

The thing

Rudi Visker, *Truth and Singularity: Taking Foucault into Phenomenology*, Kluwer Academic, Dordrecht/Boston/London, hb. 1999; pb. 2001. 399 pp., £110.00 hb., £29.00 pb., 0 7923 5985 2 hb., 0 7923 6397 3 pb.

'A volume of essays', Rudi Visker writes in his Introduction, 'is not a book'. It owes its synthesis – 'as the German kindly reminds us' with its name for this kind of collection, *Buchbindersynthesen* – to a glue of a literal rather than a literary kind. This volume collects together twelve essays, most previously published (the earliest in 1991), representing Visker's careful, illuminating and even devastating readings of major thinkers in what in Britain is called the 'continental' philosophical tradition. Visker is one of the more prominent commentators in contemporary continental circles, and, as these essays bear out deservedly so. Writing on, amongst others, Heidegger, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, each of Visker's critical essays is given weight by an impressive knowledge of the various texts under discussion.

Despite Visker's disclaimer, however, this is also a collection of essays that *wants* to be a book, and the way in which it is a book is peculiarly appropriate to its subject matter. The essays appear, at first, to be rather awkwardly grouped together under three even more awkward section titles, as if to impose a retrospective (but not strictly chronological) intellectual unity to justify the bookbinder's glue. Paragraphs seem to have been added to the ends of many of the earlier essays, linking them somewhat adventitiously to their successors and to the more developed themes of the later essays, as if to fit them into a philosophical project conceived with the benefit of hindsight. If, however, the mechanisms of these revisions and elaborations are rather obvious – inelegant, even – they highlight a genuine thematic unity and the working out of a set of problems which make the book more than the sum of its essayistic parts.

The central thesis is a bold declaration of an existential ontology: the human subject is singularized by attachments or 'roots' from which it cannot escape without ceasing to be itself but to which it has no access. The 'meaning' of the singular subject is therefore not available either to itself or to the others who see it from the outside: 'The subject is singularized

by some "thing" that refuses to become part of the order of meaning (signification).' My 'thing' is thus something to which I am irresistibly drawn – I would like to know, that is, who I am – but by which I am also repelled, as I do not own my 'own' thing, but am disconcerted by my detachment from it and by the impersonality of what is most intimate. The subject, Visker declares, is decentred not because it has no centre but because it has a centre 'which it may neither abandon, nor comfortably nestle itself into'. This centre, which cannot be shared, is both the source of the subject's 'dignity' (its singularity – what in another vocabulary would be called its 'alterity') and of its 'metaphysical unrest', its 'ontological loneliness'. The subject suffers from the burden of its thing, both because of its lack of access and because of the impossibility of escape. It is both 'not enough' and 'too much'. The 'thing', finally, is that with which I cannot bear to be alone, even though it makes me the singular being that I am and is what makes it possible for me to be a human being among other human beings. As subjects, then, we are dissociated within ourselves. Unable to inhabit that centre which is most proper to it, 'the subject is something that has missed an appointment', marked as a singularity by something it cannot see but which weighs upon it: '*Man is a being ... whose being consists in caring for something that does not care for it.*'

These statements are collected together from the various essays in the book. This existential core functions, structurally, as the 'thing' of Visker's project, the decentred centre of the book. The essays, on otherwise disparate topics, return obsessively to it without ever pinning it down firmly. They circle it, they pretend to ignore it, but they always end with it in such a way as to indicate its presence from the beginning. It intrudes. It will not be ignored. And to that extent this is, in one sense, a very personal book.

On the other hand, the philosophical (especially existential) and psychoanalytical antecedents of the

position are easily identified, and like those of his predecessors Visker's claims are speculative, in the sense that they cannot be proved. They function not as the conclusion to a series of arguments but as their presupposed ground, and their putative justification lies in their application to a series of problems. Perhaps aware of the slightly florid character of some of the formulations, Visker ascribes his commitment to the position not to 'a strange predilection for linking subjectivity to pain, or to a crypto-romantic coquetry with the lonely and the gloomy sides of existence', but to 'the wish to do justice to some of the phenomena that embarrass all of us today (racism, multiculturalism, Eurocentrism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, etc.)'. The proof of the pudding, then, will be in the eating. The test is whether this conception of the structure of the singularization of the subject can illuminate anything about these and other phenomena.

Squeezing some of the essays in the book under this rubric does not work. These essays are best read for what they are: insightful investigations of the articulation of certain philosophical problems in Heidegger, Foucault, Habermas, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Rorty and others. If there is a unifying method in Visker's readings here, it is in the identification of what he calls the 'unthought' of various thinkers – that which, in relation to the founding conceptual schemes or assumptions of a philosophy, could not (and perhaps need not) be thought. Although these schemes and assumptions are most often found to consist in pairs of conceptual oppositions and hierarchies, this 'unthought' is not posited as the unconscious of any of these texts and the method is not, therefore, deconstructive.

Rather, Visker's guide is, consistently, a Foucauldian conception of discourse as the determining context of what may *count as* (not what *is*) true or false, and the identification of the unthought of a philosophy is simultaneously the revelation of the conditions for the possibility of what *is* thought, and the exposure of their contingency. (The 'truth' in Visker's title is worked out via Heidegger and Foucault as a distinction between a truth that is opposed to falsity – the validity model – and a truth, called *aletheia* or discourse, that is not, but is the condition or the occurrence of the former.) Thus, to take the example of the first essay in the collection, Heidegger's failure in *Being and Time* to account for the possibility of the modification of everydayness or *doxa* (such that an authentic everydayness could at least be thought) is traced back to a reliance on a founding distinction between truth and untruth intolerant of the thought

of ambiguity, which relegates a merely semantically conceived ambiguity to the sphere of the everyday inauthenticity of the 'they'.

The lesson learned in the uncovering of the unthought of Heidegger and others points to the need for a certain self-reflective vigilance, in relation to a certain impossibility. Committed to the Foucauldian thesis of the inevitable 'relativism of conditions of validity', a thesis which is only lazily confused with a vitiating 'postmodern' scepticism (our problem is not that 'there is no truth'; if anything, there are too many truths), Visker counsels repeatedly against the avoidance of the question of the contingency of our own 'orders' of thought. He also constantly reminds us that we cannot have access to their conditions of possibility and thus, in a sense, have no access to the specificity of their contingency.

At this point the sense of Visker's subtitle, what he later calls an 'existentialization of Foucault', becomes clear. For this is, again, the structure of singularization writ large, or the place where the 'truth' and the 'singularity' of the title meet. These orders of thought are, it seems, the most highly developed forms of the various symbolic structures generated from, but not under the control of, the subject. The explanation of this occurs at several different levels of analysis. At the highest level of abstraction, discourse confronts the subject with that in it which is neither simply universal (the subject is not dissolved and could not dissolve itself in discourse, contrary to the claims of some readers of Foucault) nor 'charmingly singular'. The singularizing roots or attachments of the subject are located in contingent structures of nation, ethnicity, family, and so on, in a way that complicates, fatally, the traditional opposition between particular and universal. At the same time – and this points to the obstinate core of Visker's position – the symbolic structures of society are said to protect the subject from its 'thing'. The subject flees from itself to others, to ethics and to politics, and thus tolerance is born.

