

Philosophy as cultural form

The histories of *Radical Philosophy*

Interview with Peter Osborne

Peter Osborne is the longest serving editor in Radical Philosophy's history. He joined the editorial collective in 1983 and was involved in the publication of 168 issues until he stood down as an editor in 2016. Over these four decades he undoubtedly did more than any other member of RP to define the journal's direction and identity. He is Director of the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy at Kingston University in London and is the author of The Politics of Time (1995), Philosophy in Cultural Theory (2000), Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art (2013), The Postconceptual Condition (2018), and Crisis as Form (2022). Peter was interviewed for the fiftieth anniversary of RP by David Cunningham, a member of the editorial collective since 2003. The conversation took place in London in September 2022.

David Cunningham: What was the intellectual context that *Radical Philosophy* sought to intervene in when you joined in the early 1980s, especially, but not only, with respect to philosophy? Had this changed in the period since the journal's founding in 1972?

Peter Osborne: It seemed to be changing around the time I joined. Looking over the earlier issues, one could see that in the first eight to ten years *RP* was largely oriented towards the politics of the student movement and the struggle to change – to expand – university curricula. By the early 1980s, it was becoming more focused on the details of theoretical debates and less immediately connected to student politics, which was on the wane. I first encountered *RP* when I was an undergraduate student at Bristol in the late 1970s. I remember going to a meeting of the local group there towards the end of my first year, in 1977. By 1983 what had begun as debates about the university – including getting Hegel, Sartre and Marx onto syllabuses in philosophy departments – had become more about issues internal to Marxism, and the Marxist critique of 1960s and '70s French philosophy in particular. There was also a fairly intense ongoing concern with the Marx-Hegel relation throughout the 1980s, in the work of people like Sean Sayers, Chris Arthur and Joe McCarney, and to a lesser extent myself. That fed into the discussions about 'science' and 'dialectics' that had begun earlier as an effect of Althusserianism. The first article I wrote for *RP*, just before I became an editor, was on Gillian Rose's *Hegel Contra Sociology*.

The other thing that *RP* was doing in the 1970s and early '80s was introducing the work of contemporary European thinkers. The translations of Goldmann (1972), Rancière (1974) and Foucault (1976), and the introductions to Althusser (1973), Derrida (1979) and Lacan (1982) were very early pieces of and on their work in English – especially in a philosophical context, where it took another thirty years for these figures to become recognised.

DC: What was the main readership for the journal in this period?

PO: It's hard to be sure, but if at the outset *RP* was principally read by graduate students and young left-wing academics in philosophy departments, by the early '80s it was increasingly being read by academics working in the social sciences – sociology, in particular, which was the still-growing radical discipline of the day, since it was the only one outside economics which taught Marx. *RP* was also beginning to become more concerned with what in the 1990s became called 'continental philosophy', which was then still primarily taught in English departments as a part of literary theory, although we didn't use the term 'continental philosophy' in *RP* back then.

DC: Was this also about a changing relationship of the journal to analytical philosophy? It's notable that in the first decade you've got quite a few critical engagements with, say, Popper and Russell, Austin and Searle. This gradually disappears. Indeed, there's an editorial from Jonathan Rée in issue 20 from 1978 that bemoans precisely this waning engagement with what he calls 'British philosophy'.

PO: Yes, Jonathan was very bound up with the idea of 'British philosophy' – which is actually a much wider (as well as a much more restricted) category than 'analytical philosophy' – all the way through to the eventual publication of his 2019 historical doorstopper, *Witcraft: The Invention of Philosophy in English*. I had a rather less respectful idea of it, as you can see in my *RP* 114 review of Baggini and Strangroom's *New British Philosophy* of 2002: 'The Erotics of Deference'.

