

that Fortunati sought to elucidate with her reference to photography. Different from Fortunati, Lonzi saw that role as a way out. Emphasising the technical measures that disintegrate the authenticity of the artwork and the relative autonomy of the critic in Benjamin's view, Lonzi transforms the subject of critique (and sexual difference) to what is not yet represented and hence 'unforeseen'.

In September 2023, Rivolta Femminile's first compilation of texts, *Sputiamo su Hegel e Altri Scritti*, published in Milan in 1974, was republished in Italian for the first time since the 1970s. The regained accessibility of the texts resulted in new discussions regarding Lonzi's understanding of sexual difference and the role that it plays in the twenty-first century, especially in light of the contemporary neo-fascist pro-life movement

in Italy. During a book conversation organised by the transfeminist bookstore Tuba in the Roman district Pigneto, then 78-year-old Maria Luisa Boccia stated that for Lonzi, sexual difference was not a matter of sexual identity but rather 'a negation of sexuality as dogma.' If we understand Lonzi's use of the notion of deculturalisation in line with Boccia's proposal, it stands out as a social withdrawal from the identities produced by social, legal and cultural forms. Correspondingly, Lonzi wrote in 'Let's Spit on Hegel':

Women are not in a dialectic relationship with men. The demands we are trying to make clear imply not an antithesis, but *a moving on another level*. This is the hardest point to understand, but it is essential that we do not fail to insist on it.

Frida Sandström

Subjective objects

Carla Lonzi and Leopoldina Fortunati, *Gendered Labour and Clitoridean Revolt*, eds. Arlen Austin, Sara Colantuono, and Jaleh Mansoor (Vancouver: Fillip, 2024). 280pp., £14.99 pb., 978 1 92735 441 4

Gendered Labour and Clitoridean Revolt is an important resource in the study of Italian feminisms in English, providing the translation of several texts drawn from the oeuvres of the workerist feminist Leopoldina Fortunati (b. 1949) and the existentialist feminist Carla Lonzi (1931-1982) thus far untranslated into English. The contributions by Lonzi in particular extend the areas of her work available to Anglophone readers, including works which are often referenced elsewhere but have hitherto been unavailable in full (such as 'The Clitoridean Woman and the Vaginal Woman').

Lonzi's texts include the short piece 'The Absence of Women from Occasions Celebrating the Manifestation of Male Creativity' (1971), which discusses the meaning of male culture, and which links her art criticism to her feminist writing: the notion of the artist-spectator divide, which parallels the gendered divide in culture. Two texts deal with the psychic or psychoanalytic resonances of feminism, including 'Female Sexuality and Abortion' (1971), which considers the importance of theorising male and female pleasure and sexuality vis-à-vis pro-creative sexual intercourse; and 'The Clitoridean Woman

