

## Culs-de-sac

Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, Continuum Press, London and New York, 2005. x + 116 pp., £14.99 hb., 0 8264 7067 X.

Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2005. xi + 148 pp., £29.95 hb., £12.50 pb., 0 80474408 4 hb., 0 8047 4409 2 pb.

Rancière and Badiou have moved to the centre of the gilded stage of radical French thought in recent years, probably due to a combination of the death of other 68ers and a certain critical mass to their oeuvres. Certainly, the translation and reception of their work has been particularly frenetic of late, and there has been plenty of material for comparative analyses, especially with regard to politics. In relation to their considerations of art there has been less, so the translation of these texts – which, despite being brief and occasional in many ways, present programmatic accounts of their positions – enables a timely critical assessment.

### Rancière

*The Politics of Aesthetics* is essentially a publishing vehicle for a single 40-page text, ‘The Distribution of the Sensible’. Its appearance as a monograph in France, *Le partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique* (La Fabrique Éditions, 2000), is far less exceptional than in Anglo-American publishing. With a translator’s introduction, a glossary covering all Rancière’s writings, an interview for the English edition and an afterword by Žižek, the book is testimony to the kind of breathless attention that Rancière’s work currently attracts, if not a certain desperation on the part of the publisher. It is not clear that this text deserves more singular attention than other essays by Rancière. For his part, he does not try to conceal its occasional character, written in response to a journal’s invitation.

In the foreword, Rancière identifies the two principal objectives of the text. The first is to respond to a set of questions by the editors of the journal *Alice* about the consequences that Rancière’s conception of politics has for aesthetics, specifically in relation to a section of the issue entitled ‘The Factory of the Sensible’, concerned with ‘aesthetic acts as configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity’. Second, Rancière frames his response as part of his attempt to displace the mournful trajectory of the debates around the avant-garde and modernity: ‘the transformations

of avant-garde thinking into nostalgia’. He identifies this in both the decay of ‘Situationist discourse’, from ‘radical critique’ to ‘the routine of disenchanting discourse that acts as the “critical” stand-in for the existing order’, and in the work of Lyotard, which he describes as what ‘best marks the way in which “aesthetics” has become, in the last twenty years, the privileged site where the tradition of critical thinking has metamorphosed into deliberation on mourning’. (On this, see Rancière’s essay, ‘The Sublime from Lyotard to Schiller: Two Readings of Kant and their Political Significance’, in *RP* 126.) Against this mournful trajectory, Rancière describes his text as part of a wide-ranging and ongoing attempt at ‘re-establishing [this] debate’s conditions of intelligibility’, in which he proposes the radical displacement of the concept of modernity with a renewed clarification of the concept of aesthetics.

These two objectives are pursued by elaborating the aesthetic dimension of the definition of politics proposed in Rancière’s earlier work *Disagreement*. There, Rancière defines politics as a form of disruption of the established social order by a group or class that has no place within that order. It is not the empowerment of a group that already has a subordinated place or part. Rather, politics is the emergence of a claim to enfranchisement by a group that has been so radically excluded that its inclusion demands the transformation of the rules of inclusion. As Rancière puts it in *Disagreement*: ‘Politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part.’ Politics exists in the process of this destruction of a social order, and it comes to an end with its reconstitution, however revolutionized the new order may be. Changes or alterations internal to an order, whether prior or posterior or besides a properly ‘political’ transformation, are distinguished by Rancière as a matter of ‘the police’.

Rancière’s definition of politics is inherently aesthetic in so far as this political disruption is a reconfiguration of the order of what is visible or perceptible. That is to say, politics is the disruption of an

order that claims to be total, not only by subordinating each of its parts to a particular place within it, but, in so doing, establishing the conditions of visibility for a part to be a part. The irruption of a part that has no part is therefore the irruption of something that is invisible, something outside the established sense of what can exist. Consequently, its inclusion does not just demand that it is recognized as akin to other parts, but demands a transformation of the fundamental terms by which parts are seen or become visible – that is, a transformation of experience. In other words, Rancière’s conception of politics revolves around a certain transcendental logic of experience, in so far as the order that politics disrupts is understood as a universe of possible parts or objects, extending to what can become an object of experience. Politics is the disruption of this universe by a part that is impossible, which therefore, in order for it to be included, requires a new universe. This new universe is understood by Rancière not as the realization of politics once and for all, but as the end of one of its episodes. Thus, the new order also remains transcendental in the sense that it is not absolute. As Rancière puts it in *The Politics of Aesthetics*:

aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Foucault – as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.

This political dimension of aesthetics is elaborated through Rancière’s distinction of three different regimes: the ethical regime of images, the poetic or representational regime of the arts, and the aesthetic regime of art. The ethical regime of images, associated with Plato, is described as follows:

In this regime, ‘art’ is not identified as such but is subsumed under the question of images. As a specific type of entity, images are the object of a twofold question: the question of their origin (and consequently of their truth content) and the question of their end or purpose, the uses they are put to and the effects they result in. The question of the images of the divine and the right to produce such images or the ban placed on them falls within this regime, as well as the question of the status and signification of the images produced.... In this regime, it is a matter of knowing in what way images’

mode of being affects the ethos, the mode of being of individuals and communities.

The poetic or representative regime of the arts, associated with Aristotle, is defined thus:

I call this regime *poetic* in the sense that it identifies the arts – what the Classical Age would later call the ‘fine arts’ – within a classification of ways of doing and making, and it consequently defines proper ways of doing and making as well as means of assessing imitations. I call it *representative* insofar as it is the notion of representation or *mimesis* that organizes these ways of doing, making, seeing and judging....[H]owever, *mimesis* is not a law that brings the arts under the yoke of resemblance. It is first of all a fold in the distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in social occupations, a fold that renders the arts visible. It is not an artistic process but a regime of visibility regarding the arts. A regime of visibility is at once what renders the arts autonomous and also links this autonomy to a general order of occupations and ways of doing and making.

Finally, the aesthetic regime of art, which is primarily associated with early German romanticism and especially Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* – which Rancière describes as the aesthetic regime’s ‘first manifesto ... and remains, in a sense, unsurpassable’ – is given the following gloss:

I call this regime *aesthetic* because the identification of art no longer occurs via a division within ways of doing and making, but it is based on distinguishing a sensible mode of being specific to artistic products. The word aesthetics does not refer to a theory of sensibility, taste, and pleasure for art amateurs. It strictly refers to the specific mode of being of whatever falls within the domain of art, to the mode of being of the objects of art. In the aesthetic regime, artistic phenomena are identified by their adherence to a specific regime of the sensible, which is extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself.... The aesthetic regime ... strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter and genres. Yet it does so by destroying the mimetic barrier that distinguished ways of doing and making affiliated with art from other ways of doing and making, a barrier that separated its rules from the order of social occupations.... It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself.

