

Beneath the soviets the beach

McKenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene*. Verso, London, 2015. xxii + 280 pp., £16.99 hb., 978 1 78168 827 4.

Geological time is long; the lifespan of critical terms is decidedly shorter. The sedimentary record of buzzwords logs the granulated residue of terms that were snuffed out not by intellectual gradualism but a particularly volatile mode of cultural catastrophism. We have for a while been standing on the flaky vanilla-coated nonpareil crust left by what used to be called postmodernism; the particulate matter currently clogging the airways has come to be known as the Anthropocene. McKenzie Wark is rightly leery of the term, not least because it manages to smuggle anthropocentrism back into a discussion of climate change that demands precisely a mode of thinking that reaches beyond the earth-is-for-us model. Rather than fuss over terminology, though, Wark sticks with Anthropocene since, he writes near the end of *Molecular Red*, ‘perhaps it is better to see it as what it is: a brilliant hack. The Anthropocene introduces the labor point of view – in the broadest possible sense – into geology.’ We are finally, Wark claims, at the end of ‘pre-history’; history proper begins now that humanity has been forced to fully acknowledge its own role in the production of ‘nature’.

One consequence of the ‘emergency’ of the Anthropocene is that it has finally given those of us who are interested in more than one thing a job to do. Like the war effort, the revolution or alien invasion, the congealing of multiple issues around the Anthropocene has served to sharpen attention towards a common cause. Transdisciplinarity is no longer the pipedream of university managers seeking joined-up governance but the most viable means of mobilizing resources towards solving problems. Scientists and engineers, among others, have known this for some time, but the arts and humanities have largely remained waist-up in the quagmire of individual expression, however much collectivist torque is applied. Deterrence geeks at RAND and economic futurists grasped early on the need for speculative thinking and plugged writers and artists into the mainframe, but only recently has the radical instability of the known world meant that people who make stuff up for a living might be as well equipped as anyone to deal with the situation.

The framing concept of the Anthropocene represents, Jill Bennett has recently argued, a paradigm shift in which ‘the external or cultural ramifications ... are at least as profound as the internal or scientific ones’. Neoliberal and neoconservative resistance to climate science is one measure of how such a paradigm shift ripples through the culture; another might be the reallocation of cultural labour as a function of primary production instead of its conventional position as compliantly subaltern or ineffectively insubordinate. Recent impatience with the politics of representation and the perceived exhaustion of critique are, in no small measure, indicators that the limits of the cultural Left have already been exceeded: what is needed is less in the way of diagnostics and more intervention.

Borrowing from Marx’s discussion of how industrialized agriculture disrupted the soil cycle, Wark understands the Anthropocene as ‘a series of metabolic rifts, where one molecule after another is extracted by labor and technique to make things for humans, but the waste products don’t return so that the cycle can’t renew itself’. The result of releasing carbon that has nowhere to go has pushed the climate ‘into the red zone’ and the proposed fixes – the market, technology, individual accountability, romantic anti-modernity – are less than satisfactory. The task Wark sets himself is to ‘create a space within which very different kinds of knowledge and practice might meet’. What we need, writes Wark, is ‘some new critical theory. Or new-old, for it turns out that there was a powerful and original current of thought that was all but snuffed out in a previous, failed attempt to end pre-history.’ In this spirit, *Molecular Red* seeks to put scholarship to work. The result is a playbook for the Anthropocene, a set of moves and strategies extracted from an unexpected canon of texts formed by a mash-up of the Soviet avant-garde and the Californian high-tech imaginary. Remnants of the two great empires of the twentieth century are pitted against the rapacious insurgency of their twenty-first-century progeny, playfully named by Wark as the Carbon Liberation Front.

The Soviet planks of this new programme are both Proletkult veterans: the proto-systems theorist and blood transfusion advocate Alexander Bogdanov and novelist and engineer Andrei Platonov. Representing the American delegation are Santa Cruz cyborg Donna Haraway and sci-fi novelist Kim Stanley Robinson, probably the only liberal member of San Diego's interplanetary colonization lobby. The whiplash produced by the lurch from Bolshevism to West Coast techno-science does not burn as much as you might think, though it is an effective structural détournement that produces some sparky juxtapositions, not least between Bogdanov's and Robinson's respective Martian sci-fi. Part of the attraction of Bogdanov and Platonov for Wark is that they have been largely ignored by critical theory and its attachment to philosophy and cultural critique. Rather than theory that becomes 'just the study of thought', Wark is interested in a 'low theory' that 'sticks close to the collaborative labors of knowing and doing'. The task of a low theory is to 'extract from particular labor processes those diagrams of form and relation that might have experimental application elsewhere'. This is where Bogdanov's empirio-monism comes in. The point of empirio-monism's synthesis of Mach and Marx (aggressively attacked in Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*) is to articulate the collective labour point of view (including science) in the present. As such, the focus is always determined by the task at hand rather than by prior philosophical questions. The merit of such an approach for Wark is not doctrinal but practical: empirio-monism is 'a low theory of the discovery and communication of potential forms of organization between different experiences in a comradely way'. The way these experiences are put to use is through what Bogdanov calls 'tektology', a kind of practice-based systems analysis (with its own terminology of linkages, ingressions and disingressions) that involves experimentally applying 'understandings of one process to quite different processes to see if they can be grasped as analogous'. Tektology, for Wark, is a form of détournement – like reading Proletkult through Silicon Valley – that 'works "sideways", from field to field, rather than from past to present'. Before tektology can organize the material world, though, it needs a Proletkult, a mode of knowledge that emerges from the labour point of view. This potentially radical defamiliarization of the known into new modes of organization – not just new descriptors but new forms – anticipates, for Wark, the kinds of transdisciplinary collaboration required to address the emergency of the Anthropocene.

Writing is a good model for tektological thinking because language is more malleable than other stuff. For the journalist, poet and novelist Alexander Platonov, writing is not the 'life of the mind'; it is work that involves gathering, borrowing, sifting and cataloguing. Writing is a form of working with the materials in what Platonov calls, in a speculative report on the possibility of retooling textual productivity, 'The Factory of Literature'. The attraction of this model for Wark is that it recalls and anticipates a number of constructivist strategies – Wark mentions Vertov, Benjamin, Mass Observation, Acker, Manovich – though it is also clear that Platonov's factory system and the collective scribbling it requires also anticipates the precarious labour of the Internet's millions of 'content providers' and the industrial-scale surveillance of the KGB or the NSA. The point for Platonov, though, is less to iron out the contradictions of such a scheme than to tektologically transpose the factory model onto the archetypal bourgeois practice (creative writing) and see what happens. What would writing look like from the proletarian point of view? What is the view from below? What forms might the articulation of such a view take? How might a collectivity describe itself? What might the function of literature produced under radically altered conditions be? Could such a literature not just represent the world but participate in making it?

Wark attempts to answer some of these questions in the first California chapter, where he is less interested in Donna Haraway as such and more concerned with the assemblage he terms 'Cyborg Haraway' – 'a sort of text-machine of indeterminate type' – built out of Haraway, her sources (Paul Feyerabend), colleagues (Karan Barad) and students (Paul Edwards). Haraway's famous acknowledgement that she is a product of both the Cold War arms race and feminism, like Platonov's Factory of Literature, is double-valenced: utopian collectivism can swing both ways – compartmentalized ingenuity contained within a wider technocratic conformity or radical social movement. The power of 'knowledge infrastructures' such as the West Coast research universities is that they are capable of 'both reproducing the world as commodity and strategy, and yet also of generating intimations of a nonhuman world'. The machine that retools 'nature' (Wark's example, derived from Edwards's work, is the way climate modelling uncouples itself from real-world data gathering by being able to generate more accurate forecasts from simulations) is also the engine that liberates identity from biology, being from 'nature'. Wark is good at summations: 'We are

cyborgs, making a cyborg planet with cyborg weather, a crazed, unstable disingression, whose information and energy systems are out of joint. It's a de-natured nature without ecology.'

The main service Wark provides in the Kim Stanley Robinson chapter is to read the *Mars Trilogy* all the way through so that we don't have to; Robinson may be the 'hard' sci-fi author it is politically acceptable to like but the novels' diligent mapping of competing colonization and terraformation debates has thus far successfully resisted my attempts to get to the end of one of them. Wark is wise to treat the *Mars Trilogy* as theory rather than literature; at least this way aesthetic disappointment can be sublimated into purposeful work. The idea of using the triple-decker realist novel form as a means of working through the ethical and practical aspects of Martian settlement is a good one, but not all good ideas stay interesting. To his credit, Wark keeps it interesting, but, as with the chapter on Platonov, the Robinson material is largely an extended gloss of the texts. There's more to chew on in the Bogdanov and Haraway sections, largely because Wark is more willing to ventilate textual summary with broader contextual and theoretical material. Given the right's dominance of the space colony agenda, it might have been illuminating, for example, to rub Robinson's liberal outlook up against someone like Robert Zubrin, the writer and aerospace engineer who has spent decades campaigning for the human settlement of Mars. Zubrin is a classic pro-growth technofuturist, frustrated with the brake on scientific innovation imposed by bureaucratic, political and environmentalist obstacles to expansion into what he sees as the potentially unlimited resources available on the Martian frontier.

Wark doesn't get into a fight with Zubrin and his ilk since he is more concerned with identifying conceptual and metaphoric models that might do away with the old-fashioned but easily monetized rhetoric of adventurist expansion and resource accumulation that someone like Zubrin mobilizes. Eventually, though, the Proletkult/feminist science studies/situationist/hacker bloc is going to have to deploy the new practices Wark is after – not just to tackle the challenges of living in the Anthropocene but, before that, to demolish the legitimacy of the corporate, neocon, climate-science-denying technocapitalists and the infrastructure upon which such a position depends. It is not clear how the strategies Wark excavates from his reading might do that, but what he has identified, in the provocative pairing of early revolutionary Russia and late-twentieth-century

California, is a means of thinking through the antinomian possibilities thrown up by radical social and technological change. The work of Bogdanov, Platonov, Haraway and Robinson is produced out of an engagement with the crackle and spit of the enormous utopian energies put to work to build worlds, however disastrous the consequences of those revolutionary impulses might have turned out to be. None of Wark's writers roll with the programme but dig away at its structure while at the same time siphoning off power from the grid. It is a shame that Wark did not devote more space to mapping the interzone between Bolshevism and high-tech California, but *Molecular Red* does provide the coordinates for such a weird, as yet unexplored convergence. One way or another, the next move has to be 'comradely' – the Bolshevik-California nexus is clear on that, as is Wark's conclusion: 'We all know this civilization can't last. Let's make another.'

John Beck

Lovers' discourse

Kathy Acker and McKenzie Wark, *I'm Very Into You: Correspondence 1995–1996*, Semiotext(e), South Pasadena CA, 2015. 160 pp., £9.95 pb., 978 1 58435 164 1.

