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The pink Viagra story

We have the drug, but what's the disease?

Leonore Tiefer

Ever since Viagra put a spring in the step of millions of impotent men after coming onto the market in March, attention has been focused on the more mysterious key to sexual gratification among women.

Sunday Times, 19 July 1998

Another way to put this would be, 'Ever since Viagra proved to the pharmaceutical industry that contemporary sexual confusions and dissatisfactions could be medicalized and marketed (to the sweet cash-register ring of billions of dollars and euros), companies have been searching for some way to make women into sex-problem consumer-patients.' News media around the world have tirelessly chronicled the 'hunt for the female Viagra', which, as of the date of writing (June 2003), still lacks a definitive quarry.

The problem has been that before pink Viagras or other such products could be tested, approved and sold to the public, there had to be clarity on exactly what disease or disorder the drug would be treating. And despite huge industry expense and the involvement of multitudes of doctors, marketers and health journalists, there has been no consensus on a targetable women's sexual disorder that could work for the industry in the same way that men's erectile dysfunction had. Clarifying women's sexual function and dysfunction has become not only complicated, but contentious, and therein lies an interesting story about sexuality, medicalization, globalization and feminism.

Sexual options become more interesting every day. Now we have reality shows on television that not only showcase sexual attractiveness, but feature real (maybe) longing, lust, pursuit, rejection and jealousy along with the endless expanses of flesh. For seemingly insatiable audiences of men and women, gay and straight, old and young, mass media offer a continuous Roman orgy. Background social shifts such as increased longevity, a new freedom of choice about relationships, and new goals for recreation and physical well-being set the stage for changes in sexual life. Publicity about HIV-AIDS and campaigns against international sexual trafficking make the public aware of how diverse and driven sexual life can be. And then there are the ever-present stories about celebrities' sexual lives which have filled the press since the time of penny papers. Results of social-science surveys, perhaps stimulated by publicity about new drugs and the apparent primacy of sexual life for the ubiquitous celebrities, show that ordinary people expect more in the way of perfect performance from their sexual lives than they used to.

Ironically, all this sexuality promotion coexists with only the most rudimentary sexuality education in most regions, save Scandinavia and Northern Europe. The idea of comprehensive sexuality education that would include an understanding of identities, bodies and relationships; introduce cross-cultural variation; and dispassionately describe value systems, is certainly lacking in both the USA and the UK. People are somehow supposed to be able to figure out the vicissitudes of sexual life from their own experience, the teachings of family and other authorities, and the hyped and confusing messages from the media. Good luck.

Midwifing 'female sexual dysfunction'

The dilemmas and anxieties of contemporary sexual life create a variety of markets, not least of which is a medical market for obtaining sexual information and managing sexual uncertainty and dissatisfaction. As women's sexual entitlement (at least in industrialized nations) grew through the 1970s and 1980s, women were freer to pursue sex. But what sex would they pursue? What forms would satisfaction take?

Orgasm had widely become the presumed measure of women's satisfaction in both feminist writing and sex research by the middle 1970s. Revoking Freud's dismissal of clitoral pleasure was a major feminist triumph and segued into the assumption that orgasm should be as important and valued for women as it is for men. Some feminists argued that orgasm could become a new tyranny and source of pressure, but sexual self-determination without goalposts was too anarchic to become popular. By the late 1990s, physicians gathered at meetings sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry to discuss the complaints they were hearing from women about low sexual interest and difficulty with arousal and orgasm. In some cases, these seemed to be women with a history of disease or medical treatment (surgery, chemotherapy) who felt newly emboldened to raise sexual complaints and newly hopeful about medical remedies. In most cases, however, these were women whose complaints lacked identifiable medical causes, whose expectations had been raised by the media, who had partners who expected more from them, and who turned for advice and relief to physicians as a result of 'disease awareness campaigns' that suggested doctors had something to offer in the way of sexual health.

Instead of taking the new public interest in women's sexual life as an opportunity for collaborative research with feminist scholars, social scientists and relationship experts, however, leading physicians and sexologists allowed themselves to be drawn into a narrowly focused industry-dominated perspective whose sole purpose was developing a medical-sexual rhetoric suited for new diagnoses and new drugs. By 1998, experts in secret industry-sponsored meetings were refining a list of sexual disorders for women – too little desire, problems with arousal and orgasm, pain; basically the same list as for men – that made sex into a medical function like digestion, and opened the gates to over-the-counter and prescription-only products. The list of disorders became a new problem, 'female sexual dysfunction', and journalists began to follow the story of the search for its treatments with article like 'Rx for Sex', 'The science of "O"', 'Designing women', and 'The search for the Lady Viagra'.¹

Unexpectedly, however, there were problems in the drug development process, and, after five years of intense effort, surprised physicians and researchers are now saying that women's sexual function and satisfaction are mysterious, complicated, and certainly different from men's.² The favourite slide at sexology conferences around the world these days shows two metal boxes, one with a single up-and-down switch, and the other with many knobs and buttons of different shapes and sizes. The first box is labelled 'The Man', and the second 'The Woman'. Does this sound familiar? 'What DO women want?'

The stumbling block turned out to involve both diagnosis and new drug evaluation. The drug evaluation problem was what measure of outcome to use in clinical trials for women. For erectile problems in men, drug companies basically just asked, 'is it harder?' and 'does it last longer?' The answers were quantifiable and statistics could be used to show whether drugs 'worked' or not. But as women lack a penis or other visible sign of sexual functioning, their sexual satisfactions turned out to be more difficult to measure. Should success of a drug for women be gauged by more orgasms? More sexual encounters? Higher self-reported arousal or pleasure?

The US Food and Drug Administration says it will reject purely physical measures like genital temperature and blood flow in assessing drug trial results. But it will also reject purely subjective measures like 'enjoys sex more'. The smart money is on statistically validated questionnaires that combine event-counting and subjective assessment. The first drug consistently and reliably to reduce 'sexual distress' in women with defined complaints of sexual arousal or desire will probably be approved to treat 'female sexual dysfunction'.

Yet the bigger problem has turned out to be channelling women's sexual complaints into specific diagnoses – hence the many knobs and buttons. It turns out that the list of sexual disorders for women developed in the industry-sponsored meetings – too little desire, problems with arousal and orgasm, pain – don't work too well. There are no unambiguous biological measures to slot women into one category or another, and women's own descriptions of arousal and desire often overlap. Many women report several complaints. Moreover, although drugs tested so far frequently affect genital measures of blood flow, they don't improve sexual distress and satisfaction ratings. This has led to scientists' epiphany that women's sexual lives are contextualized – that is, that sexual experience depends as much or more on social context (relationship, cultural background, past sexual experiences) as on genital functioning. This is news?

Backlash against big Pharma

The explanation that 'women are different' has both advantages and disadvantages for progressive sexual medicine. Looking at social context could bring awareness and attention to issues of sexual abuse and assault, insecure body image, anxiety and depression, lack of sexual knowledge and access to reproductive health care, and the many ways in which male supremacy still thrives in sexual life. Improving these 'contextual' matters will unquestionably improve women's sexual opportunities for pleasure and satisfaction. I suspect clinical trials repeatedly report equivalent responses to placebos as to active drugs because of the sex education and encouragement that are part of the trial.³ I would think a doctor with a clipboard cooing, 'Gee, that's great, let's see how you do next week', could go a long way in correcting a disadvantageous context – at least temporarily.

Eventually, researchers might recognize that sexual life is contextualized for both men and women, and that men are not simply sexual robots. Men's social privilege allows their context to be invisible, like being a fish in water or a rich shopper in Saks Fifth Avenue. Cultural entitlements for men to be sexual and scripts that call for men to initiate sexual encounters favour men's arousal. Similarly, the 'coital imperative' and the active role men take in sex make it likely that men will regularly experience pleasure and orgasm in their encounters. Men aren't simply lucky in their biology; they have the context going for them.

The disadvantage of the new 'women are different' rhetoric, of course, is that it naturalizes the categories of 'men' and 'women', produces endless ghastly socio-biologizing, and may never lead physicians and researchers to the awareness that sexual life is contextualized for everyone. Women's sexuality can be ghettoized by any theory, and I can imagine a generation of experts in new women's sexual health centres teach-



ing the ‘men are from Mars, women are from Venus’ philosophy that women’s sexuality is relational and contextual and touchy-feely. That would be terrible.

The global pharmaceutical industry is extremely large, wealthy and powerful. A temporary delay in developing the perfect outcome measure for drug trials or in creating workable diagnostic categories for recruiting patients for those trials may be no more than just a temporary delay. It may be – it probably will be – that, in a year or two, female

arousal and desire drugs will be as widely available and as widely praised as Viagra and the Viagra wannabes now emerging from Lilly and Bayer. But the search for the pink Viagra is occurring just as a new backlash against the global pharmaceutical industry is picking up steam. Editorials in medical journals (for example, ‘Is Academic Medicine For Sale’, in the 2000 *New England Journal of Medicine*) and entire issues of the *British Medical Journal* (for example, 13 April 2002 on ‘Too Much Medicine’ and 31 May 2003 on ‘No Free Lunch’) indicate that aspects of the medical community are opposed to excessive pharmaceutical industry involvement in advertisement, medical research, training, organizations, publications and continuing education.⁴

This backlash dovetails with the analysis and critique of ‘medicalization’ over the past several decades within sociology, the women’s health movement, the ‘anti-psychiatry’ movement, and, newly, from cultural historians examining the social construction of illness and disease. All these scholars argue that the medical model, with its hallmark elements of mind–body dualism, universalism, individualism and biological reduction, is not well suited to many of the challenges of contemporary life and suffering. Yet, at the same time, patient advocacy groups are clamouring for medical legitimacy, increased funding and research, and, above all, new drug treatments. And the drug industry continues to expand.

Allying with the backlash, I convened a ‘Campaign for a New View of Women’s Sexual Problems’ in 2000 to provide a feminist anti-medicalization perspective in the debate about ‘female sexual dysfunction’.⁵ Salvation is in the struggle, they say, but I still think I’ll live to see that pink pill.

Notes

1. Many ‘pink Viagra’ stories, especially ones including criticism, are listed on and linked to www.fsd-alert.org/press.html.
2. Mary Duenwald, ‘Effort to Make Sex Drug for Women Challenges Experts’, *New York Times*, 25 March 2003, p. F5.
3. A recent American Urological Association conference abstract (May 2003) reported that a cream for FSD improved things 50–60 per cent depending on dose, but that the placebo improved things 54 per cent. A high placebo rate is also found in the erectile dysfunction literature.
4. Links to medical literature publications on the backlash against the pharmaceutical industry can be found in section IV on www.fsd-alert.org/links.html.
5. <http://www.fsd-alert.org>.

Lost worlds

Political memoirs of the Left in Britain

Lynne Segal

The parliamentary incantation of the 'new' is now neatly matched by both popular and academic fascination with the 'old'. 'The past', as Andreas Huyssen quips, is simply 'selling better than the future'.¹ In the personal arena, it evokes a comforting nostalgia, when not calling up the sorrows of what might have been, as time speeds up with passing years. In the public domain, the past has a more complex presence. In the decade following the decisive defeat of the Labour Party in Britain in 1979, the past was frequently invoked to keep alive the high hopes of only yesterday, already in jeopardy. The past was before us.² But by the 1990s the inexorable trouncing of those ideals had installed a more settled sense of mourning. The gradual inflation of the personal domain began to engulf much that remained of collective resistance.

In neat testimony to the process, in academic publishing, history has been collapsing into memory, memory into trauma, and trauma into studies of silence and forgetfulness. The 'traumatic turn' has yielded up the buried secret of memory, one step beyond, yet the underside of, its precursor, the linguistic turn. Attention to personal and collective practices of remembering – and, above all, of failing to remember – has drawn public events into the private sphere. There, it has left behind the intricacies of conscious experience for the enigmas of the unconscious. In the new psychosocial approach to history, the public realm folds itself back into stories of individuals and their ways of coping with the shared hurdles and harms of life, fragmenting and dissolving in the process.

A slew of new books are currently addressing the fragility of memory, as it stretches tenuously across the public–private divide. Two compilations in particular, with authoritative editorial amplifications by

cultural theorists Susannah Radstone and Katherine Hodgkin, are exemplary of ongoing work.* But if the turn to memory and autobiographical narration is one way of stabilizing our place in the world, anchoring the vicissitudes of personal lives all the way back in childbirth, the Zeitgeist currently encouraging it is suspicious of efforts to speak collectively. Attempts to stand, even cautiously, upon the presumed solidity of a 'we' – to lay claim to some shared narrative – courts disapproval, if not denunciation, as a colonization of the experiences of others.

We can agree that conscious memories are both personal and inescapably collective, dependent upon culturally distinct ways of making sense of experience, but in most of the cultural modes made available for interpreting ourselves today there is a common liberal outlook, encouraging the retrieval of 'uniquely personal' readings of world events. This sits oddly alongside the acknowledgement that we only gain some measure of that world, some sense of our often unsteady footing within it, through the shared stories we can create, clutching on to whatever threads through time others hold out for us. In searching for such support, it is political memoirs, probing the thoughts and practices which have motivated conscious collective efforts – not just to wrestle with the world, but to help change it – which offer some of the most fruitful material. However, nowadays they are likely to attract the cynicism that shadows political activism and vision alike. After all, it was scepticism about politics that paved the way for the new interest in memory and autobiographical narrative in the first place.

There are other reasons why the political memoirs of dissidents may provide unwelcome, eccentric snapshots of history – whether daring to capture the con-

* Susannah Radstone and Katherine Hodgkin, eds, *Regimes of Memory*, Routledge, London, 2003. xiv + 224 pp., £55.00 hb., 0 415 28648 4. Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds, *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, Routledge, London, 2003. xvi + 264 pp., £60.00 hb., 0 415 28647 6. See also Jill Bennett and Roseanne Kennedy, eds, *World Memory*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003. ix + 230 pp., £50.00 hb., 1 40390 115 5.

sequential moment for others, or trying to hold on to the diverse legacies of struggle. The burning political questions around which activists position themselves, wrangle and fall out at any one moment – from the precise inadequacies of the Soviet Union to the dangers of ‘identity’ struggles – can become irrelevant, even absurd, in the next. It is strange to think of political beliefs and emotions as trappings slipped on and off, like Prada footwear, but there have been eras when politics has seemed on a par with sex, at the centre of any dynamic life. In others, more like the present, it is mostly viewed askance, the preserve of careerists and ‘old crusties’, or the occasion for sudden eruptions of collective feeling which dissipate as rapidly as the day is done.

Nevertheless, however purposely or unwittingly selective, however unreliable and contingent political reminiscence may be, it stirs up questions of lasting significance – from what it is that inspires hope in those most in need of it at any given moment, to what the contexts and conditions are which all too easily erase awareness of cruelties, corruptions or exclusions. Pondering the paradoxes surrounding such issues along with other campaigners of old, mulling over lessons they might hold for resurgent young rebels, seems crucial for coming to terms with the pessimism never far from political life on the Left today. It means engaging critically with politically formative moments, whether in our own lives or those of others. Political engagements can strengthen or disappoint their supporters irrespective of whether they result in success or failure. Their complex legacies often tend to blur that distinction in any case. Such are the thoughts that have led me to some contemporary Left memoirs that address periods that largely predate the political world I came to inhabit in Britain in the 1970s, their historical residue by then already misconstrued or mysterious.

What follows is the first part of an attempt to understand the differing sources and effects of political radicalism, in this case by exploring the reminiscences of men of the Left looking back over their political lives, pondering the defeat of most of the ideals for which they fought. The ebullient re-entry of women into that history, in the final decades of the last century, and its ambiguous bequest to the current one, will be the subject of a second essay, next year.

The Party man: Communism as identity

Though the period seemed new and special to us at the time, the 1960s was far from the first era in which students in Britain were radicalized. We are reminded of this in an extraordinary political memoir, spanning almost the whole of what he calls the ‘short’ twentieth century (1914–1989), Eric Hobsbawm’s *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life*.^{*} Early on in his journey, the young Eric arrived in Cambridge in the 1930s to find his fellow students plunging into politics:

Mine was the reddest and most radical generation in the history of the university, and I was in the thick of it ... the 1930s was one of the few periods when an unusual proportion of eminent natural scientists were also politically radicalized. (100)

The Left Book Club, launched in 1936, had 57,000 members by the end of the decade, its popularity spawning a whole movement of local, vocational and interest-based discussion groups.³ Now that historians have joined in the sudden surge of memoir writing, exploring contemporary history while reviewing their own role within it, we might expect to find telling insights into the disjunctions and tensions of thinkers caught between ‘history’ and ‘memory’. Today, the accounts of lived experience arising from memory, underwriting localized knowledge-claims, are often given more legitimacy than the totalizing presumptions of history. However, Hobsbawm remains deeply suspicious of this move, believing that the current popularity of the partial and misleading ‘twilight zone of memory’ is not advancing but undermining the credentials of his profession, which should be attempting the difficult task of correctly understanding the past objectively, thereby helping to predict the future: ‘More history than ever is today being revised or invented by people who do not want the real past, but only a past that suits their purpose’ (296).⁴ Accordingly, in his own memoir, depictions of and reflections upon personal feelings are meagre, for the most part curtailed early on, after presenting himself as a curious, solitary, intellectual, homely child – as the photographs endorse – living mostly without close friends.

Hobsbawm warns readers at the outset that he is, anyway, a man who keeps his feelings to himself. It is, of course, a reserve – some might say a strategy

^{*} Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life*, Penguin, Allen Lane, London, 2002. 448 pp., £20.00 hb., 0713 99581 5. Page references appear within the text.

– familiar as part of the ‘character armour’ found in men of his generation, for whom the autobiographical mode could be seen as self-indulgence: if not narcissism, then at least something a little too suggestive of the ‘feminine’. A similar disdain for self-disclosure is evident in Hobsbawm’s scholarly contemporaries, typified by Zygmunt Bauman, who – also still publishing prolifically on the changed world of his closing years – scorns ‘displays of ersatz intimacy’.⁵ A decade younger, Richard Sennett has suggested that reminiscence, and the seductions of confessional writing, are a form of self-display contributing to the shrinking of the space for public life, eroding the difference between the private and the public.⁶ In Hobsbawm, self-restraint certainly meshes flawlessly with the Communist politics which seized him so young and so lastingly in the tough conditions of his

extremely disagreeable, others likeable, yet others ... just ridiculous... He is vain and conceited. He is a coward. (98–9)

With this abrasive backwards glimpse at his brittle, brash young self, the ageing historian leaves self-scrutiny largely behind. A mistake, in commercial terms, as one reviewer, Perry Anderson, noted.⁷ For the book could have been declared a ‘masterpiece’ had it ended, like a multitude of more conventional memoirs, with the protagonist’s coming of age – orphaned, exiled, homeless, but heading for the grandeur of Cambridge – consummation endlessly deferred.

Instead, Hobsbawm’s account of his ‘long walk through the short twentieth century’ has barely begun when he swerves away from his inner life to focus upon the ‘interesting times’ he leads as a budding, quickly successful, professional historian and, until its

final day, a lifelong member of the British Communist Party. Although an uncompromising supporter of the Soviet Union, Hobsbawm from the beginning loved the elegance and grandeur of Cambridge, joining its elite cluster of Apostles and considering himself incalculably lucky to be there – ‘like enjoying the constant and envied public company of a universally admired woman’ (102). (Feminism will remain, forever, *after* Hobsbawm.) He came from a profoundly impoverished yet culturally middle-class background, yet there is no sense of dramatic incongruity between his delight in the aristocratic splendour of Cambridge and his radical politics, any possible unease seemingly obviated by the extraordinary stability of the

author’s sense of identity and attachments: ‘I became conscious of being a historian at the age of sixteen.’ This was a year after he had become a ‘lifelong communist’, at school in Berlin in 1932. At fifteen he was already ‘a man whose life would lose its nature and its significance without the political project to which he committed himself as a school boy even though the project has demonstrably failed, and, as I now know, was bound to fail’ (55–6). Fidelity, indeed.

Such allegiance, Hobsbawm reflects, was perhaps assisted by his sense of having a ‘facility for deleting unpleasant and unacceptable data’, recalling his relative equanimity following the death of one parent then the other in rapid succession during his post-pubescent



childhood as a Jew in ‘Red Vienna’ between the world wars, when ‘one acquired political consciousness as naturally as sexual awareness’, although, interestingly, it was not anti-Semitism but poverty which he recalls afflicting his family life at the time (11). The first hundred pages of *Interesting Times* bring us to the point, in 1935, when the young Hobsbawm decides to abandon his lengthy teenage diary, signing off with a final autobiographical flourish. Presented to the public almost seven decades later, it provides a movingly self-mocking portrait of the Marxist historian as a young man:

An incorrigible striker of attitudes, which is all the more dangerous and at times effective as he believes in them himself.... Some people find him

years. Perhaps. But this facility is far from unusual, even when trying to remember to remember. As others have noted, the most dramatic life events often appear to make the least impact on memory, in contrast with the rich recollections and feelings sometimes triggered by more mundane things – from familiar objects and scenes to the Proustian moment of that certain taste, that special smell. In Freudian thought, the vividness of such incidental recollection serve as a ‘screen memory’ of the past, both connecting us with, yet protecting us from, the impact of its potentially more overwhelming aspects. ‘The momentous facts of life’, the analyst Christopher Bollas writes, are those ‘creating a momentary caesura, or blankness – and they stand in isolation, as markers of the subject’s history, notations of trauma and subjective absence.’⁸

Hobsbawm’s most consistent explanation of why he remained to the very end within the haunting shadow of Stalinism is more compelling. He returns repeatedly to his position in the political universe of Europe (as distinct from Britain) in the 1930s, when Communist Parties were building the Popular Front against fascism. For his generation of Leftists, he says, ‘the October revolution represented the hope of the world’ (41). It was a world in agonizing need of hope. Nowhere was it needed more than by a Jew in Germany, a Jew born the year of the Russian Revolution, one who can still recall, ‘as in a dream’, reading the news headline of Hitler becoming chancellor of Germany in 1933, as he returned home from school hand in hand with his sister:

For someone who joined the movement where I came from and when I did, it was quite simply more difficult to break with the party than for those who came later and from elsewhere. (218)

Yet, others did leave. (Ten thousand, one third of the CPGB, left around 1956, most of them remaining on the Left.) In a telling flash of self-disclosure, Hobsbawm adds that it was egotistical pride that enabled him to sustain that ‘almost unbreakable umbilical cord’ to the Communist Party he officially joined in 1936. He was determined to prove he could succeed as a historian on an international stage, including the USA, even with his proudly displayed Cold War handicap, ‘as a known communist’ (218).

Different versions of this self-appellation, such as ‘a known Marxist historian’, pepper the book. For a man who is so dismissive of what he calls ‘identity politics’, and who believes that he has never wholly belonged to any place or chosen group, he certainly secured for himself, in his teenage years, two fundamental anchors of his identity, which he has lived

out and defended ever since. He overstates his case, therefore, in so comprehensively dismissing the uses of identity in politics: ‘As identity is defined against someone else, it implies not identifying with the other. It leads to disaster’ (416). In contrast, I would suggest that today it could be the *lack* of anchors, of any secure sense of identity and belonging, which is potentially as dangerous. People might more effectively manage to align themselves with a sense of their shared humanity with others if, like Hobsbawm, they were able to feel less unanchored and alone, if they could secure for themselves a stronger sense of their own identity – *as a ‘known Marxist historian’*, even – one they might be happy to flaunt as a badge of their own ‘apartness’, when seeking some individual affirmation. Whatever the complexity of the task, Hobsbawm does not seriously attempt to justify his warning that to claim an identity for political ends, especially when seeking to overcome institutionalized forms of oppression, is to insist upon a type of distinctiveness, which thereby threatens to negate or exclude that of all others.

Reflecting upon friendships which have ended, Hobsbawm comments, in a rare moment: ‘Perhaps private and public lives are not as separable as all that’ (145). Indeed. Alongside all we learn from him about twentieth-century history, we glean much as well about the ways in which political commitment can provide the soil for selfhood – at least when the time is ripe and conditions foster such attachments (152). We are made familiar with the dutifully dull, daily life of a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), referred to by its members simply as ‘the Party’. Prior to the last two decades before its official demise in 1991, the demands of strict discipline, ruthless efficiency, total emotional dedication were all-encompassing: ‘The party was what our life was about. We gave it all we had. In return we got from it the certainty of our victory and the experience of fraternity’ (134). They also thereby avoided, he suggests, some of the anguish of those who place the ups and downs of personal passion at the core of their lives, if not altogether living up to the (rather feeble) words they made up and sang in parody of Cole Porter’s ‘Let’s Fall in Love’:

Let’s liquidate love/ Let’s say from now on/ That all our affection’s/ For the workers alone/ Let’s liquidate love/ Till the revolution/ Until then love is/ An un-Bolshevik thing. (120)

Not only did members give up much of their time to the Party, they made huge sacrifices, whether to meet membership payments, in jeopardizing job promotions or careers, in remaining loyal even when unhappy

about the frequently unexpected, often seemingly indefensible, reversals of policy decreed by the Soviet Union. However, as Hobsbawm notes, the boredom, bureaucracy, near robotic obedience required of members in the mid-century Communist Party did also mirror the manner, if not the minutiae, of the psychological conformity so hegemonic in the 1950s: 'communist intellectuals were not cultural dissidents' (70). Quite the contrary, for all Hobsbawm's own embrace of the world of jazz. Although there was more than one way of being a communist, especially for those affected by the more bohemian life of the 1920s.

It is understandable, to me, that Hobsbawm should still have no serious regrets at belonging to a party that was perennially a party of protest, never remotely close to holding power in Britain, one that fought primarily to improve the conditions of the working class, locally, nationally and internationally. For the reviled minority, as for the persecutors, the Cold War became a type of religious war. Moreover, members of all the mainstream political parties in Britain could be said to have serious reasons for expressing regret, although they are rarely required to do so: their parties having failed to oppose fascist dictatorships, until forced to; supported the Suez invasion; the USA in Vietnam; condoned any number of murderous regimes internationally, while failing to assist those attempting to oppose, or even expose, them. But, stalwart beyond the bugle's dying echo, it is far less understandable that Hobsbawm should offer so little critical commentary on, or revision of, past political strategies. The late Italo Calvino, for example, echoes Hobsbawm's explanation of why he joined up in Italy: on the one hand, Communism represented the rejection of all that had produced fascism; on the other hand, it promised, via the image of the October Revolution, what seemed 'most modern and progressive and complex from a political, social, economic, cultural point of view'.⁹ But, an active member for over fifteen years, Calvino later condemned his own Stalinist complicity, feeling he had to take responsibility for helping to produce a language which defended him and others from seeing a reality they did not want to see: '*Stalinism was also the smooth-talking cheerful mask which concealed the historical tragedy taking place.*'¹⁰

In contrast, Hobsbawm mostly still defends old sectarian demarcations and largely dismisses alternative visions and engagements. The achievements of the New Left of the late 1950s and early 1960s, for

example, are dismissed as negligible in practical terms, 'a half-remembered footnote' (214). Yet, as we'll see, unlike the CPGB, it was the New Left which was decisive in the formation of the massive anti-nuclear movement (CND); was at the centre of anti-Vietnam protests; and was more than receptive to, and hence able to help radicalize, the cultural revolution of the 1960s. It paved the way for the flowering of movement politics, the largest of which would prove to be the Women's Liberation Movement – however apprehensive its embrace of feminism. Hobsbawm manages to all but ignore both Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, who both helped transform the intellectual and political landscape with their awareness of the significance of culture, just as he remains blind to the complex legacy of second-wave feminism. Finally, he remains uncritically proud of the role he attributes to *Marxism Today* in paving the way for what would become New Labour, undermining the old labour movement and the social-democratic Left, despite now finally regretting the lack of internal resistance to Blair's neoliberal embrace of the market, which has resulted from the undermining of that Left. This is identity politics. The name: card-carrying communist.

Nevertheless, for all his high seriousness, political intransigence, fears that cultural politics has abolished real politics (with its slogan 'the personal is political'), this indomitable campaigner knows one thing about the force of personal narrative:

Historians of my age are guides to that crucial patch of the past, that other country where they did things differently, because we have lived there ... we know what it felt like, and this gives us a natural immunity to the anachronisms of those who were not. (413)

A partial immunity, perhaps. It is not that memory is reliable, far from it. As often as not, we do not know quite what we feel about what is happening to us, around us, as it happens; nor quite why we do, or did, the things we do. Nevertheless, simply 'being there', as he notes, provides us with associations that may help to challenge the imposition of new orthodoxies onto the past. In the face of all he has witnessed and reported on the rise and fall of political power, institutions, even empires, it is the strength of Hobsbawm's personal conviction, in his mid-eighties, that social injustice can and must be fought, that gives his parting words their persuasive, even hopeful, force: 'Let us not disarm, even in unsatisfactory times. Social injustice still needs to be denounced and fought. The world will not get better on its own' (418).