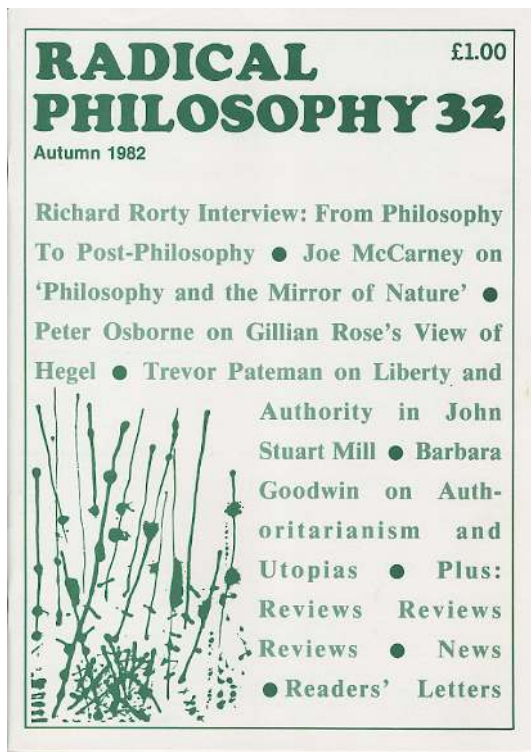
Most of the earliest members of the *RP* collective were trained in analytical philosophy (as I was myself, slightly later on) whilst also being on the left politically. But they didn't see much of a tension between analytical philosophy per se, as a distinctive approach to philosophical argument (and an exclusionary attitude to other philosophical approaches), and socialist intellectual traditions. Keith Graham, for example, who was my first tutor at Bristol in 1976, wrote a critique of J. L. Austin's version of ordinary language philosophy, which remained almost wholly within the analytical idiom. In fact, at my very first tutorial at Bristol, in reaction to a reference to Sartre in my essay, he patiently explained to me that I would be very ill-advised to continue reading Sartre, since his work had nothing in common with what was thought of and practiced as 'philosophy' in Britain. He wasn't an editor of *RP*, but he was close to members of the collective and he appears in the 'Local Sellers' lists, for Bristol, in the early issues. Many of the early editors had done the BPhil at Oxford and were working at what were then the new universities of the 1960s, such as Kent, Sussex and Essex, or the new polytechnics of the early 1970s, such as Middlesex and North London, where there had been a mass of new jobs in philosophy.

This was well before the association of any of these philosophy departments with what became known as 'continental philosophy'. They taught individual figures from within that canon, but it wasn't coded as 'continental philosophy' until the late 1980s; and that was predominantly a US genre, associated with the reception of Husserlian phenomenology, Heideggerianism, Derrida and Levinas, and so on. With the exception of Derrida, that is a deeply conservative tradition in many ways. It was imported into Essex and Warwick in the UK. Marx, for example, was never part of the canon of continental philosophy, because Marx wasn't considered a philosopher at that time. Nor were the Frankfurt School. A lot of things got re-coded in the early 1990s, at the point at which continental philosophy was emerging

as the anti-analytical genre. This was the period when Jonathan Rée and I established the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP) in 1995 at Middlesex University, which was so named precisely to distinguish it from the idea of continental philosophy. For Jonathan, this was in order to incorporate analytical positions viewed from the standpoint of their European beginnings. His idea was that someone like Wittgenstein was a modern European philosopher; analytical philosophy was an offshoot of modern European philosophy. That was connected to his desire to stay in touch with the mainstream but to be dissident within it. I was more concerned to use the broader inclusivity of the term to include figures like Marx and Benjamin in the philosophical field.

DC: Was this true of *Radical Philosophy* also?

PO: Well, at that point, the journal had already largely lost touch with analytical philosophy. The project of relating critically to British mainstream philosophy had ebbed away. And one should not underestimate the hostility of the analytical philosophical community. As



I said, *RP* was initially based at the so-called new universities of the 1960s, and in some of the polytechnics. Then, in 1992 there was a second round of ‘new universities’, when the polytechnics became universities. The philosophy departments in those post-92 universities never really had much of a relation to the mainstream (they weren’t generally staffed by people who had done the BPhil at Oxford with Ryle). The institutional culture of the polytechnics related more to adult education – there were still a lot of so-called ‘mature’ students there in those days. Those of my generation who were awarded PhDs in the 1980s, when there were almost no jobs in philosophy, had often worked in adult education colleges. I taught at Camden Working Men’s College and Morley College, for example, before Middlesex Polytechnic. Interestingly, that connected

us, pedagogically, to the history of cultural studies in Britain: Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson in the 1950s. This provided a kind of organic connection between the expanding polytechnics of the 1980s (soon to be the new universities of the 1990s) and organisations like History Workshop and the early cultural studies journals, as well as to *Feminist Review*, to which *RP* became more connected in the 1980s, through common membership of the Socialist Society.

DC: How was *RP* editorially organised and produced when you joined? Was there a clear collective sense of the kind of work that the editors wanted to publish?

