

REVIEWS

Post-genomic interventions

Eugene Thacker, *Global Genome: Biotechnology, Politics, and Culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2006. 464 pp., £25.95 hb., £12.95 pb., 0 2622 0155 0 hb., 0 2627 0116 2 pb.

Rishab Aiyer Ghosh, ed., *Code: Collaborative Ownership and the Digital Economy*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2005. 384 pp., £24.95 hb., £12.95 pb., 0 2620 7260 2 hb., 0 2625 7236 2 pb.

Millenarian thought in its contemporary capitalist or technovisionary strains suffers no shortage of epochal events locking in grand designs of new orders, whose power to render the merely familiar or the almost forgotten entirely irrelevant appears more concrete than the actuality in which we, historically and futurably, live. The key to the locks, of course, is that a complex process becomes subjective only as shattering event. Two such events anchor a massive amount of recent critical scholarship on affect, technics and ethics. First, the events of 9/11, promoted from a stream of policing challenges faced by neoliberal economies and now familiar as the call for 'global war on terror'. Regardless of its timelines for Iraq, a 'policing' war's future duration cannot be demarcated, because its policy basis ensures it lasts until policy can no longer determine actual events – a contradiction in terms to begin with. A second, simultaneously eschatological and annunciatory event was the completion of the human genome sequence in 2003. While the 'post-genomic' age had already been noted critically in the mid-1990s, this announcement was its inaugural ball, at least for the carbon-based.

For Arendt, writing in the 1960s, the present had become a narrowed, Kafkaesque staging ground delimited by the duelling fencers of past and future time, but today nothing seems to possess more historical inevitability than the power of the new to compress the present into an infinitesimally thin membrane, or veil, whose surface is protracted under the puncturing pressure of what comes next. Stretched thin, the present declines to the moment of the new's arrival. Every shivering human moment becomes epochal. The complexity of this can be configured spatially, corporally, or temporally – but only as disjuncture.

A usually overlooked effect of this power of disjunction has to do with one direction opened up by these strange transpositions of historicity, eventuality and futurity that instantaneity-as-epochality requires. The present becomes a future history: we live a contingent past tense of the posteriority we project as approaching, a projection we extend more concretely via speculative

means (of capital, of media, of science, of politics, of expression). The opposite direction of temporal disjuncture inscribed by the epochal imagination has long been entirely modern and conventional. In this mode, mining history itself becomes essential, but not to the present which time compresses *as* history. Instead, history, and all we consign to it, including ourselves and our power to change the present, becomes a reservoir of material upon which the labours of speculation draw. Designing the future by excavating ever deeper or broader historical trenches with ever more diamantine drill bits is the requisite labour, especially for studies of technoculture attempting interventions in futural design. Drilling down while holding a forward gaze is a difficult enough posture to hold; the real trick, though, is honing the bit.

Eugene Thacker's *Global Genome* critiques contemporary information technology, genomic science and political sovereignty by bringing Marx's account of species being to bear on Foucault's understanding of biopower. We learn in his introduction that the project incubated over a period of ten years, but he makes less of the fact that his earlier monograph, *Biomedica* (2004), a more narrowly framed study of contemporary bio- and info-technology along Deleuzian lines, appeared while this larger study was under way. In *Biomedica*, Thacker outlined a 'bio-ethics', a critical and productive ethics of genomic medicine that might intervene against the tendencies of bioethics since the 1970s to legitimate the commercial overdetermination of identity, personhood and corporeality in the new life sciences, where production has intensified via high-throughput diagnostic techniques such as the Affymetrix DNA chip. But in spite of Thacker's skills in illuminating core problematics within industrial genomics and information processing paradigms, and in spite of his attempt to clarify Deleuzian ethics with systems theories from Varela or Luhmann, I couldn't entirely see how Thacker's 'bio-ethics' differed from conventional 'bioethics'.

Now, in *Global Genome*, Thacker vastly expands his historical frame of reference and yet concentrates more

closely on accounting for corporeality and labour in his description of biology's transformation, via information sciences, into technology as such. The book is divided into three parts, 'Encoding/Production', 'Recoding/Distribution', and 'Decoding/Consumption'; each section represents a resolution in the contemporary vocabulary of bioinformatic process of Marx's understanding of production, distribution and consumption. The book's organization also suggests that the explicit insertion of 'recoding' between the received conceptual pair of 'encoding/decoding' emblemizes an epochal difference between informatic capital and bioinformatic capital, a difference which Thacker argues the global life sciences industries best encapsulate.

Part one introduces the claim that 'genomics is globalization', and Thacker presents his argument that genetic sciences are *the* hegemonic agent of global technoscientific capitalism. Part two presents the central intervention of his critique of material labour and biopower. Thacker argues that the bi-directional recoding processes now operative between cybernetics and genomics calls for a new account of biotechnology's massive production of excess 'biovalue' (a term drawn from Catherine Waldby): a productive power he adduces as 'biolabour'. The section concludes, however, with a discussion of biowar and bioterror as 'bioinfowar' which, while responding in some ways to post-9/11 concerns, steers the book around the immediately following third section, and towards its concluding chapter. That third section turns to the consumer-oriented products of biolabouring production (such as regenerative tissue), and Thacker reads this regime's cultural symptoms through science fiction films such as *28 Days Later* or the *X-Men* serials.

Throughout, Thacker develops Marx's treatment of the machinic organicity of technologized labour with reference to Foucault's description of biopower as the point at which the biological life of a population enters into the state's calculation of sovereignty. Mediating these two major critical frames are Canguilhem's historical treatment of the normal and the pathological, and Bataille's accounts of capitalist economy as the production of excess. Where Italian autonomists like Lazzarato and Negri have famously attempted, since the 1970s, to articulate the specificities of knowledge work as an 'immaterial' form of labour, Thacker describes the very different labouring masses emerging from the genomic sciences' production of 'living dead' biolabour: regenerative tissue, DNA chips, experimental organisms or cloned beings. Biolabour, he argues, is totally transparent to the processes of global genomics, and entirely mediated by them. His description of the

'total mediation' of biolabour explains why Deleuzian ethics plays almost no role in this book. Yet it is here that an attempt at an ethics might become all the more compelling.

In fact, much of the material presented in the last third of *Global Genome* is simply a less detailed version of material presented in the second section of the book. These recapitulations – another tract defining Foucauldian biopower, another summary of Lazzarato's immaterial labour – wouldn't jar quite as much if they led to new plateaus in the argument, but they tend not to. The repetitions come at the considerable cost of any ethical questions going largely untreated. Perhaps these are obscured by the need to machine another critical innovation that would keep up with the new epoch. And when Thacker reads regenerative medicine through films like the *X-Men* series, we meet the text's weaker links; as insightful as Thacker is with genomics and materialist theory, he's not a media scholar. By the time *Global Genome* closes with a homage to the 'bioart' of the Critical Art Ensemble, the material still fascinates, but the discussion seems all but exhausted. Thacker has little to add to contemporary discussions of CAE, Stelarc or the other art and bioscience projects he mentions. That he does so little with aesthetic interventions into efforts to locate 'the gay gene' is also a let-down – that's material with which a more queerly informed theoretical effort could do much.

The more significant problem for *The Global Genome*, though, is its universalizing of genomic bioinformatics as *the* globally hegemonic agent (indicated, for example, in a slightly suspicious chart presenting two historical eras of 'industrialism' and 'post-industrialism' followed by a third, organized under a different conceptual category, 'biotech industry!'). Contemporaries in Thacker's field produce contrary results. Reading Thacker's *Global Genome* alongside Raushik Sunder Rajan's *Biocapital*, also published last year, is, for example, illuminating: both studies effect a return to Marx, work through questions of materiality and labour power by way of Foucauldian biopolitics, and entertain Bataille's theory of expenditure on the path towards disambiguating a post-genomic future. Yet *Biocapital* clarifies to a much greater degree (and in a considerably shorter book) the ways that small genomics-oriented discovery firms interoperate with much larger pharmaceuticals corporations; variations in the economies of genomics between India and the USA; different tendencies for capital in each location to overdetermine the processes, projects and products of the varying sectors of production; and even the

deskilled milieu of graphic designers working in the educational sector of the bioinformatic industry.

