

# REVIEWS



## THE SHAMEFUL FACE OF PHILOSOPHY

Michèle Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, trans. Colin Gordon, London, Athlone Press, 1989. x + 199pp., £32 hb, 0 485 11352 X.

Western philosophy has, by tradition, defined itself in opposition to myth, fable, the poetic, and all that inhabits the domain of the image. Whatever else either reason or good sense have or have not required, they have characteristically demanded the renunciation of the vagueness and ambiguity inherent in images in favour of the precision of logically structured literal discourse. Michèle Le Doeuff seeks to remove the mask constituted by this self-image of rational respectability, to reveal the essential dependence of philosophy on precisely those forms of discourse which it has sought to exclude. More radically, this unmasking discloses a whole imaginary realm, the philosophical imaginary; a realm which functions to support the exclusions founding philosophy's self-image. In this realm dwell women who embody the formless feminine other and thus necessarily lack the rational abilities required to make good philosophers.

The simultaneously castrated and panhysterized woman can thus be read as the emblem of a discursive practice, one which can be called Ideological in the strict sense of the term. ... But why should it be specifically 'woman' who covers the costs of this chiasmic figuration of competence? To resolve the problem of this choice of symbolizing substance one would need to reconsider the strategies of all those philosophers since the mid-eighteenth century who have transcribed their anxieties about their own legitimacy into reveries on 'the feminine' (p. 170).

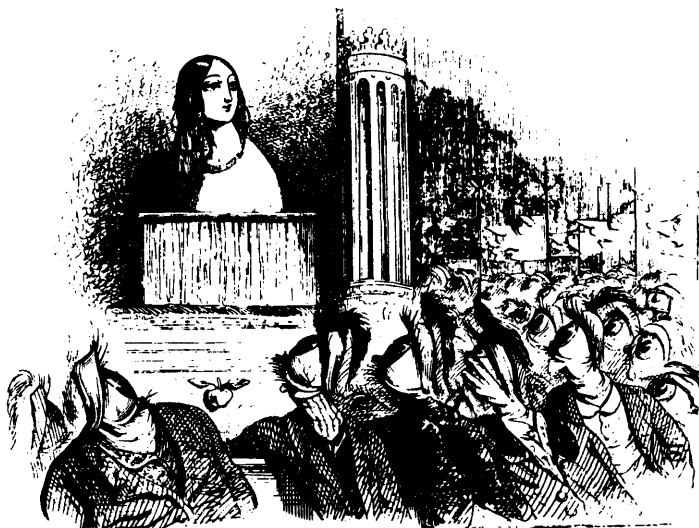
Who is it that has the audacity to remove the mask? A philosopher who cannot assume it – a female philosopher.

So this collection of essays is at once a sequence of explorations of the role of images in philosophic discourse and an elaboration of the means by which it is possible for a woman to engage with and in philosophy whilst coming to terms with, and coming to a philosophic understanding of, the obstacles that she has encountered. (These themes emerge more explicitly and are developed further in Michèle Le Doeuff's most recent book *L'étude en le rouet*; *The Philosophical Imaginary* is a translation of her first book, published in French in 1980.) There is here a serious commitment to and faith in the project of changing philosophical practice through critique, in finding a non-exclusionary, non-hegemonic way of engaging in and with philosophy. To this extent she is

swimming against the tide of feminist and post-modernist trends. Seriousness of purpose does not, however, preclude the playfulness of a brilliantly barbed wit.

As Michèle Le Doeuff explains in her excellent opening essay, the papers collected here were written over a number of years. They began as an exploration of the role of imagery in philosophic writing and from this there emerged the hypothesis, explored in the final chapter 'Pierre Roussel's Chiasmas', that there is imagery which is specific to and performs specific functions in philosophic texts – a philosophic imaginary. Amongst these images is an icon of the feminine which differs from the image of the feminine to be found outside learned circles. Her initial hypothesis concerning the role of images in theoretical texts is that imagery is the locus of points of tension. More strongly, images work both for and against the system that deploys them, sustaining something that the system cannot justify but which is essential to it, and yet doing so in a way which is incompatible with the system's possibilities. This is illustrated by Kant's use of the image of the island of truth surrounded by an ocean of illusion to mediate the conflict between hope in the practical value of the critical enterprise which requires a connection between sensible and intelligible realms, and the official doctrine of the analytic which severs this connection.

The theme of an anxious philosophy displacing its anxieties through its use of images begins to emerge in 'Red Ink in the Margin'. Here Le Doeuff examines the sources of



(mis)readings of Descartes' *Discourse on Method* which take it that the morality there adopted is only a provisional morality, when a meticulously literal reading of Descartes' phrase 'par provision' shows this to be quite inaccurate. This examination has two purposes. One, to show that Descartes' text, through its use of images, opens itself to the 'misreading' because it is itself traversed by indecision and slippage. The second is to situate the demand for 'loyalty to the letter of the text', for if the reading labelled 'erroneous' is latent in the text, the insistence on literal reading is a move to occlude what is said in the marginalised elements through the use of images, that is to prevent the surfacing of certain problems. She locates the pressure to 'misread' Descartes in debates in 19th-century France concerning the teaching of morality in schools in which the relevance of philosophy was at stake. The retention of the task of producing a definitive morality as one proper to philosophy was important to its status, hence the reading of the morality, which Descartes adopts ready-made, as provisional. But the seeds of this reading are sown within the *Discourse* itself where the use of images (a lodging, the concern about foundations, the tree of knowledge) suggests a devalorisation of the morality adopted by Descartes at the outset. Nevertheless the effect of the Cartesian method is to sunder the practical from the theoretical, so rendering the notion of knowledge of the Good problematic:

The nostalgia for wisdom – that is, for a knowledge which makes possible the Good – is thus a pure nostalgia, the mask of an unredeemable loss. It is the conflict between the possibilities of the system and the philosopher's wish concerning the power of philosophy which summons up the images, and draws them from a place whose recollection carries a great power to reassure (p. 96).

Is the literal reading, that Descartes provided himself with a common-sense morality of which he approved, then to be counted as the correct and definitive reading when it ignores the images, the unease and tension in Descartes' thought?

Whenever philosophical discourse touches, even indirectly, on the nature and status of philosophy itself, the discourse can never be univocal and subject to simple, neutral readings. Literal discourse becomes contradictory when it seeks simultaneously to incorporate reflexivities and to be definitive (as the Liar paradox and Gödel's theorem remind us). To the extent that philosophic discourse attempts to occupy the high ground of knowledge whilst at the same time exhibiting a concern with the legitimacy of its own claims it will go beyond the resources of literal reading in the manner illustrated by Le Doeuff. To the extent that it does this whilst defining itself in opposition to the image, it inhabits, insecurely, an imaginary space. One route to displacing reliance on an exclusionary image of the feminine may thus be, as Le Doeuff suggests, that of internalising the inevitable role of the image in philosophy, to cease wishing to mask the incomplete nature of all theorisation and to create a philosophy which becomes open to history:

Insisting on philosophy's lack, while making of this lack the condition of its insertion into historical reality, allows philosophy to be moved towards a position where the alternative between a hegemonic reason and a revolt of unreason can be seen as mythical, a connivance or complicity between forms which present themselves as opposites (p. 118).

Changing philosophical practice in this way is likely to alter the interlocking of the 'philosophical' and the 'feminine' by altering the realities which sustained it in the past.

Mary Tiles

## NEW TIMES, NEW ORTHODOXY

Nicholas Costello, Jonathan Michie and Seumas Milne, *Beyond the Casino Economy: Planning for the 1990s*, London, Verso, 1989. 320pp., £24.95 hb, £8.95 pb, 0 86091 252 3 hb, 0 86091 067 6 pb.

Modification of the base/superstructure model and rejection of technological determinism has been something of a touchstone of Western Marxism since Stalin (G. A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* being a notable exception). Or so it was until the emergence of the New Orthodoxy – a loosely related body of thought whose most trenchant and self-conscious exponents are the post-Fordists of *Marxism Today*. Suddenly the politics of the Communist Party's *Manifesto for New Times*, and also the Labour Party's *Policy Review*, are promoted as having been derived from technological, industrial and economic developments. The irony of base/superstructure concepts being resurrected by those who would have formerly regarded them with dissatisfaction was pointed out by Paul Hirst in a *New Statesman* article in July 1989, though with the qualification that technological determinism has given way to 'causal metaphor' – a persistence 'in seeing broad processes of social change in terms of a meta-

phor taken from industrial production'.

For Hirst, the real problem with 'post-Fordism', paradoxically, is that it is inadequate for conceptualising changes in the manufacturing base and ought to be replaced by the more precise category of 'flexible specialisation'. 'Flec spec' involves the production of a range of customised goods by skilled workers using re-programmable technology. It is, so to speak, the antithesis of the Fordist mass production methods which relied on special-purpose (inflexible) machinery, unskilled and semi-skilled labour, to produce vast quantities of standardised goods.

But Hirst is mistaken in counterposing the two concepts – flec spec is an integral part of the post-Fordist view, which couples it with two-tier employment, subcontracting to specialised suppliers, and an increasingly consumerist, flexible and individualist workforce. All of which has a concomitant – dare I say it – *superstructural* effect, described thus by *Marxism Today* editor Martin Jacques:

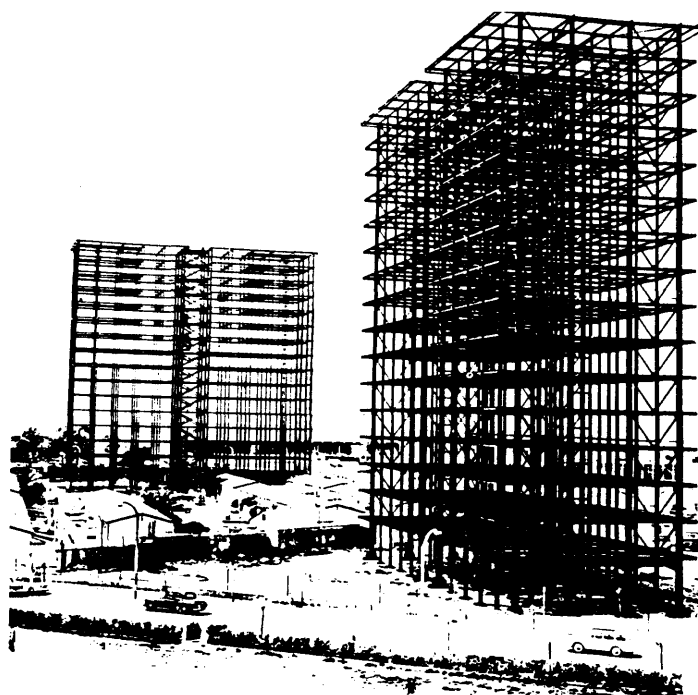
Our world is being remade. Mass production, the mass consumer, the big city, the big-brother state, the sprawling housing estate, the nation state are in decline: flexibility, diversity, differentiation, mobility,

communication, decentralisation and internationalisation are now in the ascendant (*Marxism Today*, October 1988).

But to the extent that political and ideological changes are influenced/determined by changes in production, the base/superstructure model could only possibly be of use if you can get the base right. Unfortunately the New Orthodoxy has got it wrong. The general account of changes in the economy is misguided, and the political conclusions and policy proposals arising from them – as epitomised by the Labour Party *Policy Review* – are correspondingly inappropriate and inadequate to the problems of the British economy in the 1990s. Such at least is the claim of Costello, Michie and Milne.