PO: For the first 5 or 6 years that I was involved, and for the 10 years before that, there wasn’t

really an *editorial* project at all. Indeed, for the first 10 years there wasn't much actual editing. There was a sense that the author's text was sacrosanct. Nobody messed with other people's sentences. What the author submitted was what was published. Editing was opposed because of a view that it was in some sense anti-democratic. This was the libertarian side of the radical democratic aspect of the student movement. My view though was always that, if it's not a movement journal as such, you have to have a more critically intellectually-based editorial policy, you have to commission, and you have to make each issue make sense, structurally, as a cultural form.

You need to remember that, in its earliest years, *RP* had no fixed membership, no editorial collective that was continuous between issues. The idea was that the time and place of a meeting would be advertised and anyone who turned up would be part of the group that would edit the next issue and would decide what would go in that issue. Clearly, there was a continuity in the sense that various people continued to turn up regularly – founding members like Richard Norman, Tony Skillen, Sean Sayers (the Kent group), Chris Arthur and Jonathan Rée.

When I joined *RP* it didn't really have an editorial history; it just had a publishing history. And publishing histories are over-determined by production technologies (the forms of setting and printing) and by the modes of distribution (initially, primarily, sales via local groups). The real material history of *Radical Philosophy* is the history of the changes in the technologies of production, of which there have been four or five distinct ones during its lifetime, and in the modes of distribution of the journal. To begin with, the journal was sold on campuses by student groups. You bought your copy from the *RP* representative on campus. It didn't really have a commercial existence apart from one or two left-wing bookshops. There was no distributor other than a member of the collective driving up with their car to somewhere with a bunch of issues in the boot. That changed as *RP* became more subscription-based. And we started to sell in bookshops through Central Books. That also changed the economics of the journal, because the journal had no real distribution costs before then. Because distributors take 55% of your cover price, you have to become more expensive in order to be able to pay the printer. Until the mid-1990s, the journal only published three issues a year, which meant the collective only met as a whole about three, or exceptionally four, times annually. So, fundamental changes in the journal, like moving to six issues a year – which I proposed and which meant a much a bigger commitment on the part of editors – were driven partly by the need to increase subscription prices because bookshop distributors took 55%. We had to double the price because we had to get more income. So, we doubled the number of issues primarily in order that the subs price could double, while the price of each individual issue remained relatively cheap, because subs cost less than bookshop sales. It was also my view that we couldn't have an effective cultural impact if we didn't come out more often.

DC: How much is this about the changing nature, more generally, of the journal, or the magazine, as itself a cultural form?

PO: Well, *RP* began as a sort of Xerox-style magazine and became a kind of magazine-y journal. The magazine-y side – and especially the images and the occasional sardonic humour – stopped it from becoming too academic and maintained its 'para-academic' status. That was very self-conscious. The other thing was the *Radical Philosophy* conferences, because the conferences were never really philosophy conferences as such. Even when they were

occasionally more explicitly philosophical in topic, they were always quite broadly politically and culturally defined, and the majority of speakers were generally not in philosophy departments. So, the conference represented the disciplinary plurality of the writers and readers more than it did 'philosophy', and certainly more than academic philosophy in the UK.

As the connection to the student movement and the activist side diminished, we became more professionalised in relation to production and distribution. The main things that kept *RP* more like a magazine, as opposed to an academic journal, was the way we used images. This was connected to the earlier history of the journal, the way that situationist-style *détournements* of cartoons were used in the first few years, for example. But in the 1990s and 2000s this became defined instead by amateuristic, photo-conceptualist forms of irony, so that both the placement of images and the titling of reviews became a kind of counter-discourse to the journal's own academicism. Again, I was very self-conscious about that, at the point of production, although it was never explicitly discussed by the collective.

The politics of radical philosophy

DC: How then did the content and readership of the journal change in the late '80s and '90s?

