

# Marking time, making histories

Massimiliano Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities*, trans. Peter D. Thomas and Sara R. Ferris, Brill, Leiden and Boston MA, 2012, 206 pp. €99.00 hb., 978 9 00423 678 3.

There have been few more important episodes in the history of Marxism than its provincialization in the figure of what the Soviets named 'Western Marxism', shifting its discourse away from preoccupations with labour and the production process to circulation, commodification and culture. This tendency has become so hegemonic that it has managed to mask its own cultural and political origins behind universalistic claims. Moreover, its success has run the risk of making it look complicit in capitalism's own self-representation. While this reflex stems from the work of the Frankfurt School and its subsequent expansion into cultural disciplines, it is evident in another register in the work of Antonio Negri and his followers, who have presumed the final completion of the commodity relation everywhere – the putative realization of 'real subsumption' – to reaffirm capitalism's own self-image in the pursuit of progress. These cases share the common ground of the assumption of capitalism's completion, its final externalization and naturalization, whereby it has subsumed society as such. In Frankfurt Marxism, there is an explicit transfer of perspective to circulation, whereas in Negri productive labour is envisioned as intellectual and immaterial, expressed in the sovereign subject of the 'general intellect'. What they commonly propose is the secondary stature of industrial labour, which has been silently demoted to a residual status, since value is now made to appear to come directly from the productive process itself and production is elastically expanded to fill every pore of society and inform all human activity.

It is this particular version of Marxism that commands the full attention of Massimiliano Tomba's timely and often brilliantly suggestive and informed reading of how Marxism lost its way and failed to account for the changes that Marx introduced in the 1860s and 1870s, producing *Capital* as a massive conceptualization of capitalism's system of time accountability that finds in the world market the instrument to synchronize the multiple temporalities and different forms of exploitation embodied in commodities, in order to secure greater surplus value.

Tomba's aim is to rethink the grounds of 'historical materialism' in order to demonstrate that, far from appearing as an abstract 'theory of history', it is a 'practical mode of intervention into history', in line with Marx's self-conception as a 'practical materialist'. This proposition involves focusing on Marx's conceptualization of time and history: delinking the former from a 'universal conception of history' and the latter from its correspondence to meaning. Tomba proposes to reinstate the perspective of multiple temporalities (the scandal of national time), in order to break clear from any further association with a singular linear time. In his reckoning with time, linearity is inscribed in the narrative of progress that follows a trajectory that presupposes a uniform and causal relationship between past and present (which Marx had discounted as early as *The German Ideology*) by defining a 'field of experience' which produces a dialectic between advance and backwardness, thereby authorizing a comparative measure that has consigned much of the world outside Euro-America to the inferior domain of time-lag and catch-up. In this narrative scenario, the Euro-American nations became the stand-in for the broader civilization of the West, but capitalist modernization and its 'progress' were vocations yoked only to the nation-state and a collective agreement on a normative uniform and linear time in which achievement unfolded.

However, Marx's increasing preoccupation with temporalities embedded in different histories (already recognized before World War II by Japanese thinkers) actually enlarged the geopolitical space beyond the nation form to the expanded arena of the globe and the synchronizations demanded by the spectacle of mixed temporalities brought to market. As Tomba insists, a change of perspective leaves European provincialism and its 'self-representations' of singular time and joins it now to Marx's recovery of pre-capitalist archaic and 'primitive' societies and the 'non-eternal' and historical edge of capitalism. Clearly, Tomba is intent on concretizing Ernst Bloch's notion of the *multiversum*, 'polyphony of a unity', and the autonomy of temporalities and their mutual

claims to dehierarchization. The axis of his reading is Marx's growing recognition of the co-presence of multiple temporalities and the process of inversion from production and wage labour to circulation and commodification, which reinforces both unilinearity and progress, to reveal the silhouette of 'real subsumption' (which Tomba doesn't mention) and the idealization of the totality and its completion and final, naturalized and eternalized self-representation.

With Tomba, what seems to be at stake is the importance of acknowledging the 'historical stratifications of modernity' and the ruptures generated by class struggles that will call into question the image of modernity as a continuous, smooth surface and reveal the fiction of capitalism's self-image. This epochal encounter was marked by revolution – the French Revolution – and the successive centralizations of the political order it continued from the monarchy, resulting in opening up a space within the Revolution for revolution to oppose it. How that process was perceived became the principal vocation of political historiography, which Marx's *18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* sought to portray: not the great revolution as rupture but the temporality of social revolution yet to be realized. (Here, Tomba's account of the revolution within a revolution recalls Gramsci's revolution/restoration, which, in cases like Italy and Japan, constituted the dominant model of transformation.) For Marx, prior revolutions like the French Revolution had not been able to break the spell of the past, and even fortified it with forms assuring renewed continuity that repressed the 'spirit' of a revolution of the future capable of animating the necessary rupture in political time.

If Marx chose to represent the afterlife of the failed Revolution of 1848 in the modality of farce, as a repetition, his purpose was to identify the most characteristic reflex of capitalist modernization in the unscheduled recurrence and presence of the past in the present and its unyielding hold on contemporary society. Tomba names this reassertion of tradition 'present-past', what anthropologist Marilyn Ivy once described as the task of re-presenting this fading world as the 'discourse of the vanishing', which disappears only in the last instance. This recognition involves grasping how the modern sought to conceal the reality of unevenness, through capitalism's aptitude for controlling representation and deterritorializing fixed relationships. The historical reality of capitalist modernity disclosed that the collision of present and past was exposed at its sharpest along the periphery, the margins, especially the colony, where the modern and its other met, producing 'non-

synchronisms' caused by dissonant forms of being. Where later interpreters sought to resolve this problem in cultural terms, Marx unambiguously saw the question of the present occupied by 'imaginary spectres' as political, requiring an overhaul of the social conditions of existence that encouraged the persistence of the dead's hold upon the present.

Marx discerned these non-synchronisms in France's revolutionary process in the figure of the 'tradition of the dead' that 'weighs like a nightmare (*Alp*) on the brains of the living'. The oppression of lingering superstitions stood in the way of the living, regularly appearing in the post-revolutionary imaginary, a materialization of ghosts Marx first detected in Stirner's historiography, vampires, which in *Capital* dramatize capital's desire for surplus value, sucking blood from workers. Tomba rightly proposes that the figure of the vampire possessed a specifically modern political instrumentality precisely because 'it represented a past' that simply refused to go away: spectres that constantly disturb the modern boundaries of identity and subjectivity among the living, and which later supplied ammunition to 'reactionary politics and fascism'. The task of resolving a future yet to be born thus initially required letting 'the dead bury the dead' as a condition of freeing a living present ultimately to realize liberation in revolution. Such a history and its temporality, unfastened from tradition and its 'spectres' (*Gespenst*), was already incubating in Marx's critique of Stirner and his 'ghostly history'.

Marx's break with bourgeois historiography thus required a new form of representation, not simply another story, but a form that would repoliticize the scene by turning to the working-class struggle and offering it an openly partial and particularistic history. Deriving its power from a tradition of revolutionary struggle, this history would seek to rewrite and release new possibilities in the present to persuade revolutionaries to enlist the spirits of the past, rather than merely to summon them. The great achievement of the *18th Brumaire*, Tomba argues, was thus Marx's insight of the 'temporality of present-past', the different temporalities of 'present praxis'. It is, moreover, in this text that Tomba suggests that Marx perceived in the received representation of society a 'phantasmagoria' without either head or body. In *Capital*, this idea would be enlarged to become the specifically capitalist form of the social totality, but in the *18th Brumaire* it described the Second Empire. The phantasmagoria constitutes an ideological representation that refracts social reality into distorted form. Yet it's also of a piece with Marx's deployment of dramatic metaphors

of vampires, ghosts and spectres: the imaginary scene of shadows no longer inhabited by bodies but only phantoms, terrorizing the proletarian masses in the name of a farcical existing order that possessed no substantiality. Such an autonomous political regime, endlessly increasing state centralization, relied on linear causality as historical time to privilege the changes of calendar days, without events, as such, or, as Tomba advises, mandated *misrecognition of eventfulness*, since events are what syncopate history to the register of rapture.

The phantasmagoria prefigures what Tomba describes as a 'new phenotype', which results in the formation of a new kind of human produced by the capitalist inversion of use-value into exchange-value, the expansion of the domain of needs and the accelerated production of a world of commodities that led to the domination of 'consumerism'. This is a familiar story in cultural studies, a staple of current accounts among Marxists and non-Marxists alike that has become a classic cultural cliché. If it is an image that 'has acted beyond all expectation', it also announces in muffled tones the realization of real subsumption, even though Tomba remains silent and distant from this view, without explaining the difference. Value, in any case, supplants use-value and the individual misrecognizes the latter in the former. An even more important effect of the inversion is its consequences for experience. Since capitalism installs the 'dominion' of the abstract over the concrete, the inversion reshapes the collective imagination and reorients it to indifference. With this epochal transformation of human individuality, the 'death of use-value', or its suppression, produces a void in the experiential realm and undermines the capacity to differentiate qualitative differences. Echoing Simmel, Tomba points to how capitalist modernity resembles a contradictory Janus figure comprising 'inner worldly asceticism' and 'hyper-consumerism', whereby human needs have been displaced by endless but never satisfied desire: the production and consumption of the new. 'Contemporary experience appears fragmentary, yet each fragment reflects the same image...' producing equivalence in all things.

While the static countenance of the phenotype reflects the inversion of the temporalization of space into a spatialization of time, 'reproducing the image of that which reappears', the former, where time 'impresses' on space redefinition and rescaling, remains invisible, in a repressed state. Only when capital finally appears as an 'automaton', signalling the moment capital produces its own presuppositions, personified as money-making and occluding

value's source in living labour, does its perspective change to the sphere of circulation. This is not a conjunctural event but rather a duration when social relationships and labour are intensified and workers increasingly expelled from the labour process. By the same measure, Marx narrowed his focus to the central chapter in *Capital* on the 'working day' and away from the abstract totalization of capitalism, towards its principal but concrete part and the perspective dedicated to 'living labour'. But the violence inflicted on the body, prompting workers to call into question the excessive exploitation they must endure, is simply absent from a perspective dominated by circulation. In Tomba's thinking, it is Marx's insistence on seeing the commodity in its concreteness, the object of use-value, which permits him to consider the historicity of different social forms and the way they became the embodiment of exchange-value, rather than the object of satisfying human need. Moreover, this perspective enabled Marx to envision the operation of dual



temporalities, whereby the objectification of abstract labour was obliged to depend on the time of concrete and specific labour. In this inverted world, commodities are sold as portions of labour-time indifferent to the qualitative labour implicated in their making. As a result, what is exchanged is labour time, where the exchange process serves the law of value, universalizing and internalizing the 'consciousness of time' by figuring the fetishization that presents a world-image occupied by commodities neither produced by, nor subject to, history.

Far from shifting his own perspective, Marx in the 1860s and after extended and enlarged it to give it further substance to offset the effect of the inversion and restore the reality of the 'temporalization of space.' It was during these years, as well, that he began to explore the history of primitive societies and the world outside Euro-America, through ethnologic reports, to inaugurate the process of his own deprovincialization. The evidence for this move away from circulation for production appears in *Capital* Volume I, where Marx concentrates on the particularity of the social labour process that concretely produced commodities, in other words wage labour. Here is the meaning of his decision to insert the long chapter on the working day, to make sure the experience of work was remembered, and a reminder that because labour was a 'peculiar commodity' it still retained traces of use-value. The conflict was not simply between capital and labour but between different orders of temporality, 'over and for time'. But Tomba overlooks the role played by 'disposable time', time belonging to the worker, which Marx assigned to satisfy the worker's 'intellectual and social requirements', which in numerous subsequent examples in France, Germany and Japan involved workers stealing time for their pleasure.

At the level of the world market and later globalization processes, efforts to expand wage differentials to increase the magnitude of surplus value and simultaneously conceal the source of value through circulation led to both the revolutionizing of the means of production and the appropriation of non-capitalist modes of production that might be harnessed to capitalism. The latter meant resorting to what Marx designated as different forms of subsumption: formal, hybrid, miscellaneous. In this respect, Tomba concedes that slave labour coexists with wage labour, but once the curtain of circulation is lifted to reveal the scene of production, the forms of subsumption acquire greater importance in the narrative of multiple temporalities that he wishes to stage as the site of struggle. If capital's phantasmagoria produced an unhistorical present

and virtually annihilated history, then the appearance of formal subsumption, along with its subcategories, became the site of the historical, or the making of history, because its behaviour entails the event of an encounter of capitalism with received practices from prior modes of production, to produce uneven relationships.

