

Where is capitalism going?

Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991*, Michael Joseph, London, 1994. xii + 627 pp., £19.95 hb., 0 7181 3307 2.

Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times*, Verso, London, 1994. 416 pp., £39.95 hb., £14.95 pb., 1 85984 915 6 hb., 1 85984 015 0 pb.

In marked contrast to liberal complacency about the future of global capitalism, both Arrighi and Hobsbawm conclude their otherwise sharply contrasted studies of the twentieth century with broadly similar warnings about the dangers of 'the escalating violence that has accompanied the liquidation of the Cold War world order' (Arrighi), and the need for a new political project to counteract the approaching 'darkness' (Hobsbawm). Sharing a profound scepticism about – even hostility to – the kind of argument made notorious by Fukuyama, Arrighi and Hobsbawm argue that capitalism has reached some kind of historical turning point, beyond which it cannot survive in anything like its present form. In both cases, this sense of crisis registers much more than the dislocations and transformations attendant on the ends of the Cold War. On the one hand, Arrighi suggests that we are reaching the end point of a succession of hegemonies which have progressively expanded the scope of the capitalist world economy. On the other, Hobsbawm speaks of a 'landslide' in a 'world which has lost its bearings', and which is sliding towards a crisis 'not ... of one form of organising societies, but of all forms'.

These are bold claims and they are, at first glance, perhaps difficult to take seriously. But they are advanced in a reasoned and cautious manner, without any accompanying confidence that a revolutionary alternative is ready to hand. Indeed, it is the very fact that such dystopian conclusions emerge from positions which have no credence in revolutionary alternatives that invites further scrutiny. For the situation with which we are presented is as refreshing as it is perplexing. It is refreshing in so far as Arrighi and Hobsbawm seek to demonstrate that global capitalism is in crisis by means of an analysis of historical capitalism, rather than by short-circuiting the issue with assertions about the anticipated revolutionary role of a historical subject. But it is equally perplexing because the idea of capitalist crisis (understood not as local turmoil, but as global

dissolution), in the absence of a revolutionary challenge, seems hard to fathom.

What, then, are the grounds offered for the claim that global capitalism has reached an epochal turning point? Let us begin with Hobsbawm's history of the 'short twentieth century' (1914–91). This is by no means an easy work to discuss. As a 'participant observer' for most of the century, whose political formation and touchstone of moral and political judgement lie in the anti-fascist Popular Front, and as a professional historian of the 'long nineteenth century', Hobsbawm brings both a specific structure of political imagination and a particular reading of the course of capitalist history to bear on his account of the twentieth century. Moreover, since the cause and movement to which Hobsbawm was committed – historical Communism – has ended the century in ruins, it is perhaps inevitable that his reflections, for all their occasional brilliance and wealth of insight, are partial, distorted and uneven. Though there is little in the work that could be called autobiographical, the moral and political stance of Hobsbawm as participant exercises a powerful sway over the organization of the argument as a whole and the selection of particular emphases in the material.

At the most general level, Hobsbawm's treatment is organized around a periodization of capitalist development from its general crisis in the 'Age of Catastrophe', via its subsequent reform and unparalleled global expansion during the 'Golden Age', to its loss of bearings and erosion of normative regulation in the contemporary 'Landslide'. However, while the logic of this argument lies in a characterization of the course of capitalist socio-economic development, the overall narrative is conducted in a rather different register – in terms of the political and ideological conflict between capitalism and Communism. These somewhat discrepant principles of composition are held together by a twofold claim on behalf of historical Communism: first, that the apparent strength of the Communist challenge to the

capitalist order was a reflection of capitalist weakness; and second, that Communism nevertheless helped to save capitalism from itself, both from without, through the Soviet defeat of fascism, and from within, via political incentives to ameliorative currents of reform. In turn, this assessment of the Communist experience rests upon an identification of both liberal capitalism, especially as reformed by social democracy, and historical Communism as the legitimate heirs of the Enlightenment, in contrast to the forces of reaction, ranging from the authoritarian right to the exclusivist claims of identity politics and contemporary nationalism.

These differing threads do not always combine readily and consistently, and it was perhaps only in the conjuncture of the Popular Front that they could have been woven in an apparently seamless unity. For, in other respects, do they not exist in some tension with one another? Considered as a global process, can the historical development of capitalism, from the eighteenth century through to the First World War, be unproblematically assimilated to the progress of 'reason'? Marx, to say nothing of Max Weber, certainly did not think so. Was Stalinism simply another variant and embodiment of Enlightenment progressivism? Hobsbawm's evasive account of Stalinism, both domestically and internationally, suggests that he is not wholly comfortable with such a judgement. Are the contested claims of identity as manifestly antithetical to the universal norms of reason as Hobsbawm implies? After all, nationalist movements played a powerful role in the nineteenth century, and not all the claims of identity politics are inherently particularistic. These are no doubt complex questions, and it would be hard to offer a simple 'yes' to any of them. And yet something like that is required to sustain Hobsbawm's depiction of an epochal crisis of capitalism in the contemporary period.

Stated positively, Hobsbawm's case for the 'Landslide' of contemporary capitalism is simple enough: the global economy is out of control, having outgrown the national economies 'defined by the politics of territorial states', and the mixture of universal norms and traditional social relationships that once provided the basis of progressive political regulation, on the one hand, and the glue of social order, on the other, are under threat from an antinomian and nihilistic culture. Both of these trends – the

globalization of production and the breakdown of social and cultural stability – are the product of a relentless commodification of human existence, generated by the very material successes of capitalism in its Golden Age. In these circumstances, and confronted with a combined demographic and ecological challenge, capitalism appears to lack the resources for renewal and stability. On this account, then, it is not an internal logic of contradiction and class struggle that threatens the survival of capitalism. Instead, the breaching of its outer limits – political, cultural and now even ecological – by the sheer power of commodification betokens its potential dissolution. The logic of the market is self-destructive, ruthlessly consuming all that it encounters, including those external sources of political, social and cultural support that once provided it with a degree of stability.

Implicit in this analysis are a substantive thesis and a theoretical claim. The substantive thesis is that it was the admixture of pre-capitalist and pre-industrial traditions to the logic of the market that enabled capitalist societies to function. The theoretical claim is that pure logic of the market is self-destructive, rather than self-correcting. The evidence for both is to be found negatively in the interwar depression, and positively in the success of capitalism in its Golden Age. In the interwar years, the inadequacies of a private international financial system, and the absence of international leadership by a hegemonic power, transmitted the US depression across the globe; while the impotence of political liberalism in the face of the slump bolstered the power of fascist and Communist alternatives. In the Golden Age, by contrast, capitalism prospered when it broke with economic and political liberalism under pressure from the interwar experience, the example of Soviet Communism, and the



organizational initiatives imposed by US leadership in the Cold War international system.

There is much to be said in favour of this kind of analysis. But in what sense can the stabilizing influences in capitalist development be seen as *external* to the logic of capitalist society? And how far did such external arrangements prove stabilizing? Could one not argue the converse? In other words, the main sources of stability within capitalist societies derive from logics *internal* to their development – perhaps from the introduction of the mass of the population into political participation and the regulative demands thereby imposed upon the state; and the main barriers to capitalist development, and the sources of its periodic instabilities, are a result of the external resistance that its expansion has generated.

Hobsbawm does not really consider these possibilities. The substantive reasons for this neglect have much to do with a stance that is often difficult to disentangle from a form of nostalgia: for the stabilizing role of Communist forms of organization and for traditional cultural – and especially kinship – relations. Leaving these particular attachments aside, however, what conception of capitalism underpins Hobsbawm's analysis? The answer is simple, but surprising: Hobsbawm here employs a concept of capitalism, and especially of capitalist crisis, that owes more to Karl Polanyi than to Karl Marx. Capitalism is theorized primarily in terms of markets, and capitalist crisis is seen to result from the absence of non-market norms and institutions. This is surprising, not because a Marxist historian cannot learn from Polanyi, but because so much of Hobsbawm's outstanding trilogy on the long nineteenth century is a major advance on the latter's account of *The Great Transformation*, being an exploration of capitalist *society*, demonstrating how capitalist transformation uproots and reshapes culture and politics quite as much as socio-economic production, and also how these things 'hang together'.

Indeed, probably the single biggest omission from *Age of Extremes* is any sustained analysis of the ways in which the reconstruction of the world market and the consolidation of the nation-state system in the Golden Age made the structures that Hobsbawm analysed so brilliantly in *The Age of Capital 1848–1875* – those of the *capitalist* world market and the liberal state form – the near universal, as well as dominant, features of the international system. For the enduring achievement of the Golden Age, and specifically the project of US hegemony within it, might be seen as the fashioning of an international system in which sovereignty and the relatively free mobility of capital have been reconciled through the global spread of capitalist relations of

production, on the one hand, and the growing dominance of liberal-capitalist state forms, on the other. The world announced in the *Communist Manifesto* is now (some 150 years later) upon us; and, in the absence of a political challenge to its basic structural principles, there is no reason to suppose that it won't be reasonably stable. It may not look very nice, judged from the standpoint of the highest achievements of European social democracy, but that is another matter. *Contra* Hobsbawm, if the working class will not dig capitalism's grave, there is precious little evidence that the commodity form will take up the shovel for it.

