, through close readings of such media products as *The Grizzly Man*, Nine Inch Nail lyrics, and more, Pettman explores what actions and reactions happen around the human–animal/human–inhuman boundary through the negotiation of its borders – something that compares to the ways in which, in *The Open*, Agamben mapped the intertwining of inclusion/exclusion as the operational logic of the anthropological machine. Yet, the border between human and animal is very much a fuzzy one, as *Human Error* shows by engaging such daring

perspectives as that of zoophilia. We humans do a lot of things with animals that cross categories. This suggests a need for other kinds of ethics as well – ones that take into account the emotional, affective, intellectual and other practices of being/becoming with animals, whether acceptable or not; an ethics that could account for the nonhuman as already intertwined with our cognitive and affective worlds. Pettman's perspective identifies the anthropological machine as operating primarily in two modes of the 'ancient' and the 'modern' – humanizing the animal, and animalizing the human, respectively. Pettman's own version is, however, the 'postmodern version of the machine, in the sense that it has simultaneously enabled or adapted to the exponential expansion and intensification of the Spectacle or Simulacrum of the last sixty years or so.'

In this way, the 'media machine' becomes a way to interrogate Marx's concept of species-being. As Pettman puts it, referring to media machines and anthropological machines:

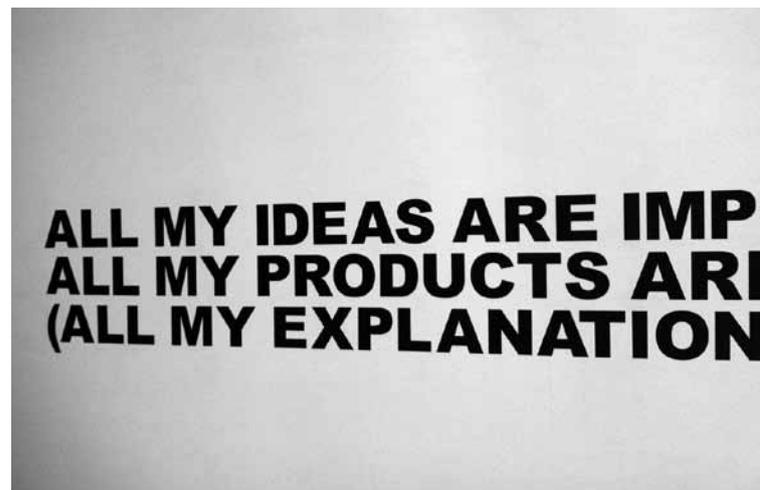
These machines, considered both in the abstract sense and in the particular medium of their material, create a great deal of friction in the effort to regulate 'us' from 'them' from the 'it'. Sparks fly and smoke billows out as the gears and circuits attempt to process the contradictions that emerge with each passing year, as technics evolves and distinctions between creatures dissolve, thanks to the pressure of extinction and the advances of biotechnology.

There are not, however, many sparks or circuits actually addressed under this term, 'media machine', which instead remains more metaphorical in *The Human Error*. For a more mediatic definition of such a machine we need to wait until the conclusion where Pettman notes something that could have been a starting point: that we perhaps need to account for the 'medialogical machine' as one key instance of Agamben's anthropological machine in the age of technical media; in other words, that media machines already record both the human/animal relations and themselves, acting as an inscription surface for a machinic anthropology. Certainly, that would have been the more Germanic – in the sense of that German media theory developed by such writers as Kittler, Wolfgang Ernst, even Siegfried Zielinski – way of understanding the role of media (cinema, recording technologies, archives) as part of the epistemology of modernity.

In the examples that he uses, it is clear that, for Pettman, the media machine relates most obviously to visual culture, and not so much to the machinic apparatuses in the sense, for instance, that Friedrich Kittler has outlined in relation to the birth of the

'So-Called-Man' (perhaps another alternate way in which to understand the anthropological machine as more literally born of the technological machines of modernization) – although, to be fair, beyond visual culture, other interesting examples are discussed by Pettman, for instance in Chapter 3, 'After the Beep', where he discusses answering machines, voice and the philosophical questions raised by response, automation and recording technologies.