Marx believed that formal subsumption was 'the general form of every capitalist process' – that is, the general basis of all capitalist development – which made it the process whereby historically prior practices were subordinated to capitalist production. Because subsumption was a form, rather than an ultimately replaced fixed stage, the process was not bound to a particular time and place but co-present with more advanced practices, down to the present day. Subordination didn't dictate either loss or disappearance of this historical identity but rather its retention and coexistence, what later Marxists called 'remnants' and contradictions that capitalism would dissolve, and bourgeois modernizers describe as 'traditions' that survive the evolutionary arc of a society to assist and mediate the modernization process by assuring a peaceful transformation. Instead, these traces of other modes of production and the historicity of the event of subsumption made them historical-temporal forms embodying different temporalities, serving presents other than the ones in which such practices originated. Even though they have been synchronized by what Tomba calls a 'universal chronometer marked by the temporality of socially necessary labour', their mark of unevenness still retains a difference capable of rupturing the timelessness of capitalism's phantasmagoria.

When Marx called for the fusion of the archaism of the Russian commune and modern industrial forms, José Carlos Mariátegui appreciated the retention of Inca forms of landholding in Peru's modern history, and Uno Kozo observed the 'partnership' of the Tokugawa village and modern capitalism in Japan, they gave us instances of how historical-temporal retentions behave in new temporal environments. More importantly, we also have the analytic route followed by interpreters of Marx beyond Euro-America who bypassed the fiction of real subsumption and the auratic grip of value in favour of an accounting of production and labour processes in specific sites, and thus a model of an epochal encounter joining older historical practices to capitalism and the wage-form, long before Dipesh Chakrabarty costumed it in Heideggerian vestments and renamed it History II.

**Harry Harootunian**

# Only a poet can save us

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2012. 173 pp., £9.95 pb., 978 1 58435 112 2.

This is the fourteenth book to be published in Semiotext(e)'s Intervention series of pocket-sized texts. Launched with the translation of The Invisible Committee's *The Coming Insurrection* in 2009, it evidently seeks to revive the format of the publisher's original 1980s' Foreign Agents paperbacks, while making a specific claim to contemporaneity in its explicit identification with activist politics. Each inside cover reproduces a tastefully tinted snapshot of recent insurrection – from Greek riot police (*The Coming Insurrection*) to masked stone-throwers (Tiqqun's *This Is Not a Program*) to the photograph of Occupy Wall Street that appears here – while stylistically the emphasis is on the manifesto-like and polemical.

'These texts were written in 2011, the first year of the European uprising, when European society entered into a deep crisis that seems to me much more a crisis of social imagination than mere economics', begins *The Uprising*. Yet the book is, for all its rhetorical urgency, unfortunately notable most for its repetitious and digressive form. The same examples and topics loop around, from the EU and Greek debt, to Bretton Woods and the gold standard, to May '68 and punk, giving the impression of a text that has been left unrevised and unedited, dictated by whatever happened to occur to the author at the time. (No translator or original Italian text is cited, so one can presume it was written in English.) Pocket-sized as it is, this reads like a book with an article struggling to get out.

In general terms, the book resumes where Berardi's 2009 *The Soul at Work* left off. As in that earlier text, the account of a distinctive 'post-Fordist' mode of production that 'takes the mind, language and creativity as its primary tools for the production of value' subjects the traditional *operaismo* emphasis on working-class agency, as both the engine and ultimate gravedigger of capitalist development, to a somewhat belated linguistic turn. This is a move already familiar from, among others, Maurizio Lazzarato's writings on immaterial labour, Paolo Virno's account of the 'grammar' of the multitude, and, most impressively, Christian Marazzi's series of books on what he has termed the 'linguistic turn of the economy' under current regimes of financialization. At its heart is a proposition that it is 'communication' that has become the driving force of leading-edge capitalism today, as

well as, more foggily, the potential basis for the multitude's power to generate new modes of cooperation and collaboration constituted by 'mass intellectuality'. As a result, so-called cognitive or semio-capitalism entails not just an extraction of value from labour within the production process, but, according to this argument, a far more extensive valorization that draws directly upon the creativity and knowledge produced by social 'life' as such.

Despite its emphasis on the historical specificity of some post-2011 'catastrophe' and emergent 'insurrection', the underlying claims of *The Uprising* are, then, pretty familiar stuff. What distinguishes Berardi's 'intervention' is the particular desperation apparent in its conjunctural articulation. Setting out from a strikingly sombre diagnosis of the contemporary, in which, he suggests, 'it is difficult not to see the future of Europe as a dark blend of techno-financial authoritarianism and aggressive populist reaction', Berardi's depiction of the present swings wildly between its two poles of Virilio-style apocalypticism and Negrian optimism, as if in a peculiar mimesis of the manic depressive 'bipolar disorder' that he identifies with the drugged-up and anxiety-ridden subject of a contemporary 'Prozac economy' in general. Tellingly perhaps, Baudrillard is, along with Deleuze and Guattari, the most frequently quoted thinker in the book, and it is the former's application of semiotic theory to a series of Marxian problematics that often seems to loom largest in what philosophical consideration of contemporary financialized capitalism is offered here. The 'digitization of exchanges' transforms 'things into symbols ... sucking down and swallowing up the world of physical things, of concrete skills and knowledges', while 'signs produce signs without any longer passing through the flesh'. Where, however, Baudrillard's own trajectory, from the late 1970s, took him towards an emphatic refusal of any nostalgia for the flesh of the world – polemically disavowing those Situationist-style rhetorics of a liberation from the generalized abstraction of the Spectacle which his earlier writings had at least tacitly continued to evoke – Berardi seeks to recover many of those elements that Baudrillard precisely jettisoned. What results is a fairly traditional 'reproach of abstraction', as Peter Osborne calls it – against a language 'whose consistency has nothing

to do with the multilayered consistency of life' – which entails that, for all of its Guattarian sloganizing, much of *The Uprising* reads rather more like Richard Sennett bemoaning the loss of craftsmanship than it does *A Thousand Plateaus*. Berardi may reject elsewhere the 'idealism' of the young Marx's account of alienation, and of what he describes, in *The Soul at Work*, as the latter's 'presupposition of a generic human essence' (while, significantly, resisting the concept's wholesale negation). But the dominant tone of *loss* that pervades the pages of this book rather serves to undermine any Tronti-like emphasis upon the productive powers of 'estrangement' as the basis of proletarian autonomy today. Instead, Berardi's sporadic invocations of 'a new era of autonomy and emancipation' come only to seem less and less convincing as the book progresses; not least, one suspects, to the author himself.

That Berardi's desperate solution to 'our' own particular riddle of history should turn out, therefore, to be the most venerable modern answer of all – *poetry* – is, if nothing else, of some symptomatic interest. The 'closed reality' of abstraction in financial capitalism cannot, Berardi writes, any longer 'be overcome with the techniques of politics, of conscious voluntary action, and of government'. (So much for socialism then.) Instead, 'Only an act of language can give us the ability to see and to create a new human condition, where we now only see barbarianism and violence'. Poetry or barbarism? Such is apparently the dilemma *du jour*. Alluding vaguely to recent debates surrounding debt, a classically autonomist invocation of the line of flight is here reworked via a rather loose metaphor of 'insolvency', in which poetry becomes equivalent to the linguistic 'act' of refusing to pay up, 'the line of escape from the reduction of language to exchange'. If poetry is 'the language of nonexchangeability', it constitutes 'language's excess, the signifier disentangled from

the limits of the signified', writes Berardi, sounding more like *Tel Quel* than *Potere Operaio*. Yet, in fact, of course, the signifier is far from inherently 'fleshy', as regards its conventional relationship to the signified, since it depends for its iterability (and, hence, 'exchangeability') precisely on its capacity to abstract from actual material forms of identity. One would, at the very least, thus need to account for the process of abstraction that is essential to any such supposed linguistic 'disentanglement'. Without this, such claims are little more than bad 'poetry' themselves.

What, then, of poetry? The organizing motif of *The Uprising*'s subtitle – *On Poetry and Finance* – is one that posits a parallel between 'the deterritorialization effect' which has, on the one hand, 'separated words from their semiotic referents' and, on the other, separated 'money from economic goods'. Considering 'the main thread of twentieth-century poetic research' alongside 'the economic reconfiguration that occurred during the last three decades of the century, from the neoliberal deregulation to the monetarist abstract reregulation', Berardi writes, 'we'll find some similarities'. Perhaps. Certainly, the notion that there is some historical connection between those modes of abstraction apparent in modernist practice and those inherent to commodity fetishism and the money form is surely correct; a point agreed upon by thinkers as diverse as Adorno, Jean-Joseph Goux and Manfredo Tafuri. But 'some similarities' is pretty vague, and the analogy isn't much further developed over the course of the book. (A loose correlation between Rimbaud's 'deregulation of the senses' and financial deregulation doesn't exactly help much either.) In conjoining early-twentieth-century modernism with post-1970s' 'neoliberalism', Berardi's chronology is more than a little strained too, in so far as it means that the former has to assume a position of prophetic anticipation, in



which poets have not so much reflected the crises of their own time as they ‘forebode the coming distortions and perversions of the huge deterritorialization that would come with capitalist globalization’. The fact that Yeats’s 1919 ‘The Second Coming’ is Berardi’s main example in this respect tends to confirm the apocalypticism at work in this (though one might also wonder whether this particular poet’s reactionary brew of nationalism, mythopoesis and occultism is quite what Berardi wants to evoke against a coming world in which ‘things fall apart, the centre cannot hold’). More to the point, it is not at all clear what Berardi actually wants to make of his comparison between poetry and finance. The point is evidently not to damn modernism by association, in the manner of Lukács, not least because Berardi’s own vision of poetry as ‘the signifier disentangled from the limits of the signified’ seemingly depends upon it. Yet, if the aim is to proffer a distinction between a ‘techno-linguistic automatism’ governed by the money form (bad abstraction) and a ‘deterritorialization’ as poetic ‘free flight ... out of any kind of rule’ (good abstraction?), the philosophical account of language provided is simply too thin, too impressionistic, ever to make any headway with this.

While, then, on the terrain of contemporary post-Deleuzisms, the linguistic focus to be found in *The Uprising* could well have opened up an interesting theoretical alternative to recent tendencies to dismiss language as a central medium of subjectivization in favour of the privileging of *pre*-linguistic affect, Berardi’s invocation of a specifically poetic language – language, above all, as ‘affective potency’, a ‘re-activation of the desiring force of enunciation’ – short-circuits any such potential, precisely as it might have been worked through in relation to (rather than in withdrawal from) the developments of contemporary ‘semio-capitalism’. Derrida’s *Writing and Difference* appears in *The Uprising*’s short bibliography, but there’s not much evidence that Berardi has actually read it. If he had, he might well have been a little more wary about pseudo-Heideggerian definitions of poetry as ‘the voice of language’, let alone as ‘the here and now of the voice, of the body, and of the word, sensuously giving birth to meaning’. The archaism of an appeal to the poetic aligns at this point with a desire for a return to the production of ‘useful’ and ‘concrete’ ‘things’ that is all too reminiscent of recent journalistic pleas for a restoration of the ‘real economy’.

In fact, as a form of cultural politics, Berardi’s mission statement is a simple if hazy one: ‘Only the conscious mobilization of the erotic *body* of the general intellect, only the poetic revitalization of language, will

open the way to the emergence of a new form of social autonomy’. Poetry’s task is thus one of ‘reactivating the social body’, in which we ‘have to start a process of deautomating the word, and a process of reactivating sensuousness (singularity of enunciation, the voice) in the sphere of social communication’. There is, of course, a name for this kind of thing: romanticism. This is not immediately to damn it. In some sense, a ‘romantic’ moment would seem crucial to all effective (as well as affective) politics, if it is to be more than merely a matter of administration. And *The Uprising* is, even by usual standards, haunted by the memory of 1968 as a moment ‘when poetry ruled the streets’ (as Andrew Feenberg has it). The problem is that Berardi transparently has no idea of what this might actually mean today. As such, the text can finally have recourse only to a familiar set of organicist fantasies for which the poem appears, yet again, as the sensuous image of a freedom *beyond* all politics itself. (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s account of ‘speculative Rousseauism’ in *The Literary Absolute*, their study of Jena Romanticism, should perhaps have been added to the bibliography along with *Writing and Difference*.) As an avant-gardism, this is one lacking any avant-garde.

As much to the point, isn’t a certain ‘process of progressive abstraction’ a rather evident *condition of* the ‘general intellect’? What would be the contemporary (or, in fact, any) ‘sphere of social communication’ without this? Indeed, is it remotely possible to conceive of a global social collectivity that would *not* involve an experience of abstraction as, in some way, intrinsic to it? In which case, mere rhetorical invocations of our need to restore the bodily, the fleshy or the sensuous – somehow, magically, rendered collective in form – will not take us very far. It is, at any rate, hardly a surprise, therefore, that whatever faith is expressed by Berardi in those new ‘psycho-affective reactivation[s] of the social body’, to be glimpsed in ‘the English riots and the Italian revolts and the Spanish *acampada*’, this does not translate into anything as solid as a political strategy in *The Uprising*, while ‘poetry’ becomes not much more than a placeholder name for the forms of social life imagined for some phantasmatic Deleuzian ‘people’ to come. Such a sense that the ‘poetic’ offers some resistance to capitalist forms, as well as a speculative basis for a life beyond them, is scarcely a new one. In the end, however, for all the stress upon its own contemporaneity – and for all Berardi’s own likeability – *The Uprising* has little more to offer than a reassertion of the romantic form of such an idea itself.

