

The same goes for the compact lessons provided on the history of choreography that punctuate it. In this way, the book functions simultaneously as a philosophical intervention and as a textbook. Among its other achievements, the book should be able to give readers in thirty years a sort of historical experience of the period in question. It is partly for this reason that, reading *Choreographing Problems*, one feels out of time. However, there are other reasons, too. Since this is a book about *European* contemporary dance, it is worth recalling that the subprime crisis, and the sovereign debt crises that followed it, developed over the time of this book's composition from 2007-2012. The funding cuts and wave of precarisation that ensued have changed the possibilities of artistic production in Europe, and will continue to do so. None of the performances analysed in the book were more than nine years old in 2007, when Cvejić began work on the project, and the most recent, Mette Ingvartsen's *It's in the Air*, had made its debut only a few months before. But today, they all belong to the near past, between ten and twenty years ago; not 'now' but 'just now'. This recent past saw the emergence of a new 'set of practices' and a new 'method of creating', which the author theorises and names 'problem-posing', and whose implications she pushes to the limit. But what is the relationship between these practices and this period? One might answer that problem-posing can never become 'dated' because it will always remain a possibility for choreography. In that case, it belongs to its period insofar as it originated there, but transcends it as a possibility. I wonder if we can be happy with this answer, however, which hitches the autonomy of art to the hot air balloon of possibility. At the very least, it provokes the following (productive) doubt: what if, since 2007, these practices have not had a future, or have not yet had a future? What if we have been unable to maintain the conditions that made them possible? What were those conditions?

Cvejić is a powerful thinker of the geneses of works of art, which are classically considered irrelevant to aesthetics, but, when it comes to endings, she is very oblique. Perhaps this is her Deleuzian side: to see more that is remarkable in the emergence of a thing than in its ending. The last chapter of the

book promises to inventory the legacy of problem-posing post-2007: 'As I write these lines, six years after this project began ...' The tendencies and works she goes on to mention continue to problematise live presence and the theatrical apparatus, but none of them, so far as I can tell, carry on with problem-posing as a method of creation. The crucial afterward that would explain and give the measure of this absence is missing.

Austin Gross

## Gridlock!

Rosie Warren, ed., *The Debate on Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London and New York: Verso, 2016). 304pp., £60.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 978 1 78478 696 0 hb., 978 1 78478 695 3 pb.

'To leave error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality.' Attributed to Karl Marx, this dictum prefaced E.P. Thompson's infamous 1978 polemic against Louis Althusser, *The Poverty of Theory*, but it might equally have adorned the opening pages of Vivek Chibber's 2013 book *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (hereafter *PTSC*). The conceptual and empirical errors Chibber was out to refute belonged to a number of historians and political theorists gathered around the journal *Subaltern Studies*, which was formed in the early 1980s and initially dedicated to its own form of Gramscian-infused 'history from below' that aimed at displacing both colonialist and elitist historiographies of Indian nationalism. In *PTSC*, arguments made by Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee were consecutively reconstructed and dismissed as inadequate attempts to theorise the relation between power and capital in a global perspective that at times would tend toward cultural essentialism. With its focus on historiography and historical sociology, Chibber's intervention read both as an echo of and compliment to Aijaz Ahmad's 1992 *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, which explicitly challenged the forms of 'theory' that had prevailed, especially in comparative literature departments, in the wake of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Disciplines

(and transdisciplinary objects) are important here, since the polemics against postcolonial theory often come with the charge of unwarranted generalisations and obfuscating transpositions of linguistic registers. As Chibber frames it, the most problematic issues with 'subaltern historiography' stem from an opposition to the 'naïve' global extension of analytic categories generated in a specifically 'Western' context. In a dispute where both sides have seemed intent on 'bending the stick' to straighten up the theory, how one defines 'naïvety' itself is both crucial and, in part, what is being fought over.

Aside from acerbic comments about 'High Theory', Thompson, Ahmad and Chibber shared another concern: the easily inveigled youths of grad schools who, then as now, were incapable of resisting the temptations of convoluted language and complicated ideas with ties to French philosophers. In Chibber's case, the cure is presumably to be found in a clearheaded and rational(istic) rundown of the central arguments, a quick assessment of their empirical premises and the big reveal of 'inconsistency', designed to bring us all back from follies of subjectivation, traces, archives, traditions and erasure to a more tangible conception of 'class'. The standout response to Thompson remains Perry Anderson's book-length reply, *Arguments within English Marxism* (1980). In the case of *PTSC*, its publication was followed by a centre-stage confrontation between Chibber and Chatterjee at a *Historical Materialism* conference in New York (April 2013), picking up on a panel at the launch of the book at another *HM* conference in Delhi earlier that month. Lines were sharply drawn in the ensuing online and printed responses and the tone seemed to tend irreparably towards disdain on both sides: those defending the subaltern historians, or the different lineages of postcolonial theory, and those congratulating Chibber on having composed the final 'riposte' against their supposedly corrupting effects. Nonetheless, Chibber's critique carved out a space marked by a number of important questions. First, is the globalisation of capital relations co-extensive with their universalisation? And, second, how does our grasp of this possible overlap affect the traction and translatability of theoretical frames grounded in certain streams of the European

Enlightenment?