Nothing personal

The force of Hobsbawm's conclusions are inseparable from the engaging style with which he manages to sustain the reader's interest throughout his journey, even with scant self-disclosure. A second political memoir has just appeared from much the same stable, by another Marxist historian also in his mid-eighties, John Saville's *Memoirs from the Left*.^{*} It chronicles the same extraordinary events, from a man who had almost identical affiliations, engagements and opinions to Hobsbawm. Joining the radical student movement at the London School of Economics in 1934, in the midst of global economic slump, massive unemployment, war clouds over Europe, Saville (then still using his given name of Orestes Stamatopoulos) was quickly part of all the radical movements of the day. He imbibed the ideas of the gigantic anti-war movement – in 1934 it held an overflow meeting at the Albert Hall, founded the Peace Pledge Union, collecting eleven and a half million votes in its National Peace Ballot the following year (calling for large-scale disarmament and sanctions against warring nations). In the mid-1930s Saville marched against Oswald Mosley and his British fascist followers, supported the Unemployment Movement and the Hunger Marches, opposed the emerging fascist regimes in Europe. In 1934 he also joined the CPGB: 'It seemed to me a very "matter-of-fact" decision' (9) – as it did to thousands of others at the time.

A fellow member of the Communist Party's Historians' Group, formed in 1946, Saville (unlike Hobsbawm) left the Party in 1956, to become an early member of the New Left, starting the *New Reasoner* alongside Edward Thompson, and a little later the *Socialist Register* with Ralph Miliband. Saville's memoir is packed with useful information, whether pointing out police collusion with Mosley's anti-Semitism, or explaining the failure to appreciate Stalin's barbarism before 1945. Students of Saville recall him as an excellent and indefatigable teacher, and as displaying the dogged tenacity essential to keep political campaigns afloat in tough times. It may be significant that Saville is the only one of these political memoirists I have never met, yet, overstuffed with detail, delivered for the most part in monotonal register, his memoir reads to me like sixty years of minute-taking, punctuated by somewhat staid opinions.

Had we no counter-examples, the book could serve as a cautionary tale on the numbing effect on the imagination of a lifetime in politics. But then, unlike

one of his closest comrades from the past, E.P. Thompson (who did not live to the ripe old age when others have felt free to pen their memoirs), Saville likes to dissociate political life from *any* emotional engagement. He mocks Raphael Samuel's version of the emotional benefits of Party membership, suggesting in relation to the large contingent of Communists in the engineering industry that 'to suggest they needed a sense of "belonging" or a craving for "recognition" – can only be described as absurd' (9). I am more inclined to think it absurd to suggest otherwise, of *any* comprehensively committed band of people. Saville is a man who can still speak on public platforms with wisdom and passion against deprivation, poverty and worsening global inequality. Yet the flat, mechanically driven recording he offers of the twentieth century renders his personal recollections of extraordinary times, in Africa, the Shetlands, India or London, almost humdrum, devoid of affect, whether we are reading about his intimate life ('I loved my mother and she remains in my memory'), his contact with charismatic comrades, such as Stuart Hall ('He is an extremely nice man, highly competent and imaginative'), or his depiction of the impact of catastrophic events on those most affected by them – for example, Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956 ('It was clear from what was being said from the platform that the "mistakes and errors" of the Stalin years were responsible for the repressive acts which had outraged public opinion beyond the Soviet Union and for which the world communist movement had acted so long as apologists') (184, 123, 101). This is also one of the few memoirs of the twentieth century I have read that is devoid of photographs. Most importantly, I can glean next to nothing about the emotional hold of politics on Saville – a situation that makes this an unhelpful memoir for my own purposes, so I will have little reason to return to it.

Both Hobsbawm and Saville remain committed to the need to work for change, while also certain, as Marxist historians, that there are inescapable limits to what can be accomplished by human agency, change being largely determined by more general economic and technological forces. 'The world will not get better on its own', both men agree, in guarded tension with their own old-style Marxist epistemology, in which change is always immanent in the universal dialectics of the historical process itself. Nevertheless, for a while, in the three decades following the end of

^{*} John Saville, *Memoirs from the Left*, Merlin Press, London, 2003. 197 pp., £15.95 pb., 0 85036 520 1. Page references appear in the text.

World War II, the world did seem to get better, almost on its own, at least the Western capitalist part of it. This much is clear from Hobsbawm's other Olympian survey of the astonishing speed of change in world affairs over the last century, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991*.¹¹ There he maps out its effects not on his own life and its landscape, nor upon his conscious participation in the making of its history, but rather on the rapid shift from the desolation and barbarism during the first half of the century (two world wars, Hitler, the Holocaust and Stalinism) to a Golden Age of rising hopes in its second half (accompanying widespread welfare and liberal reforms, which generated all manner of radical ideas and freedom movements across the world), only to end with so many of the new aspirations crushed at its close (rising inequality globally, ethnic strife and warfare). Ironically, perhaps, it would be the young benefactors of increasing educational and employment opportunities after the Second World War who would rebel against the conformity and acquisitiveness pervading those affluent times, the very choices and erudition opened up for them shedding its light on remaining inequalities and injustices – at home and abroad – masked in the orchestrated consensus of the 1950s.

Revolutionary agitations

Radical politics began to reappear as the 1960s unfolded, both in the labour movement and on the university campus. Terry Eagleton recalls this period in his rather anomalous political reckoning, *The Gatekeeper: A Memoir*.^{*} It includes his arrival in Cambridge to study English literature, a generation after Hobsbawm. However, even more self-consciously than Hobsbawm, this Left memoir aims provocatively to 'outwit' the current conventions of the genre, seeking (we are told) to frustrate both the author's own desires for self-display and readers' desires for access to his inner life. Eagleton's reflections on the pleasures, hopes and miseries of life are rendered almost entirely through hilarious anecdotes of the feats and peccadilloes of the people he encountered on his bracing ride through it, attentive primarily to the institutions that produce such inhabitants – Irish Catholicism, Oxbridge, the Leninist party – with scant depictions of his own mood or musings along the way. The sacrificial bleakness of Irish monastic life, the cheerlessness of his working-class childhood in Salford in the 1950s, are recounted

alongside the weird ways of revolutionary vanguards, as he joins a small Trotskyist group. He parodies the enduring aristocratic complacencies of college dons, sheltering beneath the dreaming towers of Cambridge, as he begins his own academic career on the privileged inside. He mocks the dawn leafleting, endless meetings, exhaustive arguments forging the single 'correct' line amongst the Marxist militants determined to rouse the masses from their own dreaming slumbers, on the disadvantaged outside.

Avoidance of the confessional mode is justified early on in Eagleton's disdain for the ruling 'fetish of interiority'. He contrasts the promotion of an agonized inwardness with his own provocative delineation of an 'alternative' cultural background to which he remains the most loyal adherent: 'A Catholic aversion to subjectivism went along with a working-class allergy to emotional ostentation, and both were underpinned by Irish devotion to the tribe rather than the individual' (31–2). The cultural homogeneity he depicts is obviously dubious, expounded as much for its wit as its wisdom. (James Joyce, just for one, likes to suggest rather different strains of Irish Catholicism: 'All moan-day, tearsday, wailsday, thumpsday, frightday, shatterday till the fear of the Law'.¹²) As Philip Derbyshire noted in this magazine, you need to 'read asquint', to gain any personal detail from Eagleton.¹³ But you do not need to read obliquely to see why this clever young man from Salford would move immediately into embattled confrontation with the 'braying tones' of privilege on reaching Cambridge. Unlike Hobsbawm, Eagleton says he always felt a stranger in Cambridge; indeed, he claims always to have loathed it. And since he was not alone in making this sudden leap upward – the times were, the airwaves proclaimed, ripe 'for revolution' – it would have been odd, at that moment, were it otherwise.

It would have been anomalous then *not* to be politicized by the dramatic contrast between his adult opportunities and the deprivations of his childhood, within a family described as always isolated, anxious and gloomily conscious of its own 'social inferiority': 'The present is made up largely of what failed to happen in the past; my present, anyway' (104). It is only in the chapter 'Losers', well into the second half of this brief book, that the buoyant, humorously anecdotal tales brake for more poignant personal description which, delivered in a low-key, distancing, largely passive voice, unveils the author's compelling

^{*} Terry Eagleton, *The Gatekeeper: A Memoir*, Allen Lane, London, 2001. 178 pp., £9.99 hb., 0 713 99590 4. Page references appear in the text.

drive to compensate for his father's life. This father 'had the unattractiveness of the victim', a man who sacrificed his own life for that of his son and his other two children (115). A clever, uneducated, endlessly labouring, always physically remote father, he was a performer, never an achiever. But the son will achieve all that his father could not, and will do it effortlessly through words, tirelessly proving he can overcome 'the uncertain literacy of [his] own early environment', and lay to rest his father's silence with talk, the silence of a man who 'was agonizingly inarticulate, and deeply



ashamed of it' (121). In his own continuous stream of literary accomplishments, in his loquacious vivacity and wit – with Oscar Wilde his inspiration, Bertolt Brecht his mentor – Terry Eagleton will turn upside down his father's sense of failure. Even in his love of liquor (his father a devout teetotaler), he tells us, in an aside that we can now recognize as his characteristic conceit of distanced understatement: 'Perhaps I compensated for him in that way too.' Though boasting of them to others, the father never praised his children, never touched or played with them: 'Catholics did not go in for all that subjective mush' (115, 121–3).

However rashly he simplifies the customs of Catholicism (my very different Jewish father never touched or played with his children in those years either), it was certainly characteristic of Eagleton's chosen far-left Trotskyist milieu (the Workers Socialist League) consciously to subordinate the sphere of personal life to that of politics. All around, others spoke an idiom

of self-emancipation, while Trotskyist sects disdained the loose-knit student movement and the radical events of the day, although using them as recruiting grounds for their own more 'serious' goal – in what has since been only somewhat harshly ridiculed by Stuart Hall as an 'entirely gestural mimicry of revolutionary politics'.¹⁴ What is more unusual is Eagleton's steadfast, if ambivalently expressed, loyalty ever since to this universal vision of revolutionary Marxism acquired in his young adulthood, flanking an enduring scorn for that poetics of personal liberation which characterized more popular forms of sixties radicalism. Along with what remains of the Trotskyist Left from those post-sixties days, when diverse radical passions made headway for a while, this has left him a lifelong Marxist, a supporter of class struggle, but incurably suspicious of feminism or other forms of what he also too easily dismisses as 'identity politics'.

Nevertheless, Eagleton has acquired some critical distance on many of the defining features of his Trotskyist past, and he provides more than enough information for his readers to draw certain lessons about radical politics – beginning with the futility of sectarian squabbles. Looking back, he sees most of the energies of his militant group being directed not towards fighting the injustices of capitalism 'but to the rather more urgent war against other left-wing organizations' (81). Of course, even the most taxing Left groups usually manage to supply a social life and sense of belonging for members – often assisted by so many outlets for verbal aggression – particularly, as Eagleton notes, for those with little social charisma (a trait dauntingly pronounced, I recall, in many a 'comrade' whom one was not free to choose to ignore). However, given a reputation for wit and bonhomie at the time, it is hard to see what the exact allure of this particular far-Left faction was for the author. Perhaps, one might speculate, it offered certain continuities with a dour, despised, aggrieved childhood, as well as some targets for persisting anger over his parents' fate.

The decades of Left defeat that began in the 1980s, with student politics largely disappearing from academia, has left Eagleton today looking for a more realistic assessment of the legacy of the radical politics he lived through. For all its occasional absurdities, he remains confident that, globally, sixties radicalism did speed the end of the war in Vietnam; it also helped democratize higher education in Britain (hardly – though he fails to mention it – the project of his own faction within it). Political activism, he now reflects, although sometimes effective and rewarding, is more often a thankless business, never free

from contradiction. Just one of the contradictions he notes is that in fighting for elementary social justice, it is ‘revolutionaries’ who are so often protecting and conserving the past, even as capitalism spreads anarchy and revolution on all fronts. Here Eagleton is reprising an idea that can be found in leading critics of unconstrained capitalism, from Karl Marx himself to Walter Benjamin or Marshall Berman. The young man who arrived in Cambridge in the 1960s was, in the reflection of his older self, as opinionated as he was ignorant; but the Eagleton we read today is more astutely epigrammatic: ‘It is a sign of just how bad things are that even the modest proposal that everyone on the planet gets fresh water and enough to eat is fighting talk’ (84). Nevertheless, it is grossly misleading to suggest that modest proposals and traditionalist outlooks were ever the guiding spirits of Left radicalism in *any* era of the twentieth century. Left militants espoused their own version of the modernist insistence on the need for dramatic ‘change’, ‘renewal’ and ‘progress’, to fight social injustice and build a better, fairer world. Eagleton’s mature mellowing, after his youthful certainties, also often vanishes in cruel but clever reviews of fellow academics, in particular when ridiculing (a little hypocritically?) the obscurities of post-structuralist prose.¹⁵

Unlike Hobsbawm, Eagleton is forever trying to outmanoeuvre the contradictions of the different worlds he occupies – geographically, politically and intellectually. Claiming to loathe Oxbridge, he has spent most of his life there, until recently occupying the prestigious Thomas Wharton Chair of English at Oxford; a class warrior, his affiliations were never with any popular political formation; a Marxist, he is aware of the strengths of the intellectual perspectives he disparages and the weaknesses of his chosen standpoint. It is hardly surprising that irony is his main weapon. He as nearly doubles as stand-up comedian. ‘It would be intellectually dishonest’, he announced in the 1990s, ‘to pretend that Marxism is any longer a living political reality’; socialism ‘is now probably a more plagued and notional idea than at any stage in its turbulent career’ (15). When he wants to, Eagleton can express eloquently the folly of positioning class politics against the recognition of multiple identities or subject positions, when any ‘reasonable’ concept of equality must engage notions of difference. He similarly repudiates any necessary opposition between universalism and cultural particularism, knowing that the flowering of difference so often calls for widespread solidarity to fight exploitation, relying upon some notion of universal humanity. Indeed, he even

suggests, quoting Raymond Williams, that with socialism currently discredited, it is ‘militant particularism’ that is on the rise, ‘which it would be foolish to hope to short-circuit’ (121). (Williams has throughout served as a foil for Eagleton’s ambivalent relation to academic trends: his original mentor, later mocked as a parochial humanist and idealist, he would be embraced again after his death in 1988 for his influential cultural work.¹⁶) Yet he remains largely scornful of cultural politics, and post-colonial studies in particular, for obscuring Western military dominance and economic exploitation in talk of discourse, language and identity. Far more perceptive than Hobsbawm about so much that he ostensibly rejects, Eagleton notes that today people largely languish from the lack of any secure sense of identity, feeding the pathological search for one. But he finds it difficult to appreciate those who have managed to refashion hitherto humbled identities, especially dismissive of those ‘dreary old bickerings between feminists and socialists’, except when capitalism itself throws the two together (93). If he wanted, he could himself facilitate more creative couplings, but his own stubborn Marxist identity, long securing a traditional anti-capitalist stance, prevents him venturing down that road.

The death of socialist man

There was continuity in the political formations of the older Party member of the 1930s and the younger Trotskyist militant loftily recruiting out of the more laid-back environs of the 1960s, which is why I have so far leapfrogged the New Left, moving from the one to the other. The Trotskyist factions, while fiercely critical of those they called the ‘Stalinists’, shared a common Leninist faith in the pivotal importance of the revolutionary party: its leadership and self-discipline guaranteeing both political and strategic certainties for members; its vanguard role speeding up the inevitable class liberation from the global plunder of capitalism. Sheila Rowbotham explores its dangers persuasively at the close of the 1970s, suggesting that the inappropriate stridency of attacks on the CP at that time fed upon Cold War anti-communism and that by ‘overshooting the mark’ Trotskism blocked many aspects of the New Left resistance to Stalinism proper. It was the collapse of the previous dominance of Communist Parties worldwide as the legitimate representatives of Marxism after 1956 that facilitated the growth of the ever-splintering Trotskyist groups in Britain and elsewhere, with some of their ranks drawn, quite literally, from the children of old CP members. However, I need to backtrack.

Between these two Left configurations, a 'New Left' had emerged after 1956. In full flight from the horrors of Stalinism, critical also of the rigidities and failings of the British Labour Party, it tried to hew out an open, self-organizing, participatory democratic politics, critical of all democratic-centralist organizational forms and the whole notion of leaders and led. Some departing Communists remained close to the old traditions; others moved ever further away. The Cambridge literary theorist Raymond Williams, who like Edward Thompson had always been interested in the cultural dimensions of class, was soon lining up with younger radicals, including Stuart Hall (who had never been in the Party), making a still more definitive break with the Communist past.¹⁷ They began to focus upon way in which popular culture works to mediate the forces contesting within it.

This first New Left offered, primarily, a new way of organizing politically, stressing the importance of 'building socialism from below', in the 'here and now', through diverse forms of self-organization. Its principles were for a while embodied in the rapid growth of CND, with its lively marches to Aldermaston, at the turn of the 1950s. CND was the first of the postwar 'new social movements' to emerge in Britain, seeking to forge cross-class alliances, while offering a radical critique of capitalist domination and intimidation, nationally and internationally: 'Without CND supporters, Anti-Ugly protesters [a protest movement against the banality and conformism of postwar British architecture], African demonstrators, Free Cinema and the Society for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, we would be nowhere', the editors of one New Left publication declared in 1959.¹⁸ In Hall's later account, it was this New Left, still in its 'missionary phase', with its commitment to journals, clubs, networks of contacts (even a short-lived coffee bar) – committed, above all, to the 'propaganda of ideas' (a term borrowed from the utopian socialist William Morris) – which made 'the first faltering steps of putting questions of cultural analysis and cultural politics at the centre of its politics'.¹⁹

As Hall also recalls, it was Raphael Samuel, who died in 1996 aged 61, who was the dynamo, the inspiration, the indispensable catalyst of this early New Left. Appropriately, therefore, in ways none of the previous memoirs has managed, it is from Samuel's

recollections of his Communist childhood and young adulthood, 'The Lost World of British Communism', that we can gain the richest picture of the ways in which class politics is lived as personal support, cultural belonging and ideological conviction, quite as much as in terms of economic imperatives.*

Twenty years Hobsbawm's junior, at first glance Samuel appears as another pea from the same pod. Two of a kind, they were both tall, lean, sharp-featured, resolutely secular, Ashkenazi Jews; both in childhood knew poverty, loneliness, hardship; already in their early teens both self-identified as Communists, and remained committed to its ideals throughout their lives; both chose permanent professional identities as historians, also in their teens; both had an obstinate, compelling sense of self. Indeed, still a teenager, Samuel was already attending the prestigious Communist Party Historians' Group, with Hobsbawm, Thompson, Saville and Christopher Hill, among others. Yet Hobsbawm and Samuel were almost the antithesis of each other. Hobsbawm was a political dissident, yet otherwise conventional; an outwardly dour, establishment figure. Samuel was a chaotic 'eager vagabond', full of 'hare-brained' schemes (as the older man saw him), with an exuberant inventiveness, charm and magnetism that could entice even the most reluctant eventually to endorse (or at least fail successfully to resist) his wildest proposals, often against their better judgement. Hobsbawm quietly survived what he calls 'the great 1956 earthquake' by dropping out of political activism while remaining in the Party; the effect on Samuel was devastating, even while intensifying his political activism as he worked to reinvent himself. Said to have worn a black armband, and shed tears on learning of Stalin's death in 1953, he saw his world fall apart three years later, leaving him for a long while, as his friend Hall reports, 'in serious emotional and intellectual difficulties, rescued only from serious breakdown by Christopher Hill's timely recommendation of him for a tutorship at the trade union Ruskin College'.²⁰

Yet, true to the extraordinary fortitude and diligence implanted in his Communist training, though now wholly repudiating its hierarchical regulation and programmatic teaching, the anguished Samuel hurled himself into the New Left's renewal of radical intellectual and cultural life. He proposed, largely

* Raphael Samuel, 'Faith, Hope and Struggle: The Lost World of British Communism, Part One', *New Left Review* 154, November/December 1985; 'Staying Power: The Lost World of British Communism, Part Two', *New Left Review* 156, March/April 1986; 'Class Politics: The Lost World of British Communism, Part Three', *New Left Review* 165, September/October 1987. Henceforth LW I, II and III in textual references.

orchestrated and successfully solicited funds and resources for popular debates, speaking tours, publications and, against everyone's better judgement, the famously doomed Partisan Café in Soho, manning the kitchen and designing the menu himself: 'the part-international, part-proletarian, part-provincial, part-Jewish diasporic flavour of its "Bill of Fare" was pure distilled "Samuel"', Hall reflects, from its Irish peasant stew to its Patna rice, Viennese coffee and Russian tea, with much else in between. So, too, was Samuel's stubborn refusal to allow an espresso machine on the premises, leading those chatting in the Partisan to sneak across the road to buy their espresso coffee and return.²¹

But history was Samuel's abiding passion: history converted into politics, politics converted into history, through the mission of inspiring in everyone he encountered the belief that they had an interesting story to tell – whether emerging from a jungle in Bolivia, or a bed-sit in Bromley. He not only encouraged the hitherto excluded and powerless to understand their place in history, but also played a pivotal role in transforming the discipline itself. His most tangible memorial remains the ongoing success of *History Workshop Journal*; his less tangible one the many who feel they owe much of their confidence and ability to encountering him – although, unlike John Prescott, they may lack the chance to affirm it publicly: 'Everything was lovely about that man.' Well, not quite; as publishers, editors and those often inveigled into reluctant action by this 'chaotic, bohemian Prometheus' might ruefully reflect.²² Though grateful for the personal encouragement they received from him, and the public platform he helped create for new rebel voices (especially that of women's liberation), some saw that behind the 'deliberately dozy, slightly dotty front', he was 'the world's most adept hooker, and ruthless beneath the charm', as Sheila Rowbotham affectionately recalls.²³ However, all would agree that it was this ruthlessness that could make things happen, things that just might allow the past, the present and the future to speak more freely to each other, in ways pertinent to struggles against social disparagement, inequality and injustice. In what could serve as his own epitaph,

Samuel introduced a collection celebrating twenty-five years of *History Workshop* in 1991 by reflecting upon socialism. Only a few decades ago

[it] was a totem for a sense of collectivity, a name for something which was otherwise ineffable.... As socialism has ebbed in the world at large ... it re-enters in another direction as one of those "imagined communities" which, like the nation, it becomes the task of the historian to interrogate.²⁴

Yet for all his awareness of the place of the past in the present's future, combining both conservatism and rebellion, it was three decades before Samuel would burrow back into that 'lost world' of his own young life, searching through the debris with his now uniquely honed historical skills. Seeing it on the verge of permanent extinction, Samuel set out to portray the mid-century 'Communist mentality' he had imbibed as a child, combining slivers of memoir with lashings of



archive research and associated memorabilia. Throughout his densely packed account of the daily routines of life inside the CPGB, he critically echoes and enriches Hobsbawm's portrait, while speculating on what it all meant for himself and his family, as well as on the pains and gains, the sentiments, self-perceptions, styles of behaviour, illusions and delusions of other members who then made politics their lives.

Born into an East End Jewish home in 1934, devoid of decoration apart from a bust of Stalin on the kitchen mantelpiece, one of Beethoven in his mother's bedroom, Samuel was a passionate Communist Party supporter in his childhood in the 1940s and a zealous Party recruiter and organizer in his young adulthood at Oxford the following decade. Showing early signs of the character that would make him such an extraordinary historian, Samuel reports his teacher's worried concern about his 'obsession' with 'justice and fairness' – aged six. He was intensely lonely and isolated when evacuated to boarding school in Buckinghamshire during the war years. His early Communism, he later reflects, secured his sense of identity and – an expression of loyalty – of closeness to his absent mother: he busied himself mapping out the progress of Soviet tank manoeuvres. Never at ease with being a child (he describes himself as 'pretending to be a schoolboy', on visits to his father, who was by then divorced from his mother), he soon learnt to win recruits for Communism once allowed back home: organizing a strike against the headmaster at the elite but progressive King Alfred's School he next attended in Hampstead, while getting himself expelled from the school debating society for belligerence (*LW II*, 70). Apparently rebellious, Samuel muses, his childhood Communism also satisfied his craving for authority: 'Like many Communists of my time, I combined a powerful sense of apartness with a craving for recognition, alternating gestures of defiance with a desire to be ordinary and accepted as one of the crowd' (*LW I*, 53).

Depicting the intense neighbourhood networks, deep friendships, disciplined, dedicated, doggedly optimistic, hyperactive spirit of the Communists he knew, Samuel claims: 'To be a Communist was to have a complete social identity, one which transcended the limits of class, gender, nationality' (*LW I*, 11). Strange as it might seem nowadays, he suggests, for his mother's generation being a Communist (as many in their extended family were) was 'a way of being English, a bridge by which the children of the ghetto entered the national culture', leaving behind the hostility or coldness that had greeted them elsewhere. It was also,

perhaps, a way of disowning their own Jewishness, of losing any sense of being Jewish (feared by others, such as his father, with his son refusing to go to synagogue), or any other exclusive identity, whether gendered, racial or ethnic, in favour of an internationalism that saw itself committed to the social and cultural advance of all. Yet, mid-century Communism created an exclusive identity and private world of its own, 'a moral vocation as well as a political practice', not unlike a religion or tribe. Suspicious of outsiders, protective of members, who socialized, drank, even holidayed home and abroad with their own kind, it frowned upon marrying out: 'My mother "wouldn't have dreamt" of having a close friend who was not a Communist.' Nor would her son, until he left the Party aged twenty-one. He kept his thoughts pure by avoiding all dissident books and treating anti-Communists, including his father, as the class enemy (*LW II*, 69–70). The constant political activism served as a way of practising togetherness: 'our demonstrations, though intended as "mass mobilization", could be seen in hindsight as rituals of reassurance' (*LW I*, 12, 11, 46).

However, Samuel is also adroit at placing what might seem some of the most bizarre anachronisms of mid-century Communism within the wider social scene they mirrored, if somewhat more intensely. The 1940s was a time – so unlike today – when the polarization between Left and Right (Labour, working class, versus Conservative, those 'higher-up') was near monolithic; the principle of unity, collectivity, standardization was still everywhere encouraged; self-serving ambition, even individuality were discouraged, both in wartime and during postwar reconstruction: 'a man who wore suede shoes was morally suspect' (*LW I*, 8–9). For all its fast-growing pariah status, the CP fetishism of leadership, discipline, efficiency, punctuality, obedience, exemplary respectability, mimicked much of dominant culture at the time, but more meticulously. Their belief in the central importance of knowledge, above all of science, as a liberatory force that would put an end to social problems, poverty and war, was widely shared. But Communists in particular saw themselves as quintessentially modern and forward-looking, their vanguard role coupled with their striving for a scientific knowledge of everything. Whereas others were now confident that mass education would produce better, healthier citizens and society, Communists more optimistically imagined that socialist educators were 'engineers of the soul' (Stalin's words), producing 'socialist man', 'a different species being', which would be unique, Samuel

observes, 'immune from competition and jealousy, emancipated from selfishness and greed' (LW I, 40). Yet, for all its revolutionary goals, the Party was in general consistently non-confrontational, unlike later libertarian and other Leninist formations, 'never more in command of a strike than when beating an orderly retreat' (LW II, 111).

Where Party beliefs really were unique, of course, was in their ruling illusion that the Soviet Union embodied their ideal socialist goal, a land free from exploitation and discrimination: 'the only country in the world where anti-Semitism is a crime against the state', as Samuel quotes from Clifford Odet's play *Waiting for Lefty* (LW II, 38). In reality, under Stalin, it was perhaps the only country in the world where anti-Semitism remained state policy. Nevertheless, outside the USSR, Communists internationally did work to oppose racism; they supported struggles for national independence in the Third World, most importantly the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Nor was the CPGB particularly internally fractious; it was extremely successful in producing effective union organizers (especially in engineering), provided excellent fundraisers for compassionate causes, encouraged members' self-education – joining the Party 'was like going back to school', Samuel records one Scottish miner reporting; its members tried to live selflessly, always welcoming and caring towards other members (LW III, 86). The point of class struggle was not so much economic as political, to transform society.

It is just this old sense of community Samuel saw as having all but vanished in the CPGB in the 1980s, within what had become its more fashionable liberal 'Eurocommunist' wing, represented by the magazine *Marxism Today*. By the mid-1980s its platform for voices from the Tory Right accompanied a preoccupation with criticizing trade unionism, the Labour Party and the far Left, bringing it into fierce conflict with the Party's mostly ageing trade-union loyalists, grouped around the *Morning Star* newspaper. Despite his long-standing distance from either side, Samuel's journey into his own past sprang, he tells us, from extreme distress at witnessing the ferocity of the modernizers' rejection of former Party convictions, with old class warriors now viewed with social and sexual disgust (dismissed as 'white, male, middle-aged'), even facing expulsion from the Party to which they had given their lives: 'When I read of the expelled London veterans', he writes, sentimentally, 'I imagined them to be rather like the Communists I had been brought up with in St Pancras – sticklers for protocol and precedent, completely untroubled by doubt, but

brave, selfless and with a redeeming London wit' (LW III, 55; LW II, 35).