PO: It followed the larger political context. If you look at what was new in the journal in the late '80s and early '90s, in terms of content, it was the introduction of feminism into philosophy, and also ecology, as represented on the collective by people like Kate Soper, Ted Benton and Andrew Collier. There were various different moments in the course of the late '80s and early '90s, when there were proposals for editorial changes to the journal which were conflictual, and some people left after each of those, including Ted. This relates to the introduction of the subtitle of the journal. From the late '80s to around 1993 when it was introduced, there were debates about whether the journal should have a subtitle. These began in a slightly comical way, from my point of view, when Joe McCarney proposed (I assumed ironically but perhaps not) that *Radical Philosophy* should be subtitled 'The Journal of Left Hegelianism'. This seemed, auto-destructively, to restrict the range of interests represented by the journal to the point of annihilation! But it introduced a debate about subtitles. What then happened was that *History Workshop*, which had been subtitled 'A Journal of Socialist and Feminist Historians', removed their subtitle when they went from being self-published to becoming published by Routledge. So, I proposed that we become 'The Journal of Socialist and Feminist Philosophy', as a kind of ironic counter-move to what I took to be *History Workshop's* concession to a growing anti-Marxism after 1989. But this led to inevitable debates. So, it was argued, for example, why weren't we a Journal of Socialist, Feminist *and* Ecological Philosophy? At which point the list of potential subtitles started to multiply, imaginarily, and it became clear that we couldn't do this multiplication: so we stuck with 'Socialist and Feminist Philosophy'. Another point here was to put pressure on ourselves to maintain a regular feminist content (and to encourage such submissions), as the initial wave of feminist material had begun to break.

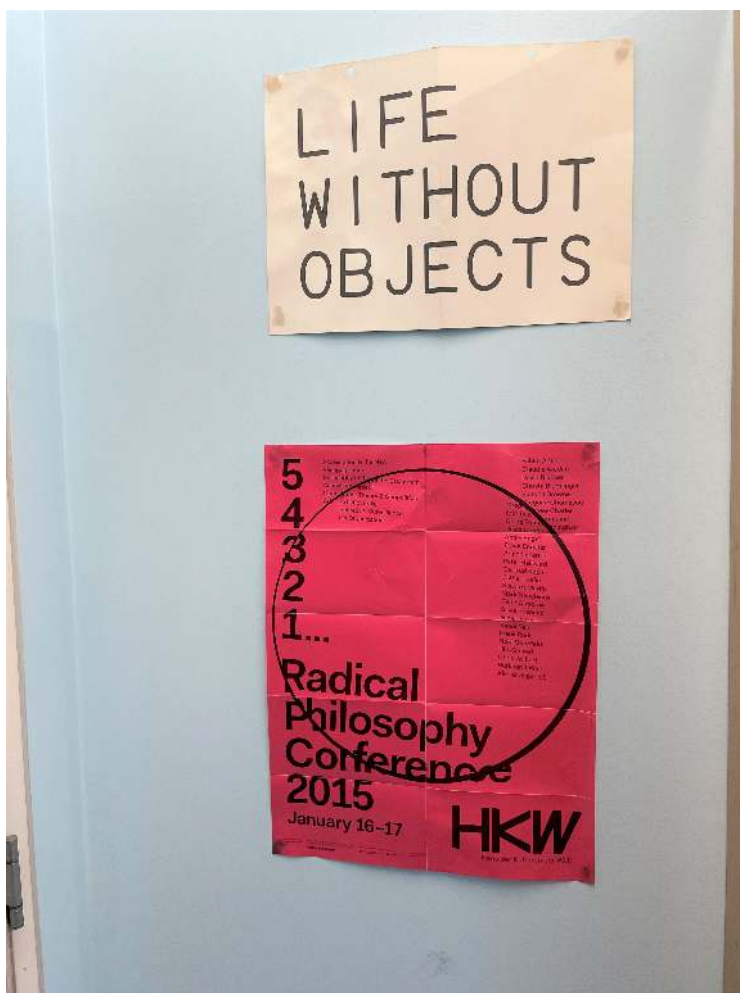
DC: Were there any objections to it being 'socialist' rather than 'communist'?

PO: No. None of the collective had historical ties to the Communist Party of Great Britain. Socialism was understood as a strong position between organised Marxist parties, on the one hand, and the Labour Party, on the other. It's a position that has, unfortunately, largely

disappeared. Once Communism no longer had an ‘actually existing’ variant and became an Idea, then philosophers started to like it, right? But that was a bit later. While it was an organisational practice, there wasn’t so much connection.

DC: Did the broader relationship between intellectual work and political forms – institutional or otherwise – alter significantly during this period?

