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Haitian inspiration

On the bicentenary of Haiti's independence

Peter Hallward

Two hundred years ago this month (January 2004), the French colony of Saint-Domingue on the island of Hispaniola became the independent nation of Haiti. Few transformations in world history have been more momentous, few required more sacrifice or promised more hope. And few have been more thoroughly forgotten by those who would have us believe that this history has since come to a desirable end with the eclipse of struggles for socialism, national liberation and meaningful independence in the developing world.

Of the three great revolutions that began in the final decades of the eighteenth century – American, French and Haitian – only the third forced the unconditional application of the principle that inspired each one: affirmation of the natural, inalienable rights of all human beings. Only in Haiti was the declaration of human freedom universally consistent. Only in Haiti was this declaration sustained *at all costs*, in direct opposition to the social order and economic logic of the day. Only in Haiti were the consequences of this declaration – the end of slavery, of colonialism, of racial inequality – upheld in terms that directly embraced the world as a whole. And of these three revolutions, it is Haiti's that has the most to teach those seeking to uphold these consequences in the world today.

Recognized as a French territory from the late seventeenth century, by the 1780s Saint-Domingue had become far and away the most profitable colony in the world, the jewel in the French imperial crown and the basis for much of the new prosperity of its growing commercial bourgeoisie. 'On the eve of the American Revolution', Paul Farmer notes, 'Saint-Domingue – roughly the size of the modern state of Maryland – generated more revenue than all thirteen North American colonies combined'; on the eve of the French Revolution it had become the world's single largest producer of coffee and the source for around 75 per cent of its sugar.¹ This exceptional productivity was the result of an exceptionally cruel plantation economy, one built on the labour of slaves who were worked to death so quickly that even rapid expansion of the slave trade over these same years was unable to keep up with demand. Mortality levels were such that during the 1780s the colony absorbed around 40,000 new slaves a year. By 1789, Eric Williams suggests, this 'pearl of the Caribbean' had become, for the vast majority of its inhabitants, 'the worst hell on earth'.²

Rapid growth put significant strains on the colony's social structure. Coercive power was divided between three increasingly antagonistic groups – the white plantation-owning elite, the representatives of French imperial power on the island, and an ever more prosperous but politically powerless group of mulattos and former slaves. With the outbreak of the French Revolution tensions between these factions of the colonial ruling

class broke out in open conflict, and when a massive slave rebellion began in August 1791 the regime was unable to cope. Sent to restore order, the French commissioner Sonthonax was soon confronted by a rebellion of the white planters seeking greater independence from republican France and withdrawal of the civic rights recently granted to the island's mulattos. Sonthonax only managed to suppress this rebellion by offering permanent freedom to the slave armies who still controlled the countryside, in exchange for their support. Over the next few years, the army of emancipated slaves led by Toussaint L'Ouverture slowly gained control of the colony. In a series of brilliant military campaigns, Toussaint defeated the planters, the Spanish, the British and his own rivals among the black and mulatto armies. By the turn of the century he had become the effective ruler of Saint-Domingue. Unwilling to break with France itself, however, Toussaint allowed himself to be taken prisoner by the expeditionary force that Napoleon sent in 1801 to restore colonial slavery. Napoleon's troops were successful in Guadeloupe but failed in Saint-Domingue. Toussaint's army reassembled under Jean-Jacques Dessalines and by the time the war of independence was over Napoleon, like Pitt before him, had lost 50,000 troops. The last of the French were expelled in November 1803.

Apart from the extraordinary impact of the historical sequence itself, why should anyone with an interest in radical philosophy take an interest, today, in the making of Haitian independence? Haiti is invariably described as the 'poorest country in the Western hemisphere'. It routinely features as an object lesson in failed economic development and unfinished 'modernization', as deprived of the benefits associated with representative democracy, modern civil society and stable foreign investment. Almost as regularly, it is presented as the referent of explicitly racist hogwash about Voodoo or AIDS. Why take an interest in the revolution which led to the creation of such a country? Here are some of the more obvious reasons.

1. If the French Revolution stands as the great political event of modern times, the Haitian revolution must figure as the single most decisive sequence of this event. The French colonies were the one place in which the 'universal' principles of liberty and equality affirmed by 1789 were *truly* tested: they were that exceptional place in which these principles might fail to apply. No question served to clarify political differences within the Revolutionary Assemblies as sharply as the colonial question, and, as Florence Gauthier has shown, no question played a more important role in the reactionary transition from the Jacobin prescription of *natural* rights to the Thermidorian affirmation of *social* rights – the prescriptions of order, property and prosperity. The Haitian revolution continued, moreover, where the French Revolution left off: just before Napoleon tried to restore slavery in the western half of Hispaniola, Toussaint

abolished it in the eastern half.

And in so far as our political present retains an essentially Thermidorian configuration, the logic used by the French colonial lobby to justify the preservation of slavery says something about the logic at issue in today's global division of labour as well. Pierre Victor Malouet, speaking on behalf of the planters in the Assembly's 1791 debate, knew that the universal declaration of human rights was incompatible with the existence of colonies, and



so urged his patriotic countrymen to preserve the exceptional status of their colonies. ‘It’s not a matter of pondering whether the institution of slavery can be defended in terms of principle and right’, said Malouet; ‘no man endowed with sense and morality would profess such a doctrine. It’s a matter, instead, of knowing whether it is possible to change this institution in our colonies, without a terrifying accumulation of crimes and calamities.’³ The basic principle persists to this day. The rules that apply to ‘us’ cannot reasonably be made to apply to ‘them’ without jeopardizing the stability of our investments, without risking global recession, terror or worse.

2. The achievement of Haitian independence reminds us that politics need not always proceed as ‘the art of the possible’. Haitian independence brought to an end one of the most profoundly improbable sequences in all of world history. Contemporary observers were uniformly astounded. As Robin Blackburn observes, Toussaint’s forces broke the chain of colonial slavery at ‘what had been, in 1789, its strongest link’.⁴ They overcame the most crushing form of ideological prejudice ever faced by a resistance movement and defeated in turn the armies of the most powerful imperialist nations on earth. Their example further provided perhaps the single greatest inspiration for subsequent African and Latin American liberation movements: Haiti provided crucial support to (a notably ungrateful) Simón Bolívar in his struggle against Spain, and in the first decades of the nineteenth century helped motivate rebellions against slavery in Cuba, Jamaica, Brazil and the USA, just as it would later inspire those working for an end to colonialism in Africa.

3. The Haitian revolution is a particularly dramatic example of the way in which historical ‘necessity’ emerges only retrospectively. Those who refrain from action until the full strategic import of the moment becomes clear will never act. With hindsight, it is obvious that in the circumstances of the late eighteenth century only the achievement of national independence could ever guarantee the lasting abolition of slavery in Haiti. Nevertheless, it took Dessalines ten years to reach this conclusion, and it is one that Toussaint himself was apparently never willing to accept. Toussaint’s eventual determination to placate the French, to preserve the essential structure of the plantation economy, to accommodate the white planters, cost him much of his popular support in the final campaign against France: the man who did most to achieve liberation of the slaves was unable to do what was required to preserve this achievement. Similarly, although the slave uprising that sparked the whole sequence was carefully planned and thoroughly prepared by the structural conditions of the plantation economy itself, its full consequences remained obscure long after the event. None of the leaders involved in the uprising deliberately set out to achieve the abolition of slavery. Pursuit of abolition was virtually imposed upon them by the planters’ refusal to accept anything other than the quasi-suicidal surrender of their armies. The actual decision to abolish slavery was then forced on a reluctant Sonthonax as a result of intractable divisions among the Saint-Domingue elite.

4. Although the process was contingent and unpredictable, the achievement of Haitian freedom and independence was forced through direct action, without mediation of ‘recognition’, ‘negotiation’ or ‘communication’. Enlightened arguments against slavery were hardly uncommon in the eighteenth century. Montesquieu poured scorn



on its racial and religious ‘justifications’, the *Encyclopédie* labelled the colonial slave trade a crime against humanity, Rousseau identified slavery with a denial of humanity pure and simple. The mostly Girondin *Société des Amis des Noirs* supported a ‘carefully prepared freedom for the slaves’ within a reformed colonial system. There’s a world of difference, however, between the assertion of such fine principles and active solidarity with an actual slave uprising. Brissot, founder of the *Société*, called for the repression of the slaves’ uprising as soon as it began. As C.L.R. James points out, impassioned moral outbursts about the evils of exploitation ‘neither then nor now have carried weight’, for when the basis of their authority is in question those in power yield only to irresistible pressure.⁵ The moderates who worked to improve conditions in Saint-Domingue through official legislative channels achieved virtually nothing during three years of indecisive wrangling, and the Jacobins’ eventual acceptance of an end to slavery came a full two and a half years after the 1791 revolt. Unlike the slaves, who lacked any official representation, the island’s mulattos were weakened as much by their futile efforts to solicit recognition from France as they were by their reckless determination to pursue their claims in isolation, without black support. (As for Tocqueville, the darling of those reactionary historians of the French Revolution who have recently gone to some trouble to erase the question of slavery and the colonies from this history altogether⁶ – for all his well-known aversion to slavery, he was to echo the colonial lobby almost to the letter when in the 1830s and 1840s he came to advocate the ‘total domination’ of Algeria through ‘devastation of the country’ and the enforcement of apartheid-style forms of social control.) Among the French *philosophes*, only Diderot and Raynal, after Mercier, were willing to tell the nations of Europe, in words that may have inspired Toussaint himself, that ‘your slaves are not in need of your generosity or of your councils, in order to break the sacrilegious yoke which oppresses them.... A courageous chief only is wanted [who] will come forth and raise the sacred standard of liberty.’

5. The Haitian revolution is a powerful illustration of the way in which any actively universal prescription is simultaneously an exceptional and divisive revaluation of a hitherto unrepresentable or ‘untouchable’ aspect of its situation. Every truly universal principle, as Alain Badiou suggests, ‘appears at first as the decision of an undecidable or the valorization of something without value’ and its consequent application will ensure that the group or capacity that has so far been ‘minimally existent’ in the situation comes to acquire a maximal intensity.⁷ On the eve of 1791, what virtually all the participants in the debate over slavery accepted, including the future slave leaders themselves, was the impossibility of an independent nation peopled by free citizens of African descent. The achievement of this independence must stand as one of the most categorical blows against racism that has ever been struck. Rarely has race been so clearly understood for what it is – in no sense a source of conflict or difference, but merely an empty signifier harnessed to an economy of plunder and exploitation. Early Haitian writers understood perfectly well the point made more recently by Wallerstein and Balibar, among others, that theories of racial inequality were concocted by white colonists so as to legitimate slavery and the pursuit of European interests. The first constitution of Haiti (1805) broke abruptly with the whole question of race by identifying *all* Haitians, regardless of the colour of their skin, as black – a characterization that included, among others, a substantial number of German and Polish troops who had joined in the fight against Napoleon. David Nicholls demonstrates that throughout the nineteenth century, though they showed little interest in the contemporary state of African culture per se, ‘Haitian writers, mulatto and black, conservative and Marxist, were practically unanimous in portraying Haiti as a symbol of African regeneration and of racial equality. Mulatto intellectuals from the elite, who in appearance could well have been taken for Europeans, proudly regarded themselves as Africans, as members of the black race.’⁸ And, as Nicholls goes on to show, nothing has undercut Haitian

independence in the post-revolutionary period more than the resurgence of colour prejudice and the re-differentiation of Haitians in terms of either coloured *or* black.

6. Haiti's revolution is a reminder that such divisive universality can only be sustained by a revolutionary subject. Haitian independence was the conclusion of the only successful slave uprising that has ever taken place. It isn't difficult to list the various conjunctural reasons for this success, including the large numbers and concentration of slaves in the colony, the economic and cultural factors which tied them together, the brutality with which most of them were treated, the relative freedom of movement enjoyed by the slaves' 'managerial' elite, the intensity of economic and political divisions among the ruling class, rivalries among the imperialist powers, the inspiration provided by the revolutions in America and France, the quality of Toussaint's leadership, and so on. One factor above all, however, accounts for the outcome of what became one of the first modern instances of total war: the people's determination to resist a return to slavery under any circumstances. This is the great constant of the entire revolutionary sequence, and it is this that lends an overall direction to the otherwise convoluted series of its leaders' tactical manoeuvres. As Carolyn Fick has established, when Dessalines, Christophe and the other black generals finally broke with the French in 1802, it was the constancy of their troops that enabled their eventual decision. 'The masses had resisted the French from the very beginning, in spite of, and not because of, their leadership. They had shouldered the whole burden and paid the price of resistance all along, and it was they who had now made possible the political and military reintegration of the leaders in the collective struggle.'⁹ Haiti's revolutionaries thereby refused today's logic of 'democratic intervention' *avant la lettre*. The recent introduction of democracy to Iraq is only the latest of a long sequence of international attempts to impose self-serving political arrangements upon a people whose participation in the process is only tolerable if it remains utterly passive and obedient; the people of Haiti, by contrast, were determined to remain the subjects rather than the objects of their own liberation. And by doing so, they likewise challenged that category of absolute passivity, that quasi-human 'remainder' revived, in a certain sense, by Giorgio Agamben's recent work on bare life and the *Muselmänner*. Whereas 'before the revolution many a slave had to be whipped before he could be got to move from where he sat', James notes, these same 'subhumans' then went on to fight 'one of the greatest revolutionary battles in history'.¹⁰

7. In stark contrast to today's democratic consensus, Haitian history from Toussaint and Dessalines to Préval and Aristide features the consistent articulation of popular political mobilization and authoritarian leadership. Needless to say, the fortunes of the former have often suffered from the excesses of the latter. It is no less obvious, however, that arguments in favour of 'democratic reform' and a judicious 'separation of powers' have very largely been made by members of Haiti's tiny propertied elite, along with their international sponsors. Precisely these kinds of argument have served to paralyse Aristide's presidency from the moment he first took office. The basic pattern was already set with the reaction to Dessalines' own brief rule: in his several years as (an undeniably bloodthirsty and autocratic) emperor, Dessalines introduced taxes on trade that were unpopular with the elite, took steps to dissolve prejudice between coloureds and blacks, and began to move towards a more equitable distribution of land. 'Negroes and mulattos', he announced, 'we have all fought against the whites; the properties which we have conquered by the spilling of our blood belong to us all; I intend that they be divided with equity.'¹¹ Soon afterwards, in October 1806, the mulatto elite had Dessalines assassinated, and were subsequently careful to protect their commercial privileges by imposing strict limits on presidential power. Dessalines' true successor, as James implies, is Fidel Castro. On the other hand, repeated attempts (begun by Toussaint himself) to restore the old plantation economy by authoritarian

means foundered on the resolve of the emancipated slaves never to return to their former life. The main goal of most participants in the war of independence was direct control over their own livelihood and land. Haiti's first constitution was careful to block foreign ownership of Haitian property, and by the 1820s many of Haiti's ex-slaves had succeeded in becoming peasant proprietors. The ongoing effort to retain at least some degree of economic autonomy is one of several factors that help explain the exceptionally aggressive economic policies subsequently imposed on the island, first by American occupation (1915–34) and later by the IMF-brokered structural adjustment plans which have effectively continued that occupation by other means.

Much of the power of James's celebrated account of the Haitian revolution stems from the fact that it is oriented squarely towards what were, for him, the ongoing struggles for African liberation and global socialism. Today, things may not seem quite so clear-cut. Today's variants on slavery are somewhat less stark than those of 1788, and their justification usually involves arguments more subtle than reference to the colour of one's skin. Some things haven't changed, however. Haiti's revolution proceeded in direct opposition to the great colonial powers of the day, and when after Thermidor even revolutionary France returned to the colonial fold, Haiti alone carried on the struggle to affirm the rights of universal humanity against the predatory imperatives of property. Aristide's greatest crime in the eyes of the 'international community' was surely to have continued this struggle. Thermidorians of every age have tried to present an orderly, pacified picture of historical change as the consolidation of property, prosperity and security. Haiti's revolution testifies to the power of another conception of history and the possibility of a different political future.

Notes

1. Paul Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*, Common Courage Press, Monroe ME, 1994, p. 63.
2. Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492–1969*, André Deutsch, London, 1970, p. 245. The standard account of the Haitian revolution remains, with good reason, C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, Penguin, London, 2001; originally published 1938.
3. Florence Gauthier, *Triomphe et mort du droit naturel en Révolution 1789–1795–1802*, PUF, Paris, 2000, pp. 174–7.
4. Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, Verso, London, 1989, p. 258.
5. James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 19.
6. Saint-Domingue isn't even mentioned in Simon Schama's bestselling *Citizens* (Knopf, 1989) or Keith Baker's *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990), while François Furet and Mona Ozouf were unable to find room in their 1,100-page *Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1989) for an entry on Toussaint L'Ouverture; the entry on 'Slavery' in their index refers only to America's revolution, not Haiti's.
7. Alain Badiou, 'Huit Thèses sur l'universel', in Jelica Sumic, ed., *Universel, singulier, sujet*, Kimé, Paris, 2000, pp. 14–15; Badiou, *La Commune de Paris: Une déclaration politique sur la politique*, Les Conférences du Rouge-Gorge, Paris, 2003, pp. 27–8.
8. Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1996, p. 5. As Nicholls points out, the term *blanc* in Haitian creole connotes a foreigner of any colour, and can be applied to black Haitians themselves if they look and sound like people from France.
9. Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1990, p. 228.
10. James, 'Revolution and the Negro' (1939), in Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc, eds, *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C.L.R. James 1939–1949*, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands NJ, 1994, p. 79.
11. Dessalines, quoted in Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, p. 38.

I am grateful to Bob Corbett for his trenchant response to an earlier version of this article.

Formations of feminism

Political memoirs of the Left (II)

Lynne Segal

'Spot the difference' is the game, whenever the subject of gender crops up. I play it myself, usually trying to combat the clichés to which it gives rise. This is the danger that stalks feminism: the threat of banality – its impact fading with repetition, its complexities and nuances submerged by anxious attachments to sexual difference as the bedrock of identity. Since, even today, intimacy is still imagined as a feminine preserve, the popularity of memoir writing is itself a sign of women's cultural influence. If political pursuits and purposes are not prominent themes in the current memory boom, they are in even shorter supply when women reminisce. But where and when women do record lives of dissent and struggle, whether focusing upon their own feelings or not, private lives often edge outwards, throwing fresh light upon the ways in which we are defined by and help to define the worlds we move through – engaging, retreating, disavowing, making do. For those concerned with the intricate ways in which power relations shape personal lives within the Left, the political memoirs of women militants immediately predating the second-wave feminism that took root in Britain the 1970s are of particular interest. Those now available to us are written by women who often felt themselves to be (and identified with) outsiders, although they are, unsurprisingly, relatively privileged women – these are not the words of those who confronted the toughest challenges of class and racial hierarchies.

Another good communist

In 1989 Yvonne Kapp, at eighty-six, began and completed her autobiography, *Time Will Tell*.^{*} Just like a woman, it would seem, she embarks with excessive modesty: 'My reminiscences lack gravity ... partly out of sheer laziness ... [they] rely upon my fallible,

fitful and selective memory, fully aware of the pitfalls that presents.' Moreover, just like the political memoirs of the men I have considered,¹ Kapp is wary of the temptations of autobiographical self-indulgence, while knowing about its satisfactions: 'The gratifications of chattering about one's childhood, to indulge long cherished resentments, paranoia, self-pity, self-love and pure swank, must account for the lasting appeal of psychoanalysis' (17). What follows, after her tales of a conventional Edwardian childhood, are vivid reconstructions of Kapp's engagement in twentieth-century politics – elegant and witty from beginning to end. Their zest resonates with Raphael Samuel's nostalgic memories of the older working-class Party men from his childhood: 'completely untroubled by doubt, but brave, selfless and with a redeeming London wit'.² A strange harmony, it might seem, when Kapp was neither working class nor male, but rather raised as a 'lady', moving from her elite girls' school in Harley Street to Swiss finishing school, remaining all her life erudite and refined, though certainly a 'good Communist' for over sixty years.

Kapp's memoir covers her journey through the heartlands of Bloomsbury sexual bohemianism and Parisian chic couture in the 1920s, her work with Basque and Jewish refugees in the 1930s (when she published four successful novels under the pen name Yvonne Cloud), employment as a lone woman at the centre of trade-union politics in Britain in the 1940s, the pursuit of field work in the East End of London after the war, later editing and translating Bertolt Brecht and other Communist writers, followed by a decade of research and the writing, by then in her seventies, of her scholarly, much acclaimed thousand-page biography of Eleanor Marx. Along the way, Kapp was busy raising and supporting her daughter, for the most

^{*} Yvonne Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, Verso, London, 2003. xv + 296 pp., £15.00 hb., 1 85984 510 X. Page references appear in brackets in the text.

part as a single mother, engaged in complex triangular love affairs with women and men, and becoming – as her friend and former lover Quentin Bell records – ‘magnificently active’ in the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) from 1936 onwards. It seems extraordinary that in the ten years she lived after completing her memoir, she could not find a publisher for it. But in the 1990s, as backs turned firmly against those whose lives had found meaning and purpose in activist Left politics, the times were not receptive to her story. The publisher that commissioned her book, Virago Press, turned it down in 1990; and even the Communist Party publisher Lawrence & Wishart rejected it. Having become affiliated to *Marxism Today*, they were perhaps unsympathetic towards the memories of staunch old-timers, a number of whom were by then hoping in vain to publish accounts of their political journeys.³

Born into an affluent German-Jewish family in London in 1903, Kapp caught TB as a child, spending much time alone in bed, away from school, often away from her family, always reading, writing from the age of seven – kicking off with a tiny collection of comic verses. A frail but apparently rebellious child, she was early on in conflict with a domineering mother, a woman, we are told, with ‘all the makings of a colonial governor’, but only two children and a few servants to bully: ‘her despotic sway ... needed larger fields of operation’ (46). By adolescence, the daughter would feel a ‘suffocating sense of injustice’ confronting parental restraint, an emotion also experienced when informed of her ‘immutable inferiority’ at synagogue:

There I learnt from the prayer-book that while boys, who sat downstairs, gave thanks to God that they had not been created female, girls, who sat in the gallery, could only thank Him for having made them according to His will. This attestation from on high of second-class status deeply impressed – and depressed – me. The Lord’s less than halfhearted appreciation of his female creation struck me as rather shameful: if he thought so poorly of us, why on earth have bothered in the first place? (34)

Still in her teens, she ran away from home, earning her living from the age of eighteen. Marrying Edmond Kapp, a Jewish artist and musician thirteen years her senior, the following year, estranged her for years from her implacably disapproving parents:

The generation gap, much talked of in the years after the Second World War was nothing compared with the chasm that opened between the young and their elders during that earlier conflict [the First

World War] when all values and assumptions, even behaviour patterns and social norms, were in flux (51).

Kapp settled cheerfully, if impecuniously, into the 1920s’ bohemian world of intellectuals and artists, nomadically on the move, often living in houses owned by more affluent friends, in Bloomsbury, on the Sussex coast, in East Anglia, Capri and the Riviera. At odds with their reputation today, she writes of the great kindness of certain famous writers, especially of D.H. Lawrence and Rebecca West (though West disapproved of her friends, with their ‘vows of unchastity’). She accepted her husband’s casual couplings with any women he fancied – ‘he had taught me that it was idiotic and petty-minded to object or take it seriously’ (103) – although not without pangs of jealousy and distress. She even consented to his abandoning her for long periods, after the welcome birth of their daughter in 1924, but not without succumbing to bouts of depression. With gaiety all around, ‘who ... had ever heard of helping out young mothers?’ she asks (118). ‘I must say I was very miserable ... alone with a small baby ... it wasn’t very good’, she would later confide (accompanied by peals of laughter) to the feminist historian Sally Alexander, who interviewed her in the early 1980s.⁴

She was rescued from sporadic bouts of isolation when offered her first well-paid job as Literary Editor for *Vogue*, in Paris in 1927 (on Rebecca West’s recommendation), where she lived in somewhat guilty luxury for a few years, before orchestrating her departure, angered by the pittance paid to clerks and typists. Back in England, she lived for a while near Cambridge, close by the charismatic, philandering, Marxist scientist J.D. (‘Sage’) Bernal, who believed science and Marxism would bring prosperity and peace to all humanity:⁵ ‘our two families were inseparable, sharing children, husbands, wives, seaside holidays and cars’ (142). She also wrote her first novel, *Nobody Asked You*, which – with characteristic resourcefulness – she ended up bringing out herself (with the Willy-Nilly Press she set up for the purpose) after its original publishers, informed it was obscene, backed out at the eleventh hour. Its huge financial success was guaranteed, she tells us, once a review in the *Observer* had declared it ‘shocking’ (159).

A little less reticent than the male memoirists I have covered (at least, that is, until she joined the Communist Party), Kapp touches lightly on her own sexual desires and experiences, discovering soon after puberty ‘that people of either gender could arouse the strongest emotional and erotic response’ (59). It was

a happenstance that certainly made her suited to the mores of her bohemian scene, whether forming relationships with Bloomsbury dandies, such as Quentin Bell, or with extraordinary women, such as Nancy Cunard. The breakdown of her marriage (for which she takes the major blame) came after its light-hearted intimacy had dimmed following an abortion, on her husband's insistence, which left her at death's door, infertile and sad. She had hoped for many children: 'the consequences of this episode were far-reaching' (121). She writes sympathetically of her husband's frequent anguish and depression, suggesting that he, like so many of his contemporaries, had been permanently damaged by the nightmare of his experiences in the Great War. Emotionally muddled and miserable after the collapse of her marriage in 1930, Kapp entered Freudian analysis with Adrian Stephen, Virginia Woolf's brother. Soon after, she sought out Melanie Klein, thinking that her daughter might also benefit from analysis following her parents' divorce. But on learning of Kapp's guilt-free 'love affairs' with women, Klein 'with voluble discourtesy' refused to analyse her daughter, leading Kapp to reflect that it was she, perhaps, who was 'more in need of therapy' (147).

Growing alarm at widespread unemployment, poverty and the menace of fascist governments installed in Europe, soon eclipsed both the giddy hedonism and the gloomy confusions of the emancipated 1920s. Like



many others, even within her liberal, bohemian world, Kapp began reading Marx, taking an interest in Communism and the Russian Revolution, at a time when some thought it provided the last chance of defeating the combined threats of poverty and fascism.⁶ It was the historic disasters of the 1930s that soon made politics – not literature, aesthetics, the claims of motherhood, or romantic adventures – Kapp's primary passion, the permanent centre and source of meaning in her life. Harry Pollitt persuaded her of the importance of joining the Party when she encountered him in 1936, on a boat returning from a trip to the Soviet Union. The next twelve months, meeting and working with the London poor for the very first time, tramping the streets to raise money and arms for the Republican government fighting Franco in Spain, organizing a concert at the Albert Hall to bring Basque refugee children to Britain, set the pattern of her new life thereafter. From then on, the love of useful work and of comrades kept her forever grounded and busy, except for a short period in 1940, when Party membership led to her dismissal as assistant director of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, and briefly outlawed her from paid employment altogether. However, by 1941 (with Stalin now in alliance with Britain) she was back as sole research officer for the Amalgamated Engineering Union, writing humorously in her memoir of how she handled the hostility she encountered as the lone woman in that chauvinistic stronghold of male craftsmen. Until 1946 she was supported by its president, Jack Tanner, becoming his speech writer and confidante, so attuned to his rhetorical style that he refused to read her scripts before delivering them: 'He was ... the only member of the Executive Council, I believe, who, unlike God, did not hold women in contempt but genuinely liked and respected them' (227).

There was always more than one way of living as a communist, and Kapp took some of her bohemian past into her new life, as well as remaining close to certain non-Party friends, one of whom, the children's writer Kathleen Hale, would write, after seventy years of friendship: 'She can be fiery in defence of her beliefs, which are intense, but she also has a delicious and infectious sense of fun.'⁷ Once a Communist, however, Kapp never shifted her loyalties again, although she wrote movingly (quoting Browning) of the need to rethink everything following Khrushchev's revelation of the full horror of Stalin's rule, in 1956: 'We had to take new bearings. Though we were not deflected from our course, it marked a turning point. "Never glad confident morning again"' (265).

