

townships may have had admirable moral values, such as opposition to slavery, but were often ethnically and religiously homogeneous and conformist, frequently intolerant of other Christian sects. One is tempted to say that this is little more than a small-scale possessive individualism which avoids inequality merely because of the smallness of scale and the room to escape – Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis – but one that will ultimately grow into large-scale free-market capitalist democracy. One is reminded of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, in which there are two moments of comparable relative equality, and for very similar reasons: one in the state of nature, the other about halfway between it and an advanced civilised state. But these are stages in a process of socialisation. What Rousseau has which Karatani does not is a very sophisticated psychological model: humans start with a number of different drives, one of which – the capacity for self-perfection – stimulates socialisation, which, in its turn, radically alters the initial drives, bringing both improvements and corruption. It is not so much the specificity of drives that is important – one could think of different ones – but the fact that they interact and are malleable. This means that there is always the possibility of social engineering to remedy the corruption. Indeed, thinkers influenced by Rousseau, including Saint-Simon and Marx, can still be drawn upon in modern pluralistic democracies, as Honneth has carefully argued in his recent book, *The Idea of Socialism* (2017). There is no such mechanism in Karatani: Ionia seems an irrecoverable golden age unless one repeats the conditions that made it come about. Yet colonisation is simply no longer morally possible.

It is significant that the American subsidiarity so admired by Karatani is much more individualistic than European versions of it. His idea of society seems to be an assemblage of rational free agents who exchange goods and ideas with each other. Yet he fails to distinguish between community and tribalism. This is why he dismisses Heidegger's profound exploration of pre-Socratic thought, which, in an essay such as *The Saying of Anaximander*, provides part of the basis for the later Derrida's thinking on the subtle reciprocities that underly good politics and social justice. Similarly, Karatani is too influenced by Weber's eth-

nocentric attitude to Indian religious philosophy to see how it could produce a movement like Sikhism, which has many of the qualities that he associates with Ionian thought: a non-personalised god, something like deism or pantheism, a lack of priestly hierarchy, opposition to ritualism and superstition, egalitarianism and communal self-government, a resistance to despotism and a valourisation of hard work honestly pursued. There is however an esoteric power in hymns like *Japji* that is intimately connected with passionate social outreach to non-Sikh and Sikh alike (as the West London gurdwaras' extraordinarily rapid and well-organised response to the Grenfell Tower disaster abundantly showed). Both pre-Socratic thought and Sikhism have quasi-mystical, poetic sides as well as rational ones that help one to achieve solidarity with the actual flesh of others and the universe. Karatani cannot access these because of his Kantianism. Consequently, however many splendid philosophical insights *Isonomia and the Origins of Western Philosophy* may contain, it does relatively little to address the contradictions of modern Western democracy in the way that it intends.

Nardina Kaur

Everybody out!

Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (London and New York: Verso, 2016). 304pp., £16.99 hb., £12.99 pb., 978 1 78478 188 0 hb., 978 1 78478 681 6 pb.

Yates McKee's book is concerned with the power of the strike under contemporary conditions. What he understands by 'strike' incorporates, however, a wide range of publicly visible forms of political struggle. Whether it be the occupations of the Zuccotti Park and the Occupy movement in 2011, the occupation of public places like Grand Central Station by smaller groups of Black Lives Matter or the occupation of museums by art groups like G.U.L.F. (both in 2014), it is this kind of symbolic public political struggle that McKee analyses as the 'strike' today. In other words, the strike is no longer what we might call the 'traditional strike' as a strategic and organised attempt of

workers to shut down certain production and transportation nodes in the network, or, as in the case of the general strike, the whole production and distribution network altogether, in order to enforce the workers' particular or general claims for better wages and social conditions. Instead, McKee focuses on a form of strike that depends most of all on its own spectacular appearance. And this means that this kind of strike depends not only on its aesthetic and symbolical forms, but also means that it can be seen itself as a form of *art*.

Without long-term statistical data it is difficult to judge to what extent the strike art form has comparable political effects to the more traditional strike forms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even the author himself comes to the conclusion that very few 'if any projects examined [in the book] have been "successful" according to conventional political metrics, let alone revolutionary ones.' Nonetheless, one can argue that the strike has been an often 'successful' and hence powerful *aesthetic* operation at the level of symbolic and medial appearance. It is in this light that the Occupy movement is presented by McKee not only as a general model for this kind of new symbolical struggle, but as a new strike form as itself art. Nonetheless, this new political art form should not be confused with any classical *ars politica*; that is, an art of taking control and power into one's own hands under conditions predetermined by already existing institutions. Indeed, it is well known that the activists operating according to the Occupy model consciously reject the possibility of taking or seeking political power as such.