Rancière’s conception of the aesthetic regime of art is highly condensed here. It is clearer in another essay, ‘The Aesthetic Revolution’, where he clarifies the

inherent tension or contradiction that defines it. This revolves around Schiller's conception of aesthetics as both an art of the beautiful and an art of living:

Schiller says that aesthetic experience will bear the edifice of the art of the beautiful and of the art of the living. The entire question of the 'politics of aesthetics' – in other words, of the aesthetic regime of art – turns on this short conjunction.... It grounds the autonomy of art, to the extent that it connects it to the hope of 'changing life'. (*New Left Review* 14, March/April 2002, p. 134)

The key point is that the aesthetic revolution involves a singularization or autonomization of art, but only through its heterogeneous determination as a changed life. In other words the autonomy of the aesthetic involves a simultaneous autonomy of art and life. This autonomization of art destroys the internal determinations of art – its hierarchy of arts, genres and subject matters – while also destroying its delimitation from life. This ambiguity or equivalence of autonomy explains why autonomous art took on a political significance even in its most politically indifferent forms, such as the democracy that contemporaries read into Flaubert's literature of microscopic description because of the equivalent visibility it granted everything and everyone.

Yet this also explains why the aesthetic regime is liable to being misconceived or suppressed. It is in these terms that Rancière introduces his critique of the concept of modernism. He claims that this concept is not just a confusion of the aesthetic regime, but a precisely developed suppression of it. He describes modernism as having two main forms. The first is the purification of the autonomy of art from any reference to life and the re-establishment of the autonomy of the arts internal to art. (Rancière has Greenberg in his sights here, who takes on a conspicuously dominant role in his conception of modernism. While Greenberg's status is historically undeniable within art theory, the partiality and, in many respects, impoverishment of his account are not registered by Rancière, and result in his evasion of broader conceptions of modernism that have little to do with Greenberg.) The second form of suppression is something that Rancière calls 'modernatism': 'the identification of forms from the aesthetic regime of the arts with forms that accomplish a task or fulfil a destiny specific to modernity'. This appears to result from the failure of the aesthetic revolution in two ways: first, in the opposition of art to the failure of political revolution (e.g. by the surrealists, Frankfurt School, etc.); and, second, in the interpretation of this political failure as a failure of

its original aesthetic-ontological model (principally by Heidegger). Postmodernism is described as a reversal of this general process of modernity: the recognition of the fallacy of the autonomy of the different arts, not as a recommencing of aesthetic revolution, but rather as a deeper abandonment of the project of an autonomous life (e.g. the mournful abandonment of the revolutionary project of a fusion of idea and sense in Lyotard's reading of Kant). The avant-garde is differentiated into two ideas: a strategic idea of the party and innovation, and a properly aesthetic idea of a total transformation of life that is broadly faithful to the aesthetic revolution.

The passages in which the topic of 'The Factory of the Sensible' is addressed most directly are those on photography and mechanical reproduction. Rancière's claim here is that the visibility of the masses or the anonymous, which enable new forms of historiography, is not due to the invention of photography, as Benjamin suggests, but rather to an aesthetic regime that has a literary rather than a photographic heritage. Rancière's point is that the visibility of the anonymous had to have been made possible first, through a new sense of visibility, before photography could be recognized as an art of the masses. His claim is that the novel provided the paradigm for this, with its setting in relations of equivalence everything and everyone.

Highly elliptical definitions and dogmatic staking out of positions, which are consequently question-begging and often crude, dominate this text, as with many others by Rancière. Each section is precipitated by a question from the journal's editors, which Rancière then goes on to answer at length, each answer constituting a 'chapter'. The form is that of a pseudo-interview of a rather parodic kind, in which the questions are not critical, but mere prompts. For someone who professes to attempt to invent forms of writing that avoid the strategies of mastery, this must be considered a failure. Nonetheless, it does at least have the virtue of indicating the main coordinates of Rancière's position. And in this light we come across a fundamental aporia.

This concerns Rancière's account of capitalism, specifically the question of the relationship between the equivalence of exchange value and the equivalence of the aesthetic regime of art. This is touched on only once, in Rockhill's interview for the English edition. Rancière insists on distinguishing the equality generated by the aesthetic regime and the equality of exchange:

The play of language without hierarchy that violates an order based on the hierarchy of language is

something completely different than the simple fact that a euro is worth a euro and that two commodities that are worth a euro are equivalent to one another. It is a matter of knowing if absolutely anyone can take over and redirect the power invested in language. This presupposes a modification in the relationship between the circulation of language and the social distribution of bodies, which is not at all at play in simple monetary exchange.

This is an incredibly reductive account of exchange value. Surely it *does* modify the relationship between the circulation of language and the distribution of bodies. And if its empowerment of absolutely anyone is obviously severely restricted, it still played a massive role in dissolving medieval social hierarchy, and generating the comparatively indeterminate interaction of status and agency within modern capitalist societies. In any case, what is overwhelmingly needed here is an account of the relation between these forms of equality, given that, or in so far as, exchange value is the dominant form of relation that has a tendency to overdetermine other forms. Rancière fails to provide such an account. More significantly, he fails to account for how a culture of exchange value can be disrupted by the aesthetic regime of art. He actively refuses this, as if to give an account would be a concession to capitalism. Thus, in answer to probably the central



question of contemporary culture and politics, Rancière has nothing to offer but a kind of moral resoluteness. Far from reconstructing the conditions of possibility of debates around modernist art and politics, Rancière has merely reasserted its romantic heritage. But it was precisely the indifference of romanticism to the conditions of the political economy of capitalism that generated the aporias of these debates in the first place, and, in the process, rendered romanticism culturally inadequate and politically harmless. Rancière's position should be judged in the same terms. The affection with which his oeuvre is held by many on the Left looks dangerously like nostalgia for yet another form of romantic anti-capitalism.

## Badiou

Badiou's *Handbook of Inaesthetics* is less of an occasional publication than Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics*. It starts with a methodological essay in which Badiou stakes out his position and introduces his key concepts, which is followed by a series of essays on different arts, artists or artworks, through which this position is pursued. But the book retains the seams of a collection of essays. The opening essay was written for an 1994 anthology on the relation of artists and philosophers to education, which explains the foregrounding of the problem of education in this essay, and, more glaringly, the extent to which it makes no mention, let alone explanation, of the concept of 'inaesthetics'. All we are given is an epigraph:

By 'inaesthetics' I understand a relation of philosophy to art that, maintaining that art is itself a producer of truths, makes no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy. Against aesthetic speculation, inaesthetics describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art. (A.B., April 1998)

Well, gee, thanks for that Alain. It is with good reason that Rancière has described Badiou's announcement of inaesthetics as a UFO. (See Jacques Rancière, 'Aesthetics, Inaesthetics, Anti-Aesthetics', in Peter Hallward ed., *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, Continuum, London, 2004.) Also, the impression of variety given by the contents page – listing nine essays on poetry, theatre, dance, cinema – obscures the dominance of particular concerns, specifically the significance of poetry as a model for the arts and of Mallarmé's poetry in particular. Effectively five of the essays turn out to be deeply indebted to Mallarmé, who turns out to be a very faithful representative of Badiou's philosophy.



