Bluffer's guide

Timothy Brennan, *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005. 360 pp., £19.00 hb., 0 231 13730 3.

It's the evening of 8 August 1974, and I'm watching Richard Nixon resign from the US presidency with the lack of grace that distinguished his entire political career. Just after Nixon has uttered his fateful words, grim-faced news reporters tour a traumatized nation, striking gravitas-laden poses next to eerily quiet scenes in the West, the South, the Midwest, and so on, until they arrive finally in Harvard Square, a few miles from my home, where they are dancing in the streets. Bliss was it to be alive in what turned out to be not political dawn, but political dusk. For today Nixon's policies would place him on the leftward reaches of the Democratic Party. The 1970s turned out to be the moment when the forward march of social democracy was halted, when the Right took over the reins of ideological leadership and led popular debate into reactionary territory that had remained unvisited for decades. Colloquially known as the 'Me Decade' at the time – who could have predicted how shallow its narcissism would look compared to what followed? – the 1970s witnessed the onset of the hegemony that has rendered much of the Left helpless and disorientated.

Helpless, but not speechless. While the poor have starved and the weak have been pummelled, intellectuals in the humanities have laid waste to countless forests in their attempts to think through the political meaning of the long post-1960s moment. One of the most striking products of this meditation has been 'theory', which Timothy Brennan claims coalesced as a discursive formation at precisely this moment of the 'turn', 1975–80. According to Brennan, these are the years when 'theory' acquired its typical style, its defining interests and topoi and its lasting political orientation, an odd combination of left-wing braggadocio and actual conservatism. 'Theory' is the moment when intellectuals in the humanities make all the wrong choices and abandon the social-democratic politics of the 1960s for the identity politics to come.

I therefore ought to like Brennan's book, but I don't. There are two principal reasons. First, it is sloppy in its argument and is willing to cut far too many corners to score a political point. If this were a short political text, when time was of the essence and the immediate stakes high, it would be fair enough; but in a glossy, beautifully produced book from Columbia University Press, there are no excuses. Just a few examples should suffice. Faced with the fact that Judith Butler, a figure unquestionably central to 'theory' today, doesn't fit the model of identity politics Brennan ascribes to 'theory' as such (indeed, makes a point of doubting it), Brennan reverts to the argument that 'her work still permits the notion, certainly adhered to by her followers, that the critic must be of a certain race, gender or sexual articulation in order to comment authoritatively on political issues pertaining to the same'. 'Permits the notion' is a weak way of admitting that what Butler actually says is inconvenient for his argument.

One chapter later, Brennan needs to demonstrate that contemporary theory doesn't take socialist culture seriously. The 'scorn' with which it treats socialist realism must therefore be unmasked as mere prejudice: 'socialist realism turns out to be a rupture in taste between those whose hands are calloused and those who take their literary agents out to lunch at expensive restaurants'. A little research would have revealed, however, that in fact 'those whose hands were calloused' in the Soviet Union belonged to the Proletkult movement that Stalin ditched, with all his customary delicacy, in favour of an aesthetic, socialist realism that put Russia's traditional intelligentsia (Gorky, Aleksei Tolstoi) back in the driver's seat.

One last example: in order to seal his political polemic, Brennan claims to have found common ground between the New Left movements of the 1960s and the New Christian Right that arose in response. To do so, he reverts to the use of vague, merely formal parallels: 'The NCR [New Christian Right] and 1960s youth both built their first underground constituencies on AM radio, both distrust secular government, both attempt to legislate morality and both exist in a 'vigorous yet marginalized subculture, strong in the faith'. One page later, he will himself make the point that vitiates this argument: 'in politics *formal* similarities are ethically irrelevant', but will not, in the interest of argumentative consistency, allow it press on the absurd comparison hazarded a page earlier.

These shortcuts, and a strange habit of referring to the naivety of today's graduate students as evidence (you get the impression Brennan has been scarred by some very uncomfortable seminars) make otherwise excusable errors stand out: 'Honneker' as leader of the GDR, a strange creature called 'Orthodox Catholicism', the description of Routledge as 'quasi-commercial' (which will be sad news for the shareholders at Taylor & Francis) and the inclusion of Walter Benjamin in an already overgenerous list of 'left Hegelians'. (As if to ensure the errors are harder to find, the book also features the worst index to have graced an academic book for many years.)

The other reason for not trusting this book is that while Brennan continually upbraids cultural theory for political views that are lightweight and self-deceiving, what he offers us in exchange is one-dimensional and equally insubstantial. If you are going to harangue the opposition for their lack of political savvy and 'worldliness', you set a high standard for yourself, and nowhere in the text does Brennan meet that standard.

Despite these faults, Brennan offers two substantial arguments in support of his polemic, which, though I think they are wrong, are made seriously and in good faith. The first is that cultural theory has displaced what Brennan calls 'cultures of belief' (political movements based on shared commitments and positions) with 'cultures of being' (politics based on received, or supposedly received, identities). The second is that cultural theory has an intrinsic hostility to the state and to state power, and as a result it has not only vacated the field of responsible political action, but has strengthened the right-wing assault on social democracy. Each argument occupies roughly half of the book, and each is pursued not directly but in a series of related case studies. Some of these case studies are devoted to the use cultural theory makes of concepts like 'cosmopolitanism' or 'globalization'. The focus is on postcolonial studies throughout, which is reasonable given Brennan's own expertise. One is a critique of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*. And each half of the book features an extended recuperation of an iconic figure who has been made into a pillar of postcolonial cultural theory – Edward Said in the first, Gramsci in the second. The upside of this less systematic approach is that one can learn a good deal from the studies while remaining unconvinced by the larger argument.

The first part, 'Belief and Its Discontents', tilts at identity politics and its fixation on ethnicity. It's in many respects a shrewd move: Brennan senses that so long as the political commitments of the Left are deemed the product of disembodied reason, they will always lose out to the apparently thicker, more elaborate commitments that, we have been assured, flow easily from subaltern or subcultural identities. But he doesn't elaborate on what a culture of belief looks like, or refer us to the excellent social histories that have described actually existing socialist cultures (in the manner of Raphael Samuel or Geoff Eley). Instead, he points to the achievements of social-democratic intellectuals, motivated by 'beliefs' not 'being', and to their persistent misrepresentation in public and critical discourse. One such is Salman Rushdie, whose critique of Thatcher's Britain gets lost in attempts to place him as Indian, Muslim or Western. But Brennan is at his best when recapturing the intellectual trajectory of Edward Said, whom he slowly and persuasively detaches from the role assigned to him in later postcolonial studies, that of the Foucauldian scourge of Western reason.