**David Cunningham**

# Normalienism

Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945–1968*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011. xi + 326 pp., £58.00 hb., 978 1 10700 967 7.

Edward Baring's new book is the proverbial curate's egg. Based on research in the Derrida archives at University of California, Irvine and the Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine (IMEC) in France, the book reconstructs the intellectual formation of Jackie, later Jacques, up until 1967 when the three celebrated books appeared: *Voice and Phenomenon*, *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*. An epilogue describes the events of 1968 and concludes with Derrida's SUNY lecture given later that year, 'The Ends of Man'. Simultaneously, Baring attempts to use Derrida as the 'privileged guiding thread for tracing the twists and turns of postwar intellectual history in France', so that each chapter is split into two parts: one concerning the institutional and social context and one on how Derrida was implicated in this nexus.

In truth, it is the institution of the École Normale Supérieure which gets most attention, since Derrida studied to gain entrance for three years, spent four years there as a student (1952–56) and returned in 1964 at the insistence of Louis Althusser as 'agrégé-répétiteur', a full-time member of the ENS teaching staff whose responsibility was to prepare *normaliens* for the philosophy component of the *agrégation* (a set of competitive examinations determining status within the French secondary education system). 1964 splits the book into two parts. Part One is organized chronologically and covers the years before joining the ENS staff with separate chapters on the preparatory effort needed to gain entry to ENS; the time at ENS; the writing of his dissertation on Husserl and genetic phenomenology; and a rather compressed account of the eight years following his successful *agrégation*. This last chapter focuses on the first published work: the translation of (and book-length 'Introduction' to) Husserl's late essay 'Origin of Geometry'. Part Two, 'Between Phenomenology and Structuralism', takes a different tack, with its three chapters tackling the genesis of a different 1967 book while situating each in its particular intellectual conjuncture.

Now this sounds like a much-needed project. Certainly the period between 1950 and 1960, the interregnum, philosophically speaking, between existentialism and (post)structuralism, has so far been badly served by scholarship. However, Baring makes some idiosyncratic decisions, lacks adequate philosophical nous,

and pursues a grand narrative for which he can only muster extremely weak, circumstantial support.

First, *The Young Derrida* sits alongside the recently translated biography by Benoît Peeters, *Derrida* (reviewed by David Cunningham in *RP* 176, November/December 2012). Both have had extensive periods in the archives. However, whereas Peeters concentrates on Derrida's correspondence, Baring has chosen to represent the student years through juvenilia: Derrida, an inveterate hoarder, kept all of his student work and course notes. This decision profoundly affects Baring's narrative frame. The contrast between Baring's and Peeters's books is stark. In his excitement about what he finds in essays written by Derrida in his late teens and early twenties, the extensive letters to Michel Monory, whom Derrida met at that age – and which Peeters describes as 'perhaps as important in Derrida's development as the young Freud's correspondence with Wilhelm Fleiss' – are ignored entirely by Baring. This same principle affects Part Two of Baring: there is no account of Derrida's 'extra-mural' engagement with the French literary scene. Baring is explicit: he believes the relation to the literary avant-garde has been well treated elsewhere. He does not specify where, but perhaps in Peeters, who gives weight to Derrida's epistolary friendship with Gabriel Bounoure, venerable poetry critic for *Nouvelle Revue Française* and who makes the eight-year friendship with Philippe Sollers central. Derrida met both men in 1964. Neither Bounoure nor Sollers is mentioned in *The Young Derrida*.

Second, and this is decisive, Baring attempts to demonstrate that the preoccupations of the young Derrida, as evinced in his homework and assignments, reveal his filiation with French Christian existentialism. The specific nature of this claim is never entirely cleared up, since the empirical individual concerned is clearly an atheist, but at its strongest Baring seems to imply that this interest persisted and that Derrida was forced by institutional and peer pressure at ENS, both as teacher and student, to occlude it in order to comply with the dominant intellectual fashions. To wit, he was 'under enormous pressure to tone down references to mystical thinking'. A lot hangs here on Baring's insistence on the early influence of Gabriel Marcel, and in particular his 1951 book *Le Mystère de l'Être*. The groundwork for this claim is laid by



arguing for the thematic proximity to Marcel of Derrida's teenage essays. These 'follow the arguments of Marcel' or 'paraphrase' him. It is never really clear what Baring is claiming beyond shared characteristic concerns. Strangely, and I assume this is an oversight, Baring does not muster a single direct citation of Marcel from Derrida's documents, although Simone Weil and Søren Kierkegaard are there. In post-Kantian philosophy, concerns about the valid application of reason and the place of faith are hardly monopolized by Marcel. One footnote even admits that Marcel abandoned an explicit alignment with Christian existentialism and adopted the term 'Christian Socratic' to describe himself after 1948.

To illustrate the thesis advanced by Baring, one can look at his discussion of Derrida's ENS dissertation. In this 1953 'Mémoire' on Husserl, eventually published in 1990, Derrida's true interest in the 'mystical' is dressed up in 'phenomenological garb', or 'Husserl is merely the occasion' to go beyond a 'worldly dialectic'. Correctly identifying the contemporary importance of Tran Duc Thao's *Phenomenology and Dialectical Materialism*, Baring writes: 'one can say that the mysterious was both the condition of the possibility and the condition of the impossibility of science. The mystical [Gabriel] Marcel was invoked to remedy the scientific Tran Duc Thao's ills.' Baring notes that Marcel is 'missing in name' (not even a reference) but that his ideas are 'clearly active'. The main evidence appears to be, first, the revised choice of title *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*, and, second, the focus on the 'mysterious' element that disrupts Husserl's various efforts in moving from static to genetic phenomenology in his later work. That is, Marcel utilizes a binary comprising 'problem' and its mundane counterpoint, 'mystery', which escapes all rational thought. We see, first, the word in the title and, second, the key feature uncovered through Derrida's analysis. However, the book serves at key points to undermine even the sparse evidence marshalled to this cause. One footnote towards the end of the relevant chapter reads: 'It is also significant that Derrida's whole essay mirrored a work by Heidegger that, when Derrida wrote his essay, had only recently been translated into French: *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.' If we also recall Heidegger's use of *Rätsel*, 'enigma' or 'mystery', in *Being and Time* to mark points where Husserlian phenomenological description would have been seeking *Evidenz*, 'evidence', then a closer solution lies at hand. Baring tries to downplay this glaring connection through the insistence that 'Heidegger played little explicit role in Derrida's *Mémoire*. He is only

cited once positively, in Derrida's discussion of Husserl's notion of time.' But this is one more reference than he can produce for Marcel, and both Baring and Peeters emphasize that Derrida had repeatedly referred to Heidegger before 1952, much to the annoyance of Étienne Borne, his tutor at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand.

What Baring draws from the archive is unable to warrant his interpretation, which persists throughout the book in various forms. At one point, Derrida 'drew on Christian philosophy', though he is not 'doctrinally Christian'. At another, 'Derrida's thought can be understood within the context of French Christian philosophy.' At yet another,

Derrida probed first Sartre's existentialism, then a phenomenology of science, and finally Althusser's Spinozist Marxism, and for internal reasons found them all wanting. God was an axiom Derrida could do without; his anti-foundationalism was consonant with a religious tradition criticizing human arrogance, but he never proposed substituting a final religious ground.

That these three are substantially different claims requiring different methodological approaches is not considered. Since there is no attention in the book to the distinctions between religious beliefs, philosophical world-views, and the nature of theological and philosophical claims, the problem is compounded. Baring asserts that Derrida was opposed to 'idolatrous ontotheologies', but the opposition to ontotheology resides more in his fidelity to Husserl, who strictly interprets the 'scientificity' of philosophy as located in *Selbstbesinnung* – taking responsibility for the meaning of each sign in one's discourse. This is not 'religiously inspired criticism of epistemological hubris'.

Equally, Baring's treatment of the technical aspects of philosophy and phenomenology is too loose. Husserlian phenomenology is explained as follows: 'not attempting to understand the object itself, phenomenology contented itself to analyze the intention that aimed at it.' Ontological difference is crudely mapped onto the structuralist distinction between signifier and signified: 'It was because Saussure's difference had been contaminated with Heidegger's that Derrida was able to unsettle structuralism's synchronic systems.' (It is the collapse of the Husserlian distinction between expression and indication that is most pertinent here: under generalized 'association', grammatology dispenses with the claimed unity of the signified and so views the signified as structured like the signifier – differing and deferred).

This general technical deficiency exacerbates the tendency to go outside the philosophical texts to

explain their real significance via positioning in an intellectual or an institutional-political context. Part Two sees Baring attempt to account for the advent of deconstruction, after Derrida's return to ENS, through the professional imposition of teaching towards the *agrégation*. But the double movement of explication and commentary merely describes a general hermeneutics, not anything specific to Derrida's essays of the time. Indeed, a general differentiation of Derrida's approach from any close reading whatsoever is lacking. There is a short three- to four-page discussion of Paul Ricœur's opposition to existential phenomenology, but this is not really adequate. A deeper meditation on how Derrida differed from Ricœur's hermeneutics might have helped avoid describing Derrida's lectures at the Sorbonne (where Derrida was *assistant* to Ricœur, Suzanne Bachelard, Jean Wahl and Georges Canguilhem) as 'religiously minded phenomenology'.

The fixed idea of Derrida's Christian existentialism is attractive to Baring owing to the particularities of today's distorting US academic conjuncture, where *The Young Derrida* would aim to have a threefold effect. The current thesis of a 'religious turn' in the later Derrida would be displaced: 'Religious thought was not a new interest for the middle-aged Derrida, but rather the milieu in which deconstruction first developed.' Simultaneously, the emphasis on Derrida as Jewish would be shown to be based on a false privileging of his inheritance rather than his intellectual formation. Finally, Martin Hägglund's account of Derrida in his 2008 book *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (reviewed in *RP* 154, March/April 2009) would supposedly be refuted: 'Hägglund cannot be right about Derrida's radical atheism.'

Baring's archival selection just is not up to this challenge. The attempt to prove the grand thesis means that the good work done to reconstruct the French contexts for Derrida's first publications is squandered. Far more fruitful would be to develop that contemporary return to Husserlian phenomenology as a philosophy of the concept and its irrigation of 'French epistemology'. Two sections on the period from 1960 onwards are where the merit of the book lies.

Derrida referred to Canguilhem as his 'philosophical superego' and this second wave of phenomenology's reception spurned the first's existential problems for the problem of grounding science and explicating the conditions of objectivity. Derrida's early work on Husserl, for which he won the Prix Cavallès in 1962, belongs to its time alongside the work of Suzanne Bachelard, Jean-Toussaint Desanti, Gilles Gaston Granger and Jean Ladrière. Here was cooked

up a heady brew of work on phenomenology, intuition and mathematical and scientific ideality after Gödel. Especially important was the problem of 'formalization': the process by which perceptual acts and experience were rendered into objects and concepts through well-defined language and writing. As Baring notes, Granger's *Pensée formelle et sciences de l'homme* (1960) is a companion to Derrida's earliest work on writing and scientific ideality in Husserl.

With regard to the question of writing (*écriture*), which was to become the crucial element of Derrida's work, Baring tracks the production process by which the essays forming *Writing and Difference* came together in that collection. Written between 1959 and 1966, Derrida's re-editing of them involved the effacing of concepts such as 'Man' and *parole* from the earliest pieces and the integration of 'writing' in their place. In addition, essays such as 'Violence and Metaphysics' saw the incorporation of the new concepts of *jeu* and *économie*. Baring claims that this development was hidden as Derrida's thought underwent a decisive shift: 'In the period before 1965, as we saw, it was language in general which corresponded to the totalitarian reduction to the finite, which had to be enlivened by free thought, and when a distinction was made between speech and writing, speech took the place of the indeterminate free moment, with writing its condensation into a stable formal system. Writing was the finite rendering of the ineffable. Whatever its future role, here writing was a fall; it forgot difference.'

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Unfortunately a more appropriate form for this publication, in this regard, would then have been the reproduction of the relevant materials accompanied by commentary in a scholarly edition, but it seems that this will not be approved by the archives in the short term.

In his prefatory remarks, Baring admits that his 'dual history' of Derrida's early thought and the intellectual history of postwar France will be 'comprehensive in neither', but his real problems lie in a failure to consider what evidence would be needed to support the main claims advanced. This is not about the differences between intellectual history and philosophy as disciplines, but the failure of *The Young Derrida* to be adequate to either. It does not provide the 'biography of a philosophy' desired by Cunningham in his review of the Peeters biography (*RP* 176), but in its best moments Baring's work indicates what might be achieved through further philosophical work on this neglected period of intellectual ferment.

**Andrew McGettigan**

# Collateral assets

Eyal Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza*, Verso, London and New York, 2012. 208 pp., £16.99 hb., 978 1 84467 647 7.

