

## Bodies in transition

Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994. xvi + 250 pp., £32.50 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 253 32686 9 hb., 0 253 20862 9 pb.

Rosalyn Diprose, *The Bodies of Women: Ethics, Embodiment and Sexual Difference*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994. xi + 148 pp., £35.00 hb., £11.99 pb., 0 415 09782 7 hb., 0 415 09783 5 pb.

Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994. xi + 325 pp., £34.00 hb., £12.00 pb., 0 231 08234 7 hb., 0 231 08235 5 pb.

The body is a central but difficult concept for feminist theory. As the derogated term in the tradition of post-Cartesian thought, it is key to understanding women's oppression and constitutes the ground for alternative conceptions of ethics and politics. However, in thinking through the concept of the body, feminist thought has tended to polarize around social constructionist and psychoanalytic perspectives. Each has its own limitations. Whilst providing an 'anti-essentialist' account of the body, social constructionist approaches propose such an arbitrary link between the body and sexual identity (sex-gender) that it is difficult to explain why it is the female body which is inscribed with an inferior feminine identity. A constructionist perspective also endows the body with a problematic originary status, in that it is held to exist prior to processes of social inscription and as such may provide the basis for liberatory practices. Whilst psychoanalysis provides an account of how the sexually differentiated body is the condition of possibility of identity, it is problematic in so far as it normalizes the feminine position as negativity or lack.

This polarization has been further entrenched by the polemical debate within feminism over 'essentialism'. Some recent feminist thought, however, has attempted to overcome such dichotomies by combining psychoanalytic and constructionist insights in an idea of the body as a deeply inscribed but open-ended or transitional construct. Perhaps the most notable example of this approach is Judith Butler's work on the body as a performative entity.

It is on this terrain that these three excellent critical studies are situated. What is immediately striking about them is their similarities in aim, argument and intellectual reference points. Each begins with the presumption that it is necessary to jettison the subject-object paradigm in order to reformulate the

concept of subjectivity through a univocal concept of embodiment. Embodiment is understood as the threshold through which the subject's lived experience of the world is mediated. As the point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological, the body is a dynamic, mutable frontier. It is neither pure object, since it is the place of one's engagement with the world; nor pure subject, in that there is always a material residue which resists incorporation into a voluntarist schema. The dominant sources for such a formulation of the body are Lacan, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault and Deleuze.

In *The Bodies of Women*, Diprose deploys the notion of embodiment as a critique of traditional moral theory, whose reliance upon a disembodied notion of the self and a contractarian model of social relations renders it incapable of an adequate account of sexual difference. This is illustrated by the treatment of surrogacy in bio-medical ethics, which denies the specificity of the pregnant body in order to resolve competing claims over the foetus. Whilst this critique is familiar, Diprose remains critical of alternative feminist theories of ethics. Pateman's rejection of contractarianism is problematic because it restricts women's actions by not offering an alternative way to think the nature of social exchange. Gilligan's reliance on object-relations theory to sustain her ethics of care serves further to naturalize stereotypical perceptions of sexual difference. Finally, Benhabib's idea of an 'interactive universalism' eradicates alterity in the normalizing framework of communicative relations, which assumes the transparency of self and other to each other.

Diprose argues that a radical ethical practice must primarily be understood as a relation with the body in the manner suggested by Foucault in his final work. Here, the body is not the fixed foundation for ethical

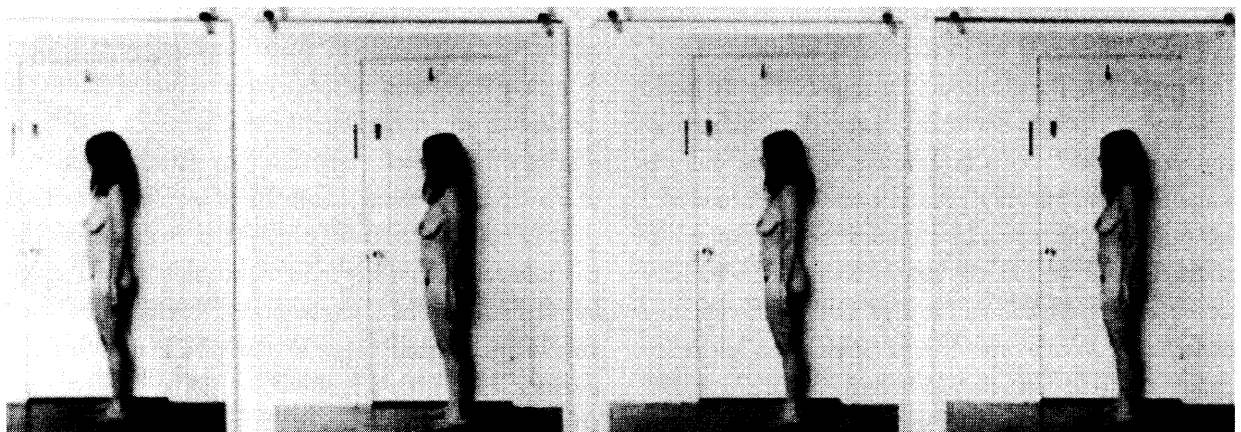
practice, but rather the volatile surface upon which the exploration and creation of new types of identity takes place. Foucault's idea is limited, however, by his emphasis on the relation with the body as aesthetic activity, the value of which is determined not through interaction with others but through a solipsistic privileging of action *per se*. Such a monadic model cannot incorporate an ethical perspective based on a relational conception of identity and sexual difference. Drawing on Irigaray, Diprose argues that this relational conception must be one of radical plurality, of the continuum of identities that exist between polarities and that resist containment within the structures of opposition or complementarity. An outline of it is immanent to Hegel's thought. However, it ultimately offers only a restricted economy of difference, because the dialectical drive towards the reconciliation of identity and difference forecloses the uncontainable moment of alterity.

The notion of the gift suggests a relational model of social relations, whereby the gift is constitutive of the identity of the giver and the receiver as they are given in the relation. Identity and difference do not pre-exist the relation; nor does self-present identity flow from it. Such a model can be generalized as the basis of a radical ethics of sexual difference in which an ethical relation to the other rests on not determining anything about the other's difference ahead of, or during, one's encounter with them. Thus, in contrast to a communicative ethics, the other's difference remains beyond accommodation, bearing the 'gift' of new possibilities of being. Derrida has recognized the ethical potential of the relation of irreducible difference implied in the gift. However, Diprose shares the concerns of other feminists that the celebration of the feminine as indecipherability neglects the question of women as concrete historical beings. This difficulty can be bypassed if the play of difference is understood not as a transcendental process but as executed upon the surface of women's bodies. Hence difference

as irreducible otherness refers to the material remainder within the dominant economy of representation: that is, the extent to which the bodies of women are never fully absorbed by the hegemonic definitions of femininity. This moment of excess is the point from which an alternative ethics can be formulated.

The elements of Diprose's argument are familiar, but the sensitivity of her textual readings, and the elegance of her writing, are impressive. Some questions perhaps need fuller consideration – for example, the extent to which the idea of the gift has been used, in a Bataillean tradition, to uphold an implicitly masculine idea of sovereign expenditure. Moreover, the argument about the normalizing impulse of communicative ethics needs to be developed. However, this is an important contribution to feminist ethics.

Grosz also develops a critique of the Cartesian subject through a notion of embodiment as an unstable and open-ended process. In place of the idea of the gift, Grosz uses the image of the Mobius strip to replace dualistic understandings of the relation between psychical interior and corporeal exterior (mind–body, inside–outside) with a notion of mutual inheritance of torsion of one into another. The image of the Mobius strip dictates the structure of the book, which argues for the co-dependence of constructionist and psychoanalytic insights in an understanding of the subject. Through a critical rereading of psychoanalytic, neurological and phenomenological accounts, Grosz traces the way in which the formation of the psyche is constitutive of corporeal reality. Despite the problematic association of femininity with negativity, Grosz claims that psychoanalysis yields a non-oppositional conception of mind and body in the idea of 'body image', which suggests a necessary inter-constituency and relation of mutual determination between the biological and psycho-social domains. This notion of mutual inheritance provides a concept of the body as a transitional entity in so far as it is amenable to immense transformations.



Through a rereading of Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze and Lingis, on the other hand, Grosz considers how the social inscription of the surface of the body generates psychological interiority. Contrary to feminist criticism of his work, Grosz argues that the Deleuzian idea of the 'body without organs' is suggestive, in that it proposes a denaturalized, univocal concept of being. The body without organs is a field of immanence of desire which resists transcendence and defies hierarchization. As a volatile entity, it is the site of a multiplicity of micro-struggles between competing power regimes. Such a notion suggests that the ascription of feminine corporeal identity is never straightforward or complete.

This is a lucidly written study, which sets out debates clearly for those not familiar with the field, while being impressive in its erudition. It is perhaps least successful in the brief final section, which seeks to show how the ontological incompleteness of the body leads to a counter-violence of resistance. More needs to be said on how the localized instances of the body's uncontrollable status can be generalized into meaningful patterns of resistance. However, this is a minor quibble with a book of great scholarship and insight.

For Braidotti, it is the figure of the nomad that is used to challenge phallogocentric definitions of subjectivity. The image of the nomad encapsulates the condition of the postmodern subject: nomadic identity is changeable and unstable, but also acquires form from its particular situation. This gives rise to a mode of thinking that is autobiographical, that addresses its own situatedness, but that resists the desire for fixity or generalization. This further dictates the authorial

style, which moves from the personal and anecdotal to the academic and speculative. It is speculative in that some of the arguments could be better sustained. For example, the concept of postmodernity is assumed to be self-evident and non-contentious. The use of neologisms such as 'McDonaldized world' are unfortunate, and evoke an unmodulated mass cultural pessimism. Moreover, despite her commitment to difference feminism, Braidotti slips into a rather undifferentiated view of sexual relations in general statements such as: 'It is precisely in their being all equally excluded from sociopolitical rights that all women are alike' (p. 253); and 'However different women may be from each other in other respects, all women are excluded from higher education' (p. 235).