Notwithstanding the many differences between Hobsbawm's history of the short twentieth century and Arrighi's theory of the cycles of capitalist hegemony, from the Genoese in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, through to the American in the twentieth, there are important points of contact between the two works. Arrighi attempts to analyse the historical development of world capitalism from the vantage point of its successive cycles of expansion, crisis and restructuring, and renewed and expanded reproduction. In order to accomplish this, he focuses on a series of 'regimes of accumulation', supporting particular alliances of state and capitalist interests, which have been linked 'to processes of state formation on the one side, and of market formation on the other'. Each of these 'systemic cycles of accumulation' has been associated with the hegemony of a particular state, where hegemony is understood not as a cycle of rise and fall within an unchanging structure, but as a process of active construction and leadership in the international system.

The peculiar novelty of Arrighi's account lies in the specific direction taken by the analysis: whereas Marxist analyses of accumulation and hegemony have typically moved 'below' the sphere of the market to the relations of production, Arrighi proposes to move 'above' the market, where 'the possessor of money meets the possessor, not of labour power, but of political power'. This undoubtedly yields some illuminating insights, and Arrighi has much to say that is interesting about the contrasting character of British and US hegemony and the present decline of US leadership in the face of the rise of East Asian capitalism. But these gains are bought at the price of a radically incomplete account of capitalist reproduction and crisis. The systemic cycles of accumulation associated with successive hegemonies are divided by Arrighi into a phase of material expansion, in which the advance of money-capital is subordinated to the expansion of productive activity; and a period of financial expansion, during which finance is severed from production and seeks speculative gains. In its

progressive phase, the hegemon configures market relations to encourage the former – productive growth and an expansion of the market; while in its decline, it promotes the latter – a flight of capital from real material expansion. Profitable activity is thus portrayed as the result of a favourable articulation of material expansion and political power, which is destined to prove transient as the reinvestment of profit eventually results in margins falling faster than the growth of the market increases economies of scale. This logic is seen to operate across all the cycles since the Genoese, and its course is not markedly altered by the advent of capitalist *production* in the British cycle during the nineteenth century.

Specifically, Arrighi reinterprets Marx's remarks about the real barrier of capitalist development being capital itself – a point about the contradictory character of use-value and exchange-value under capitalist relations of production – 'as reflecting the same underlying contradiction between the self-expansion of capital and the material expansion of the world economy'. But this means that the self-expansion of capital is merely posited by Arrighi (whereas Marx claimed to explain it); and that Marx's point about the contradictory nature of capitalist development, arising from the fact that capital has seized hold of *production*, is entirely missed in favour of what amounts to a quantity theory of competition and a theory of profit based on politically regulated unequal exchange. Arrighi's conclusion on the future of capitalism follows naturally enough: if US hegemony is now waning and is incapable of imposing a new imperial order, and if it is irreplaceable because the new poles of accumulation (East Asia) lack the state-military power necessary for hegemonic status,

then the resulting absence of authoritative political regulation of the world market must signal an end to the conditions for capitalist expansion. In the absence of means for generating a new cycle of expansion through hegemonic restructuring of the world market, anarchy, chaos and escalating violence are the likely consequences.

Thus, just as Hobsbawm sees the end of the Cold War as presaging not the triumph of global capitalism, but its incipient dissolution into 'darkness', so Arrighi foresees rivalry and conflict as the face of the future. Once again, the root of this understanding lies in a conception of capitalism as a self-expanding market which requires external (hegemonic) regulation in order to prosper. Without this externally imposed order and direction, capitalist reproduction is inherently unstable and prone to crisis. Even in the absence of a systemic political challenge to capitalism, this lack of normative and institutional control threatens its survival. But in both cases the focus on the anarchical character of capitalist *markets* neglects two other critical aspects of contemporary global capitalism. In the first place, capitalist relations of production are now the universal and dominant form of productive arrangements; for all the continuing conflicts over their reproduction, they currently face no systemic, organized alternative. And second, the global dominance of the liberal state form, with greater or lesser additions of a welfare component, is for now an accomplished fact. Together, these secure a formidable capitalist hegemony that shows little sign of retreat in the face of the problems of market instability rightly emphasized by Hobsbawm and Arrighi.

Simon Bromley

History and heritage

Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory, Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Verso, London and New York, 1994. xiv + 479 pp., £18.95 hb., 0 86091 209 4.

Everything about Raphael Samuel's work – here as elsewhere – breathes generosity: generosity in the breadth of its sources, in the amplex of its length, in the affection for its subjects. The style too is generous; not the cramped and tortuous style of the professional academic, full of arid technicalities, but an easy, open, free-flowing style, clear and graceful, full of allusion and imagery and always a delight to read.

Samuel's subject is 'heritage', which he writes about under the headings variously of 'retrochic', 'retrofitting' and 'resurrectionism'. He is concerned to document and

understand the current obsession, in all contemporary industrial societies, with preserving and conserving – whether it is a Victorian pier, an old mine-shaft, or the Abbey Road studios where the Beatles made their recordings. More profoundly, there is the turn to the past as a 'theatre of memory', a storehouse of artefacts and images that appear to have a mesmerizing effect on all sections of the population. Girls wish to be dressed as Victorian governesses (the Jane Eyre look); houses have to be built of bricks, the once despised medium for factories and warehouses; banks and businesses celebrate

the *genius loci* and deck themselves out in all the trappings of historic pageantry. Samuel notes the way in which the past, as theatre, creeps nearer and nearer to our own times. Before the war it was, in England at least, mainly the rural past that was celebrated, the England of country houses and cathedral towns. Increasingly, it is urban, industrial England that is the source of fascination – not just Victorian townscapes, but postwar council housing and the pop memorabilia of the 1960s.

Part of Samuel's purpose is to acknowledge, and to congratulate, the army of 'Clio's underlabourers' that has been involved in this massive work of historical retrieval and reconstruction: the collectors, animators, illustrators, photographers, boot-fair haunters, local librarians, museum curators, amateur archivists and school history teachers who have, often unpaid and in their spare time, taken upon themselves the bulk of the task. It is these, the 'unofficial' historians, far more than the professionals, who have contributed most to our sense of the past. Their work makes nonsense of the traditional distinction between 'memory', seen as an imprecise and unreliable 'folk' thing, and 'history', the province of the professional historian armed with scientific techniques of recovery. As a form of knowledge, history is a hybrid, mixing memory and myth, folk tradition and archival reconstruction, the written record and the oral and visual past. Samuel has been in the forefront of the movement for 'people's history'; here he celebrates the people as historians.

This championing is the springboard for Samuel's main general claim, and the one that has aroused the greatest controversy, at least on the Left: that 'heritage', the conservation of the products not just of human but also of natural history, is profoundly democratic. He takes issue with the 'heritage-baiters', such as Patrick Wright, Robert Hewison and Neal Ascherson, who have argued that the 'heritage industry' is crypto-feudal, conservative or – alternatively – rampantly capitalist, 'Thatcherism in period dress'. While conceding that – partly owing to the negative effect of the Left – heritage has largely been annexed by the Right, Samuel shows that many of the roots of the heritage movement have a respectably left-wing provenance (for instance, in the work of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the interwar struggle to establish National Parks). More to the point, he argues that heritage today is the one movement capable of mobilizing popular forces, across all classes and parties and on a wide variety of fronts. There is now virtually a national consensus on conservation, which is today 'the most favoured outlet for the reformist impulse in national life'. Conservation is 'collectivist in spirit', favours

planning and regulation, and subordinates private interest to the public good. Based as it so often is on local initiative, and the direct involvement of ordinary people, it bids fair to renew the 'Civic Gospel' of the earlier years of this century, when municipal authorities took the lead in wide-ranging improvements to civic life. The real conservatives in the current debates are, Samuel charges, the heritage-baiters, reminiscent of earlier critics such as Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis in their disdain for the enthusiasms and abilities of the populace.

This is an area in which ideological posturing will not do, as Samuel amply demonstrates. His own case has to be judged against the wealth of documentation he provides. This very richness might be one source of the uneasiness his argument may provoke in readers – such as this one – who are otherwise highly sympathetic to his position. Does his concept of 'heritage' embrace too much in its generosity? Is he insufficiently discriminating in his use of the term, so that too many disparate activities are included within it? It is one thing to praise the resurrectionism of Clio's underlabourers, and to recognize the democratic impulse behind its rescuing of the lives of ordinary people – craftsmen and shopkeepers, servants and labourers, many of them women – from 'the enormous condescension of posterity'. It is another thing to enthuse over historical theme parks and other such Disneyfied expressions of the heritage industry, which,



besides being often tasteless and a travesty of history, are also shamelessly commercial in their aims. They should not be allowed to shelter beneath the affectionate cover given to the real unofficial custodians of the past.