Or at least this, according to Visker, is the best-case scenario. Nationalism and racism are other outcomes. If the 'metaphysical unrest' of the subject consists in its being attached to something to which it has no access, nationalism offers it the reassuring (but false) fantasy of knowing, inhabiting and, in the last instance, *being* (in the sense of substantively coinciding with) those roots. Xenophobia and racism are another side of the same coin: not knowing the meaning of our own attachments and yet not able not to care, we ascribe imaginary meanings to the attachments of others – to

the colour of their skin, for example – in order to avoid being confronted with that ‘strangeness which lives with us but not according to our house rules’.

If this is the diagnosis, the prescription is minimal. The inevitability of our need for the symbolic structures with which to mask our ‘thing’ – structures in which we must, to some extent, misrecognize ourselves and forget what the structures are for – can only give rise to the weak hope that there may be some such structures ‘that allow us better (!?) than others to cope with the fact that for man [*sic*] the source of his dignity is also the source of his misery’. Failing this, Visker returns to the counsel of vigilance, to the hope that the recognition of the singularity of the symbolic articulation of the other’s attachments may not lead to the pathologies of racism, but might make the contingency of my attachments, also, recognizable to me. The model here is the phenom-enological reduction, the outcome of which, as Merleau-Ponty said, is always to reveal the impossibility of a complete reduction. This may not seem like much. The point, however, was not to offer a solution to these political problems, but rather to show that they have their philosophical dimensions, too.

As an attempt to understand certain phenomena, and in particular certain philosophical problems, in terms of psychic structures consequent upon what Visker sees as the structure of singularity, this is a fascinating book – even if, to this end, the cart does sometimes seem to be pushing the horse. Its own attachment is to the thought of an ontology of the subject, but it is one with which the content of the book does not (and, given what has been said, perhaps cannot) coincide, whilst nevertheless being compelled to try. This theme becomes more insistent in the final chapters, which would perhaps have made a more coherent book on their own. Here, in some out-standingly good essays, Levinas and contemporary Levinasianism emerge as Visker’s true adversaries, though he downplays the force of his attack. What amounts to Visker’s refusal of Levinas’s ‘ethicization of the subject’s subjectivity’ is arrived at through an intricate demonstration of the essential philosophical role of the word ‘God’ in that ethicization (anyone interested in Levinas should read this) and through the developing suspicion that there is something about the ‘provocation’ of Levinas’s work, ‘something about its way of shocking people that is sufficiently soothing to makes them choose its side’. (What Visker would do to avoid the same charge in relation to the perverse thrill of his own horror show

is an interesting question. But what would be the point of a *dull* existential ontology?)

The non-ethical singularization of the subject is the ‘unthought’ of Levinas’s work, according to Visker. It is not able to be thought within its determining distinctions between infinite and finite, face and form, invisible and visible. According to these distinctions, others can only be encountered in their alterity without a context, without a culture, without even eyes of a determinate colour, let alone a determinate skin colour or sex. The reverse strategy of the particularism of nationalism (identification with one’s attachments), this peculiar form of universalism looks for ‘man’s essence’ beyond or before rootedness. Visker’s counterclaim that the other is never without a context or a culture is surely right, as is the claim that the ultimate meanings of these attachments, to which we cannot be indifferent, always escape us.

For Visker, the singularizing ‘part’ of the subject does not respond to others because it does not even respond to the subject. This insistence on a singularization that is not only not ethical, but that bears within itself the possibility of the destruction of the ethical, is much more sober than the earlier hyperbole of misery and horror suggests. Its apparently pessimistic conclusion offers a surer foothold, in the end, than that ‘philosophy which is still too confident in the sublimative powers of the ethical ... and that lost its trust in the visible too soon’. And yet Visker will also claim that ‘the attachment which singularizes the subject ... has the structure of a *vague debt*’, a debt ‘which obligates the subject’ without that subject knowing ‘*what* he must do in order to repay it’. This obligation arises, it seems, because it is to this thing that the subject owes its singularity. But is this not to reintroduce the ethical structure apparently so foreign to this part of the subject? Is not the subject’s relation to its ‘thing’ thus the same thankless obligation of Levinas’s subject in its ethical relation to the other?

Finally, Visker’s conception of truth frustrates the asking of certain questions about *the* truth of his claims, yet – as a consequence of the existentializing of Foucault – the notion of ‘truth’s transcendent claims’ is not ruled out. The relation of Visker’s truth to ‘truth’s transcendent claims’ is thus the unthought of this book, ‘what he did not have to think in order to formulate his thought’, but which we must think in order to criticize it.

Stella Sandford

Blind spot

Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001. xiv + 419 pp., £45.00 hb., £15.95 pb., 0 521 66215 2 hb., 0 521 66559 0 pb.

Jason Barker, *Alain Badiou: A Critical Introduction*, Pluto Press, London, 2002. viii + 189 pp., £40.00 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 7453 1801 0 hb., 0 7453 1800 2 pb.

Whilst the systematic exposition of 'national philosophies', once so dear to German Idealists, has disappeared as such, the habit of responding to philosophical systems and their propounders along national lines is, for better or worse, very much with us to this day, and no more so than with respect to French philosophy. Anglo-American reception of French thinkers often oscillates between blanket denouncements of hermeticism and parochialism, on the one hand, and mimetic allegiance, often verging on unintentional parody, on the other. Yet is there such a thing as 'French philosophy', a native core to be salvaged from its many, often divergent guises? And is any philosophical innovation from across the Channel marked (or even tainted) by its provenance? These two books are welcome compasses for the task of orienting ourselves to the question of whether 'Frenchness' might be of any *philosophical* interest.

French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century is an admirably lucid survey of the French philosophical scene from 1890 to 1990. Though opening with a brief and illuminating treatment of the institutionalization of philosophy in the Third Republic, as the crowning discipline in a national system of secular education, Gutting's is really a 'logical geography' of figures and movements, concerned above all with the presentation of their principal motivations and key concepts. Structured as a series of quasi-autonomous monographs linked by short transitions dealing with polemics, doctrinal sequences, and political context, this is an avowedly *philosophical* history, and not a genealogical intervention of a Foucauldian sort. Many of the authors and movements dealt with, especially in the first half, will be unfamiliar to most readers, but Gutting's pedagogical flair and his ability to evoke a philosophical position's conceptual physiognomy with brevity and insight make this a very good introduction. Whether delving into Jules Lachelier's singular Kantianism, investigating the formation and unfortunate (and continuing) isolation of French philosophy of science, or outlining the conservative trends of Thomism and the Catholic philosophy of action, Gutting's book functions equally well as historical panorama or incitement to deeper inquiry.

