

# Althusser after Althusser

Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987*, ed. François Matheron and Olivier Corpet, trans. and introduced by G.M. Goshgarian, Verso, London and New York, 2006. 300 pp. £50.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 1 84467 069 4 hb., 1 84467 553 X pb.

‘I am looking, in the history of philosophy, for the elements that will enable us to account for what Marx thought and the form in which he thought it’, writes Althusser in ‘Philosophy and Marxism’. The statement arguably describes his project as a whole, from *For Marx* onwards, in which he tracks down the ways in which Marx avoids epistemological capture by Hegelianism and political economy and breaks away into a new science of history. But here it also refers specifically to a more positive turn in his endeavours: the articulation of a possible ‘materialism of the encounter’ or ‘aleatory materialism’. ‘Philosophy and Marxism’, a long interview, originally published in Mexico in 1988 (interestingly, aimed ‘exclusively’ at a Latin American audience of students and political activists), is the most recent text collected in this volume and the only one published in his lifetime

Althusser’s use of the present tense to describe his ongoing search puts the rest of the collection into perspective, suggesting that the longer and earlier ‘Marx in His Limits’ (1978) and ‘The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter’ (1982–3) – extracted out of a longer repetitive manuscript by the editors – remain incomplete, works-in-progress that he may have deemed unsuccessful and therefore unpublishable. In this sense, they have much the same status as many of the works by Marx on which he comments, critically for the most part, hinting that some, like the theses ‘On Feuerbach’, knocked off quickly in pencil, should perhaps have remained confined to the archives. Indeed, so insistent is he in this regard that the suggestion becomes a defining trope, which cannot but reflect back on and frame the reading of Althusser’s own unpublished texts collected here. Yet, as Peter Osborne has pointed out in his recent book on Marx, many of the most important works of modern European philosophy were unpublished – unfinished and unpublishable – in their own time, for epistemological and other reasons, precisely because they *broke away* from the present of their composition.

Are Althusser’s drafts worth publishing today? Yes, they are, as long as their philosophical and political incompleteness is recognized and worked through.

Althusser most dramatically addresses the question of non-publication in reminding us of Marx’s refusal to publish the theoretically invaluable ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’ at a crucial moment in the historical institution of Marxism. Meekly resisting his own status as a ‘Marxist’ (when he could rather have deployed the ‘theoretical-personage effect’ emerging around him), Marx, paradoxically for a critic of political idealism, refused to intervene theoretically in party political practice: the founding of the German Social Democratic Party on completely misguided ‘communist’ grounds. Maybe these texts by Althusser – together with their associated correspondence – will prove to be politically and theoretically invaluable in the future too.

In the contemporary theoretical context, in which post-Marxist thought is so heavily marked by the experience of 1960s and 1970s Althusserianism (in the form of the ongoing influence of the writings of Balibar, Rancière, Badiou, Negri and Laclau), the publication of these post-‘Althusserian’ texts by Althusser himself is of interest for the light they throw on the different paths taken. For example, on the one hand, ‘The Underground Current’ arguably presents itself as closer in political (if not affective) spirit to the ‘democratic materialism’ that Badiou associates with Negri and Deleuze, than to Badiou’s own more ‘aristocratic’ dialectical materialism (Badiou’s joke). On the other hand, the Epicurean notion of the ‘void’ outlined therein – which, Althusser writes, ‘*began by evacuating all philosophical problems ... in order to set out from nothing*’ – is suggestive of the ‘aleatory rationalism’ that Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano have imputed to Badiou.

‘Philosophy and Marxism’ and ‘The Underground Current’ seek to think Marx anew with regard to the philosophical tradition. ‘Marx in His Limits’ looks to settle philosophical and political accounts, re-engaging official CP-centred Marxisms, from ‘Leninism’ to contemporary Eurocommunisms, in order to complete tasks associated with *For Marx*, *Reading Capital* and *Lenin and Philosophy* (especially the ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’ essay) – that is, with

classic Althusserianism. In other words, whilst 'The Underground Current' may be considered a work of post-Althusserianism, 'Marx in His Limits' remains – just – within Althusserianism's limits. It starts with a devastating question, born of political and theoretical impatience, and asked of a perspective that, ironically, has stubbornly presented itself as self-consciously attuned to historical analysis: 'How could a history made in the name of Marxism – the theory of Marx and Lenin – remain obscure for Marxism itself?'

In Althusser's view, misguided concrete analyses of concrete situations have not only led to major political catastrophes, they have remained misunderstood. (What, one wonders, would he have thought if he were writing today?) The mistakes begin not with Stalin, but with Marx and Engels, and embrace Lenin and even – in a final, short but hard-hitting chapter – Gramsci. But the solutions begin with Marx and Engels too; especially, it turns out, with Engels. In effect, in 'Marx in His Limits' Althusser seeks to provide the beginnings of a Marxist theoretical critique of Marxism based on what is rescuable from it.

A good example is his short reflection on what he terms the 'double inscription' of Marxist theory. One *good* reason for Marx rejecting his own Marxist-belonging was that it underlined the real determining factor in the production of Marxist theory, beyond its supposed three 'component parts' (British political economy, French political theory and German philosophy): Marx's and Engels's experience of working-class organization and struggle against exploitation (in England, France and Germany). Indeed, Althusser insists on the primacy of class struggle – and within that, on the primacy of struggle over class – over any idealization of intellectual labour and any suggestion of the importation of theory into the working class from 'outside', be it from Lenin or Kautsky. Marxist theory is, in his view (precisely because of this dependence), 'internal' to the workers' movement. This is one reason Althusser foregrounds its 'double inscription' within the otherwise inadequate base–superstructure model of the 1859 *Preface*: if, on the one hand, Marxist theory accounts for the 'object as a whole' – 'the structure of a social formation in general' – on the other it simultaneously locates itself, as ideas, inside that object, its 'class relations and their ideological effects' – that is, within the 'superstructure'. Marxist theory thus becomes active 'in and through ... *mass ideological forms*'. Shifting between the 'truth' of its theoretical form, and its 'efficacy' as ideological form, Althusser points out that Marxist theory – including its 'truth' – was then fatally grasped by history (which it did

not, however, comprehend) and ironically transformed back by a 'whole history of deviations' into what it originally negated: an institutionalized 'doctrine' (the 'omnipotence of ideas').

So, what are the 'limits' Althusser refers to in his title? There are many, including the well-travelled one of Hegelian 'interference' – or more precisely (because it perhaps explains its perseverance) its Feuerbachian and materialist 'inversion' – in Marx's *oeuvre* as a whole. Especially troublesome for Althusser is its presence in *Capital*, dividing the book into two: one part 'abstract' and Hegelian, the other part 'concrete' and Marxist. The abstract part is dedicated to the theory of value, which imposes a specific idealist 'order of exposition' on the work – and especially a 'beginning' (the relation between use value and exchange value established by the commodity form) that Marx derives largely from Hegel's *Logic*. Such idealism interferes in *Capital's* analyses by imposing, for example, 'an "economistic" interpretation of exploitation' that is presented in a purely mathematical illustration of the extraction of surplus value. For, Althusser insists, 'exploitation cannot be reduced to the extraction of a surplus value'. However, Marx seems to recognize the inadequacy of this account: hence the importance of the historical chapters 'that stand *outside* "the order of exposition"' and detail the 'concrete forms and conditions' of exploitation – for example, those about struggles over the length of the working day and 'so-called primitive accumulation'. These, according to Althusser, 'have nothing to do with any abstraction or "ideal average" whatsoever'.

From the point of view of *Capital*, however, the commodity arguably constitutes one of Althusser's own severest limits: he has never really had anything to say about it as a social form or about the *real* abstraction involved in exchange (for example, the exchange of labour power); nor does he engage with the idea that, rather than an abstract philosophical imperative, it is the everyday social experience of this form that provides Marx (and others) with a 'beginning' whose conditions are then systematically exposed. Nevertheless, there is a goal behind Althusser's symptomatic reading of the theoretical and compositional dissonances of *Capital*: namely, to uncover the *absolute* limit of Marx's (and Marxist) thought in the 'superstructure', or, more specifically, *the state*. According to Althusser, the state is constitutively present in exploitation. Again, he notes, Marx clearly intuits this in his historical chapters, but erases its overdetermining effects (we are now back on the terrain of *For Marx*) in his abstract and dialectical enplotment of value.