Never glad confident morning again; but never, either, confused attachments or belongings again. In her sixties, Kapp, who had never passed an exam in her life, transformed herself into an amateur historian and began her ten-year research on Eleanor Marx. The biography was a homage to her classical Marxist heritage, as much a hagiography of Engels and Marx as of Eleanor herself. In one way or another, it drew on her whole accumulated experience and, she declares, 'left me wonderfully enriched' (286). This eternal optimism of the spirit finds her closing her own memoir welcoming change in Russia, with the advent of Gorbachev. She is refreshed by the thought that she has finally learnt in old age that despite 'what appear to be sudden dramatic spurts, the march of history is unconscionably slow'; but, she quickly adds, 'a love of justice and a belief in the potential for human progress is inextinguishable' (288). History has, for the moment, for most people, extinguished that once seemingly inextinguishable feeling of hope that brought so many out, with their 'lighted candles in Wenceslas Square' – the image with which Kapp signs off, in November 1989. What this memoir suggests to me is a little less sanguine: there is no steady forward march either of history or of people's hopes for greater egalitarianism; but, at particular moments in history, in specific settings, a belief in justice and better lives for all is implanted in the consciousness of certain people, forever.

For all her political commitment, humanitarian compassion and belief in equal pay for women, Kapp remained deeply sceptical of, and cut off from, second-wave feminism, although she was far from actively hostile to it. She recognized the reality of the social and cultural subordination of women; indeed, throughout her long life she confronted the distinct humiliations, harms and burdens of women's lot. Yet she did not address them as specifically political issues. Her memoir divulges her own feelings and emotions, but only up to a point. She is candid about the delights and hazards of her bohemian life, but once she casts its frivolities behind her on joining the Party (including any sense of achievement from her four successful novels), the serious business of politics mutes out personal concerns, as though the two are necessarily at odds with each other. Her lesbianism is attributed no significance. We learn that, approaching ninety, to her 'astonishment', she still has both 'the satisfactions of work [and] the miraculous and surpassing happiness of love' (287). But a veil covers her intimacy with Margaret Mynatt, her lover, comrade and collaborator for over forty years (up to her death in 1977), as well

as her falling in love again, late in life, with another woman comrade, Betty Lewis.

Quite at odds with the feminist sensibility of the 1970s and after, Kapp never identified *as* a lesbian. This kept feminists aloof from her, and her distanced from feminists. She alarmed Sally Alexander, for one, with her challenging question when they met: 'Why do all you girls hate men? What dreadful things have men done to you?'⁸ Moreover, she insisted then that Alexander delete from her notes all reference to her sexuality, her abortion, or any other intimate detail. Fortunately, in her memoir a few years later, she felt able to be just a little more forthcoming – old age, it seems, as well as greater awareness of the changes feminism had wrought, gave her more licence. I differ from feminists who would criticize Kapp for failing to affirm the delights and dangers of her dissident private life more publicly. After all, she never identified specifically as a Jew (the only one in her exclusive school during the First World War, and one who lost close relatives in the Holocaust), as a single mother, or as a female worker in the male world of trade unionism: all experiences that no doubt informed, but were submerged by, what she believed to be her all-embracing identity, *as* a Communist, in the struggle for a better world – different, but not so different, from Hobsbawm, after all. The time for taking a stand on the politics of personal life had yet to come, and would throw up its own dilemmas.

From ambivalence to anger

Although today passionately hostile to them, the one-time communist who did capture the interest of second-wave feminists was Doris Lessing. Born in 1919, as a young woman she joined a small Communist Party group formed in Southern Rhodesia in the early 1940s; she rejoined the CP for a few years in London, the following decade. It is tempting to attribute the dramatic contrasts between the political reminiscences in her autobiographical writing – very much a memoir of the whole person – and the other political memoirs I have considered so far to Lessing's determination to write *as* a woman. It was certainly as a woman that she addressed the ties between the personal and the political, in a way not seen before. Added to the beauty, skill and intelligence of much of her writing, it is this that made it so popular with second-wave feminists, born a generation after her. She reflected so many of their preoccupations. However, gender is not all that is at issue in her two memoirs *Under My Skin* and *Walking in the Shade*,* though it enters in distinctly troublesome and disquieting ways.

There are surprising overlaps as well as disparities with the accounts of other memoirists in Lessing's musings on CP membership in the 1940s and 1950s. They are all the more compelling about the nature and significance of Communist affiliation given her later position as a scathing apostate, one whose commitment – though she was erratically involved for almost two decades – was, she tells us, for the most part always ambivalent. Hobsbawm and Kapp joined the Party in Britain to defeat fascism and work for peace and prosperity. In Southern Rhodesia, Lessing joined for much the same reason, 'because of the spirit of the times, because of the *Zeitgeist*' (*UMS*, 259). In the early 1940s her friends were those same predominantly Jewish refugees fleeing fascism in Europe – just like the young Hobsbawm, but without access to a British passport – who ended up in Africa. They were, she tells us, 'by definition political' (*UMS*, 269).⁹ They were hardly wrong to blame the capitalist world for failing to prevent the ongoing slaughter of the Second World War. It had failed to support the democratic government of Spain against fascist forces, failed to oppose Hitler's military aggression until too late, failed to respond to the plight of the Jews in Germany: 'Communism was being born in storms of blood and fire and bullets and explosions, and illuminated by the shells of Hope' (*WITS*, 240–41).

In Africa, it was also the Communist groups, like the one she joined for two years in 1942, that were responsible for distributing information about the wretchedness and 'idiocies' of race relations in Africa, enabling her to express her revulsion at the ubiquitous racial injustice (one she had felt since childhood), causing 'all kinds of useful yeasts and ferments to start working' (*UMS*, 367). After rejoining the Party a decade later, Lessing corroborates other writers' view of its significance, especially for working-class members, 'who found in Communism a hope, a way of life, a family, a university – a future' (*UMS*, 284). One reason people found it so hard to leave the Party, she reflects, was that there were so many 'generous, kind, clever' people in it (*WITS*, 56). This memory, repeated several times in her two autobiographical volumes, sits oddly alongside the scorn she expresses, especially of comrades in Africa, as 'the embodiments of envy, vindictiveness, ignorance', not to mention the chilling, repellent depiction of communist men in her fiction. This seems to have no parallel in her memoirs – not even in the accounts she provides of her second

husband, Gottlieb Lessing, despite her encouragement of others to assume he was the loathsome prototype whose legacy had put her off Communism for good: 'I was married to a 100 per cent communist and, believe me, that cured you fast!' (*UMS*, 301).¹⁰ In fact, she joined the CPGB many years *after* initiating the separation from Gottlieb Lessing. But, then, her current mantra that she has 'never' been a feminist sits oddly alongside her second preface to *The Golden Notebook*, written in 1971: 'To get the subject of Women's Liberation over with – I support it, of course, because women are second-class citizens, as they are saying energetically and competently in many countries.'¹¹

Where Lessing's autobiographical writing is so different from other political memoirs is in her frank portrayal of her most intimate thoughts and feelings, which are not abandoned as she ages. Bodies, sex, desire, relationships, pleasure, loneliness, confusion, pain and sorrow lace her memoirs throughout. As we've seen, rarely a hint of such things creeps into the men's narratives, including that of Italo Calvino, even though he was, like her, first and foremost a literary figure, a novelist (albeit of a very different ilk). But Lessing's reminiscences are not written primarily as political memoir, which is just as well, since her political commentary is consistent only in its ambiguities and contradictions. Even within one moment, for instance, trying to clarify her views to her friend Edward Thompson in 1957, her letters are extraordinarily confused and confusing: 'What I feel is an immense joy and satisfaction ... that people all over the world care enough for their fellow human beings to fight for what they feel, at the time, to be justice.... But what has this got to do with political attitudes?' (*WITS*, 196).

Lessing's chronically incoherent political ideas and attachments ensure that her undisputed strength as a writer has never come from her assessment of world affairs, or of those who fight for justice and equality – despite constantly drawing upon periods of her own active engagement in just such politics. Rather, her evocative force – whether in fiction or autobiography – has always been her incisive personal voice, drawing upon her own experience to recount dilemmas which appeared emblematic of the life of a woman to a multitude of later readers, who would use them politically: the resentful daughter of a harsh and demanding, distressed and needy mother; the bored wife of an uninspiring, uncomprehending husband;

* Doris Lessing, *Under My Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949* (hereafter *UMS*), Flamingo, HarperCollins, London, 1995. 419 pp., £7.99 pb., 0 00 654825 3; Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade: Volume Two of My Autobiography. 1949–1962* (hereafter *WITS*), HarperCollins, London, 1997. 369 pp., 0 00 255861 0. Page references appear in brackets in the text.

the guilty parent, struggling to combine childcare with writing and other passions of the heart and mind; the anguished older woman, facing the fearful horror, the appalling pain, of ageing. Yet, for all its idiosyncratic intensity of feeling, Lessing's autobiography is nevertheless gripping in its struggle, however equivocally, to depict a whole social reality, which encompasses the ambiguous place of the political in her unfolding story.

This is where it anticipates so many of the quandaries of the next generation of militant feminists, dilemmas that Sheila Rowbotham later captured, as we will see, in her memoir of the 1960s. Lessing's analysis of women's anomalous ties to politics also explains her love-hate relationship with second-wave feminism. 'We' tended to love her, even though, for reasons I'll come to, she says she always hated us: 'I have nothing in common with feminists. They never seem to think that one might enjoy men.'¹² The enjoyment of men, it must be said, is hard to find in any of Lessing's novels, or her memoirs – another reason, ironically, for her appeal to the generation of feminists stealing up behind her. One of the main criticisms of her ground-breaking book *The Golden Notebook*, when published in 1962, was that, as she later admits, 'the men characters were so unpleasant'. Indeed they were, notwithstanding their creator's shrug: 'I could not see this' (*WITS*, 359). Lessing almost invents man-hating feminism, yet, in what Freudians might aptly see as a peculiar form of splitting, she hates her own invention.¹³ Interestingly, Lessing's resentment of that younger generation of women is played out again at the other end of the line, as youth turns to age, and another generation of women have emerged once again to mock the 'moralism' and 'man-hating' of presumed dour, outdated feminists (for all the overtly hostile hum of sex-war cliché in much of their popular humour, as young women seek out 'sex in the city'). The antagonism between different generations of women can be harsh. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Under My Skin opens with Lessing's account of her childhood and schooling in Southern Rhodesia, noting along the way the impossibility of honest autobiography, not least in the chasm that separates a child's sense of time ('where the end of a day could hardly be glimpsed from its start') from an adult's (*UMS*, 109). Despite her pleasure in the untamed landscape she explored with her brother, she was miserable for much of her childhood, eager to escape it as soon as possible, 'there are so few [memories] that are jolly, pleasant, happy, even comfortable' (*UMS*, 38). She was constantly embattled with an unhappy mother

presented as an energetic disciplinarian, chronically scolding, hostile towards the black servants, living in a lonely African wilderness in thwarted, miserable exile from the crisp, clean English world she loved. She listened to the querulous, self-pitying sorrows of her ill and abstracted, crippled father, with his bitter memories of World War I, as each new farming venture failed around him: 'We are all of us made by war', Lessing wrote of her generation, 'twisted and warped by war, but we seem to forget it' (*UMS*, 10). 'All my childhood, every minute', she writes, 'I waited to be grown up.'¹⁴

Leaving school at thirteen, Lessing educated herself from that time onwards, fleeing from home altogether in 1934 to earn her living, at fifteen. The book that then most stirred her with its 'substance of truth' was written by the white South African socialist, suffragette and crusader for peace and racial tolerance, Olive Schreiner. *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), which she read at fourteen, 'became part of me, as the few rare books do ... I had only to hear the title, or "Olive Schreiner", and my deepest self was touched.'¹⁵ Within a few years she was married and had given birth to two children, in her early twenties. It was from here that her public political journey began. Whatever the *Zeitgeist* in the 1930s, however, with Left and Right so sharply etched the world over, the reason Lessing (as distinct from other women of her time) was attracted to political life in the 1940s was not only her determined flight from the fate of her mother, but, equally, her flight from the life of *all* women of her day, whom she saw as resentful, frustrated, discontented, while caring for husband and children – just as she was at the time. She soon felt compelled to abandon both. Women terrify her, with their 'women's talk', forever complaining about husbands, children, money, servants. Lessing 'simply refused' to allow herself to be become 'trapped', to turn into one of those 'nagging white housewives', forced to accept a role where she just could not feel authentically herself (*UMS*, 205, 230–32).

All Lessing's writings from the late 1940s through to the 1960s dwell upon the differing phases of womanhood that she found so distressing. She depicts the plight of a young married woman, facing the unbearable condescension of male gynaecologists, amounting at times to cruelty; feeling completely abandoned on giving birth in hospital in the mid-twentieth century: 'The babies were a nuisance, and so, too, were we, the mothers... I lay sore and forlorn, longing to hold the baby' (*UMS*, 218). She captures the isolated anguish of older mothers who, having surrendered

their careers and creative interests to care for home and children, are left feeling unwanted and useless once their children leave home – just like her own mother, whom she can hardly bare to think about: ‘She could have lived another ten years’, she says of her mother’s premature, lonely death, ‘if anyone had needed her’ (*WITS*, 196). These are precisely the issues feminists would politicize and seek to transform just two decades later: if ‘the personal is political’, it becomes a site of struggle and change. How very puzzling it seems, barely credible even, that Lessing, so sharp and discerning about women’s lives and feelings, should vehemently denounce rather than embrace feminism when it came along, with all its principled seriousness and determination to improve the lot of women. Instead, she turned away, publicly proclaiming feminists ‘avaricious’, ‘vindictive’, guilty of an ‘efflorescence of crude stupidity’ (*UMS*, 248, 410; *WITS*, 347).

The mystery of Lessing’s scorn resonates with the feelings of certain other women who had also managed, against all odds, to become professionally independent (to a limited degree), successful (in certain respects), despite all the hurdles and heartaches: the blanket sexism, the sexual harassment, the backstreet abortions, the abandonment by lovers, the betrayal by husbands – despite, in short, the many costs and frustrations they faced, usually more or less alone, with next to no support from other women at the time, before the re-emergence of a campaigning feminist consciousness. ‘It is certain’, Lessing observed in 1968, ‘that public women attract a certain kind of spite, of bitchiness, from both men and women’.¹⁶ With heroic exceptions, this often made younger women a source of envy and anguish to successful older women. Younger feminists, with all their complaints, could not appreciate (it might seem) the stoical route to individual survival and success of those older women who were not able to turn to a movement to assist them as women: ‘I sometimes wonder why it is that our lot – my peers – would rather have died than ask our parents for support, and left home the minute we could, only to be succeeded by one generation and then another whose only idea is to prolong dependency as long as possible’ (*UMS*, 203). (This is a most peculiar perception of ‘my’ generation, which – coming of age in the 1960s – were notorious for leaving home quite as fast, and going just as far, as our legs could take us: fame or fortune the last thing on our minds.)

Lessing’s generation of professional women, who after 1945 often did have to be especially tough to have any authority in the workplace, or the public

arena, might now feel their lone battles unappreciated by younger feminists collectively complaining about each and every obstacle in their path. To some, it must have seemed that the protesting women who followed in their footsteps were made of weaker stuff, our words too expedient, our successes – if we had any – too easily achieved. Moreover, younger women (rather than the men who have disappointed them in life) become the perfect targets for women of a certain age – especially when, as Lessing likes to depict herself, they still love and desire younger men.

So adept in her portrayal of feelings, Lessing captures exquisitely the overwhelming pain that can devastate an older woman gazing at a younger woman, all the more so when she – like Lessing – has been seen as beautiful. Lessing’s grief is triggered by her recollection of the narcissistic joy she once found in her own strong, young body. Her writing here contrasts so sharply with the memoirs of the men I have considered (in *RP* 121) that it is worth a closer look: ‘is there any pride fiercer than a young woman’s? ... I used to stand among people, knowing my body was strong and fine, under my dress, and secretly exult.’ In both her novels and memoirs, Lessing thrills at the thick, glossiness of her youthful pubic hair, ‘growing three perfect little swirls’ (*UMS*, 203–4). Recalling that same pleasure in bushy pubic hair, reading other older women mourning of the loss of it, suggests to me that ‘bushiness’ serves as one symbol of a young woman’s own ‘phallic’ power. (I see them on marches, as I write this, cheerfully pitting their own ‘Good Bush’ against the current US President’s ‘Bad Bush’ – perhaps more than just a weak pun.)

The pain, the shock and the horror of ageing that suffuse Lessing’s memoirs start early, in her late thirties. It emerges in counterpoint to encounters with younger women, as when Lessing muses upon the ‘pretty girl of twenty’, who coolly and deliberately displays her beautiful breasts – and then back to the author: ‘Pain was slicing through me for what I had lost. And, too, because I knew that I had been every bit as arrogant and cruel as that girl’ (*UMS*, 205). It is my strong impression that young men do not threaten older men in quite the same way. After all, it is women, as Lessing comments, with weary resignation, who lose their men to younger women; it is young women who successfully pursue them. Via a Darwinian riff, we learn that it is ‘female ruthlessness’, the ‘unregenerate’ nature of young women, that causes the heartbreaking unfairness older women suffer: ‘it comes from a much older time than Christianity or any other softener of savage moralities’ (*UMS*, 206). In the 1950s, with

Lessing in her thirties, the group of leftists and writers to which she belonged changed rapidly: ‘The wives and girlfriends who had shared early hard times and acted as agents and counselors, even earners – out’ (*WITS*, 128, emphasis added). Although probably herself the most successful member of this group, as a now ageing woman she too was, in a sense, out: abandoned by the two great loves of her life in those years.

Adding a pinch of Freudianism to her Darwinian mantra, men are doubly exonerated for the pain they cause women: ‘It seems to me that men have to fight so hard to free themselves from their mothers, but then circumstances and their natures make their wives into mothers, and they free themselves again’ (*WITS*, 130). With eyes so open to, heart so wounded by, what she sees as women’s inevitable lot, Lessing could never accept it – could never become a feminist. Her desires, her identifications, her attachments, lie with men, and men alone – never with that abjected mother.



Such is her struggle against the sorrows of the older woman, facing life alone, that, following her rejection by Clancy Sigal at thirty-nine, she describes herself as for a short while sliding into alcoholism, ‘feeling abandoned, unloved, unwanted’ (*WITS*, 262). It seems to me that such sorrow not only feeds Lessing’s fear of younger women – as the source of her annihilation – but sets off her growing estrangement from political affiliations more generally. The futility of generational confrontation soon becomes her reason for rejecting politics itself, as a ‘sad, bad, stupid cycle’ of the young turning against their elders: ‘About politics there is nothing to be done finally but laugh’ (*WITS*, 206, 186).¹⁷ Or cry, one feels. As a source of strength, politics failed her. In the end she found consolation for the disappointments of both sex and politics in spiritual guidance, in the Sufi teachings of Idries Shah. Lessing’s autobiography closes with her encounter with an ‘unlikeable young woman’ (with a baby in a pushchair) who comes knocking at her

door, a single mother, ‘demanding’ money from her, and displaying bitterness and ‘rancorous envy’ towards her (*WITS*, 364). The rancorous envy she experienced coming from young women would seem, at the very least, to be mutual.

Lessing did not write the third volume of her autobiography, closing the second volume in 1962, when she was in her early forties, only halfway through her life. Instead, she decided to substitute a fiction, *The Sweetest Dream*, to revivify her reminiscences of the 1960s and beyond. Here, her ongoing contempt for utopian visions, or other political ideologies, leftist or feminist, is absolute. She ridicules and stereotypes them all. Crafting a situation which parallels her own in the 1960s, the only likeable character is the long-suffering, dignified older woman, Julia, who struggles to put up with the selfish and insufferable behaviour of the motley young crew she shelters in her large household: her disturbed communist son; a neurotic, resentful, fantasizing earth mother; assorted spiteful, deluded, prattling female zealots. One reviewer, Hywell Williams, sharing my view that the novel is a truly reactionary work, commented: ‘This is emotion recollected in hate... [It] is a woman thing – but emphatically not a feminist thing.’¹⁸

As chance would have it, I was one of the young women Doris Lessing encountered briefly in her middle age. I met her (with my baby in a pushchair) when I took over the lease of her flat in Maida Vale in 1970. I was at the time much too shy, lost and bewildered (as a single mother, newly arrived in London) to make the most of the encounter. She seemed to me eccentric: moralistic about the threatening ways of the young, while expressing concern for the stray cats of the neighbourhood. We surveyed each other with mutual incomprehension, although I continued to enjoy and admire her books throughout the following decade. I have sometimes wondered whether I was the ‘unlikeable young woman’ she depicts (arriving as she is leaving her flat), but I have been told of other feminists of my age who met her, who also wonder the very same thing.¹⁹ A composite picture, no doubt.

In writing her life – the unfolding and wrapping up of her sexuality, the rise and fall of her political dreams – Doris Lessing’s autobiography is undoubtedly the most compelling of those I have examined. It touches me deeply. It was always going to be harder for women to stay enmeshed in political life on the Left, especially if and when they found themselves alone, unpartnered. Until very recently the Left’s bedrock was a labouring man, a fighter. Hobsbawm commented that Brecht’s ‘great elegy’ on the professional

revolutionary, written in 1930, spoke to his generation of Communists as did no other: 'I ate meals between battles/ I lay down to sleep among murderers/ ...We, who wanted to prepare for kindness/ Could not be kind ourselves.'²⁰ Lessing quotes these same lines, but with understandable disdain. Their message, born of revolutionary times, hardly spoke to women, who could not, following their precepts, live out social existence as a woman at all – least of all without those lovers and companions male revolutionaries so rarely lacked; let alone if they sought personal freedom and literary success as ardently as Lessing did.

The surprise, given her abiding ambivalence towards politics, is hardly her desertion of the Left; it is more that she supported it for as long as she did. Her repudiation of feminism in recent decades is no more astonishing, given her flight from politics and the anguish aroused in her by younger women. But, as Lessing the good writer suggests, the political intentions of authors are hardly all there is to a book, which is usually richest and most productive 'when its plan, shape and intention are not understood, because that moment of seeing the shape and plan and intention is also the moment when there isn't any more to be got out of it'.²¹ This is certainly a strength in her own early novels and stories.

Phallic mother

Lessing claims to be angry that *The Golden Notebook* became the 'Bible of the Women's Movement' (*WITS*, 315). Her compass is, reliably, awry. It was not so much Lessing as Simone de Beauvoir who, in the beginning, supplied the text, set the goal and lived the life (or so it seemed) of an independent, politically committed woman, helping to inspire women the world over to think again about their own emancipation. 'Women, you owe her everything', declared those who like to see individuals embodying the spirit of history, in this case the French scholar Elisabeth Badinter, joining the five thousand who attended Beauvoir's funeral in Paris in 1986, on her death at the age of seventy-eight.²²

For all the controversy it would engender, nowhere more viciously than in France, only rarely in history have books had the impact, the long slow burn, of *The Second Sex*. Selling 22,000 copies in the week it was published in 1949, it is still selling, still debated, more than fifty years later. It is not an easy read, but one maxim crystallized out of the ink that was spilt to fill the hundreds of pages Beauvoir penned on

the situation of women, drawing upon a medley of historical, philosophical, psychological, anthropological, biological, biographical and economic research: 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.' In that becoming, readers learn, woman is installed in her condition as 'object and prey' for man, never as 'sovereign subject'. Women have yet to be recognized by men as 'free and autonomous', like them. Beauvoir's goal is to establish that a woman's behaviour is not dictated by her physiology, but rather 'shaped as in a mould by her situation': her grasp upon the world, the world's grasp upon her. Hardly anticipating all the criticism in store, Beauvoir did gesture toward the age-old dilemma confronting 'an emancipated woman', who must refuse 'to confine herself to her role as female, because she will not accept mutilation', while being aware that 'it would also be a mutilation to repudiate her sex'.²³

More significantly, and just as she intended, Beauvoir's life itself became a public attempt to transcend that dilemma. She was legendary as she lived it, even to women who had not read a word of her books. Beauvoir's symbolic presence as 'liberated' woman, *choosing* to pursue a free and independent life, was uniquely significant for many of the postwar generation of women I knew. Her four autobiographical volumes,* her various polemical novels (each one written as a commentary on her life and times), the postwar media attention on the King and Queen of existentialism (Jean-Paul Sartre and herself), the lasting glamour of Parisian bohemia, all made her early on an iconic figure.

In almost identical words, one early second-wave feminist after another recorded Beauvoir's impact on their younger selves: 'I was seized by a desire to imitate her' as a teenager in Canada in the 1960s, Lisa Appignanesi recalls. '[We] were grateful, regaled, awe-struck and disturbed.... [Her] denunciations opened windows on to a great gale of air. We shouted yes.' Sylvia Lawson remembers her delight on discovering *The Second Sex* as a young middle-class mother in my own home town, Sydney, in 1960, immediately sharing her reading with friends. 'For us, the young women in the 1960s who became the Women's Liberationists of the 1970s her life was truly exemplary, to be pondered and explored for clues [on] how to live differently', another Australian, Ann Curthoys, notes; 'she demonstrated an art of living'. Yet another, Margaret Walters, adds: 'It helped me make sense of

* *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (1958), trans. James Kirkup, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1963; *The Prime of Life* (1960), trans. Peter Green, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1965 (hereafter *PL*); *Force of Circumstance* (1963), trans. Richard Howard, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968 (hereafter *FC*); *All Said and Done* (1972), trans. Patrick O'Brian, Paragon House, New York, 1993 (hereafter *ASD*).

my confused and isolated depression.’ ‘It was a siren call’, Kate Millett claims, alighting upon *The Second Sex* in New York in the 1960s. ‘[She] indicated a new and transformed possibility – the movement from passivity into freedom’, Sheila Rowbotham agrees, in one of the founding texts of British feminism. Judith Okley broadens the picture: ‘I was fortunate in receiving the testimony of some women from the Third World’, recording favourable responses to *The Second Sex* in India and the Middle East.²⁴ I could go on.

‘Idealized mother’, maybe, as Appignanesi suggests, but – archetypically – a never less than difficult one: for many, morphing from idol to irritant when feminism reinstated itself as a collective force and an analytic framework in the 1970s. Many feminists rather quickly decided to condemn Beauvoir to the dustbin of history, despite once having turned to her for inspiration. Germaine Greer, to whom I will return elsewhere, was one. She declared her ‘repellently male-oriented’, although, in *The Female Eunuch*, Greer all but paraphrased her – it was, of course, Beauvoir who saw femininity fashioned as ‘intermediate between male and eunuch’.²⁵ In the cruel combat soon conducted by feminists in France, the Lacanian Antoinette Fouque later referred to her ‘feminism of non-difference’ as ‘the master trump card of gynocide’!²⁶ Irigaray said much the same thing. Only a generous soul like Angela Carter could more gently tease Beauvoir with her ‘thinking woman’s’ question: ‘Why is a nice girl like Simone, sucking up to a boring old fart like J-P?’²⁷

For my purposes here, exploring Beauvoir’s legacy seems indispensable, despite her being French and hence coming from a distinctly different cultural context from the other writers I consider. (She spent only a brief time in Britain, where she was distressed by the absence of good cafés and the dull nightlife.) Like those of Kapp and Lessing, her life was indeed idiosyncratic, yet her themes remain emblematic of the volatile ties binding the personal to the political. Beauvoir had a singular impact on my generation of feminists, as well as an enduring interest in the role of identity and attachments in sustaining lives of political commitment. She expressed both a lifelong determination to seize the moment, living fully and freely in the present, while deploring hypocrisy, injustice and exploitation, and a resolve to chronicle all the ‘enthusiasms and disappointments’ of her life in the hope that they might provide a model and resource for others (*FC*, 6). In so doing, she highlights the difficulties of any such project, including my own, of focusing on certain autobiographical reflections to ponder the mutability of radical passions. She lived her politics so

personally: frequently self-critical, forever engaged (at least from her thirties onwards) in exposing and supporting those struggling against colonialism, exploitation and cultural denigration, emphasizing (from her forties onwards) that much that she wanted to say was linked to her ‘condition as a woman’, throwing her weight behind women’s liberation and all its activist campaigns when it took off in the 1970s. She also wrote poignantly (from very early on) of her fears of the fate of the ageing woman. How puzzling, it might seem, that the very women most indebted to Beauvoir’s insight and fortitude would later become so annoyed with her. Lessing became cross with feminists, who would echo her own criticisms of men and their mores, but feminists became cross with Beauvoir, who had virtually founded and later signed up to their cause. Why? Precisely *because of* all the contradictions she so unashamedly exposed when making her private life public. Yet these are the very contradictions that sustained her intellectual endeavours and political engagement in the first place.