The three central tenets of 'New Times' thinking – post-Fordism, the impossibility of pursuing radical strategies in the face of globalised markets, and an epochal shift from planning to markets – are subjected to searching criticism in the book's opening section, 'A Brave New World?'. The need to shift to long-term economic planning and intervention is set against the actual experience of Britain's relative decline and repeated false dawns in the book's second section – 'Crisis and the Road to Renewal'. The implication is clearly that current Labour Party policies would allow at best just one more false dawn. This leads into the third section – 'Planning for the 1990s' – which attempts to uncover the emerging opportunities for radical intervention in the 1990s, such as the growing industrial need, particularly in the leading-edge sectors of telecommunications and information technology, for public ownership and planning. Possible objections and debates are well presented in the concluding section, which calls for further work, both on uncovering the emerging opportunities and on developing policies able to meet those challenges – to *really* 'make the change'.

Specifically, Brian Gould's argument, that the 'new terrain ... of high technology, of small firms, computers and information technology ... is a future of diversity and flexibility, of internationalisation on the one hand and specialist production on the other', is taken to task as fighting the battles of the last war. While the information technology sector in the 1970s went through a phase of small start-up companies developing the market, the market in the 1990s will not only be dominated by massive corporations, but also by technological and industrial imperatives for networking, integration, compatibility and standardisation. According to the authors it

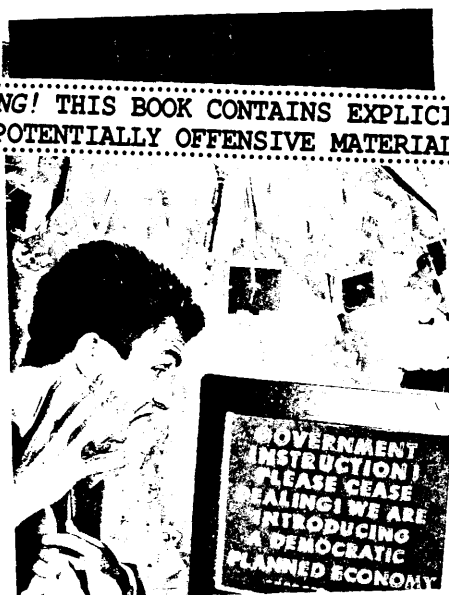


was just the sort of approach articulated by Gould which lay behind the relative failure of British Telecom's Prestel Service, in contrast to the successful state-led and planned approach adopted by French Télécom with Minitel. Success in information technology, they argue, will increasingly necessitate social intervention and ownership. This is partly because the mobility of labour renders it uneconomic for private companies to spend the necessary money on training only to have their workers move on. But more importantly, rival research teams engaged in producing almost identical software products which, once produced, cost virtually nothing to copy, creates a drag on such work itself. Add to this the resulting need of private firms to devote increasing resources to methods of protecting their research investments from copiers, and the conclusion must surely be that, in this leading-edge area of production, existing social relations have become a definite fetter on the development of productive forces.

The authors do concede that there has been an emergence of a large number of small, 'flexible', go-getting firms, whose innovatory efforts tend to support the post-Fordist world view. Nevertheless, the huge cost of research and development required to meet the individualistic and fluid demands of the post-Fordist consumer definitely favors the big boys – who even as you read are belying their Fordist reputations with flec spec 'batch' production. The available evidence suggests that in the years to come there will be a further increase in industrial concentration, a process which will be given additional impetus by the creation of a 'Single European Market'. It should also be stressed that large sections of the economy remain untouched by flec spec. Even on the High Street – which is thought to be particularly fashioned by the needs of the new flexible consumer – paragons of corporate standardisation such as MacDonalds still seem to be flourishing. Mass society therefore shows little sign of disappearing. So why did anyone imagine it was?

Ironically enough, the New Orthodoxy has, quite unwittingly, provided us with a real-life example of developments in the economic base being reflected ideologically. Certainly there is a new individualistic ideology being promoted and supported. And it may be that, however misguided that ideology is in claiming to be the wave of the future, or in claiming to provide policy proposals which would work in the interest

**WARNING! THIS BOOK CONTAINS EXPLICIT AND POTENTIALLY OFFENSIVE MATERIAL**



of society as a whole, it nevertheless reflects the interests, aspirations and lifestyles of a particular sector – ‘class fraction’ even – of society. Michael Rustin, in an interesting examination of such superstructural phenomena, suggests that designer socialism ‘is really the socialism of designers. That is to say, the world of flexible specialisation is the world as seen from the point of view of its beneficiaries ... of the man or woman for whom the capacity to acquire, apply and transmit knowledge is the market resource’ (*New Left Review* May-June 1989). As Marx remarks, ‘one must not take the narrow view that the petty bourgeoisie explicitly sets out to assert its egoistic class interests. It rather believes that the particular conditions of its liberation are the only general conditions within which modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided.’

*Beyond the Casino Economy* is a serious and important contribution to the search for a progressive programme of economic and social reform in the 1990s. It presents an acute analysis of the British economy and its actual and potential place in the world. In addition it provides sound arguments and up-to-date evidence for a comprehensive radical economic programme involving a major extension of democratic public ownership, and does so without any of the ostrich-like dogmatism or re-warming of the Alternative Economic Strategy which have characterised many left responses to the New Orthodoxy. As such it is the first effective challenge both to the arguments of the post-Fordists and the Labour Party *Policy Review*, and adherents of both will need to take serious account of what it has to say.

Kevin Magill

## THE TENDER TRAP

Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989, x + 223pp., £25 hb, £8.95 pb, 0 09 174093 hb, 0 09 174098 3 pb.

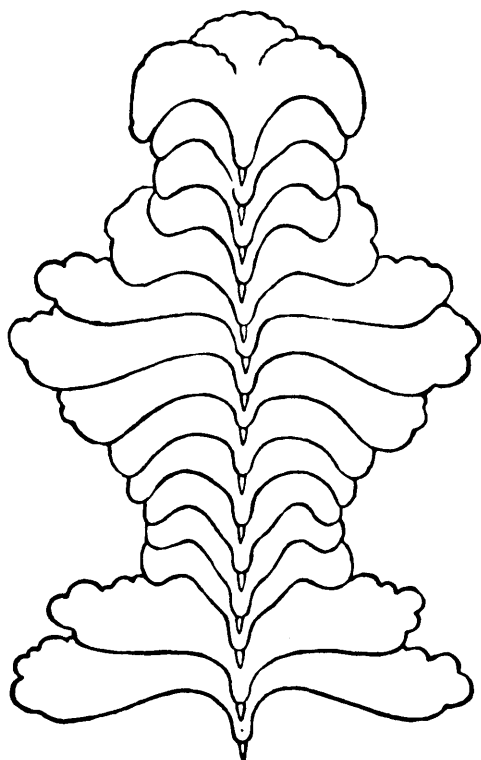
1989 saw a triad of distances from feminist aesthetics. First came George Steiner with *Real Presences* in which he argued that great artifice implies an essential maleness. Feminist criticism was relegated to ‘legitimate rancour’ and ‘vengeful impatience’ with ‘traditional aesthetic and philosophic theory’. No future here for developing a non-essentialist form of feminist aesthetics. Refusal to concentrate on biological ‘facts’ would be a form of bad faith. Then, more or less simultaneously, came my own *Gender and Genius* (subtitled ‘Towards a Feminist Aesthetics’) and Rita Felski’s *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*. Never ... towards ... beyond? Why should Rita Felski – who emerges out of Marxist feminism – be so

quick to collude with conservative positions that doom feminist aesthetics to failure before its tasks have barely begun?

Felski defines feminist aesthetics as ‘any theoretical position which argues a necessary or privileged relationship between female gender and a particular kind of literary structure, style, or form’ and then goes on to attack two targets: (i) ‘the existence of a specifically feminine psychology’; and (ii) the notion of a ‘feminine’ form of discourse that must always and necessarily undermine the authority of a ‘masculine’ symbolic language. Felski mounts a punchy attack on those who treat the ‘feminine’ in ahistorical and context-blind ways. But, given the ways that aesthetic and metaphysical terms have been gendered in the history of the arts, there are other analyses that could be provided of the relationships between being female and particular forms of artistic expression. Felski blocks off these alternatives for a feminist aesthetics by, in effect, narrowing her enquiry to ‘feminine aesthetics’.

Felski’s book includes an attack on poststructuralist and ‘cultural’ feminists. But by accepting both the reductive account of Anglo-American feminism offered by Toril Moi in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, and Moi’s pro-Kristevan slant on French feminist theorists, Felski manages to leave a variety of feminist positions unexamined. And this means that, despite the (many) virtues of Felski’s negative critique, she cannot establish her strong conclusion about the undesirability of feminist aesthetics. Felski claims that the current conflict in feminist literary theory between Anglo-American and French critics ‘does not simply constitute an as yet unresolved state of affairs which will be transcended at some future date’. Rather, all attempts to ‘collapse’ the ‘literary and political domains’ into each other must fail, leaving us with ‘a social and historical problem rather than a purely theoretical one’. As an argument this only works if we assume that a feminist aesthetics must seek to explain all formal and literary features of a text in terms of an autonomous theory of gender relations. But I cannot think of any feminist theoretician who would wholeheartedly adopt this premise.

Felski quotes Patrocínio Schweickart to the effect that feminist criticism cannot involve either a compromise between, or a hierarchical relationship between, political values and traditional literary values. But, whereas Schweickart’s formulation suggested a ‘dialectical mediation’ between the oppositional value systems, Felski’s summary of this position



suggests that the feminists' 'necessarily contradictory enterprise' must fail. 'The notion of a feminist aesthetics presupposes that these two dimensions of textual reception can be unproblematically harmonized'. Whereas I would freely admit that a very few feminist philosophers have as yet begun to develop a theory of aesthetic value, Felski is much too quick to conclude that all such attempts must end in deadlock. Why should dialectical movement be permitted in Marxist, but not in feminist, aesthetics?

In place of a feminist aesthetics Felski proposes 'a sociologically based analysis of the reception of artworks in relation to specific audiences'. It is this move that enables Felski to put forward an innovative and richly suggestive account of two specifically female prose genres during the 1970s and '80s: feminist confession and narratives of feminist self-discovery. Literary critics will value these chapters for their detailed analysis of the relationship between implied readers and implied authors in two sub-genres of fiction and autobiography. But, far from offering a space *beyond* feminist aesthetics, it is surely with such acute analysis of the paradoxes of female subjectivity that feminist aesthetics should begin ...

Felski's analysis in this part of her study will be of interest to those philosophers concerned with thinking through the problems of gendering the framework of the Frankfurt School and other Marxist aesthetics. Felski moves beyond the positions argued by Adorno and Lukács, arguing that the 'modernism *versus* realism' debate marginalises feminist art. Instead, she develops a notion of a 'feminist

counter-public sphere': a shared discursive space which contains the tensions of feminist-authored texts without negating those tensions. Although Felski's argument moves far too quickly from Habermas's notion of a shared legal and social 'public sphere' to that of a counter-sphere that can embrace literary texts, this part of Felski's book is an important contribution to feminist literary theory. It needs, however, to be set against Joan Landes' brilliant and much more radical revision of Habermas in *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cornell University Press, 1988).

*Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* will be a useful course-book for those studying gender in autobiography and the novel. But the philosopher who comes to Felski's book looking for a theoretical discussion of the vocabulary handed down to us from the history of aesthetics is likely to be disappointed. 'Form', 'matter', 'oeuvre', 'disinterestedness', 'objective', 'beautiful', 'sublime' are all terms that, to my mind, require a (historically based) gender analysis of the kind I provided for 'genius'. Since Felski conceives of aesthetics primarily as twentieth-century literary theory, she simply does not see the urgency of this task for feminist philosophers. It is good to welcome a sceptical Marxist-feminist counter-voice to the debates currently raging within feminist criticism. But it is sad that Felski felt the need to entitle this book *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* instead of *Against Aestheticism and Essentialism in Feminist Literary Theory*. This might be a much less catchy title, but it is a much more precise indicator of the direction of her arguments.

Christine Battersby

## CONFUSION OF TONGUES

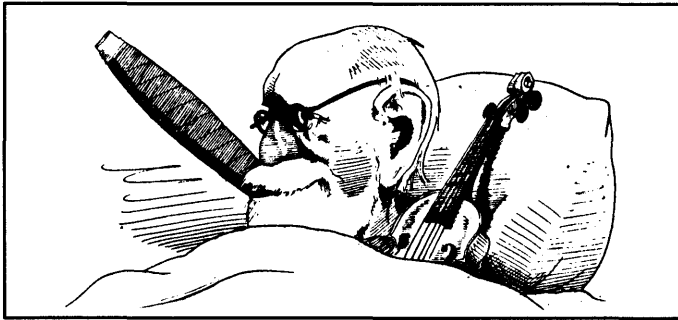
*The Clinical Diary of Sandor Ferenczi*, edited by Judith Dupont, translated by Michael Balint and Nicola Zarday Jackson, Cambridge, Mass. and London, Harvard University Press, 1988, xxviii + 227pp., £23.95 hb, 0 674 1356 1

Sandor Ferenczi, a leading figure in psychoanalytic circles and a one-time president of the International Psychoanalytic Association, was regarded by Freud as the 'most perfect' of his heirs. A favourite travelling companion of Freud's, he was a trusted member of the secret committee founded to further the cause, one of the elect who wore the antique intaglio ring. Like many of Freud's close friendships, the relationship was to end in acrimony and distrust, with Freud claiming that Ferenczi was 'too much under the influence' of his patients, and with Ferenczi reproaching the father of psychoanalysis for not loving his analysands. Ferenczi's posthumous reputation suffered greatly at the hands of Ernest Jones, whose Freud biography describes him as suffering from an 'unhappy deterioration' of the mental faculties. Rumours of a descent into psychosis abound, but have always been discounted by those who were close to Ferenczi, a man who inspired great affection in his friends and patients, in his final years. It is sometimes said that Jones never forgave Ferenczi for having been his analyst.

The clinical diary was written over a ten-month period in 1932, the year in which Ferenczi presented his controversial paper on 'The Confusion of Tongues' to the Wiesbaden Congress of the IPA. The following year, its author died of

pernicious anaemia at the age of sixty. The diary is therefore Ferenczi's final and unfinished contribution to psychoanalysis.





Ferenczi's estrangement from Freud began with the scandal over the so-called 'kissing technique'; he had breached the rule of analytic neutrality by demonstrating affection to his analysands. Throughout the diary, he explores his differences with Freud, struggling to remain loyal and at the same time to justify his own technical innovations. Analytic neutrality is criticised as inhuman, as a defence against weakness and fear, and Ferenczi argues the case for a form of analysis based upon what he calls a healing compassion: the love of the analyst should have the same effect as the embrace of a loving mother and a protective father. All too often, the professional politeness of the analyst masks contempt for the patient, whereas in Ferenczi's view 'only sympathy heals'. The proposed solution centres on the still controversial technique of mutual analysis. In certain sessions, the patient analyses the analyst, who relates fragments of his own past and reveals his own feelings of anxiety and guilt. The unconscious of the analyst thus becomes a further resource for the analysis of the analysand in a spiral of mutual interpretation and working through.

If the technical innovations described here were and are controversial, the underlying theoretical claim borders on the heretical. Several passages are in fact drafts for the 1932 paper on the 'Confusion of Tongues', in which Ferenczi argues that trauma and sexual abuse are realities and not retrospective fantasies. Without ever denying the fact of infantile sexuality, he stresses that it is *infantile*: the child who

seeks tenderness and affection encounters the brutality of adult passion and sexuality. Two languages are confused, and the child victim is reduced to silence or worse. The role of the analyst is to restore the affection that was denied, to make reparation for the damage that was done to the child who lives on in the analysand. Only the trust that comes from mutual compassion can establish a contrast between the present and the traumatic past. Once that contrast has been made, the patient can relive the past, not as a compulsively repeated hallucination, but as an objective memory which can be mastered.

The diary is densely written, with fragments of case histories jostling alongside theoretical speculations, some of them in the form of terse and fragmentary notes. There are no signs of the 'deterioration' mentioned by Jones, but there is evidence of considerable and painful inner conflict and struggle. The attempt to be both mother and father to his analysands (or is it a fantasy of bisexuality?) clearly cost Ferenczi dear; he complains, not surprisingly, of severe headaches after a three-hour session of mutual analysis, and finally abandons the technique as unmanageable. As a chapter from the history of psychoanalysis, this is essential reading. As a human document it is moving and at times painful.

The history of the text is emblematic of psychoanalysis's difficulty in coming to terms with its own past. The manuscript was brought from Budapest to London by Balint in 1939, but he held back from publishing it because of the controversy surrounding the Jones biography. Balint originally believed that it could be published in 1969, thinking that the obstacles to a simultaneous publication of the voluminous Freud-Ferenczi correspondence had finally been removed. That proved not to be so, and it is only now that we can read the diary, though a French edition did appear in 1985. The publication of selections from the correspondence is now announced for an unspecified date. It is to be hoped that we do not have to wait a further twenty years. And it is to be regretted that not everything will be published.

David Macey

## CHEEKINESS LOST

Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, translated by Michael Eldred, Foreword by Andreas Huyssen, London, Verso, 1988, xxxix + 558pp., £14.95 pb, 0 86091 933 1.

This book arrives ripe with expectation. A runaway success in West Germany, where it sold over 40,000 copies in the first few months after its publication in 1983, it has been touted as the quintessential philosophical text of the 1980s. A heady blend of impulses from Poststructuralism and Critical Theory, it mixes and juxtaposes intellectual genres and topics with bewildering facility in an attempt to outflank everyone in the battle over the fate of Enlightenment reason. At once a history of cynicism (and its repressed 'kynical' Other), a philosophical reflection on the climate of the times, a prolegomenon to a Universal Polemics, and a meditation on the Weimar Republic as an exemplar of the political pathology of modernity, it ranges (and rages) across the landscape of European thought with extraordinary virtuosity and considerable originality.

Its starting point – the impasse of an Enlightenment thought which has become conscious of its own contradictions – is familiar; its perspective, refreshingly new. For by testing this impasse, which takes the form of a gap between theory and practice, less as a problem amenable to either a theoretical or an immediate practical solution than a structure of consciousness or form of practical reason in its own right (cynicism), Sloterdijk is able to connect it up to a whole tradition of anti-philosophical thought and action and to investigate its structure in genuinely novel ways.

The times, Sloterdijk declares, are cynical. We are enlightened, but we are also apathetic. 'New values have short lives.' Our theoretical sophistication (the self-consciousness of enlightenment reason – 'knowledge is power') has brought us not the good life, but an enduring scepticism about all claims on behalf of such a life. Critique has lost its force. In its inability to change the world it has become complicit with it. It has become masochistic. This is the specificity of modern cynicism. It is *enlightened false consciousness*, a conscious-



ness which has learnt the lessons of enlightenment, but has not, and probably cannot, put them into practice. 'Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered.' The formal sequence of states of false consciousness from *lies* through *error* to *ideology*, it is argued, must be extended to include cynicism as the fourth (and final?) stage. An ideology-critique which has become conscious of its own impotence demands a critique of cynical reason.

So far, so good. But what could a 'critique' of cynical reason mean in this context, once the recognition of the *fact* of cynicism has undermined the self-understanding of critique as a form of practical reason? And what form is it to take in this decidedly post-Nietzschean world?

The text is divided into five main sections, sandwiched between a slender Preface and fragile Conclusion which bear the weight of philosophical contextualization and orientation with thinly disguised discomfort. The first section, 'Preliminary Reflections', sets out the main argument of the book. The remaining four – a Physiognomic, a Phenomenological, a Logical, and a Historical 'Main Text' (the latter devoted exclusively to the Weimar Republic) – develop it through a variety of narrative and argumentative strategies. Illustrations are scattered throughout. The apparently systematic ordering, like the title of the book itself, is in part satirical, in part the result of a will to order which at times prevails over, and at others is defeated by, the enormous diversity of the material covered.

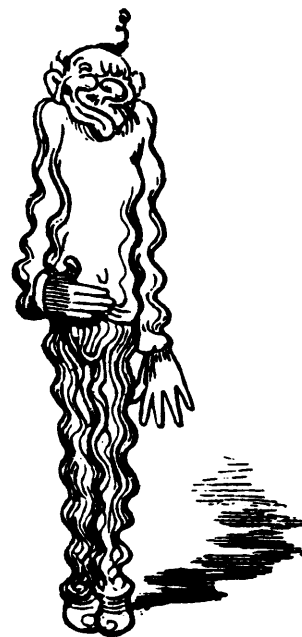
The power of the work derives from the combination of the creative tension inherent in this often sprawling but never chaotic structure, and the simplicity and conviction of its guiding idea. The necessity to maintain systematic and anti-systematic impulses simultaneously, which is given a theoretical foundation in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, is played out here at the level of form in an unusually innovative way. The problem is whether there is anything more to this than a *merely* aesthetic mediation.

There are four main issues at stake. The first concerns the place of cynicism within the history of philosophy as a deviant but repressed 'anti-philosophical' tradition. The second is the difference between ancient and modern cynicism, and the splitting of the cynical tradition in the modern world, detected by Sloterdijk, into a subversive, celebratory, marginalised 'kynicism' (*Kynismus*) and its strategic, deceitful, powerful twin, for which the term 'cynicism' (*Zynismus*) is generally reserved. Thirdly, there is the brief but central claim which is made for the subsumption of dialectics within a Universal Polemics. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, there is the question of the status and implications of the 'critique' of cynical reason itself.

As an intellectual tradition, cynicism has its origins in the ancient world in Diogenes' performative critique of Platonic philosophy. With Diogenes, Sloterdijk argues, 'laughter about philosophy itself became philosophical'. 'Kynicism' (from the Greek *kyon*, meaning dog – Diogenes was denigrated as a 'dog' philosopher) was the first reply to Athenian idealism that went beyond theoretical repudiation: 'It does not speak against it. It lives against it.' As such, it, rather than Aristotelianism, is understood by Sloterdijk to be 'the real philosophical antithesis to Socrates and Plato'. Its form is not logical-rhetorical, but gestural and embodied. (Diogenes' replied to Plato's theory of Eros by masturbating in public, for example.) It is a derogatory, satirical, 'dirty' materialist tradition which resists the devitalisation of culture performed by philosophy by outrageous, scandalous acts. It is an ancient

existentialism born of a pact with poverty, directed against the hegemonic aspirations of philosophical reason. It is 'cheeky' (*frech*). It fools around, but to a point and in public. It refuses to be drawn onto the ground of rational abstraction. It is material argumentation, a sublation (*Aufhebung*) of philosophy: a shrug of the shoulders, a malicious laugh, a fart, a shake of the head. It is shameless.

