Double trouble

Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection,* Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1997. 218 pp., £27.95 hb., £9.95 pb., 08047 2811 9 hb., 08047 2812 7 pb.

The Psychic Life of Power is far less inviting than any of Butler's previous productions. Indeed, it gives a first impression of being no more than an obsessive reworking of the guiding themes and moments from Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Althusser, and Foucault that Butler's theoretical project has progressively appropriated, synthesized and extended. Initially, the book seemed to me a failure; not only badly written – repetitive, inconclusive, dense – but also deepening the paradoxes which mark Butler's attempt to deconstruct the very possibility of 'giving an account' of subject-formation whilst simultaneously taking the opportunity to make suggestions as to the essential features of that process.

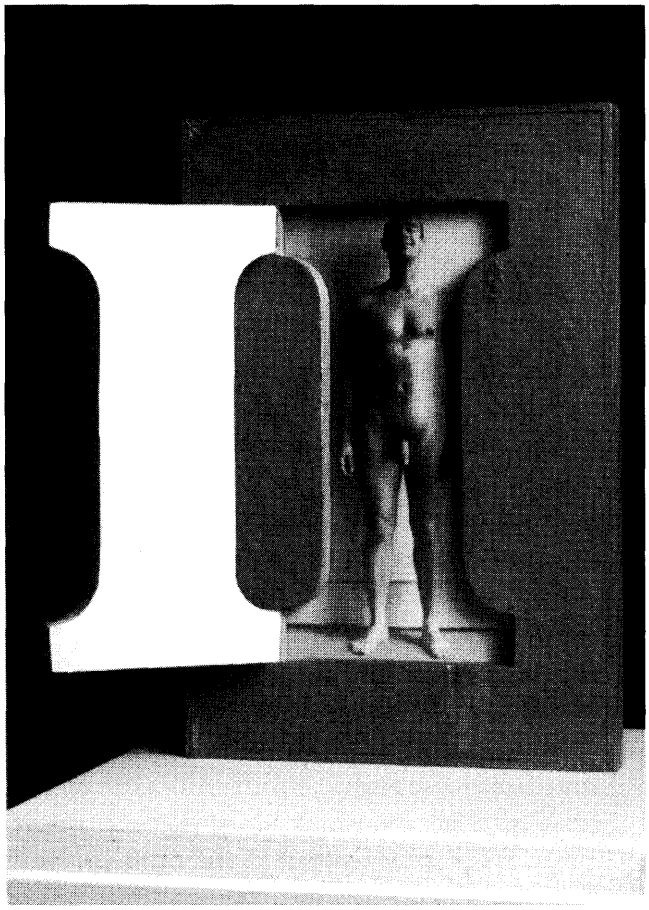
Yet on reflection neither of these objections seemed straightforward to sustain. On a second reading, I began to wonder whether the style of writing that had so irritated me was not somehow intrinsic to the project: a necessary frustration of the desire for unequivocal accounts, for answers to apparently reasonable questions, which are instead shown to be unaskable, or rather, askable and answerable only on equivocal terms. The book draws its inspiration from theorists of the path to 'subjectification' who have viewed it as being neither without cost nor given fact, but only as an ambivalent and provisional achievement. Butler's ambition seems to be to sustain whatever can be said of the subject in the ambivalence proper to the essentially evaluative and indeed, passionate moments of every recounting of its formation. On the one hand, the story of how we came to be is a story that cannot coherently be told; on the other, some essential desire reveals itself in the very wish to tell it.

The first gesture of *Psychic Life* is to draw attention to the paradoxes of recounting the emergence of a subject who, in some sense, seems always to be presupposed by the narrative of its coming to be. The second is to specify the subject as *desiring* such accounts of itself, desiring accountability, desiring to be counted, desiring an 'identity'. A guiding theme of all of Butler's recent work has been a characterization of the emergence of the subject that refuses to allow it to be either fully originary or fully produced. Where she continues and deepens that theme here is in the attempt to describe the role played by passionate attachments in the subject's formation, by love, and more especially, by the foreclosure of love; and the connection of that foreclosure or prohibition with the phenomena of reflexivity, in particular, with conscience. The subject's 'desire to be', which is shown to be essential to narratives of the formation of identity, is explored in its relation to the repudiation of attachments – the role of the requirement '*not* to love that, if one is to be *this*'. Such a subject is, as she puts it, 'constituted in primary vulnerability', and this has political implications that were already explored in *Excitable Speech* as a question of the subject's dependency upon finding her place within language, a site of identity whereby she is recognized and recognizes herself and which thus at once enables and constrains her. In *Psychic Life*, Butler's thoughts about the dependency of subjects upon recognition and her reflections upon the possibilities of resistance to normalization are brought together with a new level of complexity.

Butler pursues her project by staging an encounter between Freud and Foucault. The theoretical task of *Psychic Life* is to think 'the theory of power together with a theory of the psyche, a task that has been eschewed by writers in both Foucauldian and psychoanalytic orthodoxies'. Whilst one might wish to quibble with certain aspects of this synthesis, its results are interesting and productive as a means of situating a *gendered* subject within the Foucauldian construction of the social, and, by the same stroke, developing an account of 'subversive' potentiality that significantly extends Butler's previous efforts in this direction.

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler had already explored the idea of a 'melancholic' formation of gender. Here she figures 'psychic vulnerability' as melancholic – an effect of a social restriction on 'proper' attachments and identifications – and hence a foreclosure of certain forms of love and loss, which, following Foucault, is to be construed as a *productive* moment of power. The melancholic is characterized by Freud as the site of

heightened conscience, of a reflexivity which is a symptom of uncompleted grief. If homosexual desire is linked particularly with guilt, it is, Butler suggests, due to the melancholic 'turning back into the ego of homosexual attachment'. But in political terms, perhaps what is most interesting here is the development of systematic connections between melancholia, conscience and moralism, invoked by Butler in order to situate this psychic form in social life, and to force a



reconsideration of the origins of the voice of conscience along Foucauldian lines. In her elaboration of this, the emphasis of Butler's project has shifted from the *troubled*, multiple cracks of gender formation to the site of a *doubled* aspect of identification's role in the constitution of a self. Gender now is less *symptom* of a social imperative to produce fixed, coherent identities than coextensive with a founding moment of the psychic inception of power. As in previous work, her account makes the construction of gender fundamental to the character of sociality and hence of political potentiality. But here the theory is filled out as an argument that the repudiation of same-sex attachments fundamentally shapes not only the available forms of sociality and recognition of otherness, but also the capacity for a critical relation to the 'norm'.

The subtlety of Butler's thought on this point – though also arguably the site of a tension that is unresolved in the work – lies in her characterization of 'melancholic' identity as carrying profoundly ambivalent effects. On the one hand, the disavowal of same-sex attachments as constitutive of the self, the inability to mourn them due to a heterosexual regime that denies these ever were attachments, means that such love will be 'repeatedly repudiated and subject to a policy of disavowal'. On the other hand, however, considered not merely as a psychic economy but as part of the operation of regulatory power, the subversive capacities bestowed by melancholia must also be marked. For melancholia, as an incorporation of the lost other, provides the conditions for taking oneself as object, for viewing from the perspective of that other. Melancholic identification, then, like the conscience which is its form of reflexivity, is the condition of a critical view of the world, and of the possibility of deliberate transformations.

Thus Butler rehearses her theme that 'the analysis of subjection is always double, tracing the conditions of subject formation and tracing the turn against those conditions for the subject – and its perspective – to emerge'. The most important question to pose here, perhaps, is whether this account of the 'equivocal' value of social and psychic identity will enable critical analysis, sensitive both to the desire to possess 'identity' as a condition of social recognition, and the risk that such desire will be systematically exploited in forms of social control that deny the potentiality for difference and change. Butler has articulated with enormous subtlety the structural ambiguities of this issue. It is to be hoped that the sheer difficulty of her undertaking – and a degree of unclarity in her mode of presenting it – does not prevent a critical interrogation of her manner of pursuing it. For this work traces the precarious edge between a substantive theory of the internal relation of the psychic to the social and the deconstruction of the very possibility of providing unequivocal genealogies, in a way that distinguishes Butler's thought as amongst the most interesting and rigorous theoretical projects today. With this, however, it carries the risk of inviting a reception of misconstrual and counter-defence that would evade the genuine challenge posed to political thought by Butler's innovative contribution to the investigation of subjectification's uneasy value.

Fiona Jenkins

Object lessons

Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, translated and with a preface by Henry W. Pickford, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998. xii + 404 pp., £30.00 hb., 0 231 07634 7.

Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998. x + 283 pp., £45.00 hb., £13.95 pb., 0 7456 1178 8 hb., 0 7456 1179 6 pb.

Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1997. 270 pp., £23.50 hb., 0 262 14062 4.