PO: The major change happened in the 1990s. In the mid-1980s, supported by municipal socialism and the trade unions, there were still independent political cultures in Britain, served by independent left bookshops. Collet’s in Charing Cross Road, which went bankrupt and closed in 1993, for example, would take 100 copies of each issue of *Radical Philosophy* in the early eighties; and Compendium Books in Camden, which survived until 2000, would take a pile too. [See Philip Derbyshire’s obituary for the Compendium Bookshop in *RP* 105 (2001).] Institutionally, too, in the 1980s, *Radical Philosophy* was one of the journals that was connected to the Socialist Society, which was founded by Raymond Williams. The Socialist Society was a non-Trotskyist, left of the Labour Party, extra-parliamentary organisational space. So, it was non-sectarian – it wasn’t involved with the SWP or the IMG [International Marxist Group], or any of the Trotskyist groups, but it also wasn’t affiliated with Labour, although it included some left-wing Labour MPs. It was where many of the Bennites went after Tony Benn lost the Labour Deputy Leadership contest in 1981. And it became more generally politically significant because it became a founder of the Chesterfield conferences – Chesterfield was Tony Benn’s parliamentary constituency – and it was connected to the GLC under Ken Livingstone and to the Campaign Group of Labour left MPs. So, in the late 1980s we used to have our Socialist Society meetings in the GLC building, with *RP*, *Feminist Review*, *Capital and Class*, *History Workshop*, and so on – all these self-produced, self-published journals.



The first big Chesterfield conference, I think, was October '87, because it took place during so-called Black Monday, when the stock market crashed. It happened during the

conference, and John Ross, who was economic advisor to Livingstone at the time, suddenly got up and made a preposterous speech about how it was the end of capitalism because of the collapse of the stock market. That was the point at which we realised that actually there were still some quite old-school Trotskyists involved in the Labour left.

DC: Were members of the collective participating in, and speaking at, these kinds of events?

PO: Well, some of us were – I was, Gregory Elliott was, Kate Soper was. Greg and I wrote for the Socialist Society journal, which later became *Red Pepper*. We didn't write about politics so much in *RP* at that time. There were a lot of debates around, for example, the neo-constitutionalism of the people around *New Left Review* who were hoping to base an alternative left politics of human rights on the Czech Charter 77 movement and on this idea that, for progressive politics to develop in Britain, you have to have a written constitution. Anthony Barnett was the main purveyor of this position. Greg and I were very much against that kind of institutional formalism, at the time, and we co-wrote some things about it.

More generally though, I should repeat: at that point *Radical Philosophy* was not a politically-defined space in an everyday political sense. It was a space in which people who shared a very broad left political position – left of the Labour Party – wrote intellectual and quasi-academic pieces. *RP* was not a place in which it was really considered appropriate to write directly political things, because the journal didn't want to have a political line on issues on which there were disagreements on the left. Later, in the 1990s, we introduced the Commentary section, which was coded as a different kind of writing – a kind of intellectual journalism or opinion piece – which didn't need to be so philosophical. But this also wasn't like an 'editorial', in the sense that it didn't have to represent anything like an editorial position of the collective. So, from the 1990s onwards, the journal evolved towards a structure which was made up of a Commentary, Articles, Interviews, Reviews, News, which were much more structurally differentiated, editorially, than in the early years of the journal.

Later, *RP* gradually became less philosophical. Being more political was a way of replacing the philosophy, but at the same time, as it became more directly political, it also became more academic. So, in a way, the journal was more political in later years, but also less political in the sense that it was actually more academic.

This is partly a history of the collapse of intellectual into academic work. That became a major problem for the journal. For the first maybe 20 years, nobody wrote in *Radical Philosophy* because it might further their career. Later, there was a period when people used to submit articles that they wanted to enter into the REF or whatever, and write them in such a way that they could do this. So, there was a pressure for academicisation. The other thing, of course, is that UK academia has completely changed in the last 20 years. It has become far harder to find people who will commit the necessary amount of free time to this enterprise in a way that is intellectually related to their academic work but also separate from it. People either wanted to see it as part of their academic work, and think of it more as an academic journal, or they didn't want to, or couldn't, spend the time, the free labour. Self-published journals consume a huge amount of free labour from their collectives; and it can also become very unequally distributed within these collectives, for all their formal 'collective' status. The demands made on staff time by academic jobs – the incredible increase in 'productivity', in a crude economic sense – has rocketed in the last two decades.

