Oxymoron

Paolo Virno, *When the Word Becomes Flesh: Language and Human Nature*, trans. Giuseppina Mecchia, Semiotext(e), South Pasadena CA, 2015. 264 pp., £12.95 pb., 978 1 58435 094 1.

In Paolo Virno's previous book, *A Grammar of Multitude*, grammar – in other words, the philosophy of language – played second fiddle to the multitude – in other words, to the political analysis of the contemporary, post-Fordist state of capitalism (the book ends on ten theses on post-Fordism), inspired by Marx's seminal page on 'general intellect' in his *Grundrisse*. Language was deemed to have become a direct productive force, the post-Fordist labour force being an intellectual force, in which linguistic competence was of the essence.

In this book, the philosophy of language has come to the forefront. The multitude is evoked only in the last essay, and all the previous essays, which, we are warned, must be read in order, work their way towards a coherent account of the language faculty and of historical languages: from the speaker as musical virtuoso (a theme already dealt with in *A Grammar of the Multitude*), to the 'absolute performative', linguistic anthropogenesis, second-degree sensualism, natural philosophy and a defence of reification. The tone is given in the very first sentence of the introduction: 'This book contains several philosophical reflections on language, that is, on human nature.' There is an obvious element of provocation in this. 'Human nature' is a danger word, and even if we grant it a modicum of relevance, that it should be equated with language is highly contentious. But in philosophy provocation may well be an asset and it is the element in which Virno dwells. Witness his taste for the oxymoron. So welcome to the Wonderland of continental philosophy of language, where the local Mad Hatter will produce, with considerable skill and a certain amount of glee, sundry white rabbits, like the absolute performative and second-degree sensations (such as the colour of words) – and we enjoy the journey every bit as much as Alice did.

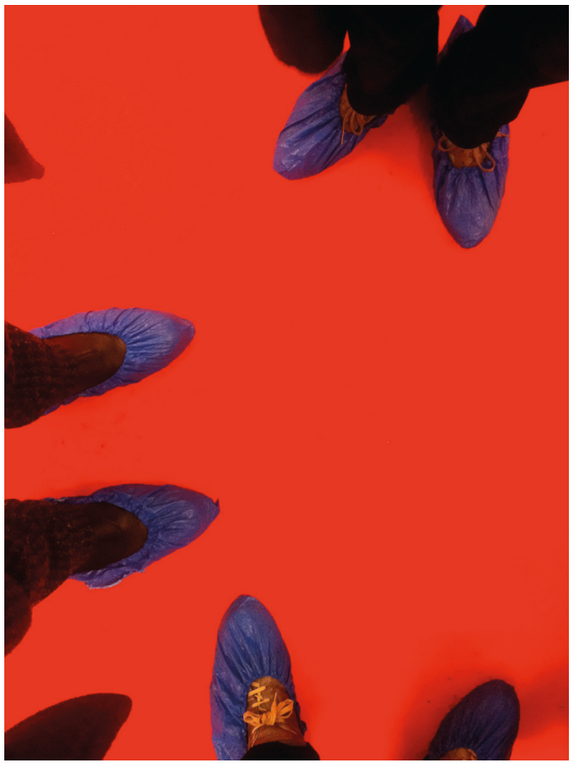
'Continental' this philosophy certainly is: no analytic philosophy of mind, no universal grammar and no cognitive linguistics (cognitivism is the explicit philosophical opponent). Instead, we have Kantian transcendentalism, the process of individuation described by Gilbert Simondon and the enunciation linguistics of Émile Benveniste. (The last is unjustly neglected and under-translated in English-speaking countries and Virno's book would be precious if only as an introduction to his approach to linguistics.) But Virno's philosophy is 'continental' not only in its references, but also in its rhetorical stance: the systematic development of various instances of oxymoron. The usual dichotomies (nature versus culture, transcendental versus empirical) are not taken as simple opposites, the two aspects of a paradox; nor are they captured in the unity of a dialectic process. They are joined in what Deleuze calls a disjunctive synthesis, the philosophical equivalent of the rhetorical figure of the oxymoron. Thus the phrase 'natural history' is not taken by Virno in its antiquated sense, as an old name for the sciences that deal with the natural world, but as an oxymoron, where the natural cannot, and yet must, be historical. The task of the philosopher is to historicize nature and to naturalize history. The truth is not out there, it is in between, the relationship between the two terms of the oxymoron being what Simondon calls a transductive relation, a relation that creates its terms (as opposed to inductive or deductive relations, where one term precedes the relation and the other follows). A Marxist example of such a relation would be the relation between opposing classes, which are created by the class struggle. In Virno's philosophy of language, it is language that is the site, or the manifestation, of such oxymorons.

Let us take, for instance, the opposition between the transcendental and the empirical. The usual position on this dichotomy is that the transcendental, being the precondition of our experience of the empirical, is not itself an object of experience. In the field of language, the opposition takes the form of the opposition between the transcendental linguistic faculty and empirical utterances. Virno's aim is to link together the two terms of this potential oxymoron, by producing utterances that make the linguistic transcendental manifest, an object of

sensory experience. He finds this in the 'absolute performative' of the utterance 'I speak', where the usual content of the utterance 'what-we-say' (*Ciò che si dice*) is overshadowed by the pure sayability of 'the-fact-of-speaking' (*Il fatto che si parla*). Here, Virno is implicitly playing with another dichotomy, one that the English language does not allow, but on which a good part of French linguistics, after Benveniste, is founded: between *énoncé* (the utterance as result, what we say) and *énonciation* (the utterance as process, the fact of speaking). The utterance 'I speak' is an *énoncé* the only contents of which are its own *énonciation*. It is a performative, in that it does what it says, and it is absolute, in that it can never fail – it is the only performative for which it is impossible to imagine conditions of infelicity.

Except, of course, it does not exist. It is a purely theoretical utterance, which the grammar of the language allows, but with no possible meaning outside the philosophical language game in which it plays the main part. But, faithful to his oxymoric stance, Virno insists that it must be voiced, that the word must become flesh by being articulated, that the theoretical potentiality must become actuality. And, in support of this, he produces various language games, the logical structure of which is provided by the absolute performative. Not all of them are convincing. Thus he claims that in phatic utterances, as in our everyday small talk, we speak not in order to communicate or to share a cognitive content, but in order to practise the simple ritual of speaking. What-we-say is communicative and cognitive; the-fact-of-speaking is ritualistic. Unfortunately, in both cases the proposition is patently false: we may not say 'hello!' or talk about the weather in order to share a cognitive content, but we do utter these utterances in order to communicate, to establish or to maintain communication.

But Virno's other examples are far more convincing. He borrows from Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky the concept of a child's egocentric discourse, when a child speaks in order to establish her capacity to speak, to exercise her linguistic faculty. Virno also proposes an analysis of religious language, from simple prayer to glossolalia. Contrary to the trivial analysis of common sense, we do not pray to God in order to inform Him of a state of affairs (since He knows it all already) or to demand something of him (since He is far above attempts at influencing His will), but in order to ritually assert our faith. In this sense, the endless repetition of the Om syllable by Buddhists is the archetypal form of prayer. This account also applies to glossolalia, where, under the direct inspiration of God, the faithful utter a stream of words whose only meaning resides in the bare fact of their utterance. Thus the linguistic transcendental, the faculty of speaking, the precondition of actual utterances, finds its incarnation in specific language games, when it become empirical without ceasing to be transcendental.



The phrase 'linguistic faculty' is fraught with danger. It smacks of Chomskyan innatism and universal grammar. But it is not used in that sense by Virno, who revisits the famous discussion between Chomsky and Foucault at Eindhoven in 1971, the topic of which was the concept of human nature. Chomsky's naturalist position (the language faculty is inscribed in the mind/brain in the form of an innate universal grammar) clashed with Foucault's historicist position, framed in impeccable Marxist terms (language is a set of historical and social phenomena). Virno shifts the ground of the debate by producing one more oxymoron: the way to approach the question of language adequately is through what he calls 'natural historiography'. Utterances are the product, necessarily and inseparably, of biology and of history. Their temporality belongs both to the arrested time of evolution (which he calls 'metahistory') and to the time of historical change. For, on the one hand, an utterance is the product of the linguistic faculty, understood here as the biological

precondition of language (the physiological structure needed for phonic production) and, at the same time, the product of a historical conjuncture in which this language is actually spoken (with its social, cultural and historical determinants). Language, therefore, is a 'transitional object' in the sense of Donald Winnicott. Language links the potentiality, the *dunamis* of the linguistic faculty, with actually existing and constantly changing historical language.

At this stage, we have a full-fledged philosophy of language, at the centre of which we find the following four propositions: (i) there is an incommensurable difference between the linguistic faculty and the historical languages; (ii) the linguistic faculty coincides with the ancient notion of *dunamis* or potentiality; (iii) the linguistic faculty coincides with the historical languages and characterizes the entire experience of the speaker; (iv) 'the linguistic faculty confirms the instinctual poverty of the human animal, its undefined character and the constant disorientation that defines it'. In the contrast between propositions (i) and (iii), we recognize a formulation of the oxymoron that characterizes language, an oxymoron that incarnates itself in proposition (ii); whereas proposition (iv) introduces a new element, the unfinished state of the human animal at birth, known as neoteny – which Marxist psychologists like Vygotsky make much use of.

In order to assess the interest and importance of Virno's philosophy of language, it might be useful to read it in conjunction with Lucien Sève's massive volume on Marxian anthropology, *'L'Homme'?* (published in 2008, an important book in urgent need of translation). We find a number of points of convergence. First, they share a critique of interiority (the title of one of the sections of Virno's book). Language for Virno has pre-individual elements (the linguistic faculty) and it is transindividual, a concept he borrows from Simondon. In Sève, whose anthropology is a sustained commentary on Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach ('the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations.') the central thesis is what he calls the social ex-centration of human essence. The unfinished human animal becomes fully human by appropriating the human world inscribed in society (in historical language, in knowledge, beliefs and skills).

