

Capitalocene

Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, Verso, London and New York, 2015. 316 pp., £60.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 978 1 78168 901 1 hb., 978 1 78168 902 8 pb.

Jason Moore is a key figure in the World-Ecology Research Network, an international grouping of scholars and activists committed to making nature central to the study of historical change, and to an understanding of capitalism as at the heart of all such change over the last half-millennium. For world ecologists, the planet is a crucible of historical transformation of both human and non-human elements, with capitalism manifesting a specific and highly resilient – but now crisis-ridden – example of that: a continually shifting dialectical unity of accumulation, power and appropriation within ‘the web of life’ (i.e. the totality of nature, human and non-human). Capitalism, in short, is neither an economic nor a social system, but an ‘organization of nature’ within the biosphere.

The methodology can be seen, therefore, as an ecologically weighted response to Marx’s insight into capitalism as but one *form* of wealth production. It also represents a renewal and extension of dialectical materialism to allow it more adequately to register the specific formations of ‘capitalism in nature’ and ‘nature in capitalism’, both in the past and currently. Indeed, Moore’s project in this particular volume is to provide such a history from the mid-fifteenth century through to present times, and to provide it in a way that takes proper account of the input and agency of both humans and non-human forces without succumbing to the ‘Cartesian’ Nature–Society dualism that he claims has hitherto bedevilled even the best-intentioned Green critiques. Counter to any view of the metabolism of human and extra-human natures as an exchange between quasi-independent objects, capitalism is constantly creating its own matrix of relations – its own *oikeia*, as Moore terms it – through its changing modes of ‘bundling’ together human and extra-human nature. Within this schema, rather than viewing Nature as something progressively destroyed by human activity or posing a limit to its future ambitions that will end in cataclysm, one should understand ‘limits’ as co-produced by human activity within a capitalist organization of humanity–nature relations. Hence for Moore it would be more apt to

speak of a Capitalocene era rather than accept the reductive account that he sees encouraged by current ideologies of the Anthropocene. The latter’s elevation of the *Anthropos* as a collective author, he argues, mistakenly endorses a concept of scarcity abstracted from capital, class and empire, a neo-Malthusian view of population, and a technical-fix approach to historical change.

But if capitalism is a specific form of production, it is one reliant on certain constants, the main one being the imperative of accumulation, and the main means to that being the provision of what Moore refers to as the ‘Four Cheaps’ (of food, energy, labour-power and raw materials) through capitalist ‘appropriation’ (i.e. plunder) of non-human nature and *unpaid* human labour. Capitalism, in essence, is a system of unpaid externalities, in which only waged labour is valued. Had it had to pay for the bounty of nature or any of its debts to the labour of animals, slaves, the reproductive and domestic work of women, and so on, it could never have existed. ‘The great secret and the great accomplishment of capitalism’, claims Moore, ‘has been to not pay its bills.’ Historical capitalism, moreover, has been able to resolve its recurrent crises until now *only* because of its continued success in ripping off what it should have been paying for, only because it has always managed to extend its zone of appropriation faster than its zone of exploitation – to overcome exhausted means or ‘natural limits’ to further capitalization, by engineering, with the help of science, technology and conducive cultural-symbolic forces, ever new means of restoring cut-price supplies of food, energy, labour and materials. Cartesian talk of Nature’s wreaking revenge on Humanity at some indefinite point in the future overlooks the often spectacular ways in which capitalism has overcome its socio-economic obstacles to growth. Particularly impressive in this respect has been its capacity to harness new knowledges in the service of economic expansion – as, for example, in the critical use made of cartography in the seventeenth century, or of time measurement, and other quantifying systems. Extensive historical illustration

of all these devices and accumulation strategies is provided in the various sections of Moore's book covering the colonizations of capitalism over the centuries, the territories thereby opened up for fresh labour exploitation, and the frontiers marked out for acquisition of pivotal resources at key historical moments (sugar, corn, silver, iron, oil, etc.).

But if apocalyptic formulation of nature's limits is mistaken, Moore does also accept that capitalism may well now be running into the buffers, or, in other words, running out of the sources of the Four Cheaps, and into a situation in which overcapitalization is left with too few means of investment and further accumulation. The problem here, he suggests, is a *longue durée* tendency for the rate of accumulation to decline as the mass of capitalized nature rises. In the process, accumulation becomes more wasteful due to increased energy inefficiency and the toxicity of its by-products; the contradiction between the time of capitalism (always seeking to short-cut that of environmental renewal) and the time of natural reproduction is made more acute; the eco-surplus declines, and capital has nowhere else to go other than recurrent waves of financialization. The key question, then, to which Moore continually returns without any clear answer, is whether the crisis of our times is epochal or developmental; whether, against the odds, new sources of accumulation will be located, or whether the combination of physical depletion, climate change, stymied investment opportunities and new anti-systemic movements now indicate a terminal decline.

Such uncertainties about future directions are understandable, and do not in any sense detract from what is otherwise an impressively confident, well-informed and generally persuasive analysis of capitalism as ecological regime. Not only does Moore provide an exceptionally powerful sense of the dystopian impact of capitalism – of how regrettable it is, in so many ways, that this has provided the *oikeia* that has won out for so long against any other organization of ourselves and nature – he also reveals a compelling dialectical grasp not just of *how* it might have to come to an end, but *why* it would be deplorable even if there were no limits to its continuing. 'I have long thought', he writes at one point, 'that the most pessimistic view is one that hopes for the survival of modernity in something like its present form' – a sentiment with which I fully concur but whose hedonist implications are seldom addressed.

That said, there is no disputing the heterodoxy of his critique of capitalism, and there are times where

his case for that would have been better served by less repetition of its main themes and more engagement with possible lines of objection. There are also a number of points on which I, for one, would have valued a more probing and, in some cases, more qualified exposition. Although Moore acknowledges the role of a Red-Green approach to global capitalism in making it impossible to ignore the status of 'nature' in social theory, he nonetheless charges it with continuing in the earlier 'Cartesian' frame of thinking on humanity-nature relations, and thus with failing to synthesize environmental change with the history of capitalism. But while the 'Cartesian' charge might be applicable to some aspects of Green argument, it seems question-begging in the case of those who, on Moore's own account, readily agree to the ongoing interaction of the natural and social and thus to the historicity of environmental making within capitalist relations. Since Moore himself is constantly invoking the binary distinctions between 'nature' and 'society', the 'human' and the 'extra-human', in order to press the case for their dialectical imbrication, one wants to ask how he himself would ultimately discriminate between his own reliance on binary ideas and the 'Cartesian' misuse of them. For example, when he tells us that 'nature' can be neither saved nor destroyed, only 'transformed', one wants to say: yes, but that applies to nature as causal powers and processes rather than 'nature-in-society', whose formations are being constantly eliminated. Or, again, there are times when dualism is preserving distinctions of importance to historical materialism. For example, the reference to 'social relations' in Red-Green thinking is not intended to deny the role of nature in human activity, but to preserve the distinction between the labour process within capitalism and its purely material form (which, as a combination of labour, tools and resources, can be carried out under differing forms of social relations). Moore's tendency to view all discrimination between natural and social inputs as subverting dialectical historical understanding seems at risk at times of conflating generalities common to all epochs and modes of production with aspects particular to capitalism.

This bears on a further controversial aspect of his argument, namely his resistance to what he calls the 'Two Century Model' (the view that capitalism begins around 1800 as opposed to his own view that dates its origins to the mid-fifteenth century). Moore makes out a good case for the early dating in his history of colonial appropriation and commodification, but it is an account that is unusually silent on what was

for Marx the central role in specifically capitalist relations of waged labour and thus extraction of surplus-value. It must also, in consequence, disregard Marx's conceptualization of 'capitalism proper' as only established when primarily reliant on extraction of relative rather than absolute surplus-value. In defence of his own position (although the point is historical rather than conceptual), Moore disputes any rigid distinction in the actual contribution made by relative and absolute exploitation, and argues that the focus on nineteenth-century capitalism overlooks the equally dramatic increase in labour productivity



since 1450. He also suggests that the disposition to see 'real' capitalism as emerging only after 1800 turns on a reluctance to look at how capital, science and empire conspired to appropriate nature and unpaid work/human energy in service to surplus-value production. And it is, of course, this attention to the unpaid inputs into capitalist exploitation that lies at the centre of his reworking of historical materialism. But, again, compelling as this emphasis is in many ways, especially in respect of non-human nature's contribution, there seems a curious reluctance to recognize that, on Marx's account, the main earner's wage is set at a level to cover the unpaid labour within the family household. As is also made clear in Marx's discriminations between slave, feudal and capitalist exploitation in *Wages, Price and Profit*, even in the absence of exchange relations, slaves and serfs have to be fed, clothed and housed, however minimally, in order that they may present for work the next day, and this will be a cost of production. Viewed in this light, it is perhaps a little misleading to speak of only waged labour being valued (as opposed to having price or exchange-value). All labour power on Marx's account, whether paid or unpaid, incorporates the value of the socially necessary labour time of its own reproduction. None of this, of course, gainsays the general truth of Moore's argument that capitalism continues to benefit hugely from the reproductive

and domestic labour of (mainly) women in the home, and other residual uncommodified contributions, which would be much more costly if acquired on the market. However, it is probably worth pointing out that it has also hugely benefited in recent decades in its metropolitan centres from the marketing of compensatory goods and services (fast food, fast transport, online shopping, spas and stress-relieving therapies, quick-fix holiday breaks, etc.), all of which profit from the pressures of an increasingly time-scarce, work-centred economy. For while it is true that such capitalization of everyday life contributes

to rising costs of production, it is also true that capitalism profits immensely from the sale of goods that would otherwise have been supplied by individuals themselves.

Issues of individual consumption, however, figure little in Moore's account – where it is capitalism as relentless mechanism of accumulation that commands attention rather than capitalism as means to consumption (however socially divi-

sive and environmentally destructive its methods). Indeed, at times the hypostatizing of the system (its 'arrogance', its 'desires', its 'choices'...) combined with the relative abstraction from people either in their role as consumers or in their electoral support for the system, can give the impression it is only as workers that they figure in the survival and reproduction of capital. Moore certainly recognizes that ultimately it is humans who are on the receiving end of whatever capitalism delivers in the way of consumption and lifestyle. 'At some level', he writes, 'all life rebels against the value/monoculture nexus of modernity, from farm to factory. No one, no being, wants to do the same thing, all day, every day.' He also acknowledges that this is not just a matter of class struggle, but also a struggle over the grip of commodification, 'a contest between contending visions of life and work', and rightly suggests that the ecological crisis of the twenty-first century is not so much about insufficient food or oil, but about fundamentally new ways of ordering the relations between humans and the rest of nature. But little is said in the way of expansion on these points, no insights are offered on the alternative vision, and in the end the only forms of resistance that Moore does specify are those of class struggle in the heartlands of industrial production (which has scarcely been the vehicle of protest over consumerism or abuse of nature), and what he

calls 'the revolt of extra-human nature in modern agriculture' – in other words the 'battle with weeds' and super pests.

So while Moore frequently speculates in optimistic vein about the possibly quite imminent end of capitalism, he has much less to say on the formation that might supersede it. If this is due to lack of cultural vision, then it sits rather ill with his charge that other Green thinkers have neglected the cultural-symbolic and radically underestimated the role of ideas in historical change. If, on the other hand, this reflects a reluctance to confront the realities of

popular support for (as well as disaffection with) the market and consumer culture, then it is evasive of precisely the complexities of our times that Marxism now needs more readily to address. It would be a pity if the innovative argument on ecology that is now being developed within historical materialism, and of which this book, and world-ecology more generally, are excellent examples, proves unwilling to extend its insights onto capitalism as outdated economic form in order to provide an equally luminous, de-naturalizing assault on capitalism's anachronistic conceptions of human prosperity and well-being.

Kate Soper

A fixed position

J.M. Bernstein, *Torture and Dignity: An Essay on Moral Injury*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2015. 408 pp., £35.00 hb., 978 0 22626 632 9.

It would be easy to characterize J.M. Bernstein's new work of moral philosophy as a negative ethics; that is, as a work that attempts to delineate an ethics constructed around what ought not to be. Although oddly absent from the book, Adorno's spirit hovers over it as you would expect from an eminent Adorno scholar like Bernstein. One thinks particularly of Adorno's thought of the physical moment of suffering that inaugurates critique, the moment when 'Woe speaks: Go', as Adorno refers to it in *Negative Dialectics*. However, Bernstein's book is far more than a statement of the 'false state of things'; rather, it is a transcendental critique of morality. True, Bernstein begins with a consideration of particular paradigmatic instances of moral injury; namely torture and rape. However, these paradigms open up the necessary normative basis for ethical life that is previously taken for granted for humans to coexist. A consideration of what 'ought not to be' reveals the pre-reflective, tacit, core constitutive components of ethical life. It is only through a phenomenology of devastated lives that the conditions for normal ethical existence can be illuminated.

