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Walter Benjamin, *Early Writings, 1910–1917*, trans. and intro. Howard Eiland, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2011. 320 pp., £20.95 hb., 9 780 67404 993 2.

This translated collection of forty-five of Benjamin's early writings begins with his first published work, a poem that appeared pseudonymously just before his eighteenth birthday, and follows the tempestuous period of his immersion in and break from the Youth Movement, before drawing to a close with the poetic commentaries of a 25-year-old on the verge of marriage, fatherhood and a short but productive academic spell. There is grist for the mill of the cynic here. About a fifth of these translations have already appeared in *Selected Writings*, Volume 1: 1913–1926, whose chronological span overlaps that of the *Early Writings, 1910–1917* by five years. Most of the significant works from this period of Benjamin's studies in Berlin, Freiburg and Munich are therefore already available to the anglophone reader. Although the important exclusion from the *Selected Writings* of Benjamin's 1915 dialogue on 'The Rainbow' – discovered by Giorgio Agamben in 1977 – and its associated fragment has been rectified here, these have been previously translated in the appendix to Peter Fenves's recent *The Messianic Reduction* (reviewed by Andrew McGettigan in *RP* 168). This arouses the suspicion that further delving into the early archive might perhaps only serve the interests of Harvard University Press's profits, the aura of biographical completeness, or the strategic 'de-Marxification' of Benjamin's thought.

Why else, then, the strange overlap given the differentiation of the *Early Writings* from the *Selected Writings*? An explanation for this editorial decision might be found in Benjamin's own claim, in correspondence from the beginning of 1918, that the 'six years ... since I left school have constituted an epoch, lived through at a monstrous tempo', which had ended with the commencement of his doctoral studies on Kant at the University of Bern. Admittedly such a span is most properly designated by the years 1912–1917, but it is significant that the work collected in the *Early Writings* might thus be said to frame a third, overlapping epoch to be added to the self-proclaimed and themselves overlapping 'Germanistic' and 'Parisian' production cycles (defined in relation to the *Origin of German Trauerspiel* and the uncompleted *Arcades Project*). Such a claim challenges Howard Caygill's

designation, in *The Colour of Experience*, of this first epoch as *internal* to the 'Germanistic' phase. Notably, however, Caygill affords no place in his own categorization of the genres that constitute the latter two production cycles (short reviews, academic treatises, major critical essays) for the works from this epoch. For the texts collected here are mainly expressionist poetic pieces published under the Latin pseudonym Ardor in the journal of the student group *Anfang* and short polemical addresses on education reform (whose form is derived from the speeches given in the student 'talking-houses'), which appeared in pamphlets associated with the student movement and, after Benjamin's break from *Anfang*, in literary journals such as *Der Neuer Merkur* and *Die Argonauten*.

That these texts delineate a distinct epoch in the life of their author is unquestionable; judged in terms of immediate public influence (terms Benjamin himself would not endorse), it perhaps constitutes the most successful period of Benjamin's career. Nor, unless we wish to contradict the very idea of youth that Benjamin advances here, can we dismiss these works as mere juvenilia (hence the inappropriateness of originally excluding them from the *Selected Writings* only to reincorporate them differentiated as 'early' writings). The ultimate test of such a claim, however, lies in what emerges from this reconfiguration of Benjamin's *œuvre* and to what extent this facilitates the interests of the 'de-Marxification' to which Benjamin's work has so often been editorially subjected.

The idea under which this epoch of Benjamin's life is to be assembled is that of *Youth*. It is an epoch marked above all by the personal and intellectual influence of the educational reformer Gustav Wyneken. Benjamin's philosophical interests first bloom under Wyneken's gaze whilst schooling at Haubinda in 1905. When he publicly denounces his mentor a decade later, he does so in order to wrest from Wyneken's grasp the living legacy of his idea. It is one founded philosophically on Wyneken's blend of an Idealism of Spirit with a Nietzschean metaphysics of Life, and socially on the 'Youth Culture' Wyneken promoted first at Haubinda and then at the Free School Community in Wickersdorf. This concept of 'Youth Culture' is in part inspired

by the philosophy of history contained in the second of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*, a series of essays that emerged from the unpublished lectures on 'The Future of Our Educational Institutions' that Nietzsche gave in 1872, having taken up his professorial position at Basle. Here, Nietzsche attacks the 'historical culture' that has sprung from Hegel as one which paralyses the natural philosophical impulse of the young, 'from which alone, as a fruitful soil, a deep and noble culture can grow forth'. Against this, in 'The Use and Abuse of History for Life', Nietzsche declares his 'trust in youth that has brought me on the right road in forcing from me a protest against historical education, and a demand that man must learn to live, above all, and only use history in the service of the life that he has learned to live'. Benjamin was also profoundly influenced by Wyneken's insistence that youth must actively create its own culture, one that positively fills in the hollowed-out time between childhood and adulthood, in order to transform spiritually the bourgeois institutions of society that it inherits. In numerous addresses to youth collected in this volume, this idea is deployed to critique existing pedagogical practices. 'School Reform: A Cultural Movement' appeared in a 1912 pamphlet produced by one of Wyneken's 'School Reform Units' that Benjamin helped organize at Freiburg University, 10,000 copies of which were distributed to universities throughout Germany. By 1913 Benjamin held a leading role in the *Anfang* movement, producing its journal and organizing public speakers, a responsibility which brought him into personal contact with intellectual figures such as Buber and Klages. At its height, in 1914, the journal had 1,000 subscribers and the movement 3,000 members (for a more detailed discussion, see P.L. Utley's 'Radical Youth: Generational Conflict in the *Anfang* Movement').

Benjamin's report on the First Free German Youth Congress held at Mount Meissner in October 1913, which collected together the different elements of the nascent German Youth Movement, encapsulates what happened next:

A speaker concluded: '...with a salute to freedom and German nationality!' A voice: 'And to youth!' The speaker hastily corrected himself: 'And to youth!'

There was worse. When the prizes for sport were being awarded, the name Isaacsohn was announced. Laughter rang out from a minority.

In February 1914 Benjamin was elected president of the Free Students' Association of Berlin University, a post he held until the outbreak of the First World War in August. But the chauvinistic, nationalistic and anti-

Semitic forces that manifested themselves on 'High Meissner' – and against which Benjamin's ideals of youth were pitted – tore the fragile movement apart. *Anfang* was wrongly identified as a mouthpiece for Wyneken (whose views were typically less left-wing and liberal than those of the journal's contributors), and the educationalist was denounced by the Bavarian minister of culture for the right-wing Catholic 'Centre Party'. Similar accusations were made in the Prussian and Baden parliaments. In Bavaria, *Der Anfang* was banned and the 'talking-rooms' closed. Wyneken was expelled from the Free German Youth and *Anfang* split into factions, intent either on turning to direct political agitation or, in the case of Benjamin's more literary circle, withdrawing from the compromise of politics in order to secure a spiritual commitment to 'unlimited honesty'.

The outbreak of war that summer sent a generation of young men to be slaughtered at the front. Several members of Benjamin's circle committed suicide, including Fritz Heinle and Rika Seligson. It is difficult to overestimate the significance of this experience for Benjamin. 'Only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope', Benjamin wrote in the conclusion to his essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, meaning: hope is never for ourselves, the living, but only for the dead. As Howard Eiland writes in his introduction to the *Early Writings*:

After this event, Benjamin effectively ceased his student activism – in a letter two months later, he writes of the need for a 'harder, purer, more invisible radicalism' – and he turned away from most of his comrades in the youth movement, including his former mentor, Gustav Wyneken, whom he denounced, in a letter of March 9, 1915, for his public support of the German war effort.

Did Benjamin simultaneously renounce his youthful philosophy? In 'Dornröschen' from 1911, in which Benjamin announced his commitment to the Youth Movement, 'Youth ... is the Sleeping Beauty who slumbers and has no inkling of the prince who approaches to set her free. And to bring about the awakening of youth, its participation in the struggle going on around it, is precisely the goal to which our journal aims to contribute.' It is an image of awakening Benjamin returned to in each of his production cycles. In the secret preface to the *Trauerspiel* book, he recast himself as the cook whose violence inadvertently awakens the slumbering truth of the plays, so rescuing them from the approaching prince of academic scholarship ('I would like to tell the story of Sleeping Beauty a second time ... The cook woke her up when

he gave the scullery boy a box on the ear which, resounding from the pent-up force of so many years, echoed through the palace'). Similarly, the *Arcades Project* was originally conceived as a 'Dialectical Fairy-Tale', a historical version of Sleeping Beauty, predicated on a theory of collective awakening. Indeed, the earliest methodology for the *Arcades Project* is expounded in relation to the dream-configurations of each epoch that constitute 'a generation's experience of youth'. The task of childhood here is to recognize the new configurations of nature and technology by bringing them into symbolic space. Benjamin is drawing on the pedagogical principles he had expounded nearly two decades earlier: 'The school receives a generation ... full of images, which it brings with it from the land of the future'; 'the most urgent requirement of modern pedagogy is to create space for the emergent culture'. Here, then, the radical pedagogical impetus of Benjamin's early metaphysics of Youth provides the philosophical framework for his rethinking of the relationship between historical materialism and revolutionary communism.

Benjamin's later assertion that this dialectics of dream and awakening was no longer a viable model responded in turn to Adorno's insistence that this was precisely because it remained immersed within and hence could not escape from the utopian dimension of the dream (a charge Benjamin himself had directed against Surrealism). Against this, Eiland's introduction insists that 'none of the "romantic" motifs ... or the philosophical principles informing them, are absent from the later work', that there are 'virtually no false steps in the youth writings', and so the 'tendency among some critics to oppose Benjamin's early "idealism" to his later "materialism" is misleading'. This claim needs to be interrogated. For it to hold true, an emphasis would have to be placed not on Adorno's insistence that everything undialectical about the construction of the dialectical image in the early drafts of the *Arcades* revolves around the motto 'Each epoch dreams the one to follow', but his insistence that this problematically immanent version of the dialectical image requires a *theological* corrective of the kind given its fullest explication in Benjamin's early *Trauerspiel* book.

The theory of dreaming must be brought back into conjunction with the concept of ruination developed there. But even in Benjamin's earliest writings, the 'romantic' motifs Eiland speaks of were (and increasingly so from 1913 onwards) always distinguished from a 'false' or 'school' romanticism through the development of nihilistic 'new' and 'sober' romanticism. According to the false romanticism, 'we were

supposed to see something extraordinary in everything infinitely particular, instead of in the development of the human being, in the history of humanity. Thus, one produces an unpolitical youth, eternally limited to art, literature, and experiences of love.' Art becomes a narcotic and spirit is reduced to a stimulant.



Opposed to this is 'the romantic *will* to action' which 'would recognize spiritual connections, the history of labour, and which would transform this recognition into living experience so that, in the most unromantic and sober way, one might act in accordance with it'. For Benjamin, this sober romanticism places youth in the same position as the early Christian Quietists, 'to whom the world likewise appeared to be so utterly overflowing with the sacred – which could arise in each and all – that it deprived them of the power to speak and act.... And yet its boundless scepticism (which is nothing other than boundless trust) compels it to love the struggle [in which] the figure of the sacred reveals itself.' This underpins the messianic dimension of Benjamin's romanticism that Adorno alludes to in his reference to the theological. Hence, when he promotes Rudolf Pannwitz's quasi-religious definition of education as the 'propagation of spiritual values' this should not be misunderstood as an idealist individualism, but as related to the development of an 'honest socialism' which recognizes the natural richness and abundance of individuals as more than *merely* socially determined. One pedagogical consequence of this claim is the belief that 'personality' is not the goal of education, but its starting point. But it also informs Benjamin's focus, in both his early and later writings, on winning over the intellectuals or *literati* to the revolutionary cause, as a 'class' which bears 'the precipitous living contradiction to the social inertia of our time' as the 'deepest abasement to which the modern individual, punished with the loss of social possibilities, must submit': 'They want to be the honest ones, want to give shape to their artistic enthusiasm, their "love of the most distant" (to speak with Nietzsche), but society repudiates them.'