Kynicism becomes cynicism at the point at which its insight into the deficit of all 'philosophical' reason is appropriated by the powerful to denounce their *critics* as self-serving. In cynicism, 'critique changes sides'. It becomes 'opportunism trimmed to the irony of those in power'. Sloterdijk presents us with both a 'Cabinet of Cynics', from Lucian the Mocker (born 120 BC) to 'Anyone' ('The Most Real Subject of Modern Diffuse Cynicism'), and a phenomenology and logic of Cardinal and Secondary Cynicisms (Military, Political, Sexual, Medicinal, Religious, Epistemological; Moral, Communicative, Exchange), in a dazzling display of cultural and literary history. And all in the name of their repressed kynical Other, who lives on in the margins of cultural life, sniping from the sidelines. Such neo-kynicism is taken to find its foremost modern representative in Nietzsche and the project for a Gay Science. (Diogenes, Sloterdijk insists, is the real founder of the Gay Science.)



In his libertarian emphasis on the dissenting margins and his attempt to give negative dialectics (a form of experience which is true in the medium of determinate negation only) a sensual-erotic, pantomimic turn – symbolised by the student who stripped during one of Adorno's lectures in Frankfurt – Sloterdijk locates himself firmly within the cultural context of the '60s and the 'thin thread of political culture' which it stimulated. *Critique of Cynical Reason* both provides the politics of the student movement with a philosophical pre-history and holds out the hope of the renewal of its impulse. It is at once a cry against the academicisation of left theory ('a kind of philological gardening where Benjaminian irises, Pasolinian flowers of evil and Freudian deadly nightshade are cultivated') and a monument to scholarship. It would like to play Diogenes to Habermas's Plato, but it is a text, and a considerably sophisticated one at that, and kynicism, it insists, is always embodied.



Sloterdijk's aim is to lay bare the structure of modernised false consciousness (cynicism) 'physiognomically', by placing it within a 'political history of polemical reflections' which starts out with Diogenes' kynicism. In order to do this, however, he must give an account of polemic, not just historically, but theoretically. It is this latter task which is undertaken in the second half of the Logical Main Text in a chapter entitled 'Transcendental Polemic: Heraclitan Meditations', which offers an account of the foundation of dialectics in what it calls Polemics and Rhythmics (a kind of Prolegomenon to a Universal Polemics). This is the one place in which Sloterdijk risks a theoretical confrontation with Critical Theory. It is the secret philosophical core of the book and reveals its innermost conceptual ambition. It is also deeply disappointing.

The starting point is the idea that neither a critique of instrumental reason nor a critique of functionalist reason (neither Adorno nor Habermas) discloses the connection between strategy and cynicism which is the 'philosophical signature of modernity'. In contrast, Sloterdijk offers a 'transcendental-polemical' viewpoint which sets out from 'the "war of researchers" as the condition of that which they work out as truths'. Dialectics is to be reconstructed in the form of a Universal Polemics. The problem with all this, however, is that it remains fatally vague what the conceptual structure of such a polemics is to be. We are told that the Heraclitan dialectic 'corresponds completely to this type of wisdom'. But this hardly helps. We are also told that it represents a further radicalisation of Adorno's 'great intervention' against the affirmative essence or 'victor's fantasy' of Hegelian dialectics, with which the Marxian dialectic is also taken to be infected. But it remains unclear what is *conceptually* objectionable about negative dialectics; or in what sense this Universal Polemics is to be dialectical at all, if it is to give up the residual Adornian version of mediation. Coming from Sloterdijk, the charge that Adorno 'did not bring about the with-

drawing of dialectics from ontology in a satisfying, rationally well-ordered form' can only be read ironically. But where does all this leave us? Pretty much where we began, with a *will* to transcend the opposition of (subjective) agonistics and (objective) dialectics – Nietzsche and Hegel – on the basis of the recognition of their mutual inadequacies, but without recourse to the logical mediation of a classically dialectical unity. Universal polemics exhausts itself in the consumption of its own contradictions. All it can do is conclude with the romance of a physiological reduction. A rational reason, we are told, 'will unconstrainedly intercept the decision from the inclination of our bodies'. Kynicism and cynicism turn out not to be so different after all.

The very terms of Sloterdijk's text ('critique', 'subjective and objective reason', 'analysis' and 'dialectics') place him within a tradition to which he no longer wants to belong, but from which he is unable to free himself without simply tearing himself away – however thoroughly he may try to subvert it through carnivalisation. Theoretical sophistication and literary brilliance ultimately prove inadequate, in themselves, to the problem. It was not for nothing that Adorno insisted on the strict separation of the conceptual and the aesthetic as cultural forms within his account of their speculative identity.

Huyssen has hailed *Critique of Cynical Reason* as a postmodern pastiche of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a step on the road to a postmodernism of resistance, and it is likely that this is how it will be read. Such a reading, though, however accurate, diffuses its seriousness, and excuses its flaws. It is too good a book to read that way; too problematic a text to treat with such easy indulgence. Michael Eldred's translation is an impressive achievement.

Peter Osborne

## MODERNISM STRIKES BACK

Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, London, Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1988, 171pp. £25 hb, £8.95 pb, 07108 13392 hb, 07108 1349X pb.

Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: an Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989, £30 hb, £9.95 pb, 0 631 16203 8 hb, 0 631 16204 6 pb.

'New readers start here.' Most of Madan Sarup's *Introduction to Post-Structuralism* comprises brief, accessible and unpretentious summaries of the thinking of a battery of 'post-structuralist' thinkers: Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari (a quite masterly résumé of those two), Lyotard, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Fredric Jameson. In addition, he explains their intellectual forebears and challengers: particularly Nietzsche; but also Lévi-Strauss, Adorno, Habermas and so on.

Sarup's book has three pivotal chapters explaining major post-structuralist thinkers. In all three the thought Nietzsche is an *idée fixe*. The first explains how, for Lacan, a symbolic order (in which the ego is constructed by language) subjugates the pre-oedipal imaginary. In the second, Sarup sets out Derrida's claim that deep 'phonocentrism' and 'logocentrism' constantly draw Western thought back towards the illusion of a foundation: the self before 'différance', present



to itself. Sarup explains how Derrida's strategy changes the posture which Nietzsche aspired to: by plucking out the illusions of fixed presence in the marginal metaphors of the text, deconstruction keeps identity fluid, 'under erasure', in continual self-reflexive uncertainty. Thirdly, there is a chapter on Foucault. Avowed pursuit of genealogy à la Nietzsche (as against history) is the thread here. Sarup follows Foucault's historical accounts of the transition to the modern forms of power. Those modern forms – the 'disciplinary' power which constructs the human self (much as the symbolic order does for Lacan) and 'power/knowledge' – also have Nietzschean dimensions. They subjugate knowledge to power and remove it from any single source or location.

After the chapters on the various post-structuralists, there is a single chapter on the post-modern fragmentation of culture. Apart from its résumé of Lyotard, I found this too compressed to be anything like as useful as what had gone before. But I will not indulge myself by arguing with the tough choices that Sarup decided on.

An unstated aim of the book is the defence of history (in a roughly marxist understanding of it) against the attacks of post-structuralism and post-modernism. This accounts for Sarup's sympathetic use of Nietzsche. Even though he articulates an anxious, self-doubting consciousness, Nietzsche admits that individuals and history exist. Sarup would like a return to history (and Marxism) which preserved something of that Nietzschean insight.

Yet, Sarup's pursuit of that aim gives us two rather different books. One is a craftsman-like synopsis of the arguments of various writers, traced back to those they were reacting to. The other is the defence of history in the modern world. The way this latter emerges as the book progresses did make me uncomfortable. It can leave Sarup in a seemingly dogmatic position: condemning Deleuze and Guattari's 'sheer idealism', for example; or assuming that any defence of the importance of history will favour Marxists, because they 'struggle for a better future for all'.

This impression belies the real strength of Sarup's own arguments. Scattered through the last two chapters, there is a quite incisive case against the post-structuralist interpretation of the postmodern situation. It states that post-structuralism wrongly *complies* with the trend towards fragmentation which it correctly *diagnoses*. If a critic wants to make the broad claim that the inherited grand narratives have broken down, Sarup asks, is it not self-contradictory to eschew everything but little narratives and local struggles? Is that not, furthermore, to misconstrue the significance of avant-garde artists for our historical situation? For Sarup, their failure, from within art, to counteract the fragmentation and marginalisation of culture only goes to show (as Walter Benjamin argued) that these things are not merely effects of the content of art. They are the product of the fragmenting *institutions* which interpret culture. The struggle against fragmentation is not yet lost. These points suggest a telling strategy against the post-structuralist position.

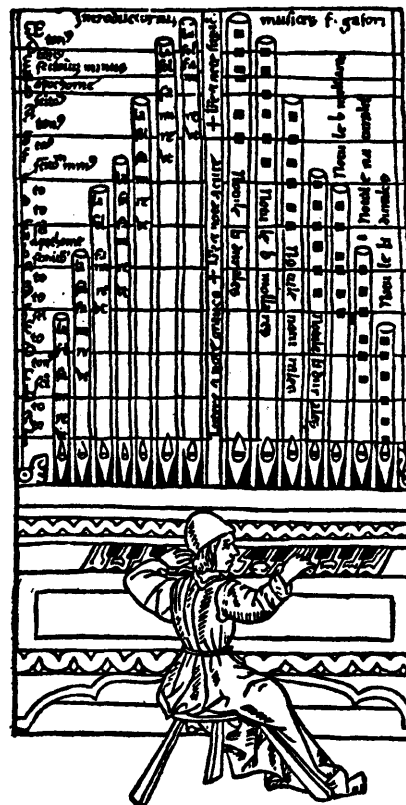
Steven Connor's *Postmodernist Culture* is prompted by a similar distaste for the insistence upon fragmentation which, in cultural post-modernism, shadows the strategy of post-structuralism. Connor mounts a more or less parallel argument to Sarup's. He claims that post-modernist criticism loses its way when it turns from the enclosed univalence of modernism: 'in such a situation, questions of value and legitimacy do not disappear, but gain new intensity.' But post-modernism is, in his view, simply hooked on an endless play of further fragmentation. In place of that, Connor advocates a reintegration of cultural debate within the social-cultural

sphere. That is an antidote to what Sarup attacks as 'idealism'. Connor's specific arguments can sound remarkably like Sarup's, too: for example, his claim that 'the post-modern critique of unjust and oppressive systems of universality implicitly depends ... upon the assumption of the universal right of all not to be treated unjustly.'

Yet, these are running arguments extracted – and not without difficulty – from the generality of the book. For it, too, is an introduction, laden with quick, exceedingly useful exegeses of the thought of every post-modernist theorist you could possibly be asked about, and not a few of the artists as well. With an almost relentless courage, Connor takes us over the fields of architecture, fine art, photography, literature, theatre, film, video, television and popular culture. There is a battery of critics addressing each. Through them, Connor pursues his chosen linking theme: that post-modernism in one way or another rejects the self-absorption of art and self-referring univalence which was characteristic of modernism. The rejection appears under many names: contextualism; conservative, or critical pluralism; an 'expanded field' of reference; the inversion of presence in paradoxically 'live' recordings; the explicit advocacy of sub-culture; and so on. Connor takes us through each area with clarity, thoroughness and a sharp eye for historical and institutional dynamics.