Second, Virno's concept of reification (there is a whole chapter devoted to a spirited defence of reification, which he distinguishes from both alienation and fetishism) corresponds not to its classic conception in Lukács (whom Virno does not even mention), but to the Marxian concept of objectivation (*Vergegenstandlichung*), one of the five concepts on which Sève constructs his anthropology: the human species became human by objectifying, in tools and signs, the result of its activity, thus creating a human world, transmissible to the next generation and accumulating knowledge. This is why it left the arrested time of biological evolution to enter the accelerated time of history; why, in Virno's terms, metahistory coincides with history. Third, Sève, a consistent Marxist, would have no difficulty in accepting Virno's main oxymoron, 'natural history', as it is a venerable Marxian proposition that *Homo sapiens* is a creature both natural and social-historical. And, as we saw, in spite of his use of the term 'innate' to qualify the linguistic faculty, Virno's innatism owes nothing to Chomsky, restricted as it is to the physiological preconditions of speech.

There are also, however, notables differences between the two approaches. Thus Sève would certainly reject the very first proposition of Virno's book, where he equates human nature with language. For Sève the sign is one of the means of production (the other being the tool) whereby human activity constructs the human world of objectivation. Virno's *tout au langage*, a common feature of our philosophical modernity, would smack of idealism for Sève: his anthropology is emphatically *not* a philosophy of language. And he would have problems with Virno's continued anthropogenesis. Virno makes much of Benveniste's suggestion that the speaker, with each new enunciation, appropriates the whole of language: the ontogenesis of the speech act recapitulates the phylogenesis of language. For Sève, the appropriation of the social human world, whereby the human animal becomes truly human, is a slow and cumulative process of learning, and this concerns language as all other types of knowledge.

It would seem that the old operaist and political leftist has not quite forgotten the philosophical convictions of his youth, even if they have now taken a widely different form. The Marxian oxymoron, the 'social individual', still figures in the book. But the philosophical *provocateur* has certainly achieved his goal: to compel the reader into thinking anew. And we remember Deleuze's contention that real thought is always the result of a *coup de force*. We must accept this coup, and read Virno.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle

Politics as (civil?) war

Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*, trans. Nicholas Heron, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, and Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2015. 87 pp., £40.00 hb., £11.99 pb., 978 1 47440 153 1 hb., 978 1 47440 307 8 pb.

Michel Foucault, *The Punitive Society: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1972–1973*, trans. Graham Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2015. 340 pp., £27.00 hb., 978 1 40398 660 3.

Michel Foucault, *Théories et institutions pénales. Cours au Collège de France, 1971–1972*, Gallimard/Seuil, Paris, 2015. 349 pp., €26,00 pb., 978 2 02098 569 7.

The publication of Foucault's early 1970s' lectures at the Collège de France, *The Punitive Society* (just translated into English by Graham Burchell) and *Théories et institutions pénales*, has begun to revive debates about Foucault's relation to Marxism as well as the place assigned to these lecture series in Foucault's oeuvre. Beyond Foucault's explicit and more polemical distancing from Marxist thought, concepts of capitalism, the wage-form, labour-power, materiality, and the time of production all traverse his analysis of the penal system and are particularly deployed in *The Punitive Society,* which is thus deemed by some to be among Foucault's most Marxian texts. The works of Louis Althusser, E.P. Thompson and Boris Porshnev, as well as Marx himself, are mobilized anew in these lectures, and, although Foucault explicitly rejects a series of Marxist concepts – including 'ideology' and 'appropriation' – and is more ambiguous in his use of a language of state apparatuses, the lectures show a more or less constant engagement with Marxist work. The lectures are also likely to rekindle discussions about the relation between politics and war, method and the 'history of the present' in Foucault's work; themes that appear, too, in Giorgio Agamben's short book *Stasis*, also based on lectures (from 2001). *Stasis*, which has come to replace *The Kingdom and the Glory* as 'Homo Sacer II. 2', raises similar questions about politics and war, method and the contemporary from what is, nonetheless, a quite different perspective from that of Foucault.

Reading Agamben's and Foucault's respective lectures on civil war together places their interventions in stark contrast: philosophically, methodologically, politically. Yet it is not only the distance between Foucault and Agamben that emerges through these books, but also a question of their distance from the present and of what light they might throw on how to carry out a 'history of the present' today. Agamben's and Foucault's interventions were made not only at the distance of several decades from each other, but also at a considerable distance from their publication (the two seminars that *Stasis* comprises were given at Princeton in October 2001). Each nonetheless raises renewed questions about our contemporary political condition. At the same time, Foucault's lectures render readings of his oeuvre messier, without a clear break marked either by the shift from archaeology to genealogy, by the 1976–77 sabbatical, by the much debated encounter with the Chicago School, or the turn to aesthetics in the later lectures. Instead, the lectures make visible a series of hesitations, uncertainties and aporias in Foucault's work. The insertion of civil war at the heart of Agamben's *Homo Sacer* series also performs a destabilizing gesture, in which the paradigm of exception is reconfigured as that of civil war.

Both *The Punitive Society* and *Stasis* start by observing the lack of political and philosophical attention to civil war. Civil war, declares Foucault, is 'philosophically, politically, and historically, a rather poorly developed notion'. Several decades later, Agamben concurs that a 'theory of civil war is completely lacking today, yet this absence does not seem to concern jurists and political scientists too much'. This lack of conceptualization has not gone unnoticed by political scientists and jurists. As civil wars have been increasingly juridified and measured, their conceptualization, and particularly how they differ from the vocabularies of revolt, revolution, guerrilla war, rebellion, uprising, sedition or insurgency, has nonetheless remained obscure. While Agamben's short book is dedicated to the theoretical thought of civil war, Foucault's attention to civil war fades over the course of subsequent lectures to disappear completely from the published version of *Discipline and Punish*. Briefly mentioned in *Homo Sacer* in relation to the originary biopolitical fracture of the people, Agamben's account of civil war moves in an opposite direction from

Foucault's work in this respect: from the margins to the centre of the *Homo Sacer* series.

Foucault's 1971–72 lectures do not problematize civil war, but rather use the language of revolt and sedition to discuss the repression of the Nu-pieds in 1639 Normandy through the intervention of Chancellor Séguier following an earlier military intervention and victory. In 1972–73, however, the denial of civil war as one of the 'first axioms of the exercise of power' is inverted so as to articulate a conception of power as 'a certain way of conducting civil war'. This formulation of the relation between politics and civil war marks a clear difference from the later reversal of Clausewitz in the lecture series published as *Society Must Be Defended*. 'Not Hobbes, nor Clausewitz, nor class struggle' – Bernard Harcourt helpfully reminds the reader by drawing attention to Foucault's note in a letter to Daniel Defert. Rather than the continuation of war by other means, the 1972–73 course articulates politics specifically as the continuation of civil war by other means.

At the beginning of the lecture series Foucault elaborates both a methodological rejection of concepts of exclusion and transgression (whose political usefulness he nonetheless acknowledges) and a rereading of Hobbes. In this early reading of Hobbes, Foucault distinguished the 'war of all against all' from civil war in order to then articulate civil war as an analyser of power. It is civil war that is to be excluded in Hobbes rather than the 'war of all against all'. By 1975–76, rather than 'permanent civil war', it is 'permanent war' that is taken up as an analyser of power and repeatedly invoked in the subsequent Foucault-inspired literature on politics and war. As 'civil war' becomes increasingly effaced from Foucault's analyses, so do earlier vocabularies of rebellion, sedition and revolt. In this way, civil war as an analyser of power relations captures a methodological problem that Foucault struggled with throughout this work. As he writes in *Society Must Be Defended*: 'How can we understand struggle in purely civil terms? Can what we call struggle – the economic struggle, the political struggle, the struggle for the State – actually be analysed not in terms of war, but in truly economico-political terms?'

The articulation of civil war as an analyser of power relations is symptomatic of a politico-theoretical uncertainty that Foucault attempts to solve in the guise of a methodological experiment. *The Punitive Society* adds an important qualifier to war – Foucault starts his analysis not from war per se, but from the specification and differentiation of war in Hobbes's work. His reading is not that of military strategists and architects of military camps, but of the revolts and insurgencies in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France and England. He refers to E.P. Thompson's work and reads historical accounts of the revolt of the Nu-pieds in Normandy in the first half of the seventeenth century. In the earlier lectures on *Théories et institutions pénales*, Foucault analyses the revolt of the Nu-pieds in terms of sedition. He argues that a system of repressive power – different from military and judicial power – emerges in response to popular sedition. A year later, the 'simple control' of sedition and seditious mob is replaced by a relation of compatibility and incompatibility between the bourgeoisie and 'popular illegalisms'.

The shift from the use of sedition and revolt in *Théories et institutions pénales* to that of civil war in *The Punitive Society* and of war *tout court* in *Society Must Be Defended* thus highlights an aporia at the heart of Foucault's rethinking of power. Civil war remains largely elusive – neither external war nor the 'war of all against all'; neither sedition nor revolt. Its relation to the private wars of the Middle Ages and even the war-like distribution of justice in Germanic countries remains unproblematized. Foucault also misses the distinction that Hobbes had drawn between sedition and civil war, in which he saw the former as the sickness of the Leviathan and the latter as its death. While civil war implies collectivities set against each other, the problematization of civil war ultimately eludes Foucault. Hence the qualifier 'civil' by and large drops out from later analyses, where war and the military language of strategy and tactics come to inform the diagnosis of the present.

Similarly, and despite its title, a theory of civil war is not the objective of Agamben's lectures. While he diagnoses the lack of a theory of civil war in the 1960s as deriving from the predominance of the concept of revolution and in the 1990s from the hegemony of management and administration of civil wars, Agamben is interested in civil war as a political paradigm that 'assimilates and makes undecidable brother and enemy, inside and outside, household and city'. In the first chapter, drawing on Nicole Loraux's writings on the Greek 'stasis', he locates the signature of civil war within key concepts of modernity. The second chapter moves to an investigation of the imagology of Hobbes's Leviathan and situates contemporary 'global civil war' within an eschatological reading. For Agamben, stasis is the threshold of politicization and depoliticization, a zone of indifference between the politicization of *oikos* and the economization of

polis. In a similar vein to the blurring of boundaries between *zoe* and *bios*, stasis creates a 'zone of indifference between the unpolitical space of the family and the political space of the city'. It is the ambiguity of stasis that makes possible the zone of indiscernibility between *oikos* and *polis*.