Yet, from the outside, the two factions still had much in common, as he notes, each struggling to maintain a sense of their vanguard role in harsh times for the Left, albeit now in disagreement over the prioritizing of class and the role of union militancy. The internal battle was symptomatic of changes outside the CP. Earlier Party thralldom to the 'working class' was contingent upon a world where trade unionism had grown from strength to strength throughout most of the twentieth century. Its defeat began only in the 1980s, following a decade of exceptional strength and militancy. Oddly, in Samuel's analysis, a retreat *into* trade unionism within the CP from the late 1960s had begun with the Party's disenchantment with itself, when it no longer made the same demands on its shrinking membership, factory branches had disappeared, and members, although still powerful within the trade-union movement, worked mostly to contain the militancy of newly radical young workers and other activists. It was the militant trade unionism of the late 1970s (uncharacteristic of Communist traditions), as jobs came under threat and the first signs of welfare cuts began, that sparked off the *Marxism Today* switch from the former Communist rhetoric of homage to working-class struggle to a broad embrace of the idea of the new social movements – at a time when these movements were already beginning to weaken and fragment. What had disappeared on both sides of the Communist split was any confidence in the possible success of revolutionary transformation. Thus, four years before it voted to dissolve itself, Samuel could justly describe combat inside the CPGB as a 'war of ghosts', for all its impact on an equally embattled broader Left (LW III, 52).

With this final reflection on the closing years of the CPGB, Samuel halts his peregrinations on his Communist past, although not without promising readers a follow-up essay on 'The Politics of the Personal' (LW III, 91). It never materialized; nor – mutual friends assure me – would it ever have done. True to his roots, Samuel could hold on to his early political goal of universal justice and respect for all by focusing in on the stories of a multitude of individuals, but he did not risk rethinking questions of Left unity or regrouping. Nor would, or could, he wander too far down the road of narcissistic self-narration. He was never very happy with the deconstructive turn in cultural criticism, its new academic eye narrowed to apprehend the instabilities of the discursively located 'I'. The recent prominence of post-colonial and race studies

also made little impact on Samuel, with its attention to the corrosive role of racial imaginings in imperial legacies of the British present. Though Samuel never identified specifically as a Jew, the strength of his earliest intellectual formation within that world of Jewish Communism meant that, as Bill Schwarz notes in a recent elegant tribute to him, he had little sympathy for more recent critiques of 'Englishness', remaining closest to a world in which the true outsiders remained forever Jews and Gypsies, not newer targets of the harshest forms of British racism, such as that greeting the postwar Caribbean or African diaspora.²⁵

Following the large gathering at Samuel's funeral in Hampstead in 1996, one mourner after another wrote of the end of an era, feeling that we on the Left who had gathered on that day represented a bygone age, one which would not come again – at least in our lifetime. Certainly, the combination of confident, outspoken self-identity, committed not to personal ambition but to political change, community building or, at the very least, to understanding and voicing opposition to the injustices of the world, is thought anachronistic in much of public life today; although not on its fringes, where Pied Pipers emerge in the global arena, encouraging young people into battle from Seattle to Genoa and beyond. As one of his oldest friends pondering the uniqueness of Samuel's political formation concluded,

what strikes me most profoundly is the way he managed continually to remake himself, and to confront the irreversible transitions ... through which he passed ... without ever really losing his way, renouncing his political convictions or letting go his attachments to the worlds and values which formed him.²⁶

Intellectual diaspora

Much the same could be said about the author of those words. Stuart Hall is in my experience the most charismatic of all the New Left figures: still with us, still politically engaged, still rousing audiences on public platforms, still offering friendship and encouragement at every turn. His political memoir would have the most eager readership of all, but he has yet to write it, and probably never will. Fortunately, autobiographical snapshots have been appearing, especially in the frequent interviews for which he is hounded. Despite his long commitment to positioning political affairs in both their cultural-historical conjuncture and the private worlds of personal and interpersonal experience, it is only late in life that Hall has felt able to look back and write personally about his Jamaican past. Reflecting upon the anguish he escaped from as

a black West Indian, he remarks: 'In a sense, it has taken me fifty years to come home.... It was a space I couldn't occupy, a space I had to learn to occupy.'²⁷

There are, for sure, always other spaces, other identities, we might learn or decide to occupy, but which instead remain occluded. The cultural and personal impediments that keep them buried are multiple, operating within and outside consciousness. Amusingly, for one who has avoided the narcissistic pleasures of autobiography, the first conversation in which Hall speaks more intimately of himself was one where the interviewer, hot off the plane from Taiwan, straight away fell asleep, leaving Hall, helpful as ever, to fill in for him. It is here, and in a later, book-length conversation with his friend and former student Bill Schwarz (as yet unpublished) that Hall sketches the most moving account of the ways in which his childhood can be seen as a crucible of the destructive permutations of class, colour, status, fantasy and longing which are the lasting legacies of colonial subordination.

Hall was born into a middle-class Jamaican family in 1932, in which the overwhelmingly dominant figure was his lighter-skinned mother, some of whose relatives could pass as 'local white'. She identified with the island's white settler past, having been adopted into a wealthy plantation-owning family with traceable English ancestors. His darker-skinned father, from a poorer middle-class rural background, had risen fast in his career to end up the chief accountant for the Boston-owned United Fruit Company – giving him entry (on sufferance) into respectable Jamaican clubs. Stuart Hall, the 'blackest' of all his family, felt an outsider from the beginning, the one 'who didn't fit':

My memory of negotiating my way through these relations of unrelenting aspiration is one of embarrassment. I hate the way my mother lords it over servants; I hate the way my father wants to be seen as the person going out with the Americans. I hate the way in which my mother and my father are like the *grande-dame* family visiting the poorer relations in Old Harbour.

His paternal grandmother, whom he loved dearly, and her eight daughters, all lived in one small house.²⁸

The older he grew, the greater his alienation from his family and his sense of not fitting into any of the spaces in which they belonged: the school friends he liked were too black to bring home (like the clever, rural schoolboys he loved teaching in the experimental school in which he worked the year before leaving Jamaica – who, unlike him, were not confused about who they were). The sports clubs his father wanted his son to join were places where he saw him demeaned by white people; the identifications his parents made

were with the old colonial world, one that others were now working confidently to overthrow. But, if a sense of estrangement from the past was implanted in him within the family, a sense of post-colonial possibilities soon filled the air of his youth, with the resurgence of the Jamaican independence movement as the country headed towards self-rule after 1945, following the breakdown of the old colonial order in the late 1930s. Indeed, the very week Hall first attended secondary school, he recalls, Michael Manley, already a teenage rebel, was expelled from school for throwing a text book at the English history teacher for his colonial interpretations – proleptically revealing (in ways self-styled postmodernists would quickly forget) the unique impact of a *combined* practical and deconstructive textual assault.

While remaining for a while apart from such politics, feeling personally depressed and resentful within the divided world he occupied (evident, he indicates, in his sad face in the family snapshots he has from school days), the young Hall nevertheless acquired a measure of self-confidence and achievement through academic success, which would take him – at nineteen – to England. With his mother escorting him to Merton College, Oxford, in 1951, to study English Literature, he recalls her sense that she was taking him ‘home’, to the place he belonged: ‘She gave me to the astonished college scout and said, “There is my son, his trunks, his belongings. Look after him”’.²⁹ And it was in England, of course, that he learnt for the first time that he really was ‘black’: ‘That was when I discovered I was a West Indian. I became Caribbean there’, in Oxford.³⁰ It was this experience which accentuated Hall’s characteristic stress on the contingency of any identity, its lack of any fixed origin, called into being through the different ways we find ourselves placed, or manage to position ourselves, in the narratives of the past. Learning of his anti-colonial politics, appalled by his identification as black, his mother later instructed him *not* to return to Jamaica.

Indeed, he would not – in the end, could not – ever really return. However, during his first three years in England, Hall was fully immersed in West Indian anti-colonial politics, expecting that he might go back, along with his other Caribbean friends, who all left Britain in the mid-1950s to work for their short-lived dream of a united, socialist West Indian federation. Only much later would Hall decide that he had already known, without acknowledging it, that leaving Jamaica was necessary for his own survival, necessary to escape the toxic colonial mix which he had watched destroy his bright and rebellious elder sister, two

years before his departure. (She suffered a breakdown, from which she never wholly recovered, when forced by her mother to break off her relationship with a young student doctor whom she loved, because he was ‘black’.) This is the world from which he fled to save himself, guilty, he now reflects, at abandoning his sister to her painful fate, to a life wrecked by the contradictory ambitions projected onto children by aspiring parents in that particular colonial setting:

I am telling this story [of my sister] because it was very important for my personal development. It broke down for ever, for me, the distinction between the public and the private self ... from then on, I could never understand why people thought these structural questions were not connected with the psychic – with emotions and identifications and feelings because, for me, those structures are things you live. I don’t just mean they are personal, they are, but they are also institutional, they have real structural properties, they break you, destroy you.³¹

This takes us back to the place where Stuart Hall entered this story, remaking himself – after his Caribbean friends went home, after Suez, after Hungary – to become a prime mover in the New Left in Britain, placing culture and personal life at the heart of its political agenda, struggling for a renewal of ideas and ways of organizing, rather than a renewal of old party formations. The New Left provided a political base broad enough to include those in retreat from the Communist Party after the Soviet invasion of Hungary, along with those, like him, now enraged at the renewed flexing of British colonial muscle in Suez and the threatened war with Egypt (Hall even forced himself to address the Oxford Union for the very first time, ‘I had always steered clear of this before: it was one of my refusals’).³² Surprisingly perhaps, Hall reflects, 1956 was decisive because it seemed to mark the end of the frozen, two-camp politics of the Cold War. He was soon working all hours, editing *Universities and Left Review*, then in 1960 launching *New Left Review*. As its founding editor, Hall set that journal’s initial utopian tone, dedicated to creating a ‘society of equals’: one of ‘conscious thinking human beings’ motivated not so much by the need to escape immiseration as to escape ‘last-stage capitalism’, to create instead self-determining lives which would prove more than ‘something one passes through like tea through a strainer’. This first New Left, Hall later concluded, found itself weakened (as would the ‘new social movements’ hovering on the horizon) by its organizational dilemmas, ‘trapped between the “Vanguards” and the “Fragments”’.³³ One could say, though Hall didn’t, it found itself trapped between following



leaders and leaderless follies. Nevertheless, thirty years on, Hall remained as attached as ever to the project of building a 'third' space for 'the renewal of democratic and socialist politics', if with few ideas on quite how, or many platforms on which to do so.

Alone of the men discussed so far, chronicling their political journeys and all – except Saville – obvious outsiders in one way or another, the diasporic journey Hall travelled leaves him acutely conscious of the fragility of identity, his own very much included, alert always to his difference as the 'familiar stranger', whether visiting Jamaica or living in England. Hall was the sole black person when at Merton College, where the only other 'others' were (usually rich) Americans, with whom he joined forces. He encountered no overt racism at Oxford, but unlike Hobsbawm, Samuel, or even the elected contrarian Eagleton, Hall felt deeply out of place in that heartland and pinnacle of 'Englishness'. He would also be the only one to detach himself permanently afterwards: 'the English at home had a solidity, a rootedness, and one was aware that Oxford was so central to that.... You just knew that you were very, very different.'³⁴ Samuel, like Hobsbawm, always at home at Oxford, never appreciated his friend's deep sense of displacement, once confiding to him: 'But I thought you loved Oxford – you were so much at home there.'³⁵

It was this sense of 'difference', so often unrecognized by others, that from the beginning made Hall permanently unhappy with the term 'we', in particular making his relation to the time-honoured

sentiments of inherent unity in class politics troubling for him (whether in the labour movement or the Labour Party). Back in 1954, Hall was already addressing the Oxford Communist Party on class, suggesting their conception of it was inadequate, while he found the local Labour Party unbearable, with its 'combination of puritan self-righteousness and Englishness'.³⁶ Leaving Oxford in the late 1950s to live in London, teach in school, edit the *Universities and Left Review* as well as help organize its associated club, Hall was energetically opposing the violent racism greeting black workers recently recruited to fill the toughest jobs in the 'motherland': daily assaults by white youth against Caribbean workers in Notting Hill, climaxing in the race riots of 1958. His ideas on the exclusions of class solidarity could hardly have been more incisively etched:

we were heavily involved in the aftermath of the riots, trying to win back control of the streets; then in trying to set up black and white tenants' associations; trying to counter the racism prevalent in the local constituency Labour party, which was split between those who supported and those who denounced Mosley.³⁷

After two years as editor of *New Left Review*, Hall bowed out to a new group which took hold of the journal and formed what has been called the 'second' New Left, headed up by Perry Anderson – less libertarian in thought and style, with ties to the Trotskyist Fourth International. Interestingly, this second 'New Left', distainful of the leaderless, chaotic excess of the

first, has not joined the memoirists, although Eagleton is connected to its political configuration.

In 1964 Hall accepted Richard Hoggart's invitation to start up a new Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham University, thereby inaugurating what would soon prove the remarkable rise of cultural studies as a radically transdisciplinary new discipline, exploring the political dynamics of cultural formations: hegemonic and subcultural. Its founding texts addressed histories and ruptures in working-class life and cultures, but its objects of study and tools of investigation were broadened and honed with the successive opening up of new areas of study. Hall's use of Gramsci's stress on situating control and contestation in the production and consumption of diverse cultural practices within a comprehensive analysis of the historical conjuncture containing them has provided one of the few abiding principles for those faithful to the Birmingham heritage. This evolving outlook made the CCCS a dangerous place to dwell, the most contentious moment arising when feminism erupted there, when 'the personal lives of everyone there were knocked sideways', Hall ruefully recalls.³⁸

Like Samuel, Hall had been among the first to notice and take steps to remedy the New Left's blindness to the marginal place of women on its platforms and in its politics: supporting Women's Liberation from the beginning (alongside his keenly feminist young wife, Catherine Hall), he invited feminist thinkers to work with the Centre. Yet, in a paradoxical but by now all-too-familiar move, it was those most open to change that tended to become its first fall guys, hurt and distressed in the process of the upheavals they helped engender. As the indisputable paternal figurehead and leading light at the Centre, Hall soon find himself targeted as 'patriarchal enemy', hostile and bewildered by the demand that the women students needed to meet and work separately from the men. There would be further more predictable mutinies, fought in the name of pedagogic liberation, as each new political cluster arrived at the Centre. For those trying at every turn to encourage student autonomy and democratic collective modes of learning – through reading groups, joint research and publications – the contradictions were painful. For me, this story has ghastly anticipations of the traumas soon to haunt feminist collectives themselves. By the close of the 1970s, struggling to be in the forefront of the overturning of embedded hierarchies of race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, these collectives often found themselves torpedoed by the forces they

helped liberate. In reassessing his own relation to that first rebellion, Hall writes:

Living the politics is different from being abstractly in favour of it. I was checkmated by feminists; I couldn't come to terms with it, in the Centre's work. It wasn't a personal thing. I'm very close to many of the feminists of that period. It was a structural thing. I couldn't any longer do any useful work from that position. It was time to go.³⁹

True or not, go he did. He took his pioneering cultural studies agenda into the sociology department of the Open University, which was itself one of the first universities in Britain to develop more creative pedagogical tools (but within more formal structures) to enable students, without formal qualifications, to study off-campus.

Theorizing race and ethnicity as hybrid, contingent, 'cultural identities', Hall's battles with the reductionisms of class politics and the Leninism of Marxist practices continued. He became a – if not the – key intellectual influence on the 'Eurocommunist' turn of *Marxism Today*, in which it positioned itself against its own former doctrinal beliefs, although not equally against its former strategic conceits. In this mode, in 1979, he launched his ground-breaking analysis of 'Thatcherism', arguing presciently in 'The Great Moving Right Show' that nobody could now afford to ignore the 'definitive swing to the Right' symbolized by Thatcher's victory.⁴⁰ Ten years later, after Thatcher's symbolic defeat of Arthur Scargill and the miners' strike, after the defeat of Ken Livingstone and the moment of creative resistance during his days at the GLC (abolished in 1986), after *Marxism Today* had continued its attack on 'the British Left' for its inability to jettison old conventions and its refusal to face up to the 'new times' of 'popular capitalism', Hall would declare the death of 'Socialist Man':

The problem now is to rethink the politics of class as, and through, a politics of difference. I truly did believe for a time that it was not me but 'Socialist Man' who would appear somewhere, homogenize all differences, and 'make socialism'. ... [but] 'Socialist man' has gone over the hill and far away, and thank God for his departure. *Finito!* Now any future is a future of difference, any future society a society of diversity.⁴¹

I was somewhat shocked when I heard Hall utter this obituary, with his familiar compelling rhetoric. I remain troubled by the sentiments it encourages, despite having myself worked against the rigidities, the moralism and other glaring deficiencies of traditional labourism and purportedly revolutionary class politics alike. Piecing together his political journey now, I feel

I understand better how he has got here, still one of most persuasive figures on the Left – his egalitarian spirit unbowed and unbroken.

What I learn from the men's memoirs and memories I have looked at is precisely the message Hall is most eager to deliver from his own journey: new times, however revolutionary the dream, reconfigure as much as they transform the old – which calls, I think, for a softer burial of 'socialist man'. We reproduce what we are breaking from, even when heading towards and beyond profound ruptures. On the world's stage, this indicates the permanent nature of struggle. We never simply win; but then again, we never simply lose either. If we cannot manage to change the world in line with a heart's desire for greater justice and equality, we might at least attempt to understand it. But if we bother to attempt to understand it, we might at least puzzle over what changes are for the better, and play what part we can in the possibilities and perils of promoting them. For the world will not stop changing. It makes sense to promote the least bad outcomes, while always wondering along the way whether we are for the moment winning or losing.

Notes

1. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2003, p. 20.
2. See, for example, Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s*, Pandora, London, 1989.
3. Jon Heddson, 'The Left Book Club in Manchester and Salford', *North West Labour History* 21, 1996/7, p. 58.
4. See also the essays collected in Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1997.
5. Bauman quoted in Madeleine Bunting, 'Profile of Zygmunt Bauman: Passion and Pessimism', *Guardian*, Review section, 5 April 2003, p. 22.
6. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1992.
7. Perry Anderson, 'The Age of EJH', *London Review of Books*, 3 October 2002, p. 3.
8. Christopher Bolas, 'The Function of History', in *Cracking Up*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 140. His inspiration here is, of course, Lacan's notion of the unbearable 'Real'.
9. Italo Calvino, *Hermit in Paris: Autobiographical Writings*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2003, p. 148.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 198; stress in original.
11. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991*, Abacus, London, 1995, p. 627.
12. James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 1939, part 2.
13. Philip Derbyshire, 'Terry's Turns', a review of *The Gatekeeper*, *Radical Philosophy* 113, May/June 2002, p. 54.
14. Stuart Hall, 'The First New Left', in *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left 30 Years On*, ed. The Oxford University Socialist Discussion Group, Verso, London, 1989, p. 32.
15. See, for instance, his attacks on Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, reprinted in *Figures of Dissent*, Verso, London, 2003.
16. See Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Methuen, London, 1976; Terry Eagleton, ed., *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, Polity, Cambridge, 1989.
17. See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1963; Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961.
18. Quoted from the editorial of the last issue of *Universities and Left Review* in Stuart Hall, 'The First New Left', p. 33.
19. Hall, 'The First New Left', p. 26.
20. Stuart Hall, 'Raphael Samuel: 1934–96' *New Left Review* 221, January/February 1997, pp. 119–227; reprinted in *Raphael Samuel, 1934–1996: Tributes and Appreciations*, private publication, p. 55.
21. Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, *Conversations with Stuart Hall*, Polity, Cambridge, forthcoming.
22. Bill Schwarz, 'Keeper of Our Shared Memory', *Guardian*, 10 December 1996, reprinted in *Raphael Samuel*, p. 2.
23. *Raphael Samuel*, p. 76.
24. Raphael Samuel, Editorial Introduction, *History Workshop: A Collectanea 1967–1991*, Ruskin College, Oxford, 1991, p. iv.
25. Bill Schwarz "'We have met before": Caribbean Stories and the Predicament of History', paper delivered for the Raphael Samuel Memorial Lecture, 20 June 2003.
26. *Raphael Samuel*, p. 68.
27. 'The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual: An Interview with Stuart Hall by Kuan-Hsing Chen', in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen eds, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 489.
28. Hall and Schwarz, *Conversations with Stuart Hall*.
29. 'The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual', pp. 492, 489.
30. Hall and Schwarz, *Conversations with Stuart Hall*.
31. 'The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual', pp. 489, 488.
32. Hall and Schwarz, *Conversations with Stuart Hall*.
33. *Out of Apathy*, pp. 36, 38.
34. Hall and Schwarz, *Conversations with Stuart Hall*. More controversially, Hall now often suggests that with the undermining of familial, community or workplace belongings, he sees such a post-colonial identity, or de-racination, as 'the archetypal late-modern condition', an attribute increasingly shared by all – in agreement with the volatility or 'disembeddedness' of identities described by Bauman, Beck, Sennett or Giddens.
35. Personal communication from Stuart Hall.
36. Hall and Schwarz, *Conversations with Stuart Hall*.
37. *Ibid.*
38. 'The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual', p. 500.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Marxism Today*, January 1979, pp. 14–29.
41. *Out of Apathy*, p. 153.

Axiomatic heresy

The non-philosophy of François Laruelle

Ray Brassier

There are at least two ways of evaluating philosophical originality. The most obvious is in terms of *what* a philosopher thinks. As well as proposing novel philosophical theses concerning the nature of being or truth or knowledge, a philosopher may produce new sorts of claim bearing on history, art, morality, politics, and so on. Another way of evaluating originality is in terms of *how* a philosopher thinks. There are philosophers whose most conspicuous claim to innovation resides not so much in what they think but rather in how they think. They propose a fundamental change in the way philosophy is done – a revolutionary break, a new beginning. Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Husserl are perhaps the most celebrated examples, but figures such as Frege or Russell also deserve a mention. That their putative innovation may, on closer inspection, turn out to be pseudo-revolutionary or essentially conservative is irrelevant here. What is relevant is their avowed ambition to effect a total transformation in philosophical method, to have reconfigured both the formal means and the substantive aims of philosophizing. Thus, the novelty of *what* they think is less important than the newness of *how* they think. Which is to say that any substantive claims philosophers like this make about history or nature or art or politics can only be appraised in light of the revolutionary innovation they purport to have brought about at the level of the form of philosophical thinking.

It will be objected that this is an entirely superficial distinction and that the canonical philosophers in the European tradition combine both dimensions of originality in varying proportions: their work marries a greater or lesser degree of formal inventiveness to a greater or lesser degree of substantive innovation. And of course Hegelians or Deleuzeans will be quick to point out that in Hegel or Deleuze we have formal invention and substantive innovation bound together in perfect equipoise. Heideggerians or Derrideans will be equally quick to point out that Heidegger or Derrida wed formidable abstract inventiveness to

detailed concrete analyses in a way that cannot be mapped back onto this clumsy form/content schema. Notwithstanding this clumsiness, however, and the ease with which exceptions and counter-examples can be summoned, this admittedly simplistic schema remains useful if only because it provides us with a basic frame in terms of which to begin gauging the originality of a thinker who has a serious claim to being the most important unknown philosopher working in Europe today: François Laruelle.¹

What makes Laruelle so singular is that he may well be the first European philosopher in whose work substantive innovation has been wholeheartedly sacrificed in the name of total formal invention. This is a polite way of saying that, unlike his more illustrious peers,² not only does Laruelle not make novel philosophical claims about being or truth or knowledge; he also has nothing much to say about history, ethics, art or politics – or at least nothing that would make any kind of sense outside the parameters of his own severely abstract theoretical apparatus. Those deliciously ‘substantial’ titbits with which it is customary for the philosopher to placate the public’s appetite for ‘concretion’ are entirely lacking in his work. ‘Show me an example of an example, and I renounce this book’, Laruelle once quipped.³

The truth is that his thought operates at a level of abstraction which some will find debilitating, others exhilarating. Those who believe formal invention should be subordinated to substantive innovation will undoubtedly find Laruelle’s work rebarbative. Those who believe that untethering formal invention from the constraints of substantive innovation – and thereby transforming the latter – remains a philosophically worthy challenge, may well find Laruelle’s work invigorating. Regardless of the response – whether it be one of repulsion or fascination – Laruelle remains indifferent. Abstraction is a price he is more than willing to pay in exchange for a methodological innovation which promises to enlarge the possibilities of conceptual

invention far beyond the resources of philosophical novelty.

Thus, Laruelle's importance can be encapsulated in a single claim: the claim to have discovered *a new way of thinking*. By 'new', of course, Laruelle means 'philosophically unprecedented'. But what Laruelle means by 'philosophically unprecedented' is not what philosophical revolutionaries like Descartes, Kant, Hegel or Husserl meant by it. Laruelle prefers heresy to revolution. Where philosophical revolution involves a reformation of philosophy for the ultimate benefit of philosophy itself – and a philosophical stake in what philosophy *should* be doing – heresy involves a *use* of philosophy in the absence of any philosophically vested interest in providing a normative definition of philosophy. This is not to say that Laruelle's heretical use of philosophy is anchored in a refusal to define philosophy; were that the case, there would be nothing to distinguish it from cynical Rortian pragmatism. On the contrary, what makes the Laruellean heresy interesting is the way it provides a philosophically disinterested – which is to say non-normative – definition of the essence of philosophy.

Like the revolutionary, the heretic refuses to accept any definition of philosophy rooted in an appeal to the authority of philosophical tradition. But unlike the revolutionary, who more often than not overturns tradition in order to reactivate philosophy's supposedly originary but occluded essence, the heretic proceeds on the basis of an indifference which *suspends* tradition and establishes a philosophically disinterested definition of philosophy's essence, or, as Laruelle prefers to say, identity. This disinterested identification of philosophy results in what Laruelle calls a non-philosophical use of philosophy: a use of philosophy that remains constitutively foreign to the norms and aims governing the properly philosophical practice of philosophy. And in fact, 'non-philosophy' is Laruelle's name for the philosophically unprecedented or heretical practice of philosophy he has invented.

Yet despite its name, this is neither an 'anti-philosophy' nor yet another variant on the well-worn 'end of philosophy' theme. It is not the latest variety of deconstruction or one more manifestation of post-philosophical pragmatism. *Non-philosophy is a theoretical practice of philosophy proceeding by way of transcendental axioms and producing theorems which are philosophically uninterpretable*. 'Uninterpretable' because Laruelle insists – and reactions to his work certainly seem to bear him out – non-philosophy is constitutively unintelligible to philosophers, in the same way that non-Euclidian geometries are constitutively

unintelligible to Euclidian geometers.⁴ Thus, Laruelle suggests that the 'non' in the expression 'non-philosophy' be understood as akin to the 'non' in the expression 'non-Euclidian' geometry: not as a negation or denial of philosophy, but as suspending a specific structure (the philosophical equivalent of Euclid's fifth axiom concerning parallels) which Laruelle sees as constitutive of the traditional practice of philosophy. New possibilities of thought become available once that structure has been suspended and non-philosophy is an index of those philosophically unenvisageable possibilities.

Consequently, if non-philosophy can be contrasted to the postmodern pragmatist's 'supermarket trolley' approach to philosophy, where the philosophical consumer's personal predilections provide the sole criterion for choosing between competing philosophies, and where the academy now figures as a sort of intellectual superstore, it is not as yet another theoretical novelty – the latest fad, the next big thing – but as *a means of turning the practice of philosophy itself into an exercise in perpetual invention*.

How is such a practice possible? Why should it be necessary? And what worth does this enlargement of possibility for thought have? These are the questions we propose to examine in what follows.

Philosophy as decision

We must begin by considering the first of several of Laruelle's controversial claims: that there is a single, transhistorical invariant operative in every attempt to philosophize, whether it be by Hume or Heidegger, Descartes or Derrida. Laruelle calls this invariant 'the philosophical decision'. The structure of decision is a formal syntax governing the possibilities of philosophizing. Yet it remains unrecognized by philosophers themselves; not through a lack of reflexive scrupulousness on their part *but precisely because of it*. It is philosophy's hyper-reflexivity that prevents it from identifying its own decisional form. Decision cannot be grasped reflexively because it is the constitutively reflexive element of philosophizing. The identification of decision as essence of philosophizing presupposes a non-reflexive or (in Laruellese) *non-thetic* perspective on the thetic reflexivity which is the very element of philosophy.