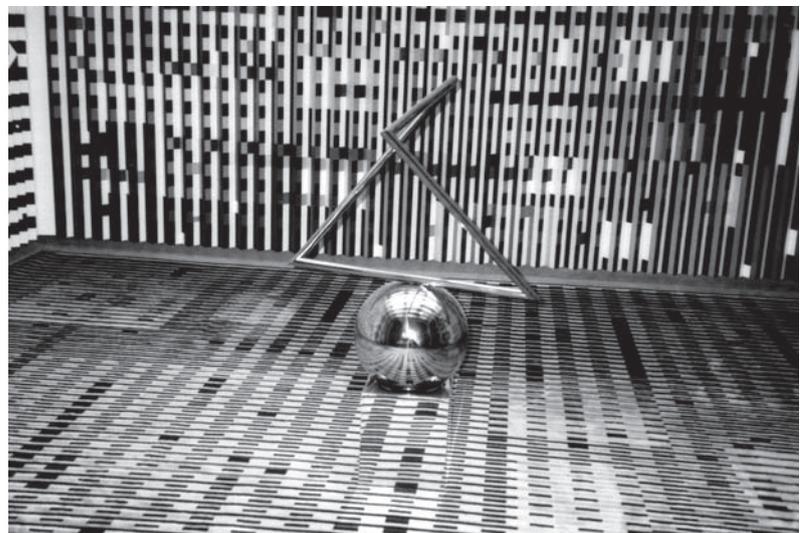
For Sunder Rajan, asymmetries in the global production processes of biocapital means that Indians are more likely to experience the products of post-genomic life sciences as test subjects, while Americans are more likely to experience these as consumers. That is a striking ethical disjuncture, although one in keeping with other studies of biopiracy or global tissue economies, and provides a stronger prompt for consideration of 'biocapital's' importance. *Global Genome* develops similarly sophisticated questions about the implications of 'biolabour', but it might be hard for Thacker's less careful readers to care about the resistance a regenerated bladder might offer to global capital. On the other hand, while both Sunder Rajan and Thacker note that DNA chips have implications for the human subjection to biopower and the biopolitical control of national food security, there are surely many Super-Fund sites where DNA chips might also help gauge the toxicity humans have created for both ourselves and our carbon-based brethren. A more general and more faceted view of 'somatic ethics' within biocapital is still required.

Code: Collaborative Ownership and the Digital Economy is another MIT publication offering well-honed critical tools for technocultural studies. *Code* also addresses, for example, questions of biopiracy in the new life sciences (in an essay by Cori Hayden), but instead of characterizing epochal shifts effected by a singular agent (the global genome or biocapital), it takes on ongoing, uneven, and unfinished transformations associated with digital network production and IP law, pointing to undervalued or misunderstood practices of creation and distribution, profiling broadly historical patterns typifying privatization of intellectual and expressive property, and thinking through the potentials of open source strategies or new legal frameworks for collaborative work. Appropriately for this transdisciplinary collection of work, *Code* 'feeds off controversies', as Latour might put it, not to approximate an impossible object of critique, as both Thacker and Sunder Rajan succeed in doing in different ways.

Opening the first section, two complementary essays from cultural anthropologists Marilyn Strathern and James Leach make clear that distinct cultural and technical milieus for visual or acoustic expression,

such as those of Papua New Guinea, differ radically in organizing collaboration, creativity and ownership. Reading the two, we see concretely that not all understandings of 'authorship' modulate primarily between individual and corporate registers, as the dominant Euro-American models of filtering public expression have tended to do. Fred Myers follows, pointing out specific ways that global IP regimes work against both Aboriginal expression in its own terms, and their territorial situatedness. If Strathern's and Leach's contributions make explicit that contemporary rights management schemes are inadequate to the extant developmental paradigms of many locales, Myers extends their comments by observing that conflicts between Euro-American and indigenous regimes of expression are often exacerbated, rather than resolved, by trade agreements on IP.

Where Strathern, Leach or Myers emphasize the differences of indigenous production, and, indeed, suggest that we benefit by appropriating not the works or processes of indigenous peoples but lessons from the modes of network production they demonstrate, other contributors suggest that any such transpositional manoeuvring requires an analytics of complicity. Anthony Seeger interrogates his own complicity in bringing the Brazilian Indian 'Savannah Deer Song' into the public domain; Boatema Boaten considers



the complicity of Ghanaian lawyers who can only protect Ghanaian 'folkloric' knowledges by condemning Ghanaian cultural production to a static register of value that is always inferior to that of Western technoscience. The need arises, then, for a historical inquiry into what constitutes Western 'open science' and how digital production may be transforming it. Paul David obliges, revisiting modernizing Europe's Scientific Revolution to suggest that contemporary systems of technoscientific knowledge production among universities

and their assorted clients and publics are not radically dissimilar from patronage systems in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' 'Age of Academies'. If David downplays the centuries-long transformation of instrumental technics into systemic technologies and the meanings of that shift, he does work against the singularizing commentaries on digital epochality chiming with every uptick in the NASDAQ index.

This succession of essays in the first section reveals what is both fruitful and frustrating about the volume as a whole. Throughout, essays are carefully ordered so that questions raised by one contributor are taken up by another. Where a historical treatment is prompted, one appears – but on a different topic, and with a different orientation and object. The problem isn't, then, that *Code* forces together essays that don't fit; it's that the discursive creases which arise in reading them tend to be smoothed over rather than made to stand out – with questions raised, hesitations expressed, other possibilities indicated – as we move from one essay to the next.

At the same time, although *Code*'s broad coverage and 'open source' style helps undo many of the damaging mischaracterizations which limit peoples' and publics' abilities to conceive, demand and exercise expression across technics and instrumentalities, some gaps needed filling. First, the volume's multiple disciplines and presentational styles would benefit from a glossary of terms, concepts and relevant legal constructs and events in order to fill out motivations and contexts. Second, there's no reason why today's media industries can't be studied in the ways that Ghana or Papua New Guinea are; readers would benefit from an engagement with the conflicted, contradictory and contingent movements of major copyright holders or network providers. Third, a treatment of aesthetics, collaboration and digital networks is sorely missed here. Fourth, materialities of 'hardware' are largely taken for granted. And fifth, some study of digital sharers would realistically fill out the alternately idealized or voluntarist attribution of digital collaboration as a flowering graft of 'altruistic economies' onto the gnarled old trunk of global technocapital.

Lacking these, the cumulative effect of reading *Code* is that by the time we get to open source pioneer Richard Stallman's provocative iconoclasm (in a transcribed conversation) – defending peoples' and publics' abilities to determine how, how much, and when to allow encroachments on expression, a stance which, Stallman's respondent points out, is historically vague, and probably idealistic – the volume seems torn between two rather typical organizational tasks: the

difficulties of identifying resources for collaboration versus those of managing them. In that gap, there is no rigorous critical deconstruction of collaboration or use as expression, other than the presentation by Stallman, which begs critical, theoretical and historical questions but provides little in the way of forward movement. The result is that the volume's critical orientation wavers uncomfortably between cultural anthropology's need to supply resistance to advances in transnational cybernetic media, and policy gestures seeking to modify neoliberal legal frameworks to ensure that some simulacrum of a public sphere still exists after the forces of privatizing technological innovation redefine peoples and publics as consumers of the new markets which media industries retroactively plan to have waiting for them – *after* people have already established these topographies through their own patterns of use. Apparently the future comes first, after all. Implicitly, and all too predictably, the temporality of that emerging marketized consumption of our own active labour is coded as 'future tribal'.

Code provides a useful overview of the problematic of collaboration in globalizing digital contexts, but partly misses its mark both in terms of timeliness and in terms of applicability – perhaps because the open-source model inspiring much of the contents does not extend to the actual volume itself. I'd like to see *Code* retooled, via some modified version of an open-source model: informed by just the kinds of discussion this volume provides, more explicitly teasing out tensions between contributors, respectfully tethering these tensions to a larger critique of technics and milieu which sustains engagements with biocapital, bringing together the productivities of peer production with the productivities of peer review. But *Code*, alas, is only one of a great number of publications appealing to the digital newness of what turns out to be a very long *durée* of technological transitions. It's easy for such publications to miss fully developing their own analyses by not implementing their own presentation according to the conditions, critiques and milieus they address. The latency between academic research and publication and inevitable gaps in coverage are only two problems which open-source publishing might ameliorate. The questions of authority and authorship, creativity and ownership, sovereignty and rights, and local, national and global publics that *Code* addresses would benefit with a shift from a 'print anthology' to a hybrid, free and open-access 'print-online project'. Perhaps the MIT Press will consider distributing *Code* 2.0.