Contrary to the impression conveyed by some of the newspaper reviews of this book, it needs to be stressed that Samuel is not much concerned to press his general case. Or, rather, he is content to let his case largely speak for itself. The strength of this work is not in its generalities, which in truth Samuel does not have much time for ('overdetermined' is one of his favourite words, in examining causes). No other book more heartily endorses the view that 'God is in the details'. There are general insights aplenty, but they emerge from the material rather than rigidly encasing it. One needs to read this book at leisure, not rush at it to extract a thesis. Approached in the right manner it yields many pleasures, not least the incidental glimpses it gives of Samuel's own

life as a Londoner growing up in the 1950s, and his later voyages of discovery in that city. He shows an insatiable curiosity about the ordinary things of life, finding significance in the contents of the new supermarkets as much as in old photographs and the spread of brick as the new 'vernacular' material (one footnote reads 'Visit to Sainsbury's, Islington, 21 September 1993; another, 'Notes on a perambulation, 12 September 1993'). One immediately thinks of parallels, such as Roland Barthes, an author Samuel evidently much admires. But to my mind the most relevant figure is Henry Mayhew (and perhaps Pierce Egan behind him), the great chronicler of the lives and labour of the London poor and the indefatigable explorer of the city. In Samuel, heritage has found its Mayhew – which is to say, as exhaustive a chronicler, and as eloquent an advocate, as it is ever likely to find.

Krishan Kumar

Knowing the difference

Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford, eds, *Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994. xiii + 300 pp., £37.50 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 415 08988 3 hb., 0 415 08989 1 pb.

Feminist approaches to epistemology have had a great deal in common with other critiques of Enlightenment ideals of reason and objectivity. Lennon and Whitford note in their introduction to *Knowing the Difference* that the most compelling epistemological insight of feminism lies in the connections it has made between knowledge and power, and in the recognition that knowledge claims have often been tied to structures of domination and exclusion. Feminism has not, of course, been alone in this. Many of its themes have been shared in various ways with Marxists, with radical philosophers of science, with those who have been critical of the Eurocentrism of much philosophy, and with philosophers commonly named 'postmodern'.

But the concerns of feminist philosophers have not been identical with those who have in some respects been their theoretical allies, and the specifically feminist contribution to the 'deconstructive' task of challenging Enlightenment paradigms has been to analyse and expose their 'masculinity'. Feminist philosophers have thus argued that knowledge claims have often reflected the experience, interests and concerns of men rather than women, and that conceptions of reason and objectivity are often closely allied with conceptions of masculinity.

Feminist deconstruction of the masculinity of knowledge claims implies that their evaluation can no longer be undertaken in the name of 'universal' criteria

of truth, rationality or objectivity. Knowledge claims are always anchored in the subjectivity and social location of those who claim to know. Questions about *what* is known and *who* claims to know can no longer be sharply distinguished. Feminist philosophers have thus wanted not only to analyse the ways in which knowledge claims, and the enterprise of epistemology itself, have assumed a male knower, but to ask how knowledge might be different if it were produced by women, and what difference it might make to philosophy if it came to bear the imprint of female experiences and female subjectivity.

But if feminist philosophy has aimed to expose the 'false universalism' of much traditional philosophy, it is also the case that feminism has itself at times been accused of a different kind of 'false universalism' – one which too easily assumed that it was possible to speak for all women. A central issue confronted by feminist thinking in recent years has been that of facing up to the ways in which some feminist discourse replicates structures of hegemony and exclusion. If women have been 'other' to masculine thought, then feminists have had to confront the challenge of other 'others': women of different class, ethnic group or sexuality, for instance, who experienced themselves as marginalized by some dominant feminist modes of theorizing.

Lennon and Whitford point out that the prominence

of the issue of 'difference' in recent feminist theory has meant that the postmodern critique of totalizing theory has sometimes proved attractive to feminist writers. Yet there are also reasons why feminists have been ambivalent about postmodernism. Some postmodern theorists have flagged the 'end of epistemology', in the sense of rejecting *all* notions of the referentiality of knowledge or the possibility of subjecting knowledge claims to any criteria not wholly internal to the discourse within which they are produced. But there is a critical and 'universal' impulse in feminist thinking which it is difficult to reconcile with these strands in postmodern thinking. It is precisely the desire to move beyond the immediate and the local, and to subject these to critique, which has informed feminist theory, politics and activism.

How, then, with the abandonment of Enlightenment 'objectivity', should we think about women's knowledge claims and the production of feminist theory? If women produce new narratives to replace older masculinist ones, are there reasons for supposing that these narratives have any greater claims to truth? If feminism cannot afford to abandon all claims to referentiality, or all critique which is in some way external to that which it criticizes, can notions such as 'objectivity' be reformulated in a way that avoids both old-style universalism and postmodern relativism? Is it possible to conceptualize the possibility of feminist 'metanarratives', and allow for the generalizing impulse in feminist theory, whilst recognizing 'difference' and avoiding the exclusion and marginalization of others?

This book is a welcome contribution to what can be called the 'reconstructive' moment of feminist epistemology. The essays in it are divided into two sections. The first section, entitled 'Objectivity and the Knowing Subject', has as its central theme the question of whether and how a meaning can be given to the concept of 'objectivity' which recognizes the social location of all knowledge claims. A number of the essays, including those by Lazreg, Lovibond, Barwell and Fricker, defend the claims of a reformulated 'objectivity' in the face of a postmodern relativism. Barwell, for instance, defends the account of 'strong objectivity' given by Sandra Harding in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* Lovibond defends the need for criteria for evaluating knowledge claims which are answerable to a community of knowers, and which are non-arbitrary and non-individualistic. A central theme of the reformulation of 'objectivity' proposed in these essays is a broadening of the concept of accountability, to include, as Lennon and Whitford note, accountability not merely to the community of scientists, but to the feminist community. Other essays in this section cover a broad range of

themes, from a critique by Braidotti of an assumed link between visibility and truth, to a reading by Caroline Williams of Lacan and Irigaray which questions the classical notion of 'objectivity'.

The second section of the book is entitled 'Knowledge, Difference and Power', and its central theme is that of 'difference'. What kind of response should feminists make to the diversity of the situations of women and the different perspectives of the communities in which they live? And how can this response take account not merely of differences *per se*, but of inequalities, of power and privilege? The notion of dialogue, for instance, or that of consensus emerging from such dialogue, may fail to take note of such inequalities. Other essays discuss the inadequacies of approaches to difference based merely on pluralism or liberal tolerance. The essay by Tanesini, for example, echoing some of the themes of the first part of the book, argues that any approach to difference which leaves no space for feminists to differ from their own communities, and engage critically with them, must be rejected. Seller's essay, discussing her experiences in India, explores the difficulties of creating a community of dialogue in a context inevitably structured by a colonialist history and by the very different constraints under which academic communities in India operate.

The most interesting thing about this book is the way in which the contributors, despite considerable differences in their backgrounds and concerns, and despite disagreements in some of their conclusions, share some broad perspectives on the directions that feminist epistemology should take. There is no one 'female way of knowing'. Female experience is diverse and cannot easily be contained in any consensus. Nor can it be characterized without reference to patriarchal forms of thought of which it is critical. The task for feminist epistemology, therefore, is not to reject notions such as 'rationality' or 'objectivity', but to contest and re-negotiate them.

Readers are bound to take issue with some of the specific conclusions of many of the essays. But the overall sense of direction generated by this collection may be more important than the differences between the contributors, or the disagreements they may generate. *Knowing the Difference* proposes a reconstructive agenda for feminist epistemology, and it is a timely intervention at a stage of feminist philosophy when there is a need to move beyond the deconstructive task, and to think afresh about how a feminist critique of traditional epistemology might intersect with issues of power and difference which have been central to feminist thinking itself.

Jean Grimshaw

The vision thing

Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, British Film Institute and Indiana University Press, London and Bloomington, IN, 1994. 81 pp., £19.99 hb., £9.95 pb., 0 85170 444 1 hb., 0 85170 445 X pb.

Like much of Virilio's earlier work, *The Vision Machine* is concerned with the development of new aesthetic concepts which renounce the heritage of Western philosophy and, in particular, the idea that linguistic semiology is somehow superior to an aesthetics of pure visibility. Virilio's writings represent a fundamental rejection of the tradition of both phenomenology and structuralism. Indeed, they are critically disposed toward the development of aesthetic principles which recognize that visual sensations have their own autonomous logic. *The Vision Machine* is a historical study of the various forms of aesthetic visibility.

