

and relations to the phenomenological canon. At various points in the volume, the suggestion is that feminist phenomenology of pregnancy will radically transform phenomenology as we know it; yet in some of the chapters the relationship between feminist philosophy and traditional androcentric phenomenology is presented in a rather more congenial and mutually supportive manner. For example, in chapters pertaining to canonical male thinkers, including Levinas, Sartre and Bataille, the androcentrism of such thinkers is acknowledged – as evident in Levinas’s formulation of fecundity in terms of paternity, for example – but there is nevertheless a common agreement that their basic phenomenological models can help us analyse pregnancy, and in turn that taking pregnancy into account can help us improve and fine-tune those models. A somewhat harmonious rapprochement between feminist and androcentric phenomenology thus emerges: if only those canonical philosophers had paid proper attention to pregnancy, their accounts would have been more complete and convincing. But does feminist philosophy really need

to continue orbiting around the same male philosophers in this way? Is feminist philosophy best served by conceptual frameworks which never had any anchoring or investment in female experience? Moreover, it is important that traditional, heteronormative models of social relations during pregnancy are more thoroughly problematized, and that experiences of terminated, lost, impossible and unconventional pregnancies are included in discussions of this kind – otherwise there is a real danger that we will simply cement phenomenology as a conservative mode of philosophy, or replicate those normative models of pregnancy that have played such a key role in the oppression of women and perpetuation of patriarchal thought. But this ought not to dampen enthusiasm or be taken as a deterrent. The creativity, richness and vitality of many of the essays in the volume indicate that the phenomenology of pregnancy certainly has the capacity to tackle these critical issues and continue working towards delivering on its transformative promise.

Victoria Browne

Take that, Frankfurtists

Anita Chari, *A Political Economy of the Senses: Neoliberalism, Reification, Critique*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2015. 284 pp., £67.00 hb., £22.00 pb., 978 0 23117 388 9 hb., 978 0 23117 389 6 pb.

According to Anita Chari’s compelling and impressive new book, neoliberalism requires a ‘reconstruction’ of Georg Lukács’s concept of reification: first, because certain elements of Lukács’s pioneering essay ‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat’ do not adequately describe the structures of reification in contemporary capitalism; but second, because Lukács’s concept is the one that best enables us to grapple with the present-day forms of capitalist domination. Whereas the alienated workers of industrial capitalism were passive and disengaged, the subjects of contemporary neoliberalism are actively involved in their alienation. Stylistic choices, communicative networks, affective engagements with others, the expression and fulfilment of personal desires all contribute directly to the information economy, the construction and consolidation of which has been facilitated by the spread of social media. Such once-peripheral elements of the consumer economy have become (in Maurizio Lazzarato’s words) ‘directly productive’. In these ways, reified subjectivity, insists

Chari, is no longer a supplementary effect of the production process but ‘an immediate site of capital accumulation’. The most important element of Chari’s reconstruction of the concept of reification, then, involves the degree to which the activity and engagement of neoliberal subjects are not at odds with their alienation but its very machinery.

Students of Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* may wonder where the notion of the ‘passivity’ of Lukács’s industrial proletariat comes from. When Lukács describes reification as a ‘phantom objectivity’ – that is, ‘an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people’ – the ‘passivity’ of reified subjectivity is not overt but always obscured by an illusion of activity. What, then, is so different about the ‘entrepreneurial’ activism of neoliberalism? And when Lukács famously describes the journalist’s ‘lack of convictions’ and ‘prostitution’ of his experiences and beliefs as exemplary of ‘capitalist reification’, it is difficult to

see a substantial difference with the ways in which neoliberalism mobilizes and exploits the interiority of its subjects.

Nevertheless, Chari's claim of a distinct neoliberal form of reification only goes to support the important larger case made in her book: the indispensability of Lukács's concept for understanding the present. Even at the cost of an incomplete reading of Lukács's essay this premiss distinguishes Chari's book, especially among prominent recent accounts of neoliberalism. What comes over especially clearly is the quality of neoliberalism as an ideology. As Foucault's indispensable 1978–79 lectures make clear, neoliberalism is a mode of 'governmentality' predicated on an extension of market logic to the domain of the self. Foucault's *Homo oeconomicus* is no longer simply 'a partner of exchange', as for Adam Smith, but an 'entrepreneur of himself'. Chari gently registers her differences with accounts of neoliberalism that have taken insufficient notice of the way this structural relationship to subjectivity works ideologically.