It is with such a phenomenology of devastation that the argument of the book begins. Bernstein's chapter on Cesare Beccaria's text *On Crimes and Punishments* is an excavation of how the notion of torture and its abolition served as the founding legal achievement of a nascent Enlightenment. Modern moral philosophy emerges for the first time with the

bodily individuation that occurs following Beccaria's focus on torture as the ultimate wrong. However, this early achievement that founds an emphasis on the inviolability of the human body is also the beginning of a process where the body is forgotten in Western moral philosophy after Beccaria. Beccaria's success is such that a conception of autonomy is constructed that disregards and discounts this early emphasis on bodily pain, what Bernstein terms 'the trembling recognition that the body can suffer devastation'.

What must a human being be for her to experience devastation? This is the founding question of moral philosophy for Bernstein and it begins with a phenomenology of devastation, particularly through an analysis of Jean Améry's famous account of being tortured. The devastation of torture is primarily ethical because it is intersubjective; a relation that is constructed purely on the denial of all intersubjective foundations for true relationality. In torture, the body is fixed as a pure form of negative involuntary sentience through incessant and repeated pain. The body is reduced to an instrument of another person and turned against itself. Améry writes that despite the constant refusal of help the expectation of aid naturally arises when we are in pain, even within the torture scenario. With the 'first blow' some core trust in the world is lost and can never be regained. The torture victim is fixed to a position of existential helplessness in the nightmare of a relation that is constructed upon the denial of any ethical

foundation for intersubjectivity. As Bernstein writes, 'the sound of pain ... inspires in the torturer only the response that more pain is possible.'

Bernstein further elaborates and elucidates the paradigm of torture through a later examination and analysis of rape. Like torture, rape is a particular manipulation of what Bernstein terms the 'moral ontology' of the body. Rape and torture exploit bodily vulnerability, existential helplessness and tacit trust by destroying the person's claim to mineness, to her own control over her body and the reduction of her body to a vehicle of another person's desires. This reduction of the body to an 'object body' has a particular gendered aspect in so far as the female body has routinely been designated as shameful in one form or another and subject to domination. The reduction of a body to an object state through the evisceration of any voluntary relation to embodiment is what Bernstein terms a 'consummation' of existential helplessness that is paradigmatic in both torture and rape.

The term that Bernstein uses for such an object state is 'devastation'. Devastation is the end process of a pathology of human relations that begins with humiliation which is constituted by the denigration and devaluation of persons. Drawing on Avishai Margalit's work, Bernstein argues that humiliation consists in treating humans as non-humans, rejecting their claims and actions that lead to a removal of control. Devastation is an end point of humiliation. There is a critical question about Bernstein's use of paradigms of devastation rather than pursuing an attempt to construct a phenomenology of damaged life *in toto*. An analysis of moral injuries from denigration through to devastation might have provided the basis for the elaboration of a wider concept of social suffering. As it is, Bernstein tends to use pain and suffering interchangeably, rather than attempting to elaborate a larger concept of social suffering. This emphasis on pain leads to further questions when he attempts to build an account of the core components of ethical life out of the rubble of torture and rape.

The analysis of rape and torture as paradigmatic moral injuries reveals three core theses for the normative foundations of ethical life. First, there is the revelation that the self cannot separate itself from the body; any account of moral life must initially be an account of embodiment. Second, devastation is only possible due to a core existential helplessness constituted by experiences of vulnerability, exposure and inescapability that are revealed *ex negativo* in

torture and rape. Finally, the complete loss of trust in the world exemplified by the denial of relationality and aid in torture reveals the tacit necessity of core, pre-reflective relations of trust for ethical life. Each of these three theses constructs a reformulation and critique of traditional moral philosophy that directs it away from an emphasis on objective rule-based deliberation towards an emphasis on embodiment and vulnerability.

Bernstein first emphasizes the dual aspect of embodiment familiar from many phenomenological accounts, namely that the body is both an instrument and a point of access that discloses the world and an involuntary set of processes that I undergo. Any definition of what it means to be a self is always a negotiation of this dual characteristic of embodiment. Therefore, what it means to be autonomous cannot simply be described without an understanding of involuntary processes of embodiment. Being embodied means being vulnerable and exposed to pain and attack. It is only through an expectation that the bounds of my body are my own that a sense of security within ethical life can arise. This sense of security does not consist just in a respect for bodily boundaries, but more strongly in the expectation of aid should I feel pain. Trust in the world is the tacit taken-for-granted intersubjective relationship of security in my own being and the expectation that help will arrive should I express pain.

Bernstein importantly recasts autonomy as a form of negotiation of the voluntary and involuntary aspects of embodiment alongside a reformulation of recognition in terms of trust and dignity. Trust is the prereflective expectation of respect for my bodily worth and the expectation of aid should I feel pain. Such trust can only arise through the intermediary of another. I can only be a being worthy of dignity if that recognition is bestowed upon me, but such recognition is not a deliberative contractual act; rather it is a prereflective requisite for ethical life.

The difficulty with this concept of trust as fundamental recognition is that it downplays the diffuse and differentiated nature of intersubjective relations. For Bernstein, trust is all or nothing, and he makes a compelling case that without an all-pervading atmosphere of tacit trust and the expectation of worth, no ethical life could be possible. He argues that this background level of trust is built on a basis of strong attachment relations in early life, although he doesn't emphasize the vicissitudes of attachment and the range of desires and hatreds that might coexist with first love. The route from strong attachment to

ethical relations of trust seems too straightforward in his account.

Bernstein's emphasis on the necessity of a response to pain occludes many questions. He argues that the relationship between pain and aid is 'grammatical' in the same way as the relation between pain and expression. The yelp when I sprain my ankle is directly analogous to the instinct to offer aid to help someone if I see that they are in pain. They are both immediate responses. Now, there are two key critical questions here. First, there is the question of proximity that Bernstein acknowledges but doesn't explore. In the tradition of compassion that originates with Aristotle, the question of proximity is already a qualification to any normative basis on two counts. Proximity means that I only care about those close to me, both spatially and in terms of a form of life. I only feel the necessity to respond to expressions of pain by those that share my immediate physical environment and that I feel are creatures that share my form of life. One can therefore question both the morality and the immediacy of such a response that requires proximity. Second, there is a question concerning the concept of pain, and the manner in which Bernstein elides the question of pain and suffering. One might think that a 'grammatical' account of pain and aid is understandable, but if we consider a wider response to suffering and social suffering, then we can see how the expectation of aid is less immediate and obvious. Immediate responsiveness to issues such as homelessness, poverty and unemployment is less straightforward than responding to an expression of pain.

Nonetheless, there is a sense in which these critiques miss the mark. Bernstein is claiming that the immediate responsiveness to expressions of pain and the expectation of aid is a core foundation of any ethical life. This is not an attempt to solve all normative questions but to understand the core constituents of what it might mean to live intersubjectively. As he persuasively argues, if I am to feel that I am a human being of worth, then that claim only makes sense if I understand that it is accompanied by the expectation that my pain matters to others.

Bernstein concludes his book with a fascinating discussion and reconceptualization of the notion of dignity. Rather than the traditional idea of dignity as residing in respect for individual autonomy alone, he constructs an account of it as an intersubjective relation that is a social negotiation of the dual aspects of embodiment. Dignity is a socially accomplished relationship to the involuntary body; the manner in

which the involuntary processes of embodiment are acknowledged and resolved in ways that provide trust in the world and security in ethical life. In a penetrating discussion of disgust, Bernstein acknowledges the Nietzschean point that compassion may lie very close to disgust, particularly when we are concerned with involuntary aspects of the body, but a moral philosophy that disavows the body in favour of a concept of dignity as sheer freedom or autonomy is always liable to lapse into an immoral disgust that leads to hatred rather than love. Thus, dignity can only be accomplished – and it is a fragile accomplishment – if it makes socially intelligible a relation between the



voluntary and involuntary aspects of embodiment.

Bernstein outlines the range of immoral responses that can result in reasons for denying that others' experiences of pain are worthy of response, that others are worthy of dignity. These reasons all relate to a disavowal of the dual aspect of embodiment. I may not be compassionate because I cannot tolerate dependency, or may desire absolute sovereignty and radical independence. Unfortunately, this disavowal is repeated by forms of moral philosophy that only function through an emphasis on rule-based rational moral deliberation that separates us from our deepest normative commitments. Bernstein's text serves to reawaken those commitments and sets us the task of making them actual in socially intelligible ways.

Alastair Morgan

Start spreading the news

Kenneth Goldsmith, *Capital: New York, Capital of the 20th Century*, Verso, London and New York, 2015. 1008 pp., £25.00 hb., 978 1 78478 156 9.

Since the turn of the millennium ‘conceptual writing’ and ‘conceptual poetry’ have become increasingly common critical terms. They describe a strain of contemporary textual practice that utilizes a series of twentieth-century avant-garde histories and strategies: montage, appropriation, Situationist *détournement*, the OuLiPo’s constraint-based compositions, and, perhaps most potently, conceptual art. Conceptual writers of a techno-utopian bent also proselytize the creative and critical potential of the Web as both medium and context. Kenneth Goldsmith, the movement’s most visible and controversial practitioner, in his quasi-manifesto *Uncreative Writing*, maintains that ‘in the face of [an] unprecedented amount of digital text, writing needs to redefine itself in order to adapt to the new environment of textual abundance.’ Essentially this means redefining cut and paste as composition. Indeed, if there is a unifying quality to this work it is in its use of constructivist and serialist modes of composition that seek to evacuate poetic subjectivity or the so-called expressive ‘lyric I’.

As judged by the criteria of sheer volume, ‘conceptual writing’ has certainly been a productive term. There has been a deluge of articles devoted to the perceived implications or failures of what might be described as the ‘conceptual turn’ in poetics. In its early stages, the focus of such critical discourse tended to be directed towards what academics like Craig Dworkin and Marjorie Perloff presented as conceptual writing’s twin genealogies – conceptual art and experimental literature – and its retrospective critical effects thereon. Recent years, however, have seen a shift from a perspective based on the legacies of modernism and questions of avant-gardism towards a criticism that seeks to place conceptual writing within the discursive fields of globalization studies and media theory. Academic articles with subheadings like ‘Conceptual Writing, Information Asymmetry, and the Risk Society’ or ‘Conceptual Writing’s Critique of Metadata’ are now not uncommon. This points towards a broader development in the recent history of art criticism, one where the theoretical interests of the *October* generation (modernist legacies, avant-gardism, critical distance,

histories) give way not only to what Peter Osborne has described as ‘the semiotic reductionism and sociologism of most cultural-theoretical approaches’, but also to the decentred and diffuse critical landscape of the digital environment.

Throughout the development of this body of critical work one theorist has been cited with particular insistence – predictably so, given his work’s general significance for literature and media theory – namely Walter Benjamin. Critics and practitioners of conceptual writing such as Goldsmith, Dworkin, Perloff, Vanessa Place, Patrick Greaney and Robert Fitterman have all mobilized Benjamin’s work on allegory and the fragment in an attempt to provide a strong theoretical ancestry for conceptual poetics, with the *Arcades Project* positioned as a kind of talismanic urtext for the movement. Until recently the *Arcades* was primarily of interest to Goldsmith and Perloff because it allows, indeed demands, a non-linear approach to reading which they could spuriously compare to surfing the Web – where the Web is viewed as an infinite arcade made possible by advances in digital technology in the same way that the original arcades were made possible by advances in the production of iron and glass. As Goldsmith has put it,

In many ways, the way we read *The Arcades Project* points toward the way we have learned to use the Web: hypertexting from one place to another, navigating our way through the immensity of it; how we’ve become virtual flâneurs, casually surfing from one place to another; how we’ve learned to manage and harvest information, not feeling the need to read the Web linearly and so forth.

Or, in the words of Perloff,

The *Arcades Project* may ... be understood as an ur-hypertext: the numerical classification of notes (e.g., A3, 1, A3, 2, [...] A3a, 1) providing ready passage from link to link in this Passagen-Werk. ... Sequential exposition and coherent argument [are replaced] with what looks like web-page design.