The last is, of course, integral to the drift of his argument. For he, like Sarup, wants to see post-modernism apply itself boldly to the overall historical and institutional situation of today. Most of all, he is opposed to what he refers to as 'the romance of the marginal' which, as Gayatri Spivak has pointed out, may preserve the inequalities on the overall map of culture by endlessly celebrating the margins. In spite of the limitations of any introductions, these two books show how post-modernism and post-structuralism fail to face the challenge which they revealingly diagnose.

Noel Parker

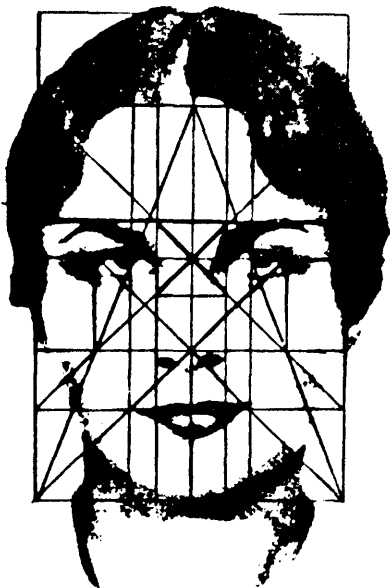


# PRACTICE AFTER PATRIARCHY

Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987. viii + 187pp. £22.50 hb, £6.95 pb.

To argue the political usefulness of poststructuralism, and in particular its usefulness for feminism, as Chris Weedon sets out to do here, is on the face of it a rather bold thing to do, given the chorus of criticisms addressed to poststructuralism in its various guises, precisely on political grounds. This is not the place to look for answers to the usual charges of nihilism, self-indulgence or incapacity to address the ethical, since the author's project is not so much to defend poststructuralism as to harness it to the feminist cause. In fact, in choosing between what she sees as the various kinds of poststructuralist work on offer, she is seeking to forge a new variety altogether, namely feminist poststructuralism, on the grounds that this alone permits satisfactory analysis of discursively constructed power relations and realities, which in turn modulate particular political practices.

Insisting quite rightly on the interdependence of political practices and their implicit or explicit theorisations, she mobilises primarily Saussure, Lacan, Althusser, Derrida, Kristeva and Foucault, to affirm the inadequacy of a feminist politics grounded in women's experience or biology, in 'commonsense' views of gender relations or in variations of a universal humanist model; the burden of the argument is to theorise patriarchal oppression and historical change, demonstrating that established meanings are amenable to analysis and change, and it bears particularly upon language, subjectivity, and power relations. Given that we live within patriarchal sets of relations, we have to look at the way power relations are institutionalised, as well as at the ideological discourses constructing subjectivity – naive or existential belief in our individuality being illusions guaranteed by those very discourses. Poststructuralism therefore covers both the theories which show that these are discursively constructed, and the methodological apparatus which permits their analysis.



One question which is unavoidable is the kind of poststructuralism which figures here. It is in some ways strange to read a critical work placed under the sign of poststructuralism which does not take on the Heidegger-Lyotard connection, and in fact this is a very structuralist poststructuralism. Most of the founding books mentioned here were originally published in the mid-'60s, although, very confusingly for the uninitiated, on the whole only translation publication dates are given; Weedon is seeking to use concepts rather than fit them into a 'history of ideas' frame, but this kind of imprecision adds to the impression that 'theory' is quite uncontextualised, and that appropriations from theory are considered unproblematic. Some of the claims put for-



ward for the originality of poststructuralism, feminist or otherwise, are unconvincing, given that the insistence on the ideological and historically dated, as part of a case against humanism and the naturalising ideology of commonsense, has been part of a certain intellectual stock in trade through the 1940s and 1950s, in the work of, say, Barthes and Sartre, among others. In a sense, then, the debate has moved on, to an appraisal, from a variety of standpoints, of the position being argued for here. It is difficult at times not to read the emphasis placed on the centrality of a decentred subjectivity for any ideological analysis, and on the politically liberating effects of such analysis, as relying on a subtext of *Tel Quel* was right, OK?!

The target audience appears to be particularly those who take categories of gender for granted, who have not thought through the implications of valorising women's experience, or who have some familiarity with the theoretical scene of the past fifteen years and tend to dismiss much of what Weedon is defending as being in some way 'anti-women'. As a response to the school of thought which rejects theory on the grounds that it is patriarchal, as a persuasive marshalling of the political arguments in favour of the usefulness of certain kinds of theorisations for feminism, and as a clear introduction to the work of the theoretical gurus mentioned above, students too will welcome it. It is thought-provoking also in its areas of contradiction. Firstly the question of agency vs. the hidden determinism operating in the notion of discursively constructed subjectivity: on what basis can an individual choose between discourses if they are constitutive of the individual *qua* individual? Secondly the problem of affixing meaning to a particular political position within a framework marked by the notion of the non-fixity of meaning: how does one theorise the ethical within a perspective committed to deconstructing what is at stake in such stances, which necessarily have to misrecognise the arbitrary nature of their own discursively constructed 'truths'; which in this context means asking, how does one legislate for feminism, for notions of women's oppression being rather more than a self-defeating claim for 'meaning', within the infinite and indeterminate plurality of the text?

Margaret Attack

# UNBUILT BRIDGES

Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, The MIT Press, 1989. x + 447pp., £31.50 hb, 0 262 18134 7.

The cover of this beautifully produced volume is illustrated by an architectural drawing of a bridge connecting France and Italy. Designed in 1829 as a student project, the bridge was never built, but the image neatly captures Rabinow's theme of the birth of the modern in France. The bridge is monumental, with single arched triumphal entries at both ends. The perspective adopted means that only the inscription reading 'France' is visible; Italy is reduced to a historical and architectural blank. Labrouste breaks with the authorized version of the past by designing an Etruscan, rather than a Roman, structure. In doing so, he also breaks with classical space and severs the link with two supposedly eternal civilizations. Its severance is at once temporal, spatial and discursive.

Rabinow's stated aim is to explore the middle ground between high culture and science, and ordinary life, the territory inhabited by 'technicians in general ideas' like Lyautey,



Governor of the Protectorate of Morocco and military architect of Rabat and Casablanca. This is a ground across which terms like *milieu* migrate from physics to biology, then to sociology and finally to urban planning. He explores the institution of the norms and forms, the discourses and practices and symbols of social modernity, the fleeting alliances and coalescences that characterize the modern. More specifically, Rabinow charts the processes whereby space and society converge in a historically situated relationship which permits the emergence of the city as an object of discourse, observation and intervention. Whilst cities have existed since Antiquity, the convergence of discourses on health, planning, policing, statistically-based norms and various forms of moralizing philanthropy is characteristically modern. Rabinow also explores the emergence of the meritocratic technical aristocracy which was so decisive in the shaping of modern France, particularly after Vichy. This is no arcane archaeology and its traces are conspicuously visible in cities like Paris and Lyon.

Discussions of the birth of the modern are often couched in almost purely philosophico-aesthetic terms (Berman's *All That is Solid Melts into Air* being a notable exception). Yet the appearance of the modern is rooted in a multiplicity of discourses and practices. Haussmann is as

significant as Baudelaire and the poets and painters of modern life. Following Foucault and associates like Perrot and Castel, Rabinow extends the debate in an almost bewildering number of directions. Colonialism, pacification campaigns in Indochina and Madagascar, unrealized projects for garden cities, the life sciences, social statistics and probability theories all figure in the discussion. At times, the very weight of erudition becomes a problem and results in a certain loss of focus. That is a minor problem. No single thesis emerges, but these explorations into the history of the present have an undeniable fascination.

The book is dedicated to Michel Foucault, whose influence is openly acknowledged throughout. Rabinow has many of his master's virtues. Not the least of Foucault's talents is his ability to make the Physiocrats sound interesting. Rabinow accomplishes something similar. Forgotten theorists of urbanism come back to life. The architectural squabbles of the Ecole des Beaux Arts signify a good deal more than sound and fury. The technocratic visions of Saint-Simon become almost compelling. Military visionaries like Lyautey and Gallieni, architects like Garnier and reformers and urbanists like Selier prove to be the technicians of general ideas who shaped the modern nation rather than forgotten names in a history book, or at best the eponyms of streets and squares. Rabinow can even convince the reader that it may be actually worth looking at Richardson's *Hygeia, a City of Wealth*, a rather dreary exercise in urban utopianism published in 1876. That in itself is no mean achievement.

David Macey

## DARK CONTINENTS

Richard and Rosalind Chirimuta, *AIDS, Africa and Racism*, London, Free Association Books, 1989, 192pp. £9.95 pb, 1 85343 072 2.

The target of this book is the persistent suggestion, backed with supposedly scientific evidence, that AIDS originated among black people. The authors take us through the two main stages of this claim – that Haiti, and then that Central Africa, was the source of the AIDS virus. They suggest – with, it must be said, only a smattering of direct evidence – that Western scientists' obsession with these notions derives centrally from racist assumptions about the 'promiscuity of black people' and their 'greater proximity to apes' (this last encouraging speculations about Green Monkey Disease as the source).

With great care they take us through the history of these researches and arguments, showing their repeated flaws and failings, all of which helped scientists and politicians to avoid the possibility that the disease appeared, or even was manufactured, in the West. They also show how some Western radicals, including gay activists, gave voice to these views. Yet investigation after investigation turns out to be seriously inadequate. Scientists accepted poor quality research that they would certainly have dismissed in other fields. All this is demonstrated, as far as I can tell, very effectively and I came away firmly convinced. And then the book stops.

The authors do not go on to discuss what this reveals about current forms of racism, and their role in relation to First/Third World relationships, or how this episode compares with the long tradition of racist pseudo-science with its

evolutionary claims, and obsession with inherited intelligence. It is a pity that the book does not even seem to recognise that these remain issues. It is as though we all know the meaning and the role of racism, hence it does not need argument or articulation.

Still, the book does excellently what it sets out to do. If you want clear evidence and arguments about the ways AIDS research can itself be 'infected', this is it.

**Martin Barker**

## BLOOD AND SUPERSTRUCTURE

Ann Ferguson, *Blood at the Root*, London, Pandora Press, 1989. 299pp. £8.95 pb, 0 04 440445.

*Blood at the Root* is a sophisticated defence of socialist feminism. It analyzes motherhood and sexuality as well as the economic position of women. Ferguson develops the concept 'relations of sex/affective production' to describe the various ways there have been, historically, of 'organising, shaping and moulding the human desires connected to sexuality and love'. She argues that it is partly through these systems that domination is reproduced. Others have created similar concepts but, Ferguson argues, a central limitation of all previous theories is that their authors see their 'systems' as being distinct from the economy. This, Ferguson avers, is wrong.