Movement between exposure and evasion, documentation and delusion, haunts attempts to make the personal political, or to describe political life personally. But the fissures in Beauvoir’s biography are formidable and threatening. The woman who valued her ‘independence’ above all else, urging women not ‘to take shelter in the shadow of men’,²⁸ was resolutely determined to see herself as the subordinate half of a couple: ‘far from feeling embarrassed at the thought of his superiority, I derived comfort from it’, she claims (*PL*, 26). The expounder and zealous critic of woman’s definitive ‘Otherness’, the symbolic subordination of the ‘feminine’, more or less uncritically idealized the ‘masculine’, cherishing the esteem of men: ‘I was encouraged to write *The Second Sex* precisely because of this privileged position. It allowed me to express myself in all serenity’ (*FC*, 199). Her inexhaustible repackaging of the background, context, successes and failures of her life, *all* framed around Sartre, not only omit her own lesbian encounters, but race her readers onwards, with her both seeing and not seeing the ways in which she misconstrues her everlasting ‘oneness’ with Sartre in the process – the ‘guarantee’, as she says so often, of her self-worth, her happiness. ‘Very conveniently I persuaded myself that a foreordained harmony existed between us on every single point’, we read at one moment (*PL*, 143). At another, she frets, ‘When I said “We are one person”, I was dodging the issue.’ She even wonders, when most devastated by Sartre’s perpetual philandering, ‘whether the whole of my happiness did not rest upon a gigantic lie’; only to

continue obdurately reinstalling that ubiquitous ‘we’ on the very next line, undaunted by doubts, displacing all impediments to unity with her chosen double (*PL*, 260–61).

It is this tireless labour of alliance which underwrites both her power and her pain, leading others (one of the first being Margaret Walters) to suggest that her rigorous self-examination might itself have helped her sustain a kind of self-evasion: ‘We see that she spent a lifetime working out and on her relationship with one man – but that relationship is an absence at the heart of her story.’²⁹ ‘Lies, all lies’ is the even more disparaging title a later British feminist, Mary Evans, provides for her chapter on Beauvoir’s four volumes of autobiography, suggesting that they are better seen as ‘exercises in concealment rather than revelation’.³⁰ Beauvoir is certainly an absence at the heart of Sartre’s story, where she receives not a mention (not even in the dedication) in the only autobiography he ever published, *Words* – an account of his childhood delusions and delights, as the idolized only child of a young and beautiful widowed mother. Always, he tells us in his memoir, ‘running from the past’, thinking only about the future, the adult male philosopher nevertheless did ‘like and respect the humble and dogged loyalty that some people – especially women – preserve for their tastes, their desires ... their determination to remain the same amid change, to safeguard their memories, [or] to take ... an early love with them to their graves.’³¹ As well he might. In the two central memoirs of her adult life (from the age of nineteen to fifty-three), Beauvoir reveals just what such dogged loyalty cost her – so frequently fluctuating between elation and desperation as she wrestles with, and later denies, appalling loneliness during long absences from Sartre. It was what it cost her, as Toril Moi concludes, to become the woman admired by the whole world ‘for her independence’.³²

Absence and evasion there surely is in Beauvoir’s memoirs (which appear to devote more space to Sartre than to herself), yet it was a strategy that served as constant motivator and trigger for her life’s work. Beauvoir does not want to *be* Sartre, she does not ever compete, but believes she must *have* him. Fantasizing completeness through him (knowing and not knowing the infantile, illusion-ridden nature of that fantasy), it worked for her, although not without anguish. The torment is hardly surprising, when her ‘little absolute being’, as she sometimes addressed him in letters, could proudly affirm that he had ‘no Super-Ego’: ‘I became a traitor and I have remained one.... I am already betraying myself, in the heat of passion, by

the joyful anticipation of my future betrayal.’³³ Sartre, they both agree, could never ‘grow up’, declining most of the usual responsibilities of adulthood. It may be wild analysis, but we might here benefit from a psychoanalytic framing, to suggest that Beauvoir’s belief in her ‘little absolute’ both encouraged his pretensions to, and her desire for, phallic grandiosity – the power attributed to the father, who had never been present in Sartre’s life to protest the pretence. Discussing his writing, Sartre will tell Beauvoir in his final years that it was she who gave him his power to resist any and all criticism: ‘You gave me confidence in myself that I shouldn’t have had alone.’³⁴ And it was he, not she, who faced breakdown, as a young man in



his late twenties (hallucinating lobsters walking close behind him); he who moved restlessly from infatuation to infatuation, never able to lose himself in sexual engagement (‘I was more a masturbator of women than a copulator’), or feel overwhelmed by the beauty of the world; he who had a shorter life, dying after a decade and more of ravaged health exacerbated by drugs and alcohol. Men do suffer, both despite and because of all the indulgences they receive as superior beings. It was a superiority which Sartre himself never consciously sought, at least over other *men*: ‘A whole man, made of

all men', was what he said he struggled to be, 'worth all of them, and any of them worth him'.³⁵

The 'betrayal' that confounded many feminists in Beauvoir's erection of Sartre as the bulwark of her life, accompanying her idealization of what she saw as 'masculine' self-sufficiency, has to be placed alongside the strength she undoubtedly derived from it: the courage to write and to act in conditions requiring extraordinary levels of bravery. During the 1940s' Vichy government in France Beauvoir called for sexual information, contraception and abortion rights for women, at a time when one woman was guillotined for performing abortions and people were sent to jail merely for conveying contraceptive advice. When abortion was still illegal in the 1970s, she allowed her home to be used as premises for the termination of pregnancies.³⁶ The publication of *The Second Sex* in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1949 (the magazine founded by Sartre, herself and Merleau-Ponty in 1945) detonated thunderous blasts of obscenity against her throughout France: 'Unsatisfied, cold, priapic, nymphomaniac, lesbian, a hundred times aborted, I was everything, even an unmarried mother', she reports (*FC*, 260).

The following decade Beauvoir expressed her ongoing grief as she and Sartre were increasingly isolated and attacked, eventually facing bomb threats and briefly forced into hiding, for their staunch support of Algerian militants fighting for independence from France. For years Beauvoir wrote of her distress trying to expose and put an end to her fellow citizens' complicity in the rapes and torture of Algerian militants by French authorities: 'I had been labelled ... anti-French. I became so. I could no longer bear my fellow citizens.... I felt as dispossessed as I had when the occupation began' (*FC*, 381). It was only in the early 1960s, when calls for an end to the war in Algeria eventually gained wider support in France, that her intense sorrow over that battle (like a 'personal tragedy') began to lift. As huge marches calling for 'Peace in Algeria' took over the streets of Paris, she finally wrote: 'And how good I felt! Solitude is a form of death, and as I felt the warmth of human contact flow through me again, I came back to life' (*FC*, 619–20). So hell is not always 'other people', whatever her loyalty to Sartre and his aphorisms!³⁷ Her radical activism increased with age. Beauvoir spent the last fifteen years of her life fighting primarily for women's rights, but her sustaining illusion – of unity with Sartre – continued.

If the power and authority Beauvoir felt she gained from her sense of merging with Sartre would come to puzzle some feminists, it was only after the image

of the independent woman she evoked had already served to inspire a multitude of women the world over. Moreover, it was precisely the ways in which she could be described as a 'phallic woman', wanting to be both woman and man, to see and do everything, that enabled so many women to feel empowered by her courage, in times when women's autonomy was still barely thinkable. As she suspected, it would be her autobiographical writing, where 'events retain all the gratuitousness, the unpredictability and the often preposterous complications that marked their original occurrence', that women read most avidly (*FC*, 511). *The Prime of Life* sold 40,000 copies in advance of publication, and women would later congratulate Beauvoir (to her consternation at the time, so appalled was she by the Algerian war): 'It's bracing, it's dynamic, it's optimistic' (*FC*, 665). For all her interest in truth, however, Beauvoir soon realized that 'self-knowledge is impossible, and the best one can hope for is self-revelation' (*PL*, 368). It was a productive hope, for tens of thousands of female readers. (Hoping for self-revelation could perhaps serve as the motto for what is distinctive about women's political memoirs!)

Hurting from unlimited passion for universal freedom and full humanity into recurrent despair at the state of the world and the vicissitudes of life, what else sustained this exemplary activist and intellectual woman? In adulthood, she always had a network of close, enduring friendships with women, often younger women, and just a few men. At fifty-three, Beauvoir completed her third autobiographical volume with words of intense anguish, utterly devastated by her long-held fears of ageing: she loathed her appearance, grieved over the absence of a man, had lost hope of ever again even 'feeling any new desires', certain that only calamities could now befall her. 'Memories grow thin, myths crack and peel, projects rot in the bud', she mourns. 'If this silence is to last, how long it seems, my short future' (*FC*, 673). Ten years later, she had not found a man, but she had found a new joy, new love, a new sense of unity even, with a woman – Sylvie le Bon, thirty-three years her junior – new projects and a new identification, with feminism. 'Today I've changed', she would say, 'I've really become a feminist.'³⁸ She was busy meeting feminists from all around the world. *The Second Sex* sold 750,000 copies, in the year it was reissued in the USA, exactly twenty years after its first publication.

Meanwhile, eyeballing her horror of her own ageing, she embarked upon her second major piece of theoretical research, into the social situation of the aged, for *Old Age*, published in 1970. Once again,

Beauvoir identifies the way in which a marginalized Other (the Old) is contrasted with a norm (the young and male). Again, too, she argued that the disparaged meanings attached to this marginalized other are not fixed in the body, but a product of cultural neglect and disparagement: ‘man never lives in a state of nature’, but rather grapples with an existential situation imposed by his own society. However, just as Beauvoir always idealized and to a large extent identified with the masculine, so too has she always idealized and identified with arrogant youth. On the one hand, she declares: ‘We must stop cheating [and] recognize ourselves in this old man or that old woman.’³⁹ On the other hand, it is she herself who expresses in so much of her autobiographical writing her abhorrence of the ageing body, especially the ageing female body; who in her fiction evokes the ageing and abandoned woman with so little sympathy; who pictures herself always only as a young woman; who works, even in sleep, to deny her age: ‘often in my sleep I dream that in a dream I’m fifty-four [which at the time she is], I awake and find I’m only thirty. “What a terrible nightmare I had” says the woman who thinks she’s awake’ (*FC*, 656).

Tellingly, whereas Lessing in her novels pours scorn on young women’s dreams, Beauvoir reprimands the ageing woman for her delusions.⁴⁰ Finally, just as her culturally disdained female self did not confront but rather insisted upon her unity with a man, so her ageing one will not criticize but rather establishes a new unity with a younger generation (a woman and movement), making her also young, as well as old:

The better I knew Sylvie, the more akin I felt to her ... all this gave me a certain feeling of being reincarnated... There is such an interchange between us that I lose the sense of my age: she draws me forwards into her future, and there are times when the present recovers a dimension that it had lost. (*ASD*, 63–4)

She had pulled it off again, identified with the otherness of the youthful other, to escape the plight of the old she worked both to expose and to decry.

This avatar of women’s autonomy was the last person who could live unpartnered; this polemicist against the plight of the elderly liked to surround herself with youth; this feminist, who enjoyed the friendship and love of women, never spoke openly of her lesbian experiences (though she certainly publicly supported lesbians). She needed and found close friends, her alternate ‘family’, and functioned best with a small group or social movement to support her. This was the source of her intellectual and politi-

cal strength. She muddled through her contradictions, exposing rather than denying them, much like the rest of us, but better than many.

I am committed to looking reality in the face and speaking about it without pretence: and who dares say it is a pretty sight? ... It is just because I loathe unhappiness and because I am not given to foreseeing it that when I do come up against it I am deeply shocked or furiously indignant – I have to communicate my feelings ... it is because I reject lies and running away that I am accused of pessimism; but this rejection implies hope – the hope that truth may be of use. And this is a more optimistic attitude than the choice of indifference, ignorance or sham. (*ASD*, 462–3)

Whatever paradoxes sustained her labours, it was a valuable, courageous, if impossible, commitment.

Battling for words

‘A persistent intimation of having arrived just a little too late remained with me’, Sheila Rowbotham wrote, after meeting the pioneers of the New Left, already rent by division, in the early 1960s.⁴¹ This might surprise her first feminist readers on the Left, for whom, for a while, she often was ‘it’, the place to begin. (Certainly, she was for me, even before she became my closest, most lasting English friend.) Actually, she nearly did miss out altogether, and were she to join the trauma-trail searching for events on which to lay her miseries down, she could pick out her own beginning. She was told that she was conceived as a ‘mistake’ by a frail mother, who had had a mastectomy in her forties, to a father well into his fifties: her mother tried to buy quinine to abort her, later hurling herself downstairs, without managing to induce a miscarriage.⁴² However, nothing could be less in character than for Rowbotham to use her parents, or any intimate attachment, as scapegoat for her own predicament. Confounding Virginia Woolf’s myopic predictions about which women of the future were likely to seek intellectual freedom from men’s cultural dominance, she was the daughter not of an educated man, but rather of an overbearing, dogmatic Yorkshire father, suspicious of books (a salesman for an engineering firm); a man with whom she was in perpetual conflict from early childhood, in ‘open battle’ from adolescence.⁴³ Although later, struggling to understand her enduring resentment of this stubbornly suffocating patriarch (‘whose love choked at the source until its only expression became either possessing and controlling or protective’), she reached out to grasp the experiences that might have so trapped and enraged him, concluding: ‘Bitter the death of a father I

never really met.⁴⁴ Luckily, though the father growled, the mother giggled or sighed: 'Time is on your side', this much loved, elegant, mischievous woman would say, having taught her daughter early on the secrets of small subversions of domestic patriarchy.

The only child at home, for a while a gang leader, bossing, directing and fighting her lower-middle-class playmates, in Harehills, Leeds, by the age of seven Rowbotham was regarded as too rough and 'common' by local children's mothers, when her family moved to slightly more affluent Roundhay, leaving her (like Kapp and Lessing in childhood) largely on her own, lonesome, forced to turn inwards to fantasy playmates for her elaborate escapades. 'This "Common" lodged inside me – the lost good times.' A skinny, sickly, bronchial child, she was mocked for her Yorkshire accent when, aged ten, she was packed off alone for the mountain air of Switzerland with older, southern children: 'It's alright for other people to have regional accents, but not for oneself', the sympathetic teacher in the Alps puzzlingly explained. Shortly afterwards, she was sent to a Methodist boarding school in East Yorkshire (again for its healthy air), from which she emerged at seventeen an existentialist – having read Wollstonecraft, Schreiner, Camus, Sartre, Beauvoir, and found an early champion and mentor in a radical, ironic history teacher, who could laugh at the trappings of power. Dressed in black, hair bouffant, fearful of the dangers of sex, yearning for its delights, she was eager for the attention of wild boys: 'I'm a psychopath and I come from Bradford', a leather-clad youth yelled at her. She 'grinned a welcome. It was 1960.'⁴⁵

Forty years later, Rowbotham published her memoir of the 1960s, *Promise of a Dream*.^{*} The legacy of this tumultuous decade, a time when prosperity and transformation seemed equally pervasive, was by then a battleground. Today, it arouses fondness or loathing, but most often dismissal as the last moment of irresponsible, self-absorbed dreamers. Rejecting such dismissal, Rowbotham offers a wry, witty, but always serious appraisal of her hectic route through the decade, knowing it provided the backdrop for her own and others' lasting radicalization. 'Retrieval has become an act of rebellion', she writes, when radical ideas and fashions once inspired by genuinely egalitarian movements are later repackaged – commodified, sanitized, toothless (xv). Trained as a historian, she returned to her diaries, interviewed friends and acquaintances, read everything she could until, 'drowning in memories', she recaptured her

often fraught embrace of the seditious 1960s. Like all these memoirists, however, she is well aware of the traps and distortions of memory. Her midnight salvage proves a lonely, bewildering, often disturbing process, rendering the familiar unfamiliar, as she sifts through relics for 'evidence' to narrate 'the tangle of coincidences which contribute to the particular fatality of living a life' (xvii).

The fundamental threat, or exhilarating promise, which feminism offers those it ignites is that of transgressing the barriers between public and private. Rowbotham's memoir embraces that challenge in ways not quite seen before: not to lose herself in politics (like Kapp), to disown it (like Lessing), or to provide her own life as exemplar (like Beauvoir), but rather to resurrect her young selfhood in order to grasp the emergence of a whole social movement of women. Women such as her, caught between vibrant cultural change and political action to eradicate newly visible inequalities, violence and inhumanities, near and far, were bound to feel a queasy disorientation in relation to the subservience expected of them – and, just sometimes, desired as well – in fulfilment of their 'feminine' destiny. Adept penmanship, Methodist missionary zeal, perennial introspectiveness, fanciful retreats, all made Rowbotham a key – if surprising – catalyst for other women at that moment: surprising because she was particularly attuned to hearing dissident mutterings, out of kilter with or suppressed by the single-minded folk she admired who got things done; invaluable because she could express the contradictions and doubts of political lives, just when a rising constellation of women was eager to hear them.

Rowbotham depicts herself as a confused teenager in the late 1950s, determined to break out of the invasive patterns of passivity and hypocrisy, surrounded by silence, ignorance and prejudice, with no guidance, resources or protection for doing so. She gives an extraordinary account of her thoughts at seventeen, physically overpowered but fighting off an attempted rape, while still a virgin travelling alone in France in 1960, her aggressor an Algerian, during the battle she supported for the independence of Algeria. Although determined to recover from the ordeal by engaging in freely chosen sexual contact, she remained for several years comprehensively ignorant about everything to do with sex, still wondering what exactly it was several years after becoming sexually active within the beatnik haunts of the Latin Quarter, Marseilles, Formentera and London: 'I was not the only one steering without

^{*} Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, Penguin, Allen Lane, London, 2000. 262 pp., £18.99 hb., 071 399446 0.

a compass between the dreaded Scylla of frigidity and the humiliating Charybdis branded “nymphomania” (48).

Nor was she the only one, on arriving at Oxford in 1961, to discover its cunning ways of putting down anybody who is not upper class. The ex-public school boys then identifying as ‘revolutionaries’ often proved as complicit as others with the Oxbridge mode of maintaining England’s ruling elite. Once again, the Yorkshire accent evoked smirks and mimicry, deepening a defiant sense of pugilistic Northern pride – the sly return of the spurned paternal adversary. Her irritation at the male-student sniggers regularly greeting female students aroused further anger. This was a time when women numbered but a quarter of the student population at Oxford. They were still barred from its Student Union (which Rowbotham hated anyway, as the place to advance careers) and subject to harsh paternalistic absurdities in its women’s colleges (which enraged her) – especially after a fellow student caught in bed with her boyfriend at St Hilda’s was expelled (and subsequently refused entry to other universities), while her lover was merely ‘rusticated’ for two weeks for his escapade. Worst of all was the desiccated diplomatic history she was expected to study, as if being prepared for a life in the Foreign Office; detached from social history, it left her bored and despondent. She was rescued from these tribulations by the kindness of the older Left historians she managed to encounter, mostly former CP members, who were more interested in people without power. These included Richard Cobb, Bridget and Christopher Hill and, most crucially, Edward and Dorothy Thompson, who became almost surrogate parents after the death of her mother, quickly followed by her father, in her early student years.

These mentors offered her a non-dogmatic Marxism, which seemed engagingly self-critical, ironic and open, expressing the culturally creative intellectual life of the New Left. The Thompsons, however, remained affectionately scornful of her ongoing ties to the more mystical, introspective counterculture of the 1960s, with its unstable mix of hedonism, music and contempt for greed and competitiveness; later, they also opposed her involvement in the militancy of the decade’s closing years. Rowbotham’s socialist leanings were strengthened at nineteen after meeting the young Marxist economist Bob Rowthorn, who – raised by a single mother and aware of Beauvoir – supported women’s emancipation: ‘[he was] a man who loved me patiently until I had orgasms and who resolutely bullied me into Marxism’.⁴⁶ He introduced her to (then still illicit) ways of obtaining birth control, as well as

the new generation then (as now) in control of *New Left Review*: Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn. However, it was the broad-based, direct-action politics of CND that attracted her, with its looser style of organizing, that soon reappear in struggles against homelessness, campaigns for user-controlled local resources and, from around 1966, the flowering of the counterculture and underground press, combining psychedelic visions with anarchic politics.

Nevertheless, on moving to Dalston, East London, in 1964, she joined the Hackney Young Socialists the year Harold Wilson’s Labour government assumed power, heightening hopes for social reforms and cultural change. There she encountered, in continued action replay, the venomous sectarian combat between differing Trotskyist factions working as ‘entrists’ inside the Labour Party. ‘United Front, *yes*; Popular Front, *no*’, the member from Militant explained when she joined, warning her against his enemies from Gerry Healy’s Socialist Labour League: ‘I blinked, trying to concentrate. It would be easy to get this the wrong way round, and his tone suggested the consequences could be dire’ (89). Scrutinizing the battle of dissenting certainties, she was quickly an expert on the ritual differences between rival Trotskyist sects, admiring their tenacity (always angry, acerbic, alert for betrayal), even while appalled by their arrogance and dogmatism (which served primarily to drive away any working-class youth they managed to recruit). It was the beginning of a permanent aversion to vanguardism, a conviction that it was not the most effective, least of all the most creative, way of winning people for progressive ends, while sowing the seeds of potential intimidation or abuse. Several short satirical efforts at illustrating this over the years would culminate in her influential critique of Leninism in 1979, in *Beyond the Fragments*, with its call for solidarity between differing campaigning movements, creating immediate but short-lived impact, in by then already harsher times.⁴⁷

From the late 1960s, Rowbotham was swept up in the extraordinary activism of the moment, supporting the surge of trade-union struggles (from fishermen in Hull to women sewing machinists at Ford), befriending and supporting Third World radicals, immersed in the Trotskyist-led Vietnam Solidarity Committee against America’s war in Vietnam. All the while, she retained her links to the counterculture, the radical edge of the now internationally celebrated vibrations of ‘Swinging London’, inspiring her later venture into Agitprop.

Much of this time she was also nursing serial heartaches, experiencing the pain of both rejecting and

being rejected, after separating from Rowthorn, her panicky feelings over ‘dependency’ generating ambivalent terror and anger (feelings she later connected to reliving battles with her father). She endlessly mulled over the differences, similarities and heartache, seemingly intrinsic to heterosexual passion: all her goals for autonomous, mutual loving, stymied by experience, by internal inconsistencies. In stumbling diary jottings and subsequent reflection, she puzzled over her own sexual energy, at odds with itself, in battles over identity and unity, reason and passion. Meanwhile, the chronically niggling frustrations and humiliations that she knew sprang from her situation as a woman remained quite separate from her political activity: her anger hearing sexual denigration directed at women, outbursts when socialist men dismissed shared housework as ‘utopian’, an abiding sense of being cut out of men’s conversations, rendered invisible, except when being chatted up. These irritations merged with the grief she had felt when her mother lay dying, speaking bitterness over the constraints of her life; a narrowness she saw again in the lives of her women neighbours in Hackney and in the limited horizons of her students, the apprentice hairdressers in the FE college in East London where she was teaching.



In hindsight, Rowbotham saw herself feeling ‘profoundly disjointed and askew’ by the close of 1967, brooding increasingly in her diary on the intolerable way men perceive (and overlook) women. But it would take a few more years for her to find the right words to explain why she felt so ‘struck with the tragedy of the sexual divide and the way it had hobbled me’.⁴⁸ ‘Feminism’, as she first understood it, did not attract her: it was associated with women’s formal rights in the public arena, of little relevance to the personal conflicts then distressing her. This lack of fit included her initial glance at Juliet Mitchell’s important early theorizing of women’s ‘overdetermined’ subordination in terms of four separate structures, ‘production, reproduction, sex and the socialization of children’, in *New Left Review* in 1966:⁴⁹ ‘Adamant that I didn’t want to be like a man, the evident contradiction in how to be a woman kept making me question my own emotions and relationships’ (159). One new term she heard, ‘male chauvinism’, would continue ‘to churn around’ in the back of her head: it was used, extraordinarily then, by an American Leftist after a VSC meeting, sympathizing with her over all the other men ‘shutting her up’, when she offered suggestions for raising money (162).

However, with the pace of political life becoming even more frantic, it sidelined ‘mere’ personal frustrations. The year 1968 kicked off with the shattering of US military morale following the relative success of the NLF’s massive Tet Offensive in Vietnam – heralding their eventual victory and igniting revolutionary spirits across the globe:

Beyond party and beyond sects, Vietnam came to symbolize a wider humanitarian struggle between the just and the unjust. Vietnam was to be my generation’s Spain and the suffering of its people became imprinted on our psyches. (171)

As in the 1930s, the world polarized, it seemed, into Right and Left. On the one side, the mainstream media were near universally hostile to protesters; Harold Wilson refused to criticize the US Army’s intensified bombing of Vietnam; Enoch Powell was inciting racism and encouraging the National Front with his ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech, blaming immigrants for Britain’s economic decline. On the other side, the first New Left reappeared with a fresh edition of the *May Day Manifesto*, discussing the meaning of work and the nature of communications under capitalism, challenging Wilson’s worship of modernization.⁵⁰ But their intellectual labour was

eclipsed by militancy on every side, as anti-Vietnam War marches grew larger around the world.⁵¹ In May, students in Paris occupied the Sorbonne. To the amazed horror or delight of a watching world, revolt spread to 9 million French workers, who, for a few months, expressed solidarity with the students facing police attacks, demanding change.

In June 1968 Tariq Ali and a number of other radical writers and designers founded the Left newspaper *Black Dwarf*. It was certified radical and non-sectarian, under the banner: 'PARIS, LONDON, ROME, BERLIN. WE WILL FIGHT. WE SHALL WIN.' As protest spread, Rowbotham's diary records her feeling a new 'sense of significance' outside herself. She even briefly joined the Trotskyist International Socialists, abandoning some of her inner journeys for outer ones.⁵² She travelled England with the *Dwarf*. Copies disappeared fast at campuses, whether in Hull, Essex or Bristol, where students were in 'occupation', demanding greater democratic control over both educational structures and curriculum (demands which ultimately met with at least some success). To her surprise, and exceptionally then for a woman, she was invited to write for and join the editorial board of *Black Dwarf*. But when she tried to speak at the founding of the Revolutionary Socialist Students' Federation in London, in a miniskirt, she was blasted with the full force of 'revolutionary' sexism:

To my horror, as I walked to the mike, I was greeted by a tumultuous barrage of wolf whistles and laughter. I remained frozen for what seemed like an eternity... I had ceased to be an individual and had become an object of derision. It was like a living nightmare. Stubbornness kept me in front of the microphone... Somehow through the whistling and laughter I managed to speak about [the underfunding of] further education. (188)

Some things never change – the class-based underfunding of FE colleges, I mean. Public guffawing watching a young woman try to address a meeting would, within a few short years, be frozen in the throats of men – whatever she was wearing.

