

Red carnation

Peter Hallward and Knox Peden, eds, *Concept and Form*, Volume 1: *Key Texts from the 'Cahiers pour l'analyse'*, Verso, London and New York, 2012. 272 pp., £16.99 pb., 978 1 84467 872 3.

Peter Hallward and Knox Peden, eds, *Concept and Form*, Volume 2: *Interviews and Essays on the 'Cahiers pour l'analyse'*, Verso, London and New York, 2012. 302 pp., £16.99 pb., 978 1 84467 873 0.

Concept and Form consists of two printed volumes – one with selected texts from the *Cahiers pour l'analyse* in English translation, the other containing interviews and essays on the journal – along with a website (<http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk>) including the full text of every *Cahiers* article in French (some accompanied by a translation), unabbreviated versions of the interviews, short biographies of the authors who contributed to the *Cahiers*, and substantive entries on the crucial concepts used. Hallward and Peden provide us with an almost exhaustive overview of the contents and history of the journal, and succeed in disentangling one of the major nodal points of the pre-history of contemporary continental philosophy.

Scanning the table of contents of the ten issues of *Cahiers pour l'analyse* that appeared between 1966 and 1969, the first surprise is the sheer variety of authors it included and the even greater variety of topics. Established authors (Louis Althusser, Georges Canguilhem, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, among others) and master figures from the history of Western philosophy (Plato, Machiavelli, Descartes, Hume) are printed next to young and as yet unknown students from the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* (Jacques-Alain Miller, Jean-Claude Milner, François Regnault and Alain Badiou, to name but a few). Moreover, traditional divides between the concerns of Anglo-Saxon and French philosophy are ignored by contributions that treat questions spanning psychoanalysis, mathematics and logic, and political philosophy. Just as the journal aimed at bringing together different strands of thought (both historically and thematically), the articles themselves, more often than not written in a very dense prose, reinforce this by, for example, discussing Lacanian psychoanalysis alongside Frege. In brief, *Cahiers pour l'analyse* brings to mind one of the mechanisms at work in dream formation: condensation. Such an attempt at thinking together seemingly heterogeneous thoughts did not, however, happen randomly, but was the consequence of an ambitious theoretical project.

The opening sentence of the foreword to the journal's first issue states that the *Cahiers* 'aim to present new and previously published texts dealing with logic, linguistics, psychoanalysis, and all the sciences of analysis, in order to help constitute a theory of discourse.' As is apparent from several other texts, by 'all the sciences of analysis' is meant a psychoanalytically inspired structuralism, which has at least two important characteristics. First, the ambition to constitute a theory of discourse needs to be understood as opposed to the structuralism developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Where the latter considered structures as existing independent from human experience, the *Cahiers'* editorial board wanted to think structure *with* subjectivity. The subjectivity at stake here is not the Sartrean individual 'doomed to be free', but a point included in the structure. Such a point, however, is not just one element, like all the other elements defined by its position with regard to the other positions distributed by a structure, but a mark which indicates that something got excluded, or, more technically, an element that does not only differ from all the other elements but differs from itself. This means, first, that the subject is ultimately nothing but a lack of any positivity or substantiality, and, second, helps to explain the imaginary distance a supposedly free consciousness entertains towards the determining structure. For the point at which one 'enters' the structure coincides necessarily with an exclusion or repression, which opens up the space for an imaginary (and ideological) failure to acknowledge that one is first and foremost the subject of a pre-existing structure. In short, 'the sciences of analysis' do not include the subject because of their psychoanalytical inspiration, psychoanalysis being a praxis that obviously pays attention to the particularities of human subjectivity, but because psychoanalysis considers the human subject to be determined by an unconscious structure – *der andere Schauplatz*, as Freud put it – and locates this subject, distinct from the conscious ego, within the determining operations

of the structure. This obviously leads to the difficult issue that any Lacanian needs to address: the subject is both subjected to the unconscious determination of a structure *and* that element both inside and exterior to the structure that has the capacity to transform it. This cannot but remind us of the older psychoanalytical insight that it only makes sense to refer to the subject's freedom as a paradoxical freedom to subjectify its objective determination. The *Cahiers pour l'analyse* do not directly address this problem, as the main focus is on one side of the problem – a structure that includes its subject – to the detriment of the other, that is, a subject that would not only be able to assume its determination by structure, but also to change it. This is effectively confirmed by the way different interlocutors, at the time directly or indirectly related to the *Cahiers* project, react to Peter Hallward's repeated questions, in the second volume of *Concept and Form*, about how the will, militant engagement and a committed practice to change the world got theorized: they sidestep it.