What attracts Brennan in particular is Said's insistence on the priority of 'affiliation' – political commitments made on the basis of moral and political judgement – over 'filiation' – the sense of ethnic belonging. That said, 'belief' seems an odd choice of words. Not least because the most dramatic, widespread and historically impressive cultures of belief are arguably the great world religions, which distinguished themselves from local ethnic devotion by requiring only belief from their adherents, but at the same time comprehensively informed art, culture, diet and in general 'a whole way of life'. Yet religion figures for Brennan as only one more mode of being, as if 'being' stood for a certain brittleness of conviction, rather than a characterization of its origin or nature.

And doesn't Marxist argument, for Brennan the paradigm of belief, ground left-wing positions in being;

isn't this what distinguished it from the utopian socialisms of its (and our) day? But this is very much beside the point here, because in the end Brennan isn't interested in elucidating the conceptual difference between a culture of belief and a culture of being. The former serves merely as a code word for an older Left, the latter a marker of what has displaced it. '[T]argeted identities have been enlisted to crush social democratic belief cultures': why anyone believes in social democracy is not really the point.

Which brings us to the second half of Brennan's book, 'The Anarchist Sublime', in which the political case against cultural theory is made more directly. A chapter on the 'cosmopolitanism' debate intimates that cultural theorists are not thinking carefully about how their discourse intersects with the interests and activities of the American state, and the long chapter devoted to *Empire* accuses it of an infantile anti-statism, derived in large part from the Autonomia movement. Yet in many respects the crucial chapter of the whole book is neither these nor the final, lengthy discussion of Gramsci's heritage. It's the relatively brief opening to the second half, entitled 'The Organizational Imaginary', where Brennan comes closest to laying his cards on the table.

Admittedly, a couple of those cards have been sitting there for a while. We've known right from the start that it's the Marxist tradition that's suffered the most grievously from cultural theory, and Brennan asks us to agree 'for the moment' that Marxism means 'social democratic politics and left Hegelian critique'. It turns out to be a rather long moment, particularly as most of us will have spent the time wondering why anyone would equate Marxism with social democracy (or, for that matter, narrow its intellectual legacy to left Hegelianism). 'The Organizational Imaginary' promises to end the suspense, telling us why 'theory' is, in fact, right-wing in its politics, and how it emerged in the dreaded 'turn' of 1975–80.

Does Brennan hold a winning hand, or is he just bluffing? Interestingly, he opens with a critique of the campaign against sexual harassment, a moment when 'culturalist political theory' has taken the road he's suggesting, harnessing the power of the state for political ends. Needless to say, they have got it all wrong. Theory's progressive ideals have produced reactionary outcomes because the problem is not really anti-statism, but an aversion to politics as such, which means 'taking responsibility' for Brennan in a Weberian sense: surveying the field of battle, calculating the consequences of different courses of action, using the means that contradict the ends when things get dirty. And why is theory averse to politics, conceived of in this sense? The years 1975–80 will not answer this question. For this, we have to go back, of course, to the 1960s.

Brennan's genealogy of cultural theory, on which arguably the whole book depends, occupies a page and a half, but it is nonetheless revealing. The youth of the 1960s, we're told, 'borrowed from the language of the pre- and postwar avant-gardes at the same time that [they] borrowed from the party solidarities of international communism'; given that they were, as Brennan calls them a chapter later, 'Dissident youth, sick and tired of the world', the former tendency won out, crippling cultural theory to this day.

Let's assume that by 1960s youth Brennan is thinking of the American New Left. Very little of it will fit the description. Were the youth who ran the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in the civil rights movement merely dissidents, sick and tired of constant humiliation, legally enforced poverty and state violence? Weren't the women who led feminism sick and tired of their continuous exploitation? Weren't those who organized against the war in Vietnam sick and tired of the colonial arrogance and mass slaughter they witnessed every day? For none of these movements can be explained by the 'party solidarities of international communism'. They stood for new solidarities, even if the problems they addressed had been a topic of concern in the existing Left.

Yet the other half of Brennan's equation, celebrating the traditional solidarities, is, in fact, the more disturbing one. The tradition abandoned by cultural theory is indeed protean. First described as 'social democracy and left Hegelianism', it acquires more substance when we learn that it includes not only the thinkers commonly known as 'Western Marxism' but also the 'Third International Marxists', of whom only a couple are named, and all except Gramsci mentioned only fleetingly. But one element of the 'left traditions of the interwar period' is mentioned once, in an offhand manner, but never even named: that is the tradition of murdering one's own citizens and comrades, suppressing political debate, invading other socialist countries and the rest of it – in short, Stalinism.

Brennan was thinking of the French, British and the Italian 1960s as well as the American variant, and we can only wonder at an account that ignores the degree to which those New Lefts were formed in reaction to the betrayals of actually existing Communism and the actually existing Communist parties. The latter's 'party solidarities' weren't rejected because young leftists were bored, and the resulting movements neither

rejected political organization as such, nor simply mimicked the forms bequeathed to them by historical Communism. If they did not limit themselves to thinking about how the Left should deploy state power, they had very good reasons for doing so.

Brennan wants cultural theory to return to the party solidarities and focus its attention on the acquisition and use of state power. If this is because he hasn't thought through the history of these solidarities, then his appeal to an 'organizational imaginary' is as vapid and rhetorical as the culturalist 'anarchism' (his word, not mine) it supposedly opposes. Words like 'solidarity', 'discipline' and 'action' don't add up to a politics, any more than 'subaltern' and 'dispersal' do. If he has thought through the history, and he really thinks the 1960s are about bored youth dissing the inherited solidarities, then we know a little more about the game he's playing: it's one where the rules are made to be broken, and the pot isn't worth winning.

Ken Hirschkop

Mobilizing globalizing

Tony Smith, *Globalisation: A Systematic Marxian Account*, Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2006. vii + 358pp., €89.00 hb., 90 04 14727 6.

At the heart of this book there is a tour de force of analysis and presentation. It consists in Tony Smith's 'rational reconstruction' of the 'most significant positions' in the globalization debate. These positions are expressed successively in what he calls the 'social-state', 'neoliberal', 'catalytic-state', 'democratic-cosmopolitan' and 'Marxian' models of globalization. The models have both an explanatory and a prescriptive dimension. On the one hand they claim to 'capture the essential features of the contemporary global order'. On the other they 'call for', 'advocate', 'insist' on or 'propose' various changes to bring that order more into line with the picture they project. The methodological framework for Smith's reconstruction is provided by what he calls 'systematic dialectics', a procedure he finds classically exemplified in Hegel and Marx. The twin pillars of this framework are the notions of 'immanent contradiction' and of 'determinate negation'. Thus, each model in turn succumbs to its own immanent contradictions and is negated by another that promises to resolve them. Their negation is determinate in the sense of being shaped by the specific character of the problems to be overcome. The series is brought to an end by the Marxian model, which is free of immanent contradictions and so does not need to be determinately negated. In the final chapter Smith switches his attention from models of capitalist globalization to the task of presenting and defending 'a Marxian model of socialist globalization'.