Militancy was being forced upon women; a box reopened, the spirit of feminism flew out – although, in Rowbotham's reminiscence, for a while the meetings between women occurred mainly in the toilets, and she herself would end up, repeatedly, silenced by left comrades, feeling once more stifled and 'annihilated by the way men behaved' (190). She expressed these frustrations in a poem the following year, 'The Sad Tale of Nobody Me' (1969): 'who told me to paddle my own canoe/ into the sewer/ of once begun'.⁵³ In 1968,

Nobody Me was getting into further trouble with the ever more militant Male Somebodies, as the supposedly non-sectarian *Dwarf* was cleft by enmities, once Tariq Ali joined the Trotskyist International Marxist Group (IMG), which heightened Rowbotham's aversion to self-appointed vanguards, leading others formed only in their own image. 'Students the New Revolutionary Vanguard', the *Dwarf* declared (forgetting the question mark) (191). She was equally dismayed by proposals for pin-ups to adorn the *Dwarf*, penning her own riposte on men wanking in the revolution: 'Let us stick cunts/ On our projecting egos/ Calling this comradeship/ And the end of exploitation.'⁵⁴

Rowbotham escaped these tensions, forming a group she called AgitProp, working with her friend John Hoyland (also on the *Dwarf*), to bring a more radical aesthetic into political actions. Making their colourful mark in intricate displays and dynamic poster presentations on demonstrations and at festivals, they nevertheless found that most campaigning groups had little interest in linking politics with art, being too attached to their thick black lines and white, wordy leaflets (182). That year she managed to turn around the attitudes of some of the young apprentice engineers she was teaching, who had earlier supported Enoch Powell; this confirmed her sense that political polarizations are more complex than they might seem – on both sides. She recalls not only the 'unrelenting hatred' in the eyes of some fascist supporters of Enoch Powell picketing an anti-racist march, but the upper-class scorn in the voice of a Notting Hill 'Situationist', sneering at dockers supporting Powell.

Rowbotham remained on the *Dwarf* just long enough to write and solicit articles for an issue (this time encouraged by Tariq Ali) heralding *The Year of the Militant Woman*, which appeared in 1969. As in her teaching job, it enabled her to reach beyond the radical student milieu, writing of Rose Boland, who spoke of wanting 'recognition' as much as better pay for women working at Ford, and of Lil Bilocca's campaign for trawler safety after the death of forty Hull fishermen. Rowbotham always emphasized that working-class women were pivotal in initiating women's liberation; it was they who provided the early role models, alongside Vietnamese women guerrilla fighters. Preparing for that issue of the *Dwarf*, she read other attempts at combining the personal and the political, in Beauvoir and Lessing, later concluding: 'I had *become* a woman.... As the words splattered out on the pages, it felt as if I had reached a clearing' (209). The words she wrote, addressing equal pay, child care, contraception, the demeaning of women's

bodies, included little things, such as ‘not wanting to be ... sent off to make the tea or shuffled in to the social committee’. But women were also insisting on something much less tangible: ‘a smouldering, bewildered consciousness with no shape – a muttered dissatisfaction – which suddenly shoots to the surface and EXPLODES’ (211).

Many women quickly found their own way onto the clearing she had reached. 1969 was the year the tall, flauntingly sexy Australian Germaine Greer (then working with the radical porn magazine *SUCK*) was busy writing *The Female Eunuch*, which, both despite and because of its snipes at women and feminism, would become an instant bestseller in mainstream culture, popular with both men and women. It was the year the first Women’s Liberation group appeared in the UK, in North London, including some young Americans aware of the women’s groups formed the previous year to confront sexism in Left groups in the USA. The first National Women’s Liberation Conference in the UK was set in motion for the following year, after Rowbotham announced a meeting (again to guffaws) for those interested in talking about women, at one of Raphael Samuel’s History Workshops. Just for a change, as she later wryly notes, the assertive predictions of a Left paper ‘had been vindicated by history’ (252). 1969 was the turning point in the rebirth of the ‘militant woman’ in Britain. Summing up her views in a 1969 article for *Black Dwarf*, ‘Cinderella Organizes Buttons’, she realized she could not bear to defend her views before what would be a largely hostile editorial group. Instead, she wrote a letter of resignation, suggesting that to understand why she found it hard to discuss what she had written on women, the men should spend two minutes ‘imagining they had cunts’. ‘This is outrageous’, they all agreed; the silence her words briefly evoked was one of embarrassed anger, not creative compliance. It would take twenty years for her novel challenge to become commonplace – if only on ‘Queer’ platforms in academia.

1969 was also the year Rowbotham began writing her first book, *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, seeking to understand how, historically, women had managed to educate themselves and fight for better lives, their collective action often emerging out of initially spontaneous forms of resistance. Her editor at Penguin, Neil Middleton, remarked that he’d never met a writer who wrote so well, but who ‘was so unconfident’.⁵⁵ Part of that book, completed in 1971, would be separated off and published as *Woman’s Consciousness: Man’s World* (1973), one of the founding texts of socialist feminism. The times were just right

for her thoughts to inspire women around the world. Having always stressed her indebtedness to others, her former lover Rowthorn had joked that others could now take heart from her, since they would realize that anything she could do, they could do too. Not so much vanguard, one might say, as vigilant forager: ‘I seemed often to bumble along almost unconsciously into doing a lot of things in my life which have then connected me to some radical mood in the culture’ (247). When that mood began to change, a decade later, the audience for her style of politics began to evaporate, even as her own thoughts shifted to embrace new challenges.

Generational histories, temporal belongings

Rowbotham’s abiding legacy is both her struggle for words, and her suspicion of them: ‘As soon as we learn words we find ourselves outside them... There is a long inchoate period during which the struggle between the language of experience and the language of theory becomes a kind of agony.’⁵⁶ Reviewing *Promise of a Dream*, the smart but cynical Jenny Diski echoed the current sentiments of her former surrogate parent and mentor Doris Lessing, when she saw in it no more than evidence of banal generational fighting: to be young is, ineluctably, to be opposed to the old. Meanwhile, she suggested as her own lasting lesson in disenchantment, the world takes ‘not a blind bit of notice’ anyway, but goes on its way impervious to the struggle between age groups, whose ‘cycle of anger, action and failure is as inevitable as hormone fluctuation’.⁵⁷ She could hardly be more wrong. The world takes all too much notice of generational stirrings, ever watchful for ways to contain and commercialize the creative resistance of its young critics.

When the women’s movement ran with the slogan of the American New Left ‘the personal is political’, it had excellent reason for doing so. Hidden cruelties and violence were rife in the domestic ‘haven’, hypocrisy endemic to sexual life. The ‘freedom’ masquerading as ‘revolutionary’ was blatantly sexist (while veiling a host of other ingrained pecking orders). There was little that was unchallenging about centring attention on personal life and intimate experience when most women had yet to learn that their bodies, sexuality, intellect and inclinations were not inherently ludicrous, unless hidden or mimicking those of men. Moreover, it accompanied an overly moralistic disapproval, not encouragement, of using that personal voice for self-promotion. Women who had wanted to get a sense of themselves as autonomous agents in the world of the

1960s had metaphorically to switch sex to do so, as almost all of my generation recall.

However, what was beyond words yesterday, may be cliché today; the silent scream, once heard, can be isolated to mute out other signs of distress, even those once perceived. New ways of talking and organizing pioneered by Women's Liberation, which at first felt so fragile, did eventually succeed in pushing women's interests onto mainstream political agendas, especially where occupational openings were expanding for some women. But they could not forestall the appearance of new modes of manipulation, often of a curiously self-righteous kind, as orthodoxies congealed.

Whether the insights individuals take with them from one period to the next are helpful, and for whom, depends on the possibilities for translation between differing landscapes and the figures in them. While political parties always hand down memories (albeit often self-serving and distorted), nonaligned activists and thinkers, especially prevalent from the 1960s, have *only* our snatched and fleeting reconstructions. Here, personal narratives of political journeys become most valuable. In the women's memoirs, for all their idiosyncrasies (and access to the privileges of Western women), I sense more background nuance and foreground uncertainties than I do in the men's. It is certainly a cliché, but they expose secrets of love, loss, loneliness, anger and longings, which shift significantly as time passes, and minds and bodies age and weaken. From their stories it is easier to divine movements between resistance and accommodation, despair and renewal, in both personal and political life, than it is from the narratives of those for whom 'politics' involves the classification of life neatly into loyalty and betrayal, success and failure. I am uncertain how age figures in the men's memoirs, learning little of the impact of generational histories and tensions, as the men seem to remain more solidly at the centre of their specific domains, the 'young Turks' who challenge them, perhaps, more often departing to create their rival camps.

Grasping more clearly today much that I never understood, or sought to understand, about repetitions and denials of fissures and follies on the Left, the transmission of generational histories appears more important than ever. Older radicals and younger rebels have equal need of such history. At a time when ageing is increasingly disdained as intolerable, it becomes almost subversive to celebrate the particular experience and self-reflective knowledge it may at times bring with it. Intergenerational affinities can curb the stabilization of stereotypical age roles: the confidence, anger and

cynicism of young critics; the resignation, disillusionment and bitterness of old-timers. And such affinities are not necessarily as difficult to construct as we are led to expect. Since identifications are largely fantastic, we can be – in a sense, we cannot avoid being – young and old at the same time. Lessing rejected politics, partly, as I see it, because she turned her back so determinedly on any affirmative identifications with a younger generation. Beauvoir, in contrast, launched herself into just such identifications and affiliations. Interestingly, Rowbotham points out that in 1969 just a few women who were much older appeared at planning meetings for the Ruskin conference:

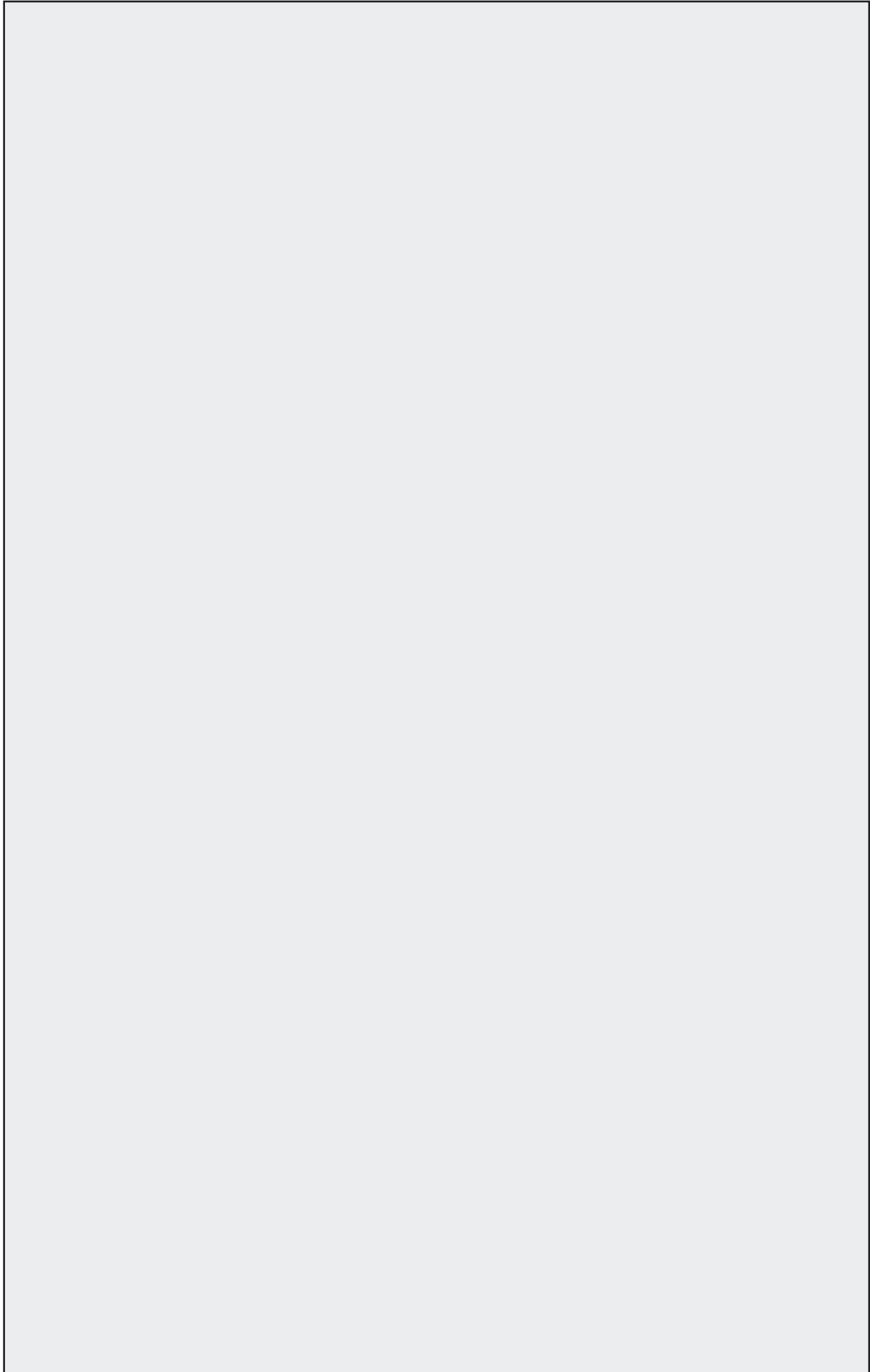
This generation were like political grandmothers to us, closer to our wavelength than the political mothers – the left women in the generation which preceded ours. Formed by the thirties and forties, they would often remonstrate with us for identifying as 'women'. They had their own struggle to be independent, political activists and saw the 'women' tag as restrictive; to us it was liberatory. (252–3)

Older people's identification with the young is often disparaged as a 'disavowal' of ageing. But we can, and we do, have a more complicated relationship to time than this, never more so than on our political voyages.

Notes

1. Lynne Segal, 'Lost Worlds: Political Memoirs of the Left in Britain', *Radical Philosophy* 121, September/October 2003, pp. 6–24.
2. Raphael Samuel, 'Staying Power: The Lost World of British Communism', Part Two, *New Left Review* 156, March/April 1986, p. 35.
3. Personal communication from Sally Davidson and Nick Jacobs. Kapp's memoir, it should be noted, was significantly revised and edited by Charmian Brinson, before it was accepted by Verso.
4. Quoted in Sally Alexander, "I Have Always Been a Writer" – Yvonne Kapp: Writer and Socialist', in S. Alexander, *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History*, Virago, London, 1994, p. 189.
5. J.D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science*, Macmillan, London and New York, 1939.
6. See Quentin Bell, *Elders and Betters*, John Murray, London, 1995, p. 11.
7. Kathleen Hale, *A Slender Reputation: An Autobiography*, Frederick Warne, London, p. 126.
8. Alexander, *Becoming a Woman*, p. 184.
9. Some later travelled on to the USA or Australia, like my own grandparents, who had passed that way a little earlier, fleeing the conscription of Jews in Vilnius.
10. Lessing on her second husband is quoted in Barbara Ellen, 'From Feminist Icon to Male Champion', *Observer*, 9 September 2001, p. 2.
11. One of many places Lessing denied ever being a feminist was in conversation with Barbara Ellen, *ibid.* The back

- page of the collection in which this preface was most recently published has a 'Note from the author' asserting 'I have changed my mind about politics since I wrote these essays.' Paul Schleuter, ed., *Doris Lessing: A Small Personal Voice – Essays, Reviews, Interviews*, Flamingo, London, 1994.
12. Quoted in Ellen, 'From Feminist Icon to Male Champion', p. 2.
 13. It was my friend Barbara Taylor who pointed out this Freudian reading to me.
 14. Doris Lessing, 'My Father', in Ursula Owen, ed., *Fathers: Reflections by Daughters*, Virago, London, 1983, p. 79.
 15. Doris Lessing, 'Afterword' to Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1968), in Shlueter, ed., *Doris Lessing*, pp. 162–3.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
 17. Much like Jenny Diski (mentioned below), who was once fostered by Lessing when, for several years in the 1960s, she became a 'housemother' to various young waifs and strays.
 18. Hywel Williams, 'The Dream Is Over', *Guardian*, 22 September 2001, available online <http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/generalfiction/0,6121,555617,00html>.
 19. In personal conversation with Sarah Benton.
 20. Eric Hobsbawm, quoting Brecht, in his *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life*, Penguin, Allen Lane, London, 2000, p. 139.
 21. Doris Lessing, 'Preface to *The Golden Notebook*' (1971), in Schleuter, ed., *Doris Lessing*, p. 46.
 22. Quoted in Deirdre Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1990, p. 617.
 23. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley, Picador, London, 1988, pp. 295, 29, 328, 643.
 24. Lisa Appignanesi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, Penguin, London, 1988, p. 2; Sylvia Lawson, *How Simone de Beauvoir Dies in Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, pp. 153–4; Ann Curthoys, 'Adventures of Feminism: Simone de Beauvoir's Autobiographies, Women's Liberation and Self-fashioning', *Feminist Review* 64, Spring 2000; Margaret Walters, 'The Rights and Wrongs of Woman: Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau and Simone de Beauvoir', in *The Rights and Wrongs of Woman*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976, p. 351; Kate Millett, quoted in Penny Forster and Imogen Stubbs, eds, *Daughters of de Beauvoir*, Women's Press, London, 1989, p. 22; Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 10; Judith Okley, *Simone de Beauvoir*, Virago, London, 1986, p. ix.
 25. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 295.
 26. Quoted and discussed in a fascinating reflection of the Beauvoir's legacy, p. 151; Fouque quoted in Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 553.
 27. Angela Carter, 'Colette', in *Nothing Sacred*, Virago, London, 1982, p. 176.
 28. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Frechtman, Citadel, New York, 1976, p. 37.
 29. Margaret Walters, 'The Rights and Wrongs of Woman', p. 369.
 30. Mary Evans, 'Lies, All Lies: Auto/biography as Fiction', in *Missing Person: The Impossibility of Auto/biography*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 40.
 31. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Words*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1967, p. 148.
 32. Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994, p. 252.
 33. Sartre, *Words*, pp. 15, 148.
 34. Simone de Beauvoir, *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*, André Deutsch, London, 1984, p. 168.
 35. Sartre, *Words*, p. 158.
 36. Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 187.
 37. A famous line from Sartre's play *No Exit* (1944).
 38. De Beauvoir, 'Today I've changed – I've really become a feminist', *Seven Days*, 8 March 1972.
 39. Simone de Beauvoir, *Old Age*, trans. Patrick O'Brian, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 12.
 40. Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream*, HarperCollins, London, 2002; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Woman Destroyed*, Fontana, London, 1971.
 41. Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, Penguin, London, 2000, p. 64.
 42. Sheila Rowbotham, 'Our Lance', in Owen, ed., *Fathers*, p. 208.
 43. Sheila Rowbotham, 'Revolt in Roundhay', in Liz Heron, ed., *Truth, Dare or Promise: Reflections by Daughters*, Virago, London, 1985, p. 208.
 44. 'Our Lance', p. 216.
 45. 'Revolt in Roundhay', pp. 193, 196, 210.
 46. Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness*, p. 17.
 47. Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments*, Merlin, London, 1980.
 48. Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness*, p. 20.
 49. Juliet Mitchell, 'The Longest Revolution', *New Left Review* 40, November/December 1966, pp. 11–37.
 50. Raymond Williams, ed., *May Day Manifesto*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968.
 51. Although, interestingly, at its height, in London in late 1968, and seen as huge, the Vietnam solidarity march was less than a tenth – at 100,000 – of the largest march against invading Iraq – at over one million – in 2003.
 52. Sheila Rowbotham, 'Diary in the Life of Sheila Rowbotham', in *Dreams and Dilemmas: Collected Writings of Sheila Rowbotham*, Virago, London, 1983, p. 47.
 53. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
 54. Sheila Rowbotham, 'The Role of Women in the Revolution Defined by Some Socialist Men', pinned up in the *Dwarf* office in Carlyle Street in 1968, reprinted in Lillian Mohin, *One Foot on the Mountain*, Onlywomen Press, London, 1979, p. 210.
 55. Sheila Rowbotham, 'Remembering 1967', in *History Workshop: A Collectanea 1967–1991*, History Workshop, London, 1991, p. 6.
 56. Rowbotham, in *Dreams and Dilemmas*, p. 33.
 57. Jenny Diski, 'A Long Forgotten War', *London Review of Books*, 6 July 2000, pp. 9–10.



Deleuze's Bacon

Art & Language and Tom Baldwin

I

Francis Bacon's public career as a painter began in the 1940s and was more or less established by the 1950s. But it received its first guiding impulse from a convulsion in the British art establishment of the late 1930s. This convulsion was provoked by the increasing prominence of a cosmopolitanized, *professionalized* abstract art – the relatively powerful instrument of an emerging class, a new cultural bourgeoisie. The prospect that a professionalized abstract art would take hold in Britain was threatening to an older class of literati and dilettanti for whom art was a 'civilizing' rather than a 'professional' tendency.

It had become apparent that the rising cultural bourgeoisie perceived modernist abstract art as autonomous, driven by the dialectic of its own technicality. The technicality of its action enabled it to assume a practical (and a moral) legitimacy which devalued the authority of the older civilizing class. Cosmopolitan modernism accounted for its practice in terms of coherent *ideology*. To its opponents, the increasingly specialized vocabularies that accompanied it seemed menacing and aggressive.

In the 1930s the lead in the reactionary fight against this professionalism was taken by Kenneth Clark. A 'humanistic' vocabulary of aesthetic grandeur was developed and refined, and recalcitrant abstract artists were effectively marginalized. By the end of World War II, British art had been re-established as a civilizing discourse, predicated on the interesting eccentricities of individuals, that remained in thrall to a patronage of gentlemanly amateurs. Civilization was assisted by many 'personalities', artists and literati. Some of these were to be the art arbiters of the future: the wartime personnel of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts grew up into the Arts Council; some of the loftier minds became voices on the BBC, and so on. In Britain at least art would be, one way or another, in the grand manner. Henry Moore became the great British sculptor and Graham Sutherland the great British painter. The canonical

discourse of the authentically human opposed, and seemed to defeat, the outlandish vocabularies used by the foreign-seeming intellectuals of international abstract art. While surrealism recognizable as such was rejected for its unsightly political ramifications, in so far as its mannerisms were adaptable they were domesticated as picturesque detail. Acceptable deformations entailed the reinvention of a form of romanticism: depoliticized, de-psychologized, British, and all right.

Though some early work of Bacon's was shown alongside the surrealists in London in the 1930s, he emerged in the 1940s as a rather shady figure at the edge of a bohemian circle consisting of Sutherland, Minton, Craxton, Melville, Vaughan, Lucien Freud and others. One of the perceived tendencies of professionalized modernism was pedagogic. It seemed that its ideological and technical metiers could be taught. By contrast, resistance to socialization or to the distribution of power through teaching was a marked aspect of the bohemian authenticity of the 1940s and 1950s. Tradesmen's sons and daughters, unless suitably marked and transfigured by an appropriate authenticity, must not be allowed to pollute the rare mountain air. Such sentiments are significant among the enabling ideological conditions of Bacon's eminence.

Picasso seemed to bestride both modernist professionalism and British figuration. Some – Minton, Sutherland, Craxton – identified the source and clung on. Bacon 'acknowledges' the influence of Picasso's techniques. But of course. What else, who else? Decoding, we might say that Bacon, like the others, borrowed and adapted and diluted the formalistic and expressionist threads of Picasso into an occasionally seamy, but essentially genteel figuration. This figuration, which shunned or sought seriously to restrict the 'narrative', compromised the painterly. But abstract art compromised or seemed to compromise a variety of ideological canons. It was therefore to be represented as trivial, empty, as incapable of bearing the weight

of a necessary aestheticism. A middle, one might say quietly, *British* category emerged as a consequence: the figural. Historicistically tractable and located, vaguely continuous and discursively passive; neither one thing nor the other; neither ‘illustrative’, nor ‘narrative’, nor ‘abstract’.

Bacon as authentic is the prisoner of a trope, a comical spectacle. In the hands of an authentic the fractious materiality of modern art is a picturesque shadow. The disciplines imposed by vertiginous materials, the blindness of the ironies which, contra Barthes, do not *merely* constitute a superiority of one voice over another, are denied in the culture of anecdote and nostalgic order.

II

The foregoing is a kind of recollection of an article on Bacon that we wrote for the journal *Artscribe* almost twenty years ago.¹ Its final thought was that it is more constructive and emancipating to make fun of Bacon than to engage in the genre of serious criticism. Gilles Deleuze’s *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation** belongs unquestionably to the genre of serious criticism. We might ask if it counts significantly against our recollection. We ask this in changed – or at least aggravated – circumstances: the hegemonic triumph of global capital has had artistic consequences. It has put a management in charge of production, and in doing so has bloated the power of the institution and robbed art of its internal complexity. If the power of the institution is to be resisted, it may be necessary to restore the internal complexity of the artwork. Painting *may* supply some clues to how this is to be accomplished.

While we argue that Bacon’s early eminence was due to a reactionary tendency in British art, he has re-emerged more recently in an abundance of critical writing and other cultural ‘studies’ addressed to *the body*. Bacon’s ‘scenes of love, vomiting and excretion’ (16), his zones of indiscernibility between man and animal, are celebrated as *abjection*, and abjection goes to the transgressive. Deleuze himself doesn’t explicitly mention the transgressive. His book will lend support to the tendency, however. ‘Abjection becomes splendor, the horror of life becomes a very pure and very intense life’ (52). This is right out of the old bohemian’s charter. It is perhaps disconcerting to see a theme set running in the civilizing world of Sir Kenneth Clark being taken up for radical honour by Julia Kristeva.

Deleuze argues that ‘Bacon’s is a closed and artificial world’ (43). But we can also read today that ‘interest in the body’s apertures depends on the preoccupation with social exits and entrances’. Kristeva has argued via Bataille for the power of abjection, on the grounds that it ‘disturbs identity, system, order; that it does not respect bodies, positions, rules’.²

The modernist art project may well have to face up to the charge that it issued from an over-intellectualized delibidinized laboratory. But it does not follow from this that the hopelessly attention-seeking transgressions of processed art-world abjection have any chance of disturbing, let alone overthrowing, globalized power. Neither the anus nor the mouth nor any of the other holes – including the one you might vomit down – are *ipso facto* transgressive. They fit well enough into those cultural templates that were first formed in the context of ‘civilization’.

III

Deleuze is not naive in his readings of such basics as pictorial space and depth, figure–ground relations, and so on. He has a grip on the unavailability to twentieth-century painting of ‘simple figuration’, and on some of the reasons for that. He says, ‘Painting has to extract the Figure from the figurative’ (8). (The logic of this necessity becomes somewhat tortured in places, as when, ‘the body [in Bacon’s painting] ... exerts an effort upon itself in order to become a Figure’ (15).) Later, ‘the Figure is opposed to figuration...’ Even if ‘something is nonetheless figured (for instance a screaming Pope)’, there is a ‘secondary figuration [which] depends on the neutralization of all primary figuration’ (37). We might ask what this neutralization is like. Presumably it doesn’t mean that one no longer sees the screaming Pope. Rather one *experiences* the Pope as a Figure rather than recognizing it as a represented body. A lot is made to hinge on this distinction. Supposedly, ‘Bacon has always tried to eliminate the “sensational”, that is, the primary figuration of that which provokes a violent sensation’ (38). As a disclaimer on Bacon’s part, that has always seemed a bit disingenuous. As Deleuze represents him, Bacon is interested in violence not as narrative or even as a subject of representation, but as ‘itself a Figure’ (39). But this doesn’t quite do away with the question of what it is that forms the set of the figurative themes of Bacon’s pictures.

* Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith, Continuum Press, London and New York, 2003. 240 pp., £16.99 hb. 0 82646647 8. Page references appear parenthetically in the text.

Deleuze has an evasive but possibly interesting preoccupation with ‘the fact’ (3). This appears to be a kind of unarticulated requirement of realism. He gives an odd account of religious figuration (9–10). On the one hand it appears that, if ‘with God, everything is permitted’, then there can be no realism in religious art. On the other, he seems to be saying that it is by religious art that ‘Figures [are] freed from all figuration’, thus offering modern art a precedent – besides recourse to abstraction – for liberation from the invasion of the photographic. (He returns in his seventh chapter to the matter of figurative representation versus abstraction.) It’s not quite clear what is and what is not a fact, or *the* fact. There’s a suspicion of circularity: that a fact may simply be what gets onto the surface of a Bacon painting.