The reading of civil war in both Agamben and Foucault is framed through a methodological problem of oppositions. Oppositions have not been central to discussions of Foucault's methods. Foucault's methodological interventions appear primarily to formulate a move from repressive to productive power and from archaeology to genealogy (or what Foucault calls a dynastics of knowledge). Agamben uses the same distinction between archaeology and genealogy to describe Foucault's and his own methods. Indeed, in *The Kingdom and the Glory* Agamben opposes his philosophical archaeology to Foucault's genealogy, as a science of 'signatures' that is able to orient and follow concepts in new fields that are at a distance from the ones assumed by genealogy. This opposition between different forms of archaeology and genealogy elides the question of the methodological status of oppositions in both their works.

At the end of *The Punitive Society*, Foucault concludes that power is 'a permanent strategy that should be thought of against the background of civil war'. He takes dominant oppositions – justice and war, civil and military, power and war – and reverses them in order to rethink power and politics as (civil) war. In so doing, Foucault radically reconfigures one of the terms of the binary but leaves the second one untouched. The reconfiguration of politics is underpinned by a language of war, battlefields, strategy and tactics, which raises difficult questions about the militarization of politics. In rejecting both a dialectical and a philological view of politics, Foucault embraces an unreconstructed military one. His uncertainty about this methodological experiment is symptomatic of a theoretico-political uncertainty about the status and function of militarism and war in politics. As his notes on the revolt of the Nu-pieds suggest, the intervention of the army rendered the Nu-pieds as an enemy and thereby disqualified them as subjects of the king.

Despite his rejection of binaries, Foucault continues to work with oppositions. Supplementary terms such as 'civil war' or 'sedition' gradually disappear and the politics–war relation reverts to a Clausewitzian binary that he appeared to reject. His method of inverting oppositions needs to be placed in the context of his political interventions with Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (GIP). As the editors of *Théories et institutions pénales* note, Foucault repeatedly insisted on the political dimension of all forms of delinquency and rejected the distinction between political prisoners and common-law prisoners. For this reason, Foucault rejected the Maoists' initial attempt to differentiate political from common-law prisoners as a 'political error'. The rejection of such an opposition is a rejection of the perspective of the state, which is mobilized again and again across the lecture series – from the rejection of Hobbes's distinction between the warlike state of nature and the peace of the Leviathan to Lombroso's positivist criminology distinguishing between worthy and unworthy revolts in the *Abnormal*.

By inverting terms of opposition, Foucault leaves their displacement incomplete, in so far as one of the terms of the opposition remains unchanged and unchallenged: war (and its accompanying concepts of military strategy and tactics). Thus in his analysis of the revolt of Nu-pieds Foucault diagnoses a change in the work of justice that turns private wars into individual crimes, while public wars become political (in their dual understanding as internal and external wars). This diagnosis reiterates the opposition between private and public, internal and external, rather than displacing it, and elides the vocabularies of revolt, uprising and sedition that the discussion of the Nu-pieds had elicited. The formula of power as 'anti-seditionary' (1971–72) is subsequently replaced by power as civil war (1972–73) and ultimately by power as war (1975–76). Yet, in the reading of Hobbes, the insertion of civil war as a third term displaces the binary of 'war of all against all' and the peace of the Commonwealth. By distinguishing civil war from the 'war of all against all', Foucault effectively severs civil war from the Hobbesian fiction of the state of nature. This reading displaces binaries which are reiterated throughout the literature on Hobbes, including Agamben's reading in *Stasis*: 'In other words, the state of nature is a mythological projection into the past of civil war; conversely, civil war is a projection of the state of nature into the city: it is what appears when one considers the city from the perspective of the state of nature.'

In contrast to Foucault, Agamben approaches oppositions not by inverting their terms but by blurring the boundaries between them in discovering a zone of indiscernibility. In its ambivalence, *stasis* becomes an operator of indistinction. Thus, in invoking Arendt's reference to 'global civil war' in her 1963 book *On Revolution*, Agamben does not

discuss the distinctions that Arendt draws between revolution, insurrection, civil war and *coup d'état*: 'revolutions are more than successful insurrections and … we are not justified in calling every *coup d'état* a revolution or even in detecting one in every civil war.' For Agamben, it is not the field of distinctions that matters, as is the case with Arendt, but the indistinction that civil war inserts into the relation between *oikos* and *polis* so that the difference collapses or enters a zone of indiscernibility. Drawing upon Nicole Loraux's analysis, Agamben argues that 'Insofar as civil war is inherent to the family – insofar as it is, that is to say, an *oikeios polemos*, a "war within the household" – it is, to the same extent – this is the thesis that Loraux seems to suggest here – inherent to the city, an integral part of the political life of the Greeks.' For Agamben, too, civil war raises a question about the methodological and political status of oppositions. Or, in his own formulation: 'What relations should we suppose between *zōē* and the *oikos*, on the one hand, and between the polis and political bios, on the other, if the former must be included in the latter through an exclusion?' The key terms of Agamben's method are thus 'essential ambivalence', 'confusion', 'displacement' and 'threshold'. In blurring boundaries and unearthing the ambivalence of concepts, Agamben aims to displace the work of differentiation that law and power continuously enact. A dual movement of inclusion–exclusion is repeated with stasis as it is with sovereignty: *oikos* is included/excluded within the *polis* in similar ways to the inclusive exclusion of *zoe* from *bios*. This zone of indiscernibility disappears, however, in a collapse of binaries in his diagnosis of the present: the morphing of *polis* into *oikos* and the re-emergence of stasis as the 'global civil war' of terror.

Read together, these texts revitalize questions about politics and war, about the diagnosis of the present and the status of oppositions in political theory. Both Foucault and Agamben distance themselves from the juridical formula of settling oppositional ambiguities through clear definitions. More importantly, despite Foucault's suspicion of binary oppositions, he continues to labour with binaries which he inverts and attempts to displace. As oppositions – between migrants and refugees, terrorists and citizens, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, violence and peace – continue to demarcate the field of political action today, the necessity of displacing such oppositions remains as acute as ever.

Claudia Aradau

Snookered

Quentin Meillassoux, *Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction*, trans. Alyosha Edlebl, Univocal, Minneapolis, 2015. 96 pp., £13.15 pb., 978 1 93756 148 2.

The narrator of Isaac Asimov's 'The Billiard Ball' (1967), reprinted as the final third of Meillassoux's short book (first published in French in 2013), suspects that revered theoretical physicist James Priss has murdered Edward Bloom, an engineer-entrepreneur grown wealthy through exploiting his work. Their lifelong rivalry reaches its bloody conclusion after Priss establishes that anti-gravity is impossible since it would require an electromagnetic field of infinite size. To prove his superiority, Bloom develops a device to annul gravity and challenges Priss to participate in a televised demonstration. He claims that when Priss hits a billiard ball through the zero gravity field his invention projects, it will stop moving and just float up in the air. Instead, the ball shoots off at the speed of light, cutting through Bloom, killing him instantly.

Asimov's inspiration comes from David Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), which questions why, in anticipating the collision of one billiard ball with another, we assume a particular outcome will follow. The collision will be almost totally inelastic except for kinetic energy dissipated as sound and heat, and the balls will move off in this or that direction. Why, Hume asks, do we not expect the balls to 'remain at absolute rest', or for the cue ball to 'return in straight line' to the tip of the cue, or 'to leap off from the second in any line or direction'?

Meillassoux invokes Asimov as part of his argument that a 'metaphysically significant' difference can be described between two 'regimes of fiction', science fiction (SF) and extro-science-fiction (XSF). He consciously uses a 'rather common and banal'

definition of SF – it imagines different worlds, the alterity of which can always be explained through 'scientific knowledge' – so as to elaborate against it the distinctiveness of XSF, which conceives worlds in which 'experimental science cannot deploy its theories or constitute its objects within them'. To support this distinction, Meillassoux eschews contemporary genre theory, which considers genres as uncertain and unstable discursive phenomena, constantly in flux, to argue that if XSF novels do not exist, then SF (by his definition) nonetheless creates the conceptual category of XSF; and that if XSF novels do exist, including them within SF, regardless of any and all other characteristics they might posses, is an error. Such archaic formalist blather not only sails close to the tedious condescension of the chatterati wittering on about a 'transcending' of the genre in which it most obviously participates, but also undermines Meillassoux's conclusion.

Hume argues that neither *a priori* logic nor an *a posteriori* appeal to experience can foreclose the possibility that the laws of physics pertaining now might in the future abruptly change. Karl Popper, in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1934), has no problem with Hume's billiards scenario since it does not contradict his own argument about the falsifiability of science. (Proliferating experimental verifications of a theory merely demonstrates that, in the current state of knowledge, it is the best explanation we have. When an experiment proves it false, then refinements of the theory, even entire paradigm shifts, must occur. And there can be no guaranteed end to such upheavals.) But, Meillassoux argues, Popper rather misses the point. Recasting an ontological question as an epistemological one, Popper concedes that it is possible for the billiard ball to do the unexpected but assumes that its behaviour, once observed, will merely lead to better theorization, rather than inaugurate an XSF universe in which the very notion of experimental verification is untenable.

Asimov follows Popper in that his billiard ball's trajectory and velocity can be explained: mass-less objects travel at the speed of light; on entering the antigravity field, the ball loses all mass and thus accelerates to light speed; on leaving the field it regains its mass but atmospheric friction has negligible effect on its velocity. Although this explains the physics of the incident, there remains a residue of uncertainty, a figuration of falsifiability. Priss is a notoriously plodding thinker; to have deliberately killed Bloom he would have had, 'at one crucial moment', to manage 'to think quickly and act at once'.

Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* argues that since Hume's scenario defies the general category of causality, we could not even perceive it: the contingency of natural laws necessary for it to happen 'would also make every perception and object-consciousness impossible'. It is not just that, in an XSF universe, dreams and reality would be impossible to tell apart, but that consciousness itself could not exist there. In a condition of such unstable chaos any potential objects or entities – including conscious subjects – would be denied the duration necessary to separate themselves out as distinct things. But, Meillassoux asks, must it be all or nothing? Can we not imagine universes that are more or less regular without being subject to *necessary* laws? Why must such a universe 'be, without fail, frenetically inconstant'? Kant's assumption that a lawless universe would be utterly chaotic is based on a probabilistic law to which a genuinely lawless universe would not be subject: 'Nothing prohibits it from composing – against every sound probability – a global order … at the heart of which certain details could nonetheless "run out of control" at any moment, like Hume's billiard balls.'