Throughout *The Human Error*, what is being continuously addressed, but from rather different directions,



are the various symbolic and material processes of an exploitation of animal intensities. The chapter that most clearly addresses this political economy of animal-human relations is Chapter 4, 'The War on Terra', also the longest in the book, and, at least to this reader, the most successful one in carving out various contexts of material agency that are connected to a wider political economy of non-humans (even if it actually approaches this in part via discussions of such examples as Steven Soderbergh's 2009 film *The Girlfriend Experience*). In fact, the book includes various perspectives that function as more independent takes on the book's topic. Pettman is excellent at really working through the details of the complexity of the human-animal relation, and offers fine readings of some of the major debates in animal ethics and the philosophy of non-humans. This, however, begs the question of human variety itself, and how the constitutive human versus non-human division should include the various biopolitical gestures of mapping and categorizing humans too. Hence, when it is argued that 'We play the role of Adam, naming and sorting all the other creatures and not allowing anything else to label us', this does not acknowledge the amount of different mappings of human capacities to be found historically. In modern contexts, this could be addressed, for instance, in the meticulous laboratory work of nineteenth-century

experimental psychology – and a whole plethora of practices ever since – exploring how we perceive, feel, relate, socialize and think, and how that data has been part and parcel of various biopolitical regimes from anthropology to modern social network data mining. In other words, Adam and Eve are constantly being mapped and named themselves, and in various different political, ethnic and gendered ways.

Pettmann mobilizes a whole zoo of philosophical arguments that articulate the shifting definitions of the (non) human in various cultural practices and



texts (though he noticeably fails to take on board the influential feminist perspectives of, for instance, Rosi Braidotti or Elizabeth Grosz), and, overall, *The Human Error* makes for an inspiring and entertaining read. Pettman's style of writing weaves together a number of key philosophical debates with analyses of popular culture – although I am not even sure that 'popular culture' quite covers all of his discussions, as with the great example of fish porn:

Swiss scientists have discovered that male sticklebacks ejaculate more sperm if first stimulated by a 'soft porn' film featuring 'virtual' flirting fish. The University of Fribourg researchers believe the fish porn simulates conditions in the wild where mating male sticklebacks ejaculate more if they are threatened by other finned Romeos swimming nearby.... Researchers showed 17 male sticklebacks (in separate tanks) two films using computer-animated fish: one a 'sexy' courting film; the other of a male caring for his brood. After each stickleback had watched one film for a couple of minutes, a female was put in the tank to spawn. Each fish ejaculated more sperm over the eggs if they had seen the fish 'porn' film.

Pettman summons a posthuman cosmogony, which discusses the materiality of living as well as non-organic life. Twentieth-century philosophy is indeed a whole zoo, filled with various animals from horses

and cows to ticks and praying mantises. Such animal agencies are, as *The Human Error* shows, often where we should start our theoretical inquiry.

Jussi Parikka

What you make it

Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2010. 240 pp., £27.50 hb., £17.50 pb., 978 0 23114 548 0 hb., 978 0 23114 549 7 pb.

The centrality of 'life' to contemporary theory – from the misery of Agamben's 'bare life' to the prodigality of post-Deleuzean vitalism – is self-evident. The very protean qualities imputed to life by the various strands of neo-vitalism bleed into their own discourses, and the promiscuity of productive 'life' begins to strain conceptual boundaries, if not credulity. The importance of Donna V. Jones's intervention is not simply that it tries to take the measure of vitalism, but that it places the history of cultural vitalism in its fraught dialogue with questions of racial discourse. What she traces is the tense ambiguity of vitalism, at once imbricated with discourses of racism and anti-Semitism and yet engaged with as a critical resource by the poets and thinkers of *négritude*, Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire. The equivocal fortunes of *Lebensphilosophie* in the discourse of 'race' recast the contemporary valorization of 'life' as critical operator.

Crucial to this study is the sense of the perpetual *attraction* of cultural vitalism as a discourse of resistance to the 'deadening' of cultural and political forms. Jones summarizes how, in this discourse, life is a tribunal to judge whether cultural and political forms serve it or frustrate it; how vitalism also engages a realist epistemology of life, as it can be known or intuited; and, finally, how it underwrites a personal ethic of affirmation. These are the familiar contours of vitalism from Bergson to contemporary theoretical rearticulations. What Jones is concerned with is the dangerous link between this discourse and racial life-mysticism, which is predicated on the dynamization of the racial spirit, the biologization of the will to power, and a 'deep holism' in the understanding of historical forms. The profound ambivalence of cultural vitalism as a project of resistance is thereby revealed. This is particularly the case in *négritude*, which in its reversal of the tropes of racial classification risks a reactive

counter-racism, valorizing 'African culture' (treated as a whole) as an anti-intellectual and vital counter to Western rationalism.