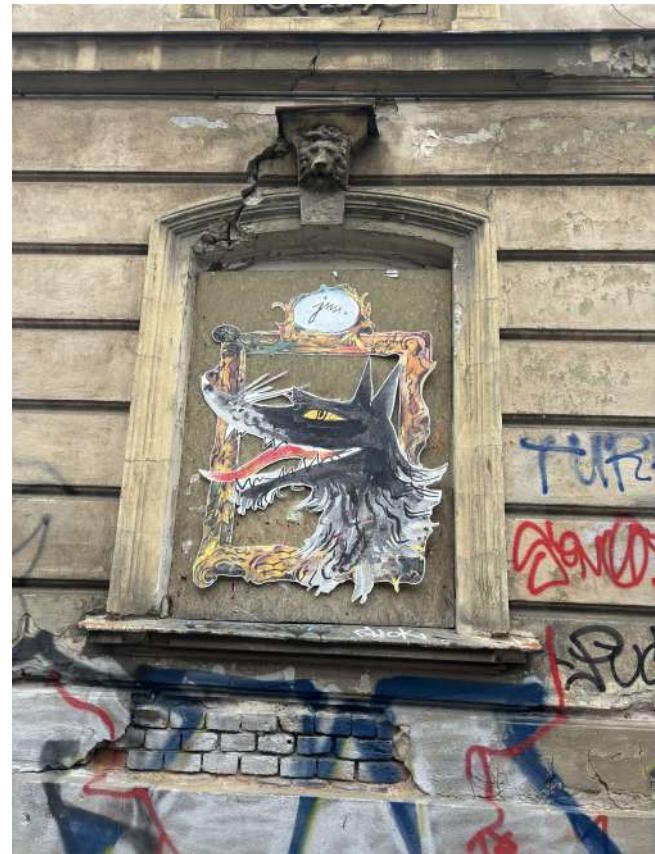
and the Vaginal Woman' (1971), which deals with theories of vaginal sexuality and their attendant teleologies of sexual development in Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Reich, and others. Lonzi here proposes one of her key ideas: the 'clitoridean woman', who pursues radical pleasure and orients herself away from an exclusive focus on male cultural dynamics towards 'authenticity'. 'An Itinerary of Reflections' (1977) is the least well-known text, comprising reflections on and critiques of contemporary feminists, including Julia Kristeva, Lea Melandri and Sylvia Plath, and considerations of figures or themes in feminism like Electra, the figure of the void and the dynamic of ceding. A dense but simultaneously very productive text, it both extends her theories and clarifies her applications of the latter, as in the clitoridean woman (a term she uses to criticise other feminists). For the editors, this text marks a change in focus across the 1970s, from male culture to 'the relationship with women, in both the past and the present.'

The contributions by Fortunati include sections of her forthcoming book *The Arcana of Reproduction*, a re-translation of what was earlier published as *The Arcane*

of Reproduction in 1995 by Autonomedia, and was first published as *L'arcano della riproduzione* in Italian in 1981. The change in title (discussed in the editorial essay by Sara Colantuono and Arlen Austin) – which translates the term *arcano* from Italian and *Geheimnis* [secret] from Marx's German – is emblematic of the specificity with which the editors and translators consider the minutiae of terminology. This aspect of the new Fortunati translations is incredibly helpful in understanding the Marxological resonances of the text and positioning Fortunati's intervention within Marxian discourses. These terms are themselves discussed precisely by Fortunati, even if her use of Marx might be considered heretical. The chapters included are those on 'Production and Reproduction', 'The Capitalist Form of the Man-Woman Relationship', and 'This Strange Form of Absolute Surplus Value', and are the first, third and tenth chapters of the book as a whole. Their non-sequentiality in the original text means it may be hard to grasp the totality of her argument from these extracts, meaning it serves best as a primer for reading *Arcana* in full. According to Jaleh Mansoor, Fortunati expresses, in these texts, that 'what constitutes gender in capitalism is ... a (negative) relation to market mediation on the one hand and surplus value on the other', and this allows her to consider the constitution of revolutionary subjectivity from conditions of unwaged work (which nonetheless determine the wage itself).

This collection of key works by two very different 'Italian feminists' responds to a more general Anglophone interest in 'Italian feminism' today. The Anglophone reception of the latter has tended towards a sometimes impressionistic blurring of boundaries, in which, as Lea Melandri argues often occurs, the distinction between different tendencies, traditions and histories is annulled or blurred out. This blending leads to notions such as 'Italian feminism' itself, which attaches to the national signifier as though it provides a guarantee of political authenticity. This can become a depoliticising approach to the intellectual history of feminist thought, and pays short shrift to the actual breadth of thought hiding beneath the national identification. The editors of the volume take care to differentiate the thinkers, while, at the same time, a relationship between the two is charted. For example, mention is specifically made of Lonzi's critique of the economism and 'emancipationism' of Marxist feminists like Fortunati, which rejects the

conflation of economic realities and the objective per se. Yet, the comparison between the two at times foregoes the possibilities of speculative relationships between different genres of feminism, despite the suggestiveness of the pairing.