Deleuze’s invocations of horror and violence (e.g. of the act of painting), and of all the stuff about meat and animals, is by now little more than conventional ‘G2’ culture-speak. ‘The common fact (again) of man and animal’ (21) is not a very *profound* fact. Meat is another ‘fact’ (23). As with much of the stuff about how figures in Bacon’s paintings relate to their enclosing contours and armatures, the frisson comes largely from a kind of forgetting that what’s being talked about is actually *not* ‘fact’, but a series of pictures. Nevertheless, ‘Bacon harbours within himself all the violence of Ireland, and the violence of Nazism, the violence of war. He passes through the horror of the crucifixions ... or the head of meat, or the bloody suitcase’ (38). What is this but the stipulation of authenticity?

Deleuze has a thoroughly Greenbergian distaste for narrative and for the kinds of rhetorical devices that tend to go with it. But it’s not quite clear how this fits with his apt perception that a typical Bacon painting is ‘composed like a circus ring’ (1) – that is, presumably, is in certain respects deeply theatrical and cornily spectacular. Nor is it clear that the account he gives (in Chapter 2) of Bacon’s development of a ‘different relation to figuration or illustration than the painting of the past has’ would not apply equally well or better to more or less any mid- to late-twentieth-century painter worth bothering with.

Deleuze is constantly finding animation in Bacon’s work. This is not quite the kind of animation by means of which a static painted image is normally thought to acquire psychological vividness – usually through some sense of interaction with (or even alienation from) an imagined spectator. It is animation as in Tom and Jerry or *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* We have bodies flattening themselves into mirrors, or flowing

in and out of holes – in doors or sinks or hypodermic syringes, or even in the body itself (‘Bacon’s scream is the operation through which the entire body escapes through the mouth’ (16, and again on 28).) Late-late surrealism meets Tex Avery, in the logical world of the Notes on the Large Glass. And the spectator gets left behind – or is somehow conceived of as part of the ‘internal’ world of the picture. (‘Bacon needs the function of an *attendant*, which is not a spectator but part of the Figure’ (13).)

Central to Deleuze’s argument is a strange and antique kind of antithesis between the Figure and ‘abstract form’ that connects to the earlier discussion of flesh and bones in Bacon’s painting. To be concerned with the wild movement of the body as against the sterilizing environment of abstract modernity is a hopelessly adolescent dualism. Deleuze acknowledges this but still seems a bit unsure about it. He describes Bacon as ‘refusing the double way of figurative painting and abstract painting’. Deleuze may use the term ‘figure’ in ways that are almost Greenbergian, but sometimes things get more ambiguous. Just when you think he’s proposing either abstract art (‘pure form’, whatever that is) and the figure as ways out of anecdote, illustration and narrative painting, he announces that the name of the figure is ‘sensation’. This is the neurosis and psycho(pathology) that forms a self-affirming stereotype of the creative individual.

We identify the body on the canvas not because we know it to be a representation of *that* object, but by virtue of its sustaining *this* sensation. Deleuze equates Cézanne’s admonition to himself to ‘paint the sensation’ with Bacon’s to ‘record the fact’ (35). He goes on to talk about a ‘difference of level, a plurality of constituting domains’ in the sensation, and also about its ‘material synthetic unity’ – which is *not* made up by ‘the represented object’ (37). It’s not immediately clear what this means. The issue is an important one for Deleuze’s text, however, since it bears on the question of how and why Bacon’s work may be said both to be complex in one’s experience of it – to operate at different ‘levels’ – and to offer something like compositional unity.

Deleuze does address the question of ‘what are these levels, and what makes up their sensing or sensed unity’ (37). He rejects two possible candidates for unifying agent. The first is the represented object. This is not to be confused with the Figure, which is the authentic source of the sensation. The second candidate is the painter himself, whose potential ambivalence of feeling might be thought to have generated some ambiguity or complexity in representation of the

body that is its object. This is ruled out by Deleuze on the grounds that ‘there are no feelings in Bacon: there are nothing but affects; that is, “sensations” and “instincts” according to the formula of naturalism’ (39). In other words, you can’t trace any complexity of sensation back into the psychology of the author; you must account for it in terms of the conventional language of pictorial representation. This is all very well and nicely Greenbergian (or it would be if Deleuze didn’t go on to talk about the appropriate sensation being the one ‘that fills the flesh at a particular moment of its descent’ (40)), but we do have to remember that it’s Francis Bacon we’re talking about and not, say, Matisse.

Deleuze finally gets round to his own preferred explanation for the complexity of sensation he finds in Bacon’s work. It comes over as a bit limp. His answer is that the figures are actually in motion, or in spasm, as a consequence of ‘the action of invisible forces on the body’ (41). He writes later that ‘the force of bodies in Bacon’ is ‘to put time inside the Figure’ (48). This explanation seems to require a descent from figure to body in order to justify a ‘level of sensation’ that was previously seen as dependent on the extraction of ‘the Figure from the figurative’. We’re back with narrative. As if in recognition of the inadequacy of this hypothesis, Deleuze offers another, which is perhaps less limp than desperate: synaesthesia. ‘The levels of sensation would really be domains of sensation that refer to the different sense organs ... independently of the represented object they have in common ... each time meat is represented, we touch it, smell it, eat it, weigh it’ (42).

Traversing these different domains, and serving to unify them, is the power of rhythm: ‘This rhythm runs through a painting just as it runs through a piece of music.’ It looks almost as though we’re back with significant form, with the decorative, and with their various correlates. No great harm in that, perhaps. But if this was really the destination you had in mind, would you choose Bacon as your vehicle? As Deleuze goes on, however, it becomes clear that his apparent formalism is of a more exotic cast than Bell’s or Greenberg’s. ‘This ground, this rhythmic unity of the senses, can be discovered only by going beyond the organism ... the lived body is still a paltry thing in comparison with a more profound and almost unlivable Power [*Puissance*]’ (44). You might think that what’s being invoked here is a kind of transcendence, at the level of the Seriously Aesthetic. On the contrary, however, what Deleuze has in mind is Artaud’s ‘body without organs’ (44) – or without determinate organs

at least. This is an imagined circumstance in which ‘every sensation implies a difference of level (of order, of domain)’, and in which a hypothetical ‘complete series’ includes all possible permutations of *temporary and transitory* organs: ‘What is a mouth at one level becomes an anus at another level’, and so forth (48). ‘This complete series constitutes the hysterical reality of the body.’ It transpires that the cartoon-like body escaping from itself through its own mouth (or through any of its other orifices) is a kind of Ur-hysteric.

IV

Deleuze himself poses the question that naturally arises. ‘What kind of hysteria are we speaking of here? Is it the hysteria of Bacon himself, or of the painting itself, or of painting in general?’ (It seems a long time ago since we posed the question, ‘Who dares to appoint himself art’s psychoanalyst?’ Will a schizo-analyst do any better?) Deleuze posits a ‘special relation’ between painting and hysteria, on the grounds that painting ‘directly attempts to release the presences beneath representation, beyond representation’ (51–2). Painting gives us lines and colours freed from the requirements of ‘organic representation’; in turn, in the presence of painting, the body without determinate organs is made all eyes.

‘The body without organs’ has come in for a certain amount of conceptual abuse. In spite of its name, this body isn’t exactly organless. While the ‘organism’ ‘is defined by determinate organs’, the body without organs ‘is [thus] defined by an *indeterminate organ*’. It is finally defined ‘by the *temporary and provisional presence* of determinate organs’ (48). This is a bit messy: does a constantly shifting set of determinate organs constitute an indeterminate organ?

It is at this point that Deleuze returns to the two alternative routes open to painting as he conceives it: to ‘conserve the figurative coordinates of organic representation’, or else to turn toward ‘abstract form’ and invent ‘a properly pictorial cerebrality’ (53). But each of these now appears as a means of avoiding the ‘fundamental hysteria’ which Deleuze has come to identify not simply with Bacon but with the ‘clinical essence’ of art – possibly of each art. Thus, just as painting makes us all eyes, so music makes us all ears, and so on. It is at this point that Proust finally makes his explicit appearance, quoted on the notion of a kind of ‘bodily combat’ in music, ‘in which there subsists not one scrap of inert matter refractory to the mind’.

Deleuze quotes Bacon saying that the smile he painted on a 1955 Pope came from a ‘model’ ‘who was very neurotic and almost hysterical’ (51). Around

this *obiter dictum* he constructs a representation of Bacon's paintings as 'hystericized'. 'With painting, hysteria becomes art' (52). 'Hysteria' threads through the text and makes its presence(!) felt, not only where it appears explicitly or in connection with 'relations' such as 'bodies without organs', 'scream breaths', 'disordered convulsions', 'sex organs sprouting anywhere, rectums [that] open, defecate and close'.

Presence, presence ... this is the first word that comes to mind in front of one of Bacon's paintings. Could this presence be hysterical? The hysteric is at the same time someone who imposes his or her presence but also someone for whom things and beings are present, too present, and who attributes to everything and communicates to every being this excessive presence. There is therefore little difference between the hysteric, the 'hystericized' and the 'hystericizer'. (50)

It's not too much to say that at times Deleuze writes as if *possessed* by Bacon's paintings. Freud acknowledged that his psychoanalytical description of hysteria was but a kind of semantic revision of the demonological one. Neurosis and hypochondria become modern versions of the medieval theories of possession. Deleuze, it seems, has decided to go the whole hog and write himself as the demon's habitation, and in doing so to demonstrate the point. There is something demonic and vexing about the figures that Deleuze, as it were, 'figures' by 'hysteria'. As we wrote many years ago, however:

it is difficult to distinguish between 'genuine' hysteria and malingering.... Between 'hysteria', 'impersonation of hysteria', 'explicit' or 'implicit' malingering there lies a vexed hiatus of differentiation and undecidability.³

To work with these vexatious representations is a complex but perhaps not entirely pointless endeavour. But Deleuze's world is as tightly closed as the world that he sees Bacon as depicting. Is he talking about hysteria, or is he hysterical – the victim of hysteria? There are no rational distances, no historical circumstances, around and in between things in this world of violence, demonology, dirty washbasins, dog-spirits, bat-spirits and howling meat. You want to interrupt, but the breath doesn't come.

V

Deleuze refers to Proust directly on nine occasions. The most striking reference occurs on page 67. It's striking because, in spite of what John Russell has to say about Proust and involuntary memory, Deleuze

states that 'Proust's world seems to have little in common with Bacon's.' 'One still has the impression', however, 'that Russell is correct.' Deleuze is discussing what he refers to as 'coupled figures', which, apparently, 'Bacon never stopped painting'. He writes that there is 'one Figure common to two bodies, or one "fact" common to two Figures', more or less recapitulating what Proust has to say about the workings of *la mémoire involontaire*. In a blatant paraphrase of Proust, Deleuze writes that

It [involuntary memory] coupled together two sensations that existed at different levels of the body, and that seized each other like two wrestlers, the present sensation and the past sensation, in order to make something appear that was irreducible to either of them, irreducible to the past as well as the present: this Figure. (67)

Proust writes, in *Time Regained*: 'Always, in resurrections of this sort, the distant location engendered around the common sensation would be meshed for a moment, like a wrestler, with the actual location.'⁴

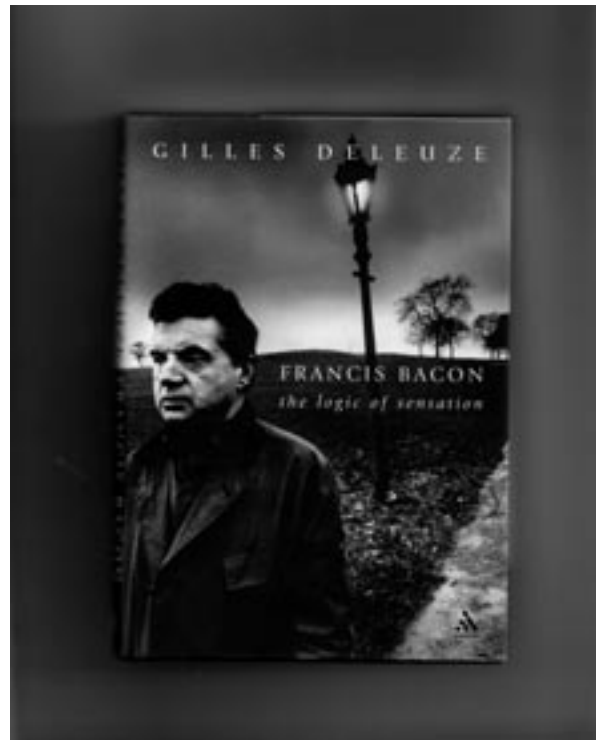
So it's clear on Deleuze's own analysis that the worlds of Bacon and Proust have something in common – a 'coupling' of two things (bodies or sensations) engenders the production of a 'Figure' (Proust might have called it an 'essence', 'a bit of time in the pure state'⁵). Is that where the affinity ends? Regarding Bacon's triptychs, Deleuze observes: 'The previous solution of coupling is of no use here, for the Figures are and remain separated in the triptych' (69). In other words, since the 'Figures' in the triptychs 'must remain separated and do not resonate' it's difficult to see how they can have a 'common fact'. A Proust-style 'coupling' will not work. Perhaps this is why Deleuze says that Bacon's and Proust's worlds don't have much in common. But if this is right, then he has ignored what he himself says about Proust's work in his own *Proust and Signs*. Bacon's 'Figures' are, like monads, radically separate. They are, however, brought together on or across the same surface – they are 'Figures which are [nonetheless] united in the painting' (70). They 'remain separated, but they are no longer isolated; and the frame or borders of a painting no longer refer to the limitative unity of each, but to the distributive unity of the three' (85). There is a 'union that separates' which is constituted by 'an immense space-time' (84, 85). There are a number of distinct similarities between this analysis and that of the structure of Proust's novel in *Proust and Signs*. Deleuze suggests that it is mistaken to observe 'the laws of continuity and unity' in Proust's work.⁶ Proust's image of 'vases clos' occurs in *Time Regained*:

The gesture, the simplest action remains enclosed as if within a thousand sealed vessels each one of which would be filled with things of a completely different colour, odour and temperature; quite apart from the fact that these vessels, arranged across the full length of our years, during which we have never ceased to change, even if only our thoughts or our dreams, are placed at quite different heights and give us the sensation of extraordinarily varied atmospheres.⁷

In Deleuze's analysis, these suspended vessels are not simply the containers of essences hanging at different levels in time. Each of the narrator's love affairs, for example, is merely part of 'an infinity of successive loves' – one of an apparently infinite number of fragments or 'closed parts'.⁸ As the narrator suggests, the sheer multitude of fragments may serve to give a false 'impression of continuity', an 'illusion of unity'. So far, this would seem to be the kind of illusion that Georges Poulet, for example, entertains. Deleuze, however, rejects the idea that there is a 'direct means of communication' between the fragments of Proust's world. Instead, there is a system of 'transversals', which enable us to jump from one fragment or multiple to the next 'without ever reducing the multiple to the One'.

The important point is that these fragments are both (simultaneously) 'separate' and 'united'. They don't whisper in each other's ears. They shout across large valleys. Proust's closed parts cannot be 'reduced to the One', and Bacon's paintings don't 'tell a story' (69). What is the transversal of Bacon's 'Figures'? Deleuze suggests that the uniting-separating force is 'light', 'an immense space-time [that] unites all things, *but only by introducing between them the distances of a Sahara, the centuries of an aeon*' (85). So we might argue that time or 'space-time' is the transversal of Bacon's 'Figures'. While Deleuze's argument concerning Bacon's triptychs is reminiscent of what he says about Proust's novel, it also resembles what Poulet observes in *Proustian Space*. Like Deleuze's, Poulet's analysis hints at a monadic conception of the work. But, for Poulet (unlike Deleuze), as radically fragmented as Proust's work might be, these fragments are connected in so far as they are juxtaposed not only within the perceptive field of an individual consciousness but also across or along the same aesthetic surface or 'space' – 'on the same map'.⁹ The monadic fragments suggest a differentiated system, but the aesthetic surface implies that this is only a limited form of textual discontinuity. Indeed, it suggests a surface that does not work by gaps – a system that is replete. Deleuze rejects any

relatively direct or continuous (undifferentiated) connection between the monadically separate parts: we can skim between the different regions, but we cannot bring them together to form a continuous, analogical system. The fragments are 'connected' in an indirect (i.e. 'transversal' manner), but there are gaps (empty spaces) between them. They are remote islands, but they are not, it would seem, united across the surface



of a single map. Poulet's Proust is mixed up with Deleuze's own Proust to make Bacon.

So even – or perhaps especially – when Deleuze insists on the lack of affinity between Bacon and Proust, we can hear echoes, if not of Proust himself, then of Deleuze on Proust (or of Poulet on Proust). Deleuze says that to 'render time sensible in itself is a task common to the painter, the musician, and sometimes the writer' (64). It's difficult not to view this writer as Proust, or, moreover, as Deleuze's Proust. In creating a temporary and provisional presence, Bacon has, according to Deleuze, 'painted time' ('there is a great force of time in Bacon, time itself is being painted' (48)). The body without organs is Bacon's device for inserting 'time into the painting' (48). In *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze argues that the narrator's 'apprenticeship', during which he must learn to translate signs in order to access 'truth', moves through different levels of signs – 'worldly signs', 'sensuous signs', the 'signs of love', the 'signs of Art'. The subject learns to decipher them, and to discover different kinds of temporality that are associated with them.

The 'worldly sign' is a sign of 'Time that Passes'; the 'sign of love' is a sign of 'Time Wasted'; the 'sensuous sign' is a sign of 'Time Recovered at the Heart of Lost Time'; the 'sign of Art' is a sign of an original, absolute Time – 'a bit of time in the pure state'.¹⁰ Deleuze argues that Proust privileges the 'signs of Art' over all other types of sign. This is because they're the signs of what he refers to in this book on Bacon as 'the force of eternal time' (63); what Proust refers to as 'le Temps' rather than 'le temps'.

So works of art give us 'a bit of time in the pure state'. It should be noted that Proust first uses this phrase in *Time Regained* in relation to an experience of involuntary memory (a 'sensuous sign') rather than in relation to a 'sign of Art'. For Deleuze, however, 'sensuous signs' are inferior to the 'signs of Art'. This is because while they're signs of essences – of an original, absolute Time – the other signs 'refer to or are associated with material things'.¹¹ In Deleuze's analysis, the experience of the madeleine, for example, is secondary. This is because the madeleine's taste is still 'materially connected to the essence it contains' – the narrator's childhood home in Combray.¹² The 'sign of Art' is made of a spiritual matter 'so ductile and kneaded' that it refracts the 'pure light of essence'.¹³ The two most obvious examples of such precious and privileged 'signs of Art' in Proust's work are, as Patrick French notes, the 'little patch of yellow wall' in Vermeer's *View of Delft* and the 'little phrase' in Vinteuil's sonata.¹⁴

The point is that an encounter with both the 'signs of Art' and some 'sensuous signs' (those associated with involuntary memory) allows us to experience an 'essence' or 'Time' which is 'real without being actual, ideal without being abstract'.¹⁵ In the case of involuntary memory, we're not dealing with the remembering of a moment that is past but was once present, but with the 'very being of the past in itself' – what Bergson called the virtual (in Proust's words: 'something which, common both to the past and the present, is much more essential than either of them'¹⁶). Similarly, the 'signs of Art' bring together both past and present, the virtual and the actual, in a 'small internal circuit'.¹⁷ The important difference between these things is that the 'signs of Art' express 'Time' ('render time sensible in itself') in a far more direct manner. There's no need for memory or for the contingent materiality of a sensation in order for that expression to be realized. In a sense, 'abstract form' and the 'Figure' are the new terms in the Bacon book for 'involuntary memory' and the 'signs of Art' in *Proust and Signs*. The former (abstract form) is

described, possibly *for* comic effect but certainly *with* comic effect, as 'addressed to the head' and 'acts through the intermediary of the brain, which is closer to the bone' (34), whereas the Figure is 'the sensible form related to a sensation which acts *immediately* upon the nervous system, which is of the flesh' (34, our stress).

Having asserted that Bacon and Proust have little in common, Deleuze goes on (in the next paragraph) to talk about Proust and involuntary memory. That Proust = involuntary memory is revealing. His argument may be that there's little affiliation between the two since Bacon deals in the 'signs of Art' and Proust with 'sensuous signs' (involuntary memory). But this is at least disingenuous: Bacon's 'Figures' operate exactly like Proust's 'signs of Art'.

Deleuze's text engulfs Bacon's 'closed and artificial world' in another that is without material and political contingency, this notwithstanding his chapter 'Every Painter Recapitulates the History of Painting in His or Her Own Way'. Here is Bacon in a purified, one might say sanctified, world – a fictional world in whose mimetic space Deleuze performs his ekphrasis. A world, in short, a bit like Proust's. In this case, the semi-abstract synthesis is one that has only limited vulnerability to 'naturalistic' criticism, but it is similarly restricted in its power to defend itself against criticism that answers to the contingent mess outside.

It turns out that the virtual world that Deleuze creates is deaf to the laughter that we recommended as the best medicine for Bacon. But a voice located somewhere in the contingent mess of the practical, the political and the dialectically technical – a voice off – continues to interrupt.

VI

Bacon used certain theatrical devices to hold his isolated figures on his modernistic coloured grounds: the outline of a box in perspective, what Deleuze calls 'parallelepipeds of glass or ice', railings around areas, oval or round shapes, armatures and pedestals. Deleuze does admit that these devices are 'rather rudimentary' – as they are. Bacon is not, like Cézanne, attempting the dogged pursuit of a unifying pictorial system. Instead, he is desperately looking for something to get him out of one the pitfalls of semi-abstract painting. Figures with paint all over their faces and bodies fall out of their flat modernist backgrounds and have to be stuck back on somehow. You need devices. Bacon's parallelepipeds create a geometry that prevents the figures from seeming to fall out of the

shallow modernist pictorial space onto the floor. The devices are *tricksy*.

Shallow pictorial spaces are common enough in portraits and in pictures of few or single figures both 'pre- and post-cubism' – and not only 'post-cubism' as Deleuze suggests. Bacon's 'space' is perhaps not so much that of the circus ring as of the chapel, the small theatre or the Punch and Judy show. In this world there are plenty of curtains, confessionals, altar rails and other quasi-liturgical (theatrical) decorations. By popular *convention*, the air may be heavy with incense and with dodgy sexuality. This is a world that was looked into by Rimbaud, Verlaine, Proust, Gide and the surrealists (in their literature more effectively than their art). By the time Bacon's career got going it was a source of the atmospherics of easy art.

According to Deleuze, painting 'has two possible ways of escaping the figurative: toward pure form, through abstraction, or toward the purely figural, through extraction and isolation ... to break with representation, to disrupt narration, to escape illustration [is to] isolate the figure' (3). To liberate the figure from the figurative is to isolate it against the ground. Now, Deleuze may be talking of bodies as figures or he may be talking more of figure-ground relationships. For the hysteric or the malingerer it's frequently hard to say which is which. But remember, in the curator-fixated world of art and art writing barely a moment has gone by without someone coming up with 'the body' or with 'new gentleness' – or something – as a solution to, or a salve for, the insecurities and scandals of abstraction.

Deleuze sees the paralleliped theatre as somehow essential to Bacon's 'logic'. The voice off says that this is how Bacon gets to have puppets that he can adorn as he pleases with artistically conventional artifices of expressivity, emotional gravitas, and so on. The puppets that are created by the Punch-and-Judy show décor-cum-space are merely the hooks from which Bacon's style-shopping, his self-regarding anxiety in the face of the modern(ist), are hung. This is a theatre in which well-established artistic conventions can be mistaken for critical or violent or otherwise urgent and significant insertions of the figural. This is not what they really are. They are usually borrowed artistic swatches, patches of artifice that anticipate *readymade* responses. The little theatre enables the figure to stay in place the easy way. We might say that it is clearly an artifice that is not impinged upon by reality. Bacon sees no need, or can't be bothered, to find a surprising angle or bit of the world – a table or a window or what-

ever *à la* Manet, Degas or Bonnard – but he makes a few smears, a few decorative gestures, and redeems them with the small conventions of 'perspective' to produce theatre and to allude to a grander and more auratic *Weltanschauung* of religious art (the Renaissance, curtained rooms, confessionals, ecclesiastical power, and so on). This is in fact the *Weltanschauung* – or rather the panoply – of the conjurer/illusionist. It is kitsch.

VII

In a descriptive passage in 'A Note on Color', Deleuze points out that the three fundamental elements of Bacon's painting are 'armature or structure, the figure and the contour' (144). These are lines that bind colour. So far we are hearing a description of almost *any* figurative painting. Deleuze then goes on to describe several paintings by Bacon (146–7). His argument seems to be little more than that colour has certain effects – pushing and pulling, flowing and so forth; that coloured pictures can sometimes be flattened by their chromatic effects, and that flat-ish colour is, well, the background somehow – or, rather, that it does not form the figure. In Bacon this is true. It is his broken tones that recall the modelling of a conservative figuration.

The chapter goes on in more or less formalistic vein. And then we return to the idea that the figures are trapped or confined in a quasi-decorative theatre, and that this decorative-cum-atmospheric (theatrical) scheme has a certain logic or autonomy. In its decorative autonomy, it invokes questions of taste. This is dealt with as follows: 'Even the most hideous of rugs ceases to be hideous when one comprehends it figurally' (153). That is, even what might be – we might imagine to be – an ugly rug depicted is not ugly in its depicted form, so long as it has a significant (formal?) role (figural role?) in the painting. This is surely no more than obvious and simultaneously dubious. It does not follow from our guess that there is a real rug that is in fact hideous and that serves as the prototype of the painted rug that is in fact hideous, that a rug-like patch of paint that may itself be hideous will not be hideous in the painting as a whole. How *would* such a thing be hideous? Or does he mean that 'mentioned' bad taste can be converted into something transcendent by a pictorial use? It's all (again) both obvious and simultaneously dubious. This is a dinner-table topic, familiar not only at the high table, but also in the sub-Platonic chitchat of petty-bourgeois taste.

VIII

For example, a mouth: it will be elongated, stretched from one side of the head to the other. For example, the head: part of it will be cleared away with a brush, broom, sponge or rag. This is what Bacon calls a 'graph' or a *diagram*. It is as if a Sahara, a zone of the Sahara, were suddenly inserted into the head. (100)

'The diagram' is a strange term of Bacon's artspeak shorthand. It is cooked to death by Deleuze. It is what is somehow a 'given' – 'what's in your head'. Who ever painted (figuratively) nothing much? Bacon perhaps. Or is Deleuze saying nothing much – the art-school obvious about what it is like to do a certain kind of 'abstract'-ish painting? You don't think of it and then do it. You chuck paint, rub and dab. Clear things out of the way, distort and change. The diagram is 'thus the operative set of asignifying and non-representative lines and zones'. This is simply false. They may be a set of marks that aren't what Bacon finally 'finds' figurally, but there's no reason to say that they are asignifying unless what Bacon finally makes is all they ever could be. In fact they 'refer' intentionally or not to *many* other bits of art. Art's like that – unless it's not and art has no art connections. But Deleuze doesn't live in that postmodern world of art without history, as he repeatedly makes clear.

'The paintbrush and the easel can express a general subordination of the hand' (154). The hand presumably subordinated to the eye. The easel painting is worked at and looked at under certain conditions that are associated with the exercise of a certain control. But easels, and so on, do not make that inevitable. 'Easel painting' became a term for a certain sort of European art of a particular scale and pictoriality. (There is in Bacon a distinct vestige of that easel-painting tradition, notwithstanding his rather superficial borrowings of 'attendants' from the cupboard of American abstract art.) '[B]ut no painter has ever been satisfied with the paintbrush' (154). How does Deleuze know? Is the technical necessity to use a palette knife something to do with *dissatisfaction* with the paintbrush? Deleuze goes on to say that the 'values of the hand' come in the form of the digital, the tactile, the manual proper and a stage on the journey to the Proustian-cum-*tachiste* haptic.