The changes in *RP* were also connected to the change in the institutional spaces available outside the university. Whereas there was first the student movement, and then cultural

and intellectual left spaces like that of the Socialist Society, Blairite hegemony of Labour kind of closed down these left intellectual political spaces, which had often been generated by anti-Thatcherism, and energised by that opposition, which was then taken away. The character of the opposition to Blairism was different because it was more internal to a broad coding of the left. That's the point really, in the late 1990s, that *RP* started to relate more systematically to, for example, *art* institutions. There was a classical displacement from politics to art spaces. The ICA was really important in the late '80s and early '90s as an intellectual space for talks and conferences in London – focused mostly on French philosophy, but for non-philosophers – and *RP* took up the idea behind such programmes.

DC: How far was this connected to the disciplinary construction of the academy itself? I'm thinking of the ways in which, say, literature or art departments in universities increasingly became homes for people who wanted to write books about Foucault or Derrida, or indeed Marx, but who couldn't do so from institutional spaces coded as 'philosophy'. Because the other thing that changes in the 1990s – maybe already in the '80s – and which is partly connected to the emergence of continental philosophy as a genre, is the growing number of people trained or part-trained in philosophy, for whom there were increasingly no jobs in actual philosophy departments. So, these people ended up teaching in literature departments, or in art, sociology, cultural studies, politics departments, and so on. If you look at the changes in the make-up of the *RP* collective over time, at the beginning almost everybody is working in a philosophy department, but by the 2000s there's only a handful teaching philosophy as such.

PO: Well, literature has certainly become a lot less hospitable a place for that, with the removal of 'theory' from English departments – which began in America actually at the end of the '90s and took a little while to travel over to the UK – and a return to a combination of aesthetic discourse and literary history. The relation to the art world is a bit different, because in a way we were using their *spaces* in order to maintain a public-facing discourse that wasn't wholly academic – not their discourses. Theory in the art world largely became a belated version of the serial importation of French thinkers – with a ten-year time lag – beginning with Foucault, and then Derrida and Levinas, moving on to Deleuze and then Badiou, Rancière, and now to Latour. Maybe it's terminating in Latour ... It's true that the way that French philosophers got into English was by being read in literature departments and then in the art world. But *RP* wanted to provide a more critical and philosophically nuanced counter to those readings; to perform a more serious educative function.

DC: Coming back to the loss of independent bookshops and of cultural and intellectual left spaces like the Socialist Society, how did *Radical Philosophy* continue to be independently published after the 1990s, when so many other self-produced journals set up in the same period either simply stopped or went to commercial publishers?

PO: In terms of bookshops, we did ok for a while through extending sales venues, to Waterstones in the UK and through selling in art spaces like Tate Modern, the Serpentine and the ICA. But then bookshop policies changed, so Waterstones stopped having interesting individual magazine sections in their stores, the ICA became a less political space, and the Tate Modern bookshop is now basically only for children. The subscriptions market was also increasingly difficult. We never really made much money from individual subscriptions –

certainly when we were shipping copies to the States, from which we made no money – but we made money from library subs. However, the peculiarity of library subs – and this takes us back to the history of the journal – is that university libraries tend to be departmentally organised, which means you have to get ordered by someone in the philosophy department. And philosophy departments generally weren't going to order *Radical Philosophy*, after the 1970s! So, it was hard to increase these. At the same time, once we had a website, we had the question of how are we going to relate the subs model to what appears online? The result was that we had to use the website for 'tasters' of new content and then only open up more of the website once a new issue was published. Otherwise, we couldn't sell the subs. At the end of series 1 with issue 200 in 2016, we were still, economically, wholly viable – in fact, more so than ever before – but solely through raising the price of the institutional library subs. The main problem was whether or not you want to have a paywall. The more things were made available on the web, the more it seemed hard not to make *RP* generally available, but doing so would have destroyed the economic model of the journal. This wasn't the reason Series 1 of the journal came to end in 2016, though; that was about the lack of collective commitment to the amount of free labour required at the time.