Less frivolously, the literary critic Patrick Greaney has sought in his 2014 book *Quotational Practices: Repeating the Future in Contemporary Art* to move conceptual writing away from questions of originality

and expressivity and, utilizing the *Arcades*, attempted to situate the movement's appropriative strategies within the context of Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image and his montage-based methodology for the exposition of a philosophy of historical experience. On Greaney's account, Benjamin's 'quotational practices', and by implication those of contemporary conceptual poets,

aim to counter historicism and commodification by returning to the moment in which their objects – history and the object – become known in the first place. The dialectical image proposes a different way of knowing that moment, a way of reading events that includes their contingency and their unrealized futures.

It seems that Kenneth Goldsmith has now made this homage to the *Arcades Project* concrete with his new book *Capital*, subtitled *New York, Capital of the 20th Century*, the conceit of which is a 'rewriting' of the *Arcades* under Benjamin's original convolute categories (plus a few additional ones) filled with material concerning New York in the twentieth century rather than Paris in the nineteenth. If this accounts for the book's initial rationale, the stakes of reviewing it have, however, been rather altered by the subsequent context surrounding Goldsmith's poetics into which this book has been published. In March 2015 Goldsmith gave a reading at Brown University entitled 'The Body of Michael Brown', an edited version of the autopsy report on the body of the black teenager whose death at the hands of a white police officer sparked weeks of protest in Ferguson, Missouri. Goldsmith's speech act (the work has not been published or a recording released) was perceived by many to have appropriated black suffering for a gain in cultural capital and to have made a fetish of the traumatized black body, a charge that gained traction when it was revealed that Goldsmith had reorganized the material so that the reading ended with the line: 'The remaining male genitalia system is unremarkable.' A typical reaction was that of the poet P.E. Garcia, who wrote that,

For Kenneth Goldsmith to stand on stage, and not be aware that his body – his white male body, a body that is a symbol loaded with a history of oppression, of literal dominance and ownership of black bodies – is a part of the performance, [means that] he has failed to notice something drastically important about the 'contextualization' of this work.'

Here, Goldsmith's apparently blind Warholian insouciance hit a brick wall and rendered claims like those

made by Greaney about the dialectical image redundant if not ridiculous. If the quotational practices of conceptual writing are in some way connected to the messianic – connected, that is, to a philosophy of history in which there is nothing less at stake than the claim of the dead over the living and the opening up of a radical temporality in opposition to the false and politically conservative narrative of historical progress – how come those who have suffered the most from that same history of the victors are the most offended by 'The Body of Michael Brown'?

It is within this context that *Capital* needs, then, to be considered, and it unequivocally transforms any reading of the work. The first unfortunate feature is the packaging. The book comes in a golden slipcase on which the word 'Capital' is the most pronounced. When this was planned in the design meetings no doubt it seemed to fit perfectly with Goldsmith's dandy trickster image, his paisley suits, golf shoes and Ezra Pound beard, its crassness a finger to the ivory-tower academic Benjaminians (and Marxists). Indeed Goldsmith has claimed that in producing this book he wanted to 'bring Walter Benjamin down from the pedestal and onto the coffee table'. This is a dull provocation that might nonetheless reveal something more interesting and critical about the relation of academic theory to revolutionary praxis. Yet it hardly matters now because the book itself looks like a tasteless bauble (in the wrong way) given the context outlined above. Ironically, the book itself has become a remainder like those found in the Parisian arcades, a golden commodity stripped of its fetish power.

What of the content? Though the inspiration is Benjaminian, the cumulative effect of Goldsmith's 'cathedral of text' is Whitmanic. Unlike Goldsmith's other works *Capital* is extraordinarily readable, its effects both hyperbolic and symphonic. He has assembled a huge amount of material but without any scholarly attention. Much of it is cross-quoted from single sources and the notation system is useless. No doubt this wouldn't bother Goldsmith since it's probably meant to be another poke in the eye to ivory-tower academicism (and doesn't the digital archiving of so much of this stuff make it easy to just cut and paste it anyway?). So here we have some kind of comment about digital labour, another of conceptual writing's concerns. If Goldsmith's earlier projects such as 'Day', the rewriting and publishing in book form of a single edition of the *New York Times*, or *The Weather*, the transcription of a week's worth of radio weather reports, represented what the literary critic Brian M. Reed has described as the 'spectacle

of wasted labour', then *Capital* switches tack. This time the labour is minimal for maximal result. The techno-utopian conceit – and here comes the Whitmanic dimension again – seems to be to democratize *The Arcades*. It's the notion that anyone can do this stuff; all you need is a computer, a city and some time. Goldsmith has described the book as a love letter to New York, a work that brings in the marginal and that looks without cynicism upon the notion of New York as a harbour for the poor, huddled masses. Yet the book contradicts itself because so much of the material here is not particularly rare or marginal.

With 'The Body of Michael Brown' Goldsmith made a hubristic mistake; the problem with *Capital* is that it embodies all the things that led to that mistake. Although it attempts a kind of radical textual egalitarianism, it signally fails to fully represent marginal voices, writing over them once again. (One could hardly say, for example, that Joan Didion

is a marginal voice, but nonetheless she is one of the few female sources in the book's 1008 pages.) Goldsmith perhaps needs to learn that uncovering the marginal involves work, and that that work is not automatically elitist, and that the 'I' is more complex than an either/or equation. As the poet and academic Fred Moten wrote when asked for a response to 'The Body of Michael Brown':

Do you know that why you fucked up and how you fucked up are totally entangled? Do you know that entanglement is given in the raciality of the concept, as such? I wish I could be convinced that you're thinking right now about how and why you fucked up. I wish I could convince you that the continued existence of human life on this earth depends upon you thinking about why and how you fucked up.

Capital suggests that such thinking still hasn't taken place.

John Millar

Prêt-à-manger

Boris Groys, *In the Flow*, Verso, London and New York, 2016. 208 pp., £14.99 hb., 978 1 78478 350 1 hb.

In *Ecce Homo*, Friedrich Nietzsche famously diagnoses European culture as suffering from chronic dyspepsia. Nietzsche will offer no antacids or laxatives for 'the most constipated bowels and temperaments'. Rather, he presents himself as dynamite. To cure cultural blockage and intellectual bloating, something more explosive is needed. Boris Groys takes up the rheological character of Nietzsche's cultural criticism in his rich and absorbing new work, *In the Flow*. He does so, however, by shifting Nietzsche's emphasis from the explosion of cultural gastric reflux to art's immanently fluid status. As Groys puts it in his introduction, this amounts to grasping the study of art in terms of a 'rheology of art – discussion of art as flowing.' What this means rests on Groys's central thesis.

At the core of *In the Flow* is nothing less than a reconstruction of avant-garde practices running from Marcel Duchamp to Ilya Kabakov via Kazimir Malevich. Groys's conception of avant-garde art is mediated by three historical conditions: first, the theoretical dominance of a post-metaphysical and postmodern culture fully ensconced in the incessant reproduction of change; second, the expansion of the museum into an archive practising selection,

re-arrangement and installation of pre-existing images and objects; and third, the complete neutralization of Duchamp's strategy of the readymade. (Through a formulation of the concept of *metanoia*, Groys develops the first condition in his *Introduction to Antiphilosophy*. The second and third conditions are explored in Groys's older but only recently translated book, *On the New*.) Connecting these three conditions is the notion of art's immanence to what Groys refers to as 'the flow of time': that is, the material flux of life generated under the conditions of the capitalist mode of production.

The basic premiss organizing Groys's 'rheology of art' is the fundamental transformation of the ontology of art produced by the modern: art is no longer defined by the production of discrete, self-contained works, but is the expression of an activity caught in a struggle to comprehend itself as distinctively artistic. Modern art constitutes the becoming-conscious of artistic activity grasped as a fluid process. Referring to Michel Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France in the 1970s, modern art, according to Groys, constitutes an attitude, a practice of life. (Although absent from the book, Allan Kaprow's definition of 'happenings' illustrates this ontological shift in a neat,

Capitalocene

Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, Verso, London and New York, 2015. 316 pp., £60.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 978 1 78168 901 1 hb., 978 1 78168 902 8 pb.

Jason Moore is a key figure in the World-Ecology Research Network, an international grouping of scholars and activists committed to making nature central to the study of historical change, and to an understanding of capitalism as at the heart of all such change over the last half-millennium. For world ecologists, the planet is a crucible of historical transformation of both human and non-human elements, with capitalism manifesting a specific and highly resilient – but now crisis-ridden – example of that: a continually shifting dialectical unity of accumulation, power and appropriation within ‘the web of life’ (i.e. the totality of nature, human and non-human). Capitalism, in short, is neither an economic nor a social system, but an ‘organization of nature’ within the biosphere.

The methodology can be seen, therefore, as an ecologically weighted response to Marx’s insight into capitalism as but one *form* of wealth production. It also represents a renewal and extension of dialectical materialism to allow it more adequately to register the specific formations of ‘capitalism in nature’ and ‘nature in capitalism’, both in the past and currently. Indeed, Moore’s project in this particular volume is to provide such a history from the mid-fifteenth century through to present times, and to provide it in a way that takes proper account of the input and agency of both humans and non-human forces without succumbing to the ‘Cartesian’ Nature–Society dualism that he claims has hitherto bedevilled even the best-intentioned Green critiques. Counter to any view of the metabolism of human and extra-human natures as an exchange between quasi-independent objects, capitalism is constantly creating its own matrix of relations – its own *oikeia*, as Moore terms it – through its changing modes of ‘bundling’ together human and extra-human nature. Within this schema, rather than viewing Nature as something progressively destroyed by human activity or posing a limit to its future ambitions that will end in cataclysm, one should understand ‘limits’ as co-produced by human activity within a capitalist organization of humanity–nature relations. Hence for Moore it would be more apt to

speak of a Capitalocene era rather than accept the reductive account that he sees encouraged by current ideologies of the Anthropocene. The latter’s elevation of the *Anthropos* as a collective author, he argues, mistakenly endorses a concept of scarcity abstracted from capital, class and empire, a neo-Malthusian view of population, and a technical-fix approach to historical change.

But if capitalism is a specific form of production, it is one reliant on certain constants, the main one being the imperative of accumulation, and the main means to that being the provision of what Moore refers to as the ‘Four Cheaps’ (of food, energy, labour-power and raw materials) through capitalist ‘appropriation’ (i.e. plunder) of non-human nature and *unpaid* human labour. Capitalism, in essence, is a system of unpaid externalities, in which only waged labour is valued. Had it had to pay for the bounty of nature or any of its debts to the labour of animals, slaves, the reproductive and domestic work of women, and so on, it could never have existed. ‘The great secret and the great accomplishment of capitalism’, claims Moore, ‘has been to not pay its bills.’ Historical capitalism, moreover, has been able to resolve its recurrent crises until now *only* because of its continued success in ripping off what it should have been paying for, only because it has always managed to extend its zone of appropriation faster than its zone of exploitation – to overcome exhausted means or ‘natural limits’ to further capitalization, by engineering, with the help of science, technology and conducive cultural-symbolic forces, ever new means of restoring cut-price supplies of food, energy, labour and materials. Cartesian talk of Nature’s wreaking revenge on Humanity at some indefinite point in the future overlooks the often spectacular ways in which capitalism has overcome its socio-economic obstacles to growth. Particularly impressive in this respect has been its capacity to harness new knowledges in the service of economic expansion – as, for example, in the critical use made of cartography in the seventeenth century, or of time measurement, and other quantifying systems. Extensive historical illustration

of all these devices and accumulation strategies is provided in the various sections of Moore's book covering the colonizations of capitalism over the centuries, the territories thereby opened up for fresh labour exploitation, and the frontiers marked out for acquisition of pivotal resources at key historical moments (sugar, corn, silver, iron, oil, etc.).

But if apocalyptic formulation of nature's limits is mistaken, Moore does also accept that capitalism may well now be running into the buffers, or, in other words, running out of the sources of the Four Cheaps, and into a situation in which overcapitalization is left with too few means of investment and further accumulation. The problem here, he suggests, is a *longue durée* tendency for the rate of accumulation to decline as the mass of capitalized nature rises. In the process, accumulation becomes more wasteful due to increased energy inefficiency and the toxicity of its by-products; the contradiction between the time of capitalism (always seeking to short-cut that of environmental renewal) and the time of natural reproduction is made more acute; the eco-surplus declines, and capital has nowhere else to go other than recurrent waves of financialization. The key question, then, to which Moore continually returns without any clear answer, is whether the crisis of our times is epochal or developmental; whether, against the odds, new sources of accumulation will be located, or whether the combination of physical depletion, climate change, stymied investment opportunities and new anti-systemic movements now indicate a terminal decline.

