Anti-Nazi musicology and the diminished seventh

Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, ed. Rolf Tiedermann, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998. xii + 268 pp., £39.95 hb., 0 7456 1467 1.

Pamela M. Potter, *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1998. xx + 364 pp., £27.50 hb., 0 300 07228 7.

Beethoven and Hitler are synonyms for civilization and barbarism. Theodor Adorno was notorious for dragging such polar opposites into proximity, but this was not just the perversity of his aphorism-sporting dialectic. Such oppositions rehearse historical actualities: the Nazis planned an all-conquering Europe spearheaded by German excellence, and Beethoven's 'absolute' art provided spiritual legitimation for their project. All treatments of the Western musical ideal need to wrestle with this problem – or risk charges of historical evasion.

In a chilling, conscientiously researched narrative, Pamela Potter shows how the vast majority of middle-class musicologists benefited from Nazi rule. The discipline was central to the Nazis' cultural programme. Musicological research justified annexation of the Sudetenland, and was sponsored by the SS to 'discover' German traits in the folk music of the South Tyrol. These were not aberrations, but the culmination of a nationalistic movement in music studies initiated after World War I. Musicologists who unearthed good, clean German traditional music from the archive were given ample opportunity and promotion. Jews, Marxists and 12-tone modernists barely skimmed the conservative backwaters of university musicology, so the 1933 Nazi takeover caused minimal institutional disturbance.

After 1945, de-Nazification was superficial, the parameters of the discipline unchanged. Disgusted, the exiled Curt Sachs refused aid to colleagues accused of collaboration, arguing that all musicology that refused the challenge of comparative studies across cultures led to the death chambers of Auschwitz. Jewish and Marxist exiles were not given positions in Germany's postwar music schools. Potter's evidence supports musicologist Alfred Einstein's description of the FDR as the 'Fourth Reich'. Even today, academic musicology worldwide remains a bastion of *Deutschland über alles*.

There are signs of revolt against this situation, usually under the dubious banner of postmodernism. Potter gives dark warnings about scholarship succumbing to political agendas. She even compares today's 'subjective pejoratives' – 'racist', 'sexist' and 'elitist' – to the Nazi-era terms 'Jewish' and 'Bolshevist'. This astonishing equation of political contraries evinces trust in her own scholarship as transcendent and supra-social. Actually, sentences like 'the emergence of a working-class culture demanded that the arts be accessible and comprehensible, providing entertainment and pleasure rather than intellectual challenge' show that Potter's starting point is highly ideological. There is scant sense of the working-class organization and insurgency that led to Germany's ruling class taking Hitler's draconian regime on board. The SPD and CP are never mentioned. In 1938 in Düsseldorf, the Nazis organized an exhibition entitled *Entartete Musik*: if Ernst Krenek and Anton Webern (jazz and 12-tone) and the modernist controversy that surrounded them (Kurt Weill, Hans Eisler, Theodor Adorno) are omitted from the equation, then the prescriptions of Nazi musicology become incomprehensible. In the absence of its antagonist – the theory and practice of Communism – Nazi barbarism, too, becomes incomprehensible.

Potter's one-sidedness is explained by her positivist definition of what constitutes a musicologist: someone holding an academic post. Her sociology of professional life means that Germany's extraordinarily rich culture of Marxist debate on music disappears from view. Indulging familiar postmodern ventriloquy for the silent majority, Potter rejects Peter Gay's account of the Weimar avant-garde because it highlights cultural extremes ignored by ordinary Germans. In her conclusion, Potter may deplore the reactionary, Germano-centric nature of musicology, but she remains unable to locate its contra-vaccine. Without the Marxist critique, we are at the mercy of a thousand quack cures for the 'limitations' of Western thought – theories whose

recent effect on non-classical music writing has been to reduce historical understanding to Deleuzian irrationalism, flatulent drug 'theory', mystical pronouncements about the primordial Other, and uncritical genuflection towards Techno.

In this context, the publication in English of Adorno's work-in-progress on Beethoven is to be welcomed. Editor Rolf Tiedemann has gone to great pains to collate, cross-reference and annotate Adorno's 370 fragments, written every year between 1938 and 1963. Most were written in four notebooks. These have been supplemented by extracts from a further eight, plus reprints of passages on Beethoven from already-published works. Although yet to be woven into the dense philosophical prose of his finished works, these spontaneous statements have the crackle and urgency of his best writing.

Adorno maintains awareness of the historical and naturo-cosmic totality while examining the minutest details of Beethoven's scores. Focus on the actual texts of the most cherished icon of European culture knocks the 'great composer' from his pedestal and begins to explain his real place in history. In so doing, Adorno challenges classicism, an ideology which freezes history, shores up identity and denigrates the unknown. The effect – like the vodka in the ads – is shattering.

To Adorno, Beethoven is music's Hegel. Deconstructionists fond of Adorno's quip 'the whole is the untrue' will have difficulty with what follows, because Adorno's thesis is entirely dependent on the concept of totality. Listeners who extract a tune or motif from Beethoven and praise it as 'inspired' utterly misconstrue his aesthetic. In Beethoven, sounds only mean in relation to the whole, and it is their position in the piece that determine their meaning. This mobilizes the weighty traditions of German Art History, understanding artistic form as a historical product: an irreversible and specific transformation wrought by human labour. It rebuts naturalistic interpretations of musical communication – the 'Germanic triad' beloved of Nazi musicologists – and opens the door to comparisons across cultures.

Adorno repeatedly cites Beethoven's definition of 'genius' – 'the correct use and resolution of chords of the diminished seventh' – debunking metaphysical fantasies of soul and depth in favour of materialist analysis. Adorno is closer to Brecht than many epigones like to admit. In a complex treatment of *Missa Solemnis*, Adorno argues that it anticipated the bourgeois class's post-1848 renunciation of the cause of enlightenment and universal humanity. Adorno's rejection of Stalinist Russia should not obscure the fact that his reading of European history is thoroughly Marxist.