One of the signal achievements of Jones's work is a broader critical mapping of the discourse of vitalism and its particular forms. This offers a series of valuable insights. For example, Jones notes that, for all its claims to affirmation, vitalism is a reactive discourse, dependent on resisting the mechanical and mechanistic. In fact it operates as a 'negation of the negation', turning from the mechanical 'crust' to recover the occluded and sedimented forces of life. We can take Jones's argument further and suggest this is the reason why vitalism so often displays an animosity to critique, which it condemns as 'reactive' and 'negative', and also why it so easily seems to slip into its place. In fact, Jones suggests that vitalist traces remain within some unlikely places in contemporary theory and critique. Taking the case of Pierre Bourdieu, she remarks that we could reinterpret his analysis of the fixations and constraints of the *habitus* as the routine of a Bergsonian comic, poking fun at the mechanical nature of class society. Perhaps the extension of this argument to Bourdieu's *Homo academicus* might offer scope for a form of observational comedy with a rather niche market.

The book is also careful to consider both celebratory and critical voices, even extending to the usually, and unfairly, anathematized *Destruction of Reason* (1952) by Lukács. In tracking critiques by Lukács and Horkheimer, and celebrations by Deleuze, Jones strives to be judicious and fair in her assessments. While this avoids the often shrill polemical tone that can characterize debates on vitalism, it sometimes makes the work a little uneven in tone, as each option is carefully weighed and the good (and bad) seen in all. The book sometimes also has a tendency to over-quotation, which occludes the train of argument. A concluding sense of ambivalence, in her discussion of Deleuze's vitalism, might well be seen to characterize the book as a whole.

In the final chapter's discussion of *négritude* this critical balance and sense of ambivalence are put under some pressure. While Jones is no doubt successful in establishing the Bergsonian provenance of the work of Senghor and Césaire, her rehabilitation of the critical value of *négritude* is less successful. Certainly she rightly has little sympathy with the Catholic corporatism Senghor promoted under the name of 'African socialism'. She is more successful in suggesting that *négritude* is not simply anti-intellectual, but operates as a critique of Western rationalism, brought into crisis by the First World War and the financial crisis of 1929. In

particular, her argument that the recovery of 'primitive worldviews' speaks to 'modern entanglements' with the fetish form of the commodity offers a promising analytic in which to view the 'attraction' of vitalism.

Jones offers a more robust defence of the work of Aimé Césaire, suggesting its Nietzschean elements cut against the grain of the potential reification of 'life' as counter-discourse. In her account *négritude* becomes a process of tracking a positive or vital difference that opens not to a Romantic return to a pristine African identity, but to a rupture that opens to plural black identities. The sense of the necessity of *négritude* as a discourse of overturning is convincing, but this does not answer fully the political problems, nor consider the other competing materialist discourses of anti-racism that focus on exploitation and labour.

In terms of the issues raised by this historical analysis for contemporary theoretical articulations of vitalism, Jones suggests new critical pathways. It is surprising that she does not mention Peter Hallward's *Absolutely Postcolonial* (2002), as Hallward's analysis of the singular and quasi-Deleuzian orientation of much postcolonial literature would suggest the persistence and modification of vitalism as a counter-discourse. Of course this would lead beyond the strict limits of this study, but it does offer testament to the persistence of vitalism in critical racial discourses. The other crucial issue that is raised throughout *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy* is the 'alternative' interrogation of vitalism through the lens of labour offered by the Marxian tradition. Here Jones's point that Césaire offers an affirmation of life against labour, due to the irredeemable nature of labour under slavery, is suggestive. Césaire's stress on the emancipation from labour could be put further into dialogue with the strains in Italian *operaismo* and *autonomia* that developed the 'refusal of work', and often the concomitant valorization of subjectivity, 'life' and living labour against capital.