James Tobias

Absolute naturalism

Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling*, Continuum, London and New York, 2006. xi + 232 pp., £65.00 hb., 0 8264 7902 2.

Although prospective readers may be surprised to discover that this book has relatively little to say about the history of post-Schellingian philosophy of nature, such concerns quickly dissolve when it becomes apparent how much more intriguing and ambitious the book's actual content is than its title might indicate. *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* is indeed a work of painstaking historical scholarship, but its expository dimension primarily functions as an aid to its prescriptive one. Grant's interpretive thesis is that 'Schellingianism' is 'nature-philosophy'. Furthermore, he claims that revisiting it is a contemporary necessity given (1) nature-philosophy's critical relationship to Kantian epistemology, and (2) the latter's continuing circumscription of the conceptual possibilities legitimate available to present-day philosophy. Supplementing historical perspicacity with an eye to the future, Grant reconstructs nature-philosophy as an indispensable corrective to what he sees as the currently dominant philosophical paradigm: an ethically or politically motivated 'antiphysics' that can only prioritize the practical by segregating it from the physical. Most importantly, Grant argues, the stark divisions of labour between philosophy and science that such 'practicisms' implicitly or explicitly advocate inevitably end up curtailing thought's speculative prowess by denying philosophy's bolder aspirations. Consequently, the book's overarching injunction concerns 'philosophy becoming capable once again of metaphysics' – but with the caveat that the latter 'cannot be pursued in isolation from physics'. (Grant often uses the term 'physics' in the sense of *physicalism*, which conveys something more general than a specific branch of natural science and its methodologies.)

Essential to the success of this transformation of philosophy's capabilities and self-conception, then, is a reassessment of those historical moments in which the relations between physics and metaphysics were most definitively shaped. Grant locates the prototype of such situations in the transition from Platonism – provocatively recast as a 'one-world physics' encompassing matter and the Ideas – to Aristotelianism – depicted as the primary instigator of the physics–metaphysics disjunction. More specifically, Plato and Aristotle are shown to be divided by the differing conceptions of matter that determine their differing conceptions of nature. At issue here is the question of *somatism*, of

whether or not materiality is reducible to corporeality. For Grant, somatic theories of matter, such as those adopted by Aristotle and Kant, rarely fail to reveal their complicity with the practicist agenda. This is because somatism always provides an alibi for the excision of nature from philosophy. For example, the restriction of matter to body entails that nature be conceived of as an *aggregate* of bodies, and given that this aggregate will inevitably require a non-corporeal substrate in which those bodies must inhere, the more fundamental term of this relation *has to be non-physical* since materiality extends no further than body. With principles like this, an estrangement of physics from metaphysics follows as a matter of course: materiality is relegated to the sciences while philosophy distinguishes itself as the 'deeper' discourse.

In short, somatic theories of matter can grow no larger than a 'physics of *all things*', to which Grant opposes the Platonic 'physics of *the all*'. Grant contends that Plato's anti-somatism, echoed in Schelling's 'materiality is not yet corporeality', conceives of matter as 'power', which allows the fundamentality of physicality to be maintained since material bodies (as well as Ideas and everything else) genetically emerge from potentiated, self-organizing matter. The continuity that this genetic physicalism establishes between the organic and the inorganic vitiates another practicist tactic: the vitalist isolation of organic life from inorganic matter. However, Grant's management of this issue illustrates the extent to which one facet of his overall position remains unclear. He criticizes vitalism as 'antiphysics' in so far as it centralizes life in order to safeguard ethical and political programmes from the anti-practicist effects of a genuine engagement with nature; yet the Platonic 'world-soul' and Schellingian 'nature as pure productivity' (both principles of 'self-generating motion') which he defends would hardly satisfy a staunch anti-vitalist. Thus Grant – like Schelling – may not succumb to the vitalism he decries, but the position he adopts ends up complicating the issue by generating uncertainty as to whether he is simply espousing a different kind of vitalism or actually illuminating theoretical options irreducible to vitalism or mechanism.

The dynamized absolute which Grant extensively and compellingly explicates is, in fact, what he calls 'nature as subject', a term which does *not* indicate

similarities with more familiar conceptions of human or divine subjectivity but is instead a way of conceptualizing nature's *unconditional autonomy*. Crucially, this autonomy entails an absolute and irrecoverable excess of human thought and perception (as the time-scales involved in natural geneses make clear), and so Schellingianism at its best is powerfully presented as an anti-anthropocentric metaphysical realism which affirms nature's full independence of any cognitive relation to it. At other times, though, Grant seems to oscillate between construing ideation as a regionalized natural phenomenon and as Platonic Ideas universalized as *ousia*. The latter results in Schellingianism sometimes appearing as a less interesting objective idealism. While this equivocation obviously has its roots in Platonic idealism's incompatibility with Schelling's version of transcendental idealism (which also entails an inconsistency in Schelling's intellectual trajectory), the emergence of objective idealism in Grant's project is indicative of the importance of a problem which any absolutization of nature must confront. To wit, this brilliant 'nature as subject' thesis exhibits the viability of an absolute that is *wholly real* (mainly because it is wholly *material*), but it seems as though, once many philosophical naturalists begin to explain 'natural-ity', idealism and/or vitalism invariably resurface (e.g. Bergson, Whitehead, Deleuze). Nevertheless, this is not to say that Grant lacks the resources to overcome this obstacle and 'purify' his naturalism; on the contrary, he proves the opposite to be the case.

If Grant does not elaborate on these questions it is probably because he is not that concerned with them in the long run. What he does care about are the philosophical benefits that a dynamized nature allows him to enjoy. In particular, the latter is allegedly capable of explaining physicality *and* ideality through the ascending levels of matter's self-construction, while all the variants of 'antiphysics' and its accomplices (practicism, organicism, somatism, subjective idealism, etc.) betray an inadequacy in the elimination of nature which is their condition of possibility. With this idea, one of the most significant premisses of Grant's arguments comes to light. Throughout the book Platonic physics and Schellingian nature-philosophy are advanced as standard-setters for a test by which the *extensity* of philosophical systems should be measured. The operative assumption seems to be that a philosophy which can encompass what another is incapable of handling thereby demonstrates its superiority with respect to the other. This is why Grant finds the Platonic–Schellingian model preferable to all 'antiphysics': the latter makes metaphysics, which is precisely

this maximized extensity, impossible. Accordingly, the disqualification of practicism would merely be the impartially generated consequence of a fidelity to extensity rather than an ideologically motivated dismissal.

Two problems arise here. The first concerns the question of Grant's success in completing his own objective. While he argues quite convincingly that a genuine engagement with nature makes any philosophical privileging of the practical impossible, he also seems to suggest that the Platonic–Schellingian model's encompassing of ideation is pre-emptory with respect to whatever practicism could petition in order to secure this privileging. However, Grant appears a long way from being either willing or able to explain a political situation or an aesthetic phenomenon in physicalist terms (although he does discuss the naturalistic basis of human freedom). And if he thinks that such domains are illusory or not worth attention, then he risks inviting the charge of being almost as 'eliminative' with regard to them as he claims practicism is with regard to the physical domain. (I say 'almost', because a genetic physicalism surely has a better chance of explaining any kind of human activity than an ethical or political philosophy does of explaining natural phenomena.) So, while the idea



Courtesy of Richard Paul

of a test of extensity is by no means a worthless one, given the desirability of increased explanatory power, its consistent application sets an extraordinarily – and, some would say, unrealistically – high standard.

The second problem is more obvious but even more crucial, since it goes straight to the heart of the critique of metaphysics which Grant wants to overcome. That is, even if this maximized extensity is conceptually envisageable, in what way is it cognitively realizable? What are the epistemological conditions of claims

made about such an immense field of objects? One cannot help but be struck by Grant's expressed lack of concern for such questions, as the absolute priority of ontology over epistemology seems to be the book's working presupposition rather than a demonstrated conclusion. This is a serious obstruction to Grant's proposed rehabilitation of metaphysics, and until it is removed he will always be open to the charge that he has yet to engage fully with his most powerful opponent on the latter's own terms (despite the meticulousness with which he exposes fatal flaws in Kant's attempts at a philosophy of nature). Interestingly, this is one point where Grant and Schelling certainly diverge, as the *System of Transcendental Idealism's* explicitly stated epistemological agenda makes clear. Grant's omission of this only underscores his disdain for epistemology, something which is all the more inexcusable given that



Courtesy of Richard Paul

Schelling may have provided the resources required for defending ontological naturalism on epistemological grounds in that text. In this regard, Grant misses a significant opportunity to strengthen greatly his overall position.