Critical Models contains excellent translations of two volumes of essays, *Interventions* (1963) and *Catchwords* (1969), published by Adorno in the aftermath of the success of *Prisms* (1955) and intended to carry his work to a new-found audience. Many of the essays are based on radio lectures, and not all have appeared in English before. 'Why Still Philosophy', 'On Subject and Object' and 'Progress' are well known to English-speaking readers, as are 'Free Time' and 'Resignation', which were not included in the German editions, but are included here as they were intended for an unpublished third volume. It is valuable and interesting to have these essays restored to the context of their original book publication. Much of Adorno's writing is directed against the culture industry, and his style is frequently compared to paratactic modernism in the arts, so it may come as a surprise to find Adorno in such a communicative mode, speaking from the belly of the beast, in essays derived from radio broadcasts.

The texts are, as the subtitle announces, a series of interventions, and while the style shifts according to context, the object of intervention remains the same, the 'reified consciousness, ... whether it be in the human sciences or in the attitude of teachers towards philosophy, in the cliché of the twenties or the survival of sexual taboos, in the prefabricated word of television or in unfettered opinion'. The specific consciousness which Adorno addresses is that of a Federal Republic which is seeking to distance itself from the Nazi past, a task which encounters unrecognized resistances.

> Besides the economic and straightforward societal problems democracy in Germany confronts in order to permeate the sovereign people, not inconsiderable is the additional difficulty that predemocratic and undemocratic forms of consciousness – in particular those that stem from statism and a thinking that conforms to authority – survive in the midst of a suddenly implanted democracy and prevent people from making it their own. (p. 284)

The discursive pieces are accompanied by more closely written ones, among which are the two 'Dialectical Epilegomena' which come at the end of *Catchwords*. The first of these is 'On Subject and Object', which famously argues for the primacy of the object over the subject within a dialectic which is historically sedimented. Adorno works through Kant, whose modelling of the subject is criticized here in order to bring forward what is necessary in it. Subject is both 'semblance and at the same time something exceedingly real'; the difference between subject and object 'can no more be absolutised than it can be removed from thought'. This defence of the subject is aimed at Husserl and, although Adorno does not labour the point, at Heidegger: 'the subject will hardly simply vanish into object or into anything else allegedly higher, into Being however it may be hypostatized' (p. 256). This essay's companion piece, 'Marginalia to Theory and Practice', is only now available in English, restoring each essay to its original context. The piece begins by demonstrating the implications of the argument about subject and object for the opposition between theory and practice. While the first essay fights an old battle, the second fights a new one – against the New Left – and its tone reflects a certain amount of bitterness on Adorno's part.

Adorno mounts a lucid defence of theory against the praxis advocated by the activist extra-parliamentary Left. In effect, he is defending theory against the activism of his own students. 'A consciousness of theory and praxis must be produced that neither divides the two such that theory becomes powerless and praxis becomes arbitrary, nor refracts theory through the archbourgeois primacy of practical reason.' This element of Adorno's argument, which draws principally on his interpretation of Kant and Hegel, is a well-turned dialectical argument, which successfully confronts praxis with the historical determinateness of its division from theory. More contentious is the use Adorno makes of the psychoanalytic characterology which informed his analysis of the subject of administered society in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *The Authoritarian Personality*. The figure of the activist is polemically denounced in the terms which were used

to characterize the anti-Semite: 'Those who protest most vehemently are similar to authoritarian personalities in their aversion to introspection; when they do consider themselves, it happens without criticism, and unreflectedly, aggressively is directed outward.... They reify their own consciousness and expect reified consciousness from those who face them.' 'Actionism is regressive.' Adorno, who was under attack by student activists, speaks feelingly. 'Academic freedom is degraded to customer service and must submit to inspections' (pp. 271–4). Notwithstanding the apparent facility with which the arguments of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are imported into the new context, it is impossible to miss an element of renewed disillusion in this essay, a sense that theory must wearily reconfigure itself to confront a new variety of an old opponent.

Since Adorno had committed himself to theoretical intervention in a variety of contexts, his dismay at the attack on theory in the name of praxis may have been all the more acute. Some of the more informal essays represent an attempt to influence the practice of teaching, as when, against the demand of philosophy students for narrow procedure, Adorno asserts that 'culture requires love' (p. 28). These arguments are made in the context of a desire to demonstrate the extent to which the deNazified Federal Republic presents social features which are continuous with those that generated Nazism: 'National Socialism lives on today less in the doctrines that are still given credence ... than in certain formal features of thought', predominantly 'the eager adjustment to the reigning values of the moment.' To this end, Adorno criticizes several elements within the contemporary ideology: the myth of the twenties; the valorization of public opinion; the resurgence of the irrational belief in revealed truth. In all of these arguments, Adorno seeks to show how profound intellectual disorder and social epiphenomena are imbricated. 'The Meaning of Working through the Past' engages directly with the unwillingness to acknowledge the Nazi past and the myth that a break with the past is immediately available. It concludes with the sombre warning that 'the past will have been worked through only when the causes of what happened then have been eliminated. Only because the causes continue to exist does the captivating spell of the past remain to this day unbroken.' Adorno risked obloquy by advancing this view at this time: that hostility came from the Left, and for quite different reasons, is one of the ironies – he would say inevitabilities – that this volume will help to illuminate. Henry Pickford's introduction is informative and unobtrusive: his notes are extensive and scholarly.

Adorno shared with Heidegger a dislike of the routinization of philosophy, the ambition of students to produce only 'summaries of philosophy'. In the same spirit, Heidegger denounced the endless publisher's series which compartmentalized philosophers as famous names, thereby compromising the actual practice of philosophy. In this sense, Polity's ongoing series of Key Contemporary Thinkers is designed to make the heart sink in proportion as the library sales will undoubtedly rise. The existence of such series reflects a lack of ambition on the part of publishers, but not necessarily on the part of the authors of these works. Simon Jarvis's *Adorno* is both an exemplary series book and the best account of Adorno's work now available in English. The series format commits Jarvis to a great deal of summarizing, generating a difficulty for the reader in finding it hard to tell whether the problems which emerge are problems in Adorno's thought or problems in the paraphrase. However, this book is more than just a summary; it has a mission. Jarvis is mostly interested in Adorno as a philosopher, and he tends to downplay certain elements of Adorno's thought – the extensive reliance on Freud; the near constant interplay with Benjamin; the commitment to dialectical cultural commentary – in favour of arguing the validity of Adorno's philosophical materialism. The most important argumentation in the book occurs in the last three chapters,

which show how Adorno formulates the negative dialectic from within a critique of transcendental method, and defend his arguments for the priority of the object and against the liquidation of metaphysics. In all of this, Jarvis attempts the double task of defending Adorno against criticism of his philosophical assumptions in Germany and introducing English-speaking readers to a dimension of Adorno's thought which is both less familiar and harder to disengage from Adorno's texts without an implicit knowledge of Kant and Hegel and their contexts. Jarvis accomplishes this with grace, concision, impressive learning, and a scrupulous attention to his materials.

Shierry Weber Nicholsen's *Exact Imagination, Late Work* is a collection of five related essays by an established translator of Adorno. Nicholsen is thankfully not bound by the need to summarize everything, and in contrast to Jarvis, who seeks to defend the integrity of Adorno's *oeuvre*, Nicholsen takes the opposite tack and treats Adorno's later writings as 'late work' in the sense which Adorno establishes in his essay 'Beethoven's Late Style'. Adorno presents Beethoven's later works as catastrophic and radically discontinuous, the product of an excess of mastery and a crisis in the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, and as a response to mortality. Nicholsen finds in *Aesthetic Theory* a similar catastrophe, and her approach to Adorno's work on the aesthetic is happier to treat it as a decaying monument than as a series of propositions which must be shored up. Nicholsen's approach yields intriguing insights and reads across Adorno's work in suggestive and original ways.

The attempt to disengage an implicit but never centrally articulated theory of language in the chapter called 'Language: its Murmuring, its Darkness, it's Silver Rib' moves on from Adorno's theorization of language as configurational form, in the 1930s, to show how later essays on literature (collected in *Notes to Literature*, which Nicholsen translated) attend to the non-communicational aspects of language, an attention which has important consequences for Adorno's own style. There is a potential problem in emphasizing the role of configurational form in Adorno's writing. Jarvis acknowledges this aspect of Adorno's presentation but goes on to convert Adorno into rather less constellational and more consequential form. Nicholsen's emphasis on the essay as form, and her attention to the aesthetics of Adorno's parataxis, is justified both by Adorno's own arguments and his mode of argumentation, but it runs the risk of empty formalism, a risk which is in any case inherent to the speculative mode. Whatever view one takes of Adorno's presentation, Nicholsen's essay is an asset in that it demonstrates what a direct attention to style, rather than to an abstracted and harmonized account of content, may mean for a reading of Adorno.