With such questions in mind, a collection of review essays, symposium papers and previously published commentaries has now been published by Verso (the publishers of Chibber's original book). The stated purpose of the collection, edited by Rosie Warren, is to bring together 'the major critics of Chibber's work to assess the efficacy of his arguments from differing perspectives'. With little done to alter or elaborate the pieces for this publication, a great deal of space is given over to reiterations of the argument Chibber originally presented, concerning what he considered to be mistaken assumptions regarding the specificities of colonial capitalism reflected in the work of the Subaltern Studies historians. This might be fair, given that the ambition of the collection is a recapitulation not an elaboration. But then the question becomes whether this is really a debate worthy of so *much* unelaborated recapitulation.

The book is structured in sixteen chapters divided into three parts and prefaced by Achin Vaniak's introduction to the debate, its context and the central claims that sparked it. As another opening feature, a fairly fawning interview with Chibber from *Jacobin* is reprinted – in which the drive-home point is that the manner in which the Subaltern Studies historians conceptualise the difference between 'East' and 'West' (Chibber's terms) entails an endorsement (however unintended) of 'the kind of essentialism that colonial authorities used to justify their depredations in the nineteenth century.' Of the book's three parts, the first is presented as the debate proper, with responses by Chatterjee, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Bruce Robbins contrasted in each instance with Chibber's reply. Name calling is ample and tiresome, and Chibber fares no better than his critics; to lament the tone of an academic debate while calling the replies offered by your opponents 'hysterical' and 'shrill' frankly doesn't cut it. The second part gathers the scholarly and mostly careful papers from a review symposium dedicated to *PTSC* (previously published in *Journal of World-Systems Research*), while the third consists of slightly longer articles and reviews framed as 'commentaries'.

The core concerns of the debate can be gathered

in three clusters, each centred on a specific question. First, how might we trace the lineage of postcolonial theory and relate this lineage to the possible cohesion of a field of inquiry with a distinct vocabulary and methodology? In other words: what do we mean when we talk about postcolonial theory? Second, within a broadly construed Marxist perspective, how are we to understand the globalisation of generalised commodity production and its relation to universalist political categories and terms of analysis – especially regarding the distinctions to be drawn between the globalisation of the wage relation, the homogenisation of labour conditions and the notion of bourgeois hegemony? Third, to what extent does Chibber's own form of social theory, counterposed as it is to the arguments he reconstructs and denies, provide an adequate frame by which to address global capitalism, with its high tolerance towards (or even reproduction of) so called 'cultural difference'?

The first of these – the lineage of postcolonial theory – is perceived by the contributors, subject to affiliation, either as a red herring or a central issue. Several of the responses (notably Spivak's, Robbins's and Timothy Brennan's) give a much needed, if cursory, map of the histories of (as well as overlaps and divides between) anti-colonial Marxists, the Subaltern Studies group and post-colonial theory as it took shape largely in Anglo-American comparative literature departments. The chronology of theoretical influences matters, but as George Steinmetz suggests in his contribution, a title like *The Subaltern School of History and the Specter of Capital* certainly has less panache and would probably have created much less of a response.

The questions posed in relation to the second issue – that of the relation between the globalisation of the wage relation, the homogenisation of labour conditions and the notion of bourgeois hegemony – grapple directly with Chibber's critique of Guha, Chatterjee and Chakrabarty. Since Chibber's argument (brutally reduced) is composed first as a critique of Guha and then, in different forms, as a critique of derivative claims based on Guha's initial assumptions, I'll limit this summary to Chibber's assessment of the work in question: Guha's 1997 *Dominance without Hegemony*. Here, Guha proposes that

the specificity of capitalist modernity in India might be grasped in terms of the dominance of a subaltern class without a political and ideological hegemony on the part of a national bourgeoisie, contrasting this with a standard image of bourgeois hegemony at the inception of European modernity.