Yet even if an ontology with no epistemological scruples is suspect, an epistemology which tries to excuse itself from clarifying the ontological status of its components should not go uninterrogated either. This is one reason why Grant's treatment of the *System* deserves special mention. In a remarkable tour de force of textual exegesis and conceptual synthesis, Grant situates Schelling's transcendental philosophy *within* the nature-philosophy. The resultant structure of Schellingianism determines the ontological constitution of the transcendental to be physical by rendering self-consciousness immanent to a nature upon which it depends, with which it is continuous (but not commensurate), and in which it is merely local. Therefore, bearing in mind matter's inherent tendency to self-organization – the auto-productive capacity of 'nature as subject' – it follows that the internality of

transcendental subjectivity is only the externality of inorganic matter at a 'higher potency'. Hence the title of what may be the most stimulating chapter, 'What thinks in me is what is outside me.'

Most impressive, though, is the thoroughness and consistency with which this naturalization of ideality is carried out, providing a lucid account of thought's reflexive capacity as inherently resistant to idealistic totalization. Grant shows how Schelling achieves this through the *System's* unwavering commitment to the unceasing productivity of ideation and its temporality, which determines the dimensionality of thought to be an irreversible uni-directionality. This means that any idea, regardless of its *ideatum*, is always new, and therefore the pure productivity that is ideation (and nature) is *always recapitulated* but *never recuperated* with every product of thought:

To turn, as it were, from the product and form a concept of the producing does not complete the intuition, but renders the producing a product itself produced by another producing, thus leaving an 'irreducible remainder' of forces that cannot be resolved into the product.

Nevertheless, this supposedly enables thought to cognize its own immanent activity without appearing to transcend that activity, because the object of this (and every) cognition is a product, while the cognition itself is a producing which can itself become a product.

Furthermore, Grant's identification of the asymmetrical relation between Schelling's nature-philosophy and his transcendental philosophy (a reflection of the productivity-product asymmetry) allows him to demolish Hegel's interpretation of Schelling's 'system' in the *Difference* essay. This is a significant polemic, because it is Hegel's presentation of the 'two sciences' of Schelling's philosophy as 'relative totalities' in symmetric opposition (rather than two intersecting trajectories) which enables him to set the stage for his later sublation of such antitheses in his completed system. The implication is that the portrait of Schelling which the *Difference* essay praises eventually becomes a straw man in Hegel's self-congratulatory reading of the development of German Idealism. Grant attributes this mischaracterization to Hegel's employment of his own conception of identity as latent in opposition, while Schellingian identity (natural productivity) is actually recapitulated in the proliferation of differences (products), a process afforded by the infinite bifurcations in matter's self-construction.

With respect to the book's interpretive thesis, Grant builds a strong case against the conventional view

which depicts the nature-philosophy as no more than an ephemeral episode (roughly 1797–1800) in Schelling’s fifty-year career. Instead, he argues that the recognition of its persistence throughout Schelling’s oeuvre is the only way to grasp the latter’s internal coherence. Thus the expository incompleteness and hyper-periodization characteristic of previous commentaries’ presentations of Schelling are merely symptoms of a reluctance to accept the nature-philosophy’s fundamental status. Accordingly, the majority of Grant’s engagement with rival secondary literature focuses on its evaluations of the nature-philosophy’s significance (e.g. whether it is depicted as an autonomous ontological enterprise or a mere extension of transcendentalism). But although such a strategy is necessary given the objective, it is not sufficient on its own. By passing on a chance to criticize non-naturalistic interpretations of Schelling such as those of Slavoj Žižek, Peter Dews and Jason Wirth, Grant also misses the opportunity to explain the apparently non-naturalistic elements of Schelling’s thought upon which those interpretations seize. For example, Grant’s contention that the *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom* and the *Ages of the World* operate on a naturalistic (and, specifically, *geological*) basis is compellingly defended, as is the assertion of continuity between earlier works

and these texts via the latter’s ‘abyss of forces’ being the cosmological antecedent to the former’s ‘pure productivity’. But what Grant does not address are the clearly visible theological strains of these two texts, concerned as they are with the conditions of the possibility of a personal god. Furthermore, Schelling’s later philosophies of mythology and revelation, usually considered to be even more theologically motivated, receive much less attention. To be fair, the mere presence of these elements in Schelling’s work is certainly not fatal for Grant’s reconstruction, but their absence from his exposition does render it incomplete. A more effective approach would have sought to demonstrate their ultimate amenability to Grant’s project, or would have exposed their illegitimacy in Schelling’s by way of an internal critique.

Nevertheless, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* sets a new standard for Schelling scholarship. More than this, it is an important work of philosophy in its own right, for all its problems. The book closes with the words: ‘Schelling is not a forerunner of anything, but a precursor of philosophical solutions, or “experiments in dynamic physics”, yet to come.’ There is reason to hope that Grant will keep the promise implicit in this declaration.

Dustin McWherter

Only what acts thinks

Alberto Toscano, *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2006. xiii + 249 pp., £45.00 hb., 1 4039 9780 2.

Works such as this, along with the renewed interest in speculative metaphysicians like Whitehead and Bergson, have begun to redefine the project of contemporary metaphysics, on the basis of four claims of particular importance. First, there can be no aprioristic exclusions from its ambit: metaphysics proves itself in its extensity, and any restrictions thereupon can only disqualify it *as* metaphysics. Second, and derivatively, the engagement with nature is essential: metaphysics is not *other than* physics, but rather the *phusis* of the All, the nature of nature; accordingly, metaphysics without nature is *a priori* inadequate. Third, if the principle is the atom of metaphysics, a field theory must supplant it. Finally, the post-metaphysical settlement into which both the main traditions in philosophy slumped at the end of the last century must be countered, and its post-Kantian development reoriented.

In these terms, *Theatre of Production* proposes nothing less than a confounding of Aristotle’s denial

that there could be a ‘science of the individual’ by impugning Kant’s restriction of judging natural purposes to a regulative use of speculative reason, and pursuing instead a metaphysics based not on given existents, but on ontogenesis. Toscano’s metaphysical recommendations echo developments in the philosophy of biology that seek to refocus the problems of molecular biology around ontogeny rather than phylogeny (e.g. Lenny Moss, *What Genes Can’t Do*, 2003) so as to focus on individual’s ability to evolve rather than on supposed trans-generationally subsistent entities. Just as this Platonism of molecular biology denies the historicity of the laws of nature, so Aristotelian substances deny the individuation of productivity. Already three principles of a metaphysics of ontogenesis emerge. First, ontology cannot be pursued as a science of being qua being without failing in regard to determination (the elimination of the science of the individual entails an ontology without entities). Second, failures

of determination equally arise from the relegation of speculation to the domain of analogy (the determination of the domains of reason, not of being) as from any commitment to the Absolute. Third, avoiding the Heideggerian verdict that it is sufficient to hypostatize ontological difference, *Theatre of Production*'s central hypothesis is that determination is satisfied only through the immanent productivity of a *consequently* particular individuality. To this Toscano tentatively gives the name of a 'superior nominalism'.

The problem at the base of this book is this: how to understand the 'operations of individuation without the inaugural presupposition that these operations may be captured by a point-like idea or principle'? The proposed solution is 'to persevere in the thinking of the unity of being and concept ... from the standpoint of individual difference'. Only by attending to the operations of individuation *as* operations, that is, do we generate an adequate typology of the operations not of being as such, but of *this* becoming, *this* productivity. Accordingly, alloying a concept of 'recursive evolution' taken from the philosophy of computation with an individuating account of Parmenidean unity, the book proposes an ontology based on the recursion of generic operations in thought and being. Since operation recurs upon operation, the assumption of a product other than the productivity of operations constitutes a transcendental illusion, falsely withdrawn from productivity to stand over and against it.