Virilio's contribution to our understanding of vision rests principally on his reworking of Foucault's conception of the power of the image. Thus, Virilio attempts to comprehend the image not from the standpoint of the subject, but from the perspective of a philosophy of *forces*; a philosophy conceived, in Foucault's words, as 'an arrangement of strategies'. Virilio's portrayal of the force of the image has arisen from his efforts to offer a depiction of postmodernity based on the aesthetics of *dromology* – the logic of speed – and the 'disappearance' of subjectivity. As such, Virilio's strivings are basically involved with articulating the relationship between speed and what he sees as the epochal shift in the way images are *re-presented* in the contemporary era. For instance, Virilio views the invention of the cinema as one of the defining moments in the weakening of the traditional Christian appearance aesthetic and the consequent consolidation of a disappearance aesthetic. Virilio deliberates on these and other matters because he believes it necessary to develop new aesthetic concepts which can explain not simply the ongoing crises of representation in modern and postmodern art, but the crises of the twentieth century as a whole.

The Vision Machine presents a stimulating historical examination of the various instruments of observation (telescopes, cameras, cinema, television, video, etc.), along with a consideration of the images such machines compose. It aims to investigate the affinity between heterogeneous optical devices that pepper not only the history of art but also the history and technologies of warfare and cinema. Focusing on the contemporary urban landscape and the increasingly ubiquitous surveillance camera, Virilio additionally develops a

whole new 'logistics of the image'. As he puts it, 'the age of the image's *formal logic* was the age of painting, engraving and etching, architecture; it ended with the eighteenth century. The age of *dialectic logic* is the age of photography and film, or, if you like, the frame of the nineteenth century. The age of *paradoxical logic* begins with the invention of video recording, holography and computer graphics ... as though, at the close of the twentieth century, the end of modernity were itself marked by the end of a logic of public representation' (p. 63).

Clearly, Virilio is not content with providing an original account of the history of vision. He is also concerned to alert us to the fact that, while we in the twentieth century are now comfortable in the presence of painterly, photographic and even cinematic representations, we are still very apprehensive about the *virtual* images produced by video surveillance cameras, computers and other vision machines. Indeed, it is the anxiety surrounding these images which, in his view, explains the 'frantic interpretosis' of the new technologies of cultural production, distribution and consumption in the academy, the press and elsewhere.

But what of Virilio's own frantic interpretosis in *The Vision Machine*? Obviously, he has found in postmodern philosophy, and particularly in new aesthetic concepts like paradoxical logic, a rich and rewarding contemporary appreciation of vision. In addition, his shift away from a subject-centred philosophy of visibility has produced a disturbing report on artistic and social history. There are, however, a number of difficulties with Virilio's ideas about vision technologies and the dissemination of images. First, the present work seems as much influenced by the postmodern writings of Lyotard, Derrida and Deleuze on difference and repetition in the visual and plastic arts, as it is by Foucault. For example, *The Vision Machine* seeks to understand the image almost from the object's point of view; that is, from the viewpoint of automated perceptual devices. In so doing, the book evinces not only the aesthetics of speed and disappearance, but also the aesthetics of Debord and Baudrillard and their various considerations of the 'society of the spectacle'. For Virilio too appears to regard advanced societies as dominated not simply by the media, but, crucially, by freely circulating images which bear no real relation to the socio-economic system. Like many other recent

French philosophical tracts, therefore, *The Vision Machine* is completely divorced from any reference to the broader dynamics of capitalist production or class conflict. In short, the correlation between signs, subjects, objects and media aesthetics is, for Virilio, merely a matter of simulation.

There are also one of two troubling questions concerning Virilio's understanding of technology. For one thing, his work is founded on a pessimistic technological determinism. Indeed, one cannot help but hear the forbidding voice of the late Jacques Ellul echoing through the pages of *The Vision Machine*. Like Ellul, Virilio fails to appreciate that, while vision technologies may be technically feasible, this does not mean that they will all be either profitable or practically attainable. Moreover, Virilio seems unaware of what might be described as compound technologies, such as video games, which incorporate keyboards, sound and vision. Nor does he appear to be acquainted with feminist accounts of technology and subjectivity, like those of Donna Haraway. Similarly, Virilio's emphases on the disappearance of material space, and its almost total

replacement by the 'speed-space' of video surveillance cameras, seems not only premature but somewhat overblown.

On the other hand, his theoretical focus on both the new logistics of the image and paradoxical logic is something to be encouraged. For video images, computer graphics and so-called virtual reality are all essentially late-twentieth-century optical phenomena. They can thus be considered postmodern public (and increasingly private) forms of representation. In this respect, *The Vision Machine* is an important book, because it concentrates on the widespread *ambivalence* that currently encompasses the development of technologies of perception. Virilio manages to tap into one of the key themes pursued by postmodern theorists and those of us who are expressly concerned with the links between vision, technology and culture. In the end, though, *The Vision Machine* is really an example of the problem it seeks to analyse: namely, the desperate search for ontological assurance with regard to the emergence of vision technologies. The search is set to continue.

John Armitage

The Sunday of life

Shadia B. Drury, *Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Postmodern Politics*, Macmillan, London, 1994. xii + 274 pp., £31.00 hb., £14.50 pb., 0 333 62211 1 hb., 0 333 62210 3 pb.

Alexandre Kojève was one of the stranger figures to have wandered across the French intellectual landscape. Best known for the lectures he gave on *The Phenomenology of Mind* between 1933 and 1939, he was, together with Jean Hyppolite, one of the major architects of the extraordinary renaissance of French Hegelian studies in the immediate post-war years. His later texts, almost all of them published posthumously (they include a three-volume study of pagan philosophy, a bulky phenomenology of right, and a study of Kant), remain relatively unknown.

Without Kojève's reading of the *Phenomenology*, Lacan's celebrated dialectic of desire could not have been elaborated. The Heideggerian-Hegelian thesis that man is the only animal with a foreknowledge that he must die, and that human existence is a consciousness of death, became part of a philosophical vulgate. Yet Kojève was never really a professional philosopher. His extraordinary lectures, not published until 1947, were given at the École des Hautes Études, a relatively marginal institution, and he never held a full-time academic position. Kojève's postwar career was that of a

senior civil servant, and he seems to have regarded himself as a philosophical adviser to worldly princes or even as the Sage who has transcended history. At the same time, he claimed to be a right-wing Marxist, and to have wept when Stalin died. A major, if shadowy, figure in the establishment of GATT and of early European institutions, he clearly viewed the emerging European Community as a prototype for a Hegelian world state. Kojève died of a heart attack in 1968 while he was attending an EC meeting. Shortly before his death, he had opined that nothing had happened in May '68 'because no one died'.

The paradoxes that surround Kojève's life and writings are such that it is difficult to know quite what to make of him. The Russian-born Kojève was fifteen when the Bolshevik Revolution erupted; arrested for black-marketeering, he narrowly escaped execution. That experience, he claimed, converted him to Communism. His conversion did not, however, prevent him from arguing, as early as 1948, that the United States had created a world culture which had rendered Communism unnecessary, and that the Russians were no more than

impoverished Americans. Even the admiring Bataille found the claim bewildering, and wondered whether Kojève might not be the author of a comic novel about the end of history.

Kojève's influence in the late 1940s and early 1950s was enormous, but interest focused on the violent phenomenology of intersubjectivity that can be derived from his reading of the master-slave dialectic, rather than on the end of history thesis. Inevitably, Kojève's importance was eclipsed by the hegemonic rise of Sartrean existentialism and then structuralism. A new and unexpected interest in his work was sparked by the extraordinary success of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* in 1992. Fukuyama reworked Kojève in order to contend that the triumph of the 'worldwide liberal revolution' marked the end of history—a claim that now looks rather naïve as so many of the post-Communist countries lapse into barbarism rather than snuggling into liberal social democracy. It is perhaps time to look again at Kojève himself. A major biography by Dominique Auffret appeared in French in 1990, but it still awaits translation.

Drury's study is the first book-length account of Kojève to appear in English, but it is sadly disappointing. She sets out to tell the story of the metamorphosis of Kojève's Marxist theory of the realm of freedom into the world of Nietzsche's last man, and to explicate his effort 'to historicize Heideggerian existentialism'. It is clearly a story that she finds distasteful in the extreme. Nor, it would seem, does she have any enthusiasm for Kojève's followers in either France or the United States, where the blood line runs from Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom to Fukuyama.

Any reassessment of a thinker whose importance has been temporarily eclipsed runs the risk of overstating his significance, if only because of the need to redress the historical balance. Postmodernism is claimed by Drury to mark the beginning of a new age typified by its disenchantment with the modernist project, and Kojève is held to be a pivotal figure in that shift of mood. The claim is so unexceptional as to be almost banal, but the tendency to blame Kojève for all the ills of post-modernism is ill-judged. After all, disenchantment with modernity is probably as old as modernity itself, and certainly at least as old as Max Weber. Drury's reading of Strauss and Bloom is more interesting than her views on modernism, and she successfully demonstrates that it is more appropriate to regard them as Right Nietzscheans than as aristocratic liberals. Yet even here, her judgement and taste must be in doubt. Analysing Bloom's patrician attacks on rock music and his defence of Wagner, she predictably notes the Nazi enthusiasm for the latter and

concludes that '*Gesamtkunstwerk* is a fancy excuse for making art the pimp of the established order'. A brief discussion of Kandinsky (Kojève's uncle) generates the comment that, far from being a remedy for the degradation of man in the modern world, abstract art's emptiness is symptomatic of that very degradation. At such points, one can only turn to Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas* for consolation.