This is why non-philosophy is not metaphilosophical – philosophy is already metaphilosophical through its constitutive reflexivity or specularity: every philosophy worthy of the name harbours (whether implicitly or explicitly) a philosophy of philosophy. Non-philosophy is not a philosophy of philosophy but a heterogeneous

practice of philosophy; one shorn of the dimension of specular reflexivity which is intrinsic to decision. And once again, since philosophical specularity is a function of the structure of decision, the identification of the decisional structure which conditions that specularity is only possible from a non-specular, which is to say non-decisional, perspective on philosophy. But in order to understand how this non-philosophical perspective is not only possible but already operative for the non-philosopher, we have to understand how decision operates.

Decision minimally consists in an act of scission or separation dividing two terms: a conditioned (but not necessarily perceptual or empirical) datum and its condition as an *a priori* (but not necessarily rational) faktum, both of which are *posited as given* in and through a synthetic unity wherein condition and conditioned, datum and faktum, are conjoined. Thus the philosopher posits a structure of articulation which immediately binds and distinguishes the conditioned datum – that which is given – whether it be perceptual, phenomenological, linguistic, social or historical, and its condition – its givenness – as an *a priori* faktum through which that datum is given: for example, sensibility, subjectivity, language, society, history.

What is crucial here is the way in which such a structure is immediately independent of, yet inseparable from, the two terms which it simultaneously connects and differentiates. It is a basically fractional structure comprising two differentiated terms and their difference as a third term that is simultaneously intrinsic and extrinsic, immanent and transcendent to those two terms. Thus, for any philosophical distinction or dyad, such as transcendental/empirical, subject/substance, being/beings, *différance*/presence, the distinction is simultaneously intrinsic and immanent to the distinguished terms *and* extrinsic and transcendent in so far as it is supposed to remain constitutive of the difference between the terms themselves. For the division is inseparable from a moment of immanent indivision guaranteeing the unity-in-differentiation of the dyadic coupling.

The result is a structure wherein the coupling of related terms is also their *disjoining* – for example: pure synthesis as that which (dis)joins transcendental and empirical (Kant); self-relating negativity as that which (dis)joins subject and substance (Hegel); horizontal ekstasis as that which (dis)joins being and beings (Heidegger); *différance* as that which (dis)joins architect and signified presence (Derrida); ‘indifferentiation’ as that which (dis)joins virtual and actual

(Deleuze) – a (dis)joining that remains co-constituted by the two terms it is supposed to condition and so implicitly contained within both. Because it is posited as given in and through the immediate distinction between conditioned datum and conditioning faktum – the very distinction which it is supposed to constitute – this structure presupposes itself as given in and through the datum which it constitutes, and posits itself as *a priori* condition, or givenness, in and through the faktum which conditions that datum.

Thus, because the disjoining of condition and conditioned is simultaneously extrinsic and intrinsic to their joining, all the moments of a philosophical decision are self-positing (or auto-positional) and self-presupposing (or auto-donational): a conditioned datum is given by being posited *a priori* through some conditioning faktum which is in turn only articulated as conditioning in so far as it has already been presupposed through that datum, and so on. There is a sense in which the structure of decision is circular in that it already presupposes itself in whatever phenomenon or set of phenomena it articulates. Hence the suspicion that philosophy manages to interpret everything while explaining nothing, because the structure of the *explanans*, decision, is already presupposed in the *explanandum*, the phenomenon or phenomena to be explained. Yet strictly speaking the structure of decision is not so much that of a circle as that of a Möbius strip – but one where the twist that joins the inner and outer faces of the strip and allows them to flow smoothly into one another is also a fracture, scission or split whose dimensionality is simultaneously more and less than, both in excess of and subtracted from, the immanent dimensions of the strip’s opposing surfaces.

This fractional loop, this auto-positional and auto-donational structure, constitutes philosophy’s inherently reflexive or specular character. It guarantees that everything is potentially philosophizable, which is to say, possible grist for the decisional mill. Thus, if philosophizing (especially in the ‘continental’ manner) remains a loose-knit grouping of interpretative strategies rather than a rigorous theoretical praxis, it is because decisional specularity ensures the world remains philosophy’s mirror. Philosophizing the world becomes a pretext for philosophy’s own interminable self-interpretation. And since interpretation is a function of talent rather than rigour, the plurality of mutually incompatible yet unfalsifiable interpretations merely perpetuates the uncircumscribable ubiquity of philosophy’s auto-encompassing specularity. Absolute specularity breeds infinite

interpretation – such is the norm for the philosophical practice of thought.

Unilateral duality

Moreover, if everything is philosophizable, that which most urgently needs to be philosophized for post-Kantian European philosophy is the difference between philosophy and its other(s); which is to say, the difference between the philosophical and the extra-philosophical. Continental philosophy lives off this difference between itself and its specular, imaginary other(s): science, religion, the mystical, the ethical, the political, the aesthetic or even – surely a symptom of terminal desperation – ‘the ordinary’. It is because philosophy enjoys a constitutive relation to the extra-philosophical, however characterized, that the ‘non’ in Laruelle’s ‘non-philosophy’ indexes a suspension of philosophy’s all-encompassing specularity, rather than a naive attempt to demarcate or delimit it – which would merely reiterate the decisional gesture.

Thus, whereas the relation between the philosophical and the extra-philosophical is constitutively dialectical (where ‘dialectical’ is taken to mean ‘differential’ in the broadest possible sense), and since the dialectical relationality championed by philosophy is invariably one of bilateral reciprocity (following the circular logic of decision), the relation between philosophy and non-philosophy is one of what Laruelle calls ‘unilateral duality’ – ‘unilateral duality’ rather than just ‘unilaterality’. This is a crucial technical nuance. The concept of ‘unilateral duality’ lies at the very heart of Laruelle’s non-philosophical enterprise and it is important to distinguish it from the notion of unilateral relation, which is well known in philosophy: *X* distinguishes itself unilaterally from *Y* without *Y* distinguishing itself from *X* in return. Various Neo-Platonists, Hegel, Heidegger, Derrida and Deleuze all make (implicit) use of this logic of unilaterality in different ways. But in philosophy, the unilaterality of *X* is always reinscribed in a bilateral relation with *Y* at the supplementary meta-level available to the subject of philosophy, who enjoys a position of overview vis-à-vis *X* and *Y* and continues to see both terms in relation to one another at the same time. Thus, *X*’s unilaterality relative to *Y* is only operative at the level of *X* and *Y*, not for the philosopher who exempts himself from this immanent relation through transcendence. The philosopher is always a spectator who views everything (terms and relations) from above. This is what Laruelle means by specularity.

By way of contrast, in the non-philosophical logic of unilateral duality, it is the subject of non-philosophy

(what Laruelle calls ‘the Stranger-subject’) who now effectuates the *unilateralizing* identity of the term *Y* while philosophy instantiates the *unilateralized* difference of the term *X* as it distinguishes itself from *Y*. Consequently, it is not non-philosophy that distinguishes itself unilaterally from philosophy but philosophy that distinguishes itself unilaterally from non-philosophy. But in non-philosophical thought, the supplementary dimension of specular reflexivity through which the philosopher is able to oversee the relation between *X* and *Y* is effectively reduced, rendered inoperative, so that the unilateral relation between *X* and *Y* has itself become unilateralized, deprived of its transcendent, bilateral circumscription via the subject of philosophy and leaving only the unilateralizing identity of *Y* qua subject of non-philosophy and the unilateralized difference between *X* and *Y* qua philosophy. *Y, the subject of non-philosophy, is now radically indifferent to the difference between X and Y, philosophy and non-philosophy.*

This total structure is what Laruelle means by unilateral duality: a structure comprising non-relation (the subject of non-philosophy as unilateralizing identity) and the relation of relation and non-relation (philosophy as unilateralized difference between *X* and *Y*). Unlike philosophical unilaterality, which always ultimately has two sides, the unilateral duality which lies at the heart of non-philosophy is a duality with only one side: the side of philosophy as difference (relation) between *X* (relation) and *Y* (non-relation). Accordingly, if the apex of decision’s dialectical specularity consists in articulating the relation between the philosophical and extra-philosophical as ‘relation of relation and non-relation’, then the unilateral duality as non-dialectical ‘relation’ between philosophy and non-philosophy has to be understood in terms of ‘the non-relation of relation and non-relation’. Once again, unlike the philosophical dialectic, non-philosophy effectuates a unilateral duality with only one side – the side of philosophy as all-encompassing relationality. Since every philosophical decision is always two-sided – that is, dialectical – the non-philosophical unilateralization of decision cannot be dialectically reinscribed.

The axiomatic suspension of decision

What is innovative about twentieth-century European philosophy’s preoccupation with alterity or difference,⁵ Laruelle suggests, is its attempt to use the latter as a way of acknowledging and mobilizing the structural blind spot in decision, the moment of absolute division as absolute indivision, the fractional surplus

or indivisible remainder that (dis)joins decision and enables philosophical reflexivity while disabling philosophy's attempt to grasp the non-specular root of its own specularity. If twentieth-century European philosophy has consistently characterized that condition as an aporia, caesura or unobjectifiable excess (e.g. *différance*, non-identity, *Unterschied*, event, other, real, and so on), it is because it has tried to grasp the non-reflexive root of reflexivity using reflexive means. Hence the latter's aporetic or intra-decisional characterization as condition of (im)possibility for philosophy; as an unnameable traumatic kernel that resists or shatters conceptualization.

For Laruelle, philosophy's assumption that decisional reflexivity is the only available paradigm for abstract thought, and that specular abstraction is the only possible kind of abstraction, results in this aporetic characterization of the non-thetic root of decision. Yet a non-specular paradigm of theoretical abstraction already exists, Laruelle insists. Moreover, it exists precisely in that form of thinking which 'continental' philosophy has consistently belittled and demeaned as un-thinking: the axiomatic. Since philosophy cannot conceive of a thought operating without recourse to the fractured mirror of decision, since it equates thinking with infinite specularity and interminable interpretation, it cannot imagine any thought worthy of the name that would be neither specular nor interpretative. Yet axiomatic abstraction provides the paradigm for precisely such a thought: one which is non-specular, non-reflexive. This non-thetic or immanently performative thought anchors itself in the non-reflexive root of decision by positing it axiomatically as its own enabling condition, rather than trying to grasp it decisionally and failing (it is this failure which results in the aporetic characterization of decision's non-thetic root as unthinkable caesura or obstacle to conceptualization). What is an obstacle for decisional conceptualization – an obstacle whose quasi-insurmountable status fuels the postmodern pathos of terminal exhaustion – provides a new basis for axiomatic invention. It is a question of positing the non-thetic root of decision axiomatically, without presupposing it via decision. Or (which comes to the same thing) of presupposing it via an axiom rather than positing it via a decision.

For Laruelle, a thinking of this sort – axiomatic or non-philosophical thinking – is not merely possible but real, which is to say radically performative (we will have more to say about this performativity below). Thus, if the 'non' in non-philosophy is not a negation of philosophical reflexivity it is because it indexes a

thinking for which philosophical decision qua infinite reflexivity encompassing and integrating its own limits *has already been suspended through an act of axiomatic positing*. But what prevents this axiomatic suspension of decisional specularity from amounting to yet another decisional scission between the philosophical and the extra-philosophical is the fact that it is effected on the basis of an immanence which has not itself been decided about: an immanence which has not been posited and presupposed as given through a transcendent act of decision, but axiomatically posited as already given, independently of every perceptual or intentional presupposition, as well as every gesture of ontological or phenomenological position. It is posited as already given and as *already determining its own positing*.

Thus, this non-decisional immanence, which allows itself to be posited as already given without decisional positing, is an immanence that does not even need to be liberated from decisional transcendence: it is precisely as that which is already separated (without-separation) from the decisional co-constitution of given and givenness, immanence and transcendence, that it conditions its own positing as already given. Consequently, this non-decisional immanence is not the Deleuzian plane of immanence, which is at once presupposed as pre-philosophically given and constructed or posited as given through the philosophical concept,⁶ in accordance with the decisional co-constitution of given and givenness, positing and presupposition. Where decision renders positing and presupposition co-constitutive – the positing of a presupposition and the presupposition of the posited (as in Hegel's exemplary analysis of the logic of reflection in the *Science of Logic*) – the non-decisional axiom separates them in such a way as to render the immanence it has posited *determining* for its own description as already posited (without-presupposition). By the same token, the axiom renders the immanence it has presupposed *determining* for its own description as already presupposed (without-positing).

Consequently, unlike Michel Henry's phenomenologized version of radical immanence,⁷ which has to absolve itself from reflexive specularity in order to count as non-thetic, Laruelle's non-decisional immanence is not co-constituted by decision. Non-philosophical immanence is *foreclosed* rather than opposed to decision – which is to say: radically indifferent to the dyadic distinction between positing and presupposing, immanence and transcendence, given and givenness, as well as to every other decisional dyad. In other words, it is radically indifferent to all dyadic couplings of the

form: thinkable/unthinkable, decidable/undecidable, determinable/undeterminable.

It should now be easier to see why a certain obvious philosophical objection to the non-philosophical positing of radical immanence misses the point. This objection, which tries to argue that the axiomatic positing of immanence as non-decisional reinscribes it in the dyad decision/non-decision, thereby allowing it to become co-constituted by decision, is mistaken on three counts.

First, whereas philosophical specularity operates by assuming a fundamental reciprocity or reversibility between conceptual description and ontological constitution, non-specular or non-philosophical thinking does not. It operates on the basis of a radically irreversible or unilateral duality between the axiomatic positing of immanence and its description as already posited. Thus, the non-philosophical characterization of radical immanence as already given does not constitute it as given. Radical immanence is ontologically foreclosed. It remains non-constitutable, not because it opposes or resists constitution, but because it is indifferent to the dyadic distinction between description and constitution. It is the *already constituted* determining its own description as constituted. Thus, there is no dyadic distinction between the axiomatic positing of immanence as given and its description as posited. Instead, there is a unilateral duality, which is to say a duality with only one side: that of the description which is determined by the positing without determining that positing in return. This unilateral or non-decisional duality, whereby what is axiomatically given determines its own description as given, guarantees that the non-philosophical description of radical immanence as already posited is adequate to it in the last instance, without being constitutive of it. *Adequation without correspondence*: such is the hallmark of truth for a non-philosophical axiomatic shorn of the specularity that envelops truth as correspondence, coherence or unveiling (*aletheia*).

Second, that radical immanence is foreclosed to constitution does not mean that it is unconceptualizable. On the contrary, it becomes limitlessly conceptualizable on the basis of any given conceptual material precisely in so far as it already determines its own description as adequate to it in the last instance, without any of these conceptual characterizations or descriptions becoming co-constitutive or co-determining for it. Thus, where decisional thinking posits and presupposes a reversible equivalence between immanence and its transcendent conceptual characterization,

non-decisional thinking operates on the basis of an irreversible duality between them, so that immanence unilaterally determines its own transcendent conceptual description, without being determined by it in return.

Third, the separation between the decisional and non-decisional is not itself dyadic, which is to say decisional. To maintain that is to fail to acknowledge that for non-philosophy that separation is axiomatically posited as *already* in effect without recourse to decision, in accordance with the nature of radical immanence as *separate-without-separation* and determining its own description as already-separate. Accordingly, it is imperative that we appreciate the peculiar radicality of the manner in which Laruelle's 'non' separates the decisional from the non-decisional. It is not two distinct 'things' that are being separated. If it were, the non-philosopher would indeed still be operating within the ambit of decision. What this 'non' separates is the realm of separability in its entirety (decision) from the inseparable (immanence) as that which is posited as already separated prior to the need for a separating decision. In other words, the non-philosophical positing of immanence as already given axiomatically separates decisional separation (scission, distinction, differentiation, division, dialectic) from the inseparable as that which is already separated, independently of any separating decision.

Of course, it is intrinsic to the character of decisional thinking that it cannot acknowledge this axiomatic separation between the decisional and the non-decisional as something which is already realized, already achieved for non-philosophy. Decisional specularity cannot countenance the axiomatic positing of a radically autonomous, non-specular immanence. However, for Laruelle, far from indicating confusion on the part of philosophers, this incapacity is symptomatic of philosophy's necessary *resistance* to non-philosophy. Far from being an unfortunate, arbitrary expression of philosophical prejudice, this resistance is wholly and legitimately necessary. It is structurally intrinsic to decision rather than empirically contingent. In other words, it is *de jure* rather than *de facto*. Decisional thinking is programmed to insist that the axiomatic positing of immanence amounts to yet another instance of decisional division. It is obliged to reduce the axiomatic suspension of decision according to immanence to an intra-decisional opposition to decision, or an anti-decisional annihilation of decision. And rather than being a problem or obstacle for non-philosophy, this philosophical resistance is precisely what non-philosophy requires in order to operate. The decisional

resistance to radical immanence provides non-philosophy with the occasional cause which it needs in order to begin working. It is what initiates non-philosophical thinking in the first place. There would be no non-philosophy without it. Non-philosophy is the conversion of philosophy's specular resistance to non-thetic immanence into a form of non-specular thinking determined according to that immanence.

Determination in the last instance

Thus, non-philosophy works with philosophical decision. It does not seek to replace or supplant it. Philosophical decision is the object of non-philosophy – better still, its material. But it is a matter of using decision non-philosophically. Consequently, besides positing immanence as ultimately determining instance for non-decisional thought, the non-philosophical axiom posits decisional resistance to that positing as something which is also already given non-decisionally as a determinable material; a contingent occasion that can be determined in accordance with immanence's foreclosure to decision. Following an axiomatically given immanence as *determining* instance, the second axiomatically given factor for non-philosophy is decisional resistance to immanence as *determinable* occasion.

Accordingly, non-philosophy is the coordination of 'two' causes: immanence as necessary cause in-the-last-instance and decisional resistance as occasional cause. Non-philosophy is simply the determination of the latter by the former: it is the taking into consideration of decisional resistance to immanence as an occasional material to be determined in accordance with immanence as cause in-the-last-instance. Thus, the minimal but definitive coordinates for the non-philosophical axiomatic are: immanence qua radically necessary condition; decisional resistance qua occasional cause; and immanence's determination of decision as transcendental effectuation of that necessary determining condition *for* that determinable material.

We are now in a position to understand in what sense the new way of thinking initiated by Laruelle is supposed to be philosophically unprecedented. The syntax of non-philosophical thought is that of determination-in-the-last-instance as unilateral duality whereby the non-philosophical subject determines philosophical decision. Like much in Laruelle, 'determination in the last instance' is an expression with an explicit philosophical lineage – in this case, Althusserian. But like every other philosophical expression used by Laruelle, it has been subjected to non-philosophical transforma-

tion. In Althusser, the philosophical dyad infrastructure/superstructure entails that the last instance remains reciprocally co-constituted by what it determines, in accordance with the bilateral logic of decision. For Laruelle, however, the last instance is separate-without-separation from the decisional logic which it unilaterally determines. Determination-in-the-last-instance consists in the non-philosophical transformation of the unitary syntax of decision qua transcendental synthesis or 'One-of-the-dyad' into a unilateral duality whereby the One (i.e. identity or immanence) now unilateralizes the philosophical dyad (i.e. difference or transcendence) – not directly, since it is indifferent to decision, but through the intermediary of the non-philosophical subject who has posited immanence as determining and decision as determinable. The structure of the non-philosophical subject is simply that of the unilateral duality: a duality with only one side – that of decision as transcendent difference between the decisional and the non-decisional. The 'other', non-side of this duality is not immanence, whose radical indifference precludes any direct determination of philosophy on its part, but the non-philosophical subject itself as unilateralizing instance effectuating immanence's indifference. Since philosophical resistance to non-philosophy *occasions* non-philosophy, the non-philosophical subject effectively unilateralizes (or 'dualyses') its own dyadic inscription at the hands of philosophical resistance. Non-philosophical thinking consists in converting philosophy's bilateral resistance to non-philosophy into a unilateral duality: not the unilateral duality of immanence and decision, which does not exist since the former is radically indifferent to decision, but rather the unilateral duality effectuated by the subject of non-philosophy in so far as it is now the organon for determining decisional resistance according to immanence.

Obviously, the role played by this non-philosophical subject bears little resemblance to that played by the philosophical subject. It is no longer the phenomenological subject, whether the latter be construed in terms of intentional consciousness or being-in-the-world. But nor is it the subject as caesura, self-relating negativity. It is neither the explicitly reflexive, self-conscious subject, nor the pre-reflexive, unconscious subject, who is merely the obverse of the latter and therefore implicitly enveloped by decisional reflexivity. It is simply a *function*: the transcendental function which non-philosophy effectuates for philosophy on the basis of immanence as real invariant and decision as occasional variable. The subject as transcendental function is a radically disembodied, excarnate, non-conscious

subject performing a set of quasi-algorithmic operations upon a philosophical material by determining-it-in-the-last-instance. These operations involve neither interpretation nor reflection: they are blind, automatic, mechanical, which is to say non-thetic. Consequently, the non-philosophical subject is simply an axiomatizing organon, a transcendental computer, but one which Laruelle prefers to characterize as a 'uni-maton' rather than as an auto-maton.⁸ This is a subject which has been definitively purged of all its philosophical privileges as locus of reflection and reduced to the unilateralizing structure of determination-in-the-last-instance. Thus, for non-philosophy unilateralization *is* subjectivation and subjectivation *is* determination: the non-philosophical subject determines decision by converting the philosophical dyad which provides its material support into a theorem that is – at least temporarily – philosophically uninterpretable because it cannot be dyadically circumscribed or 'decided'. However, unlike deconstruction, where aporia or undecidability is unleashed merely in order to effect a destabilization of metaphysical conceptuality, the non-philosophical subject's unilateralization of decision has a positive and expansive rather than negative and delimiting effect on philosophy: a non-philosophical theorem ultimately forces philosophy to expand its available decisional resources by obliging it to invent a new dyad in order to decide – reintegrate – the unilateral duality encapsulated in that theorem.

The non-philosophical identity of theory and practice

Determination or unilateralization is not just what the subject of non-philosophy does, it is what he/she *is*. Performativity is the hallmark of thinking *in accordance with* immanence. It provides the criterion for an important contrast between the self-sufficient or philosophical practice of philosophy and its non-philosophical practice. Philosophy's specular self-sufficiency means that the philosophical practice of philosophy is not really a theoretical practice but rather an empirical activity whose claim to theoretical legitimacy is only ever assured through its performance. Thus, philosophy is a game, the rules of which are always effectively guaranteed by virtue of the operation through which their stipulation is enacted. Moreover, the philosopher reinscribes his/her own philosophical activity within the decisional mirroring which renders that activity co-constitutive of the real at a level that is simultaneously ontic-empirical and ontological-transcendental (the decisional hybrid once

again). More exactly, the syntax of decision enacts or performs its own hallucinatory reality in what effectively amounts to an operation of auto-deduction with a tripartite structure: decision is at once an empirically conditioned enunciation; an enunciated faktum conditioning that enunciation; and finally the transcendental synthesis of enunciated condition and condition of enunciation as event of thought. This is the complex internal architecture proper to the decisional '*autos*' as self-positing/self-donating circle or doublet.⁹

For Laruelle, the trouble with this performative dimension of philosophical activity, this decisional auto-enactment, lies not in its performativity (far from it) but in the way in which the latter invariably operates on the basis of an unstated set of constative assumptions which themselves only ever become performatively legitimated. In other words, philosophy consists in the co-constitution of theory and practice: it is a theory whose cognitive possibilities are compromised through an extraneous set of practical exigencies, and a practice whose performative capacities are hindered by a needlessly restrictive system of theoretical assumptions.¹⁰ The philosopher, in effect, never says what he/she is really doing, nor does what he/she is really saying.

Laruelle objects to this co-constitution of theory and practice, constative and performative, on the grounds that it needlessly constricts both the possibilities of saying and of doing, of theory and of practice. Moreover, simply to affirm the *différance* between theory and practice, constative and performative, is complacently to reaffirm philosophical decision's embroilment in its own self-presupposing, self-perpetuating structure.

By positing radical immanence as *already-performed*, as performed-without-performance, the non-philosophical subject operationalizes the non-decisional essence of performativity.¹¹ It releases the identity (without synthesis or unity) of theory and practice by converting their decisional co-constitution into a unilateral duality whereby the subject performatively unilateralizes the dyadic synthesis of saying and doing. Thus, the non-philosophical subject unleashes the radically performative character of theory as well as the rigorously cognitive character of practice. Non-philosophy is at once a theoretical practice and a performative theory. Moreover, it is precisely in so far as the non-philosopher is *already* operating according to immanence as 'already-performed' that he or she cannot help but say what he/she does and do as he/she says.

The reality and contingency of non-philosophy

Consequently, for Laruelle, non-philosophy is more than just a possibility. It is real – more radically real than any positivity or effectivity gauged philosophically in terms of empirical concretion or actuality. The question of its possibility is a philosophical one: it continues to assume the validity of the philosophical problematization of something that is no longer a problem for non-philosophy; something that is simply out of the question for it – radical immanence as the real root of decision and hence as the answer to every philosophical question. More specifically, radical immanence is the solution that precedes the possibility of decisional problematization.

Clearly, however, if radical immanence is the non-philosophical real, it is no longer the real as philosophically characterized in terms of perception, consciousness, materiality, production, power, the social, and so on. Nor is it the real as being, *différance*, *Ur-grund*, noumenon, thing-in-itself, will-to-power, self-relating negativity, *Unterschied*, non-identity, absolute deterritorialization. Instead, it is simply real immanence as utterly empty invariant=X. This is an invariant that does not resist philosophy but is indifferent to it, and hence can be rendered axiomatically determining for thought on the basis of any philosophical occasion. It is an invariant whose empty transparency does not render it refractory to cognition but on the contrary can be axiomatically specified using any philosophical material.

Thus, the specifically Laruellean discovery that makes non-philosophy effective is that the real is not a philosophical problem: it is positively nothing at all. And the fact that the real is no longer a problem for non-philosophy allows for a change in the way one thinks. Instead of proceeding philosophically from thought to the real, or using philosophy to think the real as difference, or as differing from some other philosophical term, one proceeds non-philosophically from the real's immanent identity to philosophy as specular transcendence which strives to split, distinguish or differentiate between the real and some other term, and then mirror the world through that difference. Instead of using the mirror of philosophy to think the transcendence of 'real' objects in the world, non-philosophy uses the immanence of the real to de-specularize those objects which philosophy cocoons in its reflexive transcendence. It follows that the object of non-philosophy is not the real, which is never an object, not even an unthinkable one, but the philosophical specularization of real objects.

Yet since non-philosophy only exists as immanent axiomatic determination of philosophy's resistance to immanent determination, does this de-specularization have any binding force for philosophy as such? Could something like a non-philosophical injunction to change how one thinks become imperative for philosophers?

Laruelle himself would be the first to admit that there is nothing necessary about non-philosophy. There is no obligation for the philosopher to switch from the philosophical to the non-philosophical posture. Unlike philosophical revolution, whose *raison d'être* stems from a vision of the true tasks of philosophy, Laruelle's axiomatic heresy cannot be philosophically legitimated by invoking an intolerable shortfall between what philosophy has been doing and what it should be doing. While the conceptual preoccupations which – after long and arduous detours – led Laruelle to his discovery have a venerable philosophical pedigree, they cannot be used to lend it an aura of necessity. Thus, from a philosophical perspective, the non-philosophical practice of philosophy is neither necessary nor inevitable. Unlike Heideggerian/Derridean deconstruction, which lays claims to an irrecusable 'historial' necessity for itself – the uncircumventable necessity of deconstructing the history of metaphysics – non-philosophy simply remains an aberrant possibility for the philosopher; one whose sole criterion of legitimation resides in an efficacy which can only be judged according to the parameters of the practice itself. Since that practice suspends the teleological considerations in terms of which the necessity of a move in the space of conceptual possibilities is usually appraised, Laruelle is obliged to deny that philosophers are under any kind of obligation to accept the pertinence of his discovery and begin practising philosophy non-philosophically.

Interestingly, the very considerations which render non-philosophy unproblematically real and immediately operational for the non-philosopher also ensure that it remains at a safe remove, safely ensconced in the realm of possibility for the philosopher. Yet the question remains: what is non-philosophy for? This is a philosophical question, but perhaps one non-philosophy cannot entirely obviate by simply referring the questioner to the efficiency of non-philosophical practice. Since the only philosophical legitimacy non-philosophy can muster is as an arbitrary possibility, and since its non-philosophical validity is out of the question – being a simple matter of efficiency – is it possible to frame the question of the worth of Laru-

elle's axiomatic heresy without reinscribing the latter within a philosophical teleology?

Laruelle himself invokes the desirability of 'enlarging the possibilities of thought' as one way of legitimating non-philosophy. And he also suggests that, despite appearances, philosophy's privileging of thought has always involved subordinating it to some extraneous end (ethical, political, aesthetic, and so on) while simultaneously reappropriating that end for thought, in conformity with the logic of decisional co-constitution. Thus, Laruelle seems to imply, thought has never been an end in itself for philosophy. Non-philosophy, by way of contrast, frees thought from every end. By curtailing philosophy's specular narcissism, non-philosophy untethers thought from every decisional telos.