In a fashion that is reminiscent of the work of Alison Jaggar, Ferguson begins her work by 'criticising Marxist, radical feminist and Freudian accounts of women's oppression. Some of her arguments against these theories have been rehearsed elsewhere. This is inevitable given the wide range of material she subjects to critical scrutiny. The very breadth of her discussion, however, sometimes leads to a tendency to superficiality. For example, she complains that Luce Irigaray's advocacy of women's language, or, as Ferguson puts it, 'womanspeak' ('a spontaneous language which emerges when women are together but disappears when men are present') seems to lapse into mysticism. She argues that, for Irigaray, 'we cannot say anything to men because to do otherwise is a mere reversal of the masculine/feminine triad supposed by phallocentrism.' But this is to miss an important aspect of Irigaray's thought, which is that, in many trans-historical, trans-cultural systems, woman is constructed as 'other'. In an important sense, then, woman does not exist in these symbolic systems. Instead, drawing on the real experiences of women, Irigaray would advocate the construction of a new language, one that would be novel both for women and men, but where woman is no longer 'other'. This tendency to superficiality is repeated, to some extent, in Ferguson's discussion of Freud and other post Freudians.

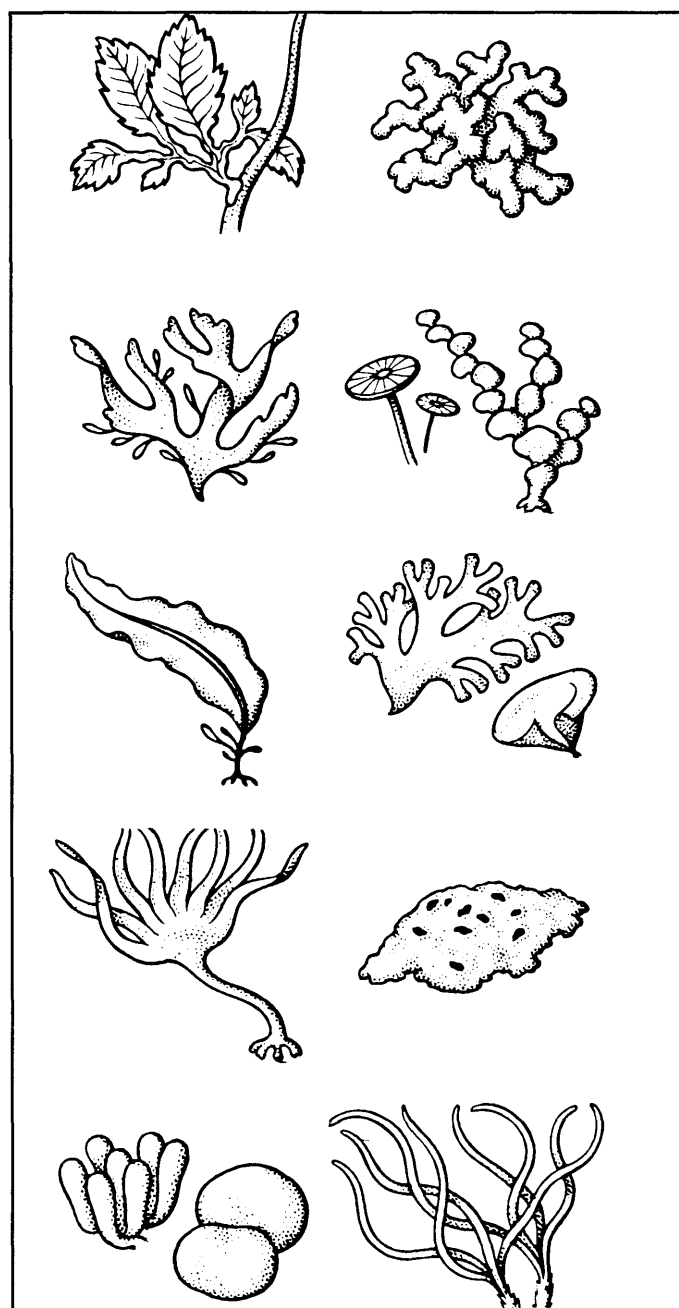
The second part of Ferguson's book is a discussion of the view that women constitute a radical class, and the third describes how a socialist feminist transformation of society might look. She has interesting material on a 'new' socialist-feminist sexuality, on the construction of lesbianism historically, and on the role of the mother as a possible subverter of patriarchal systems.

One important unifying theme of the book is Ferguson's emphasis on the historically diverse forms taken by women's oppression, motherhood, sexuality etc. This focus forms a vital corrective to 'universalising' theories of these

phenomena. However, Ferguson is sometimes confusing. Thus, for instance, the central concept that she develops, the 'relations of sex-affective production', is supposed to explain *in part* how different forms of male domination are reproduced. But she doesn't say what else is necessary for their reproduction. Further, it is important for her case against other theorists whom she accuses of developing concepts for analysing domination that are 'just' ideological, that she describe her 'sex-affective systems' as being themselves economic systems. Sometimes this is indeed what she does claim. But at other times she represents them as being merely 'analogous' to economic systems (in which case they might just be ideological).

A great strength of the book is the way in which Ferguson links her personal experience (particularly as a lesbian and a mother) with theoretical analysis both of the historical development of these concepts and of their political role in the USA in the '80s.

**Alison Assiter**



# POLITICAL MEANINGS

Terence Ball, *Transforming Political Discourse: Political Theory and Critical Conceptual History*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1988, xiv + 200pp. £25 hb, 0 631 15821 9.

Within the field of intellectual history and the 'history of political thought' it would not take long for a British reader to recognise the success of the 'texts in context' approach of writers such as Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock. Though methodological differences between them exist, they have a common purpose: to examine the modalities (the illocutions) of political theorists' *intended* meanings (or speech-acts) within the linguistic conventions of their time of 'enactment', and to examine the transformations effected by authors and commentators upon existing political languages. This method's use of contextual meaning, historicism and an underlying hermeneutics finds common cause with the '*begriffsgeschichte*' or critical concept-history approach of Terence Ball and his West German peers such as Reinhart Koselleck.

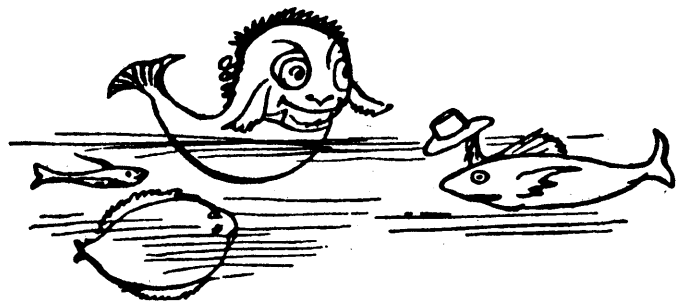
Ball concentrates on conceptual meaning changes through interacting discourses rather than on the changes brought about by the interaction between material contexts and language. For Ball, concepts are articulated through *argumentation*. How certain concepts have changed, are manipulated, or have evolved through *debate* by 'agents occupying specific sites and working under the identifiable linguistic constraints of a particular tradition as it exists at a particular time' into specified concepts of contemporary political discourse forms the content of chapters 2 to 7. For Ball, what is critical about his enterprise is (1) that it shows the defining characteristic of political concepts to be their 'essential' and eternal contestability; (2) the providing of an account of the recognition by agents of the effects of political discourse upon them; (3) an account of how agents transformed the political discourse of their day.

Terence Ball in successive chapters examines the agencies, contexts and effects of conceptual meaning-changes that have brought about our *modern* political concepts of 'party', 'republicanism', 'power', 'authority', 'democracy' and 'intergenerational justice'. In doing this he advocates a conceptual relativism without at the same time endorsing a radical incommensurability thesis. Agreeing with the arguments of Michael Walzer, Ball argues that we can make a reasonable stab at understanding the meanings of the past and anticipating the shape of the near future, but the more remote a particular future, the more opaque to us it becomes. This entails a highly sceptical view of the usefulness of historical knowledge for deriving timeless, universal ethical principles, and, in particular, principles for an intergenerational justice. With regard to the latter, Ball maintains that in the face of our ignorance about future generations we should do for them the best we can.

Terence Ball's style is deceptively simple, but the argument is complex. Throughout this book he advances his arguments, never being waylaid by the temptation to debate extensively with structuralist and poststructuralist critics or with his intellectual cousins such as Skinner, Pocock, Ashcraft or Gadamer. This could be construed as regrettable because of the present need to disabuse critics of their belief that Skinner et al are all using the same methodology. Notwithstanding this, Ball lucidly presents his histories of certain concepts, and we can profit from these without necessarily having to struggle with the theories of historiography outlined in Ball's first chapter. This book can also be read as going

beyond merely providing conceptual histories and into the realm of arguments about how political concepts transform, and are transformed by, the practical context of political debate and its agents.

Graham B. McBeath



## REMEMBER THE CO-OP?

Stephen Yeo (ed.), *New Views of Co-operation*, London, Routledge, 1988, xii + 276pp. £30 hb, 0 415 02523 0.

One of the healthier aspects of what has loosely been defined as 'postmarxism' is a willingness to look at a range of socialist currents previously marginalised. As the old certainties and hopes have crumbled, so has the basis for patronisation. In this climate, Stephen Yeo's book should be particularly welcome, focussing as it does on themes in socialist/labour history which once brought forth a sniff from many marxists. In particular it deals with the development of the co-operative movement, or rather movements, in Britain and Ireland from the period of 'utopian socialism' in the 1930s. This is presented in chapters mainly written by former and current post-graduates of the University of Sussex. This 'School of Yeo' volume is itself dedicated to that pioneer of Owen studies, and former professor at Sussex, John Harrison.

The bulk of the book consists of microhistorical analysis – case studies of particular experiments, specific individuals and important conjunctures. Out of these emerges the issue discussed in the first and last chapters (Stephen Yeo, Eileen and Stephen Yeo) – the practical and theoretical definition of community. Thus Andy Durr discusses the conflicting interpretations of co-operative behaviour held by working class and middle class co-operators in early 19th-century Brighton, and how, historically, the imposing figure of Dr William King has eclipsed the humble artisans. The similarly obtrusive presence of the Rochdale Pioneers is put into perspective by Robin Thornes. Mick Reed shows the importance of shared religious belief in the success of the communal experiments of the Society of Dependents. Gill Scott and Alistair Thomson draw attention to gender conflicts in co-operative politics, whilst Neil Killingback and Paddy Maguire illustrate the fraught relationships between the co-operative movement and state and business interests. The theme of creative struggle surfaces time and again, the struggle to establish the particular co-operative practices, and the struggle to theorise these using concepts hotly contested. Sally Mullen examines the political and artistic exertions of the Bristol shoemaker poet John Wall (1855–1915), Peter Gurney charts George Jacob Holyoake's attempts to make

sense of, and participate in, the political struggles of the Victorian working class, whilst Keith Harding looks at Larkin and Ireland. The Yeos attempt to conceptualize three notions of community: community as mutuality – the notion of mutual support developed by early 19th-century Owenites and co-operators; community as service – a mid-Victorian, middle-class, conception of public service, concretised in the great civic endowments of libraries and town halls; finally, community as state – the 20th-century spread of the word 'community' to cover the politically defined 'people'. In a subtle piece of analysis the complexities of the growth and inter-relationship of these definitions are effectively displayed.