A moving aspect is that Adorno refuses to relinquish the direct, visceral impact of music, even as he insists on its thoroughly historical status: 'To imagine music is always to sing it inwardly: imagining it is inseparable from the physical sensation of the vocal chords,

and composers take account of the "vocal limit".' This surrender to the physical body is quickly followed by 'Soul is not an invariant, not an anthropological category. It is a historical gesture' (p. 173). Alternately materialist and historical, Adorno refuses to sacrifice nature to history and end up with pure spirit; nor will he hypostatize nature and thereby deny change and dialectics. This 'contradiction' will be familiar to anyone who has tried to appraise music both subjectively and by study: it is less a flaw in Adorno's logic than a closely observed account of the poignancy of authentic musical experience.

In a draft introduction to *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argued that philosophical aesthetics must address artistic details – for example, the 'sound of hoofbeats' in *Piano Sonata Opus 81a* – rather than resort to 'general reflections'. This invaluable advice stems from the concrete materialism that allowed Walter Benjamin to derive social theory from meditations on paperweights and old toys. Such an approach precludes the journalistic high ground from which postmodern academics accuse Adorno of Eurocentrism and elitism. However, if it is true that Potter's account is flawed because it ignores the Left, then it is necessary to explain why this close focus is something more than the myopia of the apolitical aesthete.

Adorno thought hard about the effects of music on the listener, and this meant bringing its mediations to consciousness. The point of a motif is its place in the whole: 'torn from its context', the initial notes of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* become a commonplace 'to be exploited up to the hilt by international patriotism' (the oxymoron 'international patriotism' condemns the power structures that clashed in the Second World War, refusing to bless the Allies with an anti-Nazi halo). This is not just an old-fashioned injunction to listen 'properly'. The low volume of domestic radio-listening spoils the sheer impact of the opening, and hence ruins the meaning of its subsequent development. Just as much as event DJs or free improvisers today, Adorno insists that an authentic musical event is a specific historical experience, resistant to commodification. By indicting the bourgeoisie's exploitation of Beethoven, Adorno opens a space for genuine musicality.

Adorno rejects the cliché that 'late works' (Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Beethoven) are subjectivist, expressionist, 'about death'. Instead, they recognize that artistic form survives an individual's demise, an extension of his aphorism that 'we do not understand music – it understands us'. This disdains petty individualism – self-pitying or transcendent – in favour of a materialist grasp of social mediations, unique but determinable. He understands Beethoven's music as an emotional narrative, but one achieved by techniques the intellect can grasp. It breaks with classical fetishization of heroic genius: any and every music that moves us becomes an object worthy of investigation. Not that escape from vacuous 'heritage' guarantees pastures of uncritical consumerism. Discarding its packaging and publicity, Adorno still foregrounds the technical means by which music works on subjectivity. This prepares the way for a caustic polemic against the way capitalism treats music.

Adorno's *Beethoven* is not a work of reverence about a dead white male, but a polemic against the way the tonal system – a historic expressive achievement – has been naturalized and nullified by commercial repetition. Whereas others (from the Nazis to the Minimalists) accept this banalization as the end of history, Adorno counters that authentic musical experience risks an encounter between history and subjectivity. Exceptional though these occasions of risk appear to the mass-market consensus, if they are ignored all that remains for musicology – however stickered with garish 'political' identities – is marketing.

Ben Watson

As such, as was

Manfred Frank, *The Subject and the Text: Essays on Literary Theory and Philosophy*, trans. Helen Atkins, ed. Andrew Bowie, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997. 1 + 199 pp., £45.00 hb., 0 521 56121 3.

Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack, eds, *The Tel Quel Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998. ix + 278 pp., £14.99 pb., 0 415 15714 5.

Ninety-four issues of *Tel Quel* appeared between 1960 and 1982, when it ceased publication and was immediately reborn as *L'Infini* ('the unfinished' and/or 'the infinite'). The title means 'as such' and was borrowed from the poet Paul Valéry. What began life as a small literary journal intent on defending 'literary quality' and experimentation against the demons of committed literature became a major Parisian institution. A network of study groups and innumerable conferences and seminars made it a powerful intellectual force, and its editorial collective was highly skilled in the positional warfare that is an integral part of life in the cultural-intellectual field. Some eighty volumes appeared in the associated 'Tel Quel'

series, including Derrida's *L'Ecriture et la différence*, Barthes's *S/Z* and Kristeva's *Révolution du langage poétique*. The journal itself was at various times an important platform for Derrida, Barthes and Foucault, and the site of dialogues with Lacan and Althusser. The history of *Tel Quel* is a vital chapter in the history of structuralism and its various successors, and the journal played a vital role in making available the work of the Russian formalists and Bahktin. There can be no denying its historic importance.

Although a lot of the material that was published in *Tel Quel* has appeared in English elsewhere (existing translations are listed in the useful bibliography), this is the first reader to be dedicated to the journal itself and most of the content has not been previously translated. The *Tel Quel Reader* includes fourteen essays published between 1968 and 1975, or during what the editors call 'the moment of theory'. The selection of material inevitably produces some disappointments: there is, for instance, no contribution from Derrida (presumably for copyright reasons), even though 'La Pharmacie de Platon' and 'La Double Séance' were published in *Tel Quel* in 1968 and 1970 respectively. Even so, this is a rich selection and fills an important gap. Wisely, the editors do not concentrate too exclusively on Kristeva and Sollers, and have included the work of less well known contributors. Guy Scarpetta is represented by an essay on American experimental theatre; Marcelin Pleynet by an essay on 'thetic madness' and a poem that explodes across the page in a blaze of typographical glory; and Marc Devade by a study of chromatic painting written in the form of a theorem. The texts have been well translated and edited. The editors and translators have coped well with what they charitably describe as *Tel Quel*'s 'vexing' tendency to cite material without giving a source. A very good chronology is included, but the brief introduction needs to be supplemented by reference to ffrench's *The Time of Theory* (1995), by far the best of the recent crop of histories and studies of the journal.