Yet this is also where Althusser's disagreement with Gramsci's *over*-politicization of the social occurs in 'Marx in His Limits'. In his reflections on hegemony and the state – that is, in Gramsci's own attempt to 'cross the "absolute limit" of Marx on Ideology and the State' and its resulting economism, whilst in Fascist jail – the famed theoretician of the superstructures theoretically delinks them from exploitation, and thus from working-class struggle, with a view (and here Althusser's eyes are fixed on Gramsci's afterlife in Eurocommunism) to

a political examination of the 'nature', hence of the 'composition' or internal arrangement [*dispositif*] of the states of the day, undertaken with a view to defining a political strategy for the workers' movement after all hope that the schema of 1917 would be repeated had faded...

Althusser is referring to 'war of position'. With Gramsci (and today one can add Laclau) 'everything is political ... "political society" has no outside' because the state (and force) is sublimated into hegemony, bracketing out 'the determination of the state on the basis of the productive relation'. In this way, Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' occludes what for Althusser constitutes the special character of the machinery of the state. An alternative interpretation might be that Gramsci in fact *expands* the state to include more than force, across the whole of the social, so as to think the emerging corporatist and/or democratized 'integral state' and the process of de-differentiation of politics and economics it implies. (This is registered more recently, for example, in Negri's notion of 'command'.)

Building on 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1969) – as well as Gramsci's theoretical forays – Althusser dedicates much of 'Marx in His Limits' to sketching out elements for a theory of the capitalist state, critically recovering ideas from Marx and Lenin whilst, as usual, purging them of their Hegelian–Feuerbachian idealism, as evidenced in the line of thought that runs from 'alienation' to 'fetishism'. (In Althusser's eyes, it is the state, rather than the commodity, that is 'enigmatic'.) Much of this is familiar. The starting point is that the state is an instrument of class domination (Althusser prefers the word 'domination' to Marx's and Lenin's deployment of the post-Paris Commune notion of 'dictatorship', as well as to Gramsci's 'hegemony'). To act as an instrument and secure the reproduction of the social relations of exploitation and domination, however, the state must be *separate* from class struggle ('that is what it is made for, made to be separate from the class struggle'). This is because (as in the legislation instituting a shorter

working day discussed in *Capital*) it may have to act against particular bourgeois fractions in the interest of the class as a whole. Althusser refers to the inculcation of 'state values' as one of the ideological means through which this separation is produced: these are 'inscribed in its structure, in the state hierarchy, and in the obedience (as well as the mandatory reserve) required of all civil servants'. They make up the military's, the police's and the bureaucracy's *esprit de corps* as law enforcers.

As a separate instrument, the state is also both an *apparatus*, a unified ensemble of elements or combination of apparatuses working to 'the same end', and a special *machine* 'which is obviously external



to the apparatus'. It is this idea that is new. It makes good the supplementary character of his evocation of class struggle in his 1970 postscript to his 'Ideology' essay. Althusser comments that Marx's and Lenin's unelaborated idea of the state as a 'machine'

adds something essential to 'apparatus': to the idea of the simple utilization of a given amount of energy, it adds that of the transformation of energy (of one type of energy into another: for example, of caloric energy into kinetic energy). In the case of an apparatus, one kind of energy is sufficient; in the case of a machine, we have to do with at least two types of energy and, above all, the transformation of one into the other.

Echoing Marx's famously reductionist evocation of the steam mill in *The Poverty of Philosophy* ('The hand-mill gives society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist'), Althusser resorts to the steam engine to explain the machinic character of the state. It rests, he writes, on a 'conflictual difference': it transforms *force* – the excess of force – into political, mainly legal, *power*, the stuff of the apparatus. Force, in contrast, is the stuff of class struggle, which now rests at the centre of Althusser's conception of the state – essentially, the 'groups of armed men' referred to by Lenin. This force ('energy A') is the 'Violence of class struggle... that has "not yet" been transformed into Power... into laws and right' ('energy B'). As the state machine transforms force into power it also becomes the means by which the dominant class – whose demands are 'recognized' by the state – disavows the very class struggle it nevertheless depends on (so much so that it remains 'secret'), thereby (re)producing the state's 'separation'. Althusser hints that this account of the state machine also accounts for the fetishism of the state: the sense not only of its separateness but also of its experience as a subjective agency. Finally, and more strategically: it is this disavowal-in-separation, nourished by 'state values', that seriously limits the – for Althusser – over-optimistic political idea that class struggle *actually* traverses the state.

There is no real continuity between 'Marx in His Limits' and 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter', written four or five years later. There are indications, however, that the aleatory materialism outlined in the latter might have provided a new theoretical space, a positive philosophy, into which a number of Althusser's early ideas – conjuncture, overdetermination, structural causality – could have been relocated and reconfigured. The hunt for Hegelianism remains, but the form the critique now takes is the formulation of a positive alternative philosophical tradition to which Marx (and Althusser himself) might belong – whether Marx knew it or not. The contemporary representatives of such a materialism of the encounter are, surprisingly, Derrida and Deleuze. But they are only mentioned; their inclusion is not explained. The other philosophers are mainly political, and include: Epicurus, Machiavelli, Spinoza, Hobbes and Rousseau. The other two important presences are Heidegger and Engels.

Althusser begins his account with Epicurus (not with Marx on Epicurus) and Heidegger. The latter provides 'a prospect that restores a kind of transcendental contingency of the world' consonant with Epicurus,

centred on the notion of 'there is' (*es gibt*): we are thrown into a facticity that 'makes short shrift of all the classical questions about Origin' and is just 'given'. It is Epicurus, however, who provides Althusser with his principal concepts, which are then reconfigured, historicized and politicized through short commentaries on Machiavelli (rehearsed also in his *Machiavelli and Us*), Spinoza (ever present in Althusser's work), Hobbes and Rousseau. 'The non-anteriority of Meaning is one of Epicurus' basic theses', as is the idea that the 'swerve was originary', according to Althusser. Epicurus begins with the image of atoms falling horizontally in a void, parallel to each other. A swerve or 'clinamen' intervenes, inducing 'an encounter with the atom next to it, and, from encounter to encounter, a pile up and the birth of a world'. Althusser refers to this world as 'accomplished fact', an effect of contingency. It is only when encounters last, because they may not (and all may be otherwise 'at a drop of a hat'), that Reason, Meaning and Necessity are established. This is a theory of 'the fact of contingency, the fact of the subordination of necessity to contingency, and the fact of the forms which "give form" to the effect of the encounter'. Epicurus' swerve thus becomes in Althusser's hands something like the constitutive outside of all social formations: the might have been and/or the might be.

There is, however, a tension in Althusser's extension of this 'theory' to history and politics – a tension between history and politics. In his reading of Machiavelli, history becomes a series of accomplished facts the relations between which is unknown, except by 'working backward'. This is because

History here is nothing but the permanent revocation of the accomplished fact by another undecipherable fact to be accomplished, without our knowing in advance whether, or when, or how the event that evokes it will come about.

However, as suggested by Machiavelli's *Prince*, politically, it is possible to know and thus to act upon the diverse elements that make up a conjuncture – a structured and lasting encounter of elements – and transform it (in that particular absolutist historical context, so as to create a nation). It is here that the well-known tension between the political idea of conjuncture and the idea of history, which characterized classic Althusserianism, re-emerges in Althusser's philosophy of the encounter. In other words: political determination 'works forwards', but it is as if it does so outside of history, or as if it is constituted through its negation.

A final word about Engels: in this philosophical context he appears as a crucial influence on Marx,

particularly in the chapter in *Capital* on so-called primitive accumulation – Althusser’s favourite, which, more than any other, is taken to exemplify his aleatory materialism. Clearly influenced by the account of the emergence of capitalism to be found in Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* (as noted by the translator), Althusser denounces Marx and Engels for saying that the proletariat was ‘the product of big industry’. Such a statement is, in Althusser’s view, articulated from the position of ‘accomplished fact’, that is, from the standpoint of the reproduction of the proletariat on an extended scale, which cannot countenance things

being otherwise. This is what the chapter on primitive accumulation exemplifies: the stories of the emergence of a dispossessed workforce and the accumulation of money-capital did not *necessarily* have to culminate in their encounter, since they are radically different narratives. This way of telling the story undoes necessity with political effect: things can be different. Althusser insists that this is a story Marx learned from Engels, specifically from *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. From the perspective of the philosophy of the encounter, the most Marxist section of Marx’s *Capital* is Engelsian.