Such uncertainties about future directions are understandable, and do not in any sense detract from what is otherwise an impressively confident, well-informed and generally persuasive analysis of capitalism as ecological regime. Not only does Moore provide an exceptionally powerful sense of the dystopian impact of capitalism – of how regrettable it is, in so many ways, that this has provided the *oikeia* that has won out for so long against any other organization of ourselves and nature – he also reveals a compelling dialectical grasp not just of *how* it might have to come to an end, but *why* it would be deplorable even if there were no limits to its continuing. 'I have long thought', he writes at one point, 'that the most pessimistic view is one that hopes for the survival of modernity in something like its present form' – a sentiment with which I fully concur but whose hedonist implications are seldom addressed.

That said, there is no disputing the heterodoxy of his critique of capitalism, and there are times where

his case for that would have been better served by less repetition of its main themes and more engagement with possible lines of objection. There are also a number of points on which I, for one, would have valued a more probing and, in some cases, more qualified exposition. Although Moore acknowledges the role of a Red-Green approach to global capitalism in making it impossible to ignore the status of 'nature' in social theory, he nonetheless charges it with continuing in the earlier 'Cartesian' frame of thinking on humanity-nature relations, and thus with failing to synthesize environmental change with the history of capitalism. But while the 'Cartesian' charge might be applicable to some aspects of Green argument, it seems question-begging in the case of those who, on Moore's own account, readily agree to the ongoing interaction of the natural and social and thus to the historicity of environmental making within capitalist relations. Since Moore himself is constantly invoking the binary distinctions between 'nature' and 'society', the 'human' and the 'extra-human', in order to press the case for their dialectical imbrication, one wants to ask how he himself would ultimately discriminate between his own reliance on binary ideas and the 'Cartesian' misuse of them. For example, when he tells us that 'nature' can be neither saved nor destroyed, only 'transformed', one wants to say: yes, but that applies to nature as causal powers and processes rather than 'nature-in-society', whose formations are being constantly eliminated. Or, again, there are times when dualism is preserving distinctions of importance to historical materialism. For example, the reference to 'social relations' in Red-Green thinking is not intended to deny the role of nature in human activity, but to preserve the distinction between the labour process within capitalism and its purely material form (which, as a combination of labour, tools and resources, can be carried out under differing forms of social relations). Moore's tendency to view all discrimination between natural and social inputs as subverting dialectical historical understanding seems at risk at times of conflating generalities common to all epochs and modes of production with aspects particular to capitalism.

This bears on a further controversial aspect of his argument, namely his resistance to what he calls the 'Two Century Model' (the view that capitalism begins around 1800 as opposed to his own view that dates its origins to the mid-fifteenth century). Moore makes out a good case for the early dating in his history of colonial appropriation and commodification, but it is an account that is unusually silent on what was

for Marx the central role in specifically capitalist relations of waged labour and thus extraction of surplus-value. It must also, in consequence, disregard Marx's conceptualization of 'capitalism proper' as only established when primarily reliant on extraction of relative rather than absolute surplus-value. In defence of his own position (although the point is historical rather than conceptual), Moore disputes any rigid distinction in the actual contribution made by relative and absolute exploitation, and argues that the focus on nineteenth-century capitalism overlooks the equally dramatic increase in labour productivity



since 1450. He also suggests that the disposition to see 'real' capitalism as emerging only after 1800 turns on a reluctance to look at how capital, science and empire conspired to appropriate nature and unpaid work/human energy in service to surplus-value production. And it is, of course, this attention to the unpaid inputs into capitalist exploitation that lies at the centre of his reworking of historical materialism. But, again, compelling as this emphasis is in many ways, especially in respect of non-human nature's contribution, there seems a curious reluctance to recognize that, on Marx's account, the main earner's wage is set at a level to cover the unpaid labour within the family household. As is also made clear in Marx's discriminations between slave, feudal and capitalist exploitation in *Wages, Price and Profit*, even in the absence of exchange relations, slaves and serfs have to be fed, clothed and housed, however minimally, in order that they may present for work the next day, and this will be a cost of production. Viewed in this light, it is perhaps a little misleading to speak of only waged labour being valued (as opposed to having price or exchange-value). All labour power on Marx's account, whether paid or unpaid, incorporates the value of the socially necessary labour time of its own reproduction. None of this, of course, gainsays the general truth of Moore's argument that capitalism continues to benefit hugely from the reproductive

and domestic labour of (mainly) women in the home, and other residual uncommodified contributions, which would be much more costly if acquired on the market. However, it is probably worth pointing out that it has also hugely benefited in recent decades in its metropolitan centres from the marketing of compensatory goods and services (fast food, fast transport, online shopping, spas and stress-relieving therapies, quick-fix holiday breaks, etc.), all of which profit from the pressures of an increasingly time-scarce, work-centred economy. For while it is true that such capitalization of everyday life contributes

to rising costs of production, it is also true that capitalism profits immensely from the sale of goods that would otherwise have been supplied by individuals themselves.

Issues of individual consumption, however, figure little in Moore's account – where it is capitalism as relentless mechanism of accumulation that commands attention rather than capitalism as means to consumption (however socially divi-

sive and environmentally destructive its methods). Indeed, at times the hypostatizing of the system (its 'arrogance', its 'desires', its 'choices'...) combined with the relative abstraction from people either in their role as consumers or in their electoral support for the system, can give the impression it is only as workers that they figure in the survival and reproduction of capital. Moore certainly recognizes that ultimately it is humans who are on the receiving end of whatever capitalism delivers in the way of consumption and lifestyle. 'At some level', he writes, 'all life rebels against the value/monoculture nexus of modernity, from farm to factory. No one, no being, wants to do the same thing, all day, every day.' He also acknowledges that this is not just a matter of class struggle, but also a struggle over the grip of commodification, 'a contest between contending visions of life and work', and rightly suggests that the ecological crisis of the twenty-first century is not so much about insufficient food or oil, but about fundamentally new ways of ordering the relations between humans and the rest of nature. But little is said in the way of expansion on these points, no insights are offered on the alternative vision, and in the end the only forms of resistance that Moore does specify are those of class struggle in the heartlands of industrial production (which has scarcely been the vehicle of protest over consumerism or abuse of nature), and what he

calls 'the revolt of extra-human nature in modern agriculture' – in other words the 'battle with weeds' and super pests.

So while Moore frequently speculates in optimistic vein about the possibly quite imminent end of capitalism, he has much less to say on the formation that might supersede it. If this is due to lack of cultural vision, then it sits rather ill with his charge that other Green thinkers have neglected the cultural-symbolic and radically underestimated the role of ideas in historical change. If, on the other hand, this reflects a reluctance to confront the realities of

popular support for (as well as disaffection with) the market and consumer culture, then it is evasive of precisely the complexities of our times that Marxism now needs more readily to address. It would be a pity if the innovative argument on ecology that is now being developed within historical materialism, and of which this book, and world-ecology more generally, are excellent examples, proves unwilling to extend its insights onto capitalism as outdated economic form in order to provide an equally luminous, de-naturalizing assault on capitalism's anachronistic conceptions of human prosperity and well-being.

Kate Soper

A fixed position

J.M. Bernstein, *Torture and Dignity: An Essay on Moral Injury*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2015. 408 pp., £35.00 hb., 978 0 22626 632 9.

It would be easy to characterize J.M. Bernstein's new work of moral philosophy as a negative ethics; that is, as a work that attempts to delineate an ethics constructed around what ought not to be. Although oddly absent from the book, Adorno's spirit hovers over it as you would expect from an eminent Adorno scholar like Bernstein. One thinks particularly of Adorno's thought of the physical moment of suffering that inaugurates critique, the moment when 'Woe speaks: Go', as Adorno refers to it in *Negative Dialectics*. However, Bernstein's book is far more than a statement of the 'false state of things'; rather, it is a transcendental critique of morality. True, Bernstein begins with a consideration of particular paradigmatic instances of moral injury; namely torture and rape. However, these paradigms open up the necessary normative basis for ethical life that is previously taken for granted for humans to coexist. A consideration of what 'ought not to be' reveals the pre-reflective, tacit, core constitutive components of ethical life. It is only through a phenomenology of devastated lives that the conditions for normal ethical existence can be illuminated.

It is with such a phenomenology of devastation that the argument of the book begins. Bernstein's chapter on Cesare Beccaria's text *On Crimes and Punishments* is an excavation of how the notion of torture and its abolition served as the founding legal achievement of a nascent Enlightenment. Modern moral philosophy emerges for the first time with the

bodily individuation that occurs following Beccaria's focus on torture as the ultimate wrong. However, this early achievement that founds an emphasis on the inviolability of the human body is also the beginning of a process where the body is forgotten in Western moral philosophy after Beccaria. Beccaria's success is such that a conception of autonomy is constructed that disregards and discounts this early emphasis on bodily pain, what Bernstein terms 'the trembling recognition that the body can suffer devastation'.

What must a human being be for her to experience devastation? This is the founding question of moral philosophy for Bernstein and it begins with a phenomenology of devastation, particularly through an analysis of Jean Améry's famous account of being tortured. The devastation of torture is primarily ethical because it is intersubjective; a relation that is constructed purely on the denial of all intersubjective foundations for true relationality. In torture, the body is fixed as a pure form of negative involuntary sentience through incessant and repeated pain. The body is reduced to an instrument of another person and turned against itself. Améry writes that despite the constant refusal of help the expectation of aid naturally arises when we are in pain, even within the torture scenario. With the 'first blow' some core trust in the world is lost and can never be regained. The torture victim is fixed to a position of existential helplessness in the nightmare of a relation that is constructed upon the denial of any ethical

foundation for intersubjectivity. As Bernstein writes, 'the sound of pain ... inspires in the torturer only the response that more pain is possible.'

Bernstein further elaborates and elucidates the paradigm of torture through a later examination and analysis of rape. Like torture, rape is a particular manipulation of what Bernstein terms the 'moral ontology' of the body. Rape and torture exploit bodily vulnerability, existential helplessness and tacit trust by destroying the person's claim to mineness, to her own control over her body and the reduction of her body to a vehicle of another person's desires. This reduction of the body to an 'object body' has a particular gendered aspect in so far as the female body has routinely been designated as shameful in one form or another and subject to domination. The reduction of a body to an object state through the evisceration of any voluntary relation to embodiment is what Bernstein terms a 'consummation' of existential helplessness that is paradigmatic in both torture and rape.

The term that Bernstein uses for such an object state is 'devastation'. Devastation is the end process of a pathology of human relations that begins with humiliation which is constituted by the denigration and devaluation of persons. Drawing on Avishai Margalit's work, Bernstein argues that humiliation consists in treating humans as non-humans, rejecting their claims and actions that lead to a removal of control. Devastation is an end point of humiliation. There is a critical question about Bernstein's use of paradigms of devastation rather than pursuing an attempt to construct a phenomenology of damaged life *in toto*. An analysis of moral injuries from denigration through to devastation might have provided the basis for the elaboration of a wider concept of social suffering. As it is, Bernstein tends to use pain and suffering interchangeably, rather than attempting to elaborate a larger concept of social suffering. This emphasis on pain leads to further questions when he attempts to build an account of the core components of ethical life out of the rubble of torture and rape.

The analysis of rape and torture as paradigmatic moral injuries reveals three core theses for the normative foundations of ethical life. First, there is the revelation that the self cannot separate itself from the body; any account of moral life must initially be an account of embodiment. Second, devastation is only possible due to a core existential helplessness constituted by experiences of vulnerability, exposure and inescapability that are revealed *ex negativo* in

torture and rape. Finally, the complete loss of trust in the world exemplified by the denial of relationality and aid in torture reveals the tacit necessity of core, pre-reflective relations of trust for ethical life. Each of these three theses constructs a reformulation and critique of traditional moral philosophy that directs it away from an emphasis on objective rule-based deliberation towards an emphasis on embodiment and vulnerability.