In a filmed interview, General Yoav Galant, formerly the head of the Israeli army's Southern Command, describes the achievements of Operation Cast Lead of 2009 in the Gaza Strip. The general's main insight about the operation, during which 1,400 Palestinians were killed, pertains to a certain body count ratio calculation. Galant says:

When we end up with a proportion of a hundred to one, ten Israeli soldiers and 800 terrorists [killed], this shows the other side we can do something they cannot. ... Our second achievement is related to [Palestinian] civilian casualties. ... The acceptable proportion nowadays is one to five – five civilians for each combatant, sometimes 1:10 or 1:15. ... In our case, 800 terrorists were killed and unfortunately also 300 civilians. This means 1:0.33. This is ten or thirty times better than any other Western army operation in the past decades.

Galant's maths is arguable. For instance, among the 800 'terrorists' killed, he counts 248 civilian Hamas policemen targeted by the Israeli army. But what is exceptional in the description is his concept of achievement: success measured not only by narrow military criteria, but by wider, moral and humanitarian ones. The killing of 300 civilians, no doubt uninvolved in fighting, is morally justified by force of comparison to a much greater number of combatants that the Israeli army killed. Indeed, had it killed more combatants, an even higher number of civilian 'collateral' deaths would have been tolerated. Moreover, this ratio of civilian to combatants is legitimized by the much higher number of civilians that *could have been* killed in such military action – as reflected in the experience of other Western armies. A civilian death toll lower than the one potentially caused by other modalities becomes humanitarian achievement; a lesser evil becomes good.

The calculus of evils caused by state military violence, and its overwhelming impact on the politics of our age, are the subjects of Eyal Weizman's new work. Having revealed the architectural structures of the Israeli military occupation of Palestine in *Hollow Land* (2007), he now offers an investigation into a different kind of architecture: the design of destruction. The reader is led by words and images through the rubble and ruin left by military action. The inner structures of destruction are delineated through various historical

examples, culminating in two complementary narratives, the criminal's and the detective's – namely the uniform-wearing designers of the ruins and their interpreters, human rights investigators who deduce the initial act of destruction from its traces. Weizman's foray into these coupled processes of engineering and reverse engineering reveals a language common to the criminal and the detective: the language of ethics, or the ethics of the lesser evil. Despite occasional disputes between the two sides, they share the drive to minimize harm and avoid 'unnecessary' suffering.

These ethics of the lesser evil, which have come of age in the last two decades, have different formulations and stem from different motivations. The call to ease human pain and spare lives (regardless of political conditions) is central to humanitarian organizations' ethos, especially to a narrow, perhaps naive, formulation of politically indifferent relief. They venture to minimize the effects of man-made catastrophe on individuals, though powerless to halt its true causes. In this practice of 'small differences', military violence is neither accepted nor challenged, but seen rather as an inevitable backdrop to the humanitarian effort. Other, more militant forms of relief, reflecting on aid's political function, have gone further by subjugating the political to the humanitarian. Several humanitarian organizations have called for military action so as to allow aid campaigns during the past two decades. Through the rising power of international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights advocacy, such ethics of the lesser evil have achieved a peculiarly influential position in politics and military affairs. The juridical practices of international law are based on the calculation and comparison of evils, while the legal status of extrajudicial killings, air raids, property grabs or even torture is based on proportionality analysis – that is, an evaluation of the relation between the toll paid by civilians and the military goal achieved – as well as a calculation of the relation that an alternative course of action would have achieved. In a case where this relation is ruled adequate, and the toll the lowest possible, the action is rendered legal.

Ironically, the most significant influence of IHL on military action has not necessarily been the ruling out of excessive practices, but rather the legalization and normalization of others, considered 'moderate' or 'less harmful'. Following acceptable 'lesser evils',

assassinations that cause fewer civilian casualties or air raids which damage less property have become norms. Moreover, since every calculation is relegated to a discrete case, such ‘lesser evils’ can be continuously repeated. The number of civilian casualties or ‘collateral damage’ caused during the latest war in Gaza (November 2012) is not affected by the death toll in the previous one (December 2008) and won’t influence the threshold of ‘acceptable deaths’ in the next. Furthermore, legalization is usually irreversible: extremes that pass the threshold of legality by a hair’s breadth become common practice. In a gradual process of legitimization, the benchmark of legitimacy shifts – what was considered immoral and excessive before is now normalized.

Several conceptual formations of the lesser evil have emerged in recent years. ‘Engaged’ philosophers with one foot in the realm of philosophical reflection and the other in the mundane sphere of military affairs have contrived theories to justify various sorts of military violence. Canadian philosopher and politician Michael Ignatieff (author of *The Lesser Evil*) and Israeli ethics philosopher and military adviser Asa Kasher are just two examples of intellectuals who have created positive theories of the lesser evil, according moral and political justification to a range of military and policing practices that have become prevalent in the past decade. Weizman’s most important observation is related to the role played by these ethics in the planning and performance of military violence itself:



not merely apologia in the face of legal and public criticism or a means of preventing public and legal interference in fighting, they actually serve as a tool to increase the effectiveness and prevalence of military acts; to increase, indeed, their lethality. The sparing of unintended casualties is not only consistent with military efficiency – preventing the ‘waste’ of fire-power on irrelevant targets; it also reduces friction and resistance against its actions. The choice of a ‘lesser

evil’, in sparing ‘collateral damage’, is recorded by the militaries’ opponents, provoking lesser resistance, and is normalized even among their victims. ‘Residual violence’, as an unrealized potentiality, has a role in the semantic function of military force, conveying the threat of greater violence that can take place in case the political ends of the chosen acts are not achieved. Public statements made by military generals alluding to the possibility of ‘restraining themselves less’ constantly communicate this threat.

A slightly different form of a state-run ‘lesser evil’ project is the Israeli ‘red line’ policy. In an effort to pressure Hamas’s legally elected Gaza government, the state subjected the strip’s residents to sanctions. Beginning in mid-2007, it used its control over land crossings there to dramatically reduce the goods allowed in, managing ‘allowed’ products and quantities lists. An investigative report in *Ha’aretz* later revealed that the Israeli Ministry of Defence was limiting itself to a ‘red line’ – that is, a minimum amount of calories each resident of Gaza was entitled to (2,279). Had it completely closed the crossings with disregard for humanitarian concerns, a greater catastrophe would have occurred, provoking greater pressure from Gaza and from the world. The man-made famine wouldn’t have sustained itself.

The language shared by militaries, humanitarian organizations, human rights investigators and legal scholars has culminated in a ‘lesser evil community’. The links between its members are reflected by a public exchange of ideas in day-to-day coordination between militaries and humanitarian organizations, shared conferences and forums, and professionals ‘crossing the lines’ between military occupation and human rights. Indeed during the 2009 Gaza war, daily meetings were held between army officials and aid organizations in order to prevent the humanitarian situation in Gaza from spiralling out of control. These connections between seemingly rival agents are not based on coincidentally overlapping agendas but on a partnership based on shared moral values. The choice of a lesser evil is no less central to aid and human rights than it is to the achievement of military goals. When disputes arise, they pertain to the calculation itself: which evils are considered tolerable and which are not. Thus Weizman’s argument against the ethics of the lesser evil is a radical one. Lesser evils, he shows, play an essential role in the carrying out of greater evils. Humanitarian aid, international law and the practice of human rights may, in this way, be playing an essential role in the deployment of military violence. This is an inference Weizman borrows from

Hannah Arendt's reflection on the role played by Jewish Councils (*Judenräte*) during the Second World War. In their attempt to alleviate pain and assist Jewish individuals by cooperating with the Nazis, members of these councils became an integral, essential part of the extermination apparatus. Arendt shows that in places where effective Jewish councils were installed, the extermination was indeed swifter and more efficient. In her essay 'The Eggs Speak Up', Arendt thus calls for 'a radical negation of the whole concept of lesser evil in politics'. This, however, presents a formidable challenge to any form of radical political criticism, as the structures of contemporary political movements, such as those that opposed the Iraq War or the attacks on Gaza, are deeply rooted in humanitarianism, human rights and international law. This is apparent not only in the language of these movements – labelling acts of war as 'war crimes' or as standing in contradiction to 'humanitarian values' – but also attests to deep structures of thought and argument.

Yet there are other forms of humanitarianism. On 22 May 2010, a naval flotilla organized by a wide coalition of humanitarian organizations left Turkey with the intent of breaking the Israeli siege of Gaza and bringing its citizens humanitarian supplies. Islamic-Turkish charity IHH (the Foundation for Human Rights

and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief) was the most conspicuous of the organizations taking part, managing the sail of the flotilla's largest ship, the *Mavi Marmara*. The Israeli special forces soldiers, who tried to take over the ship and stop it from reaching Gaza eight days afterwards, were met with fierce, violent, though unarmed, resistance from the Turkish activists on board. Using metal rods, chains and bottles, they lightly wounded several of the soldiers and temporarily overpowered their officer. The next batch of soldiers to board the ship used live ammunition, killing nine of the activists, including a 19-year-old who was filming the confrontation with his video camera.

The Turkish organization achieved what two years of militant struggle by Hamas and international political and legal pressure could not. The action embarrassed then-president Hosni Mubarak's regime to such an extent that it could not but open the Rafah Border Crossing, with Israel reauthorizing the entry of goods into Gaza. The siege was broken. This action by the IHH, alongside other Islamic humanitarian initiatives currently receiving greater attention, may mark out a path towards real political humanitarianism: radical, possibly violent, political action aimed at alleviating individual suffering while practising free agency and rejecting the compromise of the lesser evil.

**Yotam Feldman**

## Dialectics of liberation

Kevin B. Anderson and Russell Rockwell, eds, *The Dunayevskaya–Marcuse–Fromm Correspondence, 1954–1978: Dialogues on Hegel, Marx and Critical Theory*, Lexington Books, Lanham MD and Plymouth, 2012, 269 pp., £49.95 hb., £21.95 pb., 978 0 73916 835 6 hb., 978 0 73916 836 3 pb.

Raya Dunayevskaya died in 1987 aged 77, but her ideas remain alive and to-be-lived-by today, a permanent reproach to thought's accommodation to an intolerable present. Dunayevskaya inspired and inspires a special enthusiasm, evidenced here by the meticulousness of the editing: no passing reference to text or event is left without a footnote. The scholarly apparatus is not there to obscure the original writing, but to make sure no prior knowledge – of history, of politics, of 'isms' – is taken for granted. The result is that, in its footnoted entirety, the book becomes an ideal introduction to the agonistic drama of twentieth-century life and politics: global conflicts are pursued right down to the *minutiae* which make and break friendships. This is entirely in the spirit of Dunayevskaya, the revolutionary activist who believed that Detroit auto-workers fighting speed-

ups and mechanization on the shop floor were better equipped to understand world history than professional intellectuals.

'Kicked down a dirty staircase' in 1928 for daring to suggest to some Young Communists that they should perhaps read some Trotsky before condemning him, Dunayevskaya refused to be intimidated. A skilled typist, she wrote to Trotsky in Mexico offering her services as a secretary. He accepted. This role gave her the best Marxist teacher on the planet, a prestigious place in international politics, and a pistol. But Dunayevskaya outgrew Trotsky. In his 1933–35 *Notebooks*, Trotsky wrote: 'Lenin created the apparatus. The apparatus created Stalin.' Yet he never awoke to the completeness of Stalin's counter-revolution. Working with C.L.R. James, Dunayevskaya

concluded that Russia was *state-capitalist*. The manner in which Russia waged World War II was exactly like Nazi Germany and the Allies: conquest of territory via armed bodies of men organized to prevent political consciousness. In 1943 and 1944, both the US State Department and the Soviet embassy in Washington strove to prevent the publication of Dunayevskaya's translation of an article in a Soviet publication (*Under the Banner of Marxism*) which argued that the law of value still applied under 'socialism', along with a commentary in which she stated:

Foreign observers who have carefully followed the development of the Soviet economy have long noted that the Soviet Union employs almost every device conventionally associated with capitalism. Soviet trusts, cartels and combines, as well as the individual enterprises within them, are regulated according to strict principles of cost accounting ... Essential to the operation of Soviet industry are such devices as banks, secured credit, interest, bonds, bills, notes, insurance, and so on.

Dunayevskaya was blowing a whistle on the entire coming spectacle of postwar politics, the 'struggle' between the Free World and Communism. In fact, as Philip K. Dick showed in *The Penultimate Truth* (1964) and Charles Levinson in *Vodka-Cola* (1979), the Cold War was the perfect environment for exploitation of workforces in both East and West, and Dunayevskaya is scathing about intellectuals who took sides: 'since our state-capitalist age has the two nuclear giants fighting to the end, it compels those intellectuals who do not wish to base their theory on what the proletariat does, thinks, says, to attach themselves to one or the other pole.' The same thing, of course, has happened to many intellectuals with shaky (or non-existent) Marxism during the War on Terror.