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## Matters of sense

Jean-Luc Nancy, *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, ed. Simon Sparks, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2006. x + 270 pp., £45.50 hb., £17.50 pb., 0 8047 3953 6 hb., 0 8047 3954 4 pb.

The theme of the artwork’s singularity is one that has been resourcefully developed by a range of recent critics and theorists. At varying distances from (but still within sight of) Jacques Derrida’s thought, much of this work – Derek Attridge’s *The Singularity of Literature* (2004), for instance, and, more adventurously, Timothy Clark’s *The Poetics of Singularity* (2005) – has resulted from widespread dissatisfaction with the forms of cultural studies currently dominating humanistic research in Europe and North America, and the identity politics that usually informs them. At the same time, a renewed interest in aesthetics has also figured in these reactions in various ways. Indeed, saying that artworks signify in excess of what determinate judgements or discursive rationality are capable of compassing, and that they do so by promoting a specific experience tied to the singular form of the work, is one way of presenting Kant’s understanding of the aesthetic judgment of beauty itself – and a way of thinking about art that should hardly be unfamiliar (even if Kant himself was thinking for the most part of nature).

Kant’s reflections on aesthetics are, of course, famously rich, compacted and tense, and it matters in drawing inspiration from this source how, among many other things, his account of the feeling of pleasure is unpacked, or how compelling his notion of form is taken to be. Most specifically, it matters whether the fundamentally non-cognitive and disinterested nature of aesthetic judgement is accepted and re-protected, or whether, instead, such judgement’s sketching of the possibility of an expanded *somatic reason* is noticed

and developed. Among the best known theorizations of an aesthetic singularity eluding capture by an enlightened, and damaged, discursive reason, Adorno’s for example emphasizes an important correlative: how art’s own materials or media equally resist reduction to meaning-indifferent stuff. The ‘singular’ would thus be the apparent sense or meaning which belongs to this very ‘art’ object or thing, and its materials, or which *is* my sensory experience of them – a sense or meaning that cannot be translated out of these terms. One of the key arguments developed by Adorno in regard to this concerns, then, what distinguishes and connects the *different* arts, their privileged if complicated relations to the different senses and to their own media. For Adorno, these are neither to be dissolved nor united in an ordinary art (as, he argues, happens with Heidegger’s ontological *Dichtung*), nor hierarchized within the regime of the sign. Rather, singularity of artwork and multiplicity of arts imply each other. The arts *are* arts in their mutual resistance and their implied critique of disenchanting reason – as well as of a commodified, Kantian modernity where sensate experience has lost its authority. Translation of artistic materials into (arbitrary) signs, and signs into discourse – in a manner that is customary today – loses this sense of singularity, precisely by losing experience.

Given the concerns signalled in its title, Jean-Luc Nancy’s new book, *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, is thus a particularly valuable and timely addition to what is now a large, philosophically substantial and extremely wide-ranging corpus. For it is perhaps in

the work of Nancy that the most sophisticated, sensitive and elaborated form of a Heideggerian version of artistic singularity is to be found; one that has distinctive things to say about the aesthetic issues sketched above. Crucially, it is articulated in a manner that is alive to many of the questions that Adorno raises, even though there is little sustained explicit philosophizing along these lines. The new volume collects twenty-five various pieces, published over two decades (1980–2000, though most are from the 1990s), almost none of which has appeared in English before. Simon Sparks, as editor and one of the principal translators, has performed a useful service in bringing together these scattered and often occasional writings to make up a second volume of *The Muses*. The resulting book is, however, just about summary-proof. Nearly all the pieces demand repeated reading and thinking through. They manifest a variety of approaches, and deal with a disparate set of themes, concepts, works and authorships. Brisk digestion and assessment are, at any rate, impossible where there is such a sense of instability, as well as of specific engagement.

The book is divided into two halves, 'Literature' and 'Art'. The first discusses poetry, literature and politics, addressing, with reasonable directness and clarity (and certainly criticality), the idea of a linguistic or poetic determination of the arts – a notion to which the limitless discursivity envisaged by much current theory contributes. It also contains responses to several individual writers, including Flaubert, Michel Leiris, Michel Deguy and others. Some of these latter pieces can be extremely indirect, dense and allusive, as are several of the essays in the book's second half, which deal with painting, photography and sculpture (including the work of François Martin, Soun-Gui Kim, Henri Etienne-Martin, On Kawara and Johannes Gump). Nancy utilizes different formats and styles of writing; indeed, some pieces are effectively 'artworks' themselves. There are dialogues, mini-dramas, interviews, etymological allegories, occasional pieces of all sorts. There is also plenty of intense, abstract probing of general concepts. Clearly much of this is intended to encourage a feeling for the fragmented and singular exposure to what Nancy himself calls 'sense'. Ironically, this volume could be the ideal introduction to Nancy's general approaches to, and involvements with, artworks just because the reader is likely to want guidance from some more 'philosophical', exoteric or programmatic pieces to be found elsewhere. Indeed, instructions for stuffing and mounting these writings within a philosophy of fragmentation are largely missing, or at least thankfully various and fleeting, in *Multiple Arts*.

Nancy has of course concerned himself throughout his career with the relations of art, literature and philosophy. From his early Derrida-inspired reflections on literariness and philosophy, his well-known work with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe on Jena Romanticism (*The Literary Absolute*, 1978; trans. 1988), through to *The Sense of the World* (1993; trans. 1997) and beyond, Nancy's larger philosophical interests in technology, community, ethics and religion often linger over questions of art and readings of artworks. The first volume of *The Muses* (1994; trans. 1996) is only one work taking on art and its philosophy extensively, but it is an important one. Other recent writings on painting and the image have been collected and translated into English in *The Ground of the Image* (2004). All of these reflections are dominated by Hegelian and Heideggerian problematics, and the outlines of Nancy's official approach are generally clear, though often mobile, in these other writings. (Many of the details are intriguingly obscure, however, at least to me.) 'The Girl Who Succeeds the Muses', for example, which is in the earlier *Muses* volume, offers a subtle reading of the complexities of Hegel's account of the overcoming of art in religion and philosophy. In the course of that reading, however, not only Hegel's linkage of the end of art with questions of objective spirit, religion, society and politics, but also the high stakes of the analyses of modernity that this controversial thesis has inspired, are – entirely characteristically – displaced and reconfigured into a *quasi-transcendental* reflection on the entwinement of philosophy, art and the senses. Nancy's typical point is a demonstration of how philosophy repeats art's finitude, its inability to gather itself up and ground itself, to make a presence of the event of presentation itself. Throughout his mature work, in fact, Nancy is interested in artworks' presentation or indication of the *sense* that opens the world, a sense that grants presence and signification but that must remain forever beyond them. And it is true, as several critics have argued, that Nancy's thought thereby risks eternal detention in a factitious 'presenting' obsessively picked clean of whatever gets presented. As it apparently falls to art to present presentation as such, the issues should thus be legible here, and not only in the abstract.

In 'Making Poetry', the first essay in *Multiple Arts*, poetry is understood as what occurs when there is an access to sense, a *sense-making*, whatever the art-medium or object. Access is always singular, exclusive and 'unexchangeable'. But, says Nancy:

Making accomplishes both something and itself each time. Its end is its finish: it thereby posits

itself as infinite, each time infinitely beyond its own work... The selfsame thing that is both abolished and posited is the access to sense. Access is unmade as passage, process, aim, and path, as approach and approximation. It is posited as exactitude and as disposition, as presentation.

While, then, Nancy is very explicit in the opening essays in rejecting any installation of poetry as *the* art, in this sense of 'making' there is still something he is clearly content to generalize. The cutting-off of any route to sense, while at the same time positing it immediately, aims to guarantee singularity, a rupture in experience. The debt to Heidegger in this account of 'art in general' is obvious, but so, too, is the echo of Kantian purposelessness and the stress on singularity. Nancy wishes to emphasize a contact-in-separation ('touch') with the event of sense-making, even if he often then moves towards an abstract distinction and separation. The bridges are sometimes burned once they have been crossed. As Adorno argues of Heidegger, such an approach tends against thinking thought's dependencies on *what* is thought. It places what are really unthematized, socially particular experiences beyond the reach of criticism. Hence, it would

seem, automatically, to have little critical purchase on art's concrete *social* dimensions. Yet for Nancy, the making of sense will always be technically specific; the different senses concretely involved in the sense they 'touch' upon.