This choice (if it is one) to focus upon the problem of how to theorize a structure that includes its subject, rather than upon how a subject might change it, can be related to the origin of the journal. Most of the members of the editorial board participated first in another journal: the *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes* started in 1964. Both journals shared the idea that a theoretical formation is required to overcome the ideological distortions known as humanism and personal experience, yet *Cahiers pour l'analyse* widened its

scope in order to seek to construe a general theory of discourse (and its relations to regional theories of ideology, of art, etc.). In this sense *Cahiers pour l'analyse* was less directly political, instead pursuing questions of formalization, considered as essential to any non-ideological science. Significantly, many of the articles that made up the *Cahiers* not only contributed to the theory of discourse, which was supposed to eventually show the subject's place of non-coincidence with itself and to open up the possibility of acting *upon* the structure, but were also guided by the idea that it would be a mistake to take this sort of analysis as a mere theoretical exercise, as the most formal approach to any structure entails precisely the most practical thing that needs to be done, namely to locate the subject within it. Put differently, if the *political* aim of the *Cahiers* did not consist in connecting abstract and universal structure to concrete and particular experience, but in situating the latter within the former, each article contributed to this operation.

This second characteristic of the work published in the *Cahiers*, the attempt at formalization, is closely related to the first. If structure needs to be thought as structure including its subject, the only way to discern this subject is through a formalized approach to structure, i.e. to pay attention exclusively to its elements and their relations of interdependence. In Miller's famous article 'Suture' this is named the logic of the signifier. Developing a logic of the signifier implies, first and foremost, sticking to the superficial



plane on which the signifiers operate and resisting the temptation of any (depth) psychology. Like the psychoanalyst who discerns in stories and associations the meaningless concatenation of signifiers – and tries to shift the analysand from the search for signification to experiencing determination by the meaningless signifier – the *Cahiers* theoretician tries to shed light on the action of the structure in its effects. In this respect Miller's use of Frege is not so surprising as it might seem, in so far as the latter is similarly interested in explaining what a number is, without having recourse to psychology or to the experience that people can count objects. Frege's definitions of numbers remain on a purely formal level, starting with zero as the object that belongs to the concept 'not identical with itself'. As there is only one such object (zero), one is the number that belongs to the concept 'identical with zero', and two is the number that belongs to the concept 'identical with one or zero', etc.

This elegant solution to what Frege called a scandalous situation – that mathematicians were confused about one of their most important objects: number – has the striking quality that it is based on the illogical concept 'not identical with itself' and that its number, zero, is implied in each definition of any other natural number. This allows Miller to propose the notion of suture as a name for the weak point in any structure, pointing out that exclusion was always needed in order to make the structure operational. Like the logic of the number, which begins by introducing an illogical concept, the logic of the signifier is fundamentally marked by a blank or a void (zero) that both indicates and covers up an inevitable exclusion. Proving the existence of such a point can be considered as discovering the possibility of 'analysis' – that is, as Yves Duroux puts it in one of the interviews, 'to seek out the point by which the imaginary element of the structure can be made to topple over (*basculer*)'. It is in this light that, in the interview with Duroux and Étienne Balibar included here, the former states: 'The role of logic was something peculiar to Lacan. It came from him. It didn't come from us, contrary to what people say, people who say that we "logicized psychoanalysis", etc.' Duroux refers here to the widespread opinion that the effect of Jacques-Alain Miller & co. on Lacan's teaching consisted in introducing a logical approach to psychoanalytical notions such as the subject, the unconscious and phantasm, neglecting the more concrete particularities of the analytical experience. Duroux is right to correct this misconception, although it is difficult

to imagine that Lacan's exchange with Althusser's students (which coincided with the change of venue of his weekly seminar from the Sainte-Anne hospital to the École Normale Supérieure) had no effect on the orientation of his later teaching. If one looks at his seminars from the period 1964–1968, one can scarcely overlook the important place that logical issues occupy within them, and, indeed, one may even be tempted to consider this logical approach as mediating between the earlier structuralist method and the later mathematical, topological excursions. Although Tracy McNulty is right, then, in an illuminating discussion of the debate between Jean-Claude Milner and Serge Leclaire, to point out, *contra* Milner, how mathematics, and topology in particular, are already present in Lacan's work from the 1950s, one should also note that the use made of it, and the hopes placed upon it – to invent mathemes which allow for integral transmission – as well as the main problem motivating it – to formalize that which seemingly resists formalization, *jouissance* – becomes only evident in the later work. In this context, an interesting suggestion can be found in Patrice Maniglier's contribution to *Concept and Form's* second volume, in which he suggests that Miller's turn to logic in order to go beyond the 'weak' subjectless structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, may have caused, or at least have enhanced, a blindness to those aspects of his theory that are useful for exactly the kind of theory the *Cahiers* wanted to develop. Maniglier highlights, in this regard, Lévi-Strauss' reference, in his seminal article on 'The Structural Study of Myth', to the Freudian conception of trauma as involving *two* times. Trauma is not a terrible accident that has happened, but an imbalance at the level of one myth that implies the creation of a second one. The crucial point here is that the structuralist reading of a (neurotic) myth cannot consist in a mere identifying of the places and their differential relations pertaining to a structure, but necessarily implies taking into account the generation of a variant. Lacan used this idea in his early text on the case of the 'Rat-Man', which allowed him to consider the subject, not as occupying one of the positions within a myth, but rather the space in between one myth and one of its variants, which are part of an open-ended process of transformation. Whether one agrees with Maniglier's critique of Miller and Milner or not in this respect, it is clear that Maniglier's 'rehabilitation of Lévi-Strauss' is indeed 'striking' (as Duroux puts in his interview with Peter Hallward) and deserves a more thorough discussion than is possible here.