The alleged influence of Kojève on Sartre and Foucault is grossly overstated, and the judgements passed on their work are tired. Sartre, apparently, believed that the best goals to fight for were those that were impossible. Foucault is not a liberator; like Bataille, he simply longs for the forms of power that make transgression glorious. Drury seems immune to the charm of the description of the suburban Sunday of life to be found in Queneau's novels, whose enormous debt to Kojève is so well analysed by Pierre Macherey in his *The Object of Literature*. When she turns to Bataille, Drury falls into the most obvious of traps by remarking that his novels often read like the scripts for grade B horror movies, and adding that the latter try to terrify their audience but in fact elicit laughter. As Bataille remarks in a prefatory note to his novella *Madame Edwarda*: 'If you laugh, it is because you are frightened.'

Kojève has found his French biographer; he has yet to find his English or American exegete.

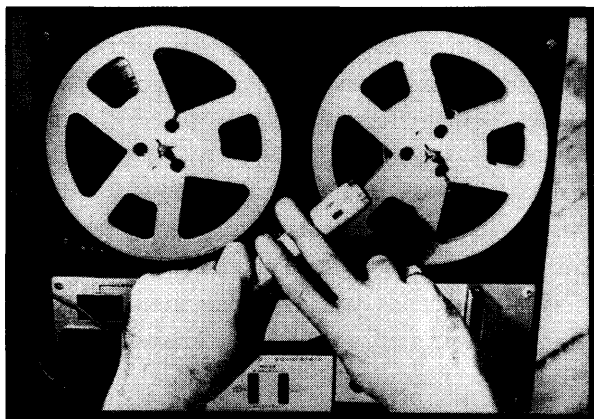
David Macey

Going public

Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, translated by Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel and Assenka Oksiloff, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1993. xlix + 305 pp., £35.00 hb., 0 8166 2031 8.

In recent decades some of the most important contributions of Critical Theory have centred on the 'public sphere' (*Öffentlichkeit*). Jürgen Habermas's account has aroused considerable interest in the Anglophone world, following the strangely belated translation of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1989), which was originally published in 1962. Besides Habermas, other 'second generation' Critical Theorists have also made a seminal contribution on this topic. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's recently translated *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*

was originally published in 1972, ten years after Habermas's book. Many things had changed in the intervening years: the West German *Wirtschaftswunder* was tarnished by conjunctural crisis; the dominant position of the Christian Democrats was being eroded; and the student revolt of 1968, stimulated by Vietnam, shook up the stale culture of the postwar Republic. Although the public sphere is crucial to social emancipation in both books, there is a significant change of perspective between them.



For the radicalized student movement, whose 'organic intellectuals' Negt and Kluge were, it was imperative to abandon the stance of private intellectuals characteristic of the postwar Frankfurt School. Fighting the libels of a 'liberal' press and trying to create its own public sphere, this was a moment of organization for the extra-parliamentary opposition. In these circumstances, relations between the leftist student movement and Habermas, who accused it of 'left fascism', became strained; the editor of the 1968 book *Die Linke antwortet Habermas* (The Left answers Habermas) was Oskar Negt.

For many radical students, some kind of party would resolve the problem of forging links with the working class. However, since there was no agreement about the character and politics of such a party, there was soon no shortage of them. Negt and Kluge's book can be seen as an intervention against this tendency of the student movement to split up into numerous small 'left factions'. What they offered was the wider critical – as well as utopian – perspective of 'proletarian public sphere'. Their subject is accordingly the 'dialectic of bourgeois and proletarian public sphere' (p. xliii). Compared to Habermas, the stress placed on the connection between the public spheres and people's daily experience is new. In accordance with the anti-authoritarian impulses of the student revolt, Negt and Kluge sought to highlight the role of sensuality, fantasy and experience – presumably apparent in their remarkably fragmentary style – and yet relocate them in a wider, and politically more promising,

context of the 'proletarian public sphere', where Wilhelm Reich meets Georg Lukács and the notion of class consciousness.

Besides indicating 'specific institutions, agencies, practices', the public sphere is 'also a general social horizon of experience in which everything that is actually or ostensibly relevant for all members of society is integrated'. In this sense, the public sphere is also a 'dimension of their consciousness' (pp. 1–2). The crux of the argument is that the bourgeois and the – largely undeveloped – proletarian public spheres crucially differ in their ways of organizing experience. The bourgeois public sphere regards the proletarian life-situation only in so far as it can be incorporated 'in a domesticated form' (p. 17) into the interests of profit-making. Its proletarian counterpart, by contrast, is the form that sets in motion repressed emancipatory potential, embodied in experience and fantasies.

However, Negt and Kluge warn about the dangers of 'the ideology of the camp', leading to political isolation. They argue that in Italy, Germany and Austria the workers' movement was defeated largely because it did not practise a politics combining 'preventive control of the bourgeois public sphere' with 'constructing a counterpublic sphere' (pp. 211–12). Because the workers' movement withdrew from the bourgeois public sphere to its own narrowly conceived organizations, it left the way open for fascist forces to dominate the political arena.

Negt and Kluge differentiate between two forms of bourgeois public sphere. The classical public sphere, already analysed by Habermas, is composed mostly of newspapers, parliaments, clubs, parties and societies. The 'new public spheres of production', on the other hand, 'are a direct expression of the sphere of production' (p. 13). This contemporary form comprises 'the consciousness industry' and the relations between advertising and consumption which it engenders, as well as the new forms of PR work in politics. It creates a link between the processes of production and what previously counted as the 'privacy' of individuals, positing television as a 'concrete technique' of the bourgeois public sphere. Negt and Kluge's emancipatory strategy is the counter-production that sets in motion 'sociological imagination' (a term borrowed from C. Wright Mills), and creates new active relations between producers and audiences. In their view, only a perspective of social change can evoke any real interest in realism among viewers.

It is Negt and Kluge's horizon of social change, offering new ways of organizing experience, that is most appealing in their book. Yet, the noncontemporary verve

of the book is in part eclipsed not just by the present conjuncture but also by its inherent theoretical flaws. In their conception, bourgeois and proletarian public spheres, respectively, express the inherent essential qualities of the abstract logic of capital and the experience, repressed needs and fantasies of the proletariat. This is suspiciously close to what Louis Althusser once criticized as a conception of 'expressive totality'.

There is also a class reductionism secreted in Negt and Kluge's attempt to move beyond Lukács by thematizing the constitution of class consciousness in terms of the repressed needs, fantasies and experience of the proletariat. Though their critique of leftist 'ideology of the camp' tentatively points towards a wider horizon, they are unable to break out of a class-reductionist framework that ignores women and other oppressed groups. Thus, their approach lags far behind the Gramscian conception of hegemony and hegemonic struggles. Given a similar problem in Habermas, this seems to indicate that the notion of 'public sphere' is a more useful analytical tool when linked with concepts which do not originate in the Frankfurt tradition. That in turn underlines the importance of a functioning radical public sphere which facilitates an international exchange of views. Welcome as this translation (and Miriam Hansen's exemplary foreword) is, it is to be hoped that it will not take more than twenty years for other German authors to the left of Habermas to have their voices heard across the barriers erected by the dominant media and academia.

Juha Koivisto

King Kong

Ben Watson, *Frank Zappa: The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play*, Quartet Books, London, 1994. xxxiii + 597 pp., £25.00 hb., 0 7043 7066 2.

Frank Zappa's music was a life-long battle against hypocrisy, censorship, injustice and the culture industry. His last battle was against cancer, which he lost in December 1993. Watson's book is a timely review of Zappa's work and worth.

It can be summarized as follows: Zappa's politics are those of a petty bourgeois at the same time as his music throws a spanner into the sweet music of bourgeois respectability and political correctness. Zappa did not enchant the disenchanting world with love songs, happy-together melodies, and the sweet repetitions that characterize the homogenizing tyranny of the culture

industry. In Zappa, the unique cross-fertilization of rock and classical music does not suppress heterogeneity in the name of identity. Rather, Zappa's music is seen as a challenge to the tyranny of the exchange principle which proclaims in favour of identity; that is, a world where music becomes a spectacle of sameness. In Zappa's music there is no place for the sinister aspect of pop where the regression of hearing is exploited by a music programmed to cheat the listener into accepting advertising as a site of genuine pleasure. Zappa, as Watson puts it, seems intent on thrusting something unpleasant at you. His obsession with sexual slavery, bodies, machines, commodity fetishism, death and gas masks, libidinal investment in atrocities and so on, orchestrates the travesty of power, not its imitation.