There is a telling anecdote about Kathy Acker in what is arguably Chris Kraus's best novel, *Torpor*, when the disgruntled novelistic couple, thinly disguised versions of Kraus and her husband, the French theory lothario and editor of Semiotext(e), Sylvère Lotringer, try to come up with a list of names for a well-paid German anthology of American poets and writers. The only woman Lotringer is able to think of is Kathy Acker. Kraus herself is not taken seriously by her husband as a potential editor of such an anthology, despite being extremely well-versed in contemporary experimental writing. Indeed Kraus and other (often feminist) women artists are regarded as boring by alpha-male intellectuals like Lotringer. By contrast, the predatory, oversexed Acker is the only kind of woman sexist male intellectual circles ever accept or consider their equal – largely, perhaps, because they are scared of her.

The 'problem' with Acker's writing, and what made her underappreciated, was that her novels were always read via her outrageous persona. The fairly spectacular career she enjoyed in poetic and arty circles in the 1980s and 1990s came, in part, from a combination of two things: scandal and very good

networking. It's fascinating to trace her string of friends, mentors and literary masters, always male and very much established in literary circles, from David Antin to William Gibson, with Burroughs, Bataille and Genet as literary blueprints. To say that Acker 'experimented' with her life, sexuality and art would be a gross understatement – she embraced everything 'outrageous'. She didn't just apply avant-garde literary methods, but rather kamikazied into them, setting them on fire.

In a review of this newly published exchange with McKenzie Wark (another theory 'heavyweight', though not yet at the time of their correspondence), writer Lauren Oyler foresees that with this 'come-back' Acker is destined to become the next most annoying literary fashion, following the revivals of Susan Sontag and Joan Didion. Lena Dunham, icon of the facebook generation, recently instagrammed a whole pile of Acker's books with a hashtag #get-educated. And in a way, the hipster, narcissist and anodyne Insta-generation really does seem to have an uncanny precursor in Acker. Despite the *poète maudit* lifestyle and her image as a terrifying pierced-all-over pansexual biker-bodybuilder on speed (with a touch of the literary *grande dame*), Acker also recognized and pursued a distinctively meta-kind of writing, based on quotation and appropriation, where absolutely nothing was taken from real life, where 'everything was text' and the self was endlessly divided and fictionalized. For Acker, personality was certainly not one, but multiple. She was a lucky escapee from the hippy era, who followed Herbert Marcuse to San Diego University, where she took influences from the Black Mountain College free idiom and then from the super-controlled New York circles of appropriation art (Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine), combining both into a 'confessional' writing that was entirely made up and yet completely unironic. She plunged herself into texts which, despite being someone else's, became entirely her own: a fake which became truer than truth, a *je est un autre* aesthetic doctrine pushed to the extreme. This is no doubt the reason she found a kindred spirit in Wark, who, though his primary work at the time concerned the impact of media on the changing self, shared her desire to 'fuck' with gender and become the Other. Both had multiple lovers, experimented with their sexuality and made this experience a texture of their work.

Acker's intimate emails, in which there's no manipulation, no composition of text (but rather 'anti-composition' composition), in which her thoughts are, as it were, laid bare, can be seen as



an annex to her other writings. Is this also the way she wrote her many books? Emails show her endless writing capacity, on a spree, often while drunk, stimulated by this new acquaintance. At the time this correspondence took place, email was still a quite experimental electronic device, the form and meaning of which was to be 'negotiated'. And yet these are emails par excellence: strangely intimate and awkward, ultra-close and distant things, where the self is at its most open, real and simulated at the same time; a mixture of bluntness, literary and intellectual confessions, unfinished thoughts, moments of emotional weirdness and discomfort and then chatting and then academic dispute, or all at once. Editor Matias Viegner writes, 'To call them love letters would exaggerate their tenor and consequence, but there is an irresistible tug of seduction in them. Not love letters, but certainly letters of intention.' In fact, it would be crass simply to call them 'love letters' because they are much, much more – they're about getting to know someone through their thoughts and only a memory of physicality, philosophizing via riffing and flirt, where every possible step is multi-filtered via endless concepts and themes. If a romance is impossible here, it is because describing what the two writers are engaged in as 'love' turns it into a series of clichés. What the correspondence shows is the two trying to escape this, by constantly 'rewriting' and complicating any deceitfully straightforward statement.

Wark and Acker briefly met and had a fling when she toured Australia. After she returned to the USA, they kept missing each other, being in the wrong cities at wrong times. But the brief encounter releases an avalanche of emails – it's only two weeks

of correspondence, but in effect over 130 pages – whose primal force and main (if often logorrhic) voice is definitely Acker. It's Wark, however, who actually initiates and introduces the main themes of the exchange, while he's jetlagged, or in a 'haze', as he puts it:

The shared intimacies of the body, mind and spirit: it's such a fleeting thing, so singular. I think we're both probably pretty solitary in our own ways, but for a slice out of time we were singular together. There are no words. I just want to say there are no words. I'm glad you came; and I'm glad you came. Thinking about you sleeping on a plane with those knockout herbal sleep-bombs of yours. Bear with me. I'll have something to say for myself sometime soon. When I remember who I thought I was in the first place. Even if I've been displaced a little from wherever that I was.

This sense of misplacement, and sudden closeness, is what an email correspondence, with its immediacy and urgency, can become at its best. Acker is the one who always blames herself for talking too much, for 'blabbing', and yet she's at the absolute core of this exchange. Her thoughts are always thumping around ten or more things at once, incoherently but with stridency and real intellectual passion – treating email as a way to realize what she really thinks. At the time, she was disillusioned with the reception of her work – in an interview with Lotringer from 1991 that begins 'Hannibal Lecter, my father,' she described her media image in the UK as 'absolutely horrible ... the media image is so much this kind of sexual image. I'm very well-known there and I get tons of work, but to say that they like what I do, no, I wouldn't say that. They fetishise what I do.' By 1995, she's clearly burned out, doing erratic teaching jobs, and seeming to crave some material and emotional stability, while being aware of the ways in which her own thinking and lifestyle were always throwing her into chaos.

As Viegner states elsewhere, 'From the earliest letters she is preceded by her image. In order to undo this precedence, she must write more or unwrite and rewrite herself.' This is enabled by the hit-or-miss automatism of emails, and by the self-exposure encouraged when one is out of it on alcohol or other drugs. Wark's role is mostly one of assisting Acker's tireless mind, in which her musings on Blanchot, Bataille or myth appear on a continuum with fucking, fisting and anal sex, gender, gossip, power, media, academia, money. Every element of the conversation may or may not influence the other, because there is no clear separation between the intellectual and the

dimension of real, raw emotion. The book cannot be understood in any monolithic way, because its senses and meanings are changeable like a bad Internet connection. Form influences the content. The contemporary context for much of the exchange is clear – queer post-AIDS culture, Acker's disappointment with heterosexual sex games, but also queer groups and PC feminism. There's lots of 1990s' television, too – MTV, *The Simpsons* and *Beavis and Butthead* – which appear for a second before disappearing into another stream of consciousness: motorcycles, Australia, men-men, men-women, women-women – like zapping through different channels on TV.

Acker's relationship with Wark eventually dissolves without transforming itself into a 'real' relationship, when after two weeks he is set to visit her. Then Acker publishes *Pussy, Queen of Pirates*, which dwells on numerous elements of this exchange, and there's only one more email from 1996. Less than two years later Acker dies from breast cancer complications, which, to the objection of her friends, she had decided to treat with alternative medicine.

Despite being so sensitive to mediation and literary thievery, in the end, it is the style of Acker's prose – and of those emails – that conveys her philosophy best; pushing against the walls of any mediocrity. Yet the question remains, why should we read these epistolary fragments of post-digital love discourse? Publishing fragments of Internet prehistory as a book seems strangely apt in our retromania-driven times. Still, it is hard not to wonder why Wark kept them for almost twenty years. (It seems such a long time ago in terms of technology that I'm not even sure how it's possible in technical terms. Did he copy and paste them into a document back then when they were received? Or can you keep them like this forever in those old-school academic mailboxes?) If he kept them for so long, it is presumably, of course, because they mattered to him, especially after Acker died. Yet a closer look at the actual content of the emails, and the different ways in which they are written by each – oddly composed in the case of Wark, while Acker is always an untamed eruption of words that sometimes come together in brilliance, but sometimes not – may suggest that perhaps Wark knew (consciously or otherwise) that one day he might publish them in some form. Perhaps the best and main reason Wark had for publishing them now, however, is that Acker, unjustly forgotten after her premature death, needed precisely that kind of spur so that people would start to read her again.

Agata Pyzik

Anthropology becoming philosophy

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*, trans. Peter Skafish, Univocal, Minneapolis, 2014. 229 pp., £20.00 pb., 978 1 93756 121 5.

While the debates and provocations of sixties France in the texts that make up post-structuralism, or, perhaps more accurately, 'la pensée 68', continue to influence contemporary philosophy and theory, the encounter between philosophy and anthropology that framed that period has had rather less of an effect. Little is said, at least in the Anglo-American world, about the fact that Althusser, Derrida and Lacan engaged in dialogue and debate with Lévi-Strauss about the nature of society and history; or about the central role that anthropological theories of kinship, as well as the myth and arts of various societies of Western Africa, played in the formation of the two volumes of Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. There has, however, been a slight change of late. Bernard Stiegler's writings on technology have as their basis a re-examination of the relationship between Derrida's concept of grammatology and Leroi-Gourhan's paleontological account of anthropogenesis, while, more broadly, there has been a return to philosophical anthropology in the works of Étienne Balibar and Paolo Virno. Is it possible that this encounter is returning to both disciplines, transforming our understanding of society, humanity and knowledge?

Of all of the various recent returns to anthropology there is none more sustained and engaged than the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, as is demonstrated by the recent translation of *Cannibal Metaphysics* (published in French in 2009). Viveiros de Castro approaches this relation from the perspective of anthropology, not philosophy, although he does so from one informed by philosophy. *Cannibal Metaphysics* begins from the middle of the intersection of philosophy and anthropology. He immediately contests two ways in which this relationship has been viewed. The first, and most traditional, is to see anthropology as providing insights into 'primitive societies'; insights which could then be used to add a bit of empirical detail to the conceptions of human nature put forward by armchair ethnographers. The second, and more recent, turn sees anthropology as nothing more than a reflection of the preoccupations and obsessions of the culture of the anthropologist. From looking glass to mirror, anthropology remains nothing other than a reflection

of the society that created it. Viveiros de Castro aims to shatter this mirror. (He even proposed to call the book *Anti-Narcissus*.) In place of the dialectic of magnification and reflection he proposes a relation of refraction. Anthropology is about neither us nor them, but the unstable division between the two, and thus between subject and object. As Viveiros de Castro writes, 'Doesn't the originality of anthropology instead reside there, in this always-equivocal but often fecund alliance between the conceptions and practices that arise from the worlds of the so-called "subject" and "object" of anthropology?' Rather than simply see the practices and concepts of other societies as some supposed evidence for a putative human nature, or simply a reflection of one's own cultural anxieties, they should be viewed as intellectual and cultural productions in their own right. It is a matter of reading the ethnographic other not just as evidence of human nature, but in terms of its ability to constitute entire new concepts of nature and humanity. 'If real philosophy abounds in imaginary savages, anthropological geophilosophy makes imaginary philosophy with real savages.'