It is impossible to convey the character of Smith's account without looking in a little detail at the way the notions of 'immanent contradiction' and 'determinate negation' are put to work in it. His choice of a starting point is, however, fixed by another methodological principle he derives from Hegel and Marx. This is the principle of moving from more abstract and simple to more concrete and complex determinations. The 'social state', of which Rawls's theory is the paradigm, is, in Smith's view, the most abstract and simple model of globalization. Indeed it is only, as he admits, in a very wide sense that it counts as a model of globalization at all. For it conceives the global order 'as an aggregate of more-or-less-independent states and national economies, externally connected to each other in ways that do not substantively affect domestic structures and practices'. The main contradiction Smith detects here arises from the acceptance in the model of international trade and the freedom of economic agents. For cross-border transactions and the exercise of exit options by capital must, he suggests, undermine the capacity of the social state to discharge its key function of managing domestic markets. Smith recognizes that a number of alternative models may be seen as addressing this contradiction, and so determinate negation alone will not uniquely identify its successor. In this situation the principle of 'from abstract to concrete' has to be invoked once again. Thus, the choice falls on the simplest and most abstract of all relevant alternatives, the neoliberal model.

In this model the assumption of more-or-less independent national economies is dropped and the world market is placed at a centre of the picture. Smith identifies a number of immanent contradictions that now ensue. It will suffice for present purposes to note the two that yield a determinate negation in the sense of motivating the shift to the next model in his sequence. The first arises from the fact that, while the model

stresses the importance of technological dynamism, there must, in a neoliberal world, be systematic under-investment in the scientific research and development that underpins it. The market will not generate what is socially optimal in this regard and the minimal state is powerless to provide. The second contradiction is that while neoliberals claim to speak in the name of certain normative principles, such as global justice, the implementation of their ideas must yield results that are normatively unacceptable. In particular, it must generate economic insecurity and a loss of social cohesion and stability. What is specifically called for in these circumstances is a strong state that will pursue aggressive industrial and technology policies and impose controls to ensure that the functioning of markets is compatible with flourishing communities. These needs are addressed by the catalytic-state model, of which John Gray is taken by Smith to be the leading defender.

Gray is, however, in Smith's view, 'caught in a trap', in the incoherent position of accepting certain features of the neoliberal global order while denying their inevitable consequences. In particular, Gray acknowledges, and indeed stresses in his critique of Rawlsian social democracy, the reality of international capital mobility and the dependence of governments on international capital markets. The 'continuous plebiscites' these markets conduct on policy must, however, erode the ability of any particular government to fulfil its communitarian role. This process is, in Smith's view, already well advanced even in the case of Gray's best exemplars, Germany and Japan. What the dialectic now requires is a regime of global governance that subjects the world market to effective social regulation. This requirement is addressed in the democratic-cosmopolitan model of globalization, whose most effective defence is, Smith maintains, to be found in David Held's work. Held advocates a 'Charter of Rights and Obligations' which would, among other things, guarantee, throughout the global economy, rights to a basic income and to access to economic decision-making, together with social control of investment and controls on short-term flows of finance capital. Smith discusses these proposals in turn and argues that each comes to grief on the same rock, the continuing reality, accepted but downplayed by Held, of capitalist property and production relations. The fact that these relations are fatal for Held's project leaves the dialectic with no alternative but to envisage their abolition, a step explicitly taken in the culminating stage of the sequence, the Marxian model of globalization.

This is, in Smith's view, the only model that can give a coherent account of the central issue of the systematic relations between states and global markets. Indeed, with its arrival the immanent contradictions are displaced from models of globalization on to the object, the global order itself. These contradictions are expounded by Smith in terms of such concepts and theses derived from Marx as the law of value, the necessarily antagonistic relation of capital and wage-labour, the drive to appropriate surplus profit by technical innovation, and the tendency of the system to generate financial crises and crises of over-accumulation together with uneven development on a global scale. Smith argues that no conceivable form of capitalist state can overcome the effects of these factors. He is also at pains to deny that they can be overcome by post-Keynesian proposals, such as those of Paul Davidson, focused on the idea of a new form of world money. Davidson's case must, in Smith's view, founder on his continued attachment to the production and property relation of capitalism. This reinforces Smith's conclusion that the contradictions of the existing global order can be overcome only by a 'revolutionary rupture from the capital form'. In his final chapter he defends the feasibility and normative attractiveness of a form of socialist globalization founded on such a rupture. The account, drawn in essentials from the work of David Schweickart, provides for producer and consumer, but not capital or labour, markets. In addition, Smith suggests versions of Davidson's proposals for a world money and of Held's proposals for democratic cosmopolitan law and global social investment funds. These measures, though incompatible with capitalist social relations, would, Smith argues, prove their worth under socialism.

It should be clear, even from this summary, that Smith has found a most effective principle of organization for his material. His systematic dialectics of immanent contradiction and determinate negation serves, so to speak, as a spinal column along which the various models of globalization are perspicuously and comprehensively arranged. This gives his work a strikingly self-aware, architectonic character. Moreover, in dealing with specific opponents he is always a civil interlocutor, constantly seeking to meet them, in best dialectical fashion, on the ground of their strength. Hence, his verdicts, when they come, carry all the greater force and conviction. His account of a Marxian model of capitalist globalization is valuable in itself as an incisive updating of Marx's own analysis of capitalism. Finally, Smith's model of a socialist global order is as sophisticated and persuasive an attempt as one will find in the literature to deal with the central

question of the relationship between states and markets under socialism. Any moderately sympathetic reader is likely to think that he has, while fully acknowledging uncertainties and difficulties, shown that the balance of rational argument favours the view that such an order would be viable. This is in effect to say that it could sustain itself indefinitely if it could once be instituted. The question that now arises starkly is how it is to be instituted, how to get from here to there. It is not asked here in order to saddle Smith gratuitously with a vast problem to which, it may be, no one has at present any very convincing idea of the solution. The question surfaces at various points in his own discussion, and

that discussion offers at least some clues as to how it might be taken a little further.