Another formulation connects production to the image and to a particular sense: 'It does not show something – its form, figure, and colour – but shows that there is this thing. It shows the presence of the thing, its coming to presence.' Here what sounds like a dichotomy between the abstract singular, which *is* rather than being 'something', and the specific qualities which manifest the withdrawal of this sensible-intelligible 'sense', is presented, perhaps softened, through the term 'image'. Rather than indicating a stuck transcendence, making the artwork a sign of an exterior meaning or event or of its non-self-coincidence (still less a brute datum), the aim seems to be to emphasize and phenomenologically capture the particular quality of the work's appearance and artifice of self-explicitness, the way the work presents its sufficiency, attends to, re-articulates and refreshes sensate experience by making apparent the newness of a new configuration.

Anyway, Nancy's thinking of the arts stresses the techniques of their making as much as their material instantiation and sensory appeal or availability. Each artwork's singularity is bound up with its status *as* art, which is here no empty cover-concept. Just as each sense (sight, hearing, etc.) is involved with the others, and 'touches' the others in touching on itself, so the different arts (whose divisions are not simply to be derived from or mapped onto the senses) touch on one another also. Sense is plural and heterogeneous and splintered, as is art itself, its techniques and materials. The world's unrepresentable sense is somehow glimpsed, overheard, or touched on in, and as, all the fragmented and singular arts. It is the emphasis on the corporeal and affective dimensions of what Nancy does not call aesthetic experience that makes the ramifying 'quasi-transcendentals' of his writing compelling.

Material embodiment is required by any meaning-making. But this moment, whether a technology of production or the material of the work itself, cannot appear within meaning for Nancy. He can talk of both bodies and technologies of writing in this regard, which could imply an equivalence between living and dead 'apparatuses' where poetry, for example, might only ever be mere prose – whatever that is – stuck on a ventilator machine. Getting the body into sense



must involve more than a mute pointing at mechanical functions. Yet Nancy wants to treat these material aspects in their specificity. He is after all precisely interested in a sense, not a senselessness or blankness. Signifying touches these things, relies on them. Nancy allows no mimesis as resemblance to characterize this relation, but another mimesis, of affinity among the senses and between them and what is sensed, may be pertinent. He has some interesting comments on voice in this regard. This could help unfix what threatens merely to inflect, rather than dislodge and criticize, an inert separation of domains.

Nancy recalls philosophy to art because of art's defining involvement with and attention to matter and the senses, through whose differential plurality the sense of the world is presented. This simply means that art sets forth, makes available, the opening or sense of the finite world as such. The sensuousness and materiality of art, its medium's insistent contribution to its sense, is what secures art this elevation. Art is not for Nancy the discardable (or undiscardable) husk of ideal contents, a mere blank thing, any more than it is the achieved sensory manifestation of the idea. The essay entitled 'Res extensa', for example, confronts directly sculpture's relation to its materials and illustrates some of these large themes. Etienne-Martin's *Dwellings (Demeures)* inspire a line of thought about the *expression* of matter, about an expression that is not the material's giving form to some alienable content, but one that is its own response 'to its own massy thickness'. This matter, the wood, remains (*demeure*) in itself by a minimal distention of its mass that presents its dwelling with itself, the way it inhabits its own solidity. This also suggests to Nancy the resistance offered to the sculptor's hands and tools. So the title of the sculptures leads to reflections on their materiality, but by opening up a sensing of and attention to the wood itself. Likewise, the word 'material' is explored to open the world lit up through its etymology, and leads to the touching of wood, the display or showing of a 'thickness' that gives way to touch, 'a finger that sees'. The word 'title' prompts another synaesthetic flight, or burrowing, wherein names become a 'signature of substance'. One sense touches on another sense, or is porous to it, one medium to another, reception to production. Further aspects are disclosed through the title of the sculpture *Janus-Torso* (1969), which triggers a sequence of associations – mythic, material, artefactual. The torso presents and withholds; it is not a body but a 'fossil of the origin', a presencing frozen, truncated. Janus-faced, the sculpture offers to twist and face itself, 'slowly like a heavy vessel whose

anchor drags in the depths', facing its own mass rather than making itself available for 'spiritual assumption': there is a singular, sensory, matter-bound experience that withdraws from or resists the various senses it recruits and presents. Most obviously, it is linguistic associations, anthropomorphisms and similes that try to lever the artwork into experience, but that fizzle out, regroup, fall silent again.

There are many spurts of reflection and fantasy here; but the essay coils round the work in a way I have squashed and simplified in order to string together examples of the opening of one sense and medium onto another. Nancy's reading wends a path towards what sounds like an allegory of the world's emergence – with the subsequent, abrupt production of a split, embodied subject. 'The cogito here belongs to a substance, not to a subject.... What is sculpted is this – the subject.' Nancy appears to be interested in a cognitive potential only realized in the singular experience of the work. Is this betrayed by discovering there a concept secreted by the still-philosophical reader? Or is a rethinking of that concept enjoined by crystallizing out *this* subject's experiential contents?

One of the two essays on Blanchot defends that thinker from hasty calumination of his politics, and Nancy there advances some bald formulations about the political thrust of his own thinking. Demythologization is the order of the day, which means here that we are to confront in thought the absence of any collective and subjective foundation, of all 'imaginary totalizations'. But, apart from anything else – we might complain – the brusque eviction of myth by thought is itself myth. The question of an infinite self-legislation of finitude is at the heart of Nancy's close but vexed relations with aesthetics. When he endorses the desiderata of a more familiar aesthetics, and protests against a disenchantment of art's thinghood, the tensions are all legible, rather than camouflaged:

There's no silencing it and no saying it, as if, before any intention to speak on my part, there were something there, set down like an inert or formless thing simply awaiting its seizure and petrification into signification.... It's not as if there is the thing on the one hand and its saying on the other. The taking-place of the thing, its beginning-and-end, is both saying and thing.

Nancy is not content always to seal this taking-place in an airless limbo. And while there is 'no silencing it', there is a silencing to be heard in his readings, one that cannot be made good by philosophy: the confiscation of what is due to material and the senses.

**Nigel Mapp**



# Creative writing

Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, Verso, London and New York, 2006. 199 pp., £50.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 1 84467 079 1 hb., 1 84467 555 6 pb.

In this much anticipated monograph, Peter Hallward wastes no time announcing his aim ‘to go right to the heart of Deleuze’s philosophy’. This for Hallward amounts to the claim that Deleuze ‘equates Being with unlimited creativity’. In so far as such Being-as-creation is ‘univocal’, it will be creatively ‘said’ in a single way for all creatures. Thus, like the version of Deleuze that we get in Alain Badiou’s earlier study, *The Clamor of Being*, Hallward’s Deleuze turns out to be an essentialist, neo-Platonist thinker of the One-All, rather than a thinker of multiplicity. Before looking at some of the specific arguments Hallward offers in support of this series of claims (which amounts to a book-length tour of Deleuze’s entire *oeuvre*), it might be useful, first, to return briefly to the mini-polemic that unfolded in the pages of *Radical Philosophy* around Christian Kerslake’s 2002 article ‘The Vertigo of Philosophy’. For we might see Hallward’s book as a protracted appendix, not only to Badiou’s earlier monograph, but also to this later exchange.

