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The hijab and the Republic

Headscarves in France

David Macey

At the end of the long summer holiday the children of France will return to schools governed by a new dress code. There is no tradition of school uniforms in the state sector and they will still be free to wear more or less what they wish, though the more outlandish manifestations of teenage fashion may incur some disapproval. (As I recall, the wearing of thongs set off by low-cut jeans has already caused controversy.) Should they choose to do so, school students may wear a small cross, Star of David or Hand of Fatima. Three things will be forbidden on pain of exclusion: the kippa or Jewish skullcap, the large wooden crosses worn by members of certain charismatic Christian sects, and the headscarves worn by some Muslim girls. All have been deemed to be ostentatious or conspicuous religious symbols that have no place in secular schools. Very few commentators on France have any doubts as to the real target. There have been no reports of Jewish boys being expelled for wearing kippas; the 'charismatic sects' in question are so small that few had ever heard of them until 17 December 2003, when President Chirac announced that legislation was required to put an end to a dispute that has been going on for over a decade. The legislation was duly passed at the beginning of February by 494 votes to 36. The vote did not split along party lines.

Somewhat late in the day, it was realized that the legislation must, in all logic, also apply to Sikh boys wearing top-knots or turbans. It can only be assumed that they were forgotten about: France's Sikh community is small, consisting of at most a few thousand – mainly refugees from India – living near their temple in Bobigny in the Seine–Saint-Denis *département*. The fact that boys can wear their turbans results from an administrative decision taken at the local level. The issue was raised when foreign minister Dominique de Villepin visited India in February. The French embassy in New Delhi had received a petition signed by a hundred thousand people. De Villepin promised that a solution would be found, but did not say what it might be. He had no real cause to worry: it is hard to believe that anyone cares greatly about a small number of Sikh boys. It is very difficult to escape the conclusion that the legislation is directed against only one group, and that a modern democracy has, probably for the first time, ruled by law on what certain girls can wear to school.

In September 1989 two girls were excluded from their lycée for refusing to remove their hijab. There have regularly been similar incidents over the years, most of them involving no more than two or three girls. The official response has varied from automatic expulsion to reluctant tolerance. Apparently trivial incidents have led to strikes by teachers unwilling to accept headscarves in their classrooms, and to vocal 'pro-hijab'

demonstrations in the streets, none of them supported by the official parties of the Left. The controversy is, of course, symptomatic of the much broader and more difficult issue of France's ongoing difficulties with the 'integration' of social groups that increasingly tend to define their identities in religious terms. North Africans in particular have little alternative; long after Algeria achieved independence in 1962, 'Algerians' born in France were still referred to as French Muslims of North African Origin, and ethnicity was disastrously conflated with religion. Even today, the wearers of the hijab can still be described as *issues de l'immigration* ('descended from immigrants').

In the confusion surrounding the issue, it is often said that the ban is on wearing veils. A hijab is not a face veil, but a scarf concealing the hair, the ears and the throat of the wearer. The common slippage from headscarf to veil is intriguing. Whilst it would be dangerous to take the argument too far, it is tempting to see the slippage as an expression of the old Western (male) fascination with the mysterious Veiled Woman (and the powerfully erotic fantasy of unveiling her). It also has some nasty historical overtones: a lot of effort went into trying to persuade Algerian women to remove their veils during the Algerian war.

In the late 1980s and even more so in the early to mid-1990s, photographs of young women wearing hijabs connoted only one thing. On 24 November 1994, the cover of the weekly *Express* showed a woman wearing one but looking directly at the camera. It was captioned 'The Headscarf. The Plot. How the Islamists Are Infiltrating France'. Girls and women in hijabs were, that is, the concealed vanguard of the Armed Islamic Group that was terrorizing Algeria, and that planted bombs that killed eight people in Paris in August 1995. Despite the immediate hijab/Algerian terrorism, the girls concerned in the earliest incidents over the hijab were Turkish.

Laïcité

The new law is quite in keeping with the spirit of the legislation that laid the foundations of the secular educational system from the 1880s onwards. The complete separation of Church and State came in 1905. France's schools were a major battleground and their teachers, especially those in primary schools, were often described as the Republic's 'hussars'. There is no teaching of religion in French schools, and there are no faculties of theology in French universities. Conversely, there is no direct government involvement or interference in religious affairs. Although the key term *laïcité* is habitually translated as 'secularism', the English noun does not capture all the connotations of the French. The French state and its schools are neutral when it comes to religion, but they also guarantee and defend religious freedom, defined as an issue for the individual. The principles of *laïcité* have long been dear to the French Left and are an integral part of its culture, as is the anti-clericalism that has always lain just beneath the surface.