The problem this entails is the following: is this a universal or a particular science of the individual? If there are grounds for asserting the particularity of the science of the particular, they derive from the determination to avoid abstraction from the immanent context – the theatre – of productivity. Despite this 'transcendental materialist' critique of the separation of product and productivity, there remains a confessed 'biophilosophical', albeit anti-organicist, focus. In part, this is to maintain the advantages of an immanence of ontogenesis in being, experience and consciousness; the risk, however, is a nature divided by a biophilosophical imperative. That is, as Toscano urges against Cassirer, if one ontic kind is acknowledged as primary for the metaphysics of ontogenesis, then the critical strictures against a transcendence of product over productivity are vitiated. Whether physicalistically grounded on a materialism regarding the occasions of consciousness, strategically on the location of the problem, or ethico-politically in the essential 'dramatiz[ation of] the process of individuation', biophilosophy leaves nature riven not between the organic and the inorganic but – inquiring as to 'what is living and what is dead

in biophilosophy' – between those regions of being wherein the formal and the abstract *consciously* arise, and those where they do not. The immanence of abstraction to conscious production – an apperception governed by individuation rather than unity – thus restricts 'the unity of being and concept'. The problem becomes how the two inhere in a singular nature, just as it was for Kant: is it only where nature attains a 'highest' individuation that it *acts*? Toscano's solution is that the *abstract problem* of thought and being is posed as an 'original duality' that is only 'concretely resolved'. Finally, however, it is 'thought itself' that 'must... construct both the problematic fields of individuation and their solutions'. Thus the question 'what is the place of thinking?' is answered through a further question, 'who acts in the theatre of production?', and being becomes the exclusive *passion* of thinking. Here, then, the second of the problems a metaphysics must satisfy comes into focus in so far as it confronts the fourth: even allowing the proposed 'materialization of intention', a riven nature is the primary legacy of post-Kantian metaphysics.

Although the insistence on the movements of thought and the immanent determination of concrete particularity cannot but recall Hegel, it is the 'enduring legacy of Kantianism' that for Toscano forms the matrix of engagement here. Countering Badiou's premissing of metaphysics' future on the rejection of the critical philosophy, five elements of this legacy stand out with particular clarity. These are: (1) the problems of *immanence*, reoriented around matrices of production rather than the legitimacy of critique; (2) the powerful Marxian echo of a corresponding reorientation of *critique* around the problem of production; (3) ontology's locus as acts or 'operations' of production (*esse sequitur operare*); (4) *experience*, taking up the baton from Deleuze's 'superior empiricism', as the guarantor of the immanence of thought-as-operation; and (5) in consequence, the guiding question of a critical philosophy of the operations of productivity as 'who acts?'

It is in the last of these that the particularity of Toscano's determination of the problem comes into focus. Announcing early on its concern with biophilosophy, *Theatre of Production* proposes that an operationalist ontology devolve from operating *onta*, from living beings. This specification is certainly not conducted under the rubric of *Lebensphilosophie*, as the critical engagement with current revisionist Nietzscheans demonstrates. The problem is instead pursued through the problems of causation philosophically bequeathed by Kant's finally 'as if'

organicism, alongside the scientific ‘solutions’ that so many unequivocally locate in the theory of autopoiesis (here refreshingly critiqued). If this does provide a solution, Toscano correctly points out, it does so only phenomenologically, and ignores the ontological dimensions of the problem, making no advance whatever on the condition that the philosophy of nature was left in by Kant. Be this as it may, we thus have an initial answer to the question posed above: this is a particularist ‘science of the individual’. The grounds of this particularity are not incidental or ontically contingent but transcendental, however, in that an operationalist ontology cannot consistently be held to act on non-operational beings without conceding its regionality with respect to Being; this is why a ‘transcendental materialism’ is compelled to conceive matter as either activity or operation.

Accordingly, the book’s forensics of Kant’s philosophy is itself critical, imposing productivist ‘strains’ on the ‘enduring legacy’. Specifically, an operationalist Parmenideanism imposes an identity of knowing and *acting*, making ‘being’ transitive, and entailing the transfer of ontology from atomistic questions of being to operational fields of becoming. From this it follows first that production is *material* rather than reducibly cognitive (paraphrasing an early thesis in the book, ‘genesis is larger than epistemology’); and second that matter is not entity but operation. It is as attempted satisfactions of these operationalist strains that Toscano conducts some extraordinarily lucid analyses of the contributions of Whitehead’s philosophy of organism (the difficulty of which task cannot but provoke sympathy among readers of *Process and Reality*) and Peirce’s evolutive cosmology.

Pursuing, then, a materialist philosophy of production by transcendental means yields a multiply *strained* Kantianism: critique remains, but is oriented around production; the transcendental ceases to be simply an epistemogenic method, and is materialized (‘transcendental materialism’), and the dualism for which Kant was notorious among the immediate post-Kantians is abolished not along the lines of an identity of thought and being, but as an asymmetrical identity of operativity and cognition: asymmetrical because operativity is the generated *prius* of cognition, so that identity becomes a dynamic concept measuring the strains in immanence. The question is: how far is Kant thus strained? Kant’s own manufacturing ethos of cognition – ‘he who would know the world must first manufacture it’ – is apparent in the never-completed *Transition between Metaphysics and Physics*, as the *Opus postumum* would have

been called. And it was Fichte who ‘operationalized’ Kantianism, viewing himself as its legitimate successor, under the primacy of the practical. For Fichte, too, ontology became a field of determination by a thinking secondary to acting. While not suggesting Toscano’s outlined metaphysics is identical to Fichte’s, there are parallels: Fichte too would not extend the operations of determination beyond those immanent to complex biological phenomena; the primacy of activity is not considered by Fichte as reducibly an ethical, but rather an ontological project, similarly pursued by transcendental means; but whereas Fichte pursued this through Idealism, Toscano here launches a transcendental materialism.

The problematic element can be demonstrated by something the notorious Stirling wrote in his *Secret of Hegel*: ‘The electricity was a product – a product of your energy, of your operation, of your process, of your experiment.’ First, then, Idealism is equally capable of a genetic ontology premised on production. Second, the electrical operativity of nature extends beyond the immanence of cognition and action, unless the former can recapture its *prius* in reflection. The question *how far* operativity extends (as far as the immanent genesis of electricity?) may either be taken to settle the limits of immanence, or to demonstrate the requirement that a materialism extend beyond them (this of course is why we have here to do with a transcendental rather than a ‘crude’ materialism). On this scale, to settle with the former trajectory is to settle with the Fichtean solution, making it a matter of indifference whether the resulting programme is called ‘idealist’ or ‘materialist’. Ultimately, it is the restrictive use of Parmenidean identity – only what acts thinks – that differentiates them. The Idealist inheritance offers this alternative: nature becomes the *prius* determinant of all, including abstract operations, exacerbating the asymmetry of thought and operativity at the cost of immanence.

Merely to problematize these issues in this work is, however, something to be celebrated, not only in that it confirms that, for all philosophy’s recent posturing, metaphysics requires engagement with the still unsettled bequest of Kant’s philosophy of nature in the third *Critique*; but also for the sheer exuberant joy of the reaffirmed powers of thinking. In its spartan lucidity and the complexity of its engagements, in the problems that it re-energizes, this is a model work of post-anxious metaphysics, which contributes greatly to the re-emergence of speculative metaphysics after an age of austerity.

Iain Hamilton Grant

Ha, bloody ha

David Cunningham and Nigel Mapp, eds, *Adorno and Literature*, Continuum, London and New York, 2006. xii + 203 pp., £60.00 hb., 0 8264 8752 1.

A slightly shop-soiled anecdote often repeated to students at the start of term by cheerfully optimistic lecturers in philosophy departments relates that one of Dr Johnson's acquaintances once said to him, presumably in a pretty complacent tone, 'I too have tried in my time to be a philosopher, but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in.' At present, as the example of Slavoj Žižek might indicate, cheerfulness frequently interrupts and even shapes the practice of philosophy, at least in the public sphere, and in doing so it doesn't necessarily compromise its intellectual reputation, its claims to be philosophical. Indeed, postmodernism – the formal or stylistic qualities of which Žižek adeptly, if rather riskily, mimics in pursuing his critique of its ideological content – has made philosophical playfulness, if not cheerfulness exactly, appear almost imperative: 'Enjoy!' In this climate, the playful pleasure to be derived from reading philosophy, particularly in populist formats, sometimes seems almost compulsory, like the engagement with popular culture from which it is generally indissociable. *Harry Potter and Philosophy: If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts* is the dispiriting title in one publisher's series on 'Popular Culture and Philosophy'. In *RP* 109 Ben Watson rightly complained that books like *The Simpsons and Philosophy*, a collection published under the same imprint, smacked ultimately of 'academic condescension', in spite of its self-conscious attempts 'to mak[e] the fiercest philosophical systems sound friendly, even humorous'.