Although *Tel Quel* began as a literary project, it soon took on political overtones and underwent an extraordinary evolution from relative apoliticism to tactical alliances with the PCF (and a concomitant failure or refusal to take May '68 seriously). A period of virulent Maoism followed, with a special issue on China in 1972 and the proclamation of a home-grown Cultural Revolution, complete with Big Character posters in the editorial offices in the rue Jacob. Enthusiasm for China and for Marxism itself faded in the wake of revelations about the Gulag, and gave way in 1977 to a celebration of the pluralism of America.

All Parisian intellectual life was there. Now that Sollers is a man of letters in the grand tradition with a power base in the House of Gallimard, and Kristeva a defender of the France of Montesquieu and De Gaulle who applies a domesticated psychoanalysis to the gospels and Mariolatry, one can only wonder where the revolution went. The editors express the hope that their collection will demonstrate the case of the journal's enduring value; it reads more like a fascinating documentary history of something that is no more, as such.

In many ways, *Tel Quel* was always a classic instance of the theoretical avant-gardism that sees, in Kristeva's phrase, a revolution in poetic writing as the precondition for, or even a substitute for, political revolution. The central element in what is sometimes (and not always kindly) called *telquelism* is a concept of writing influenced by both Barthes and Derrida. Writing is viewed primarily as a material practice with its own rules, and not as the reproduction or reflection of an external reality filtered through an authorial consciousness. After an early flirtation with the *nouveau roman*, even Robbe-Grillet was criticized for his 'traditionalism' and in the name of 'textual writing'. Writing is, as Kristeva puts it, a productive activity that takes place within an intertext or a network of poetic texts without beginning or end. Eventually, writing becomes a block of prose – the unpunctuated text of Sollers's unclassifiable and seemingly endless *Paradis* – and finally an undifferentiated entity with strong religious overtones. Throughout *Tel Quel*'s history, writing and reading are viewed as parallel activities, or even aspects of the same textual activity. Traditional boundaries between genres are blurred as writing becomes theory, and theory writing. One of the most exciting, and at times infuriating, things about reading *Tel Quel* was always the near-impossibility of knowing whether this was theory, fiction or poetry.

Although *Tel Quel* went through many changes, its canon or pantheon of authors remained remarkably constant: Lautréamont, Ponge, Mallarmé, Céline and Artaud are, in various guises, present from beginning to end. There is also a constant absence. The *Reader* contains only two allusions to Sartre. They both occur in Barthes's 1978 interview with *Tel Quel*, and Barthes speaks here of Sartre as though he belonged to some distant past that has gone for ever. *Tel Quel* was by no means alone in ignoring or disparaging Sartre, who was denounced as a historicist, criticised (notably by Lacan, who should have know better) as

a latter-day Cartesian, vilified as a petty-bourgeois humanist. To all of which, one can only reply by citing the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*: yes, Paul Valéry was a petty-bourgeois intellectual, but not all petty-bourgeois intellectuals were Paul Valéry. Sartre was in fact still a presence in 1978. The third part of his *Idiot of the Family* had appeared only six years earlier. For Manfred Frank, Sartre's study of Flaubert, which opens with the question 'What can we know of a man, today?', is the masterpiece that allows us to see the continuing relevance of what Schleiermacher called 'technical interpretation' or the complete understanding of style.

Born in 1945, Frank is a prolific scholar, but woefully little of his work has appeared in English translation to date. A translation of *What is Neo-Structuralism?* appeared in the USA in 1984 and an essay on 'self-presence' is included in David Woods's *Derrida: A Critical Reader*. His extensive writings on romanticism and hermeneutics, and his editions of Schleiermacher, remain untranslated. The appearance of the four essays collected here is therefore greatly to be welcomed, and Andrew Bowie's excellent introduction should do a lot to make Frank a more familiar name. The same author's important *From Romanticism to Critical Theory* provides a broader and more detailed overview to the tradition in which Frank is working. That Frank is such an unknown quantity is, perhaps, an effect of the dazzle of a so-called 'French theory', which sometimes suggests that Heidegger was the only German philosopher since Hegel. It is also a rather sad reflection on the state of German studies in Britain.

Frank proposes a return to both hermeneutics and a theory of the subject, a category of the understanding much maligned by *Tel Quel* and associates. Hermeneutics is described not as the excavation or recovery of textual meaning, but rather as the creation of meaning through an understanding and transformation of the text. The invocation of Schleiermacher, the Romantic tradition and Sartre provides the basis for a critique of Derrida's deconstruction that is all the more effective in that Frank is not entirely unsympathetic to it. His main criticism is that Derrida's focus on the critique of 'self-presence' means that he addresses only one of the traditions that determine the idea of individuality: the thesis, exemplified by Hume, that individuality is an unchanging core of selfhood. This is the basis for his strictures against the metaphysics of self-presence that is supposedly central to the Western tradition. Frank argues that an alternative notion of the individual subject can be found in a tradition rooted in German Romanticism and the thesis that the subject is not given, but a self-positing structure that is constituted by an absence or a lack. It is the concept of lack that provides the link with hermeneutics: the lack of natural meaning forces the individual into the path of creative interpretation, to project meaning just as the individual life-project is projected into the future. Derrida's insistence on slotting Sartre into the tradition of self-presence is, according to Frank, a mutilation of this thought because it blurs the in-itself/for-itself distinction. It is only in bad faith, at the point of death or in deification, that the two coincide. Schleiermacher's 'immediate self-consciousness' exists on the basis of a principle that escapes it; for the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness,* what exists is what it is not and is not what it is. It 'nothings' itself. Existence is not self-presence, but separation or distance from oneself. This model, notes Frank, is not dissimilar to Derrida's 'iteration–transformation' or to his 'difference/deferral' structure. He adds, mildly but firmly, that 'Derrida appears not to notice this convergence' because of his fixation on self-presence. Frank's detailed explorations of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics presuppose great familiarity with the German philosophical tradition and make few concessions to the non-initiate. A full evaluation is best left to specialist Germanists; for others, the defence of Sartre is a timely reminder that there is life in the old dog yet.