It is true that a dialectic of models of globalization can offer little help directly. What is needed here, one might rather suppose, is a dialectic of the object of investigation, of the global reality itself. Yet the primacy of what is being modelled shows itself at various points in Smith's argument. It does so in the general formula for the contradictions he detects in every model of globalization short of the Marxian. For what he argues, to speak somewhat schematically, is that each of them accepts, indeed welcomes, dynamic features of capitalism, such as capital mobility or the drive for surplus profits through technical innovation, which, once given their head in the real world, are destructive of the normative appeal of the model in question and of its claim to represent a world that could reproduce itself over time. This is, however, to concede that the dialectic of the object, so far as it functions strategically in Smith's account, is the dialectic of capital. Indeed, with his usual objectivity he acknowledges as much. Thus, at the end of his book he asks whether his model of socialist globalization captures what Rawls called 'the deep tendencies and inclinations of the social world', and answers that it does not. For these continue 'to be defined by the social forms of global capitalism, best formulated in the Marxian model of capitalist globalization'.

Smith does not, however, leave us with this gloomy verdict. Instead he goes on to repeat a point he had argued for earlier, the somewhat abstract assurance that 'resistance to capital is part of the concept of capital'. More concretely, he suggests that in the contemporary world such resistance may take the form of an 'extended historical process whereby a transnational class "in itself" is transformed into a transnational class "for itself"'. This too is to take up a theme introduced earlier in the remark that the dynamic of capital 'creates the material conditions for new forms of collective transnational identities'. Moreover, at the beginning of the book Smith had signalled the crucial significance of the question of whether there will emerge 'social agents with the interests and capacities to engage effectively' in furthering a socialist global order. These are, of course, only hints and conjectures in need of systematic elaboration and defence. To provide that would in effect be to provide a dialectic of the object whose logic runs counter to the logic of capital. It is a large undertaking, not least because, as Smith also acknowledges with typical realism, 'At the present moment, new transnational capitalist class identities are undoubtedly being forged.'

Nevertheless, the Marxist tradition can provide some inspiration and motivation here. For one thing, it now seems quite generally acknowledged that what is truly living in Marx's own thought is his vision, most vividly expressed in *The Communist Manifesto*, of capitalism as a never-resting, world-transforming force, melting everything solid into air. To discern and articulate a socialist dialectic of reality against this background would amount in effect to providing the work on 'the world market and crises' that Marx projected in *Grundrisse* but never seriously embarked on, the work that was to exhibit the world market as the indispensable setting in which, for the first time, 'all the contradictions come into play'. It seems essential to have some functional equivalent for it if the tradition of thought Marx founded is ever to go beyond providing the best analysis of capitalism to making a practical contribution to an alternative global future. It may slightly ease one's sense of the enormity of the task to recognize that this could not possibly be the achievement of any single individual of whatever degree of genius but only of the work of many hands. Exercising the traditional prerogative of reviewers to say in which direction their author should turn next, it would surely be hard to better this one in Smith's case.

Joseph McCarney

Linguists of the world, unite!

Boris Groys and Michael Hagemeister, eds, *Die Neue Menschheit: Biopolitische Utopien in Russland zu Beginn des 20 Jahrhunderts*, trans. Dagmar Kasse, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt, 2005. 688 pp., €20.00 pb., 3 5182 9363 X.

Boris Groys and Aage Hansen-Löve, eds, *Am Nullpunkt: Positionen der russischen Avantgarde*, trans. Gabriele Leupold, Annelore Nitschke and Olga Radetzkaja, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt, 2005. 777 pp., €20.00 pb., 3 5182 9364 8.

Boris Groys, Anne von der Heiden and Peter Weibel, eds, *Zurück aus der Zukunft: Osteuropäische Kulturen im Zeitalter des Postkommunismus*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt, 2005. 892 pp., €16.00 pb., 3 5181 2452 8.

Boris Groys, *Das kommunistische Postskriptum*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt, 2006. 96 pp., €8.50 pb., 3 5181 2403 X.

The international research project 'The Postcommunist Condition' was launched at the ZKM (Karlsruhe/Germany) in 2003 by Boris Groys. In collaboration with the German publisher Suhrkamp, the project has so far resulted in three books. These two anthologies and one volume of essays (re)construct a historical tableau of the origins of the revolutionary Russian avant-garde and its current reassessments in Eastern Europe. Through this initiative, as well as its spin-offs, like the temporarily established 'United Nations Plaza' – a one-year exhibition-as-school in Berlin – Groys has claimed a defining role in the reception of the Russian avant-garde in the German-speaking context. The question of what premisses guide these influential interventions into the communist heritage is of central political as well as philosophical interest.

The publications comprise a collection of philosophically charged utopianism (*Die Neue Menschheit*/*The New Mankind*), programmatic texts of the Russian artistic avant-gardes (*Am Nullpunkt*/*At Zero-Point*), and essays representing the research project's own investigations into the current state of postcommunist culture (*Zurück aus der Zukunft*/*Back from the Future*). The last volume sets out to define the present political and cultural status of the postcommunist countries of the East. The first two volumes redefine their revolutionary roots between 1880 and 1930, via a rich but thoroughly tendentious collection of newly translated documents. These are now followed by Groys's own theoretical account of communism. *Das kommunistische Postskriptum* completes the picture, presenting Groys's attempt to advocate the communist idea against its own historic assumptions. His introductory statement, reproduced on the book's back cover, opens as follows: 'The communist revolution is the transcription of society from the medium of money to the medium of language. It is itself the *linguistic turn* on the level of social praxis.' For Groys, communism is – and, more importantly, was – linguism, rather than materialism. These four publications give a well-structured insight into the repercussions of this dematerializing but sympathetic perspective.