In his original article in *RP* 113, Kerslake places Deleuze in a philosophical genealogy that would treat *Difference and Repetition* as, among other things, an idiosyncratic inheriting of Kant’s First Critique, and finds an important affinity between Kant’s critical project and Deleuze as a thinker of immanence. In so far as the First Critique was itself an attempt at a totally immanent epistemology – such that the conditions of possibility for experience might be situated at the level of *a priori* intuitions and categories within the thinking subject – we find already in Deleuze’s insistence on this term a Kantian imperative. But the more explicit link between Deleuze and Kant, Kerslake tells us, is around the terms ‘idea’ and ‘problem’. Despite Deleuze’s slightly flippant comment about Kant as an ‘enemy’ – from the over-read and over-interpreted ‘Letter to Michel Cressole’ – problems for Deleuze should be understood as the making radically immanent of those transcendent ideas which, for Kant, caused the faculty of Reason to become bogged down in illusion through unavoidable speculation about the Soul, the Cosmos and God. To the extent that such ideas (which are nevertheless salvaged, in the First Critique, as the regulative horizons within which concepts are applied to experience) are for Kant precisely

problems – because things like the Soul, the Cosmos and God can never themselves correspond to any object of experience – Deleuze reworks them in a very literal way. For Deleuze, such ‘problems’ will be reconceived (following Albert Lautman) as yet-to-be-actualized distributions of points and relations in reciprocal determination, a transcendental field he calls *différence-en-soi*, or the virtual. Indeed, the closest thing to a ‘transcendental unity of apperception’ in Deleuze’s ontology is the virtual itself. This idiosyncratic inheriting of Kant is what Deleuze calls ‘transcendental empiricism’ (clearly riffing on the transcendental idealism of the critical project), and what Kerslake describes as Deleuze’s ‘apocalyptic transformation’ of Kant.

While acknowledging that ‘some of the most sophisticated and original new work on Deleuze centres on ... his relation to Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy’, and conceding that ‘it would be much too simple ... to treat Kant exclusively as Deleuze’s adversary’, Hallward nonetheless prefers to de-emphasize this post-Kantian dimension in *Out of This World*, telling us instead that Deleuze ‘presents himself as a non- or even pre- rather than a neo-Kantian thinker’. If this is so it is because, as Hallward rightly points out, ‘instead of a logic of representation Deleuze proposes a logic of creative expression or sense’. Yet if we consider Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism, it becomes clear that what Kerslake calls Deleuze’s post-Kantianism in no way contradicts such a ‘logic of creative expression’. If the project is one of deducing a unity of apperception, such that *a priori* categories and intuitions hook up logically (and thus, for Kant, necessarily) with objects of possible experience, then this unity is, in Deleuze, repositioned as an impersonal transcendental field, such that the conditions of possible experience become the conditions of *real* experience. This move from ‘possible’ to ‘real’ is in parallel with the move from transcendent ideas to immanent problem; a move that nonetheless ceases, for Hallward, to be ‘Kantian’ in any meaningful sense, since ‘unlike Kant’s ideas ... Deleuze affirms problems precisely in so far as they *do* allow for the immediate and adequate intuition of reality as it is in itself’. The obvious objection would be that such a knowing inversion of Kant remains itself Kantian.

How, then, might Hallward's creationist Deleuze and Kerslake's post-Kantian Deleuze intersect? The crucial notion here is perhaps one Deleuze borrows from the late essays of William James, of relations being 'external to their terms'. Acknowledging the irreducibly empirical dimension in Deleuze's thought (and James was careful to distinguish his own 'radical' empiricism from Hume's associationist psychology), Hallward reminds us that Deleuze 'retains the truly fundamental position ... that relations are external to their terms'. This is a position Hallward himself calls a 'non-relational theory of non-relation'. Presumably he has devised this unwieldy formulation in order to draw attention to the paradox that if relations are genuinely external to their terms then nothing is related, since relations which operate independently of terms do not, by definition, relate anything. Externality of relations would then rather amount to something like relationality *as such*. But this type of externality has a more explicitly 'creationist' consequence – namely, the thinking of multiplicity as an experimental pluralism of undetermined relations and their unforeseeable terms, *en train de se faire*.

Daniel Smith (for whose 'detailed engagement with some of the more contentious aspects of the argument' Hallward tells us he is 'especially grateful') has recently elaborated this experimental and improvisatory aspect of Deleuze's thought. Describing how relations work at the level of virtual problems (again, those 'problems' Deleuze borrows from Kant, turning the regulative idea into an immanent distribution) Smith tells us that in Deleuze's ontology,

relation persists even when the terms of the relation have vanished. It is thus a pure relation, a pure relation of difference ... not only is [such a] relation external to its terms, it is also constitutive of its terms: the terms of the relation are completely undetermined (or virtual) until they enter into differential relations.

If transcendental empiricism is, therefore, not only a pluralism, but the condition under which the New is produced, then Hallward's thesis need not lead to a Manichaeic stand-off between creationist becoming and post-Kantian critique. And if the repositioning of problems – from an undeterminable (but regulative) idea to an unforeseeable (but immanent) idea – is a matter of thinking becoming as the reciprocal determinations of relations which are external to their terms (pure relation or relationality-as-such), then it is precisely the Kantian inheritance which allows Deleuze to think Being as *différence-en-soi*. Relations which are external to and as real as their terms are then accordingly free to link up the terms of real experience such that, as Hallward describes it (sounding very Jamesian), the 'human subject comes to be constituted within the flux of experience'. Thus, when Deleuze writes, in his essay on Walt Whitman, that relations, when thought of as external to their terms, will 'consequently be posited as something that can and must be invented ... [such that] we can invent non-pre-existing relations between them', we have the basis for that harlequin-patterned multiplicity which we find in both the style and substance of all of Deleuze's writing. Far from the primordial squirmings



of proto-organic molecules, or the eternal throb of a cosmic pulse, Deleuze's 'creationist' philosophy is an empiricist logic of open-ended experimentation at the level of real relations.

We might, then, want to look for a rapprochement between Kerslake's post-Kantian 'critical' Deleuze, and Hallward's affirmative 'creationist' Deleuze, and suggest that Deleuze is: (1) a post-Kantian thinker in the way Kerslake and Smith want him to be (in making the regulative ideas of reason into the immanent problems of the virtual, where problems are composed of reciprocal determinations of relations, such that relations are external to and as real as their terms); but is, also, (2) still radically empiricist enough to posit that such immanent ideas can be affirmed (even 'thought') through a kind of pure experience of relationality-as-such. Thus we might say that Deleuze, following Bergson, makes Being-as-difference accessible through what the latter calls (in his own transformative borrowing of a Kantian term) 'intuition'. Indeed, Deleuze saw in Bergson's notion of 'intuition' nothing less than a rigorous philosophical *method* – what he called, in his 1966 monograph, Bergson's '*superior empiricism*'. This is no doubt an early rehearsal of the 'transcendental' empiricism Deleuze will elaborate in *Difference and Repetition*, and it prefigures the way the unlikely pairing of Bergson and Kant will form a strange alliance in the latter work. To return to Hallward's objection that Deleuzian 'problems' cease to be Kantian because they – unlike Kant's subjectivist conditions of possibility – enable the direct intuition of Being as such (indeed, nothing less than an access to *noumena*), we might nevertheless read 'transcendental empiricism', still using Hallward's own language, as itself the 'intuition ... of the true reality of things'. Putting thought into connection with Being is a matter, for Deleuze, of a miscegenation of Kantian and Bergsonian terminology, such that a bypassing of the categorical generalizations of the concept, as an intuiting of immanent ideas, leads to an access to the real, as a continuity of difference and becoming.

Part of the pleasure of reading Hallward's book is the extraordinary lucidity he is able to bring to Deleuze's extremely difficult philosophy. Some examples of this total mastery of Deleuze's polymathic archive are his unpacking of Deleuze's use of the differential ratios of the infinitesimal calculus; his hugely clarifying discussion of how the surface–depth relation works in *Logic of Sense*; and his brief but somehow thorough sketch of Spinoza's ontology, and how it relates to Deleuze's use of the term 'expression'. There are many such moments in *Out of This World*. Still, after reading in the introduc-

tion that 'the question to which Deleuze's project will itself be submitted in the following pages may be to reveal ... the degree to which his work, far from engaging in a description or transformation of the world, instead seeks to escape it', it then comes as something of a surprise that it is only in the last six pages of this 200-page book that Hallward decides to give Deleuze a slap on the wrist for apolitical otherworldliness. If, as Hallward tells us in his reply to Kerslake, Deleuze is a 'naturalist' (a claim with which I agree), then this can only mean that Deleuze is nothing if not *in* the world, and thinking Being will amount to something closer to Bergson's extreme empiricism, whereby an intuitive bypassing of the conceptual intelligence recovers the smoothness of Being as *durée*. In this way, we ought to agree with Badiou's claim that 'Bergson is [Deleuze's] real master, far more than Spinoza, or even Nietzsche', but directly at the expense of Hallward's final forbidding warning that '[while] few philosophers have been as inspiring as Deleuze ... those of us who still seek to change our world and to empower its inhabitants will need to look for inspiration elsewhere'. This judgement is finally premissed on a false dichotomy: we must make a choice between either an otherworldly escapism or a concrete engagement with the here and now. It is a choice Deleuze's transcendental empiricism prevents us from having to make.