A possible danger of this notion of ethical solitude as a precondition of community in Benjamin's early writings is that it threatens to segue into the vulgar kind of Levinasian communitarianism so popular recently. From the late 1920s onwards, the recontextualizing of this pedagogic function within a historical materialist perspective framed by communism comes to invest technology with a collective educative function, demanding a liberation of the technological means of production as a precondition for redemption. Eiland's claim that there are 'virtually no false steps in the youth writings' therefore downplays the extent to which this resituating involves more than a shift in *aesthetic* attitude towards cinematic montage. ('An exception', Eiland writes, 'is the attitude toward cinema in 1913.... The montage aesthetics emerges with *One-Way Street*, which was begun in 1923.') Given the radical implications of this materialist refunctioning of pedagogy, it remains to consider what Benjamin's early critical pedagogy can teach us in the context of the present crisis in education. As Eiland notes, the conception of the university that emerges from this early liberalism is that of

an open-ended working ideal that is the true seat of authority and the basis of any genuine vocation for learning and teaching.... And it was the role of the students, in their propensity for both uncompromising idealism and radical doubt, to constitute an intellectual vanguard in the learning community: to keep alive a space for questioning, for recollection of the underlying crisis of modernity, and in this way to foster 'the culture of conversation', thereby

preventing the degeneration of learning into a mere accumulation of information and making all study in a fundamental sense philosophical.

Yet Benjamin is also insistent that this metaphysical claim must be distinguished from any empirical reduction of moral education into 'a peculiar sort of civic – instead of moral – education'. This 'deshumanized humanism' refuses to look the Greek world from which its classical liberalism takes inspiration fully in the face: 'that woman-despising and man-loving Greece of Pericles, aristocratic, with slavery, with the dark myths of Aeschylus' that Nietzsche had revealed. And although Benjamin will later insist that the impoverishment of bourgeois education theory demands a confrontation with 'the Marxist dialectical anthropology of the proletarian child', the target of his scorn remained consistent across his work: bourgeois education functions to mediate between the psychological hypostatization of an absolute childhood or youth and the ethical one of an absolute citizenship, tricked out with the attributes of idealist philosophy.

In their conjuncture with our fundamentally pedagogical moment of recognizability, the writing in this collection therefore reconfigures the afterlife of Benjamin's philosophy anew. Some of the clunkiness of the earlier English translations has been smoothed over, the scholarly apparatus in the footnotes substantially expanded, and – despite my specific reservations above – Eiland's introduction is exemplary in the clarity of its historical and philosophical contextualization.

Matthew Charles

You are all proletarians

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Towards a New Manifesto*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Verso, London and New York, 2011. 128 pp. £9.99 hb., 978 1 84467 819 8.

According to J.M. Bernstein, 'the point of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was to explain why the dialectic of class had come to a standstill.' The 'conflictual dialectic of proletariat and bourgeoisie', Bernstein writes, 'is unavailable for interpretive purposes'. It bears noting that this is the only appearance of the term 'class conflict' in the 428 pages of *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* (2004). Bernstein's point is made again by Simon Jarvis in the same volume when he writes that the 'concept of class ... designates not a real entity but a real illusion'. 'There is', he insists, 'no such thing as a "class"', because to 'classify a diverse group of

people under a single concept inevitably misleadingly identifies them'.

What real or potential use could emerge from this rereading of Marx? At stake is the sea change in Marxist analysis that Adorno initiated when, in *Negative Dialectics*, he criticized the basic Marxist tenet that 'economics has priority over domination; domination may not be deduced otherwise than economically'. That domination exists *without private property* was presumed to point to a more basic fact about civilization than any economic analysis could explain. For Adorno the fact that 'human beings ...

are always being humiliated' assumed absolute priority over any economic analysis. At issue is nothing less than a vision of Marxism as an analysis of humiliation, of shame, not exploitation.

The profound stakes of Adorno and Horkheimer's influential revision of Marxism emerges in the new translation of their dialogue *Towards a New Manifesto*. The title is an inspired misnomer; it is hard to see how 'Discussion on Theory and Praxis' – the original title in Horkheimer's *Nachlass* – would attract any but the most dedicated readers. But what makes the brief volume – 113 generously spaced pages – so engaging, and what partially legitimates the English title, is the space devoted to a reassessment of key Marxist concepts. We should 'write a manifesto that will do justice to the current situation', Adorno says, and adds a surprising addendum: it should be 'a strictly Leninist manifesto'. Despite Adorno's thoroughgoing use of Marxist terminology, his explicit engagement with Marx is slim (roughly four essays in his extensive body of writing are devoted to the problem of class analysis). In the twelve discussions that make up *Towards a New Manifesto* nearly half revolve around the problem of work and 'political concreteness'. But as Adorno and Horkheimer make clear, their theory 'no longer has anything in common with Marx, with the most advanced class consciousness; our thoughts are no longer a function of the proletariat'.

Horkheimer formulates the basic problem for any contemporary Marxism: 'in whose interest do we write, now that there is no longer a party and the revolution has become such an unlikely prospect?' Horkheimer's answer is striking and central to more or less all Frankfurt School analyses: class struggle has shifted to the superstructure: 'It is in language that the idea that all should be well can be articulated.' More tersely still: 'All hope lies in thought.' To which Adorno replies: 'In Marx language plays no role, he is a positivist.' It is Kant, rather than Marx, who saw how 'the concept of freedom ... can be grasped only in relation to the constitution of mankind as a whole'. That *language* retains in itself the universal claims denied by the particular interests of individuals stands at the foundation of Adorno's lifelong commitment to the work of art as a form of dialectical overcoming, through a mode of mimetic exacerbation, of capitalist contradictions. Works of art can perform a kind of 'second reflection' of capitalist modes of production. Put another way, the political power of the work of art is fully predicated on the *unreflective* modes of work embodied in wage labour. Horkheimer clarifies the problem: 'Thesis: nowadays we have enough by way

of productive forces; it is obvious that we could supply the entire world with goods and could then attempt to abolish work as a necessity for human beings.' He later puts it in more clearly Marxist terms: 'classes must be abolished because the time is ripe for it, the forces of production are strong enough.'

For Adorno, however, this new prospect for freedom is in fact a path to 'catastrophe'. Whenever workers are given 'free time' they are discovered to be 'obsessively repeating the rituals of the efforts that have been demanded of them'. Adorno describes all the newly won freedoms, the sense that 'everything seems to be improving', as 'a kind of false classless society'. The 'perfect classless society' is 'in reality the very opposite'. Horkheimer blasts back: 'That's too reactionary.' But Adorno is unrelenting: 'this entire question of spare time is so unfortunate' because 'people unconsciously mimic the work process'. What could it mean to say 'people', not owners or workers, mime the work process at home? Adorno further broadens the point when he explains how 'the appeal to class won't work any more, since today [we] are really all proletarians'. Owner *and* worker mime labour in their 'relaxed' moments. The new manifesto is tailored to bourgeois and proletarian alike.



At its worst, Adorno and Horkheimer's account of identity thinking is blandly reductive: 'All [that self-determination] means [in German idealism] is that the work my master formerly ordered me to do is the same as the work I now seek to carry out of my own free will'; Kant's 'transcendental apperception: labour made absolute'. And speaking of exchange value: 'People like advertisements. They do what the ads tell them and they know that they are doing so.' Along this sweeping line of thought Horkheimer remarks that 'The USA is the country of argument.' Adorno picks up the (banal) idea – 'Argument is consistently bourgeois' – but goes on to confuse the matter when he also insists that the 'mistrust of argument is at bottom what has inspired

the Husserls and Heideggers' and their fall into 'pure irrationalism'.

Horkheimer, the more pessimistic and less historicist of the two, suggests 'we have to reject both Marxism and ontology'. Or, rather, it is the *ontological* and *theological* roots of Marxism – a 'faith in progress' (my emphasis), something Adorno suggests when he speaks of 'a new political authority [that] will emerge' at the limits of despair (my emphasis) – that Horkheimer rejects. Horkheimer blanches, for instance, at Adorno's literalist attempts to identify theory and practice. 'Even the most rarefied form of mental activity contains an element of the practical', Adorno contends. There's no difference, he says, between 'thinking' and 'eating roast goose'. Horkheimer rejects the identification and observes how thinking 'must have a connection to a world set to rights' and must be 'targeting true practice'. Yet, although Horkheimer is far more pessimistic than Adorno – 'today we have to declare ourselves defeatists ... There is nothing we can do ... basically we cannot bring about change' – he is also more practical. He places his diminishing hopes on a 'more or less worn-out version of the American system'; 'planning', he suggests, 'would offer the best prospect'. This view of planning is broadly redistributive: 'Automation. We should take greater care to help others, to export the right goods to the right people, to seek cures for the sick.' In this vein, Horkheimer announces the second thesis of the new manifesto: 'If there is so much affluence ... we must give to those who have nothing.' But this is a fleeting thought within the general tenor of the manifesto, and it stands in tension with his more determined insistence on 'the notion of difference'. He is 'in favour of the chaotic'; one 'should think differently and act differently'. But even here Horkheimer's scruples are evident. He fears that the use of vague words like 'change' and 'otherness' are simply 'metaphysical gilding for bourgeois desires' and prefers instead the 'animal qualities' of 'a not-too-strenuous life, having enough to eat, not having to work from morning to night'.

The conversations conclude on a brief discussion of 'Individualism'. It is here, in the most concise terms, that the larger problems of the manifesto project are revealed. It was Marx's mistake, Horkheimer declares, to be 'concerned to ensure that all men would be equal! Rather than equal, Horkheimer affirms that 'human beings should be subtly *different*' (my emphasis). Adorno picks up the thought, insisting that 'Marx was too harmless'; 'he did not concern himself with subjectivity'. And it is subjectivity or 'difference' that lies at the centre of the new manifesto. Adorno's most

surprising assertion, and his most misguided, appears with his concluding thought. The 'idea that people are products of society down to the innermost fibre of their being' was dismissed by Marx as 'milieu theory'. The future of Marxism lies in the reinstatement of this idea 'first articulated by Lenin'. The battle that Marx fought against 'milieu theory' was against the idea that *culture* determined *consciousness*. His great achievement was to see that economics was *not a matter of culture but of exploitation*. Which is to say Adorno's emphasis on domination and difference (how bourgeois culture shapes being), rather than exploitation and the proletariat, is finally pre-Marxist in orientation. Post-Marxism is pre-Marxism redux.

Todd Cronan

Technoreformism

Bernard Stiegler, *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*, trans. Daniel Ross, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011. 200 pp., £55.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 0 74564 809 5 hb., 978 0 74564 810 1 pb.

Bernard Stiegler's work addresses the relationship between philosophy, technology and culture. This combination has proved popular, and has been furthered by Stiegler's impressive output: he has produced no fewer than thirty books in the last two decades, eight of which have been translated into English. His celebrated *Technics and Time* is still growing – a fourth volume is forthcoming – and *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies* is the first part of another such series (the book was first published in France in 2004; its two currently untranslated companion volumes appeared in 2006). The latter series is collectively titled *Disbelief and Discredit*, and it addresses a familiar problematic – the degree to which technology has assisted capitalism in moulding and degrading culture – but it sets those issues within the framework of Stiegler's philosophy, thus offering a novel perspective upon them. Stiegler's claims are, however, marked by an effectively classless view of capitalism that undermines the book's critical analysis, and that leads him, ultimately, to present a set of very questionable political prescriptions.

This is a dense book, and it assumes that its readers are already familiar with its author's work. Stiegler relies throughout on terms and concepts that he has developed in earlier texts, and the book's explanatory endnotes frequently direct readers towards other elements of his impressive *œuvre*. In consequence,

those anglophone readers seeking an overview of his position might turn instead to his *For a New Critique of Political Economy* (2010): a book that rehearses the primary themes of *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*, but that does so with greater concision, exposition and clarity. Nonetheless when stripped of their baroque terminology, Stiegler's arguments are in essence quite simple: capitalism's continual need to engender new demands and markets has led to the rationalization of consumer desire, impoverishing the latter; this tendency has been furthered by the increasing digitization of technology, which lends itself to the ever more minute calculation and control of the everyday, and which has fostered a politically disabling nihilism, and a loss of faith in the notions of community and collective identity that society requires if it is to be steered away from economic and environmental disaster. Stiegler, however, maintains that an alternative social order is possible, and that the contemporary confluence of economics, technology and culture can be redirected towards a better future.