There is, to be sure, much to admire about France's secular schools. Whilst it is easy to overestimate its influence (and the quality of the teaching), the inclusion of at least the rudiments of philosophy is surely to be welcomed. *Laïcité* means that there is no danger of creationism creeping onto the syllabus, even disguised as the mere 'alternative' to evolutionary theory peddled in the brave new world of some of our city academies in Britain. French children and their parents are spared the mish-mash of Christmas-card Christianity and homeopathic doses of multiculturalism that pass for religious education in our schools. No tears are shed over who gets the best parts in the nativity play. The ban on 'ostentatious religious signs' notwithstanding, French children and parents are spared the fetishization of 'school uniform'. One school in Peterborough was recently reported as having contrived to turn this into a religious issue too by making a distinction between 'uniform' and 'non-uniform' hijabs (*Guardian*, 11 March 2004). That takes real genius. France has now decided, on the basis of a report to the

prime minister by Régis Debray, that more attention should be given to teaching about *le fait religieux*, as it has been rather pompously termed. This will not mean teaching religious education (RE), but it does mean that more emphasis will be placed on the social importance of religions in history classes and so on. The principles of *laïcité* will be defended.

On their return to school, French teachers will be armed with a small book entitled *L'Idée républicaine aujourd'hui*. Three hundred thousand copies are being prepared for distribution in May, and the document can be consulted at www.education.gouv.fr/actu. It is an impressive document which outlines the history of *laïcité*, summarizes the primary legislation and provides a bibliography and filmography of materials on 'the Republican idea'. In some respects, it represents an advance: there is at last some acknowledgement of Vichy France's shameful role in the Shoah and even of the Algerian war. An 'alphabet primer' (*Abécédaire*) conveniently summarizes the main 'Republican ideas'. The sociologist Dominique Schnapper contributes a few hundred words of 'citizenship' that unwittingly identify the main problem with the new republicanism. A citizen, she remarks, is not a concrete individual; no one ever meets a citizen in the street. The citizen is a legal subject enjoying certain civil and political rights in a universal republic. This has long been the case: the Jews of France were emancipated as individual citizens, and not as part of a Jewish collectivity. A citizen is neither black nor white. And a citizen certainly does not wear a hijab.

In his presentation of the legislation, Chirac spoke of the need for '*un sursaut républicain*' – a republican start or jump. This is a distinctly odd expression, but it is revelatory of the semantic inflation affecting the adjective. Chirac entered the 1995 presidential election calling for 'a Republican pact', defined as a defence against unbridled 'American-style' neoliberalism. Over the next few years a rash of books appeared with titles like *La République menacée* (Pierre-André Taguieff, 1996), *Philosophie de la République* (Blondine Kriegel, 1998) and *La République expliquée à ma fille* (Régis Debray, 1988). The new republicanism was supposedly a way of reinforcing France's sense of identity and defending the key institutions of State and School. The main threat to the Republic is seen as 'communitarianism', and that is the crime of which the hijab-wearers stand accused. 'Communitarianism' can be defined in quite extraordinary terms.

When the headscarf affair first broke, I learned from a French anthropologist that I live in a country characterized by a 'differentialist' mentality that believes in the need to keep different races separate. More surprisingly still, I learned that I will be reluctant to allow my son to marry a Pakistani girl because of my fear that the Pakistani community will be dissolved into the English (*L'Express*, 24 November 1994). In France, Muslim women are frequently criticized in print for insisting on being seen by women doctors. Halal meals are not provided in schools. Even 'women-only' sessions in



swimming pools are criticized on the grounds that they offend against the principles of equality between men and women and are a further manifestation of communitarianism. Natasha Walter's classically liberal plea that we should 'respect women's choices that are not our own, even if they include wearing the hijab' (*Guardian*, 20 January 2004) would probably be ruled inadmissible.

The French feminist position on the veil tends to be that it is an assault on the freedom of all women and, as Blandine Kriegel, who chairs the Haute Commission sur l'Intégration puts, is a 'symbol of the inequality between men and women' (*L'Express*, 26 January 2004). The argument that girls and young women are being coerced into wearing the veil by their fathers and brothers is commonplace, and is often backed up by scandalized talk of arranged and forced marriages. No statistics are ever brought forward to substantiate these claims. They probably cannot be. The number of 'Muslims' in France remains a matter for speculation: the principle of *laïcité* means that a French census cannot, by law, collect information about ethnicity or religious belief.