Viveiros de Castro turns to the practices and myths of Amerindian societies to read them in terms of their concepts, their metaphysics. What he finds effectively inverts and transforms the classical Western concepts of nature and culture. While it is commonplace to posit one nature that is interpreted by different cultures, Amerindian societies offer a variety of different natures that, paradoxically, are refracted through the same 'culture'. Amerindian mythology looks at the different animals of the rainforest, such as jaguars, as having their own 'humanity', their own perspective on the world. At first glance this perspective seems oddly similar to ours. Just as we have beer, the 'beer' of jaguars is blood. This identification of the humanity of animals of nature, the belief that they can only be known or understood in terms of their particular perspective, does not annul the difference between man and animal. Rather, it conceives this difference differently. First, and most importantly, it radically inverts what it means to know something; to understand is not to reduce something to an object, but to imbue something with its own 'humanity', its own action and perspective. This transformation of

the object of knowledge is a transformation of the subject as well. As Viveiros de Castro writes, 'What perspectivism affirms, when all is said and done, is not so much that animals are at bottom like humans but the idea that, as humans, they are at bottom something else – they are, in the end, the "bottom" itself of something, its other side; they are different from themselves.'

What perspectivism asserts is, then, not an identity – animals are human too – or a simple inversion – positing one culture and multiple natures in place of one nature and multiple cultures – but rather a way of thinking perspective as difference and variation as nature. Perspective posits neither identity nor contradiction but variation as the fundamental relation that structures both reality and our knowledge of it. There are perspectives all the way down. Anthropology does not just contribute to some philosophical anthropology, expanding or redefining our understanding of humanity, but becomes part of a general transformation of our understanding of knowledge and reality.

It is from this perspective, a perspective of 'internal difference' which would already seem to parallel Deleuze's philosophy, that Viveiros de Castro turns to the encounter of philosophy and anthropology in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Deleuze and Guattari engage not just with anthropological theory, with Lévi-Strauss and other writers, but with the cosmologies and ontologies of different societies such as the Dogon, Guayaki and nomads from Mongolia. As Viveiros de Castro argues, *Anti-Oedipus's* critique of Oedipus is in part framed in terms of how the Oedipus myth, or its psychoanalytic reinterpretation, treats the problem of filiation and alliance, the elementary structures of kinship that determine descent and relation. In order to counter this conception of the family, psyche and society, Deleuze and Guattari do not turn just to a Marxist critique of the family, but to a cosmological, or mythic, conception of production understood as a universal intensity. In myths drawn from the Dogon and other societies, filiation is figured as the 'intense germinal flux', as an intensive production that is prior to, and the condition of, the extensive marking of persons and relations that define alliances. Everything is production prior to being marked, exchanged and consumed. Filiation is intensive: alliance is extensive. The task of every *socius*, to code desire, can then be understood as containing the intense potential of desiring production, subjecting it to the order of alliance, to the family and reproduction. The concept of production

that Deleuze and Guattari develop in opposition to representation has as much to do with the myths of 'pre-capitalist societies', as it does with Marx's 'Pre-capitalist Economic Formations'.

Viveiros de Castro's reading of the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* through their engagement with anthropology reframes the difference between the two books. As Viveiros de Castro writes, 'The concept of becoming effectively plays the same axial cosmological role in *A Thousand Plateaus* that the concept of production plays in *Anti-Oedipus*.' In each case the term in question is opposed to the order of representation, but this opposition functions differently and is related to different concepts. The shift from production to becoming is also a shift from filiation to alliance as the privileged term. In *A Thousand Plateaus* alliance is no longer the intensive excess, but the imaginary genealogy that constructs identity and continuity out of the various alliances. 'All filiation is imaginary, say the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus*. We can add: and all filiation produces a state, is a filiation of a state. Amazonian intensive alliance is an alliance counter the state (homage to Pierre Clastres).' The critical perspective shifts from alliance to filiation just as the object of critique of the two volumes shifts somewhat from capital to the state. Alliance is no longer associated with social reproduction, with the coding of society, but with transformation, becoming. The alliance that is found in becoming, in the transformations of myth, sorcery and sacrifice, is neither an identification of man with nature, nor nature with society, but a transformation of each. Viveiro de Castro reminds us that Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of becoming is framed by Lévi-Strauss's understanding of sacrifice and totem, between two different ways of understanding the human–nature relation: 'the imaginary identification between human and animal, on one hand, the symbolic correlation between social differences and natural differences, on the other'. Becoming is neither an identification of man with nature, or the social order with the natural order, but a transformation that destabilizes each. As Deleuze and Guattari write,

Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing–progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, 'appearing,' 'being,' 'equaling,' or producing.

At this point it would seem that the difference between the two texts is a relatively simple manner of a shift from production to becoming, and from filiation to alliance. However, as Viveiros de Castro argues, there is always more than just one alliance or filiation. There are always intensive filiations, filiations that exceed any legacy of state, family or society, and intensive alliances, alliances that pass beneath established identities and relations. I should say that in the final analysis there are both intensive and extensive dimensions to each relation, but, as Viveiros de Castro argues, *Anti-Oedipus* does not seem to allow for intensive alliances; filiation is always productive and alliance is a recording of this intense germinal flux. (However, it would seem that Viveiros de Castro overlooks the role of direct filiation in the constitution of the state.) This makes the second volume's focus on alliance as a kind of becoming even more striking. For Viveiros de Castro, *Anti-Oedipus* remains too Oedipal, or too anti-Oedipal, structured by that which it negates. As much as desire is expanded beyond the family to become world historical, it remains human desire. It is caught in an opposition between production, understood as intensity and alliance, and representation, understood as extension and filiation. In contrast to this *A Thousand Plateaus* give us an alliance that splits into two, an imaginary alliance constituted in relation to the state, to the majority, and an intensive alliance, an alliance of becoming which passes beneath it. Becoming exceeds not only Oedipal identity, but the delimited nature of humanity as well.

These transformations and divisions of filiation and alliance reorient the political task of each book. Beyond the obvious (and dated) critique of Oedipus the task of *Anti-Oedipus* is to think a production irreducible to teleological and instrumental logics of production. The anthropological and cosmological dimensions do not just add a touch of exoticism to a Marxist critique of psychoanalysis, but push Marx beyond the 'mirror of production'. The task of *A Thousand Plateaus* (or, at least, some of the latter plateaus) is to think exchange irreducible to identity and the contractual foundations of the social order. Viveiros de Castro's recasting of the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* in terms of alliance and filiation, in terms of their relation to anthropological debates about the nature of kinship, ritual and myth, does not reduce the texts to a merely intra-ethnographic debate about the nature of kinship but opens up their innovations and transformations to fundamental problems concerning how both the economy and the state are conceptualized.

Viveiros de Castro's perceptive reading of Deleuze and Guattari offers a fundamental way to think his own relation to anthropology. It is not a matter of production, or at least production in its teleological sense, where ethnographic research would simply function as the raw material for philosophical representations. Nor is it a matter of an alliance, in which anthropology and philosophy exchange empirical research for theoretical concepts setting up a free-trade zone between their disparate, and distinct, territories. It is a matter of thinking a relation between anthropology and philosophy as a becoming: a becoming philosophical of anthropology, as anthropological texts are read for their metaphysics and ontologies, and a becoming anthropological of philosophy, as philosophical texts are read in terms of their relations to the practices and rituals that condition their emergence.

Jason Read

De interpretatione

John Fletcher and Nicholas Ray, eds, *Seductions and Enigmas: Laplanche, Theory, Culture*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 2014. 365 pp., £16.99 pb., 9781909831087.

John Fletcher, *Freud and The Scene of Trauma*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2013. xvi + 364 pp. \$40.00 pb., 9780823254606.

In different ways, these two books are significant and helpful additions to the anglophone reception of the psychoanalytic theory of Jean Laplanche, for which John Fletcher can claim much credit. The first, *Seductions and Enigmas: Laplanche, Theory, Culture*, will be the more widely read, including translations of three essays by Laplanche concerned with the Freudian topic of interpretation and the interpretation of Freud – two sides of the same coin, for Laplanche. The other, Fletcher's extended study of the centrality of the idea of 'trauma' in Freud's thought, is for a more specialized readership, but provides perhaps the most detailed and rewarding Laplanchean interpretations of aspects of Freud's early work, in particular, that can be found in English.

Fletcher and Ray's Introduction to *Seductions and Enigmas* provides an overview of the relevant aspects of Laplanche's work which is both accessible and useful. It covers, in particular, Laplanche's method of

reading Freud, distilled in the idea of the 'exigency' driving Freud's thought – the exigency of the objects of psychoanalysis itself, particularly the unconscious – and its evil twin, the 'goings-astray' (*fourvoilements*) driven by those same objects. It is through the application of this method that Laplanche arrives at his most influential contribution to psychoanalytic theory, the general theory of seduction; that is, the generalization, in the form of a philosophical anthropology, of Freud's restricted theory of traumatic seduction as the 'cause' of hysteria, which he famously (ostensibly) abandoned in 1897.

Laplanche's general theory of seduction (clearly set out in his *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, first published in 1987) rereads Freud's seduction theory as the recognition (and then disavowal) of a universal situation of primal seduction, which refers not to an abusive event but to the asymmetry between the infant and the adult(s) on whom the infant depends for its very existence. The infant is interpellated by, but unable to understand, the enigmatic 'messages' of the adult, conveyed in the everyday situations of care, comfort, love, conscious communication and so on, but which are 'scrambled' by interference from the adult's unconscious and developed sexuality (so the adult doesn't understand them either). This leads to what Fletcher and Ray describe as 'the ontological priority of the adult as a fully formed subject in the formation of the infant's psychic life' or the other-centredness of subjectivity, as the infant's attempts to 'translate' or 'bind' the enigmatic message into 'its own signifying sequences and fantasies and its own evolving self-representation' installs the alienness of the adult other's unconscious in the infant-subject.

This 'other-centredness' of subjectivity is for Laplanche the major insight of Freud's work, the Copernican orientation dictated by the exigency of the object of psychoanalysis, the unconscious. But just as the unconscious and sexuality are 'covered over' in the human being, so too are they in Freud's work. The exigency of the object also leads Freud astray, perhaps inevitably, to a Ptolemaic re-centring, an 'autocentrist or ipsocentrist reconstruction of the human being' (as Laplanche puts it in 'Exigency and Going-Astray', reprinted here). This egological covering over is most notable in the model of the ego as a self-sufficient reflex apparatus and goes hand in hand with the progressive covering over of the early theory of sexuality, in which the distinction between normality and abnormality is severely tested, by the developmental, stagist model that is said to culminate in the achievement of 'normal' reproductive

heterosexuality. (See Philippe Van Haute, 'Freud Against Oedipus?', *RP* 188.)