Zurück aus der Zukunft brings together essays by guest scholars, like Chantal Mouffe and Boris Kagarlitsky, with the work of participants in the Postcommunist Project, such as Boris Buden, Pavel Pepperstejn and Igor Zabel. With introductory overviews by the project's three leaders – Groys, Peter Weibel and Anne von der Heiden – this monumental collection of over thirty essays explores different aspects of contemporary postcommunist culture in Eastern Europe. Most aim at using the postcommunist condition as a means to resituate the capitalist present, exploring the capacities of the 'we' and various reformulations of a diverted utopia. They follow up individual desire and its relation to the changing status of the objects of production (as in Ivaylo Diotchev's text '*Die Konsumentenschmiede*'/'Forging Consumerism'), or look more specifically at national regimes and their disparate attempts to find alternatives to Western models of production and consumption (as in August Ioan's examination of the city of Bucharest in his essay 'ScarCity'). The collection is indebted neither to melancholic accounts of lost chances nor to apocalyptic descriptions of the present national constitutions of the East, and this certainly makes it a very productive introduction to postcommunist thought. Here, the 'post' does not exist in a position of retrospective denial, but, by bringing together a large group of scholars, mostly from Eastern Europe, succeeds in opening up new dimensions of thought. Groys in his introductory essay argues that communism always presented itself as a transitional stage and that its demonization as a betrayal of the ideal of communism was always guided more by the Western desire to present capitalism as the realization of an ideal than by Soviet claims of purified

political relations. His argument, however, goes on to present Communism as the 'first postnational model of society', now followed not only by a previously national capitalism's own globalization, but also by Islamism. Communism, for Groys, opened the *Markt der Möglichkeiten* – the market of possibilities. Groys's own argument, however, leads to a partial dissolution of the material specificity of the Russian experience in order to distribute its traits among other traditions of thought and praxis, mainly in contemporary Western discourse.

The other two publications, the anthologies *Die Neue Menschheit*, edited by Groys and Michael Hagemeister, and *Am Nullpunkt*, edited by Groys and Aage Hansen-Löve, present a large number of newly translated texts from between 1890 and 1934, ranging from Russian mystics like Nikolai Fedorov to central figures of the artistic avant-gardes like the painter Kazimir Malevich or the absurdist poet Daniil Charms. They are also an invaluable bibliographical resource.

Die Neue Menschheit is devoted to biopolitical utopias, which proliferated not only in the mystic religiosity of tsarist Russia, but also in the constitution of revolutionary Russia after 1917. These include Konstantin Ciolkowskij's invention of astronautics in the last decade of the nineteenth century and Alexander Bogdanov's Tectology, dedicated to the defeat of human mortality through blood transfusion. Groys's introduction links those utopian visions of eternal life to Foucault's concept of biopower, which enables a contemporary reinterpretation, but mostly neglects the political role of its protagonists. Groys differentiates between tsarist Russia and Communist Russia but not between revolutionary Russia, Leninism and Stalinism. This first volume offers a view of early modernist philosophy in Russia, which does not distinguish its authors in accordance with their role in the Russian Revolution, but rather with regard to their metaphysical – and in that sense amaterial – conceptualizations of a future society.

Am Nullpunkt follows that same procedure in bringing together a seemingly comprehensive overview of mostly newly translated texts of Russian revolutionary art. Starting with Futurist texts of the 1910s and ending with absurdist writings from the early 1930s, Groys and Hansen-Löve collect essays from differing if not opposed positions of the Russian avant-garde. These include major texts of productivist theoretician Nicolai Tarabukin and constructivist avant-gardists like Aleksei Gan and Aleksandr Rodchenko. But this chapter is an exception. As a whole, the anthology is dominated by Groys's enthusiastic affirmation of Kazimir Malevich's concept of Suprematism. In his introduction, Groys positions Malevich at the turning point of the revolution in the arts, whereas Malevich's most potent counterpart, Vladimir Tatlin, is mentioned only in notes throughout the book. Malevich's metaphysical concept of non-objective art allows Groys to distance his own appreciations of Communist Russia from Russian Communism. He thus quotes Malevich, the anti-materialist, attacking his constructivist counterparts for equating matter with material, while himself stressing its fleeing, non-objective qualities. Groys sees this as the 'most radical and most consequent opposition', as it diverts the attention of avant-gardist artistic actions from the stage of political action to

that of its metaphysical extension. As such, Groys sees Malevich as countering what he calls the 'biopower' – those (pre)revolutionary attempts prevalent in Russia at that time to determine man's mortality. (This links *Am Nullpunkt* to *Die Neue Menschheit* via the aim for a 'new' dematerialized discourse.) Malevich's anarchism, expressed in his objection to any form of productivism, is valued by Groys as the only potent break with what he sees as the central pitfall of other Russian avant-gardists: the notion of progress. Together with Malevich, he seeks a communism freed from economy, freed from production. This puts him in opposition to most of the constructivist writers and artist who have a central position in other anthologies, like John E. Bowlt's now classic *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde* (1957/1988).

Groys steps into the field from a more literary basis and thus leaves out the whole field of art education, the debates at Vchutemas and Inkchuk, which were central to the move from construction to production, and to the Russian avant-garde's desire to intervene in general production. This is a significant point of difference between revolutionary Russian and other avant-gardes: historically, they were the only artistic movement which had the chance – however short-lived – to practise art as an intrinsic part of general production. In contrast, Groys's focus on 'biopower' neglects the economic and political situation in revolutionary Russia on the level of praxis while re-enacting it on the level of linguistics.

Groys's own volume, the 96-pages-short *Das kommunistische Postskriptum* (*The Communist Postscript*), while not formally a part of the Postcommunist Condition project, nonetheless extends its concerns. In it Groys reflects on the state of communism as a political project. His affirmation of communism in contrast to capitalism is, again, based on an anti-materialist approach. As quoted above, Groys argues that communism was – and still is – expressed in language, whereas capitalism is expressed in money as its main medium. In that, he favours communism because it is based on an unveiled and permanent expression of antagonism, which is veiled in capitalism's discourses of money. However, this antagonism, following Groys, is based neither on historical developments of production, nor on its material effects, but is Platonic in kind. Groys argues for a 'repetition' of communism under the premiss that 'language is the medium of equality'. He characterizes communism as the only total system, in that antagonism lies at its core and unites what capitalist society defines as its central opposition: private and public interest. However, this model of a reduction of society to language leads Groys to an ontologization of Marx's definition of ideology. Arguing that if 'consciousness is defined by its being', then 'being' cannot mean material being but rather refers to being as such and is thus a non-material category, Groys leaves out one word from Marx's sentence: 'social'. This difference between 'social being' and 'being' is Groys's central lapse. Throughout his contributions to the four books discussed here, Groys separates the words of the Russian Revolution from its social actions, to make it available for its (formal) repetition.

Kerstin Stakemeier

American pie

Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, Allen Lane, London, 2006. 464 pp., £25.00 hb., 978 0 713 99789 7.

Though the question Daniel Dennett addresses in *Breaking the Spell* is by no means novel, it remains as controversial as it has ever been: what happens when religious belief is subjected to scientific scrutiny? Dennett describes the project of his book as being an extension of Hume's in his *Natural History of Religion* (1777), with a heavy dose of evolutionary theory and a dash of James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* thrown in for good measure. Given these rich sceptical ingredients, one might have expected a heady brew, with some distasteful conclusions. And since science and religion don't seem to mix particularly well, one might at least have anticipated an unstable, combustible result.