Framed in this way, the book's contentions echo those of many Marxist writers. For example, Negri and the Situationists come to mind when Stiegler talks of the cybernetic control of desire and the redirection of society's technological capacities; his comments on the culture industries also frequently recall Adorno and Horkheimer. Stiegler's conclusions do, however, differ significantly from those of what might broadly be termed Marxism, as he ultimately takes an essentially reformist perspective. The question thus arises as to whether the philosophical framework with which he handles these issues necessarily lends itself to such a view.

Stiegler employs a model of cultural memory based around what he calls primary, secondary and tertiary modes of retention: primary retention corresponds to the experience of the passage of time, secondary retention to memory, and tertiary retention to the externalization of memory and experience in technical and cultural forms. Borrowing from Simondon he claims that those forms shape and are shaped by society's processes of 'psychic and collective individuation', and, drawing on Derrida, terms the system of techniques by which societies order and reproduce those forms 'grammatization'. The problematic sketched above is located within this model as follows: contemporary tertiary retention and the individuation processes enacted through it have become dominated by a harmful mode of grammatization fostered by consumerism's rationalization of desire; this has rendered technology and culture a means of cybernetic control, and has thereby

arrested the individuation process. However, as grammatization is an inevitable aspect of any society, and as no technology is inherently harmful, Stiegler contends that one should not abstractly reject industrial capitalism: instead, it needs to be redirected towards forms that will be less damaging to society's processes of individuation.

This in itself may not be incompatible with Marxism; one could perhaps propose that Marx himself thought it possible to alter his society's individuation process by changing its system of grammatization. Yet Stiegler maintains that grammatization should be understood as a Derridean *pharmakon* – as something that can be both poison and cure – and as our contemporary mode of grammatization is capitalism, Stiegler argues that our politics should aim at rendering capitalism itself the cure to our ills. We should thus attempt instead to give it a cultural 'jumpstart' (*sursaut*): to kick it into a different, more satisfactory gear, and thereby to re-initiate its processes of collective individuation. Consequently, whilst warning of the dangers of a revolution *against* capitalism (its demise would 'inevitably result both in innumerable wars that would immediately become global, and in immense chaos, if not indeed in the disappearance of the human species'), Stiegler in effect advocates a revolution *of* capitalism.

This position is further supported by his Nietzschean complaints about oppositional political perspectives. The cynicism and loss of faith said to characterize the malaise of contemporary decadence are described as a form of *ressentiment* towards contemporary technics, and Stiegler contends that one cannot combat them by creating further *ressentiment* qua class struggle. Against such reactivity, he advocates 'reconstructing a libidinal economy (a *philia*)'. This project does not require an exploited social class to oppose an antagonistic other; for in so far as our present crisis derives from the collapse of faith, meaning and trust, it is in effect a crisis of the 'spirit'. Consequently, the 'weighty task' of responding to our present predicament falls first on society's 'intellectuals', as by critically appealing to existing political structures and by employing the so-called creative industries these 'thinkers, savants, artists, philosophers and other clerics' can restore faith in society and community, thereby rendering capitalism's 'technical mutation' a viable possibility.

This is ultimately a call for social and cultural responsibility, and it can be seen to be rooted in Stiegler's philosophical anthropology. His work addresses the interrelated becoming of the human and the technical, and it seems that the history of that

becoming is not motivated by class struggle, but rather by the Freudian interplay of a 'life drive' towards belief and the constitution of meaning, and a 'death drive' towards order, repetition and bare existence. The interaction of the two drives generates individuation through grammatization, although the dominance of either can bring that process to a halt. Stiegler is thus able to claim that capitalism, with its impulse towards the calculation and rationalization of desire, brings a 'tendency that inhabits every *psyche*' to a 'planetary level'. By extension, he is also able to contend that it would be a mistake to attempt that tendency's eradication; 'there is', he claims, 'still something Christian' in Marxism. Yet Stiegler himself is not without moralism. In developing these positions he uses Aristotle's *On the Soul* to contend that the noetic psyche, which he links to the rationale of cultural discourse, is always capable of falling back into mere sensitivity, or rather into crass *sensationalism*: a possibility that *otium* (which in Stiegler's usage pertains to the constitution of meaning above and beyond factual existence) might collapse into *negotium*. The role of culture – which Stiegler defines as 'care' – is to prevent this from happening.

These views may well lend themselves to the naturalization of contemporary modes of subjectivity, and indeed to a tacit conservatism (arguably highlighted in Stiegler's recent comments on the exposure of contemporary youth to a toxic mass culture), but the most serious issue here is the contradiction that Stiegler's political position seems to entail. On the one hand, the crisis of contemporary capitalism stems from the degree to which its demand for profit fosters the

rationalization of desire; on the other, we are told, in *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, that a better capitalism could lead us to a 'renaissance of desire', and that it would be compatible with an 'economy of contribution'. Consequently, and despite Stiegler's concern with the avoidance of oppositional dualities, his arguments result in a particularly problematic pairing: namely, a preference for 'good' capitalism over 'bad' capitalism.

This is rendered possible by Stiegler's apparent disregard for the notion that social antagonism might be intrinsic to capital's very conditions of existence; such conflict is largely removed from his account through the ostensibly radical but ultimately empty gesture of expanding the proletariat (the latter now encompasses society, as all individuals have been alienated from the *savoir-vivre* enabled by contemporary technics). His arguments thus imply a 'spiritual' redemption of capitalism that will leave its bases untouched: a redemption that will somehow reunite society with its alienated technical capacities, but that will do so without actually combating the system of value that led to that separation in the first place.

My comments here are not aimed against the pragmatism of Stiegler's interest in social democracy, or indeed against his legitimate concerns regarding the consequences of capitalism's demise. Nor are they to suggest that the book is without merit, as there are undoubtedly a host of issues connected to the interplay between culture, economics and technology that remain neglected within the work of more explicitly Marxist theorists. Yet whilst his analysis may contain



insights, his prescriptions are coloured by his disregard for capitalism's own disinterest in qualitative difference *vis-à-vis* its need for quantitative profit (for example, his dubious contention that the capitalism of Europe might constitute a bulwark to the dangerous effects of American culture). The result is a politics that is certainly suited to cultural studies – it in fact places that discipline in a pivotal position – but that is ultimately far too compatible with the empty notions of ‘responsible’ capitalism so frequently invoked by our contemporary politicians.

Tom Bunyard

Non- (often anti-)

Miguel Abensour, *Democracy against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Moment*, trans. Max Blechman and Martin Breugh, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011. xlvii + 149 pp., £50.00 hb., £15.99 pb., 978 0 74565 009 8 hb., 978 0 7456 5010 4 pb.

Considering how long *Democracy against the State* has taken to make it into English – it first appeared in French as an essay in 1989, then as a book in 1997 – it now seems remarkably timely. That a text on Marx mostly written when there was still a Soviet Union should speak to the current political mood is no doubt a matter of luck, but also reflects the singular vision and persistence of its author. An inheritor of the French ‘libertarian’ left of the 1960s and 1970s, Miguel Abensour is known for his long-running ‘Critique de la politique’ series at Éditions Payot; his edition of the writings of Saint-Just; his retrieval of neglected nineteenth-century utopian and revolutionary thinkers (Leroux and Blanqui, Owen and Morris); and his essays on contemporary philosophers from Benjamin, Adorno and Arendt to Lefort, Clastres and Levinas. The interest uniting this varied work can be traced back to his anti-totalitarian roots: a commitment to emancipation and a rejection of orthodoxies of all kinds, be they liberal or Marxist.

Abensour's background in the non- (often anti-) Marxist left makes Marx a surprising place for him to have gone looking for a theory of democracy. *Democracy against the State* is not a contribution to Marxology, and it pointedly ignores ‘Marxist’ literature. Rather, Abensour locates a moment in the early Marx from which he derives a conception of what he calls ‘insurgent democracy’. The moment (literally just a few months) comes in Marx's 1843 *Critique of*

Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Written in Kreuznach between his wedding and his departure for Paris, the 1843 *Critique* is a close commentary on the sections on Internal Public Right in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, a democratic dismantling of Hegel's defence of constitutional monarchy. Though more or less ignored in English, it is central to some of the more heterodox French Marx interpretations, such as Maximilien Rubel's anarchist reading.

The 1843 *Critique* is known to all but the most dedicated students of Marx for a single sentence, ‘Democracy is the solved riddle of all constitutions’, and perhaps also for its tantalizing references to the ‘real *demos*’ and ‘true democracy’. Abensour's interpretation revolves around another line: ‘In true democracy the political state disappears [*untergehe*].’ As Abensour stresses, this *Untergang* of the state is not equivalent to Marx's later accounts of its ‘withering away’ or being ‘smashed’. Rather, on Abensour's reading, ‘true democracy’ subjects the state to a Feuerbachian ‘reduction’: a politicized civil society rises up to challenge state domination, and the state ‘no longer functions as a whole dominating and determining its parts’. The state does not simply vanish; it is put in its place, reduced to just one moment of social life, making way for political initiatives elsewhere.

The other side of this ‘reduction’ is the opening up of ‘the possibility for the democratic institution of every realm’. ‘True democracy’ is not an anarchist escape from politics through the spontaneous coordination of social interests. Instead, Abensour describes it as an ‘accession to political existence’ that allows ‘instituting activity as such to reach all the other realms’, ‘as far from anarchism as from communism, as far from a self-regulating social spontaneity as from a species-community that would exist beyond politics’. Rather than transcend politics, true democracy liberates and generalizes it. What Abensour most wants to take from Marx's text, then, is its ‘opposition between democracy and the political State, between the democratic self-institution of society and the formalism of the modern State’ – including the ‘democratic’ state, or what the translation calls the ‘State of right’.

Some of the difficulty of articulating the precise nature of Marx's ‘true democracy’ derives from its combination of elements that, while not contradictory, point in different directions. For the most part, true democracy is depicted as negative, a ‘breaking with the very idea of form’, ‘a refusal of synthesis, a refusal of order’. In its negativity, the closest analogue in today's theoretical landscape would probably be Jacques Rancière's idea of politics as the egalitar-

ian disruption of the existing order. (Rancière's *Disagreement* appeared in 1995, and is cited in Abensour's Conclusion.) But Abensour distances himself from a purely negative view by giving democratic contestation a strong element of Arendtian solidarity, the assertion of another, non-statist kind of politics – 'the passage from power *over* human beings to power *with* and *between* human beings'. While the 1997 Conclusion underscores the 'against' of the title, the 2004 and especially the 2008 Preface, helpfully included in the English edition, make clear that insurgent democracy is not simply anti-institutional. Insurgent democracy, we are told, 'distinguishes between institutions that promote the people's political action and those that do not, with non-domination serving as the criterion'.

These negative and positive sides reappear in Abensour's characterization of the 1843 *Critique* as a 'Machiavellian moment'. The reference, of course, is to J.G.A. Pocock's 1975 *chef d'œuvre*, and Abensour convincingly argues that the young Marx saw in Renaissance humanism a model of active citizenship, secularism and the appreciation of contingency. But the Machiavelli of Claude Lefort, herald of a different but not incompatible political modernity that embraces conflict and forgoes philosophical certainties, plays an even larger role. Indeed, the difference between the two – Pocock's humanist republicanism and Lefort's poststructuralist democracy – seems to best express the gap between the Marx of 1843 (chapter 5) and Abensour himself (chapter 6). It is only in this latter, post-foundationalist sense, which Abensour inherits from Lefort but also identifies with Emmanuel Levinas – and, in a 2002 essay appended to the book proper, with Rainer Schürmann – that Abensour affirms 'anarchy': not in the conventional political sense, but as learning to act and think without *archē* or foundations.