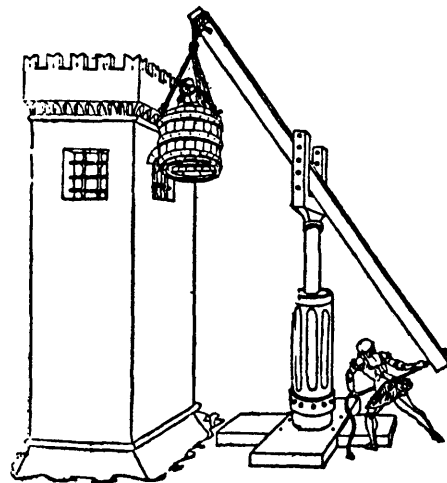
The memory the book leaves is of ordinary people who felt sufficiently empowered to make bold experiments in alternative work and living patterns, who grew in the act of creation, and developed self-confident cultural forms (see Lawrence Magnan's chapter on the vast co-operative festivals at Crystal Palace). If memory is the means in the present to ground the future in the past then this volume will have served a very useful function.

Vincent Geoghegan

## WOMEN, EDUCATION, POWER

Ann Thompson and Helen Wilcox (eds.), *Teaching Women: Feminism and English Studies*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989. ix + 211pp. £27.50 hb, £7.95 pb, 0 7190 2603 2 hb, 0 7190 2604 0 pb.

This stimulating collection of papers covers a broad range of aspects of 'English teaching' for, by and about women. In keeping with the spirit of much feminist research, the authors explore the very notion of what constitutes a paper, an article or an essay, as well as offering an array of theoretical and



experiential accounts of feminist teaching. Hence we find included topics as diverse as Elaine Hobby's account of a women's 'return to learning' course; Patsy Stoneman's discussion of the 'ivory tower' of women's postgraduate study; Susan Greenhalgh's essay on feminist drama teaching; or Margaret Beetham's 'realist fiction' diary of a seminar. The book is divided into five parts, reflecting the different interests and experience of the contributors, but Ann Thompson's introductions to each section and her joint editorship with Helen Wilcox do a lot to draw together the common threads of argument.

One shared preoccupation is the question of how feminist teaching and learning can thrive in the patriarchal, hierarchical, competitive world of academic education. All the contributors bear the scars of their day-to-day struggles in our so-called post-feminist world. The problems are familiar to feminist teachers: the conflict between the supportive, democratic learning sought by feminist educators, and compulsory assessment procedures; the effects of marginalisation in setting up and maintaining courses on women's writing; the tensions which can arise in mixed sex groups on conventional courses that have a 'women's' component. Isobel Armstrong and Penny Florence agonise over the question of whether the price feminists have to pay for academic recognition, in terms of modification of course content and learning style, is too high. All the contributors realise that none of these important issues is easily resolved; many freely acknowledge and describe the practical mistakes that are often made.

Beneath these problems, however, lie certain assumptions. Feminist teachers have come to take for granted the idea that feminism necessarily implies a particular pedagogy, leading naturally to a more collaborative, learner-centred, open-minded education. Gabrielle Griffin, for example, argues convincingly that 'maximising student participation' in choice of study material, organisation and methods will lead to the 'acquisition of transferable skills whose objects are the cultural dominants under which we labour'. One is reminded of Paulo Freire's vision of education as a revolutionary tool. Many of the central notions are also very similar to those advocated by child-centred theorists in Primary education – Dewey, Montessori and more recently Pring – all of whom directly link thinking on justice to educational theory.

So is what is described in this book necessarily a feminist theory of education? The authors argue that it is, from the initial position that women's behaviour, ideas and learning styles, as well as their ways of writing and reading, are radically different from those of men. Louise Stewart and

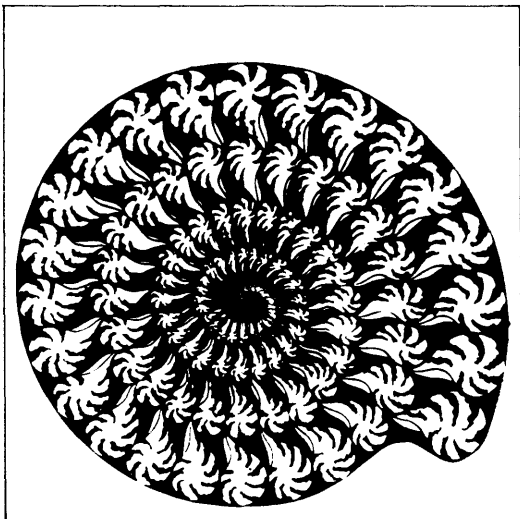


Helen Wilcox identify the 'interwoven strands of women's lives as opposed to the linear pattern of male autobiography', again something that many feminist teachers will recognise. If women's lives are so different, so the argument runs, why should their literature or their methods of literary analysis or their styles of learning not also be different from – or even better than – the traditional patterns of patriarchal academia?

All this serves to justify the contention that feminist pedagogy, even more than any other kind, has to be exploratory and innovative because of its desire to enable *women's* learning. In an article by five Leeds lecturers, itself something of an academic experiment, the case is put for teaching texts non-chronologically in order to 'highlight the specificity of historical conditions women face'; what appears to be an ahistorical approach in effect accentuates women's special history. Sue Reid describes the experience of teaching mixed sex groups to read 'as women' rather than as men, real or 'honorary'. These are just two examples of the kind of thought-provoking insights to be found in this book.

It is beyond doubt that the results of a feminist theory of education would hold benefits for all learners, once its implications for justice are taken seriously. Although this collection will obviously attract those teaching women, or English, or both, it is a very enlightening and timely book that should be read by all those involved in adult education.

Patricia Prior



## REALLY CRITICAL

Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy*, London, Verso, 1989. ix + 218pp. £24.95 hb, £8.95 pb, 0 86091 237 X hb, 0 86091 951 pb.

Those who are already persuaded that contemporary philosophy can be defined as what Bhaskar does will presumably need no introduction to it, though they may welcome this selection of articles, talks and previously unpublished essays which serve to chart out the development of his critical realism in one handy volume. Other prospective readers, however, might fairly be warned that this book is often hard-going as an introduction, even a critical one: a number of the essays gathered here not only presuppose a thorough acquaintance with the philosophers selected for criticism, but also make frequent reference to arguments of Bhaskar's other books

without much summary in terms accessible to the uninitiated. That said, though, the interest of the Bhaskarian project is undeniable – and will probably repay the effort which readers will have to put in.

The unity of the book lies in its main themes which fall into place around what I take to be the central question: what must the world be like for knowledge of it to be possible? Bhaskar's reply is that the natural and social sciences must presuppose that the world is more real than any form of either empiricism or idealism or Kantianism allow. Thus it is not a question of *whether* to be a realist – since everyone explicitly or implicitly presupposes some ('intransitive') reality – but what *kind* of realist to be. Bhaskar's proposal is what he has come to call critical realism, and each essay in some way elaborates what is involved in this. It is established chiefly through 'critiquing' the philosophies of others – which means, above all, disentangling the ontological assumptions of these philosophies out of their epistemological (or post-epistemological) presentation.

How successful Bhaskar is I leave to others to judge; and this book is anyway not intended as a definitive statement of his position. The one point that strikes me for comment is the great political claims made for critical realism – 'it is a philosophy without which a socialist emancipation cannot be achieved.' In view of this the generally high level of technicality might have been relieved by clearer indications as to how the critiques pave the way for concrete arguments for socialism. Encouragement to believe this can be done emerges from the chapter on Rorty – where the connection between the philosophical critique and what's at stake politically is, for once, made fairly explicit. Otherwise, though, glimpses of the recognition that philosophy can be (and lead to) something more and other than 'underlabouring' for social scientists are rare.

For me this is a pity, and fuels my initial uncertainty as to who the book is intended for. If critical realist knowledge is a *sine qua non* of socialist emancipation, then its production and articulation cannot be left exclusively in the hands of professional social scientists. But in this volume, at least, little concession is made to anyone else who wants to know how being a critical realist might make them a more effective socialist – to facilitate, indeed, the possibility of their reclaiming reality.

Tim Hayward



## WORDS AGAINST WORDS

Gerald L. Bruns, *Heidegger's estrangements: Language, truth and poetry in the later writings*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989, xxx + 233pp. \$29.50 hb.

'If philosophy were more open to poetry, if it would allow poetry to loosen it a little, it would probably not find Heidegger so weird and unphilosophical – would not think of Heidegger as being incompatible with itself.' This quotation indicates the line of entry into Heidegger's work adopted in this book. It seeks in the later writings a corrective to the reductive excesses of philosophy which were diagnosed by Heidegger in his critique of metaphysics and also reenacted by him. Bruns discovers this reenactment both in the central project, *Being and Time*, and, controversially, in Heidegger's later readings of Hölderlin's poetry. He finds in Heidegger's later writing a critique of an earlier attempt to find in Hölderlin's writing an instance of poetry 'establishing being by means of the word'. Bruns seeks to show that in the later work Heidegger constructed an elaborate and indirect critique of the supposition that words can be used in this way.

Bruns shows that the existing separation of spheres between philosophy and literary criticism rends the domain which Heidegger sought to investigate. He perhaps misses Heidegger's point that philosophy, as currently constituted under the influence of technique, cannot be more open to poetry; and that therefore Heidegger's thinking in the gap between technique and living cannot but appear weird and unphilosophical. This division, as Bruns points out, leads commentators on Heidegger to seek in him either a commitment to rigorous argumentation, from the side of philosophy, or a proposal about how to analyse writing, from the side of literary criticism. Bruns indicates that both of these must be disappointed, and must fail to address Heidegger's central preoccupation with a paradox constitutive of language. He shows how commentators on Heidegger who are excessively influenced by the preoccupations of philosophy tend to underplay the later writings on language, and especially on the self-refutations of poetic language. He notes the bafflement of literary critics, quoting Terry Eagleton at some length as an example, who become impatient with the absence from Heidegger's work of definite proposals for generalisable reading strategies.

Bruns himself makes use of the strategy of close reading in order to show an unstable conception of the nature of language at work in Heidegger's texts. Through a series of detailed and rewarding readings of Heidegger's later writings on language, Bruns identifies the centrality to Heidegger's later thinking of an understanding of language as both providing a sense of ordering and concealing the absence of any foundation for that ordering. Bruns powerfully outlines Heidegger's view that the operations of language itself cannot be demonstrated within any such ordering, and that at exactly those moments when language is used most effectively to identify significant features of the language user's circumstances, its role in constituting those circumstances and as a part of those circumstances slides out of view. Bruns reveals Heidegger's sense for the fragmenting of language at the point when this triple role of language begins to come into focus.

The structure of this account, suggestively put forward by Bruns in the course of his readings, is analogous to that of Heidegger's earlier analysis of the invisibility of the functioning of tools, in *Being and Time*. There, in the contrast between



presence at hand and readiness to hand, Heidegger shows how, when tools are functioning adequately, their nature is not in question and therefore not identifiable. Only when they cease to function, or are used in unusual contexts, do they reveal themselves as the tools they are. Bruns does not explicitly point out this parallel between the earlier analysis of tools and the later discussion of language; but it is a sign of his deep sympathy with Heidegger's thinking that he is implicitly using a piece of Heidegger's own analyses to make sense of these later difficult texts and their obscure claims about the self-withholding and dissembling aspects of language.

Bruns insists on making an engagement with the density of Heidegger's writing and thinking central to any understanding of Heidegger. He indicates Heidegger's preoccupation in the later texts with irreducible ambiguity, resulting from the impossibility of taking up a stance outside the processes of producing meaning. He suggests that a recognition of this impossibility already informs *Being and Time*. An elaboration might show that it is this recognition which deflected Heidegger from completing *Being and Time* as projected, deflecting him from the self-chosen task of destroying the history of ontology and of specifying a relation between time and being.