Le fait religieux

Most sociologists would agree that one of the many serious problems facing North African families in France is precisely the decline of traditional paternal authority. Even where it still exists, it may not always be coercive. *Libération* (24 June 2003) has reported on one girl who wore her hijab to school as admitting that she had to take it off when she got home – because her father disapproved. The reference to supposed 'coercion' is the nearest most commentators come to discussing the real conditions of existence of immigrant women. No doubt forced and arranged marriages do occur, and polygamy is practised (and either tacitly tolerated or ignored by the authorities) in some social groups, many of them from Mali. So-called 'Islamic fundamentalism' is on the rise, and some mosques are issuing calls for jihad or holy war, just as they do in Finsbury Park. 'Republican fundamentalism' may not, however, be the best of answers.

Any future incidents concerning the hijab will almost certainly not affect the schools attended by French legislators, journalists or feminists. They will occur in schools serving the grim suburbs of the big cities, and these are places where alienation is not a philosophical concept but a fact of life. These are the breeding grounds for forms of 'fundamentalism', for the anti-Semitism of Maghrebi youth – a real and frightening phenomenon. They are places where the gang rape of young women is appallingly common. Here, wearing a hijab may be a form of self-defence, and quite conceivably the only thing that allows a 16-year-old to get to school in the first place. Self-proclaimed feminists such as Anne Vigerie and Anne Zelensky argue that the solution to aggression against non-veiled women is to ban the public wearing of all veils (*Le Monde*, 30 May 2003). This sounds like a bad case of White Woman Knows Best. The small groups of very brave women who are beginning to organize in the suburbs under the slogan *Ni soumises ni putes* ('Neither Submissive nor Whores') would probably not welcome such advice. If France and French feminists do wish to help women *issues de l'immigration* to improve their lot, they have much more to worry about than 14-year-olds in headscarves.

Surprisingly little is being heard in public from those who actually wish to wear their hijabs to school. If pressed, most will argue that they are under a religious obligation to cover their heads. The Koran does contain such injunctions, but it is a contradictory text and its authority can also be used to argue that a Muslim living outside the house of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) should submit to the laws of the country in which he or she is resident. Some will admit that the hijab has, in some quarters, become a fashion item. And some will display the bloody-mindedness of teenagers the world over, like the two who told a journalist that whilst they insisted on wearing their hijabs

to school in France, they would refuse to do so in a country where it was compulsory (*Libération*, 22 September 2003).

The decision to discuss *le fait religieux* in schools is an attempt to stem the worrying rise in both anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim feeling: no one wishes to see confessional battles in the playground. They are already beginning elsewhere. Synagogues have been attacked and Jewish graves desecrated. Mosques have been fire-bombed. In March of this year, a prayer room in Annecy and a building belonging to a mosque in the same town were destroyed by fire. Manifestations of anti-Semitism are, quite rightly, greeted with outrage and anger. But, as an editorial in *Le Monde* (8 March 2004) noted, there was an uncomfortable delay before politicians reacted to the fires in Annecy. The daily commented: 'If the *laïcité* of the state means anything, it must mean the duty to defend, both physically and politically, all the country's places of worship. No republican could challenge that conception of *laïcité*.' Indeed.

Speaking about his hijab bill in January, Education Minister Luc Ferry remarked that, if the wearing of beards became a 'religious sign', beards too would be banned from schools, which raises the fascinating question of the distinction between 'Islamic' and 'non-Islamic' beards. As some wits were quick to point out, it also has its comic side. The original legislation on *laïcité* was largely steered through by the Minister's namesake Jules Ferry (1832–93). Like most politicians of his day, Ferry had a very fine beard. It was presumably a Republican beard.