However, *Nomadic Subjects* is also speculative in a positive sense, in that it is brimful with interesting and provocative insights. Braidotti's interpretation of her sources skilfully treads the line between criticism and creative reappropriation. For example, she inverts Deleuze's idea of the 'body without organs' to produce an interesting analysis of how the dismemberment of the body within reproductive technologies reinforces patriarchal power. Reprinted here is her celebrated essay on the politics of ontological difference, which attempts to reformulate the notion of essentialism as a historical rather than a transcendental category. There are also essays on the implications of European Unity for feminism, ethics, and men in feminism. This is a playful, splendidly wide-ranging and insightful work. All three studies are set to push feminist debate on to new terrains.

**Lois McNay**

## Against Hobbes and Pangloss

Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations*, Verso, London and New York, 1994. 256 pp., £39.95 hb., £12.95 pb., 0 86091 442 9 hb., 0 86091 607 3 pb.

Perhaps only those who have laboured in the often exiguous vineyards of international relations theory can appreciate the richness and importance of Justin Rosenberg's book. For many, even those otherwise conversant with social theory, the news that there is something which may be a theory of international relations might come as a surprise. International relations may well be the last area of human activity which we are condemned to live as pure, unreflected experience – a world where, under the guise of common sense, fear, prejudice and unchallenged historical myths predominate, and where those who seek

improvement resort to invocations of perfectibility. For others, not least some of those now entering the field from the disciplines of history and sociology, there is no need to go further than the first wayside café – the tourist trap of 'realism', with its stress on an unchanging and irremediable realm of inter-state conflict.

It is not that there have not been challengers. The cautious refer to incremental improvement, epitomized by the building of international law and institutions; and in this fiftieth year of the UN, with 'Europe' growing apace, there is something to be said for that. Others, apparently driven to despair by the intractabil-

ity of the issues, have resorted to dramatic alternatives: the state is all but gone; war should be abolished; 'non-state' activities from town-twinning and stamp collecting to freedom of movement should be embraced; humanity should engage in an all-transcending, cosmopolitan hug. Nor have historical materialists been absent. There is a far richer vein of Marxist writing on the international than many, including most Marxists, would realize: early twentieth-century debates on the relation between capitalism, empire and war; later theories of the unequal and combined character of the world economy; theorizations of the role of domestic interest in determining foreign policy, come to mind. More recently some (of us) have tried to explain Cold War, and the end of the Cold War, in this way. It will come as no surprise that in recent times another form of challenge, in the form of postmodernism, has also arisen: all our old friends are there – the rejection of a single narrative, multiple identities, diplomacy as text, and the international as playfulness.

Rosenberg is cognizant of these debates, but has produced a work that is decisively, confidently and successfully distinct from them. His aim is nothing less than a reconceptualization of the international system by doing something that has not been done before: namely, to bring the international into the orbit of social theory as a whole. This is done in two, convergent, ways: a reconceptualization of the 'international' in the light of general social theory; and an analysis of the ways in which the apparently separate realm of international relations is a function of changing forms of social power within societies. In particular, he approaches his topic in the light of three general concepts that serve to highlight the limitations of orthodox theories of inter-state relations, and to relegate their sundry competitors to the sidelines. These are historicity, modernity, and the relationship of the political to the economic realms.

The stress on historicity denies that any social or political forms can be treated as constants, across different social and economic epochs. Asserting the importance of the concept of 'totality', Rosenberg shows how in international relations, as elsewhere in social life, institutions have a particular origin and content. From this starting point it is possible to introduce modernity: this serves to demonstrate that, in contrast to the transhistorical claims of most writers on the international, who treat states, nations, war, diplomacy as constants, from Thucydides to Kissinger, the forms of these in modern history are products of the process that has transformed the whole world over the past two centuries. Rosenberg's central theme

is that our contemporary conception of the 'international', of a world of competing states, is a product of that particular separation of state and market which emerged with the rise of modern capitalism.

Far from being eternal, or a separate realm, the international is an expression of the differentiation of state and economic relations characteristic of capitalist modernity. Not the least service which Rosenberg performs is the revival of interest in Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (originally published in 1944): this identifies the connection between the inter-state wars of the twentieth century and the social and political changes – the 'great transformation' – of the nineteenth. We need not accept Polanyi's or Rosenberg's specific answers to be convinced by their question.

Faced with these insights, critical in the best sense of both challenging an orthodoxy and suggesting an alternative agenda, Rosenberg proceeds to reconstruct an alternative history of the international system, in which the apparently eternal forms of inter-state activity are set in their historicized context. Once again, the critical power of denaturalization, of showing how forms of power distribution and hierarchy experienced as eternal are in fact contingent products, is demonstrated. Thus, at different phases of its evolution, the international system is revealed to correspond to different phases of the development of capitalism itself, both in its internal socio-economic form, and in the manner of its extension across the world.

Rosenberg is not the first to argue for an understanding of the international system based on the existence of a world market: Wallerstein, for one, has made much of this. But whereas Wallerstein offers a single, expanding world market, in which the political entity, the state, nationalism, alliances, the balance of power are expressions of that market, Rosenberg's analysis identifies the necessary, ideological, roles of these political forms, and their changing interaction with this expanding market. Equally, with his focus on modernity, he draws a much sharper distinction than does Wallerstein between the earlier, mercantilist, period of capitalist expansion, when the political and the economic were intertwined, and the later, 'modern', form in which the two are separated.

Here he deploys the most creative insight of Marx's work: the need to investigate the realities concealed by the appearances of social relations. Perhaps the most powerful section of all is Chapter 5, where Rosenberg's critical agenda yields its most substantive results in his analysis of the 'empire of civil society' – that is, the non-territorial empire of glo-

balized economic relations distinct from the political and territorial empires of earlier epochs. He shows how the central concepts of an ahistorical international relations – sovereignty, the balance of power, and the anarchy of the international system, supposedly eternal givens of a world of unequal states – are a reflection of the underlying structures of this particular system of capitalist market relations.

This is a work of great insight and precision, a model of social theory in general, and a rebuke to the accumulated musings of many others on the international system. At a time when a range of critical voices are being heard in this field, and when there is much loose talk of a new era of 'globalization', the level and rigour of Rosenberg's analysis are more welcome than ever. It is a tribute to the book's challenge that, in so successfully executing its critique, it raises questions that remain unanswered. There is, on the one hand, the inevitable temptation, when studying long-term shifts in social form, to downplay the confusion, chaos and contingency involved in the reorganization of social and political power. It may be that capitalism is moving towards a formal separation of the economic and the political, but the history of the last two hundred years shows much bloody combination of the two, in world wars and elsewhere, and it is by no means clear that such a

complete separation will now be achieved. It is not just institutionalist social theorists, but many a dominant class, which now seek to bring the state back in.

By establishing the link between the international and the distribution of social power within societies, this analysis raises the question of agency – of how human actors have, historically, acted, or might, normatively, act to change the pattern of international relations. Hitherto, as Rosenberg underlines, the argument has been an unhappy one, proponents of a deterministic realm of conflict being countered by the advocates of goodwill and human improvement. In the unreflective world of states, Hobbes and Pangloss ride side by side.

Marxists themselves have had their own illusions, oscillating from a Stalinist perspective of inevitability to proclamations about the ability of the working class and its allies to transform the international system. The search for the emancipatory subject – one necessarily posed by the theoretical framework of Rosenberg's analysis – continues. The lesson of this study, however, is that it is only when we go beyond the appearances of the inter-state system and identify its underlying structures of power, that it becomes possible to discuss such a transformation, at once critically and realistically.

**Fred Halliday**

## The horrors of history

Alex Callinicos, *Theories and Narratives: Reflections on the Philosophy of History*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995. x + 252 pp., £45.00 hb., £12.95 pb., 0 7456 1200 8 hb., 0 7456 1201 6 pb.

This is an outstanding piece of committed scholarship, impressive in its intellectual scope, rational argumentation and clarity of exposition. It is not a systematic treatise, but rather a collection of closely knit essays, dealing with different aspects of the contemporary debate on historical theory. The unifying purpose is a spirited defence of historical materialism against its main opponents or rivals.

The best-known – but not necessarily the most serious – of these is the notorious Fukuyama. The obvious answer to this strange combination of pseudo-Hegelianism, Spenglerian pessimism and Reaganite triumphalism is to point to the reality of post-Cold War politics: the return of fratricidal national hatreds and the rise of fascism – a reality conjuring a vision, not of the End of History, but of history as the endless repetition of disaster. Unlike most left critics of Fukuyama, Callinicos avoids the pitfall of accepting

the so-called 'defeat of socialism' in 1989–91 as empirical fact: refusing to consider the Soviet and East European regimes as 'socialist' (his own preference is for Tony Cliff's concept of 'bureaucratic state capitalism'), he is able to challenge this pseudo-evidence.