Yet to chuck paint without looking at the canvas, for example, does not make the optical come to bits, even if the viewer is well aware of the 'fact'. One has *used* a system to produce an optical or visually recoverable effect. But how can the insubordination of the hand (e.g. as a consequence of poor hand-eye

coordination or of avant-garde gesturalism), which presumably results in unintentional marks, *dismantle* the optical except in making a rather flaccid and Maurice Denis-ish point to the effect that painters *usually* do their work by hand. (Where do paintings by mouth fit it?) How does this render the painting, as it were, 'purely' manual? When Bacon sketches and arts about, is that what he is (was) doing? Messing up, smearing, and so on, are all recognized techniques. When Fantin-Latour scrapes the painted shadows and flower stems in order to have the little smears, smoothings and darkenings 'reconstruct' a glass vase and its contents, he is, no doubt, engaged in a relaxed insubordination of the hand. It seems that Deleuze has constructed some rather precious categories, smelling strongly of rue de Seine epochalism, to try to account for the varieties of homeless representation that occur in Bacon's work. We introduced Fantin-Latour perhaps unwisely. His is not homeless representation, and there's plenty of his work in Paris. Deleuze's hermetic discourse invokes the pompous spectacle of post-World War II French abstraction as presided over by Michaux's mescaline drawings and Mathieu's aviator outfits.

Bacon saw the possibilities in the *semi*-abstract. Well, shouldn't we all? Except that this is the abstract that didn't worry the upper classes. Deleuze's analysis is quite sophisticated, but really it's a fancy way of saying that Bacon thought that abstraction was sort of unamenable to the grand 'human' manner. Both Bacon and Deleuze prefer Michaux to Pollock. In this Bacon didn't understand, and neither does Deleuze, that the dialectical technicality of non-French abstract painting confronts and rejects the grand manner. Bacon nevertheless mined it promiscuously for decorative effects.

To those who attended art school in the early 1960s, there is an eerie ring to Deleuze's insistence on Bacon's diagram as the key to understanding the artist technically. In those days the straight conservatives, the real conservatives, dwelt stolidly in the nineteenth century or put their faith in dot-and-carry. As authenticity developed a sort of pedagogy, youngish or trendy-ish 'teachers' emerged whose mission-in-smug-self-importance was founded on humiliation: torture the life model and 'jolt the students out of their complacency'. 'Make a mark', 'make another mark' ('smudge it, smear it', etc.). What does it do to what you (can) see? We were mere inches from 'significant form' but this was significant form with psychological extras. The life class was beset by such crap. Students were often confused by the smeary semi-abstract biomorphic figural results. It is possible that Deleuze has

brought this shifty conservatism to its theoretical – we had better say *literary* – apotheosis.

It's not that Deleuze is always *wrong* about painting, rather that he trusts the interpretations that he, qua philosopher, makes of the arch and self-serving artspeak of his subject and of those in his milieu. One tries to unpack, or rather to puncture the vessel – to recover something practical rather than aesthetic, artistic and embedded. One longs for a sceptical voice, a lowering of the tone. Having set the scene theoretically – or in general – Deleuze sort of gets to Bacon and a certain clarity. Bacon paints a figure or a figurative form more or less conventionally. What is called the 'law of the diagram' 'intervenes and scrambles it'. It might be more natural to say that Bacon messes the figure up in an *artistic* sort of way, with smears and patches that come *manually*. What can we make of this emphasis on the manual or the diagram? One paints a figure and smears it. In what sense is this smearing and decorating insubordinate to the eye? It's the eye that says that's enough, that's good, and so on. In Bacon, this was a self-replicating style, a theatre of borrowed decorative abstraction – or rather abstraction trivialized so as to adhere semi-abstractly to the figure.

These possibilities of the figural seen in paint are usually far from surprising (which may not matter), but they are also not simply *found* in insubordinate patches and traits. They are frequently repeated Baconish things, moments of pointless knowingness. And Bacon is not so much worthy of prolonged analysis of his painting habits as trapped in the biomorphic conventions of late and politically unmotivated surrealism, decorated from time to time with a few updatings from recent abstract painting.

Deleuze quotes the song 'Crosseyed and Painless' from the Talking Heads album *Remain in Light*. 'I'm changing my shape, I feel like an accident' (158). Do Bacon's effects look accidental? The painter paints, and various figures – or rather pictorial possibilities – are suggested as he proceeds. How come the accidents so consistently produce such arch theatre, such clever little crowd-pleasers? Deleuze has Bacon thinking of a formula – a trait (brush)stroke formula or colour patch formula – 'capable of expressing the diagram'. He's attributing the wrong question to Bacon. He *had* a formula that ensured that he did paintings that do the job that Bacons always did.

IX

Chapter 17, 'The Eye and the Hand', is an attempt to map further the exchanges and tensions between the

manual and the visual into Bacon's work. We first have to accept that there is something in Deleuze's purified *tachisme*. One can think of the literal facts about painting in at least two ways: line and colour or brushstroke (or just stroke) and colour patch. Deleuze obliquely acknowledges that a line is, of course, a stroke, but we might want to emphasize the action of the artist in calling it a stroke. So far, so good. Second, Deleuze argues that paintings can, as it were, show 'action' that somehow overwhelms or makes what the artist *did* more important than what the artist sees (or we see). (Soulages, Mathieu?) The haptic relation of hand and eye is one where the eye touches or seems to touch what it sees. Is the haptic relation indeed exemplified in a convexity of objects: the reaching out to the eye of the surfaces of things *à la* Proust? None of this is clear.

The best we can do to interpret Deleuze constructively is suggest that eye and hand make no distinction between themselves. As art approaches a modern condition of hapticity, the supposed 'violence' of (some) painting, for example, would allow for no considered ruling by either organ in the act of painting. But how fruitful is this? It seems to have far more to do with the hopeless and unwittingly funny performance values (dramas) of Mathieu and Michaux and even Soulages, who produced academic, abstract art (academic because figural and gestural and scared of wallpaper), than it does with the wider field of abstract painting. Pollock's works came 'out of' a sort of action, but what they speak of are questions that painting had to answer. They are good, when they are good, because it matters that we are intrigued as to how they are made, but our grasp of them does not replay a film in which Pollock pirouettes. They tell us that materiality, or literalness, and pictoriality – as meaning or content, including human content – *are* connected and disconnected in ways that continue to puzzle us. What doesn't worry us is that there is imposture in Pollock. (As Greenberg said, 'Pollock was full of shit just like everyone else.' The safety of the academically-figural-plus-mess-as-provocation has long been abandoned.)

Insisting on the glories of the semi-abstract (the Bacon model range), Deleuze notes approvingly that the 'diagram', the chapter of smudges, smears and accidents, pictures or pictorial fragments suggested by the hand (the paint, etc.), does not cover the whole painting – or, as he puts it, 'it must remain localized in space and time, it must not cover the entire painting'. If it did not remain localized, the results would be 'sloppy'. Well, it wouldn't be a Bacon-ish thing – a theatrical figure or a nameless something on a

shallow stage. In short, it wouldn't be the conservative exercise that Bacon's painting is. One is struck, over and over again, by the banal conventionality not only of the stuff under analysis, but also of the analysis itself, however apparently sophisticated. We might say that Deleuze gives it away on the last page. It's Michelangelo who 'inspires' Bacon to put bodies in relation with forces. The pictorial fact in its pure state, distortion for all kinds of emotional effect, the autonomy of the artwork, and so on, were all born in mannerism. Of course. What Deleuze cannot account for, or at least doesn't enlighten us about, is the fact that the legacy of mannerism has gone through many transformations, redescriptions and reinventions. Bacon merely invokes Michelangelo (or, guess who: Velázquez, Van Gogh) by producing figures that, to the susceptible, look like figures by Michelangelo or hitch a ride on paintings by Velázquez. (It has to be said that he treated Van Gogh better.)

Deleuze's way with the 'diagram' has many features that literalize a virtual – that is, fictional – situation in Proust's *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. The Guermantes' fountain starts as a literal fountain, becomes a sign of art (a Hubert Robert *picture* of a fountain) that breaks up into jagged Cubistic pieces, only to return to its literal (fictional) form as a thing that wets a snobby onlooker.¹⁸ Deleuze's book is *about* Bacon, but Proust's text is folded in its pages. Its author, the apostle of the rhizomous many, is thus perhaps revealed as an apostle of the 'essential' and 'the pure'.

X

Elegantly argued and 'authoritative' as Deleuze's thesis may be, in so far as it touches on Bacon it is an apology for a particular form of what used to be called semi-abstract art. It can be acknowledged that the neither-one-thing-nor-the-other has long been close to our intellectual and cultural tastes and interests. The semi-abstract often has an instructive abjection as art – a diagrammatic power to reveal the contradictions and difficulties entailed by any art whose project is somehow to be anchored in realism. But Bacon is different. While his brand of semi-abstract art frequently depicts a sort of journalistic abjection, it is far from retiring or modest in its reflections. Indeed, it is an art that has or rather takes the best of everything it can in a project of artistic conservatism and self-regarding pessimism. Bacon's people and sorts of bodies are made modern and expressive, or rather expressionist, by the paint on their faces or their arses.

Perhaps it is this kind of semi-abstract 'hysterical' hiatus in Bacon's paintings that enables Deleuze's

override figuring. It is possible that the Baconian catalogue of violence (the diagram) plus geometry, of the theatrical device masquerading as riveting pictoriality, of paintings unresolved and *of* the unresolved, of incompetence, of convulsions of the soul that must never be re-described as convulsions of the diaphragm, of neither one thing nor the other, is what gives Deleuze room to write. Ad Reinhardt said 'Semi-abstract is halfwitted, so to speak'. We know that artistic disasters are often more fruitful than seamless artistic successes. Viewed from outside the Deleuzean vessel, it may be that Bacon's oeuvre is a repetitive cycle of exemplary fuck-ups. Such things are good to write about for intellectuals who don't quite know how painting is painted and who care neither for the imposture nor for the difficulty involved.

For Deleuze, the paint itself swells and reaches out to meet our haptically sensate eye – reconstructs the figure as fact. That's a way to see it, so long as you don't see the actor or the dummy underneath. If that was all there was – a description of and an epochal imperative to the effect that a real Francis Bacon has made the really telling synthesis – then we might dismiss it as culturally conservative and trivial, taking a grim satisfaction in the thought that Deleuze – postmodernism's new Walter Benjamin – is in fact no more and no less than a commanding traditionalist in the finest French cultural mode.

On the inside, however, there is nothing that is ordinary and robust, or everyday and discursive. Deleuze's 'third way' has authenticated the continuity and unity of the eternal verities in a tradition that grows through Bergson and Proust to the officialdom of surrealism and its postwar *enfants terribles*. But this is Deleuze, after all. It will therefore be misunderstood by some and put to use as the theoretical background and *Zeitgeist* guarantee for a culture of callow spectacles – for dead meat in clinical containers, for the sterilization of blood and pain, for the downright silly made cheaply grand. For those who can put it to use, it will be 'about' capitalism and desire. For those who can't, it will lend dignity to the genre of nasty journalistic hyperbole that, in breaking Victorian taboos, simply exploits them.

Notes

1. *Artscribe* 53, July–August 1985, pp. 15–20.
2. Both quotations from Warwick Anderson, 'Excremental Colonialism: Public Health and the Poetics of Pollution', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 21, no. 3, Spring 1995.
3. Art & Language, 'Letter to a Canadian Curator', *Art-Language* vol. 5, no. 1, October 1982, reprinted in C. Harrison and P. Wood, eds, *Art in Theory 1900–2000*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2003, pp. 1040–41.

4. Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, édition publiée sous la direction de Jean-Yves Tadié, 4 vols, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1987–89, vol. 4, p. 453. All subsequent references are to this edition. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are ours.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 451.
6. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*, Quadrige/PUF, Paris, 1964, p. 149. Translated into English by Richard Howard as *Proust and Signs*, Continuum, London and New York, 2000. All subsequent references are to the French text.
7. Proust, *À la recherche*, vol. 4, pp. 448–9
8. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
9. Georges Poulet, *L'Espace proustien*, Gallimard, Paris, 1963, p. 50.
10. See Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*, p. 34.
11. Patrick ffrench, "'Time in the Pure State': Deleuze, Proust and the Image of Time", in Carolyn Bailey Gill ed., *Time and the Image*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000, p. 162.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Deleuze, cited by ffrench in *ibid.* (See Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*, p. 60.)
14. See *ibid.*, p. 162.
15. Proust, *À la recherche*, vol. 4, p. 451.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 450.
17. ffrench, "'Time in the Pure State'", p. 165.
18. See Proust, *À la recherche*, vol. 3, p. 56.



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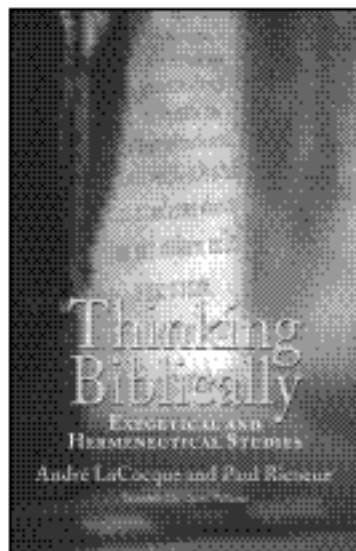
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Against parochialism

Eduardo Mendieta, ed., *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2003. 218 pp., £13.95pb., 0 253 21563 3.

Eugene Gogol, *The Concept of Other in Latin American Liberation: Fusing Emancipatory Philosophic Thought and Social Revolt*, Lexington Books, Lanham MD, 2003. 385 pp., £20.95 pb., 0 7391 0331 8.

Fidel Castro, *On Imperialist Globalization: Two Speeches*, Zed Books, London, 2002. 156 pp., £9.99 pb., 1 84277 269 4.

In his introduction to *Latin American Philosophy*, Eduardo Mendieta complains that ‘one of the most amazing things about the bibliographical work on philosophy in English over the last decade or so is its utter silence about Latin American philosophy and philosophers’. Surveying the encyclopaedias and dictionaries of the discipline, he suggests that ‘as if by conspiracy’ their quiescence on these topics would seem to indicate ‘that neither [the philosophy nor the philosophers] existed or exist’. His collection of essays aims to indicate otherwise, to show that ‘Latin American philosophy exists and it is prodigious in its production and creativity’. Reading the essays themselves, however, may lead to other conclusions.

Indeed, even some of Mendieta’s contributors are prepared to question the existence of such a thing as a distinctly Latin American philosophy. Most notably, Jorge Gracia ends up with the observation that

if we adopt a particular selective point of view with respect to certain philosophical texts, we can easily conclude that there is no Latin American philosophy, or very little of it. And if we adopt a different selective point of view with respect to the same texts we can conclude that there is Latin American philosophy – and much of it.

One knows what he means, which is in part that the definition of philosophy itself, let alone of what he terms an ‘ethnic’ philosophy such as the Latin American (or the Asian, or the French), is a site of contestation and dispute. Still, one might wonder, and other contributors to this book do wonder, whether it is better to work towards a subversion of the concept of philosophy from a Latin Americanist viewpoint, rather than to engage in the struggle to assert that Latin America can and must have its own philosophy too. Ofelia Schutte, for instance, rehearses a post-colonial critique that ‘attempt[s] to place an element of undecideability in the colonial signifier’ and thus

to ensure that ‘the “resonance” of the postcolonial is felt in Continental thought. Somewhere in the speech of the colonizing power, a code is left imperfect, through which critical thinking can garner an Other vision, an Other language, a meaning missing in the lexicon of the dominant.’ In other words, rather than attempting to complete that lexicon, as would seem to be Mendieta’s desire, the point would be to keep it from ever appearing finished.

Eugene Gogol’s approach, in *The Concept of Other in Latin American Liberation*, is rather different. A sustained defence of Marxist Hegelianism, Gogol’s book advocates a philosophical tradition that, he freely admits, has with some justice been regarded as Eurocentric. Moreover, this is a tradition that is unabashedly totalizing and so apparently in search of closure. But it is for precisely this reason that, Gogol argues, Hegelianism can be read against the grain: Hegel’s ‘political conclusions’, as found in, for instance, his *Philosophy of World History*, should not deter us from following a philosophical logic that is ‘profoundly emancipatory’. Itself read dialectically, Hegel’s dialectic can and should be open to and engage with an Other that is the practice of Latin American resistance to colonial oppression and capitalist exploitation. Hence this book’s subtitle, ‘Fusing Emancipatory Philosophic Thought and Social Revolt’, and also its structure, in that its first half begins with a reading of Hegel and Marx and its second half consists of a series of brief analyses of movements such as Ecuadoran and Bolivian indigenous organizations, Brazil’s Landless Movement, and Argentina’s Mothers of the Disappeared.

Gogol’s particular inflection of Hegel and Marx is strongly influenced by the work of Raya Dunayevskaya, whose ideas, he states, ‘formed the cauldron from which my own ideas have emerged’. (The book is dedicated ‘For Raya’.) Dunayevskaya, once Trot-

sky's secretary, is probably better known in the USA, through the journal *News and Letters*, than she is in the UK (though see Ben Watson's review of her *Power of Negativity* in *RP* 116). In the 1940s, she and C.L.R James combined with a small group of others in the US Trotskyite movement to form the 'Johnson Forest tendency', so named after the pseudonyms that she (as 'Freddie Forest') and James (as 'J.R. Johnson') adopted for publication purposes. Johnson Forest, who developed the theory of state capitalism and eventually split from Trotskyism in the early 1950s, have been seen as precursors of, among others, Claude LeFort and Cornelius Castoriadas's *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, as well as the Italian *operaismo* and *autonomia* movements from which, most notably, Antonio Negri has now emerged onto the English-speaking scene. As such, it is intriguing to consider a book such as Gogol's as an estranged cousin of Michael Hardt and Negri's *Empire* or their (forthcoming) follow-up, *Multitude*.

Like Negri and others in the extended family of autonomist or libertarian Marxism (other representatives of which would include Paolo Virno, Harry Cleaver and John Holloway), Gogol privileges Latin America as a site for the emergence of new forms of social protest, and equally he regards Mexico's Zapatistas as the paradigmatic example of these new modes of struggle. Critical of nationalist or party-centred theories of liberation, Gogol praises what he sees as an emergent subjectivity whose 'organization primarily emerges spontaneously out of the revolutionary consciousness of masses of people. A small group may at times serve as catalyst for such a movement, but its decisive nature is determined by the masses' own self-activity.'

Even Gogol's Hegelianism is pushed in the direction of what Werner Bonefield and others have termed 'open Marxism' in that, for instance, the concept of absolute knowledge as a circular form is not in fact "'proof" of the "closedness" of Hegel's system' because 'Hegel adds that this circle is "a circle of circles"... Isn't this circle of circles perhaps best seen as a spiral because of the temporal development, history, and thus open to, indeed dependent upon Otherness, even when it has reached Absolute Idea?' Similarly, Gogol quotes Dunayevskaya's suggestion that we might see 'the "eternal Idea" not as eternity, but ceaseless motion and thus, "revolution in permanence," a movement entering upon "the new society"'. In short, and in contradistinction to other Marxist-Hegelian emphases on, say, the transition from a class 'in itself' to a class 'for itself', Gogol is

out to reconceptualize Hegel as a philosopher of difference, whose conception of totality is always open and expansive: 'All who see Hegel as a philosopher of identity, of an Absolute spirit that swallows up all Otherness, have not dove deeply enough into the Hegelian concept of "the thinking of contradiction [that] is the essential moment of the Notion".' Otherness itself is, if not primary, at least as relentless and persistent as is the resistance that Gogol sees in the historical record of Latin American responses to colonialism. Moreover, not only does Gogol claim that 'the Other is not a passive object'; he argues that otherness goes beyond simple reactivity in Hegel's conception of 'an Other which can be as self-animating as is Spirit'.

In addition to his defence and reinterpretation of the European philosophical tradition, demonstrating ways in which it is open, or can be opened, to the practice of Latin American resistance, Gogol also engages with a series of Latin American thinkers, such as Frantz Fanon, Octavio Paz, Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and José Carlos Mariátegui. His aim is, first, to outline 'a view of Hegel with Latin American eyes' and, second, 'a view of Latin America with the eyes of the Hegelian dialectic'. And again, whereas the tradition of Latin American thought is usually taken to be an (often anguished) examination of the existence of or possibilities for autonomous identity, Gogol emphasizes the way in which precisely this identity-talk yields to elaborations of what he terms Otherness. Mostly, however, Latin American philosophical articulations of Otherness are found wanting compared to Hegel's – thus Leopoldo Zea's version of *aufheben* 'considerably narrows its scope from Hegel's usage' while Enrique Dussel 'does not dive fully into [Hegel's] dialectic'. One might wonder, however, whether coincidence with Hegel should really be taken as the suitable benchmark by which to judge Latin American thinking. Fanon and Mariátegui, meanwhile, fare Gogol's inspection rather better, as Fanon is seen as a true Hegelian, and Mariátegui as authentically Marxist. Now, Mariátegui was indeed one of the most interesting Latin American thinkers in the twentieth (or any other) century, but his greatness and interest arise as much from what he achieved despite his Marxism as from what he achieved with it. The Peruvian's reconceptualization of colonial regimes of production and governance, and their relation to the so-called 'indigenous question', in many ways anticipates contemporary postcolonialism and subaltern studies more than it continues the legacy of European debates.

Finally, after a long (and, like the rest of the book, rather choppy) overview both of Marx's economics and of dependency theory, Gogol turns to an analysis of what he terms Latin America's 'revolutionary subjectivity'. Here, however, the theoretical framework of the first half of the book is either discarded in favour of almost testimonial narrative, or is applied with a clumsiness verging on the embarrassing. Take this conclusion to a section on the Zapatistas:

Despite all the horrendous activity of the government and its military in Chiapas, I would argue that the greatest challenge for the Zapatistas is taking steps along the path of the Self-Determination of the Idea along with the important steps taken on the Self-Determination of the People. To work out the Idea, the dialectic, to single out the concrete Other(s), form revolutionary organizations, battle to overthrow the oppressive objective situation, and move to overcome the Party-State form that is the oppressive heritage of capitalism is urgently needed.

Once we get past the awkward grammar, the proposal outlined here is either banal (the Zapatistas should combat oppression) or mystificatory (they should 'single out the concrete Other(s)'). Whatever force such a passage has is derived from bringing together the banal but rousing and the mystificatory but vague without ever attempting to resolve the differences in register. Even a 'dialectical' resolution would have been better than none at all. Moreover, while there is no doubt that, with the decline or discredit of national liberation movements of the Left and neoliberalism on the Right, we should attempt to rethink the question of revolutionary organization, Gogol's approach to the problem is uninformative. Merely to suggest that a dialectical philosophy needs to be brought into a (dialectical) relationship with revolutionary subject-

ivity (which is essentially the book's conclusion) is an empty and tautological expression of a *a priori* principle, rather than a contribution either to philosophy or to practice.

So, the project to discover or elaborate an autonomous Latin American philosophy (as per Mendieta's collection) appears problematic, while the crude 'fusion' of European philosophical framework to (resistant) Latin American content, as per Gogol, is deeply unsatisfactory. Fidel Castro's two speeches to Venezuelan students published as *On Imperialist Globalization*, while undoubtedly entertaining, are as formulaic as one would expect of four-and-a-half-hour 'impromptu' discourses delivered forty years after the Cuban Revolution. Castro is almost Homeric in his recourse to familiar figures and illustrations: where Homer has his 'wine-dark sea', Castro has his healthcare system and his non-negotiable national sovereignty as recurring tropes. But at least Castro's discourse is global in scope, ranging from Simón Bolívar to the euro, the collapse of the Soviet Union to José Martí. Castro takes advantage of his status as some kind of elder statesman of world politics to eschew parochialism whether hidden or overt, and relishes the prospect of being invited back to Caracas in 2039. Any philosophy today has to be global and to emerge from a historical perspective on colonialism and postcolonialism. In so far as global culture is infected by (and inflected through) Latin Americanism, from the encounter with and construction of Europe's Other in 1492 to the viral spread of Latin affect through contemporary popular music, advertising and film, so any such global philosophy will inevitably be Latin American whether that is acknowledged or not.

Jon Beasley-Murray

The primacy of politics?

Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian, Verso, London and New York, 2003. 434 pp., £45.00 hb., £17.00 pb., 1 85984 602 5 hb., 1 85984 471 5 pb.

It would usually be pointless, and churlish, to cavil at the encomiums distinguished scholars provide for works by younger members of their profession. Whether Stathis Kouvelakis's book is well served by Fredric Jameson's generous and arresting Preface seems, however, so doubtful that an exception should be made. For the main claims Jameson makes about the book have to be set aside if the reader is to form an accurate view of its aims and achievements. Thus,

Jameson suggests that Kouvelakis provides 'perhaps the first truly original new version' of the formation of Marx's thought 'since Auguste Cornu's monumental postwar history'. In contrast to this somewhat startling suggestion, Kouvelakis himself acknowledges that he is following a path opened up by Louis Althusser through the admission in his texts of self-criticism that 'Marx's political break preceded and conditioned his epistemological break'. Where Kouvelakis wishes

to go beyond Althusser is in establishing the 'central', as opposed to merely 'determinant', role of politics in Marx's development, thus dethroning philosophy from its Althusserian 'pre-eminence in the field of theoretical mediation'.

Still more puzzling is the fact that, in Jameson's view, Kouvelakis's originality consists partly in his 'new theory of what is structurally most central and distinctive in Marx's achievement: namely, the unique political nature and powers of the proletariat'. Once again the author knows better, for he is well aware that it was 'before discovering the proletariat' that Marx made the 'leap' which really is the central concern of his history, that from Rhineland liberal to political revolutionary. Moreover, that history comes to an end with the text of early 1844, the 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction', in the final paragraphs of which Marx does no more than, in Kouvelakis's words, 'name', and 'herald the entrance' of, the proletariat. Hence, it is plain that the materials for reconstructing any general theory of the nature and powers of the proletariat are simply not available in the period to which Kouvelakis confines himself, and that such a project falls outside the scope of his intentions.

While Jameson is clearly right to take the discussion of Marx to be the main focus of interest of Kouvelakis's book, it is by no means the only major topic dealt with there. The first two-thirds of the book consists of chapters on Kant and Hegel, Heine, Moses Hess, and Engels. They form, Kouvelakis tells us, a 'montage', being 'largely autonomous', 'virtual monographs' which 'at the limit can be read out of order'. This arrangement will not please those who like their intellectual history to be tidily linear and consequential. Nevertheless, the discussion does have at least a roughly determinate shape. The thinkers Kouvelakis deals with were addressing a more-or-less common set of problems, even if, as he maintains, their lines of approach and solutions were widely divergent, and indeed mutually opposed. In the most general terms their concern is with the ancient question of the relationship of theory and practice, and specifically of 'German theory' and 'French practice'. Still more concretely, the problem is that of the unfinished business of the French Revolution and its implications for Germany. Thus, these five thinkers may be seen as offering different versions of the 'German road' to an emancipated society. Moreover, the shape of the discussion may be further determined by way of negation. For, taken together, the thinkers in question present, in his account of them, a sharp contrast to

Marx, in that their positions, in relation to his, turn out to be either insufficiently political or insufficiently revolutionary or, usually, both.