Of interest to many readers will be the two sections which deal with Adorno's relationship to Benjamin. The first of these makes the case that the concept of mimesis deployed in *Aesthetic Theory* must be understood in terms of its relationship to Benjamin's concept of the aura. Benjamin's notions of language and of philosophical form are claimed to provide the basis for an understanding of the mode of presentation of *Aesthetic Theory*. The second piece tackles photography and the aura, with the broad aim of defending Benjamin's 'Work of Art' essay against Adorno's well-known criticisms. I call these criticisms well known, although they seem to be rarely taken on board by advocates of Benjamin's essay, who in any case rarely respond to an ambivalence and sorrowfulness in this piece which can be readily grasped when it is read in the context of his *oeuvre*, an aspect of the essay which even Adorno did not acknowledge. Nicholsen does not commit these errors, but instead undertakes to dismantle the net opposition of Adorno and Benjamin over the 'Work of Art' essay by examining the complicity as well as difference in their views of photography in essays which are not usually evoked in this context.

David Ayers

The purring of postmodernity

Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, trans. David Webb, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1997. x + 129 pp., £39.50 hb., £11.95 pb., 0 7456 1567 8 hb., 0 7456 1752 0 pb.

So little Italian philosophy is translated that it is a rare privilege to be able to peer into the rich debates that are going on in a country whose publishing houses appear to translate everything. First published in Italian five years ago, the slender *Beyond Interpretation* is a pendant to the more substantial *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, which appeared in English translation in 1994, and a further exercise in what Vattimo calls 'weak [*debole*] thought'. 'Weak' is not synonymous with 'facile', and

still less with 'easy', as Vattimo takes it for granted that his readers are more than familiar with the hermeneutic tradition that runs from Nietzsche to Heidegger and Gadamer.

Vattimo's thought is 'weak' in that it rejects foundationalism, and even certainty itself. Following Heidegger, it is presented as a weak thought for a weak ontology that dwells in a world where Being has been diluted into use-value. Even the apparent consensus that hermeneutics is now the common idiom of philosophy is a weak claim. It is indicative not of deeply held convictions but of the existence of a 'family atmosphere' or of the 'common atmosphere' breathed in by Heidegger, Gadamer, Rorty, Levinas and so many others. Weak thought has its discreet charms. It offers the possibility of a non-metaphysical philosophy with an essentially interpretative attitude towards truth, and a nihilistic ontology which questions all values; even the need for values. Like Hayden White in his *Metahistory*, and like Rorty, Vattimo proposes poetry and rhetoric, and not the cast-iron epistemologies of foundationalism, as models for an improved understanding of the world and language in which we dwell.

In many ways this is an attractive prospect. Vattimo's weak hermenutics even offers an alternative to a deconstruction which he nicely describes as a set of 'conceptual performances entrusted to the sheer artistic flair of the deconstructor'. He celebrates the exhaustion of the modernity which promoted the 'new' as the only value, and the end of the exhausting quest for the newer than the new as the cycle of production–consumption was speeded up. Now that modernity's constant acceleration has stalled, we have been set free from the need to choose between overcoming the new in the name of the more new, and the silence of a Beckett or a Blanchot. The dominance of pastiche, self-referentiality and the realization that there are no 'originals' in Benjamin's age of mechanical reproduction is something of a release from the rigours of high modernism.

The death of God does not mean that everything is permissible, but rather that we have outgrown the need for the violent foundations his continued existence implied. God was once a defence against the fears of primitive man, but modern science is there to guarantee the stability of a formal and ordered world that has exorcized those fears. I am not sure how matters stand in the refectories of the University of Turin, where Vattimo is Professor of Philosophy, but such reassurances ring hollow in a country where, thanks to the science and technology of agribusiness, the simple pleasure of eating beef may still prove to be life-threatening. Perhaps they order these things better in Turin.

The hermeneutics proposed by Vattimo is self-consciously 'weak' too. In 1900, Dilthey could confidently follow Schleiermacher and describe the ultimate goal of the hermeneutic process as being 'to understand an author better than he understood himself'. For a hermeneutics dominated by Nietzsche's adage that there are no facts, only interpretations, 'understanding better' is more problematic than Dilthey could have imagined, and the understanding of another subjectivity more problematic still. For Vattimo, Nietzsche and Heidegger's crucial (and it is so tempting to call it foundational) insight is the realization that Western thought cannot be criticized in the name of better foundations. He argues that the realization that there is no final interpretation, and not merely scepticism about grand narratives, is the hallmark of the farewell to modernity that is postmodernity. Whereas biblical hermeneutics was both a search for correct interpretation and, perhaps more importantly, a way of avoiding misinterpretations, it has become, thanks largely to Nietzsche and Heidegger, a mild-mannered attempt to find a rationality of the *Lebenswelt* that can, up to a point, unify the plurality of languages and value systems that support the scientific and technical worlds, so as to give citizens the power to take part in collective decision-making. Despite the postmodernist accent, this still sounds like the old theme of the citizen against the state and the powers that be.

Vattimo tells us that modern man dwells in a library, and that his experience of truth is 'a library of Babel' (surely the definite article is intended here, as there cannot be more than one library of Babel). The reference to Borges' library, which is of course infinite and coterminous with the universe, is in danger of becoming a commonplace, and one might have thought that the Internet was a more appropriate postmodernist metaphor. After all, the noise of the chatter in cyberspace is more frightening that the interstellar silence that so terrified Pascal. More disturbingly, Vattimo seems to overlook the darker side of Borges' fable in his promotion of what looks alarmingly like the purring complacency that typifies so much postmodernist theory.

For most of its users, the library is a comforting place. It is somewhere where we can read and interpret in silence, and from which we can then emerge to interpret our interpretations in a Rorty-like conversation. (There will still be time after tea for critical

criticism and, for those who like such things, practical criticism too.) Borges does not tell us what happens to readers who are so foolish as to leave their desks and wander into the stacks, but his librarians tell of a 'staircase without steps' where some of their colleagues have almost lost their lives. Unable to reach a consensus, others have died in interpretative quarrels. The library of Babel is, potentially, a dangerous place. And for real libraries, the danger lies outside. A library burned in ancient Alexandria, libraries burned in postmodern, post-communist ex-Yugoslavia. Books have burned, and their writers been killed, throughout the short and terrible twentieth century. Conversation is not always enough to defend them in ages of extremes. Vattimo is a good and sophisticated apologist for weak thought, and it is in many ways a pleasure to read him. And yet one can only wonder about the advisability of even trying to converse with fire-raisers.

David Macey

Substance in style

Sean Homer, *Fredric Jameson: Marxism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998. xi + 216 pp., £45.00 hb., £12.95 pb., 0 7456 1685 2 hb., 0 7456 1686 0 pb.

Stephen Regan, ed., *The Eagleton Reader*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1998. xvi + 454 pp., £14.99 pb., 0 631 20249 8.

Fredric Jameson's famous injunction to 'always historicize' applies not only to the objects of criticism but to its subjects. These two volumes offer an ideal opportunity to follow the trajectories of arguably the most influential figures in postwar Anglo-American Marxism. While both Eagleton and Jameson can be characterized by their level of political commitment, their oppositional but open engagement with continental theory, and their determination to keep Marx on the agenda within an increasingly conservative academic culture, it is hard to discuss them without reference to their style, for in addition – and perhaps even in contradiction – to their charged advocacy of a rigorous materialism and historicism, they share an irresistible passion for the pulling power of the signifier.

Jameson and Eagleton are gifted writers whose theoretical acumen is matched by a level of rhetorical proficiency that can be both seductive and reductive in equal measures, a heady brew of dialectics and polemics. Eagleton wields a Wildean wit, and is noted for the transparency and clarity with which he has conveyed complex ideas to generations of grateful undergraduates, this reviewer included. Indeed, Eagleton, himself a consummate stylist, has addressed Jameson's work in terms of its syntax in an essay entitled, 'Fredric Jameson: The Politics of Style' (1982), unfortunately omitted from Regan's *Reader*, while Jameson's first book was called simply *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (1961). Their styles are distinct, reflecting their early influences, with Jameson drawing on Sartre's vacillation between Marxism and existentialism, and Eagleton taking his cue from the vexed yoking together of culture and materialism executed by Raymond Williams, exemplified in the oxymoronic 'structure of feeling'.

The concern with presentation and prose ought not to be seen as a triumph of style over substance, for what Jameson and Eagleton have ably demonstrated is the awesome materiality of the sign. There is substance to their style. Brilliant analysts of the ideology of culture, they are also arguably our finest exponents of the language of criticism. While cautioning against the more extreme claims of deconstruction and postmodernism, each has indicated how a forceful engagement with other theories and traditions can enrich and enhance mainstream Marxist thought. Of course, these terms – margin and mainstream – are inappropriate in so far as syllabus and society are out of step, so that within the university today 'Deconstruction', 'New Historicism' and 'Postcolonialism' may be more at home – more 'real' – than Marxism. The curriculum has a currency of its own.

What Eagleton and Jameson do so well is to negotiate the space between a larger non-academic Marxist inheritance and the panoply of modish intellectual formations that have sprung up within the academy, and that can strengthen as well as undermine it. If Eagleton and Jameson harbour a common scepticism about philosophical postmodernism, anchored in a strain of French philosophy that can be seen to take its lead from the wrong German tradition – Heidegger and Nietzsche, rather than Hegel or Marx – they are paradoxically immersed in the language of those whom they seek to criticize. By exploiting the resources of poststructuralism in the interests of Marxism they have hatched a hybrid theory that aims to partake of the best of both, combining detailed attention to texts, especially documents of culture, with commitment to a historical context that is much more than mere background.