Putting on public display all those unpleasant things which are normally swept under the carpet, Zappa became not only a symbol of political incorrectness but also a hate figure for all those who extol decency. His orchestration of the fear of one's own impulses replays the allure and cruelty of the siren song whose tormenting melody is desired and denied in one breath. Zappa's music is that of the world's greatest sinner who beats the devil by acknowledging desire and, in so doing, shows the misery of a world where the fine distinction between sexual liberation and harassment remains unacknowledged. Zappa stated brute fact and so deprived the moral authority of the evangelist kind of its greatest pleasures. Zappa jokes about blow jobs, whereas the television evangelist Jimmy Swaggart is reduced to tears after having been discovered practising things God forbade. Lastly, Watson claims that Zappa's project of social documentation reconciles fact with the representation of fulfilment as a broken promise. Against the culture industry's respectful melodies, Zappa's music is seen to sublimate rather than repress.

Watson develops his argument with particular reference to Adorno's work. Hence the book's title: *The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play*. The first part of the title summons Adorno as the critic of the Enlightenment's broken promise to liberate humankind from self-imposed immaturity. The second part – poodle play – indicates where Watson sees the negative dialectic at work in Zappa. 'Poodle' stands for perversion both in terms of sexual perversion and social servility. The pampered and obedient poodle is a symbol of the unusual intelligence credited to poodles being trammelled, disciplined and domesticated. Zappa, so the argument runs, throws the poodle back to his listeners and thus produces a play in which power and pleasure, desire and fear, are brought together, creating a situation where reason and dark impulses coincide as separate-in-unity.

The combination of 'poodle' and 'play' holds the key to what Watson sees as Zappa's negative dialectic. The spectacle of the everyday perversion is contrasted to playfulness; and playfulness, rather than being external to perversion, is shown to exist in denied form within perversion itself. In short, the poodle barks.

The book's main shortcoming concerns Watson's interpretation of Zappa through Adorno. Although it discloses many useful insights, it is unconvincing. Adorno is invoked when the argument is either Marcuse's or Benjamin's (who saw emancipatory potential in mass culture and surrealism). Either Adorno's critical account of popular music is skipped, or it is asserted that Zappa does in fact achieve what Adorno thought was impossible. A much more rigorous critique of Adorno's position, and location of his work within the context of the Frankfurt School, might have been more appropriate. Although this would have shifted the balance of the book, it might well have improved what ultimately amounts to the fairly predictable argument of a committed 'Zappalogist'.

The tension between Adorno's position and Watson's embrace of Zappa is not used productively. Indeed, it seems at times that Adorno's role is that of a straw man required to endorse the value of Zappa's work. Adorno's critique of 'ticket mentality' stands in sharp contrast to Watson's endorsement of Zappa as a 'hero for anyone who thinks that the class system ... is something that needs dismantling' (p. 553). Is there a use-value in Zappa for an SWP member (p. 552)? And would Zappa join the Anti-Nazi League (p. 548)? These views and sentiments seem to indicate either a misunderstanding of 'negative dialectics' or a regression of critical thought to ticket mentality. Poodle play appears to prevail over negative dialectics. Watson is surely right to claim that Zappa was an extraordinary artist confronting the administered world of the culture industry and the tyranny of the exchange principle, according to which sales indicate artistic value. Zappa's critique of the sweet music of repetition, and his refusal to supply simplistic melodic structures conducive to the paraphrase of musical advertising, need to be endorsed. However, merely endorsing Zappa does not do him justice. Negative dialectics need to be summoned as a critique of Zappa's music itself. Without a critical reflection on Zappa's work, its endorsement lapses back into what Zappa is said to resist: repetition, hero-worship and fetishistic ritual. In the negative dialectic of poodle play, the fetishization of Zappa prevails over a critical evaluation of his achievements.

Werner Bonefeld

Back to Hegel?

J.M. Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life: Jürgen Habermas and the Future of Critical Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995. xii + 249 pp., £40.00 hb., £13.99 pb., 0 415 06194 6 hb., 0 415 11783 6 pb.

Half-way through the last decade of the twentieth century, the problematic of ethical life seems as inescapable as that of the *fin de siècle* itself. The revival of Hegelian and sub-Hegelian theories of all kinds leaves no doubt that Hegel's critique of Kantian abstraction, along with Descartes' cogito and Kant's critique of Humean empiricism, remains one of the central motifs of Western philosophy. Everything else, whether in Marx or Nietzsche, existentialism or postmodernism, can be taken as an extrapolation of, or a reaction to, one or another moment of Hegel's thought.

The oppositions between the first and second generations of Critical Theory, represented by Adorno and Habermas respectively, and continued by their followers in the third generation, are also in many ways a replay of those which separate Kant and Hegel. But, as Jay Bernstein shows in this extremely challenging book, Habermas, like the bourgeoisie in the English Revolution, is on both sides. His thought is driven both by an evolutionary conception of human development, including, as Bernstein emphasizes, the tragic Hegelian motif of the causality of fate, and by a Kantian concern to provide grounds for our cognitive judgements on both empirical and ethical questions in what Habermas terms a post-metaphysical context.

For Bernstein, recovering ethical life means in part recovering it from what he sees as Habermas's excessively Kantian approach. In this sequence of powerful essays, several previously published but now substantially reworked, he argues that Habermas should have stayed closer to Hegel and Adorno, especially to the latter's aesthetic theory. Critical theory, he suggests, is basically torn between a concern for justice, leading to a focus on domination and exploitation, and a concern for meaning, leading to a preoccupation with more cultural issues to do with meaninglessness and nihilism in capitalist modernity. Although Habermas uses Lukács's concept of reification to address both these dimensions, his 'focus on the justice problem entails surrender over the question of nihilism' (p. 29); Habermas's attempts to handle issues of meaning(fulness) within an essentially neo-Kantian framework of validity is ultimately part of the problem, rather than a possible solution.

In an argument which for a time parallels that of Seyla Benhabib's *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, but then heads off in a more radical (anti-Habermasian) direction, Bernstein argues that Habermas has placed undue emphasis on the model of the 'ideal speech situation' (chapter 2), misrepresented the cognitive claims of psychoanalysis and exaggerated its emancipatory claims (chapter 3), and overemphasized 'moral norms' at the expense of 'ethical identities', incidentally drawing the wrong conclusions from his detailed reading of Durkheim and Mead (chapter 4). This leads to problems in Habermas's characterization of the philosophical discourse of modernity and his claims for communicative rationality as against more traditional and felt solidarities (chapter 6), and, once again, an emphasis on specific judgements, rather than broader issues of world-disclosure in language (chapter 7).

Put as baldly as this, the message of the book sounds much more negative than Bernstein intends. First, he stresses that Habermas's Kantianism 'corresponds to ... one of the deepest impulses of modern philosophical reflection: to salvage the claims of rational universalism while acknowledging the full force and import of contingency and history' (p. 229). Second, he notes that Habermas has repeatedly acknowledged Hegelian or Adornian objections to his approach, whether spontaneously or in response to criticisms. Here, of course, Habermas's recognition of Hegelian motifs goes along with what one might call a structural feature of his own (or anyone else's) work, in which a model initially stated in bold (or perhaps excessively cut-and-dried) terms, for the sake of argument, is subsequently smoothed off at the edges with concessions to framework and context – as, say, in the shift from Wittgenstein's early to his late work. And, while Bernstein believes that Habermas was too quick to give up on some of the more romantic or utopian elements in the thought of Hegel, Marx and Adorno, he accepts that any attempt to restate these themes in the present context must necessarily engage with Habermas's work.

Bernstein promises for future books the 'attempt to vindicate Adorno's analysis of modernity, Hegel's account of intersubjectivity or the ethical ideals of democratic state citizenship, the synthesis of which would provide a critical theory for the future' (p. 234). There is no doubt that his forthcoming book on Adorno and the one he plans on the causality of fate will be exceptionally important contributions. Personally, I remain sceptical about this direction of argument, for essentially the same anti-utopian reasons which Habermas advances for taking his distance from Hegel, Lukács, or Adorno. But there can be no doubt that the vigorous debates between

Habermas and his more Hegelian critics continue to focus many of the most central intellectual and practical-political issues of our time. As Bernstein notes, several thinkers deeply sympathetic to Habermas's project – Albrecht Wellmer, Seyla Benhabib and Axel Honneth – have all, in different ways, revived Hegelian forms of thought, and Bernstein's outstanding book is now also essential reading for anyone concerned with Habermas's thinking and its implications for contemporary social and political theory.