Ending up with religion (again)? Christianity in contemporary political and psychoanalytical theory

Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht, the Netherlands, 10–12 May 2004

Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and many other 'masters of suspicion' unmasked religion as an ideological weapon in the hands of the ruling political and cultural power. Contemporary thinkers stemming directly from this tradition fully endorse this critique. Yet, it is remarkable to see that in their works religion, in particular Christianity, has come once again to play an important role. It is as if Christianity, including its problems and its crises, helps current ideology critique to deal with its own problems and crises. Here one can mention the importance of mysticism for Lacan, Lyotard's fascination with Augustine and Derrida's preoccupation with religion. Žižek, in *The Fragile Absolute*, argues that 'the Christian legacy is worth fighting for.' According to Agamben, Badiou, Negri and Taubes the reaffirmation of Saint Paul is an inevitable point of reference for political theory. The aim of this conference is to question the presence of Christianity and its (re)affirmation in contemporary political and psychoanalytical theory. Rather than new answers, this reference to Christianity might first of all generate new questions, or a new way of articulating the problems we are now facing.

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Academic boycott as international solidarity

The academic boycott of Israel

Lawrence Davidson and Islah Jad

Boycotts are age-old undertakings. Unlike sanctions, which are enforced by governments and sometimes destroy the lives of millions of ordinary people (as in the case of the twelve-year sanctions against Iraq), boycotts are most often grassroots means of protest against the policies of governments. They can be undertaken by ordinary people to defend fellow human beings who are oppressed by governments and armies, and they can be deliberately restricted in scope to cause as little damage as possible to the lives of innocent people. Boycotts have historically been undertaken at many levels: they can be carried out against companies or industries (for instance, the California grape boycott of the 1970s, or the ongoing worldwide boycott of Nestlé products¹); and against states (for instance the Jewish-initiated boycott of goods from Nazi Germany, or today's evolving boycott of Israeli products and institutions in the face of that country's colonialist occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights). Thus, from a historical point of view, there is plenty of precedents for the tactic of boycott. And, as in the case of South Africa, public pressure through boycotts can eventually help force governments and organizations such as the United Nations to apply sanctions against a particular regime. In our view, an academic boycott of Israel should form part of a broader boycott and divestment effort involving economic, cultural and sports agendas.

The call for a moratorium on relations with Israeli academic institutions has drawn widespread criticism. Much of this has come from people who are, to some degree, partisans of Israel. But some of it has its origins among those who have genuine concerns that innocent Israelis are being unnecessarily hurt, or that the boycott is undermining valued principles such as academic freedom and the free flow of ideas. It is to this latter group that we would like to address the following arguments in the hope of taking up their concerns and, if not putting them to rest, at least putting them in a context that makes understandable the historical trade-offs inevitably involved in this struggle for justice.

The call for a specifically academic boycott is based on several premisses. One is that, to date, all but a small number of Israeli academics have remained quiescent in the face of the violent colonial war their government is waging in the Occupied Territories. As a group they have had nothing to say about Israeli violations of scores of United Nations resolutions and the transgression of international law in the form of the Fourth Geneva Convention. This includes not only human rights violations of a general nature but also, specifically, the systematic destruction of Palestinian education and academia. Nor, as a group, have they come to the defence of their very few fellow academics who have been persecuted for openly criticizing Israeli policies against the Palestinians. A second and related premiss is that educational institutions and their teachers are

principal agents in the shaping of future generations' perceptions of their country's relations with their neighbours and the world. If, in the midst of extreme practices of oppression such as we have been witnessing in the Occupied Territories, these institutions do not analyse and explain the world in a way that promotes justice and reasonable compromise, but rather acquiesce in aggressive colonialist practices, then others may legitimately boycott them.

Actions of boycott represent a non-violent way by which non-Israelis the world over can express their concern for what is now the world's longest post-Second World War occupation and one of its bloodiest and most ethnically oriented. There has been a great outcry against the violent tactics of resistance to Israeli occupation evolving among the Palestinians. Though the first Intifada started with little more than rock-throwing, it was condemned in the West as a 'dangerous escalation' of the Middle East crisis. It also brought the Palestinians no relief. The second intifada is certainly much more violent in its nature and now includes the infamous tactic of suicide bombing. The organizers of the boycott condemn this tactic even whilst understanding that it is a product of despair and desperation that the occupation itself has created.

Some general objections

Objections to the academic boycott of Israel have not been consistent. They have tended to change over time. For instance, at the beginning of the boycott there was a call to keep academia, and particularly scientific fields, out of politics. While as an ideal this may be an admirable goal, in reality the bulk of higher education and its academics never escape politics. In the United States during the Vietnam War, various government agencies quickly recruited an array of academic departments and individuals, ranging from chemists to sociologists, to support their war effort. The intimidation and bribery directed at the rest of the academy to remain quiet and loyal was effective until the war itself became vastly unpopular. Israeli educational institutions have followed this pattern. In general, states do not support academic freedom or the free flow of ideas in cases that impact on government policies. Through various forms of pressure they attempt to enforce only two alternatives: quiescence or active support. In times of stress, opposition comes to equal disloyalty, and threatens academic funding and careers. The academy, then, is not a neutral arena on matters important to government.