Meillassoux proposes three conceivable types of XSF universe. Type 1 is not, strictly speaking, an XSF universe since it contains causeless events that are too infrequent and limited to derail science or consciousness. Such punctual events are not reproducible and are thus beyond the purview of science. When they occur in fiction, they are probed by science until they can be explained, such as the haunting in Nigel Kneale's *The Stone Tape* (BBC 1972), or they take the form of a rhetorically heightened paraspace of uncertainty, such as the assorted Zones of the Strugatsky brothers' *Roadside Picnic* (1971), *Stalker* (Tarkovsky 1979) and M. John Harrison's *Kefahuchi Tract* novels (2002–12). Type 3 universes resemble the chaos Kant imagines, or perhaps, in the words of Fredric Jameson, a schizophrenic series of 'pure and unrelated presents in time' that not even the most aleatory of texts can describe. They are, however, limned in singularity fictions, such as Greg Bear's *Blood Music* (1985) and Greg Egan's *Schild's Ladder* (2002), which imagine regions in which consciousness is able to function at the quantum level, effectively weakening decoherence and enabling quantum potentialities to coexist. Fictions of this kind are defined by a profound contradiction – such regions are beyond representation yet must be represented – and by the asymptotic approaches to representation they must adopt. Their significance lies in the varieties of their failure.

Meillassoux's main concern, however, is with Type 2 universes, which are sufficiently irregular to make science, but not consciousness, impossible. He identifies three novels that suggest different ways in which a story might 'tear the tissue of its own frames through ruptures that nothing justifies'. Robert Charles Wilson's *Darwinia* (1998) introduces a massive, inexplicable rupture as Europe and parts of Asia and Africa are suddenly replaced with an isomorphic landmass on which evolution has taken a radically different path; but later revelations provide a scientific rationale. In Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979), the absurdity-generating 'infinite improbability drive' points to the possibility of proliferating ruptures beyond number; but in order to calculate the improbable, such a device depends on probabilistic laws. Philip K. Dick's *Ubik* (1969) presents a universe in which reality is uncertain, 'in which the real would go to pieces, progressively ceasing to be familiar to us'; but it turns out to be the shared delusion inhabited by a group of assassinated psychics, their lives fading away in suspended animation as their energies are predated by a malevolent psychic in the same half-life facility (this might not sound much like science, but it is figured as such in the novel).

While each of these examples eventually succumbs, as Meillassoux admits, to causal logic, he claims to have found in René Barjavel's *Ravage* (1942), translated by Damon Knight as *Ashes, Ashes* (1967), 'a genuine XSF novel … mistakenly branded as science fiction'. Set in 2052, it depicts a rather fantastical future – closer to the satirical absurdism of Albert Robida or Boris Vian than to the extrapolative engineering of Jules Verne – in which electricity suddenly ceases to work; a small remnant of humanity survives the ensuing fall of civilization. A pair of speechifying characters foreground the idea that this single, far-reaching transformation effectively renders all physical laws contingent, and the novel sanctions none of the several sketchily proffered explanations. And for Meillassoux this is sufficient. He downplays the reinvention of the steam engine in the novel's closing pages, even though it potentially signifies the return to an SF universe. He notes the coincidence of this reactionary novel's composition and Marshal Pétain's 'return to the land' policy, but completely overlooks the importance of the massively overdetermined recuperation of a nationalist and misogynist Catholic patriarchy as the basis of the novel's *stable and knowable* successor civilization. He also neglects to mention that the end of electricity coincides with the Black Emperor avenging centuries of slavery and colonialism with a devastating missile attack on America; while there is no causal link diegetically, the novel does place the 'chaos' of anti-colonialism under erasure, destroying that world so as to reinstate 'order'.

Meillassoux's formalism gives him, unsurprisingly, a quite monolithic view of genre. Consequently, he struggles to make sense of a novel that switches from one (Robida/Vian-like) regime of verisimilitude to another (apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic) one, both of which are science-fictional, albeit in different ways. Such redirections and misdirections are not that uncommon in science fiction. Philip K. Dick and A.E. Van Vogt tend to concatenate epistemological

rug-pulling within a particular diegetic order, while stories that force their protagonists to reframe their entire understanding of the universe typically reinforce this 'conceptual breakthrough' with a change in the regime of verisimilitude: take a sledgehammer to the wall at the edge of the *Dark City* (Proyas 1998), and suddenly you are no longer in a film noir. In contrast, *Ravage* has no conceptual breakthrough, but its single switch of regime heightens the effect of the punctual event in such a way that Meillassoux misreads it. Daunted by the apparent *scale* of the phenomenon, he cannot perceive that its *singularity* (reinforced by the novel's ultimate conservation of order) means that it is just another Type 1 punctual event.

Although Meillassoux cannot persuasively identify an XSF text, is it possible to imagine 'an environment of rubble in which to explore the truth of a worldless existence'? Perhaps. *The Signal* (Eubank 2014) combines Dickian destabilizations with frequent regime changes. It starts off indistinguishable from an indie movie about a college-age couple breaking up as they drive across America with a friend, but becomes, one after another, a hacker movie, an off-road horror movie complete with first-person video, an alien abduction movie, a conspiracy thriller in a government facility, a couple-on-the-run movie with SF overtones and a superhero movie, all shot in different styles, before culminating in a conceptual breakthrough so unexpected and visually stunning that it takes a couple of minutes to realize it explains nothing. Meillassoux's climactic call for XSF, for 'self-experience in a non-experiencable world', for a 'precarious intensity … plung[ing] infinitely into … pure solitude', for 'an environment of rubble in which to explore the truth of a worldless existence', produces a similar sense of elation. And moments later of deflation.

Mark Bould

Mediate and aggregate

Christine Delphy, *Separate and Dominate: Feminism and Racism after the War on Terror*, trans. David Broder, Verso, London and New York, 2015. 192 pp., £14.99 pb., 978 1 78168 880 9.

For those who are already acquainted with Christine Delphy's work, *Separate and Dominate* is a long-awaited publication. It does not disappoint. Having co-founded the journal *Nouvelles Questions feministes* with Simone de Beauvoir over four decades ago, Delphy remains one of the most influential and controversial feminist thinkers in France. With sharp and accurate arguments across a range of different text and formats, she applies the materialist feminist theory of sex and gender, for which she is best known, to questions of race and 'othering', and, in doing so, lays out the premiss for a new universal political project that sacrifices no one at the expense of others.

The main aim of *Separate and Dominate* is to demonstrate that human division is socially constructed through concrete material practices. Delphy provides us with analytical insights into the oppression of women, queer people, Afghan civilians and Guantánamo inmates and warns us against false oppositions between oppressed groups. Particularly, she challenges the claims that the French 'veil law' and the invasion of Afghanistan were attempts to emancipate women and the way in which feminists came to support racist measures. Although some of the essays in this collection date back to 1996, and a few discuss political events particular to France, the issues addressed are far from outdated or parochial. With the intensification of Islamophobia, especially after the November Paris attacks, continuously high rates of domestic violence and the increase in racialized murders by police in North America, the book reveals the degree to which Western societies still have Others in common.

The opening essay, 'Who's behind the "Others"?', is by far the most philosophical. Here Delphy presents the reader with her underlying theoretical framework, some of which can be understood as a development of her former works 'Rethinking Sex and Gender' (1993; published in the journal *Women's Studies International Forum*), *The Main Enemy* (1977) and *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression* (1984). Through brief engagements with thinkers including Levinas, Hegel and Freud, Delphy argues that the concept of the Other is purely an invention of the Western tradition. Philosophy, understood here as a *Weltanschauung*, a world-view that a culture has in

common, has ever since Plato firstly been a reflection on the self and only secondarily a reflection on the world. However, the 'I' is never alone. Indeed, when writing 'cogito, ergo sum', Descartes never asks what the conditions of possibility of his thinking are – nurture, shared language and care. Therefore, Delphy concludes, the Western *Weltanschauung* is a philosophy of the dominant: the Ones. Further, as a social construct this idea of the Other is upheld through material practices, including discursive and ideological ones; it is the One who has the power to name and define 'the Other', whereas the Other qua Other can never be the One. The idea of the 'Other', then, as a way of 'naturalizing' the oppression of women, non-whites and gays, is itself the source of oppression. The relationship between the Other and the One is not reciprocity. The Ones are by definition in a position of power and privilege.

This is not, of course, a new argument. Although Delphy only reminds us of it in a brief footnote in this book, all her work is marked by the notion that a dichotomous distinction, such as that between men and women, is a social construct and, as such, not an essentialist one. This is because the 'mark of sex' is not found in a pure state, but rather is a mark of an exploitative social hierarchy. Delphy does not deny anatomical and reproductive differences between males and females, but argues that there is no essential reason why the reproductive function should be extended as a division into all fields of human activity. Thus, the mark of sex merely allows us to identify the dominated from the dominants, and like the concept of the 'Other' it allows for a naturalized explanation for the oppression of women.

In the chapter 'Race, Caste and Gender in France', Delphy applies the same principles to the concept of race. Instead of reproductive organs, here colour is the axis of the dichotomy. Again, Delphy makes it clear we are talking about a social construct, which employs some of the physical characteristics of individuals to construct hierarchically ordered groups. Otherness is born of a hierarchical division, and is simultaneously the means of this division. Consequently, gender and race are social constructs built for the purpose of domination, although they take distinct forms. Delphy has rehearsed the solution to this before, particularly in *The Main Enemy*: we must do away with dichotomous categories. Whereas differentiating between individuals or items is not necessarily hierarchical, dichotomous categorizations are. She refers to her argument that although we categorize vegetables, for example, they are not hierarchically organized in this distinction. The negation within a dichotomy necessitates that one category is superior to the other. This is why the 'liberal' response of 'accepting the Other' is still oppressive.

The second theme addressed by this book is the multiplicity of oppressed groups, and the relation between them and the concept of class. Although she is not explicit in her use of the term 'intersectionality', the chapters 'A Movement: What Movement?' and 'Anti-sexism or Anti-racism? A False Dilemma', make a good attempt to theoretically untangle and develop this concept. What is at stake in *Separate and Dominate* is the way in which the struggle of one group can serve as a tool for the oppression of another; disclosing the form of racism disguising itself as a feminist liberatory discourse that was employed, for example, in the war against terror and the French hijab ban.