Yet besides its ecumenical breadth and pedagogical function, the book defends a rather contentious thesis: namely, that French philosophy in the last century is best understood in light of the problem of *freedom*. Although this thesis does not mar the generosity of Gutting's single readings, it affects the weighting of the book considerably. Three of the six authors afforded chapters of their own are existential phenomenologists – Sartre, de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty (the others being Bergson, Foucault and Derrida) – and the judgement passed on philosophical movements follows suit. Spiritualism, encapsulated in the thesis that 'the qualitative content of concrete things is the contingent product of spontaneous activity', is, in its Bergsonian guise, identified as the originary locus for the French formulation of the problem. If science and common sense are grasped as freedom's 'freeze-frames' (its *clichés*), the task of philosophy is that of moving by means of intuition behind the sediments of activity in order to assume the concrete movement at the heart of the real. To capture this stance, Gutting uses a term that can in varying and often divergent guises be applied to many of the figures here on show: *transrationalism*.

By this we are to understand a philosophy that traverses the representations of scientific fact and common sense in order to capture the acts that either give rise to these representations or rupture their stability. In this sense, a philosophy of freedom, articulating constitutive activity and constituted fact, can at once be regarded as a movement towards the concrete (in the decisions that articulate a lifeworld) and beyond it (in the intuition of a vital impetus cloaked by utility). Only in the midst of the violence of the 1930s does spiritualism's conciliatory cosmology become superseded, and the theme of freedom truly comes into its own in the form of a philosophy of radical subjectivity. After its statement in *Being and Nothingness*, a text positively reassessed by Gutting, the question of existential phenomenology becomes that of situating this freedom, of maintaining the radicality of its irruption into the everyday without dissolving it in the sterile agitations of solipsism. Thus, Sartre's own *Critique of Dialectical Reason* moves to the problem of the relationship between the nothingness of subjectivity,

the realm of the practico-inert and the transformative opportunities of collective political action. De Beauvoir problematizes the possibilities of transcendence in terms of the biological immanence of woman. And Merleau-Ponty embodies freedom in the density of bodies and their practical comportments. In all these instances it is the positive insertion of the nothingness of the subject – that ‘worm in the heart of being’ (to use Sartre’s evocative phrase) – into the realm of constituted reality that is at stake.

The structuralist and poststructuralist attacks on existential phenomenology are very well staged here, via the polemics between Sartre and Lévi-Strauss, on the one hand, and Sartre and Foucault on the other. But although Gutting recognizes and catalogues some of the salient moments of structuralism as the first ‘alternative’ to the Sartrean legacy, his verdict is that it did not live up to the claim of having finally achieved a scientific methodology, and thus failed truly to counter the existentialist project. In its outright denial of the importance of subjective action, structuralism as anti-humanism is viewed here as a transitional phase, interesting in its details but of minor importance overall. For Gutting, the real critique of existential phenomenology takes place in the poststructuralism of Foucault, Derrida and the philosophers of difference (Lyotard, Deleuze, Irigaray). With poststructuralism, we witness the prolongation of the anti-humanist agenda, but now accompanied by a suspension of structuralism’s scientific claims. This constitutes a decisive break in the continuity of French philosophy, hitherto dependent on some philosophy of human nature (of which structuralist anthropology was, despite itself, still a variation), a break embodied in a thorough transformation of the style and claims of philosophical activity.

Reading Foucault, Gutting advances the provocative claim that poststructuralism’s blind spot resides precisely in its relationship to the constitutive role of freedom, particularly in the sense of praxis. Thus, although poststructuralism, in its myriad forms, is both stylistically and, to a great extent, politically an exercise in liberation (from the tyranny of the signifier, the axiomatics of capital, or the asymmetry of sexual difference), it is not a philosophy of liberation. Yet it could be argued against Gutting that it is precisely in presenting itself as an intransigent critique of representation, and thus of any subject

of an ‘intentional’ freedom, that poststructuralism thinkers both problematize and shed new light on the issue of liberation and political action, turning towards an ethics of the material and institutional articulation of desire, rather than to the irruption of subjective nothingness. Ultimately, the stakes common to Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* and Deleuze and Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* would seem to be that a practice of liberation can – indeed, must – do *without* a philosophy of subjective freedom in the Sartrean mould.

It would be difficult to imagine a starker contrast than the one between the last chapter of Gutting’s book, chronicling the ‘move to the center’ of recent French philosophy, allegedly returning to its *fin de siècle* role as the handmaiden of liberal humanism, and the opening pages of Jason Barker’s introduction to the thought of Alain Badiou. On the one side is the



reaction against postwar radicalism exemplified in the moral and theological concerns characteristic of late phenomenology; on the other is Badiou’s ‘impossible wager’, the deeply polemical formulation of a philosophy of militant subjective truth articulated on the basis of a set-theoretical ontology. Yet the thematic continuity between Gutting’s compelling characterization of French philosophy and Badiou’s project is remarkable. This is evident in the best of Barker’s treatment, where he deals with the radical demands at the heart of the development of Badiou’s thought, providing acute comparisons with other accounts of the political ontology of the subject, such as Rousseau’s *volonté générale* or Foucault’s disquisitions on power and subjection.

In 'Maoist Beginnings', an excellent chapter delineating the fertile encounter between the politics of the Cultural Revolution and Badiou's initial Althusserian 'scientism' – a moment as essential to the proper understanding of Badiou's project as its theoretical and historical coordinates will be alien and obscure to the average Anglophone reader – Barker introduces us, via the close reading of a set of politico-philosophical pamphlets from the 1970s, to the singular twist given by Badiou to the question of subjectivity. Immersed in the antagonistic dialectic of philosophical Maoism, Badiou's subject emerges, purged of the individualistic and experiential concerns of a phenomenology of freedom, as a *party* bent on the *destruction* of the capitalist system of class assignation. Concurring with Sartre's critique of Foucault, Badiou's conviction is that there is no emancipatory hope to be deduced from an objective analysis of the structures and becomings of power; that, on the contrary, in Barker's elegant formulation: 'The subject is the anchorage of subversion.'

Unfortunately, although providing a nuanced and stimulating invitation to the work of Alain Badiou, Barker's book does not sufficiently clarify the (admittedly difficult) question of the development from this dialectical theory of subjective destruction to Badiou's more recent work, in which the figure of subjectivity, no longer bound to the party, is linked to an eventual truth's rare *subtraction* from constituted knowledge. The manner in which this radical revision of Badiou's philosophical beginnings is ultimately sustained by the equation of mathematics with ontology is insufficiently fleshed out. Perhaps this is because of the regrettably little attention granted to Badiou's most systematic exposition of the dialectics of destruction, his *Théorie du Sujet* (1982). (This omission also explains the lack of clarity on the issue of Badiou's peculiar brand of materialism, and the inaccurate claim that his concern with ethics began in the 1990s). The mathematical ontology is dealt with somewhat impressionistically, although, to be fair to Barker, it could hardly be abbreviated from the deductive consistency of Badiou's own expositions without losing its pedagogical clarity. Again, it is through his effective *political* illustrations of the concepts of 'state', 'situation', 'event' and 'fidelity' that Barker offers us a fruitful point of entry into the extra-ontological theory of subjectivity presented in Badiou's more recent works, and to the way in which it moves beyond politics proper. More insistence on this point, perhaps to the detriment of the excessive attention paid to his confrontation with Deleuze, would have

illuminated the way in which Badiou's post-Maoist thought presents a profoundly challenging radicalization of the 'transrationalist' tendency reconstructed by Gutting.