Next to Fukuyama, the most popular conception of history in (Anglo-Saxon) academia is post-structuralism. Callinicos offers a radical deconstruction of poststructuralist 'ironic relativism', as represented by Lyotard and Hayden White, using the Holocaust as an acid test. Faithful to his 'pluralist' (i.e. relativist) philosophy of language, Lyotard claims that there is no way of demonstrating that 'revisionist' historians who deny the genocide (Faurisson and company) are not respecting 'the cognitive rules for the establishment of historical reality': it is impossible to subsume mutually irreducible discourses under a comprehensive grand narrative. The conflict between



Photo by Jaroslav Fiser

Faurisson and the anti-revisionist historians is an example of 'differend' between different 'phrase regimens', which cannot be resolved since 'there is no universal genre of discourse to regulate them'. Callinicos's comment is understandably harsh: Lyotard presumably intends us to take this argument seriously, 'but it is hard to see how we can'. How on earth can he justify conceding the historical case to the revisionists? That he can simply ignore the vast effort aimed at understanding the Holocaust (by people like Primo Levi, Raul Hillburg, Zygmunt Bauman, Arno Mayer) 'is a symptom of the kind of belletrism, with its love of superficial paradox, into which French philosophy in the dog days of poststructuralism is all too apt to degenerate'.

Against this sort of 'hopeless muddle', both Marxist and Weberian theories of history represent serious attempts to deal with the problems of understanding historical reality, by analysing its structure, mechanisms of transformation and directionality. Some of Callinicos's formulations seem to suggest an affinity with 'structural Marxism' and its overwhelming emphasis on 'the contradiction between the forces and the relations of production'. Fortunately, however, he distances himself from this kind of impoverished historical materialism by rejecting the 'Primacy

Thesis' (G.A. Cohen), according to which the relations of production are explained by the level of productive forces. By abandoning this approach, it is possible to introduce 'an element of irreducible contingency' into historical materialism: since the outcome of the crisis in the mode of production is not predetermined, there is space for the Marxist political project, with its stress on working-class self-emancipation and revolutionary subjectivity.

Both Marxist and Weberian theories discern a progressive directionality in the course of history – respectively, the development of productive forces and the growth of domination (social power). This viewpoint does not necessarily imply an ethical approval: for Weber, modernity was leading humanity to a sort of 'iron cage'. The main differences between them are situated in the realms of politics (socialist internationalism versus German imperialism) and philosophical anthropology: emancipatory humanism versus Nietzschean pessimism (or domination as an inevitable feature of human life).

Callinicos offers a substantial critique of contemporary Weberian theories of history, focusing on their attempts to present ideological or military power as irreducible forms of domination. The next section, dealing with History as Progress, is interesting though perhaps less persuasive. Callinicos's formulation of the problem is insightful, but the solution he offers is ambiguous. His starting point is that the Marxist conception of progress, unlike other views of history, is also able 'to encompass an understanding of the horror of history'. This is why, in his opinion, Benjamin's attempt at 'a critique of the concept of progress itself', by pointing to the catastrophic continuity of history, has to be taken seriously. Marxism is a theory that is able to think of history as progress *and* as catastrophe simultaneously: in Fredric Jameson's words, Marx understands that 'capitalism is at one and the same time the best thing that has ever happened to the human race and the worst'. But what of such texts of Marx as his article on the British rule in India (1853)? Callinicos's answer is careful: acknowledging that there are tensions in Marx's thought, he concedes that some of his formulations could be used for an apologetic legitimization of Western capitalist expansion as an instrument of progress (as in Bill Warren's well-known celebration of imperialism). The teleological moment in some of Marx's writings has been the main basis of the so-called 'orthodox historical materialism' of the Second International (and then of Stalinism), with its claim that the development of productive forces – whatever

its price – is positive in itself, since it will inevitably lead to socialism.

However, Callinicos insists that Marxism has a strong theory of progress, a theory which not only discerns growth in history (the development of productive forces), but also asserts that this growth makes a positive contribution to the good. Consequently, he tries to rescue Marx by pointing to the fact that he never hid the crimes of the bourgeoisie, but only insisted that progress is to be welcomed as *potentially* increasing human well-being – a potentiality that will only be fulfilled in a socialist world. But is this not dangerously close to a form of Hegelian teleology and theodicy, wherein the (inevitable) goal both explains and vindicates the course of history? If one believes that socialism is not inevitable, and that capitalist crisis can lead to barbarism; if one takes seriously (as does Callinicos) Benjamin's warning that the outcome of progress can be *catastrophe*, how is it possible to assert that capitalist progress is to be welcomed in any event? Does not the capitalist development of the productive forces contain, *potentially*, both the 'best' – socialism, the full development of human capacities – and the 'worst' – barbarism, nuclear exterminism, eco-

logical disaster? Callinicos argues that classical Marxism 'inherits from Hegel a dialectical conception of history as a spiral movement, in which each advance contains within itself an element of regress'. But is such a conception not a typical example of Hegelian teleology/theodicy, which indicates each 'regress' as a moment of the ultimate 'progress'?

The last section of *Theories and Narratives*, 'Identity and Emancipation', is a brilliant defence of emancipatory universalism against the 'politics of identity'. Contemporary intellectual fashion denounces every universalism as a masked particularism, while postmodern radicalism celebrates 'identity politics' as the only genuine alternative. The problem, as Callinicos demonstrates, is that particularism is scarcely coherent, since resistance to oppression requires some sort of universal ethics. In the absence of a universal criterion, how is one to distinguish truly oppressed groups from false ones (in fact, oppressors)? And this is to leave aside fratricidal 'ethnic' conflicts in the name of rival national 'identities'. The only way to overcome false universality is through a genuine – emancipatory and egalitarian – universality.

**Michael Löwy**

## An eye for reason

John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1994. x + 191 pp., £19.95 hb., 0 674 57609 8.

The central chapters of this book consist of a recasting of the 1991 John Locke Lectures. They are followed by an afterword in which McDowell locates his position in the context of the work of Quine, Davidson, Sellers, Putnam, Rorty and Peacocke. But this book is not only of interest to readers of mainstream analytical philosophy. Indeed, McDowell indicates a surprising and welcome indebtedness to, among others, Kant, Hegel, Marx and Gadamer.

The discussion circulates around the sceptical anxieties of traditional epistemology. However, one of the central themes is that such anxieties need 'exorcising', not answering. By outlining an alternative account of human experience, McDowell aims 'not to answer sceptical questions, but to begin to see how it might be intellectually respectable to ignore them'.

The basic line of argument defends a Rortian conviction that epistemological problems about the felt distance between mind and world are inseparable from historical shifts in our conceptions of nature and human nature. This relation to Rorty is explicit, but

somewhat hidden by the philosophical traditions which inform their respective approaches. Where Rorty expresses his views in terms of ('French') concerns with the possibility of knowledge, McDowell's account is framed by ('German') concerns with how thought can have empirical content. For McDowell the problematic is that thinking – what, in Kantian terms, he refers to as 'operations of the faculty of spontaneity' – may be nothing but a 'frictionless spinning in the void'. Like the more familiar Cartesian version, this problematic represents the mind in terms which threaten its confinement; thinking may be nothing but a play of concepts without external constraint.

It might be supposed that this threat can be removed by insisting that the deliverances of the senses ensure that thought has a bearing on a reality outside the conceptual sphere. McDowell calls this solution calming by the idea of the Given: appeal to extra-conceptual impacts from the world which would supply empirical content to one's thoughts. Deploying



relatively familiar Wittgensteinian objections, he argues that this recoil to the Given cannot fulfil its promise. However, the hopelessness of the recoil should not, according to McDowell, lead us to take refuge in a coherentist position which denies that thinking is subject to rational constraint from outside. There is, he claims, an alternative.

The alternative allows for rational constraint from outside thinking but denies that it takes us outside the realm of the conceptual, outside 'thinkables'. What is given in experience are not non-conceptual impressions, but *that things are thus and so*; that is, facts. And facts are not internal products constituted by thinking but, when actual, 'an aspect of the layout of reality'. With this alternative, McDowell claims to get off the see-saw that threatens the hopeless options of



either frictionless spinning or the idea of the Given. In a formulation which comes as close to a Derridean maxim as anything in contemporary analytical philosophy, he affirms the alternative with the thesis that 'the conceptual is unbounded; there is nothing outside it.'

McDowell's alternative may well seem an impossible one. Given that our sense organs belong to nature, how can our sense impressions be permeated with the operations of conceptual capacities? To put this in the Kantian terms that McDowell favours, how can rule-governed operations of spontaneity find a place in the natural goings-on of human sensibility?

It is in the resolution of this Kantian duality of norm and nature that McDowell's argument is at its most fascinating and, ultimately, its most puzzling. According to McDowell, what prevents us from seeing the possibility that takes us off the see-saw is the modern scientific conception of nature as a realm which is fully explicable in terms of law-governed processes. The problem is that 'if we identify nature with what natural science aims to make comprehensible we threaten, at least, to empty it of meaning.' So this conception of nature makes 'the very idea that spontaneity might characterize the workings of our sensibility' look completely mysterious. McDowell's proposal is to refuse to equate the modern scientific understanding of the realm of law with clarity about

nature as a whole. There are patterns in nature which cannot be fully captured in terms of such laws – namely, the patterns of life of beings whose nature is largely 'second nature'; the patterns of life of mature human beings.

The notion of a second nature is crucial to McDowell's aim to provide a 'smoothly naturalistic' account of the autonomy of meaning from natural law. It allows him to acknowledge that the normative connections which constitute the realm of meaning are *sui generis* in comparison with the realm of law, while insisting that a certain kind of natural entity – namely, human beings – can, in their natural mode of actualizing that sentient nature, be 'shaped' by exercises of spontaneity: 'We do not need to integrate spontaneity-related concepts into the structure of the realm of law; we need to stress their role in capturing patterns in a way of living.' Human beings are born mere animals, but through initiation into a way of living they are transformed into thinkers, creatures who have had their 'eyes opened to reasons at large'.