William Outhwaite

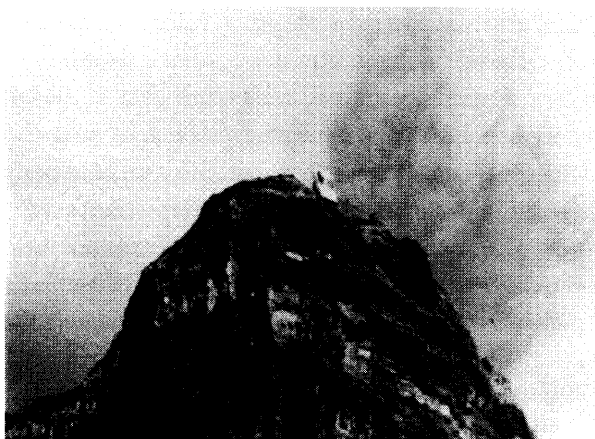
In the family way

Carole Ulanowsky, ed., *The Family in the Age of Biotechnology*, Avebury, Aldershot, 1995. ix + 161 pp., £32.50 hb., 1 85628 955 9.

The predominance of the traditional household form – a married heterosexual couple and their offspring sharing a permanent residence – has been undermined over the past twenty-five years by at least two developments. One has been the growing prevalence of non-traditional household arrangements, such as lone parent families, and unmarried cohabiting couples, both heterosexual and gay or lesbian, with and without dependent children. The second development has been in reproductive technology, chiefly IVF, AID and surrogacy. This has extended the possibility of parenthood both to those previously incapable by reason of infertility (including, most contentiously, post-menopausal women), and to those, such as lesbians, disinclined to procreate through heterosexual coition. Not only are new familial forms possible, but they would seem now to be open to control and choice.

Against this background, it seems implausible to continue characterizing the family, in its traditional guise, as 'natural' where this means 'inevitable', 'standard' or 'given'. Whether it should be natural in the sense of 'normal' or 'ideal' is contentious. This collection of essays, although of uneven quality, represents a valuable contribution to the debate. Unsurprisingly, a major theme is an exploration of the tension between the 'natural' and its various contraries, such as 'chosen', 'constructed', 'social', 'artificial', 'technological' and 'new'.

Marilyn Strathem muses, as an anthropologist, on the interconnected meanings of the old and new, change and preservation, social and technological, in our discourses about the family. Philip Cole bluntly argues that the current framework of legal and medical controls around the new reproductive techniques aims to maintain a



traditional familial structure, even whilst the biological relationships within it may be radically novel. Both contributions suggest that, concerning the family in the age of biotechnology, the *plus ça change* maxim applies.

Brenda Almond provides a spirited defence of the priority of natural bonds, especially those between biological parent and offspring, over social or constructed relations. By contrast, Martin Thomasson offers a lively defence of Marge Piercy's fictional utopia, wherein children are produced ectogenetically and parented by three 'comothers'. Both pieces give a good sense of what there is to be said for and against the value of kinship in the context of the family.

Thomasson speaks of a broader 'networked' family, but does not develop further the idea of communal responsibility for rearing children. Surprisingly, no one else really goes beyond the question of variations in family form, to broach the issue of whether any form of the family is really necessary or desirable. This is a pity. In an admirably nuanced piece, Sandra Marshall considers how far the new technology puts consideration of agency and responsibility, with respect to the having of children and the formation of families, within a model of choice rather than contingency or luck. We have, it might seem, moved from 'falling pregnant' to 'making a baby'. What enters the picture through her discussion is the role of collective policy-making. For if reproduction is open to control, 'private' individual choice can be circumscribed and regulated by public rules. That opens up the whole matter of who should be permitted to have and to rear children. Apart from the occasional swipe at the Right's unwarranted pillorying of certain unacceptable parents, such as single mothers and lesbians, nothing is said about whether society should let anyone who can have children (and remember how extensive that list now is) do so (and remember that nothing in the matter of having children need now be left to chance or luck).

This comparative silence is compounded by the fact that marriage and monogamy get a sustained battering in

the three final pieces of the volume. The criticism is well made, but it is also at a tangent to the main concerns of the book. It is the ideal of the couple as such which these chapters subvert, rather than the need for child care to be managed by at least two parents in a permanent loving relationship exclusive of others. It would have been good to see someone explore the question of child development, and the role that should be played by significant adult others. Neil Leighton's remarks on a child's need to acquire a sense of self as a lived narrative, in which biological origin is crucial, are suggestive but in real need of extended exposition.

Notwithstanding its omissions, the book is to be commended for the wealth of good arguments it boasts. Editors and publishers might also note that the book, although short, comprises ten contributions. Good, informative and argumentative philosophy can be short and snappy.

David Archard

Goods and bads

Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994. viii + 225 pp., £39.50 hb., £12.95 pb., 0 7456 12776 hb., 07456 12784 pb.

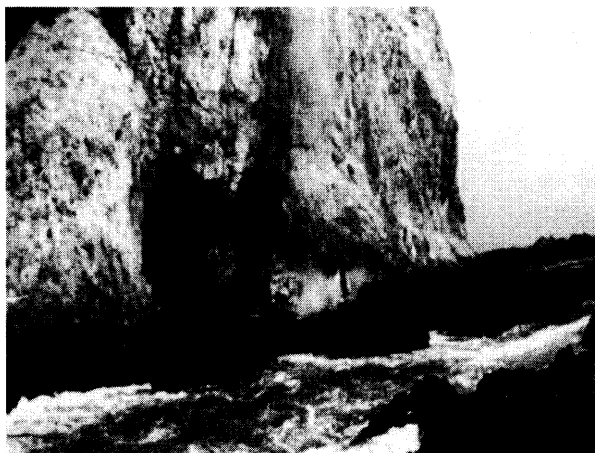
One of the best ways to understand this book is to see it as the product of a dialogue between the thinking of two influential sociologists – one British, Anthony Giddens; the other German, Ulrich Beck. Despite thirty years or more of extensive programmes of translation in social theory, such genuinely collaborative work across national boundaries is still far too rare. In addition, these authors have had a much wider social and political impact than most sociologists could ever expect. As Michael Rustin noted recently (see *RP* 67), Beck's *Risk Society* sold 60,000 copies in five years in Germany, becoming a cornerstone of Green political discussions and propelling Beck into a career in journalism. Giddens may not be so famous in Britain, but, as Scott Lash points out, whereas he used to be read mainly by sociologists for highly theoretical discussions of 'structuration', since the publication of such books as *Modernity and Self-Identity* and *The Transformation of Intimacy*, a whole new audience reads him in search of enlightenment about trust and risk, relationships, sex and therapy.

The second way to understand this book is as a sociological response to the broad phenomena of post-modernism (or, as Giddens prefers, 'late modernity'). In

sociological theory this tends to take the form of the return of repressed agency after decades of domination by structural determination in both functionalist and Marxist forms. *Reflexive Modernization* consists of three essays on specific areas, one by each author, which develop previous work: Beck on the politics of risk society; Giddens on tradition and de-traditionalization; and Lash on aesthetics and culture. These are followed by shorter responses by the three authors to each other's work.

The centre of the argument in each case concerns the nature and significance of global social and economic changes, and their effect on questions of agency (especially individual agency). Via concepts like 'individualization' and 'disembedding', Beck and Giddens suggest that changes in the form of social and economic life are forcing a 'freeing' of agency from structure and promoting the reflexivity of agents, both individual and institutional, in relation to the structures of their environment. At the core of this process are changes in economic organization, usually called post-Fordism, but with general characteristics such as knowledge intensiveness, self-monitoring of work organization, flexible specialization for individualized consumers, niche markets, and so on. All of these are said to correspond to wider individualizing processes in civic culture, in the form of increasing emphasis on the value of autonomy and a decline in the collective organizations of the industrial-capitalist period. A critical edge is given to the work by the ecologically informed sense of the increasing dangers or 'risks' to an environment, both cultural and natural, that cannot carry the weight of modern practices.

In general *Reflexive Modernization* is stimulating and imaginative; it may well help a wider, non-academic readership to make some sense of the confusion around them. But I have some rather old-fashioned doubts about the evidential basis of some of its claims. This is especially true of Beck's contribution. Take, for example, the following bald statement: 'With the advent



of risk society, the distributional conflicts over "goods" (income, jobs, social security), which constituted the basic conflicts of classical industrial society and led to attempted solutions in the relevant institutions, are covered over by the distributional conflicts over "bads" (p. 6). Could anyone seriously recognize this as an accurate description of, say, British or French society? Surely what is happening is that we have conflicts over the 'goods' and the 'bads'. If this description *might* more plausibly fit Germany, then that fact should be brought out in a putatively international discussion.

All the authors raise important issues. Giddens provides a much-needed sociological discussion of the nature of tradition, which should provoke debate. Lash's contribution is in some ways the most helpful, given his direct engagement with his co-authors and his relation of theory to a variety of evidence.

Peter McMylor

Surviving Nietzsche

Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994. xix + 243 pp., £35.00 hb., £10.95 pb., 0 521 41722 8 hb., 0 521 42721 5 pb.