In the current context, there are numerous examples of the direct involvement of Israeli academia and related professions in promoting and sustaining the oppressive measures of the Israeli government and in violations of human rights and of UN resolutions. In general, almost all Israeli academics find themselves actively or passively supporting the occupation by virtue of Israel's policy of universal Jewish conscription. (With the exception of the ultra orthodox, all able-bodied Israeli Jews are subject to military service. Indeed, there appears to be a de facto requirement that all non-ultra-orthodox Israeli Jews must have served in the military just to be hired in most professions! It is an unwritten way of filtering out non-Jews from the professional job market.) This is a policy that does not so much democratize the Israeli army as militarize Israeli civilian society. Thus, almost all Israeli academics are military veterans and many will do reserve duty in the Territories. If they wish to resist serving as part of the occupation forces, they can do so by joining the refusnik organizations. Very few choose to do so. More concretely, one can point to the active role taken by Bar-Ilan University in validating courses given by the colleges now being established in the settlements. Finally, there is the particularly sinister, documented involvement of Israeli doctors in torture.²

The argument for isolating academia from politics was later augmented with the assertion that 'in the end the best way to resolve issues is to pursue dialogue, not boycotts'. But it is precisely because 'dialogue' on the Palestinian issue has been histori-

cally stifled that the boycott against Israel has become necessary. The vast majority of coverage in the press, magazines and television news, particularly in the United States, most of the time gives only the Israeli side of the story. To the small extent that this is breaking down, those offering the Palestinian point of view are labelled anti-Semites and supporters of terrorists. 'Intellectual exchanges' have been going on between Israelis and the rest of the world since 1948 but it has made no difference to the oppressive and colonialist policies of successive Israeli governments. Under these conditions, 'dialogue' is unlikely to achieve anything in the future unless, simultaneously, real pressure is applied from outside on Israeli institutions.

One of the earliest tactics to silence and discredit advocates of the boycott has been the red herring of anti-Semitism. The boycott of Israel, including the academic boycott, is inherently anti-Semitic, we are told, 'in effect if not in intent'.³ It encourages anti-Semitism, even if it does not mean to. This argument is based on *equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism*; it conveniently ignores the mounting crescendo of Jewish voices against Zionist and Israeli colonialist practices. It also ignores the fact that not only was the first call for a moratorium on EU funding for research collaboration with Israeli institutions launched by Jewish scholars in the UK (Professor Steven Rose and others), but also that many of the supporters of the boycott are Jewish, some even Israeli.⁴ Indeed, as many have argued, it is current Israeli practices and the Zionist colonial project that encourage and feed anti-Semitic discourse, rather than legitimate means of protest against violations of human rights in Israel.

It should be noted that the academic boycott of Israel as presently pursued is not one of uniform practice. It is a decentralized movement that allows for individual interpretations on the part of its adherents. In most cases the boycott is directed against Israeli institutions, including academic institutions. But it may also be that as a consequence of the boycott Israeli academics are now having a harder time publishing outside the country, participating in formal exchanges, sitting on boards and international committees, and the like. However, this is not translated into a situation where no one will talk to them. Boycott organizers are in constant touch with the few dissenting Israeli academics. In effect, far from discouraging Israeli dissent, the call for a boycott is aimed at encouraging Israeli academics to act in solidarity and sympathy with their Palestinian colleagues who suffer much worse isolation due to Israeli occupation. When the occupation is dismantled, the academic boycott will be as well.

We turn now to more serious issues concerning the objectives, scope and potential effectiveness of the boycott.

Specific objections

1. The academic boycott is ineffective; it cannot influence the policies of the Israeli government, and will only harden positions due to resentment over outside pressure.