This refusal explicitly differentiates such movements from earlier socialist or social democratic movements that operated both within and outside the framework of parliamentary politics in order to affect governmental decision-making through the deployment of general strikes. At the same time, it also differentiates itself from the kinds of strategies that one associates with twentieth-century communist movements and parties, which were hierarchically and militarily organised in order to take political power over state institutions while destroying the 'democratic' political system, and its social and symbolic order, as cultural products of the bourgeois ruling class al-

together. By comparison, the Occupy model of the strike replaces such strategies to seek political power with what McKee terms 'an activity of dissensus that never comes to end', characterised by 'creative unrest, activity, and mobilisation, rather than a finite organisational structure or political programme'. It is precisely for this reason, he argues, that it is also possible to describe this model of the strike not only as an aesthetic event, but also as a new site-specific art form in its own right.

The movements described by McKee as a new genre of political and socially-engaged art seek not only to bring art back into life, but also have artistic value in themselves within the context of the contemporary art system. This explains why one of the central goals of McKee's book is to establish a professional academic perspective from which the Occupy-model can be also evaluated according to already-established academic standards and art-historical norms. McKee outlines here a genealogy of artistic activism reaching from the Paris Commune to Dada and Surrealism, from the Situationist International and the Art Workers Coalition to alternative art practices of the 1980s and early 1990s, arguing that Occupy has to be understood within this historical lineage *as art*. From this genealogical perspective, McKee argues that, in an analogy to Walter Benjamin's theory of the emergence of 'author as producer', 'Occupy involved the emergence of "the artist as organiser"', a new type of artist who 'takes on an "organising function" in the creation of a new collective assemblage of authorship, audience, and distribution networks embedded in political struggle.' This not only concerns those professional artists who are 'engaged in every facet of the movement work', but also those 'organisers and participants in Occupy with no professional training in art per se [who have] found their own work inflected by aesthetic concerns with visuality, performance, and poetics.'

McKee emphasises that his attempt to evaluate the Occupy model as a form of art is thus not only 'just because artists are involved', but because the merging of "art" and "non-art" are themselves recurrent and essential in the history of modern art' and because 'Occupy as a totality – rather than just this or that phenomena within it – can itself argu-

ably be considered an artistic project in its own right.' From this perspective, the importance of strike art for established art discourse lies in the fact that it realises an already existing 'tendency in the contemporary art system to strive for the dissolution of art into other fields of social practice', a tendency that, McKee writes, 'is informed, however faintly, by the dream of the historical avant-garde to liquidate the bourgeois institution of art itself', but which, until the emergence of Occupy, could appear only as false or simulated.



At the same time, the perception of Occupy as an aesthetic phenomenon is not restricted to the professional art historian alone. Even the viewer who does not actively take part in these movements, but who is confronted with it as public and media spectacle, in fact judges, McKee argues, the event in a similar way to a contemplative aesthetic appearance. Certainly, for some viewers, the appearance of the Zuccotti Park occupation in New York, its 'physical precarity [that functioned] as a cipher for the lived experience of economic precarity, including that of recent evictees from the supposed American Dream', might well be aesthetically appreciated. On the other hand, for other viewers, of course, the anarchic aesthetics of

Zuccotti Park made only a profoundly repellent impression and appeared as an ugly, disorganised and shocking spectacle. The city's decision to clear the park was, in this sense, justified officially less as a political decision – to suppress, criminalise and censor the content of strike art – than as an aesthetic one, seeking to reinstate the neutral aesthetic character of the park, and clearing the site-specific 'installation' of its tents, cardboard boxes, generators, and so on.

The obvious question that *Strike Art* raises is: why is it so important that the Occupy model be recognised as art? This is a question that McKee only answers indirectly. On the one hand, his attempt to make the case is certainly driven by a tactical consideration. For if the Occupy model is considered as art, McKee seems to believe that it will also be possible to tap into the resources of official art institutions:

The authority of the institutions of the contemporary art system – museums, galleries, magazines, academia, art schools, nonprofits – ... continue to exist. Much remains to be done with them – and to them – in such a way as to support the flourishing of autonomous, movement-based artistic infrastructures. Tapping their potentials and organising their resources requires its own tactical arts of cunning ... a certain authenticity when it comes to the love of art and the incalculable questions it poses on our lives.