In one of the opening essays in the collection, Jaleh Mansoor justifies the inclusion of work by these thinkers in a single volume by making the claim that Leopoldina Fortunati is to the 'objective' in feminism what Carla Lonzi is to its subjective side: that is, they each have a representative relationship to these approaches to feminism, which cleave to the poles of an objectivist (materialist) feminism, and a subjectivist feminism, however schematic this divide may be. ('Fortunati addresses the occluded structural conditions that *objectively* determine women's oppression, where Lonzi 'emphasizes the ineffable *subjective* dimension' of women's daily life; Fortunati addresses the 'logic of gender', Lonzi its 'passionate affect'.) Fortunati writes on the side of the object, Lonzi on that of the subject. Other claims are made throughout Mansoor's essay, and the volume as a whole, to substantiate the comparison between the two thinkers (their

'equally nonnegotiable criticism of hegemonic Marxist ideologies'; that their writings 'appeared side by side in key publications' in the 1970s; that both are scarcely translated, for example). Mansoor's claim can clearly be traced through the tendencies of each of these writers: the particular intervention here is that the two are placed together almost as though the one might complete the other, as two nodes of a symbolic totality or unity.

Lonzi proclaims the need to 'begin the course of history again, to traverse it with women as a subject', and claims that we have never properly seen a practice of life in which women occupy this position. Her claims throughout her work about the value of an authenticity of existence, produced through the consciousness-raising practice of *autocoscienza* (self-consciousness) are focused on the creation of a new subject, which she terms the 'Unexpected Subject' – unexpected, that is, since it does not issue forth from the crossed positions of Hegel's lord and bondsman, but enters the scene from left-field: the non-historical realm of the private, which is the disavowed precondition of but does not enter into this moment of the dialectic itself (it subtends it). She issues forth from her 'immediate universality' in the *oikos*, described by Hegel in his section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* on Ethical Life (*Sittlichkeit*) as being too coincident with nature to be brought into the narrative of spirit or spiritualised (tracking with women's naturalised role in reproduction and the family). In this scene, she is too objective, not abstracted enough from a paradoxical private indistinctness. Lonzi does not, however, simply raise 'Woman' to consciousness from the former status of a kind of object (the difference between 'self-consciousness' and 'consciousness-raising' is important here), nor insert women into a prescribed scene, enjoining her to act out the script, prevailing over Man the master just as does the bondsman. She instead appears from nowhere, from the no-place of Hegel's putrid waters of perpetual peace and the non-historical (in his essay on 'Natural Law,' cited by Lonzi), from a void in which atrophy and indistinctness reigns.

Lonzi frequently refers to the site of the 'void' out of which women emerge as subjects: the opening to her near-thousand-page diary sees her claim that before creating the practice of *autocoscienza* in which she herself was able to resonate with other women, she was simply a 'misunderstood nothingness', and she finds this experi-

ence in women throughout history. She criticises the writing of other feminists such as Julia Kristeva, arguing that Kristeva's critique of masculine history in fact simply proposes a 'subaltern destiny' and puts an emphasis on women's labour of ironising, as a positive reclamation of the 'eternal irony in the life of the community', which Hegel identified with Sophocles' Antigone (this does not provide an exit from the problem of women's subjectivity, even if it signals 'an indistinct movement of female dissidence'). For Lonzi, this subjective position-taking would not render women substantially different from what they are *expected* to be, since they work as a complement to the community composed of men. Moreover, it would require a 'masochistic effort of Sisyphus' where women are perpetually vigilant in confronting male history, although effectively as a mystic complement rather than an alternative to it: 'Hegel had already understood how the cunning of reason would not fail to make [this dissidence] functional to patriarchy.' It doesn't substantially differ from a large-scale, high-level historical confrontation and the central structuring logic of the '*sfida*' (conflict/challenge) in male culture and social life as a whole. Yet, 'without women, the cult of male supremacy becomes a character clash between men': Lonzi proposes women simply absenting themselves from this culture, and finding, like herself, 'an identification elsewhere'. Expressing the possibilities for unforeseen values when women find resonances in each other, rather than in opposing male values, Lonzi conceives of the 'clitoridean woman'. She differs from the 'vaginal woman', who sees herself as a complement to man, and man as her imaginary complement (no matter whether she is fully aware of it). Lonzi, indeed, proposes a new *subject* of struggle.