The essays here from Laplanche ('Interpreting (With) Freud', 'Exigency and Going-Astray' and 'Sublimation And/Or Inspiration') are an instructive way into Laplanche's work, which itself offers an instructive way into, or back into, Freud's work. Fletcher and Ray's wager in *Seductions and Enigmas* is that Laplanche's method of reading Freud also offers a model for reading or interpreting more generally (a general theory of interpretation, perhaps) and that the metapsychological developments arising from the implementation of the method 'open up new horizons for the psychoanalytic reading of other texts and oeuvres'. The other essays in the volume (eight of the ten previously published elsewhere) either develop aspects of Laplanche's metapsychological innovations or take them as (in Fletcher and Ray's words) 'points of departure for the reading of cultural works of different kinds (fiction, drama, painting, visual and sound installations, film)'.

The two essays by Jacques André develop Laplanche's notion of 'the fundamental anthropological situation' of general seduction in terms of a primal 'femininity'. 'My own hypothesis', André writes in 'Primal Femininity' (first published in 1994), 'is that the early femininity of the infant (regardless of its anatomical sex) presents a certain privileged affinity with the primal position of seduction'. This takes over Freud's identification – or even definition – of femininity with/as 'passivity', most clearly stated in the famous footnote in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. He quotes Freud's 1897 claim that 'the essentially repressed element is always what is feminine' to argue for the '*femininity of the origins* of all psychosexuality'. Aware of the obvious feminist objections to this, André explains (in 'Femininity and Passivity in the Primal Scene' (1991)) that the 'passivity' at issue here is not the simple negation of activity. It is, rather, a 'drive passivity', for which he proposes the following definition: '*enjoying that which comes (to you)*, participating with enjoyment in that which penetrates or intrudes (into you)'. With no corresponding definition of 'femininity', we are left to conclude that the definition of femininity is drive passivity. In this André perhaps makes explicit what is only implicit in Freud's stipulative definition of 'femininity'. But without any account of the relation of this definition (we could call it the specifically psychoanalytic definition of femininity) to the other, non-psychoanalytic meanings of 'femininity' and to the associative chains leading off from 'femininity',

the weight of convention is crushing. Why call it 'femininity'?

André also formulates the hypothesis that 'for everyone, men and women, the *other* sex is always the female sex – insofar as it is pre-inscribed in the psychosoma of the infant by the primal and seductive effraction of the other (the adult), and because being-penetrated repeats this gesture and maintains its enigma.' So the specifically psychoanalytical definition of femininity is effectively identified with the usual idea of the female and the conventional association of femininity and passivity seems to be unquestioned rather than theoretically refigured. Why is it that so little psychoanalytical theory can avoid this particular going-astray?

Judith Butler's contribution to the volume, the previously unpublished essay 'Seduction, Gender and the Drive', proposes that 'gender' itself be understood in terms of the fundamental anthropological situation: 'To be called a gender is to be given an enigmatic and overwhelming signifier; it is also to be incited in ways that remain in part unconscious. To be assigned a gender is to be subject to a certain demand, a certain impingement and seduction, and not to know fully what the terms of that demand might be.' In this, Butler argues, the gender of the

adult is incidental and the priority of the (adult) other in the infant's psychosocial becoming/being is a significant departure from the Lacanian presumption of the Oedipality of the primary structure. Echoing Laplanche's view that the meaning of gender precedes, for the child, the meaning of sex (a point confirmed empirically in infant psychology) Butler sees the demand of gender as a generalized interpellation 'that precedes and conditions the experience of somatic sex'. Indeed, gender is a perpetual demand that we can never adequately understand or to which we can never adequately reply.

With this argument Butler perhaps overgeneralizes the idea of the enigmatic message. Laplanche's point concerns the intimate situation between specific adults and specific infants. What is 'in' the message is less important than the fact of the experience of an address *compromised* by the strangeness of the sexual unconscious of the other. When Laplanche elsewhere speaks explicitly of gender he describes it as an 'assignment' (i.e. it comes from 'the other'), but in the form of a social code. The 'enigmatic message' is the sexual noise in this assignment, not the 'content' of gender, however we understand that. Ironically, Butler's generalization of the idea of the enigmatic message to include gender does not allow



us to say anything about the specificity of gender; it cannot explain why the enigmatic address is 'translated' by the child (and then the adult, who continues to be interpellated) in terms of gender.

In other essays, the idea of the primal situation of seduction is transferred to the idea of the 'address' of cultural texts. This is not merely a metaphorization of the primal situation, but an attempt to acknowledge the ways in which not only the presence of an infant but also the encounter with cultural texts may 're-activate the child that lives on in the adult, that is to say, the adult's own repressed infantile sexuality', or 'the difference *internal to the adult*'. Allyson Stack pursues this idea through to the consideration of the possibly 'traumatic' effects of reading, where books might have the power to produce 'major psychic and subjective shifts' in readers – 'shifts that are invasive, traumatic and entrenched'. Stack suggests that our responses to this – in effect, our ways of interpreting 'enigmatic' texts – may then be seen as either Ptolemaic (having recourse to the comfort of what we already know), or 'Copernican' (leaving oneself open to the enigmatic provocation of the text). Others (Mike Davis, Nicholas Ray, Josh Cohen) also read specific texts or works and/or genres and forms as such textual enigmas, both in their formal address and in their content.

The essays that interpret specific texts according to Laplanche's metapsychology engage in a kind of old-school psychoanalytic criticism – the kind that Freud practised – but are always careful to psychoanalyse the cultural text, not the author (or artist or auteur). But the point of the collection concerns the question of interpretation itself. Ironically, the application of Laplanchean theory to the interpretation of specific texts risks lapsing into precisely that kind of 'Ptolemaic' gesture that a Laplanchean idea of interpretation might seek to avoid, with 'Laplanchean theory' becoming a way of 'binding' the enigma.

Fletcher's *Freud and the Scene of Trauma* considers some of Freud's own excursions into the analysis of cultural texts, arguing that Freud turns to these sources (especially Leonardo's paintings) 'at key moments of theoretical impasse and crisis' that centre on the tension between the ramifications of the ostensibly abandoned theory of traumatic seduction and the biological model of development that replaces it. *Freud and the Scene of Trauma* is in fact an extended demonstration of Laplanche's identification of this tension in Freud, dealing at length with Freud's often overlooked early works (including the *Studies on Hysteria* with Breuer) and the early letters to Fliess. The

book is an object lesson in interpretative patience and exactitude, with detailed analyses of the ways and byways, backtracking, second thoughts, reconsiderations, impasses and breakthroughs leading to and then beyond Freud's seduction theory. The devil really is in the detail here. It makes more sense to recommend a reading of the whole book than to try to summarize it in a review.

Fletcher begins with the influence on Freud of Charcot's theory of traumatic hysteria, Freud's move away from Charcot's emphasis on the primacy of hereditary factors in the explanation of the aetiology of hysteria, to the development of a fully psychological theory of hysteria. He shows how this focused on the importance of the specific *traumatic* cause of each individual case (in the context of the principle of the generalization of trauma as the causal mechanism for all forms of hysteria), such that the clinical interrogation of the specific cause performs the central therapeutic function in the treatment of hysteria.

Fletcher argues that Freud elaborates what can be called a 'scenography' of trauma, the dramatization of primal scenes of seduction that replicate themselves in compulsive repetitions of both memory and fantasy. This 'scenography' makes sense when it is understood as 'governed by a distinctive temporal logic', that of Freud's celebrated idea of *Nachträglichkeit*, afterwardsness or deferred action. Fletcher thus insists, on the one hand, on the complexity of Freud's elaboration of the 'temporal effectivity or mode of traumatic agency' of the primal scene. He also shows, on the other hand, the ways in which Freud's residual attachment to Charcot's framework acts as a constraint on this. He shows how Freud frees himself from Charcot's emphasis on heredity by positing 'a simple model of trauma that privileged the moment of the symptom's emergence as the *determining* moment', relegating all subsequent scenes of memory and fantasy to merely auxiliary or intensifying roles: 'The more Freud's theory is based on the primacy of the single specific cause, the more the complexity and richness of the model of afterwardsness is put at risk.'

Fletcher shows how this tension is also evident in the vacillations in Freud's work between the roles of memory and fantasy, and indeed in the distinction between memory and fantasy itself. Thus Freud will often attempt to uncover – and seek external corroboration for – the 'real' memories of his patients in the course of the treatment, as if the objectivity of facts would enable the settling of psychological disturbances. At the same time, other of Freud's analyses – and

especially the idea of 'screen memory' – will tend to demonstrate the inextricability of memory and fantasy, leading to 'an account of the role of fantasy as part of his theory of traumatic seduction rather than an alternative to it'. Fletcher brings all of this together in two strong chapters that sink deeply into Freud's Wolf Man case history – chapters that are both tremendously instructive and marvellously enjoyable to read. One could criticize in them (and other chapters) the moments in which Fletcher slips over into seeming to make psychoanalytical claims about the subjects of the case histories themselves, rather than claims about the texts, but it is a small point.

To some extent *Freud and the Scene of Trauma* practises the kind of Copernican method of reading

suggested in *Seductions and Enigmas*. But Fletcher's book is also an example of a genre less common now than it once was – a kind of literary-theoretical archeology and interpretative practice, possible in this particular 'case', perhaps, because of the peculiarly literary character of Freud's works. It is an artisanal, interdisciplinary genre that is now largely incompatible with the demands of industrial academic production; and it is a relief that someone is still able to do it. But it may also be time to press hard on the genre, to determine its precise relations to the theoretical constructions and metapsychological arguments outside the texts and their political contexts.

Stella Sandford

Don't get over it

Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2014. 320 pp., £62.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 0 82235 767 4 hb., 978 0 82235 783 4 pb.

During a speech to the World Conference of Science Journalists in Seoul in June, Nobel laureate Tim Hunt shared his 'trouble with girls' working in scientific laboratories: 'Three things happen when they are in the lab: you fall in love with them, they fall in love with you, and when you criticise them they cry.' After a female lecturer in science journalism made these comments public, Hunt resigned his post as professor at University College London. But various well-known figures, including the mayor of London, Boris Johnson, have demanded his reinstatement, claiming his 'light-hearted' comments have been taken too seriously.

In such situations, a figure springs to mind who featured in Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010): the 'feminist killjoy', who 'ruins the atmosphere' by refusing to 'laugh at the right points' and 'be seated at the table of happiness'. The feminist killjoy serves as a bridge between Ahmed's earlier book and her latest, *Willful Subjects*, in which 'willfulness' is characterized as the determination to assert one's own will even when it contravenes the general happiness or general will. Tracing the term through its articulation in philosophy and literature, Ahmed defines 'willfulness' as a 'diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given'. To be designated 'willful' is to be deemed 'too full' of one's

own will, 'not empty enough to be filled by the will of others'.