As the title of the opening essay, 'Art and Philosophy', suggests, Badiou's preoccupation is with the relation of art to philosophy, which he maintains must be investigated as a relation to truth. Ostensibly, if not altogether transparently, it is to this end that Badiou diagnoses three currently available 'schemas' of the relation of art to truth, which he claims are today fused or 'saturated' with one another and therefore need to be distinguished. Badiou's taxonomy is broadly parallel to Rancière's, but with an alternative focus, and trumped by a fourth 'schema'.

Badiou calls the first schema of art the '*didactic* schema', which is defined by the thesis that 'art is incapable of truth, or that truth is external to art'. This is the schema that Badiou associates with Plato. The second is the '*romantic* schema', which, as its name suggests, is associated with the romantics: 'Its thesis is that art alone is capable of truth.' The third schema, associated with Aristotle, is the '*classical* schema', which combines two theses:

- (a) Art – as the didactic schema argues – is incapable of truth. Its essence is mimetic, and its regime is that of semblance.
- (b) This incapacity does not pose a serious problem (contrary to what Plato believed) ... because the *purpose* [*destination*] of art is not in the least truth.... [B]ut it also does not claim to be truth and is therefore innocent.... Art has a therapeutic function.

In other words, what Aristotle calls 'catharsis'.

Just in case you thought the abstractness and questionableness of these schemas was merely an artifice of presentation, Badiou proceeds apace with the claim that the twentieth century, 'was characterized by the fact that it did not introduce, on a massive scale, any new schema.' And in relation to, 'the massive tendencies of thought in the twentieth century', Badiou claims, 'I can only see three: Marxism, psychoanalysis and German Hermeneutics', each of which relates to art according to one or other of the three schemas he has outlined. So: 'Marxism is didactic, psychoanalysis classical, and Heideggerian hermeneutics romantic.' The twentieth-century avant-gardes are diagnosed as a hopeless confusion of these schemas:

From Dadaism to Situationism, the century's avant-gardes have been nothing but escort experiments for contemporary art, and not the adequate designation of the real operations of this art.... [T]hey were nothing but the desperate and unstable search for a mediating schema, for a didactico-romantic schema.... [T]he avant-gardes were above all anticlassical.

Badiou proposes to interrupt this confused and mournful scene with a new schema, presumably the one longed for by the avant-gardes... Badiou does not name it. Perhaps we should call it the 'inaesthetic schema'? In the first place, it is derived from what the three inherited schemas of art have in common, which Badiou concludes is their refusal of the simultaneous immanence and singularity of art's relation to truth. This negatively produces a positive definition of the new schema:

In these inherited schemata, the relation between artworks and truth never succeeds in being at once singular and immanent. We will therefore affirm this simultaneity. In other words: Art *itself* is a truth procedure. Or again: The philosophical identification of art falls under the category of truth. Art is a thought in which artworks are the Real (and not the effect). And this thought, or rather the truths that it activates, are irreducible to other truths – be they scientific, political, or amorous. This also means that art, as a singular regime of thought, is irreducible to philosophy. Immanence: Art is rigorously co-extensive with the truths that it generates. Singularity: these truths are given nowhere else than in art.

Badiou is not bashful about his idea:

It is imperative to recognize that beneath its manifest simplicity – its naivety, even – the thesis according to which art would be a truth procedure sui generis, both immanent and singular, is in fact an absolutely novel philosophical proposition.

All we are given by way of demonstration of this novelty is the fact that Deleuze persisted in thinking art as a form of sensibility (as percept and affect) and separated it from philosophy (which is alone attributed with the capacity for the invention of concepts).

The central issue of Badiou's philosophy of art – which is indeed the issue of his philosophy more generally – is whether his professed neo-Platonism overcomes the problems of Plato's original conception of philosophy; specifically his 'didactic' treatment of art. According to Badiou's fourth 'inaesthetic' schema, art produces its own truths, which are both immanent and singular to itself. In this sense, art is autonomous (which is not a new idea). Philosophy does not produce truths, but only registers them. Philosophy is therefore not autonomous, self-sufficient or unconditioned, but conditioned. (Indeed, besides art, Badiou maintains that philosophy has three further conditions – politics, love and science (or mathematics) – which are derived from those forms against which Plato himself tried to maintain philosophy's sovereignty.) This autonomy of art, and this limitation of philosophy's autonomy or

sovereignty, ostensibly differentiate Badiou from Plato. However, this difference becomes more questionable when we consider the rationalism of Badiou's conception of the autonomy of art.

Thus, Badiou maintains that the autonomy of the arts is due to the extent they are able to generate ideas that are not reducible to their sensuous appearance. So, for instance, he maintains that there are poetic ideas and cinematic ideas. But he insists that these ideas are not merely the projection or the thought of philosophy, but rather that they are singular to the art in question. This is central to his reading of Mallarmé. Badiou writes:

The modern poem is certainly not the sensible form of the Idea. It is the sensible, rather, that presents itself within the poem as the substituting and powerless nostalgia of the poetic idea....Through the visibility of artifice, which is also the thinking of poetic thought, the poem surpasses in power what the sensible is capable of itself. The modern poem is the opposite of mimesis. In its operation, it exhibits an Idea of which both the object and objectivity represent nothing but pale copies.

It is the ideality of the modern poem that renders Plato's judgement of poetry redundant for Badiou: 'modernity makes the poem ideal.... It thereby overturns the Platonic judgement more surely than Nietzsche had ever desired to.' However, even if we accept Badiou's claim that modernity renders poetry ideal, this does not render Plato's judgement redundant, so much as absolve poetry from it on Plato's own terms. In other words, Badiou claims that the ideality of modern art enables its autonomy from philosophy, but in reducing art to its ideas its autonomy is dissolved. This is demonstrated by the extent to which his essays on the arts are preoccupied with the reiteration of his basic philosophical terms, which he professes to find already there in the works. Badiou finds philosophy in art because he does not look for anything else. Badiou claims that philosophy is not sovereign since it is conditioned by the four relatively autonomous forms of truth. But what conditions these truths, such that there are four and only four of them, if not philosophy? We can recognize here an inversion that Hegel diagnosed in Kant's philosophy: Badiou's delimitation of philosophy is a self-delimitation, which therefore conditions what it claims to be conditioned by.