On the side of objective analysis, Fortunati's account of the structural position of reproductive labour in a capitalist economy is concerned with the reproduction of one specific commodity central to its workings – the commodity 'labour power' – presenting itself objectively as a thing among things, an exchangeable property (to recall Marx's characterisation of capitalism as the commerce of 'things' rather than the conversation of 'persons'). The worker, through the scansion of the working day, becomes a partly exchangeable thing. Her analysis sets out to de-reify this commodity, analysing the labour required to produce it, most commonly carried out by the housewife. While it is often claimed that Fortunati's ap-

proach broadly differs, in its Italian inflection, from other Marxist feminisms, we might draw parallels with roughly contemporary texts: Michèle Barrett and Mary MacIn-tosh's 'The "Family Wage": Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists' in 1980 on the 'familial complex', and Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas's response in 1984, in which reproductive labour's place within the reproduction of capitalism is argued differently. Attempts to argue something similar have occupied Marxist thinkers long prior: from Eleanor Marx to Mary Inman to Margaret Benston, and beyond.



What does Fortunati add to these debates, which makes her account especially cogent (a question we might ask, given the expanding interest in her work)? For Maya Gonzalez, introducing her text in 2013 (and reprinted in the book), this is her overall critique of productivism and the '*structural transhistoricization*' of reproduction, part of the project of making the category of reproduction political and social, and theorising 'the gendered character of reproductive work'. While theorising gender and claiming a specifically *political* rather than simply economic critique of reproductive labour, Fortunati is clearly concerned with the production and reproduction of capital and commodities in the material

world, and with an extended Marxian account of reproductive work.

To return to Mansoor's claim: Lonzi provides the subjective work, where Fortunati provides the theoretical description of objective reality. This is despite the fact that, as Sara Colantuono argues, the two writers do not automatically form a pair, and may in fact strongly contrast one another. If the book is limited in any respect, it is in this: that it is not two books, which could significantly expand the critical and intellectual-historical apparatus that comes with the original writings. The pairing of the two thinkers leads to a compulsion to reiterate the difference repeatedly: if presented autonomously, each thinker's contradictions might be considered, in relation to her own work first, and afterwards in reference to its complement or contrast.

Why is this a limitation? In imagining a speculative complement of subject and object – a feminist combination which we might wish for, or a new kind of theory-practice which takes account both of processes of subjectivation, and of objective economic compulsion – what may be missed is the speculative contained in each writer taken by herself. Lonzi has much to say about the 'objective' realities referred to in feminism, just as Fortunati has an account of the subject, however occluded this may be on the surface by the economic terminology of absolute and relative surplus value, the formal and the real planes of economic exchange. I will briefly suggest where we might find these.

In the 'Manifesto of Rivolta Femminile', substantially written by Lonzi along with other members of Rivolta Femminile, we find references to the use of women periodically, as in during crisis, as '*massa di manovra*', the Italian term for *masse de manoeuvre*, which only approximately translates into English as 'reserve army', but also conjures the terminology of labouring masses, manual work and the tactical deployment of military resources. Lonzi elliptically refers to a debate around the family wage and labour time in a historical perspective, and the use of women as a reserve army of labour. We find references like this to the economic uses of women, and the work performed in the home throughout her work: Lonzi is not unaware of women's employment in both productive and reproductive work, but this critique is what she might call 'pre-feminist' (as she claims of Kristeva's work). Her further concern is also to 'refute