The Eagleton Reader makes accessible an indispensable archive, bristling with energy and intelligence. Stephen Regan, who Eagleton, with characteristic glibness, says 'knows more about my stuff than I do', has gathered together thirty essays and extracts spanning as many years, from the early days of radical theology to the searing critiques of postmodern apocalypse. The volume is divided into six parts: 'Literary Criticism', 'Cultural Politics/Sexual Politics', 'Marxism and Critical Theory', 'Modernism and Postmodernism', 'Friends and Philosophers', and 'Ireland's Own'. The

final section contains, as one would expect, more recent writings, though the presence of an early essay on Yeats's 'Easter 1916', published in 1971, offers a useful starting point for an exploration of Eagleton's passionate engagement with Irish politics and history, and the rediscovery of a national identity that sheds light on his disaffection with established English intellectual traditions.

Eagleton's ability to move with ease between the canonical and the contemporary is evident here in the range of topics. Essays on Seamus Heaney and Tony Harrison sit comfortably alongside readings of a host of earlier authors including Charlotte Brönte, Hardy, Hopkins, Lawrence, Pope, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Wilde and Yeats. These treatments of literary figures are supplemented by important pieces on thinkers as diverse as Walter Benjamin, Derrida, Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein and Raymond Williams. In one of the essays on Derrida, Eagleton speaks of *Specters of Marx* under the heading of 'Marxism without Marxism' (see *RP* 82), but one could turn this round and say that what Eagleton gives us is 'Deconstruction without Deconstruction'. Eagleton's constant refrain that poststructuralists and deconstructionists – and formalists of every kind – have taken a flight from history cannot conceal the fact that it is the contemporary French tradition that haunts his work, just as it pervades Jameson's.

Homer's book is a lucid and accessible guide to Jameson's work, charting one of the most fascinating adventures in contemporary Marxist thought. In *Marxism and Form* (1971), *The Prison House of Language* (1972), and *The Political Unconscious* (1981) Jameson mapped out a form of Marxism that has been hugely significant in an American context, less so on this side of the Atlantic. Writing with great economy and good sense, Homer seeks to do three things: to provide an introduction to Jameson's writing, place it in its philosophical context, and elaborate a provisional critique. The six sections cover the main planks of Jameson's criticism: from form, through history, desire, postmodernism and space, to totality and difference. Homer illustrates the extent to which Jameson's work shows that 'Marxism's theoretical primacy rests on its ability to appropriate other critical discourses'. This eclectic appropriation of discourses entails an active intervention rather than a passive consumption. The idea of 'sampling' in music, an exemplary postmodern practice, is an apt description of Eagleton and Jameson's parodic and transformative engagement with other theories.

Eagleton and Jameson share a conviction that culture is a sore point of capitalism, a place where Marxism can and should apply pressure. Perhaps most importantly, both are indebted to what Stephen Heath has termed 'the return of language', for despite themselves, and no matter how hard they try to champion reality over representation, Eagleton and Jameson illustrate the perils of the phrase 'going beyond the content'. Jameson's statement that 'there is nothing that is not social and historical ... everything is "in the last analysis" political' can be read against Derrida's notorious claim that there is nothing outside the text. However, if we consider Derrida's own interpretation – 'there is only context' – then both statements amount to the same thing, for surely if everything is 'in the last analysis' political, this

'everything' includes language and textuality. In order to read the ideology of the text, and, by extension – since reading is an active, material process – to lay it bare, we have to have an understanding of the text of ideology, its rhetorical ruses, its ability to hide in language, pretending to be immaterial, transparent, obvious, in short something other than itself. Perhaps if Derrida had said right at the outset 'everything is political', instead of 'There is nothing beyond the text', he'd have saved himself a lot of trouble.

One of Engels's definitions of dialectics in *Dialectics of Nature* was 'the interpenetration of opposites', and this could stand as a description of Eagleton and Jameson's love–hate relationship with the ideality of the literary object. Both writers adore paradoxes and enact dialectical reversals with astonishing dexterity. Opposites attract, and a materialist critique that pits word against word always runs the risk of re-appropriation. Homer's assertion that 'the present political imperative for a Marxist or the radical left ... is to develop a theory flexible enough to articulate the increasingly complex mediations between a global economic market and our discrete, fragmented, cultural experience' can be read alongside Regan's claim that Eagleton's transgression of the boundary between art and ideas is what makes his work so politically effective.

Willy Maley

New Hegel, new Marx?

John Rosenthal, *The Myth of Dialectics: Reinterpreting the Marx–Hegel Relation*, Macmillan and St Martin's Press, London and New York, 1998. xv + 238 pp., £45.00 hb., 0 333 69442 2.

This work situates its treatment of the Marx–Hegel relation and 'the mysteries of dialectics' in the context of 'a certain revival in academic circles of specifically Hegelian Marxism'. Rosenthal intends to exorcize the baneful influence of Hegelian dialectic from Marxism, very much in the spirit of Althusser and Colletti, because this is incompatible with science. The originality of his enterprise lies not so much in the details of the anti-Hegelian polemic as in his interpretation of Marx's theory of value. Since 'the real form of economic value, viz. money' has 'a fortuitous theoretical isomorphism' with Hegel's mystical 'Idea', the way was open for Marx to flirt with Hegelian modes of expression and for 'New Hegelian Marxism' foolishly to take this as a vindication of Hegel's method and to seek to employ it more consistently than Marx himself. Authors cited under this head are Backhaus, Banaji, T. Smith, Arthur, Reuten and M. Williams; but he adds that 'the new Hegelian Marxism is, so to speak, "in the atmosphere".'

A debate on new Hegelian Marxism is certainly due. Unfortunately the present work constitutes little more than a shot across the bows, since the treatment of this topic is somewhat perfunctory, as is indicated by the chapter-heading 'Some Passing Remarks on the "New" Hegelian Marxism'. Much more substantial is the critique of 'old' Hegelian Marxism. Rosenthal argues that 'the traditional historicist variety of Hegelian Marxism' not only proposes a misleading interpretation of Marx's *Capital*; it presupposes a 'banalized interpretation of Hegel's *Logic*'. Key here is its insistence on giving Hegel's category of 'negation' a *temporal* connotation. Rosenthal rightly points out that, even if Hegel slides from one meaning to another, the original sense of 'negation' in Hegel's logic is that of limitation and alterity. The new dialectic, in its interpretation and reconstruction of Marx's *Capital*, abjures the old historical dialectic but finds in Hegel's central works precisely the articulation of a system of synchronic categories. The 'method', therefore, to be appropriated from Hegel and Marx is that of *systematic dialectic*. However, this will not do for Rosenthal either, for he argues that Hegel's logic – which he says is thoroughly 'paralogical' – debouches into a form of Christian mysticism in which the 'Idea' incarnates itself in the world and, conversely, there results a 'logicization of the empirical'.

Rosenthal's own account of Marx discusses the peculiar 'objectivity of the economic', which requires theory to grasp the 'transcendental conditions' of the possibility of exchange. Prior to any actual exchange, the category of value is 'presupposed' because 'value as a practical concept is not *abstracted from* particulars in their empirical diversity, but rather *projected upon* them'. Rosenthal rightly insists that this has an *objective* character; it is not a merely intersubjective convention. The consequence of this practical inversion is that a peculiar 'objectivity' is constituted that is 'analogous' with the world of Hegel's Idea. Rosenthal insists that this 'unmistakable isomorphism' is 'a remarkable *accident*'; thus it gives no warrant whatsoever for the general applicability of Hegel's method.

Rosenthal concedes that 'Marx made the curious discovery of an object domain in which the inverted relation between the universal and the particular which constitutes the distinctive principle of Hegelian metaphysics *in fact* obtains.' But, far from justifying the appropriation of a 'rational kernel' in Hegel's method,

> the relevance of Hegel's philosophy to Marx's analyses consists *precisely* in the peculiar logical formulae which Marx takes over from it (and not in any 'method') and the distinctiveness of these formulae, as well as their usefulness for Marx, consists precisely in their *inverted* character ... which is to say that it is paradoxically the *mystical formulae* of Hegelian 'logic' for which Marx finds a *rational* scientific application.

This position is that which I have myself adopted, as Rosenthal briefly notes, and thus I am by no means committed to the view that there is nothing wrong with Hegel's method in general and that Marxism simply makes a better application of it, a view characteristic of Tony Smith, Geert Reuten and Michael Williams, for instance. I hold that Hegel's effort to think through a genuine idealism capable of understanding how a realm of objectivity might be constituted through the effectivity of pure concepts has a certain relevance to how the inverted world brought into being in exchange imposes itself on us; how a real ideality pervades the economy and shapes its destiny.