Paul Grimstad

## Nothing in common

Simon Glendinning, *The Idea of Continental Philosophy: A Philosophical Chronicle*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2006. v + 144 pp., £45.00 hb., 0 7486 2471 6 pb.

The title of this book is a problem for reasons indicated by the subtitle, *A Philosophical Chronicle*. The contrast suggests a Kierkegaardian engagement with a paradox concerning truth as 'idea' and its narration in time, as chronicle. The book does indeed advance a paradoxical hypothesis, but without direct appeal to either Kierkegaard or his great twentieth-century successors, Bertrand Russell and Gilles Deleuze. In place of the paradoxes of faith, number and concept, paradox here turns on a psychoanalytical notion of projection and incorporation, derived perhaps from a reading of Derrida, Lacan and Levinas. This paradox, however, is not referred to these writings, nor is it revealed in its full complexity when Glendinning arrives at an

account of an irreducible 'other in me': the decentring of subjectivity by its investments of energy in others and in object-relations. In this respect, this is a very analytical book, in both the psychoanalytical and the philosophical senses, which supposes that testimony may be allowed to stand and that concepts need not be traced back to their textual origins.

The book's main aim is to diagnose the institutionalization of a non-existent difference between two strands of philosophy, one of which is supposed to exist, and the other of which is to be shown as the phantasmatic other of the first. To mark this hypothesis, 'analytic philosophy' is to be written thus, and 'Continental philosophy' thus, the capital letter marking the surmised phantasmatic status. Analytic philosophy is provided with a table of defining characteristics (in Dummett's phrase) and is thereby deemed to have determinacy. The claim appears to be that, since no such table can be provided for continental philosophy, it does not exist. Both parts of the proposal seem to me suspect. The notion of a phantasmatic other, written 'Other' to distinguish it from other others, is borrowed from the tradition which has been declared not to exist. This is the paradox that Glendenning seems not to have detected, although a careful reading of the writings of Climacus and Anti-Climacus might have alerted him to it.

There is also a problem of scope. The institutionalization in question is discussed in terms of the UK scene, and the strand of philosophy deemed to exist, analytic philosophy, is represented in the main by those domiciled in the UK: Dummett, Glock, Ryle, Hare and G.J. Warnock. The arguments concerning the value of the supposed Continental strand are derived from writings of those domiciled in North America, Simon Critchley, John McCumber and Robert Pippin, who might themselves not claim to be continental – or, indeed, 'Continental' – in any obvious sense. This, then, appears to be rather a dispute between North America, where Continental Philosophy (capitals for both, indicating sub-disciplinary status) has a kind of institutionalized presence, and the UK, where it has yet to make an impact. This shift of focus is underlined by a lack of engagement with the distinctive concepts of the supposedly alternative tradition: Critique and Antinomy, Dialectics and Inversion, Genealogy, Phenomenology, its transformation into an Existential Analytic, and so on. Here capitals may be deployed to suggest that, until these terms are put to work in the development of philosophical argument, they are closer to names than recognizable concepts. Husserl's distinction between a formal indication and a fulfil-

ment of intended meaning gives an account of how a term may shift from one status to another. The unmotivated introduction of an exception, in the role attributed to a concept of the 'Other', reveals that the author must presuppose what he seeks to disprove: a distinctive continental tradition in which sense can be made of this key concept.

The book begins autobiographically with our young Wilhelm Meister in search of a discipline. It proceeds in a tone part ethnographic and part journalistic, such that a response to it in terms of philosophically based protocols might seem supererogatory. However, it does contain the following declaration:

While most of the discussion is negative, I will also be providing what I will want to call a philosophical (and not merely, say, historical or sociological) account of the emergence of the idea of a 'wide gulf' between the kind of philosophical analysis pursued in the English-speaking world and its Continental Other.

Our author then reasonably points out: 'the question of "what philosophy is" is itself a contested concept within the subject we call "philosophy".' This 'we', however, is fatal, since only some philosophers will conduct an analysis in terms of 'contested concepts'; others suppose that their task is to construct philosophical accounts of problems, and perhaps even answers to questions, in which concepts are borrowed from extraneous sources, but are then 'essentially' reconstituted in the performance of the philosophical task in question.

After two chapters entitled 'Starting Points' and 'A Meeting of (Some) Minds', the book descends into encyclopaedic mode, with the third chapter consisting almost entirely of lists of names and movements. This demonstrates that eighteenth-century means cannot provide a specification of common characteristics for those arraigned under the unlovely title 'The usual suspects', listed first by date of birth, and then in groupings entitled 'Movements in the Stream'. It is tempting at this point to suggest a reading of Blanchot's 'The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common', or of Nancy's remarks on 'Unworking Community', and to point out that these thinkers, along with Jean-Luc Marion, Giorgio Agamben and Dominique Janicaud, have not made it into these lists. It is also tempting to point out that in a very great work by Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, which is mentioned but not used, there is an analysis of the dynamics of such an ordering of things.

For there is nothing philosophical in this kind of naming of names, although the question of how to

understand names dominates at least one strand of the so-called Continental tradition, from Husserl to Derrida and indeed Deleuze. It also turns up under another description in the enterprise of distinguishing names, definite descriptions, and rigid and non-rigid designators. This chapter, with its lists and even a map of Continental philosophy, cannot provide the promised philosophical account of either 'the Idea of Continental Philosophy', or a 'gap' between the Continental and the analytic.

The next two chapters are more promising, but prove paradoxical in ways again unanticipated by the author. The first, 'The Analytic Perspective on the Idea', rehearses some less considered remarks by Ryle, Hare and Geoffrey Warnock on a certain style of philosophy with which they were not in agreement. At this point it might have been worth canvassing a distinction between a practice of analytic philosophy, which can be done well or badly, and a non-philosophical practice of denouncing the otherness of others, distinctive of some who call themselves analytical philosophers. The following chapter, 'The Continental Perspective on the Idea', by sleight of hand, seeks to confirm the hypothesis under interrogation – that the 'Idea' of Continental philosophy is a projection of analytic philosophy – by discussing only the views of commentators on that tradition, separating a history or commentary on philosophy from the activity of philosophy itself. However, there are inventors in philosophy, Austin and Heidegger, Aristotle and Nancy (again, Deleuze and Russell are also good examples here), who write the history of philosophy they need in order to launch their conceptual transformations.

Next, we are invited to consider the 'Idea' of Continental philosophy through the following lens:

So taking our bearings from the discussion to this point, what then *is* Continental philosophy? Not, I would suggest, a style or method of philosophy, nor even a set of such styles or methods, but, first of all the Other of analytic philosophy; not a tradition of philosophy that one might profitably contrast with analytic philosophy, to a distinctive way of going on in philosophy, but a free-floating construction which gives analytic philosophy the illusory assurance that it has methodologically secured itself from 'sophistry and illusion'.

Such a deployment of psychoanalytical categories in relation to institutions, however, requires a radical challenge to Freud's deployment of terms, and a discussion of their transformation in the work of later thinkers, such as Reich and Levinas, Lacan and Žižek. For a need for reassurance cannot in any obvious sense

be attributed to a style of philosophy. This requirement to attend to textual origins and the transmission of concepts are two of the distinguishing marks of the alternate tradition, which make no impact on the kind of enquiry adopted here.

The notions of illusion and sophistry are provided with a sketchy genealogy by invoking Plato's *Sophist* and perhaps, by implication, the stranger of his *Parmenides*, and by a gesture towards David Hume, but not, at this point, to Kant. There is no analysis of the concepts of illusion and of sophistry themselves. This, perhaps, is not so reprehensible, for any attempt to explain Kant's refinements of the notion of illusion would have taken rather more than a couple of footnotes. However, variant responses to Kant's notions of illusion form the basis for distinguishing between some of the main strands of philosophy since his day, so more attention to this would have helped. (For instance, Hegel supposes that attention to a relation between idea and content can resolve and dispel antinomy and illusion.) Glendinning hopes instead to show that a picture holds us captive. He declines to discuss these other notions of illusion.