some of the principles of patriarchy ... [including] those advanced by revolutionary ideologies.' In *Sputiamo su Hegel* [Let's Spit on Hegel], Lonzi in fact rejects a Hegelian account of the subject not as a non-existent or unimportant critique but as insufficient to its purported cause. For Lonzi and Rivolta Femminile, 'the belief in mirroring has ended', of the kind which posits a simplistic relation between base and superstructure, leading them to upbraid the reader in advance for presuming their work to be that of a 'cultural revolution which follows and integrates a structural revolution' (the way women's revolutionary involvement has sometimes been considered). Here the notion of Rivolta Femminile as subjective work is emphatically rejected: for Lonzi, a relational affective materialism takes precedence, in which the substrate of emotional labour subtends all social life, but this is not at the expense of 'materialism', and isn't a primarily idealist argument about the priority of affect, opinion, ideology or subject formation in the sense of the masculine community. She instead claims a 'lack of ideological necessity'. Material transformations involving these unforeseen, as-yet unremarked-upon parts of social life, would reach further into the bedrock of the locked embraces of motherhood and family, which upholds all other domination on an elemental level, at the root.

In the sections presented in this collection of Fortunati's *The Arcana of Reproduction*, there is a repetition of the terminology of the formal plane of appearance, and the real plane of being or existence. While exchanges in the marketplace, between Labour and Capital, 'appear to be between equals', the 'arcane of production' reveals the substantial inequality of ownership behind this façade, in which surplus value is able to be appropriated on one side (her title is itself a further play on this term). Fortunati's work is concerned to extend this analysis of the 'arcane' to the analysis of reproduction as a second, double level of appearance – which creates a new *Doppelcharakter* of the commodity. In this sense, her work is concerned with ideological transformation, with unveiling and countering the consciousness of the universal subject which retains these exchanges as veiled, and as 'equal'. Feminists (and Marxists) ought to integrate the insight that women's reproductive work is not a 'natural social labour': just as Marx satirised political economists, as in his *Theories of Surplus Value*, countering their naturalist fictions with a social cause, so Fortunati

counters representations of work performed in the home, re-using and re-appropriating Marx's categories which describe productive work. Importantly, and somewhat differently to the way some have argued that Marxist feminists theorise ideology (as in the recent evaluation of Italian Marxist-feminism in Alyssa Battistoni's *Free Gifts*), Fortunati represents this movement between levels, this play of *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung* to be integral to the very process of valorisation itself. Fortunati, then, also rejects the 'belief in mirroring', since ideological contestation is, as in workerist theories, internal to Capital's very strategy itself, as well as the struggle to surpass it. Her theory reflects a tendency to theorise political economy as concerned with 'command over labour', refocusing on the question of domination. Politics no longer simply stands against economics (indeed, as Mansoor glosses, 'Fortunati introduces the crucial insight' that the wage's 'operations are both economic and political').

Neither writer can be reduced to one side of the abstraction of subject-object, a subjective or objective side of feminism. Can we, nonetheless, dialecticise the relationship between the two writers, as indeed several of the critical pieces in this anthology do?

The essays surrounding the translated Lonzi and Fortunati selections both contextualise and provide additional interpretations and uses of the texts therein. The originality and non-coincidence of the critical texts with their primary objects is something that might easily be lost in the proliferation of interpretations in the book. There are two essays each by Mansoor, Claire Fontaine and Colantuono, split across two halves of the book, and each of the central writers (Fortunati/Lonzi) has a dossier of short texts; finding one's way among these can sometimes be confusing. Yet, *Gendered Labour and Clitoridean Revolt* feels like a book one can begin at any point, resembling a galaxy of connections and relationships, rather than a linear strip mall of anthologised selections: each contribution retains its own surprise and freshness.