If the first part of this argument were really true the reaction against the boycott effort would not be so strenuous; in the USA, the Anti-Defamation League would not be expending time, energy and money to label the academic boycott as a 'hijacking of academic freedom' and there would not be a rush to launch a number of anti-boycott petitions. The outcry from Zionists indicates a high level of insecurity and fear. This fear may come, in part, from the awareness that the academic boycott is not just directed at the humanities and social sciences. It incorporates the hard sciences which feed into Israel's high-tech economy. Some Israelis have already acknowledged the potential of the boycott. Israeli economist Yoram Gabai is quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (8 August 2002):

Faster than expected, we will find ourselves in the time warp of [white-dominated] Rhodesia in the 1970s and South Africa in the 1980s: enforced isolation from without and an

isolationism from within.... The enormous price of isolation will drag us into withdrawing from the [occupied] territories, either in the context of a peace treaty or without one as a unilateral act.⁵

The power of national isolation, including academic isolation, has been recently attested to by Frederik de Klerk, the former president of South Africa who initiated the move away from apartheid and towards democracy. 'Suddenly the doors of the universities and libraries [of the world] were closed to our bright students, which stimulated and motivated advocates of change.'⁶

One of the most important achievements of the academic boycott is that it has generated such heated discussion in so many venues (mainstream newspapers, television, student publications, Internet discussion lists) that the negative details of the Zionist enterprise have forced themselves onto the consciousness of many people, both within and outside academia. Thus, even the efforts to discredit those who support the boycott, and to delegitimize the boycott as a strategy of protest, have unintentionally helped provide a forum for debating the facts about Palestine and the occupation. If the boycott achieves nothing more than this it will have achieved a great deal.

2. The academic boycott targets the wrong people and hurts Palestinians as well as Israelis. It harms collaborative efforts between Israeli and Palestinian universities.

We do not believe that the academic boycott hurts Palestinians and harms collaborative efforts. While in the past there have been minor collaborations between Israeli and Palestinian academic institutions in the Occupied Territories, these have now ceased. This is due to the inevitable estrangement and suspicion that have accompanied the continuing colonization and occupation of the Occupied Territories. Israeli policies forbid the travel of Israeli citizens into the Occupied Territories (except if they are going to and from Israeli colonies, illegal under international law) and make it extremely onerous for Palestinians in those regions to enter Israel. If the Israelis claim that these policies have been made necessary by the Palestinian uprising, we answer that the uprising has been made necessary and inevitable by the Israeli occupation and its brutal nature. Part of that brutal nature has been the employment of tactics designed to prevent Palestinian colleges and universities from functioning in any normal manner. These tactics include prolonged shut-downs, military raids and travel restrictions that impede the journeys of students and faculty to and from campuses.

No organized protest or resistance to this consistent and prolonged attack on Palestinian academia has come from Israeli academic groups, colleges or universities. As Tanya Reinhart, Professor of Linguistics at Tel Aviv University and one of the few Israeli academics to take a public stand against Israeli occupation policies, has observed,

Never in its history did the senate of any Israeli university pass a resolution protesting the frequent closure of Palestinian universities, let alone voice protest over the devastation sowed there during the last uprising. It is not that a motion in that direction failed to gather a majority, there was no such motion anywhere in Israeli academia.⁷

Even with the increasing atrocities committed by the Israeli army since the beginning of the second intifada, Israeli academia continues to do practically nothing to bring the facts to public attention. There is something obscenely hypocritical in the fact that many of those individuals and organizations (Israeli or otherwise) which have so vocally attacked the boycott have not raised their voices against the destruction of Palestinian academia and society in general.

The claim that the boycott 'targets the wrong people' is a more complicated one and deserves close consideration. Almost all of the complaints registered against the boycott of Israel, academic or otherwise, put forth examples of well-intentioned, humanitarian

Israeli *individuals* (whose existence we certainly acknowledge) who are allegedly being punished unfairly by the boycott. In the case of the academic boycott there are scholars who cannot place publishable material, particularly in European journals; there are Israeli doctors who cannot receive research assistance from abroad; there are individual Israelis who have been asked to leave the boards of scholarly journals. Taken as individual cases, there is no doubt that such situations result in frustration, inconvenience, the disruption of research and perhaps even careers. But we believe, as Shahid Alam has written, 'it is reasonable and moral to impose temporary and partial limits on the academic freedom of a few Israelis if this can help to restore the fundamental rights of millions of Palestinians.'⁸ To our minds, the most notable cases of the 'wrong people' being hurt are those of the relatively few heroic Israeli academics who have put their careers on the line to stand up against the injustice of their country's colonial policies.