Yet he presumes that it is evident what the difference might be between an 'other' and an 'Other':

In any case, with this assumption in place Continental philosophy begins to emerge in the second half of the twentieth century as analytic philosophy's Other. And it is true: the primary texts of Continental philosophy are not works of analytic philosophy. They *are* something *other* than analytic philosophy. However they are other to analytic philosophy without being reducible to *its* (own) Other.

This, of course, is incomprehensible, even offensive, to an 'analytic' philosopher, and the implied reference back to a discussion of capitalization is insufficient to fix meaning. But according to Glendinning, there is no tradition other than the analytic, and so there is no tradition in which his distinction makes sense. The attempt to make it is therefore self-refuting, and in more ways than one. For his distinction to make sense, he would have to discuss the writings of Freud and Sartre, Hegel and Levinas (for whom a capitalization of Other is important), Blanchot and even, God forbid, Derrida, who refines Levinas's notion of the 'other in me', in a tradition and style of philosophy declared not to exist. These prior uses of the term, and the typographical device, are apparently simply not relevant.

Even more disastrous for the claim that this book offers a philosophical account of a non-existent difference is the failure to discuss what is here meant

by 'idea'. This indicates that Glendinning is to be situated firmly in an analytical, rather than an analytic, camp, supposing that concepts work perfectly well until proven otherwise. This is what makes this strand of analytical philosophy no more than a passing phase, and marks it out as methodologically distinct from the forms of philosophy preceding and succeeding it, to which the insultingly named 'usual suspects' also belong. If Plato and Hume, Kant and Austin, are to be brought into a discussion, in which light might be cast on some current philosophical labels, discussion is required of the differences between them on how to think with and about an 'idea'. Instead, the 'Idea' of Continental Philosophy is allowed to morph into the 'Idea' of a division or gulf between analytic philosophy and Continental philosophy, which then leads to an improbable 'Idea' of analytic philosophy's phantasmatic Other, and all without reflection on why, how or if these three might be called 'ideas' at all.

There is no philosophy in *this* 'Continental philosophy', because this is not the philosophy practised by those whose names are currently associated with it.

Joanna Hodge

## Rhetorical devices

Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra, eds, *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2006. 297 pp., \$34.95 hb., 0 2621 9530 5.

The stated aim of this collection is to interrogate the figural trope and the material reality of prosthesis. The diverse interests and methods of the writers and disciplines in it certainly speak to a remarkable range of theoretical activity – crossing cultural and visual studies, philosophy of science, art, new media, and technology theory, historical and philosophical inquiry. Theoretically, the volume is motivated by a particular concern with how the 'material and metaphorical figurations of prosthesis in modern Western cultures initiate considerations of the historical, conceptual *edges* between "the human" and the posthuman, the organic and the machinic, the evolutionary and the postevolutionary, and flesh and its accompanying technologies.' And, indeed, the operating trope throughout the book is not so much prosthesis and prosthetics themselves, but rather the deconstructive *gap* that such concepts serve to imply. It is this gap that is, for most contributors, clearly the condition of possibility

for a re-imagining of 'the human' qua the humanization of technology, which, by extension, operates as a counter to any fetishism of embodiment, perception and memory. Focused on both what Freud famously described as 'magnificent' extensions of the body, and its 'troubled' borders, the various essays thus seek sophisticated negotiations of the interstices between metaphor and matter, the 'real' and 'represented.'

The texts take a decidedly 'eclectic approach' to this process, however, ranging from accounts of the evolutionary compulsion of the artistic drive (Alfonso Lingis) to the reconceptualization of genes and genetics in recent medical discourse (Lennard J. Davis) to the study of mimetic 'bugs' and 'bugging' in military intelligence and cyberculture (Gary Genosko). Explicitly positioned against the privileging of phantasmagorical discourses of prosthesis as lack and compensation, the case studies collected here are, nonetheless, orchestrated by a specific and fairly consistent framework of critique: the systematic dismantling of the often careless deployment of figural designations or semiotic tropes that have heretofore troubled the logic and lived reality of prosthetic fusions. Typical of this is Vivian Sobchack's highly self-reflexive contribution 'A Leg to Stand On', which directs our attention towards the often banal experience of actual prosthetics wearers themselves, whose daily familiarity with limb appendages undermines many of the fantastical notions of science fiction and techno-cultural theory, and their tendency to privilege the abstract 'exquisite corpse' of the cyborgian hybrid. Taking her own prosthetic leg as a point of departure, Sobchack reveals the significance of the inter-subjective and inter-objective exchange that is meant to 'ground and expand the tropological premisses of "the prosthetic" as it informs the aesthetic and ethical imagination of the humanities and arts'. As such, she methodically outlines what is termed here the 'scandal of the metaphor' and the ways in which the semiotic activity of prosthesis has rendered the actual material *experience* of the prosthetic a somewhat vaguely 'un-fleshed' out figuration, severed or ultimately overdetermined by an instance of totalized discursivity.

Sobchack's contribution is characteristic of most of the essays in the collection, in so far as it attempts to suggest the interpretative *promise* of prosthetic engagement, in all of its material, experiential, metaphorical and speculative forms, while simultaneously trying not to succumb either to nostalgic fictions of the (un)naturalized body or to the kinds of conceptual lapses of fantastical 'opportunism' that are perhaps more typical in cultural theory today. Supported by

recent critiques of the 'prosthetic imagination' in the work of Steven L. Kurzman and Sara S. Jain, and calling on the rhetorical analysis of Paul Ricoeur's study of metaphor and metonymy, Sobchack herself deftly demonstrates the possibility for a productive move away from the 'literalization of desire' in contemporary material/literary prosthetics.

The disconcerting complicity of Aimee Mullins – an American double amputee, paralympian sprinter, fashion model, and star of artist and filmmaker Matthew Barney's *Cremaster 3* series – with the erotic fetishization of her own various 'legs' ('Cheetah', 'Barbie', and otherwise) figures as an exemplary subject of investigation in this regard. Marquard Smith also pursues a reading of the ways in which medical, commercial, fashion and moving-image culture each play out certain erotic fantasies of the prosthetic 'Other' (here, of woman with double or triple lacks). Although some of the questions raised are left hanging, Smith takes care to avoid the supposed rupture of the symbolic order in the various discourses of prosthesis by effectively reformulating the question of fetishism itself, locating its problematic convergence with the 'metaphorization of the prosthetic body' in the erotic paragon of female amputation and representation.

If the essays in this first section are grounded in a dialectic of prosthetic embodiment – both phenomenological and psychological – the texts in the book's second half produce a more direct investment in the technological procedures and relational oddities of prosthesis, interrogating various notions of internal and external projections of the world (and work) of subjectivity. Of particular note, in this regard, is Elizabeth Grosz's essay 'Naked', a consideration of the mediated nature of nakedness as the corollary of an evolutionary human movement towards display and exhibition. Exploring the plausibility of certain well-known genealogies of human history (Nietzsche, Freud, and André Leroi-Gourham), Grosz tracks the gradual incorporation of the internal and external development of the visual narcissist in sexual spectacle and representation across broad cultural lines. By exploring the 'interface between sexuality, bodies and art' and the 'threshold between what is bodily possible and impossible', she successfully demonstrates the continuing primacy of vision as augmentation. Such multiple extensions of vision are also productively examined in Lev Manovich's study of new kinds of representations that are enabled by modern visual technologies. Raiford Guins and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz's provocative deconstruction of Marshall McLuhan's (often troubling) rhetorical devices, and their resulting analysis of the prosthetic

extensions of a multi-sensorial turntablism in contemporary urban youth culture, meanwhile, opens up some genuinely new readings of technology's critical presence in our everyday lives – even if its inclusion in this particular anthology seems somewhat curious.