If Marx's democratism was momentary, its end can be precisely located, and Abensour's distance from Marxism properly speaking gauged, by comparing *Democracy against the State* with Stathis Kouvelakis's 2004 *Philosophy and Revolution*. In a detailed reconstruction of the young Marx's theoretical development, Kouvelakis treats the 1843 *Critique* as Marx's penultimate station on the way to his concept of revolution. Marx's point of arrival as a political thinker, for Kouvelakis, is the slightly later 1844 'Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', where Marx announces his new revolutionary subject, the proletariat. For Abensour, by contrast, this move 'obliterat[es] the Machiavellian moment'. It embodies the subordination of the political to the social, depriving politics of its autotelic character,

that would deform Marx's subsequent thinking and eventually produce Marxism. Thus, as early as the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx replaces 'democracy' with 'communism' and politics with history, pronouncing *communism* 'the enigma of history solved'. Even prior to this subordination of the political 'superstructure' to the economic 'base', however, Abensour diagnoses a problem in Marx's thinking that may account for some of his own difficulties in presenting a convincing account of 'true democracy': 'Marx ... thinks true democracy according to the model of unity', so that 'the self-identity of the people structures the 1843 Critique from beginning to end.' For Abensour, following Lefort, society is always divided; to imagine it otherwise is to wish away politics. In Abensour's final analysis, then, Marx never escapes a 'metaphysics of subjectivity' that 'culminate[s] in a refusal of exteriority, ... a rejection of alterity and a foreclosure of finitude'.

Yet Abensour finds a trace of insurgent democracy that remains as 'an anti-statist matrix that persists in the form of a latent dimension in Marx's œuvre'. It re-emerges in Marx's response to the Paris Commune, when he praises the self-organization of the Parisian workers. For Abensour, the persistent potential of society to organize against the state punctuates modern politics. With Arendt, he cites the 1956 Hungarian Revolution as 'demand[ing] a persistence of the political principle ... while practicing the "reduction" of the political realm'. (A sceptic, of course, might suggest reasons beyond its grassroots form for why the Hungarian uprising, like the Paris Commune, never congealed into a new form of domination...) This image of democracy as resistance against domination resonates strongly with the present mood, where the left seems to float between radical democracy, anarchy and rebellion. From the *Indignados* to the Occupy movements to the Arab Spring, spontaneous, popular political initiatives attract broad sympathy only to see power reassert itself. (Of course, we might ask whether such movements are best characterized as demanding/practising democracy exclusively or even principally against *the state*?) Abensour has written as persuasive an account of the underlying logic of such movements as I know, and an invaluable critique of their widespread liberal and anarchist (self-) misunderstandings. These movements are democratic and political or they are nothing, as Marx might have said. If Abensour cannot resolve their difficulties and ambiguities, he has nonetheless made an essential contribution to the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age.

James D. Ingram

Welcome to the club

Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden, *Posthuman International Relations: Complexity, Ecologism and Global Politics*, Zed Books, London, 2011. 224 pp., £19.99 pb., 978 1 84813 515 4.

Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden present their new book, *Posthuman International Relations*, as a comprehensive assault on the discipline of international relations (IR). As a subject area, IR, they argue, is stuck in an Enlightenment project characterized by state-centrism, anthropocentrism and the idea of man's domination over nature. In merging contemporary developments in complexity thinking with ecologism and posthumanism, they thus seek to set out not only a new way forward for addressing pressing global concerns but also to open up a space for rethinking 'the political' by way of decentring the human. This new framing would take account of all Earthlings existing in the biosphere. Only this liberation, so the overall argument goes, will allow us to grasp and address systemic social injustices produced by embedded and co-constitutive, co-evolutionary, self-organizing and self-regulating regimes of domination.

While the task of rethinking the political subject is doubtless a pressing one, posthumanism not only fails to provide a critical intervention; it in fact deprives us of any epistemological and critical means of engagement per se. If we follow the themes structuring the book's contents, there is a line from 'social world' (chapter 2) to 'complexity' and 'international systems' (chapters 3 and 4) through 'complex ecologism' (chapter 5) to end in 'posthumanism' (chapters 6 and 7). As the book turns towards 'complex posthumanism' there seems, however, to be something almost exigent in the growing dispersion of themes, concepts and issues as well as in the cursoriness of their discussion and analysis. Rather than constituting a mere problem of the authors' style, this reflects a problem inherent in the very framework that the study attempts to develop. This, in turn, has far wider and far more problematic implications for Cudworth and Hobden's project of seeking to provide a disruptive intervention and to outline a radically new approach to the study of international relations, liberated from the constraints of state-centric and anthropocentric conceptualizations.

According to the authors, the impact of 'complexity thinking' on the discipline of international relations has been 'fairly limited', suggesting that '[i]t may ... be the case that the implications of complexity are ones that the discipline does not wish to engage with, because, at least in our analysis of complexity, they

would require a fundamental reorientation of the discipline.' This is as questionable a claim as it is telling. As the authors themselves indicate, if complexity thinking had the impact they wish to see, the discipline would become unrecognizable to the point of disappearance. In this context, the dated nature of what they perceive, discuss and criticize as 'IR literature' reaching from the 1970s (neorealism) to the mid-1990s (constructivism) is revealing. For, in fact, one might contend that the collapse of core binaries on which international relations, both as policy field and academic subject area, were built – such as the international–domestic divide, which makes for its 'state-centrism' – into complex systems is precisely what is already taking place today.

In the 1990s, a reversal in the perception of the state occurred, shifting it from the primary ordering principle of international relations to a cause of disorder and exploitation (see, for example, the UN's 1992 report, 'An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping', as well as Kofi Annan's 1999 article in *The Economist*, 'Two Concepts of Sovereignty'). International attention became preoccupied with humanitarian interventions in what has come to be known as 'complex emergencies'. This has swiftly been followed by, or rather merged with, growing concerns for global problems such as environmental degradation and climate change. Correlating with the shift from state-centrism to global problems, concerns with security gave way to notions of 'vulnerability', 'risk' and its management. These shifts and developments, then, pre-empt Cudworth and Hobden's decisive rejection of the notion of environmental 'security' 'in analysing both environmental problems and associated risks for human populations, and intra-human vulnerabilities'. In fact, hardly any other area has excited Western and international agendas as thoroughly as have the global problems posed by environmental issues and the associated concerns with managing disaster and risk to which a plethora of reports, guidelines, assessments and studies, from the UN Development Programme, World Bank and EU, among others, bear witness.

Whether it is true that '[i]nternational relations, with its tradition of state-based analysis, has difficulties in dealing with the global character of many environmental issues' and their profound impact 'in

the context of ... persistent inequities' is, no doubt, a question of definition. Western and international policymakers, in any case, do not seem to get bogged down by state-centrism. They have difficulties neither in addressing 'global environmental problems' and corresponding 'inequities', as the World Bank's 2003 *World Development Report* puts it, nor in producing the respective knowledge output that would recognize the interlinking of intra-human vulnerabilities and human and non-human populations (see, for example, the World Resources 2005 report, *The Wealth of the Poor – Managing Ecosystems to Fight Poverty*). Moreover, a conventional state vocabulary is increasingly being discarded in favour of 'networks and larger systems' or 'open systems' which 'like organisms ... are in a constant exchange with the environment' (this from a 2008 EuropeAid document), constituted and affected by multiple and interacting layers leading to the emergence of 'complex adaptive systems', in the words of one 2008 OECD-funded study. As the latter continues, examples of these 'include the stock market, social insect and ant colonies, and any human social group-based endeavour in a cultural and social system such as political parties or communities'. Analytically



and conceptually, there is no difference between the stock market, an ant colony and a political community within complexity thinking. Focusing on 'systematicity', thus conceived, renders human and non-human systems epistemologically indistinguishable.

With their self-proclaimed radical intervention into the study and understanding of international relations, Cudworth and Hobden find themselves, then, in good company, with precisely those agencies that are usually held to be the most fervent promoters of (neo)liberalism. Rather than offering a disruption, their complexity thinking – its 'complex ecologism' and 'complex posthumanism' – is all too well attuned to mainstream discourses of the policy world.

What, then, of their political project? In the light of complexity's proximity to international policy discourse, this question assumes particular importance. The points of critique raised here portend a broader concern. Cudworth and Hobden state that they wish to insert 'power' into complexity thinking in order to provide IR with new tools to understand, disclose and unravel embedded glocalised patterns of 'multiple complex inequalities' at play in intra-human constellations as well as between human and non-human system in their mutual imbrication. Throughout the book these patterns of domination turn out to revolve around a well-established triad of class–gender–race. These are, according to the authors, responsible for persistent social injustices and exploitative mistreatment of the non-human. However, the actual relations of domination that they say they wish to engage with remain only implicit, rendering this more of a general claim than an argument. These patterns and dynamics are further obscured by two methodological aspects. On the one hand, such vagueness is intensified by complexity's imperative to pursue holistic approaches, since a complex system is regarded as more than its constituted constituents, as constantly emerging ('emergent properties'), influenced and reconfigured by multidirectional feedback loops, and – given Cudworth and Hobden's incorporation of environment *into* the system of domination – as also limitless. On the other hand, following complexity thinking's exigent logic, the productive dynamics of inequality are inevitably obscured by the authors' rejection of causality.

This is symptomatic of a more fundamental and ultimately fatal contradiction that emerges in their posthumanist project. Approaches to the notion of complexity have so far, the authors argue, 'under-theorized the notion of power'. To remedy this gap, they propose the insertion of three types of power: institutional power, relational power and biopower. In the last chapter, a clear hierarchy of these types appears. Institutional power, they freely admit, is theorized 'to a lesser extent' (it is not even indexed), followed by relational power which refers to the social dynamics underpinning social and political institutions – although, again, the concept is presented in a rather cursory fashion – and finally the culmination in biopower. Drawing on Foucault, they see the capillary character of biopower as the most pertinent way of filling the gap in complexity theory. What particularly entices them is the 'complex networks of power relations' and how they come to be literally embodied. However, what they reject in Foucault

is his argument that biopower works fundamentally through concrete institutions. In this, Cudworth and Hobden run head-on into doors wide open. The trick of complexity – its condition of emergence and the way it finds its current application in decision-making – is the dissolution of power as having a permanent site, concrete manifestation or causal chain. ‘Complex systems’ is what emerges *once* the permanence of the political world as a creation and responsibility of man disappears. Running a de-institutionalized, capillary notion of power with no origin and no permanent site of condensation by a notion of limitless complexity does not remedy anything – it merely repeats what is already the case and the condition of complexity.

As a consequence, their ‘critical posthumanism’ fails. It fails because at the heart of their project lies a very anthropocentric critique of the human subject. What drives them into posthumanism is a distaste for human agency. Time and again, it becomes clear that rather than being entirely embedded and imbricated in complex networks of power relations, it is the human subject itself in its capacity to exercise power that is to blame for social inequality and exploitation of nature. This, in fact, is the underlying rationale of their *critical* posthumanism. Calling on the ostensibly democratizing move and greater care of levelling humans with non-humans ‘within broader multi-species and biosphere contexts’, however, undoes precisely this human agency in its specificity and its faculty that is the subject of critique. Complex posthumanism with its emphasis on mutually imbricating processes metabolically linking and levelling humans and nature has cancelled out what it sought to problematize: power and political subjectivity. A critique of anthropocentrism and the dismissal of the most man-made creation – the state – in order to address and enmesh the problematic subjectivity of human beings ultimately means that man – the one responsible for making the social and political world as it is, the one that could be judged upon his product – disappears as the sole, violent but accountable, maker of this world. His product no longer can be tied to him. No one can speak back to what has already vanished.

In this way, undoing the human specificity of the political subject as a means to criticize it leaves us without any means to locate and make sense of, let alone critically engage with, social injustice, persistent inequality and man-made environmental degradation. While critical of the proliferation of agency into matter in recent new materialisms, Cudworth and Hobden’s merging of complexity with posthumanism offers few epistemological tools for change.

Instead, it provides us with more sophisticated conceptual tools to deepen our alienation from the world of our making to which we – as a species – are now helplessly exposed. As members of a complex post-human system in which causality dissolves in endless mediation, the man-made world becomes unknowable to us. Thinking in terms of complex systems, thus conceived, not only generates an epistemologically slippery slope in which an ant heap becomes indistinguishable from a political community (a problem Cudworth and Hobden sense but cannot address due to the constraints of their framework), it also warns us of the dangers and impossibility of knowledge and understanding as anything more than self-limitation, management and adaptation. This problem gains particular importance in the light of complexity thinking’s proximity to international policymaking. Less than a radical or critical intervention, ‘complexity’ and ‘posthumanism’ seem to speak all too smoothly to contemporary power.