Bernstein first emphasizes the dual aspect of embodiment familiar from many phenomenological accounts, namely that the body is both an instrument and a point of access that discloses the world and an involuntary set of processes that I undergo. Any definition of what it means to be a self is always a negotiation of this dual characteristic of embodiment. Therefore, what it means to be autonomous cannot simply be described without an understanding of involuntary processes of embodiment. Being embodied means being vulnerable and exposed to pain and attack. It is only through an expectation that the bounds of my body are my own that a sense of security within ethical life can arise. This sense of security does not consist just in a respect for bodily boundaries, but more strongly in the expectation of aid should I feel pain. Trust in the world is the tacit taken-for-granted intersubjective relationship of security in my own being and the expectation that help will arrive should I express pain.

Bernstein importantly recasts autonomy as a form of negotiation of the voluntary and involuntary aspects of embodiment alongside a reformulation of recognition in terms of trust and dignity. Trust is the prereflective expectation of respect for my bodily worth and the expectation of aid should I feel pain. Such trust can only arise through the intermediary of another. I can only be a being worthy of dignity if that recognition is bestowed upon me, but such recognition is not a deliberative contractual act; rather it is a prereflective requisite for ethical life.

The difficulty with this concept of trust as fundamental recognition is that it downplays the diffuse and differentiated nature of intersubjective relations. For Bernstein, trust is all or nothing, and he makes a compelling case that without an all-pervading atmosphere of tacit trust and the expectation of worth, no ethical life could be possible. He argues that this background level of trust is built on a basis of strong attachment relations in early life, although he doesn't emphasize the vicissitudes of attachment and the range of desires and hatreds that might coexist with first love. The route from strong attachment to

ethical relations of trust seems too straightforward in his account.

Bernstein's emphasis on the necessity of a response to pain occludes many questions. He argues that the relationship between pain and aid is 'grammatical' in the same way as the relation between pain and expression. The yelp when I sprain my ankle is directly analogous to the instinct to offer aid to help someone if I see that they are in pain. They are both immediate responses. Now, there are two key critical questions here. First, there is the question of proximity that Bernstein acknowledges but doesn't explore. In the tradition of compassion that originates with Aristotle, the question of proximity is already a qualification to any normative basis on two counts. Proximity means that I only care about those close to me, both spatially and in terms of a form of life. I only feel the necessity to respond to expressions of pain by those that share my immediate physical environment and that I feel are creatures that share my form of life. One can therefore question both the morality and the immediacy of such a response that requires proximity. Second, there is a question concerning the concept of pain, and the manner in which Bernstein elides the question of pain and suffering. One might think that a 'grammatical' account of pain and aid is understandable, but if we consider a wider response to suffering and social suffering, then we can see how the expectation of aid is less immediate and obvious. Immediate responsiveness to issues such as homelessness, poverty and unemployment is less straightforward than responding to an expression of pain.

Nonetheless, there is a sense in which these critiques miss the mark. Bernstein is claiming that the immediate responsiveness to expressions of pain and the expectation of aid is a core foundation of any ethical life. This is not an attempt to solve all normative questions but to understand the core constituents of what it might mean to live intersubjectively. As he persuasively argues, if I am to feel that I am a human being of worth, then that claim only makes sense if I understand that it is accompanied by the expectation that my pain matters to others.

Bernstein concludes his book with a fascinating discussion and reconceptualization of the notion of dignity. Rather than the traditional idea of dignity as residing in respect for individual autonomy alone, he constructs an account of it as an intersubjective relation that is a social negotiation of the dual aspects of embodiment. Dignity is a socially accomplished relationship to the involuntary body; the manner in

which the involuntary processes of embodiment are acknowledged and resolved in ways that provide trust in the world and security in ethical life. In a penetrating discussion of disgust, Bernstein acknowledges the Nietzschean point that compassion may lie very close to disgust, particularly when we are concerned with involuntary aspects of the body, but a moral philosophy that disavows the body in favour of a concept of dignity as sheer freedom or autonomy is always liable to lapse into an immoral disgust that leads to hatred rather than love. Thus, dignity can only be accomplished – and it is a fragile accomplishment – if it makes socially intelligible a relation between the



voluntary and involuntary aspects of embodiment.

Bernstein outlines the range of immoral responses that can result in reasons for denying that others' experiences of pain are worthy of response, that others are worthy of dignity. These reasons all relate to a disavowal of the dual aspect of embodiment. I may not be compassionate because I cannot tolerate dependency, or may desire absolute sovereignty and radical independence. Unfortunately, this disavowal is repeated by forms of moral philosophy that only function through an emphasis on rule-based rational moral deliberation that separates us from our deepest normative commitments. Bernstein's text serves to reawaken those commitments and sets us the task of making them actual in socially intelligible ways.

Alastair Morgan

Start spreading the news

Kenneth Goldsmith, *Capital: New York, Capital of the 20th Century*, Verso, London and New York, 2015. 1008 pp., £25.00 hb., 978 1 78478 156 9.

Since the turn of the millennium ‘conceptual writing’ and ‘conceptual poetry’ have become increasingly common critical terms. They describe a strain of contemporary textual practice that utilizes a series of twentieth-century avant-garde histories and strategies: montage, appropriation, Situationist *détournement*, the OuLiPo’s constraint-based compositions, and, perhaps most potently, conceptual art. Conceptual writers of a techno-utopian bent also proselytize the creative and critical potential of the Web as both medium and context. Kenneth Goldsmith, the movement’s most visible and controversial practitioner, in his quasi-manifesto *Uncreative Writing*, maintains that ‘in the face of [an] unprecedented amount of digital text, writing needs to redefine itself in order to adapt to the new environment of textual abundance.’ Essentially this means redefining cut and paste as composition. Indeed, if there is a unifying quality to this work it is in its use of constructivist and serialist modes of composition that seek to evacuate poetic subjectivity or the so-called expressive ‘lyric I’.

As judged by the criteria of sheer volume, ‘conceptual writing’ has certainly been a productive term. There has been a deluge of articles devoted to the perceived implications or failures of what might be described as the ‘conceptual turn’ in poetics. In its early stages, the focus of such critical discourse tended to be directed towards what academics like Craig Dworkin and Marjorie Perloff presented as conceptual writing’s twin genealogies – conceptual art and experimental literature – and its retrospective critical effects thereon. Recent years, however, have seen a shift from a perspective based on the legacies of modernism and questions of avant-gardism towards a criticism that seeks to place conceptual writing within the discursive fields of globalization studies and media theory. Academic articles with subheadings like ‘Conceptual Writing, Information Asymmetry, and the Risk Society’ or ‘Conceptual Writing’s Critique of Metadata’ are now not uncommon. This points towards a broader development in the recent history of art criticism, one where the theoretical interests of the *October* generation (modernist legacies, avant-gardism, critical distance,

histories) give way not only to what Peter Osborne has described as ‘the semiotic reductionism and sociologism of most cultural-theoretical approaches’, but also to the decentred and diffuse critical landscape of the digital environment.

Throughout the development of this body of critical work one theorist has been cited with particular insistence – predictably so, given his work’s general significance for literature and media theory – namely Walter Benjamin. Critics and practitioners of conceptual writing such as Goldsmith, Dworkin, Perloff, Vanessa Place, Patrick Greaney and Robert Fitterman have all mobilized Benjamin’s work on allegory and the fragment in an attempt to provide a strong theoretical ancestry for conceptual poetics, with the *Arcades Project* positioned as a kind of talismanic urtext for the movement. Until recently the *Arcades* was primarily of interest to Goldsmith and Perloff because it allows, indeed demands, a non-linear approach to reading which they could spuriously compare to surfing the Web – where the Web is viewed as an infinite arcade made possible by advances in digital technology in the same way that the original arcades were made possible by advances in the production of iron and glass. As Goldsmith has put it,

In many ways, the way we read *The Arcades Project* points toward the way we have learned to use the Web: hypertexting from one place to another, navigating our way through the immensity of it; how we’ve become virtual flâneurs, casually surfing from one place to another; how we’ve learned to manage and harvest information, not feeling the need to read the Web linearly and so forth.

Or, in the words of Perloff,

The *Arcades Project* may ... be understood as an ur-hypertext: the numerical classification of notes (e.g., A3, 1, A3, 2, [...] A3a, 1) providing ready passage from link to link in this Passagen-Werk. ... Sequential exposition and coherent argument [are replaced] with what looks like web-page design.

Less frivolously, the literary critic Patrick Greaney has sought in his 2014 book *Quotational Practices: Repeating the Future in Contemporary Art* to move conceptual writing away from questions of originality

and expressivity and, utilizing the *Arcades*, attempted to situate the movement's appropriative strategies within the context of Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image and his montage-based methodology for the exposition of a philosophy of historical experience. On Greaney's account, Benjamin's 'quotational practices', and by implication those of contemporary conceptual poets,

aim to counter historicism and commodification by returning to the moment in which their objects – history and the object – become known in the first place. The dialectical image proposes a different way of knowing that moment, a way of reading events that includes their contingency and their unrealized futures.

It seems that Kenneth Goldsmith has now made this homage to the *Arcades Project* concrete with his new book *Capital*, subtitled *New York, Capital of the 20th Century*, the conceit of which is a 'rewriting' of the *Arcades* under Benjamin's original convolute categories (plus a few additional ones) filled with material concerning New York in the twentieth century rather than Paris in the nineteenth. If this accounts for the book's initial rationale, the stakes of reviewing it have, however, been rather altered by the subsequent context surrounding Goldsmith's poetics into which this book has been published. In March 2015 Goldsmith gave a reading at Brown University entitled 'The Body of Michael Brown', an edited version of the autopsy report on the body of the black teenager whose death at the hands of a white police officer sparked weeks of protest in Ferguson, Missouri. Goldsmith's speech act (the work has not been published or a recording released) was perceived by many to have appropriated black suffering for a gain in cultural capital and to have made a fetish of the traumatized black body, a charge that gained traction when it was revealed that Goldsmith had reorganized the material so that the reading ended with the line: 'The remaining male genitalia system is unremarkable.' A typical reaction was that of the poet P.E. Garcia, who wrote that,

For Kenneth Goldsmith to stand on stage, and not be aware that his body – his white male body, a body that is a symbol loaded with a history of oppression, of literal dominance and ownership of black bodies – is a part of the performance, [means that] he has failed to notice something drastically important about the 'contextualization' of this work.'

Here, Goldsmith's apparently blind Warholian insouciance hit a brick wall and rendered claims like those

made by Greaney about the dialectical image redundant if not ridiculous. If the quotational practices of conceptual writing are in some way connected to the messianic – connected, that is, to a philosophy of history in which there is nothing less at stake than the claim of the dead over the living and the opening up of a radical temporality in opposition to the false and politically conservative narrative of historical progress – how come those who have suffered the most from that same history of the victors are the most offended by 'The Body of Michael Brown'?

It is within this context that *Capital* needs, then, to be considered, and it unequivocally transforms any reading of the work. The first unfortunate feature is the packaging. The book comes in a golden slipcase on which the word 'Capital' is the most pronounced. When this was planned in the design meetings no doubt it seemed to fit perfectly with Goldsmith's dandy trickster image, his paisley suits, golf shoes and Ezra Pound beard, its crassness a finger to the ivory-tower academic Benjaminians (and Marxists). Indeed Goldsmith has claimed that in producing this book he wanted to 'bring Walter Benjamin down from the pedestal and onto the coffee table'. This is a dull provocation that might nonetheless reveal something more interesting and critical about the relation of academic theory to revolutionary praxis. Yet it hardly matters now because the book itself looks like a tasteless bauble (in the wrong way) given the context outlined above. Ironically, the book itself has become a remainder like those found in the Parisian arcades, a golden commodity stripped of its fetish power.

What of the content? Though the inspiration is Benjaminian, the cumulative effect of Goldsmith's 'cathedral of text' is Whitmanic. Unlike Goldsmith's other works *Capital* is extraordinarily readable, its effects both hyperbolic and symphonic. He has assembled a huge amount of material but without any scholarly attention. Much of it is cross-quoted from single sources and the notation system is useless. No doubt this wouldn't bother Goldsmith since it's probably meant to be another poke in the eye to ivory-tower academicism (and doesn't the digital archiving of so much of this stuff make it easy to just cut and paste it anyway?). So here we have some kind of comment about digital labour, another of conceptual writing's concerns. If Goldsmith's earlier projects such as 'Day', the rewriting and publishing in book form of a single edition of the *New York Times*, or *The Weather*, the transcription of a week's worth of radio weather reports, represented what the literary critic Brian M. Reed has described as the 'spectacle

of wasted labour', then *Capital* switches tack. This time the labour is minimal for maximal result. The techno-utopian conceit – and here comes the Whitmanic dimension again – seems to be to democratize *The Arcades*. It's the notion that anyone can do this stuff; all you need is a computer, a city and some time. Goldsmith has described the book as a love letter to New York, a work that brings in the marginal and that looks without cynicism upon the notion of New York as a harbour for the poor, huddled masses. Yet the book contradicts itself because so much of the material here is not particularly rare or marginal.