If one considers the specific polemic against 'New Hegelian Marxism', one finds little to get to grips with. Indeed the discussion is curiously out of focus in that it is organized around the essence/appearance distinction in a peculiarly misleading way. Rosenthal attempts to warn us off Hegel through holding up to ridicule a couple of citations from *Encyclopaedia §131 Addition*, supposed to show Hegel's contempt for the real world. Rosenthal therewith repeats a common error of Hegel's critics, namely the attribution to him of a position he is discussing but which is not his own view. Rosenthal should have understood that the whole Doctrine of Essence is not Hegel's standpoint but, as he carefully explains at the outset (§114), that of the reflective Understanding; and rather than being truth it is 'the sphere of posited contradiction'. It is, of course, a feature of Hegel's method that even the most inadequate categories are retained when sublated, but their meaning is then controlled by the larger framework, and they must therefore be used with due care; absolutizing them leads to falsity. Yet this absolutization is what Rosenthal does when he attributes such positions to Hegel as if the view in question were Hegel's last word. In the *Logic* the immediate successor to Essence and Appearance (or Existence) is Actuality. What a different Hegel Rosenthal would have shown us had he cited *this* category, which results precisely from destabilizing and overcoming the essence/appearance opposition: 'The utterance of the actual is the actual itself, so that the actual remains still something-essential in this utterance and is only something-essential so far as it is in immediate existence' (§142). So, after all the real world is ... essential! – indeed, as he goes on to say, 'rational through and through'.

The lesson of all this with respect to Marx's substantive problem – the value form – is clear. It is inadequate to assert that 'value' is essential and money price mere appearance. The actuality of value is achieved only in and through price. It would be still worse to assert that value is inessential while the 'reality' is exchange of labours, for the key task is to show how the product of labour takes the value form and only therewith is properly a value. The strange thing is that this is precisely the view taken by 'new Hegelian Marxism', whereas the overemphasis on essence, which Rosenthal falsely attributes to Hegel, is that of the old orthodoxy which never took value forms and fetishism seriously and read Marx as a Ricardian.

Notwithstanding this, I agree with Rosenthal that there is something mysterious about Hegel's philosophy. It is one thing to vindicate the category of Actuality, another to logicize what *is* actual as if the world were there simply to provide a proof of the category. In Hegel's philosophy the relation of logic to the world is aporetic. But this has its parallel in the topsy-turvy world of capitalism. Does the dialectic of 'the Concept' create the world or simply appropriate it in thought? Does capital create wealth or does it simply expropriate under its own forms the wealth derived from labour and nature?

Chris Arthur

'Somewhat epistemologically relativistic' liberalism

G.F. Gaus, *Justificatory Liberalism: An Essay in Epistemology and Political Theory*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1996. 309 pp., £40.00, hb., £22.50 pb., 0 19 509439 5 hb., 0 19 509440 9 pb.

Liberalism is not what it used to be. Amongst those of its North American allies who continue to defend something like the institutional heritage of the Founding Fathers, few, if any, would claim self-evidence for the 'truths' proclaimed in the founding documents of the USA. Nor now truth. Only three decades ago the road from reason to liberalism was briefly reopened in that renaissance of liberal political philosophy which produced one of the tradition's seminal texts: John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Since then, however, Rawls himself has abandoned the pursuit of *rational* foundations for a *universal* morality, settling instead for articulation and celebration of the confessedly particular ideas of a particular tradition; of 'certain ideas ... latent in the public political culture of a democratic society'.

Amidst widespread reaction against the Ages of Reason in general, and liberal universalism in particular – and a growing awareness of the tensions inscribed within multicultural societies – there has arisen a 'political liberalism', the vocation of which is to secure consensus on liberal constitutional principles within 'democratic societies'. The quest for 'overlapping consensus' precludes anything so controversial as insistence on the truth, or rational superiority, of 'comprehensive' liberal values – or, for that matter, the superiority of, say, Kantianism to the Koran. Aiming to secure the allegiance of all, political liberalism has steered clear of commitments within moral epistemology. Forthright epistemological positions are ruled out because reasonable citizens may demur from any particular epistemological theory, such as that there are (or are not) moral truths.

Gaus's justificatory liberalism also requires that liberal constitutional principles be publicly justified to 'every last individual', including, presumably, many who will not be especially liberal in their wider commitments. There is, however, as he points out, a snag with the supposed epistemological agnosticism of political liberals. If political liberalism aims to *justify* liberal principles and institutions, then it cannot but commit itself to some understanding of what constitutes justification, and this is itself an epistemological matter. In fact, political liberals have tended to conflate justification with acceptance, or rough consensus, achieved via processes of 'commonsense' reasoning. The trouble is, as Gaus argues, that people often do not accept what is justified, and 'commonsense reasoning' is often more common than it is sensical.

Setting out to 'show why liberal democracy is justified', Gaus argues that this is an altogether different matter from showing that it is, or could be, an object of consensus: '[the] test for the justification of a political regime ... is not whether that justification is widely accepted, or is uncontroversial ... [but] whether it provides all citizens with good reasons for supporting it'. Consensus need not follow from justification because all citizens may have such reasons and yet fail to recognize or accept that they do. Gaus is not, however, here returning liberalism from its recent particularist decampment and rededicating it to moral cognitivism or universalism. Justificatory liberalism neither supposes nor requires that, regardless of what anyone might happen to believe, there simply are good reasons for supporting it. It argues instead that particular individuals, given their existing and various belief systems, will *all* have their *own* good reasons for doing so. As with political liberalism, it is to be justified relative to a plurality of existing belief systems, such that, in theory at least, what may justify it to one person may carry little or no weight with another.

All that remains to be done, then, is to show both that liberal constitutional principles are justifiable to everyone, given such a conception of justification, and that nothing else is. (The liberalism defended here is somewhat to the right of that currently at large in Europe and the United States; it would, for example, reject Clinton's health reform programme and the use of taxation to subsidize the arts, on the grounds that neither policy can be shown to benefit *all*.) In fact no attempt is made to demonstrate that, for example, religious fundamentalists have their own good reasons for allegiance to a liberal polity. It is the commitment to justification which in the end justifies justificatory liberalism.

There is no doubt that this book is an important contribution to a recently emergent genre: that of post-Enlightenment liberalism. This has an oxymoronic ring to it, and it is therefore not surprising that the same antinomies inscribed within other prominent examples of the genre are evident here too. Broadly speaking, the problem confronting contemporary liberal theory is how it might abandon Enlightenment universalism and yet avoid a collapse into radical particularism, which leaves liberalism as no more than one form of life amongst others, with no privileged claim upon human reason. Thus, Rorty's open and unapologetic grasping of the particularist horn of this dilemma has left him vulnerable to the charge that he ultimately lacks the courage of his lack of conviction, and is compelled covertly to invoke universal claims about human nature in support of his liberal allegiances.

It is unclear precisely where Gaus stands on these all-important matters. There is hardly a word addressed to communitarian, and kindred, critiques of liberalism. A social contract theory is developed and deployed without even an acknowledgment of, let alone response to, the objection – common to both socialists and communitarians – that it is premissed in hugely controversial assumptions about the relationship between individual and society and the purpose of political association. Sometimes Gaus's arguments appear to be aiming for no more that a working up of ideas latent within the public cultures of contemporary liberal cultures *à la* the New Rawls. More generally, his approach tends towards particularism for the obvious reason that whether or not liberal principles are 'justified' must depend upon the beliefs and convictions which those to whom they are addressed (contingently) happen to have.

However, Gaus also argues that we must refrain from imposing principles upon others – that is, principles not derivable from their existing belief systems – because this is required by an 'ethic of respect'. In doing so he appears to be asserting that this ethic is itself of universal scope and application. The problem is that such an ethic of respect is not justifiable given justificatory liberalism's own epistemological protocols. There is no guarantee whatsoever that the existing belief systems of all will commit them to the claim, required but undefended here, that we respect others where and because we refrain from imposing upon them principles and institutions not justifiable on the basis of their existing commitments. The suspicion is that Gaus would here override local commitments in the name of a universal ethic (and particular conception) of respect. As with Rorty and Rawls, such ultimate recourse to a principle of trans-traditional application is not at all surprising: liberals are liberals after all, and cannot in the end avoid standing somewhere and for something or other.

Marcus Roberts

Cosmopolis or Cuba?

Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1997. x + 369 pp., £26.50 hb., £14.50 pb., 0 674 05030 4 hb., 0 674 05031 2 pb.

James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, eds, *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1997. vi + 260 pp., £29.50 hb., £14.95 pb., 0 262 02428 4 hb., 0 262 52235 7 pb.