Dennett sets himself a delicate task. He would like to distance himself from a straightforward condemnation of religion of the kind espoused by Richard Dawkins. For Dawkins, religion is merely a poisonous concoction of memes, dangerous viral parasites of the mind, which we would be better off without. Nor does Dennett want to adopt the stance proposed by the late Stephen Jay Gould, who claimed that religion and science should negotiate different, non-overlapping spheres of influence, and really are better off leaving each other well enough alone. Dennett believes that Dawkins's stance is tiresome, and intellectually incurious. And he thinks Gould's is a hopelessly half-baked fudge that satisfies neither believers nor atheists. Dennett's project is different and, he thinks, more nuanced and fair-minded. Rather than condemn religion as a set of false beliefs, or leave religion alone, Dennett wants

to see what happens when science, and specifically evolutionary theory, is allowed to look at religion itself as an object of scientific enquiry.

The organization of the book essentially poses three questions. What is the evolutionary history of religion? Is there any rational foundation for religious belief? And, given the results of these enquiries, is religion a good thing or a bad thing? As to the first question, when evolutionary biology meets the social sciences in a project of the sort Dennett is engaged in, several varieties of hypotheses are suggested, and Dennett draws upon most of them in some form. Enlisting the resources of meme theory, cultural anthropology, evolutionary psychology, rational-choice theory and philosophy of mind, Dennett proposes a sketch of how he thinks religion began, how it developed, and how and why it persists. To those who think that the application of 'reductionist' evolutionary biology to human experience is a nefarious pursuit, this aspect of the book will no doubt seem scandalous. But for a sceptic, this facet may be the most satisfying. To a scientist, however, it may simply prove confusing. Given the sheer number of hypotheses under review, Dennett's chatty style makes the topics engaging, but does not make it easy to distinguish the arguments at play.

One family of theories investigated by Dennett, which he calls 'sweet-tooth' theories, suggests that religion satisfies a craving in us which is itself a product of evolution. Just as we have evolved to find sweet things tasty (because sweet things contain sugars that we require physiologically), it might be the case that we find religion 'tasty' psychologically, because our brains have evolved in a certain way. Another way for biology to deal with religion draws on meme theory. Here, religion is composed of a set of memes that travel around with us in our minds, passed from one human mind to another; those memes that confer some benefit on humans or human societies are conserved over time. Although for Dawkins religious beliefs are bad memes that co-opt our minds for *their* benefit, for Dennett the situation is more complex. Dennett suggests that religion consists largely of memes that persist because each meme is particularly well-suited to human social organization. For example, one of the hallmarks of most religions is some type of ceremony where believers profess their belief publicly. These ceremonies can be seen as ways for groups to strengthen trust, which has distinct evolutionary advantages when cooperation is necessary to survival. Dennett even suggests that religion might be a 'pearl', an evolutionary strategy designed to protect against irritation and friction, in the sense that religion provides a way for us to deal with uncertainty, fear and death. Dennett also discusses the possibility that religion is an evolutionary 'good trick' in the context of cultural evolution; a solution to problems of group organization so powerful that evolution finds paths towards it again and again. Just as monetary systems have evolved several times in every human culture to solve the ever-present need for exchange, religion may similarly be a strategy for organizing human societies, a way for humans to deal with themselves in the context of others.

Having offered a provisional sketch to answer the question of how religion evolved, Dennett then moves on to address the question begged by such a naturalized epistemological approach: if religion is merely a set of memetic animal behaviours that promote group organization, then what, if anything, is rational about religion? Here he makes use of both meme theory and rational-choice theory (borrowed from the field of economics). In fact, Dennett avers, it may well be rational to have religious beliefs, simply because those memes that religion is composed of might in fact make it easier for us to negotiate the world. After all, it's not unreasonable to commit oneself to a meme that provides comfort to us in times of need and doesn't cost one anything evolutionarily. Although religious memes may start out as mere mind-parasites, some of those memes will be more successful than others. The suggestion seems to be that in the marketplace of ideas, religious memes are tastier than many others on offer, and therefore it's reasonable for people to choose them. Dennett hopes to show that it is possible to give both a 'meme's-eye view' and a group-level explanation of religion. These moves will be unconvincing to those who don't accept either meme theory or the methodological individualism of neoclassical economics. But even if we do agree to these ingredients, it's startling to see just what Dennett gets from this voluble mixture: American pie.

It is here that it becomes clear why Dennett was at such pains in his introduction to address his book primarily to American readers, and here that the limitations inherent in Dennett's pragmatism become obvious. For after showing how and why religion could have evolved, and proposing that his evolutionary story suggests that religion might even be rational in the context of human society, Dennett then must answer the very normative question that his pragmatist naturalism lacks the philosophical resources to address: is religion a good thing, or a bad thing? Dennett, it turns out after all this, concludes that religion can be bad, but is not necessarily bad. The main test for

him seems to be whether you came by your religious beliefs through coercion, or through rational, reflective consideration. It is entirely unclear how this insistence on choice can be squared with memetics, so it comes off not only as inconsistent, but ultimately as rather prosaic. Furthermore, Dennett's sole criterion for assessing the merit of any particular religious belief seems to consist in asking whether it fits comfortably with beliefs in democracy, human rights and the good of society as a whole. If your religion is based on blind, slavish obedience to authority and unquestioning devotion to ignorant, outmoded systems of thought, then it's bad – though it must be remarked, it is not necessarily bad for you if you are the enslaver, or bad for the memes which encode the beliefs themselves. If your religion teaches that openness, fairness and tolerance towards others is a good thing, then your religion is good. Here it seems that Dennett is either making normative claims that cannot be licensed by his pragmatist naturalism, or falling back on liberal truisms that render the trappings of evolutionary explanation redundant.

So what do you get when you mix science and religion? What happens when you combine the overt scepticism of Hume and the pragmatism of James with the corrosive reductionism of naturalized evolutionary epistemology? It may come as a shock to find that the scientific approach Dennett enlists yields only this concluding remark: 'My central policy recommendation is that we gently, firmly educate the people of the world so that they make truly informed choices about their lives.' Given Dennett's combination of ingredients, one might have expected a spicier dish.

Michelle Speidel

Fully Foucault

Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, ed. Jean Khalfa, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa, introduction by Ian Hacking, Routledge, New York and London, 2006. 725 pp., £35.00 hb., 0 415 27701 9.