As a self-proclaimed materialist feminist, this is not new territory for Delphy. As opposed to a more Marxist tradition, this strand of feminist theory insists on examining the material conditions under which social arrangement and oppression develop, in ways which are not reducible to strict capitalist economic relations. Criticizing the present-day function of the class struggle as divisive in so far as it has the ability to silence people against other forms of oppression, Delphy argues that struggles are necessarily multiple and non-hierarchical. The social production of sex and race relies on material conditions of all sorts and the different ways in which people participate in these social productions.

Perhaps the most significant contribution to the discussion of structural oppression is to be found in the chapter 'Race, Caste and Gender in France', introducing the concept of caste as a 'local system of oppression'. Where the concept of class fails, so does 'race'. Focusing on ex-colonized North African immigrants in contemporary France, Delphy argues that the concept of caste is useful for explaining a specific place of racial oppression within the class system. Whereas race emphasizes the process, caste stresses the results – the 'inherited social structure' – of the process. This takes up the deployment of a concept of caste in *The Main Enemy* to explain women's oppression. Referring to women's economic position as performers of unpaid housework, she argues that as a group, which is subject to a relation of production, they constitute a class, and as a category of human beings who are destined at birth to become a part of a particular class, they constitute a caste. In this way, then, women share a certain class position, which somehow transcends the capitalist class structure.

As applied to Delphy's argument in *Separate and Dominate*, this would imply that certain immigrant groups are not only a caste; they also constitute a particular class, much like women. However, apart from mentioning that caste functions 'within' the class system, the relation between the two becomes rather more blurry in *Separate and Dominate* than in her earlier work.

How, then, in more practical terms, does *Separate and Dominate* suggest that we move forward? Can we propose a strategy of 'the left'? In 'A Movement: What Movement?' Delphy poses the question of whether we need to reject the categories of race, sex and class altogether. If we are to fully understand the overlap of oppressions we need to attend to the array of 'real' lived experiences. However, she also adds that these categories might be useful for helping people analyse their own situation. Each oppression, then, is the basis for an autonomous struggle; however, such struggle must always address the ways in which oppressions overlap.

Unfortunately, it is not clear what the universal approach proposed here by Delphy must focus on. Delphy explicitly argues that the Other/One distinction is a result of a division as opposed to an *a priori* cause of it. Similarly, Delphy repeatedly criticizes the orthodox Marxist approach of reducing oppression in capitalist society to pure relations of production. In her earlier work, *Close to Home*, for example, she argued that the oppression of women is rooted in the so-called 'domestic mode of production' existing *alongside* the capitalist mode of production. For Delphy, men appropriate the *unpaid* labour of the wife and of other family members as head of the household in a form that therefore necessarily differs from the extraction of surplus value from wage labour. But we are left to wonder how, by comparison, we understand race, caste and sexuality with regard to modes of production, and thus how exactly we universalize the struggle.

Separate and Dominate, then, does leave a number of questions to be answered, and if the reader is not acquainted with Delphy's more philosophical work it can at times be difficult to tease the theory out of the writing. However, Delphy does not set out to present an all-encompassing philosophical theory. In fact, what the collection does is call for further developments in materialist feminism. After reading *Separate and Dominate*, it is clearer than ever that this is an urgent call.

Malise Rosbech

The dregs of Hegel

Martin Heidegger, *Hegel*, trans. Joseph Arel and Niels Feuerhahn, Indiana University Press, Bloomington IN, 2015. 168 pp., £23.99 hb., 978 0 25301 757 4 hb.

To claim that the famous 'confrontation with Hegel' traverses the whole of Heidegger's philosophy is not without justification. There is reference to Hegel at the end of a supplemental text the young Heidegger composed immediately after the completion of his 1915 *Habilitationsschrift*; and over five decades later, during the 1968 seminars at Le Thor, the septuagenarian philosopher notes again that 'we must begin a confrontation with Hegel'. This welcome translation of volume 68 of the Heidegger *Gesamtausgabe* makes available to English speakers another presentation of this central philosophical motif of Heidegger's thought.

Hegel contains two texts. The first consists of lecture notes organized under the title 'Negativity. A confrontation with Hegel approached from negativity' (1938–39 and 1941). The second is a more polished manuscript, 'Elucidation of the "Introduction" to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*' (1942), which is basically a preliminary articulation of Heidegger's 1942–3 essay 'Hegel's Concept of Experience', first published in the collection *Holzwege* in 1950 and translated into English as a book in 1970. Both the translators and Heidegger's editor note that it was Heidegger himself who grouped these texts together, forming a self-contained treatise.

At first blush, it is not entirely clear why Heidegger envisaged the two texts together. Not only are they distinct in form, but their content and textual focuses also appear to diverge. The first text focuses on an explication of the way in which the question of the anteriority of 'negativity' is insufficiently raised in the famous opening sections of the *Science of Logic*. Heidegger orients his reading from the standpoint of

two speculative propositions of Hegel's philosophy that are not explicitly part of the conceptual trajectory of the *Logic*: the identity of substance and subject (as presented in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) and the identity of rationality and actuality (as presented in the Preface to the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*).

The second text, in radical distinction to the first, consists of a close reading of the dense sixteen paragraphs that form the 'Introduction' to the *Phenomenology*. More precisely, it is a detailed exposition of the ontological status of Hegel's concept of experience; that is, experience as knowledge of, as Heidegger puts it, 'the objectness of objects'. Here, recourse to what Heidegger calls the 'principles' of Hegel's work is not taken. Rather, experience is grasped as the thought of the ground of the 'originary' unity of itself in its self-differentiation, from within the confines of Hegel's 'Introduction'.

The first text also recalls the general philosophical categories organizing Heidegger's great unfinished, posthumously published work, the *Beiträge* or *Contributions* of 1936–38: 'event', 'abyss', 'leap', 'beyng' and, in some sense, 'inceptual thinking' punctuate the lecture notes. The second text, however, does not seem to fit neatly – at least at a semantic level – to the Heidegger of the 'turn'. Hegel is not confronted at the point at which his philosophy does not, and cannot, think its anteriority; that is, the essence of negativity as a distinctive comportment of the 'question of being'. Rather, the exposition of experience discloses in what sense the concept of experience is itself the ontological presentation of 'confrontation' itself, which, according to Heidegger, means the 'letting-appear' of the ontological difference between being and beings.

What is it, then, that unites these texts at the level of content if they appear to be so distinct at the textual and conceptual level? Two points of methodological and conceptual coalescence are apparent from the first text. That text begins with a caveat addressed directly to Heidegger's audience: 'The explorations that we are attempting in the form of a discussion should not interrupt the course of your work of interpreting Hegel's *Logic*.' As we read on, however, we realize that Heidegger's confrontation with Hegel is formed around proposing nothing less than the 'interruption' of any reading of the *Science of Logic*. What Heidegger wants to address is the 'questionlessness (*Fraglosigkeit*)' of negativity as it unfolds, principally, in Hegel's *Logic*, which, according to Heidegger, consists of an attempt to grasp the ontological difference between 'the totality of beings' and 'the being of beings' from out of the limits of 'pure being' (the most immediate and abstract ontological category).

For Heidegger, Hegel's philosophical enterprise constitutes a 'singular' moment in the history of Western metaphysics in that it is oriented by an attempt to expose the transformation of being in the very moments that structure its ontological unfolding. Thus, ontological difference is produced in the process of being's self-determination; it is the truth of its becoming. From beginning to end, the *Logic* is, according to Heidegger, a speculative metaphysics in that it presents the becoming of the truth of being from out of its initial status as 'the being that is most in being'. This transition is, crucially, conditioned on the unquestioned presupposition of the 'reconstructable' status of the terms that punctuate the transformation of being. According to Heidegger, this is rendered possible by the 'energy' of an unconditioned negativity that is enclosed in the unconditioned 'standpoint' of philosophy as absolute knowledge. It is this 'energy' that is 'questionless'.

What is 'the questionless'? Heidegger gives the following definition: 'that which is at bottom *un*decided but which in the flight from mindfulness passes itself off as something that is decided.' In that Hegel's philosophy is premissed on the 'self-evidence' of negativity as the 'questionless', it does not touch upon the 'fundamental question' that operates, in some sense, before negativity, as an anterior origin (*Ursprung*) whence *Dasein,* as the radical 'openness' to that which is 'originary', is said to arise as a 'leaping attainment (*Er-springung*)'. What renders Hegel's thought philosophical is that it 'wants *being*'. It does this without thinking what comes before it; that is, the experience of an originary mode of comportment to being orientated towards its own basis as essentially undecidable. In its form as a construction of systematic philosophy, Hegel's metaphysics thus results in a 'wilful evasion' of thinking itself.

And yet Hegel's philosophy points beyond itself at the moment of its 'questionlessness': 'the questionlessness of negativity goes back to the questionlessness of thinking as the basic faculty of man, the positing of whose essence is itself beyond questioning.' For Heidegger, this shift constitutes the reinscription of the *a priori* determinate relation of thinking and being that underpins the history of modern metaphysics, from its Cartesian inception, especially. In so far as an *a priori* determinate relation to being forms it, thinking is 'the determinative and horizon-giving

relation to being.' On the basis of this self-evident relation of thinking and being, 'ontology' is reduced to a 'scholastic sealing' of the 'questionability of thinking in its essence' as a relation to what Heidegger refers to as 'beyng (*Seyn*)'; that is, the 'being' that at once *grounds* (or gives 'permission [*Zulassung*]' to, as Heidegger puts it at one point) 'beings' and 'is most in being', and is irreducible to a 'mere supplement to being'. ('Beyng', accordingly, cannot be understood in terms of the *woraufhin* noted in the introduction to *Being and Time*.)

It is at this point that the full effect of Heidegger's 'turn' can be recognized. It is the *thinking* of negativity that deepens the philosophical kernel of Hegel's 'consummation' of metaphysics, as an 'onto-theology' that does not think the 'question of the truth of beyng'. This shift in terms – from philosophy as metaphysics to 'thinking' – consists in bringing into question the 'essence of thinking (*Wesen des Denkens*)' itself – that is to say, the matter of thinking itself. Here, Heidegger puts this another way: 'to loosen up what is questionless into something questionworthy'.