3. The boycott violates the principle of academic freedom and as such is unacceptable.

The boycott's impingement on the academic freedom of Israeli scholars has been repeatedly condemned. It has been called 'contemptible', 'hypocritical' and 'an unacceptable breakdown in the norms of intellectual freedom'. For example, Dena S. Davis, a law professor at Cleveland State University, wrote in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that 'Academic boycotts undermine the basic premise of intellectual life that ideas make a difference, and the corollary that intellectual exchanges across cultures can open minds.'⁹ Unfortunately, it is not only positive ideas that can make a difference. Historically, unimpaired 'intellectual life' and 'exchanges across cultures' have failed to lead to the humanization of Zionist policies. In addition, it is to be noted that those brave Israelis, both academic and non-academic, who have taken a stand against such policies have, for the most part, not done so because they had access to foreign academics or foreigners per se.

This makes problematic the claim that academic freedom somehow operates in a vacuum and, in and of itself, always leads to the good, or the betterment, of the world. Nonetheless, we do agree that its opposite, the obstruction of the

'free flow of ideas' ought to be undertaken only in severe and extreme circumstances. Unfortunately that is exactly the situation successive Israeli governments have brought about with regard to Palestinian higher education. Here, Israel's illegal occupation has destroyed 'intellectual life' for the Palestinians. The practice of 'exchanging visits' and 'talking to each other', such as it has been over the last thirty-five years, on the part of Israeli academics has not produced the courage or insight to stand up and protest this destruction. Israeli academics should be claiming for the Palestinians the same rights of academic freedom they claim for themselves. Their pointed failure to do so makes them subject to the general boycott of Israel that is now evolving as a consequence of Israeli policies.

4. The boycott adherents unfairly single out Israel while ignoring all other military occupations.

What is the basis of the claim that the signatories of the various moratorium and boycott calls are 'picking' on Israel and ignoring the behaviour of the Chinese in Tibet, the Russians in Chechnya, the Americans in Iraq, and so forth? All the signatories have in common is that they consider the struggle against Israeli occupation a high priority. The Israeli-Palestinian crisis remains the most internationalized conflict in today's world, in terms of both the role of the UN and international financial support for Israeli occupation. Because of the international character of the conflict, Zionist agendas clearly influence policy-making in the West. They have import beyond the Occupied Territories and potentially affect the lives of ordinary citizens of most Western nations. This is particularly obvious in the case of the United States, where Zionist lobbies are extremely powerful within both Congress and the media, and the administration of George W. Bush and his neo-conservative advisers see Israel and its aggressive behaviour as a model for their own policies. Numerous examples of how this influence is exerted can be found on the website of the Project for the New American Century.¹⁰

5. The boycott of Israel ignores the (alleged) facts that (a) the Israeli army is in the Occupied Territories as an act of self-defence against suicide bombers and other terrorists, and (b) boycott efforts only encourage and lend comfort to these terrorists.

The Israeli army and settlers are in the Occupied Territories to annex 'Judea', 'Samaria' and Gaza. The resulting thirty-five years of land confiscation; of destruction of crops, houses and other Palestinian property; of destroying Palestinian civil society; of the construction of illegal colonies; and of the importation of hundreds of thousands of illegal settlers are not 'acts of self-defence'. On the other hand, one can reasonably define resistance to these actions on the part of the Palestinians as acts of self-defence. The international community, through the actions of the United Nations and the testimony of respected world leaders, has made it clear that Israeli occupation constitutes an ongoing case of severe injustice. Is it not possible that, as Shahid Alam has suggested, the boycott, functioning as a manifestation of 'world conscience', can 'mitigate the Palestinian's deep despair' and hopefully lead to a reduction in violence of both the 'colonizer and the colonized'.¹¹ In any case, the boycott represents a non-violent alternative route to oppose a regime which many see as itself terrorist.

Israeli goals in the occupied territories have always aimed at possession and absorption of these lands. However, with the advent of the Sharon government the scale of destruction and brutality has risen to new and shocking levels. The Sharon government was put into power by an overwhelming majority vote of Israelis in the election of February 2001. Sharon received 62 per cent of ballots cast. In the January 2003 election the Israeli public reaffirmed their allegiance to Sharon, his Likud Party, and allied right-wing parties, by once more putting these forces in command of the government. What this electoral history indicates is that the majority of Israelis are either unwilling or

unable to understand the origins of their own insecurity and the nature of the occupation. It is under these circumstances that outside pressure becomes the only viable way of encouraging change in Israel. There are those who would look to the government of the United States, Israel's ally and patron, to apply the necessary pressure. However, the US government is itself operating under the same delusions as Israel as to the nature of and reasons for the occupation. This leaves us with the non-violent strategy of developing a grassroots, international movement to boycott the institutions of Israeli power at all possible levels: economic, cultural and academic.