These chapters vary greatly in interest. That on Kant and Hegel is the least rewarding, a routine exposition saying little that is not already familiar. It is, on the other hand, salutary to be reminded of Heine the revolutionary, even if, as he appears, here, one who suffers intermittently from anti-political bias and fear of the masses. Kouvelakis fails, however, to explain what Heine's 'revolutionary interpretation' of Hegel actually amounts to, beyond a belief that the categories of Hegelian philosophy of history can accommodate radical change. Hence, the claim that this interpretation marks the beginning of the Young Hegelian movement rings somewhat hollow. Heine had, of course, other things to do, more important perhaps in the human scale or at any rate more expressive of his genius, than adding to the interpretations of Hegel's philosophy being produced so copiously in his time. The result, however, is that the eighty or so pages of the chapter on him seem needlessly discursive, a sledgehammer addressing a small and not very tough nut. The treatment of Hess and Engels is more successful in this respect, with more proportion between subject matter and manner of treatment. They are depicted as committed in somewhat different ways to what Kouvelakis terms 'social-ism', underpinned by Feuerbachian humanism and anthropology. This position prioritizes the social at the expense of the political, and hence unity and harmony rather than antagonism and division. Kouvelakis's argument is persuasive in itself and, moreover, sheds a general light on the intellectual scene. It makes clear, for instance, how much closer the young Engels was to Hess than either of them were to Marx. In doing so it makes wholly intelligible Marx's break with Hess, and that of Engels too, once he had entered Marx's orbit, and indeed shows them to have been unavoidable. The discussion is, however, somewhat marred by the curious animus it displays towards Engels, the only thinker dealt with in the book of whom this is true in any degree.

It suggests itself in important details, such as the strong emphasis on Engels's supposed *völkisch* and racist affinities, the claim that his account of Irish immigrants 'comes close to being an expression of pure and simple hatred', and the scorn poured, with the clear vision of hindsight, on his hopes for an English road to socialism. It is reflected also in the way that even a feature that might well be accounted to his credit, in comparison with, say, Marx in the same

period, his personal acquaintance with, and scientific study of, a modern proletariat, is turned against him. For the 'sociological positivity' of his description of the condition of this proletariat is contrasted unfavourably with Marx's identification of the proletariat as the formal solution to a theoretical problem conceived on Hegelian lines; that is, as 'the negativity of a non-class which reveals the antagonisms inherent in bourgeois society'. However great one's respect for theory, and however little one may wish to be accused of sociological positivity, this surely goes too far in seeming to hint it might actually be an advantage for

never to trouble the discussion again. This bringing to bear of the fruits of recent fashions in scholarship seems to serve here, as so often, largely as a device for cutting a great figure of the past down to size, our size. It does so, moreover, without the need for any serious intellectual or imaginative engagement with their work and situation. In the present case it fails to do justice either to Engels or to Kouvelakis's own gifts as an intellectual historian. These are for a painstaking, scrupulous unravelling of meanings that is acutely responsive to, and expressive of, the inner life of its object, a procedure that appears to best advantage in the discussion of Marx.



This discussion derives its unity from its un-Althusserian insistence on Marx as a thoroughgoing Hegelian, indeed as a Hegelian critic of Hegel. His debt to Hegel shows itself most obviously in the main peg on which Kouvelakis hangs his narrative, the problem of the transition from civil society to the rational state. Marx's critique of Hegel is aimed in the first instance at the mediations he proposes for this transition, the estates, corporations and the bureaucracy as the universal class. From the start Marx, as convincingly depicted by Kouvelakis, starts off in a direction Hegel had set his face firmly against, that of democratic politics. In the earliest phase of this development Marx's hopes are pinned on a gradual extension of the public sphere, to be brought about largely by the workings of a free press under the tolerant eye of the Prussian government. In the critical year of 1843, however, he turns from reformist to revolutionary politics, to a 'true democracy' that demands the relentless democratizing of all political forms. This takes him close to the tradition of permanent revolution

a theorist of proletarian revolution not to know any proletarians at all.

The antipathy towards Engels shows itself in a deeper way, in a methodological shift undertaken for his sake alone. For he is subjected to a Foucauldian critique, a critique of a purely external kind not practised on anyone else in the book. Thus, the hapless text of *The Conditions of the Working Class in England* is pummelled and pulled about by means of the categories of 'bio-power', 'the empirico-transcendental doublet', 'the process of sexualization', and so on. The Foucauldian fever then subsides as quickly as it arose,

of the radical Jacobins and Babouvists, and may be said to represent a solution of the problem of transition just in that it envisages a closing of the original gap through overcoming the distinct existence of the political state.

Although the problem of the transition from civil society to the state serves Kouvelakis effectively as an organizing theme, his treatment of it has a feature which prevents him from exploiting its potential to the full. This is his failure to respond to the specificity of Hegel's concept of civil society. In the *Philosophy of Right* civil society, *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, is explic-

itly presented as the 'system of needs' in its peculiarly modern form. It is, that is to say, the system in which human needs are met through a vast web of market operations whose agents are private proprietors. Thus, as Kouvelakis notes, though without seeming to register its significance, Hegel has recourse to the French word *bourgeois* to characterize the members of civil society, and this may well, as older translations of Marx assume, be less liable to mislead than 'civil' as a rendering of *bürgerlich*. Thus, civil society is in essence bourgeois society or, in a word, capitalism. Kouvelakis's discussion does not adopt this distinctive focus and instead uses the term with great, and somewhat indeterminate, generality. For him civil society encompasses, it seems, the entire public realm and may be identified with 'the sphere of social relations' as such. Indeed, his usage might best be captured by supposing that in it civil society is effectively, again in a word, quite simply 'society'.

To have acknowledged the peculiar character of Hegelian civil society would, no doubt, have complicated Kouvelakis's story. It might well, for instance, have obliged him to recognize as a third basic category the economic, thereby upsetting the dualism of the political and the social. The resulting gain in explanatory power is, however, easy to illustrate. It would, for instance, have enabled Kouvelakis to state the central political problem facing Hegel and Marx in sharper, and more fertile, terms. This becomes the problem of the transition from capitalism to the rational state – that is, to the community of human freedom. Kouvelakis may surely be said to have missed a trick in depriving himself of the possibility of using such a formulation. A similar missed opportunity may be found elsewhere. For had Kouvelakis held to the narrower, authentically Hegelian concept of civil society, his scheme might have provided the framework for, or at least an important clue to, Marx's development more generally. Kouvelakis takes his leave of that process with, as he explains, Marx poised on the threshold of communism. His eventual stepping over the threshold may readily be seen as a specific rejection of Hegel's civil society, founded as that is on the right to private property. Thus, it abolishes the first term of the problem of transition he inherited, and thereby transforms the problem in its entirety. The step into communism seems, however, impossible for Kouvelakis to conceptualize in any such terms. For that step is, of course, not a rejection of the 'sphere of social relations' as such. Here too, Kouvelakis's inflation of the concept of civil society does not leave him best placed to make sense of the history.

The mention of Marx's later development summons up a context in which the reader can scarcely fail to wish to situate Kouvelakis's account. It is hard to avoid inquiring of it how much light it can project forwards, how well it prepares us for what is still to come in that development. When one asks such questions, however, misgivings of a general kind arise, misgivings that seem to call into question Kouvelakis's conception of his project. They focus on his choice of a unit of study, his periodization, so to speak. For he has surely broken off his narrative at a point that is not adequately motivated in terms of the larger story, and indeed is arbitrarily selected in terms of it. Thus, it would scarcely be contentious to claim that Marx soon ceased to be a radical Hegelian of the kind described in this book. For he ceased to conceive of the revolution to bring about human emancipation in exclusively political terms, as a matter of true democracy and the transformation of the state. Indeed, there seems no way to avoid admitting that instead he became a socialist. In doing so he was to produce either, as sympathetic critics hold, a dialectical synthesis of the two moments of the political and the social that stand opposed in Kouvelakis's account, or, as less sympathetic critics allege, an outright cancellation of the political, to the lasting detriment of the tradition of thought he founded. Kouvelakis's discussion has no significant premonitory insights to offer into either possibility.

It is true that he does sometimes look ahead, beyond his self-imposed limits, but these occasions do little to help his cause. Thus, he has to acknowledge that Feuerbach's influence on Marx had not yet reached its peak within the period he considers. Kouvelakis indicates his awareness of the presence in the *1844 Manuscripts* and *The Holy Family* of what are from his point of view lapses or regressions in a Feuerbachian direction, towards an anthropology which grounds a teleology of the human essence and a 'substantialist' view of the proletariat. This is at least tacitly to recognize that, even at the end of the period in question, not only, if the expression may be permitted, is Marx not yet Marx; he is not securely set on the path to becoming Marx. Hence, nothing that could properly be described as an account of his formation as such – much less a truly original one – is to be sought from Kouvelakis's book. Of course, in one way the remedy is obvious. It is that Kouvelakis should continue his narrative, to take in the *1844 Manuscripts*, *The Holy Family* and to go beyond, to *The German Ideology* and the texts of Marx's full maturity. Were he to bring the virtues mentioned earlier to bear on this complex, and still quite inadequately understood, subject matter, the

results might indeed be remarkable, and the words of Jameson's Preface come to seem anticipatory of, rather than falsely reporting, a major achievement.

Joseph McCarney

Street fighting man

Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2003. 198 pp., £37.00 hb., £11.95 pb., 0 8166 4159 5 hb., 0 8166 4160 9 pb.

In the final chapter of his *Atlas of the European Novel*, Franco Moretti traces the diffusion of various novels across the European continent during the course of the nineteenth century, tracking the quantity and speed of translations between different languages. Unsurprisingly, Britain and France prove to be the greatest exporters and smallest importers in percentage terms. It took, we discover, twenty-nine years for *Madame Bovary* to be translated into English (by Eleanor Marx), and an astonishing seventy years for *The Red and the Black* to make its way, linguistically, across the channel. Someone perhaps needs to carry out a similar exercise in cultural geography as regards philosophical texts of the last half-century. It could certainly throw some light on the differences between the contemporary 'philosophical cultures' of the French- and English-speaking worlds: the former notoriously reluctant to engage or disseminate the works of the latter; the latter, at least in the particular guise of 'continental philosophy', often seemingly content to do little else.

It might also explain why it has taken thirty-three years for Henri Lefebvre's classic 1970 text, *The Urban Revolution*, to merit a fine translation by Robert Bononno, while (shall we say) rather less 'impressive' works were accorded the privilege a good deal quicker. As Neil Smith notes in his excellent introduction, one unfortunate effect of this tardiness has been that certain influential encounters with Lefebvre's work from the early 1970s – particularly those of Manuel Castells and David Harvey – have been available in English for some time, while the text to which they most directly responded has not. Given the belatedness of this translation, it is tempting now to read the text for signs of prophetic anticipation. And there is indeed much to admire in this respect. When *The Urban Revolution* was first published, the 'urban'

was far from being the fashionable topic it is today (not least within mainstream Marxism), and what work there was, was still largely descriptive, reliant on undertheorized 'empirical generalizations', or tied to the technocratic concerns of social policy. While Lefebvre may thus be read as a precursor of the massive explosion of writings on the 'urban' over the last decade or so, he can also be read as extraordinarily foresighted regarding debates about globalization, a notion which is an explicit thematic of the book. One even encounters here an early, and still useful, articulation of the concept of the 'global city' (somewhat peculiarly credited to Maoism, if not to Mao himself). Moreover, in the light of his growing influence on a variety of disciplines, the book is of considerable interest in relation to Lefebvre's own intellectual trajectory; particularly as regards preliminary versions of ideas developed at length in his better-known *The Production of Space* (1974; trans. 1991).

Nonetheless, such historical and scholarly interest as this new translation will undoubtedly arouse should not elide the more fundamental and specific challenge that it offers to the burgeoning sphere of urban studies, as well as the relevance that it has for some of the most pressing problems of today. Close to 50 per cent of the world's population now inhabit urban space. By 2005 there are expected to be nearly twenty megacities with populations exceeding 10 million, located in all areas of the globe. A Landsat 7 satellite image of Tokyo (biggest of all, with a population approaching 27 million), included in the latest *Times Atlas of the World*, shows its extraordinary spread, like a terrifying lava flow absorbing surrounding conurbations, rural land and even reclaimed sea. One could not find a more vivid image of the way in which the 'urban fabric grows, extends its borders, corrodes the residue of agrarian life'. This is not simply a question of 'the built world of cities' but of 'all manifestations of the dominance of the city over the country'. If this includes the 'highway', the 'out-of-town supermarket', the 'vacation home' – which themselves can prompt new forms of urbanization, as in the eighty miles of coast around Malaga which many are describing as an emergent megalopolis – then the global process of 'urban revolution' also gives rise, as Lefebvre asserts in rather understated terms, to 'growths of dubious value'.

According to the UN-HABITAT 'Global Report on Human Settlements' (www.unhabitat.org/global_report.asp), published in October 2003, nearly a billion people – approaching 32 per cent of the global urban population – are living in what the UN defines as

'slums'; in sub-Saharan Africa the proportion is closer to 72 per cent. The overall figure may well double within thirty years. As Kofi Annan notes: 'The locus of global poverty is moving to cities.' This movement is altering the very 'nature' of cities themselves, both in terms of the radically new 'non-Western' forms of urbanization that it produces, and the fact that some slums are now as vast as those spaces conventionally understood as properly 'metropolitan'. The Kibera district in Nairobi has a population of around 600,000, with little running water, access to few services, and appalling sanitary conditions; the Ashaiman settlement in Nairobi is now larger than the city of Tema around which it originally grew. Such are some of the most visible impacts of capitalist globalization and the policies imposed on so-called 'developing nations' by its guiding institutions, the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO.

Yet, as always, statistics conceal as much as they reveal. It is precisely for this reason that, as Lefebvre saw, the 'expression "urban society" meets a theoretical need', giving shape to 'a search, a *conceptual* elaboration' that, at a global level, might allow us to think through the larger *qualitative* implications of an emergent historical situation in which 'the urban problematic becomes predominant'. In his attempt to meet such a 'need', Lefebvre *still* has, despite the obvious achievements of Harvey, Castells, Sassen and others, few real equivalents in recent urban theory. Only those Italian theorists of the Metropolis, Manfredo Tafuri and Massimo Cacciari, whose neglect I have elsewhere bemoaned, spring readily to mind (and they draw on a distinct German tradition encompassing Simmel, Benjamin and Kracauer).

This is not to say that Lefebvre's own theoretical hypothesis concerning the 'urban problematic' is without problems or has not dated in crucial respects. The attempt to articulate a 'synchronic picture' of urban society, through a taxonomic scale of spatial-social 'levels' ('global', 'mixed', 'private') – partially retained in *The Production of Space* – remains crude, particularly in its extension to different types of 'built form'. Furthermore, the key concept of *l'habiter*, associated with the last of these levels – translated by Bononno as 'habiting', but which clearly refers to Heidegger's Hölderlinian *das Wohnen* (usually rendered as 'dwelling') – risks drifting into a naively ahistorical appeal to the 'durable primacy' of a certain human 'lived experience' that underlies and resists the various 'homogenizing' practices inflicted upon it. Yet the ambition of Lefebvre's undertaking is scarcely undermined by such weaknesses.

No doubt the most controversial aspect of *The Urban Revolution* remains that which both Castells and Harvey picked up on in their early critiques: the strong claim that, in some way, the 'urban field' has superseded the 'industrial' to become the dominant problematic on a global level. Castells and Harvey were surely right to say that Lefebvre exaggerates this 'shift' (which, in any case, is somewhat under-theorized) and underestimates the extent to which industrial capital continues to produce the conditions for urbanization. But one has to see Lefebvre's argument in context: seeking to remedy the neglect that the urban had received at the hands of most Marxist thinkers and their tendency to regard it as a mere 'superstructural' phenomenon. Moreover, fairly late in the book, Lefebvre acknowledges that the projective emphasis on an emergent 'urban reality' and its 'renewed space-time' is essentially a theoretical shift in perspective which seeks to overcome the reduction of its 'productive force' to the already given terms of the 'industrial field'. The 'city' is, as he puts it elsewhere, no longer conceivable (if it ever was) as 'a kind of vast factory, nor as a consumption unit subordinated to production'. It is in this light also that Lefebvre asks what remains a pertinent question for the Marxist Left: 'Why is it that the Commune was not conceived as an *urban revolution* but as a revolution of the industrial proletariat moving towards industrialization, which does not correspond to historical truth?' Lefebvre refers to the Commune, but, of course, he's thinking as much of the events of Paris 1968 and the 'urban guerrilla warfare' that marked the period elsewhere. For clearly, despite the often dry, analytical tone, what is really at stake for Lefebvre is the potential for elaborating new modes of revolutionary thought and practice resistant to 'the application of a homogenous global and quantitative space'. He is in search of urbanization's 'utopian moment'; what is historically *new* in the possibilities opened up by a global urban modernity, and the (long-harboured) promise of a 'differential space' to which it may give new life.

This translation of *The Urban Revolution* is, then, of far more than mere 'historical interest' and it requires much more detailed study than I can provide here. Indeed, its insightful, philosophical *and* politicized approach to questions concerning the urban problematic on a 'planetary' scale puts most of what passes for a contemporary 'urban studies' to shame, still pursuing, as it is, 'fragments of indigestible knowledge'. The demand it places upon us, to fashion a coherent and counter-disciplinary *concept* of that 'concrete abstraction', the urban, in a manner which

is adequate to emergent social dynamics, is one that will continue to grow.

David Cunningham

Limbo

Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2003. xiv + 310 pp., £54.00 hb., £16.95 pb., 0 8223 3055 5 hb., 0 8223 3067 9 pb.

Ranjana Khanna's book is very ambitious, with several objectives. These are to 'provincialize and parochialize psychoanalysis', utilizing Chakrabarty's strategy of reducing the universalist claims of the products of Western reason and Partha Chatterjee's reflections on differential appropriation, leading to a discussion of the mobilization of psychoanalysis in (essentially) francophone anti-colonial writing of the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, there is an attempt to develop an analysis of 'critical melancholy' as the basis for a postcolonial ethics. En route she also endeavours to give these objectives a feminist inflection. Such a project runs many risks, not least of which are exegetical top-heaviness, conceptual overstretch and philosophical haste.

The 'provincializing of psychoanalysis' is carried out by demonstrating the imbrication of Freud's work with colonial practices and disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology and exploration, and by configuring psychoanalysis within the rise of nationalism and the acceleration of colonial expansion. Archaeology provides Freud with his model of the self – the self as object of retrieval – whilst Freud identifies 'with the nationalist colonialist, self-constructions of such explorers and archaeologists such as ... Stanley and ... Schliemann'. Khanna proposes that this model undergoes crisis with the onset of the First World War, and ideas of melancholia and disavowal come to the fore. So, psychoanalysis as a developing theory registers the vicissitudes of colonial power. Equivalently, the anthropology that psychoanalysis borrows from Fraser, Tyler et al., and rearticulates through Freud's social works (*Totem and Taboo*, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*) can be seen as an 'ethnography of the West': Freud's model casts light on the form of subjectivity ordered by narcissism and the ego ideal that emerges with imperialism: 'Freud's self was clearly one that was created as a national self conceived as civilized', but it too undergoes traumatic

dislocation in the aftermath of war and Freud's own displacement from 'national belonging'.

The discussion of the 'colonial rescripings' of psychoanalysis is a far denser affair, carried out along two primary axes. The first is an exegesis of Sartre's existential psychoanalysis and its impact on francophone anti-colonial writing, specifically the work of Fanon and Memmi. The second is a discussion of colonial psychiatry and the work of Octave Mannoni, with an intermittent engagement with Lacan and with Lacanian rewritings of Fanon, exemplified by Bhabha. Each leads to a discussion of 'colonial melancholy' as an affect linked to the 'uncertainty of national belonging', which echoes the emergence of Freud's theory of melancholy in his ambivalent experience of being Jewish in Austria, undergoing a sharpening of German nationalism prior to the *Anschluss*.

The final part of the book addresses the idea of melancholy thematically, but now as the basis for a contemporary ethic. 'Haunting' and 'lament' are the central ideas informing this conception of the persistence of the past and its unresolved legacies. For Khanna, it is the narratives of nationalism which provide a false resolution to the traumas of colonialism: what cannot be mourned, that which refuses inclusion in the redemptive articulation of the nationalist symbolic, 'thus gives rise to a critical agency which we could call the melancholic postcoloniality that characterizes *limbo patrum*' (a term from Joyce for the no man's land outside of nationalism).

As the book proceeds, then, the idea of melancholy and its complex relations to mourning, narcissism, Freud's evolving ideas of the ego as stages of assimilation of external figures and the emergence of the superego as punitive-critical agency becomes more and more central, to the point where the recuperation of melancholia becomes an ethical desideratum. The dialectic of assimilation and rejection reworked through Freud's digestive metaphors replaces the ocular preoccupations of post-Lacanian thinking about colonialism and nationalism: a shift from a preoccupation with identification and recognition to a concern for belonging and exclusion.

Here the work of Abraham and Torok, who revised Freud's theory, taking up Ferenczi's distinction between introjection and incorporation as an underpinning to the distinction between mourning and melancholia, becomes central. Mourning is achieved through introjection, the full assimilation of loss; melancholia involves the incorporation of the unassimilable, which, encrypted, evades integration and entails a process of endless lament. In opposition to Abraham and Torok's

therapeutic strategy, which designates melancholy as pathological and attempts to de-crypt the buried loss and articulate the unassimilated into narrative, turning lament into ordinary mourning, Khanna holds that the unassimilable must remain as such. Echoing a Derridean suspicion of Abraham and Torok's distinction, she claims that any mourning that is 'successful' does away with the trace of the lost object, in some sense annihilating it over again, denying its otherness. Critical melancholy, then, is the holding fast to the unassimilable as such because it maintains the trace of trauma, and in its symptomatic embodiment as haunting. It makes an ethical challenge to a present defined by amnesia and it makes an ethical claim on the future as beyond assimilation, restitution, reparation, or any other simple enactment of mourning.

There are clear parallels here with Lacan's extimate *objet a* or traumatic kernel of the real and Laplanche's source object of the drive. Other writers have used Abraham and Torok's notion of melancholia and explored its links with ideology, fantasy and the operations of narrative, seeing the persistence of a Žižekian version of the unassimilable Lacanian real as the basis of critique. A classic use of this in the Latin American context is the work of Idelber Avelar, especially *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999) which, like this book, appeared in Duke's Post-Contemporary Series, and yet goes unmentioned by Khanna.

In conformity to a version of 'afterwardsness', the fullest discussion of melancholy appears in the introduction to Khanna's book, which was obviously written after the various occasional pieces that make up the main body of the text – as if the object of Khanna's investigations only became apparent to her later. This is unfortunate in that aspects of the argument are rehearsed incompletely in the chapters that follow, giving the reader an uncanny and persistent sense of *déjà lu*. More troubling is Khanna's failure to address the epistemological consequences of her historicization and reworking of Freudian concepts. If melancholia is a signifier of Freud's own 'loss of power' as a Jew and an index of 'non-belonging', can it still operate as a scientific theorization of a generally experienced affect, with the net of its conceptual connections intact, or must it now be resemanticized within a discussion of a rhetoric of social and biographical expression? As the concept is reformulated, can it maintain its original clinical content or does it slide into a mere metaphoricity?

Khanna must be aware of the long-standing debates over the status of psychoanalytic concepts and their explanatory value, given her approving citation of Nandy and Obeyesekere's view that psychoanalysis is not a science but rather a 'historical and theoretical discipline'. But her response is to claim a strategy of reading psychoanalysis 'against the grain', which avoids the epistemological issues and allows her text



to trade on ambiguities. Too many of the effects of a colonial and imperial modernity come to register as failures of assimilation, with their corresponding hauntings: Fanon's symptoms are 'a form of demetaphorized ... melancholy'; 'women coming into full citizenship ... could similarly experience melancholy haunting'; 'the refusal to assimilate ... brings the affect of the subaltern into the archive ... [which] can also be a home ... for the phantoms from *limbo patrum*'. Phantoms seem to be everywhere, grief ubiquitous, and mourning suspect.

The strongly deconstructive cast of Khanna's more extravagant claims for 'critical melancholy', where melancholic remainders are 'non-identificatory ... do not build a sense of belonging ... manifest an inability to remember, an interruption ... that critiques national-colonial representation', and melancholic manifestations constitute a 'form of non-representational critique ... that nevertheless alerts us to a different form of disenfranchised, subaltern call for justice', suggests a metaphysical hypertrophy of the notion of melancholy, wholly unwarranted by the textual material. As the introduction has it: 'Melancholia becomes the basis for an ethico-political understanding of colonial pasts, postcolonial presents and utopian futures.'

Such inflation contrasts harshly with the definitional deficit of other central notions; most egregiously, nation, nation-state, nationalism, colonialism, imperialism and so on. Despite their importance, they barely achieve conceptual presence. Events may have 'thrown the purity of the concept of the nation-state into doubt' and the *limbo patrum* may, 'in its very specific formations haunt all of us who live under the shadow of the nation-state', but it is far from clear what object this is. The very linkages that need to be explained – between the psychoanalytically theorized self and political form – are asserted rather than argued.

Such lopsidedness suggests that the book's initial aims – entirely laudable, delimited reconstructions of particular intellectual contexts – underwent a massive exorbitance under pressure for a radical and totalizing ethical gesture. They have suffered grievously in consequence. Current academic publishing seems bent on demanding endless avatars of the same unsuccessful grandiloquence.

Philip Derbyshire

Fleshing it out

Max Deutscher, *Genre and Void: Looking Back at Sartre and Beauvoir*, Ashford, Aldershot, 2003. xxxii + 268 pp., £45.00 hb., 0 7546 3296 2.

'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman' must be one of the most famous opening lines in modern French thought. And it launched a scandal. On the front page of the daily *Figaro*, the Catholic novelist François Mauriac wrote in disgust that, having read *The Second Sex*, he now knew 'all about' Simone de Beauvoir's vagina. It was clearly something he did not want to know about. The Vatican took the view that *no one* should know about it and placed the text on its Index of Forbidden Books, which presumably meant that the unfortunate Mauriac was (*nachträglich*) in a state of mortal sin. Albert Camus – macho Mediterranean man personified – spluttered that the book made French men look ridiculous. Like existentialism in general, Beauvoir's book came to enjoy an almost pornographic reputation. The cover of my old paperback copy of the 1953 English translation, purchased in 1969, is illustrated with a softish porn photograph of a nude woman seen from behind in three-quarter profile. If memory serves, I bought it from the sort of not-quite-a-bookshop that specialized in Henry Miller, second-hand copies of *Lady Chatterley* and offerings from Maurice Girodias's Olympia Press.

The Second Sex is often said to be one of the founding texts of modern feminism, but that it is what it *became* and not what it was born as in 1949. It was only in the 1970s that Beauvoir began to speak of herself as a feminist; in 1949, she was convinced that socialism would bring women social equality. The book is not so much feminist manifesto as a phenomenologically based account of becoming woman in a world where men force women to assume themselves as the other, as the second sex. Its author had had the right to vote for only three years, and she had no legal access to either contraception or abortion.

Max Deutscher's backward look at Sartre, Beauvoir and their phenomenology is an attempt to work upon their ideas 'so as to keep them in motion' as part of contemporary thinking, as opposed to leaving them to gather dust in the museum of philosophical antiquities. The conference held at the Sorbonne in 1999 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *The Second Sex* – not mentioned here – strongly suggested that, for many, the book is still relevant. Yet both

looking back and 'keeping in motion' prove to be more problematic than might be expected.

Deutscher certainly looks back with great attention and perspicacity, particularly when he picks his way through the density of Sartre's terminology, concepts and tortured syntax. But by concentrating almost exclusively on *Being and Nothingness*, he may be missing things that can perhaps be better seen elsewhere. The metaphors of and references to the 'obscurity' of the female genitals – also to be found in Beauvoir – might look rather different if they were set against the imagery of Sartre's fiction, where gender proves to be a very uncertain category. Beauvoir's journey to feminism may have begun not in 1949, but with her 1948 account of her travels in America, where the mordant account of 'college girls' – apparently so free, so independent and so *American* but in fact so naively conformist – reads like a critique of 'the feminine mystique' *avant la lettre*.