For rather different reasons, this is true also of what is perhaps the most directly philosophical (and elusive) contribution to the volume: David Wills's chapter, 'Technology or the Discourse of Speed'. Asking us to consider 'extra' amplification of a somewhat different sort, Wills's essay is organized around a critical, if fairly abstract, exploration of the writings of French philosopher Bernard Stiegler. Charting the uncanny effects of technology as laid bare by Stiegler, Wills, at the same time, instigates a Derridean critique of sorts directed at Stiegler's own Derrida-inspired conceptions. While the details of this argument are too complex to go into, suffice it to say that Wills's concern is with the 'prosthetizing effect' of spatio-temporal disjunctions in our contemporary technological discourse, specifically as it relates to the rapidity at which *language itself* 'plays' and 'mutates' – that is, the ways in which the supposed certainties of technological 'progress' are undermined by the nature of language's own properly technological function. As Wills points out, the very 'prosthetic mutability' of language allows for a re-reading of a technology of the body that signals its continual linguistic 'displacement into an otherness whose contextual bonds it cannot itself foresee or control'. At the same time, it nevertheless 'obeys' what he describes as 'the teleology of a simple hermeneutic operation, the electronic certainty of a digital impulse'. For this very reason – so Wills argues – the ceaseless flow of text, sound and image, which demands our compulsive attention in contemporary culture (and leaves its own psychological marks), might actually provide the kinds of 'techno-differentiations' necessary to the ongoing reorganization of our perceptual systems.

Whatever one thinks of this argument, in this case, linguistic mutability, and its perpetually mobile 'displacement into otherness', is patently being called upon by Wills to perform something of the metaphoric role potentially accorded to prosthesis more generally. Something similar happens with regard to the materiality of language within the province of artistic representation in Joanne Morra's concluding essay, which considers both the literal and speculative understandings of prosthesis so as to facilitate a critical reconception of the role of drawing in the work of Robert Rauschenberg and its relation to the 'gap between art and life'. While these essays by Wills and Morra may expand our understanding of prosthesis in

various ways, their presence in this volume appears both awkward and arbitrary. Rather than contributing to a sense of thematic coherence across the volume as a whole, they risk offering up the kind of metaphoric exhaustion that other essays here warn against.

Still, as a whole, *The Prosthetic Impulse* brings together a set of voices and topics that certainly rub against one another in productive ways, inciting their own friction and disclosures. The majority of the case studies fulfil their brief in demonstrating the critical possibilities of an attention to the material of prosthesis and prosthetics. At their best they operate as a testing of the conditions of our 'posthuman present' and of our 'biocultural future' – even if those conditions fail, finally, to be fully determined or defined here. Perhaps inevitably, the collection remains fundamentally vague as regards what exactly a 'posthuman present' or 'biocultural future' might actually be, and, more to the point, how prosthesis would materially or metaphorically relate to it. For all its qualities, therefore, readers seeking more clearly explicated accounts of the practices and politics of prosthetics might find more immediate gratification elsewhere.

**Nicole L. Woods**

## Anarchism strikes back

Benjamin Franks, *Rebel Alliances: The Means and Ends of Contemporary British Anarchisms*, AK Press, Edinburgh and Oakland CA, 2006. £15.00 pb., 1 9048 5940 2.

Benjamin Franks's new book is one directed at readers tired of the presumptive academic treatment that this subject often receives. It reflects a new seriousness in much recent work concerned with examining the deeper theoretical underpinnings of contemporary forms of anarchism, and their basis in the social movements of the present. From the winning allusion of the title – to that most influential generational marker of pop culture, *Star Wars* – to its interweaving of theoretical analysis set against political practice, the book is conceived as being as much a contribution to the movements under consideration as a scholarly study. At the same time, it provides a welcome focus on substantive questions surrounding class struggle and revolutionary currents of anarchism – as well as heterodox Marxisms – rather than the non-revolutionary

traditions that seem too often to absorb foundational inquiries into the subject.

The book begins with a comprehensive survey of the history, and political and cultural influences, that helped shape contemporary movements in Britain. Franks's opening chapter covers a vast amount of detail whilst succinctly defining central conceptual arguments against relevant concrete examples. From exiles and radical immigrant communities, to the innumerable groups and individuals involved in day-to-day struggles, we get a taste of the distinctly cosmopolitan flavour of the anarchist and libertarian communist movements as they took shape in the late nineteenth century and across the twentieth. Experiencing something of an eclipse in the decades following World War II, these strands re-emerged in their more recognizable contemporary form in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Yet *Rebel Alliances* is not a simple 'history' of British anarchism. Instead, the book offers an explicitly philosophical analysis that situates its subject matter within a historical context. In doing so, it sets out to examine the ethical dimensions of contemporary anarchist and autonomist currents in a way that is framed by a critical overview of moral philosophical concepts more generally, as well as of their practical political applications. Most particularly, for Franks, what he calls an 'ideal-type' anarchism must be understood in terms of a specific logic whereby the 'outcomes are prefigured by the methods', without one being sacrificed to the other.

Now, critics of anarchism frequently argue that the theory is narrowly focused on a future-to-come, whilst ignoring the reality of the present. Or, conversely – and somewhat paradoxically – that it is overly concerned with immediately realizing its aims to the detriment of any longer-term goal. Such arguments would seem to betray their own fallacious 'bad faith' more than they shed light on the ethical dimensions of anarchism. Nonetheless, it is often difficult to address the more pertinent criticism that anarchism as a political idea does not offer logical or consistent moral criteria by which to measure itself. It is in response to this difficulty that chapters 2 and 3 offer an incisive exploration of the real ethical considerations underlying anarchism as a theory and movement. Noting the unease which many associated with the movement would have with applying the standard meta-frameworks of moral reasoning to it, Franks then goes on to present a convincing argument for what he calls a specifically 'prefigurative' anarchist ethic as distinct from either consequentialist or deontological theories. The



importance of this ethic could be understood in terms of the (negative) 'dialectical' relation that it establishes between motive and goal, means and ends. By contrast, Leninism's emphasis on instrumental methods in advancing – if not attaining – a declared goal has, in practice, meant the (so-called) end becomes reducible to its immediately prescribed means. As Franks argues, anarchist and autonomist practice makes no such distinction.

It is on this basis that Franks puts forward a bold argument that the prefigurative ethic does indeed comprise a consistent evaluative logic for the reflexive practice of contemporary anarchism(s). Whilst anarchism could hardly be accused of neglecting future-oriented goals, what remains indivisible from any such ends-based standpoint is that they must be consistently reflected in the means. In this sense anarchist and autonomist theories resist any essentialist paradigm, whether Kantian universalism or straightforward utilitarian instrumentality, through what Franks calls their 'self-creative' criteria. In keeping with the anarchist and libertarian critique of instrumental political action, these criteria attempt to measure effectiveness in the primacy given to developing methods and modes of action that reflect their own normative bases, including: a complete rejection of capitalism and the market economy; an egalitarian concern for the interests and freedoms of others in creating non-hierarchical social relations; and a rejection of state power and other quasi-state mediating forces.

Franks explores in some detail the 'anti-political' nature of class-struggle anarchism, as a dynamic, negative 'anti-power' aimed at subverting and challenging hierarchical power in all its forms. As such, he goes some way to countering successfully the accusation often made by critics, hostile and sympathetic alike, that such movements merely propose passive withdrawal, because they reject the traditional goal of political action embodied in the state-form. Taking this as its evaluative standpoint, class-struggle anarchism emphasizes the self-affirming – or self-valorizing – agency of the oppressed themselves, as the emancipatory 'anti-political' force capable of ending oppression and at once developing 'the autonomous composition of new types of living'. Later chapters examine the forms this prefigurative dynamic takes, central among them being the anarchist emphasis on direct action. According to anarchist principles, direct action must aim to embody the materiality of 'anti-power' in itself, as a force capable of contesting existing hierarchical social relations, and act as a prefigurative means for creating and expanding new liberatory modes of being.

Such a moment of immanent critique is necessarily contingent, as Franks argues, on the needs and experiences, or 'subject positions', of the agency in question, the multiple identities cohering into the revolutionary social subject of class-struggle anarchism(s).

The potential weaknesses of such variable approaches are not ignored by Franks, and the book poses many prescient questions regarding the problems of differing methodologies. Questions of agency and the difficulties inherent in avoiding both formal and (perhaps more pressingly) informal organizational and structural tyrannies are followed in the final, and longest, chapter of the book, which draws together the many modes of action favoured by contemporary anarchism(s), with substantial explanation of the consistencies and tensions these offer. From insurrection, via strikes and sabotage, to the 'refusal of work', we are left with a thoroughly comprehensive overview of anarchist and autonomist practice, of the material 'anti-power' of the prefigurative dynamic elucidated throughout the course of the book.

**Christian Garland**



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