Sometimes this abundance risks losing the translated texts underneath their critical commentary, especially given the at-times partial presentation and representation of these thinkers, not just because of their translation context and limited access. Certain areas, concepts or terms, as in prior appropriations of Lonzi (see particularly her appropriation into the canon of 'sexual difference feminism', a concept she did not herself en-

dorse), come to stand in for the whole: *deculturation*, the barricade, *making a tabula rasa*, or Claire Fontaine's evocation of the 'human strike', which seems to provide a unifying term for the disparate thinkers. These concepts do indeed reflect parts of each writer's work, but they are not able to bear as much representative significance or explanatory power as might be hoped, especially if the concepts don't receive elaboration in the original texts themselves.

Yet, as Lonzi herself argued, the use value of writing ought to predominate over the alienated use of texts as *culture* (writ male *tout court*), whose alienated exchange exists in their being traded ahead of posterity – a bet on lost desires and foregone relations in the service of an economy of future time and of imaginary recognition in the future anterior. Neither can past texts be made into monuments of culture, something decried in 'The Absence of Creativity'. Just as in Lonzi's rejection of the spectator-artist divide, the contemporaneity of Austin, Claire Fontaine, Colantuono and Mansoor's essays reminds us that the distinction between commentary and original text is just as mythic and reified.

Seeking to liquidate – that is, make usable (see also Walter Benjamin's 'The Destructive Character') – texts of the past is precisely the way Lonzi pursued her own criticism: she wrote that 'we [Rivolta Femminile] will sabotage any aspect of culture which calmly proceeds in ignoring' women's oppression, whether present or past. Working in the spirit of Lonzi's texts, by her example rather than at her word, a productive reinterpretation which enters into present webs of relation becomes not only desirable but unavoidable. But since this pragmatic approach (see the preponderance of 'practice' in Lonzi's writing, and its descriptive use in defining feminism) courts the risk of presentism, we are left with a dilemma of wishing both to do justice to and historicise these writers, and to refuse their being made into something monumental. As the 'Manifesto of Rivolta Femminile' declaims: 'We consider incomplete any history which is based on imperishable traces.' What value does the accuracy or adequation of interpretations, then, have? On what basis should we agree or disagree with interpretations of these past writings?

While Lonzi supported a creative use of the past on the part of clitoridean women, to produce new clitoridean 'resonances' (*risonanze*), she was not in favour of a his-

torically revisionist presentation of her own thought, whose translation and access (as the editors mention) she carefully guarded. Attending to it with sufficient scrupulousness, while also keeping an eye on *practice*, is a delicate balance. The editors move closer to this forking of paths and proliferation of analyses, by contrasting the two writers and taking care to signal this contrast in its historical dimensions rather than elide it.

In other presentations and interpretations, a lack of historical contextualisation has left these writers open to charges – when viewed from a distance – which they themselves might have levelled against others: for example, in Lonzi's case, of a merely deregulatory approach to the problem of abortion, or a biological essentialism of the clitoris. The inclusion of 'The Clitoridean Woman and the Vaginal Woman', but also 'An Itinerary of Reflections', helps in revising the latter interpretation. These writings are among those of Lonzi most liable to misinterpretation. Yet Lonzi herself refutes the idea of 'clitoridean' or 'clitoral' as a simple reference to anatomical sex or genitalia, since it is a term that refers to a kind of gendering (or is at a further remove altogether from the sex/gender pairing, signalling an orientation beyond either):

It has been said that [...] I entered into lesbianism in that I posed the clitoris as the female sex. But the clitoris, if it is an organ nonfunctional to heterosexual intercourse, is no more inherently functional to homosexual intercourse. In fact, among women there is no further facilitation toward clitoridean intercourse than the removal of an obstacle, the phallus (not the penis), and therefore the removal of a concept. The clitoris counts as sex for both the man not identified in the phallus and for the woman not identified in the vagina. It is beyond the categories of homo- and heterosexuality. The distinction of complementarity and subordination between the two sexes falls away.