Dunayevskaya fought tooth and nail against the prejudice (Stalinist and academic) that Hegel and Marx were 'too difficult' for workers to understand. In her obituary of Herbert Marcuse, she wrote that 'far from the proletariat having become one-dimensional, what the intellectual proves when he does not see proletarian revolt, is that *his* thought is one-dimensional'. Her understanding of Marx was *non-pareil*. A letter of 11 October 1957, where she explains to Marcuse how social developments in the American Civil War influenced the writing of *Capital*, is a stunning splice of political economy, historical analysis and scholarship. Both Marcuse and Fromm, members of the famously erudite Frankfurt School, used her to source quotations in Marx. But mere displays of intellect repelled her. Dunayevskaya believed that philosophy – that is,

truth – was the *sine qua non* of political activism. She dived into Hegel, not in order to prove she could juggle concepts, but because she was convinced that if you didn't grasp his dialectic, you'd make mistakes (in Stalin's case, mistakes with atrocious results). The notion of philosophy as a set of random 'moves' in a timeless void – turns on the dance floor – is binned: there are clear steps in the advance of thought, and if you miss these, you fall.

She didn't read German. She read her Marx in Russian (she emigrated from the Ukraine to the United States as a child) and her Hegel in English. Her readings of Hegel are nevertheless incredibly excited and vivid. Compared to run-of-the-mill Hegel scholarship, it is as if someone had slapped a Marvel super-hero comic down on top of some mouldering leather-bound volumes. In 1974 at the Hegel Society of America, her paper 'Hegel's Absolutes as New Beginnings'

almost got a standing ovation; they were falling asleep over their own learned theses, and here I was not only dealing with dialectics of liberation – Hegel as well as Marx tho the former was, by his own design, limited to thought – but ranging in critique of all modern works from 'their' Maurer to Adorno's Negative Dialectics which [is] so erudite they didn't quite dare attack until they found I was merciless in critique.

Dunayevskaya rages against Adorno for abandoning Hegel's 'negation of the negation' (which in *Capital* is concretized as the proletariat), dismissing his proposal that Auschwitz represents absolute negativity as a 'vulgar reduction'.

It is hard to summarize Dunayevskaya because she is always driving at the same point, the moment of human liberation when official bourgeois society (and its official opposition), with its pretexts and lies and corruption and humbug, collapses like a house of cards. In their introduction, the editors insert Dunayevskaya back into the known quantities of various ideologies and 'isms', and it is hard work: you miss the freshness and self-deprecating humour of her correspondence. An improvisatory, open-ended quality illuminates all her writing: Dunayevskaya doesn't say things because she ought to or because she's afraid of criticism. Like Marx, Dunayevskaya entirely lacks the *deference* which fogs up academic philosophy. She'll debunk before you wink. Marcuse finds this attitude disturbing, and in his very first letter warns her about the dangers of 'anti-intellectualism', calling her image of the common people 'romantic'. However, she started the correspondence with Marcuse because she believed her work on a grassroots socialist paper in

Detroit had borne fruits that any intellectual would find interesting. Three years later, Herbert Marcuse wrote a preface to Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom*, his famous name adding to its lustre (although in his last paragraph he demurs from Dunayevskaya's faith in the working class; and in the edition prepared for publication in Britain she replaced his preface with one by Harry McShane 'of Glasgow Trades Council').

Marcuse is usually described as someone who studied with Heidegger, became a member of the Frankfurt School and supported radical movements in the 1960s. In her obituary (included here as an appendix), Dunayevskaya finds the real cause for his radicalism: she points out that 'as a young man completing his military service in Germany, he was active in the Soldiers' Council in Berlin [in 1919]. Marx's philosophy of liberation and the revolutionaries, Rosa Luxemburg–Karl Liebknecht, were the real determinants of Marcuse's life.' Because she herself learned from activists, Dunayevskaya rejected the academic notion of philosophy as a set of bookish 'choices' (she called this 'one-dimensional'), instead registering the impact of political events and possibilities on

(car workers) enabled Dunayevskaya, by contrast, to test ideas for their relevance without imposing historical schemas. Conservative thought hypostatizes a certain staging of history and beheads an idea if it doesn't conform; Dunayevskaya's dialectic of liberation, on the other hand, allows infinite speculation to source itself from flashes in the past. She is loyal to Hegel's insistence on the freedom of the mind, whereas Marcuse comes across like a tetchy bureaucrat with a rulebook.

Dunayevskaya broke with Marcuse after the publication of his *Soviet Marxism* (1958), which she felt concurred in the Cold War lie that the USSR was a 'Marxist' state. For all his Hegelianism, Marcuse lacked the dialectics to see how Communism could become the *opposite of itself*. Whereas the revolutionary can understand the murderous role played by the Stalinists in the Spanish Civil War or by a Mao or a Ho Chi Minh – elimination of 'Trotskyists' the first task in establishing a hierarchical state capitalism – global politics remained a tragic puzzle for Marcuse. There was a slight reconciliation towards the end, and Dunayevskaya's obituary is frank and moving.

Dunayevskaya wrote more letters, and longer ones, to Marcuse than she received in return (which is fine, because her company is so much more enjoyable than his!), but at least we can read what he wrote. Here, due to copyright reasons, we have to make do with editorial summaries of Erich Fromm's letters. Fromm has not had a good press. A writer of psychoanalytic bestsellers, his reasonable but flat prose does not have the spike of Adorno or the deftness of Marcuse. He's probably the most neglected member of the Frankfurt School. However, during the period of correspondence with Dunayevskaya, having neglected Marx in the past,

he was moving leftwards. Since he had no previous baggage, he could get on board the state-cap train, and in turn opened up windows on Freud and the unconscious for Dunayevskaya.

At the recent *Historical Materialism* conference in London, the International Marxist-Humanist Organization (stemming from Dunayevskaya's own News & Letters collective in Detroit) organized a fringe meeting in a Kings Cross pub about three female revolutionaries: Helen MacFarlane, Rosa Luxemburg and Raya Dunayevskaya. The meeting was good-humoured, informed and creative. Activists who attended were encouraged to speak. This tone was in sharp contrast to the accusation and anguish which emerged when



the mind. Dunayevskaya wrestled with Marcuse over Hegel, especially his argument that Hegel's Absolute Idea was simply proof of the separation of mental and manual labour in the 'pre-technological' stage of history. This kind of historicism – the argument that once, long ago, we could think certain thoughts, but not any more – is familiar today in the postmodernism of Fredric Jameson and T.J. Clark, who maintain that revolutionary ideas like Dunayevskaya's are 'unthinkable' today. What they mean is unthinkable for *them*. Marcuse's use of 'technology' (not a Marxist concept, since it is historically indeterminate) is an unfortunate residue of his Heideggerianism. Associating with those whose lives were totally involved with new technology

Marxism and the ‘woman question’ was debated at the official conference. In other words, Dunayevskaya *solved* problems which still plunge the rest of the Left into trouble and strife. She’s a Leninist, but her Lenin is completely different from the ‘hard man of politics’ we know from bourgeois and Stalinist accounts (she cites him *criticizing* vanguardism, saying that workers and peasants were the best judges of Party careerists; her expositions of Lenin’s reading of Hegel in 1914, the basis of C.L.R. James’s classic book *Notes on Hegel*, are mind-spinning). As anti-capitalism and student protest and UK Uncut outdo our own ‘Leninist’ organizations for originality and daring, Dunayevskaya’s critique of orthodox Leninism becomes more and more relevant. Looking at the list of enthusiasts for Dunayevskaya (a list which includes Adrienne Rich, Harry McShane, Egon Bondy, Ralph Dumain, Sheila Lahr and Dave Black) makes this writer, for one, want to join up.

The response of the ‘pragmatic’ or ‘realist’ left politico to Dunayevskaya’s politics of complete liberation is to say it’s ‘impractical’. Yet in 1976, three years after the brutal suppression of Hortensia Allende’s husband’s regime in Pinochet’s coup, her secretary was in touch with

Dunayevskaya about a Spanish translation of her *Marxism and Freedom*: Dunayevskaya was by then a Marxist of international standing. The delusions of grandeur emanating from the Trotskyist ‘Fourth International’ have made it a laughing stock, but if the current crisis of capitalism is going to receive an effective internationalist response, Dunayevskaya’s Marxism – advanced, unsectarian, non-vanguardist,



impassioned, utterly unimpressed by the cavorts of spectacular politics, democratic, imaginative, undogmatic, funny, irreverent, earthy and *truly liberating* – will be the best place to start.

**Ben Watson**

## The impossible origin

Louis Althusser, *Cours sur Rousseau*, Le Temps des Cerises, Paris, 2012. 189 pp., €17.00 pb., 978 2 84109 928 3.

The concept of origin always played a crucial role in Althusser’s attempt to develop a philosophy for Marxism. For Althusser, the essential precondition of a genuinely materialist philosophy is the elimination of any reference to an ‘origin’, any recourse to a founding ‘essence’. The theoretical foundations of a science of history demand a philosophical orientation purged of idealist references to extra-historical principles, to both ‘origins’ and ‘ends’ (telos, purpose, etc.). Structural causality, process without subject or ends, anti-humanism and interpellation are all concepts that have, as their theoretical opposite or alternative in Althusser’s work, the concept of origin. It may even be said that, in Althusser, the ‘origin’ is a sort of polemical idol, as if it were *the* concept on which the entire edifice of idealistic philosophy was based – and

also then the concept whose suppression would make this edifice fall, finally clearing the space for a truly materialist philosophy. All readers of Althusser will be familiar with this polemic, and the recent ‘second reception’ of his thought, bearing primarily on his ‘materialism of the encounter’ (a philosophy ‘without origins nor ends’) serves simply to further the anti-foundational character of his philosophy.

Starting from such a premiss, one might then be surprised to find Rousseau included in Althusser’s list of philosophers who explore the ‘underground current of the materialism of the encounter’. Who could deny that Rousseau was himself a great thinker of the origin? Didn’t Rousseau devote much of his time to an investigation of the origins of language, of society, of inequality, of corruption, and so on? A detailed



explanation of such an apparent paradox might come from the recently published *Cours sur Rousseau*, a collection of three lectures delivered in February 1972 at the École Normale Supérieure devoted almost entirely to Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. Althusser here seeks to demonstrate how Rousseau, although he works within the problematic of the origin as a means of conceptualizing the essence of society, and hence of politics – a problematic that he shares with thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Pufendorf and various contemporaries – nonetheless subjects this problematic to a radical criticism which subtracts him from its grip, and leads him towards a 'materialist' concept of history and an 'aleatory' conception of politics.

Althusser begins the first lecture by placing Rousseau in a peculiar position between the two contrasting ways of approaching the conceptualization of politics represented by the 'Machiavellian paradigm', on the one hand, and that of the 'philosophy of natural law', on the other. These two models are opposed, according to Althusser, by virtue of their respective relations to matters of 'fact'. In the first case, the mode of existence of the object of enquiry (for Machiavelli, the Italian state in the making) is that of absence, and therefore philosophy will assume the form of a thinking of the 'fact to be accomplished'; in the second case, the mode of existence of the object of thought (for the philosophers of natural law, the really existing modern states) is the mode of presence, and philosophy assumes the task of founding what *there is* – it will be a philosophy of the 'accomplished fact'; that is, of established or officially sanctioned history. The historical shift from the first to the second mode of thought is crucial because it entails, for Althusser, the deployment of a new theoretical device, which he characterizes as the couplet 'essence analysis' (*analyse d'essence*), and 'genesis of essence'. This couplet transcendently grounds the 'accomplished fact' by resorting to an essence, which in the philosophy of natural law takes the form of the state of nature.

Within the framework of this opposition, Rousseau occupies an odd position. Althusser reads Rousseau's well-known critique of his predecessors not only as a critique of the empirical content of the state of nature, but, more radically, as an overall critique of the device of the 'genesis of essence' (and, *a fortiori*, of the entire philosophy of accomplished fact). Criticizing the projection back to the timeless origin or essence of determinations drawn from the contingency of the present – that is, the accomplished fact – Rousseau exposes and rejects what Althusser calls the 'circle

of the origin'. Reason, he argues, is itself historically and socially produced and therefore separated from the original state of nature, and so is constitutively incapable of attaining any origin whatsoever; consequently, any pretence to illuminate the status quo through evocation of its 'ideal genesis' performs an eminently ideological function, representing nothing more than a disguised 'justification of all that which exists'. Nevertheless, Althusser recognizes that Rousseau remains bound to the philosophy of 'accomplished fact' – with his appeal to a 'state of pure nature', thought as the 'true' origin. Since reason cannot attain it, Rousseau argues that it is accessed by the heart, or by conscience: this, for Althusser, represents the 'impossible solution' to which Rousseau resorts in order to posit a state of nature not contaminated by extrapolation from what is established in the present.