I will come back to this ocular image shortly, but the present point is that because our second-natural being is permeated with rationality, we do not have to suppose that, as natural animals, our sensibility must deliver non-conceptual content. Instead, we can allow that our distinctive mode of sensitivity to a reality outside thought provides a genuinely rational constraint on empirical thinking. In contrast to traditional accounts, for McDowell justification comes to an end not with pointing at bare presences, or with brute impacts from causal interactions with reality, but 'passive occurrences' in which conceptual capacities are already in play; experiences that things are thus and so.

This vision of human experience is wonderfully rich. But it is not unproblematic. According to McDowell we have to acknowledge that the realm of meaning has a sort of autonomy. In so far as this insists that rule-governed practices cannot be entirely captured by scientific laws, the case against reductionism is well made. However, McDowell goes on to construe this autonomy in a far stronger and deeply puzzling sense: 'The dictates of reason' are, he claims, not human interventions (what Derrida would call 'legal fictions'), but 'are there anyway, whether or not one's eyes are opened to them'. It is not clear that the claim to develop a truly satisfying naturalism can be sustained in the face of this unexplained Platonism. Nevertheless, this remains a powerfully impressive book which simply towers over the more routine contributions of current analytical philosophy.

**Simon Glendinning**



# French modern

Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1995. x + 261 pp., £19.95 hb., 0 262 18161 4.

Beautifully produced and sumptuously illustrated, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* is an innovative study of the modernization of French culture and society in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the years 'after electricity and before electronics'. These were years not so much of transition, as of near-total transformation. Car ownership rose dramatically and urban space was transformed radically, as France, and especially Paris, adapted to the car. The accelerated modernization or even Americanization of the country coincided with the collapse of empire and with France's final withdrawal from Algeria after a very bloody war. France could scarcely have modernized without the labour of the immigrants who built the infrastructure. Yet decolonization and immigration are issues that France has difficulty in confronting. Many of the ethnic-racial problems facing the country can be seen as stemming from a refusal or inability to come to terms with the Algerian War.

Whilst the general economic framework of Ross's study owes much to the Regulation School's description of Fordism, typified by the rise of standardized housing units as a site for individual consumption and of the car as supreme commodity, the main focus is that of a specialist in cultural studies. Ross concentrates in illuminating detail on the rise of new magazines such as *L'Express* and on women's magazines, and culls her imagery from a range of films (Tati, Godard) and novels (Beauvoir, Rochefort, Perec). She analyses the media's construction and celebration of the couple as consumer unit. Her study is at times both insightful and highly entertaining, as when she examines, for instance, how *L'Express*'s Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber and Françoise Giroud were groomed (or self-groomed) into being a fashionable alternative to the Sartre-Beauvoir duo.

Although this is an immensely seductive and enjoyable book, a number of serious doubts must arise. Decolonization did coincide with a new interest in everyday life on the part of sociologists and Situationists alike. The metaphor of the colonization of everyday life was common, but to take it so seriously as to argue that administrative techniques developed in the colonies were reimported and applied to domestic life is to overlook the human cost

of colonization and decolonization. According to official *French* figures, the war in Algeria cost the lives of 140,000 Algerians. The modernization and electrification of French kitchens did not.

Too often, apparently significant arguments are founded on the elision of telling but contradictory details. It is, for instance, perfectly true that the publication in 1954 of *Bonjour Tristesse*, the first novel by Françoise Sagan – now the oldest *enfant terrible* in France – played a major role in the celebration of the speeding car, and that her career coincided with the marketing of cheap paperback books. But there is in fact no causal connection between Sagan's sudden fame and paperbacks. *Bonjour Tristesse* appeared in a normal edition, and the first 'Livre de poche' title was Pierre Benoit's *Koenigsmark*: it is hard indeed to see the marketing of an exotic romance (first published in 1917), by a member of the Académie Française, as evidence of modernization.

The author is American, and her knowledge of Europe appears to be confined to France. The only point of comparison is American culture and capitalism. How, one wonders, does postwar French modernization compare with the modernization of Germany and Italy under fascism? After all, the Volkswagen was the prototype for the 2CV. How does the cult of the white telephone in Italian cinema compare with the Gallic celebration of the car? It is true that the French media of the 1950s made much of mythologies and 'ideologemes' of cleanliness (usually related to the new availability of domestic appliances). Yet a glance at the first chapter of Raphael Samuel's *Theatres of Memory* – a delightful if somewhat disorganized jumble sale of a book – indicates that the British press abounded in similar imagery in the years following the Festival of Britain. Is the French emphasis on cleanliness really so specific? The theme of cleanliness is also the site for a disturbing account of the domestication of torture in Algeria. French troops attempted to use clean methods of torture (mainly water and electricity) but, as with the deaths, the human cost tends to be ignored as Ross attempts to map this onto a more general and modernizing concern with bodily and domestic cleanliness. Curiously, the common complaint that torture was a cancer eating away at France is not discussed.

Despite the novelty of the approach and much of the material, the underlying thesis is sadly familiar. That structuralism, the *nouveau roman* and *Annales* historiography are all an integral part of capitalist modernization – ‘an ideology that seeks above all to undermine eventfulness by masking the social contradictions that engender events’ – is an old argument, originally put forward with varying degrees of sophistication by both Sartre and the French Communist Party. Ross extends this criticism – which is basically a crude reflection theory – by observing that structural anthropology was more interested in dead or stable societies than in the revolutionary dynamic. That in itself is a valid point, but it is surely disingenuous to note that no ‘soon-to-be-prominent structuralist’ signed the *Manifeste des 121* (which defended the right of conscripts to desert), without mentioning that no prominent Communist or Socialist signed it either. The claim that Foucault’s proclamation of the ‘death of man’ coincided with Fanon’s call for the ‘creation of a new man’ becomes less startling if it is recalled that Fanon was writing in 1961, and Foucault in 1966. Foucault may not have been especially concerned with Algeria, but it seems only reasonable to point out that Boumedienne’s coup d’état of 1965 had already crushed Fanon’s voluntaristic optimism. Ross appears to have a particular animus against the *Annales* school for its supposed abandoning of ‘the event as a conceptual category’, observing that what is at stake is the idea of revolution itself. But is she really suggesting that we have to go back to Georges Lefebvre and Albert Soboul, whose grand narrative saw 1789 as a prefiguration of 1917, and therefore as legitimizing the role of a Communist Party with scant sympathy for those who created the ‘events’ in Algeria?

**David Macey**

## The political connection

José Brunner, *Freud and the Politics of Psychoanalysis*, Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge MA, 1995. xiv + 238 pp., £40.00 hb., 0 631 16404 9.

With the exception of those clinical psychoanalysts who see themselves as neutral channels for the delivery of a therapeutic service, most of us who are intrigued by psychoanalysis are convinced that it has an intimate connection with politics. Freud himself

may have argued that he was creating a science, not a system of political thought. But his creation has slipped away from this apparent state of value-free purity, corrupted by the world in which it has found a place. If it ever was apolitical, it is so no longer; contemporary arguments are concerned with what the politics of psychoanalysis are – which branch is more progressive or more reactionary, for example – not whether it is political at all.

In any case, Freud was clearly wrong in those moments when he distanced himself from political thinking: science is part of politics and is infused with it. Furthermore, Freud was nothing if not political in his promotion of himself and his new discipline; and in any event, as Brunner shows, politics was a significant subtext in even the most ‘pure’ and apparently value-free scientific elements of his own writing. Without straying from Freud’s own work, many of the political influences upon, and connotations of, psychoanalysis can be revealed.

These influences and associations or connotations appear in a number of areas. Those selected by Brunner range from Freud’s attitude towards the scientific assumptions of his time, through the political metaphors to be found in his models of the mind, to an examination of politics in the clinical setting, and eventually to an account of the most overtly ‘political’ of Freud’s works – those which bear on the applications of psychoanalytic thinking to groups and society. Predictably, it is this last category which is treated most critically by the politically progressive Brunner: Freud’s analyses of the social role of sexuality (it must be controlled), and of groups and society (the masses are dangerous; leaders are great men), are conventionally authoritarian and patriarchal. On the other hand, the immersion of infantile sexuality in a developmental account implicating family dynamics and the structures of Oedipal authority politicizes both individual psychology and family life in ways which continue to prove fertile for analyses of the power structures of individual lives.

Brunner is more approving in his account of the other facets of the encounters of politics with Freud. Freud’s understanding of hysteria is shown to be radically distinct from the morass of hereditarian and racist thinking characteristic of the medical establishment of his time. His construction of a hermeneutics of the body leads on to a general psychology that surpasses the narrow confines of nationalistic thinking and degeneracy theory. Freud was a hero in this regard – as is also shown later in Brunner’s book, when dealing with the somewhat more liberal

approach to the psychological casualties of the First World War taken by psychoanalytically inclined psychiatrists than by their non-psychoanalytic colleagues. Second, Freud employs, explicitly and implicitly, metaphors of political life in portraying the mechanisms of the mind. Struggles around representation, censorship, tactics of occupation, repression and liberation: these are the stuff of our psychological existence, according to Freud, the life of the social order writ small in the psyche of each one of us. Third and most significantly, Freud's clinical activity, at least as described in his case studies and technical writings, acknowledges the intimate workings of power in the encounters between one person and another – and reverts in the end to an emancipatory use of authority in the consulting room, in which the knowledge-stance of the analyst is employed as a means towards heightened freedom for the patient.

There are many strengths and weaknesses in Brunner's book. He has an eye for the employment of political metaphors in unexpected places, and a good sense of historical context. He is explicit about his preferences and dislikes, sometimes less than subtle on the complex world of theory he is describing, but

nevertheless conscientiously fair and thoughtful. The book functions primarily as a defence of Freud, but only partially takes up the debates generated by his work. In particular, the lack of any consideration of post-Freudian theory makes it difficult to trace out the elements of Freud's thought which have been important for later psychoanalytical thinking, and so reduces the implications of Brunner's argument for contemporary work. For example, the section on Oedipal politics has much relevance for assessing the political standing of object-relations theory, which sometimes seems to combine progressive possibilities and reactionary assumptions in a lamentable way. Finally, Brunner makes a strong statement of his feminist sympathies, but does not use contemporary feminist thought effectively to enhance his exploration of the politics of Freud.