Badiou's inaesthetics is radically opposed to Rancière's aesthetics. Badiou's insistence on the autonomy of art and the arts, forged through his subtractive, non-sensuous thinking of being, stands in stark opposition to Rancière's account of the aesthetic regime, in which

the distinction of idea and sensibility stands in suspension, as does the autonomy of art. Badiou is typical of what Rancière considers as the modernist suppression of the aesthetic revolution, as he makes clear in his essay on Badiou's inaesthetics. However, the stakes of this opposition of inaesthetics to aesthetics are not at all high when it comes to considering the predicament of art within contemporary capitalism. Such a consideration would transgress the autonomous truths of modern art, which Badiou maintains are constituted independently of capitalism. Moreover, he thinks any political consideration of art is didactic, and should be redirected to the properly political realm. But even when we look there we are faced with a self-conscious subtraction of all political considerations from the analysis of political economy. As Badiou said in a recent interview: 'in order to think the contemporary world in any fundamental way, it's necessary to take as your point of departure not the critique of capitalism but the critique of democracy.' But without a critique of capitalism Badiou's renewal of the Platonic opposition of truth to democracy remains an archaism. For anyone seeking to pursue the artistic and political critique of contemporary capitalism, there is little to offer here.

In his afterword to *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Žižek repeats the account given in his own *The Ticklish Subject*, in which he associates Rancière and Badiou with Balibar and Laclau in a common post-Althusserian philosophy of politics that – contra liberal 'political philosophy', postmodern post-politics, and Lefort's Kantian Lacanianism – reasserted politics as the emergence of a supernumerary 'part' that cannot be deliberated within the existing order. Žižek points out that what they also share is an indifference or structural subordination of economics to politics. The consequence is indifference to the extent to which capital overdetermines social relations, including politics. Žižek's response is a characteristic inversion: he opposes the irreducibility of politics to economics with the irreducibility of economics to politics. It is not clear why we should be at all satisfied with this double irreducibility; why it doesn't just offer another dead end. What is required is a philosophy that is capable of thinking the relationship of emancipatory politics to developed capitalist economies. This must surely be the point of departure for any philosophy of art today. It is sobering to recognize how few contemporary philosophical enterprises even attempt this.

**Stewart Martin**

# Tinker, tailor...

Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. John Drury, Corinne Oster and Andrew Parker, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 2004. xxviii + 247 pp., £69.00 hb., £17.50 pb., 0 8223 3261 2 hb., 0 8223 3274 4 pb.

How to found a state? In the beginning there would perhaps be only a few persons. A farmer, a mason, a weaver, and so on: enough to satisfy the basic needs. To these there might need to be added a few others to provide for material necessities: a shoemaker, perhaps. So begins the construction of Plato's *Republic*. In this construction Plato founds a city. And in this construction, and particularly in the role of the shoemaker, Rancière detects the origins of a central theme within philosophy: the relationship between the philosopher and his poor.

The shoemaker is there, of course, to make shoes. But why a specialist in footwear when a mason seems to be able to handle all aspects of the building of houses? And why a specialist in footwear when Plato tells us that for much of the summer the peasants will carry on their work unshod? Perhaps the shoemaker is also there for some other purpose. At every strategic point in the *Republic*, Rancière suggests, the shoemaker is present. Whenever it is necessary to think about the division of labour, to establish differences in natures and aptitudes, to define justice itself, the shoemaker is there. It's as though the shoemaker is doing a double duty behind the scenes. He makes shoes, to be sure; but he also seems to be useful to the philosopher for purposes that go far beyond his trade.

Through an exploration of such purposes *The Philosopher and His Poor* deals with three broad questions. How are we to conceive of the relation between the order of thought and the social order? How do individuals get some idea in their heads that makes them either satisfied with their position or indignant about it? And how are representations of self and other formed and transformed? These questions are dealt with through an exploration of classic philosophical *topoi* concerning the poor.

For the philosopher – that should really be ‘the philosopher’, to be distinguished from ‘the sociologist’ as he appears later in the book – the poor have often been present as objects rather than subjects of knowledge, objects with a particular function as philosophy's *exempla*. The poor enable the philosopher to constitute himself – as other than the poor. Thus despite the range of names given to the poor, their essential function has remained constant – to play the ersatz of philosophy. This is perhaps most clear in Plato's

*Republic*, in which the artisan can do only one thing: his trade. The artisan's focus on his own business precludes the potential to engage in a very different business, the business of the philosopher, a business over which philosophers possess a monopoly. This has two implications. First, as an artisan whose main business is his own business, the worker will never achieve the ‘communism’ required of the philosopher-kings. And second, the monopoly of knowledge grants to the philosopher the right to *lie* about the division of labour itself, in order to defend itself against those ‘outside’ the philosophical community.

Yet to criticize Plato for excluding the poor from philosophy and defending the autonomy of philosophers is to say nothing new. Rancière's trick is to turn this argument against those who initially appear immune from the same criticism: Marx, Sartre and Bourdieu. The background to the writing of the book and the timing of its publication are important here.

In 1975 Rancière helped to found *Révolution Logiques*, whose approach to the social history of labour was predicated on the assumption that what intellectuals said about workers and what workers said about themselves were often very different. What followed was an immersion in nineteenth-century labour archives exploring working-class traditions. The plural ‘traditions’ is important here, for the archive seemed to reveal a working class which was much more mobile, much less attached to its tools, and far less focused on its own poverty and alcohol than the various traditions had tended to represent it. For example, the idea of ‘pride in work’ appeared to be far from a universal working-class norm. Rancière thus came to believe that the way to understand workers' culture was through its encounter with other cultures, through what was said about workers and their attitudes.

This book's publication in France in 1983 coincided with the period of power for the French Socialists. In this context Pierre Bourdieu's attacks on inequality and distinction were becoming increasingly influential, and it is hard not to read the book as more or less driven by its critique of Bourdieu. After all, there's nothing too dangerous about criticizing Plato on the poor. Although Rancière's analysis of Marx appears initially to be radical and challenging (according to



Rancière, the artisan is no more thinkable for Marx than for Plato; 'the poor', for Marx, is the non-class with its own work, namely the revolution), and it plays around with some interesting ideas (such as the observation by the forces of order that Karl Marx the communist is a cobbler, or Marx's comment about the paradoxical infatuation of Russian aristocrats with his work: 'it is not for tailors and cobblers'), it merely takes a long time to go over some familiar ground. Marxists have long debated Marx's own understanding of the proletariat, his claims about its lumpen brother which sound suspiciously like bourgeois prejudices, the difficulties passed over in the idea that we might hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon and be a critic in the evening, and the problems posed by turning a class of workers into a politically driven proletariat. It might also be pointed out that the discussion of Sartre is incredibly slight.