The unifying proposition of *Hegel* is, paradoxically, a dividing principle. Heidegger wants to show in what sense the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* are essentially separate philosophical works. The *Logic* fails to put into question its own grounding presupposition, whereas the *Phenomenology* points beyond the limits of its metaphysical orientation by way of its exposition of the ontological core of experience. Herbert Marcuse and Gillian Rose, in different yet interconnected ways, have contested Heidegger's separation.

One salient methodological point structuring Heidegger's confrontation here is the distinction between thinking the core of a philosophical project and the standpoint of mere historicism, or,as Heidegger puts it in a condensed formulation, 'a making-present … as a past'. (This distinction is taken up in a more detailed fashion in the newly translated subsequent volume, volume 69 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, *The History of Beyng*.) According to Heidegger, the general reception of Hegel's work in the university context toes the familiar historicist line. This standpoint forms one side of 'the German relation' to Hegel's work; it consists, at bottom, of a 'blind parroting' that resorts in instrumentally converting Hegel's philosophy 'to the requirements of the times'. The other side is more brutal: it is simply 'blind rejection' of Hegel's thought. Historicism remains 'entangled in an either–or' impasse that, at best, offers us impoverished understandings of Hegel's philosophy or, at worst, obstructs any philosophical interrogation of that philosophy. And yet, is there not precisely a historicist, thus impoverished, character to Hegel's own thought, operating as the undialectical starting point of the development of his philosophical project in both the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*?

It could be argued that Hegel begins his *Phenomenology* with a paradoxical presentation of the determinate content of an impoverished mode of consciousness that appears *as if* it were an accomplished, or rich articulation. This paradoxical gesture should be understood in a precise way. It does not suggest that the 'wealthiest' mode of consciousness ('sense-certainty'), or richest ontological category (being), is *merely* 'poor' when examined more closely. Rather, Hegel tries to comprehend the actual determinate content contained in a mode of consciousness that immediately arrogates to itself its own undifferentiated identity. He does not oppose externally reflected terms to one another ('rich–poor'), but exposes in what sense the terms contain within each other their inner contradiction at the level of their assumed self-identity. There is a certain 'richness' to an 'impoverished' category.

In some sense, the historicist standpoint is the necessary undialectical starting point for Hegel's thought. In fact, the *Logic* can be said to emerge by way of underscoring the necessity of its own mediation through calcified and inert positions: the 'disordered heap of dead bones' that constitute the 'familiar forms of thought', as Hegel puts it in the preface to the second edition. It is worth noting that Hegel's early philosophical work, shortly after his arrival in Jena, develops by way of an exposition of the distinction and interconnection between a 'historical view' of the philosophical systems punctuating the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and their mere appearance in the form of 'idiosyncratic views'.

A crucial aspect of Hegel's thought is that it engages these forms of thought at the level of their familiarity. It is from out of the exposition of the familiarity of what appears, at first hand, as 'familiar' that a sense of the methodological orientation of Hegel's philosophical logic is rendered intelligible. Thus, the 'insipid and dried-up sediment of a formerly lively drink' that Heidegger refers to in the second text of *Hegel* must be grasped within the dialectic it conceals (a dialectic that Heidegger sets aside). The sediment is not to be discarded and a new drink poured; rather, the dregs are the passage through which philosophical thought is actualized.

Hammam Aldouri

Heavy facts

Justin E.H. Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2015. 312 pp., £27.95 pb., 978 0 69115 364 3.

One of the most troubling moments that Justin Smith uncovers in his history of the construction of the concept of 'race' in the early modern period, among a welter of racist pronouncements by philosophers still central to the tradition of European thought, appears in a 1741 study by Pierre Barrère titled *Dissertation on the Physical Cause of the Colour of Negroes*. Barrère writes of his experiments on the skin of corpses,

> If, after long maceration of the skin of a Negro in water, one detaches the epidermis or outer layer of skin, it will be found to be black, very thick, and to appear transparent when it is held up to the light. … it is evidently proven that the skin of Negroes is not, so to speak, picked up [that is, not environmentally caused, but essential].

This passage is not central to Smith's account and is not typical of the book, which emphasizes the philosophical conditions for the construction of 'race' over empiricist ones. But it provides a gruesome synecdoche of the European intellectual investigation into 'blackness' and human difference in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The 'white' scientist here literally strips the skin from his object of study to analyse it. The 'black' body is necessarily lifeless, abstracted from his living activity and thereby from humanity. Barrère's account makes little sense: the skin is black and thick, yet transparent against the light, as if able to take on whatever narrative the scientist wants to impose. The experiment seeks to determine whether skin pigmentation relates to environmental factors, or whether it signifies essential difference between 'races'. If the latter, it would contribute to the attempt to establish a hierarchy of peoples, with various proximities to animality, reason and God. Although scrutiny of a patch of skin obviously cannot determine whether generations of environmental difference may lead to phenotypical differences, the 'white' scientist Barrère considers it 'proven' that 'blackness' is essential.

Smith's book is an investigation into the early modern roots of notions of racial difference. It examines the intellectual conditions that made Barrère's experiment possible: why and how had skin colour, and the gradations thereof used to demarcate different 'races', become an object of intellectual inquiry? Why and how were Voltaire, Hume and Kant, from their differing philosophical and geographical positions, able to write such racist passages in texts from the 1730s to the 1790s? How has this history had effects that extend into the present?

The book identifies three interrelated aspects of this history, which form a three-way feedback loop: taxonomy and life-scientific theories of classification; colonialism, its ethnographical reports and its economic and ideological imperatives; and philosophical reflection, in which any boundary between 'philosophy' and 'science' was far more fluid than today. As Smith notes, the second of these, European colonialism and, most importantly, slavery, has often been taken to be the most important factor in the appearance of systemic racism, to the extent that it has been argued that this legacy contains nothing 'intellectual' at all, but reflects only economic grounds. However, Smith's contention is that there is always a 'complex interplay' between a society's ideas, beliefs and actions. Accordingly, his focus is on philosophers, the categories through which they thought and which they brought into being. Whilst only tentatively employing notions such as 'discourse', Smith's method of tracing the emergence of the category of 'race' is broadly Foucauldian.

Is any single philosopher or group of thinkers 'to blame'? One of Smith's aims is to 'forestall any construction of a myth of origins for the modern race concept'. No one invented 'race': the term was continuous with the Latin *genus*, and had been used in French to describe breeds of domestic animals. What is at stake is not therefore tracing the first formulation of the 'race' concept, which might implicitly absolve other thinkers by isolating the problem in a thinker or a philosophy, but identifying the broad contours within European thought in which racist categorization could occur. Smith thus makes a nuanced intervention into the debates initiated by Robert Bernasconi's pioneering research into the centrality of Kant for the creation of a scientific concept of 'race'.

There is an issue in this general approach, which Smith does not fail to acknowledge. Arguing that 'race' is a biological fiction risks undermining the political struggles that utilize the category in order to challenge the very real political and social oppression that stem from the racialized structure of our societies. The political context for Smith's study (although he is a professor at Paris VII) is the United States, where it is as clear as ever that life and, frequently and tragically, death are traversed by stark racialized

inequalities. Smith quotes Naomi Zack on this: 'Tigers have to be dismounted with care'; what Toni Morrison calls enforced racelessness is unacceptable in a context of ongoing racist oppression, even if its biological basis is fictional. The book's response is not to dismiss the concept of 'race' but to show the *history* of its emergence, in which it has always been 'an evaluative notion masquerading as a natural kind'.

Smith is predominantly known for his work on Leibniz, and he recognizes that the book's truly original scholarship is on Leibniz and his contemporaries. There are two particularly key chapters: one is on Leibniz and presents his thought as constituting the high point of thinking a certain universality about humanity; the other is on Anton Wilhelm Amo, a former slave who became a significant philosopher at Halle, Wittenberg and Jena. The account of Leibniz might make one think, is this just an example of a scholar and enthusiast defending their favoured philosopher against charges of racism? Leibniz, as Smith notes, is often inserted into the history of the creation of 'race' because François Bernier's account of the division of the world on broadly racial grounds was read by Leibniz; Leibniz's summary of Bernier was then read by J.F. Blumenbach, who codified a basic classification of 'races' that had deep subsequent influence. Leibniz's own views on foreign peoples were not always beyond reproach: Smith discusses a bizarre and unpleasant text he wrote on the training of African warrior slaves for an 'invincible militia'.

But whilst Smith does try to absolve Leibniz of these sins, at issue is a broader argument about how the collapse of a certain philosophical universalism allowed the 'race' concept to dominate, when conjoined with a conception of humans as natural, classifiable beings. Leibniz's particular universalism is, in this sense, a key moment in non- or anti-racist conceptual thought. To make this claim, Smith must philologically separate Leibniz from Bernier, show that the idea of a chain of being in Leibniz is rethought as non-hierarchical, and clarify Leibniz's notion of 'domination' in both the monadological metaphysics and Leibniz's politics.

The central exhibit in Smith's defence is Leibniz's doctrine of 'unity in diversity'. Leibniz's work on Russia here provides a fascinating exemplification of this doctrine. On Smith's account, Leibniz's efforts to collect versions of the Lord's Prayer in the various languages within the Russian Empire was less a Christianizing project and more part of his intention to map the globe through its languages. This contextualizes the emergence of Leibniz's projects of a universal language and a comparative linguistics. Smith convincingly presents Leibnizian universalism as a path not taken by the mainstream of European thought, which instead developed into a different kind of Enlightenment in the liberal racism of the promotion of 'Western culture'.

The movement from early to high Enlightenment also forms the background to Anton Wilhelm Amo's career. He was emancipated by his relatively enlightened owner, a German Duke apparently hoping to impress Peter the Great of Russia. In 1727 Amo matriculated at Halle, writing a dissertation, sadly lost, titled *On the Right of Moors in Europe*, along with three further works written in the 1730s. Smith identifies two telling aspects of Amo's subsequent fate. The first relates to Amo's life. He returned to Africa in 1748: a contemporary source states this was due to 'melancholy', but a poem published the previous year had attacked Amo for his 'vile nature', which suggests at least some contribution from an emergent racism in the climate of German academia at the time. The second relates to the reception of Amo's thought. Smith argues that Amo's work has been systematically misinterpreted in the modern era, having been presented, in the context of the African philosophical tradition, as anti-Cartesian. On Smith's reading, by contrast, Amo defends a broadly Cartesian position, and, more specifically, one inspired by Leibniz's harmonious separation of mind and body. As with the Leibniz chapter, Smith's account and interpretation of Amo open a whole new branch of enquiry. The stakes are Amo's development of an anti-racist philosophical anthropology grounded on mind–body dualism, against the medical philosophy of the conservative Stahlians and Pietists whose philosophy could support a doctrine of inherent inferiority in some members of humanity. Out of the latter, Smith suggests, a liberal-racist high Enlightenment emerges, propounded most notably by Kant.