**Stephen Frosh**

## Rules of the game

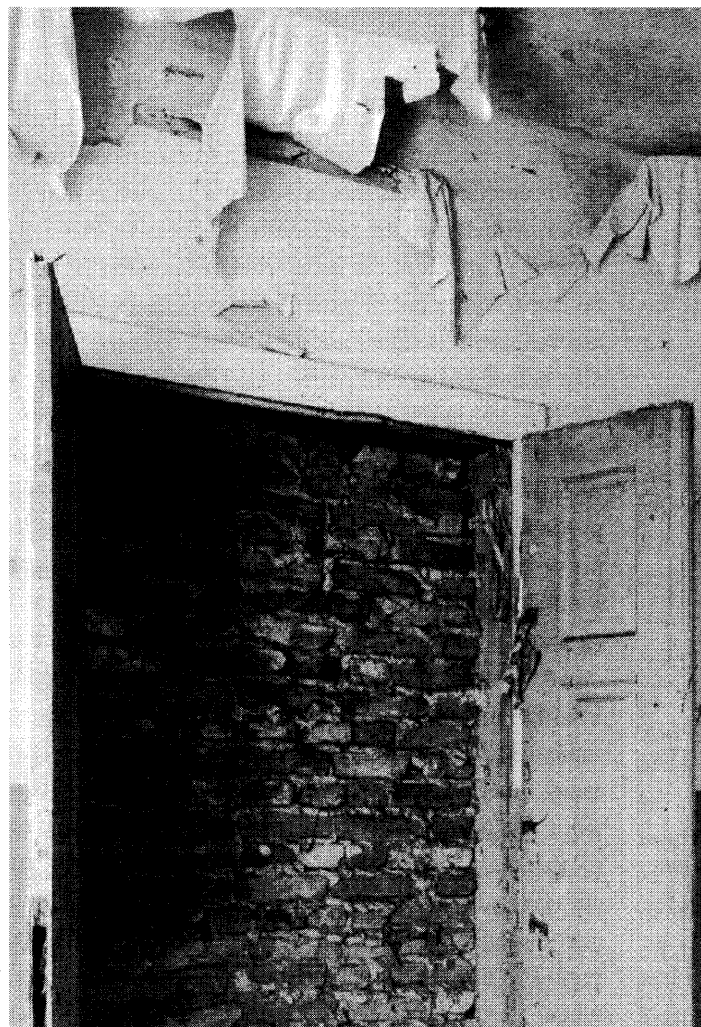


Photo by Jaroslav Fiser

Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, translated by Duncan Large, The Athlone Press, London, 1993. xiv + 239 pp., £42.00 hb., £14.95 pb., 0 485 11422 4 hb., 0 485 12098 4 pb.

Peter J. Burgard, ed., *Nietzsche and the Feminine*, The University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1994. 357 pp., \$49.50 hb., \$16.95 pb., 0 8139 1494 9 hb., 0 8139 1495 7 pb.

Michael Tanner, *Nietzsche*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994. 86 pp., £5.99 pb., 0 19 287680 5 pb.

It has taken over twenty years for a complete but idiosyncratic translation of Sarah Kofman's 1972 essay 'Nietzsche and Metaphor' to appear, and the intervening period of prolific Nietzsche scholarship has seriously diminished its impact. The merit of Kofman's article, when it first appeared in *Poétique*, was its engagement with Nietzsche's then virtually unknown unpublished writings of the early 1870s, and the theoretical prominence which it gave to the now famous line from 'On Truth and Lie in the Extra-moral Sense' (1873): 'What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms.' This assertion, which was shortly to become

the battle cry of French poststructuralists and deconstructionists, forms the now fossilized bedrock of Kofman's essay.

But if truth for Nietzsche is a semiology and symptomatology of the affective will to power, then Nietzsche's metaphysical truth about the world – 'the universality and unconditionality of all "will to power"' (*Beyond Good and Evil*, §22) – must likewise be taken as interpretation, as perspective. That is not to say, however, that Nietzsche himself presents his concept of the will to power as mere interpretation, as Kofman argues. This is a naïve reading necessitated by the poststructuralist will to power which denies the truth claims of language. When Nietzsche claims that '[t]he world viewed from the inside, the world defined and determined according to its "intelligible character" ... would be "will to power" and nothing else' (*BGE*, §36), he is offering neither a hypothesis, nor a metaphor – this is pure metaphysics, which, as Kofman points out, 'would then make Nietzsche's hypothesis just a fictional supplement inserted into a gap in the language, an improper generalization, a reified metaphor'. Precisely.

Kofman's insistence on the metaphorical status of the will to power leads her to divest the will of its power, and to reduce it to a mere trope. In so doing, she presents Nietzsche as an innocent player in a semantic game (of deconstruction?), and thereby overplays his hand. For, just as every metaphor presupposes a subtext, so every game presupposes a set of rules; and, in Schillerian mood, Nietzsche observes 'how the artist stands contemplatively above and at the same time actively within his work, how necessity and random play, oppositional tension and harmony, must pair to create a work of art' ('Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks'). This is the dialectical world of Dionysus and Apollo, of the will to truth and the will to illusion, of 'that eternal basic text *homo natura*' (*BGE*, §230) and the fanciful play of interpretation. Successfully taken in by Nietzsche's metaphorical masquerade, Kofman concludes that 'Nietzsche's "yes" is louder than all the "no's"': overlooking, perhaps, that Nietzsche, like the Greeks, was 'superficial – *out of profundity*' (Preface to *The Gay Science*).

The question of whether Nietzsche's emphatic 'no' to feminism precludes any possibility of a 'yes' lies at the centre of *Nietzsche and the Feminine*. This substantial volume of essays is not for the uninitiated: a fluency in the related discourses of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism is assumed, but it is a fluency that constrains as it liberates. As Benjamin Bennett

argues in his superlative essay, 'Bridge: Against Nothing', by allowing itself to be 'co-opted' by an established discourse, feminist thought succumbs to the very paternalism it seeks to escape. Rather, it should endeavour to re-enact the revolutionary force of Nietzsche's exemplary writing, by insisting upon an exclusionary 'I' that defies theory, system, and what Derrida terms and turns 'the hermeneutic project'. Bennett finds this exemplified in Irigaray's highly original *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Accordingly, those essays which press Nietzsche into the service of an accepted discourse – Freud, Kristeva, Derrida and Cixous provide for Sarah Kofman, Kelly Oliver, Clayton Koelb and Alan D. Schrift the respective hermeneutic 'legends' to Nietzsche's multiple perspectives on the feminine – violate the spirit of (discourse-)free interpretative play at the heart of his writing.

Genuinely new perspectives are to be found, however, in Janet Lungstrum's essay 'Nietzsche Writing Woman/Woman Writing Nietzsche', which focuses on 'the agon of the sexual dialectic' at play in Nietzsche's poetics of creativity, and in Irigaray's plea in 'Ecce Mulier? Fragments' for a *different* speech, or silence, between the sexes – 'irreducible to one another', and free of all 'predetermined codes'. Arkady Plotnitsky also calls for a new configuration, and in 'The Medusa's Ears' suggests that '[w]oman may be none of these "figures" – neither Nietzsche's, nor Derrida's, nor Cixous', nor Irigaray's ... they all warn us against attempting to figure "woman" or figure woman out'. The question of gender, he argues, might be more fruitfully addressed in a sublatory beyond: beyond Nietzsche, beyond feminism, beyond deconstruction, and, most importantly, beyond the entire Western philosophical tradition (although, as Nietzsche's work demonstrates, endeavouring to break with and through the latter proves a trifle over-ambitious).

As an introduction to Nietzsche, Michael Tanner's contribution to the Past Masters series is also somewhat ambitious; his nuanced and penetrating reading of Nietzsche exceeds the scope of the uninitiated. A more informed reader might also find disconcerting his insistence upon Nietzsche's unequivocal overcoming of Schopenhauer, Romanticism, and the 'artist's metaphysics' of *The Birth of Tragedy*. Notwithstanding these reservations, however, Tanner's portrayal of this self-proclaimed 'Dionysian' philosopher, as a Dionysus Zagreus 'torn into innumerable agonized fragments', is an inspired piece of work.

**Francesca Cauchi**

# Technologizing modernity

Lorenzo C. Simpson, *Technology, Time and the Conversations of Modernity*, Routledge, New York and London, 1995. xii + 232 pp., £37.50 hb., £11.99 pb., 0 415 90771 3 hb., 0 415 90772 1 pb.

The development of technological means of communication is clearly one of the most significant global developments of the era. Whether we live our lives in the village in which we were born, or travelling the globe, we are joined together by spatial communication flows. The development of virtual reality, cyberspace, e-mail, digital television and other technological forms currently threatens to transform the phenomenology of modernity. These cultural technologies are chopping up time and space, while simultaneously providing new opportunities for the building of cultural communities. Yet while the loudest voices are currently celebrating the technological opportunities potentially on offer, others strike a more pessimistic note bemoaning the decline of more traditional practices. Lorenzo Simpson intervenes in these debates by drawing on philosophical hermeneutics (notably Heidegger and Habermas). He undertakes a critique of rapidly technologizing societies, which is as intellectually well formed as it is timely. His analysis is neither anti-modern nor postmodern, but argues that technologies should be introduced in such a way as not to undermine the possibility of diverse human communities leading emancipated and *meaningfully lived* lives.