As a consequence, the task of the second lecture is to demonstrate that if Rousseau still retains a concept of origin, nevertheless this does not perform the same role that it did in the old philosophy of natural law; that is, the role of grounding the present state of affairs by way of an implicit or explicit idealist teleology of history (which is always the *pendant* of a 'genesis of essence'). In keeping with his critique of the 'circle of the origin', Rousseau rules out the possibility that the state of pure nature could function as cause of the historical process. Its main feature is instead, according to Althusser, a radical separateness: if it is to escape the 'circle of the origin', it must be thought and located in a radical detachment from the historical process that is supposed to 'originate' from it. As is well known, Rousseau dramatizes his original state of nature as a sort of timeless forest, a state in which all basic needs are met. Althusser, arguably exacerbating some aspects of Rousseau's own account, describes this 'purely natural' habitat of primordial man as the *Gestaltung* through which Rousseau represents the required separateness, interpreting it as a state incapable of producing its own future by virtue of a self-development. It is, in Althusser's words, a 'void', a *neant de société*. If it still figures as the origin of society, it is nonetheless marked by an 'absence of future', an absence of causal power. The result, concludes Althusser, is that unlike the essence of the philosophy of natural law, here the origin cannot serve as the basis for a deduction or justification of subsequent social development, in either the logical or the transcendental-juridical sense. The 'state of pure nature' is in itself a state of 'simple' reproduction, nothing more or less.

How, then, can Rousseau think the development of society? It is at this point, Althusser insists, that

his radical critique of the philosophy of the essence/origin produces, even without fully conceptualizing it, a new model, a theory of 'discontinuous genesis', which replaces the circular conception of the self-development of the essence. In Rousseau's account, social development, far from being deduced from its essence, is marked by and tied up with the intervention of history, which makes its appearance in the form of event, of accident, chance, contingency, inventions – all factors capable of producing something new; that is, new stages of human development that were not implicit and given in (the essence of) the previous or original one. With such a move, which prioritizes existence over essence, and in which the origin does not function as cause, Althusser claims that Rousseau abandons the philosophy of natural law for another discourse, one that bears on the 'real genesis' whereby 'the political' is subtracted from its own idealistic detachment and reconceptualized, albeit only implicitly, as merged with the aleatory dimension of history. At this point Rousseau is indeed close to Machiavelli, who likewise offers an account of politics and history purged of any reference to the idealistic and circular couplet of origin/end. Rousseau can then be invoked, after Machiavelli and against Hegel, as an ally of Althusser's campaign to negate every teleology of history along with any appeal to a form of Reason or spirit that might command the unfolding of the historical process.

In his third and final lecture, Althusser returns to the relation between nature and society. He reads Rousseau's account of the pure state of nature not as a more or less naive or inaccurate historical reconstruction, but as a basis for Rousseau's critique of prevailing accounts of natural sociability. The primeval forest figures here, first of all, as the negation of every teleology of society, every attempt to derive social 'progress' from human nature. Rousseau's forest provides men and women with all the necessary means for their subsistence and thereby eliminates any need or incentive for them to group together, whether to satisfy material needs (as Diderot and others thought) or moral needs (as Pufendorf believed, following Aristotle). All the positive features that Rousseau invests in the pure state of nature have the peculiarity of being present without yet functioning: freedom, pity and perfectibility are there only for the future, to be activated by the contract; in other words, they figure only as virtual.

Althusser detects at this point the specific disjunction that characterizes Rousseau's use of the concept of the origin. It consists in the fact that the origin, although not functioning as a cause on the historical

level, is nevertheless essential, with its various determinations (self-love, reason, perfectibility...) in order to ground the moment of contract. Although it lacks any historical causal force, it retains a sort of political causality. For Althusser, however, this double functioning of the origin, or its asymmetrical distribution, is not to be interpreted as a contradiction: on the political level the origin is present *only* in the mode of its absence, through a dialectic of loss and (invariably precarious and tentative) resumption (*reprise*). This circle of loss and resumption defines Rousseau's conception of the relationship between politics and history, in which essence (the origin) is always secondary with respect to existence (the aleatory dimension of history). The origin is not, then, a motor of history, to use an Althusserian phrase; it is eminently present, in politics, in the mode of absence, and therefore it stands in front of us as an infinite and always precarious task: a Machiavellian fact to be accomplished.

As Yves Vargas remarks in his substantial and useful preface, Althusser's interpretation of the second Discourse paved the way for new readings of Rousseau, attentive to the role that apparently fictional and unrealistic elements play in the overall conceptual framework of his work. As for its place in Althusser's own philosophical project, the chief interest of the *Cours* is that it demonstrates that Althusser's late turn to the materialism of the encounter must be dated back to at least to 1972. At the same time, the chief weakness of his interpretation follows from its attempt to articulate politics and history from an anti-humanist perspective. It is indeed significant that Althusser does not mention that, for Rousseau, the concept of the essence of man outlined in the state of pure nature also grounds his critique of the present state of affairs, and that this, in turn, grounds the *content* of emancipatory and empowering (and aleatory) political action. This aspect is totally absent from Althusser's account, which bears only on the *formal* articulation of history and politics. Equally, the radical separation between original and social man may strike some readers of Rousseau as exaggerated, and it is only partially tempered by the circle of loss and resumption with which he concludes his lectures. Althusser here absorbs Rousseau into his own theoretical project, just as he had absorbed Marx in the previous decade. This absorption, however, has its own effect, in so far as it leads Althusser to admit, in the last few pages, that a notion of the origin 'as loss' might well be compatible with a truly aleatory conception of history and politics.

**Stefano Pippa**

# And now...

McKenzie Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Street: The Curious Times and Everyday Life of the Situationist International*, Verso, London and New York, 2011. 197 pp., £14.99 hb., 978 1 84467 720 7.

Richard Gilman-Opalsky, *Spectacular Capitalism: Guy Debord and the Practice of Radical Philosophy*, Minor Compositions, London, New York and Port Watson, 2011. 133 pp., £12.00 pb., 978 157027 228 8.

In 2009 there was an unexpected shift in the reception of Situationist theorist and film-maker Guy Debord. Described by Andrew Gallix in the *Guardian* as 'the resurrection of Guy Debord', much discussion was generated by the 29 January 2009 declaration of Christine Albanel, the French minister of culture, that Debord was 'one of the last great French intellectuals' and that his works were now considered a 'national treasure'. Shortly thereafter, it would become apparent that the efforts of the French government to acquire Debord's archive were reactionary in nature and intended to intervene in negotiations between Yale University and Debord's widow Alice Becker-Ho that were already under way. The eventual acquisition by the French government resulted in Debord's archives remaining in France, and in 2010 his papers began to be catalogued by the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Not since the Paris, London and Boston exhibitions of *On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International 1957–1972* had so much attention been given to the legacy of Debord and the Situationist International (SI). New scholarship seemed subsequently inevitable.

2011 saw the publication of two noteworthy undertakings that argued for the contemporary relevance of Debord and the Situationist International, albeit with very different motivations and methodologies. McKenzie Wark's *The Beach Beneath the Street* and Richard Gilman-Opalsky's *Spectacular Capitalism*, although neither was written in response to the spectacle of archiving a thinker who was so critical of the intellectual establishment. Unlike previous discussions of the founding (and eventual demise) of the Situationists, Wark sets out to retell the history of the Situationist International for the twenty-first century. His means of intervention is to shift Debord from his usual starring role as founder and *l'enfant terrible* of the SI in order to chronicle the minor characters, often the artists, women and visible minorities that made the Situationist International possible. This is certainly an admirable goal, since the history of most avant-gardes

typically flatten out such figures, particularly women, until they fade into the footnotes. Wark thus presents a fruitful cast of characters that includes, among others, Michèle Bernstein, Ivan Chtcheglov, Asger Jorn, Henri Lefebvre, Constant Nieuwenhuys, Jacqueline de Jong, and Alexander Trocchi. Although some of these personalities stroll through Wark's narrative as the usual suspects encountered in past histories of the SI, others who are usually relegated to the role of understudies are here given the space to thrive.

While much of the legendary Debord persona has been rooted in his famous expulsions of practising artists from the SI, one of the refreshing aspects of Wark's book, in particular, is its treatment of artist Asger Jorn and his complex friendship with Debord. Wark's chapters on 'Extreme Aesthetics' and 'Tin Can Philosophy' put Jorn on equal footing with Debord as a Marxist practitioner who directed the materialist critique that evolved in the movement from the Lettrist International to the Situationist International. Wark's examination of documents such as *Critique of Political Economy* (1960) engages with Jorn as a theorist who cannot be subsumed under Debord's shadow. Also deserving of mention is Wark's discussion of Michèle Bernstein. While much press was garnered by Alice Becker-Ho during the sale of the archive, in the pre-SI years of the Lettrist International, it was Bernstein (married to Debord from 1954 to 1971) who made significant contributions of both labour and finances to make avant-garde projects, such as the journal *Potlatch*, possible. In the cultural milieu of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Wark's chapter on Bernstein's relationship with Debord is more astutely a discussion of Bernstein as a writer on her own terms who, at times in the spirit of *Dangerous Liaisons*, conveys a unique mode of feminist agency in her works. Exploring the influences of Madeleine de Scudéry, Françoise Sagan and Alain Robbe-Grillet upon her writings, Wark offers close readings of Bernstein's autobiographical novels *All the King's Horses* (1960) and *The Night* (1965) and examines how the Situationist practices of *détournement* and the *dérive* are present in each.

Although Wark's approach aspires to minimize dependency on Debord, his homage to Debord's intertextual *détournements* and playful poetics can clearly be seen at work in his prose. One of the charms of Wark's literary craftsmanship is his illuminating depiction of the cafés, side streets, and back alleys of Paris in the 1950s and 1960s. While the psychogeographic tendencies of his prose honour the practices of the *dérive* and *détournement*, Wark is also far more successful at

capturing the cultural and political landscape of Paris – and French society (including the French Communist Party) as a whole – than other historical accounts of Situationist urbanism, such as Simon Sadler's *The Situationist City* (1998). Although Wark's narrative may appeal to a general audience and newcomers to the SI, the underlying target of his critique of 'high theory' is the ivory tower. Both his introduction and his conclusion take stabs at the apolitical state of critical theory, informed by the aspiration to replace it with a 'low theory' that, based on his subject matter, one can only imagine manifesting in the city street. Wark has no patience for the worship of the 'Old Masters', as he calls them – Lacan, Althusser, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and the like – and is equally critical of the current celebrity culture of radical politics, which he observes in the intellectual adherence to thinkers such as Badiou and Žižek. Juxtaposed with what Wark describes as the mediocre state of contemporary art, he is distrustful of critical theory that has lost sight of the necessity of praxis, claiming that 'if anything, theory has turned out even worse. It found its utopia, and it is the academy.' Instead, he asks his reader to look elsewhere for tools of revolution. The dust jacket of *The Beach Beneath the Street* states that 'the story of the SI now demands to be told in a contemporary voice capable of putting it into the context of twenty-first-century struggles.' It would seem that the concluding criticisms of Wark's book are about not just *social* struggles but *academic* ones.

In contrast to Wark's historical account, Gilman-Opalsky's *Spectacular Capitalism* explicitly situates Debord at the heart of twenty-first-century struggles, but does so by removing Debord's philosophy of praxis from what Gilman-Opalsky refers to as the 'fossilization' of biographically dependent studies of the SI. His monograph comes across as a rousing take on Debord as a Marxist theorist in the spirit of Anselm Jappe's intellectual biography *Guy Debord* (1993), which emphasized Debord as a social theorist in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition and rejected applications of the SI to the realm of the 'postmodern', as well as interpretations of Debord's thought as a precursor to Baudrillard. While Gilman-Opalsky's opening chapter is titled 'Selectively Forgetting Baudrillard', he is clear that this lineage from Debord to Baudrillard is far more prevalent in North American scholarship than in other academic terrains. In examining Debord's intellectual possibilities for the realm of social and political theory, Gilman-Opalsky's study, rather than taking Debord as the central object, utilizes his theoretical framework to critique neoliberal economic policy,

environmental catastrophes, and the political uprisings that have occurred in response. Putting forth a contemporary theorization of 'spectacular capitalism', Gilman-Opalsky's analysis includes the ongoing financial crisis, uprisings in Greece, France, Tunisia and Bolivia, as well as the Mexican Zapatistas, the subject matter of his much larger study *Unbounded Publics: Transgressive Public Spheres, Zapatismo, and Political Theory* (2008). Reframing the spectacle for the twenty-first century, he argues that capitalism (despite the revelations of its instabilities since 2008) has only strengthened its ideological grip, and defines the contemporary inner workings of the spectacle as 'a particular strategic interpretation of the world that functions as an operational logic (i.e. ideology) that effectively organizes society in both structural and superstructural terms.' His analysis distances itself from reductive readings of *The Society of the Spectacle* that suppress Debord's Marxism and transform him into a theorist of 'the image' in a world of mediated experience and corporate advertising.