The will is a notoriously slippery philosophical concept, which to contemporary readers may seem not only metaphysically dubious, but also firmly tied to the intentional, sovereign, masculine subject that has been so thoroughly exposed and resisted within feminist theory. But Ahmed attempts to overturn these associations, developing a corporeal, non-humanist account of willing and wilfulness, where 'willful subjects are not necessarily individual persons', and self-conscious intention is not necessarily in play. In Ahmed's book, 'anything can be attributed as willful if it gets in the way of the completion of an action that has already been agreed.'

The book opens with the Grimm story 'The Willful Child', in which a child who 'would not do as her mother wished' and gave God 'no pleasure' becomes ill and dies; but following her burial, 'her arm came out again, and stretched upwards, and when they had put it in and spread fresh earth over it, it was all to no purpose, for the arm always came out again.' Ultimately, the mother strikes the arm with a rod and the arm draws in. For Ahmed, the sticking-out arm is as much a symbol of wilfulness as the child herself, and throughout the book we repeatedly find wilfulness in resistant matter and 'wayward body

parts': in the hair of Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* that won't be straightened out, or in Plato's 'wandering wombs' that do not reproduce. And just as wilfulness is not the sole preserve of human actors, for Ahmed, the 'will' itself is not to be understood as a 'faculty of the human subject separated from the world'. Rather, drawing on Lucretius' notion of the *clinamen* or the 'swerve', she claims that the 'will' ultimately refers to the potential shared by creatures and things to go with one's own tendency rather than 'going with the flow', to deviate from the norm (and herein lies the 'queering of the will'). Even stones have their own tendencies: 'how they fall is determined as much by their tendencies as by the arm that throws them'. Accordingly, if the will is the 'name given by history' to that capacity not to be wholly determined by without, then the will 'might even be willful before it becomes the will'. The distinction between will and wilfulness is therefore largely a matter of social grammar: a 'way of ordering human experience', and 'distributing moral worth'.

For some, the suggestion that stones, hair and wombs can be understood as 'willing' or 'willful' might be stretching the philosophy of will too far, and Ahmed herself acknowledges the risk of gathering 'too much material under this sign'. Indeed, as her stated aim is to redefine the will in terms of the 'experience of an attribution', the inclusion of stones, wombs and hair as 'willful subjects' is arguably difficult to defend, given that their 'experiential' qualities are undeterminable. Yet, overall, Ahmed's social phenomenology of will succeeds in shifting focus away from the 'metaphysical will', by asking what will and wilfulness *do*, and raising pertinent and thought-provoking questions concerning the distribution of will and wilfulness across the social field.

The first chapter articulates a phenomenology of willing as purposeful activity, where the will is presented as 'something we come to experience ourselves as having' rather than a faculty we already have. Augustine's *Confessions* serve as an illuminating example, wherein he calls upon his 'new will' which 'made me wish to serve you freely and enjoy you, my God', as a means of overcoming his 'old', 'perverse' will. For Ahmed, not only do the *Confessions* establish the relation between will and guilt, deviation and discipline; they also demonstrate how the will comes into existence through being repeatedly 'called upon'. Willing over time creates the impression of 'the will', and yet the willing subject is always out of time with itself. If willing is to command the will, we cannot be both the commanding and obeying parties at

once. Moreover, whilst Augustine frames the virtuous will in terms of command *over* the body (especially the sexual body), Ahmed insists upon the *corporeal* nature of willing, interpreting Husserl's claim that the body is an 'organ of the Will' as an indication that willing is about getting the body 'behind something', an 'energetic relationship to a future possibility'.

Chapter 2 considers the will as a disciplinary 'pedagogical tool'. Education and self-improvement, Ahmed argues, are not only about strengthening the will through developing 'will-power', but also learning to submit one's particular will to the will of others. The focus is on educational philosophies that take the will as object, ranging from the 'poisonous pedagogy' tradition which aims at dominating and controlling the child for 'the child's own good' (and hence driving out wilfulness as an 'obstacle to the educable will'), to Rousseau's *Émile*, where the tutor directs the will of the child but without the overt use of force, such that the child comes to '*will freely what the child should will*'. Hence, though Rousseau's model encourages self-will, ultimately what we learn from *Émile* is that 'freedom of the will can be force by other means'. Ahmed also highlights the gendered, raced and classed dimensions of the social distinction between 'good' and 'ill will', 'strong' and 'weak willed', as women, working-class and racialized others are consistently depicted as 'willful children' who don't know what's good for them. For instance, renunciation of the will is central to depictions of normative submissive femininity, and yet at the same time wilfulness 'tends to be registered as a feminine attribute'. Femininity is thus 'a problem of will' but one which is to be 'resolved by will'.

The theme of domination and subordination is continued in the following chapter with an examination of the 'general will'. Pointing out the power dynamics and tyrannical element inherent in the notion of the general will is by no means novel; but Ahmed's specific take on it revolves around the idea of the social body, and is influenced as much by Nietzsche's 'aristocracy of the body' as by Rousseau's notions of formal equality and sovereignty. Homing in on Rousseau's claim in *The Social Contract* that 'whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the whole social body', Ahmed contends that the general will serves as a 'mechanism for differentiating not only between the whole body and its parts, but between the parts, some of which acquire a supportive function in order to free the time and labor of others'. For instance, workers provide arms for the whole social body, and

in so doing can become reducible to the arm, just as women become reducible to the womb: 'what you are assumed to be for can then become what you are good for, even *all* that you are good for.' Hence, the woman who does not fulfil her 'reproductive duty' is narrated as 'wilful' in her refusal or failure to reproduce the social body and '*extend the family line*'. This leads to a discussion of compulsory heterosexuality, and colonialism, migration and citizenship. Just as 'the self-regard of heterosexuality is concealed under the sign of the general will', Ahmed argues, we can hear an echo of Rousseau in the much-repeated mantra that migrants to the UK 'must learn to speak English': those who come after are 'forced to be free', in order to 'generalize the will of those whose precedence is given'.



The fourth chapter elaborates Ahmed's vision of wilfulness as a 'style of politics', arguing that 'wilfulness as a diagnosis' can be 'taken up' and 'willingly inhabited', as part of a 'world-making project'. On a micropolitical level, this can mean making oneself difficult through *insistence* as a form of political labour: for example, correcting pronouns such as 'he' or 'she' (which can be 'heard as a wilful imposition on others'), or simply announcing one's presence, when one has not already been 'given a place at the table'. Indeed, 'just *being* is wilful work for those whose being is not only not supported by the general body but deemed a threat to that body'. Social privilege is cast here as an 'energy-saving device': there is no need to become self-willed 'if your will is already accomplished by the general will'.

Ahmed's book thus acts as a powerful rejoinder to philosophers such as Badiou or Žižek, whose formalist universalism 'rests more or less on muted critiques of "particularism" and "identity politics"'. She writes

acerbically that 'some have to find voices because others are given voices'. If Žižek and others have presented a rather caricatured version of particularist politics, however, one could argue that Ahmed's presentation of universalism and the general will is itself rather selective. Undoubtedly the idea of the general will can be an oppressive tool, but it is possible to tease out a more complex relationship between the particular and universal in Rousseau, for instance; and we might question whether an aspiration towards the universal is simply reducible to the project of imposing one's particular will in the guise of the universal. Climate change, for example, poses questions about the global and the universal which are themselves stubbornly persistent, and suggest that the particular and the universal cannot be opposed to quite the extent that *Willful Subjects* sometimes implies.

Finally, championing wilfulness as a 'style of politics' risks being rather indiscriminating: surely we could label anyone, even murderous or abusive individuals, 'willful' in their dogged pursuit of their own will? This is something Ahmed is acutely aware of, and she warns against succumbing to the vanities that can accompany the self-designation of wilfulness: 'you might feel like an arm but act like a rod'. To illustrate, she refers to Jasbir Puar's work on 'homonationalism' and points out that 'unseeing whiteness' allows some queer subjects to accomplish their goals, whilst simultaneously acting as 'straightening parts' on behalf of the racialized nation. This complicates Ahmed's argument for wilfulness, given that 'the very assumption of willfulness can protect some from realizing how their own goals are already accomplished by the general will'. Overall, though, her appeal to the reader to not let things go for the sake of social ease and the general happiness is compelling. It might be easier to smile politely when you are being patronized, or let racist, sexist, homophobic or transphobic remarks go unchallenged. But Ahmed's book reminds us how much the 'small' things matter when you are excluded from the 'we', or when the joke is on you. As a kind of inversion of Kant's universalism of the will, her 'willfulness maxim' – 'don't get over it, if you are not over it!' – serves as an important affirmation of the courage and 'daily grind' entailed in micropolitical labour and the 'refusal to adjust to an unjust world'.

Victoria Browne

Take or leave it

Simon Morgan Wortham, *Modern Thought in Pain: Philosophy, Politics, Psychoanalysis*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2015. 168 pp., £70.00 hb., 978 0 74869 241 5.

Modern Thought in Pain departs from the premiss that 'modern thought is, in a double sense, the thought of pain'. Engaging with an impressive range of different philosophers, and a variety of disciplinary perspectives, Simon Morgan Wortham argues that the thought of pain (the theorization of suffering and related categories of historical experience) has frequently revealed itself to be 'thought in pain, perhaps even as pain': contradictory, ambiguous, tortured, or uncannily 'entangled in the problem of its own concern'. The question of pain, then, can be seen to inflect both the content and the form of post-Kantian philosophy, dividing thought from itself, and revealing – in nihilistic and utopian ways – the 'philosophical constraints within which such a gesture necessarily operates', 'as its limits are reached, its thresholds tested, its conditions of possibility opened up, its relations questioned, its borders breached'.

Morgan Wortham grounds his analysis in the 'cultural and political climate of the early 2000s', which, he notes, 'provoked some authors to speculate anew on the value philosophy might have in relation to contemporary human miseries and turmoil'. In this way, the manifold uncertainties of the post-9/11 era prompted an emerging corpus of theoretical engagements with the question of evil, which sought to link the particular historical context of early-twentieth-century suffering to the longer tradition of post-Kantian philosophy; a move which Morgan Wortham both critiques and retraces.

Unlike the 'simplistic cultural and political discourses of "evil" of the kind that were aggressively promoted by the Bush regime in the wake of "9/11"', he contends, these endeavours revealed that '[p]hilosophy cannot establish a mere vantage point from which to adjudicate or resolve the question of evil or suffering, since it itself suffers from a degree of "perplexity" that impedes, or at any rate intensely complicates, every attempt to "alleviate" the malady that so affects or concerns it.' In this sense, whilst on the one hand philosophy promises to serve as a corrective to the 'crude polarities' of political culture, on the other this tentative mode of redress produces an 'ambivalent inheritance' through which critical enquiry becomes 'entangled' in a 'disturbance of consciousness within its own operations', or 'a modality

of consciousness in which it experiences itself as just this disturbance'. In other words, in the aftermath of 9/11, the thought of pain became itself a pained train of thought.

The remainder of *Modern Thought in Pain* comprises an analysis of the various ways in which this implicated condition has affected a number of the seminal philosophical interventions that preceded, and no doubt influenced, the historical and intellectual context in which the text was written (and by whose difficulties it was inspired).