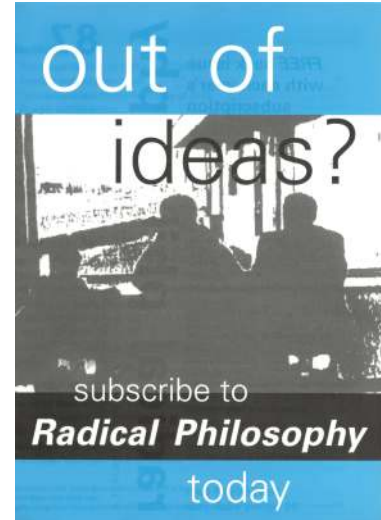
DC: How would you periodise the years during which you were involved with *RP*?

PO: There are three different ways of periodising the journal, which are formally unconnected, but which, in practice, are obscurely linked. First, you can periodise in terms of dominant themes in its content: from its early phase, through its 'left Hegelian' phase, to its broader cultural, feminist and ecological phases, and then to the more cultural theory-related period. So, you can do that and that would be true. But second, and more decisive for me, is a periodisation based on forms of production: the move from line drawing to photography, the move from laying out with rulers, scissors and paste to using computer design, the move from outsourced computer design, to in-house, at-home computer design. A history of self-publishing, in other words. A third way would be about the changing internal structure of the journal. So, there's the content of the journal, the forms of production and the editorial organisation of the journal space, in which it became increasingly structured into the discrete sections and increasingly editorially self-reflective. To understand the history of *RP*, you have to lay these three histories on top of one another to get a sense of the dynamic between them.

Philosophy beyond philosophy

DC: In a talk you gave at a conference to celebrate *RP*'s 30th anniversary in 2002, you wrote an interesting piece about the idea of a 'radical philosophy' itself. I wonder what you think of this now twenty years on: 'if philosophy wants to be true to the political dynamic of radicalism – with its split, disjunctive, contradictory, self-surpassing form – it will have to embrace the moment of realisation as the moment of its own supersession, qua philosophy. ... It will have to destroy itself as "philosophy", in the strict sense, in order to be true to the political potential of its philosophical concepts: freedom, equality, and justice, but also truth. It will have to endow these concepts with determinate historical meanings'. How far is there still a space for this 'idea of a radical philosophy as one that is inherently ambivalent about its own philosophical character' in philosophy today?

PO: That is the *only* space, the only *philosophically serious* space: one that is inherently ambivalent about its own philosophical character. The point about *Radical Philosophy* is that it was initially ambiguously or ambivalently philosophical because it was politically overdetermined – but by a cultural, philosophical, institutional project. So, it always thought about institutions in a way that most philosophers themselves were not interested in. It always took institutions seriously. Jonathan Rée was very good, for example, in the early years, at thinking about philosophy as an institution. After the politics of this went away, it then became ambivalently philosophical in relation to other disciplines. So, my own thinking about *Radical Philosophy* – at least in the last decade that I was involved with it – was as a transdisciplinary space: not as multidisciplinary, or as a little bit interdisciplinary, but as a transdisciplinary space in which philosophy was double-coded, because it was one of the disciplines that was at play, but also the conceptual resource for thinking the relations between all the disciplines as being a kind of immanently conceptual one that nonetheless exceeded philosophical conceptuality. So, it played this sort of double role: one of which was philosophy in its particularism and then a kind of metaphilosophical thinking of a relation between disciplines, one of which was philosophy. So, the statement about ‘a radical philosophy as one that is inherently ambivalent about its own philosophical character’ holds true, although the nature of the ambivalence has changed.



DC: In that same talk (published in *RP* 103), you situated *RP*’s foundation – and its wider contribution to left intellectual culture – in relation to the ‘institutional establishment of what has become known as “cultural studies”’, which you present as raising ‘the question, not only of the contribution of philosophy to Left intellectual culture in Britain since the 1950s, but also, more specifically, of its relationship to the theorisation of culture’. It’s a question you broach too in the interview that you and Lynne Segal did with Stuart Hall for *RP* in the late 1990s. Is this still an important framing for you of both the journal and of a radical philosophy more generally?

PO: This has perhaps more to do with my own intellectual interest because I was always struck by the lack of a philosophical dimension to cultural studies. This is partly what the interview with Stuart Hall is about, despite the fact that cultural studies drew on a lot of philosophical sources, particularly in the early days – think of the importance of someone like Althusser. That always struck me and I always felt that a radical philosophy should in part be a philosophical critique of cultural studies. That was the point of my book, *Philosophy in Cultural Theory* (2000): not ‘and’ but ‘in’. It was also because I associated cultural studies in the UK, politically, with the thin gruel of the populist democracy of the *Marxism Today* of the late 1980s.