Adorno, who mercifully doesn't make it into the index of either of these volumes, once stated, acidly enough, that in the conditions of the culture industry 'fun is a medicinal bath'. 'Applied philosophy', as it is called in the publishers' catalogues, slightly more rigorous but no less therapeutic than this kind of fun, is instead perhaps a recreational trip to the gym. Cheerfulness does not often break in on Adorno. He is a philosopher for whom all laughter is effectively a form of *Schadenfreude*, an expression of relief that one has momentarily escaped humiliation or persecution, and therefore an admission that one is complicit with the forces of oppression. 'There is laughter because there is nothing to laugh at', he concludes in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in a sentence that, because it so readily confirms his self-satisfied caricature of the professional

philosopher, might have delighted Dr Johnson's friend. The same could be said of cheerfulness, which from this perspective, the quietly apocalyptic standpoint of someone for whom 'the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant', is the purely reflexive response of the cheerless that Adorno typified as 'jovial denial'. Cheerfulness, derived from the Latin *cara*, meaning countenance, stiffens for Adorno into the cracked grin of a mask, like the ones that encase the faces of Beckett's comic characters as they confront the unspeakable horrors of contemporary history. Reading Adorno, then, one recalls Beckett's Belacqua, who set out to count all the smiles he could find in Dante. In a conference report in *RP* 124, Esther Leslie referred to a talk entitled 'Oh It's Not That Bad: Adorno and Laughter'. Apparently it is.

In 'the epoch of postmodernism', Fredric Jameson remarked a quarter of a century ago, 'the question about poetry after Auschwitz has been replaced with that of whether you could bear to read Adorno and Horkheimer next to the pool.' Thankfully, the thirteen contributors to *Adorno and Literature* do not appear to have taken their copies of the *Notes to Literature* to the poolside. There is nothing facile or fashionably playful about their efforts to demonstrate Adorno's importance to the theory and practice of contemporary literary criticism; not least because all of them reaffirm his commitment to the historical task of ascertaining the truth-content of artworks. As the book's editors emphasize in its Introduction, literary works contain a 'truth' that, according to Adorno, is in the end resistant to the process of autonomization, because as literary works they are 'historically constituted and transformable', especially in so far as their individual aspects are inseparable from the collective or social aspects of language. Each literary work, as Cunningham and Mapp point out, therefore 'stand[s] constitutively in need of philosophical interpretation or criticism'. And the intellectual and political responsibility assumed by the critic is in consequence of grave importance, since in excavating the artwork's truth-content he or she must seek to release both its critical and its utopian potential. 'Such an emphatic notion of "truth"', the editors speculate, 'is perhaps inadmissible to the hegemonic forms of literary criticism and theory today – to a deconstructive emphasis on radical "undecidability", or to a cultural studies committed to the "demystification" of all truth claims through limitless discursivization.'

This elegant and finely argued collection of essays, which sends the reader back to the *Notes to Literature*, in particular, with a sharpened appetite, thus

takes Adorno's responsibilities as a critic seriously, although it is respectful rather than pious in tone. Here Adorno is neither unthinkingly appropriated to a post-structuralist position that dismisses all totalizing thought nor thoughtlessly attacked for maintaining his critical distance from the commodified forms of capitalist mass culture. In a series of scrupulous readings of Adorno's reflections on literature, which have been noticeably neglected in the recent reconsideration of his thought among anglophone scholars, they communicate the sophistication of his criticism and its own critical and utopian potential for literary studies, at a time when the hegemonic status of postmodernist thought appears to be collapsing.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, on 'Philosophy, Aesthetics and Literature', constructs some of the theoretical foundations of the volume by situating literature in relation to Adorno's aesthetic theory more generally. It opens with a piece by Stewart Martin, who offers a useful philosophical genealogy of the 'modern system of the arts', before arguing convincingly that 'Adorno's conception of philosophy is conceived very self-consciously in terms of its linguistic form', and that 'its relation to language and literature is fundamental to his conception of art'. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper then explore some of the pedagogical implications of Adorno's critical example, in a chapter on 'Literary Value' that – in spite of a disappointingly truncated practical exercise in interpreting Kazuo Ishiguro's most recent fiction 'with, and against, Adorno' – helpfully, and imaginatively, identifies his attitudes to elite and mass culture as an important resource in the task of 'hold[ing] out against the practice, so general in contemporary academic literary-cultural studies, of treating the work of literary art as one more instance of discourse in general'.

The remaining chapters in the opening section pursue the book's underlying interest in using Adorno to reclaim the truth-content of art, in both its cognitive and non-cognitive senses. Andrew Bowie, focusing on the relations of music and literature that Adorno highlighted in the title *Notes to Literature*, uses him against the post-structuralist position to assert that 'art's importance lies in its extending the demand for "truth" beyond what can be known, in the sense of being classified by concepts, towards other relationships to people and things.' And Eva Geulen, after diagnosing the political reasons for the 'attack on genre' that prevailed in the twentieth century, suggestively argues for the critical-utopian value of the concept as explored in *Aesthetic Theory*, on the

grounds that 'genres figure as an emblem, however weak, not just of unity, in some abstract sense, but of a concrete community.' Geulen's article contains a detailed account of Adorno's reflections on lyric poetry, a form that receives extensive, highly productive commentary from all of the contributors to the book's second, central section on 'Poetry and Poetics'. There, Howard Caygill explores Adorno's understanding of the dialectical qualities of lyric poetry, a type of utterance that, he argues, lies between the subjective and objective aspects of language and also constitutes a 'meeting point of sound and image'. In so doing he demonstrates, intriguingly, that Adorno's proposition that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric haunts 'his readings of lyric poetry prior to Auschwitz'. Simon Jarvis, who conducts a phenomenally attentive close reading of the musical form of 'Resolution and Independence', uses Wordsworth's concept of 'philosophic song' to think about whether it is possible 'not to put thinking into verse, but to think *in* verse'. Robert Kaufman, in a rich essay on 'Musicality, Conceptuality, Critical Agency', similarly rereads a poem by Wordsworth, among others, in order to assess the relationship of the lyric form to capitalist modernity: 'How,' he asks, 'spontaneously yet rigorously, and with the utmost concision, to make thought sing and to make song think?' And at the end of this section Iain Macdonald revisits the Adorno–Heidegger debate ('a debate that never took place'), examining Paul Celan as a kind of missing link between these antagonists, and provocatively claiming that the poet helps us to understand the ways in which they 'converge on the question of how possibility relates to actuality by showing us how language can reach the possible in the real deployment of words around suppressed possibilities'.

The final section of *Adorno and Literature*, entitled 'Modernity, Drama and the Novel', could scarcely be as tightly organized as the section on poetics, a section that evokes a sense of sustained intellectual dialogue that is all too rare in essay collections of this kind. Paul Fleming's chapter reconstructs another polemical debate that never took place, this time between Adorno and the brilliant conservative critic Max Kommerell, through their asymmetrical but nonetheless parallel readings of *Faust* in terms of the idea of forgetting. In his chapter, Timothy Hall recapitulates a debate that *did* take place, and that has taken place on many occasions since the 1930s, the one between Adorno and Georg Lukács, but interestingly argues that, thanks in part to the disproportionate influence of the collection *Aesthetics and Politics*, the relation-

ship of these pre-eminent Marxist aestheticians has been misconstrued. For both men, according to Hall, and in spite of the contrast between the characteristic literary canons that each of them constructed, ‘the critical potential of the artwork derives from respecting the work’s claim to autonomy rather than attempting to dissolve it’, so that in effect their respective assessments of the novel form in particular comprise the torn halves of a consistent aesthetic. Nigel Mapp then renegotiates Adorno’s interpretation of *Endgame* in a chapter on the logic of disenchantment which neatly explains the tangled dialectic of meaning and meaninglessness dramatized by Beckett. The final contributions to the collection, by Timothy Bewes and David Cunningham, use Adorno to address problems in the contemporary novel. The former interrogates the notion of ‘lateness’ in relation to V.S. Naipaul’s *The Enigma of Arrival*, in an essay that has the effect of complicating, if not fatally undermining, Edward Said’s rather limited ideas on so-called ‘late style’; ideas interrupted of course by his death. And the latter, concluding the volume in an ambitious article that questions whether the European novel can still be described as ‘a *present force*’, looks back at the fiction of W.G. Sebald in order to summarize the ‘double bind of the modern artwork’, which is compelled both to register the contemporary crisis of prose fiction and to ‘rely upon such a category for [its] own historical intelligibility’.