The appearance of a full English translation of Foucault's *Histoire de la folie* is a welcome and long overdue event that at last brings to a happy conclusion the strange history of a book that now has classic status. First published in 1961 as *Folie et déraison: histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, it was respectfully received and reviewed by specialists (most of them historians) but did not enjoy any great success; it took three years for the initial print run of 3,000 copies to sell out. The heavily abridged *livre de poche* edition published in 1964 was much more successful and provided many readers with their first taste of Foucault, but it was the appearance of *Les Mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*) in 1966 that gave him superstar status.

Foucault himself made the abridgement of *Histoire de la folie* and claimed that the new edition preserved the 'general economy of the book'. It did so at a cost: over half the text vanished, together with the illustrations, together with most of the notes and the whole of the bibliography. It was only in 1972 that the full edition (with some minor revisions) became available once more. Sadly but understandably – no publisher could have reasonably been expected to undertake and finance the translation of a dense and difficult book of 800 pages by an almost unknown author – it was the *livre de poche* edition that provided the basis for Richard Howard's translation of 1967. Some additional material from the original was, however, included, presumably by Foucault himself. The reluctance to translate the book in its entirety was not a uniquely British failing; the only full translation was the Italian version (*Storia della follia*) published in 1972. For a long time *History of Madness* remained 'an unknown book by Michel Foucault', as Colin Gordon put it in *History of the Human Sciences* as long ago as February 1990.

The 1967 translation appeared under the title *Madness and Civilization*, which introduces a slight shift of emphasis, implying either a dichotomy or a dialectic between the two. Foucault himself speaks of 'society' and often explained in interviews that 'madness' can exist 'only in a society', implying that it is a social and not a natural phenomenon. Much more significantly, the translation appeared in a collection edited by R.D. Laing (who also reviewed it) and was prefaced by David Cooper. Laing, it now transpires, was the reader who recommended publication. His handwritten report to Tavistock, dated 29 April 1965, is reproduced as a frontispiece: 'This is quite an exceptional book of very high calibre – brilliantly written, intellectually rigorous, and with a thesis that thoroughly shakes the assumptions of traditional psychiatry.' If, as seems to be the case, that is his full

report, publishers must have been much more trusting in 1965 than they are now, and their readers better rewarded.

The perceived association of Foucault with anti-psychiatry was to have long-term effects; by the early 1970s psychiatrists who had not responded with hostility to the book published in 1961 were denouncing it as an act of 'psychiatricide'. In the aftermath of '68, anti-psychiatry became part of a general call for the 'liberation' of all minorities and could easily become a celebration of madness, as tended to happen with Deleuze and Guattari's '*schizanalyse*'. In the early 1970s, many of us would probably have rejoiced at the idea of 'psychiatricide'; now that the deinstitutionalization of mental illness has led not to liberation, but to the sinister farce of 'care' in the community, we know better.

There is a degree of wishful thinking in Laing's comment, though it is true that Foucault is reminding psychiatrists (in recognizably Nietzschean terms) that their discipline is not the product of a humanizing enlightenment, and emerges from the murky epistemological borderlands where medicine, psychiatry, psychology and the law meet – Mental Health Acts are never drafted by clinicians alone. The origins of clinical psychiatry do not lie in the gesture with which Pinel struck off the chains of the inmates of the Salpetrière, but in the 'Great Confinement' of 1656. By royal decree, a population variously composed of vagabonds, prostitutes, sexual deviants, syphilitics was rounded up. There followed the gradual identification and isolation of a population deemed to be mad and therefore amenable to medicalization. The result was the breaking off of the tentative dialogue between reason and unreason that had continued throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

The new edition is a vast improvement on the old. The translation is fluid and improves on Howard's version, particularly where technical psychiatric terminology is concerned (though *folie* – covering both 'madness' and the many senses of 'folly' remains resistant to translation). The scholarly apparatus is admirable and the appended 'critical bibliography' extremely rich and helpful. This is in fact more than a full translation of the 1972 text: the original preface has been restored and is supplemented by the 1972 preface and appendix ('My Body, This Paper, This Fire'), together with a further 'Response to Derrida' originally published in Japanese in that same year. The dispute between Foucault and Derrida, which resulted in a ten-year estrangement – neither man was particularly tolerant of criticism – centred on the interpretation of a passage from Descartes, but its most interesting feature is perhaps Foucault's waspish comments on Derrida's pedagogy, which condemns the disciple to repeating *ad infinitum* the discourse of the master.

The quality of the new edition cannot and does not dispel certain doubts and does not deflect from the criticisms that have so often been put forward. The opening sentence of the first chapter is certainly strikingly beautiful: 'At the end of the Middle Ages, leprosy disappeared from the Western world.' Where, one cannot but wonder, does the 'Western world' begin and end? What of Greece and southern Italy, or even Ireland? Did the *Narrenschiff* or 'Ship of Fools' really drift along the rivers and canals of the Low Countries and the Rhineland with its cargo of the damned, or were its endless voyages confined to the poems of Brand and the paintings of Breughel? Did a 'great confinement' take place in Britain? Why is there so little discussion of the private 'trade in lunacy', as Roy Porter asked in *Mind-Forg'd Manacles* and elsewhere? Even in French terms, Foucault's generalizations can be disquieting and empirically dubious. Foucault tells us that equivalents to the Hôpital général were quickly established throughout the country. He gives little statistical information about their effectiveness or the scope of their operations, but it is difficult to imagine that there was any real confinement of the vagrant and the insane in, say, the forests of inland Brittany or the wilds of the Auvergne. The 'classical age' covers (roughly) the seventeenth century and much of the eighteenth and is fairly recognizable in French terms, but remains an unwieldy unit of time. The problems of agency and of the transition from one 'age' are not really clarified here, and would not be clarified by the later introduction of the concept of *episteme*.

Whilst it is perhaps not wise to take Foucault's every statement at face value or as an absolute, one of his greatest qualities has always been his ability to provoke thought and to raise questions. The prisons are filling up again. For successive home secretaries (and ministers of the interior), the only solution to the overpopulation problem is to build more jails – which will fill up in their turn. Many, if not most, of their inmates are said to be mentally ill but they are treated by a medical service that is not even part of the NHS. Informed commentators accept that most women prisoners should not be inside at all, but women continue to be jailed in growing numbers. British ministers can speak quite openly of locking up those suffering from Dangerous Severe Personality Disorder on the grounds that they are a danger to themselves and others. They

will not face trial and may not have committed any crime. As Foucault puts it elsewhere, 'Society must be defended', even though there is no coherently convincing definition of DSPD in clinical terms. *History of Madness* obviously does not address these issues (and gender, notoriously, was never really an issue for Foucault), but it, and *Discipline and Punish*, may help us to excavate their origins.