With 'The Body of Michael Brown' Goldsmith made a hubristic mistake; the problem with *Capital* is that it embodies all the things that led to that mistake. Although it attempts a kind of radical textual egalitarianism, it signally fails to fully represent marginal voices, writing over them once again. (One could hardly say, for example, that Joan Didion

is a marginal voice, but nonetheless she is one of the few female sources in the book's 1008 pages.) Goldsmith perhaps needs to learn that uncovering the marginal involves work, and that that work is not automatically elitist, and that the 'I' is more complex than an either/or equation. As the poet and academic Fred Moten wrote when asked for a response to 'The Body of Michael Brown':

Do you know that why you fucked up and how you fucked up are totally entangled? Do you know that entanglement is given in the raciality of the concept, as such? I wish I could be convinced that you're thinking right now about how and why you fucked up. I wish I could convince you that the continued existence of human life on this earth depends upon you thinking about why and how you fucked up.

Capital suggests that such thinking still hasn't taken place.

John Millar

Prêt-à-manger

Boris Groys, *In the Flow*, Verso, London and New York, 2016. 208 pp., £14.99 hb., 978 1 78478 350 1 hb.

In *Ecce Homo*, Friedrich Nietzsche famously diagnoses European culture as suffering from chronic dyspepsia. Nietzsche will offer no antacids or laxatives for 'the most constipated bowels and temperaments'. Rather, he presents himself as dynamite. To cure cultural blockage and intellectual bloating, something more explosive is needed. Boris Groys takes up the rheological character of Nietzsche's cultural criticism in his rich and absorbing new work, *In the Flow*. He does so, however, by shifting Nietzsche's emphasis from the explosion of cultural gastric reflux to art's immanently fluid status. As Groys puts it in his introduction, this amounts to grasping the study of art in terms of a 'rheology of art – discussion of art as flowing.' What this means rests on Groys's central thesis.

At the core of *In the Flow* is nothing less than a reconstruction of avant-garde practices running from Marcel Duchamp to Ilya Kabakov via Kazimir Malevich. Groys's conception of avant-garde art is mediated by three historical conditions: first, the theoretical dominance of a post-metaphysical and postmodern culture fully ensconced in the incessant reproduction of change; second, the expansion of the museum into an archive practising selection,

re-arrangement and installation of pre-existing images and objects; and third, the complete neutralization of Duchamp's strategy of the readymade. (Through a formulation of the concept of *metanoia*, Groys develops the first condition in his *Introduction to Antiphilosophy*. The second and third conditions are explored in Groys's older but only recently translated book, *On the New*.) Connecting these three conditions is the notion of art's immanence to what Groys refers to as 'the flow of time': that is, the material flux of life generated under the conditions of the capitalist mode of production.

The basic premiss organizing Groys's 'rheology of art' is the fundamental transformation of the ontology of art produced by the modern: art is no longer defined by the production of discrete, self-contained works, but is the expression of an activity caught in a struggle to comprehend itself as distinctively artistic. Modern art constitutes the becoming-conscious of artistic activity grasped as a fluid process. Referring to Michel Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France in the 1970s, modern art, according to Groys, constitutes an attitude, a practice of life. (Although absent from the book, Allan Kaprow's definition of 'happenings' illustrates this ontological shift in a neat,

programmatic way: 'Context rather than category. Flow rather than work of art.')

For Groys, the comprehension of this shift from artwork to living activity is augmented by the transition from philosophy to post-philosophical theory that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century. The theoretical comprehension of the material flux of time finds its initial and most accomplished articulation in the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche (this is developed by Groys in chapter 2). With Marx and Nietzsche, we leave the realm of immutable ideals, eternal reason and absolute spirit, and enter the flow of life in all its struggles, contradictions and upheavals. Alas, Groys does not explore Hegel's position within the transition of 'classical' philosophy into post-metaphysical theory; although, strikingly, Hegel reconstructed speculative thought as a living, dialectical movement – that is, as distinctively fluid. Hegel speaks of his project as an attempt to 'bring fixed thought into a fluid state [*Flüssigkeit*]'.

The corollary to this shift from philosophy to theories of life is that the course of life in advanced capitalist societies has liquidated our belief in metaphysics. We no longer organize our cultural existence in relation to the possibility of the objective knowledge of reality as such. Rather, culture is a pressure that compels us to live. It enjoins us to both 'demonstrate that one lives' and 'perform being alive'. According to Groys, it is modern art that most clearly defines this twofold demonstration and performance of life. Moreover, it is art that locates the subject that 'performs this knowledge of being alive'. Art is, then, an epistemological project. Neither finite (as human) nor infinite (as God), the subject of art is presented, by Groys, as an ambiguous entity punctuated by the paradoxical production of the illusion of infinitude in the negativity of finitude itself, a finitude understood as 'pure negation', 'self-nullification' and the 'self-reduction to zero'.

This ambiguous production of the infinite in finitude animates avant-garde art. Speaking of Malevich, Groys notes that

to be a revolutionary artist ... means to join the material flow that destroys all the temporary political and aesthetic orders. Here the goal is not change... Rather, radical and revolutionary art abandons all goals, and enters the nonteleological, potentially infinite process that the artist cannot and does not want to bring to an end.'

We are reminded here of Malevich's strategy of destruction in his 'On the New Systems of Art' (1919), in which we are told that creation consists of

'a question of constructing a device to overcome our endless progress'. Readers familiar with Groys's work will know that this anchors his presentation of the Russian avant-garde in *The Total Art of Stalinism*. To comprehend Malevich's proposition in light of *In the Flow*, one could state that the device arrests 'endless progress' by way of an infinite process. The infinite process of avant-garde art acts as a negation of the infinite progress of modern life.

In the Flow weighs in on the critical reception of the avant-garde through its theoretical invocation of the category of negation. As is well known, negation constitutes the centre of the debates on the character of avant-garde practices. Peter Bürger's conception of the 'historical avant-garde', for example, is paradigmatic: avant-garde art is the negation of the framing conditions that secure art's autonomy. Any reference to a Hegelian conception of negation is absent from Groys's reflections. This is a theoretical strategy that allows Groys both to critically distinguish his presentation of the avant-garde from Bürger's paradigmatic Hegelianism (recall that for Bürger, 'historical' avant-garde art consists of the sublation of art into the praxis of life – a sublation, we are told, that is to be grasped exclusively 'in the Hegelian sense') and to reconfigure a deconstructive conception of negation understood in terms of a destruction that can never supersede the remainders it produces. This is a conception of negativity that runs through Derrida's works, finding its most famous articulation in his study of Bataille's Hegelianism.

Groys's deconstructive approach, however, is distinct from academic deconstruction in that it brings into sharp relief the temporal status of the *present*, thus cutting a diagonal line through the 'destruction of the metaphysics of presence'. The avant-garde is not, according to Groys, a temporal category identifying a practice that is immanently structured by a political temporalization of history with a speculative relation to the future (a thesis developed by Peter Osborne). Rather, it constitutes an intra-artistic temporalization of the *presentness of the present* understood as fluid life. Thus, Groys contends that avant-garde art 'does not predict the future, but rather demonstrates the transitory character of the present – and thus opens the way for the new'. It is the fugitive and ephemeral character of the present (its 'essential quality of being present', as Baudelaire put it) that provides the conditions of possibility of the new.

This implies that the new is not, strictly speaking, negative in character (as the negation of the 'old' that it retroactively determines), but rather a remainder in

the artistic negation of the present from within the ontological character of the present itself. In other words, the non-teleological negation of avant-garde practices neither 'fails' (thus becoming 'historical' in a rather one-dimensional sense) nor 'succeeds' (thus becoming self-conscious; that is, as masters of their own destiny), since they do not presuppose immediately recognizable institutions of *art*. Rather, the negation of avant-garde practice is contemporary with the material flow of temporary and transitory status of *life*. (Groys's and Osborne's work on the legacies of avant-garde practices overlap at the point of art's immanence to the means of capitalist production, a point developed by Walter Benjamin in 'The Author as Producer'.)

Contemporaneity exploits the distinctive temporary quality of the present from within itself. It does this because it lives *with* the life flow in such a way that it is a constitutive part of that flow. (This is developed in chapter 9, with a particular emphasis on the paradoxical nature of the reconfiguration of 'aura' under the conditions of digital reproduction.) The contemporary character of the fugitive present is exposed by Groys as a constantly shifting archive, a kind of 'total context' in which the new is epistemologically identified through the reconfigurations of the archive. The infinity of the archive – most notably the 'museum' – is located merely within its capacity to expand endlessly. Rather, it is its *potentiality* of infinite decontextualization and recontextualization that temporalizes the archive as a kind of interminable present.

This is why, above all else, the Internet and (although in a different way) Duchamp's strategy of the readymade, constitute the grounding artistic forms of Groys's work. The contemporaneity of the Internet is characterized by its material supports – the hardware that overdetermines the seamless experience of the interface exhibited by software (see chapters 10–12). The contemporaneity of the Internet is internally bifurcated and inverted on this model: it makes immediately apparent the illusion of the shared life of the collective, singular subject of the globe – what makes 'us' all contemporaries – by way of an apparatus that restricts this contemporaneity to a set of infrastructural and ideological mechanisms that converts each user into an increasingly isolated, virtual monastic life, pregnant with the potentiality of endless *kenosis*; that is, the self-voiding of the individual's substantive, historical content through life practices. (The kenotic character of modern and contemporary art is presented in chapter 3.)

The kenotic character of art once again recentralizes Groys's reflections on avant-garde practices within the category of negation understood as *de-historicization*; that is, the paradoxical process of the historicity of emptying political and aesthetic orders of their historical fixity. It is at this point that we can critically reconsider the third condition organized in the general shape of *In the Flow*: the readymades.

Duchamp frames *In the Flow* not only theoretically, but also quite literally. Appearing on the first page and at the end of the last chapter, Duchamp's strategy of the readymades is understood as the attempt to '[extend] the museum privilege to all things, including all present things'. In a sense, this extension of the museum recalls Duchamp's definition of the readymade in the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surrealisme*: 'an ordinary object elevated to the dignity of the work of art by the mere choice of an artist'.

For Groys, however, Duchamp does not take things far enough since the strategy of the readymade is focused on the transition of everyday articles of life into the distinctive 'dignity' of the work of art, thus short-circuiting its transformation into the life practice of artistic activity. This, however, sets aside a number of remarks that Duchamp made in both the context of the emergence of the readymades (1913) and his retrospective reflections on his practice in the 1960s (interviews with Pierre Cabanne and Philippe Collin, especially). It is not entirely clear the extent to which Duchamp's readymades, especially in their earliest iterations, can be comprehended as dignified artworks. For example, when Duchamp writes to his sister and confidante Suzanne in early 1916 informing her that he purchased a bottle drier (*Bottle Rack*, 1914) 'as a readymade sculpture', he notes that profanation is already at work in the context of everyday life. In other words, it is not an effect of the decontextualization and recontextualization of the museum qua 'sacred' space of a valorized, archived and acculturated tradition. Significantly, the opposition between art and life, between artistic and non-artistic activity, and between sacred and profane, is collapsed in on itself in Duchamp's seemingly inconsequential remark.

What kind of negation does this 'collapse' perform? The readymade does not function as a 'destruction' (always with remainder) of the political and aesthetic orders that form the material flow of time, since it does not adequately thematize artistic activity in terms of the construction of a 'device' that interrupts the flow. Rather, the readymade consists of a retroactive determination of the opposition of art

and life. This is achieved, initially, by way of the absence of any substantial modification to the bottle rack's form, thus thematizing the *experiential* content of both the suspension of the material flow of life and the fluid permeation of artistic and non-artistic activities *within their contradiction*. It is Groys's most valorized art practice – Duchamp's readymade – that potentially disrupts his reflections on art as a mode of the practice of contemporary life.

Hammam Aldouri

Fear of a frozen planet

Peter Fleming, *The Mythology of Work: How Capitalism Persists Despite Itself*, Pluto Press, London, 2015. 224 pp., £60.00 hb., £17.99 pb., 978 0 74533 487 5 hb., 978 0 74533 486 8 pb.