What is technology and how might we characterize it as a practice? Technology is both a response to our finitude as human beings and is end-oriented. It seeks to deal with our anxiety regarding death by domesticating time and making the future predictable, while instrumentally aiming to achieve certain ends. In this reading, technology tends to be totalitarian in that it reduces 'worldly things' to means and 'de-realizes' time by attempting to relieve us of the burden of having to wait. Ideologically, technology operates as if it were a disinterested objectivist practice, which it is not. This view seeks both to legitimize its domination over the life-world and to translate a concern with meanings into a fixation upon goals. For instance, the practice of cooking a meal with my partner for friends would usually concern discussion over what people might like, which menu

might offer the best combination, whom we should invite round, etc. Here we are concerned with the preparation of a meal as a practice rather than an end. This situation is quickly transformed if we consider a TV dinner which is eaten rapidly and forgotten. Here our concern is with the ends of satisfying our hunger, rather than with the meaningful practice of food preparation and consumption. Further, such activities reduce the uncertainty of time in that yesterday's TV dinner will taste very much like tomorrow's. Through the conversion of time into a rationalized linear narrative, we lose the hermeneutic project of reflexively reworking the self through an ethical dimension. Critical questions regarding my identity are bracketed off. There is, therefore, a deep connection between a technological project and the nihilistic loss of meaning which now pervades modernity.

This is evident in the recent dash to publish that has become such a feature of academic departments. As most readers will be aware, the rapid expansion of the numbers of books available seemingly far outweighs the community's capacity to form judgements about them. Such a situation, elevating quantity over quality, can be linked to feelings of pointlessness and cynicism pervasive amongst academics. The political point here, as with Habermas, is to reform the relationship between instrumentalist and more communicative concerns.

In the final section of the book, postmodernism's response to these issues is provocatively explored through an analysis of Baudrillard, Lyotard and Jameson. In particular, an extended discussion of virtual reality seeks to highlight some of the main themes of the text by connecting postmodernist concerns to issues of technical reason. Virtual reality is so seductive because it offers a controllable experience that enables us to transcend the limitations of the body. Moreover, the ceaseless shifting nature of modern culture disrupts biographic attempts to map the self. Virtual reality not only destroys the historicity of the past but also offers a comforting illusion that the self is infinitely plastic and can be reformed without constraint. Mature selfhood can emerge only through coming to terms with nature, history and the perspectives of others – all of which resist the narcissistic projections of the ludic postmodern subject.

This is a fascinating work and deserves to be widely read and discussed. Yet the problem remains that the author fails to link his undoubted insights to the political and economic contexts of late capitalism. While he is perfectly correct in wishing to distinguish instrumental reason from capitalistic economic

reason, such distinctions are easier to make in analysis than in practice. The most important cultural transformation of this century has been the global economy's pulverization of publicly held norms and values. But Simpson fails to link a philosophical understanding of instrumental reason with the interests and structures that drive technological development. This omission is striking, given his discussion of Habermas and Jameson. Finally, Simpson provides too few examples and too little by the way of social context to help us understand how we might resist the imperatives of technological reason politically. How, for example, do Simpson's concerns relate to a feminist or a Green politics? Nevertheless, this remains a major philosophical work.

**Nick Stevenson**

## Hounding father

Wolfgang Carl, *Frege's Theory of Sense and Reference: Its Origins and Scope*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994. viii + 220 pp., £32.50 hb., £11.95 pb., 0 521 39135 0 hb., 0 521 39816 9 pb.

Anthony Kenny, *Frege*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1995. xii + 223 pp., £7.99 pb., 0 14 012550 7 pb.

It is delightfully ironic that contemporary analytic philosophy, with its tendency to disparage 'the history of ideas' as devoid of philosophical content, should be having such a tough time assessing its own founding father – Gottlob Frege (1848–1925). If these latest contributions to the 'Frege Case' are anything to go by, agreement over even the most basic questions – What were his true interests? Where does his real influence lie? – is still some way off. Yet one would have thought these simple matters. Frege is universally acknowledged as the greatest logician since Aristotle: he virtually invented the predicate and the propositional calculus. His formal theory of classes was central to the development of set theory. His ideas about meaning and understanding have had a profound influence on analytic philosophy – not least as a result of the mesmerizing effect of their terse formulation. Their legacy stretches from Russell and Wittgenstein to Carnap, and thence to Davidson, Dummett and scores of others. So why has so much vitriol been sloshing around in Frege scholarship over the past two decades?

The answer is beautifully illustrated by comparing these two accounts. Interpreted in one way, there is just about enough evidence in Frege's work to suggest that he forced a radical break with the Cartesian tradition. Instead of privileging *epistemology* as the best means of grappling with general philosophical problems (how can we know that this is the case?), he directed our attention decisively to questions about meaning – how can we understand what we say? What is it to grasp thoughts? Thus, Anthony Kenny states that, 'for most of his life, Frege gave priority to logic simply by ignoring epistemology.' But read another way, and Frege turns out to have been mired in problems generated by quintessentially Cartesian concerns – scepticism and idealism especially – and thus deeply entranced by epistemology. This is Wolfgang Carl's interpretation: Frege's work 'belongs to the epistemological tradition of modern philosophy'. So the upshot is roughly this: either Frege is a matchless star in the current philosophical firmament, or he is just one of its many satellites; and there just isn't sufficient evidence to establish either conclusion.

There are, of course, more mundane differences between these works. Kenny provides us – at last – with a handy introduction and guide to Frege's work. It is comparable in aim, execution and general helpfulness to his much-lauded *Wittgenstein* (1973). He acknowledges a heavy debt to the pathfinding Frege scholarship of Michael Dummett – very much the leader of the 'radical break' tendency. Carl's book, on the other hand, presumes detailed knowledge of Frege and some acquaintance with, if not enthusiasm for, the intricacies of current debate. His major exegetical claim is that Frege's somewhat neglected *Logical Investigations*, left unfinished at his death, should be seen as a major work. Its preoccupation with post-Kantian sceptical and idealist problems reveals, to Carl's satisfaction at least, Frege's predilection for epistemology.

This conclusion links Carl's account to that of Hans Sluga. Sluga was the first to awaken interest in Frege's debts to Neo-Kantians and their epistemological fixation. But peripheral agreement is balanced by deep conflict at the centre. For Sluga has been notoriously dismissive of the notion that Frege had a theory of meaning, or was at all deeply interested in semantics. And Carl argues, to the contrary, that it is precisely because Frege held the particular views he did about meaning and understanding that epis-

temology must be accounted central to his project. Actually, I suspect this conclusion must place Carl closer to Dummett and Kenny than he might wish. For if Frege's epistemology is 'founded on the human capacity for grasping thoughts', then Frege must have thought the theory of understanding more fundamental to philosophy than the theory of knowledge.

But what really makes the 'Frege Case' intractable is not the epistemological issue; it is the anti-historical bias of analytic philosophy. For his legacy raises any number of philosophical issues which cry out for, and have yet to receive, a properly contextual treatment. Perhaps Frege was primarily a mathematician; but he died in despair at the collapse of what he saw as his life's work – reducing arithmetic to logic. Perhaps his interests in meaning and understanding were merely tangential; but it is undoubtedly in the philosophy of language that his arguments have aroused the most fervent admiration. We do not deny that Columbus discovered a new world just because he believed he had found a different route to an old continent. But one frequently hears it said that, because Frege had no direct interests in metaphysics and the philosophy of mind, his views have had no significant impact on these areas of philosophy. Perhaps Frege was temperamentally opposed to the incorporation of his ideas into any one system, philosophical or otherwise. But he insisted on publishing his three last contributions to logic in a crudely nationalistic journal – as if he wanted the transition from his own highly unconventional work to the dulllest ideological uniformity to be considered relatively seamless. Certainly, publication in that journal was in keeping with his virulently anti-Semitic views and his support for Hitler's failed putsch of 1923.

The irony latent in the 'Frege Case' can be driven home. Frege made much of the vital distinction between *acts* of thinking (rooted in historical, subjective and personal concerns) and the timeless, objective and impersonal *contents* of such acts. Analytic philosophy has followed him, by and large, in developing skills devoted exclusively to understanding the latter. Yet, clearly, we cannot grasp Frege's significance without fully appreciating the former as well – the historical context in which his views were formulated. So the 'Frege Case' is largely of Frege's own making. And analytic philosophy is going to have to beg, borrow or steal some very un-Fregean hermeneutic tools before it can assess its own Fregean roots.

**Max de Gaynesford**

## Eat your greens

Wilfred Beckerman, *Small is Stupid: Blowing the Whistle on the Greens*, Duckworth, London, 1995. viii + 202 pp., £20.00 hb., 0 715 62640 X.

Avner de-Shalit, *Why Posterity Matters: Environmental Policies and Future Generations*, Routledge, London, 1995. viii + 161 pp., £30.00 hb., £10.99 pb., 0 415 10018 6 hb., 0 415 10019 4 pb.

Why should we care about people who don't – and need not – exist? In the absence of good reasons, what becomes of Green politics not based on God, Gaia, Mother Nature, or other mysticisms? De-Shalit's argument about *how much* we should care, relative to our obligations to current people, and Beckerman's insistence that we start with presently existing poverty, both rely on there being such reasons: de-Shalit's *via* psychological observation, appeal to 'our intuition', and his concept of ourselves as deriving meaning from an extended community; Beckerman's by implication. Neither, however, actually answers the question; both assume that their books are not 'the place to discuss in depth the whole matter of population policy' (de-Shalit); that family size is a matter for incipient parents only; and that 'posterity' is effectively limited to 'up to eight or ten generations from now' (de-Shalit), or that 'by the time we reach the year AD 100,000,000 I am sure we will think up something' (Beckerman). It is suggestive of the intractability of the question that both a communitarian philosopher and a free-market economist should, in eschewing discussion of population policy, ignore a fundamental aspect of it.