Consequently, despite its apparent arbitrariness, Laruelle's axiomatic heresy can lay claim to a validity for philosophy: the validity of an emancipatory gesture as far as the form of thinking itself is concerned.¹² 'Emancipation', of course, is an eminently philosophical motif. But Laruelle invests it with a non-philosophical valence: philosophical specularity is constrictive because the possibilities of philosophical invention, whether formal or substantive, are already delimited in advance by philosophy's decisional syntax. But only from a non-philosophical vantage point does this constriction become perceptible. Philosophers themselves are entirely oblivious to it and more than happy to keep spinning variations on the decisional theme for centuries to come. If non-specular thinking does have a certain binding force for the philosopher willing to explore its possibility, it simply consists in the impossibility of returning to the circuitous ambit of decisional mirroring having once frequented the horizonless expanses of mirrorless immanence.

The price of abstraction

Nevertheless, there will be many for whom the punitive abstraction of Laruelle's thought is too high a price to pay for such scanty rewards. Non-philosophy strikes its more generous detractors – that is, those who do not simply dismiss it out of hand as incomprehensible gobbledegook – as interesting but thoroughly inconsequential. Unlike Adorno, Heidegger or Derrida, Laruelle does not set out to dismantle metaphysics in a way that could be co-opted for the purposes of ideological critique. And, unlike Deleuze or Badiou, he does not elaborate a new philosophical system capable of incorporating a broad spectrum of contemporary artistic, scientific and social phenomena. But what is the worth of something that is neither critical nor

constructive? Has Laruelle not retreated from philosophy into something like a mathematized theology of radical immanence?

The answer to the latter question must, I believe, be an emphatic No. Unlike philosophers of immanence such as Spinoza and Deleuze, Laruelle does not decide in favour of immanence (which means *against* transcendence) through a philosophical decision which has an ethical telos as its ultimate horizon: liberation, the achievement of beatitude, the intellectual love of God. Although ethics is a philosophical material which can be treated non-philosophically, there can be no 'ethics of radical immanence' and consequently no ethics of non-philosophy.¹³ The very notion of an 'ethics of immanence' is another instance of the way in which philosophical decision invariably subordinates immanence to a transcendent teleological horizon. But Laruelle is no more interested in subordinating radical immanence to philosophy than he is in subordinating philosophy to radical immanence. Radical immanence is simply not the object of non-philosophy. It is not even interesting: it is utterly banal, radically transparent. This is what separates Laruelle from Michel Henry, whose phenomenology of radical immanence entails an ultimately theological disavowal of philosophy. Yet the point, as Laruelle tirelessly repeats, is not to abandon philosophy in favour of a thought of immanence, but to use immanence to think philosophy. It is the consequences of thinking philosophy immanently that are interesting, not thinking immanence philosophically. Thus, unlike philosophies of absolute immanence such as those of Spinoza, Deleuze or Michel Henry, non-philosophy has nothing to say about radical immanence 'in itself'. What it does have something to say about is how immanence provides a new basis for practising philosophy.

Conversely, and in spite of the fact that Laruelle has certainly been guilty of encouraging such misinterpretations in the past,¹⁴ it would be a mistake to see in non-philosophy nothing more than an attempt to extend the Kantian critique of metaphysics to the whole of philosophy. Unlike Kantian critique, the non-philosophical suspension of decision is not guided by a normative, ethico-juridical telos. Nor can it be reduced to some sort of post-Derridean variant on deconstruction. Unlike deconstruction, the unilateralization of decision involves a positive enlargement of the ambit of decision, rather than just an aporetic interruption.

Thus, before hastily dismissing Laruelle's work as a crypto-theological renunciation of philosophy, a hyper-deconstruction, or even a sterile exercise in meta-philo-

sophical narcissism, it is important to remember that although non-philosophy does not have a goal, it does have a *function*. And although it cannot be legitimated in terms of some transcendent teleological horizon, non-philosophical practice is *for* something: it is for philosophical decision. Anyone interested in practising philosophy should be interested in Laruelle's incisive exposure of what he calls the 'theoreticist idealism' inherent in the spontaneous philosophical practice of philosophical decision. Philosophers, Laruelle insists, do not know what they are doing. They are never doing what they say or saying what they are doing – even and especially when they purport to be able to legitimate their philosophical decisions in terms of some ethical, political or juridical end. The theoreticist idealism inherent in decision is never so subtle and pernicious as when it invokes the putative materiality of some extra-philosophical instance in order to demonstrate its 'pragmatic worth'. To condemn Laruelle for excessive abstraction on the grounds that the worth of a philosophy can only be gauged in terms of its concrete, extra-philosophical (e.g. ethical, political or juridical) effects is to ignore the way in which extra-philosophical concretion invariably involves an idealized abstraction that has already been circumscribed by decision.

It may be that Laruelle's crisp, sharply delineated mode of abstraction turns out to be far more concrete than those nebulous abstractions which philosophers try to pass off as instances of concretion. In other words, the criteria for evaluating the worth of non-philosophy's function for philosophy are not available to philosophers, who know not what they do. In non-philosophy, radical axiomatic abstraction gives rise, not to a system or doctrine inviting assent or dissent, but to an immanent methodology whose function for philosophy no one is in a position to evaluate as yet. Ultimately, then, non-philosophy can only be gauged in terms of what it can do. And no one yet knows what non-philosophy can or cannot do.

Bibliography of works by Laruelle

Laruelle divides his work into three periods: Philosophy I, Philosophy II and Philosophy III. Philosophy I (1971–81) could be called Laruelle's formative period, his philosophical apprenticeship. The shift toward non-philosophy is initiated with Philosophy II (1981–95). However, as far as Laruelle himself is concerned, it is not until Philosophy III (1995–present) that non-philosophy truly begins.

Philosophie I

Phénomène et différence. Essai sur l'ontologie de Ravaillon [*Phenomenon and Difference: An Essay on Ravaillon's Ontology*], Klincksieck, Paris, 1971.

Machines textuelles. Déconstruction et libido d'écriture [*Textual Machines: Deconstruction and Libido of Writing*],

Seuil, Paris, 1976.

Nietzsche contre Heidegger. Thèses pour une politique nietzschéenne [*Nietzsche contra Heidegger: Theses for a Nietzschean Politics*], Payot, Paris, 1977.

Le déclin de l'écriture [*The Decline of Writing*], Aubier-Flammarion, Paris, 1977.

Au delà du principe de pouvoir [*Beyond the Power Principle*], Payot, Paris, 1978.

Philosophie II

Le Principe de minorité [*The Minority Principle*], Aubier, Paris, 1981.

Une biographie de l'homme ordinaire. Des autorités et des minorités [*A Biography of the Ordinary Man: Of Authorities and Minorities*], Aubier, Paris, 1985.

Les Philosophies de la différence. Introduction critique [*The Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction*], PUF, Paris, 1986.

Philosophie et non-philosophie [*Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*], Mardaga, Liège/Brussels, 1989.

En tant qu'un. La non-philosophie expliquée au philosophes [*As One: Non-Philosophy Explained to Philosophers*], Aubier, Paris, 1991.

Théorie des Identités. Fractalité généralisée et philosophie artificielle [*Theory of Identities: Generalized Fractality and Artificial Philosophy*], PUF, Paris, 1992.

Philosophie III

Théorie des Étrangers. Science des hommes, démocratie, non-psychanalyse [*Theory of Strangers: Science of Men, Democracy, Non-Psychoanalysis*], Kimé, Paris, 1995.

Principes de la non-philosophie [*The Principles of Non-Philosophy*], PUF, Paris, 1996.

Dictionnaire de la non-philosophie [*Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*], François Laruelle et Collaborateurs, Kimé, Paris, 1998.

Éthique de l'Étranger. Du crime contre l'humanité [*Ethics of the Stranger: Of the Crime Against Humanity*], Kimé, Paris, 2000.

Introduction au non-marxisme [*Introduction to Non-Marxism*], PUF, Paris, 2000.

Le Christ futur. Une leçon d'hérésie [*The Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*], Exils, Paris, 2002.

Notes

1. Born in 1937, Laruelle is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris X–Nanterre, where he has taught since 1967.
2. For instance: Althusser, Badiou, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Lacan, Lyotard, Serres.
3. *Au-delà du principe de pouvoir*, Payot, Paris, 1978, p. 7.
4. The radically heterodox character of Laruelle's thought, its sheer unclassifiable *strangeness*, has consistently managed to provoke hostility and bewilderment not only among the guardians of philosophical orthodoxy within the French academy but also among his relatively unorthodox philosophical peers. The unfortunate result, after a certain degree of intellectual notoriety among the Parisian avant-garde of the 1970s, has been a position of almost total intellectual isolation. Laruelle continues to inspire a peculiar mixture of derision and fear among his fellow philosophers. Derision, because his work is deemed utterly 'incomprehensible'. Fear, because those same philosophers, who are used to baffling the uninitiated, find their own inability to understand Laruelle

unsettling. Yet, contrary to what these philosophers maintain, there is nothing obscurantist or wilfully esoteric about Laruelle's work. Understanding it is not a matter of initiation: it does not entail exhaustive familiarity with a corpus of sacred texts replete with all manner of lexical trickery or obscure wordplay. The difficulty presented by Laruelle's work is entirely objective: it is a matter of learning to think in a way that is radically unlike the way one has been trained to think if one is a philosopher. And having learnt to think non-philosophically, the point is to put this technique into practice to see what it is capable of producing. Laruelle's work presents the reader with an organon, an instrument which one needs to learn how to use so as to be in a position to gauge its potential, not a system or world-view whose doctrines invite assent or dissent.

5. For example Heidegger, Derrida, Deleuze. Laruelle analyses this problematic in *Les philosophies de la différence*, PUF, Paris, 1986.
6. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. G. Burchell and H. Tomlinson, Verso, London, 1994.
7. Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. G. Etskorn, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1973.
8. Laruelle sketches a non-philosophical treatment of the issue of 'thinking machines' in two recent but as yet unpublished papers: 'Théorie unifié de la pensée et du calcul' ['Unified Theory of Thought and Computation'] and 'Performance et Performé' ['Performance and Performed']. I should mention here that Laruelle himself would probably not endorse what he would see as my excessively 'machinic' characterization of the non-philosophical subject.
9. This decisional structure is at work in Deleuze and Guattari's machinic constructivism: the philosophical concept's counter-effectuation of intensive materiality is at once extracted from an empirical state of affairs through which the philosopher is forced to think and transcendently productive of being qua event. But perhaps it is best exemplified by Heidegger, who re-inscribes the conditions for the genesis of the project of fundamental ontology within the structure of fundamental ontology itself. Thus, the philosophical project delineated in *Being and Time* encompasses its own conditions of possibility, as explicated in *Dasein's* shift from dispersion in average everydayness to the properly meta-physical appropriation of being-unto-death as its ownmost potentiality for being. Since it is via the latter that *Dasein's* own being comes into question for it, fundamental ontology as theoretical project is ultimately supervenient on the existential ur-project delineated in being-unto-death.
10. 'Once [philosophy] begins to be used as a material and occasion, it becomes shorn of its traditional finalities, all of which are based upon a "spontaneous philosophical faith". The latter forms a circle: it obliges one to practise philosophy for reasons that are extrinsic to it, whether these be ethical, juridical, scientific, aesthetic, etc. But philosophy then uses these finalities the better to triumph and affirm itself on the basis of their subordination as the only activity which is genuinely excellent, uncircumventable or "absolute". All this prescriptive activity – whether it be ethical or pedagogical, etc. –, all this normative or auto-normative use of philosophy "with a view to experience"; every latent or explicit teleology concomitant with the spontaneous practice of philosophy must be abandoned, which does not mean destroyed but treated as a mere material and practised henceforth within these limits' (Laruelle, *Philosophie et non-philosophie*, Mardaga, Liège, 1989, p. 27).
11. 'It is this Performed, shorn of the fetishes of performativity and of activity and the causa sui in general, which invests thinking itself as identity (within its relatively autonomous order of thought) of science and philosophy, and more generally, of the theoretical and the pragmatic. We shall not say too hastily – confusing once again thinking with the Real – that this identity is performed directly in-One, but that it is performed only in the last instance by the One as the Performed itself' (Laruelle, *Principes de la non-philosophie*, PUF, Paris, 1996, p. 215).
12. A point made by Hughes Choplin in his admirable little monograph *La non-philosophie de François Laruelle* (Kimé, Paris 2000).
13. See, for example, Laruelle's *Éthique de l'Étranger* (Kimé, Paris, 1999) for precisely such a treatment.
14. Especially in certain works from *Philosophie II* such as *Philosophie et non-philosophie*, and *En tant qu'un* (Aubier, Paris, 1991).

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The ethics of conviction

Marxism, ontology and religion

John Roberts

If the 'turn to ethics' has shaped much recent continental philosophy, the 'turn to religion' has not been far behind. The reappearance of various religious categories and concepts in recent political philosophy and philosophical ethics is unmistakable. Moreover, given that much of this writing emerges from the vicinity of Marx, if not directly from Marxism itself, this turn is certainly not to be mistaken for a simply reactionary move. Indeed, the opposite might be argued: the reinscription of various religious categories out of a philosophical ethics is part of a wider cultural commitment to renew, reinvolve, repossess Marxism as a revolutionary moral tradition, a tradition in which conscience and judgement play defining roles.

This moral repossession of Marxism, however, is not as one might presume solely Hegelian in spirit. On the contrary, the ethics of the 'other' in its current post-modernized forms is judged to be the very dissolution of the ethical, which is the basis on which moral law is rendered weak and submissible to social-democratic norms. On this view, ethics can only be made livable by breaking with the assimilative, communal act of identification.

It is no surprise, therefore, that it is in Kant, and in particular a version of Adorno's Kant, that the new politicized ethics has found its critical resources. In this corpus of writing (Alain Badiou, Roy Bhaskar, Antonio Negri, Slavoj Žižek) the turn to ethics as a turn to religious categories is broadly a *renunciative* move. That is, if we follow Adorno's loose distinction between a Kantian ethics of conviction of self-responsibility (*Geisnnungsethik*) and a Hegelian (tolerant) ethics of social responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*), in which empirical conditions of the ethical act are taken into account, this writing closes down the ethical pathway to the 'other' on the neo-Kantian basis of the primacy of the subject's moral commitments.¹ Moral duty is not to be separated from the demands of self-abnegation and self-violation. Bhaskar's views

are somewhat different to Badiou's, Negri's and Žižek's on the politics of this position – which I will discuss later – but suffice it to say that all writers invoke or borrow from a secularized, Kantian, (early) Christianized tradition of the conscionable self whose judgements and will, in Kant's sense, exist in conflict with and contradistinction to empirical experience.

To link this secularized Christian tradition to Marxism, or to a reclaimed 'existential' Marxism, is of course, in turn, to link this tradition directly to the foundations of Enlightenment thinking itself. The secularized Christian themes of Badiou, Negri and Žižek, in particular, resituate philosophical ethics within the secularized Christianity of German idealism. Indeed, Kant's secularization of the paradox of Christian moral duty – one performs one's moral duty through the abandonment of one's duty – is the very foundation of modern European philosophy's transfiguration of the ethical self within the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Kant there is no separation between the moral law as duty and the operations of reason. Moral law is to be found in the principle of the will separate from the ends which can be brought about by such an action. Only an act which does not serve sensuous inclination and self-interest can be an act of the will: 'The moral worth of an action does not depend on the result expected from it.'²

Deconstruction has recently also drawn deeply from this Kantian well of the renunciative subject, allowing us to talk about deconstruction's own ethico-religious turn, even if Derrida rejects the metaphysics of the Christian legacy of Western philosophy: that being is able to exceed its representation in signification. Derrida, Badiou, Negri, Žižek and Bhaskar may share a concern with the conscionable, responsible subject, but Derrida's interest in the immanent risk of responsibility opening up the subject to the wager of the 'to-come' is narrowly focused. In fact, we might place Derrida's 'religion beyond religion' within a

weak Messianic tradition; Badiou's and Žižek's 'ethics of passion' within a strong Messianic tradition, and Bhaskar's and Negri's 'respiritualized' Marxism – with their somewhat different ethical commitments – within a tradition of ecumenical libertarianism.

The recent turn to ethics as a turn to 'religious categories' of responsibility, fidelity and passion, then, follows a discernible path (the recovery of the Enlightenment link between religious categories and philosophical reflection) which diverges into two main tendencies: a deconstructive commitment to wresting philosophy's occluded religious concepts from the hubris of a secularized Western philosophy in order to stage the continuity between philosophy and non-philosophy; and the reinvigoration of the revolutionary and diremptive passion of the religious subject. In some sense these two positions overlap and invade each other's territories. But what is at stake metaphysically in the latter certainly means that the two positions should not be confused. This distinction is made clear in two writers who fit neatly into this bifurcated secularized Christianized tradition: the Derridean Hent de Vries, and the Žižekian, Kierkegaardian Timothy Bewes. Their recent interventions into the field of a politicized ethics sum up what has come to be at stake in these two secularized religious positions. For De Vries – following Claude Lefort and Carl Schmitt – the theological-political is the always permanent horizon of philosophy that post-philosophy and philosophy as an underlabourer for science consistently forget, and therefore remains a residual, if non-metaphysical, presence. As he argues in *Religion and Violence* (2002), 'Philosophy ... never really emancipated itself from the systematic limits – semantic and figural; rhetorical and imaginative – imposed upon it by religion.'³ For Bewes, in contrast, following Lucien Goldmann and Georg Lukács, the utopian spirit of historical materialism survives in the tropes of transcendentalism: 'It is precisely in its "transcendental" or "Messianic" aspects, the affirmation of an other to what exists – in the name of which what exists or what has already existed, may be "saved" – that Marxism retains its revolutionary and progressive potential.'⁴

Essentially, the return to religious categories out of the return to the ethics of conviction is a 'return to religion beyond religion' as the realm of the passionate act as the ground of responsibility. Ethics becomes a site of the passionate political judgement and decision. Consequently, for these writers on either side of the metaphysical divide, before ethics enters the conventionalized, social-democratic site where 'human rights' and 'difference' are given their pluralist char-

acter, it is the archive and space of a less 'forgiving', less accommodating set of moral proscriptions and precepts: the Christian demands of sacrifice, unconditional love, faith, grace, fidelity, the miraculous, and the (non-pious) vows of poverty. In this respect the turn to religious categories as an underused political heritage is not based on any reinvocation of the religions of the Book, or the elaboration of the 'good life', but on a refiguring of the universal drama of human responsibility. The new writing proposes neither an unreflecting faith nor a new version of onto-theology. What the post-Platonic, post-pagan tradition of the interiorized, reflective, responsible self is seen to provide is the repoliticization of ethics under the religious imperative of the transcendental (Christianized) subject.

If this means a return to an engagement with Kantian moral law, it also means, more pertinently, a return to Kant's insistence on the indivisibility of religious faith, reason, freedom and modernity. As Kant insisted in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, modernity does not render obsolete all religious categories (forms of ethical obligation); on the contrary, under the critical and self-critical imperatives of reason such categories are renewed and extended.⁵ Under the demands of reason, the ecclesiastical, sect-divided realm of religion is divested of its supernatural residues and of the dogmas of revealed experience. But if ecclesiastical belief is transformable, its institutional forms are inevitable for Kant. Hence the compromise formation of his moral law: enlightenment is the continuous purging of ecclesiastical form and dogma and the expansion of the domain of rational religion (*Vernunftreligion*). In other words, although religion is unable to provide a stable and authoritative system of beliefs, it is, nevertheless, in a position to provide intellectual and metaphorical resources for politics and ethics.

To say that this Kantian legacy of the ethics of conviction is wholly representative of the recent turn to religion without religion would be to over-egg the Christian legacy. But without Kant's 'secularization' of Christianized categories, it is hard to get a clear sense of why the critique of the ethics of responsibility (in its Levinasian forms) is such an overwhelming presence in the anti-postmodern ethics of the moment, even in Derrida's largely Levinasian writing. For if Derrida and Hent de Vries deflate transcendental judgement, nevertheless their writing – like the materialists and realists Badiou, Negri, Žižek and Bhaskar – is indebted to Kant's Christianized paradox of obligation (an ethics against ethics) and to Kant's notion of radical

evil: that the human propensity to sin is inherent to all (well-intended) action. As such, what unites this writing across political commitments is a defence of the paradox of responsibility as *a defence of the risk of freedom*. Consequently, the turn to an ethics of conviction is united around two competing views of renunciation and the radical subject: the subject who is responsible to the difficulty or impossibility of responsibility to the 'other' (the Derridean position), and the subject who is responsible to the subject's infinitude (Negri's productive void, the void that pulls the multitude into the revolutionary 'to come'; Badiou's fidelity to the revolutionary 'to come'). The latter concept of the renunciative subject, then, is distinguishable via a simple question: How is a revolutionary subject or subjectivity possible in a world without presently discernible revolutionary forces? Where will its critical resources emerge? Contra Derrida and De Vries, the reinvigoration of religious categories in Negri, Žižek and Badiou (Bhaskar is a somewhat different matter, as we shall see), sees in early Christian thinking a source for the renewal and deepening of revolutionary agency and commitments.



In matters of ethics, if not of Kantian renunciation, we have been here before: the would-be melding, or even marriage, of Christian faith and Marxism has been a feature not only of ecumenical versions of both Christianity and Marxism since the early 1900s and the Second International, but, more significantly, of the critique of Marxism as a scientific positivism in the anti-Stalinist, Hegelian Marxism of the 1960s. I am thinking in particular of Alasdair MacIntyre's *Marxism and Christianity* (1971) and Roger Garaudy's *The Alternative Future: A Vision of Christian Marxism* (1972), two texts which use a Christianized notion of the creative radical subject in Hegel to reinsert Hegel into the main body of Marx's writing.⁶ Also published during this period was the Protestant theologian Colin Morris's extraordinary *Unyoung, Uncoloured, Unpoor* (1969), a Christian defence of revolutionary violence and of the historical Jesus as seditious and political and an ally of the Jewish Zealots.⁷

MacIntyre wrote from a position that is critical of both Marxism (or, more correctly, a Stalinized, historicist Marxism) and the official Christian Churches, yet is close to the classical – if undertheorized – Marxist principle that Judeo-Christian categories are able to provide a set of resources and commitments that function to distance men and women from the existing structures of exploitation and exchange.⁸ 'It is in the contrast between what society tells a man he is and what religion tells him he is that he is able to find grounds both for criticizing the status quo and for believing that it is possible for him to act with others in changing it.'⁹ In this respect MacIntyre recognizes that the intellectual resources out of which Marx transformed the 'philosophy of man' into the critique of political economy – Kant, Hegel and Feuerbach – were based on a secular reworking of Christian themes, which, to the end, remained a residual force in his writing.

For Hegel the content of religion is the thoroughgoing *de-estrangement* of human beings. However, the institutional locations and mythic forms of religion prevent this process from taking hold on a universal basis; it is only philosophy – theoretical reason – that is able to achieve this. If Marx insisted famously that neither religion

nor theoretical reason, together or singularly, were enough to render this possible, nonetheless his writing remained linked to those aspects of Hegel that embody the critical content of Christianity: namely, the rescuing of humans from the ignominy of finitude. As in Christ's rejection of Graeco-Roman and Judaic law, humans for Marx are able to fashion an identity that transcends or refuses to pay homage to the existing social order. This understanding of religious commitment as a refusal to pay fealty to 'false gods' connects Marx to the Christianity of his 'master', Hegel. This is the central preoccupation of Garaudy's *The Alternative Future*. As in the case of MacIntyre, Garaudy sees a Stalinized Marxism as having accepted a mechanical materialism and a utilitarian ethics. Marxism cannot be the authentic breaker of chains unless it includes the divine creativity of humans – human subjectivity as the continuous outpouring of transcendence. In this, Stalinism and its recent postmodern cognates have successfully disconnected Marx's writing from its transcendental heritage by drawing a utilitarian line under its ethics. As such, MacIntyre's and Garaudy's work in the 1960s was a Hegelianized attempt to bring the Christianized vision of de-alienation down to earth: revolutionary consciousness does not merely reflect on a situation, it *protests* against it.

In this sense, MacIntyre and Garaudy represent the recovery of a Christianized Kantian–Hegelian infinitude within Marxism and notionally, as such, provide a precursor for the new ethics of passion, fidelity and abnegation. Hegel, Marx and Feuerbach humanized certain Christian beliefs in 'such a way as to present a secularized version of the Christian judgement upon, rather than the Christian adaptation to, the secular present'.¹⁰ This is why the notion of religion as a radical critique of the secular present is diminished by the demythologizers of religion whose goal is to assimilate Christian categories to the secular present. In a reified world, it is the universalizable claims of religion, rather than the rationalist critique of religion-as-ideology, which are able to provide an outpouring of transcendence, and therefore provide a solution to the problems of human finitude. . Thus, what the rationalist demythologizers of religion fail to recognize is that metaphysical desire persists despite the delegitimation of religious belief.

Is this new ethics of conviction a call, then, to the vast constellation of Christian churches and sects to make alliance with revolutionary politics, to recall the Christian ministry to its own revolutionary, political origins? Hardly. Contemporary Christianity, even in its radical evangelical forms, is so wedded to the

malignity of social democracy and the market as to make this a desperate joke. Thus, the last thing that these writers appear to be interested in is a reconciliation of Marxism with the ecclesiastical practices and institutions of the Christian Church, a marriage Marx and Engels themselves once dismissed as 'feudal socialism'. The possible link lies, rather, in the act of passionate transcendence itself: the utopian leap of faith. Or, as Bewes puts it, the identity of Marxism and religious thought lies in 'the mobilization of ... energies towards a mode of engagement in which conceptual forms of the present are regarded in the light of an unimaginable and yet imminent future.'¹¹

Radical subjectivity

The turn to religious categories as a realm of the authentic decision unlocks a constellation of categories of agency and commitment. Indeed, it is remarkable that in a period of the crisis of politics, of the terrifying management of consensus, of the dissolution of traditional working-class identities, there should be such an extensive turn to notions of radical subjectivity and the infinitude of the subject. For in Kant the problem of moral philosophy is exactly freedom of the will, the status of a form of behaviour that is not ruled by the causality of nature, in a world in which humans increasingly appear to be ruled by heteronomous forces.

For Kant freedom is *sui generis*. That is, we have the ability to set a series of causally linked events in motion through an action which possesses an independent character. In this way the action initiates a new causal series. In these terms Kant speaks of the absolute spontaneity of the cause: the product of thought does not resemble the premises from which it emerges. Spontaneity is the faculty concerned with the free production of concepts. Hence self-reflection is implicit in Kant's ethics: we are part of nature, yet because we are liberated from the blind pursuit of natural ends, we are capable of alternative actions. But because Kant treats reason *qua* freedom as absolute, this self-reflection is not able to expand and fuse with praxis. This is why self-reflection only plays a nominal rather than a constitutive role in his ethics. It is this failure to develop the category of self-reflection that accounts for the conventional descriptions of Kant's ethics as a form of bourgeois asceticism. But, as Adorno insists, this reduction of Kant to the stereotype of the bourgeois ascetic is a narrowing of the critical implications of Kant's moral philosophy.¹² What is implicated in Kant's ethics of conviction is a resistance to, and exclusion from, those interests and impulses by

which normative experience is defined. It is this active renunciative content of Kant's moral law that is opened out and developed in the new ethics of conviction. The moral repossession of politics can only be made on the basis of recognizing that the embodied moral agent is someone who is always implicated in risking the worst (for self and other) in the name of the best. Indeed, this is a moral imperative given the subject's entanglement in heteronomy. Hence the importance for Derrida and Bhaskar, Badiou, Negri and Žižek alike of the Christianized notion of responsibility as an invitation to irresponsibility: of shooting oneself in the foot, so to speak. Indeed, in a highly circumscribed late capitalist world, this invitation to irresponsibility, of being faithful to what is inconvenient and unfaithful to what is convenient, becomes heightened, heavily freighted with all kinds of exacting political demands.

The Kantian risk of the worst in the pursuit of the best is explored in various registers in Derrida's *The Gift of Death* (1992), Badiou's *Ethics* (1998), Žižek's *The Fragile Absolute* (2000),¹³ and now Negri's *Time For Revolution* (1997/2000) and Bhaskar's *From Science to Emancipation* (2002) and *Meta-Reality* (2002).^{*} In this regard what unites this thinking across political positions is a recovery of the 'revolutionary' cultural memory of early Christianity's break with Graeco-Roman thought: an understanding of the good in terms of that which is forgetful of itself. Responsible life is a kind of forgetting-of-self, a kind of gift of, and from, the self.