David Macey

Scorn in the USA

Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1998. 159 pp., £12.50 hb., 0 674 00311 X.

For some on the Left, Rorty's thinking is execrable because in making truth a function of cultural convention he denies all scope for *Ideologiekritik* – for an interrogation of the mendacities, oppressions and distortions of liberal capitalist societies. For others on the Left, Rorty's thinking is execrable because of its derision of the idea that 'metaphysics' or 'rationality' are socially important enough for their continuous deconstruction to have any real political consequence. From either side the mud has stuck and Rorty, big fish though he is, is damned and fairly friendless among the radical establishment: at best an anti-theory spoilsport; at worst, an acquiescent and complacent apologist for the Western socio-political status quo.

It wouldn't be outrageous speculation to suppose that, valid or not, the regularity of such allegations provided a spur for this series of lectures, given at Harvard in 1997, on the trajectories of American left and liberal thinking during the past century. Reduced to a slogan, their message might be: Thinking theory to be publicly irrelevant, and being proud of America, do not necessarily make for an evasion of radical politics. More than that; 'achieving our country' (the phrase is culled from James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*) isn't just a redeemable aim, it's what good radical politics has always been about. Tacitly at least, the book seems an apologia for Rorty's own ethnocentric liberalism, as well as an endorsement of a tradition of activism which has undergone something of an eclipse since the 1960s.

At one level, the book's three lectures and two appendices make a narrative of that eclipse. To summarize: there is a distinctively American left-liberalism, typified in Whitman and Dewey and in the motivations of the urban labour movement in the first half of the century, neither self-consciously theoretical nor sceptical of romance. Pushing dreams and piecemeal actions rather than world-historical teleologies, it saw classlessness and equality, and thus America's moral identity, as ongoing projects still to be achieved. It was anti-Stalinist, pro-New Deal and pro-Cold War. It was rooted in practice, in participation, in reformism. Intellectuals and trade unionists worked together without schism.

This tradition got displaced, some time in the 1960s, by a coalescence of historical and attitudinal factors which pointed to the bankruptcy of 'American' politics. Vietnam, especially, galvanized a new intellectual Left, dissident and anti-mainstream, conceptually armed to reveal the systematics of late capitalism. This has culminated in the ascendance of what Rorty calls the 'cultural Left', a mainly academic constituency which has concentrated largely on drawing attention to the ways in which received American history and values have occluded difference in race and gender. To good effect, in many ways. Political correctness, Rorty observes, has made America a far better place.

But by and large this new Left has abdicated engagement with 'real' politics in favour of refusal, of blanket scorn for Western theory and practice and an unqualified celebration of the Other. It presumes that 'the higher your level of abstraction, the more subversive of the established order you can be', and retreats accordingly into a self-confirming world of endless conceptual novelty and avant-gardism. Meanwhile, inattention to everyday economic and ground-level inequalities has allowed right-wing populism like that of Pat Buchanan to sneak in and gain a foothold among the disenchanted white working class, and those feeling the effects of economic globalization – an audience to whom the cultural Left has very little constructively to say. It is resolutely mute about possible alternatives to the market economy, or about how to save and improve the welfare state.

A key distinction is made: the Left has turned from *agency* to *spectatorship*; from public activity to mocking, detached diagnosis. It isn't exactly a new allegation, but Rorty makes it very well. It would be more devastating if he did more to demonstrate why anything's particularly likely to unite in common cause blue-collar workers, feminists and the professoriat in (for instance) the 'liberal ironism' he propounds in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. The implication that he's a socialist fellow traveller is pushing it a bit. He's not. But whether or not his analysis is a

convincing response to the aforementioned charges of political quietism and over-sanguineness, there's a lot that's welcome in it.

Rorty is particularly adept at showing why much that is mandatory thinking in professedly radical academic circles just *isn't*, in terms of praxis, very radical at all; and how cultural and literary theorists have (curiously enough) tended to mirror logical positivism in assuming that appropriate disciplinary knowingness renders social hopes insignificant or naive. On the other hand, his meltdown of critique into a sort of romantic-utilitarian patriotism barely suffices as a programme for renewal. He identifies a hole all right, but it's hard to see how incremental, localized left-liberalism is going to fill it. And his pragmatist refusal to sanction theoretical inquiry is as guilty as, say, current Heideggerian thinking, of drastically undervaluing the critical worth of macro social-theoretical investigation of the relations between economy, public institutions, culture and concrete lived relations. Neither way does leftist critique find an adequate scope – not least when it comes to addressing the ambiguities of identity and patriotic allegiance.

But the acuity of this book lies in the questions it asks of the academic Left, rather than the accuracy of its social history, or its rather blithe reconstructive agenda (crudely, 'let's stop philosophizing and mobilize what's worthy in our national pride'). If the accused can breezily ignore those questions, then Rorty's case is proved, and the American 'cultural Left' is cut adrift. If they confront them, then a rather more promising set of relations between spectatorship and agency than Rorty's own might well be the result.

Gideon Calder

Something else entirely

Kate Bornstein, *My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely*, Routledge, New York and London, 1998. 292 pp., £12.99 pb., 0 415 91673 9.

Tom Digby, ed., *Men Doing Feminism*, Routledge, New York and London, 1998. xiv + 359 pp., £45.00 hb., £12.99 pb., 0 415 91625 9 hb., 0 415 91626 7 pb.

Joan Broadhurst Dixon and Eric J. Cassidy, eds, *Virtual Futures: Cyberotics, Technology and Post-Human Pragmatism*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998. xii + 125 pp., £14.99 pb., 0 415 13380 7.

John MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity: The Confusion of Sexual Genesis and Sexual Difference in Modern Society,* Open University Press, Milton Keynes and Philadelphia, 1998. viii + 168 pp., £42.50 hb., £13.99 hb., 0 335 19659 4 hb., 0 335 19658 6 pb.