Jessica Schmidt

Speaking as a mother

Alison Stone, *Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Maternal Subjectivity*, Routledge, London and New York, 2012. 194 pp., £80.00 hb., 978 0 41588 542 3.

This book is a welcome contribution to the lively and growing interdisciplinary research field of maternal subjectivity. As we discover towards the end of chapter 2, Alison Stone believes that ‘second-wave feminism has largely been a daughter’s discourse’. Treating Luce Irigaray as typical of second-wave theorists, Stone notes that it is Antigone, the daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta, who is the heroine of Irigaray’s narrative. Whilst Irigaray returns again and again to the figure of Antigone, Jocasta fades into the background of her daughter’s efforts ‘to place herself in her maternal line’. Stone does register that ‘not all women are, can be, or want to be mothers’, and that there are thus ethical and political advantages in privileging the daughter’s experience over that of the mother. Nevertheless, she maintains that even those women who don’t become mothers cannot avoid being associated with maternity, and that it is therefore important for all women – and, by implication, also for all men – that maternity should be reconceived. What Stone wants, then, is for

mothers to be recognized as subjects 'of a new kind': it is maternal body-to-body relations that produce distinctive modes of agency and patterns of meaning.

So far as feminist philosophy is concerned, Stone's comments on second-wave feminism seem rather misplaced. Relatively few feminist philosophers have focused on matrilineal genealogies, and one might more plausibly argue that most have privileged sisterhood or homosexual love relationships over mother-daughter relationships. What is even more controversial, however, is Stone's eclectic deployment of psychoanalytic theory for her analyses of maternal subjectivity. Here she combines a broadly Kristevan perspective on the mother-infant bond at the pre-Oedipal stage, with the type of anti-Oedipal approach to infantile development which fits more comfortably with Irigaray's critique of Freud and Lacan. Stone has engaged with Irigaray extensively elsewhere; but in this book she seems in many ways closer to Kristeva. In an attempt to bring these two conflicting positions into alignment, she also draws on theoretical assumptions which are garnered from a wide variety of psychoanalytic theorists and feminist writers. Since these writers also disagree radically among themselves about both parenting and subjectivity, the pick-and-mix methodology is bothersome.

Stone is careful in her definition of maternal subjectivity. This does not simply involve the 'experience' of being a mother. Instead, 'To be a subject one must ... also *author* the meaning of that experience, and one must exercise some *autonomy* in doing so.' She allows that mothers do give meaning to their experience to a limited extent, but instead of being counted as a centre of agency, a mother tends to be treated as subsidiary to her child's 'subjectivity-to-be'. Stone argues that, in Western modernity, to become a full subject involves separating out from the mother, and involves a kind of psychic matricide. Rather oddly (given her focus on Kristeva's writings), Stone indicates that 'no philosophers or major theorists explicitly argue that selfhood requires a break from the maternal body'. She nevertheless insists that matricide is central to our '*social imaginary*', and that many canonical Western philosophers and theorists have 'implicitly *imagined* the self in opposition to the maternal body'. Chapters 1-2 are largely taken up with supporting this claim, but the emphasis in these chapters is mainly on psychoanalytic theorists such as Winnicott, Freud, Lacan and Klein, and also on what Stone calls 'the parenting industry'. There is a brief discussion of Kant, but this is much too condensed - especially since Stone seems to identify two rather different Kantian moves: the need

to 'grasp myself as *thinking* (of the objects the matter of which I synthesize)' and the need to 'grasp myself as *autonomous* or spontaneous' in order to count as a unitary agent.

The argument of the book really takes off in a substantive way in chapter 3. There, Stone engages with Kristeva's explicit defence of matricide as a precondition for the child's attainment of autonomy. By bringing out pro-maternal strands in Kristeva's analysis, and combining these with insights about 'transitional' space drawn from Winnicott, alongside Jessica Benjamin's analysis of the 'triangular' relationship between mother and infant, Stone convincingly shows that Kristeva overstates the case when she indicates that a kind of psychic matricide is necessary for autonomy - and hence also subjectivity - to emerge. Stone also demonstrates that Kristeva had no need to ascribe 'the child's passage from body to word, semiotic to symbolic' to the role of a father figure, which Kristeva (following Freud and Lacan) posits as intervening between the mother and her child.

This part of Stone's argument is original and interesting. However, when she then goes on to speculate on the role of the father in the child's psychic development, the dangers of her own approach become clear. Instead of associating 'the paternal function' with the child's progression towards culture (as does Kristeva), the 'father-figure' becomes simply 'someone whose *body* differs from the mother's'. And it is onto the *body* of the father that cultural significances are later projected. In effect, the chapter essentializes biological sex differences, and treats 'male' and 'female' as straightforward natural kinds in a way that seems naive in terms of both gender theory and psychoanalytic theory. At least in Lacan it was registered that all signifiers - and hence 'the father' and 'the mother' - functioned within a language system, and as such were not straightforwardly 'real'. In Stone's account, by contrast, sex differences remain biologically based, and 'Some distinction between two sexes is arguably necessary and universal.'

Stone appeals to Wendy Hollway for evidence that babies respond differently to the bodies of women and men. It seems that 'the baby is cushioned in a different way' when it is held against a man's chest than when it's held against that of a woman: there's 'the pulse of a different heartbeat'. As she quotes Hollway, the baby

feels the bristly quality of his skin, in contrast to the mother's. ... Before symbolic thought, which comes later, these are direct sensory experiences ... of difference. Some babies, for example, only settle when

picked up by a woman and, when they are mobile, keep out of the reach of any men. They don't have a label of sexual difference at this point, but retrospectively, when sexual and gender differences do impinge on the child's experience, requiring that they be understood ... these early sensations acquire their gendered significance. [ellipses in Stone]

Without empirical data – which is not provided either by Stone or by Hollway in the source cited – this is mere speculation, and Hollway seems to be disregarding ethnic and racial differences (universalizing the hairiness of males, for example). Stone makes matters worse when, in her own voice, she indicates – with due use of qualifiers such as 'some', 'may be' and 'plausibly' – that, for an infant, women's bodies are broadly similar to each other. It is stated that 'sexuate difference may well' have a kind of 'immediate significance for infants', with infants discriminating in favour of bodies that are more 'continuous with the maternal (uterine) environment' that they had experienced prior to birth. 'Plausibly, then, infants will gravitate towards experiencing those of their carers who have female bodies as embodying the maternal figure'. This does not seem very plausible to me, given adult difficulties in discriminating at a sensory level between 'feminine' men and 'masculine' women. Although Stone is quick to add that this natural tendency of infants to associate carers with mothers does not entail that fathers and men should not also have a caring role, for me the theoretical basis of the approach seems profoundly flawed. It is, in effect, a new version of the old theory of the association of impressions and ideas: a theory which used the vague notion of 'resemblance' to explain all psychic responses, but which was untestable and which also lacked predictive power.

In chapter 5 Stone argues that after a baby is born, the mother 'returns to, remembers, and relives' her own infantile experiences of being with her own mother, so that there is a kind of regression to 'a time of acute dependency on another bodily being'. She offers a persuasive account of relational identities (chapters 4 and 5), and also of the complexities of maternal time (chapter 6), and maternal ambivalence towards both her child and her own lost autonomy (chapter 7). However, what Stone does not establish is that the intense sensory awareness triggered by the experience of becoming a mother is indeed based on *memories*, as opposed to *fantasies* or what psychoanalysts might call 'screen memories'. Since in the final chapter it is also registered that infantile memories are 'archaic' and fall outside the limits of our memory systems, there is clearly no way that Stone can establish the hypothesis that 'even

young children already begin to apprehend the *sensory* difference between female and male bodies'.

As such, the argument would probably have worked better in a more personal voice, and as an expression of Stone's own experience of mothering a daughter, rather than in the neutral, 'truth-telling' and objective tone that is adopted throughout the book. This is, nevertheless, a brave and thought-provoking analysis by a respected feminist philosopher of the ways our culture (and psychoanalysis in particular) distorts the story so as to render the mother's subjectivity either silent or inaudible.

Christine Battersby

Deconstructing the Material Girl

Catherine Malabou, *Changing Difference: The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy*, trans. Carolyn Shread, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011. 164 pp., £45.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 978 0 74565 108 8 hb., 978 0 74565 109 5 pb.

The ambition of Catherine Malabou's concept of plasticity is to strike the death knell of deconstruction precisely at the juncture at which deconstruction bids farewell to the end of metaphysics. Central to *Changing Difference's* argument, in particular, is an urgent need to resuscitate the material onticity of 'woman' within the movement of the absolute, inscribed within deconstruction as the unconditional condition of both its possibility and impossibility, in order to write the difference that constitutes woman. Deconstruction, Malabou argues, falls short of delivering on its promise to liberate the feminine except through an utter vanquishing within the irreversible 'auto-affectation' of the negativity of the trace. The result is that woman never appears, except through the violence conferred upon her. The woman philosopher manufactures her own excision within the current philosophical paradigm by giving continual approbation to a logic that excludes her. Malabou's polemic against Derrida wields a sharp axe at the problematic of supplementarity, claiming that 'writing [has] come to the end of its time' and that the trace no longer writes. Derridean supplementarity must now yield its prerogative to 'another supplementarity', which opens the deadlock of the deconstructive aporia to the 'plasticity' of concepts, enabling the trace to survive past its internally self-negating logic.

Malabou's primary concern is, in this way, with a 'question of inventing deconstruction from the place of an internal dissidence, the secret and sometimes unthought announcement of a separation of difference with itself, which alone can engage it with its posterity'. The first resistance that plasticity poses towards the auto-inscription of difference is 'astonishment', which she defines as the absolutely new within repetition. Wonder is the opening towards the Other which precedes all difference. It is the space of the 'leap' of 'the separation of difference with itself', which is ethically given in the passion of the facial expression of the Other. Through this ethical grounding, which consummates 'the affective union between Being and the sex(es)', the feminine is able to bewilder. Malabou's attention to astonishment within the ontological synthesis of the feminine is intriguing, since other post-deconstructive theories of poetics and epochality also aspire towards an enunciation of the very same concepts, but with radically different outcomes. (See, for instance, the account of 'bedazzlement' as the effect of *démésure* of the word to be found in Lacoue-Labarthe's *Poetry as Experience*, as well as Nancy's 'The Surprise of the Event' in the collection *Hegel after Derrida*.) For this reason, Malabou's specific deployment of the concept requires a rigorous theoretical contextualization in relation to contemporary deconstructive paradigms. At the same time, it is necessary to investigate the strength of this conceptual framework for a thinking of *affect*, since it is this that organizes Malabou's subsequent arguments in favour of the 'counter-tracing' of plasticity.

If plasticity aims to recover the future by crossing the end of metaphysics, it does so by identifying two spaces of temporality, forever rent asunder within the synthesis of the Spirit. First is the space of recovery of the past, which is no-longer, and second, the space of arrival of a future, which is not-yet, in a 'leap' which breaches the difference between the two spaces. Nancy identifies the 'not-yet' as the leap of thought, which exceeds Being as surprise. Astonishment, he claims in 'The Surprise of the Event', contrary to separation, is the withholding as the ownmost property of sameness (*même*), such that time is not: 'The tension, the extension of the leap – the spacing of time – the discord of being in its truth: this is the surprise.' Negativity cannot return to itself, cannot sublimate, but leaps as the dehiscence of being. The 'already' coincides with the 'not-yet' such that surprise is '*prae-ens* itself without the present'. For Derrida, difference is spacing, meaning that difference is always already differentiating with difference. The space of temporalization of

difference ensures that self-negation is not an affect. *Différance's* difference with itself is contained within the spacing of temporality, so that *différance* cannot be totalized either as word or concept. If astonishment, as Malabou claims, is the space of difference of *différance* with itself, it is certainly the point at which deconstruction is threatened from within. However, this threat is not a weakness of deconstruction, but rather its quasi-transcendental condition.