In these respects, and in others I have not touched on, Smith's book covers an incredible amount of ground: he traces in detail the emergence of 'race' across two centuries and the historical and philosophical issues accompanying it. However, one wishes the book had gone even further. The trajectory of 'race', after high Enlightenment liberal racism and Blumenbach's influence on racial science, was far from preordained, and it is a strength of Smith's research that it highlights the need for further examination of how, in the subsequent centuries, the 'biological fiction' of race came to be a socio-political fact. This

would implicate further philosophical, scientific and political discourses, up to and including the present.

Such an account would need to confront areas of current intellectual complicity in the persisting structures of essentialist racism, and this raises a question of *tone*. Smith's book adopts a measured, scholarly tone, whilst clearly being committed to anti-racist struggles in the present. I expect this will be a problem for many readers, when compared to the work of someone like Fanon, whose writing offers an example of a form that reflects the stakes of the intellectual and political struggles engaged. Whether the capacity for greater intervention in the received academic discourse justifies the adoption of its calm objectivity I leave open for debate. But Smith is undoubtedly following the 'sobriety' recommended by W.E.B. DuBois in a quotation that forms the book's epigraph: 'Again, we may decry the colour prejudice of the South, yet it remains a heavy fact. Such curious kinks of the human mind must be reckoned with soberly.'

Stephen Howard

Eat like an idealist!

Michael Tencer and Andy Wilson, eds, *The Assassin: Association of Musical Marxists Reader*, Unkant, London, 2015. 518 pp., £17.00 pb., 978 0 99265 092 6.

In this loud volume the Association of Musical Marxists (AMM) puts its no-money where its mouth is, not for the first time. As a physical thing, the anthology is *generous* and *awkward*: a superabundance of dayglo and neighbouring colours, a distracting wealth of graphic charms in an outsize paperback whose shape and weight resist distracted or any other sort of effortless reading. The hardest thing about reviewing the book was opening it on a small desk next to a desktop computer. Read it on the bus and your neighbour has to try hard not to read it too (which may well be part of the point). This is mentioned only because it has something to do with the reason a review, as opposed to an annotated track-listing, can be written at all: the anomaly whereby the mutual non-resemblance of 200-plus textual and visual components is so untainted by *diversity* – let alone by editorial broad-mindedness (as in 'broad church') – that something can be said about the whole.

It will surprise no one who has seen things by two or more of the contributors to *The Assassin* before that the agent binding their unlike materials together is the same one implied in the name of AMM publisher Unkant: namely, practical disdain for the Mind–Thing dualism. As editor Andy Wilson and prolific contributor (and co-publisher of Unkant) Ben Watson put it in an interview with Susan Witt-Stahl included here: 'Yes, we dislike Kant for separating the "best" in us from animals', placing 'on the one side, those who want to turn Marxism into a new school of refined and educated opinion, reified expertise and formalist BS; and, on the other side, *us*'. Or, in the words of Watson and Esther Leslie (in 'Comic Book Marxism'): 'By elevating imagination to a separate sphere, cultural idealism actually quarantines it, and prevents it having a productive relationship to scientific and practical endeavour.'

These axioms are not so much reiterated as played out, tested, over nearly 500 pages of entangled prose polemic, verse polemic, flyposters, flyers, musical scores, historical research, postcards, comics, exegesis, memoir, T-shirt design, book cover design, correspondence, conversation, drawing, collage, complete pamphlets, paint spatters and found things. The body of the book is necessarily obtrusive because the point is not to state *in theory* that neither disincarnate thought nor unthinkable flesh is any such thing (which would hardly pass as a fresh piece of Radical Philosophy, although it bears repeating often) but to work out what can be *done* under those conditions today. Practical strategies against Idealism matter because there's more at stake than proving philosophical Kantians wrong. As the two excerpts from Robert Dellar's *Splitting in Two* make unmistakeable, an un-Kant standpoint also stands up to scientific superstitions that patrol the real world fully armed. The Idealism confronted here is more than a matter of cloudy, flesh-neglectful contemplation: at least as often it's actively preoccupied with management of The Body (emphasis on the article) in the name of abstract principle, to be applied in turn to social life as unacknowledged whole.

So-called Speculative Realism (better named 'Positivist Mindfulness') will probably soon make its excuses and leave, but its neo-Lombrosian premisses are going nowhere. Leading spec. realtor Ray Brassier railed in the collection *Noise & Capitalism* (reviewed by Andrew McGettigan in *RP* 160, March/April 2010) against 'marxisant' music-talk that invokes 'human subjectivity, the interdependency between individual and social consciousness', and so on: all so much 'early bourgeois modernity', or indeed 'Idealism'. Yet the proposed neurotechnological corrective ('brain

fingerprinting, neural lie-detectors' etc., to be 'confronted' – if some obsolete subject insists – 'only … with neurobiological resources') re(in)states a hardy Neoplatonist theme. Petty social subject-objects are made of the canonical clay, serving as a seam of bio-behavioural data for a spectral Intellect to suck *up*, digest and reform. Prophecies of this sort tend to ignore the backside of the cycle, in which the findings excreted by the Spheres are composted through layers of professional guidance down to the level of policy, at which point they become the merely historical factors excluded as spam (in the canned meat sense) from the next intake of life-metrics.

So, advanced Idealism depends on The Body as much as it institutionalizes Mind, even if it would prefer not to watch the ordeals undergone every day by bodies. Meanwhile, AMM polemicists may rarely care to mention, say, neuroeconomics by name, but their counter-Kantianism already has its measure. They answer with a libidinous aesthetics, a calculated slapstick impact which is also history *written while* below. So much is staked on talk about music because so much is at stake at those thresholds where some body's audible flailing works directly on another nervous system, decoupling the spiritual silo from *its* organism, the labour unit from its rational choice. And the stakes can't be raised without reference to the monstrosities ranged against all such provisional joy. For example: the institutionally empowered knock at the door that even – no, *especially* when it hasn't happened yet – turns life into day release or worse for the half of any given city forced to live not quite inside the law. This product of capital's fondness for *demanding the impossible* of its subject–objects is best described by *Assassin* contributor Sean Bonney elsewhere (see http://abandonedbuildings.blogspot.co.uk), but the same siege-realism seeps through the excerpt from his *Happiness* here, along with those from Dellar, Michael Tencer, Stefan Jaworzyn and a roster of contributors *unable to afford* the luxury of resignation. This is a knock at the door also known in Michael Tencer's 'Letter from America' as the fact that 'one in every seven houses in America is empty … one in every 402 Americans is homeless … 7,225,800 adults … under "correctional supervision" … around one in every 31 adults'. Or, in other words: 'Tears – not sloppy drips, but rather tears as in cuts, or rents' (Esther Leslie).

Yet no part of the book is simply a list of Terrible Facts (which is not to say that lists of Terrible Facts cannot be salutary when used properly; see www.militantesthetix.co.uk/stickers/stickersfr.htm). So much restlessness runs through it that every mention of monstrosity contains the germ of a rejoinder, more often obvious as manner than as optimistic counter-syllogism. Or, rather, there are plenty of syllogisms but most elude the opti-pessimism spectrum altogether. The real affront to luxury defeatism lies

in the way the arguments are played out by the rest of the page, which repeatedly beats sheet music as two-dimensional specimen of musical time, or of the agitation (all senses) displayed by the agent-patients involved. (The scores reprinted in the book – by Marie-Angelique Bueler (Sonic Pleasure), Richard Hemmings (Evil Dick), Simon H. Fell, Ana-Maria Avram and Iancu Dumitrescu are exceptional facts but not exceptions to the rule implied here: unlike 'sheet music' in the sense held over from the centuries before sound recording, they are working components of the reproduction of singular sounds, not purported equivalents of the sounds as such.) Sean Bonney's statement that '"I is another" = derangement of the *social* senses' is true even when lifted from its page and left standing alone, but that truth bursts out on all sides in the 'Letter' containing the statement, where supposedly personal stories bristle with anti-solipsistic stricture. Unsurprisingly, what's true there is even more pervasive in the Letter's original setting, but, surprisingly or not, it's hardly less so when reread in the anthology, where The Psychedelic Bolsheviks, Daphne Lawless, Verity Spott and others *demonstrate* the impropriety of the disowned 'I' by fleshing the same insight out in wholly unlike ways.

Meanwhile the parts that look like historical essays (because in the best sense they are) do nothing to restore the power-sharing pact between professionally detached (tanked) Thought and a private, pre-intellectual 'I'. At their most 'analytical', Dave Black, Dave Renton and Ray Challinor, just like Leslie, Tencer, Drenching, Watson and Wilson (the specific names are no more than examples), keep a near-obscene amount of skin in the game. All these writers' erudition is partisan, or intellectually coherent for the very reasons it could fail Peer Review. Theses on Helen MacFarlane, 'The Nature of Conflict', improvisation, money and Marx share with the graphopoetic mayhem on the facing pages both a self-endangering impulse and the insight that *personal* 'passion' (that winning CV item) is not in itself the point.

In equal contrast to the whims of introspection and the interchangeable bullet points of social science – but in keeping with the method of some improvised music – each conjunction of sentence and image, verse or sentence in *The Assassin* is a matter of necessity: either an utterance *must* follow the one before it and precede the next one or it's better left unuttered. Daphne Lawless, who invented 'Chaos Marxism' in New Zealand in 2006 and whose presence is an extra-high point in a generally vertiginous book, explains why necessity – all senses, indigence included – scrambles the polarities of Mind–Thing, poesis–analysis, profession–dilettantism, and so on. Quoting a character in Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, she writes: 'We do these things because we are compelled.'