It is in the manner it ultimately separates subjectivity from its specifically political guise (the party), whilst making no concessions to any phenomenology whatsoever, that Badiou's thought transforms the move beyond the concrete. That this move is based on the most stringent – mathematical – rationalism regarding the being into which subjectivity irrupts, is what makes Badiou's position so profoundly unintuitive, whilst at the same time singling it out as the only recent philosophical project to have remained faithful *both* to the scientific (structuralist) and anti-humanist (poststructuralist) pretensions of French thought *and* to the demands of a militant subjectivity voiced by Sartre in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. In this respect, although distinguished from its forebears by its singular reformulation of the relationship between subjectivity and knowledge, or freedom and science, and by no means an expression of a 'national philosophy', Badiou's thought evidences the discontinuous vitality of the problems articulated by French philosophy in the past century.

Alberto Toscano

Revelation, half-truth and rumour

Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, with new Afterword, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999. 205 pp. £29.95 hb., £12.95 pb., 0 520 21204 5 hb., 0 520 21205 3 pb.

Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2001. 424 pp., £18.99 hb., 0 224 04348 X.

By now anyone interested in the Situationist International could spend a long time reading. Materials and documents are plentiful. Editions exist of all the major works of the Situationist International, and of its precursor, the Lettriste International. Minor scraps are soon to be available too, in a three-volume collection of public documents, pamphlets, posters and leaflets. Internal documents have been republished, allowing the tracking of rifts in a much-riven body. Reprints of letter exchanges chart connections and ruptures – six volumes of Debord's correspondence are in

the pipeline. Debord's film scripts and film contracts are available, and soon to be rereleased in proper prints – as opposed to low-quality, much retaped pirate copies – are the films themselves, withdrawn from circulation by Debord in 1984, in protest at the nonchalant public reaction to the assassination of his friend and backer Gérard Lebovici, who bought a Paris cinema that played continuously, even to an empty auditorium, four films by Guy Debord.

In addition to these primary materials are abundant reminiscences about the SI years. Key participants have reflected – in interviews and monographs – on the events before, during and after the period 1957–1972. Former comrades, drinking pals, patrons and excoriated fellow travellers have all spoken. The latest books include Ralph Rumney's *Le Consul* (in French, 1999; in English, 2002) and Jean-Michel Mension's *La Tribu* (in French, 1998; in English, 2001). A subculture of sympathizers and champions of the SI and its various factions scrutinize the legacy and continue the fights – mainly in pamphlets and online. In addition, there are analyses of the SI by academics and para-academics. Some are narrowly thematic, focused, for example, on 'the Situationist city' or détournement as art practice. Some are diffuse in their uptake of Situationist ideas, for example tracing links between 'Situationism' and punk or using the 'spectacle' to investigate Victorian commodity culture. Or they dip in to Situationist theory eclectically, perhaps using the Situationist notion of 'drifting' alongside Benjamin's *flâneur* to examine a practice such as skateboarding, or excerpting willy-nilly Debord, Baudrillard and Foucault to theorize the birth of the modern spectator. (An annotated bibliography of works from 1972 to 1992 by and on the Situationist International can be found in former librarian Simon Ford's *The Realization and Suppression of the Situationist International*, AK Press, Edinburgh 1995. Many books contain annotated bibliographies. It appears to be de rigueur to be as judgemental as possible on other works. An online annotated bibliography can be found at Ken Knabb's Bureau of Public Secrets: www.bopsecrets.org/SI/bibliog.htm.)

Academic and para-academic studies appear with increasing rapidity in France and in the Anglophone world. Frequently, within the academy, the Situationist legacy has been assumed to be a cultural rather than a political one. Political practice and theory, the relationship between Hegel, Marx and Lukács, the minutiae of sectarian disputes have not been considered worthy of investigation or analysis by those – many academics – who have no experience of revolutionary politics or

who think that the seditious intent of the Situationists is outmoded, in particular when it yearns for proletarian revolt. Here Jappe's contribution is notable, for, as a student of Michael Löwy, he has a sensitivity not just to Marxism but to questions of political praxis and an interest in 'the Party' form.

Biographical tittle-tattle was, for a while, considered too vulgar a pursuit, especially in relation to a man – Guy Debord – who mocked the spectacular nature of 'celebrity', and who had, in his own 'memoirs', as matter of principle, revealed almost nothing about his personality and life. Indeed Debord's book *Mémoires* was composed solely of snippings from magazines, newspapers, comic strips and building plans, dripped over by Asger Jorn, and expressing no word that might be called Debord's 'own'. Something more akin to memoirs, *Panegyric* was oblique, with reflections on drinking and military strategy. Debord's 1985 commentary on Lebovici's murder (an episode in which some suspected Debord's hand) was much concerned to scorn journalists and secret service agents, and was used to secure damages for libel. Such retrospection sets the record straight. It is not autobiography, but rather political dissection – critique its aim, smashing of spectacular untruth its goal. Once the life was wrapped up, in 1994, biographies began to be written. Anarchist Len Bracken published an intellectual biography in 1997, a mishmash of theory, opinion, biography, history, by an admirer. Later biographers were less enamoured. In 1999 Jean-Marie Apostolides' psychologizing biography *Les Tombeaux de Guy Debord* appeared and Christophe Bourseiller published a gossipy *Vie et Mort de Guy Debord*. Hussey's attitude to Debord appears to cross-fertilize Brackenish admiration with journalistic revelling in details of Debord's cruelty. Despite the title, Jappe's book has little to say about the man as such.

Guy Debord and *The Game of War* are contraries of each other. Anselm Jappe's is a study of political theory, its theory-rich approach evident in the section headings: 'The Concept of the Spectacle', 'The Practice of Theory', 'Theory Past and Present'. Its subsections are soberly titled too: 'History and Community as the Essence of Man', 'Two Sources and Two Aspects of Debord's Theory', 'The Situationist Critique in Historical Context'. Its antithesis, *Game of War*, is a book of revelations, half-truths and rumours about a man with a 'bad reputation'. Its chapter headings crackle with dramatic energy, mystery and tragedy: 'Dark Passage', 'Attack by Fire', 'The Death of a Prince'. Its subheadings aim for shock, scandal and irony: 'No Dialogue with Cunts', 'Gangland and Philosophy',

'Like a Pack of Bastard Dogs', 'Exit, Far Left, the Mysterious Mr K', and so on. Hussey's book avoids philosophico-political theory and analysis, preferring the machinations, the scene, around Guy Debord. It is a story of excessive drinking, sexual antics, friendships and betrayals, intrigue and conspiracy, violence and illness. Hussey's next project is a history of Parisian low life. This appears to be a pre-study of that same milieu.