In the face of post-structuralist attempts to render Adorno more playful, perhaps even more cheerful, often through emphasizing forms of ‘undecidability’, these essays communicate a commitment to Adorno’s sense of the heavy intellectual and political responsibilities of the critic. Their enthusiasm is for his contribution to this form of literary criticism and its rigours. This enthusiasm implies a certain political optimism that is not inappropriate. Adorno might not have been the most cheerful of philosophers, for obvious historical and biographical reasons, but he nonetheless insisted on art’s ‘lightheartedness’, although he used the formulation in a characteristically precise and counter-intuitive sense: ‘What is lighthearted in art is, if you like, the opposite of what one might assume it to be: not its content but its demeanour, the abstract fact that it is art at all, that it opens out over the reality to whose violence it bears witness at the same time.’ It is in this sense, then, that it is true to say that art, if not philosophy, is innately cheerful for Adorno. Its constitutive countenance is itself a joyful refusal of capitalism.

Matthew Beaumont

Hegel rules

Eva Geulen, *The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor after Hegel*, trans. James McFarland, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2006.

This book delineates a few notable attempts to try and overturn or reshape the ‘end of art’ as an authentic historical event in Hegel’s wake. It aims to provide a ‘reconstruction of certain decisive stations in this figure of thought’ and of its ‘potential rehabilitation’, in Nietzsche, Benjamin, Adorno and Heidegger (as well as in Hölderlin, the non-opted-for Romantic alternative). The questions this entails are, Geulen states, considered ‘as *questions of form*’, as ‘prologomena toward a phenomenology of the end of art as rumor’. Even for such thinkers themselves (all within the German tradition), she argues, it is not always obvious to what degree they come, in the end, to play by Hegel’s own rules. As Paul de Man once suggested, perhaps ‘most of us are Hegelians and quite orthodox ones at that’. If Geulen’s approach is certainly subtle, and shows a keen eye (or ear, since it is ‘rumour’ that is at issue) for this game, which she plays on Hegel’s behalf, the rest of the book is then bound to play by this rule.

The strategy pursued by Geulen is to brand each of the readers of Hegel she has chosen (whose ‘canonical status’ is, however, somewhat apologetically described as ‘merely an arbitrary sign’) with a certain epithet that is said to be a defining characteristic of their philosophy of art as a whole. Thus Nietzsche is presented as being in a ‘retrograde motion’, Benjamin in the midst of ‘counterplay’, Adorno lost in ‘afterthought’, and Heidegger as working out ‘the same end and the other beginning’ of his thinking. If these labels (which the reader adopts in advance) are unpacked just a little, we find behind them different versions of dialectics and/or antithetical modes of philosophical persuasion which, each in its own way, attempt to move beyond the original place (of the Hegelian form found at their core) but in the end return only to reveal the mechanism that first makes them work. For instance, Benjamin’s ‘model’ is shown to be sustained by a dialectics of (allegorical) presentation which simultaneously disowns tradition as an ideological ruse but also effectively re-founds its own formal unity in the end by (counter-)playing off that ‘tradition’. In contrast to this, but by virtue of a similar mechanism, the ‘world-opening’ theses of Heideggerian being are qualified by a discourse of preservation that forever betrays their ontological immediacy (‘the same end’) by returning them to sheer form (‘the other beginning’).

Now, obviously one might think it a huge disfavour to thinkers drafted by Geulen onto Hegel's team to dismiss them as having little more to offer than certain styles of cheerleading for the master. Yet this is not really Geulen's concern; she is rather more occupied with her own argument. And it is quickly evident that much of her argumentative weight falls, in particular, on a specific 'discovery' in Hegel and, subsequently, the transposition of that 'discovery' in(to) later generations. This find is the overdetermination of the end of symbolic art in the ideality of classical art. As she puts it: 'This is the realm of symbolic protoart, which not only provides classical art with the necessary material for its labor of transformative sublation, but also supplies the conditions through which the identification of form and meaning advances to a transhermeneutic ideal.' Inasmuch as the realm of symbolic protoart is 'a time' and 'a place' where 'questions of interpretation and its possibility are historically and systematically at home', it irredeemably breaks the clean, elevated category of classical art and brings it closer to whoever experiences it.

If we consider the consequences of this discovery for the experience of art in Hegelian terms, it means that instead of simply being freely whisked away somewhere else (beyond the mere 'this' into something greater), the event would be manifested in present aesthetic actuality and activate the subject on the spot in a totally different way. This would also happen in the case of classical art, so undermining Hegel's categorical valorization of it. 'Great art' could be an art of *any* age if defined in line with these rules. And, perceptively enough, Geulen does argue that Hegel stays blind to his own game in respect to this idea: when ideal art is affected by the 'necessary material' of the non-ideal, no 'labor of transformative sublation' can be said to come into being without the former's 'conditions'. In consequence, symbolic art remains at the formal heart of classical art without ever ending or having ended, without allowing itself to be surpassed or left behind. Moreover, as the now quasi-transcendental idea of the ideality of classical art would remain at the dying heart of the Romantic end of art as well, the different arts are never able to escape or end one another, not even in the time of Hegel's own lamenting. They are just as ideal and affected. This is a Hegelian universal formalism which Hegel himself apparently fails to see, and Geulen pursues the argument in order to locate and criticize later thinkers' inheritance of this particular aesthetic resistance.

It would not be expedient to catalogue here the Hegelian nuts and bolts of all of the examples given

by Geulen in her readings of Hegel's (sometimes reluctant) intellectual progeny. And, in fact, any mere underlining of the particularly 'Hegelian thing' in, for instance, Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama* or Heidegger's 'The Origin of the Work of Art' would fail to observe its own rule as to where it 'starts' (as a 'Hegelian thing' to be applied) and where it 'ends' (as the 'other thinker's thing' to which the 'Hegelian thing' was once applied). Certainly something like this *could* be done but all too easily the result might slip into such stuttering redundancies as Geulen apparently parodies:

[In Nietzsche's] *Birth of Tragedy*, its ironic play with itself, no longer belongs to tragedy, whether as the tragedy of tragedy or the tragedy of the tragedy of tragedy. As Nietzsche assumes an ironic distance from all tragedy and from tragic knowledge as well, his book becomes comedy.

Much of *The End of Art* is focused, then, on how attempts (including Hegel's own) to escape the demands of Hegelian form almost invariably fail by way of certain overdetermined concepts and returns of critical form. In some cases, as with Nietzsche, there is an attempted escape into a form of comedy which would break with all claims made concerning an authentic 'end of art' or of any other such tragic knowledge. However, this escape can establish nothing assertable or solid about its own form, whether cognitive or epistemological, regarding what exactly instigated it or to what purpose it was performed. Indeed, if it did, the assertion would already be expressing a different thing, the comedy retreating backwards from itself. This is the 'retrograde motion' criticized by Geulen. As the Hegelian–Nietzschean event, it cannot denote the comical escape from somewhere 'else' into 'it', but takes place *as* a comic form that refuses to lend itself to being thought *about*. However, the 'actuality' of the event's occurrence is affected to its very core by the moments of tragedy redundantly uttered in its course.

Geulen's survey is a highly admirable study of the impact of Hegel's famous thesis on the history of criticism, despite (or by way of?) the limitations of a few seemingly determinate labels used to push the re-reading of some important thinkers in a very particular direction. In fact, as it turns out, it is therein that the potential for parody actually lies. As Geulen writes of her canonical thinkers, 'at the moment in which [their] "discourse enters into reality"', the language of that discourse is 'forced to treat both reality and thought *as if* they were language, *as if* they had the same name' [my emphasis]. At this point, as Adorno

knew, the discourse to be established is already lost to its rational establishment by the ‘afterthought’ of its unmoored nature; in this place, ‘[d]iscourse is haunted by what it must forget if it is to enter reality as discourse’. The reality of any discourse that wants to settle something is always already broken and cannot be fixed just by remembering to be different, as would-be post-Hegelian thinkers have attempted to do in their precursor’s wake. The final score for Geulen is thus that there is no ‘end of art’, or ‘end of X’s domination’, or ‘beginning of new age’, or ‘beginning of X’s rehabilitation’ ultimately to anchor any discourse in. Instead, there are countless leagues of ghosts, bandying back and forth on the timeless court of radical form like everything else in the game of thinking.