If looking back is trickier than it looks, the encounter with contemporary thinking, represented primarily by Michèle Le Doeuff and Luce Irigaray, is no less straightforward. The role of the former is to endorse the claim that Sartre inevitably speaks in the masculine voice and condemns femininity to the realm of facticity, lack of being and 'the viscous'. More interestingly, Irigaray is seen as offering an extension of and complement to Beauvoir's thesis, as turning dystopia into utopia when vaginal obscenity is transformed into 'two lips' touching and talking. The dialogue might have been quite different if Christine Delphy had been invited to join in. And could the phenomenology of vaginal 'obscurity' have something to do with Kristeva's 'abjection'?

Deutscher's point of departure is the thesis that in the hands of Husserl and Heidegger phenomenology is 'blind to sexuality', and that in Sartre's hands it is 'biased against women in its imagery, structure and anecdote'. It is hard to object to the first proposition (though this is far from the only objectionable feature of Heidegger; there is, after all, also the minor issue of the politics). Sartre makes the same point when he remarks that *Dasein* appears to be asexual and takes no account of sexual differentiation. He goes on to speculate that 'masculine' and 'feminine' may be contingent factors that have nothing to do with *Existenz*: perhaps men and women simply 'are'. This would suggest that if their 'being men' and 'being women' are contingent modes, their 'being' is actually a 'becoming', unless we lapse into gender essentialism. Sartre also hints that biological maturation is the key to understanding the coming into being of the boy.

In his detailed reading of sections of *Being and Nothingness*, Deutscher insists that there is a 'rampant' identification of the feminine with the in-itself, which is viewed as a threat to the transcending for-itself. Masculinity is, that is, equated with free consciousness, whilst femininity is associated with the body, passivity and the viscous. The latter induces the nausea inspired by semi-liquid substances that cannot be grasped, by unstable colours (pink and mauve), certain tastes (sugariness) and even certain allergenic dishes (the squishy body of crustacean inside a hard carapace). Yet nausea is surely a reaction to being as such rather than to being-woman. A lot of this imagery is carried over into *The Second Sex*, but its function may not be quite the same. When Beauvoir likens man's 'sex' to a 'neat finger', and woman's to a 'swamp', she is, as Deutscher suggests, writing almost on the edge of angry satire. The same imagery pervades Sartre's novels, which really should be regarded as part of his philosophical *œuvre*. But something strange, almost uncanny, happens here. Much of the first chapter of *The Age of Reason* is taken up with descriptions of one of the main female characters. Marcelle is sometimes described as being plump, feminine, soft and 'sugary', and at times as being hard and masculine. In the same novel, the brother-and-sister couple of Ivich and Boris (who always seem almost on the point of incest) are ambiguous to the point of androgyny. 'Gendered' characteristics are, that is, not always consonant with the actually existing gender of those who display them. Similar shifts take place with other categories. One of the classic instances of bad faith is, of course, the seduction scene in the café, where the woman retreats from possible eroticism and desire by withdrawing from the dialogue and letting her hand lie in that of her male companion, 'like a thing'. Bad faith can be read here as a feminine mode of being, but in *The Age of Reason* the walking embodiment of bad faith is Marcelle's lover Matthieu, who deliberately traps himself into a relationship with a woman he knows he does not love. It should also be recalled that the whole novel – written at a time when 300,000 illegal and dangerous abortions were being performed a year – can be read as a plea for the legalization, or at least decriminalization, of abortion. Mauriac found that disgusting too, but it is scarcely the work of an unrepentant masculinist.

The Second Sex is rightly read by Deutscher as striving to flesh out a somewhat disembodied phenomenology with a historical and above all economic substance. It is not just the male gaze that sees, possesses and deflowers femininity; it is an entire

politic-economic structure (and it must be said that the seeing–possessing–penetrating paradigm is by no means unique to Sartre). Beauvoir adds a whole new materialist dimension to Sartrean phenomenology. And perhaps it was she who set in motion their joint transition to Marxism.

At times, Deutscher's attempt to keep Sartre and Beauvoir 'in motion' leads him to transpose and transport into the present key scenes from *Being and Nothingness*. The theme of 'the seer seen' now involves a surfer on an Australian beach; the seduction scene in the café becomes 'doing lunch', with the gender roles reversed. The man leaves his hand between the woman's, mutters that 'we were only doing lunch', and remembers that he might have made an appointment at the gym. The transpositions are intriguing failures. Characters in *Being and Nothingness* do indulge in some gentle boating, but *surfing*? The point about the café scene is surely that it is entirely consonant with the socio-sexual mores of the day. Whatever one thinks of the contemporary value or potential of Sartre's early philosophy, his anecdotes, characters and observations all belong in the cafés of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Any reader of *Being and Nothingness* can still smell the cigarette smoke and almost taste the apricot cocktail that sent Sartre to Berlin to study phenomenology, even though it must have been both sweetish and viscous.

David Macey

Patocka to come

Barbara Day, *The Velvet Philosophers*, Claridge Press, London, 1999. 344 pp., £16.95 pb., 1 870626 42 7.

Edward F. Findlay, *Caring for the Soul in a Post-modern Age: Politics and Phenomenology in the Thought of Jan Patocka*, State University of New York Press, Albany NY, 2002. 259 pp., £13.95, pb, 0 7914 5486 X.

Aviezer Tucker, *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patocka to Havel*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh PA, 2000. 295 pp., £16.50, pb., 0 8229 5728 0.

During the Communist period, especially with the imposition of 'normalization' following the 1968 Soviet occupation, the Czech Republic became increasingly isolated from the European intellectual life to which it had previously contributed. The dynamism that it has previously shown, it could be argued, was a product of the sort of creative tension that comes of being both

'colonized', as a subordinate part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, yet also educationally and materially relatively privileged. It is perhaps not coincidental that its Jewish–German culture produced two of the intellectual giants of the early twentieth century, Freud and Husserl (their origins in rural Moravia not being as well known as Kafka's in Prague).

That Czech intellectual culture could subsequently be reduced to the state so minutely documented in Barbara Day's *The Velvet Philosophers* is a tragedy. Day's book does not focus on Czech academia as a whole but rather details, in particular, the activities of those Western academics who, in the period after the establishment of Charter 77, went to Czechoslovakia to give clandestine seminars. These arose through the response of a number of Oxford philosophers to a letter of invitation from Julius Tomin, one of a number of Czech dissents who were already organizing clandestine seminars. The eventual establishment of these activities as the Jan Hus Foundation and the involvement of academics from elsewhere in the UK and abroad is fully detailed by Day. It is particularly interesting to read her account of French attempts to take a more 'political' stance on the question of the clandestine seminars, with Derrida as one of the instigators. Yet Derrida is also singled out for criticism, as Day questions the usefulness of a complex and challenging seminar presentation for people in a pressing political situation – a criticism that could equally have been put to any of the many quite abstruse papers presented by English philosophers.

Useful as it is to recall and document these events, Day adopts a tone that seeks to stir feelings of nostalgia for a time and place where philosophy mattered enough for the secret police to make it their business. Perhaps Day tries to lighten the documentary stodginess such an account inevitably risks with a frisson of danger. Yet to let contemporary philosophers paddle in such nostalgia does no justice either to the period Day writes about or to ours. The contemporary call of university administrators may be no less threatening to philosophy as a discipline, if considerably more banal. Unlike Eastern bloc regimes, our 'open society' governments apparently have no interest whatsoever in philosophy, happy to let it wither in favour of promoting more 'relevant' and 'productive' subjects'. Perhaps, with the ever-increasing stress on the link between academia and economic output we are not as far from the state Communists as we'd like to think.

Such active links to Czechoslovakia on the part of Western academics only came after 1977 – that is, after the death in police custody of the Charter 77

founder Jan Patočka. A student of Husserl, Patočka is undoubtedly the great Czech philosopher of the twentieth century. However, his career was dogged by difficulties. In the 1930s, despite his close association with one of Europe's leading philosophers, Patočka could not find a full-time university position in the Czech Republic, a situation which continued under the fascist occupation. Finally getting a post after the war, he was then twice dismissed by the Communists (in 1949 and again in 1972) as the system clamped down. Despite his intellectual reputation he spent only a small percentage of his life in a university post.

Edward Findlay's *Caring for the Soul in a Post-modern Age: Politics and Phenomenology in the Thought of Jan Patočka*, is the first introduction to Patočka's work written in English. As such it is to be welcomed, although the way in which it situates, or fails to situate, Patočka and relies instead on summary of his writings makes it less valuable than it might have been. At a time when much of Patočka's original writings are available in English translation, the value of such extensive summaries is questionable. This is especially so when so little time is spent on engagement with these writings, and when what there is is prey to some rather dubious assumptions: for example, that the present age, post-Husserl and Heidegger, is somehow 'postmetaphysical' and that this, furthermore, can be equated to 'postmodern'. Both Findlay's rash deployment of the term 'postmodern' and his bibliography suggest a lack of familiarity with phenomenological philosophy after Husserl and Heidegger. Indeed, in general, he seems to spend rather too much time batting labels around, telling us that Patočka is neither a phenomenologist nor a classicist, neither a Heideggerian nor a Platonist – time which could have more usefully be spent placing Patočka among his contemporaries. A work that related Patočka to the post-Husserl and Heidegger generation he had so little opportunity to interact with – Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Ricoeur – would have been much more enlightening.

Where Findlay's work is largely uncritical of Patočka, Aviezer Tucker heads off in the opposite direction, going so far as to blame him for the state of the Czech Republic a quarter of a century after he died. Tucker's is a peculiar mix of a book, one which combines empirical political analysis of the Czech Republic in the 1990s with an 'assessment' of the philosophy of Patočka and, more interestingly, of his influence on Havel. The latter chapters are rightly critical of the corruption and failures of the post-Communist period. But to blame this on the culture

of dissidents in the pre-1989 period and their failure to elaborate plans for a post-Communist situation, as Tucker does, is judgementalism of the most absurd sort. Day amply details the sufferings of intellectuals persecuted for the most innocuous of actions. A retrospective demand that dissidents, instead of trying to live as they can, should have become revolutionaries with plans for the future is one that is too easy to make from the safety of contemporary academic life. In addition, it overestimates the actual ability of post-Communist governments to shape their own destinies. The transformation of the Eastern bloc was largely carried out according to the dogmas of the prevailing neoliberal economic orthodoxy. To imagine that Czech dissidents could have set a significantly different course if they had had the journey planned out seems implausible.

In opening up Czech philosophy, politics and culture to the English-speaking reader, these three volumes are to be welcomed. Yet, to the extent that they fall short of doing justice to the work of Jan Patočka, they fail to satisfy. As Derrida's *The Gift of Death* has shown, Patočka is a philosopher worth returning to. Erazim Kohák and James Todd have done much over the last fifteen years to make his writings available in English translation. Political circumstances forced Patočka's isolation from the phenomenological tradition, and European academia generally, during his lifetime and so his engagement with his contemporaries – Arendt, Levinas, Ricoeur – is yet to happen.

Mihail Dafydd Evans

Paulinity

Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier, Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 2003. 128 pp., £29.95 hb., £10.95 pb., 0 8047 4470 X hb., 0 8047 4471 8 pb.

Many Anglo-American readers will already be familiar with this book via the work of Slavoj Žižek, as well as through the secondary literature on Badiou that has quietly emerged in recent years. Whatever preconceptions already exist may soon prove inadequate, however, for in spite of its brevity this text provides the clearest development of Badiou's theory of the subject available in English to date. *Saint Paul* serves as an ideal introduction to Badiou's philosophy not only because it incorporates so many of his major themes

(truth, the subject, anti-philosophy) but because this exposure is situated in relation to Paul's militancy. This makes for painless initiation: neologisms like 'evental truth' – often obscure when posed purely philosophically – seem quite lucid when presented in the context of the Damascus Road conversion. This text would be an allegory if it were not for Badiou's insistence on the subjective, materialist tenor of his interpretation.

Badiou's task is not so much the explanation of his own philosophy as the reflection of what is unique in Paul. As suggested by the subtitle, Paul's distinctive contribution is the understanding of subjectivity as necessarily 'universal', which for Badiou (and anachronistically for Paul) entails the quasi-Kantian notion that the witness to evental truth must be singular (even asocial) in her determined proclamation of a truth which is nevertheless valid for the entire universe. Thus the Resurrection of Christ was, for Paul, the Event that marked his creation as a subject and the revelation of the possibility of human immortality – achieved through participation in the truth process (the persevering proclamation of evental truth).

This kind of 'truth' may strike one as anonymous or even contentless, and this is a charge Badiou gladly concedes, for he believes that his two contemporary adversaries have erred specifically in their privileging of such content. On the one hand, we have the identity politics of recent decades, in which various groups are allegedly concerned to assert their particular 'communitarian' values (be they racial, sexual or cultural) to the exclusion of others. Their antithesis is the ethics of Otherness, which professes acceptance of all difference – but only as long as the Other is a 'good' Other, and does not threaten the dominant political and economic order.

Badiou finds Paul in a similar situation: where we are faced with the suffocating expansion of global capital (reinforced by the 'ethical ideology' of Otherness), Paul stared down Roman imperial law, which was rooted in Greek philosophy; where we find communitarian and nationalist fragmentation ('only a homosexual can "understand" what a homosexual is'), Paul struggled against the exceptionalism of Jewish election. Thus in both contexts, 'Ultimately, it is a case of mobilizing a universal singularity both against the prevailing abstractions (legal then, economic now), and against communitarian or particularist protest.'

But although a given sociopolitical content is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for evental truth, Badiou has no difficulty describing the kinds of content such truth-processes have advanced.



In fact, the momentum driving this book is best captured in Badiou's willingness 'to risk the comparison that makes of [Paul] a Lenin for whom Christ will have been the equivocal Marx'. Paul is presented not as the moralizing, anti-Semitic institution-founder so excoriated by Nietzsche, but as an answer to the 'widespread search for a new militant figure', a combative Apostle of the Resurrection for whom advocacy always trumped apologetics. What makes Lenin and Paul revolutionaries together is that the justice they sought was on behalf of all, giving new pertinence to the injunction that there is 'neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female'.

Badiou's reading draws parallels between the external political and religious opposition Paul faced and the theological discourse of his epistles, with ease. In Chapter 4, 'Theory of Discourses', for example, he outlines the three 'subjective dispositions' against which Paul positioned his faithful singularity: prophetic Jewish exceptionalism, Greek cosmic wisdom, and private unutterable mysticism. The familiar nodes of Jewish election and the Greek totality are understood as the two sides of the figure of mastery, since each presupposes the other and both presuppose salvation found in the immanent order (of a law), making universalism impossible. The fourth discourse, that of the silent mystic, relies on the advent of the truth-event, but appeals to an undisclosable private transcendence as verification, typified for Badiou in the 'balanced contradiction' of Pascal. The discourse which resists

all of these, proclamation of the truth-event, contains within itself the three virtues that counter the other discourses: faith, hope, and love (each of which receives explanatory treatment in subsequent chapters). Faith, the incessant force which 'activates the subject in the service of truth', enables the initial break with the global cosmic order. Love, the affirmation of life (life understood here as the unity of thought and action) universalized for all, counters the particularist communitarian narcissism. And hope, the 'simple imperative of continuation', forestalls the temptation to silent hermitic retreat.

The text is not without its imprecisions. Early on, Badiou insists that his motives are not 'historicizing or exegetical' but rather 'subjective through and through', and while in large part this focus is maintained, there are two notable exceptions. The first is the early series of remarks on Paul's life and literature, which presumably serve as methodological signposts but seem at times irrelevant to his project and are dubious on their face. For example, the 'scholarly exegesis' that warrants the exclusion of all but six epistles seems more like an attempt at indirectly garnering hermeneutic credibility. And in his repeated attempts at countering Nietzsche's well-known condemnation of Paul, Badiou

seems occasionally to trade subjective explication for historical refutation, diluting the cogent thesis that Paul can be most relevant today if viewed as a militant figure for the possible but less straightforward claim that Nietzsche 'is not precise enough', and got the facts all wrong.

The double attack announced most audibly by Badiou and Žižek will be strengthened by the English translation of this text. The withdrawal into national, religious and sexual particularisms is spared no more than is the ethics of Otherness (which unwittingly serves as the ideological supplement to rising global capitalism). For some *Saint Paul* will provide a politically salient answer to the impotent appropriation of religion in what passes for contemporary post-secular philosophy. In the face of such vacillating and retreatist academic currents, Badiou's word is that 'Paul himself teaches us that it is not the signs of power that count, nor exemplary lives, but what a conviction is capable of, here, now, and forever.'

Jared Woodard

Edward Said, 1935–2003

The erudition, range and élan of Edward Said's work as a literary scholar, cultural critic and politically engaged public intellectual have produced a mountain of commentary, within and beyond academic communities and across continents. With his death, friends, colleagues, collaborators, former students and acquaintances all over the world have been offering tributes to the reach of his intellect and imagination, his fervent convictions, integrity and courage. In all of these the pleasure of his iridescent company, the excitement of a formidable intelligence and the wit of his irreverent remarks have been remembered. Proper evaluations of his stature as an international figure with immense influence within the academy and the public sphere are still to come. Meanwhile, it has long been evident that he was an uncomfortable thinker who through a distinctive style and virtuoso eclecticism was prominent in redirecting interdisciplinary studies yet formed no school, and a polemicist who from an unattached position on the Left touched the consciousness of large constituencies with criticism of imperialism and the imperial world-view that was both analytic and engaged.

The 'contradictory amalgam of the academic and the insurrectionary' – a phrase Said used in his own measured assessment of Foucault's place in 'oppositional intellectual life' – informed the vocation he advocated and lived as a dissenter against the status quo. Scorning accommodation and contemptuous of that generation of artists and intellectuals who had volunteered to serve in the Cold War, whose heirs today are apologists for the violent foreign policies of the USA, Said advised 'there is a special duty to address the constituted and authorized powers of one's own society'; and he went on to observe that in a political world 'animated by considerations of power and interest writ large', the intellectual must move 'from relatively discrete questions of interpretation to much more significant ones of social change and transformation'. Although Said in interviews spoke of regret at being unable to reconcile his two lives as a literary scholar and a polemical spokesperson, his writings time and again make visible 'the actual *affiliations* that exist between the world of ideas and scholarship on the one hand, and the world of brute politics, corporate and state power, and military force on the other'. And indeed many of his essays are fashioned as a parabola which can swoop with acrobatic elegance from – for example – the dialectic of sound and silence in music, to the silences installed by the official record and broken by historians of the working class and the colonized: 'There is no sound, no articulation that is adequate to what injustice and power inflict on the poor, the disadvantaged, and the disinherited. But there are approximations to it, not representations of it, which have the effect of punctuating discourse with disenchantment and demystifications.'¹

Those who have read Said's newspaper and journal articles on the punitive practices of successive Israeli governments, and the cynicism and self-interest of their American defenders, or watched him addressing audiences on the insult and injury rained down on the Palestinian people, will recall both a capacious access to language's rhetorical and discursive resources and the meticulous conceptualization of his own and others' researches. Thus in popular forums and accessible prose, Said brought intellectual practice to bear on politics – exposing the strenuous efforts of canonical Zionist historiography to erase the presence of the Palestinians, the 'atrociously biased diet of ignorance and misrepresentations' about the history and heritage of Arabs fed to Americans by the media, the assault on Iraq 'planned for domination of the resources of the region

and strategic control from the Gulf to the Caspian', the baseness of Arab fiefdoms and the 'combination of misplaced juvenile defiance and plaintive supplication' characterizing the behaviour of the official Palestinian politicians.

Had Said continued in the vein of *Beginnings* (1965) and *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966) he would have been a formidable presence within literary studies, where his reflections on the intricacies of narrative were from the outset opposed to the evacuation of intellectual, political and social contexts, a stance that distanced him from the New Criticism already in place and the poststructuralism threatening its hegemony. But it was with the essays written in the late 1970s and early 1980s that Said articulated his notion of 'secular criticism', arguing that in the America of Ronald Reagan the radical origins of European literary theory had 'retreated in the labyrinth of "textuality"' to become the 'antithesis and displacement of what might be called history', and declaring:

My position is that texts are worldly ... a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moment in which they are located and interpreted.... The realities of power and authority – as well as the resistances offered by men, women and social movements, to institutions authorities and orthodoxies – are the realities that make texts possible, that deliver them to their readers, that solicit the attention of criticism.²

This was a perspective on which Said never wavered, enabling him to elaborate unprecedented readings which joined a refined attention to form and stylistics with an insistence that literature is about experience and not just about itself, and inspiring a generation of disaffected young scholars to cross the disciplinary boundaries of history, political theory, anthropology and literary criticism in order to examine the multiple uses of representation in the exercise of domination. Within the field of literary studies, his writings on the imperial imaginary advanced an understanding of the extent to which the British Empire figured in English cultural life 'as a fact and a source or subject of knowledge ... based on its difference and its distance from, as well as its moral use to, the home society'; and the question he had asked in the mid-1980s on 'why so few "great" novelists deal directly with the major social and economic outside facts of their existence – colonialism and imperialism – and why, too, critics of the novel have continued to honour this remarkable silence', has since been addressed by a host of commentators prompted to hear this 'silence' as resonating with sounds and echoes of empire.³

Although written during the same period as *The Question of Palestine* (1979), and soon to be followed by *Covering Islam* (1981), it was *Orientalism* (1978) that brought Said renown first outside literary studies and then beyond the academy; and it was this work of subtle textual exegesis combined with ideological critique – which according to Said owed as much to Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* as it did to Foucault – that was to take on another life as a begetter of colonial discourse theory, subsequently to mutate into postcolonial studies. The confines of this field could not contain Said's multitudes and he was in time courteously to distance himself from its often acrimonious debates, perhaps in part because some practitioners, whose own eminence coincided with the high moment of deconstruction, were prone – and in terms that now appear quaint – to reprimand Said for adhering to a humanism which, they claimed, is generically unable to 'decolonize Western thought'. By the time of *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), where the emphasis of his humanism was on the agency, resistance and liberation struggles of oppressed peoples – potent vehicles indeed for decolonizing imperial thinking – Said had made known his irritation with 'Theory', and more specifically with '[C]ults like post-modernism, discourse analysis, New Historicism [and] deconstruction' for giving intellectuals 'an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history'.⁴

Said's notion of 'worldliness' as 'a knowing and unafraid attitude towards exploring the world we live in', and 'secular' as implying the earthly and the historical, is firmly within materialist traditions of thought; moreover for Said these terms 'suggested a territorial grounding' for an argument that attempted to understand 'the imaginative geographies fashioned and then imposed by power on distant lands'. Yet, as is well known, Said, who designated Marxism as embedded in German idealism, resisted that very system of thought which has done most to theorize modern empire in historical terms – although simultaneously he acknowledged the influences of Marxists as distinct in situation as they were in methodology: not only Lukács and Adorno, who systematically grasped and opposed capitalism as a totality, and Gramsci, who pondered on the intellectual's role in party organization, but also Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, C.L.R. James and Eqbal Ahmed, whom he embraced as comrades in the struggle against imperialism, and who as Marxists of one denomination or another did not speak of modern empire without speaking of capitalism's global trajectory.⁵

So many questions have been asked of Said's work in bad faith – and I am not here referring only to the slanders of Zionist lobbies or Arab quislings or American state department apparatchiki – that at this moment it may seem inappropriate to ask any



at all. This would be untrue to Said's commitment to criticism, which he himself exercised even in his generous appreciations of other thinkers. Said wrote with passionate intensity about imperial aggression without referring to the analysis of Lenin or Luxemburg; he distinguished between anti-colonial nationalism and liberation movements without alluding to the communist orientation of the latter or the class interests of either; and he placed economic and political machinery at the centre of empire without mentioning capitalism's world system. A consequence, as Neil Lazarus argues, is that although in *Orientalism* Said 'compellingly demonstrated the ideological character' of pseudo-geographical concepts such as 'the West' and 'Europe', he used these in ways which, in the absence of categories such as mode of production or a social formation, 'dematerialise what they reference'.⁶

Such moves, together with a subsequent definition of imperialism as the theory and practice of ruling distant territories from a metropolitan centre, inadvertently gave comfort to the many postcolonial critics who excised capitalism from their accounts in order to advance an understanding of empire as a cultural event or a discursive construct. So, too, his poignant meditations on the loss and satisfaction of exile have been appropriated for both a sanguine representation of the diasporic condition that appears unaware of its own elitism, and a mindless celebration of nomadism which occludes the experiences and aspirations of those – the majority of the world's populations – who cannot or would not choose displacement and deracination.

Said's recent support for the single (sometimes called bi-national) state solution to the seemingly intractable Israel–Palestine conflict is not shared by many on the Left, who see this as a utopian wish which prematurely assumes that Arabs and Israeli Jews want to live together, ignores the absence of a clear political constituency calling for that position, overlooks that a dominated population will fight occupation under a variety of ideological banners, and sits uneasily with his membership of the Palestinian National Initiative. This secular organization, which Said together with Moustafa

Barghouti assisted in founding, is opposed to both Hamas and Fatah and describes itself as committed to the development of 'a national emergency leadership', the mobilization of the people's 'intellectual, cultural, social and political energies' in the creation of national structures and the process of nation-building, and the furtherance of international solidarity.⁷

Said did not arrive at this outlook by following Lenin and Trotsky, who called for the right of oppressed people to self-determination but understood that the winning of national independence was a transitional phase and would not in itself bring socialism. However, a similar logic seems to inform his dual allegiance to the immediate activities of a *national* liberation movement struggling against dispossession, and the farther goal of one secular state for all the inhabitants of the territories of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, as well as the returned Palestinian refugees, appears as both astute and honourable. Moreover, it is compatible with a mistrust of nationalism, which he strategically suspended in the case of colonized peoples. It is also in accord with his revulsion at the incapability and corruption of the Palestinian Authority, his unease at the prospect of an Islamic Palestinian state, and his scrupulous discrimination between Zionists, whose ideology and ambitions are inescapably colonialist, and Jews, whose larger historical experience includes more spacious traditions of cultural innovation and political dissent. Said's cultivated tastes suggested an archetypal cosmopolitan; his writings testify to an internationalist.

If a case can be made for the consistency of Said simultaneously holding two positions on the future of Palestine, then other objects of his affections are more problematic. Reluctant to look too closely at the transition in the 'new South Africa', Said in this and other contexts appeared to be recommending the virtues of symbolic atonement and concord. Yet from his first monograph *Beginnings*, which concedes narrative no transparent origins, to his forthcoming studies on late style, where there are no happy endings, the will to confront and overcome the fissures within the real world coexists with an inconsolable but not demoralized intellectual pessimism:

I draw the distinction between late works that are about reconciliation, about the final work ... where the artist has this vision of wholeness, of putting everything together, of reconciling conflict ... versus another late style, which is the one I'm interested in, which is the opposite: where everything gets torn apart and instead of reconciliation there's a kind of nihilism and a kind of tension that is quite unique.⁸

This bespeaks a generative critical consciousness that refuses the solace of closure.

Benita Parry

Notes

1. Edward Said, 'Michael Foucault, 1926–1984' (1984), in Jonathan Arac, ed., *After Foucault: Humanist Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick and London, 1988; *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*, Vintage, London, 1994, pp. 72, 82; 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community', in *Reflections on Exile*, Granta, London, 2001, p. 119; 'From Silence to Sound and Back Again', *ibid.*, p. 526.
2. Said, 'Secular Criticism', in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Faber, London, 1984, pp. 3–5.
3. Said, 'Islam, Philology, and French Culture', and 'Reflections on American "Left" Literary Criticism', in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, pp. 273, 177.
4. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1993, pp. 366–7.
5. Said, 'Between Worlds' in *Reflections on Exile*, p. 565. On Said and Marxism, see Tim Brennan, 'Places of Mind, Occupied Lands: Edward Said and Philology', in Michael Sprinker, ed., *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, and Michael Sprinker, 'The National Question: Said, Ahmad, Jameson', *Public Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1993/4.
6. Neil Lazarus, 'The Fetish of "the West" in Postcolonial Theory', in Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus, eds, *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 43–64.
7. For a statement of objectives, see www.almubadara.org/en/index.htm.
8. Peter Mallios, 'Traveling with Conrad: An Interview with Edward Said', to appear in Carola Kaplan et al, eds, *Conrad in the Twenty-First Century*, Routledge, London, 2004.