It is difficult to write about the Situationists and Guy Debord – if you take the ideas at least half-seriously. Situationist thought strove to make itself poisonous for contemplative, speculative approaches. Much Situationist analysis spoke of 'recuperation' – the assimilation of radical, avant-garde thought into the spectacle. If recuperation – academic or media – was detected, then denunciations, threats, repudiation followed expeditiously. That still happens. If it is not revilement from the original players, then it is abuse from the next generations, the vocal and ever *en garde* clique of pro-sits and sub-situs clustered around the globe.

Jappe feels justified to write about Debord because he writes in unanimity with Situationist political critique. The ideas live for him. 'Withering' is a word that often crops up in his book in relation to the Situationist assault on people, artefacts or institutions. Jappe, too, can be 'withering' in his condemnation of contemporary theorists and thought fads. In his 'Afterword to the English-Language Edition', he updates a sentiment from a 1967 SI journal, rearticulating for his own moment a distancing from faux-radicalism: 'We want ideas to become *dangerous* once again. We cannot allow people to support us on the basis of a wishy-washy, fake eclecticism, along with the Derridas, the Lyotards, the Rortys and the Baudrillards.' (The original culprits were Sartre, Althusser, Aragon, Godard.) Jappe then reiterates the central theme of his book: that Debord's theory can only be understood as '*in essence a continuation of the work of Marx and Hegel*', a fact that, he asserts unconditionally, has been acknowledged by 'none of the academic and subcultural accounts'. Jappe assigns to himself a political role: the continuation of the project of Hegelian-Marxist praxis, which is, for him, the kernel of Debordian critique, thereby, hopefully, exempting the study from attack. And he gains the seal of approval from a former Situationist, albeit an expelled one, T.J. Clark, whose foreword states that Jappe's book is 'far and away the best we have so far'.

Andrew Hussey makes little issue of the theoretical-political problem of his writing about the Situationists

– not that this evasion warded off attacks, threats and denunciations from remaining members of the inner circle. He thematizes recuperation, though, coining the phrase 'Le Musée Guy Debord', and pointing up the various signs of Debord's status as fashionable icon, a 'Che Guevara of the 1990s'. (Jappe similarly refers to Debord as 'subject of a bizarre cult which threatens to turn him into a pop idol, a sort of Che Guevara for the more refined taste'.) A Paris rock magazine has a listings section called 'Guide D'Abord (La société du spectacle)', magazine features fuel the cult of Debord, and stencilled images of Debord's face appear on walls near Debord's old haunts – one of which appears on Jappe's book cover. Against this, Hussey sets the non-museal Debord, the Debord who lived, intensely, as corollary to the theoretical campaign.

For Hussey, Debord's life was lived as a game and a war, the two figures coming together in the 'Game of War', the *Kriegspiel* board game that Debord found in a junk shop in 1975, renovated, and played endlessly with second wife Alice Becker-Ho. Not only is life lived as a game, for the biographer the life presents itself as puzzle. From the motivations for stances in Debord's life to the validity of versions of events, all remains a puzzle, a life lived under the sign of confusion in the shadows. T.J. Clark's foreword to Jappe's book also speaks of two puzzles. The first is that Debord preached insurrection but was himself no more than a writer: the idea of insurrection forged the literary style through techniques such as inversion or chiasmus, polemic and aphorisms – prefigurations of the slogans of May '68. Clark's second puzzle is that the writing came from the margins, and yet is the 'true voice' of the age, remaining its only political testament. Debord had said this too in paragraph 162 of *Society of the Spectacle*: 'Under the apparent *trends* which cancel and recompose themselves at the futile surface of contemplated pseudocyclical time, the *grand style* of the epoch is always in what is oriented by the obvious and secret necessity of the revolution.'

For Hussey, the early life is described in terms of literary and filmic identifications; the death – at the book's start and end – is a dramatic act, a literary gesture of defiance, which reanimates the imitative desire of the young bohemian wannabe, occurring just before his televisual debut, a film made as suicide note. Debord's tale possesses a perfect sense of drama, and there is much in Hussey's book that reads more like a novel than a biography. The outside world features only as backdrop to events, and the past is glimpsed in widescreen, joining up unlikely things, such as Julia Kristeva and *Emmanuelle* as evidence of the 'woman

question' in the 1960s/1970s. Perhaps those links are real and only viewable later – Debord's publisher Lebovici had a financial stake in *Emmanuelle* 3.

Pornography and gangster films had their attractions, and comic strips could be détourned, but there was much in popular culture to vilify. A couple of anecdotes illuminate splits between the original French Situationists (refined in their cultural tastes) and US and UK fellow travellers. Sixties rock music and the druggy counterculture were a mystery and abomination to Debord. Hussey relates a couple of stories about football and *Match of the Day*, evidence perhaps that while the Parisian Sits were at home on the *terrasses*, UK Sits and average workers were more drawn to the terraces. Hussey's book fizzes with pop-cultural hipness, while Jappe's is judging and sombre. Choice or pseudo-choice?

Esther Leslie

A new Giedion

Sanford Kwinter, *Architectures of Time: Towards a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2001. 232 pp., £20.50 hb., 0262 11260 4.

For sixty years architecture has been held in thrall to the principles laid out by Siegfried Giedion in *Space, Time and Architecture*. Giedion's manifesto conflates progress, industrialization, modernist ruptures, and (crucially) the introduction of a 'new' conception of space, with the production of architectural form. The new space he describes is that of the cubists, supported by a simplistic nod to Einstein's space-time axis. It is the very directness of Giedion's rhetoric that is so appealing to architects, seducing them into believing the possibility of summoning up the spirit of the age through frozen form. Giedion's legacy is that of the autonomous architectural object, motivated by the polishing of aesthetics and technique. Autonomy is inevitable given the foundation on essentially classical models of space and time (not really so new after all) in which time is abstracted and represented within a fixed spatial substratum. Giedion famously captioned a picture of a 1914 staircase by Walter Gropius as 'seeming like movements seized and immobilized in space'. To a large extent architectural production still enacts this temporal abstraction, and with it divorces architecture from social conditions. The only difference now is that the power of computer-driven representa-

tion fools the designers at an earlier stage into believing that their detached and deluded operations are in some way depictions of forthcoming reality.