This raises a final and difficult question. In the *Grundrisse* Marx notes that capitalism performs an act of theological transubstantiation of the productive power of living labour into value. The attraction of vitalism could therefore be said to lie, as Jones implies, in its valorization of 'life' against the constraints of the commodification of labour-power – a de-transubstantiation that leads to re-transubstantiation of labour into resistant life. The difficulty is that valorization risks serving the capitalist operation that treats life as a perpetually creative resource available for exploitation. In the contemporary context of the slaughtering of values, including the social

abandonment of segments of the working class into permanent unemployment, the attraction of the alternative of vitalism is increased. It promises a discourse of vital resistance to those unable to reproduce themselves through the capitalist wage-relation, as in Greece. Given the fact that such segmented abandonments are often racialized, or speak to longer histories of racial exclusion and oppression through labour, this makes Jones's work timely. Her return to the interwar crisis and birth of cultural vitalism offers an uncanny reflection of our own moment; as she notes, 'Today, an exuberant politics of life, based on a Promethean embrace of new technologies and the insubordination of life itself, is accompanied by an uncanny theopolitics and cultural anxieties about death and decline.' What this suggests is that any attempt to construct a critique of vitalism, or even an anti-vitalism, today will have to traverse and deconstruct the theologies of labour and life generated through the value-form of capitalism. Jones's sensitive historical reconstruction allows us, in ironically Bergsonian fashion, to find a better way to pose the problem of life.

Benjamin Noys

The right to opacity

Timothy Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2010. 240 pp., £48.95 hb., £20.95 pb., 978 0 69114 165 7 hb., 978 0 69114 166 4 pb.

'How is it possible to write conscientiously while also acknowledging the complicity of one's writing in the conditions one hopes to bring to an end?' This is the question Timothy Bewes returns to in various forms in his interesting and provocative book *The Event of Postcolonial Shame*. To explore 'shame' as an 'event of writing', Bewes discusses the works of authors, including Joseph Conrad, T.E. Lawrence, V.S. Naipaul, Nadime Gordimer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, J.M. Coetzee, Caryl Philipps and Zoë Wicomb, who have explored in their fiction, Bewes contends, the 'simultaneous impossibility and necessity of writing'. Shame, Bewes argues, must be made central to the study of postcolonial literary forms. Neither a subjective emotion nor an ethical response, shame is rather a 'dynamic that helps us to rethink a number of conceptual relations', and must be thought in 'structural rather than ethical terms'. Shame is not a problem requiring a solution, nor a theorizable concept, but

an entity from 'which the present is inseparable'. Hence, 'any critical project undertaken in the aftermath of colonialism' must take shame as an 'object of inquiry'. For Bewes, this critical approach questions any narrative of exculpation. Instead, it opens up the possibility to address the following hypothesis: 'How might one give adequate literary form to the shame of postcolonial existence?'

Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* is the text where the relation between shame and literary form is best illuminated. To Levi, a survivor of Auschwitz, the ability to speak 'testifies to the fact that he has not experienced the full horror'. What the survivor experiences is shame not guilt, and the distinction is important. Speaking about what one witnesses – horror, humiliation – confronts one with what it means to be able to speak about that horror, that humiliation, with the knowledge that one has been spared the full horror. It is in this regard that Bewes turns to Sartre to clarify the distinction between shame and guilt: 'Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being *an* object; that is, of *recognizing myself* in this degraded, fixed and dependent being which I am for the Other.' Shame is incommensurable. Shame and pride, though, and this is an important insight, resemble each other. In shame, a narcissistic dimension may exist. Discomfort with oneself is another way to attract attention to oneself. Bewes, however, is more interested in the way in which shame is 'ontologically inseparable from the forms in which it appears'. Since colonialism and shame 'share a certain organizing assumption: the conceptual opposition of identity and difference', writing about colonialism and postcolonialism means addressing this organizing relation. Again Sartre is invoked, along of course with Frantz Fanon. Fanon was critical of Sartre's analysis of shame, which implied the bipolarity of positivity and negativity, thus reducing blackness to a dialectic. Fanon argued in *Black Skin, White Mask* that blackness was not a term in a dialectic; it had no 'value' whatsoever. Difference must not therefore be attached to the aura of positivity and negativity. The politics of postcolonial writing do not allow 'any sovereignty or privilege to perception'. Consolation is not a possibility either. The question of who is writing for whom is of course central, or, in Gayatri Spivak's famous words, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Where does the authority come from to speak of the suffering of those who cannot speak? To answer the question, one must flee from any claim of sovereignty or privilege. Writing is 'possible only as betrayal' of that ethical complexity. T.E. Lawrence and J.M. Coetzee are both,

Bewes suggests, examples of writers confronted with the problem of complicity when writing with the conditions one hopes to bring to an end.