Malabou's mobilization of the Hegelian absolute insists upon a recovery which is total, and as such denies the erasure of the originary trace. Recovery, or 'healing', for Malabou runs dangerously close to an absolute presence which dialectically raises itself to 'a higher form of life'. On the contrary, the remainder for Derrida persists after erasure in so far as the originary mark is irrevocably lost. The consequences of Malabou's thesis are threefold: first, plasticity as a resistance to the violence of the 'effraction'; second, auto-repairing as 'without a *pharmakon* and without an intruder'; and third, a 'resurrection without miracle or parousia'. She relies on extensive examples from neuronal networking of the human brain, cloning, stem-cell regeneration, and evolution to demonstrate how the plasticity of change, qua 'recovery', dispenses with scarring and physical wounding. Yet she omits to mention that evolution in humans has so far not proved to be reversible. Neither do her examples of wound structure take into account phantom wounds, which have relentlessly troubled psychoanalysis.

If 'affect' is repetition without an origin, it is foremost the event of surprise as the erasure of Being. As

Heidegger mentions at the onset of *Being and Time*, Being lies forgotten insofar as Being 'is an entity which does not just occur among other entities ... this is a constitutive state of Dasein's Being, and this implies that Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being – a relationship which itself is one of Being.' Malabou's reduction of wonderment to affect is ultimately based on a transcendental subjective consciousness – as an auto-affectation which closes upon itself, since it elides the impossibility of being-in-itself. Astonishment as the affect of faciality in the encounter with the Other must contend with the facelessness of spacing. The Other who has no face points to the radical indeterminability necessary to temporal opening. Ethical determination is contingent upon a non-ethical relation prior to temporal succession. It is this priority which spacializes temporalization as that which remains. Malabou's logic places astonishment as an 'affect of the Other', whereas the ethos of difference in Derrida is necessarily an *effect* of astonishment.

The 'remains' of absolute knowledge strike the death knell of speculative logic, precisely because of the absolutization of Spirit in its self-reflection of consciousness. The perfection of the absolute presence of Spirit is the irreducible division between the 'absolute already-there of the not-yet or the absolute already-no-more of the yet', as Derrida writes in *Glas*. The deconstructive knell announces how the dialectical synthesis works against its own logic. The knell is at once of two opposing rationales, which nonetheless wrap around each other. The first note announces the totalization of Spirit in its impossibility of failure. Failure is necessary for the system to continue, or else it paralyzes itself. By the same token, failure as an unconditional necessity for the system marks its death from within, announcing that the logic no longer works, except by exposing its self-defeat. This is the striking of the second note, which precedes the first one. For Derrida, the continual self-violence of the system is given as the irreducibility of the mark, as the priority of death that maintains the life of the system. Death announces the passage of time in the striking of the knell, as that which exceeds the system. The stroke of death holds the 'leap' in abeyance in its identification with itself. It is the un-deconstructibility of the 'remains' that points to the limit of what can be inscribed.

For Hegel, the 'heart of law' that upholds the ethical order is 'the disrupted consciousness ... [as] consciousness of perversion, and moreover of the absolute perversion'. Any study of the onticity of Woman cannot do without attention to the 'absolute perversion'

at the heart of difference, actualized into reality as self-corrupting. Malabou's attempt to save woman from de-essentialization intrinsically aims against theorists who reduce woman to the unknowable impossible. She writes, 'Philosophy is woman's tomb.' The singularity of woman can only be maintained through the violence that is specific to her material onticity, as opposed to a generic violence that inscribes Being. In this vein, Malabou protests against the anti-essentialism of Butler as appropriated by queer studies. She questions why the meaning of 'essence' is restricted to the traditional ontological notion of self-presence, which reduces difference to anatomical binaries. Here she observes a complicity between gender theory and deconstruction in rendering woman as mere negation. (The affect of plastic inscription opposes both Irigaray's critique of Platonic mimesis, as well as Butler's notion of performativity.) Her critique needs to be quoted at length:

That 'woman' is now emptied of her essence only serves to emphasize the fact that she does not define herself and cannot define herself except through the violence done to her ... Woman is nothing any more, except his violence through which her 'being nothing' continues to exist. She's nothing but an ontological amputation, formed by that which negates her.

The radical exclusion of woman in discourse ensuing from the end of metaphysics demands that the task of the woman philosopher is to reclaim her existence against the violence endemic to deconstruction. However, deconstruction's rendering of woman in her finitude is precisely based upon the subversion of violence such that it exceeds the libidinal economy of inscription. If the task of the woman philosopher is to make visible the site of invisibility of the feminine in discourse, it must proceed from the site of violence which undercuts all concepts. Malabou's X vesting woman with materiality depends upon materializing the non-graphic aspect of the trace. Such materiality can only result from the positivization of negativity. Plasticity cannot be a logical outcome of the trace, since such positivization is in conflict with the negative auto-affectation of the trace. Her recommendation for the feminine intellectual is to repudiate philosophy altogether and claim 'absolute solitude'. This is certainly a very bold move, but is again imbued with a violence necessary to the breaking of bonds as the condition of the ceaseless opening towards the Other. The promise of plasticity, for now, seems not to be the death warrant of deconstruction, but its beneficiary.

Tamkin Hussain

Plot twists

Nadir Lahiji, ed., *The Political Unconscious of Architecture: Re-opening Jameson's Narrative*, Ashgate, Farnham and Burlington VT, 2011. 344 pp., £65.00 hb., 978 1 40942 639 4.

'For the title of this volume', writes its editor, Nadir Lahiji, 'we have invoked the novel concept that Jameson used for one of his early seminal works, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*.' Whilst acknowledging the precedence of 'Freudo-Marxism', Lahiji contends that Jameson's concept of the 'political unconscious' remains the most trenchant, and still most vital, articulation of psychoanalytic perspectives with those of class struggle. For Jameson, writing in 1981, the 'political unconscious' would provide the keys to the interpretation of any historical text or cultural practice as the imaginary resolution of real social contradictions, leading, in his own words, to 'the unmasking of cultural artifact as socially symbolic act'. Furthermore, the symbolic work of such cultural artefacts could then be grasped 'as vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot': the singular Marxian narrative of all history as the history of class struggle. The interpretive strategy of the 'political unconscious' was concerned, therefore, with 'restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history'.

In joining the 'political unconscious' to the specific subject of architecture, Lahiji invokes Jameson's own long-standing and various critical engagements with that form of cultural production which is, for him, constituted more than any other by a 'seam' between the 'economic organization of society and the aesthetic production of its (spatial) art.' We are thus returned, once more, to the scene of the philosopher's encounter with the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles – with its call for a 'cognitive mapping' of its hyperspatial depthlessness – to the 'revolutionary spatiality' of Frank Gehry's house in Santa Monica, to the aesthetics of Peter Eisenman and Rem Koolhaas. Yet Lahiji argues that the earlier concept of the 'political unconscious' was, in fact, never effectively incorporated into Jameson's subsequent writings on architecture, and that it is this unrealized possibility which defines the rationale for this collection as a whole. As he puts it: it

explains the reason of our returning to his earlier *The Political Unconscious* in search for a political concept in order to underline the original intent for the present anthology. We launched on this project believing that it is now an opportune time that we allow this concept to enter the discourse and provide us with a

theoretical reference in renewing the project of critique in architecture within the contemporary culture.

In light of the current predominance of post-critical and post-theoretical perspectives within contemporary architectural discourse, this 'project of critique' is understood to be a particularly timely one. As such, *The Political Unconscious of Architecture* might also be understood as a contribution to an emerging countercurrent in architectural criticism – the origins of which could be located, for example, in the 2007 collection *Critical Architecture*, featuring essays by, among others, David Cunningham and Jane Rendell, who also appear here. Other notable contributions to this revival of architectural critique would include Gail Day's *Dialectical Passions: Negations in Postwar Art Theory* (2011), as well as much of the writing of Pier Vittorio Aureli.

Lahiji's own understanding of this collection's particular affiliation with such a 'project of critique' – its articulation of the political unconscious with the contemporary culture of architecture – is stated in explicitly redemptive terms, with Walter Benjamin summoned to frame its mission: 'in every historical epoch there is a utopian element nesting within the defeated failed attempt that remains to be redeemed.' However problematic such notions of return and redemption – to which Lahiji is clearly attached – might be for some, his introduction, in which they are articulated, serves as an effective frame through which the cohesion and purpose of the collection as a whole may be grasped. It is a little bewildering, then, that the first essay to follow Lahiji's introduction fails even to mention either Jameson or the political unconscious. Bechir Kenzari's 'Ban-lieus', rather than returning to Jameson, implies, through its references to Agamben, and the by-now-familiar figures of his discourse (*Homo sacer* and 'the camp'), that it is the latter philosopher whose thought is now more apposite to the critical theorization of contemporary forms of spatiality than is Jameson's. Although Lahiji does indicate that not all of the essays in the collection will refer to Jameson directly, Kenzari's contribution, though in itself well argued, thus seems somewhat anomalous here. Kojin Karatani's 'Rethinking City Planning and Utopianism', with its exegeses of Jane Jacobs's arguments for urban diversity and Christopher Alexander's for the 'natural

city', appears similarly out of sync with the project of redeeming a Jamesonian critique of architecture, and while the presence of Hal Foster would, on the face of it, seem highly pertinent to the book's ambitions, his essay also chooses not to engage directly, or even indirectly, with Jameson, instead preferring to gesture towards Zygmunt Bauman's model of 'liquid modernity' and Ulrich Beck's 'reflexive modernization'. Moreover, the somewhat simplistic fashion in which these various models are 'applied' to architecture – the glass blocks in a Renzo Piano-designed Hermès store in Tokyo 'do indeed appear liquid' – strikes a tone more akin to that of a broadsheet newspaper feature than that of many of the more rigorously analytical essays included in the volume. Indeed, if essays such as those by Karatani and Foster appear as problematic features of *The Political Unconscious of Architecture*, it is precisely because their limitations are exposed by the standards of analysis, research and critical engagement with the thought of Jameson to be found throughout the rest of its pages.

A number of the contributors to *The Political Unconscious of Architecture* approach Jameson's critical legacy through an exploration of its potentials for further development in methodological terms. This is particularly the case with Jane Rendell's essay 'May Mo(u)rn: A Site Writing'. Here Rendell, especially concerned with the methodological implications of the psychoanalytical dimension of the political unconscious, and its bearing upon the practice of architectural criticism, proposes that the critic position him- or herself in relation to the object of their concerns as both 'analyst and analysand'. The critic, she suggests,

is presented with the work as an enigma ... s/he also produces another enigma in the form of the critical

essay. It is possible to imagine then that the critic responds to a work drawing on the modes of operation of the analyst, as well as those more associative states – such as remembering and imagining – of the analysand.

Exemplifying this proposition through her own 'site writing' project, Rendell's essay amalgamates elements of personal narrative, poetry, photography, historical research and philosophy, so as to bring the 'fundamental history' of class struggle to the surface for both the site – in this case an abandoned and decaying rural property – and for the critic, Rendell herself.

Joan Ockman's 'Allegories of Late Capitalism: Main Street and Wall Street on the Map of the Global Village', less overtly concerned with the extrapolation of new methodologies from Jameson's corpus, settles on his call for a cognitive mapping as her interpretive method. Through this approach Ockman weaves a compelling dialectical narrative of the political and existential landscapes of Main Street and Wall Street. In the process she manages to demolish Sarah Palin's homely mythos of Main Street in devastating style and convincingly argue for the effective impossibility of locating on any cognitive map the place of the 'real America':

as far as the 'real America' is concerned, it is hardly possible to say which place is which. The facades of Wall Street, ostentatiously draped in their post-9/11 flags today, are now mostly fronts for the historical set-piece that the district is becoming, while Alaska's Main Street, with its chain stores, big boxes, and big oil interests, signals, no less punctually, the thorough colonization of one of the planet's last frontiers.

Whilst essays such as Ockman's convince, through exemplification, of the continued power and relevance of Jameson's methods, and the practice of critical

interpretation more broadly, others attend more directly to the writing of Jameson himself, including those by David Cunningham, Gevork Hartoonian, Louis Martin and Terry Smith. These chapters set to work, in different ways, a recurrent constellation of Jameson's texts – *The Political Unconscious*, but also the essays 'The Brick and the Balloon' (1998) and 'Architecture and the Critique of Ideology' (1982) – with the figures of Manfredo Tafuri, Henri Lefebvre and Antonio Gramsci, as well as with themes of criticality, negativity, mediation and phenomenology.