Sanford Kwinter's timely book provides an important and sustained alternative to this position. Whilst Giedion is not explicitly mentioned, there is throughout *Architectures of Time* a brilliant critique of so many of the values enshrined in normative architectural production. The book is that of a true polymath, ranging over a vast intellectual territory. A broad thinker such as Kwinter is not so much interested in the singular nuances of a particular philosophical or cultural position, but is fascinated by the connections that can be made between these positions. This mode of thinking is an extrapolative, even creative, process that differs from the inward interpretative gestures of traditional hermeneutics. As such it may be easy for the curmudgeonly reader to pick holes when Kwinter touches on their own particular area of expertise, but this would be to miss the extraordinary possibilities that open up in the interstices of his cross-readings.

The book opens with a simple question: 'What would it change in our arts, our sciences, and our technics if time were conceived of as something *real*?' To help answer this question Kwinter draws on a well-worn philosophical genealogy: the Nietzsche of *Genealogy of Morals*, the Bergson of *Matter and Memory*, the Foucault of *Archaeology of Knowledge*, and the Deleuze and Guattari of *A Thousand Plateaus*. Throw in passing references to Benjamin, Bataille and Bruno and one might sense one of those rapidly dating collections of cultural criticism that prop themselves up on fashionable philosophical frameworks. However, Kwinter's depth of reading, the cogency of his arguments, and the grace of his writing allow him to evade this trap. His originality lies in the application of these ways of thinking into a wider cultural context, and in particular his willingness to cross the artificial divide between the sciences and arts. On the one hand, he points to the revolutions in science at the end of the nineteenth century; on the other, hand he describes the cultural contexts (aesthetic and literary) in which these new concepts may first be seen to unfold.

Kwinter starts with the well-documented move from the linear understanding of time, as represented by the abstraction of clock time, to more complex non-linear systems in which time must be considered as folded into a spatial-temporal field of flows and energies. This is then supplemented by more recent developments in physics and mathematics that attempt to describe these dynamic temporal systems. Kwinter connects this scientific revolution with philosophical

revisions to concepts of time, centring his analysis on Bergson. Thrown out is the classical separation of time and space – and with this goes any conception of space in extension and the associated reliance on perspective worlds as the basis for design and perception. In this much, Kwinter's arguments follow standard routes, but when he starts to relate these concepts to the architectural context more interesting opportunities open up. Where traditional models of metaphysics can be associated with an architecture of the object – a fixation on the relation of 'beautiful' buildings to each other in the controlled space of extension – Kwinter argues that the new scientific descriptions of time, and the new thinking of time, lead to a completely different spatial-temporal model. The processes and practice of architecture, he argues, must not attempt to *represent* these new temporal conditions, but rather they must engage with the complex systems 'at certain specific and local points'.

This engagement is necessarily an engagement with time as something real, and develops with it 'a theory and praxis of the event'. The 'event' is central to Kwinter's argument; events are 'emergent phenomena' which arise out of the complex field. The event is for Kwinter productive; it 'punctuates and inaugurates a totally transformative proceeding'. Kwinter's proposed architectural milieu provides a field for the propagation of event. He finds in the work of the futurists the first and clearest expression of this new sensibility. Boccioni's triumph is to 'incorporate space so deeply into the body of time as to change its nature', a sensibility that Kwinter relates (in a non-causal way) to Einstein and Bergson. In Sant'Elia's visionary drawings of cities, Kwinter finds the promise of procedural maps. He does not treat the images as the depiction of realizable objects, but as 'a set of instructions ... capable of endowing with a substantial body all those events, processes and flows'.

Kwinter's project is not limited to a revision of architectural and aesthetic models. He has a more ambitious aim: to understand the ontology of modernity. For this he turns in the second half of the book to a detailed reading of the work of Franz Kafka. Most insistently, his reading overcomes the clichéd interpretation of Kafka's writings as depicting a nihilistic world of despair and political impotence. Kwinter passionately and convincingly posits a reading of Kafka that, whilst not happy, is affirmative, and goes well beyond that of Deleuze and Guattari. The event again plays a central role: Kafka, Kwinter suggests, 'oriented practice around something else than the "strategic" cure'. The event, as tactic, is in Kafka

that moment of productive resistance – 'infinitesimal deviations which could produce holes in Being through which entire worlds may erupt'.

Writing about Kafka, Kwinter states that one must read the relations and the movements, not the image, the totalities. This in effect becomes the message of *Architectures of Time* itself, as well as a suggestion as to how to read the book. Strangely, Kwinter does not always open up the full potential of these relations. Indeed, he even suggests that those with an interest in design could skip the sections on Kafka. For me, as a designer, this book might have been more powerful if the sections on the futurists had followed that on Kafka, because the work of Sant'Elia would then have been more fully imbued with affirmative potential.



As it is, Kwinter's readings of Sant'Elia are sometimes overdetermined by a formalist analysis. Whilst he is, of course, aware that this formalism alone is not enough, a sense lingers of the fatal connection between formal invention and social revival. Less aware readers – God help us, even architects – may fall into the trap of believing that a few new formal tricks of rotation, schism and overlaying will in themselves be politically productive.

In the end, it is the political potential of the book that is never fully developed. Kwinter is rightly insistent in his call for the reconnection of the practice of architecture (and other cultural movements) back to a politics of form 'based on the productive, the positive, the mobile, the new'. However, I do not share Kwinter's optimism that a concatenation of events will inaugurate totally transformative proceedings. Part of the problem is the radical subjectivity that underlies his analysis, in which the voices of individuals never assume a collective strength. In one beautifully observed section, Kwinter describes a contemporary climber on a rock face, negotiating the

complexities and problematics of the site. The climber becomes a figure for how to engage with the world; but in this creative and heroic gesture, there is also something hopeless – what happens when they reach the top? At fault may be Kwinter's overreliance on de Certeau's tactics/strategy dialectic. It has recently been philosophically and politically correct to champion the tactic over the strategy as the course of political action. Strategies bring with them all the trappings of power and control, whereas tactics provide a subversive resistance to these mechanisms. However, as Gillian Rose and others have noted, the unequivocal repudiation of knowledge (as power) and the collapse into the atomistic multiplicity of individuals, denies the opportunity for the reformulation of knowledge and power, the reconfiguration of activity and passivity. It is maybe in manoeuvring through Rose's 'broken middle' that the true space of political potential opens up. This is not meant as a curmudgeonly critique of Kwinter's book, but as an acknowledgement of the productive possibilities that this brilliant work opens up.

Jeremy Till

Terry's turns

Terry Eagleton, *The Gatekeeper: A Memoir*, Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, London. 192 pp., £9.99 hb., 0 713 99590 4.

'We were a family of performers rather than achievers', Eagleton says in this memoir of his passage from Irish Catholic working-class Salford to Cambridge, Marxism and renown. Of course, Eagleton is both – probably Britain's best-known literary critic, fêted and reviled in equal measure, and a great teller of tales. Both personae rest on an unrivalled talent for writing and an inordinate capacity for production, something the memoirist feels sets him apart. He belongs to the small number of academics for whom writer's block is a stranger: 'instead of finding myself unable to write books, I find myself unable to stop ... a disgracefully privileged problem to be plagued with'. But this is overcompensation 'for the uncertain literacy of my early environment', or, more pointedly, for his father's silence, the silence of a man 'agonizingly inarticulate and deeply ashamed of it'. Writing is the symptom he has learned to enjoy.