The first chapter positions the interwar years of the twentieth century as the moment 'when the sense of a crisis of modernity was most intensely felt and debated', as conflicting notions of the modern turned the European philosophic tradition against itself. Wortham examines the conceptual tensions inherent in a strain of 'reactionary modernism' that emerged in Germany following World War I, exemplified by Ernst Jünger's essay 'On Pain', which displays a nostalgic 'affirmation for a heroic past, yet devotes itself to a futural project that, it can be argued is highly modernistic' in its obsession with technological and militaristic advancement?

Formed 'by a contradiction that is constitutive of its own conditions of possibility', reactionary modernism embraces 'performatively that which it seeks to overcome or supersede: modernity itself'. Jünger likens this antagonism to the experience of pain, which heralds a mode of perception that is able to 'shed light' upon the 'historical conditions of "man's stature" at any one time'. Yet, as Morgan Wortham argues via two influential critiques of Jünger's work, by Walter Benjamin and Leo Strauss, respectively, rather than ushering in a revelatory historical consciousness, the contradictions inherent in Jünger's conception of pain in fact reveal that his 'thought on the topic is itself pained, the product of a certain malady or ailment that needs treatment or intervention in some sense.'

Moving forward historically, the second and third chapters examine the ways in which modern thought has navigated a 'difficult and sometimes distressing path between the philosophical and the political' in the wake of the combined catastrophes of the mid-twentieth century. In this section, Morgan Wortham

seems particularly at pains to rescue the 'ethical thought' of Jean-François Lyotard and Emmanuel Levinas from dissenting traditions (represented here chiefly by Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Žižek) that seek to denounce the allegedly mystifying tendencies of the 'ethics-of-the-other' on the grounds that its melancholic fixations 'promote perpetual regression or mourning' in an apolitical manner. Against such contentions, Morgan Wortham argues, the thought of Lyotard and Levinas encourages 'futural thinking about "civil status"', which concerns, at its very core, political questions about education, speech and citizenship, *distressing* the oppositional grounds upon which orthodox critiques of this work have been made.

The following chapter turns its attention from the ethics of mourning to the economics of neoliberalism, to consider the notion of indebtedness in recent writings by David Graeber and Maurizio Lazzarato. Wortham questions whether Graeber and

Lazzarato are 'able to resist the insidious logic of a retroactive interpretation of debt' that their work is 'devoted to overturning', asserting that these interventions are premised upon 'a false continuity between past and present, "origin" and "aim"', which construes the (neoliberal) future as an undifferentiated horizon of unending indebtedness that collapses all social life into radically asymmetrical – and inescapable – power relations between debtors and creditors. Opposing this rather eschatological rendering of history, Morgan Wortham argues that a rereading of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* suggests that 'debt itself ... aggresses against temporal continuity in general' and, as such, 'neoliberalism's violence against all future time itself becomes questionable and indeed resistible'. Accordingly, '[r]ecent writings that assess the pain of debt ... are, therefore, themselves somewhat pained by its very idea' and unable to escape the same logic that they criticize in neoliberal social and economic life.

Shifting disciplinary and conceptual terrain once more, the book then turns to an examination of the relationship between cruelty, psychoanalysis and life as foregrounded in Jacques Derrida's reflections on Sigmund Freud and Hélène Cixous. Positioning the experience of cruelty as an originary 'species-problem' inherent in the will to mastery, Derrida examines the ways in which the major tenets of (Freudian) psychoanalysis – the death drive, the pleasure principle – are inherently bound to a form of 'psychic cruelty', which 'not only helps define the "object" of (psycho-)analysis but perhaps also pervades or infects its very *thought*'. As Morgan Wortham makes clear, however, the work of Freud remains strangely ambiguous about the notion of cruelty, positing it as something 'which would perhaps form the basis of a theory of everything, but is itself little understood, if at all, and presumably therefore, it must be



at least partially withheld until such a time as a more rigorous description permits its inclusion in the psychoanalytic lexicon proper'. Questioning whether the means by which 'the term "cruelty" resists "meaning"' might in fact prove part of the 'irreducible cruelty' of 'meaning itself', Morgan Wortham suggests, in Derridean fashion, that cruelty 'is autoimmune'; '[w]hat may be opposed to it is therefore perhaps nothing other than *itself*, cruelty itself as other-of-itself'. Cruelty accordingly acquires something akin to the characteristics that Derrida assigns to life in his reading of Cixous (indeed, Wortham contends, life may be regarded as 'nothing less than the very survival of cruelty'): something not 'determinable or delimitable according to the presence of a (non-complex) opposite term', that paradoxically 'supplements itself always with the [absent] other' to render thought 'cruelly' divided from itself.

Maintaining its psychoanalytic frame of reference, the collection closes with a short reflection on the relationship between grief, creativity and loneliness in the work of Melanie Klein, all of which, Morgan Wortham argues, 'confront us with the separation of the self from itself [as well as from the Other with whom, for Klein, the self always exists in an object-relation], forcing us to encounter our own self-alienation', even if (as in creative reparation) this encounter may in the end prove productive. This highlights, once again, 'the fragile and precarious condition' of the contemporary subject and its regimes of thought. However, the consideration of Klein ends rather abruptly and fails to provide a terribly adequate conclusion to the book, leaving its own contribution to a knowledge of pain feeling unfortunately fragile and precarious itself.

Indeed, the volume as a whole suffers from the fact that the significance of its conceptual intervention is not always clearly signposted. Whilst Morgan Wortham's knowledge of modern philosophy is undoubtedly comprehensive and nuanced, and although many of the constellations he draws between thinkers and philosophers from disparate traditions are illuminating, the breadth of his reference is both the greatest strength and the biggest weakness of the volume. The discussion has a tendency to move rapidly between disparate thinkers or ideas without foregrounding the shifts in the argument (Chapter 3, for example, travels from Deleuze and Freud on sadism and masochism, to Lyotard and Rancière on education's emancipatory potential, to Žižek on the Christian legacy, and Levinas on Brunschvicg with many of the

connections remaining implicit), and the chapters do not always develop logically from one another. Morgan Wortham thus misses the opportunity to draw further connections between the different sections of his analysis (for example, the discussion of the sovereign's power to eschew debt might usefully refer back to the earlier focus on amnesty, just as the notes on cruelty and revenge could pick up on the critique of the economy of justice in the previous chapter) or to offer a more explicit theorization of the various themes which recur throughout his analysis (for instance, memory, mourning and loss) and the ways in which they mediate both the contours of the thought of pain and the contortions of thought in pain.

Consequently, at times the book feels more like a collection of tangentially related essays than a coherent and cumulative thesis – an issue exacerbated by both the shifting disciplinary frames through which the politics, ethics and aesthetics of pain are analysed, and the slipperiness of the notion of pain itself, which often slides from view, or is conflated with other concepts such as evil, suffering, tension, agitation, distress, sadism, masochism, debt, cruelty or grief, to which it may be (intimately) connected, but with which it is not synonymous. There is a certain conceptual opacity at the heart of this analysis, which is replicated in the lack of a clear historical grounding. This is doubly surprising given the way in which Morgan Wortham situates his investigation specifically in the context of 'modern' thought (a term which is given relatively little definition, aside from its implicit designation as 'after Kant'), and the fact that he so firmly locates his introduction in the post-9/11 environment. Yet, aside from the opening two chapters, which are explicitly historically situated, much of the discussion feels abstract and unmoored, even when the philosophers under consideration are clearly responding to particular historical or experiential concerns.

Ultimately, then, despite – or perhaps because of – its ambition, *Modern Thought in Pain* seems undermined by the diversity of its own frames of reference. Whilst Morgan Wortham successfully demonstrates the conflicted nature of a modern philosophical tradition unable to reconcile the contradictions within and across its political, ethical, aesthetic, economic and psychoanalytic modes of thought, the overall analysis lacks the requisite coherence to draw out his own intervention into these same discourses.

Lucy Bond

Intellectuals in the age of capitalist nihilism

François Laruelle, in conversation with Philippe Petit, *Intellectuals and Power: The Insurrection of the Victim*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith, Polity, Cambridge and Malden MA, 2015. 160 pp., £50.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 978 0 74566 840 6 hb., 978 0 74566 841 3 pb.

Intellectuals and Power, says Anthony Paul Smith, its translator, ‘was completed a few weeks after the Boston Marathon bombing in April of 2013’, just as this review is being completed two years later at the end of the trial of one of the perpetrators. ‘Watching the predictable parade of the usual personalities *who pass for intellectuals* on the 24-hour news networks’, writes Smith (my emphasis), ‘brought home and confirmed the basic thesis of Laruelle’s critique of intellectuals in this book: intellectuals, on both the right and left, do not concern themselves with victims, but only with transcendentals that are mediatized, turned into media-friendly concepts.’ Now those same media pundits are debating whether Dzhokhar Tsarnaev should get the death penalty or life in prison. Thus everything seems to enter into what Jean Baudrillard once called the great ‘procession of simulacra’.

What does all this have to do, however, with this collection of Philippe Petit’s interviews with Laruelle? Quite clearly, for Laruelle, everything; for here he connects his notion of ‘non-philosophy’ with his concept of the victim or the *Victim-in-Person*, as he calls it, before proceeding to differentiate between the philosopher and the intellectual in the way that each approaches the object of thought (e.g. the victim). For the intellectual, says Laruelle, ‘the primacy of critique, the primacy of certain conflictual nature, of clarification, of analysis, without utilizing these instruments in order to form a system’, constitutes the nature of his or her enterprise. Whereas ‘[t]he philosopher and the intellectual begin with the same kind of work ... the philosopher completes this work in a system’. And therein lies the problem for both, as well as what leads Laruelle to propose the alternative of a non-philosophy. For both the intellectual and the philosopher the victim is an abstraction, someone who is the ‘object’ of an enunciation. And so when Petit asks Laruelle, ‘What, finally, do you criticize the intellectuals for?’, Laruelle responds: ‘Non-Philosophy makes the effort it does so as to dispel a transcendental appearance proper to the intellectuals and the result of the confusion of the intellectual’s identity with distinct types.’ As he further explains:

The illusion of the disengaged intellectual is that he believes in a truth that is itself neoliberal, which consists in describing much more closely the

appearances of an operation or an event, in repeating what the politics of capitalism and globalization constantly do, write and tell, and in embellishing them with moral considerations about the victims.

By contrast, the illusion of the traditionally engaged intellectual (e.g. Sartre or Habermas), says Laruelle, is in believing that ‘an a priori decision grounded upon some ideology anticipating the meaning of events is able to provide assistance to the victims’.