Ursula Huws, *Labor in the Global Digital Economy: The Cybertariat Comes of Age*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2014. 208 pp., £45.00 hb., £15.00 pb., 978 1 58367 464 2 hb., 978 1 58367 463 5 pb.

When will work be over? This question, both urgent and plaintive, increasingly imposes itself as any fulfilment of the emancipatory promise of automation is indefinitely deferred and as work intensifies in both quality and quantity. These two books offer complementary interventions into the question of how work persists and how capitalism has survived its most recent secular crisis. The secret of this survival for Fleming is to be found in the successful promulgation of an ideology of work that creates a compulsion to labour that has little to do with economic necessity. For Huws, identifying the central site of confrontation between labour and capital through describing a typology of contemporary forms of labour is the central aim.

At the heart of Fleming's account of the ideology of work is what he terms the "I, job" function: the transformation of work from something we do into something we are. It is this that takes the stage when work is no longer necessary and working has become little more than a pointless cultural ritual or symbolic gesture aiming to mitigate the experience of abandonment. Such ritualization takes a form analogous to addiction; an internalized coercion, nicely illustrated by Fleming as the overwork-paranoia complex spiralling out from the ideological truth that, although your fears about your colleagues may be simple paranoia, neoliberalism really *does*

hate you, and doesn't care if you know it. Fleming's touchstone here is Deleuze's essay on societies of control, in which biopolitical regulation goes virtual and viral. Whereas in disciplinary regimes of labour the worker moves between defined and regulated times and spaces, now there is, Fleming argues, only the totalized 'frozen planet of work' in which the present appears to be permanent and in which every day is a work day. *The Mythology of Work* reads against Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* in this regard to describe a totality now 'virtual and viral rather than only structural'. If this perhaps suggests an oddly literal reading of Lukács's text, it nonetheless leads Fleming to his central claim that dialectical reason can no longer provide us with a means of escape because the densely complex and unpredictable meshing of labour and capital leaves no discernible outside space, no standpoint beyond this frozen planet from which contradictions may be productively identified and exploited. This totality is of course false, but its falsity cannot be revealed because there is no positive antithetical moment through which the dialectic can progress.

The concept of abandonment is central to Fleming's arguments in this regard. The 'I, job' function is premised on the terror of abandonment, generating a compulsive need to work according to an 'all or nothing' logic. This logic threatens abandonment as the disciplinary outcome of any momentary infraction of neoliberalism's constant and insatiable demand for presence, attention and contact. In this position, however, workers should conceive themselves not as permanently terrorized by the threat of abandonment, but as always already abandoned. This thesis is advanced in a particularly interesting way in the final two chapters of the book, discussing first the perverse logic of corporate ideology as 'false truth telling', and, second, the dialogic culture of neoliberalism that seeks a transformation of the worker into a 'speaking machine' ritualistically engaged in speech that is never *to* power, but always already *with* it. In this culture, 'All is public yet nothing is permissible.' The corporation's cynical acknowledgement of its own contradictions, aggressions and failures – the general outlook that Fleming calls "Fuck you!" capitalism' – seems to render dialectical critique, as a mode of dethroning power through the revelation of its constitutive contradictions, obsolete.

The strategies of resistance Fleming considers viable under these conditions include the activation of minor, 'peasant' knowledges, histories and discourses, the deployment of humour and cunning,

and above all the act of desertion as a mode directly subversive of neoliberal's desperate need for attention. Such subversion cannot take place in the forms of dialogical engagement that power offers its subject since the *form* of those engagements always supervenes over their content, as demonstrated by the ironic absorption of images of resistance and revolution into corporate discourse. Resistance, if it is possible, cannot take the form of speaking to power, but only of silence and, more crucially, desertion.

In his conclusion, Fleming argues that contemporary emancipatory praxis must be 'inoperative' from the standpoint of capitalist rationality – that is, inscrutable to it – if it is to find some space beyond the totality of work from which to envisage a world beyond work. This, however, raises difficult questions. Fleming's book is clearly trying to engage such a position through its polemical refusal to treat work with anything other than contempt, since to do otherwise would presumably be to engage in precisely the ritualistic yet attentive dialogue through which control insidiously operates. This leads Fleming at points to a somewhat trivializing account of, for instance, work-related and stress-related suicides, which are read as signs of the catastrophic lack of perspective attendant on the unavailability of any 'outside'; an outside from which it would be obvious that 'killing yourself over a trivial thing like work', a 'stupid little office job', seems 'unfathomable'. This is perhaps simply a question of tone, but it may also indicate the difficulties of the kind of intellectual absenteeism Fleming wishes to prescribe; that is, the desertion and silence over the human costs of work that might inevitably be entailed by the 'inoperative' critique he recommends.

Perhaps Fleming is right, and any such intervention would carry us back into the empty, formalized dialogic regime of neoliberal rationality. But Ursula Huws's essay collection is an interesting counter-example to Fleming's polemical disengagement from the specific configurations of work at the present time. Her book gathers together essays published between 2006 and 2013, all of which are engaged with questions of the different forms of labour emerging and being transformed by the dynamics of global industrial restructuring, automation and digitization.

For Huws, the survival of capitalism through its most recent, still ongoing crisis is less a matter of ideological control and more a matter of the perpetuation of one of its fundamental dynamics: the need to continually open new fields of accumulation by bringing more areas of life within its scope, a dynamic Huws examines here in relation to art and culture, public services, and sociality. Each of these topics is the subject of an essay here examining the processes of standardization and routinization essential for new areas of everyday life to be primed for accumulation. While Fleming regards the rise of the 'I, job' function as the paradigm shift in working culture, Huws from another angle argues that occupational identities have declined in significance. Increasingly standardized and interchangeable skills mean that offshoring is a constant threat and a disciplining



mechanism. Workers can no longer depend on their reputation or past successes; they must now begin anew with every contract, entering into the rituals of 'boasting and supplication' that the contractual disaggregation of business activities has normalized.

Against the background of this generalized tendency towards standardization and interchangeability, however, Huws performs a vital differentiation of forms of work that brings into view the central locations of the encounter between capital and labour. Labour and capital are densely enmeshed, but this does not mean no contradiction between them can be identified. Capital may be endlessly mobile, but

labour is not. Virtual and viral activities still occur within, between and against activities that occur in real time and space. In the collection's concluding essay, 'The Underpinnings of Class in the Digital Age', Huws offers a compelling intervention into the conceptual problems entailed by digital labour, digital commodities and the increasing enmeshing of consumption and production in the online context through an investigation of the applicability of the labour theory of value to these cases. Rejecting the notion that everyone who is not part of the capitalist class may be regarded as part of the 'multitude' or the 'precariat', or some other undifferentiated formation, Huws seeks to identify those forms of labour in the digital economy that are directly productive of surplus value for individual capitalists.

For Huws, neoliberalism is by no means a smooth, undifferentiated and seemingly permanent present. This is because the commodity form remains at the heart of her analysis of capitalism. Commodity production continues to be of primary significance because it is the location of direct antagonism between the capitalist employer and the employee dependent on the wage. Labour of this kind – directly productive, paid labour on which the worker is dependent – is defined by Huws as the 'knot' at the heart of capitalist social relations, and is to be distinguished from other forms, including unpaid labour and labour that is productive for capitalism as a whole rather than for individual capitalists (reproductive labour), as well as from forms of profit generation that do not engage labour directly (rent, trade). Huws rejects the assumption that every item which is bought or sold and which can be regarded as a commodity must necessarily be the product of labour, and instead directs attention to the relations of its production. Furthermore, she traces the ways that industrial restructuring motivated by capitalism's need for new fields of accumulation is in fact continually drawing more and more activities into this directly productive category of labour. Far from being an increasingly anomalous form on which wider solidarities cannot be established, this 'knot' of contradictions is the scene of continually proliferating antagonism and hence of politics.

There are plenty of potential ambiguities about this. Fleming, for instance, notes that the selling off of state assets (such as railways and utility companies) now means that some investors in formerly publicly owned enterprises in Britain are not private companies but in fact *state-owned* enterprises based in France and Germany. This makes the firm distinction

Huws draws between productive labour (labour for individual capitalists) and reproductive labour (in which she includes public-sector work) difficult to maintain in an absolute way. Such attempts to differentiate are, however, essential if we are to locate the actual sites of contestation between labour and capital. As Huws's work should remind us, the confrontation of capital and labour may be virtually staged, but its points of contradiction do not vanish in viral networks of control.

Elinor Taylor

Without force

Charity Scribner, *After the Red Army Faction: Gender, Culture, Militancy*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2014. 312 pp., £34.50 hb., 978 0 23116 864 9.

The Baader–Meinhof terrorist grouping, which existed between 1970 and 1998, but was most active in the 1970s, continues to make its presence felt in German life. Charity Scribner tabulates what she terms 'the cultural remains of a radical intervention'. There are fiction films, documentaries, artworks and entire exhibitions – most notably 'Regarding Terror' at Kunst-Werke Berlin in 2005; musical compositions, plays, dance pieces and books – fictional, factual and factional, endless books, working through this episode of German history, in German, for the most part, and attuned to the political and cultural questions that seems to press in on postwar Germans. These many reflections, absorptions and diagnoses of the armed struggle of the Red Army Faction (RAF), as Scribner puts it, 'have attained an unparalleled degree of density'. Scribner's study adds to this, but, because it is in English, it also acts to communicate some of the debates and some of the ways in which the phenomenon of a small terror cell has become a full-scale cultural phenomenon. She explores a variety of works that allow both the communication of German history and the evaluation of political debates from the perspective of today, under the twin pressures of feminist resurgence and the apparent extension of transnational terrorist activity. At the same time, it is also an exploration of the practice and image of the female militant and what lessons might be gleaned from her fate – specifically the fates of Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof – in an epoch defined by Scribner as 'postmilitant'.

To be postmilitant is to exist in 'the charged field of literature, art and criticism that responds to militancy and political violence'. But such a definition does not clarify particularly well. Examined here are cultural expressions that present 'a militant intervention', but that are explored from the perspective of the postmilitant. At the same time, postmilitancy is invoked in relation to any cultural practice that 'seeks to redefine militancy and break its ties to terrorism'. Scribner's sympathies are with the latter. There is a useful gloss on the meaning of the term 'militancy', a term originally connoting a crowd or throng that picked up associations with the military and with nihilism. It acquired particular resonances after 1968, and in Germany was a term battled over by the Far Left and the Right, the latter of which strove to uphold or institute a 'militant democracy' in the face of leftist challenges. This is the setting for the collective film *Germany in Autumn* (1978), discussed here extensively, alongside Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977*.

The book is divided into two parts. The first chapter focuses on an outline of 'cultural fallout' in the context of a timeline of armed struggle in Germany after the Second World War, but especially in the 'Red Decade' of the late 1960s to 1970s. There is a useful tabulation of responses on the part of the rest of the Left, such as Frankfurt School Critical Theorists and feminists, to a new wave of militant activism and critical art. The specific theme of the book is the cultural resonance of the RAF; this is grasped in the opening pages as a question that was already raised within the terror cell itself. Despite the commitment to politics and action alone, the members of the RAF, according to Scribner, tendered aesthetic interventions, in their clothing, their stances, their style. It is this 'look' that made the RAF available to other people attracted by the aesthetic, be they artists or writers, or people seeking to be fashionable; a phenomenon captured scornfully some years later as 'Prada Meinhof' chic.

For Scribner, it is the extent to which they were unmindful of their aesthetic mediation that renders the limitations of the RAF critique. Unlike the Situationist International (SI), they did not ward themselves against banal recuperation, making themselves available to fashion and the diminution of historical and political content. A reading of the SI against the RAF, 'two torn halves that don't add up', serves for Scribner to differentiate the boundaries between avant-garde intervention and violent vanguardism, to the detriment of the latter. It also gives the

opportunity for some comparisons in relation to the role of women within each grouping, for it is a central tenet of this book that gender questions and sexual politics are a prime vehicle for the cultural response to revolutionary violence. In contrast to the aestheticized use of the RAF, Scribner traces the networks with which the terrorists engaged practically, ones that feature less prominently in their glamorized image: the complicity with state socialism, whose regimes provided new lives and identities for later generations of RAF terrorists, and their entwinement with global terrorist networks, funded by crime. But the feminist approach of the book intends another argument: the body of the militant woman embodies the Baader–Meinhof Faction, gives it 'bodies that matter', reminds us, as against an aestheticized spectrality, of real lives and deaths, in order to cast a more sombre and contemplative light into the group's historical significance and contemporary legacy.