By contrast with such accounts, Chari's analysis presents us with a clear horizon to the neoliberal order, a sense of its ideological reach and limits. It is not simply that subjects are 'distracted' from politics by consumption, nor that contemporary politics are 'modelled' on consumption; rather, the productive energies of subjects are increasingly 'capture[d] and co-opt[ed]' by neoliberal conditions of labour. The great resonance of the term 'immaterial labor', for Chari, is in describing the degree to which 'more and more features of social life become productive for capital'.

An instructive comparison might be drawn with the way Wendy Brown bewails neoliberalism

for 'transforming the distinctly *political* character, meaning and operation of democracy's constituent elements into *economic* ones' in *Undoing the Demos* (2015). Here 'democracy' and 'liberalism' lose their ideological inflection and become, instead, the normative basis for a critique of neoliberalism tinged with nostalgia. Brown's struggle to avoid the nostalgic mode is not helped by the anecdotes that punctuate her narrative about online dating agencies, or schoolteachers compelled by new 'benchmarks' to cheat in order to improve students' exam results, or universities' replacement of faculty advising (aimed at developing 'well-educated and well-rounded graduates') with scheduling algorithms that treat courses as consumer goods. To favour 'economization' over an always reversible concept like reification is to resort to what Theodor Adorno, drawing on Lukács, would lambast as a 'subjective concept', unmediated by the object.

Importantly, the backdrop to Chari's proposed 'reconstruction' of the concept of reification is not primarily Lukács but the second and third generations of Frankfurt School Critical Theory, represented by Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth respectively. Both figures, but particularly Honneth, come in for strong criticism in Chari's second chapter, subtitled 'Third Generation Critical Theory and the Fetish of Intersubjectivity'. Not only do Habermas and Honneth fail to grapple with the shifts in the structure of capitalism that were brilliantly anticipated by their Frankfurt School predecessors, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer; their failure is actually implicated in those shifts. Chari is generous to Honneth's 2006 co-authored (with Martin Hartmann) essay 'Paradoxes of Capitalism', acknowledging what she calls its 'nuanced attention to the fetishization of normativity in neoliberalism'; but she is disparaging of Honneth's own reconstruction of the concept of reification in his widely criticized Tanner lectures in 2005 (see Nina Power's review in *RP* 154). In a remarkable phrase (which she associates with Hartmann and Honneth's text but attributes to Kathi Weeks), Chari talks of the 'surplus of normativity' that appears with the neoliberal entrepreneurial subject. Third-generation Frankfurtists such as Honneth and Seyla Benhabib have been concerned to construct a 'normative standpoint' from which to criticize society. But the crisis of neoliberalism, points out Chari, is not a normative 'deficit' but a normative 'surplus', as capitalist production 'increasingly relies on mobilizing the capacities of individuals in creating new arenas

for capital accumulation'. For Chari, to reconceive reification as a drama of 'intersubjectivity' – as in Honneth's idea of reification as failure of recognition – is to strip the concept of its critical bite. With his reformulation Honneth transforms the most complex, inexhaustible and still unfathomed critical discovery of Western Marxism, its greatest conceptual weapon against the infinite mutability of capitalist ideology, into a kind of failure of manners, a lack of 'empathy'; in other words, a communitarian theme of neoliberal ideology.

Another important element that structures Chari's book is her hope of offering an alternative to two divergent traditions of political critique that, individually, are incapable of grasping the singularity of the present. The distinction is made in Chari's opening pages between theorists of 'radical democracy' and political economists. The former include Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, William Connolly and Jacques Rancière; the latter include neo-Marxists such as David Harvey and Moishe Postone (who is one of Chari's former academic advisors at the University of Chicago). Chari's 'political economy of the senses', outlined in the third part of the book, will be a 'synthesis' of these two tendencies. The problem with radical democracy is that it perpetuates an 'autonomous' conception of politics that is too little attentive to the imbrication of politics with the economy. The problem with political economy is that it is oblivious to the 'experiential dimensions of political movements'. Chari's synthesis owes a great deal to Marx's early writings, particularly the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, where Marx identifies 'true democracy' as (in Chari's words) a 'boundless potentiality', in contradistinction to the 'rigidification' of the political that takes place in the institution. She doesn't mention the enigmatic fragment from the 1844 Manuscripts entitled 'Private Property and Communism', perhaps the most powerful statement on the place of art in Marx's theory of communism, where Marx imagines communism as 'the complete emancipation of all human senses and attributes'. Marx's fragment is all the more powerful (and enigmatic) as a statement on aesthetics because the word 'art' barely appears there. Just as, for Marx, politics (meaning the political state) 'disappears in a true democracy', so in Marx's aesthetic theory there is no art as such – because 'these senses and attributes have become *human*, subjectively as well as objectively'.