Matthew Hyland

Head over heels

Irving Goh, *The Reject: Community, Politics and Religion after the Subject*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2014. 384 pp., £66.00 hb., £18.99 pb., 978 0 82326 268 7 hb., 978 0 82326 269 4 pb.

In a sense, present-day geopolitical conditions make us all *rejects* – either we reject others socially and politically, or we are ourselves rejected by others. In exploring the concept of the 'reject' through the optic of recent French thought, Irving Goh takes as his point of departure Jean-Luc Nancy's question concerning 'what comes after the subject?', and proposes his own idea of the 'auto-reject', which, he argues, perfectly subtends the various philosophical articulations of the possibilities of post-subject configurations that Nancy's query has provoked.

In doing so, Goh situates the reject as a 'critical figure of thought' for the post-9/11 world of a statist politics that promotes the ethos of subjective sovereignty and consequent totalization of power. Goh contends that several radical French thinkers, including Derrida, Deleuze, Nancy and Cixous, already envisaged a theorization of the reject, or auto-reject, as a way of thinking beyond the concept of the sovereign subject.

Deleuze's call to construct 'new functions and discover new fields that make [the subject] useless or inadequate' and Derrida's more tentative suggestion that one could free oneself from 'the necessity to keep at all cost the word subject' are here exemplary. More generally, the term 'reject' is, Goh suggests, 'but a shorthand for a theory that seeks to articulate and affirm a figure of thought that would give expression to the multiplicity of heterogeneous rejects'. In this sense, it embraces a variety of different figures that break away from all normative configurations, including the 'syncopic lover' (Clément), the 'nomadic war machine' and 'becoming animal' (Deleuze), the 'clinamen' (Nancy), the 'zoo-morphic' (Braidotti), the *animot* (Cixous), the *divinanimalité* (Derrida), and so on.

Taking a cue from such critical trajectories, *The Reject* promotes an idea of the 'auto-reject' as the basis for what Goh terms a new ethics that would involve 'creative regeneration' rather than 'self-annihilation'. In this way, the ethical force of the auto-reject derives from its erasure of its sovereignty and, as such, respect for the other. The auto-reject, Goh writes, 'unlike the subject, has no interest in accumulating for itself predicates that might contribute to its foundation; it has no interest in totalizing everything, including elements outside of itself, within its grasp and control'. It is against this backdrop, Goh argues, that recent French thought has sought to elaborate new 'posthumanist' forms of friendship, community, love or a politics-to-come. Unsurprisingly, it is Bataille's call for a 'community without subject', and Heidegger's account of *Dasein* as *Mitsein*, as these are rearticulated through Nancy's philosophy of community as 'co-presence' or being-in-common, which thus provide a starting point for Goh's discussion.

Goh's accounts of the ways in which Derrida's 'politics of friendship' or Deleuze and Guattari's 'nomadology', in their rejection of normative definitions of community or friendship, provide the philosophical force needed to mobilize the 'reject', so as to combat a contemporary (network-centric) 'doxa of friendship, love and community', cover some fairly familiar ground. More novel is Goh's use of Catherine Clément's conception of the *syncope* as the promise of a new mode of love that entails a 'loss of consciousness' in which the subject no longer exists, and where, as a result, 'what remains in the syncope is the subject undone'. This syncopic disruption of the amorous subject can also be found, Goh suggests, in Nancy's thinking of love, which views love as an 'ontological fissure' that traverses and disjoins the elements of the subject. Here, Goh argues, 'losing oneself in syncopic space … is nothing short of experiencing oneself as an auto-reject'. Consequently, 'in a time of hyper-gregariousness … one must learn to love getting lost in the syncopic experience of solitary love, without casting out a name such as friendship'.

Having sought to derive a conception of the reject from contemporary French theorizations of community and love, the book moves on to consider how this problematizes existing notions of religion and secularism also. In his *Acts of Religion*, Derrida suggests, as Goh puts it, that there can be no future for religion if religion 'holds on to the phantasm of its sovereign ipseity'. This means, Goh continues, that 'Derrida insists on auto-rejection in religion, an auto-rejection that always opens to the other.' In seeking to escape the postsecular violence of religious and social fundamentalism, one needs, therefore, to go beyond (or auto-reject) anthropocentrism also, so as to incorporate non-human animals, their voices and silences, into any community-to-come. The 'impossible possibility' of the arrival of the other demands that we engage the absolute alterity of the animal-other, or, as Derrida called it, the 'divinanimality', which 'breaks with … the similar, to situate oneself at least in a place of alterity radical enough whereby one must break with all identification with an image of oneself … with all humanity'. Cixous's notions of the 'counter Bible', the animal perspective or the 'animots' are, Goh argues, particularly relevant in this respect, to the extent that such 'animotization' would be, for Cixous, our 'second innocence', animating a divine *jouissance*. Can we, then, think of a future discourse of politics centring on a 'becoming non-human'?

At this point, the radical possibilities of the 'auto-reject' are placed by Goh alongside new notions of the 'sans part', as theorized by Rancière and others, as designating, politically, that 'part that has no part', and that is thus rendered non-existent in the eyes of the state. However, while both Rancière's *sans part* and Balibar's *malêtre* or 'mis-being' have similarities with the idea of the auto-reject, both speak from within the framework of the subject and thus fail to auto-deconstruct their notions of agency. As such, Goh argues, notions such as Derrida's 'rogue-being' remain more radical in outlining a 'counter-sovereignty' that defies the sovereignty of the state. Moreover, if, as Derrida argues, democracy itself is the political experience of the impossible, then the impossible figure of such democracy, Goh proposes, might well be the animal, in so far as the animal has always been rejected as a possible figure of thought in politics or political philosophy. In this respect, it is Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the 'becoming animal' (more, in fact, than Derrida's own 'animal *voyou*') that comes closest to elaborating a politics of the reject, especially in the context of post-9/11 geopolitics. As for Derrida, so for Deleuze and Guattari, there is a politics of becoming animal: 'To the inhumanness of the diabolical powers responds the subhuman … of becoming animal: become beetle, become dog, become ape, head over heels and away, rather than lower one's head and remain a bureaucrat.' For Goh, consequently, 'Becoming-animal is that trajectory of resistance, if not force of rejection, that we need today.' Above all, 'it is through writing', such as Kafka's writings or Melville's *Moby Dick*, 'that you become animal'. In this sense, for Deleuze and Guattari, it is

perhaps in art that one can best locate the emergence of a becoming animal with the political potentiality to articulate a 'people to come' or an as yet unthought of assemblage in opposition to the state's proclamation that no other assemblages exist except those it has constructed and organized.

Goh pursues his single-point agenda to establish the presence of the 'reject' as a central figure in recent French thought throughout the book. It is resolutely (and admittedly) Francocentric in its approach, and more than a little theoretically abstruse in places; it would have been useful to have another section here covering other leading voices of our times that might have provided an alternative view to that found in recent French philosophy. However, to gather together so much within the scope of a single volume remains a considerable achievement in itself.

Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha

Adorno in Italy

Stevano Giacchetti Ludovisi, *Critical Theory and the Challenge of Praxis: Beyond Reification*, Ashgate, Farnham and Burlington VT, 2015. ix + 224 pp., £65.00 hb., 978 1 47244 775 3.

Based on papers from a conference held in Rome in 2010, *Critical Theory and the Challenge of Praxis* is a collection largely focused on the reception of Adorno from an Italian standpoint. Central to its concerns is the gradual disappearance of the 'revolutionary social actor', and, as Ludovisi puts it in his introduction, the fact that Adorno and Horkheimer 'never envisioned a new social class able to fulfil such a task'. While, then, Stefano Petrucciani argues that 'Adorno does not draw the conclusion that we should drop the concept of class', he continues by suggesting that in Italy 'the proletariat is completely integrated or assimilated into the capitalist system'. Ludovisi's own chapter emphasizes Adorno's distrust of 'bourgeois institutions' that 'hide structures of domination', but, following Adorno and Horkheimer's famous analysis of the Culture Industry (and Enzensberger's later *Consciousness Industry*), it is corporate mass media that are perhaps most important today in sustaining capitalism's reduction of human beings 'to the same existence as lab-rats' and the reign of managerialism inside contemporary workplaces.

If Adorno could seem to be 'crippled by a relentless pessimism', as one contributor puts it, the 'challenge of praxis' directed at critical theory came initially not only from the philosophical-theoretical domain but also from the increasingly active student movement during the late 1960s – a topic well covered in a number of essays here (including the 'infamous "Busenattentat" or breast attack' by female students that is supposed to have contributed to Adorno's 'heart attack'). These semi-revolutionary energies of middle-class students did not result, however, in any genuine alignment with the German working class or other social movements – perhaps unsurprisingly in the face of 'the power of the mass media' through which an integrated working class was told instead to engage in 'a life wasted in unending competitive performance'. This leads to the book's key question: 'how practical can critical theory be?'

Marcos Nobre notes that 'critical theory does not embrace emancipation as an ideal; rather, it embraces it as a real possibility that is inscribed in the actual logic of capitalism'. Yet this is also the point at which the 'Italian' version of critical theory offered in Ludovisi's collection most clearly marks out its difference from German critical theory's development in the work of Habermas and others. David Ingram correctly judges Habermas's proclamation that 'I mostly feel that I am the last Marxist' to be a 'self-assessment [that] seems misleading if not disingenuous' – an evaluation richly supported in Rapic's recent *Habermas und der Historische Materialismus* (2015). By contrast, although 'Adorno, with his Frankfurt associates, challenged the idea that a revolution would result necessarily from the contradictions of capitalism as laid out in the *Communist Manifesto*', first-generation critical theory never distanced itself from Marx to the degree that the aforementioned 'last Marxist' has done.

Not atypically, in seeking to recover a more 'radical critique' than that offered by Habermas, Massimo Canevacci, in the final contribution to this book, turns thus to Walter Benjamin, whose 'response to Adorno is one of the highest points of twentieth-century critical theory', he argues, and offers the basis for a renewed critique of the limits of critical theory itself. As a whole, this fine collection of mostly Italian essays on Adorno seeks to re-evaluate and re-energize this relation to a Marxist conception of praxis today. Yet, in the end, despite its title, and despite beginning with the inscription of Marx's famous eleventh thesis on his gravestone, the book concludes, probably unsurprisingly, rather more on the side of philosophical interpretation than of changing the world.

Thomas Klikauer