The position of the non-philosopher is, then, to abstain from arriving at such a *a priori*, pre-emptive decisions. For philosophy, according to Laruelle, is ‘only a superior form of the system of opinion’; it is not, as he will impute to Badiou, the opposite of *doxa*. Philosophy is *doxa*. In fact, in his book *Anti-Badiou* Laruelle accuses Badiou of elevating the importance of the media in complaining about the state of philosophy today, like a moralist whose moral outrage makes a certain erotic film even more popular. ‘Complaining about the situation of philosophy, as all the most creative philosophers do, ends up engendering its own lassitude. It is we ourselves who have ceded too much to an anti-media obsession, one that should have brought into effect a science of philosophy, rather than, as in Badiou, a philosophical reaction that ends up profiting the media’, declares Laruelle.

Badiou’s name is only mentioned five times in *Intellectuals and Power*, but his work is the implicit target of much of the criticism of ‘philosophy’ here. For Laruelle, if we once were ‘seduced’ by the unreason of postmodern discourse, to use Richard Wolin’s term, with Badiou we have been ‘seduced’ by the nostalgia of liberal, modern rationality (the *matheme*). According to Laruelle, Badiou is the Philosopher King, the philosopher who knows best, who writes manifestos of philosophy, who collapses Plato unto Maoism, and who calls for fidelity to historical events, such as the French Revolution. In response to such highfalutin philosophical position-taking, Laruelle proposes the more modest option of the non-philosopher who refuses to decide and pontificate upon the events of history as some kind of privileged authority figure in possession of a determinate number of truths. ‘Is it that there is a moment of decision which escapes the logic of history...? Is that it?’ asks Petit, to which

Laruelle, answers: ‘Yes, but it is more than a moment of philosophical decision, it is a new kind of decision determined by the Name-of-Man, a decision which I call non-decisional (of) itself’: ‘I am no longer the philosopher who says “we philosophers” and sees the meaning of history while others are exhausting themselves with opinions and with making history.’ It is the philosopher’s relation to History that Laruelle thus wants to disavow, as did Nietzsche when he declared that the *text* (the intellectual’s representation) of the French Revolution had ‘*finally disappeared under the interpretation*’; and as did Baudrillard when he polemically said that the ‘Gulf War had not taken place’.

Much to his credit, there is something in Laruelle’s ‘non-decision’ that seems to leave Philippe Petit unsatisfied, and so he presses on. ‘Once you have noted the multiplicity of opinions, can you make out your point of radical indecision?’ Petit asks Laruelle with respect to the war in Iraq. And the very much annoyed Laruelle answers him by saying that he is asking him to answer as the traditional intellectual with a series of ‘fiery performances’, when ‘non-philosophy is a practice which excludes definitions, immediate, univocal, definitive characterizations’. The triviality of opinions concerning the war (of representation) unceasingly prove ‘the intellectuals right’, he says; while ‘[t]he problem is one of making use out of these opinions, so that they are transformed and put to service for the Man within the victim’. The first problem here, of course, is what Laruelle means by ‘put to service’? Does the non-philosopher, in so far as he or she withdraws from history and the World, *do* anything at all? What is the function of non-philosophy? What is to be done? Drink wine at Parisian cafes while talking about the end of philosophy? ‘I agree with Badiou when he said that our current intellectuals have remained too Kantian, too concerned with critique,’ says Laruelle, ‘but I would not go as far as saying, as he does, that we must immediately take the courageous stance and one of *actual resistance*. That seems to me another philosophical solution, anti-Kantian but much too ... *spontaneous*’ (my emphasis). But to ask a philistine philosophical question: What is wrong with actual resistance? What is wrong with spontaneous action? Is it because they hark back to humanism? And if so, doesn’t any ‘anti’ position contain within it that which it negates? *In the name of the true victim I will no longer speak of the victim*, and I will no longer take any position with respect to any system that victimizes people.

Interestingly this is the empty set, the void that Laruelle criticizes in Badiou, and that he replaces with his notion of utopia (a non-place): ‘the yeast of the imagination’. ‘It must be agreed that, while non-philosophy has overtones of anti-philosophy, it cannot recognize itself in current anti-philosophy, whose origins are predominantly philosophical’, writes Laruelle in his anti-philosophy book, *Anti-Badiou*. Anti-philosophy, beginning with Nietzsche, is anti-metaphysics, and hence against abstractions: ‘the void of Mathematics, of the Subject, of Truth, of Philosophy’. But there is a problem here, for Laruelle’s own non-philosophy also contains within it the empty concept of a Future and Utopia. So is Laruelle’s non-philosophy anti-philosophy? Yes and no. We are back to the undecidability of Derridian deconstruction – which is all fine and well, one might say, if you are a Parisian intellectual, if you live in the world of advanced capitalist economies. However, in non-Western or economically marginalized countries, intellectuals’ games are just that, and good intentions count for very little.

Most European philosophy, especially of the post-modern kind, has had no place for the work of philosophers like, for example, José Carlos Mariátegui or Enrique Dussel. Dussel’s philosophy, with its mix of traditionally Marxian concepts, Iberian-American conceptions of human rights (Las Casas), and Christian ethics, has been seen as a kind of thought (*not* philosophy proper) that cannot address the ‘universal’ problems of humanity – universal here meaning exclusively European. Only recently, due to the fact that certain Western European countries that were once considered central have joined the economic peripheries (like Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain), has Dussel’s philosophy began to be taken seriously. In the case of Latin America, intellectuals have always had a role to play in the politics of their respective countries, from Martí on. It is one thing to assume an absolutist position, it is another to assume no position at all, or an imaginary one (Laruelle). In the translator’s preface to *Intellectuals and Power*, Anthony Paul Smith says that after the events of the Boston bombings he watched ‘the predictable parade of the usual personalities *who pass for intellectuals* on the 24-hour news networks’, and that this made him think of Laruelle’s position of non-decision vis-à-vis the ‘intellectual’ who pontificates on everything on television. But I italicized the words ‘who pass for intellectuals’ because, at least in the United States, there *are no intellectuals* on television, or anywhere else in the culture, who need to erase or diminish

their 'privileged' positions in society. That public intellectual, the object of Laruelle's critique, does not exist in the United States. Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky or Naomi Klein are marginal figures who play little if any role, hierarchical or otherwise, in the life of the American polis. Hence, while Laruelle may be correct with respect to the privileged cultural positions of French intellectuals as political spokespersons, *Intellectuals and Power* has nothing or little to do with the most economically powerful nation in the world, for which philosophy is wholly inconsequential. Would that philosophy and intellectuals everywhere have an actual role to play in the emancipation and defence of the true victims!

Rolando Pérez

Making Hegel Hegel?

Andrew Cole, *The Birth of Theory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2014. 272 pp., £63.00 hb., £21.00 pb., 978 0 22613 539 7 hb., 978 0 22613 542 7 pb.

In *The Birth of Theory* Andrew Cole proposes an examination of the 'bare-bones formality and basic process' of dialectics. From out of this, he presents the following thesis: 'Theory ... finds its origin in Hegel – and Hegel himself finds his theory, his dialectic, in the Middle Ages.' In order to substantiate the thesis, it is the dialectic of identity and difference that must be expounded, since it is this dialectic, standing 'above all other dialectics', according to Cole, which gives sense to what is *dialectical* about 'the dialectic'. With regard to the unity of Hegelian and medieval dialectic, Cole notes that there is 'no period distinction to *problematize* ... because the medieval is already modern'. For Cole, Hegelian history is an 'inclusive history' in which differences emerge from out of the movement of the identity of history itself.

So, in its Hegelian-medieval iteration, 'theory' is decidedly transhistorical. This is what allows it to endure. Indeed, Cole proposes a strong interpretation of Hegel's dialectic that brings into sharp relief an inadequately explored dimension (the medieval dialectic), in order to displace the well-trodden post-Hegelian and anti-Hegelian paths (in Marx, Adorno and Deleuze, especially) and give Hegel's thought a renewed significance in our present historical conjuncture. A strong reading, however, is not necessarily

a convincing one. *The Birth of Theory* is unconvincing on two interrelated fronts: methodological and philosophical. A reflection on the former discloses the latter.

The dialectic of identity and difference is configured here principally as an 'operation'. To understand the dialectic as an operation is to understand it within its historical formation as a particular *method*. In the second chapter of the book, Cole provides a crash course through this history, starting with its classical reification as a set of rules concerning the structure of dialogue and moving into its dynamic reconfiguration in the *Enneads*. From there, we are taken through a protracted presentation of the dialectic as it develops from Plotinus, ending with Hegel. The problem with this reconstruction is its presupposition: Hegel emerges as the *a priori* 'result' of an historical development that he actually inaugurates, since it is Hegel's dialectic that gives us the requisite standpoint for a retroactive comprehension of what is central to the medieval dialectic. This identity of historical result and historical origin in Cole smooths over a conceptual antagonism Hegel (and Marx) tried to expose: namely, history (*Geschichte*) as the movement of the spirit's (capital) self-actualization, and the historical (*historische*) as the contingent events appearing as distinct 'moments' of that self-actualization. Regrettably, Cole quietly sets *this* dialectic aside.

Consequently, Hegel's dialectic is understood in terms of a philosophical development of which it *always already will have been the result*. Thus, development does not emerge in Cole's book, as he suggests it does, in the temporal 'break' of identity produced *in* difference. It is grasped, instead, as an unrippled continuum of difference-as-same. Ironically, Cole himself suggests that Hegel 'offers up a theory of historical unevenness that accommodates all scales of time, all durations from the instant to the larger period or episteme'. But historical unevenness, as articulated in the *antagonism* of history and the historical, demolishes the idea of the 'co-presence of times and histories', as an externally *spatialized* notion of time; that is, as a 'veritable eddy of temporalities'. Cole's evasion of the temporal antagonism of history reifies the transhistorical status of the dialectic, thereby re-spatializing the temporality of dialectical movement.

There are further methodological problems. First, Cole proposes a 'return' to Hegel without the mediation of 'Hegelianisms': to 'get behind that mediating scrim in order to think about Hegel's work directly',

even though he argues that Hegel is *the* thinker of historical mediation. For Hegel, 'there is no pure Plato; only a mediated Plato', he remarks. Second, 'getting behind' mediation (if this is even possible from a Hegelian perspective) is taken to liberate Hegel's work in relation to a reception that actually retrospectively discloses the limits of his thought. According to Cole, we need to free Hegel's philosophy from its mediating reception in order to recognize in it what was already contained in Hegel: namely 'theory'. So a 'direct' interpretation helps us find in Hegel 'those ideas that made Marx Marx'. Yet to locate Marx within Hegel is to reduce the temporality of change to a one-dimensional, unmediated form, failing to mark what is distinctive about the transitional moments punctuating the history of ideas. Consequently, the 'historical unevenness' supposedly exposed by Hegel here evens out the historical development of Hegel's thought, reducing all post-Hegelian philosophy to properties belonging to Hegel himself.