The transatlantic debate between liberals and communitarians trundles on and, in a European parallel, 'Habermas's Kantian program for politics does battle with the legacy of Heidegger', as Martha Nussbaum puts it in *Perpetual Peace* – a volume which celebrates the bicentenary of Kant's essay 'Toward Perpetual Peace'. Two centuries on we are scarcely closer to it. Nussbaum, Habermas himself and the other contributors use this constantly reiterated fact – 'genocidal civil wars', 'ethnic violence, genocidal war', 'indirect violence of a Mafia or fundamentalist variety ... nationalist, ethnic, and religious fragmentation', 'ethnic cleansing, fundamentalist terror campaigns' – both to hammer home the inadequacy of a politics based on local community loyalties and to declare the need for some form of global order. The anti-communitarian theme is reinforced by attacks on national sovereignty as a cover for illiberal regimes rather than the expression of voluntary association that it had been for earlier liberals. For cosmopolitan ones what is required instead are rights for citizens of the world enforceable by global agencies. Habermas sees the growth of war crimes tribunals as a promising precursor of such procedures.

'Globalization' is in any case already making national sovereignty an anachronism in the cosmopolitans' book. Kant believed that the spread of commerce would be conducive to peace, and now with post-Cold War capitalism spread across the globe we at last have the conditions for it, or so Karl Otto-

Apel and Habermas at least believe. The disjuncture which David Held notes between the power of the nation-state and that of the transnational corporation is accompanied by a disjuncture between the authority of national states and that of international bodies, including the UN. Several of the contributors allude to the Gulf War as a happy example of the latter in operation, Axel Honneth presenting it as a fulfilment of Kantian hopes. *Radical Philosophy* readers' impressions of this war may have been more sanguinary than sanguine. While the innocent optimism of the American contributors may be unsurprising, that it is shared here by such representatives of the new Frankfurt school as Apel, Habermas and Honneth will disappoint those whose radicalism owes something to the old school of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse.

Where cosmopolitans aim to occupy the moral high ground, Timothy Brennan seeks to undermine it. Near the beginning of *At Home in the World* he challenges what he regards as their facile dichotomy between an enlightened liberal cosmopolitanism and a conservatively patriotic ethnic particularism – the dichotomy presented, for example, by Martha Nussbaum. To pit the former against the latter is to overlook 'the rights of small nations – patriotism and all – including that embarrassing but sizeable variant of socialist nationalism that is also an internationalism'; and to do so because 'cosmopolitanism is the way in which a kind of American patriotism is today being expressed'. Brennan fleshes out this last point in two connected ways. On the one hand cosmopolitanism rationalizes a new world order in which capitalism can flourish and serve, in particular, American interests. On the other, it depends upon and exports the values of the American polity.

The bulk of Brennan's book is concerned to show how American ideological formations find expression in the *aesthetic* that cosmopolitan cultural critics bring to their material, an aesthetic that renders nearly invisible its valorization of an American interpretation of rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Brennan points to a 'critical ethics of "complexity"' as what drives the cultural cosmopolitans' celebration of hybridity, bricolage and syncretism. Although the postmodernist-influenced critics caught up in this celebration have officially opposed a universalizing Enlightenment value-system – not least as irredeemably *Western* – Brennan believes that their practice presupposes a Kantian aesthetic of discrimination which is detached from the particular ways of life within and for which cultural products have their point. It is this aesthetic that permits its practitioners a fundamentally imperialist appropriation of non-Western culture, which Brennan dubs 'assimilationism with dignity'.

Yet such an aesthetic both cuts cosmopolitans off from the crudities of political commitment and involves them in a culture of commodification which offers 'a specifically capitalist fulfilment of desire that is based on addiction ... an infinitely repeatable fulfilment: a fulfilment without satisfaction'. Against this, Brennan asks, what might socialist desire consist in? He finds it in, for instance, the *relief* from consumerism of socialist Cuba, whose black music at once represents an authentic popular culture and an influential cultural export without imperialist ambitions. Examples like this provide a useful antidote to the cosmopolitan assumption that, as Brennan caricatures it, 'nations no longer exist since teenagers in Beijing listen to the rock group Nirvana and the US military has no worthy rival'.

Brennan's wide-ranging cultural criticism (influenced, interestingly enough, by Adorno) makes for a much more intelligent book than the philosophical aridities of the *Perpetual Peace* volume. But globalization *has* brought changes which often doom to failure nationally based strategies of resistance to exploitation and oppression; and a good deal of recent nationalism not only does nothing to further such resistance – it actually oppresses those whose identities *are* hybrid or (and here the word has chilling echoes) cosmopolitan. Neither of these books indicates what a realistic and radical response to such developments might be.

Paul Gilbert

Ties that bind

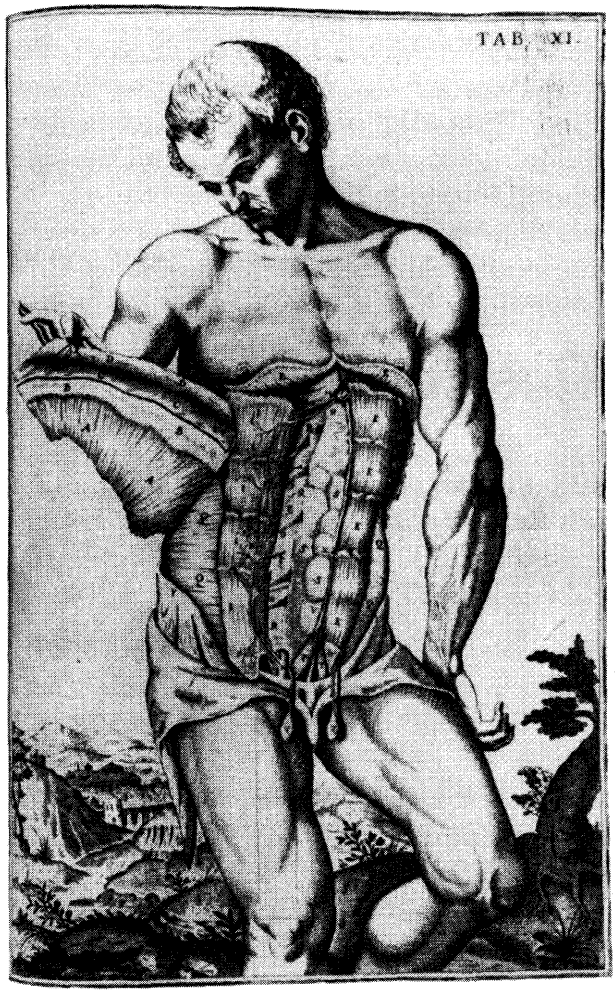
Mari Jo Buhle, *Feminism and its Discontents: A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1998. 432 pp., £23.50 hb., 0 674 29868 3.

Feminists and Freudians are a fractious lot. 'Many a monster can march about flying the banner of "freedom" or "feminism"', according to Jean Bethke Elsthain, but it takes a 'real' feminist, such as she styles herself, to detect the monstrous type, with the aid of psychoanalysis. However, as Mary Jo Buhle shows in this useful history, many of the monstrous feminists who first marched about challenging the bonds securing women to marriage and motherhood in

the name of 'freedom' and 'feminism', at the beginning of the century, had their own versions of psychoanalytic wisdom.

One such monster, the feminist and free-lover, Emma Goldman, sat enthusiastically in the audience when Freud took psychoanalysis to America in 1909. She quickly declared Freud 'a giant among pygmies', and affirmed the affinity between feminism and psychoanalysis, with its recognition of 'the inhibition of thought imposed upon [women] for the purpose of sexual repression'. Freud's first American admirers – as often popularizing cultural and political figures as professional physicians – understood him to be attacking hypocrisy and puritanism, and in favour of women's sexual emancipation. The cultural optimism of these followers in the 1910s bore little relation to Freud's own perspective. He immediately suspected he had made a 'gigantic mistake' in taking his theories to America. But then, the cultural conservatism of Elsthain and her mentors, Horkheimer and Adorno, owes similarly little to Freud's own pronouncements.

These were, of course, extremely equivocal: one minute Freud warned of the terrible effects of sexual repression and the patriarchal family, especially on women; the next he suggested the impossibility of civilization without them. Those feminists who marched about saying much the same thing as Goldman, sixty years later, targeted Freud as their enemy, following the height of psychoanalytic misogyny in the mid-century.



Feminism and Its Discontents sets out to unravel the wondrously complex love–hate relationships between – and within – feminism and psychoanalysis, which it sees as the two most important movements of modernity. One might have expected Mari Jo Buhle, an original US New Lefter, to have flagged Marxism, but she is content to interweave that trajectory into the history of the other two. Buhle situates her tale within the broader context of political and cultural history in the USA, and its shifting encounters with European thought and politics. She is well aware that her outlook on the history of ideas is currently unfashionable. It makes her all the more determined to attempt 'the restoration of feminist "theory" to the realm of "thought"'.