What concerns them is this: 'How much should we pass on to future generations and how much can we consume or pollute without neglecting our obligations?' (de-Shalit). But there are two fundamental problems here. First: to whom or what can such obligations be owed? De-Shalit addresses the issue by subtly arguing, against both utilitarian and rights-based theories of transgenerational obligation, that our notion of identity assumes continuity into the future – a view finally dependent on 'intuitions' about how we feel about our lives. Beckerman, meanwhile, debunks future property rights, utilitarianism and contractarianism, before concluding that transgenerational fairness 'has a lot of appeal to our moral intuitions, at least it does to mine'. But this won't do, not least because there needn't be future generations: we could save the Earth by ceasing to reproduce, contraception being an oddly underestimated advance. The only



plausible argument I know that we have obligations to non-existent people is Spencer Dalziel's: actually existing people wish humanity to continue; we are under an obligation to respect these wishes; and since it is likely that those coming to instantiate their fulfilment will have similar wishes, these too have to be respected. Even if sound, however, this argument depends on a preference-satisfaction model of moral obligation, one explicitly advocated by Beckerman and implicitly, if perhaps inadvertently, accepted by de-Shalit when he objects to 'dictat[ing] values and preferences to future generations'. But given the preferences of many members of present generations, such a model is no more environmentally friendly than philosophically adequate.

Suppose, however, that something like de-Shalit's notion of one's self as inhering, in part, in a continuing community can be better based than in intuition: the second question then arises, How many people should there be? Both writers regard Parfit's 'repugnant [utilitarian] conclusion – a world with 1000 people, each with half a unit of happiness, is better than one with, say, 100 people, each with 1 unit' – with due repugnance. But neither inverts it, to ask why a world with 20 people, each with 100 such units, is not better than either. Neither recognizes that the size of the human population is an environmental fact like any other. Even if there were more to say about there being 'no future generations' than that this 'would be a shame' (de-Shalit), intelligible obligation can no more be open-ended regarding numbers than it can across time; not just because the notion dissolves, but because, given contraception, our obligations to current people – and, if Dalziel is right, to (at least some) future ones – cannot but involve judgements about numbers of people. Distributional justice concerns quantity of distributees as much as quantity of what is distributed.

Both books make one think: de-Shalit's about community, self and obligation; Beckerman's about the overwhelming importance of actual people's current material conditions in comparison with 'sustainable development' and other fashionable shibboleths. Jonathon Porritt's petulant dismissal of Beckerman as 'a bitter man' (*Guardian*, 29 May 1995) merely underlines the irresponsibility of all too many Greens. For, whatever his intentions, the book in fact makes a robustly *socialist* case in insisting that 'you have to become rich' to solve the real problems facing all but 'the more affluent groups' in global society: lack of sanitation, drinking water and clean air. That a free-marketeer is committed to the highest

possible welfare' for all is startling; but neither that, his comparative philosophical and political naivety about solutions, nor his iconoclastic tone should blind us to the importance of his unfashionable concern with living people. If posterity matters at all, it matters less than they do.

**Bob Brecher**

## Tittle-tattle

Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Anti-Humanism and Being*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995. xx + 250 pp., £40.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 415 11180 3 hb., 0 415 11181 1 pb.

Everyone knows that Heidegger was a Nazi. We also know now, thanks to the detailed research of the German historian Hugo Ott (discussed by Peter Osborne in *RP* 70) that he was a more committed Nazi than he acknowledged in the famous *Der Spiegel* interview. Beyond the usual taste for gossip, to which even the most sophisticated are not immune, why should Heidegger's past interest us? Perhaps it offers a salutary lesson that philosophy is no guard against evil. Specifically, however, the question that concerns most of us is whether Heidegger's philosophy can be separated from his attraction to National Socialism. Is it just a sophisticated version of National Socialism? And are those who are committed to the importance of Heidegger in the history of philosophy tarred by the same brush?

Many of the contributions to the 'Heidegger affair' unfortunately bar rather than promote thoughtful debate. It is not that the facts about Heidegger's involvement should be concealed, but there is a place for serious *philosophical* investigation of the politics of Heidegger's work which advances beyond biography. What is always surprising when academic philosophers approach the relation of an author to his or her own work is how *naïve* they are. Have they not heard of the 'intentional fallacy', common fodder of any undergraduate course in literature? This is not to suggest that authors' lives have no relevance at all, but the reduction of the meaning of the texts to them is not even to begin to read *critically*. What is required is an investigation of the politics of Heidegger's *work* in relation to the claims of National Socialism, and not just of Heidegger as a person. Such an investigation must look not only at Heidegger's overt political statements but also at the politics hidden in the philo-

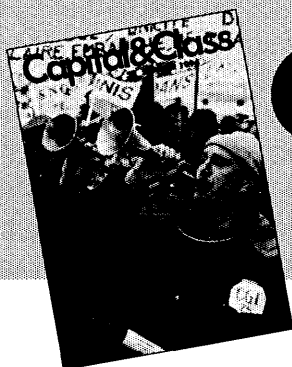
sophical works (for example, the analysis of *Mitsein* and the appeal to 'heroic individuality' in *Being and Time*). Nonetheless, at the same time, one needs to make visible an *other politics* operating in Heidegger's work, one perhaps not manifest to the author himself, which contradicts any National Socialism, whether of the past or the future. An example of such a reading of Heidegger has been given to us in Reiner Schürmann's excellent book *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principle to Anarchy*.

To jump on a bandwagon once is perhaps forgivable, but to get on for a second ride is inexcusable. Tom Rockmore has already contributed to the industry surrounding the 'Heidegger affair'. What he offers this time is a very strange book indeed. He does not have to worry about philosophical questions because he is not a Heidegger specialist, and thus he can excuse himself from the burdensome task of actually having to read Heidegger's work in any depth. What we get instead is what he calls a 'contextualist' approach: philosophers should not be studied in isolation from history. This seems to be an admirable endeavour, but Tom Rockmore's idea of history is a very limited one. Some sense of how limited it is can be shown by giving a brief description of the book. Its subject matter is the apparent domination of the current

French academic scene by Heidegger. Why are French academics unable to resist Heidegger's seductions? Tom Rockmore's answer is a rather motley collection of disparate causes: the fashion for 'philosophical anthropology', French Cartesianism, Roman Catholicism, the French obsession with 'master thinkers' (is this a particularly French disease?), the centralization of French universities, and, most important of all, the long tradition of 'humanism' in France. Moreover, added to this rather strange list is the further thesis that these factors themselves have prevented contemporary French academics (such as Derrida, or Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe) from adequately facing up to Heidegger's political involvement. In the end, what we get is not the concrete historical 'context' of the reception of Heidegger's work, but a *Who's Who* of French academia.

Those who know anything about Heidegger will be dismissive of this book (and the writer seems to know this), but even those who are interested in the historical and social conditions of academic philosophy, and find the quarrels between different philosophical schools rather childish, will find the superficiality of the approach shocking.

**William Large**



# Capital & Class

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**Carolyn Bailey Gill, ed., *Bataille: Writing the Sacred***

Routledge, London and New York, 1995. xix + 195 pp., £40.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 415 10122 0 hb., 0 415 10123 9 pb.

Edited collections are often marred by the differences in style and perspective of the individual contributions. Each essay may work well on its own, while the whole fragments into a series of loosely connected parts. Interestingly, such textual and thematic fragmentation is an advantage when faced with the work of Georges Bataille, a writer who sought to sidestep coherence in favour of a 'philosophy' that gloried in paradox and 'the emotive'. When looking at Bataille, who wrote pornography and poetry alongside works of political economy and philosophy, the plurality of styles, arguments and presentations can actually help the reader gain a greater insight into the many trajectories of his thought, without halting its imaginative and investigative flight.

Thus, while most of the essays do, in themselves, provide a useful analysis of important themes within Bataille, the real strength of this book is revealed only when it is read in its entirety. By emphasizing the diffuse nature of Bataille's thought – the essays range across topics as diverse as politics, sociology, literature, art, economics and philosophy – the reader is given an enlightening view of his overall significance, without having to submit a single account of that significance. The result is a collection that is actually greater than the sum of its parts.

It is particularly impressive in evoking the intellectual environment that provided the sources of Bataille's *oeuvre*. Throughout, the reader is reminded that Bataille's literary and philosophical pursuits had deep roots in the birth of modern sociology, the rise of fascism and Kojève's interpretation of Hegel (to name a few). Most

notably, the contributions from Besnier, Suleiman, Richman, Stoekl and Hollier admirably convey the complex set of relations and forces that shaped Bataille's thought. The innovative concepts at the heart of his work (the sacred, the impossible, excess, inner experience) are revealed as developments of more familiar sociological and philosophical material – a contextualization that brings to the surface the true power and importance of his ideas.

Unfortunately, the collection also contains an example of the worst kind of Bataille-inspired writing in its opening pages. Alphonso Lingis's account of the marvels and squalor surrounding a Mayan ruin is less a 'meditation on the sacred' than an extended and rather tedious postcard from Honduras. It seems odd that he had to travel 'to this excretion of inassimilable elements' to reach the conclusion that the sacred is 'the inapprehensible, the unconceptualizable, the inassimilable, the irrecoverable'. Given this definition, one can only surmise that 'writing the sacred' for Lingis is an impossible task which he should never have attempted.