The clitoridean woman recalls Monique Wittig's 'lesbian' – a person who ceases being a woman in directing herself towards other women – much more than the biological woman of radical feminism. The idea intervenes into prominent feminist discussions, such as that of Elena Gianini Bellotti in 1973, on 'penis envy', and yet it proposes that pleasure connected to the penis might be liberated from the 'delusion of power' in the 'penis-power identification', through non-procreative 'mutual eroticism'. What the clitoridean refers to is the will to

pleasure, refusing to be in a ‘complementary’ and binary relationship with men, which collapses into being a supplement for men’s pleasure in heterosexual sex and relational life. It is this capacity for pleasure, rather than the specifics of an anatomy, which Lonzi supports, giving the lie to the ‘myth of the vaginal orgasm’, as her contemporary Anne Koedt calls it in her critical 1968 article.

Given the ‘void’ status of the clitoridean woman (who ‘starts from a nothingness, from a cultural void’), and the need for radical reinvention under this sign, we might in the simplest terms describe what is clitoridean as what is *not* vaginal: as a refusal, which rejects a binary construct of complementarity (and the ‘biological-emotional values of the couple form’). It rejects the ‘official pleasure of patriarchal sexual culture’, a culture which is ‘rigorously procreative’ and ‘has created for woman a model of vaginal pleasure’, which extends far beyond sexuality itself. The experiential actuality of the clitoridean is to be discovered, person by person, resonance by resonance. It would then be a historical mischaracterisation, even skewering, to see Lonzi as an essentialist feminist, a tendency she strongly criticised, both directly, and through her presentation of what I’d call an ‘existentialist feminism’. (This contrasts classical categories of essence and existence; it remains to be seen whether the contrast of the two categories, recalling the subjective and the objective, might, as Althusser once argued, be overcome, such that feminism could be removed from a politics of the ‘essential section’, and instead the essences and existences of women be described in terms of a properly historical, but not historicist, articulation).

In Fortunati, the specificity of certain terms can sometimes be lost among the various Marxist references to labour: Colantuono and Austin write, ‘a certain “untranslatability” results from the appearance of familiar categories in the inverted world of reproduction.’ For example, the phrase *forza naturale del lavoro sociale* is discussed in the same essay, which refers to reproductive labour, and is variously translated as ‘naturally occurring labour power of the social’, and ‘natural force of social labour’ (another resonance might be ‘natural socialised labour-power’). The editors remark that it refers to women’s labour being ‘subsumed as [a] naturalized function’, since it has a negative relation to the wage (being defined against it). Yet it also seems to recall the infam-

ous ‘*operaio sociale*’ (socialised worker) of Antonio Negri and *autonomia* (whose uses contemporaries Mario Tronti, Agnes Heller and Lea Melandri criticised), and signals uses of the term ‘social’ to refer to abstract (socialised, productive) labour. The former term referred to the need for the ‘reproductive’ elements of the working class to be recomposed to form a unity with the productive, yet with the productive labourer at its helm, in the course of struggle. Fortunati makes an intervention here. Indeed, in Fortunati’s earlier 1984 *The Great Caliban*, written with Silvia Federici, she argues that reproductive labour is the primary moment of socialisation – ‘abstraction, socialisation and simplification of work [occurs] above all in the process of reproduction’ – rather than abstract labour.

The difficulty of translating this term derives both from the contingencies of grammar, and from the nonexistence of the term ‘social-labour’ or ‘socialised worker’ in English. Here some resonances are lost in the bracketed specificity of the term ‘social’, which comes to mean ‘the social’ against ‘the natural’ in the two poles of socialisation and naturalisation, without signalling the intellectual stakes of such terms in the period in question. While the editors are aware of this (elaborating upon it in the new Verso edition of *Arcana*), the reader may not immediately grasp the connotations. The excerpts would benefit from signalling these choices further at some moments, as well as related background (such as contemporaneous debates around the capitalist process of production linked to the above term, which are continuously alluded to in the text).