And so, in Part Three of her book, Chari's answer to the problem of political economy's positivism, on

the one hand, and radical democracy's utopianism, on the other, will be found in a 'political economy of the senses'; or, put more briefly, in art. Inevitably one feels one has trodden this ground before. But the transition is contrived elegantly, via a detailed navigation through Adorno's shifting treatment of the concept of reification in the preceding chapter. Each of Adorno's three major works in which reification is central falls down, for Chari, in a way that art does not. Thus *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-authored with Horkheimer (1947), discusses 'social reification' but is unable to extract the concept from a timeless, ahistorical model of instrumentality. *Negative Dialectics* (1966) discusses 'philosophical reification', in the form of identity thinking, but never adequately distinguishes it from the objective world. *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) discusses 'aesthetic reification' as simultaneously ideological and emancipatory, but the potentiality of thereby effecting a 'radical subtraction' from the social order remains obscure. In each case, the power that is attributed to the concept of reification is purely 'negative', the category of praxis all but 'invisible'.



By comparison, Chari takes the contemporary artworks she discusses in the sixth chapter as works of theory that are free of theory's 'excessive cognitivism', forms of materialist critique whose materialism is 'formal' as much as theoretical. It is difficult to do justice to Chari's discussions of these works, which include pieces by 'Claire Fontaine' (the *nom de guerre* of two otherwise anonymous French artists), the New York-based Argentine video artist Mika Rotenberg, the partnership of Oliver Ressler and Zanny

Begg from Austria and Australia respectively, and the American community and installation artist Jason Lazarus. One or two examples must suffice. Ressler and Begg's *The Bull Laid Bear*, a video work from 2012, features the former bank regulator and white-collar criminologist William K. Black talking to camera about the bailout of big banks by the Irish government in 2008. His filmed monologue, in which he ridicules the idea of 'too big to fail' and points up various logical and legal irregularities in the actions of the Irish government ('the dumbest governmental reaction to a banking crisis in the history of the world'), is combined with animated images that frame the monologue as a bar scene in which Black appears as a customer, alongside an animated fellow customer who periodically turns away from the speaker towards the viewer wearing expressions of complicity, mock-outrage and boredom. The multiple framing, which features a jazz music soundtrack, a succession of bears dressed and behaving like out-of-control off-duty bankers, and contributions by other pundits, interrupts any reading of the work as simply pedagogical; at the same time, it's impossible simply to abrogate the pedagogical power of Black's insights. In fact, one might say that the message of the piece is both identical and non-identical to Black's monologue. A difference is opened up within Black's discourse itself, one that neither separates the work from the monologue nor permits its identification with it. The relation has an 'experiential' dimension that 'cognitive' theoretical discourses (including Chari's, presumably) are incapable of grasping.

The same kind of claim might be made of Jason Lazarus's gallery installation *Phase 1/Live Archive* (2013), an engagement with the Occupy movement in which the artist, working with community members and visitors to the exhibition, reconstructs protest signs that were created and displayed during Occupy. Again, the installation risks inviting a reading of sentimental identification or, worse, appropriation, but for the presence of an amateur pianist in an adjacent gallery room, imperfectly practising Chopin's pathetic composition *Nocturne in F Minor*. Each work inflects and reframes the possible emotions or dissatisfactions aroused by the other. Again, Chari encourages us to view these works as in complete sympathy with the aims of Occupy while being, to the same degree, nonequivalent to them.

Chari's project is brought to an appropriate conclusion in her final chapter, on Occupy Wall Street, 'one of the most theoretical movements in historical

memory', she reminds us, alluding to the involvement of theorists and political analysts in the earliest stages of the movement and the run of celebrity academic visitors to Zuccotti Park. 'For once', she tells us, 'the owl of Minerva was flying at dawn.' This claim, presented in isolation in the context of a brief review, may seem overblown, but Chari's argument, structured around the claims of both radical democracy and political economy, provides a convincing rationale for the idea that Occupy actually achieved something like 'an experientially oriented critique of political economy – a political economy of the senses'. Elements of the movement's operating principles,



such as the General Assemblies, evoke the claims of radical democracy, while longer-term projects, such as the 'Strike Debt' initiative to buy back and forgive the debt of ordinary citizens at the same discounted prices at which such debts are sold on to financial institutions, show an extraordinary practical and critical engagement with political economy. As Chari says herself in her final paragraph, the contemporary answer to the challenge of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach is not to abandon theory but to 'materialize critique'. Her discussion of Occupy exemplifies perhaps the most refreshing quality of her book: its willingness to frame its own ambitions in the loftiest terms, even when this brings her up against the grandest of forebears. Indeed, if theoretical discourse is in any case debarred from 'true democracy', or the political economy of the senses, why do anything less?

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