Louis Martin's 'Fredric Jameson and Critical Architecture' seeks to chart the effects of Jameson's writing upon the development of architectural criticism since the latter's influence was first felt within its practice. In doing so, Martin effectively executes an analysis of architectural critique as itself driven by the force of a 'political unconscious' no less exasperated by attempts to resolve real contradictions with symbolic solutions than the objects of its critique. The development of architectural criticism in the works of writers like K. Michael Hays and Reinhold Martin is, he writes, 'propelled by a quasi-hypnotic fascination for the paralyzing and anguishing effects of negative dialectics and by a frenetic search for alternate justifications for a cathartic architectural avant-garde'.

David Cunningham's 'The Architecture of Money' likewise attends to the historical development of architectural criticism, noting the trajectory of Jameson's theoretical position from his early attachment to the 'Left-moralizing' perspectives of Lukács, in *Marxism and Form*, to his later concerns with the processes of 'mediation' through which the real abstractions of the money economy might be related to those of architectural form. His purpose is not, though, historiographical. Rather, Cunningham seeks to push the potentials of Jameson's methodology beyond the limits through which its further development has been constrained by certain of the latter's own positions. Jameson's outright rejection of phenomenology 'as always implicitly naturalizing', for instance, is critically interrogated. 'How exactly', asks Cunningham, is experience 'to be understood, if not, in some sense, phenomenologically ... in "experiential terms"?' Cunningham also refutes Jameson's rejection of Tafuri's negativity as problematically overlooking the Italian architectural historian's unique grasp of the place of abstraction in mediating the experience of architecture, money and the metropolis. Ultimately, Cunningham arrives, through this reworking of Jameson, at a rich and suggestive possibility for an architectural critique based upon a 're-thinking of the complex relations between the phenomenological dimensions of modern architectural form, ... the aesthetic – in its original philosophical meaning, as something like a cognitive discourse of the "whole corporeal sensorium" rooted in (individual and collective) physiology – and the exemplary social form of money.'

'Reloading Ideology Critique of Architecture', Lahiji's own essay, serves as something of a preface for Slavoj Žižek's contribution, 'The Architectural Parallax'. Looking back to Benjamin and his insights concerning technology and the 'optical unconscious'

of 'collective perception', and through the apparent failures of the Frankfurt School's 'Freudo-Marxism' and the abandoned project of ideology critique, Lahiji positions Žižek – 'probably the only critic who has provided us with an accurate diagnosis of contemporary society and its culture' – as the central figure through whom this project may be redeemed today. Žižek's 'The Architectural Parallax' thus serves as a kind of gravitational centre for *The Political Unconscious of Architecture* and its concerns to return, against current 'liberal-left' claims to have transcended 'criticality', to the practice of the critique of architecture. As its title suggests, Žižek's essay turns to the figure of the 'parallax' (derived from Karatani), as he has done elsewhere, to stand for the positioning of the subject between two perspectives from which can be imagined a third, virtual, space of possibility. As a means of mediating our conception of the location of the subject within both ideology and the spatiality of contemporary capitalism it is a suggestive metaphor. Žižek's employment of this figure in relation to the 'incommensurability' of the inside and the outside within this ideological spatiality, drawn from Jameson's remarks on Koolhaas's architecture made in 1991, is though somewhat anachronistic. In much contemporary corporate architecture, the concern has been to produce a continuous territory in which divisions between public and private, for example, as spatial analogies of outside and inside, are blurred precisely so as to suggest some kind of 'third space' that, rather than 'disavowed', is affirmed as a sign of the 'progressive'. Elsewhere in this lengthy essay – in its engagement with the politics of affect as a new instrument of ideology, and in its treatment of Alejandro Zaera-Polo's 'The Politics of the Envelope' – Žižek's targets are more timely and the critique persuasive.

The obvious danger that opens up for any project premised on return and redemption is that of repeating the errors or omissions that lead to its passing in the first place. These might include, here, the question of whether and to what extent class struggle can still be understood as the fundamental basis of all ideology, as well as those of the specifically spatial mechanisms of power and persuasion now operative within contemporary capitalism. In these terms, though not without certain blind spots, *The Political Unconscious of Architecture*, in its reopening of Jameson's narrative, suggests a number of ways in which this narrative might not only be redeemed, but also developed and enriched as a valuable contribution to the re-emergence of the project of critique.

Douglas Spencer

Not all concepts are oppressive

Gillian Howie, *Between Feminism and Materialism: A Question of Method*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, 2010. 280 pp., £54.00 hb., 978 0 23010 269 9.

The political problem animating Gillian Howie's intensively philosophical project in *Between Feminism and Materialism* is an oft-lamented one: how to critique and challenge women's oppression without assuming women as a coherent, stable, internally homogeneous group. As Howie points out in her introduction, once feminists incorporated the diversity of women into their analyses of power, exclusion and marginalization, they found themselves in the position of being 'unable to figure out any community or collective goal-oriented activity'. More specifically, having argued that women individually and collectively are 'fractured' and multiple in their identity, feminists found themselves without a subject for their politics.

One of the interesting things about Howie's engagement with this issue is her no-nonsense indulgence of a problem that, in many respects, she finds rather silly. What is silly is not the political problem – she is clearly aware and appreciative of the blindly colonizing impulses of (some) feminist insights and agendas. Rather, the silliness lies in the philosophical problems that the political one has created through conceptual slippage and association. The important political insights that feminists have articulated through engagement in gender politics have informed philosophical insights into the gendered or exclusionary nature of Western philosophical and epistemological claims. Through reiteration and a sense of contamination-by-association, these philosophical insights have shifted and solidified into injunctions about what may or may not be said or thought. Feminists thereby find themselves fenced in, their thinking about social and political relationships severely circumscribed and constrained by a range of seemingly inviolable pieties and strictures. Through what Howie depicts as a series of reifications, then, feminists have not only lost their political subject but have also deprived themselves of the theoretical or conceptual tools with which to analyse and criticize patterns of gender discrimination and marginalization. What is admirably indulgent in Howie's work is the seriousness with which she engages the fix that feminists have gotten themselves into. She acknowledges the draw of reification and the consequent compulsion to refuse to use concepts that are seemingly part and parcel of the oppressions against which feminists fight. And having offered such an acknowledgment, she invites feminist theorists to

reconsider their rejection of such notions as the real, objectivity, essence, women, identity and patriarchy.

Drawing on a formidable mastery of arguments within Continental philosophy, and particularly the tradition of Critical Theory, Howie does two things simultaneously. On the one hand, she parses those terms and concepts according to their exact philosophical meaning and function, recuperating those that have been, in her view, inappropriately discarded. In the context of current feminist theory, this is a bold and refreshing argument: not all concepts are necessarily and inevitably implicated in (gender) oppression. On the other hand, and at the same time, she works to re-materialize concepts that have been reified, returning her reader again and again to the social relations – the interested social relations – that might restrict or colour the effective impartiality of many tools of philosophical analysis. In other words, she claims that the exclusions and omissions feminists have identified in various philosophical and epistemological arenas have been an effect, not of the ideas in themselves but rather of a strategic or interested activity on the part of the thinkers who deploy them. As a corrective, she proposes that a combination of dialectical materialism and a modified phenomenology might return to feminists the tools with which they can grasp and articulate the political and economic relationships that together impede and undermine women's self-determination.

The first section of the book, reviewing the current feminist impasse, is a bit tedious, although useful for graduate students who may not be well apprised of the internal politics within feminism all those years ago. And there are moments within that review that are more flippant and possibly more aggravating to some among her audience than need be. For example, after a detailed reprise of Marx's labour theory of value and in transition to a discussion of how feminists have reified social relations into enduring abstract forms, Howie remarks that 'sometimes a pipe is just a pipe and sometimes the economy of the same is the economy'. This is a witty expression of Howie's frustration with the forms of abstraction with which feminists have become engulfed. But the sharpness in such observations stands in stark contrast to the methodical forbearance that characterizes the bulk of her effort. Indeed, most of the book is composed of an interesting and remarkably patient and painstaking

recuperation of the philosophical tools for political analysis.

In reading Howie's book, one might develop an impression that philosophy is being positioned as in some way giving permission to feminists to engage the political world. However, to read Howie in this way would be a mistake. Her aim is not to give philosophical permission to feminists. Rather, it is to free them – or perhaps deprive them – of any philosophical resistance they might have to redirecting their energies and critical talents to the analysis and contestation of the current empirical conditions of women's lives. If the gendered nature of philosophy and epistemology turn out to be a product of entrenched patterns of social relationships, then attention must necessarily turn towards those relationships in all their empirically nitty-gritty complicated forms. The upshot of Howie's work is that there are no philosophical grounds for feminist theorists to refuse to engage the brutal effects upon women of the global political economy at the local, state and transnational levels. This argument is a signal intervention in contemporary feminist theory. It provides not only a cogent anatomy of an immobilizing frustration but also the groundwork for a vigorous and meaningful re-engagement with contemporary politics.

Samantha Frost

Paperback being

Martin Woessner, *Heidegger in America*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011. 308 pp., £58.00 hb., 978 0 52151 837 .

All too often, philosophers act as if their arguments were autonomous from non-philosophical factors. In this sense, philosophy's default position is one of reflexive deficit. Yet recent years have seen several scholars turn their attention to the reception of philosophy, rather than its internal logic. Studies such as George Cotkin's *Existential America*, François Cusset's *French Theory* and Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen's *American Nietzsche* have helped reconnect philosophy to the historical situations that condition its interpretation. The best of these books carefully follow the course of philosophical ideas as they cross between contexts, and indeed continents. In each case, the hope is to historicize such ideas, instead of explicitly evaluating them. As Peter Gordon has put it, if philosophy deals in proof and refutation, this kind of intellectual

history has at its heart a more modest method of 'understanding'.

Martin Woessner's *Heidegger in America* maps 'how Heidegger was (re)made in the USA', reconstructing his 'American reception' from the 1930s to the present. In this it is a work of what Woessner calls 'reception history' – a case study in the transnational exchange of ideas. The latter is a complex and contradictory process, often beset by, as Pierre Bourdieu has put it, 'structural misunderstandings'. Unsurprisingly, then, studies of this sort are difficult to define and delimit. Woessner has his work cut out for him, as Heidegger's American reception ranges widely both within and beyond the academy, from philosophy and theology to architecture and popular culture. *Heidegger in America* covers all this ground and more. In doing so, though, could it be criticized for being too diffuse? Woessner would argue not. He sees this inclusivity as vital to understanding his subject. As he asserts, 'reception studies take as their central task the narration of diffusion.' Indeed, the value of this ambitious book lies in its adaptable description of diffusion. Chapter by chapter, Woessner charts a rich empirical exposition of Heidegger's influence. Yet the insights this yields can be extrapolated, contributing to a more general model of philosophical dissemination.

The opening chapters are a case in point. Here Woessner researches Heidegger's earliest American interlocutors, including Charles Hartshorne and Marjorie Grene. He unearths from their work a common hostility to Heidegger's 'cheap rhetoric', to adopt Grene's words. This thread is picked up again in a 1948 essay by Günther Stern, 'On the Pseudo-Concreteness of Heidegger's Philosophy'. The article attacks Heidegger's *Dasein* as a hollow abstraction, 'far from any actual living, breathing human entity'. Thus, in condemning Heidegger's project as 'an existential account with the existence left out', Stern links the line of critique begun by Grene and Hartshorne to later polemics like Adorno's *The Jargon of Authenticity*. For Woessner, this genealogy demonstrates a generalizable principle: 'reception is not synonymous with adulation'. If philosophy spreads via the vector of commentary, it does so no matter how negatively it is valorized. This might begin to explain how attacks against a given philosophy can nonetheless play a functional role in securing its circulation.