The notion of dominance without hegemony also reflected Guha's proposition from the first edition of the *Subaltern Studies* journal, of a structural dichotomy between the politics of the subaltern classes and the politics of a national bourgeois elite which in no way should entail a conception of the former as 'pre-political'. Chibber counters this argument by insisting that even in Europe the bourgeoisie did not attain the form of hegemony Guha alludes to and that, paradoxically, the counter-image of the 'Western' achievement of liberal democracy and political freedoms misrepresents and elides the role of working-class struggles in the realisation of this political change. In short, Chibber attributes an essentially Whiggish conception of the English and French bourgeois revolutions to Guha, arguing that this impedes the validity of his claims regarding (a lack of) hegemony in the Indian context.

The central term of the debate here is that of capital's universalising 'drive', or 'tendency', and the question that of how this drive is to be conceived in relation to proclaimed universalist political projects. The degree to which Guha and others were dependent upon an implicit comparative historical method to make claims of historico-geographical difference with regard to how this drive was realised largely structures the exchanges. A certain blurring of terms between capital and capitalism, capitalists and bourgeoisie is unfortunate here (as Spivak also notes), and perhaps also what colours the lack of clarity regarding the distinctions and mediations between the subjects of political actions and the subject(s) of economic relations.

In fact, the category of the subject is largely absent from the debate altogether, and perhaps an explicit reckoning with it might have brought a bit more clarity to matters at hand. With Chatterjee's defence of Guha, it becomes clear that both sides speak past each other, as the former flatly denies the validity of Chibber's critique by arguing that 'getting

one's European history right is not the magic formula that will solve the problems of historical change in the non-Western world.' On this issue, especially, William H. Sewell, Jr's measured (but again, brief) commentary on the historiography of the bourgeois revolutions functions as a good mediator by emphasising that perhaps the best way to 'provincialize Europe' is to insist that it, too, consists of a number of provinces, nations and histories.

On the final issue, regarding Chibber's only proposal for an adequate form of social theory, several of the symposium papers criticise the appeal to a modified analytic Marxism espoused by Chibber; the prominent term of derision here being 'rational choice Marxism'. The rather bombastic call in *PTSC* for a twofold 'universal history' – a history of capital and one of worker struggles read as the expression of a struggle for the fulfillment of basic needs and rationally-comprehensible interests – wasn't fully worked out therein, nor was it of course intended to be (although if his recent article 'Rescuing Class from the Cultural Turn', is anything to go by, this is a task he will take on in time to come). But the claim that there is an unbridgeable gulf between postcolonial theory and Marxism (or, between identity politics and class struggle) is one we've heard before; Ahmad's 1992 book is a case in point.

The current volume does much to elucidate the terms of this 'debate' but little to push the stakes further. The exception is the final (and by far the longest) essay by Viren Murthy. Here, the limitation that one faces when insisting on either side of a dichotomy between postcolonial theory and Marxism is skilfully sidestepped in an immanent critique of both Chibber and Chakrabarty that interrogates their respective conceptions of capitalism by way of value-form theorist Moishe Postone. Unfortunately, as a whole however, if the criteria of assessment for intellectual debates should go beyond leaving either side with a sense of having been both misunderstood and right all along, the Chibber debate offers, in the end, only a limited contribution.

**Marie Louise Krogh**

## Remain in light

Finn Brunton and Helen Nissenbaum, *Obfuscation: A User's Guide for Privacy and Protest* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015). 136pp., £16.95 hb., 978 0 26202 973 5

Since the beginnings of Enlightenment era struggles against absolutism, one of the most prominent concerns of progressive politics has been to tear away the veils concealing the operation of power. Publicity and openness have long been the overriding values in Western democracies and, although they do not necessarily take a liberal form, such ideals are now deeply ingrained. Political discourse constantly references the importance of 'transparency', while suspicious publics are ever vigilant with regard to the secret machinations of their representatives. At the same time, a competing tendency, according to which progressives and radicals strove to protect privacy and foster secrecy, has been equally important but arguably less prominent. In the early days of Enlightenment, those with unorthodox ideas needed to be sheltered from scrutiny; thinking against the grain required the space to do so. Thus, Habermas has described how in the eighteenth century it was from within the private space of the family that the bourgeoisie set out into the newly formed public sphere. Perhaps the most striking example of this strand of opacity is the way Masonic lodges promoted equality and Enlightenment partly through ritualised secrecy, helping to undermine the status quo from Bavaria to Haiti as they did so. Rather than ever-increasing illumination, then, modern struggles for liberty and progress began with a combination of transparency *and* obstruction.

Contemporary conditions appear to call with increasing urgency for a renewal of the latter part of this equation. The Snowden revelations concerning the extent of government surveillance capabilities and, at a more mundane level, the unprecedented capacity for corporate giants such as Facebook and Google to harvest our data are well known. Awareness is one thing, however, knowing how to respond quite another. Many are not concerned at all – shock-