Eagleton enjoys getting up there and doing another turn in another genre – after all he's tried the lot:

criticism, 'theory', introductory primers, the novel, screenplay, theatre, so why not a 'memoir'? And this hybrid form gives an unparalleled freedom. Leaning on the autobiography, but with none of its formal constraints, the memoir makes a goal out of digression and a virtue out of errancy. Eagleton can invoke his childhood and indulge in sentimental portraiture but avoid the rigours of confession; he can tell vignettes about Marxist political activity (with the Workers' Socialist League being coyly unnamed) but without the bitterness of denunciation; and can muse aphoristically on the vicissitudes of contemporary life – academic and otherwise – or do a routine about cliché, without the panoply of demonstration and justification. Nor does he feel compelled to tell us some unvarnished truth: the space for posing is great, and the various characters he plays – long-suffering academic, wryly incompetent militant, overly pious Catholic schoolboy – have free range. He is decidedly not in the business of audience-pleasing revelation: there is no sex, no drugs, no egregious crime. You have to read asquint

to find the dirt: 'my father was a devout teetotaler. Perhaps I compensated for him in that way too.'

The book is presided over by a dichotomy: the just versus the fine, the ethical versus the aesthetic. One of Eagleton's observations is that poverty is anti-aesthetic: not merely because it is unpleasant, but because it rules out 'learning how to savour things in themselves'. The requirement of leisure for the appreciation of beauty is, of course, the great Adornian critique of the bourgeoisie, but the demand for the space of the aesthetic is also one of the great utopian demands. For Eagleton, one suspects, the dichotomy causes great travail: the demand for justice drives his politics (though he is sensitive to the virtues of mercy), but the demand for the fine drives his intellectual life. The memoir belongs to the fine, to the useless and therefore to the pleasurable, but this transfiguration is not a redemption. In a reported conversation with Dr Greenway, his supervisor as a Cambridge undergraduate, Eagleton rejects the latter's idea of tragedy, that suffering could have a meaning. But nor could the author's early life have a simple, pleasing, aesthetic presentation. There is an unresolved tension between the desire to tell the fine story and a more exigent truth. This gives the earlier episodes about life in Salford a poignancy lacking in the more polished anecdotes about Oxbridge and encounters with the aristocracy, all too suffused with a sense of *déjà lu*. The performance falters here, as though the Waugh paradigm had suffered too little deconstruction, too little alienation. There are the usual fractious, egotistical dons, whose eccentricity is a cover for gross ignorance or turpitude, and the prematurely fogeyish students. There are the peculiar accidents of employment, and the standard self-deprecation over talent and aptitude. Even the language grows tired: the rare liberal don is 'egregiously witty' (what else would he be?) and praised in oddly anodyne ways, 'a general liberal of the old school, a champion of justice and liberty' – which lacks a certain Marxist precision, shall we say?

If we turn back to Eagleton reflecting on his early life, however, the language changes and fuses thought, insight and empathy in a remarkable way. In the opening account of the cloistered world of the Carmelite nuns, which the young Terry tended in his role as gatekeeper, the pre-pubertal innocent who stood on the boundaries of that sequestered space, Eagleton shows an affecting sympathy for the vocation that impelled these young women into their demanding self-restriction. Indeed, his respect for a certain Catholic spirituality and the collective forms that embody it is pronounced, and perhaps should not

have been unexpected. He sees in them a recognition of 'how dire things were with us and how much it would take to repair them', an anticipation of his own radicalism, and even allows his own vocation as literary theorist might have been prompted by Catholicism's combination of 'rigorous thought and sensuous symbolism'. And of course Catholicism is 'deeply un-English', compounding Eagleton's own disaffections, isolated from family by his prodigious learning, from class by the move to Cambridge, and from Oxbridge by the class he came from and the allegiances he professed. These disaffections led to Marxism in a fairly predictable way – after all, 'Catholics are prime candidates for the political left' and 'the path from the Tridentine creed to Trotskyism is shorter than it seems'. Catholics can bypass liberalism, a position (except in his lazy characterization of Maurice Bowra) that Eagleton deplores, along with 'post-modernism' the only constant object of his scorn. Eagleton escapes capture by the missionary order he auditions for, but ends up selling Trotskyist papers on the streets of Oxford, still saving souls. (Though Eagleton does not mention them, he might have found anticipations of his Left's demonstrations in the processions of faith at Whitsuntide that swept Catholic children into the centre of Manchester throughout the 1950s and 1960s, turning the Other's space into ours, if only for the afternoon.)

But if one were to look for the heart of the memoir, the site of ambivalent identification, unsurprisingly it would be found in the delicately sketched figure of the author's father, whose death on the cusp of Eagleton's entry into Cambridge – he dies as young Terry is 'up' for his entrance examinations, and the boy has to be informed by the emotionally ineffectual Greenway – provides the climax of the memoir. It is here that 'pain, tragedy, class, sacrifice and trauma' converge. This taciturn man, whose class provenance in the unrespectable working class inscribed a certain status hierarchy into the heart of the family (his mother's family were assertively 'respectable'), 'bored his work mates' with praise of his son's achievements, yet remained utterly closed off to his son. But the silence only masked a relentless sacrifice on behalf of his child, a sacrifice that repeated the gesture of all working-class parents whose self-denying ambitions for their children – that they lead lives precisely not marked by their own sacrifice – lead to the loss of the children themselves, alienated into a class that rejects the parents as inferior. There is a certain Marxist pungency in the paradox that Eagleton must be lost to his father in order to remain true to the latter's

values, and death is just the most extreme version of this sacrifice.

It is perhaps this ambivalence, the register of compensation and guilt, talent and suspicion, that predestines Eagleton's choice of intellectual models: Brecht, with his skilful unpicking of the apparatus of theatrical illusion, even as he relies on it to exert his art; Wittgenstein, with his simultaneous eloquence and radical mistrust of language as snare and enchantment; and Wilde, with his self-ironizing 'awareness of his own inauthenticity'. These figures who undo the very forms they consummate perhaps mark the abiding presence of the inarticulate man who made all this literary profligacy possible.

Philip Derbyshire

Full-bodied

James Mensch, *Postfoundational Phenomenology: Husserlian Reflections on Presence and Embodiment*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park PA, 2001. x + 275 pp., £37.95 hb., 0 271 02047 4.

Samuel Todes, *Body and World*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2001. xlvii + 337 pp., £37.95 hb., £15.95 pb., 0 262 20135 6 hb., 0 262 70082 4 pb.