Rancière's real target thus appears to be Bourdieu's sociological approach to the question of class, an approach which is a challenge to the whole philosophical tradition of writing about the poor. Armed with statistical tables and opinion polls, the sociologist highlights certain institutions, most notably educational ones, central to both the reproduction of class and the dissimulation of the idea that class does not matter. Rancière's claim is that Bourdieu's sociology of class and distinction is far from convincing. Worse, it actually perpetuates the very hierarchy it purports to challenge, and assumes an inequality even more significant than Plato's. For even while condemning philosophy for its naturalization of class distinctions, Bourdieu's concepts such as *habitus* presuppose that the poor can only ever do their own business. 'Everything happens as if the science of the sociologist-king

had the same requirement as the city of the philosopher-king. There must be no mixing, no imitation.'

For Bourdieu as well as Plato and Marx, 'the poor' can do only one thing at a time. Thus despite Bourdieu's position as a critic of class privilege and social distinction, Rancière comes to argue that Bourdieu's criticism of philosophy as a denial of the social in fact turns out to possess a curious continuity with the exclusions of the philosophical tradition. Bourdieu's work consists in a kind of sociological inversion of Platonism which confirms Platonism's interdictions.

The book is thus interesting in the straight line it purports to detect between the ancient ruses of philosophy and the modern ruses of anti-philosophy, a straight line which appears to undermine the strongest sociological attempt to challenge the order of things. Rancière sees this as the chance to denounce the complicity between sociological demystifications of aesthetic 'distinction' and the old philosophy of 'everyone in his place'.

Yet in writing against this feeble consensus a little of another form of 'distinction' might not be amiss. For 'the poor', the artisan, the shoemaker, and 'workers' all slip and slide into each other in the argument in ways which are at times troubling. And though the trope of the shoemaker is interesting, it is on occasion also a little forced. Other labels for the poor pop up time and again, yet Rancière appears not to know what to do with them: the milliner and blacksmith make an appearance, but little is found for them to do and so they are dropped. Sartre's 'amphibians' come and go in a flash. And why not the hairdresser or the shop worker, figures who far more often appear in both the main texts of bourgeois thought, such as Burke's *Reflections*, and in contemporary ruling discourse about politics? More tellingly, there is little discussion of contemporary forms of shoemaking, most of which is conducted by wage labour for ridiculously small amounts of money in appalling industrial conditions and with little or no rights. For this reason, perhaps, the trope of the shoemaker gradually falls away as the book's discussion moves on. When the quaint figure of the artisan is replaced by the modern and most impoverished wage-slave, this particular philosopher has nothing more to say.

**Mark Neocleous**



# Come back Heidegger-Marxismus, all is forgiven

Andrew Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History*, Routledge, New York and Abingdon, 2005. 176 pp., £50.00 hb., £15.99 pb., 0 415 94177 6 hb., 0 415 94178 4 pb.

In his short essay on titles, Adorno comments on Peter Suhrkamp's aversion to 'and' in the titles of books. Adorno counters by suggesting that, 'In some titles, and ultimately in the best ones, the colourless word "and" sucks the meaning up into itself aconceptually, when the meaning would have turned to dust if it had been conceptualized'. The avowed project of Andrew Feenberg's *Heidegger and Marcuse* is to conceptualize Marcuse's reception of Heidegger's work, and it is evident that there is more than a little historical dust to sift. Given that Heidegger's work scarcely registers Marcuse, it is perhaps not surprising that Feenberg's emphasis is on Marcuse's Heidegger, rather than on some counterfactual dialogue between teacher and former pupil. Marcuse's early work bears traces of his study under Heidegger and what has been called Marcuse's 'Heidegger-Marxismus'. More controversial, however, is the claim that Marcuse's neo-Marxism remained implicitly Heideggerian despite his explicit interests in Critical Theory and Marxist aesthetics.

Two 'ands' in one title presents the further difficulty of the movement from catastrophe to redemption. This suggests, rather misleadingly, a Benjaminian discussion of the philosophy of history. The book's main line of argument is more accurately summarized by its listing on Feenberg's homepage, which, perhaps indicating an earlier working title, gives the title as *Heidegger, Marcuse and Technology: The Catastrophe and Redemption of Enlightenment*. The absence of 'technology' from the book's published title is surprising given its prominence in the book as a whole. In so far as it is possible to identify a catastrophe calling for redemption in this book, however, it is modern technology. Feenberg traces the question of technology in Heidegger and Marcuse in order to suggest a renewed critique of technology.

This critique of technology is prefigured in Feenberg's *Lukács, Marx and the Sources of Critical Theory* (1981), which argued for a dialectical paradigm of rationality suited to the task of social self-understanding and human liberation. In this early book, Feenberg claims that Marcuse elaborated a positive theory of liberated technical practice, a position *Heidegger and Marcuse* throws in doubt. Feenberg's

subsequent books – *Critical Theory of Technology* (1991, revised and republished as *Transforming Technology*, 2002), *Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory* (1995) and *Questioning Technology* (1999) – indicate the persistence with which Feenberg has addressed the question of technology, including case studies developed at a less abstract level of argument. Extracting the question of technology from Marcuse's Heidegger is nevertheless fraught with problems, since the effective reception of Heidegger in Marcuse's thought precedes the emergence of Heidegger's reformulation of *techné* and technology. Moreover, Marcuse's understanding of technology more obviously reflects Critical Theory's relation to Marxism, and associated critical theories of instrumental reason, administration and the sociology of capitalism. The main lines of argument in Marcuse's neo-Marxist critique of technology are evident in his 1941 essay 'Some Social Implications of Modern Technology' (republished in *Technology, War and Fascism*, 1998, volume one of the *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, edited by Peter Kellner). Feenberg eschews discussion of this essay, and although his book's blurb claims a careful study of previously unpublished work by Marcuse, the readings offered focus on published work from either side of Marcuse's most sustained engagement with the Frankfurt School in the 1930s and 1940s.

Feenberg has elsewhere attempted to renew aspects of New Left socialism and first-generation Critical Theory, so the absence of a sustained discussion of Marx and Marxism in *Heidegger and Marcuse* can in part be made up there. Although the underlying source remains Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, it is hard not to notice a generalized attenuation of explicit Marxist formulations. The belated staging of Heidegger versus Marcuse suggests a settling of Feenberg's debts, designed to offer a retrospective introduction to his recent thinking on contemporary technology. But however much Feenberg's arguments are directed towards a reformulation of the potential of technology, the drift towards Heideggerian arguments needs a more historical account than is likely to emerge from speculative accounts of the implicit ontology of ancient craft.