Derrida explores this legacy in *The Gift of Death* through the reflexive notion that responsibility is always insufficient. 'One is never responsible enough.'¹⁴ In order to be responsible it is necessary to address what being responsible means, and this response will inevitably involve questioning the name by which responsibility is to be upheld or given. The responsible decision always exists in a place of reflection upon what is already judged to be responsible. In other words, responsibility implies a gift or sacrifice that 'functions beyond both debt and duty', beyond *what is expected*. Hence there is no responsibility 'without a dissident and inventive rupture with respect to authority, orthodoxy, rule, or doctrine'.¹⁵ This is why the biblical story of Abraham and his son Isaac has become so central to the recovery of the Christian

paradox of responsibility (following Kant and Kierkegaard, Derrida, De Vries, Žižek and Bewes all discuss it). In the story of Abraham and Isaac, Abraham is willing to sacrifice what he loves in the name of an absolute duty to his faith. For Derrida this sacrifice is the very condition and definition of the ethical. Directly echoing Kant's notion of performing one's moral duty through abandoning one's moral duty, Derrida argues: 'If you love only those who love you and to the extent that they love you, if you hold so strictly to this symmetry, mutuality, and reciprocity, then you give nothing, no love.'¹⁶ To love, therefore, one must come to hate what one loves in order to save love from the diktats of authority and heteronomy. One must violate ethics in order to 'save' ethics. One must invite violation, a certain death, in order to preserve ethics from death. Responsibility and irresponsibility are mutually defining. But for Derrida this mutuality of responsibility and irresponsibility is never symmetrical. The ethical point of the sacrifice of ethics in the Abraham story is that Isaac was saved. In order for the sacrificial act to occur and interrupt the ethical, the ethical must stay in place: without the 'intervention' of God, Abraham would become simply a murderer, rather than someone who remains responsible, absolutely, to his faith. Abraham's action, then, reveals a secret of fidelity: the passion that knows no self-calculation. This is why Kierkegaard was so compelled by Abraham's story and re-Christianized it as a radical principle: there is no freely given responsibility without the sacrifice of returns.

Žižek, likewise, takes the story of Abraham as of singular importance in recognizing the Christian break with the pagan economy of returns and reciprocity. Indeed, both writers use the same quotation from Luke 14:26 to emphasize the Christian imperative of the putting to death of one's own: 'If any one comes to me and does not hate his own brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple'.¹⁷ But in Žižek this break with the ethical in the name of the ethical becomes an insistence on the universalizing content of the renunciative break with the pagan economy of returns and reciprocity. For Žižek, Christ's invocation to hate those who we are closest to and hit out at ourselves enjoins us to dissociate ourselves from the community in which

^{*} Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini, Continuum, New York and London 2003. £16.99 hb., 0 8264 5931 5; Roy Bhaskar, *From Science to Emancipation: Alienation and the Actuality of Enlightenment*, Sage, New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London, 2002. 376 pp., £39.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 7619 9716 4 hb., 0 7619 9717 2 pb. Roy Bhaskar, *Meta-Reality: The Philosophy of Meta-Reality*, Volume 1, *Creativity, Love and Freedom*, Sage, New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London, 2002. 436 pp., £39.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 7619 9714 8 hb., 0 7619 9715 6 pb.

we live by espousing *a universal love*. Universal love insists on the non-identity between truth and appearances in the name of an emergent totalizing truth. As such, early Christianity adheres to what paganism denies: separation, the insistence on distinguishing boundaries as a moral choice. In this Christ disrupts the pagan/Roman circular logic of revenge and punishment and the balance of the All. For instance, the act of showing one's other cheek after being hit is not an indication of masochism, but the means whereby 'the circular logic of reestablishing balance' can also be interrupted. In the story of Abraham this takes the form of the severance of family obligations in order to gain a space of 'free action'. Žižek asks: 'Is not such a radical gesture of "striking at oneself" constitutive of subjectivity itself?'¹⁸ I must hate, put to death, in order that I love beyond what I already know and love. In this way, Žižek shares with Derrida a Christianized, Kantian sense that it is the suspension of the ethical that makes ethics possible. But Žižek's reading of this call to commitment is more than simply a commitment to the responsibility of responsibility; it is rather a commitment to the infinitude of the moment of risk. That is, the doubling of the decision does not just lead to the suspension of the ethical in the name of the other; it also opens the decision onto a transcendental objective. It is this 'passionate call' to the transcendental objective (the emancipatory 'to-come') that we also find in Badiou, Negri and Bhaskar.

Reflective renunciation

Although Badiou follows Derrida in judging the ethical act a risk, an opening to the future, this act is always potentially a means of putting an end to consensus and re-establishing the universal, outside the claims of the 'other'. (Žižek borrows his 'passionate call' to the transcendental objective and the diremptive power of the Christian paradox of responsibility from this very argument.) This is because for Badiou truth is the only thing that is for all, and therefore can only be achieved in the face of dominant opinion. In this way Badiou's ethics counterpoise the authenticity of commitment and not giving up one's conviction to the 'mere belonging of the "ordinary" situation'. Crucial to this is his Paulian idea of the subject as the bearer of fidelity to a founding, originary event which puts in place a process of truth. The subject becomes the event, perseveres with the truth of the event that first seized, broke and challenged the subject. The subject, then, does not pre-exist this process of fidelity; the process of truth 'induces a subject', produces the conditions for the subject's perseverance in truth. Fundamental

to this notion of perseverance is the idea of pursuing an excess of knowledge beyond myself, the linking of the known to the not-known. 'How will I, as someone, *continue* to exceed my own being?' Truth is the product of an encounter, of many encounters, rather than a process of discursive affability or sociability, because truth can only be seized on.¹⁹

Badiou's ethics stand very much within Kant's productive account of moral law: I produce the law from within myself (or, rather, in Badiou's case, out of fidelity to the transformative event). As such its renunciative content contains an explicit Kantian asociality. The internalization of fidelity poses a continual splitting or severance between knowledge and truth. Like Kant, Badiou distinguishes between the 'good' and the good done in the name of (disguised) self-interest. But if Badiou's ethics inflate, in Kantian fashion, the value of subjective self-control, this is not a radicalized version of Kantian moral law. For Badiou makes an Adornian move within and against the ethics of conviction. Fidelity to the horizon of truth is brought back into self-reflective engagement with empirical experience, into conflict with what Badiou calls the encyclopedia of knowledge from which everyday opinions and forms of sociability and communication are drawn. And it is precisely out of this conflict between the fidelity to the possibility of the 'to-come' and the conformities of knowledge of the 'ordinary' situation that an emancipatory politics emerges. 'Emancipatory politics always consists in making seem possible precisely that which, from within the situation, is declared to be impossible.'²⁰

In this respect Badiou's and Žižek's ethics of conviction constitute a form of *reflective renunciation*. If in Kant renunciation is established independently of experience, in Badiou and Žižek the ethics of renunciation is a daily practice of intransigence. Indeed, in clear opposition to the postmodern particularization of ethics and the Derridean doubling of responsibility, Badiou talks of the revolutionary subject as a rival to capital, as someone who, in the logic of Christianity's dissolution of particularism, is part of the struggle of one universalism against another universalism.²¹ This conflict of subjectivities, this conception of emancipatory politics as a walking away from doxa and the conformities of knowledge, as a space of rivalry to capital, also drives the asociality of Negri's theory of the subject. Negri talks about politics as a means of taking 'leave of domination'.²² But for Negri the responsible subject, the revolutionary subject, paradoxically, is not a conscionable subject, produced in truth, in the Badiouian/Kantian sense. Rather, for

Negri the risk of responsibility is immanent to all creative being, and thus responsibility to the 'to-come' does not need to be based on the fidelity to an earlier revelatory and constitutive (abstract) moment of truth. Negri rejects subjectivity as a space of transcendental mediation.

Transcendence for Negri is not a matter of waiting, of the mediation of the particular through an impending universal, of the call 'to-come', but of the opening up to the universal through the seizing of the moment 'to-come'. He calls this the eternity of finitude. In this defence of an anti-teleological space of emancipation, there is therefore no space for individual fidelity to the perseverance of truth. No space of correspondence between self, a founding event and the 'to-come', because the practices of truth (emancipatory practices) are already doing their work from below. Because the multitude is a free multiplicity on the edge of time (that is, continuously emergent being) it is the common telos which produces value and meaning. The risk of the 'to-come' is based on the collective *free appropriation* and transformation of the present: revolution does not need the internal representation of a revolutionary event for revolution to be thinkable or possible (a libertarian position defended, incidentally, by the Christian revolutionary Colin Morris). The 'to-come' lies in the unfolding act of living labour itself, rather than through an ethical commitment to its possibility. The subject, therefore, is not something which exists before or after the immeasurability of the struggles of living labour; it is produced in the struggles of labour, by labour – it is the space of common being. Truth is not behind or in the depths; 'it is in front, in the risk of vacillation'. Negri names this force *kairos*: a constant outpouring of transcendence through the collective.²³

This outpouring of non-teleological transcendence provides a very different ethics of conviction than Derrida, Badiou and Žižek. Because Negri has no interest in the mediation of politics from below, 'ethics is the responsibility of the present in as much it is innovation of being'.²⁴ Class consciousness, resistance, the politics of reflective renunciation are things which emerge immanently and spontaneously from within the relations of production and the conflicts of the 'to-come'. Nevertheless, if Negri, on this basis, rejects the classical Marxist/Christianized model of the figure/



party as a mediation between the transcendent and the human, his workerist ethics are clearly indebted to Christianized categories of faith and passion. The two categories which figure most prominently in his theory of *kairos*, and which place his ethics, like Badiou's and Žižek's, in the space of a secularized Christianized mediation of Marxism, are 'love' and 'poverty'.

For Negri love and poverty are the basis on which the immeasurability of the 'to-come' is produced: that which compels and grounds the time of revolution. That is, love and poverty represent the place where the power of the 'to-come' is made possible. For Negri love is indivisibly a *social category*. 'Love constructs tools, languages and politics of being with the common; and in generating, it creates being, i.e. it renews the eternal.' Love, then, is the force that sustains the resistance of the 'multitude', of the common enterprise of being on the edge of time. This is why love and poverty are tightly linked for Negri. It 'is the poor person who renders love real', given that, for Negri, it is the poor person who is able to act freely, to seize the opening on the edge of time as innovation and therefore express resistance and define singularity.²⁵ The power of the poor lies in the way the poor are able to open themselves up to the immeasurableness of the 'to-come' through the refusal

of work and received understanding. In this Negri seeks to reverse the ecclesiastical place of the poor in the Christian Church and social democracy. The poor person is not the object of love but the immeasurable *subject* of love. For Negri the revolutionary message of Christ's theology lies in his rejection of pity for the poor: in Christ's teaching 'in each poor person one discovers the figure of Christ'.²⁶ Love makes the common into a vital force that brings together the power of the multitude. Indeed, it is love which sustains the common construction of being; love is inseparable from cooperation, or the co-production of singularities. Love and poverty are the common names of the 'to-come', the forces through which the 'to-come' are generated.

Through the categories of love and poverty Negri seeks to break with the dualism of a conventional Kantian ethics of conviction. Renunciation is embedded in the productive labour of the multitude ('Rebellion is endemic and it traverses every consciousness and renders it proud');²⁷ it is not a transmittable virtue, a set of moral commitments that are freely interiorizable in the manner of Badiou. This is why Negri rejects the notion that the renunciative self is ever truly free of the space of the common that inscribes it. As such Negri refuses a certain self-image of the activist/intellectual which usually follows from an ethics of conviction: the self who is detached in his or her renunciation. Negri's categories of productive inclusion rightly question who is capable of following an ethics of conviction, who is to benefit from a reflective renunciative ethics, and what the benefits of such renunciation might actually be. But this leaves Negri's understanding of the politics of renunciation – of taking one's leave of heteronomy – subject to the essential weakness of anti-teleological politics: the disconnection between the 'to-come' and the *qualitatively new*, the new that doesn't simply embody the past but breaks with it. To take leave of heteronomy without taking leave of the social forms in which the subject is embodied by capital is to arrive at a very familiar place. Indeed, it is not to leave at all. Renunciation is a theory of the 'to-come' as the new, or it is nothing. In striking at oneself renunciation embodies the 'to-come' as qualitatively other.

Love, ontology and non-duality

It is a distinctive feature of Roy Bhaskar's turn to religious categories that, like Negri, he adopts the productive category of love in order to establish an ethics of conviction within a reflective renunciative framework. But unlike all the above writers, his com-

mitment to the moral repossession of Marxism (or a transcendental politics) is framed by an unprecedented opening up to actual religious traditions, in particular Eastern religious traditions (Sufism, Kabbala, Yogism, Buddhism, Taoism). His work therefore is opposed to the post-religious appropriation of religious categories in deconstruction and the Kantian/Hegelian-Marxisms of Badiou and Žižek. What preoccupies Bhaskar, and what makes his libertarianism closer to Negri's, is a convergence between the truths of religious traditions and the emancipatory sciences, on the basis of the idea that all authentic emancipatory practices are involved in the 'shedding or disemergence of unwanted and unnecessary determination'.²⁸ Religion is not the basis for philosophical speculation, but part of an ontology shared with science. However, Bhaskar is not proposing a theo-ontology; rather what concerns him are the conditions of possibility of right-action, in which right-action is inseparable from a commitment to emancipation *all the way down* to the ultimatum and the beginning of the universe.

Bhaskar's early critical realism was important as a form of philosophical underlabouring for Marxism, particularly during a period when post-Althusserianism was cheerfully dismantling Marxism's realist ontological commitments. What critical realism lacked in its earlier versions, however, was a theory of dialectic and an explicit thematization of being. Bhaskar addressed this in *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (1993), which embraced a neo-Hegelian framework of absence, totality and negation.²⁹ In *From Science to Emancipation* and *Meta-Reality* he has now moved on to a self-proclaimed new stage of development: transcendental dialectical critical realism (TDCR) or 'meta-reality'. In this he sets out not only to rectify what he sees as the antinomies and aporias of dialectical critical realism, but to rethink and reground the trajectory of the emancipatory traditions of Western philosophy. In this the thematization of being is given a central place in his system. The emancipatory claims of philosophy, religion and the social sciences are all submitted to a cosmological account of natural causation, regrounding the categories of materialism and realism in a deeper and expanded set of ontological claims. As he puts it: transcendental dialectical critical realism involves a 'deepening of greater totalization leading to greater reflexivity, ultimately that is the unity of theory and practice'. In this respect, Bhaskar's new work is the most direct attempt to bring secularized Christian and other religious categories to bear on the transcendental objective of the emancipatory traditions of philosophy and the social sciences: the

supersession of capital. In this, his recent works have a distinctly inflationary character. Bhaskar's writing no longer sees itself as underlabourer for the sciences, but as a philosophical system in itself. This is reflected, paradoxically, in the anti-philosophical tone of the writing, the fact that both *From Science to Emancipation* and *Meta-Reality* are written as 'guides to' emancipation. In crossing over to the East, Bhaskar has borrowed some of the rhetoric of the swami. TDCR is 'pro-active'.³⁰

In *From Science to Emancipation* and *Meta-Reality*, Bhaskar develops a fourfold account of the embedded subject: 'anything I do coming from me will be (or involve) an affect at the level of the stratification of my personality, but will also involve material exchanges with nature, social interactions with other human beings and impact in some way on the social structure'.³¹ Bhaskar's meta-reality represents the most systematic attempt in recent post-Cartesian philosophy of the subject to produce a non-dualistic account of self, agency and subjectivity. As a result, it risks a dissolution of the subject back into a flattened neo-pagan economy of ethical relations. In contradistinction to the whole panoply of conventionalist cultural accounts of the self as a heteronomous site of power and desire, Bhaskar argues that human autonomy is non-divisible, but occluded by social structures. He thus returns – in a kind of heavy clear-out of postmodernist culturalism – to a Rousseauesque notion of the self as essentially free but suppressed. The autonomy of human beings is overlain by 'structures of oppression, master–slave relationships, duality, alienation, split and the mystified world of ideology'. Hence what is required, he argues, is for people to recognize this, and 'shed, let go' of the heteronomous forces of determination.³²

This is the basis for Bhaskar's understanding of right-action. Without this simple invocation to 'walk away', take leave of heteronomy, the forces of autonomy are unable to start. Like Negri, Bhaskar sees transformational activity as embedded in an ontological account of human powers. This leads him to argue in Kantian terms that every genuine transformative act emerges *ex nihilo* from within a free realm of action. Or, more precisely, that free human agency emerges from a well-resourced immanent ground, prepared by previous kinds of transformative work. Human agency rests, for Bhaskar, on the non-dual actuality of our own essential freedom. This in turn is given a deeper ontological content by Bhaskar: because freedom is immanent to being, god or the ultimatum must also be immanent to this experience of freedom. If we are to talk about the ultimatum, god, Bhaskar insists, then we

should talk about 'the ontological immanence of god in man'.³³ The essence of man, if it is god-like, will be part of a totality that is greater in depth than man himself. As such, he argues, this is neither a covert resort to anthropocentricity nor an ontological proof of god's existence. Rather, it is an argument for the ontological embedding of spontaneous being in the *ex nihilo* creation of the universe.

This chain of implication is central to Bhaskar's conception of the emancipatory character of his project. We possess a basic embodied ground state that enables non-dual action to emerge. This ground state includes energy and intelligence, creativity, the capacity for love and right action and the fulfilment of intentionality. The groundedness of non-dual action is crucial therefore to the political content of his emancipatory project: the conditions and resources for emancipation are already in place in everyday capitalist relations. Emancipation, however, is fought for at the level of the embodied, dualistic personality and not at the level of the transcendental real self. Bhaskar describes the dualistic level as demi-reality, that which dominates the world of relative reality, the everyday terrain on which the struggle against dualism is fought. Emancipation is conceived as a process of oppositional dualistic activity in which the pursuit of non-duality lies in a struggle for self-consistency with one's transcendental ground state. Self-realization is becoming one with one's transcendently real self, a process of disidentification. Non-duality, however, is not just hard-won through 'meditation' or concentration – it is not unusual or exotic to everyday experience. On the contrary, humans possess a spontaneous capacity for non-dual transcendental identification.

For instance, non-dual attentiveness and right action are to be found in listening to someone speak (we cannot listen and think abstractly at the same time), in sex, creating an artwork, playing football – those activities where absorption allows some dissolution of judgemental attention, where thinking is subordinate to the activity in process. These moments of non-duality reveal that the struggle for non-duality is embodied in an already given network of non-dual powers; identity and the unity of being are ontologically and logically prior to concepts of non-identity and split. As such Bhaskar makes the broader claim that non-duality is the *necessary condition* for all human interaction and agency. He gives the example of factory workers: the factory is kept going not just as a result of the coercive effects of the wage-labour relation, but through the spontaneous, co-operative non-dual action of workers. Workers give of themselves freely *within* the wage-

labour relation. This is Bhaskar's key argument. The non-dual resources for struggle against the heteronomy of division and split have an immanent position within this struggle for non-duality. People already live and struggle within the realm of non-duality. This claim is very similar to Negri's theory of love as the ground of co-operative labour. And, indeed, it is the category of love that underwrites Bhaskar's theory of the ground state, and operates as the fundamental category of his transcendental project.

As with Negri, Bhaskar sees love as explicitly a social category: the constitutive praxis of the common. But, in contrast to Negri, Bhaskar expands the boundaries and efficacy of love to ontological proportions. For Bhaskar love is the binding, unconditional force which unites the universe. It unites energy, intelligence, creativity, right action. Indeed, the world of duality and split is inconceivable without the pre-existing, transformative presence of a 'deeper essential, creative loving self'.³⁴ This is expressed in the way love inevitably returns the absence of love to love. The more those aspects of an entity or enemy that are opposed to love are overwhelmed by love, the more those aspects will disappear. Thus Bhaskar, like Derrida and Žižek, invokes the (Christian) tactic that in offering love to an enemy the hierarchical force that drives the economy of revenge and duality is weakened. But, for Bhaskar, there is no ambiguity about the universality of this love: love *does* heal, unite and de-alienate. This is why love above all else 'embodies a drive to totality'. Once we love something we must 'be set on a dialectic in which [we] must unconditionally love the totality of all beings, albeit in ways which are specific to the concrete singularity of the relationship with them'.³⁵ The drive to totality or holistic causality is for Bhaskar based ultimately on the drive to love the divine ingredient or immanent god, the ultimatum, in the beloved thing. I recognize that my being is enfolded in all other beings *all the way down*. He calls this the cosmic envelope: the human power of transcendental identification (the love at the ground state) that connects humans with humans, and humans with other beings, across time and space. However, the transcendental content of this love does not imply an undifferentiated identification or fusion with the other. Love is not an abstract force for inclusive dealienation and unity, but a highly contextualized universal *motive* for action. Thus if the 'best way of loving people may be to transform structures ... this does not mean that you never kill. The best way of transforming a structure may be to shoot someone, though I'm not saying it is.... So love

does not imply any particular action. It is consistent with a lot of different behaviours.'³⁶

This returns us to the theme of renunciative reflection and the paradox of responsibility. As a contextual motive for de-alienating action, love will find itself in the position of the violation of self and the other. Infact it is compelled to, because love, as the ground of the struggle for non-duality, is tied to the derealization of the ego and the other: the more I am willing to surrender my ego, the more capable I am of walking away from heteronomy. Bhaskar's transcendental dialectical critical realist system operates a theory of the dialectical embedding and disembedding of the subject, in which transformational activity is grounded in an expanded account of negation and emancipation. Walking away from heteronomy, 'giving up' on split, clearing out, action-as-inaction, form a kind of renunciative inventory for the re-embedding of the non-dual self. In this respect, the reified self here is subject to the embedding of the subject in natural and social causation in two directions simultaneously: internally (towards its co-presence in the other) and externally (towards its co-presence in cosmological time, the ultimatum, god). However, this kind of systematization of an ethics of conviction invariably produces an inflation of self-emancipation, the very thing that an ethics of conviction was designed to prevent. That is, the ontological ambitions of emancipation outweigh its feasible political forms, resulting in a loss of clarity at the level of social categories and social agency.

Thus, for Bhaskar, we are all victims of master-slave relations; there is no privileged agent of change, people will come together as human beings to transcend capital, yet 'I do give a primacy to class.' But free development as a condition of the free development of all is not absolute; it is determined by our limitations and obligations as a species. Freedom is only possible as freedom *within* heteronomy. As such, at this stage of social development, human freedom will be overwhelmingly determined by how humans overcome the primary social split of class. Hence the expansion of our non-dual ground state will contribute to that possibility, but it will be subject to collective forces beyond its immediate control. In Bhaskar's model, however, desire, non-duality, flows in the opposite direction to fill the heteronomous void. The relations between non-duality and duality, between non-duality and the critique of heteronomy, non-duality and experience, need refining and re-embedding in an understanding of the historical dynamics of actual collective struggles.³⁷

Christian paradox and dialectical paradox stem from the same source: the coercive, limited, instrumental thinking of the world of dualism. In the corpus of writing discussed here, this conjunction has come into focus as the basis for the moral repossession of the subject, of politics from below, of emancipatory non-dual thought and action. The convergence of themes around (teleological and non-teleological) transcendence and sacrifice presupposes an attempt to renegotiate the language of negation and empathy, to dissolve and remix their orders. I have argued that this is grounded in the rethinking and repoliticization of a neo-Kantian (Adornian) ethics of conviction. The result – certainly in Bhaskar and Negri – is a greater emphasis on the forces of non-duality in the struggle for non-dualism, and a weakening of the place of Marx in the renunciative mix. But crucially what unites this writing is the overcoming of heteronomy through a new language of (Christianized, Marxian) paradox, in which the renunciation of life and its transformation exist simultaneously. ‘To live *in* the present does not mean to live for the present moment.’³⁸ Thus struggle as love, love in struggle, renunciation within struggle, struggle as renunciation, renunciation as an act of universal love, are held to repoliticize negation and empathy in a culture that narrows and demeans their powers.

Broadly, then, renunciation testifies to the anti-postmodern politics of this writing, and the shared sense of the importance of sacrifice to the critique of heteronomy. Severing oneself from one’s family in order to denounce the particular, striking at one’s self in order to reground the ethical, taking one’s leave of the common in order to reinstate the common, resisting the ordinary in the name of the fidelity to truth, embracing the place of poverty as the place of emancipation and of truth, stripping oneself of one’s ego, walking away from heteronomy, are not things that would appear to be conducive to the sentimentalized ethical landscape of the liberal politics of the moment. Indeed, for many they would appear to be the grievous and pathological detritus of politics. But in Derrida, Žizek, Negri, Badiou and Bhaskar – across different registers and political traditions – these actions share a common, combative and resistive identity: how is the ethical political category of sacrifice to be interpreted in a political culture where sacrifice has largely been evacuated from the post-communist language of the Left and of the Christian Church?

Today when we hear the word ‘sacrifice’ it is invariably in connection with the politics of radical Islam, in as much as it is Islam, and Islam alone, that now appears to embrace sacrifice as a political

category (suicide bombers being the supreme agents of renunciation). In this light, sacrifice is judged to be a premodern residue, an ugly hangover from the pieties and doggerel of an older religious world and socialist struggle, something that the West’s technology, secularization and multiculturalism have long abandoned as a manipulative contrivance. The reconceptualization of the Christian paradox of responsibility in the new ethical writing, then, is not innocent of the continuing political significance of sacrifice, and of the necessity of reclaiming its criticality in a period where its has been deflated and archaized. In this respect, the distinction between Derrida and Žizek, Badiou, Negri and Bhaskar over what kind of sacrificial economy is possible or obtainable or worthy for contemporary politics should not obscure the common commitment to the centrality of the sacrificial for a new model of politics. Without the risk of irresponsibility, of the violation of the other and self, the ethical could never come into being. In Derrida, though, sacrifice is always sacrificed to the impossibility of the transcendental objective, leaving the doubling of the authentic act marooned in a permanent kind of Third Wayism. The asociality of emancipatory thought, the responsibility to irresponsibility, is too easily dissolved. However, the asociality of emancipatory thought and struggle is what social democracy fears and reviles. For the renunciative act, the walking away from heteronomy, are allegories and prefigurations of a greater withdrawal: the collective withdrawal of labour.

Notes

This essay is written in the memory of Dorothy Annie Roberts, 1932–2002.

1. Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone. ed. Thomas Schröder, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000.
2. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and analysed by H.J. Paton, Harper & Row, New York, 1964, p. 69.
3. Hent De Vries, *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, p. 211; reviewed in *Radical Philosophy* 116, November/December 2002, pp. 43–6.
4. Timothy Bewes, *Reification; or The Anxiety of Late Capitalism*, Verso, London, 2002, p. 49; reviewed below.
5. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. George di Giovanni, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.
6. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1971; Roger Garaudy, *The Alternative Future: A Vision of Christian Marxism*, trans. Leonard Mayhew, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976.
7. Colin Morris, *Unyoung, Uncoloured, Unpoor*, Epworth Press, London, 1969.

8. See Karl Marx, 'Introduction. Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law', Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Volume 3, pp. 175–87.
9. MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, p. 11.
10. Ibid., p. 107.
11. Bewes, *Reification*, p. 266.
12. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*.
13. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1995; Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, Verso, London and New York, 2002; Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute – or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?*, Verso, London and New York, 2000.
14. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 51.
15. Ibid., pp. 63, 27.
16. Ibid., p. 106.
17. Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, p. 120; Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 64.
18. Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, pp. 125, 150.
19. Badiou, *Ethics*, pp. 48, 43, 50.
20. Ibid., p. 121.
21. As Simon Critchley notes, however, there is a kind of grandstanding to Badiou's theory of fidelity. Badiou's understanding of the founding event is conspicuously the Great Political Event (for Badiou May '68), leavening his renunciation with the ardour of the heroic. See Simon Critchley, 'Demanding Approval: On the Ethics of Alain Badiou', *Radical Philosophy* 100, March/April 2000, pp. 16–27.
22. Negri, *Time for Revolution*, p. 259.
23. Ibid., pp. 153.
24. Ibid., p. 183.
25. Ibid., pp. 211, 209.
26. Ibid., p. 209.
27. Ibid., pp. 200–201.
28. Bhaskar, *From Science to Emancipation*, p. 29.
29. Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*, Verso, London and New York, 1993.
30. Bhaskar, *From Science to Emancipation*, pp. 25, 54.
31. Ibid., p. 49.
32. Ibid., pp. 128–9.
33. Ibid., p. 132.
34. Ibid., p. 37.
35. Bhaskar, *Meta-Reality*, p. 92.
36. Bhaskar, *From Science to Emancipation*, p. 254.
37. Ibid., p. 198. For a discussion of Bhaskar's inflation of philosophy, see Sean Creaven, 'The Pulse of Freedom? Bhaskar's Dialectic and Marxism', *Historical Materialism*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 77–141.
38. Bhaskar, *Meta-Reality*, p. 257.



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Dead in America

Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*, edited, translated and with an introduction by Peggy Kamuf, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2002. 304 pp., £37.95 hb., £17.95 pb., 0 8047 4400 6 hb., 0 8047 4411 4 pb.