Virtual Futures presents itself as a provocation. The duly provoked reviewer who expresses a sense of the book's badness no doubt risks coming across as the very figure whom its authors have set out to taunt and irk, one of 'those benign curmudgeons or academic humanists that the Unabomber found so touchingly harmless'. (This particular provocation comes in the very first paragraph of the Preface.) The volume draws on two conferences at Warwick University. There are some pieces by cyber-performance artists, but the editors and most of the authors are academic teachers and researchers, who will list their chapters in *curriculum vitae* and RAE returns. They will no doubt find merely curmudgeonly the observation that this is a very unscholarly and silly book. Many of them seem to have subsisted on a heavy diet of Deleuze and Guattari and Baudrillard, leavened only by abusively decontextualized gobbets of Marx and Benjamin and by the boring cyberpunk novels of William Gibson. This has left them underequipped for the production of historically informed cultural criticism. Criticism, presumably, remains the intention of the volume, and its pretensions are radical, or at least radical-chic. But even as they strike avant-gardist poses as 'cyberotic geographers' (Stephen Pfohl) or fans of machine-enhanced SM (Sadie Plant), our authors display a 'touching' faith in some most banal illusions: that the import of technological change can be grasped through an exclusive focus on its 'cultural' aspect, reductively understood as the solitary pleasure it may afford

well-to-do consumers in the overdeveloped world; that 'pleasure', provided it offends 'Mr and Mrs Vanilla-Sex Patriarch von Suburbia', will somehow herald or guarantee a promise of general emancipation; and that (un)critical criticism, if only its mode is modish enough, will magically burst the bounds of the circuits in which it is produced and consumed, and change the world which it hardly even pretends any longer to interpret. The case that intellectual work in the academy can affect 'power' – that thinking 'engenders shock waves' – has of course to be argued, in terms of the particular conjuncture. Nothing about *Virtual Futures* suggests that such an argument, which would necessitate consideration of shared ethical-political horizons and of social forces and movements, would be within the capacities of its authors any more than it would be to their taste.

The End of Masculinity and *Men Doing Feminism* are examples of academic work which both responds and seeks to contribute to the wider social change initiated by 'second-wave' feminism. *Men Doing Feminism* is a useful compendium of the discourses of identity politics in the North American academy (all the authors teach in the USA or Canada). Few contributions get beyond anecdote and assertion and many are depressingly self-congratulatory and narcissistic. Although the volume's editor and most of its contributors teach in philosophy departments, readers will find little substantial critical discussion of the nexus between epistemology, ascribed/self-chosen identity, and political discourses. The book runs foul of the usual anthological problems of brevity and repetitiousness, lacks the unity in variety which a clearer editorial guidance might have given, and on the whole rehearses well-established positions rather than developing or challenging them. In many chapters here, as generally in cultural studies of gender today, what were once labelled 'deviant' sex/gender positions are coming to acquire a somewhat paradoxical normative force in the critique, and self-critique, of a 'masculinity' still construed as monolithic. (This is the premiss, too, of Kate Bornstein's *Gender Workbook*, a jokey self-help manual written from the standpoint of an mtf transsexual, offered as part of Routledge's 'gender studies/cultural studies' list). Heterosexual men are increasingly urged to become, in Sandra Harding's phrase, 'ex-gendered persons'. Neither this recommendation, nor the general assumption that queer and transsexual theories/identities are axiomatically 'de-gendered', strikes me as self-evident. It's one of the frustrations of *Men Doing Feminism* that the opportunity is not taken to subject this now familiar line to the sustained, explicit discussion which it merits.

John McInnes's *The End of Masculinity* offers a substantial argument, but one that I found confused. McInnes's central claim is that the emergence of 'gender' as a category, which he dates back to Hobbes, permits the full implication of social contract theory's critique of patriarchalism to be forestalled. The real natural limits of society (in sexual genesis, birth and mortality) are repressed, and displaced onto the fact of sexual dimorphism; and this allows the social primacy of men to persist. Epistemologically and in terms of the history of ideas, I would take issue with McInnes's view that 'gender' has been primarily an ideologically prescriptive term, rather than a perhaps inadequate but still progressive descriptive and analytic concept of the distinction between biological sexual difference and the social and cultural differences built upon it. Still more questionably, McInnes asserts that if the social belief in gender is mistaken (however powerful), then 'gender does not exist'. The political moral he draws from this is not that we should take steps to free ourselves from any restrictive 'gender' we may think we have, but rather that we should just stop worrying about our identities in these terms – stop trying, for example, to develop more acceptable forms of 'masculinity'. 'We should not seek', he says (I wondered who this 'we' comprised), 'to change men's private identities'. Instead, 'we should demand their public support for sexual equality. We should demand that men challenge the sexual division of labour.' But in a society where the division of domestic labour remains very strongly gendered (McInnes rightly foregrounds the centrality of child care, and acknowledges that only a small minority of men take significant responsibility for this), how can men support this agenda of 'sexual equality' without implicating their 'private identities'? For McInnes, however, 'thinking of the personal as political simply represents the bureaucratization of personal life', and is part of an 'inexorable socialization of intimate relations' which ultimately serves the interests of the corporate state. That as a supporter of feminism he can calmly and without discussion quote George Orwell and D.H. Lawrence as defenders of the 'true self' against the instrumentalism of the public sphere confirms what is evident throughout the book: that its emphasis on theoretico-historical and socio-economic parameters unfortunately goes along with a very impoverished sense of gender's cultural meanings, mediations, pleasures and pains.

Martin Ryle

Bystander morality

Norman Geras, *The Contract of Mutual Indifference: Political Philosophy after the Holocaust*, Verso, London and New York, 1988. x + 181 pp., £15.00 hb., 1 85984 868 0.

This is a powerful book. Its strengths flow from both its rational argument and its ethical commitment. Its starting point is a well-known remark by Ian Kershaw: 'The road to Auschwitz was built by hate but paved with indifference.' Some of the worst crimes of the century were committed while a mass of bystanders remained passive and indifferent. However, this 'dead silence of unconcern' (Bauman) is not specific to the genocide against the Jews: indifference is deeply woven into the social fabric of modern life.