Gilman-Opalsky is attentive to the three forms of spectacle posited in Debord's writings: the *diffuse*, the *concentrated* and the *integrated* (which would come to supplant the previous two in *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* in 1988). He addresses the distinctions made by Debord between each, and takes into account that the concentrated spectacle contained a critique of Soviet Communism, which Debord articulated as a form of 'bureaucratic' capitalism. It is the concentrated and integrated spectacle that are most pertinent to Gilman-Opalsky's analysis, which argues that our experiences of not just capitalism, but also socialism and anarchism, have always been mediated representations. Debord's description of the integrated spectacle, written on the cusp of 1989, envisioned a political threshold in which state and economy would become indistinguishable and the surplus of capital and corporate interests would usurp the power of state ideology. *Spectacular Capitalism* speaks to this relevance with far more empirical evidence than others have done. In this way, Gilman-Opalsky looks to Debord as a philosopher whose praxis helps reveal the manner in which social upheavals can supersede the work of philosophy itself. By doing so, he also aims to return a historical and political legitimacy to anarchist politics. This approach in no way undermines the necessity of critical reflection, but rather reaffirms it. Gilman-Opalsky's optimism for the revolutionary potential of philosophy is at moments reminiscent of Henri Lefebvre's *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, and *Spectacular Capitalism* might have strengthened

its analysis by substituting the chapter on Baudrillard with one on Lefebvre. Additionally, a more elaborate discussion by Gilman-Opalsky of the influence of the political climate of Italy in Debord's later writings, expanding his assertion that Debord's ideas 'prefigured much of the autonomist tradition', may have been fertile ground for further reflection. Regardless of its small size, *Spectacular Capitalism* is nonetheless the first text to take up in detail Debord's claim that 'the spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image' and succeeds in bringing serious considerations of Debord to the realm of political theory.

**Jessica Elaine Reilly**

## Care in the community

Julie Stephens, *Confronting Postmaternal Thinking: Feminism, Memory and Care*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011. 208 pp., £62.00 hb., £19.00 pb., 978 0 23114 920 4 hb., 978 0 23114 921 1 pb.

In this short book, Julie Stephens sets out to confront what she regards as a widespread cultural unease and anxiety about maternal care and about the dependency and vulnerability that accompany it. For Stephens, this anxiety stems from a reigning cultural logic that is the ideological dimension of neoliberalism, which she defines in terms of 'the way liberal doctrines of individual responsibility, small government, and a self-regulating market ... were given a new global inflection and reach' from the 1980s onwards. In its ideological aspect, neoliberalism idealizes the self-sufficient, autonomous worker and citizen and denies that the values of care and nurturance have any place in the public sphere. The result is, Stephens maintains, a system of belief that she calls 'postmaternal thinking': a 'process whereby the ideals intimately bound up with the practices of mothering are disavowed in the public sphere, and [as a result become increasingly] conflicted in the private' sphere too.

The contrast to both neoliberalism and postmaternalism, for Stephens, is maternalism: a set of discourses and practices that 'transformed motherhood from women's primary *private* responsibility to *public* policy', above all in the form of the welfare state. Whereas maternalists valued the caring work done by women as mothers, and sought to extend this kind of

work and its values to society as a whole, postmaternalism has pushed care back out of society, privatizing and marginalizing it in the home. Moreover, whereas maternalists valued women's caring work *as* maternal work, thus validating maternal identity, Stephens claims that neoliberalism grants legitimacy only to the identity of the gender-neutral worker and citizen. Evidence of this shift towards gender-neutrality is the introduction of welfare-to-work programmes in various countries, under which states make financial assistance available to economically active individuals but not to mothers just as such. Stephens quotes sociologist Ann Orloff: 'The explicitly gender-differentiated maternalist logic of politically recognizing, and financially supporting, mothers' caregiving is being displaced by ostensibly gender-neutral notions of recognizing and supporting only economically "active" adults.' In turn, with mothers generally expected to be productive citizens and thus to remain in paid work, care-giving is often outsourced or commodified (as Stephens puts it) in the form of daycare, care from nannies, or even pumped breast milk – milk that has been reduced to an object, detached from the warmth and intimacy of an immediate mother–baby relationship.

Aside from her overall critique of neoliberalism and defence of maternalism, at the heart of Stephens's book is an exploration of the effects of the postmaternalist cultural logic on how second-wave feminism is publicly remembered. What we remember, Stephens plausibly claims, is never simply an individual matter but depends on which memories fit in (or can be reconstructed to fit in) with the shared beliefs and conventions of our societies. As such, a society that disavows and forgets the significance of maternal care moulds our memories so that we tend to forget the maternal care that we have received. This is reflected, Stephens argues, in second-wave feminists' published recollections of their experiences of the movement. Katie Roiphe and Marianne Hirsch remember being in consciousness groups in which women constantly berated and attacked their own mothers and feared becoming like them, wanting instead to give birth to themselves – to commit 'matricide' as Phyllis Chesler puts it. Second-wave feminists thus remember the movement as one that was anti-maternal. When Stephens turns to third-wave feminist writers – such as Rebecca Walker, who has publicly accused her mother Alice Walker of neglecting her – Stephens again finds that these younger feminists are critical of their mothers. These authors depict their mothers as having been made sad, embittered and angry by feminism; having neglected their children in favour of activism; and



having unhelpfully discouraged their daughters from embracing motherhood. All of this, Stephens claims, reflects the postmaternalist cultural logic. Only those strands of feminism are remembered that fit in with this logic: thus, feminists are misleadingly remembered as having been selfish individualists, focused only on their careers, work-obsessed, and hostile to care and the maternal realm.

In Chapter 3, Stephens turns to oral interviews with prominent feminists who have had long-running careers in Australian government. In these interviews, memories surface that provide the beginnings of a counter-narrative, a counter-memory of second-wave feminism, Stephens suggests. These women comment on their lack of ambition and anti-careerism: they stumbled into their professions rather than pursuing individual advancement. One of them found it very useful to combine her career with being a mother, which, she says, gave her a sense of practical grounding and perspective. Several of these women describe having worked in women's refuges and the emotional intensity of caring for the women and their children who stayed there. For these women, then, feminist activism was not opposed to the values of care, but was a practice through which they sought to extend care and caring values beyond the home. What we see remembered here, Stephens concludes, are alternative maternalist strands of second-wave feminism that were present in the movement all along. This disrupts the prevailing narrative for which feminism and neoliberalism fit seamlessly together.

While Stephens offers a compelling critique of neoliberalism and a rewarding discussion of cultural memories of second-wave feminism, her position as a whole is weakened by the considerable problems

with the maternalist form of feminism that she defends. According to Stephens's definition, maternalism seeks to extend maternal practices of care to society as a whole, on the basis of first recognizing and valuing these practices as ones in which mothers are engaged. At one point, Stephens acknowledges the limitations of this maternalist approach, referring to work by the historian Patrick Wilkinson, who points out that the maternalist campaigns of the earlier twentieth century left the conventional ideology of motherhood intact and that this limited the progressive force of these same initiatives. That is, the maternalists wanted to extend maternal care-giving to the whole of society *because* they valued this care-giving as done

by women and mothers in the home. Care-giving was seen as women's special preserve and strength, which must be recognized and, once recognized, extended. But if care-giving is deemed the special preserve of women in the home, then this imposes built-in limits to how far care-giving can be extended. If it is to remain especially *maternal* care, then it must remain anchored in the maternal home.

Despite acknowledging this problem with maternalism, Stephens does not integrate the acknowledgement into the argument of the book; nor does she try to address or move beyond it. Instead, her own work falls prey to the ambiguities and dilemmas of the maternalist paradigm. This becomes apparent in the book's fourth and fifth chapters, in which Stephens asks what maternalism translates into in practical political terms. Here she opposes policies for sharing parental leave between men and women, claiming that such policies go together with the model of the 'dual career, dual carer' family, and demand 'impossibly long working hours and measurements of performance that ultimately devalue children and caring responsibilities'. This is a model, she claims, that fits together with neoliberalism and is inimical to part-time working or reduced working hours, instead relying on the outsourcing of childcare. In addition, she claims, such a model neglects the specificities of female embodiment, especially breastfeeding. By implication, then – although she does not explicitly say so – Stephens seems to favour the traditional gender-divided model of the family in which women are the primary child-carers. Yet one might have expected that, as a maternalist who wants to extend the values and practices of maternal care, she would advocate that men as well as women come to engage

in those practices and share those values. Plausibly, the fact that Stephens does not do so reflects the inherent tensions of maternalism, which cannot consistently extend care beyond the realm of women-at-home. To be fair, Stephens does say (referring to Eva Kittay and Sara Ruddick) that, since in fact it generally continues to be women who do childcare, we should recognize this fact by avoiding gender-neutral talk of 'parenting'. Ruddick, though, favours talk of 'mothering' while still explicitly identifying mothering as a practice in which men can engage no less than women. On occasion Stephens agrees: for example, when she ends the book by hoping for a world in which *both* women and men can arrange their lives around care. Yet, despite this, Stephens opposes arrangements for shared parental leave.

Stephens is also critical of what she calls the outsourcing of childcare to paid workers. She argues that such arrangements provide a way to reconcile neoliberalism with the ongoing reality that children need care, while at the same time commodifying childcare and thus again adapting it to the demands of neoliberalism. Stephens is enthusiastic about the work of Australian journalist and writer Anne Manne, who opposes childcare for young children on the grounds that it deprives them of the love that only their parents can give them. Although Stephens does not make clear exactly how far she agrees with Manne, this is another example of Stephens's reluctance to have maternal values of care extended beyond the home. In fact, Stephens does not explicitly recommend that childcare should remain the preserve of female homemakers; indeed, it remains rather sketchy exactly what practical arrangements she wants to draw out of maternalism. She does express some (qualified) support for the figure of the 'femivore' (roughly, an educated woman who opts out of paid work to care for her children and concentrate on growing and sourcing local food and living sustainably), as an alternative to consumer capitalism. But is the figure of the femivore truly opposed to the social reality of neoliberalism? Neoliberal societies still need care-giving to be done; as Stephens says, they simply privatize care. Indeed, often champions of neoliberalism favour – not on principle, but on the pragmatic economic grounds that it is maximally efficient and cheap for the workplace – the traditional gendered division of labour, whereby men concentrate on careers in the workplace while women perform childcare in the private sphere (ideally, now, alongside some paid work). The relation between neoliberalism and maternalism, then, is not simply one of opposition, since these discourses do

have an area of agreement: they both – in part and ambiguously – place value upon women's performance of unpaid childcare in the home. Stephens would object that these discourses *are* opposed, in the sense that maternalism wants to extend care to the whole of society while neoliberalism wants to banish care into the home. But while this is a real difference between these discourses, they nonetheless intersect in so far as maternalism cannot consistently detach care from the ideal of the female homemaker – the very same figure to whom neoliberals are likewise keen to confine caring responsibilities.

Care-giving is a valuable and important practice, and should be valued and practised not only in the home but throughout society as a whole and, in particular, by the welfare state and associated institutions. But this extension of care into society at large cannot be consistently accomplished unless we break the traditional association of care-giving with women and the home, so that care-giving can be carried out by all human beings and in all fields. Stephens worries that this kind of pursuit of gender-neutrality is complicit with neoliberalism. I would suggest, on the contrary, that if we are to pursue the programme of extending care throughout society, then we have to be willing to break the presumption that caring is women's special vocation.

**Alison Stone**

## Security fetishism (Routledge, 2012)

Routledge, *Security Studies: New Titles and Key Backlist*, 2012. routledge.com, 2012. 64 pp., £00.00.

At 64 pages with an average of five books per page and offering us somewhere in the region of 300 titles, this catalogue is perhaps symptomatic of our times. But what times? The catalogue contains some of the obvious, which I here break into some generic groupings of my own: Introduction to Security Studies, Critical Security Studies, Introduction to Critical Security Studies, Critical Introduction to Security Studies, History of Security Studies, and Applied Security Studies. I cannot honestly say that I know all of the subtle differences between these various sub-cults. What is of interest is the desire among contemporary political intellectuals and academics to

attach themselves to security and the sheer number of volumes this attachment generates; is this the fastest growing cult of our times? Maybe; though perhaps there is something else going on as well.

Take two examples. First: Inger Skjelsbaek's book *The Political Psychology of Rape: Studies from Bosnia-Herzegovina*. This book deals with some subjects that one would expect given its title, such as the use of rape as a weapon during the war in Bosnia, but it also takes in more general issues, such as an argument concerning the political psychology of war rape. So far as I can see, it mentions 'security' some twenty times, and more or less every instance occurs in either the title of an organization to which reference is being made, such as the UN Security Council, or to abstract entities such as 'Israeli security guards'. Beyond that: nothing on security. Second example: Mark Ledwidge's book *Race and US Foreign Policy: The African-American Foreign Affairs Network*. We find that the book deals with issues such as how African Americans shaped international organizations and US foreign policy to more general issues such as racial reconstruction and the Cold War. It mentions security around the same number of times as Skjelsbaek and does so, again, merely in passing reference to subjects such as US national security doctrine. Once more, this could hardly be said to address the issue of security. In other words, these two books are *not about security*, if we take the term literally. The authors have not shaped the materials and arguments in any way that their books could be said to be 'security studies', of either the introductory, critical or applied kind. Yet here they both are in the *Security Studies Catalogue*: just two examples, though many more could be given, of how books can now be classified as being about security even when they are not, even when their authors are far from being in a position to say anything about security. And regarding the question, 'is this the fastest growing cult of our times?', one might note that the only reference to an actual cult of security listed in this catalogue is in Julie Fedor's book entitled *Russia and the Cult of State Security*. I don't doubt that there might be such a cult of security in Russia; nevertheless the Russians must be falling over themselves laughing: 'you have 300 books on security in the 2012 catalogue of *just one publisher* and you think its *we* who have the cult?'