There is a mordant untimeliness to this new collection of translations of Derrida's occasional pieces. The dateline of Kamuf's introduction is June 2001, yet Derrida's themes, especially those of sovereignty, cruelty and resistance, the structure of the lie and the aporias of self-deception glow with the *Nachtraglichkeit* of the event, as Derrida might put it, of September of that year. Kamuf's own prefatory remarks share this oracular quality: "'United States" is the effective or practical name for the theologico-political myth we call sovereignty: it names the conjunction of forces sufficient, for the moment, to enforce the myth of its own absolute, if theologically buttressed sovereignty'. Subsequent events in Afghanistan and elsewhere have cashed out that myth as real. But Derrida's reflections on sovereignty aim constantly at the aporetic, at the impossibility that is the ground of the 'event worthy of the name'. 'Only the impossible can arrive', he says as he criticizes the idea of the performative which would merely repeat. 'If what arrives belongs to the horizon of the possible, or even of a possible performance ... it does not happen in the full sense of the word.' This thought is a return to his earlier *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, where he says 'Without the ordeal of the aporetic there would only be programs or causalities ... and no decision would ever take place.' However, having invoked the spectre of a sovereign decision here, a few pages later he revokes it: 'To those who are waiting for me to take a position so they can reach a decision [*arrêter leur jugement*], I say "Good luck."' The call for a deconstruction of sovereignty is accompanied by the persistence of its phantasm, and the phantasm may well be the only being of sovereignty as such. A certain frustration and disappointment are never far away.

The book itself, in keeping with its insistent Ur-Derridean motifs of divisibility, non-originality and non-self-identity, is a composite, heteroclit and heterochronic object, whose editorial production was prompted by the 'strong continuities' that Kamuf noted in the first four essays whilst she was translating '*Le Parjure*'. Derrida himself suggested the addition of the piece on psychoanalysis. The joint responsibility for

the final text leads to a certain literary uxoriousness, as Derrida hymns Kamuf's selection and engagement: 'She ... reads me better, down to the unconscious, than I will ever read myself.' In so reading him, she produces 'the book of an American thinker about the United States'. Greater love hath no philosopher than he should lay down his book for his translator.

The final product comprises, first, 'History of the Lie' from 1994, a piece given to a conference commemorating Reiner Schürmann's death, at the New School in New York. Derrida takes issue here with Arendt's notion of the lie and the possibility of self-deception, and in doing so settles scores with accusations that he (and others) had failed to insist on the responsibility of the French state for complicity in the Holocaust. This is followed by 'Typewriter Ribbon', from 1998, which engages once more with Augustine, Rousseau and de Man, and with issues of confession and mechanical reproduction. Both these pieces have been published in other collections. Then we have '*Le Parjure*', a reading of the novel of the same name by Henri Thomas, which concerns the apparent perjury of a Belgian theoretician domiciled (illegally, it transpires) in the USA, and clearly collides with the history of the 'De Man affair' (indeed, Derrida implies that it was de Man who suggested he read the novel). Here Derrida again proves to be a consummate reader, developing the literary figure of *anacoluthon* into a discussion of complicity and betrayal. 'The University without Condition' is a defence of a 'right to say everything', 'an unconditional independence' thought against the idea of sovereignty and against a certain '*mondialisation*', developed in an address at Stanford in 1999. The university is the public space of 'a principle of resistance ... a force of resistance – and of dissidence'. Finally, in 'Psychoanalysis Searches the States of its Soul: The Impossible Beyond of a Sovereign Cruelty (Address to the States General of Psychoanalysis)', an address to the eponymous convocation at the Sorbonne in 2000, Derrida returns again to questions he limned in 'To Speculate – on Freud' in *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud*, posing the possibility of a 'beyond of the beyond' of

the pleasure principle, a beyond of the death drive, which would link to the idea, inchoately developed in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, of a drive to sovereign mastery. But it is also a critique of the performativity of sovereignty, a critique that repeats the deconstruction of the constative/performative duality set out in 'Typewriter Ribbon'. This address is echoed in the introductory 'Provocation' where Derrida approvingly cites Kamuf's claim that 'the essential trait of this book ... [is] the trait of sovereignty'. There is thus a certain insistence, a certain repetition of figures, tropes and problematics, as Derrida might say, and a return once more to psychoanalysis, a recurrent locus of investigation in Derrida's work.

If the juddering repetition of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* provides, on Derrida's reading, a mimesis of the very repetition compulsion it seeks to identify, then the repetitive circling of certain notions – sovereignty and violence, resistance and responsibility – provide the perimeter and parameters of Derrida's political thinking from his reflections on Benjamin and the law in *Force of Law* to the pieces here. The return to psychoanalysis privileges just that text that Derrida has shown to be privileged within Freud's *œuvre* – *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* – inasmuch as it is the site of the emergence of the death drive, the drive that unbinds. In *Resistances* Derrida brought analysis close to deconstruction, showing how the archaeological principle (ana-) was always doomed to failure and that lysis, or rather the philolytic principle, invariably opposed any pretension to origin or indivisibility. The death drive is close to the formal principle of deconstruction: 'If, in an absurd hypothesis, there were ... a sole thesis of Deconstruction, it would pose divisibility: divisibility as difference.' In *Archive Fever*, the death drive is the foundation of the archive: the critique of Lacan hinges on the divisibility of the letter, but also on the rereading of Lacan's reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Indeed, as early as 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', Freud's 'economy of death' is almost analogous to *différance*: not quite deconstruction as psychoanalysis, but perhaps the death drive as psychoanalysis homologous with deconstruction.

But psychoanalysis 'as such does not produce or procure any ethics, any law any politics' (an offhand dismissal of a whole Lacanian problematic). It undermines the sovereignty of the subject and must be taken into account, but can never provide a programme. The thought here is that psychoanalysis as positive knowledge insists on abolishing the space of heterogeneity, the space of decision: its undermining of sovereignty,

of notions of the free, self-identical subject, always threatens to reinscribe what remains after this undermining into 'an economy of the possible', thus reducing 'ethics, even law and politics to this economy'. The subject is reclaimed for a different mastery, the drive for mastery (*Bemächtigungstrieb*). Derrida hesitates here on the source of violence, vacillating between aggression as the consequence of the redirection of the death drive, as in the discussion of *Why War?*, Freud's exchange of letters with Einstein, and aggression as a function of the more primordial drive for mastery, which he associates with a will to domination and with the performative power that institutes 'the whole order of what Lacan calls the symbolic'. The death drive thus drifts towards a principle of 'benign' negativity, whilst the performative dimension underlain by the *Bemächtigungstrieb* becomes the principle of iterative possibility, hence the closure of a certain impossibility, which functions as the place of the ethical, heterogeneity and decision. Eros and Thanatos become the pillars of the constative knowledge of psychoanalysis; the Mastery drive is the underpinning of the performative institution; and separated from each by a constitutive hiatus lies the 'free responsibility that can never be deduced from a single act of knowledge'.

If the sovereignty of the subject is dissolved by psychoanalysis (by the unbinding of the death drive), then its deconstruction has compromising effects for 'the axiomatics of responsibility'. If the model of the auto-determining intentionality of the conscious subject is no longer apposite, then 'the most stable foundations of morality, law and politics' are compromised, especially the particulars of human rights. These consequences are equally traumatic at the level of the nation-state, the specular other of the subject. In this case, Derrida speaks of 'deconstruction and combat at one level' and 'support' at another. Sovereignty can be resistance. This dual difficulty requires a different problematic, that of divided or limited sovereignty, but this immediately runs into the difficulty that sovereignty is undivided or it is not, not to speak of the operation of *force majeure* justified on the grounds of the limited sovereignty of the victim. The attempted solution, the division of the division itself 'a frontier limit divides only by partitioning, sharing itself: it is shared only by dividing itself', seems singularly opaque. In the essay on the university, Derrida is more prudent: 'An immense problem. How can one dissociate democracy from citizenship, from the nation state and from the theological idea of sovereignty, even from the sovereignty of the people?' It links this with an interrogation of juridical performatives,

among which we must include the notion of rights and novel concepts 'transformative of the geopolitical field' such as 'crimes against humanity'. Insistently, Derrida claims the necessity for the deconstruction of unconditional sovereignty 'the heritage of a barely secularized theology', even as he acknowledges that in its most visible case its value 'is everywhere today in thorough decomposition', and with it the concepts of subject, citizen, freedom, responsibility, the people, and so on.

Sovereignty is founded on violence and claims the right of violence against those over whom it exercises power. The metonym for this is the death penalty, and suddenly Derrida brings his two sets of concerns together in a startling provocation: in the USA, we have a power that is inflexible in regard to national sovereignty and maintains the death penalty, whereas the states of Europe have abolished the death penalty and have begun to question the nation-state, putting

it into an 'unprecedented crisis'. But it is the hidden enthymeme which is truly scandalous: the Europe that has begun its slow solvent work on ideas of national sovereignty, perhaps moving beyond its constitutive cruelty, is marked as the 'birthplace of psychoanalysis', whereas 'Freud is dead in America', as Roudinesco says. Is psychoanalysis then necessary? Is it the key to the death of sovereignty at the level of the state?

It is an unanswered question, like many raised by the thought in these essays. Always moving on, always elsewhere, Derrida always has an alibi for not saying what he wants to say: 'it would take too long', 'for lack of time', 'I hasten to my conclusion in a ... telegraphic fashion'. It is reminiscent of the Lacan of the seminars. Perhaps Derrida needs now to settle accounts with psychoanalysis, to do the justice to Freud for which he commends and criticizes Foucault.

Philip Derbyshire

Quiet despair

Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2002. xi + 328 pp., £18.95 hb., 0 691 10276 7.

This is a crepuscular book, written in a sombre mood. It offers a defence of two virtues which Williams associates with truth: namely, 'Sincerity' and 'Accuracy'. These virtues in Williams's opinion need to be defended against the raising tide of deniers within the context of humanities departments in universities. Williams's characterization of his opponents is not altogether clear. Initially, he writes that deniers are those who deny the importance or existence of truth or of other things usually associated with it that are standardly taken to be significant. However, this initial description cannot be exactly right since, as I show below and Williams himself acknowledges, it matters not to Williams's arguments if there is no property (minimal or robust) that is shared by all and only those beliefs, sentences or propositions that are true.

The real point of contention between Williams and those whom he calls 'deniers' does not concern truth; it concerns virtue. More precisely, the dispute is over which intellectual virtues must, in these troubled times, be cultivated in order to foster the kinds of institutions and communities conducive to the welfare of human beings. Williams does not make it explicit

that this is the main aim of the book, but once the book is read in this manner it becomes apparent why the villain of the story, the main denier, is Richard Rorty. Williams believes that hope for a better future lies with the cultivation of some of the virtues of the scholar – patience with the facts and transparency in expressing one's views – together with an acute sense of the importance of historical understanding. Rorty has often emphasized the importance of a different set of character traits. He praises the liberal ironist who dismisses old vocabularies, especially the vocabulary of truth, in favour of new ones.

It would be unhelpful, however, to read the debate between Williams and Rorty as a disagreement as to whether we need to keep or ditch the word 'truth'. Williams's main argument, which takes the form of a vindictory genealogy, attempts to establish that sincerity and accuracy are valuable for their own sake; which is to say, they are intrinsically valuable. And one can hold this view whilst denying the existence of (the property) truth. It might seem odd that one can without contradiction deny that there is such a thing as truth, and also attribute value to some dispositions

because their cultivation improves our chances of believing what is true and denying what is false. But there is no contradiction here; one can value getting things right (attempting to believe that p only if p) without believing that there is anything all accurate beliefs have in common. Williams is aware of this point. Hence, he claims that literally truth 'is not the sort of thing that can have a value'. Elsewhere, he also adds that he is only concerned with 'certain human attitudes toward the truth'. And, whatever truth might be for Williams, it is not constituted by our attitudes. Thinking that something is true does not make it so.

Williams does believe that truth is a robust property, a property with a metaphysical nature which does explanatory philosophical work. For instance, he thinks that it helps in the articulation of a philosophical account of meaning and belief. However, in this book Williams does not really explain or defend these views, presumably because his main thesis is quite independent of them. Thus, Williams's disagreement with Rorty, at least as presented in this book, cannot be understood as being centred around the question of whether truth exists. One also hopes that it is not simply about whether we ought to use the word 'truth', since, if it were, the disagreement could easily become rather empty. This is why I think the debate is best read as one about which virtues we should care about and foster, in education, for example.

Incidentally, on the matter of education Williams's attack seems to me to be off-target. He describes our times as 'a season when, in the humanities the sun is low in the sky'. Williams thinks that the cause of the decline of the humanities in universities is the growing influence within academic circles of the views of deniers, like Rorty or so-called postmodernist lit-crit types. He thinks that these views have pernicious effects because they undermine the authority of ideas, and, by failing to acknowledge even the most basic everyday truths, contribute to the alienation of the humanities from the rest of society.

It seems very unlikely that these phenomena lie at the root of the problem. First, the so-called rest of society seems to be more attracted to the outlandish views of individuals who fit the category of deniers than to the opinions of the methodical pursuers of common sense – witness the presence of one of Baudrillard's books in *Matrix Reloaded*. Second, as exemplified by the recent pronouncements by the British Minister of Education about public funding of academia, the main current threat to the humanities comes from utilitarian conceptions of education, which measure the value of teaching almost exclusively in terms of the material

wealth it contributes to producing. This is clearly not something that Rorty or other deniers advocate.

As mentioned above, the argumentative core of the book is constituted by a vindicatory genealogy of the virtues of sincerity and accuracy. Yet these are not the only intellectual virtues whose cultivation makes us better at getting things right. Humility would seem to be as important. Without it we might fail to be aware that, no matter how careful we have been, our point of view could always be mistaken. In particular, intellectual humility is required if we are to make sense of viewpoints very different from our own, since in order to understand them one must find it at least conceivable that one's own views are mistaken. It is surprising that Williams never mentions this virtue despite his concern with making sense of lives very different from our own.

Besides his far-too-narrow characterization of the intellectual virtues, Williams's employment of genealogical accounts to vindicate them is also unusual. He takes such accounts to be exemplified by classic social contract arguments like Locke's. These arguments are philosophical thought experiments which involve imagining a fictitious state of nature. The point of these arguments, Williams suggests, is to show that, because of their instrumental value, some dispositions, institutions, or social practices are nearly necessary for any human society to develop and flourish. A genealogical argument is also judged vindicatory if those who accept it do not find that their confidence in the value of the dispositions, practices and institutions in question is thereby undermined.

This is an unusual take on the method of genealogy, since Williams is not primarily concerned with historical accounts of the development of concepts, institutions or virtues. He does supplement his state of nature arguments for sincerity and accuracy with historical accounts of how sincerity was transformed in the eighteenth century into authenticity and of how the nature of accuracy changed with the development of an objective conception of the past. But these historical excursions do not bear the real weight of Williams's argument, which rests on the shoulders of the abstract state of nature thought experiment.

In a nutshell, Williams claims that any group of human beings whatsoever needs to pool information, and that this is best achieved by a division of epistemic labour. In turn, this phenomenon requires that individuals foster in themselves and in others the dispositions to be accurate and sincere. These dispositions are essential if we are to trust what others tell us, because if they lack sincerity they are likely to mislead

us, and if they are inaccurate they are unlikely to have reliable information to offer. Consequently, sincerity and accuracy are at the very least instrumentally valuable. Williams concedes that even deniers would agree with him on this point. But he thinks that they do not follow him in claiming further that these virtues are intrinsically valuable. As a consequence he believes that their position is inherently unstable.

Williams's argument for the intrinsic value of the virtues of sincerity and accuracy takes a rather peculiar form. It is a story about how in any society, whose members already have the dispositions of sincerity and accuracy, prudentially rational individuals will eventually come to believe that these traits of character are valuable for their own sake. The reason why this attitude will emerge is that it is instrumentally valuable for any society to believe that the virtues associated with truth are intrinsically valuable.

There is much that is of interest in this argument, although in my opinion it ultimately fails. The argument offers an example of how a naturalist, non-reductivist, account of

normative facts could be produced. Williams writes that it is sufficient for something to *have* intrinsic value that it is necessary for basic human needs that human beings *treat* it as intrinsically valuable, and that they can *coherently believe* it to have this feature. In other words, if human beings find it necessary to believe that something is valuable for its own sake, and they can coherently sustain the belief that it is (given their other beliefs), then that thing *is* valuable for its own sake. It thus becomes apparent that Williams's genealogical arguments have a constructive purpose. They attempt to institute norms by establishing their validity in terms of two conditions: (1) the instrumental rationality of the belief that the norm exists, and (2) the ability of this belief to survive reflection.

Williams's argument for the intrinsic value of sincerity and accuracy does not, in my opinion, satisfy this second condition. Rather, the argument undermines our belief in the value of those virtues. Suppose that you do value sincerity and accuracy for their own sake. Suppose also that you believe

Williams's argument that the reason why it makes sense to value these traits of character for their own sake is that it is expedient to believe that they are intrinsically valuable. It would then seem that your previous commitment to accuracy and sincerity would compel you to admit that you only have reasons to think that it is convenient to believe in the value of accuracy and sincerity, but that you have no further reason to think also that they actually *are* intrinsically valuable. Hence, the position advocated by Williams is inherently unstable: if you sincerely believe in sincerity, then you must stop believing in



it once you accept Williams's constructive argument in its favour. In this respect, Williams does not seem to be in a much better position than his opponents.

Reading the final two chapters of the book one has the impression that Williams himself sensed that his vindication of the virtues of truth might be unstable. His genealogical arguments are meant to show that a commitment to sincerity and accuracy does not on reflection turn against itself to undermine the worthiness of those intellectual virtues. Yet Williams concludes the book on a strikingly pessimistic note, which would be out of place if he were confident of the success of his own genealogical arguments. Instead, he acknowledges that the 'hope that a truthful story on a large enough scale will not cause despair' is just that, a hope. Hence, he appears to fear that the virtues of truth might ultimately be among the victims of the epistemology of suspicion which they have themselves helped to create. Still, perhaps such quiet despair is more realistic than the brash optimism of the liberal ironist.

Alessandra Tanesini

Gilles or Noam?

Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Deleuze and Language*, Palgrave Macmillan, London and New York, 2002. 274 pp., £45.00 hb., 1 4039 0036 1.

Inspired by what is arguably one of Deleuze's most enduring and illuminating notions, that of the problem, Lecercle's thesis is that language is simultaneously a privileged medium through which to reconstruct the originality of Deleuze's philosophical project and a manner of elucidating its internal fault lines and displacements. In the process of bolstering this thesis, Lecercle offers us something like the ideal-type of the commentary: a remarkably comprehensive and commendably lucid account of what he rightly calls Deleuze's 'part theories' of language, ranging from the thesis of the incorporeality of sense to the programme of a general semiotics in the collaborations with Guattari. Moreover, sensitive to the shifting motivations of Deleuze's philosophy, he demonstrates that the theme of language is arguably the crucial factor in assessing both Deleuze's complex relationship to structuralism and his possible contributions to a literary aesthetics (this last being the chief desideratum for Lecercle himself).

Interestingly, where Deleuze is characteristically allusive and often elliptical in his treatments of linguistic theories and literary texts, mining them for their formulas (Bartleby's 'I would prefer not to') rather than for their internal dynamics or cultural repercussions, Lecercle applies his considerable technical and terminological know-how to making the former's approach to language explicit. This is both one of the strengths of the book and something like a performative disavowal of its own basic platform. One is struck by the divergence in styles of thought between the commentator and his object. Lecercle's detailed treatment of the internal articulations and the myriad operators of linguistic usage – on show in particular in his clever 'interludes', where rigorous eclecticism replaces addenda to the Deleuzian corpus, or in his detailed reading of the *incipit* of the *Anti-Oedipus* – shows an ability to think inside sentences, to unfold the speculative content that permeates literary creativity, which, I would argue, is very much alien to Deleuze (and, incidentally, rather reminiscent of the essays of the American novelist W.H. Gass).

Lecercle's felicitously heterodox 'applications' of Deleuzian notions to literary texts, which have the immense virtue of eschewing the bane of secondary literature, that of watered-down paraphrase, seek to

give philosophical rights of citizenship to a motley fauna of literary concepts (antimetabole, anaphora, antanaclasis, anapaestis, hypotax, paratax, zeugma, paronomasia, etc.). Alternatively, Deleuze's work most often disregards the conceptual tools immanent to a pre-constituted domain (e.g. tropes in the analysis of rhetoric and textual construction), preferring to this the extraction of novel concepts, which are ultimately intra-philosophical and need not bear any resemblance to those employed by the practitioners in question, be they linguists or cinematographers, biologists or political theorists. In the end, one feels that Deleuze's preference for literature over linguistics, the sources and style of which are amply traced by Lecercle, is predicated on the greater ease of a free extraction of concepts, and is founded on a rather romantic notion of creativity, whereby the ordinary creativity of linguistic utterance (of the kind tirelessly advocated by Chomsky) is demoted in favour of the extraordinary, impersonal and ontological creativity of the arts. Lecercle's twist on this preference, summarized in the formula 'philosophy is the natural metalanguage of literature, and literature of philosophy', strikes me as far too tidy: it is only to the extent that literature enacts Deleuze's vitalist ontology of creativity that it demands philosophical capture, but there is no sense in which Deleuze is promoting a philosophy of literature, of the kind that would wish to serve as the matrix for a potentially infinite collection of 'readings'.

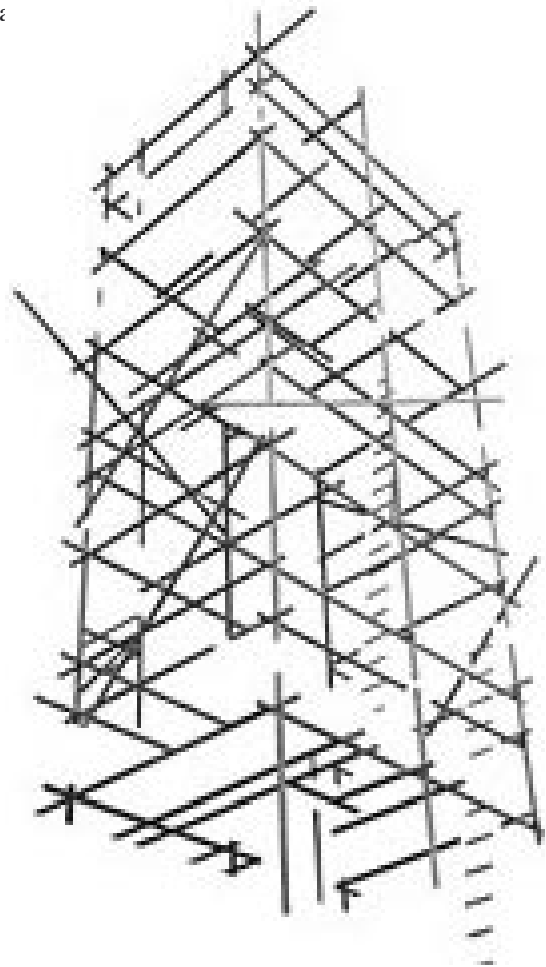
Throughout the book, the method of the *correlation*, which involves the creation of two antagonistic and asymmetrical series, matched term by term, is enlisted in the gigantomachy between the Deleuzian hero, the poet-philosopher of subversive agrammaticality, and the Chomskyan bogeyman, the state linguist of binary arborescence in search of binding universal constants. In line with Deleuze and Guattari's own 'Postulates of Linguistics' in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Lecercle stages a battle between two models of formalization or abstraction: a mathematizable positing of deep universals and a descriptive diagrammatic or cartographic study of variations. Loosely resurrecting Lakatos's terminology, he tells us that we are faced with the struggle between two research programmes on language.

Despite the persuasive advocacy of Lecercle, however, it is difficult to shake off the impression that Deleuze's relative indifference to the sort of analysis performed by Lecercle reveals the glad tidings of a Deleuzian research programme as a dead letter. After all, the genre of formalization and abstraction proposed here, a diagrammatic method in the last instance indifferent to any regional ontologies whatsoever, is precisely aimed at denying the existence of an individualizable object domain that would undergird such a programme in the first place. What's more, since Lecercle's *parti pris* is with literature (both its creation and its analysis) and the very dream of a 'nomad science' (or of *scientific* progress in the field of linguistic pragmatics) is given short shrift, it becomes unclear what research (as opposed to philosophical conceptualization or literary invention) this programme may be up to. Though at one point Lecercle feebly tries to convince us that Deleuze might be the sort of social constructivist (read unreconstructed idealist) for whom all phenomena are linguistically constituted, there isn't actually any way to maintain the specificity of language, disciplinary or otherwise, in a Deleuzian framework, especially once the structuralist project of the *Logic of Sense*, and its concept of static genesis, are supplanted by the logic of assemblage of the works with Guattari – a passage that Lecercle himself navigates with considerable pedagogical flair. Even when it comes to the supposedly radical creativity of artistic uses of language, the continuum of variations or plane of consistency that allegedly emerges from the flight from linguistic constants is precisely not itself of the order of language, as borne out by Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of vocalization in the works of Luciano Berio and by their general penchant for synaesthetic experiences.

The famous body without organs is built, amongst other things, on the expulsion of the organ of language. And it is really here – rather than in the interesting juxtaposition of models of science and formalization, and even less in the risible notion that Chomskyan linguistics is to the 'right' of an emancipatory Deleuzian philosophy of literature (how one can be an anarcho-syndicalist *and* a state philosopher is beyond this reviewer) – that the crux of the polemical confrontation lies. The fundamental 'naturalist' tenet that lies behind Chomsky's programme (as well as a number of competing approaches to language) has been succinctly stated by the Italian philosopher Franco Lo Piparo, in his recent work *Aristotele e il linguaggio*: 'Men do not *use* language, they *live* language. Language is not a tool, but rather the species-specific activity of

natural organs.' All of Deleuze's approach is negatively determined by a systematic or transcendental opposition to any such thesis. Philosophical anti-humanism may generalize the category of language to cover all semiotic phenomena (as in the vulgar image of structuralism attacked by Lecercle) or extend that of the sign to pervade the entire ontology of relations (as in Deleuze's neo-vitalism), but it cannot abdicate on its opposition to the notion of a species-specific capacity that would be binding on philosophical reflection and formalization.

Recalling the problems left pending in Chomsky's notorious 1971 debate with Michel Foucault, we should note that this decision on human nature resonates with questions of political justice, equality and action, ε



predictable. Recursively applying the method of the problem to Lecercle's own work – and, in turn, to Deleuze's – we could say that both are driven by a systematic disavowal of both the problem of human nature (and the biological specificity of the capacity for language) and of political decision (and the existence of a determinate and perhaps even autonomous domain for transformative collective practice). Recasting Deleuze's problem of language in this light can make us sensitive to what remains attractive and profoundly consistent in his opposition to both *math-*

esis universalis and naturalism (the two pillars of the Chomskyan line); it can also locate a far richer ground on which to pose the delicate (and perhaps ultimately undecidable) question of the political significance of these disputes. Whilst Lecercle has provided us with a strong case for taking Deleuze's literary experimentalism, his political anti-humanism and his semiotic of the assemblage as a coherent constellation (as well as with a non-Deleuzian demonstration of how to philosophize *within* the sentence), he has, in the polemical staging of this supposed programme, and emulating one of the least attractive of Deleuze's rhetorical habits, sunk to attacking his rival on the basis of an entirely nebulous and ultimately dishonest notion of political domination. Lecercle's Chomsky is very much like Deleuze's Hegel, an enemy cut to size that bears little resemblance to the thinker with whom he shares a proper name.

To argue, on the basis of no evidence whatsoever, that (Chomskyan) linguistics is 'part of the ideological structure of capitalism' is the kind of grandiloquent statement that does the author no favours, not least because Deleuze's concept of language is supposed to have supplanted both structure and ideology. Is it not time that this genre of rhetoric be left behind, lest we end up waxing deliriously on the deep political urgency of the struggle between the Deleuzian's 'crowned anarchy' and the linguist's 'democracy of corpus'? (At a pre-theoretical level, one could maliciously observe that a Deleuzian vocabulary, suitably decontextualized, is far more consonant with the exploitative nomadism of today's finance capitalism than Chomsky's essentially ahistorical speaking subject.) Then the very serious issues brought up in this work can be approached with the rigour they deserve. This involves recasting the problem in terms of an opposition between, on the one hand, a view of language founded on the natural and universal possession of a *capacity*, or 'language faculty', and, on the other, one which dissolves language in the construction of a continuum of creative variations, on the basis of an ontology of univocity. Whoever chooses to undertake this task will arguably have to forgo recourse to the non-dialectical method of the correlation (simply opposing the two projects term by term) and bear in mind, amongst other things, that Chomsky is a philosopher of ubiquitous or non-extraordinary creativity and Deleuze one of the few contemporary thinkers to have resurrected Kant's theory of the faculties.