Bruns's study serves as an extended commentary on Heidegger's claim in the *Letter on Humanism* that a language with which to complete the project of *Being and Time* withheld itself. Heidegger's texts emerge as a challenge to his successors, to think through the constraints of their own sensibilities and discipline orientations. In responding to that challenge, commentators reveal their strengths and limitations. What Bruns reveals is an enormous respect both for language and for the significance of Heidegger's work, while Heidegger's self-importance and self-preoccupation mercifully slide out of focus.

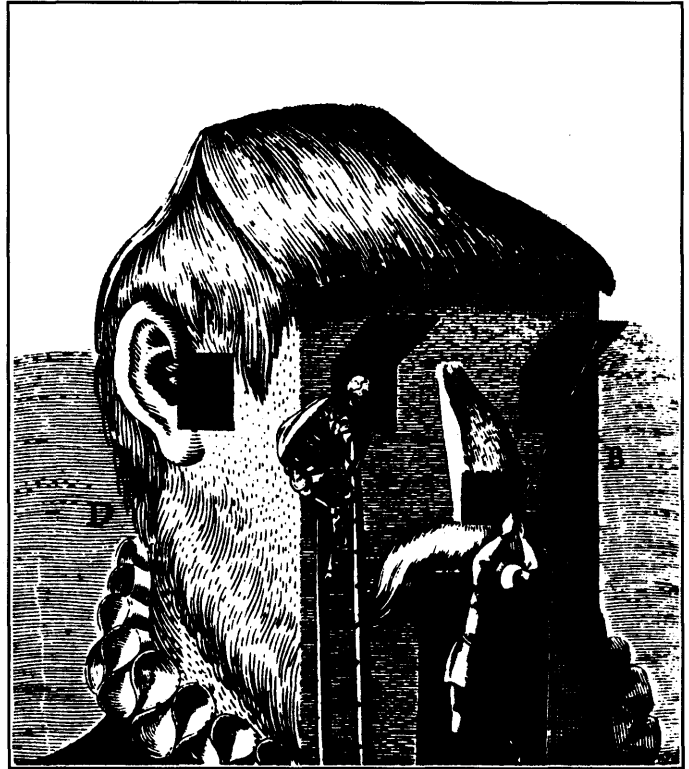
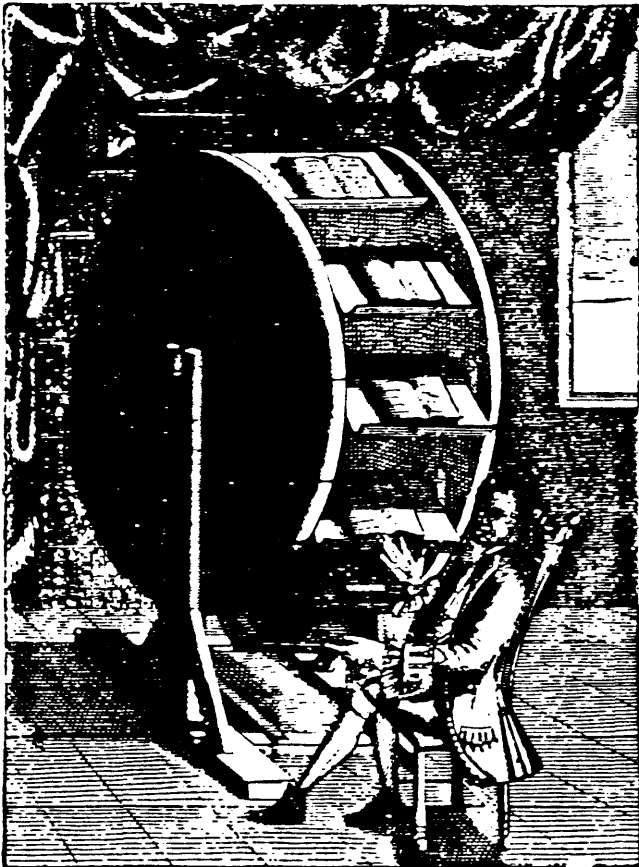
Joanna Hodge

## LIGHT READINGS

John Fauvel, Raymond Flood, Michael Shortland and Robin Wilson (eds.), *Let Newton be!*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, 272pp. £17.50 hb, £8.95 pb, 0 1985 3924 X hb, 0 1985 3937 1 pb.

The dustjacket of *Let Newton be!*, recently released in paperback, says the book offers 'a new perspective on his life and works'. It would have been more accurate (though less economical) to say, 'a dozen new perspectives on many aspects of Newton's life and work, all amounting to a fresh and original appreciation of his cultural significance'. For the title, *Let Newton be!*, can be read in two ways. As an admonition – 'leave Newton alone!' – it speaks to the hagiographers who would reduce the historic natural philosopher, alchemist, and biblical exegete to some narrowly defined scientist. The historic Newton alone must exist. As a celebration – 'vive le Newton!' – the title speaks to those who, by contrast, would take the historic figure too seriously, without regard for the richness and diversity of his representations since the *Principia Mathematica* was published 300 years ago. Newton lives on – on pound notes and postage stamps, in the names of shopping centres and pubs, as well as in the detailed researches of professional scholars. It is the editors' great achievement to have cast both aspects of Newtonian biography, the popular and the academic, into a handsome, tea-table format, replete with 165 illustrations. Although the contributors' essays are somewhat uneven, and not equally authoritative, the volume as a whole makes Newton more accessible than ever before to the general reading public. It is not likely to be superseded for many years to come.

James Moore



## BAD FAITH

John Gerassi, *Jean-Paul Sartre. Hated Conscience of His Century, vol. 1*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989. ix + 213pp. £15.95 hb, 0 226 28797 1.

This purports to be the authorized biography – authorized in that Sartre scribbled out a letter of agreement in a café in 1970. Gerassi embarked upon the project, interviewing Sartre on a number of occasions, then abandoned it until spurred back into action by the appearance of Annie Cohen-Solal's voluminous, if ultimately dull, *Sartre: A Life*. In theory, Gerassi should be well qualified for his task. The son of Fernando and Stépha Gerassi, the models for two of the characters in *Roads to Freedom*, he knew Sartre well, and was clearly trusted. The results border on the disastrous. Any reader of Beauvoir and Sartre will find little that is really new in this volume (apparently the first of two), which takes us up to the end of the war, unless, that is, he or she has an interest in the history of the Gerassi family. A fascinating history, certainly, but one that could best be told elsewhere and which is used here mainly to improve the biographer's credentials. The rest – the transformation of a child into Sartre – is familiar.

When Gerassi strays away from Sartre himself, the text abounds in inaccuracies. Nizan's *Antoine Bloyé* is not an autobiographical novel, being loosely based on the life of his father. It was Aragon, not Breton, who dreamed of seeing Cossacks watering their horses in the fountain of the Place de la Concorde. It is not in his *Critique des fondements de la psychologie* that Politzer derides Bergsonism as *une parade philosophique*. Yale does not publish 'a magazine' entitled *French Studies*. Much more seriously, Gerassi claims that, for writers like Aragon and Paulhan, the outbreak of the war and the occupation of France changed nothing and that their literary life went on as before. Both men, together with Sartre, were members of the Comité National des Ecrivains, one of the chief arenas for intellectual resistance. Resistance survi-

vors have fought successful libel actions over lesser accusations. If Gerassi does not have the command of detail that is essential to biography, his talents as a translator also leave much to be desired. One individual appears garbed in 'a smoking'; he is of course wearing a dinner jacket. Sartre presents a mysterious 'military notebook' (*livret militaire*) to the wartime authorities; is it not more likely that he presented his papers and service record? Finally, we are offered three possible translations of *La Revue sans titre*, which also raises serious doubts about copy-editing standards in Chicago. And so on.

It is, however, the politics of the book that are most disturbing. Gerassi is correct to claim that Cohen-Solal attempts to depoliticise Sartre and to reclaim him for the right.

His solution is to indulge in a shrill ultra-leftism and a tired litany of betrayal. The Blum government's policy of non-intervention in Spain means that no thinking individual should have any truck with Mitterrand's Socialist Party. The French Communist Party's endorsement of the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 leads to a similar *anathema est* from on high. This does not leave the French intellectual with much choice, though presumably he or she could look for an academic post in the USA. Sartre, well aware that politics is a world for those with dirty hands and the realm of the necessary compromise, if not the necessary murder, would surely have denounced this moralism as a variant on bad faith.

David Macey

## SHORT REVIEWS

Relativists and anti-foundationalists receive a sharp rebuke in J. N. Mohanty's *Transcendental Phenomenology* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989, 176pp. £25 hb, 0 631 16741 2). Mohanty is an expert on Indian thought and analytic philosophy, but above all he is a follower of Husserl. This book provides a clear and committed defence of an ideal of philosophy as the description and interpretation of the contents of intentional acts. Philosophical knowledge, on this conception, is built upon 'universal, invariant structures' which, though not absolutely necessary, are presupposed by the world as we experience it. Mohanty holds that transcendental phenomenology in this style can overcome relativism, not by direct confrontation, but by 'going through' it step by step. For Mohanty, there is an element of truth in relativism, but it can only be appreciated against the background of the 'universal, invariant structures' of the transcendental subject – a concept which, he argues strongly, cannot be shrugged off as an unhistorical abstraction.

'Nothing is more unlike me than myself,' wrote Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His fluent and vivid writings are both teasingly artful and embarrassingly confessional; they are a monument to what would now be called ambivalence. Jean Starobinski's classic study of Rousseau's unsettling versatility – published in French in 1957 and revised in 1971 and now translated as *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction* – is neither biography nor textual criticism. Instead it offers a 'phenomenological analysis' of the character which Rousseau created for himself in his writings and hence of the 'structure of Rousseau's world'. Rousseau turns out to be driven by two opposing obsessions: 'transparency' and 'obstruction'. On the one hand he yearns to open himself to his readers; on the other he is convinced that 'truth is constantly in danger whenever there is communication'. His 'will to self-presence' imprisons him in a 'plenitude of identity'. These themes, along with ideas of supplementarity, deferral and anxiety, have become very familiar in the work of later critics, and perhaps Starobinski has not had due acknowledgement. It should be a revelation to have the work available at last (London, University of Chicago Press, 1988. xxxviii + 421pp. £15.95 pb, 0 226 77128 8), and in a very good translation.

In a brief essay of 1938, Husserl confronted the question of how geometry could be both a realm of permanent certainties and, like all our other activities, something we pick up second-hand from received traditions. Derrida's first important publication, in 1962, was a translation of Husserl's essay, preceded by an introduction five times its length. It may have been rather harsh in its treatment of Husserl's attempt to merge 'theory of knowledge' with 'historical explanation'; it may have been a bit overbearing in its promotion of Husserl as a proto-Derridean (which is all Derrida was at the time), who had suggested 'the direction for a phenomenology of the written thing' in which 'writing' would be seen as a 'subjectless transcendental field'. (This is a kinder and probably more adequate reading of Husserl than Derrida was to offer in later works.) Edmund Husserl's *Origin of Geometry* is one of Derrida's most straightforward works and amongst his best. John Leavey made an excellent English version of it in 1978, and the only thing wrong with the paperback version (London, University of Nebraska Press, 1989, 205pp, £7.95 pb, 0 8032 6580 8) is that it has taken so long in coming.