For the most part, Buhle succeeds in her goal. She surveys a century of growth and change in feminist thinking, outlines the history of pychoanalysis in the USA, and reflects upon the puzzling but always passionate relation between the two – from warm embrace to firmest repudiation. The twists and tensions in that relationship highlight the continuous arguments around sexual difference, and their entanglement in the messy conflicts in women's lives between motherhood and careers, self-realization and gender justice. Feminists and anti-feminists alike have turned to psychoanalysis and in the process refashioned it: either seeking blueprints for their belief in the legitimate relation between the sexes, or hoping merely to understand the complex connections between sexuality, subjectivity and gender hierarchy. However, feminists have also battled over the nature of their movement. Some – from Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a century ago, to many an activist today – remain suspicious of psychoanalysis and any feminism which is primarily about selfhood (or its deconstruction), arguing for involvement in collectivities and social transformation. Not all hierarchies, they stress, arise from sexual difference, and the focus on difference removes attention from the diversity of the social institutions that maintain gender hierarchy. Others, defining feminism as the affirmation of women's 'difference' – or at least as perennial attention to the place of the 'feminine' – remain uniquely focused upon sexual difference; ironically, even when, in postmodernist guise, they proclaim the indeterminacy of gender.

Buhle leads her readers through the repeated battles over feminism, Freudianism and female subjectivity,

with exceptional clarity and care. Her book will provide no new theoretical insights for those familiar with the terrain, but it will serve as a reliable introduction for those who have scant knowledge of the historical ties binding feminism to psychoanalysis. It is also useful for those, like me, who wish to remind themselves of what they thought they already knew, but may well have forgotten – like the importance of another critical theorist, Herbert Marcuse, in welcoming the arrival of women's liberation. For those who want to glean more of the secrets of the author's heart, however, she signs off with a telling note. In a final act of unconscious wish-fulfilment, Buhle consigns Derrida to the grave – informing us of his redemption through a shift 'in his last book before his death, back to Marxism'!

Lynne Segal

Resistance through subcultures

Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, Athlone Press, London and Atlantic Highlands NJ, 1997. xxx + 347 pp., £16.95 pb., 0 485 12132 8.

The best recent work of cultural criticism professes to be an attractive surrogate for other, more concrete forms of social and economic struggle. This thriving new sub-genre of the humanities reflects both the positive political aspects of the British Cultural Studies tradition of engaged, incisive scholarship and the currently barren state of oppositional discourse in our mainstream public sphere. In this respect, Alan Sinfield, a noted Renaissance scholar and the editor of the journal *Textual Practice*, as well as a frequent contributor to *Gay Times* (a publication that is itself a dynamic example of the dying tradition of committed, issue-based journalism), is perhaps better equipped than most to trace the social, economic and political threads that define our present situation in Britain. *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, originally published in 1989 at the height of the cultural Left's despair in Thatcherite Britain, now appears in a new edition to examine the unresolved contradictions of British capitalism, Blair-style.

This is a work of selective cultural contextualization, rather than a comprehensive postwar history. It can also be viewed as a more thoroughgoing attempt at an intellectual reconstruction of the broad progressive Left, as sampled in these very pages a few years back (see his essay 'Sexuality and Subcultures in the Wake of Welfare Capitalism', in *RP* 66). Sinfield describes the study in a new opening chapter as 'a history of the political formation which fed the preoccupations of left-liberal intellectuals in the mid-1980s'. From this perspective, he constructs a narrative of the rise and fall of postwar welfare capitalism in Britain and its transformation into New Right ideology; a social revolution that presents a forbidding, yet necessarily innovative, challenge to contemporary cultural theory and practice. It is to his credit, then, and perhaps more in the politically earnest vein of the defeated New Left cultural praxis that he details in the study, that he also provides a running argument for a new cultural particularism that promotes multiple sites of political resistance.

Appropriate to his overall counter-hegemonic cultural project, Sinfield maps the postwar British cultural experience as a series of abbreviated episodes framed by the larger failed narrative of welfare capitalism. Refreshingly, he re-establishes the connection between art and social agency and paints each historical episode within the political possibilities, and frequent contradictions, of its cultural production. Chapter by chapter, the moral complexities of postwar British cultural history emerge: the struggle for a new postwar social-democratic consensus out of the suspicions of the reactionary cultural elite; the complicating influence of a suppressed gay narrative in the insecurities of that politically eclipsed leisure class; the post-colonial complicities of literary intellectuals in the distorted subjectivity of newly liberated black Commonwealth countries; the creation of a vigorous subculture out of the fraught postwar British encounter with American popular music; and perhaps most impressively, the charting of the British New Left intellectual movement as a convergence of seemingly contradictory cultural tendencies – a defensive aesthetic modernism, a vigorous resistance to American postwar political hegemony, and new institutional expressions like English and Cultural Studies, subsidized radical theatre, and public broadcasting.

If there is a limitation to this ambitious catalogue of postwar cultural experience, it is to be found in the lack of engagement with the cultural consequences of Thatcherism, only briefly dealt with in the concluding chapter, 'The Ways We Live Now'. The complex series of cultural changes often casually lumped together as 'postmodernism' is rather narrowly defined as a by-product of the institutional crisis of traditional cultural authority in Britain and the West more

generally. Having said that, the final assessment of the present state of British cultural production is remarkably lucid. Sinfield reveals a dialectical optimism in the contemporary crisis of cultural production under the two decades of Thatcherism that underscores the value of this work as both an academic study and a creative intervention in our unnecessarily defeatist postmodern public sphere. He writes in conclusion:

> A divided society should have a divided culture: an (apparently) unified culture can only reinforce power relations ... the idea of a universal 'good' culture is mystifying and oppressive, and a medium-term project should be to validate instead a range of subcultures. These are already in place, producing alternative stories, contributing to the solidarity and self-understanding of the groups that sponsor them. It is not a time for universals, but for rebuilding from that base.

Literature, Politics and Culture is highly recommended. It is one of those rare academic texts that double as blueprints for a new cultural praxis.

Alex Benchimol

Knowing Hegel

Tom Rockmore, *Cognition: An Introduction to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, University of California Press, Berkeley CA and London, 1997. vii + 247 pp., £29.95 hb., 0 520 20661 4.

This book follows up the author's earlier work, *Before and After Hegel* (University of California Press, 1993). Here a complete treatment of Hegel's erratic masterwork, the *Phenomenology*, is attempted, in the conviction, characteristic also of the previous book, that Hegel has a continuing contribution to make to current philosophical debates.

Such a claim may seem hard to substantiate, particularly when, as is the case here, the issues under discussion are epistemological ones. A text which veers within the space of a few pages from Newtonian conceptions of physical force and natural law to a discussion of the relations between master and slave, or which proceeds by way of attacks on physiognomy and phrenology to criticism of the Kantian account of morality, or which asserts that art, religion and philosophy itself are the highest ways of knowing, would seem a far cry from the soberly regimented compartmentalization of philosophical problems which is the standard approach today. To a modern reader who may be more familiar with philosophical debates about knowledge which concern themselves with whether or not it is justified true belief, such preoccupations and Hegel's way of dealing with them often seem baffling or wilfully capricious.

The key is to realize that Hegel is not concerned with singular episodes of knowing, or with such things as the necessary and sufficient conditions for such episodes. His epistemology is directed towards the understanding of the knowing subject and the *kinds* of cognitive relation such a subject can have with its objects. This knowing subject is not, for Hegel, a detached and decontextualized observer, but a fully concrete human subject for whom knowledge is a form of active engagement with the world; a world, in turn, in which the concrete context in which the knowing subject strives and struggles is *historical*. This historicizes epistemology. Hegel plunges into the whirlpool of concrete historical experience to see how the living subject grapples with its object *as that subject conceives it.*

Hegel is thus an antifoundationalist philosopher, one for whom the destination towards which the historically unfolding series of shapes of cognition is leading is more important for establishing the truth of the whole than is the series' starting-point. But what prevents this series from falling apart into incommensurable, historically local discourses? If we abandon foundations and the ideal of timeless, universal knowledge, don't we also abandon objectivity, and reason itself? Here, for Rockmore, lies the particular strength of Hegel's approach:

> Antifoundationalism without skepticism is Hegel's epistemological legacy as we move into the future. ... He shows that we cannot understand knowledge other than from the perspective of human being. He further shows that if we understand the subject as a real human being, hence as historical, then we must understand knowledge as a historical process.

Such historical process reveals the self-development of the knowing subject who becomes, through the unfolding process, the object of knowledge. Knowledge has as its object its own self-development: 'For Hegel, the highest form of knowledge turns out to be self-knowledge, or knowing oneself in otherness and otherness as oneself'. When we ask what knowledge is, we can only answer that it is this return to self from otherness, through which we come to see that what seemed to lie beyond us as an alien unknown is what we put there ourselves, in our imperfect but necessary efforts to organize our experience.

In seeing ourselves in what lies behind our experience we shift the focus of epistemology to take in our

own activity. This is what necessitates the analyses of socially embedded patterns of rational activity which result in the apparently vertiginous changes in the type object of enquiry with which the *Phenomenology* is concerned: from the 'sober' consideration of issues such as sense-experience and perception to 'wild' themes such as desire and the master–slave dialectic. Rockmore says little about how Hegel thought about the dialectic. But this is perhaps not a serious omission, as it is demonstrated in action. He deals clearly with Spirit and the absolute. In addition, I would single out for praise the discussions of Hegel's idealism, of his criticism of the Enlightenment, and of the role of religion in Hegel's philosophy.