One of the most original and important of Geras's contributions is the attempt to deal with the implications of this 'bystander phenomenon' for normative theory: the stark contrast and moral tension between the enormous sufferings of some people and the black inaction of others. The logic of such situations can be best analysed, according to Geras, as a sort of contract, a *contract of mutual indifference*: if you do not come to the aid of others, you cannot reasonably expect others to come to your help in similar emergency. Of course, this model is not universal, but it nevertheless comes close enough to the actual state of affairs in our world. Reference to this model does not mean that one ignores the existence of altruistic behaviour; on the contrary, it should be cherished as the nucleus of an alternative world. But the dominant pattern is the contract of mutual indifference, a brutal moral reality that cannot be ignored.

For Geras a political philosophy that does not deal with this issue is inadequate, and theories of rights, conceptions of justice and visions of utopia that do not include a pervasive ethics of mutual aid are incoherent. The only way to escape the moral darkness of mutual indifference is through a culture based on a generalized obligation for the security and well-being of others. Now, while liberal culture – intimately linked to an economic system where the wealth of some is obtained through the hardship of many – underwrites moral indifference, an alternative moral landscape, which could be given the name of socialism, would emphasize mutual concern and mutual help. Such an alternative social ethics does not substitute for political change; on the contrary, it is scarcely thinkable without new economic and social relations. But it has its specific autonomy and cannot be reduced to structural conditions.

The argument proposed in the main essay of the book is further explored in two other articles dealing specifically with the shortcomings of the socialist and Marxist traditions to which the author himself belongs. A fourth, shorter piece is largely a summary of the polemics with Rorty's foundationless views on progress, developed in Geras's previous book, *Solidarity in the Conversation of Mankind*.

One of the great weaknesses of socialist theory – or at least of its dominant currents – is the unwillingness to accept, as a significant reality, the human capacity for evil. This is probably why Auschwitz – the most obvious example in our times of such capacity – has not left much of a mark on its moral and political philosophy. A shadow, from the very depths of the concentrationary universe, stretches across the socialist project, which inherited from the Enlightenment a linear view of progress, lacking insight into potential disaster.

This does not mean that one should give up on socialism; on the contrary, to accept the (capitalist) world as it is – receptive to atrocity and overpopulated with bystanders – is to prolong a state of grave danger. But this hope, which implies a wager on the better human qualities, cannot ignore the dark side of human nature. It must conceive progress not as a linear advance but as a permanent battle.

This weakness is to be found in most Marxist reflections on the Holocaust – illustrated here by Ernest Mandel's writings. While emphasizing his regard for and intellectual debt to the Trotskyist leader, Geras highlights the shortcomings of his attempt to explain the Shoah. Mandel rightly perceived the intimate link between capitalism – as a system based on oppression, hatred and the contract of mutual indifference – and barbarism. But one cannot explain the singularity of the Nazi genocide against the Jews just by referring, as Mandel does, to the brutal methods of imperialism. Trotsky was one of the very few thinkers who predicted, in 1938, the impending Jewish catastrophe, the 'physical extermination of the Jews' (his own words) in future world war. He was able to do so because he understood Nazism not only as the 'undigested barbarism of capitalist society' but also as a sort of 'uncontrolled madness' (in Primo Levi's words), of primitive savagery similar to the one he had perceived

many years before when describing a pogrom in his book *1905*. The term 'barbarism' is transhistorical and not specific to capitalism. And the same applies to this sinister component of the Shoah barbarism, described not only by survivors but also by many historians as the 'compelling lust for killing'.

Geras's argument is persuasive: any attempt to understand Auschwitz has to take into account not only social and historical conditions – capitalism above all – but also potentialities for cruelty and evil which have a more permanent, 'transhistorical' nature. However, it seems to me that by emphasizing this aspect he runs the risk of missing the specific character of the Holocaust. Is human cruelty transhistorical, what is so unique in the Nazi crimes? What distinguishes them from so many other acts of barbarism in human history? Is it only a question of the scale of the crime?

To some extent, the answer could be 'yes': to the extent that the Shoah was a sort of monstrous pogrom, a gigantic unleashing of the lust for murder by thousands of perpetrators. But there is another, quite different aspect, which is specifically modern: the cold-blooded, carefully planned, 'rationally' organized, administratively implemented, industrially executed mass extermination, which had in the gas chambers of Auschwitz its paradigmatic manifestation. The *modern* nature of the Holocaust is a new and unprecedented phenomenon, of a quite different character from the old, premodern and preindustrial forms of cruelty and savagery. Geras does not ignore this aspect of the Shoah, but he tends to reduce it to a technical issue: a question of the modern 'structures and resources' without which the whole enterprise 'would have been much more difficult, if not actually impossible'.

But the issue is surely much deeper: following the insights of the Frankfurt School, Hannah Arendt and Zygmunt Bauman, one has to take into account the modern ethos, the instrumental rationality, the administrative–industrial spirit of the enterprise, which radically distinguishes it from the uncontrolled outbursts of murderous joy. If we add to this the passivity of the bystanders – expression of an indifference deeply woven into the social fabric of modern life – we must admit that the modern bureaucratic-capitalist culture is as important, if not more so, to understanding the singularity of the Holocaust as the transhistorical human propensity for barbarism.

Michael Löwy

Being minded

Jennifer Hornsby, *Simple Mindedness: In Defense of Naive Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1997. 265 pp., £23.50 hb., 0 674 80818 5.

Most of the material published in this collection of essays has been published before, but it took the bringing of it together in a single volume to make clear the contours of a distinctive position in contemporary philosophy of mind. Hornsby is firmly placed within the analytic tradition, but resists the contemporary orthodoxies in terms of which the mind is theorized. On the orthodox view, 'the basis of our everyday understanding of one another is susceptible of correction and refinement by experts in some specialist field where empirical considerations of some non commonsensical kind can be brought to bear.' This orthodoxy sees our psychological characteristics as natural kinds, whose essential characteristics will emerge from empirical investigations and whose legitimacy depends on their being appropriately anchored within a physicalist science. In opposition to this picture, Hornsby offers us a 'naive naturalism'. Minded beings are 'simply elements of the natural world', whose existence in no way commits us to mysterious immaterial substance. What is resisted is that a privileged or exhaustive characterization of this world is provided by physicalist science; 'there can be a conception of "nature" to which humanity is not inimical. This, in my terms, is naive nature' (p. 8). There are clear commonalities here with the work of John McDowell.