Security is demanding. What security demands more than anything is that we write about it. It therefore sometimes insists that we *are* writing about it even when we are not. In this sense, writing about security is now banal, in all senses of the term: of commonplace

character but also, from the term's earlier (feudal) meaning, of compulsory service – one can now be made to labour in the service of 'security studies'. And this compulsion renders most of the work banal in the other sense: trivial, trite. In his book *On Terrorism and the State* (1979), written by a revolutionary trying to reveal the state secrets of terrorist power, Gianfranco Sanguinetti says that he who is afraid of ideas is afraid of few books today; with this catalogue Routledge would seem to be intent on proving him right.

Security is so demanding that it attaches itself to... just about everything. Security and Liberty we know more than enough about. Judging by the two invitations I've had in the last six months, Security and Justice are the flavour of the day. If I think about other invitations I've had over just two or three years, we might add Security and Everyday Life, Security and Exclusion, Security and Terror. But what of all those I've missed and those that missed me? A quick Internet search for security-oriented conferences shows: Security and... just about everything. Security and God?

The state of Kentucky is the first in the USA to pass a law requiring an acknowledgement by citizens of God's role in providing security, with a punishment of twelve months in prison for failing to do so. The law was passed in 2006 and the Kentucky Supreme Court has refused to review its constitutionality. The law states that 'the safety and security of the Commonwealth cannot be achieved apart from reliance upon Almighty God as set forth in the public speeches and proclamations of American Presidents.' As such, the law requires that plaques celebrating the power of the Almighty God be installed outside the state Homeland Security building, carrying an inscription that 'The safety and security of the Commonwealth cannot be achieved apart from reliance upon Almighty God.'

Atheists and radicals have criticized the law for being pointless, strange, unenforceable, discriminatory and liable to result in the persecution of atheists and radicals. Yet these criticisms miss the point: thoroughly reactionary as it is, the real meaning of the law lies not in the attempt to reinforce belief in God, but to reinforce belief in security. After all, the logic inherent in the fact that 'In God We Trust' appears on all US dollar bills is not that atheists cannot use the notes but, rather, to reinforce the fetish of money. The Routledge *Security Studies Catalogue* for 2012 thus needs to be understood alongside decisions such as that of the state of Kentucky: as reinforcing the centrality of security fetishism in contemporary capitalism.

**Mark Neocleous**



### Voyage au bout de l'ennui

*After History: Alexandre Kojève as a Photographer*, BAK, Utrecht, 20 May–15 July 2012; OCT Contemporary Art Terminal, Shenzhen, 21 September–16 November 2012; Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 17 October 2012–7 January 2013.

In a darkened room stand seven podiums, like black treadmills at a standstill. Each faces a digitized photograph projected onto a bare wall. The humming projectors are interrupted every thirty seconds as new images replace old ones. Nearly 400 photographs comprise the endless repetition that forms the core of the exhibition *After History: Alexandre Kojève as a Photographer*. The French philosopher took these photographs in the 1950s and 1960s during his travels as a bureaucrat for the French Ministry of Economic Affairs. Seven geographical regions in all: China (1967), Japan (1959 and 1967), South Asia (India, Ceylon, Nepal 1959 and 1968), the Soviet Union (1968), Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Switzerland in 1963 and 1964), Iran (1965 and 1968) and France (between 1959 and 1964). The photographs, as well as the thousands of postcards contemporaneously collected by Kojève that comprise the second half of the exhibition, are a recent discovery by the curator, Boris Groys, in the archives of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris. From the perspective of the exhibition, this trove of images – some created, others collected – are not to be relegated to the domains of the private or the trivial, but can complement and even transform our understanding of Kojève's philosophical positions.

Born Aleksandr Kojevnikov in 1902 in Russia, Kojève became an iconic figure in French intellectual life through the seminars he gave on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the École Pratique des Hautes Études between 1933 and 1939. To read the list of the attendees is to see a panorama of figures who would become the towering intellectuals of the subsequent generation: Raymond Queneau, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Lacan, Raymond Aron, Michel Leiris and Georges Bataille. Kojève's seminars, which gained a wider circulation only after the war when they were edited and published by Queneau, were one of the central conduits of Hegel's thought into

France, displacing the reigning neo-Kantian paradigm based on an optimistic progressive rationalism. Within the labyrinths of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, two theoretical topoi have had especially vibrant afterlives. The first is his revivification of Hegel's concept of desire as a distinctly human and even anthropogenic force which is irreducible to anything natural in the world. For Kojève, the specificity of the human cannot be located in a set of essential faculties or describable material characteristics. It lies, rather, in the opposition to nature, which is not simply given, but is realized as a process. History is the time of this realization, a domain of uniquely human action, in which the irreducible autonomy of the human becomes actualized and recognized. Kojève's conception of history includes the additional caveat that such recognition, which would be the fulfilment and end of history, is not an unreachable regulative ideal or an endless process, but one that can actually be achieved. In fact, this end of history had, according to Kojève, already come about in the events of the French Revolution and the establishment of a universal state during the Napoleonic era. All that remains is the perfecting of the universal state, the political form correlated to human freedom and autonomy. The photographs collected in *After History* offer, for Groys, a recapitulation of this thesis in an aesthetic register.





There is something purposefully un-signifying about the series of photographs that comprise the exhibit. Anonymous architecture, stilled spaces, barren nature, miniature human figures, all mutely show themselves. These photographs do not elicit curiosity or fascination, only profound boredom – a boredom, moreover, that is not incidental, but attentively curated and meticulously produced. It is presented as the dominant affective state appropriate to the post-historical condition: there is nothing more to do, only register what remains. To persist in the darkened room, inhabiting this enforced boredom, is to be subjected to the sheer reiterative presence of the photographs, their monotonous seriality: the landscapes reproduced by Kojève's photographic gaze are severe and depopulated (Western Europe completely so, Asia still containing some traces of human existence, but already minimized and muted). The photos linger on grey and limestone Gothic cathedrals, steeples and minarets, spaces evoking the stillness of monastic isolation devoid of all human remnants. The mute minimalism of the photographs is withdrawn, detached, almost uninterested. If one trusts that the curatorial pruning was not tendentious (after all, only 391 photographs out of thousands are displayed), then the homogeneity of the photographs cannot but be the result of stringent methodological principles of reduction and purgation. This underlying will to reduction and repetition, as Groys convincingly suggests, is what makes the photographs artistically significant and comparable to the other long-term projects of seriality of the postwar era.

The austere architectural husks in Kojève's photographs, however, are of a less tragic modality than the ruins and decay that have permeated the visual imaginary of the present, from Richard Pare's capturing of the afterlife of Soviet modernist architecture in the 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union

to the more recent elegiac paean to Detroit by Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre. In such visions, a certain history has come to an end, but only for Kojève has it done so not as catastrophe but as fulfilment. This also determines what follows the end: boredom and technocratic formalism on one side, dilapidation and bleak survival on the other. Therein lies one of the merits of the exhibition: revealing the radical distance that separates the post-apocalyptic imaginary of the last two decades and the deactivated stasis that characterizes Kojève's end of history.

Positioned alongside his postcard collection, the very photographic identity of Kojève's photographs is undermined. If photographs capture a certain deictic moment of singularity, as was noted by both Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes, then Kojève's photographs have abrogated their photographic essence. Their faux-objective generic aesthetic explicitly repudiates such an imperative for the singular, the unrepeatable, the historical. His photographs of Western Europe are a meticulous exercise in the elimination of all *puncta* – those puncturing moments of contingency in photographs, elaborated by Barthes, that produce an affective resonance, a discordance that opens up to a flight of desire. Even as Kojève travels eastward, despite the proliferation of contingent detail (the austerity of the gaze is slightly relaxed), there is nothing like the solicitation of desire, the possibility of adventure or the production of animation in his photographs. They forbid the evocation of that animation and adventure that Barthes thought was essential to photography, instead blindly averring that nothing of the sort is possible any longer. It is as though his photographs insist on being the equivalent of mass-produced postcards – without desire, subjectivity or historical specificity.

The abundant curatorial text of the exhibition attempts to give the muteness of the images a voice. For Groys, Kojève's photographs and the photographic method that generates them seek both 'to register the post-historical world' and to capture 'the historical monuments that remind one of the time before the end of history'. In so doing, they 'manifest and confirm [Kojève's] faithfulness to the event of history'. The photographs themselves push towards other interpretations. The Soviet Union of 1968 is a barely recognizable land of Orthodox cathedrals, village churches and the towering presence of the Kremlin

– all either depopulated or, in very much a Stalinist vein (and Kojève referred to himself as a Stalinist, despite escaping the Soviet Union in 1919), dwarfing the people who live in their shadows. Some of the photos seem less interested in registering the end of history than in studying the ways that the monumental dimension of architecture exceeds everyday life. Their stillness dehumanizes, and their relentless objectivity expels the human out of the frame. Kojève's post-historical photography cannot easily be said to be faithful to the event of history because its dominant effect seems to be a radical act of dehistoricization, the evacuation of the historical dimension *tout court*. The images projected onto the gallery walls do not register anything properly human, properly historic, but, with an objective detachment and a melancholic boredom, record the dwelling places of gods and giants, now abandoned. The question that arises is what exactly makes this repeated insistence on sacred and religious architecture not only the appropriate but the necessary subject for the end of history? Perhaps sacred architecture is the highest achievement of human history, or perhaps Kojève decided to replicate directly the architectural postcards that he was collecting by the hundreds. The question is left unresolved, but it does point to a convergence between the end of history and the end of religion.

For Kojève, the post-historical condition opens up towards an aestheticization of existence, a commitment to mere form that he infamously found in Japan during his 1959 trip, in such practices as Noh theatre, the tea ceremony and the decorative arrangement of flowers. In each practice, the elaborate formalism is taken as a value in itself. An existence expressed in such formalized practices became for Kojève the proper subjective position after history has come to an end; after, that is, the era of historical struggle. He called these practices, which in their aestheticization rejected the natural sphere, pure snobbery, and did so without disparagement. Yet this formal-aesthetic dimension is indelibly bound up with an administrative-technocratic one. After all, having declared the end of history, Kojève became a functionary of the French state and worked on the development of the structures of tariffs that laid the foundation for the European Common Market, which would subsequently become the European Union. This was the concrete form that Kojève gave to the task of constructing the universal homogeneous state – the political form that inaugurates the end of history in Kojève's reading of Hegel. Yet there is not even a whiff of this bureaucratic corollary in Kojève's photographs. It is as though

existence had become radically severed: technocratic political tasks on one side, and an aestheticized gaze photographing sacred sites and muted landscapes on the other.

In the end, Kojève's photography cannot be taken as a straightforward recording of the dull boredom and mild melancholy of the end of history. The 1960s left many indelible images in the cultural imaginary, and the vast majority do not represent the world as wistful harmony and a series of depopulated landscapes. His trip to China occurs amidst the Cultural Revolution and his trip to the Soviet Union during the Prague Spring, but neither event finds any expression in Kojève's photography. In a world full of turmoil, in which something akin to historical action was again becoming a possibility, Kojève's camera persisted in creating aesthetically a forlorn, inactive, depopulated world. It is as though photography became an ascetic regimen through which to train the eye to see the world *as* post-historical with the hope of obliterating the history that was again rising up. Instead of taking the epoch of the end of history as itself a product of history – as a political formation that suppresses the possibility of collective action by severing existence into a technocratic realm, on one hand, and an aesthetic realm, on the other – Kojève insisted that this transformation is simply an ontological reality. These hundreds of photographs and postcards do not, then, merely witness the end of history; they seek to enforce it. What remains proscribed is political action that is not fulfilled in and through the state, or an existence in which politics and aesthetics are not severed from each other. The ultimate import of the stilled boredom of Kojève's photographs, then, is their attestation to his inability to perceive a way out of this binary, either for (political) practice or (philosophical) thought. This becomes even more perverse when the bureaucratic vocation is affirmed as the fulfilment of history. Something of the insanity of this sentiment is audible in one of the hyperbolic gems of Groys's commentary: 'One could say that Kojève was a kind of Arthur Rimbaud of modern bureaucracy – a philosophical writer who consciously became a martyr of the post-historical bureaucratic order.' The scene of martyrdom was appropriate to the vocation: Kojève died from a heart attack in the middle of a meeting of the European Commission. The year: 1968.

**Alex Dubile**