Furthermore, notwithstanding their genuine novelty, Cole's reflections on Hegel abound in philosophically naive asseverations. Consider, for example, Cole's repeated charge that Hegel's dialectic consists of a 'combination' of 'opposites'. Does not Hegel, from as early as 1797 (through the concept of love), try to dissolve the notion that *dialectical* thinking consists of combining opposites? With this dissolution, Hegel tries to give dialectical sense to modern life – *not* to 'the dialectic'. (Regrettably, Cole's exposition of what is dialectical about the dialectic rests on his reading of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, even though it is in Hegel himself that it is taken to find its most accomplished expression.) Does not Hegel's 1801 *Differenzschrift* disclose the sense in which 'reflection' becomes externalized when it assumes categorial couplets such as identity and difference? Hegel tries to think, instead, the dialectical dynamics of *contradiction* as the ontological and conceptual primacy of permeated relations. Only opposites can be externally conjoined. Contradiction is a more complex philosophical matter, one which is developed throughout Hegel's oeuvre, reaching great systematic detail in the *Science of Logic*. Unfortunately, it plays no conceptual role in Cole's reflections on the relations of identity and difference and their here-aggrandized function in Hegel's 'entire system'. By reducing Hegel's dialectic to 'a way of synthesizing opposites' in the dialectic of identity and difference, Cole dodges the philosophical issue of the ontological status of contradiction and, by extension, the fundamental dynamics of *negation*.

By focusing his energies on restoring Hegel so that he is 'unencumbered by the weight' of his reception, Cole loses sight of the complex philosophical problems of Hegel's thought, principal among which is the dialectical contradiction of (as Hegel consistently puts it) the 'dialectical movement' of the becoming of spirit's truth and the speculative comprehension of the truth of that movement as spirit's own absolute self-movement. In light of this dialectical contradiction, the so-called central logical dialectic of Hegel's philosophy identified by Cole signals only a *relative* dialectic. We cannot adequately comprehend Hegel's dialectic if it is undialectically reduced to a set of logical categories that are only relative to the non-categorial expression of spirit in its absolute, speculative form. Indeed, Cole even overlooks the fact that for Hegel the dialectic of identity and difference is raised to the level of its own self-reflected form. From the so-called 'System-Fragment' of 1800 to the *Science of Logic*, dialectics is presented as *identity and non-identity* (precisely not 'difference' as such).

It is the failure to raise Hegel's dialectic to its relation to the speculative core of his thought that lays the foundations for the understanding of a Hegelian *theory*. The speculative kernel of Hegel's thought, on the other hand, is anchored in its claims as a *philosophical science*; that is, a presentation of the truth of the absolute. Significantly, we are told early on that theory consists of 'the move away from philosophy *within* philosophy'. What we are not told, however, is what *philosophy* is. Sustained reflection on the speculative status of Hegel's philosophical enterprise is absent from Cole's book, resulting in an evasion of what Hegel means by 'truth', 'absolute' and the 'whole'. Without an exposition of the speculative aspect of Hegel's philosophy, theory 'sublates' philosophy in a rather effortless, indeed *unencumbered*, manner.

Cole's evasion of the speculative core of Hegel's thought (mentioned only in passing in relation to method) is all the more surprising since speculation is a pre-eminently medieval philosophical-theological concern: for example, when Duns Scotus proclaims that metaphysics is concerned with 'the highest causes as its goal, and ends with theoretical knowledge (*speculatio*) of them' (distinct from *cognitio*). Speculation, for Scotus, is the highest mode of knowledge of highest things, namely 'speculative things (*entium speculabilium*). It is, accordingly, God's knowledge of himself. It was the critique of speculative knowledge that gave rise to modern philosophy.

Consider, for example, Francis Bacon's 1605 *The Advancement of Learning*. This work stages a direct attack on neo-Aristotelian, 'fruitless speculation' via 'good and sound knowledge' grounded on a new empirically and experientially established foundation. The attack on speculation consists of a reform of first philosophy as a philosophy based on observation. (A neo-Aristotelian counter-attack is mobilized in the seventeenth century by English philosopher Margaret Cavendish in her 1666 work *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*.) This reform finds its most sophisticated articulation, as is well known, in Kant's suspension of the system of pure speculative reason by critical-transcendental philosophy. It is with neo-Kantian thought that the idea of theory as a second-order reflection on science is properly elaborated. With this legacy, critique is neutralized and reified into a rigid method. Its relation to the speculative element it suspends is dropped. Accordingly, if there is a philosophical 'birth of theory', it is perhaps more precisely located in neo-Kantianism. It is certainly not located in Hegel.

Hamam Aldouri

Making Hegel post-Hegel?

Frederick C. Beiser, *After Hegel: German Philosophy 1840–1900*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2014. 231 pp., £19.95 hb., 978 0 69116 309 3.

Fredrick Beiser is arguably the most prolific and informative historian working on nineteenth-century German philosophy in the English language today. *After Hegel* focuses on the period following Hegel's death in 1831. Beiser's historical analysis ranges from roughly 1840 to the end of the nineteenth century, and covers five philosophical 'controversies', maintaining 'that the second half of the century, though written about much less, is more important and interesting philosophically than the first half'. One of the reasons Beiser gives for this historical focus is to provide a counter-narrative to the still dominant interpretations of the period.

After Hegel argues that within the existing scholarship there have been two governing historical narratives – Karl Löwith's highly influential *From Hegel to Nietzsche* and, of course, Hegel's own lectures on

the history of philosophy – both of which omit many aspects of German philosophy that deserve more serious attention. Beiser is quick to assert that what is now considered the 'standard' historical reading of nineteenth-century German philosophy is only one interpretation, and suffers from many inaccuracies, as well as much negligence. Hegel himself is, for Beiser, the ultimate culprit here; something reflected in Löwith's own reluctance to question Hegel's systematic interpretation of the Idealist tradition. Yet one wonders whether it is really possible to extend Hegel's method to interpret philosophy after, and beyond, Hegel himself.

In the first chapter, Beiser traces the cataclysmic events that shook German institutions from the 1840s onwards, when philosophers questioned the very foundations of their discipline and its role in society. The urgency of such a crisis demanded a response, and Beiser charts its major contributors. Among the lesser-known philosophers of the era covered in Beiser's book are Adolf Trendelenburg (1802–1872), who argued that philosophy was to be defined as an organic world-view, and Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), who tried to synthesize Hegel's speculative idealism with Schopenhauer's voluntarism, as a way to combine metaphysics with the empirical sciences.

The second chapter covers the 'materialist controversy', which centred on debates between faith and reason. Beiser considers Rudolph Wagner's (1805–1864) call for scientists to avoid undermining the beliefs of the Protestant Church, which was met with criticism from the left-wing radical Carl Vogt (1817–1895), who attacked Wagner for reinforcing the existing ideological belief system of the status quo. Hermann Lotze (1817–1881) is notable for developing a metaphysics which championed a mechanistic view of the cosmos as a form of explanation of the natural world. Ludwig Büchner's (1824–1899) *Kraft und Stoff* was a highly successful treatise on materialist philosophy. Following on from this discussion of the materialist controversy, the third chapter focuses on the limits of scientific knowledge. Beiser notes the significance of the work of Emil Du Bois-Reymond (1818–1896) in inaugurating debates about the epistemological limits of natural science in which Hartmann, Büchner and many others participated.

Chapter 4 outlines the tense arguments surrounding historicism and the study of history. Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) and others sought to create a critical interpretation of history which was entirely

different from the German Idealist school of Schelling, Fichte and Hegel. Ranke and his fellow historians stressed the importance of historical facts, divorced from their subordination into a totalizing speculative philosophy. Beiser also covers the debates on historical objectivity, noting the important role that Johann Gustav Droysen (1838–1908) played in criticizing Ranke's quest for objectivity.

The final controversy Beiser examines is focused around the work of Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer's pessimistic outlook in *The World as Will and Representation*, and its questioning of 'life' itself, greatly appealed to the general public. Beiser does an excellent job of tracing the objections to, and criticisms of, Schopenhauer's thesis, drawing upon the work of Neo-Kantians, such as Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915), who sought to undermine the validity of Schopenhauer's arguments by appealing to their lack of *a priori* principles and unfounded empirical claims. Beiser ends *After Hegel* with a brief summary of the writings of two women philosophers: Agnes Taubart (1844–1877) and Olga Plümacher née Hünerwadel (1839–1895), both of whom contributed to the pessimism debates.

While Beiser's work is to be commended for its clarity of writing, historical accuracy and scholarly research, there are a number of objections to be made to his methodological approach. For Beiser, to adopt a Hegelian reading of nineteenth-century German philosophy would be to concede too much to the very standard historical narrative he actively seeks to break away from. Yet, if anything, Beiser's own approach suffers from its attempt to be non-partisan. Here is Beiser outlining his method of interpretation:

The history of philosophy tends towards either antiquarianism or anachronism. The approach taken in this book attempts to escape this dilemma. It organizes its history not according to thinkers or themes but controversies. These controversies concern issues which are still of interest today, thus avoiding the danger of antiquarianism; but they were also important to contemporaries themselves, thus escaping the difficulty of anachronism.

While the attempt to avoid both anachronism and antiquarianism is admirable, ultimately Beiser's aim to synthesize the two approaches fails, and betrays his desire for scholastic purity. Is not the very attempt to avoid both antiquarian and anachronistic approaches itself a sort of ideological fantasy: a mystified abstraction in which the historian remains

apolitical? One is reminded of Marx's reproach to bourgeois economists: that they historicize the entire history of political economy, but fail to historicize the social relations of bourgeois economic production themselves. The same could be said of Beiser's approach: he maintains that all historians of philosophy either fetishize the past (antiquarianism) or project their own interests into it (anachronism), all the while neglecting the presuppositions of his own perspective. Beiser's desire for a third interpretative method discloses its own implicit belief that the philosophical historian can achieve impartiality, that he or she can investigate the history of philosophy from a decidedly non-partisan position. But such a position does not exist; historians never exist in a social vacuum.

Hegel himself speaks of impartiality in his Introduction to the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*:

What one calls 'impartiality' in this sense is the stance that approaches philosophy in spiritless fashion, that is not present to it with one's own spirit ... impartiality, consists, then, of neutrality with respect to thoughts, to concepts, to thinking spirit. But if one actually wants to study it [philosophy], one must have taken the side of thinking spirit and thought. One actually knows philosophy when engaged with spirit. Mere information is no evidence of actual engagement.

For Hegel, then, the very notion of an impartial historian guarantees that said historian does not concretely engage with the subject at hand. Impartiality is always partial, even when this partiality is not explicitly stated. Beiser's method is not only spiritless (to use Hegel's word); it is also politically naive. It wishes to remain anachronistic on the one hand, and antiquarian on the other, but this wish is itself partial and partisan.

What haunts Beiser's *After Hegel* is, then, Hegel himself. By reading the history of German philosophy through a series of controversies, Beiser tries to provide a disjointed, anti-Hegelian narrative. However, Beiser's narrative doesn't so much escape Hegel as indirectly reaffirm him by tracing the philosophical rupture left in his wake. Rumour has it that in 1972, when asked of his opinion on the French Revolution, the Chinese premier Zhou Enlai responded, 'It is too soon to say.' Can we break with Hegel? *After Hegel* only repeats Zhou Enlai's reply.

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