As his title suggests, Rockmore's task is twofold: to display the epistemological unity of Hegel's convoluted argument, while at the same time discharging the obligation of his subtitle to provide an introduction which will guide the first-time reader and give a helping hand to those of us still struggling with this most intractable of philosophical classics after lengthy acquaintance. On the whole, he succeeds. Inevitably there are passages where paraphrase and frequent quotation – Rockmore's chosen tools – become leadenly dutiful. Such dull spots are few. Overwhelmingly he has useful and enlightening things to say, and they are said in a clear and uncluttered way. The book does not suffer from excessive brevity as do some introductions, such as H.S. Harris's recent (and otherwise excellent) *Hegel: Phenomenology and System* (Hackett, 1995). Nor does it rival the length of Hegel's original, as Hyppolite's commentary does, for example. In all, it is a worthwhile addition to the introductory literature; so it is unfortunate that its price will compel the student audience to whom it should appeal to await the paperback.

David Snelling

The sovereign pretender

Richard J. White, *Nietzsche and the Problem of Sovereignty*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1997. x + 209 pp., $34.95 hb., $15.95 pb., 0 252 02300 5 hb., 0 252 06603 0 pb.

The transition from theory to practice is notoriously disillusioning. Not so for White, who shifts from the theoretically impossible to the practically possible in an ardent endeavour to bring free will and determinism into dynamic coexistence and thereby realize the sovereign ideal. Viewing sovereignty as an ideal thwarted by the fundamental opposition between human freedom and cosmic necessity, White looks to Nietzsche as one who not only provides a dialectical framework within which the sovereign individual can play out this tension, but who exemplifies the ideal in the very act of performing this interplay. Performance is the great facilitator for White, and his book focuses on the performative function of Nietzsche's works.

White begins by interrogating the philosophical paradox underpinning the problem of sovereignty: if the will is 'the locus of every individual choice', and autonomy or sovereignty 'the true achievement of individuality through the will's determination to will itself', then the possibility of a sovereign individual necessarily rests on the possibility of free will. White denies this possibility, however, and in support of his denial offers a schematic genealogy of the Christian tradition of sovereignty in which St Paul, Kant and Schopenhauer figure as exemplary failures of the will's will to will. Paul fails because he subordinates his insubordinate will to the will of God; Kant, because he subsumes the individual will under the universal will of reason; and Schopenhauer, because he subverts the tyrant Will by an equally tyrannical will to not will. It is at the end of this tradition of attempted self-appropriation, and as the harbinger of the modern (and postmodern) condition of self-disintegration, that Nietzsche appears.

Casting the sovereign individual as the unifying idea(l) of Nietzsche's thought, White proceeds to rehearse each of Nietzsche's texts in turn in order to re-enact the principal role played by the sovereign ideal. Under various guises, the sovereign individual is seen by White to will its own becoming through a transfiguration of life. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, the dialectical opposition between Apollo and Dionysus (prefiguring the eternally recurring moments of self-abandonment and self-appropriation ideally performed by the sovereign individual) affords the spectator of tragedy an encounter with life's underlying Dionysian impulse and allows the individual to 'take charge of existence and to become what he or she is'. In *Human, All Too Human*, the autonomous free spirit is affirmed while free will is emphatically denied. In *The Gay Science*, the Dionysian element, instinct in the concept of eternal return, reappears in 'The Madman' and 'The Greatest Weight' as 'the complete celebration of life and the affirmation of its sacred character'. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the eponymous and allegedly autonomous hero 'always' encounters the thought of

eternal return with 'the wild laughter that shatters all things'. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the imperative of sovereignty is understood as a possibility that 'must be *experienced* in terms of the original opposition between masters and slaves'. And finally, in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche himself performs the 'experience' of sovereignty by 'reappropriating every chance and accident [of his life] as a necessary moment of his own becoming'.

Nietzsche is an experienced performer, of course, and a more sceptical reading of his texts will unmask the following subtexts: in *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is the tragic spectacle of the Dionysian, created by the transfiguring power of Apollo, that takes charge of the spectator and dissolves him into the flux of becoming where the individual becomes what is and where individuation is not. In his 1886 Preface to *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche confesses that the 'free spirits' to whom he dedicated his book were invented by him as compensation for the friends he lacked. In *The Gay Science*, the madman, far from celebrating the death of God, is plunged into such darkness that he needs to carry a lantern in broad daylight, while the Dionysian devil who affirms the horror of eternal return is far more likely to crush than to convert with the weight of his "divine" revelation. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the thought of eternal recurrence likewise shatters rather than transforms: Zarathustra's first encounter with the thought causes him to collapse in fright, whilst his second brings on a renewed bout of asphyxiating disgust that leaves him broodily silent. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the *original* master–slave opposition can no longer be experienced, the masters having long since been vitiated by the insidious moral branding of the resentful slaves. And finally, if, as White argues, Nietzsche's sovereign performance of autobiographical self-appropriation shows that 'the "self" thereby presented only exists in the moment of the performance itself', is sovereignty then no more than a theatrical *tour de force*?

Francesca Cauchi

John Rees, *The Algebra of Revolution: The Dialectic and the Classical Marxist Tradition*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998. 314 pp., £14.99 pb., 0 415 19877 1.

John Rees tries to trace a 'red thread' from Hegel through Marx and Engels to Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Lukács and Gramsci, claiming this 'classical Marxist' tradition as an explicitly Hegelian one. Marx, Engels and Lenin are all pushed into the Hegel camp, while the chapter on Trotsky argues that he should be placed 'very firmly in the "Hegelian" Marxist tradition'. Non-Hegelian arguments are given no space except for a derisory 'refutation' in the conclusion.

While the first chapter is a well-argued outline of Hegel's philosophy, it offers only one substantial criticism – that Hegel was an idealist who focused on the development of human consciousness, while Marx was a materialist who focused on the development of human practice. The chapter on Marx and Engels argues the familiar line that Marx took over Hegel's dialectic and turned it into a materialist one. This obscures the fact that in works like *Capital* the dialectic is applied in a very specific way to the various features of the capitalist system. Hegel's grand historical schema is not simply 'materialized'; it is implicitly rejected.

Rees also attempts to defend Engels's notion of the dialectic of nature. His argument seems to revolve around the statement that 'the alternative to seeing both nature and history as dialectical in structure is to assume that nature has a series of laws totally separate to those governing society.' It is clearly the case that nature does have a series of 'laws' that are independent of society, which would continue to operate if societies did not exist. Of course these laws carry over into human society because this is emergent out of nature. But society has its own complex dynamics which are not reducible to the nature out of which it emerges. In contrast, the dialectic of nature projects onto nature concepts that only make sense in the particular context of the social domain.

Rees is palpably unable to offer any evidence that the dialectic of nature adds to our scientific understanding of the natural world. Indeed his only real defence of this position ends up abandoning objectivity for an inter-subjective position. His main argument for the dialectical evolution of nature is the development of human consciousness. There is no mention of the development of the material structures or practices within which human consciousness takes shape.

The focus on human consciousness is the result of an acceptance of Georg Lukács's Hegelian Marxism, the second main aspect of this study. Lukács replaces the Hegelian Absolute with the identical subject-object of history. Instead of seeing history as a process culminating in the realization of Absolute Spirit, Lukács sees it as a process culminating in the self-

realization of the human subject (represented by the proletariat). Like Hegel, each differentiation in human consciousness is merely a moment in the final act of self-realization. Finally, 'the act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of its object'.

Rees fails to challenge the idealistic nature of any of this. The fact that Lukács makes no analysis of social structures is ignored. For Rees the weakness of Lukács is 'that he did not extend his general framework into a sufficiently concrete account of the historically developed forms of contradictory consciousness.' But the point is that this is due to Lukács's over-arching Hegelian schema. Rees attacks Althusserian alternatives as sterile structuralism, but in Lukács there is little in the way of an analysis of the differentiated material processes and practices that give rise to the consciousness he is so keen to emphasize.

This leaves Rees with a simplistic view of ideology, reflected in Rees's theory of working-class radicalism. The book argues that the revolutionary basis of the working class is founded on the fact that workers experience the reality of exploitation and that they therefore have the best vantage point to see society more clearly. But the real point is that the place that workers occupy in the production process gives them a revolutionary potential that no other class has. This potential has to be seen in terms of their structural location and not just in terms of the ideas in people's heads. Yet the short conclusion is the only part of the book to deal with structuralist theories, and then only to rubbish them.

Rees's main argument is based on linking Althusser's anti-Hegelian stance to his Stalinist politics. Yet the publication of Althusser's early writings shows that he had a Hegelian and humanist phase that coincided with his strongest identification with Stalinism. Rees dismisses structuralist Marxism as Stalinist without producing a coherent theoretical argument against it. As such, the constant feature of the book is its lack of a structural analysis of any kind when there are plenty of theories to engage with which reject Althusser's approach by restoring the role of human agency in a reproductive and transformatory capacity.

John Rees has given an excellent outline of the 'classical Marxist tradition' and its doctrine of dialectical materialism. Unfortunately, that is precisely its problem.

Jonathan Joseph