In rough outline, then, *Heidegger and Marcuse* suggests how Marcuse's idiosyncratic reading of *Being and Time* might be understood as a way of interpreting Marx and Hegel through Lukács. But it also makes the stronger claim that 'Marcuse remained true at some level to an earlier Heidegger [that] the later Heidegger rejected and concealed.' But at what level? Beyond the difficulties of sustaining this claim against Marcuse's own historical trajectory, Feenberg wants to claim that 'there remains much in Marcuse that is theoretically incomplete precisely because he refused either to drop central phenomenological themes or to develop them phenomenologically.' Feenberg offers intriguing accounts of Plato and Aristotle, with Bruno Latour as a point of reference, to highlight the reading of Aristotle that Heidegger pioneered in lectures of the 1920s and early 1930s, lectures from which Marcuse evidently learnt. Heidegger's Aristotle is then read into Marcuse's doctoral thesis on *Hegel's Ontology* (1932, trans. 1987) to suggest an alternative genealogy to its synthesis of Marx, Dilthey and Lukács. The central and most interesting chapter in Feenberg's account is, accordingly, his reading of *Hegel's Ontology*, which weaves a fascinating path through the contextual difficulties against which Marcuse worked. The key claim is that Marcuse finds in Hegel, above all in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a fundamental ontological orientation towards history, and a phenomenological conception of historicity that seeks to displace the apparent ahistoricity of Hegel's absolute. Feenberg is nevertheless obliged to oscillate between the implicitly Heideggerian formulations evident in *Hegel's Ontology* and Marcuse's contemporaneous essays on phenomenology and historical materialism. Indeed, although Feenberg offers an illuminating account of the way Marcuse might have imagined a synthesis of Lukács and Heidegger, he also concedes that this has to be decoded and read between lines that otherwise remain parallel rather than convergent.

Moreover, it remains unclear whether Marcuse's turn to the early Marx and Critical Theory can be read as a regression in the face of unreconciled philosophical difficulties, or as a considered rejection of the attempt to combine phenomenology with historical materialism. The problem, as Feenberg puts it, is that 'Without a phenomenological notion of being-in-the-world, he seems to be engaged in inflated rhetoric or, worse yet, a naïve metaphysical challenge to the modern scientific understanding of nature.' He suggests that Marcuse can be redeemed by reading his work as a 'deconstructive strategy', a rather baffling and unorthodox way of describing the way Marcuse

plays off antinomial opposites against themselves to defy the categories of philosophical tradition.

Feenberg's reading of *Hegel's Ontology* is largely persuasive, however, and sets the stage for his illuminating account of the eclecticism of Marcuse's subsequent appropriations of Freudian *Eros*, of the account of sensuousness in early Marx, and of utopian claims for aesthetics, beauty and imagination. Feenberg evidently shares the scepticism with which Marcuse's aesthetics is usually greeted, but attempts to redeem an affirmative conception of technology from the ruins. Despite the tenuous optimism of Marcuse's response to New Left culture in the 1960s, Feenberg seeks to develop the notion of an aesthetic criterion through which the new technical *logos* of contemporary technology might be interpreted. This aesthetic criterion remains somewhat vague, however – more a retrospective redemption of the spirit of 1968 than an encounter with twenty-first-century avant-gardes. Not for the first time, the renewed claim for the critical potentialities foreshadowed in art falls back on the aesthetics of Kant and Schiller, rather than looking forward to more recent developments as exemplified by the poetics of John Wilkinson or McKenzie Wark's bracing *A Hacker Manifesto* (2004). The spirits of 1968 continue to haunt the historical horizons of Critical Theory's engagement with art, but there is surely a problem of diminishing returns. If the project of conceiving the proletariat as the subject-object of history falls victim to recognition of the proletariat's historical complicity with the very capitalism it would supplant, then contemporary art's complicity with capitalism provides an even more tenuous set of criteria with which to distinguish affirmative technology from post-industrial catastrophe.

Between reconstruction and critical intervention, Feenberg is less concerned to develop a detailed philological account of Marcuse's relation to Heidegger than to insert his own account of technology as a critique of both Heidegger and Marcuse. He attempts to 'make explicit a remarkable theory of *techné* initiated by Heidegger, continued by Marcuse, and suppressed in the end by both'. The readings he offers are often provocative and engaging, but they provide a call to renew Marcuse's existential politics rather than a substantiated account of what is living and what is dead in Marcuse's legacy. The accounts of Heidegger are also illuminating. But anyone who can suggest of Heidegger's thought that, 'Never has such a succession of non sequiturs played such an important role in the history of philosophy!' is unlikely to convince Heideggerians to turn to Marcuse. While

Heideggerians have largely ignored the work of Critical Theorists such as Marcuse, it is nevertheless evident that the Frankfurt School were influenced by Heidegger, even if only negatively. Feenberg could make more of attempts from within phenomenology to develop Heidegger's account of technology, such as those of Derrida or Bernard Stiegler, voices absent from his account, though he does align his account with the work of Jacques Taminiaux. Feenberg's book needs to be read against the background of attempts to reconcile Marxist Critical Theory with existentialism, in the wake of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. It provides a timely reminder of resources through which to renew the dialogue between historical materialism and phenomenology. However unlikely as a compound, *Heidegger-Marxismus* needs to be rescued from the history of its antagonisms.

Drew Milne

## Pace and sweep

Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis*, Knopf, New York, 2004. xv + 429 pp., £16.05 hb., 0 679 44654 0.

Psychoanalysis is long past its heroic stage, in which its brave inventor fought with dragons social (anti-Semitism), interpersonal (Jung and other schismatics) and psychological (resistance). It has long outlasted this inventor, although it lies still within his thrall. Freud has hovered over the psychoanalytic movement since its inception, dominating its curriculum and acting as touchstone of legitimacy (try getting a psychoanalytic paper published without quoting Freud – an unnerving requirement given that he is sixty-five years dead). Freud also dominates the histories of psychoanalysis, which have often been biographies with a bit attached: Freud was born, he thought, eventually he died; he had some followers and then there were a few others. Even the histories from elsewhere that are not about Freud, such as Elisabeth Roudinesco's wonderfully hilarious *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France* (Free Association Books, 1990), are really dressed-up biography (in Roudinesco's case, laced brilliantly with gossip and character assassination) however much they manage to evoke the culture or feel of their times. Given how psychoanalysis centres on the personal, on identification, this is probably a general design fault: what is history about, if not the lives, loves, envies and unfinished business of individuals?