The question of Nietzsche's politics causes even his defenders to become apologists for an aristocratic libertarianism often labelled as fascism. It doesn't help a posthumous reputation that there were many authorized Nazi editions of Nietzsche – ambiguous aphorisms torn from the context of his thought, which is so explicitly anti-systemic that his style lends itself to precisely this type of ideological decontextualization.

Ansell-Pearson's Nietzsche is fundamentally a political writer distanced from the European liberal tradition, his sane adult life coinciding with the reign of the political pragmatist Bismarck. Although the young Nietzsche briefly sympathized with this brand of power-politics, he came to reject Bismarck's policies as racist, statist and nationalist, all major objections to the type of unified Europe of which Nietzsche approved. Critical of both liberalism and socialism, the mature Nietzsche championed an aristocratic, hierarchical view of the political structure of the state, and this fragmentary manifesto is illuminated by Ansell-Pearson's range of reference. As well as readings of the major Nietzschean texts, which take care not to assume either a philosophical or a political bias in the reader, he also uses two

unpublished essays, 'The Greek State' and 'Homer's Contest', which shed light both on Nietzsche's conception of the Greeks as practical legislators and on his own debut, *The Birth of Tragedy*.

The doubts and contradictions remain, of course. But where Nietzsche is concerned, this is the nature of the beast, blond or otherwise. Indeed, the only aspect of Nietzsche's work which is possibly more contentious than his politics is his sexual politics, and Nietzsche's apparently indefensible attitude towards women is examined here in the light of Irigaray, Cixous, Derrida and others. Contemporary feminism has found an unlikely ally in Nietzsche, and Ansell-Pearson makes clear the role played by the German in the rethinking of the politics of identity.

As well as its political concerns, this is also an excellent general introduction to Nietzsche's thought, eschewing attempted refutation and ensuring that an English readership is not further misled by the politics of translation. Analysis of the infamous Nietzschean notion of the *Übermensch*, for example, shows the standard English 'superman' to be a lazy translation with compounds the view of Nietzsche as proto-fascist. The various meanings of *Über* are isolated and their effects made much clearer than the popular cartoon of some genetic stormtrooper which dominated the received opinion about Nietzsche's political programme for so long.

Finally, Nietzschean politics is seen as a reply to the question which Nietzsche himself was the first to pose, that of nihilism, or the realization that history has no underlying teleology. Ansell-Pearson considers the answers Nietzsche himself provided in terms of cultural and historical genealogies, and identifies two distinct political solutions which exist in fragmentary form throughout Nietzsche's work. The 'politics of survival' covers the ironic and parodic treatment to which Nietzsche submits Western culture, in order to see how it survives the advent of nihilism. The 'politics of cruelty' gathers together the evidence for Nietzsche's aristocratic and ideal state. Ansell-Pearson is both sympathetic to, and appropriately critical of, Nietzsche's belief that an instituted social hierarchy, which includes slavery as a prerequisite, is necessary for a strong culture based on non-nationalist, non-racial principles. Comparing this Machiavellian view with the instituted wage-slavery of the modern West, one might agree with Ansell-Pearson that Nietzsche can be read as 'the most democratic of philosophers, since he allows his readers the freedom of interpretation'.

Mark Gullick

It's me

Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1994. 322 pp., £35.00 hb., 0 7190 3642 9.

Autobiography invites, and poses, questions about writing, subjectivity and identity. Theory calls in question the coherence of the authorial 'I', and the revaluation of cultural history challenges the prestige of a genre whose canonical texts – like all canonical texts – have mostly been produced by the wrong kinds of subject: men from the educated classes. Yet autobiographies, and autobiographical projects that involve the practices of collective writing and oral history (such as Laura Marcus discusses in her final chapter), have been important for members of subordinate groups seeking to affirm subjectivity, agency and identity. This tension, between a deconstructive theoretical impulse which makes short work of 'identity', and a practice of writing, based precisely in the search for 'identity', which makes possible the telling and publication of new kinds of stories, emerges clearly in Marcus's book. She also offers useful formulations of other key issues, pointing, for instance, to how recent theorization of autobiography fuses critiques of the subject derived from several sources (Nietzsche, psychoanalysis, poststructuralist theory, sociology of culture), or insisting that to attribute 'representativity' to the life stories of those who 'speak as' members of marginal groups involves the dubious assumption that within those groups, individual difference – the difference between the writer and those whom s/he is thought to, or claims to, represent – does not much matter.

Auto/biographical Discourses combines a historical survey of the genre since Rousseau with a discussion of matters of theoretical and critical principle. This proceeds by way of a wide-ranging, though somewhat disorganized, dialogue with the ideas of scholars and critics – mainly British, French, German and North American – who have written about autobiography from diverse positions and in diverse academic settings: Dilthey, who saw autobiography as paradigmatic for the development of the self-understanding that should found the human sciences; de Man, whose deconstructive assault on the autobiographical project can be read, it is suggested, as a mute disavowal of now notorious passages in his own life story; Derrida, and scores of others. This minute engagement with academic

commentary avoids any pre-emptive closing of the questions which make the status of autobiography so problematic, but leaves the reader wishing that Marcus had used a somewhat firmer hand in organizing her material. It also means that secondary critiques bulk very much larger in the book than do primary texts. There is a fairly extended discussion of *Orlando* (in a chapter on Woolf, Strachey and the 'new biography'), and briefer accounts of André Gorz's *The Traitor* and Ronald Fraser's *In Search of a Past*. But more typical are the five pages Marcus devotes to readings of Wordsworth by de Man and Jacobus, while saying virtually nothing about *The Prelude*.

Generally, the discussion of critico-historical meta-discourses lacks much grounding in extended treatment of autobiographical works. The 'theory' and 'criticism' of the subtitle dominate, and 'criticism' turns out, as it often does nowadays, to mean mainly the critique of critique: there is very little account of 'practice'. This is all the more frustrating in that the primary texts – one thinks, for instance, of Brontë's *Villette* (not mentioned), or de Beauvoir's fictions and autobiographies (which receive just four passing references) – have sometimes been remarkable pioneering documents in the exploration of the very questions with which criticism and theory are nowadays engaged.

Martin Ryle

Laughing cavalier

Honi Fern Haber, *Beyond Postmodern Politics: Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault*, Routledge, New York and London, 1994. vii + 160 pp., £37.50 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 415 90822 1 hb., 0 415 90823 X pb.

What's in a preposition? The suspicion that the single-minded pursuit of epistemic and value pluralism, or what Honi Fern Haber calls the 'universalisation of difference', might be of limited political use has created the conditions for a rethinking of the political possibilities afforded by postmodern philosophies. Hence the promise held by the forward-looking 'beyond' in the title of her book indicates at least in equal measure a dissatisfaction with postmodernist political discourse. Yet those who expect a careful analysis of the political aporias of poststructuralism will be disappointed. This is not because Haber's criticisms, which form the basis for her positive claims, are misdirected, but because her

analysis is, at best, schematic. Her unwillingness to engage seriously with Lyotard, Rorty or Foucault eventually undermines her arguments about 'subjects-in-community' and 'oppositional politics' – notions which, despite being defended with passion and conviction, remain vague and insubstantial.

For someone who is so concerned with difference – to the extent that Haber naturalizes it, frequently referring to 'the fact of difference', which, we are assured, is 'not something philosophers or political theorists or anyone need worry about; it is simply the way things (all of which are subject to the law of difference) are' – she has a uniquely undifferentiated view of the history of philosophy (which gets the 'reign of reason' treatment), and of the intellectual development of the authors she deals with. For instance, she presents Lyotard's 'pagan politics' as a seamless extension of what she calls the 'semiotic and structuralist background', to which she devotes three paragraphs headed by slogans such as 'the decentered self' and 'the ubiquity of language'. She shows no awareness of the possibility that Lyotard, in his discussion of desire, and indeed Foucault, through the concept of power, might have been reacting to the poststructuralist prioritization of language; that this reaction might be politically motivated; or that it might already be an attempt to move beyond critique of the notion of a self-transparent subjectivity towards a conceptualization of political struggle in terms of oppositional forces. By consistently underestimating the complexity and the difficulty of her topic, Haber is often led to facile assessments, quickly dismissing Lyotard's Kantian turn, for example, for being a relic of a deplorable traditionalism.

Haber subjects her own ideas to the same casual treatment, a habit that bodes ill for her proposal of a 'politics of difference'. We are urged to accept and value the plural identities of ourselves and of others on the grounds that the sheer fact of belonging to different communities has direct normative implications, prompts feelings of solidarity, 'empowers' oppressed minorities, and creates an 'ideal political state'. To say that Haber deals in a cavalier fashion with the issues of legitimacy and representation, the problem of reflexivity, or the hermeneutic problem of picking and choosing selves, would be an understatement. As a result, her vision of politics sounds like a game of happy families in which everybody has only to open their jaws to let the roast partridges of a jolly liberalism fly into their mouths. Beyond? Not quite.

Katerina Deligiorgi