Aside from this unfortunate beginning, the editor has amassed a sometimes startling, and always interesting set of papers that testify to the ongoing relevance of Bataille's thought. In a world that is increasingly concerned with the excavation of 'the sacred' in the everyday – one need only think of a vast spectrum of phenomena that include New Age theosophies, the burgeoning language of 'community', and the politics of moral outrage – Bataille's analyses offer both a warning on the dangers of such phenomena and a keen sense of the ways in which the sacred functions through them as a source of personal and collective empowerment. While pursuing the twin investigative track may not be an easy or comfortable journey to embark upon, Bataille goes a long way towards

revealing the pitfalls and the potential insights such a journey may hold in store, and this collection proves a worthy travelling companion.

**Iain MacKenzie**

**Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature***

Routledge, London and New York, 1994. viii + 245 pp., £40.00 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 415 07652 8 hb., 0 415 07653 6 pb.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein states that 'when a sentence is called senseless it is not as if it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation'. By focusing his analysis upon the negative prefix, Lecercle distinguishes nonsense from senselessness, seeking to preserve the former in circulation. At one point, indeed, he offers (but does not develop) an explicitly economic analogy, citing Marx's account of transition from commodity chain to money chain. For in radical nonsense, saying precedes meaning in a process that threatens endless proliferation.

Lecercle insists that this perception of causal relationship is the foundation for contemporary critical reading of literary texts, and informs key areas of current psychoanalytic and philosophical debate. In linguistic terms, Lecercle's essential concern in *Philosophy of Nonsense* is what he formulated in *Philosophy through the Looking-Glass* (1985) as the dialectic whose poles are 'I speak language' and 'language speaks'. Tristan Tzara's provocative claim that 'thought is made in the mouth' neatly summarizes the pole that really holds Lecercle's attention; though the terrain on which his explorations are conducted is not Dada but Victorian nonsense literature,

and Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books in particular.

The book's subtitle advances the claim that Carroll and Edward Lear intuitively discerned positions and relationships that have come to be recognized as paradigmatic indices of Western intellectual culture a century later. Lecercle's mission is to rescue his favoured genre from the formalist emphasis exemplified by Elizabeth Sewall's study, *The Field of Nonsense* (1952). The legitimization involves frequent citation of philosophical authority, ranging from Aristotle to Derrida, and is characterized by Lecercle's customary deft eclecticism. Evidently conscious that such references are suggestive but by no means conclusive, he begins his 'Conclusion' with the wry observation, 'It is never too late to justify one's title.'

The first part of the book presents synchronic readings; as Lecercle notes, 'the corpus of texts was Victorian, but the object of the analysis was a timeless language game.' In the second part, he draws on Foucault, Deleuze and Bakhtin to demonstrate the refraction of Victorian cultural formations through nonsense literature. Thus he connects the nonsense writer's fascination with exploration and taxonomy with those features in the discourse of natural history. The limerick is plugged into a carceral network that includes not only the prison and the madhouse but also the museum. More elaborately, he shows how the discourse of education, the formation he calls the School, was 'steeped in nonsense'; nonsense texts simultaneously subvert and support the values of Victorian education.

Lecercle sets out a theory of pastiche to elucidate this dual action of challenge and endorsement, which is characteristic of the fusion of apparent opposites invariably accomplished by nonsense. Crucially, the nostalgia of such writing coincides with anticipation of 'a more advanced state of knowledge and understanding'; the

pastoral note is tempered by genuine (if unconscious) engagement with modernity. Alice is not merely the innocent child of Romantic myth, but a language user caught up in dialogic struggles involving the rules of language and of social behaviour.

Lecercle's *The Violence of Language* (1990) ends with the declaration that 'language is the only Wonderland; what I have been doing is knocking at the garden door.' In *Philosophy of Nonsense*, he has restored that garden to history and society, and has made a strong case for the relevance of nonsense texts both to Victorian Britain and to contemporary conditions.

**Julian Cowley**

**Philip J. Ross, *De-Privatizing Morality***

Avebury, Aldershot, 1994. vii + 119 pp., £35.00 hb., 1 85626 659 2.

This is an original and promising contribution to communitarian moral thought – although Philip J. Ross seems a little wary of the term (mostly he prefers 'post-individualism', or simply 'collectivism'). His, at any rate, is a communitarianism with a difference – not so much in its diagnosis of modernity's moral shortcomings, as in its response to them. It is this difference which makes Ross's arguments most interesting, but also most vulnerable.

Like MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, Ross begins by deriding the moral self-confidence of the modern West. From government level down to everyday ethics-speak, he argues, our sense of moral superiority over other cultures founds itself not upon commitment to, or knowledge of, any coherent framework of values, but on an inhibiting moral scepticism. 'Knowledge' and 'virtue' no longer correlate: sentimentality replaces objectivity as moral motivator; and value judgement is rendered an entirely subjective affair. Rejecting MacIntyre's proposition of a

return to the Aristotelian virtues as presuming a sort of timeless supermarket of meta-ethical options, Ross is more affirmative towards the Enlightenment project. We must look to our own historicity for moral alternatives, and to a more dialectical reading of conceptual roads not taken. A lost project for moral social direction is to be found in the collectivism nascent in Rousseau's general will, Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, and especially Kant's community of autonomous ends-in-themselves subject to self-enacted laws. Rather like Habermas, Ross locates an intersubjectivity in the first flush of post-Enlightenment thought which has since been lost in a sea of individualist subjectivism.

De-privatizing morality means reconceiving individual autonomy as a symptom of, and not an extraction from, community, and demarcating the logical space for moral objectivity which the ideology of liberal individualism has denied. Opinions, by now effectively the sacred private property of the (negatively) 'free' individual, need to be resubmitted to public scrutiny and debate. We need to relearn, or create afresh, a language of moral justification – and lose the habit of presuming moral questions to be unanswerable except by fanatics and fundamentalists.

The underlabouring in Ross's argument is well executed: he engages incisively with C.L. Stevenson and R.M. Hare, MacIntyre, cultural relativism, Sartre (as accessory to liberal moral non-direction), Adam Smith, and the libertarian New Right. But on a larger scale, his most promising themes are also the most frustrating. If Kant and Rousseau are latent presences in the otherwise impoverished moral scene of the *fin-de-siècle*, Ross doesn't really show us where they're hiding. Indeed, his most polemical, and best, chapters discount any notion of getting substantive moral sustenance from the socio-economic status quo.

So where does the vital collectivist impulse come from exactly? Ross insists, as he probably must, that the grammar and functioning of everyday ethical conversation indicate 'a groping towards rationality, to objective justifiability'. But I am not sure that the fact that we still use the word 'virtue' is enough to dig us out of the moral hole he has us in. While right to distance himself from MacIntyre's ethical premodernism, Ross falters when it comes to elaborating his own alternative. The most sympathetic reader will want more by way of compelling evidence that a collectivist morality, or indeed any sort of ethical/political resolution, is objectively superior to a meta-ethical pick'n'mix. For what it sketches and promises, though, Ross's book is worthy of a place in the burgeoning communitarian (or post-individualist) canon.

**Gideon Calder**

**Tim Jordan, *Reinventing Revolution: Value and Difference in New Social Movements and the Left***

Avebury, Aldershot, 1994. vii + 166 pp., £35.00 hb., 1 85628 865 X.

Tim Jordan's *Reinventing Revolution* contributes to the debate on the renewal of the Left from a postmodern perspective. It is a work of radical action theory, which draws on the perspectives of discourse theorists, post-Foucauldians, and advocates of the transformative potential of new social movements, such as Laclau and

Mouffe, Deleuze and Guattari, and Melucci. Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the subject as a 'desiring machine' is extended by Jordan into social form – social movements are associations of desiring subjects banded together to overthrow or resist oppression. They construct social identities, narratives and memories of their struggles to help them. The problem for the Left is that its earlier dominant form of collective action – the working-class movement – is in decline. In any case, this is now experienced by many, such as women, ethnic minorities and environmentalists as an oppressive, not an emancipatory force.

Jordan believes that a radical or revolutionary project needs to be re-invented, making use of the discursive resources of its traditions, and of its diverse contemporary experiences of oppression. He describes this as 'bootstrapping' – that is, the voluntaristic self-generation of radical movements by sheer force of will and desire. One of his examples is the movement of 'ravers' (aficionados of ecstatic dancing), whose motorized travels around the country in search of venues hidden from the police are represented as a model of libertarian desire in action. But Jordan has also involved himself with other grassroots movements, such as tenants' associations, and has an inclusionary notion of what such movements of liberation might be.

It is a merit of Jordan's book that he is willing to follow the uncompromising logic of his argument: a radicalism based on virtually nothing but its own voluntarist commitments.

This indifference to counterfactual difficulties (Which movements? What conceivable unity? What justifications?) enables him to make a new theoretical case, even if its immediate political potential might appear limited. (It is curious to choose a metaphor – bootstraps – whose literal meaning implies failure.) But one might also ask, why have a radical politics at all, if it is in no rational relationship to the oppressions and inequalities of the world? The rejection of foundationalism – the idea that there are definite relations between the realities of the world and human needs and aspirations – leads Jordan to detach his politics from any definite conception of social reality.

Jordan poses the problem as follows: What is the Left? And what does it want? Politics is seen as an expression of collective desire. A more traditional realist might pose different questions, such as: (1) Is there a system or structure in existence which generates systematic harms? (2) Does this system generate unified oppositions to itself? (3) Are there tendencies which might lead this system to change and to encounter internal instabilities (which might or might not be related to the oppositions above)?

If the answer to the first question is negative, there seems little good reason for radical movements to exist. But, of course, a positive answer to this question does not necessarily imply that one can answer either of the other two questions in a positive way, unhappy condition as that might be.

**Michael Rustin**

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