In this transference-laden context, *Secrets of the Soul* manages something admirable and different. Even though Freud lives on until page 263, this book is not *about* him in the reductive way typical of psychoanalytic hagiographies or anti-psychoanalytic hatchet jobs. Instead, it is concerned with what is fashionably termed the conditions of emergence of psychoanalysis, with what made it possible for psychoanalysis to start and survive, and also with the ways in which it has participated in, and fed back into, its social environment from first to last. Identifying psychoanalysis as '*the first great theory and practice of "personal life"*', Zaretsky shows how in its early period it allowed a new articulation of social forces to be heard, linked inextricably to the needs and desires of the 'second industrial revolution'. This second industrial revolution, originating in the United States, created an all-embracing organizational form, it drew on science, education and mental labour and – most significantly for psychoanalysis – separated out the workaday and the meaningful, accentuating the value of leisure and of the 'singular personal life'. It was this that psychoanalysis spoke to throughout the Western world: personal life as a work of art, as something to be ushered in, worried over, shaped to fit cultural needs, made tolerable or mythological, made real. Personal life, that is, as important, as something that each of us can hold dear.

Through the cross-cutting influences of war, mass production and consumption (the complexities and ambiguities of Fordism's creation of the modern subject are exceptionally well described), gender politics, libertarianism and the postwar welfare state, psychoanalysis appears in this book as a major intellectual force promoting emancipation and yet dragging its conservative feet, returning again and again to individualistic conformism. In tune with the times and out of it, both marginal and central, psychoanalysis gave depth and significance to the otherwise lonely individual, but also made that individual ever more available to the ministrations of consumer culture. And now, in the twenty-first century, after modernism's relative security, in the shadow of neuroscience, biochemistry and evidence-based therapy, deconstructed and critiqued by feminism and anti-racism, its institutional base eroded and its intellectual credibility hived off into the humanities alone, does psychoanalysis still serve some purpose? Zaretsky leaves this question rather open, but with a pessimistic gloss:

Democracy entailed the capacity for self-reflection and self-criticism, not patriotic self-congratulation and partisan rapacity. The optimism that propelled

psychoanalysis during its early history – an optimism associated with the first mass economic surplus in human evolution – is no longer easily available.

A thinning out of contemporary consciousness, first identified by the Frankfurt School and then by liberal conservatives such as Philip Rieff and the theorists of narcissism, has left psychoanalysis with some diagnostic work to do, but with fewer adherents to live by its principles and values. Interestingly a recent upsurge of interest in melancholia and loss may be heralding a return to more depth of feeling – a point not really worked on by Zaretsky. But only time will tell if psychoanalysis will provide an adequate language in which this can be expressed.

*Secrets of the Soul* is a welcome history in many ways. Although it has quite a strong American bias and a tendency early on to establish its difference from other accounts of psychoanalysis by drawing too formulaically on its socio-political explanatory framework, over the long haul it is engaging, fair-minded, broad and accurate in its coverage of psychoanalytic movements around the world, and immensely interesting in its account of how psychoanalysis has interlaced with social movements. It has pace and a grand sweep, and, as well as being theoretically sophisticated, it demonstrates a particular kind of humanistic virtue that might itself be thought of as psychoanalytic. Avoiding reductive explorations of the unconscious conflicts of its protagonists, it nevertheless conveys something of psychoanalysis's insistence that self-reflection, thoughtfulness and a concern with personal 'depth' might be honourable values. This could be, in the end, the legacy of psychoanalysis, perhaps even a starting point for something new.

**Stephen Frosh**

## Speciesism

Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, eds, *Animal Philosophy: Ethics and Identity*, with a foreword by Peter Singer, Continuum, London and New York, 2004. xxiv + 220 pp., £55.00, hb., £16.99, pb., 0 8264 6413 0 hb., 0 8264 6414 9 pb.

This is a frustrating but interesting book. First, the frustrations. The publisher obviously felt that Peter Singer's name on the front cover would give the book added worth. However, all the foreword offers are ill-defined stereotypes of the so-called 'continental' tradi-

tion and its disregard for the animal question. Singer baldly states at the outset that the continental tradition has made no concrete contribution to the question of how humans treat animals, and that this is in part due to the inadequacies of its philosophical resources. This is a thinking he characterizes as consisting of 'vague rhetorical formulations that appear profound but do more to camouflage weaknesses in reasoning than hold them up to critical scrutiny'.

This beginning invites us to hold our noses and tentatively wade into the mire of muddled thinking. The frustrations continue as the editors frame the relation between a thinking of humanity and a thinking of animality in terms of something called the animal question. Thinking about humanity and animality, it seems, has to be done in terms of the ethics of consuming non-human animals, if it is to count as philosophically worthy. Hence their conclusion that 'continental philosophy has only rarely given serious attention to the animal question'. This gives the impression that the editorial task was to trawl through readings to unearth references to animality in the writings of various philosophers, and then to upbraid them for not thinking clearly (or correctly) about the animal question. It is hardly a tempting beginning.

These concerns spill over into the structure of the book. The relation between humanity and animality is a central theoretical concern of continental thought and is interwoven through many different texts, but this does not easily reduce to political statements on the 'animal question', as the editors would like. I am not sure what it means to term Nietzsche 'pro-animal', for example. The readings chosen tend to be very brief excerpts, and are often from different texts, compressed into as few as three pages. In the case of Nietzsche, the readings are taken from five different texts, but still add up to no more than three pages. There are similar problems with the readings taken from Bataille, Deleuze and Guattari, and Foucault. Any book of readings experiences the difficulty of selection and context, but one that claims an 'essential' collection and then neglects to even accurately source some of its readings (Foucault and Deleuze)...

Rather than a book of essential readings, this is actually a series of short excerpts, followed by longer secondary essays on the authors' works. Some of these essays are very interesting. Calarco's essay on 'Heidegger's zoontology' offers an exposition of the conflict between Heidegger's attempt to understand nonhuman animals through their own forms of relationality, and his denial of any form of full subjectivity to them. This thinking of the relation between humans



and animals as both a continuity and a discontinuity is a thematic concern of many of the readings, and offers a distinctive and fertile contribution to thinking the so-called animal question. However, many of the essays revert to a critique of any thinking of the human as distinct from nonhuman animals in favour of an evolutionary and biological continuity across species that does not question its own biological understanding of life. In an illuminating discussion of the usage of madness and animality in Foucault's work, for example, Clare Palmer relies on a concept of *living biological organisms* to subvert the division between reason and animality. Unfortunately, the subversion of the division in this way might do away with reason altogether.

Jill Marsden's essay on Bataille maps the division between human and nonhuman in terms of immanence and transcendence, and elucidates Bataille's ambivalence to both of these terms. Marsden acknowledges that any return to nature is not necessarily a return to something benevolent. In a similar vein, James Urpeth's essay on Deleuze and Guattari outlines the concept of 'becoming-animal' as something neither human nor animal, which cannot be reduced to a continuity of behaviours or capacities, but has to be understood in the light of a different ontology of life. These essays illuminate the fertility of a thinking about humanity and animality which does not reduce itself to a utilitarian calculation or a biological reductionism.