The second part of the book focuses on a series of cultural and artistic responses to the RAF. There is an analysis of Margaretha von Trotta's *Die bleierne Zeit* (1981), interpreted as a plaidoyer for progressive political work through the new social movements, rather than through revolutionary violence. There is exploration of the intersections of postmilitancy and postmodernism, with the second-generation Critical Theory of Habermas, and the concepts of enlightenment and emancipation, presented as a touchstone for German feminists. In contrast to their commitment, Scribner explores novels by Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Friedrich Christian Delius as a 'testing ground', whereby she perceives their deployment of the female protagonists as an effort 'to ward off the danger of the RAF's militant women'. Various bodily representations or 'militant anatomies', such as a masturbating Fassbinder in *Germany in Autumn*, are also considered, as these appear to offer a context in which to examine 'the articulation and disciplining of the militant body'. There is a striking comparison made between the rendering of Meinhof's body in Johann Kresnik's *Ulrike Meinhof* (1987–2010) and Joshka Fischer's much publicized weight loss. The slimming, tautening body of the former student radical, who had engaged in political violence before becoming Germany's war-supporting foreign minister and vice chancellor, was, according to Scribner, used as a cipher for his normalization and his embodiment of restraint in moral, political and self-disciplining senses, so making him properly available for the postwar German state. Fischer put much emphasis on getting back to his 'fighting weight', and his autobiography *The Long*

Race to Finding Myself (1999) could even be found on self-help shelves. For Scribner, this self-image is continuous with that of the sexist male urban guerrilla of the 1960s and 1970s that Fischer once was. In distinct contrast, the performance of Meinhof's body shows it to be shattered and abnormal, ghostly, force-fed, abused; but this, too, comes to be, in some contexts, synonymous with the German state, as an entity that is broken and discontinuous. It is also an emblem of the fractious and fragmented meanings attributed to Ulrike Meinhof, which refuse to resolve. Not least within this book. There are various intersecting, obliterating, overwriting lines explored here: art, politics, aestheticization, terror, reform, enlightenment, mystification, gender, class. Feminism and social change are at the heart of it all. Meinhof's notebooks show her to be critical of feminism. A note puts it crudely: 'Fuck equal rights for women'. But if Meinhof was not interested in feminist analysis or demands from that perspective, Scribner is.

The final chapter explores the complicity of artists and media in confecting the image of the RAF. This was the ground that the exhibition *Regarding Terror* explored in 2005, as it put on show the extent to which so much art that reflected on the RAF drew on newspaper and stock photography. This is indicative, according to Scribner, of a 'mediatized condition', but it is, she asserts, a deceptive one, eclipsing some of the other motivations of artists who contributed to the show, and also denying the extent to which, through art, they transformed the media materials. There are other reflections to be had on the legacy, and Scribner sets the much-acclaimed 'sexed-up' glamfest that is Uli Edel's *The Baader-Meinhof Complex* (2008; see my review in *RP* 153, January/February 2009) against a German-Turkish film by Fatih Akin, *The Edge of Heaven* (2007), which approaches the question of political activism and armed resistance in the context of post-9/11, relating in the process questions of feminism and its relation to the Far Left. This latter film stands as a model of what is needed, phrased by Scribner as 'the power of dialectical mediation', in which difference is respected, but strategic alliances may still be formed. This position Scribner attributes to Adorno. But the language is not Adornian really. It is a liberal plea to end 'them' and 'us' conceptualizations. Essentially it wants a democracy that does not use force against its people and a people that does not use force against its democracy (assuming that democracy has an agreed and stable meaning). It recognizes that the Far Left might be the agents, unintentionally, of the best reforms, but most of all it

counsels for more reflection, more culture and more books of this kind, to generate 'new modes of resistance, both critical and aesthetic'. It is most worthy.

Esther Leslie

Black-boxed

Mark B.N. Hansen, *Feed-Forward: On the Future of Twenty-First-Century Media*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2015. 320 pp., £57.50 hb., £19.50 pb., 978 0 22619 969 6 hb., 978 0 22619 972 6.

Feed-Forward sets an ambitious goal for itself: that of integrating late Husserlian phenomenology with the speculative empiricism of Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead is employed by Hansen to make up for phenomenology's inadequacy in conceptualizing the ways in which contemporary media are changing experience and subjectivity. Hansen's engagement with Whiteheadian ontology is a learned and confident attempt to produce 'new philosophy for new media' (to paraphrase the title of one of Hansen's previous books). The strength of this attempt, however, is partly undermined by the fact that Hansen subtracts some key ingredients from Whitehead's metaphysical schema in order to add him to the legacy of phenomenology. Moreover, in order to relate this proposed Whiteheadian phenomenology to contemporary media, Hansen's study can be seen to sidestep the technical specificity of the media that it wishes to theorize.

The nub of the book's argument is the claim that contemporary media impact upon and participate in 'worldly sensibility' (that is, in Hansen's words, the 'general sensibility of the world'). This participation in a broader and distributed domain of sensibility is prior to media's affecting human experience, but also a condition for this affecting. The book's point of departure is thus the following observation: human experience is undergoing a fundamental change, brought about by our entanglement with media technologies that operate outside our awareness. Drawing on media theory's insight that agency is radically environmental, and yet refusing media theory's disregard for the category of the human (an accusation of neglect that is only partially justified in this book), Hansen offers a reconceptualization of the global experiential patterns of techno/human activity by recuperating phenomenology's attention to subjectivity. The subjectivity that he addresses, however,

is an unusual one: it is, again in Hansen's words, a 'non-subject-centred subjectivity', composed of multi-scalar processes. Not so much the straightforward high-order, singular source of consciousness, attention and sense perception of traditional phenomenology, then, but a post-Husserlian, assemblage-like, low-order 'environmental sensory confound' that Hansen finds to be best conceptualized in terms of the mode of organization that Whitehead called a *society*.

A Whiteheadian society is a compositional agglomerate of the operations of elemental entities that partake in the societal composition as a plurality. Crucially, Hansen takes societies to be the principal experiential agents within Whitehead's philosophy, thus explicitly refusing to consider *actual occasions* (i.e. Whitehead's foundational ontological units, which constitute the structure of reality and



whose achievements form societies) as the main active players in Whitehead's metaphysics of experience. Drawing on Judith Jones's interpretation of Whitehead (which takes 'intensity', understood as the power that exceeds individual actual occasions, to be his fundamental category), and also following Didier Debaise's distinction between the 'speculative' (i.e. what concerns the structure of reality) and the 'experiential' (i.e. what accounts for experience) in Whitehead, Hansen empties actual occasions, and their concrescent phase, of creative value. What Hansen instead addresses as the agent of experiential novelty is the Whiteheadian concept of *superject*, arguing that the attained, composite status of societal subjectivity (i.e. the superject) best describes how humans today co-function with technology. Our subjective experience, the book claims, is born out of the sensory affordances that repose in contemporary media situations. This condition, Hansen says, shows that humans are not separate and superior experiential entities, and that consciousness is not the hallmark of subjectivity. In Hansen's view, Whitehead's philosophy can then be used to rethink

the environmental dimension of subjectivity vis-à-vis the ways in which media are responsible for propagating a distributed mode of sensibility that is decoupled from human perception.

There is much I admire in Hansen's engagement with Whitehead. However, I also have some concerns: some arise from disagreements regarding technical issues in Whiteheadian scholarship; others pertain to our differing opinions about what might be most usefully drawn from Whitehead's ontology. Debating who has got the right or wrong version of Whitehead, however, is beside the point. Whitehead's philosophy is so complex, and often so unapologetically obscure, that there cannot be one Whitehead. The impossibility of reducing Whitehead's philosophy to orthodoxy attests to its power and richness, and also explains the contemporary renaissance that it has come to enjoy. Yet, recognition of this potential plurality is

underdeveloped in Hansen's study. With few exceptions, Hansen tends to characterize other readings of Whitehead as problematic or inadequate. These readings are charged with being instrumental or tactical, and with privileging certain aspects of Whitehead's philosophy in order to make pre-established

points. To some extent, this may be true. However, and perhaps inevitably, this charge could also be applied to Hansen himself, and in a manner that goes beyond questions of interpretation. In order to forge a kinship between Whitehead and phenomenology, Hansen has to choose certain elements of Whitehead's philosophy and discard others. Hansen sees this as a sort of correction: as a 'transformative criticism', or as submitting Whitehead to 'philosophical critique'. Nonetheless, doubts remain as to whether certain dismissals (of parts of Whitehead's metaphysics, as well as of many Whitehead's past and present commentators) are not equally a form of instrumentalization.

The scope of the book is to address worldly sensibility and our involvements within it. This is a phenomenological issue, Hansen explains, which nonetheless emerges from a technological condition that phenomenology is unable to engage with because of its insistence on relating sensation to human perception and consciousness. For Hansen, Whitehead is the philosopher that might come to the rescue here, for he might give us just the right

ontology to conceptualize this worldly sensibility and, at the same time, to advance a non-anthropomorphic and non-representational phenomenology able to address technology beyond its prosthetic coupling with human capacities. It is precisely at this ontological level, however, that Hansen adds most of his corrections to Whitehead's account, with a view towards forging this reformed phenomenology. These corrections result in a Whiteheadian ontology that is, in fact, somewhat non-Whiteheadian: *eternal objects* are not eternal anymore; *actual occasions* do not end, but indefinitely converge into an imperishable 'total power'; the atomic processuality of Whitehead's many beings (indeed, the actual occasions) is overlooked in order to give room to a holistic Being-of-the world that would seem to belong more to phenomenology (or to the neo-materialism and affective turn from which Hansen would want to detach his phenomenology of media) than to Whitehead himself.

The value of *Feed-Forward* is that it contributes to both Whiteheadian scholarship and media theory with a thought-provoking proposition, achieved by way of rigorous philosophical commitment and labour. However, whilst the book opens up and reworks Whitehead's philosophy, the techno-operations that it addresses remain, to an extent, black-boxed. Hansen's term 'twenty-first-century media' is intended to denote a plethora of 'technical incursions that are now reshaping our lives'. These include social media platforms, the Internet and global networks, smartphones and smart devices, location-aware technologies, data-mining and data-gathering techniques, biometric recording, and the 'passive sensing' of what Hansen calls 'microcomputational sensors'. Twenty-first-century media differ from their predecessors, because they do not rely on agent-centred perception. Instead, they pertain to (and enhance human contact with) an environmental mode of sensibility. Yet, quite what these 'intelligent sensing technologies' really are, and indeed where their intelligence might lie, is not tackled; at least not in a manner that goes beyond observing and conceptualizing what these technologies do to us, and to our relation with the world. In other words, Hansen chooses to focus on the ways in which twenty-first-century media inscribe human experience into worldly sensibility, as opposed to theorizing how a 'computational sensing' might actually be carried out by machines.

'Feed-forward' is the book's central concept. It aims to surpass the Husserlian notion of *protention* in order to describe the data-driven anticipatory

structure of the 'experiential paradigm' engendered by twenty-first-century media. Feed-forward 'names the operation through which the technically accessed data of sensibility enters into futural moments of consciousness as radical intrusions from the outside'. This 'presentification' of data to consciousness is, Hansen argues, 'the principal mode in which contemporary consciousness can experience ... its own operability'. However, the fact that the twenty-first-century media's 'calculative ontology of prediction' is indeed about calculation remains opaque in this conceptualization of feeding-forward mechanisms. Despite identifying the role of calculation vis-à-vis prediction, Hansen does not fully address it. I see this as a problem: for if twenty-first-century media's anticipatory nature is indeed about calculation – and I would argue that this is the case – then it must concern a computational power that not only presents and presentifies data, but also has to represent the latter via symbolic but functional reductions.

The decision to not engage more directly with the calculative nature of twenty-first-century media could, however, be read as Hansen taking a specific philosophical stance. In other words, he would seem to be choosing phenomenology over Whitehead by implicitly asserting that, because we do not have direct access to these computational operations, we should not speak of them. It is therefore legitimate to wonder whether ultimately Hansen has remained loyal to phenomenology's focus on describing the 'experiential' by favouring the latter category over a more strictly and peculiarly Whiteheadian consideration of the 'speculative'. From this perspective, it is possible to say that, although the book recognizes that it is the speculative that grounds the experiential in Whitehead, its very own speculative contribution aims to assess *the reality of techno-human experience* rather than that of twenty-first-century media *per se*. In this sense, what the book affords is less a Whiteheadian ontology of media technology than a Whiteheadian phenomenology of contemporary media situations.

M. Beatrice Fazi