Within this frame, at any rate, one can note that Lacan did use Lévi-Strauss' formula at least a second time (at the end of his May 1961 lessons on a Paul Claudel theatre trilogy), and allow oneself the speculation that he perhaps did not return to it because of the influence the *Cahiers*' program had on him.

At this point the reader may have the impression that the *Cahiers* consisted mainly of texts critiquing a structuralism that does not take into account the *subject* of an unconscious structure. As mentioned before, however, the scope of the journal was much broader and involved, alongside other critiques of Lévi-Straussian structuralism (concerning its humanism and its naturalism, as in the debate with Derrida in issues 4 and 8) and articles on psychoanalytic theory, a focus on epistemological questions (Canguilhem and Foucault), the history of science, politics and the problem of formalization. The crystal-clear introduction by Hallward to the first volume provides a detailed yet exciting account of all the issues that motivated the creation of the *Cahiers*. Moreover, as the book version of *Concept and Form* cannot include all the texts the journal published, not even all those one might consider to be crucial (some of which have already been published in English elsewhere), the outstanding chapters in Volume 2 by Knox Peden (on Foucault and Lacan) and Edward Baring (on Lévi-Strauss and Derrida) deliver crucial insights into the theoretical aims and positions of some of the original articles that could not be included in Volume 1.

Devoting two books to this short-lived journal is to be welcomed as a much-needed contribution to the history of ideas, yet it also provokes the question of what happened to the programmatic idea that initiated and guided each issue of the *Cahiers pour l'analyse*. This question is partially answered by the presence of Slavoj Žižek among the contributors to Volume 2, and by Adrian Johnston's polemical reconsideration of Lacanian psychoanalysis as a materialism and its possible relation to contemporary neuroscience. The other part of the answer, however, concerns the work of Alain Badiou, whose work is evidently considered by the editors as the continuation of the *Cahiers* in the present. Tellingly, Volume 2 ends with an interview with Badiou, and Volume 1 includes both of his two *Cahiers* articles. There is certainly a logic to this last editorial choice, in so far as Badiou's contributions are replies to Miller's two central texts, 'Suture' and 'Action of the Structure', also included in Volume 1, and discussed in almost every contribution to the second volume. As Hallward shows in his own essay

in Volume 2, Badiou's contributions to the *Cahiers* articulate a theoretical disagreement with Miller, which can be referred back to what distinguishes Althusser from Lacan. In retrospect, however – that is, after the event of May '68 – these discussions enabled Badiou to think Althusser with and not as opposed to Lacan concerning the problem of science and subjectivity, whereas Miller chose to leave the *Cahiers*' project behind, concentrating on more specifically psychoanalytic issues. This causes Badiou himself to conclude that he is actually the only one who remained faithful to the Lacano-Maoist orientation of the journal. Leaving aside the question of what it may mean to be the sole and single 'embodiment of a tendency', as Badiou suggests, it is clear that the editors largely endorse Badiou in this self-situating, and in his self-differentiation from the others (renegades, reactionaries, etc.), by the place that is given to his interview in Volume 2 and to his *Cahiers* texts, at the end of Volume 1, followed only by two 'odd' texts on Cartesian politics (François Regnault) and on the notorious Molyneux problem (Alain Grosrichard). Supposing that this is a partisan choice on the part of the editors, there are definitely a number of reasons in favour of it, but also questions that this narrative provokes. To what extent is Badiou rather a Sartrean – Rancière's opinion – than a Lacanian? And if Badiou continues the Lacan in 'Lacano-Maoism', shouldn't one have included the text by Jacques Brunschwig on the particular proposition in Aristotle, published in issue 10? This text had a demonstrable effect on Lacan's reorganization of the Aristotelian square of opposition, resulting in the differentiation between a particular exception simply opposed to universality and the not-all characteristic of a non-universalizable singularity. Including this would have allowed for a more contemporary discussion of the positions of the late Lacan, Miller and Badiou regarding the subject as in- and exclusion within the universe of discourse *and* Lacan's object a, his 'sole invention' as he put it in his 1973–74 Seminar.

The last word may not be given to, but simply taken by Miller, who in the slipstream of a vehement discussion with Badiou on the latter's depiction of the former as a 'renegade' in the second volume here, has announced his plan to publish a new, eleventh issue of *Cahiers pour l'analyse* in 2014, with solicited contributions by Alain Grosrichard, Jean-Claude Milner and François Regnault. This, however, should hardly make anyone postpone taking delight in *Concept and Form*.

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