Jarkko Toikkanen

More, less, or something else

Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume III: From Modernity to Modernism (Towards a Metaphilosophy of Daily Life)*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, London and New York, 2005. xxxiv + 179 pp., £16.99 hb., 1 859984 590 8.

John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday: Revolutionary Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Theory*, Pluto Press, London, 2006. 147 pp., £16.00 pb., 0 745 32410 X.

The title of this review might sum up, albeit perhaps non-sequentially, the philosophical moods of the three volumes of Henri Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday Life* (published in France 1947, 1961 and 1981) while also serving to highlight something about John Roberts’s arguments in *Philosophizing the Everyday*. In the early pages of this third volume, Lefebvre wonders aloud about the status of ‘the real’ for critical thinking. After sniping implicitly at Lacanian psychoanalysis and the scientific Marxism of Louis Althusser (which he thoroughly detested), Lefebvre asks:

What does the word ‘real’ mean today? It is the given, the sensible and practical, the actual, the perceptible surface. As for daily life, the general opinion is that it forms part of reality. But does it coincide with it? No, for it contains something more, something less, and something else: lived experience, fleeting subjectivity – emotions, affects, habits, and forms of behaviour. We may add that it also includes abstraction.

In the next breath, Lefebvre adds that such abstractions must certainly take into account commodities and money, possessing as they do an ‘abstract dimension’, and images too: ‘a multiplicity of images, without thereby vanishing into the “imaginary”’. Critical thinking, in Lefebvre’s view, had allowed itself to be trumped by ‘the real’. Having given up on concrete imagination, critical thought now contented itself with endlessly chasing its own fascinating tail down the rabbit-hole of the imaginary.

In 1981, Lefebvre looked around and nearly all he saw, nearly all he felt, was reified thought for a reified world. All that was once fluid and in process was now frozen into postures, broken off in chunks. ‘Everyday life has lost the quality and vigour it once possessed, and dissipated, like the space that has been smashed to bits and then sold in pieces. What charms we have lost.’ But then, having set up his readers for what promises to be a thoroughly depressing ride, Lefebvre switches gear abruptly. Refusing both nostalgic lamentations and futurological longings, he focuses on the ‘possibilities’ (the real possibilities) alive in the interstices of the present, endeavouring to think in and through the innumerable anxieties and tragedies of waking life. For Lefebvre in 1981, philosophy had already missed its moment of realization. Revolution (volume 1) had turned to subversion (volume 2), which had then turned to something more or less akin to tragedy (volume 3). But ‘tragic knowledge’, Lefebvre concludes, ‘does not betoken melancholy science’. Conditions, it seemed, were never more ripe, the contrary never more pregnant. Lived contradictions had spread by now, he thought, so far, so deep and so wide, that they struck everywhere with rhythms that were increasingly discernible by even the most recalcitrant of souls. Quantification (especially of labour time and productivity) had run rampant, become almost absolute, and the qualitative nature of space and time were seemingly, *virtually* eliminated. But, Lefebvre lingers for a moment to add, ‘this “virtually” is very important ... The “virtually” means that this limit [of absolute quantification] is unattainable, and that something else is always possible.’ This virtual inhabits the real as possibilities yet to be fully divulged; the virtual offers a glimpse at an irreducible ‘something else’ within *this* horizon.

Such words, even such sentiments, might simply waft away as quasi-inspirational literature for untethered post-critical thinking, if not for the uncanny prescience of so many of Lefebvre’s diagnoses of the complexly material (and necessarily ‘abstract’) continuities and discontinuities just then beginning to wend their way through – but, now, a quarter century

later, more readily recognizable within – the realms of capital and global markets, modes of governance, aesthetic sensibilities, technological advancements, socio-economic class compositions and decompositions, and, of course, theory itself. Thus, instead of sounding like a lone (if not especially long) whistle in the gathering dark, Lefebvre's third volume of the *Critique of Everyday Life* becomes, by its own lights, 'a metaphilosophy of daily life' written in a kind of sketchy shorthand for post-philosophy-cum-praxis (by carrying philosophy beyond itself, past its own unrealized moment). As such, Lefebvre ultimately hands over to us an open-ended project left to be realized, in multiple and undoubtedly incongruous ways, as 'something else'.

John Roberts's *Philosophizing the Everyday* is one such 'something else'. His task is an excavation of the past in order to aid a reinvigoration of critical-conceptual resources in the present and for the future, as 'the promissory space of total revolutionary praxis'. Written as one long arc (stretching across an almost sixty-year timespan: 1917–75), Roberts provides a densely woven narration that gathers up three especially resonant moments/movements in the evolution of 'the everyday': the Russian Revolution and its wider reverberations across Europe and North America (1917–39), the anti-fascist liberation of post-World War II Europe (from 1945 onward, particularly in France and Italy), and the almost-giddy-with-desperation counter-hegemonic convulsions of the 1960s (peaking of course in 1968, but persisting in all sorts of meaningful ways well into the mid-1970s). Thus, Roberts wants to recover the intricacies of the often far-flung story of 'the everyday' up until the moment when it apparently lost the plot, *circa* 1975.

Like most tales of loss (or lost opportunity), this one has its villains or ciphers, here Michel de Certeau (delegated as most representative of the paradigm shift) and Cultural Studies. But neither one, alone or combined, can properly fulfil their corrosive roles in this narrative quite as completely as Roberts has cast them. Whatever the predicament of the concept of the everyday since the mid-1970s, the particulars of this are, at once, more internal and more external to Roberts's historical narrative than he allows. For instance, it might be worth 'something more' to consider, as Lefebvre did, Althusser and structuralism as significant theoretical detours very much interior to fundamentally praxis-focused debates in Western Marxism of the late 1960s and into the 1970s. This is one reason why de Certeau and Cultural Studies arrive at Roberts's shores feeling more like secondary interlopers than prime

forces capable of appreciably shifting the critical winds all by themselves. This is not, of course, to argue that they have been without any impact on contemporary discourses of the everyday; rather that Roberts offers up broad conclusions about the present state of the everyday that belie the numerous delicacies and finely drawn nuances otherwise found in abundance across his book's main arguments.

As for external factors to Roberts's plot, they would need to include many of the vital matters raised by Lefebvre in volume 3: namely, neoliberalization, ongoing biopolitical machinations, the uneven rhythms of globalization and urbanization, human rights as 'rights of difference', the total informationalization of the everyday, the increasing inescapability of the tragic, and so on. Although Roberts provides a wide-screen view of the socio-political context of change between 1917 and 1975, as dynamic shifts of historical continuity and discontinuity, these matters recede into the background. *Philosophizing the Everyday* is not a 'whodunnit'. The text is framed, briefly at the beginning and the end, by the (too) immediate apprehension of the guilty suspects, and then the still warm body of the everyday is carefully examined. It is a foreclosed and fated, if not always quite fatal, plot. From the moment of its conception, as Roberts notes in his conclusion, the everyday had been destined for its eventual disappearance, giving way to total revolutionary praxis, and, if it has departed prematurely before this mission has been accomplished, at least 'the tropological content of the "everyday" continues to possess extraordinary powers of invocation'. In other words, the critic can still ventriloquize the echo of the everyday's lost potential.

Lefebvre, however, imagines something else. Lefebvre concurs that the everyday has passed on. But the philosopher need not hover about its body, conjuring up its spirit-voice, dressing out its entrails, because the body is not elsewhere. We find ourselves in/as this body, our body. The everyday thus becomes fully synonymous with biological life or with the problem of life itself: the more-than-corporeal, more-than-human, always beyond itself. As Lefebvre states:

Daily life, the organic body of modern society, summons up its *beyond* in time and space. The work that is now concluding has consistently adopted this (relatively) optimistic perspective, despite the introduction of tragic knowledge – or, rather, precisely because of it!

In the end, the only option is – as it has always been – something more, nothing else.

Gregory Seigworth