Lecercle has provided us with a detailed and combative defence of the Deleuzian (or rather, Deleuzo-Guattarian) project, but many of the problems generated in this important book will only be adequately confronted

once the intersection of language, (anti-)naturalism and politics is approached in its own right as an object of systematic inquiry. This might mean leaving behind the image of the assembly line that graces this volume's cover, and envisioning what happens to politics (and to the very transformations in our modes of production – whether material, immaterial or literary) when language is no longer cast as a tool; when it becomes the privileged site for a renewed conceptualization of a generic human capacity for thought and action.

Alberto Toscano

Secondhand self

Dieter Freundlieb, *Dieter Henrich and Contemporary Philosophy: The Return to Subjectivity*, Ashgate, Aldershot and Burlington, 2003. ix + 195 pp., £40.00 hb., 0 7546 1344 5.

The interest in subjectivity as a fundamental principle of philosophy, and of cultural theory more broadly, has for some time now been recovering from the radical scepticism towards it that crystallized in the influential anti-humanism of the 1960s and 1970s. An epoch of subjectless thought – which this anti-humanism often dates from the late nineteenth century and the work of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud – has run into an accumulation of objections and countermoves. Increasingly, it has been argued that ontological systems or processes (whether of nature, history or language) cannot simply eradicate or marginalize questions of subjectivity, either with respect to the conscious or experiential access to these modes of explanation, or in the isomorphism between these systems or processes and the structure of subjectivity itself.

Equally, there has been a growing interest in subjectivity as an alternative to the reductive and constrictive explanation of cultural and political identity in terms of various forms of social or natural determinism, on the one hand, and various forms of ideology, on the other. Broadly speaking, therefore, there appears to have been an intellectual shift in the status of subjectivity: from an ideological illusion of modern (post-Cartesian) thought, it has begun to regain legitimacy as an irreducible structuring principle of human ontology as well as political agency. Furthermore, while this shift has often been conceived as an intensified scepticism towards claims to truth, some aspects of this resurgence have proposed the

return to subjectivity as the revival of a more emphatic or metaphysical claim to truth.

It is within this context that Dieter Henrich has emerged with a compelling claim to contemporary significance, despite what at first sight appears to be a discreetly academic and historiographic oeuvre. Since the late 1960s, he has produced an extensive and ambitious reappraisal of the project of classical German philosophy, which, more or less explicitly, attempts to demonstrate the unsurpassed need for, and value of, the conception of subjectivity that emerges, at first problematically with Kant, and which is then developed by the highly inventive complex of post-Kantian German philosophy. This has given Henrich a major status in contemporary German philosophy and a growing reputation internationally. Freundlieb's book is the first monograph on Henrich to be published in English. It is a dutiful introduction, which reviews his works and their reception extensively. As a critical examination, it concentrates on Henrich's reception by the mainstream of post-analytic philosophy and his confrontation with Habermas, arguing in support of Henrich in both cases. The book thereby restricts itself to adjudicating on existing exchanges or responses and there is little in the way of new connections, confrontations or developments. Consequently, despite the high profile of some of these exchanges, the significance of Henrich's work for broader intellectual interests in subjectivity is scarcely addressed.

Freundlieb identifies three principal aspects of Henrich's project. The first is his extensive historical studies and the methodological proposals developed for them. Henrich's historiography has concentrated on the period of German philosophy from Kant through to Hegel. Since 1985 he has been involved in the so-called Jena-Projekt, a collective research project into both the major and minor philosophers associated with the explosion of intellectual activity at the University of Jena in the period 1789–95. The recent growth of interest in this period, particularly around early German Romanticism, has done much to raise Henrich's profile outside Germany. These historical studies have generated a number of historiological proposals. One is that research into the history of philosophy should be oriented towards the constellations in which a particular philosopher's position or oeuvre stands, a method Henrich terms *Konstellationsforschung*. Thus, rather than approaching a philosophy from outside of its context or purely in its own terms, it is analysed in terms of the space of thought (*Denkraum*) that determines it. The idea here is to reveal the determinations that actually and decisively constitute

a philosophy as a historical form, without extraneously subjecting it to purportedly objective 'historical determinations' that were not actually historically determining. This reveals an analytical method that foregrounds the determining arguments that motivate an author (an *argumentanalytische Methode*), even where these arguments are with what appear to be minor philosophers or minor philosophical problems. Unfortunately, Freundlieb does not examine this aspect of Henrich's work in any depth, despite its critical significance for certain currents of Anglophone philosophy that are not practised in – indeed are largely indifferent to – historiographic considerations. And Freundlieb is himself indifferent to the radical and ambitious historiographic proposals that have come from elsewhere, particularly Walter Benjamin, which seem to be broached explicitly by Henrich's appeal to the concept of constellations.

The second and most extensively developed aspect of Henrich's project that Freundlieb reviews is the project of an anti-naturalistic metaphysics, based on the recovery of the concept of subjectivity as a form of self-consciousness or speculative thinking that emerges with Kant and becomes explicit in post-Kantian thought, first in Fichte and then through the early German Romantics. This is the vital outcome of Henrich's historical studies and the heart of his argument with contemporary philosophy. The contention is that Kant's account of the constitution of subjectivity inaugurates a new speculative conception of metaphysics, which is not adequately understood as self-reflection and is not reducible to naturalistic or objectivistic forms of explanation. Self-reflection is inappropriate in so far as it renders consciousness as a self that reflects on itself as if it were an object, since this presupposes or leaves unexplained why the self would recognize itself as that object in the first place. Self-reflection does not explain self-consciousness, but presupposes it. Self-consciousness is therefore revealed to involve a non-objectivizing or pre-cognitive sense of self that structures our knowledge of our self and of the world.

It is the consequences of this problem that motivate the immediate context of post-Kantian philosophy and which, according to Henrich, attain an unsurpassed degree of sophistication with the early German Romantics and their attention to a pre- or non-cognitive 'feeling' or presupposition in self-consciousness. This initiates a philosophy of subjectivity according to which self-consciousness exposes the self's presupposition of a constitutive ground, which is not constituted by the self (as if the self were the first principle



of a foundational philosophy, to which Fichte still clung), but which self-consciousness reveals as its own medium of constitution. It is the nature of this constitution that leads to the Romantics' preoccupation with the experience of art as that which is not reducible to what the self can objectify. Much of Freundlieb's book is given over to reviewing and elaborating Henrich's confrontation with various forms of naturalism or objectivism within analytical and post-analytical philosophy, and tracing a trajectory of growing critical acceptance for Henrich's concerns. However, despite Freundlieb's commitment to Henrich's attention to the pre-cognitive constitution of subjectivity, he scarcely touches on the aesthetic and artistic consequences of this project, even though these are decisive for Henrich, as for the Romantics.

The third aspect of Henrich's project that Freundlieb addresses is the attempt to recover philosophy as a mode of existential orientation – that is, which answers the need to lead a 'conscious life' within the problematic conditions of modernity. Here the problem and task are to orientate oneself in a finite world when faced with competing world-views. This is a task Henrich derives from Kant's dialectical resolution of the need for metaphysics and the unity of reason. Self-consciousness is conceived as that which inherently engages in this orientation, in so far as it is the attempt to unify the world in one's apprehension of it – which constitutes one's own sense of one's self – that thereby constitutes one's relation to the world, despite the awareness that this unification of the world is only problematically adequate to resolving the competing

senses or accounts of what the world is. This underpins Henrich's dispute with Habermas, which Freundlieb reconstructs.

Habermas proposes, against Henrich, as against Adorno, the overcoming of a subjective or speculative conception of metaphysics with the paradigm shift into a linguistically based theory of communicative action, which dissolves the philosophical question of totality, or the world, into a highly constrained and purely sceptical form of interpretation. But since, for Henrich, self-consciousness is not exhausted linguistically, this paradigm shift does not solve the problem. It merely suppresses it and therefore suppresses philosophy as existential orientation, resulting in the unconvincing linguistic rationalism that Henrich, along with many others, has diagnosed in Habermas's and Apel's discourse ethics. Unfortunately, the implications and historical significance of this critique are not really developed by Freundlieb. He makes repeated allusions to what would be a fascinating elaboration of Henrich's conception of existential orientation in relation to Merleau-Ponty's conception of an embodied self, but these remain allusions. It would also have been interesting to consider the consequences of Henrich's critique of Habermas for the revaluation of the first generation of Frankfurt Critical Theory.

In effect, then, Freundlieb's introduction to Henrich is a welcome publication, but also, despite its various scholarly merits, limited in its scope and critical rendering of what it insists is a crucial philosophical endeavour. Moreover, there is an awkward mismatch between Freundlieb's mode of presentation and the ultimate

topic of his book. Freundlieb's profession of Henrich as central to an attempt to release philosophy from its academicism remains almost completely circumscribed by a quasi-journalistic reporting of proposals and counter-proposals that typifies the most tedious brand of academicism. In a book on subjectivity and the liminally cognitive constitution of self-consciousness and existential orientation, it is depressingly ironic that Freundlieb reports on this phenomenon only at second or third hand, and exclusively through the medium of professional philosophers and journal articles. He thereby effectively renders subjectivity through forms of objectification that tend to reify it, covering over its irreducibility to self-reflection. We are constantly referred to existential or aesthetic renderings of self-consciousness, without ever achieving it. Subjectivity becomes something we are encouraged to contemplate only in the reflections of others.

Stewart Martin

Absolute criticism

Timothy Bewes, *Reification, or the Anxiety of Late Capitalism*, Verso, London and New York, 2002. 224 pp., £40.00 hb., £17.00 pb., 1 85984 685 8 hb., 1 85984 456 1 pb.

Perhaps no modern philosopher has suffered greater critical neglect in recent years than Georg Lukács. After a near-feverish period of reception in the Anglophone world in the late 1960s and early 1970s in which it was all but obligatory for a social theorist to settle accounts with Lukácsian concepts before proceeding, his thought has seemingly been overtaken by a host of more sophisticated critical discourses – from French anti-humanism (Althusser, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, and Derrida) to the 'post-dialectical' social theory of Apel and Habermas, Giddens and Beck. It is for this reason that Timothy Bewes's *Reification, or the Anxiety of Late Capitalism* is such a welcome addition to the current literature – to my knowledge the first full-length study of Lukács's thought to appear in the Anglophone world since the publication of Andrew Feenburg's *Lukács and Marx and the Origins of Critical Social Theory* in 1983.

That said, it is perhaps misleading to characterize Bewes's work as a full-length study of Lukács. The work is ostensibly concerned with the career of a single concept – Lukács' concept of reification. It

sets out to prove the concept's continuing theoretical fecundity in the face of claims, from a variety of sources – post-structuralism, postmodernism, post-colonialism, etc. – of its obsolescence. It does this by drawing out hidden nuances in the concept. Reification is the process by which a social relation between people comes to appear as the objective characteristic of a thing, thereby acquiring autonomy so strictly rational and all-embracing that its origin – the social relation between people – comes to be concealed. Reification – reified social reality – thus refers to the way that the social world appears once it is extrapolated from the process by which social relations are produced and reproduced. As such Lukács's theory stands in direct relation to its predecessors, Marx's concept of commodity fetishism and Weber's concept of rationalization.

The paradigmatic form of a reified social reality is, of course, the capitalist free market in which social relations between private producers appear as the property of a thing (its value in exchange) and the fluctuations of this on the market. This reified form of the object presents the basis for a thoroughgoing rationalization – the systematic exploration of economic laws to enable prediction and control – that buries the social origin of the object under a thick patina.

As Bewes is well aware, the scope of Lukács's concept of reification exceeds that of Marx's. Similar processes of abstraction are observable in other aspects of social existence and the concept can illuminate other (non-class-based) forms of social domination such as the experience of racial minorities, women and the colonized. Bewes goes to some length, for example, to point out that Lukács's concept of reification is wholly consistent with post-colonial theory, at certain junctures giving parallel readings of Lukács and Fanon on reification. In fact, one could say that the central strategy of the book is to show how Lukács's concept can 'hold its own' with more contemporary and fashionable critical concepts drawn from post-colonial and deconstructive theory.

Bewes argues, compellingly, that Lukács's concept has a reflexive dimension; that the concept anticipates its own obsolescence by refusing to exempt itself from its own critique. Built into the critique of modern social relations as reified, in other words, is the possibility or inevitability of the ossification and reification of the critique itself. In this respect the concept emerges as a *non plus ultra*, to all intents and purposes, 'un-deconstructable'. If the critique of reification must itself be on its guard against becom-

ing reified, vigilance takes the form of a demand for critical theory constantly to renew itself.

In drawing out the reflexive aspect of the concept of reification, Bewes considerably lessens the gap between Lukács's cultural theory and Adorno's negative dialectics – for if it is contradiction 'all the way down' this inevitably entails that the *standpoint* from which the reified social world is criticized is not itself free from the tendencies it seeks to identify and critique. The critique of the social world as reified, in other words, is itself, tendentially, a piece of reification. This is the source of the characteristic double gesture of negative dialectics that seeks to criticize whilst simultaneously drawing attention to its own implicatedness in that which it seeks to criticize.

Reification for Bewes is always simultaneously 'anxiety towards reification', and it is the inability to get beyond or assuage this anxiety that represents the essential difference between modern secular critical discourses and Trinitarian metaphysics. Secular critical discourses such as deconstruction or post-colonial theory remain ensnared in subject–object dualism – in a sleepless critical vigilance without transcendence or repose. Critique gives rise to anxiety and self-critique and the process is without end. The root cause of this is the self-assertion of humanity in the place of God and the substitution of the self–other relation for the absolute relation between humanity and God. In this regard, Bewes's 'anxiety towards reification' becomes synonymous with alienation. In modern society people are alienated principally because they have substituted themselves for God and thereby denied themselves the possibility of reconciliation that lies in the absolute relation alone.

The obvious difficulty with Bewes's position is that dialectical theories such as Lukács's and Adorno's, with their triadic structures and their categories of mediation, are lumped together with traditional Christian metaphysics and opposed to secular, critical discourses. What this approach precludes is the possibility of a secular dialectical theory with genuine reconciliatory power. Arguably, however, this is precisely what one finds in Lukács and Adorno – that is to say, an attempt to recover a concept of reconciliation for modernity.

The problem with interpreting modernity as the self-assertion of humanity in the place of God – as the writings of Heidegger, Arendt and other philosophers that subscribe to this view demonstrate – is that one constantly runs the risk of lapsing into an anti-modernism of the very kind that Bewes is concerned to guard against. Moreover, in the case of Lukács

there appears little basis for attributing this view to him. The standpoint of the proletariat does indeed represent a point of mediation or 'middle' from which the contradictory present is transformed. But rather than being prefigured by Christian metaphysics, as Bewes maintains, this proceeds as a praxical making of history and is presented as the *culmination* of the anthropocentric tradition from Descartes through to Kant rather than the abnegation of it. Furthermore, rather than this praxical making of the future out of the present representing a mastery of history through the denial of historical contingency (much in the way that Descartes masters reality by denying contingency), Lukács appears to insist on it: 'The nature of history', he writes in *History and Class Consciousness*, 'is precisely that every definition degenerates into an illusion: *history is the history of the unceasing overthrow of the objective forms that shape the life of man.*'

The necessary corollary of this is that a post-revolutionary society, for Lukács, is anything but the entry into a realm of universal freedom that Bewes's metaphysical interpretation would seem to imply. This is confirmed by his remark that

The substantive truths of historical materialism are of the same type as were the truths of classical economics in Marx's view: they are truths within a particular social order and system of production. As such, but only as such, the claim to validity is absolute. But this does not preclude the emergence of societies in which by virtue of their different structures other categories and other systems of truth prevail.

The point could be put thus: if the concepts and categories of a dialectical social theory have no validity beyond their application to modern society and even then only retrospectively, there appears little basis for supposing a post-revolutionary society to be one in which social relations are wholly transparent.

The immediate objection to this is that history – 'the uninterrupted outpouring of what is qualitatively new'³ – has been transformed into a *thing in itself* and whilst this is not the 'impenetrable datum' that Lukács criticizes in Kant and Fichte, it does at least seem to preclude the kind of emphatic transcendence and reconciliation that Bewes wants to hold on to. But this seems the inevitable consequence of adopting a finite (anthropocentric) standpoint. We can talk about transcending the alienation of human beings in modern society and the assuaging of reification-induced anxiety but not about transcending and assuaging alienation and anxiety *as such*. To go beyond this would surely be to lose the finite standpoint and blur the distinction

between philosophy and theology. For a dialectical social theory the task is to recover from religion a sense of reconciliation and repose – subject–object identity – that does not claim to exhaust the object (history). As Lukács demonstrates in the ‘Reification’ essay, the consequence of shutting off the ‘uninterrupted outpouring’ is the reification of the object – the transformation of history into a thing-in-itself inaccessible to reason in principle – and the inevitable reification of theory as it ossifies into a dead philosophical system.

For this reason I do not see how Bewes can hold together two important cruxes of his argument: on the one hand, the reflexive and critical character of the concept of reification, which seems to lead in the direction of an unstinting critical vigilance, and, on the other, an avowedly metaphysical reading of the Hegelian–Marxian tradition that insists on an emphatic – that is, once and for all time – reconciliation of subject and object. This said, Bewes has written a stimulating book that will divide its readership and reanimate debates on the status of the absolute in social theory – debates that have largely lain dormant since the reception of Gillian Rose’s *Hegel contra Sociology* in the early 1980s.

Timothy Hall

At last

Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, Transversals: New Directions in Philosophy, Continuum, London and New York, 2002. 256 pp., £55.00 hb., £15.99 pb., 0 8264 5622 7 hb., 0 8264 5623 5 pb.

Manuel DeLanda’s book is part of a series with noble intentions: prioritizing innovation over doctrinal readings, and engagement with contemporary concerns over institutionalized minutiae. Deleuze is the overriding spur, although Bergson, Derrida and Guattari are prominent elsewhere. DeLanda is a brave choice for inclusion in such a series, because he has presented a work radically different in its concerns from most Deleuze scholarship at present. He prepares us for this in the introduction. Regarding Deleuze’s contributions to philosophies of cinema, painting and literature, and his exploration of the nature and genesis of subjectivity and language, DeLanda tells us: ‘For better or worse, these are the subjects that have captured the attention of most readers of Deleuze, so it will come as a

surprise that I will have nothing to say about them.’ What DeLanda presents us with is a distilled and modified Deleuze focused on how Deleuze’s ontology can be applied for a realist philosopher of science. The result is a long overdue engagement of Deleuze with mathematics and science. For although Deleuze has often been embraced by biological concerns (which also figure strongly here), it is far rarer to see him integrated into that precious tradition within Continental thought engaged with mathematics and physics, excepting of course the question of time (Chapter 3), which has been ably dealt with often.

One of the most important figures in this field is Bernhard Riemann: important for Deleuze, but also before him for Bergson and Husserl. The whole book swings on the genius of Riemann, as the ubiquitous Deleuzian conception is a Riemannian one, that of the multiplicity or manifold, the conception of variable dimensions without a higher dimension extrinsically defining unity. This dovetails with Deleuze’s offensive against essentialist conceptual tyranny: morphogenesis in opposition to hylemorphism. The other key philosopher for the concept of the virtual, both at the beginning and the close of the book, is Henri Poincaré, who discovered the topological features of two-dimensional manifolds – singularities – influencing the behaviour of trajectories and hence the physical system by acting as attractors, representing a system’s tendencies. Poincaré exerted a powerful influence on Bertrand Russell, and both were significant for Deleuze. DeLanda takes his audience to be non-Deleuze-savvy analytical philosophers of science and scientists. His philosophical allies are Nancy Cartwright and Ian Hacking. DeLanda is at pains to show that Deleuze’s ontology relies on an emphasis on the mathematical and the physical, and Evariste Galois is of equal importance to Riemann and Poincaré. This is a book engaging with the generating forces of *Difference and Repetition*, and the citation of Poincaré is not out of any sympathy with the rest of his philosophy (and the later citing of Alan Garfinkel still less so). DeLanda’s is a particularly strong kind of realism, and philosophers are drawn on piecemeal, case by case, for a realist ontology.

For DeLanda Deleuze’s originality is characterized by comparison to state space ontologies proposed by analytical philosophers. In his discussion of state space in Chapter 1, he moves through a discussion of modal logic, attempting to see if multiplicities submit to modal categories, or whether an altogether new conceptualization is necessary. Here we tread more familiar ground, since the nature of Deleuze’s logic is often addressed (by John Rajchman for one), but

this analysis maintains an independence from the literature. It is less interested in understanding Deleuze as a whole (barring the excellent appendix: *Deleuze's Words*) and more focused on working through the mathematical concepts and intellectual history (e.g. Morris Kline). DeLanda certainly does not give analytic philosophy an easy ride, though; he accuses the state space philosophers of ignoring the topological innovations of Poincaré, and in Chapter 4 he tackles the deductive-nomological approach in analytic philosophy of science.

Multiplicities are structured by differential relations and the singularities which engender unfolding levels, and these two parts of the virtual are accompanied by the intensive, which DeLanda discusses in Chapter 2. In order to develop his analysis he uses a form of biological explanation known as population thinking, enabling a demonstration of the intensive process of individuation as a multiplicity. The biologist Arthur Winfree appears for the first time here, as does Gerald Edelman, to suggest that quantitative in exactitude is characteristic of a complex topological thinking, as opposed to a lack of rigour. Also discussed are Stuart Kauffman and Walter Fontana, as examples of a small minority, who, in contradiction to the bulk of studies on singularities, are studying the other force of the intensive process, affects, leading to some real insight on functional integration. DeLanda's reference to Deleuze's affects is a point of some interest, as he promises to rectify one day his neglect of the question

of lived experience, with a theory of perception that does not involve mediating conceptual structures but what are called 'affordances' – a term taken from James Gibson within the context of a theory of ecological interactions. This is of major importance with regard to the question of time, which is the subject of Chapter 3.

DeLanda sets up the conflicting interpretations of time within physics, the reversibility of time at the microscopic level for classical and relativistic physics, and the asymmetry between past and future on the macroscopic scale of thermodynamics, integrated in Ludwig Boltzmann's statistical mechanics. He moves on to Bergson's renowned attack on the time of classical physics from which Deleuze's own conception of temporality evolved. For DeLanda, Deleuze's conception of temporality is a great advance from this simply opposed conflict: 'a pure becoming must be characterized by a *parallelism without any trace of sequentiality, or even directionality*.' He shows this by submitting time to the same intricate scientific, mathematical analysis to which space is subjected in Chapter 2. The conceptual tools which DeLanda traces in Chapter 1 are then set to work on his three main problems, the last of which is the laws of physics (which 'lie' through generalizing), which he sets up by damning the use of the abstract totality term 'science' as not befitting a flat ontology. This book provides a lean Deleuzian ontology for the physical sciences.

Andrew Aitken



Locality, locality, locality

[Anti-]Globalica: Conceptual and Artistic Tensions in the New Global Disorder, Wrocław, Poland, 1 May 2003.

Organized by Geoff Cox and Joasia Krysa from the Institute of Digital Art and Technology at the University of Plymouth, this symposium was part of 'Globalica', WRO3, 10th International Media Art Biennale. It undertook to 'investigate the local tensions around the ways in which artists and commentators respond to global processes ... against a backdrop of Poland's impending entry into the European Union (and neo-liberal capitalism)'. For the organizers, Hardt and Negri's fluid-form *Empire* and Žižek's 'Real' of neoliberal capitalism set the theoretical tone. Participants were invited to respond to questions such as: 'How does contemporary artistic practice respond to these tensions, especially when using or reflecting the use of network technologies? Do artists simply respond using the same fashionable rhetoric as the system they seek to question? What chance does networked resistance have of being resistant in such a scenario? How can digital technologies that inherently serve to support the process of globalization be used to promote and maintain what is locally specific, culturally and socially heterogeneous?'

The questions posed from the outset did not necessarily find responses in the diverse presentations that took place on the day. Adam Chmielewski's 'Globalism and Particularism: On the Particularity of Global Forces and Globality of Particularisms' opened gloomily with a general rumination on the death of difference, the end of class struggle, the loss of a definable enemy, and how the fight against globalization is doomed to failure. My own 'Two Worlds of Fortune: Culture and Dying in the Global Zone', which reflected on advertising slogans as consciousness-wrecking tools, struck a sombre Adornian note in analysing the current scene. But, more combatively, I proposed a cultural activism that subverts existing capitalist materials, by setting Benjamin's notion of 'positive barbarism' against Hardt and Negri's lifestyle-based drop-out barbarism. Benjamin's technology-based 'positive barbarism' was aligned with the cultural tactics of Billboard Liberation Front and other 'culture jammers', their mimetic and parodic techniques purloined from the post-Dada embracing of technology in art for democratizing ends.

Andreas Broeckmann, from the Berlin techno-arts festival Transmediale, went for heterodoxy, in his paper 'On the Heuristics of Artistic Action'. He rejected culture as too feeble a weapon in the struggle for global justice, and suggested that globalization is a myth, which could be proven by the fact that McDonald's burger bars are different the world over. He threw in some pious homilies from Rabindranath Tagore, who, speaking in the USA in 1916, delivered a call for co-operation rather than competition, reconciliation rather than fighting, as man strives towards a 'higher nature'. Broeckmann then proposed a ragbag of strategies for artists: Becoming the Media; Techno-cultural Interference; Translocal Wandering and Story-telling; Carnavalesque Performance. To what ends these strategies should be deployed was unclear, given the initial scepticism about culture's impact and the lack of an identifiable adversary.

Monica Narula from Raqs Media Collective in Delhi presented a punchier vision of the worldwide impact of globalization in a paper titled 'Stubborn Structures and Insistent Seepage: Art in a Networked World'. Above her head was projected a clockface whose numbers and

hands were substituted by place names and emotions. When there is panic in New York, indifference is on the dial in Baghdad. This was a vision of the network, an attempt to show that interconnections exist, even if they are structured on difference. Invoking those places that 'fall off the map', she presented typical existences that 'interfere' with capitalist covenants: the illegal immigrant, the terrorist and the electronic pirate. Art too should interfere, 'assailing certainties with quiet insistence'. This amounted in the end to a familiar plea. Artists inasmuch as they operate politically (or rather ethically, as presented here) should ask questions and pose 'the possibility of alterities, without itself taking on a transcendental position "outside" the network'.

James Stevens from Internet laboratory Deckspace in London's Greenwich followed with pragmatic suggestions for local IT action. Stevens introduced his project 'Consume', an effort to construct user-owned and -operated free local networks that evade the telecom monopoly. These rely on a transmitter that uses the only free part of the radiowave spectrum – microwave – to 'trip the local loop' and allow 'free exchange at the network's edge'. This is DIY 'hacktivism', technologically astute and utterly persuaded of the wrongs of commodified corporatized technologies. This theme was continued with 'From Software to Hardware: From an Artistic Act to Social Activism' by Zoran Pantelic, a media activist from kuda-org in Novi Sad. Pantelic introduced the idea of a second wave of 'new media centres', and emphasized practical questions concerning access to the Net, media literacy, and the use and misuse of e-technologies, in relation to 'digital ecology in an age of image saturation'. Most importantly, he championed the ways in which the network can allow media activists across the world to exchange information and organize. In Pantelic's narrative this global connection was framed in some sense as a defeat, and as a loss of local significance. Lack of promotion of Internet technologies in Serbia had meant that media activists had more communication with those abroad who worked in a similar high-tech field than with those at home, despite the fact that much of their work was directed specifically towards countering Serbian nationalism through the 1990s.

The symposium ended with a contribution titled 'Politicians Are Redundant', from Polish artist Piotr Wyrzykowski, aka Peter Style. Style is part of the group CUKT (Technical Culture Central Office), which fielded a virtual candidate for the post of President of the Polish Republic recently. As the campaign put it: 'A group of people united in CUKT/Central Office for Technical Culture have conceived the idea that the best candidate for the President of Poland will not be a politician since we all know what they are like, but a virtual person who will have the chance not only to get electorate votes but to transform Poland into a Technical Culture Tiger.' The candidate – a sort of young Queen Elizabeth II-cum-Lara Croft lookalike who existed only virtually – took her policies from proposals sent in by the public to the website. This meant, of course, that her views were disparate and contradictory, progressive and repressive. The project garnered a fair amount of fascinated media coverage. Peter Style presented it as a project in electronic democracy, but what came across was rather a cynicism about politics as a whole, and the experiment's failure (candidate Viktoria Cukt received only a few votes) was blamed on the Polish people who are 'not ready for this type of opportunity'. But Style struck a chord with at least some of the Polish section of this audience. To enthusiastic applause he voiced ideas that the crowd had clearly been biting their tongues on all day: What's wrong with globalization? Only Westerners could have the luxury of criticizing it. Don't we want more globalization here? Don't we want good telecommunications and advanced technologies? Don't we want corporations to come into Poland? Don't we want more not less capitalism? Hip hip hooray. And so the symposium ended, more divided than it began. Locality persists indeed in a globalized age.

Esther Leslie