Renewed attention to the body punctuates the landscape of contemporary theory, especially amongst the now de rigueur denunciations of Descartes with which every other 'post-ish' work in epistemology or ethics or social theory begins. Typically, though, as Terry Eagleton is fond of noting, the reconceived body which emerges is a rather passive affair: a recipient of gazes and regulations, object rather than subject, effect rather than effector. Any claim that embodiment might be intimately connected with *agency* – and that Descartes' mistake was precisely to present the body as burdensome luggage, an intrusion on the self's engagement with the world – goes largely unaddressed. Instead, the totem runs deep that neither self nor world can be separated ontologically from the workings of discourse. Thus conceived, embodiment becomes distanced, fractured and indeterminate. Things are not looking good for the idea that, phenomenologically, our bodily self-presence might have anything constant, unitary or even dialectically secure about it. In differently impressive ways, these two books set out to retrieve it.

Todes' work is a reissue, with new introductions and appendices, of a doctoral thesis submitted in 1963 and published in 1990 as *The Human Body as Material Subject of the World*. It promises an engagement with the body's role in our knowledge of objects which avoids the idealism into which phenomenological accounts – even Merleau-Ponty's, for all its nuance – too easily slip. For Todes (who died in 1994) our familiar situation is one of being 'in some sense identified with our active subject-body in the midst of circumstances whose givenness implies that our body is also an object'. It is a situation with which the philosophical tradition has failed to grapple with much success. For Descartes, the body is *merely* another object in the world. Hume, meanwhile, 'shrinks our active body down to the vanishing point of our visual point of view as a pure spectator with an inactive body' – a spectator for whom experience cannot justly be said to be unitary or ordered. Kant's response to Hume comes far closer to approaching our familiar situation. But he, too, says Todes, projects a severance of self from circumstances in order to secure the former's autonomy, assimilating our circumstances to our spontaneous self, and making reason the legislator of its object.

What's wrong with all this? Put briefly, a shared assumption that the human subject cannot be at the same time fundamentally material and not *merely* a thing amongst others. For Todes, the body is 'that material thing whose capacity to move itself generates and defines the whole world of human experience in which anything, including itself, can be found'. It is *uniquely* material. In so arguing, Todes rejects the claim that (as Rorty would put it) interpretations, or language, or social construction, go 'all the way down' to the root of either world or selfhood. His conclusions are critically realist. The body is constitutively needy: it depends on an antecedently existing material environment. We determine the objects of experience as objects of a particular sort. This is what affords the regularity of experience. But this determination is 'made possible by our making an active *response* to anticipated objects of experience'. This response is 'directed toward the satisfaction of a body *need*'.

Thus, in a conception redolent of the early Marx, dependence on the material environment is reconciled with an account of the self as active centre of its experienced world – a world the disclosure of which is *both* spontaneous and receptive. Todes invests much in the 'front-back asymmetry' of the body's activity: the fact that objects being made present to us derive from a forward-directed, intentional, primordial engagement

with the world. He puts this down to 'poise': the way in which I know what I am doing because already knowingly in touch with the objects around me. The perceptual world is the counterpart of our body's ongoing poised response to the challenges and tasks it faces. Importantly, the book culminates in a prolonged, sympathetically critical discussion of Kant, in which Todes seeks to supplement the Tables of the first *Critique* with a further one: that of perceptual knowledge, understood as the missing link in Kant's bifurcation of knowledge and feeling.

Mensch's latest work follows up a series of self-professedly Husserlian engagements with the legacies of 'modernity' in philosophy. He seeks to redeem Husserl's thought as avoiding the pitfalls of that tradition – and, as his title suggests, as affording the scope for a *postfoundational* phenomenology. In a style direct and economical without avoiding the complexity of the issues he confronts, Mensch aims to retrieve key elements of Husserl's thinking from the clutches of those who have praised his project only then to bury it: Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida.

He starts out from the claim that, despite protestations to the contrary, these exponents of the 'post-modern' tradition remain wedded to a core contention of its 'modern' counterpart. This is that the 'ground' of selfhood must be characterized as an absence. Whether in terms of the noumenal self or the will to power, of the *cogito* or *différance*, philosophers from Hume to Derrida have assumed that selfhood is to be explained by way of an appeal to a ghostly something beyond our bodily self-presence: a ground able to function as such by virtue of lying outside of what it grounds. To the extent that postmodernists retain the insistence that selfhood is a function of an absence that cannot present itself in experience, their formulations represent 'the last, most extreme examples of the foundationalist enterprise', and are similarly ill-equipped to deal adequately with a body subordinated to, or rendered unapproachable because of, the priority of action going on elsewhere.

Mensch finds in the post-1920 Husserl – of the later, often unpublished manuscripts, rather than the *Cartesian Meditations* or the *Logical Investigations* – a seeking not for a *ground* for presence, but a means of describing it in terms of embodiment, without appeal to a disembodied, 'pure' phenomenological observer. Of course, Husserl is standardly regarded as a prime purveyor of precisely this sort of appeal. But latterly, says Mensch, he switched registers, examining instead the bodily origins of our perceptual intentions. What emerges is a self that is neither grounder of the

world, nor grounded by it. Rather, it is a process of embodied engagement with a world towards which it is drawn in order to satisfy instinctual needs. Reason and freedom develop through the process of this striving: rational self-reflection is the upshot of our self-constitution. Constitution is inherently *temporal*, but not in the subjective sense which Mensch discerns in Heidegger just as much as Kant. Rather than an absence, temporalization is a kind of embodiment, through which the key instincts – of retention, protention and objectification – function. Thus the body's presence is a sort of shifting centre between the past and the future. It grasps itself across the temporal distance between what it was and what it will be.

Mensch defends Husserl's claim that speech must be anchored in intuition: in our ability to embody or make sensuously present the world we report on. He thus disputes Derrida's insistence that consciousness is not possible without the voice, and that its necessary mediation through indicative signs means that it is characterized by a lack of original presence. Instead, we are given a picture of self-reflection as mediated not only by language, but by a momentum set in train by primal impressions, received from the world. As he puts it, 'learning to use language requires the child's first having learned to see its world as such'. By avoiding both naïve realism and linguistic idealism, it provides a challenging scene-setting of issues in contemporary phenomenology and a defence of Husserl's critical ambitions. The final chapters offer an account of self-responsibility and responsibility to others as inevitably conjoined while avoiding Levinas's 'apor-etic' conclusion that ethical responsibility arises in our responding to the other as an absence. Rather, responsibility arises from a response to the *presence* of life – to the presences which, for Mensch as for Husserl, constitute selfhood.

Both these works, then, return us to the problem of embodiment without resort to reductionisms, whether naturalistic or social-constructionist. Both combine accessibility with depth. And Todes' book, in particular, provides a basis on which a non-idealist phenomenology might build. That, whatever the agencies of discourse, independent reality still intrudes is something with which duly subtle phenomenological approaches, like those of Todes and Mensch, can deal – as is serious attention to pre-discursive human *need* as a primary aspect of our orientation towards the world.

Gideon Calder