As Hornsby pursues her own robustly anti-reductionist agenda, the philosopher whose work she engages with most directly is Donald Davidson. Throughout most of the essays, the anchorage of psychological concepts in a distinctive holistic, normative and rationalizing framework of explanation is taken for granted. However, she opposes Davidson's physicalism, marked by his token identity theory, which claims that each mental event is identical with some event describable in the vocabulary of physical science: 'I am resisting the idea that the events we recognise in taking a view of minded beings are available to a conception of how things are in nature independent of the minded beings there.' Once we see this as the motivation, the papers

on ontology that form the first part of this volume, and reflect Hornsby's earlier work, are given a point and direction which when read individually it was often difficult to detect.

Davidson's physicalism is motivated by a preoccupation that drives much of the contemporary picture. How do we make room for the causal efficacy of the mental within a world in which all causal interactions are grounded at the micro-particular level? For many anti-reductionists this issue is avoided by considering rationalizing explanations to be of a *sui generis* non-causal kind. Hornsby, however, accepts that causal notions are in play here. She defuses the physicalist motivation partly by refusing the identification between physical movements and the acts which our everyday understandings concern; and partly by rejecting such a unified conception of causality. The causal implications of our psychological explanations are of an everyday rather than a scientific kind. They may be supported by rough generalizations, but there is no assumption that empirical work will tighten these into strict laws. They are vindicated, not by their micro-particulate anchorage, but rather by the intelligibility they bestow on the actions they explain.

The picture that emerges from these essays is, then, something like this. We use psychological modes of description to pick out interrelated phenomena directly: actions, speech, mental states and modes of characterizing the environment in which the agent is placed. These conceptualizations enable explanations in which actions and other states are seen as rational and appropriate responses to the world. The teachability and projectibility of such patterns of conceptualization and explanation support the claim that here we are dealing with real features of the world, whose ontological status seems no less robust than those picked out within a scientific framework.

For some contemporary analytic theorists such a position will need to address directly the metaphysical question of how such a mode of conceptualization relates to the scientific one – a question Hornsby acknowledges but does not pursue. Here, however, I want to consider a rather different issue, linked to Hornsby's engagement with an exclusively analytic tradition. Some of the objections to reductionism she voices involve resistance to the view that any real phenomena must be intelligible from an objective and impersonal perspective. This is the perspective which she associates with scientific narratives. She claims, rather, that 'accounts in terms of what a person thinks and wants are fitted to provide explanations for those who share with that person a point of view on the world.' Nonetheless the perspectivity of the psychological, its anchorage in a subjectivity constituted by a subject having a point of view onto the world, is left curiously unattended to. The upshot is that, despite avowals to the contrary, for Hornsby, as indeed for Davidson, the personal rationalistic model of explanation, though quite distinct from the impersonal scientific one, remains third-personal. It consists in the recognition of distinctive patterns capturable only with intentional notions, but for which attention to the subjectivity of the agents seems to be playing no essential role.

This marks a difference between the work of Hornsby and that of John McDowell. McDowell recognizes that the world is experienced as salient to us, making certain responses apt or appropriate. Understanding action requires us to engage with the subjectivity of another, to grasp how her actions are an appropriate response to the way the world appears. This leads to a connection between McDowell's writings and work in the phenomenological and hermeneutic tradition, which he acknowledges in his references to Gadamer. For it is exactly at this point, in its exploration of subjectivity, that contemporary anti-reductionist philosophy of mind is most in need of resources from this alternative tradition. It will be interesting to see if Hornsby, in trying to make the notion of a point of view do some work within her framework, will move in the same direction.

Kathleen Lennon

Interminable crisis?

Christoph Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida,* trans. Neil Solomon, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1998. xiii + 310 pp., £27.95 hb., 0 262 13340 7.

The Sovereignty of Art attempts a semiotic reconstruction of Adorno's account of aesthetic experience with the aim of establishing a critique of reason. In mounting this critique, Menke follows Derrida's problematization of a discursive rationality which is modelled on the successful functioning of semiotic processes. The book was first published in Germany in 1988, in an intellectual context shaped by the Habermasian reading of the grounding of Adorno's pessimistic social critique in an illegitimate acceptance of the transcendental logic of subject and object. Menke's reading of Adorno accepts Habermas's replacement of such logic with a model of reason based on inter-

subjective communicative praxis. However, following Albrecht Wellmer's concerns regarding the effectiveness of this linguistic overcoming of Adorno, Menke attempts to introduce a sense of crisis into the intersubjective model of reason. *The Sovereignty of Art* gives an account of a negative moment in the effective functioning of discursive experience which neither dissolves the possibility of communicative success nor incorporates transcendental presuppositions.

Adorno's concept of aesthetic negativity is examined at length in the technically formidable first half of the book. Menke's argument is that Adorno offers a confused but essentially correct interpretation of the structure of modern aesthetic experience. In his effort at clarification, Menke emphasizes Adorno's reliance on a Weberian account of modernity, which is characterized by an increasing specialization of discourses producing separate, autonomous modes of experience. Menke thus adopts Adorno's antinomial situation of aesthetics. Modern aesthetic discourse is shaped by an historically inherited antinomy in which aesthetic reflection is claimed to be both one discourse among others and a special form of discourse which exceeds the limits of rational discourse. The concept of negativity finds its significance in the resolution of this antinomy of aesthetic reflection.