The paradox of the impossibility and necessity of writing about the colonial and postcolonial situation has been enhanced by historical factors such as the crisis in national consciousness in Europe after the First World War, the revelations of the ‘inhumane obscenities’ after the Second World War, the movements towards decolonization, mass migrations, the increasing domination of images, and so on. These factors complicated any idea of the sovereignty of the author. But colonialism added the ‘universal betrayal’ that was inherent to it, and it is worth quoting Bewes in full about what this betrayal implies:

the betrayal of every soul by his or her place within the system; the betrayal of experience by naming, by conceptualization, by the narrative of chronological development; the betrayal of life by the separation into spheres of existence; the betrayal of freedom by its ‘realization’ or embodiment in a form that will amount to its neutralization.

At one point, quoting Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*, Bewes refers to the notion of opacity; the opacity ‘cultivated that will enable the politics of transfiguration to function under the “very noses of the overseers”’. Indeed, Bewes’s argument about shame evokes, I thought, Edouard Glissant’s claim of ‘a right to opacity’. First developed in *Caribbean Discourse*, an essay born out of a collective work done on the traces and fragments of colonialism in Martiniquan society, opacity was taken literally from the Latin *opacitas*, or a thick shadow, obscure and impenetrable; in other terms, something that does not allow the light to go through. The notion was opposed of course to transparency. Glissant thought that anyone had the right to take this thick shadow as defence, to refuse transparency. In doing so, the poet and writer were challenging the claim of a certain universalism, which was in fact the expression of a province of the world, to be able to apprehend all cultures, to think that transparency of all things was a universal right, that transparency must be a condition of all relations. To Glissant, this demand for transparency was another form of colonial betrayal. One has the right to conceal, to use strategies of detour, to express what one experiences.

At a recent colloquium on ‘human zoos’ at the Musée du Quai Branly (24–25 January 2012), the public and the speakers insisted on asking what the people photographed during these exhibitions on ‘savages’ thought. It was a repeated concern: if one could know what they had felt, what they thought, one would better

understand what occurred. It was striking, though, how much the people offered a neutral face and gaze to the photographers, devoid of emotions. They refuse to play the game of the ‘encounter’, however fraught it was. The onus of shame was upon the spectators. Their own shame, if there was shame, was an intimate event. They opposed a mask. If one has to find words to express what occurred, it concerned the Europeans, whether the spectators of these shows or contemporary critics. Bewes’s work helps us understand the ambiguous and ambivalent desire for transparency, the need to put into suspension the anchored consciousness of the ‘Western ethical subject’. By exploring shame *as an event*, Bewes has contributed thoughtfully to debates concerning postcolonialism, as well as to what Fanon called ‘a new history of man’.

Françoise Vergès

Salut, Negri!

Claudio Calia and Antonio Negri, *Antonio Negri Illustrated: Interview in Venice*, trans. Jason Francis McGimsey, Red Quill Books, Ottawa, 2011. 156 pp., £19.50 pb., 978 1 92695 813 2.

Western philosophy, like politics, began as public speech and performance – Socrates’ dialogues, Plato’s and Aristotle’s lectures, Diogenes’ lampoons – but soon settled on the written word as its primary mode of production and distribution. This was its dominant means of dissemination up to and including the twentieth century, when new media became available. Occasionally, in fits and starts, philosophers were filmed and taped, most often by their students but sometimes by professionals for broadcast (more often in Europe, where intellectuals like Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre exercised a significant influence on public opinion, than in the USA). By the end of the twentieth century, documentary films and television programmes on major thinkers became relatively common in Europe. The case of Gilles Deleuze is perhaps exemplary in this regard: in addition to his many books and articles, contemporary students can also consult commercial audio CDs of his seminars on Spinoza, Leibniz and cinema, as well as hours of video interviews that he gave following his retirement from teaching. The YouTube website has taken this tendency even further by democratizing it, permitting individuals to make broadly available non-professional video and audio recordings of a wide range of contemporary philosophers, from Giorgio Agamben to Slavoj Žižek.