David Macey

The opaque world of the sensible

Renaud Barbaras, *Desire and Distance: Introduction to a Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Paul B. Milan, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2006. 169 pp., £15.95, pb., 0 8047 4645 1.

In this new work Barbaras presents his phenomenology of becoming as a dialogue with Husserl whose approach to perception is identified as static, 'presenced' and ultimately transcendental. Barbaras sees perception as action, a movement towards its object which signifies an *already existing* entanglement. Perception as activity articulates the world of everyday lived experience with our projects. As such it is rooted in the givenness of the world in experience. *Desire and Distance* draws on Merleau-Ponty's later published and unpublished writings, and Barbaras is keen to stress the Bergsonian influence here, principally its creative evolutionist strand. This is taken up by Merleau-Ponty as the reactivation of sedimented history in the present, and also in the view that the world of objects exhibits ontological continuity in the transition from one form of being to another – that is, the nothingness which differentiates and separates stages of becoming is constitutive of the process itself, as the exterior rootedness of being. At the same time Barbaras criticizes both Bergson's deterministic view of the potential unfolding of the past via a more radical account of historical possibility, and his failure to see negativity as a constitutive force which continues to abide in the positivity of being.

Barbaras develops the term 'distance' to refer to the reduction (*epoche*), the 'bracketing' aspect of perception which illuminates the lived experience grounding the perception/activity. The intentional structures or desire which orient practice are revealed in the act of distancing their object from its ground. Hence an object is only given in its fullness by retreating from it, *contra* Husserl for whom a retreat to its roots would be seen as relinquishing the universal in favour of the particular and as imperfection. This bracketing is an integral part of the object in transition, its passing or 'ageing' into becoming something else. Reduction, by its distancing, incorporates loss/desire into the object as a *productive* moment and hence is not passive reflection but rather plays a positive role in the objectification process.

Barbaras argues that a consequence of the trajectory of a domain of objectification is that when an object is in the ascendant, hegemonic, and so on, its intentionality recedes behind it as the taken-for-granted. The object then appears as fully present, self-sufficient, 'natural' which then prevents a grasp of its dynamics, its dependence on distance and the negativity of its horizon or trajectory. Human agents can demystify the object world through their activity and its reductions – which are structured by the abyssal nature of horizonal roots – but Barbaras gives no account of the power manifested in the hegemony of a particular form of institution (*Stiftung*) apart from the notion of articulation. It may be that for Barbaras this is compensated by the desire revealed in the distance of the constituting/constituted object, in that the distance or reduction shows the object to be suffused by desire, providing 'a consciousness equivalent to the object' – but this desire is also what the object *lacks*, its non-being or negative. This lack or sense of loss entails a kind of structuralist argument in that the distance signals a displacement in which the desire for/lack of one object is expressed in its substitution by another; one thing lives (in its absence) through its surrogate – it continues to inform the thing that displaces it. Desire or regret therefore only become apparent as a given order is displaced or wanes.

Barbaras notes, following Merleau-Ponty, that the bracketing of the object world reveals its base in the otherwise opaque world of 'the sensible'. As Lefebvre has argued, the everyday both veils and crowns the objectifying tendencies of modernity: everything appears familiar and so, via the reduction, 'the new' also has its intentionality revealed as 'more of the same'. On the other hand, following Barbaras, one could argue that the familiarity which the sensible entails enables us to see the object in the context of its constitution – that is, to grasp the desire behind the object not merely as something excluded by its coming to be but as a constitutive lack; an absence that structures the emergence of the new. For example, the desire for consumer goods exists in those goods as a

lack, their desirability, and this is not conjured out of nowhere or pure subjectivity but exists in the praxis of the good as a quality. Therefore desire is not merely the non-being or emptiness produced by the waning of the old. Neither is this something assimilated to the existence of the new order as per Hegel's positive negation, but a 'something' which exceeds it as a constitutive 'nothing'. Whilst there are parallels with structural linguistics in the displacement of desire, the resemblance is partial in that for Barbaras the absent or silent is not a paradigmatic nothing/exclusion but a something intertwined with a positivity, a kind of non-identical positivity or inbetween-ness in the continuum of the trajectory of social products and their constitution. For Merleau-Ponty the lack is constituted in the intertwining (*chiasm*) of subjectivity with the object world.

However, the ongoing representation of desire/loss as ontological separation – the diminishing of one construct in the presence of another such that it signifies a lack as pure emptiness, exclusion from the ascendant object – issues in problems about just how different ontological domains are related. Urban geographers attempt to interlink the spaces of different economic activities – in David Harvey's case by the notion of relational space. Spatial interconnections echo the horizonal assimilation of idealizations – that is, one space would appear in the constitutive horizon of another as its absence. For example, the local is relocalized in the 'absent presence' of the global. In this way the local bears the horizonal features of the remainder whose lack is present in its reconstitution. Thus we can think of space as a dynamic production starting from but transcending Euclidean idealizations predicated on the separation of spaces.

Debates about the relationship between use value and exchange value raise similar issues where both are seen as representing non-being in relation to the domain of the other. Chris Arthur (*RP* 107) has rightly argued that abstract labour amounts to a void within concrete labour. It sublates its grounds in concrete labour, leaving no remainder in the valorization process. Now arguably this produces the same result as ontological separation; that is, one is left without an intelligible relation between two qualitatively different sorts of being, which clearly *are* related. The way out, using Barbaras's approach, would be to see the void in the manner of desire/loss as *a something* present in concrete labour through which valorization can take place, but also as a something which via the sensible, everyday, can enable a reversal: agents' appropriation of the valorization process for their concrete ends in production (strikes, suggestions on efficiency) or consumption (customization of products). In other words, concrete labour as foreground or object assimilates the products and processes of capitalism as continuous with itself and thereby temporarily negates the reifying tendencies of commodity production. In this mode of perception workers and consumers can appropriate or 'distance' capitalism as 'the familiar'. The desire for consumer goods is then simply the reconstituted desire of the world of concrete labour, the desire for 'authentic' goods, freely or spontaneously produced.

For all its productiveness Barbaras's development of Merleau-Ponty is somewhat absent and the idea that *epoche* renders the human agent an object for itself with the developmental possibilities noted by Marx and others is never really elaborated. Indeed, development seems to be fired by a biologically driven desire for self-preservation rather than the self-expansion of being. Similarly, articulation of the ontogenetic world of lived experience turns out to be powered by Bergsonian *life* rather than being, which is nothing more than its articulation. This goes against Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on becoming as self-constituting – a 'stabilized explosion'. In pursuit of the riches of Barbaras's book we can no doubt bracket this.

Howard Feather

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