The volume works towards a fuller engagement with these thinkers, in turn disabusing the reader of certain suspicions, and extending their critical reception rather than mischaracterisation. Providing a fuller account of their contexts would require much more space than is available in a volume split across the body of work of two writers. As it is, the text is an invaluable reference for studying Fortunati and Lonzi in English. As an introductory text for these trends in Italian feminism, it offers departure points for and supplements to the longer recently translated collections of both writers. Its limitations signify not an inherent limitation of the text itself, much less the careful and considered translations it includes, but the need for more sources and resources in contextualising and building an intellectual history

of these very divergent strands of feminism, furnishing the interest in their broad characterisations – subjective or structural tendencies – with more ample space. To

specify the history of these thinkers allows us to radicalise their categories past their historical uses, rather than merely fixing them in their original time and place.

Christina Chalmers

Artificial reason

Peter Wolfendale, *The Revenge of Reason* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2025). 440pp. £24.99 pb., 978 1 91302 987 6

When Urbanomic put out *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* in 2014 [reviewed in *RP* 191], it presented its subject as that rare thing, a novel ‘ism’ with a coherent genealogy. Accelerationism may by that time have come to be associated primarily with the writhing rhapsodies of Nick Land and his collaborators, but the editors of *#Accelerate* traced a longer history, taking accelerationism as the name for a strain of anti-humanist technological optimism stretching back to Marx. Yet, however coherent the history of the idea, there seemed to be little agreement among accelerationists in the 2010s what it was, exactly, that should be accelerated. Capitalism? Capitalism’s ‘internal contradictions’? Technological development? AI? In the absence of clarity, accelerationists were often caricatured as promoting a worsening of the miserable conditions for which capitalism was responsible: an intensification of suffering that would magically enforce its transmutation.

In *The Revenge of Reason*, a multi-faceted defence of left-accelerationist ‘Prometheanism’, Peter Wolfendale bemoans the ‘persistent misunderstanding’ that ‘the purpose of acceleration is to deepen immiseration in order to hasten revolution.’ He proposes that accelerationism be defined as the ‘insistence that the transition between capitalism and post-capitalism’ mirror ‘the transition between feudalism and capitalism’: ‘a complex process that can and should be accelerated rather than a radical break in the horizon of thought and action.’ Wolfendale describes himself as a ‘systematic philosopher’, and *The Revenge of Reason*, a collection of his essays written between 2010 and 2025, is astonishingly wide-ranging. But there is a clear thread running through its forays into aesthetic theory, ‘transcendental logic’, Deleuzian metaphysics and cognitive functionalism: a metaphysical-political theory of the radical freedom of rational beings.

Aside from *The Noumenon’s New Clothes* (2019), a book-length demolition of Object-Oriented Ontology, the bulk of Wolfendale’s work over the past decade has circulated through an informal economy of blog posts and social media threads. (Wolfendale is described in the author’s note of *The Revenge of Reason* as an ‘independent philosopher’, having lost his institutional position with the collapse of the Philosophy department at Newcastle University. The book is therefore a testament both to the sorry state of academic philosophy and to the tenacity of those who continue to think and write outside it.) His new book arrives at a moment when its call for an embrace of computational intelligence seems at once more pertinent and less palatable than ever before. Today – as the one-time libertarians of Silicon Valley fall in step with neo-fascists, the digital commons are enclosed and enshittified as the result of aggressive corporate takeovers, and the AI arms race consumes ever greater quantities of material and libidinal energies – it is understandable that the left isn’t carried away with technological optimism. Can an account of the interrelation of freedom and rationality, which embraces the liberatory potential of AI, offer any encouragement?

Wolfendale’s account of freedom is self-consciously Kantian: free systems are self-legislating, which means that they are able to set their own goals. Plenty of systems may be capable of intelligently solving problems, but only those that are capable of choosing *which* problems to solve count as autonomous. Examples of intelligent but non-autonomous systems include current AIs, whose goals are set by their human designers, and – more controversially – non-human animals, which Wolfendale characterises, as a behaviourist might, as clusters of instinctual ‘drives’ loosely oriented towards the evolutionary aims of survival and reproduction. The teleological