In other words, presenting the Occupy model as art serves the tactical function of instrumentalising existing art institutions in order to support this new form. Moreover, according to McKee's logic, such support has not only a function in itself – to subsidise *l'art pour l'art* – but also functions to promote an 'authentic' and 'lovable' form of art that is able to produce a new imaginary, a new poetical vision of an alternative but possible life style.

Such a tactic is understandable. Yet the academic evaluation of any social and political art genre, and indeed its imaginary of an alternative life style, also has an objective function: it reproduces a general belief in the power of art that is central to our hegemonic social and symbolical order. From this perspective, the recognition of the Occupy model as art does not only reproduce a noble belief in authentic and revolutionary art at an ideal level; it also functions on a material level to establish, for example, the author's career as

a professional art historian operating within existing institutions. In this way it reproduces and stabilises the prevailing hegemony, to which the belief in the power of art continues to be of considerable value. Equally, the realisation of the Occupy model as ‘strike art’ also has a more general historical function. For independently of whatever ‘cunning tactics’ might be deployed by the activist art historian, history always also plays its cunning tricks on us. Once this model has been acknowledged successfully as art alongside all other ‘radical’ artworks, the model comes itself inevitably to be musealised.

Indeed, considering the inclusion of the Occupy model in the framework of the Seventh Berlin Biennale in 2012, one can observe that this has already happened. What then, one would need to ask, does such musealisation mean? Similar to other objects like old statues, cars or human bodies when they are displayed in a museum context, musealisation shows

that these objects are already *dead*, remnants of an original life-world that has disappeared. It is in this way that the successful recognition and musealisation of the Occupy model as art allows us to understand that the particular political practice that has worked, at least since the 1960s, as an attempt to consciously refuse power, and to work instead on the level of symbolic and medial aesthetics, is itself now slowly coming to an end. This is not because the political ideals that have informed this practice are defective, but because the liberal, social-democratic context of the post-war world that originally gave them life has already disappeared. The successful recognition of the Occupy model as art liquidates, in this sense, the very ambivalence that made it impossible, at least for a time, to differentiate between the politics of art and the art of politics.

Philippe Kleinmichel

A Deleuze for intolerable times

Andrew Culp, *Dark Deleuze* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016). 90pp., £7.99 pb., 978 1 51790 133 2

This book follows in a sequence of deaths: Nietzsche’s Death of God (after Feuerbach), Foucault’s Death of Man, and now, with Andrew Culp, the Death of this World. As with its predecessors, Culp’s announcement of death is also an attempt at its actualisation. The book begs us to inhabit a deep pessimism: to ‘give up on all the reasons given for saving this world’. In Nietzsche, it is Zarathustra who makes the announcement of death. For Culp, the harbinger of doom goes by the name of ‘Dark Deleuze’.

In creating such a figure, the book launches a convincing assault on existing tendencies within Deleuzian scholarship, which, for Culp, has been wrongly overwhelmed by a “‘canon of joy’ that celebrates Deleuze as a naively affirmative thinker’ concerned with ‘transversal lines, rhizomatic connections, compositionist networks, complex assemblages, affective experiences, and enchanted objects.’ Michel Serres, for example, is so convinced of Deleuze’s uplifting orientation of philosophy that he maintains a steadfast refusal even of the idea that Deleuze’s death

was suicide, instead proclaiming that it must surely have been an accident.

Dark Deleuze is Deleuze minus Spinozist vitalism and joyful affirmation, or Deleuze as thinker of negativity, whose conceptual prefixes (de-, a-, non-, un-) are as commonly negative as the affects of monstrosity, screaming, the false, cruelty and war machines by which he was lured. To introduce us to this figure, Culp invents a set of ‘contraries’: third terms coming from ‘the outside’ that complicate simple oppositions between concepts. One particularly poignant contrary comes out of his reading of Deleuze’s conceptualisation of the subject. Deleuze’s idea of un-becoming is cast against assemblage-thinking which, for Culp, reduces subjectivity to the sum of a body’s capacities. Dark Deleuze’s subject is something more elusive, something that is always vanishing from preconceived identities, and, since we cannot predetermine what a body might be capable of, that is irreducible to any empirical tracing. Other conceptual contraries include ‘asymmetry’ (rather than complexity), ‘un-