DC: Given what you said about Blairism and the loss of independent left spaces, it’s notable that the interview with Stuart Hall was done a month after Blair’s victory in the general election in 1997, which places its discussion of the relationship (or non-relationship) between

philosophy and cultural studies at an interesting political and intellectual conjuncture.

PO: The thing about the politics of cultural studies in Britain was that because of the relationship between Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, who was the editor of *Marxism Today*, cultural studies in Britain was framed partly in terms of the Eurocommunist project. In the late 1980s and early 90s, *Radical Philosophy* was very much constituted politically against and to the left of *Marxism Today*. So, the *RP* conferences of the late '80s and early '90s, for example, were always constituted against the big *Marxism Today* conferences, to which we considered ourselves to be a kind of alternative. So, the critique of cultural studies and the critique of *Marxism Today*, as the journal of a kind of weak liberal-democratic Eurocommunism, were, we could say, part of the same thing.

What my conception of *RP* took from cultural studies was the idea that the journal was a cultural form, one of the institutionalised cultural forms of philosophy. Jonathan [Rée] thought about philosophy and its institution, but by that he really meant universities and the history of the relation of the university to non-university philosophy, whereas I thought of the journal and our relationship to the amateurism of conceptual art uses of photography, for example, as part of its *philosophical* form. This was because the enemy increasingly became academicisation in general, which was associated with disciplinarisation, but in a complicated way because the disciplines became much broader and more sophisticated within themselves. So, it wasn't the fact that they were disciplined, it was the fact that they were academicised. Disciplines have become internally pluralised within humanities to become quite multi- and interdisciplinary disciplines, but they have also become more and more subjected to bureaucratic academic norms.

DC: Which, one could argue, is connected to what happens to cultural studies itself, which basically disappears and returns to its original sources in a more pluralised media studies, sociology, literary studies, etc.

PO: And, in doing so, it often loses its political project. Some of this work has moved back towards anthropology – which is ironic given the conservative anthropological origins of Raymond Williams' model of cultural studies – but to a supposedly 'reformed' anthropology. Current debates within anthropology set off by globalisation are the most interesting at the interface of the humanities and the social sciences, I think. Another side of cultural studies became a branch of policy studies. That is, to the extent that it survived, it did so by making a pragmatic (often theoretically pragmatist) policy-related move. It became the intellectual form of a certain kind of cultural managerialism – especially in Europe, in funding terms, and especially in relation to questions of diversity, which are taken more seriously by many EU states than in the decrepit and increasingly undemocratic political culture of the UK. On the other hand, the whole move away from antagonistic concepts of racialisation, and strong philosophical concepts of difference of whatever kind, towards bland notions of diversification and diversity, with this soft social democratic, conservative cultural management of difference is itself a depoliticisation.

DC: What about philosophy's own status as a discipline today?

PO: As an institutionalised discipline, philosophy still doesn't really relate intellectually or critically to other disciplines. The quiet desperation of its insistence on intellectual self-sufficiency makes much of it irrelevant and self-marginalising; hence its reactive investment

in the narrow practicalities of the impact agenda, and the sad spectacle of ‘experimental philosophy’. In that respect, it’s become very much a part of the general post-neoliberal policy-based academic pragmatism. In this regard, it too is giving up education for training, which the main structural tendency of university life in the humanities in the UK.

DC: Is this a symptom of analytical philosophy’s own constitution of philosophy as an autonomous discipline gradually collapsing in on itself?

PO: I’m not sure. My own view is that analytical philosophy’s self-narration of a move from analytical to post-analytical philosophy is largely illusory and that actually so-called post-analytical philosophy is just analytical philosophy with a textually expanding base: narrowly analytical readings of so-called continental philosophers. Methodologically (and characterologically) they haven’t really changed that much.

DC: A final question: what do you consider *Radical Philosophy*’s central project to have been over the course of your more than thirty-year involvement with the journal, and how far did it succeed?

PO: I think it was pretty successful in a number of ways. First, it helped introduce post-Kantian European philosophy into the UK philosophical space. Second, it contributed to the philosophical education of left intellectual cultures and people on the left with different disciplinary formations. And third, it did so with a certain level of criticality, irony, humour and visual literacy that wasn’t to be found anywhere else in philosophy. So, I think it did alright.

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