As an autonomous discourse, aesthetic reflection must have its own particular logical structure, yet the claim that it exceeds the conditions of discursivity and is sovereign with regard to other forms of discourse makes it hard to see how such autonomy can be maintained. Menke seeks the resolution of this antinomy in the grounding of aesthetic autonomy as a negation of other discourses. However, Adorno's approach to aesthetics was motivated by the idea that aesthetic objects offer a negatively refracted, social and historical critique of what he saw as the dominant form of an instrumentalized instantiation of reason. Menke, on the other hand, strips all reference to the social and historical away from aesthetic negativity. A deconstructive picture emerges in which artworks allow one to discern the processual character of the experiential enactment of deferred semiotic processes of understanding in general.

Using this insight, Menke produces a concept of beauty which attempts to account for the distinctive grounds of aesthetics as a discourse in terms of its experiential subversion of other discourses. Beauty is the directly normative experience of the subversion of other modes of understanding which, within aesthetic discourse, occurs only as the self-subversion of other modes of understanding. The antinomy of modern aesthetic experience is thus resolved by viewing aesthetic negativity as the condition of aesthetic autonomy. Aesthetic negativity is used to respond to the threat posed by a nonaesthetic negativity to the stability of rational discourse, using Derrida's early essay on Bataille. The vehicle for Menke's critique here is an excessive concept of sovereignty through which he attempts to establish that all understanding involves an infinite deferral of meaning and that such reference to infinity is only explicable in terms of the aesthetic enactment of negation. Derrida's aestheticization of a negative moment of unsublatable difference in an economy of general textuality locates aesthetic negativity in all understanding. Menke's prohibition on heteronomous claims for aesthetics leads him to insist that aesthetic experience is untranslatable into other modes of experience. However, because he believes he has established the discursive autonomy of aesthetic experience as a negation of other discourses, Menke is in a position to say that nonaesthetic negativity is only ever appreciable as an aesthetic experience, and as such aesthetic negativity functions as a 'disruptive crisis' for reason: 'Aesthetic negativity ... is in no relationship of interplay with nonaesthetic reason but is instead in a relationship of interminable crisis.'

The negativity Menke allows into nonaesthetic understanding is a moment of aesthetic enactment in the processes of understanding, the irresolubility of which is supposed to throw reason into crisis. Paradigmatically, it is the experience of art that 'represents

a crisis for our functioning discourses'. Yet Menke's theory of aesthetic experience is so formal in its restriction to the other discourses which frame its autonomy that the experience of art cannot figure in the crisis it is used to establish.

Andrew Fisher

Faith in the gift

Judith Still, *Feminine Economies: Thinking Against the Market in the Enlightenment and the Late Twentieth Century*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997. x + 206 pp., £40.00 hb, 0 7190 4555 X.

In these work-driven times an opportunity to think against the tide of *homo oeconomicus* is welcome. *Feminine Economies* sets out to counter the economism of the late twentieth century by tracing the logic of the gift, as that which is both 'our myth', in Baudrillard's terms, and yet a 'utopic horizon': the imagining of unalienated interpersonal relations based upon generosity, a giving to the other 'without return'. Beginning with a rapid move through responses in French thinking (Bourdieu, Lévi-Strauss, Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard, Derrida) to the seminal work of anthropologist Marcel Mauss, in which primitive societies are seen to participate in gift exchange that is uneconomic, Judith Still asks whether the assertion of the gift remains 'ethnology's noble savage' (Lyotard), and to what extent it is nonetheless recuperable within what might be seen as a 'feminine' economy (Irigaray, Cixous, Derrida). She explores the ways in which earlier discussions of the just state and social virtue, from Plato's *Republic* to the works of Rousseau, question the workings of the market and private property through the logic of the gift. Texts as seemingly diverse as More's *Utopia*, Montaigne's account of the Brazilian Tupinamba, 'On the Cannibals', and Diderot's *Supplement to Bougainville's 'Voyage'* on Tahitian culture share a formulation of an economy of abundance and elaboration of alternative systems of labour that undermine the tenets of the market paradigm even as they might serve, in primitivist and libidinalized form, to hold it in place.

Central to Still's argument is the comparison of the culture of the mid-eighteenth century, when the response to the inequalities of the emergent capitalist system manifested itself in the form of 'beneficence', with the ethical turn of the present moment. It is a connection which is not fully explored; the issue of the feminization of culture then and now, for example, involves questions of the democratization of consumption and its ethical underpinning in ways that are more extensive (and significant for gendered relations) than suggested here. In the utopian novel by Sarah Scott, *Millennium Hall*, and the works of Rousseau, Still suggests, beneficence represents a midpoint between the rational calculation of the market and the superabundance of generosity, an 'attempt to combine rational regulation with passionate expansion of the human subject'. While Scott locates such generosity in relations among women, the sexual politics of Rousseau's 'otherly economic thinking' are famously more contradictory, since women are the site of both superabundance and the *pudeur* of regulation. Employing her own 'passionate' ethics of reading, Still sees Rousseau's description of his earliest memory – being in the place of his mother on his father's lap – as the adoption of a 'feminine guise', an identification with a certain maternality, and thus 'a dream of a feminine economy' which it is possible to trace in his refusal of commerce. This homoerotic scenario begs a question raised in Derrida's recent *The Politics of Friendship* (with which *Feminine Economies* might be seen to be in anticipatory dialogue) as to what extent women are admitted into the affective fraternity of the just state; whether the modest woman, as in Kant, is a brother to man, or remains completely excluded.

Still is careful to set out the difficulty of connecting gift economies to the feminine: both because, as Irigaray has notably explored, it is women who have been exchanged and the object of a sacrificial logic, and because their unpaid labour has often been read as an essential form of generosity rather than a sign of their oppression. Yet she argues that aspects of giving historically associated with women's work should be positively valorized. Her thinking against the market, which is rich and provocative, ultimately embraces the utopianism of French feminist discourse, in which the construction of a new feminine identity might be related to the necessity of having faith in the gift, an imagining that takes place alongside other forms of struggle. My own hermeneutically suspicious mind would argue not yet; but, then again, this is the end of the millennium.

Carol Watts