In the reading taken from an interview, Levinas states:

The widespread thesis that the ethical is biological amounts to saying that, ultimately, the human is only the last stage of the evolution of the animal. I would say, on the contrary, that in relation to the animal, the human is a new phenomenon.

For many of those writing in this book, this is a crass form of speciesism, although Levinas qualifies and complicates his statement by saying that he does not know when the human arises. The challenge for those who charge speciesism is that they reduce the ethical to the biological, which has its own particular problems and difficulties.

Rather than demonstrating the poverty or paucity of thinking about nonhuman animals within the continental tradition (as its bizarre Foreword suggests), this book highlights how such thought is interwoven among all forms of thinking about what it means to be human. The wide range of writers included (Hegel, Marx, Adorno and Horkheimer, Wittgenstein, Agamben, to name but a few in addition to those already cited), indicates both the range and depth of thought about

humanity and animality within a tradition derided at the beginning of this book.

**Alastair Morgan**

## A curious omission

David Renton, *Dissident Marxism: Past Voices for Present Times*, Zed Books, London and New York, 2004. viii + 277 pp. £50.00 hb., £16.95 pb., 1 84277 292 9 hb., 1 84277 293 7 pb.

The central proposition of *Dissident Marxism* is that the failure of revolutionary socialism and the rise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union led to the creation of a dissident current within Marxism based on a shared commitment to socialism-from-below and a willingness to 'criticize the conduct of the Soviet state'. David Renton believes that the experience of this current should inform and 'nourish' the contemporary anti-capitalist movement.

The book is organized around a series of vividly written biographical essays of activists and theorists whom the author identifies with this dissident tradition. These include a useful summary of the life of Guyana-born Walter Rodney; a fascinating introduction to Egyptian surrealist Georges Henein, author of the anti-nuclear tract *The Prestige of Terror* (1945); and an overview of the work of Egyptian Maoist Samir Amin, which sits uneasily with the rest of the book. The final chapter is devoted to the life of David Widgery, East End doctor, radical journalist and founder of Rock Against Racism.

Unfortunately the lives of four of the earliest and most colourful Russian dissidents – Alexandra Kollontai, of the Workers' Opposition; Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Bolshevik Commissar for Education; anarchist Bolshevik Victor Serge; and the Futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky – are squeezed into a single 24-page chapter. Theorists, however, are allocated a whole chapter each, which results in the unintended impression that dissident Marxism is characterized by theoretical dissent, rather than by practical activism.

The first chapter describes the social processes that shaped the lives of the dissident Left, and sets out some of the issues they were forced to confront. These included the need to explain the degeneration of the Soviet Union, to understand the changes in the world economy, and to explain and confront fascism. Renton suggests that Trotskyism provided a natural early focus

for dissident Marxism, and describes how Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution provided a genuine alternative to the Stalinist policy of building 'socialism in one country'. Following Trotsky's expulsion from the Soviet Union, his attempts to create a new party in opposition to Stalin were more successful in attracting intellectuals than members of the working class. Other traditions, the New Lefts of 1956 and 1968, Castroism and African socialism, are also seen as possessing the potential to create and sustain dissidence, even if only for a short time.

The work of historians Donna Torr and E.P. Thompson is discussed in the context of the New Left that emerged in the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Torr was an influential figure within the talented circle of British Communist Party historians who pioneered a new approach to history in the late 1940s known as 'history from below'. Members included George Rudé, Eric Hobsbawm and Christopher Hill. Torr, who never really broke with Stalinism, became the mentor of E.P. Thompson, who advocated a 'socialist humanism' and was a tireless activist within the peace movement.

The different forms taken by dissident Marxism were often determined by the social and political conditions of the time. In periods of economic stability greater emphasis might be placed on developing theories explaining how capitalism had evolved and how it continued to maintain its ascendancy. It is in this context that the ideas of Paul Baran, Paul Sweezy and Harry Braverman are discussed. Baran and Sweezy published the eclectic *Monthly Review*, and explained how capitalism had developed into 'monopoly capital' in which the state played a key role in integrating and organizing capital through the means of armaments spending. The new form taken by capitalism meant that socialists could not rely upon economic collapse to create revolutionary conditions, but should instead follow the example of the Cuban Revolution, which had effectively been a matter of will.

The writings of Samir Amin on the inequalities underpinning the international economy, and the consequent underdevelopment of 'peripheral' states, are discussed. Amin's analysis has a seductive explanatory power, but it is doubtful if his Maoist prescriptions based on the need for Third World countries to emulate Chinese socialism will do any more than tie them into a more aggressive form of state capitalism.

The book's self-limiting focus on anti-Stalinism as one of the defining characteristics of dissident Marxism (with the implication that the Soviet Union only failed after the death of Lenin) excludes consid-

eration of revolutionary Marxists such as Rosa Luxemburg, who challenged the Bolshevik model before the revolution and its repressive behaviour afterwards. Luxemburg's inclusion would have strengthened the argument in favour of a dissident tradition. Renton's reluctance to criticize Lenin also accounts for an otherwise curious omission – Sylvia Pankhurst, who provoked Lenin into writing *Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*.

The book also has little to say about the suppression of dissident left-wing movements in the earliest years of the Soviet state: the Left Social Revolutionaries, the Workers' Opposition, the anarchist-communists and anarcho-syndicalists in the cities, and the peasant anarchist movement in the Ukraine. The Kronstadt rebellion, which was an attempt to renew the revolution from below, was met not with concessions as is implied here, but with bullets. The suppression of the Kronstadt Commune revealed a dilemma at the heart of Marxism itself. The very act of seizing state power transformed Marxism from a revolutionary theory into an ideology justifying state power and the rule of a bureaucratic elite in the name of the working class. Anarchists have understood this, although a theoretical understanding was not enough to stop them from making common cause with the Bolsheviks in 1917, and with the Spanish Communists in 1936, in both cases to their ultimate cost.

In fact, there is an unexplored tension between anarchism and Marxism in several of the profiles presented here. Victor Serge never broke completely with anarchism, while Korsch and Henein both looked to anarchism as a way of retaining a revolutionary edge to their Marxism. There was indeed a 'dissident' Marxist tradition that incorporated activists and writers who attempted to combine anarchism and Marxism, such as Walter Benjamin, Eric Muhsam and Daniel Guerin. Their libertarian socialism and counter-cultural politics prefigured many of the concerns of today's anti-capitalist movement.

This book is welcome for assembling evidence that not everyone on the Left closed their eyes to Stalinism, and for the enthusiastic way in which the lives and ideas of the selected dissidents are presented. It also provides an unspoken reminder that the new anti-capitalist movement has to resolve its attitude to the state. Can institutions created for the purpose of repression and used for mediating and managing the various forms of capitalism be transformed into the means of human liberation? Or should we remain dissidents?

**Martyn Everett**