A chapter on 'Exiles and Emissaries' considers the part played by German émigré intellectuals in disseminating Heidegger's thought throughout the USA. Richard Wolin has already plotted this topic in his book *Heidegger's Children*, focusing on famous names

like Arendt and Marcuse. But Woessner fills in Wolin's omissions, discussing lesser known 'stepchildren' like the historian Paul Kristeller. What emerges from this approach is an analysis of the 'personal' or pre-philosophical dimension of reception. Heidegger's protégés engaged with his work in the context of their prior engagements with his 'charismatic persona', encountered primarily through his pedagogy. His diffusion was therefore secured not so much by his thought as by his intellectual aura, his 'style of thinking'. Hence it makes sense to speak of former students like Leo Strauss as 'methodological Heideggerians', whose work reflects their teacher's disposition more than his doctrine. As Woessner writes, 'What Heidegger's students absorbed, after all, was not a specific dogma, but a methodology that was rooted in a specific philosophical attitude or style. What unites thinkers as different as Kristeller and Strauss is a mode of thinking ... a conception of the philosophical persona itself.' Woessner's book has many merits, but this may be its most compelling claim. The emphasis on 'modes of thinking' suggests a reshaping of reception history, not merely as a 'study of textual migrations', but as an inquiry into the social psychology of intellectuals. What schemas, what strategies of sense-making, would lead one to identify oneself, consciously or not, as a Heideggerian? Such identifications are produced partly by the 'performative' aspects of academic culture – as Woessner notes, Heidegger's diffusion must have had something to do with his 'mesmerizing presence behind the lectern'. The hidden curriculum transmitted in such cases of 'charismatic pedagogy' is not a formalized philosophy but what Woessner calls a 'philosophical persona' – a specific conception, led by example, of what it means to *be* a philosopher.

The sociologist Neil Gross has sketched what such personae look like in his theory of 'intellectual self-concepts'. But perhaps Gross puts too much stress on self-fashioning, as if intellectuals' identities arose solely from their own biographies. In contrast, Woessner shows how self-concepts are themselves iterable, reproduced between master-thinkers and their disciples. If styles of writing spread through citation and imitation, underlying intellectual stances don't evolve in isolation either. Identities are equally transmissible; indeed, at one level, identity and style are indissoluble. Woessner later shows how this sheds light on the legendary 'Davos debate' between Heidegger and Cassirer (see the review of Peter Gordon's *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* in *RP* 172). Davos can be recast, he claims, as a performative clash whose stakes were as much attitudinal as philosophical. The

encounter's lasting influence lay in its counterposing of two self-concepts, which then re-emerged as mutually exclusive images for American philosophers to identify with: 'the philosopher as scientist versus the philosopher as seer'. For Woessner, these personae fed into today's perceived fissure between 'analytic' and 'Continental' philosophy.

Although Woessner is at his strongest when he explores these psychological schemas, his study never neglects the structural importance of institutions. Notably, he highlights how Heidegger's academic institutionalization first occurred in theology departments, through the work of religious thinkers like Paul Tillich and William Richardson. Only later would it undergo a 'process of secularization', enabling it to be embedded in the philosophical profession. Indeed, the first English translation of *Being and Time*, by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, was initially published by a religious imprint. In this respect it seems correct for Woessner to claim that 'Heidegger's relevance to theology was his entry ticket into American intellectual debate.' Even so, this institutional angle only tells one side of the story. With Heidegger, such a description has to be thickened by an account of popular culture. Here Woessner rightly reminds us that the 'high seriousness' of philosophers and theologians has been paralleled by diffusions in 'different registers', ranging from literary references to the films of Heidegger translator Terrence Malick. Of special significance, though, is the popular portrayal of Heidegger as an 'existentialist'. As Randall Collins has argued in his *The Sociology of Philosophies*, existentialism is less a philosophy than a 'philosophical-literary hybrid', whose channels of diffusion differ from those of more narrowly 'academic' ideas. Existentialism is a mass-market phenomenon, with access to a wider variety of reproductive apparatuses. Of these, Woessner draws attention to a wave of 'paperback existentialism', embodied in affordable anthologies like Walter Kaufmann's *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*. Heidegger's inclusion in this pop-cultural canon was a crucial condition of his reception.

Heidegger in America surveys a vast terrain, and at times it strains to marshal its materials. Reception studies tend to tread a fine line between mere description and an overly dogmatic deduction of patterns. For the most part, however, Woessner masterfully combines historical detail with a conceptual grasp of what his different contexts have in common. For instance, separate sections on Hubert Dreyfus, Richard Rorty and Allan Bloom (author of the anti-Heideggerian *The Closing of the American Mind*) depict several

disparate uses to which Heidegger's thought has been put. But while Woessner sums up the specifics of these examples, he's also able to step back and assess their resemblances. Hence, he hints that where each of these thinkers read Heidegger for his own ends, each shared the same meta-intellectual strategy; the same way of rendering Heidegger's thought as an appropriable epistemic resource. By historicizing the field in which such appropriations occurred, Woessner gives us a valuable guide to the dynamics of Heidegger's diffusion. Yet the strength of his study is that its insights apply to other philosophers, in other places and times. From now on, we might say of many such thinkers what Woessner says of Heidegger: that he 'authored the script, but others ultimately gave the performances'.

David Winters

God said to Abraham, kill me a son...

Chris Danta, *Literature Suspends Death: Sacrifice and Storytelling in Kierkegaard, Kafka and Blanchot*, Continuum, London and New York, 2011. 167 pp., £55.00 hb., 978 1 4413 972 6.

In *Literature Suspends Death*, Chris Danta takes Genesis 22 as the starting point for an investigation of the role of literary imagination. As is well known, Genesis 22 tells the story of the patriarch Abraham, of whom God demands the sacrifice of his beloved only son. However, before Abraham can carry out this sacrifice, God calls him back. In the end nothing happens, the sacrifice is averted and the son is substituted by a ram. According to Danta, this non-eventuation of the sacrifice shows that 'Genesis 22 crucially concerns the problem of the imaginary.' His aim is thus to read the Genesis story from a literary-theoretical perspective in order to show how it can 'illuminate the secular situation of the literary writer'. In order to do this, Danta stages a fruitful confrontation between Søren Kierkegaard as defender of religion and inwardness and Franz Kafka and Maurice Blanchot as defenders of literature. Three important points generated by this confrontation give a good indication of Danta's central argument: the problem of identification; the moment of substitution; and the spectrality of the writer.

The first point concerns the problem of identification. Danta argues that 'Kafka's and Kierkegaard's various retellings of the Genesis story attest

to the following paradox: as soon as one tries to re-imagine Abraham for oneself, he ceases to be the real Abraham.' For Danta, these retellings show that one can only identify with Abraham by imagining another Abraham, an Abraham that fails the test of faith. Their fictional Abrahams are figures of doubt and despair. It is here that Danta stages a first confrontation between Kierkegaard and Kafka. Kierkegaard solves the problem of identification by introducing a doubting narrator (the pseudonymous author Johannes *de silentio*) with whom the reader can identify. This narrator turns the biblical Abraham into an incredible figure who only becomes greater because of our failure to identify with him. Kierkegaard's decision to turn Abraham into an incredible figure who escapes the literary imagination thus proves, for Danta, that he defends religion and inwardness by subordinating literature.

To counter this decision, Danta evokes Kafka. Kafka stages a radical disidentification with the biblical Abraham. For Kafka Abraham is a comic figure. Rather than closing the distance between God and Abraham by faith, Kafka enlarges this distance by withdrawing power from the hero and highlighting his inactivity. So, for example, he presents a mundane Abraham who first has to set his house in order. In Kafka's own words:

I could conceive of another Abraham for myself ... who was prepared to satisfy the demand of the sacrifice immediately, with the promptness of a waiter, but was unable to bring it off because he could not get away, being indispensable ... The house was never ready; for without having his house ready, without having something to fall back on, he could not leave.

For Danta, this means that Kafka adopts a strategy that is precisely opposed to Kierkegaard's. Kafka casts doubt on the religious experience that is formulated in Genesis 22 and rejects Kierkegaard's interpretation of faith as the willingness to sacrifice the beloved one. In this way he subordinates the biblical Abraham – who stands the test of faith – to literature by impeding the reader's identification with this Abraham.

The second point that arises from Danta's readings concerns the moment of substitution at the end of the Genesis story. When Abraham draws the knife to sacrifice Isaac, he is called back by God who provides a substitute – a ram. In Danta's view, Kierkegaard does not give a convincing account of this moment of substitution, only mentioning it to indicate 'that Abraham fails the test if he looks outside of himself'. Danta thus suggests that Kierkegaard focuses too much

on Abraham's secret communion with God and forgets the other characters that play a role in the story (Sarah, Isaac and the ram). In doing so, he misses the importance of the end of the story. For Danta, this means that he fails to acknowledge that 'the suspension of the sacrifice produces a momentary disjunction between Abraham's motives (to fulfil God's initial command and sacrifice Isaac) and God's motives (to call off the sacrifice by calling it a test)'. This 'momentary disjunction' shows that the Genesis story 'brings together two apparently contradictory modes of time: on the one hand, the singular, teleological temporality of a human sacrifice demanded and, on the other hand, the repetitious, deferred temporality of a human sacrifice averted'. Kierkegaard concentrates primarily on the first mode of time, namely the time of sacrifice that opens up the secret communion between God and Abraham; a time that transcends the human world or creates a transcendental realm that is outside time.

To counter Kierkegaard's one-sided focus on God's demand for a human sacrifice, Danta thus evokes Blanchot. Blanchot is more concerned with the second mode of time: the time of substitution. In Blanchot's reading the substitution of the ram for Isaac creates a new, deferred realm of time. Danta describes this realm as a no-man's-land that does not transcend the human world (it therefore differs radically from the secret communion between God and Abraham in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*). Abraham wanders in this no-man's-land, but he no longer has a task; he only has to live with the discovery of the substitutability of his beloved son. According to Danta, Blanchot shows that the suspension of death in the Genesis story opens up a space in which the identity of Isaac becomes 'spectral'. Blanchot describes this spectrality as follows: 'Others saw the son in Isaac, but they didn't know what had happened on the mountain, but he saw the ram in his son, because he had made a ram for himself out of his child.' In Danta's view, this moment of substitution not only makes Isaac's identity spectral, but also precludes Abraham from 'gaining a sense of identity from his willingness to go through with the sacrifice'.

Isaac's spectrality, for Blanchot, introduces a third point concerning the spectrality of the writer. Kierkegaard, Kafka and Blanchot not only share an interest in the Genesis story; they are united by what Danta calls Scheherazade's law. Danta describes this in terms of the title of his book: literature suspends death. In Danta's view, all three writers realize that Scheherazade's law comes at a price. The act of writing can only suspend the writer's normal identity

by substituting for it a spectral and imaginary one. Danta suggests, without saying as much, that Kierkegaard's understanding of the spectrality of the writer differs from that of Kafka and Blanchot. Whereas Kierkegaard understands this spectrality in terms of sacrifice, Kafka and Blanchot understand it in terms of substitution. This sheds new light on Danta's remark that Kierkegaard subordinates literature to Abraham, whereas Kafka subordinates Abraham to literature. Danta suggests that in Kierkegaard's works writing still has a preordained object that gives it meaning. In this way, Kierkegaard ultimately subordinates literature to a meaningful world-view. The space that is opened by the writer is not defined by the repetitious, deferred temporality of literary substitution, but by the teleological temporality of religious sacrifice. For Kierkegaard, the suspension of death is only made possible by the willingness to go through with the sacrifice. In his view, Abraham can only win back Isaac by first losing him.

To counter Kierkegaard's poetics of sacrifice, Danta evokes a poetics of postponement and substitution that he finds in Kafka and Blanchot. For them literature is not subordinated to anything, but becomes its own end. It opens up a repetitious and deferred temporality that is similar to the no-man's-land in which Abraham dwells after the ram's substitution for Isaac. Here the writer is beyond any project, the goal becomes dissociated from the way. Danta points out that this does not separate the writer from others, as in Kierkegaard. On the contrary, the work only gains reality in relation to the reader who reacts to it. For Blanchot 'the writer is, like Isaac, someone who lacks any intrinsic identity and who must always define himself in relation to the human and nonhuman others around him.'

Literature Suspends Death shows convincingly that the combined perspective of Kafka and Blanchot offers a valuable alternative to Kierkegaard's focus on Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac. However, Danta's rich and promising reading of Kafka and Blanchot only succeeds by first undermining Kierkegaard's interpretation. The generosity that is shown towards Kafka and Blanchot is not extended to Kierkegaard. In this regard, it is striking that Danta has almost nothing to say about Kierkegaard's extensive reflections on his own authorship as a type of indirect communication, which are surely extremely relevant in the light of Danta's problem of literary imagination? A generous inclusion of these reflections would have made Danta's confrontation more balanced, and thus more relevant.

Martijn Boven