What is the next media frontier for philosophy? Perhaps the graphic novel. In 1997 Martin Tom Dieck and Jens Balzer ran a comic strip entitled *Salut, Deleuze!* in the Frankfurt alternative press, and it was soon translated and published in French as well, before being collected into two volumes. Dieck and Balzer's work offers a whimsical exemplification of Deleuze's philosophy: in the first volume, the recently deceased Deleuze is ferried across the River Styx by a boatman, and on the other side he finds Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan waiting to greet him. As soon as he arrives, however, the story recommences, with Deleuze arriving at the boatman's shack on the living side and asking to be ferried across the Styx; this happens several times, each time with small differences, illustrating the repetition of difference or differential repetition that Deleuze argued was the ontological foundation of the world. Dieck and Balzer soon wrote a sequel, *Die Rückkehr von Deleuze* ('The Return of Deleuze', published in French as *Les nouvelles aventures de l'incroyable Orphée*).

But Dieck and Balzer's graphic work was a post-humous homage to Deleuze, not a new medium that the philosopher himself used. In 2009, however, the Italian artist Claudio Calia, who had previously published graphic interpretations of the Porto Marghera workers' struggles near Venice, collaborated directly with philosopher, militant and globalization theorist Antonio Negri on a graphic interview-cum-biographical sketch entitled *È primavera* ('It's Springtime'), which has recently been translated into English by Jason Francis McGimsey. The English edition is titled *Antonio Negri Illustrated: Interview in Venice*, and it offers a quick and user-friendly introduction to Negri's life and his thinking. Calia himself describes the book, self-deprecatingly though not inaccurately, as 'Antonio Negri for Dummies'. His conversations with Negri, which took place in 2007 and 2008, interweave biographical reminiscences with non-technical theoretical and political analyses, all set against the visual and historical backdrop of Negri's beloved Veneto region of Italy, including the cities of Venice and Padua, where Negri has lived and taught for most of his life.

The collaborators' decision to structure the book around a pictorial dramatization of Negri's biography is a shrewd one, because it permits them to demonstrate how his ideas emerged from active and collective militancy over several decades. In other words, it reveals the historical embodiment of those ideas, the short circuit between theory and practice that characterized the Italian radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s – Workers' Power, Autonomy, the

Movement of '77 – and that today appeals so strongly to the participants in the struggle over globalization. Negri's own remarkable global itinerary, from Padua to England to Israel to France and back, from Catholic Youth Action to a Marxism beyond Marx, from the University of Padua to prison to the Italian parliament, anticipates the unpredictable, disorienting but productive geographical and intellectual displacements of the workers and militants who today draw upon his work in order to conceptualize the potentialities of their own social and political power outside all representational forms. These are the experiences that raise the new political subject of Negri's theory, the multitude, to self-consciousness and impel it to action.

Calia's aesthetic is strongly marked by the experience of punk rock and its attendant visual styles. He draws high-contrast black-and-white images that resemble nothing so much as graffiti or street art. His human figures are often quasi-geometrical silhouettes, partially filled in with facial and bodily features, which remind the reader of Keith Haring's vibrant graffiti paintings, while his backgrounds are defined spatially by perpendicular hatching and crosshatching familiar from the daily comics pages of newspapers. (This approach produces several highly self-reflexive moments when Calia deploys his street-art style to illustrate militants in the act of painting graffiti.) Many pages include sketches of Negri's personal photographs and of well-known photojournalistic images of the Veneto workers' movement (by Tano D'Amico, among others), while one series of full-page collages incorporate headlines from workerist publications like *Rosso* that Negri founded and co-edited.

The succession of images quickly develops a syncopated rhythm: the chapters alternate between sweeping, highly charged historical and biographical panoramas, on the one hand, and still, contemplative conceptual reflections (including scenes from Negri's collaboration with Raffaella Battaglini on the stage play *Settanta*, 'Seventies'), on the other. Negri's philosophical ideas are outlined in short, comparatively dense verbal bursts between reminiscences; this approach cannot fully convey the originality and utility of those ideas, but it communicates their materiality and passion quite well (and Calia is careful to provide references to Negri's writings where interested readers can find more comprehensive expositions of those ideas). The book manages to succeed both as a primer for Negri's complex thinking and as a gripping graphic narrative of the wild ride he's had over a half-century of creativity, provocation, struggle and reflection.

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