Notes

1. See www.breastfeeding.com/advocacy_boycott.html.
2. See Derek Summerfeld, 'Israeli Medical Association Shirks "Political Aspects" of Torture', *British Medical Journal* 311, 1995, p. 755.
3. www3.sympatico.ca/sr.gowans/distractions.html.
4. See www.pjpo.org for the various calls for an academic moratorium on relations with Israeli institutions.
5. 'Israelis Feel the Boycott Sting: Creeping Sense of Isolation as Culture, Economy Takes Hits', www.sfgate.com/cgi_bin/article.cgi?file=chronile/archive/2002/08/06/mn33709.dtl.
6. *Ha'aretz* supplement in English, 16 May 2003, www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/shart.jhtml?itemno=293793.
7. Z net, 4 February 2003, www.Zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=2961§ionID=22.
8. Shahid Alam, www.pjpo.org/letter_taraki.html.
9. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 18 April 2003, p. B13.
10. www.newamericancentury.org.
11. Shahid Alam, *ibid*.

Not so simple

Reflections on the academic boycott of Israel

Uri Hadar

In the culture in which I was brought up, in the language that mediated this culture, 'boycott' had a distinctly negative connotation. It has usually been associated with a moralistic punishment directed towards an individual or a group that has transgressed a norm without, perhaps, actually breaking the law. Admittedly, boycott was opposed to the bare use of physical power, it acted in the name of morality, but it always anchored itself in a norm. It was, in that precise sense, never on the radical side of culture. In addition, the Hebrew for boycott, *herem*, like its Arabic cousin, *haram*, may associate with a whole range of moral punishments (the Arabic word stresses sanctity), but its verbal form, *lehahrim*, stands explicitly for material dispossession, usually of forbidden goods (the Arabic word connects to this theme by deriving theft and stealing). It thus espouses a morality that is associated with property rights rather than human solidarity.

The instances of boycott that came to my mind in thinking about this commentary were those of Spinoza's excommunication by the Amsterdam Jewish community and his less known immediate predecessor Uriel Acosta, who engraved himself on my teenage memory by carrying my first name, as well as by his ambivalent character and tragic

end. Then there were all kinds of cultural bans of books and people by oppressive or blind regimes. The economic sanction of Iraq by the US-led coalition brought me to the present time frame, but did not score much better for emotional valence. Of course, there was the boycott of South Africa, remarkable for both reason and impact, but I doubt that it changes the general ambience of either the word or the concept. Boycott was still essentially blind and moralistic, but the South Africa episode suffices to make the point that there may be historical conditions that warrant a boycott, unpleasant as it may be. The question is whether the current situation in Israel–Palestine is of such a nature and, if it is, whether the specific form that calls for an academic boycott, in the absence of a wider economic and cultural boycott, is supportable.

It is, to my mind, a cognitive travesty to endeavour to give a complete answer to the general question of which conditions warrant a boycott. It involves a measuring of suffering for which I lack the emotional tools. My perception of the occupation is that the conditions that Israel imposes on millions of Palestinians – with no basic human and civil rights, in extreme economic degradation and with persistent killing of innocent people – justify a boycott. They justify a statement by the civilized world of its utter condemnation of these imperturbable Israeli practices, continuing now for over thirty-five years. Those who will necessarily suffer from the boycott, the Israeli people, have repeatedly and democratically decided to perpetuate the occupation: we have honestly earned whatever consequences may befall us in this respect (although there will be some thousands in the position of innocent bystanders). In addition, the international community has repeatedly asserted that the Israeli occupation violates its norms.

A complete commercial and economic boycott would be very effective in bringing Israel into line with these international norms. Israel's economy is all but dependent on external economies, especially that of the USA, and Israeli public opinion would probably not allow a serious regression of material living conditions. Alas, in the crucial discourse of American politics, the idea of a ban on trade with Israel is inconceivable. It is, of course, doubtful that mainstream American political thinking will ever view the Israeli occupation in ways that could lead to a general boycott. According to some, the occupation is essentially a testing ground for strategies of regional domination that the USA is interested in developing, rather than ending. Therefore, as far as one can see, the boycott enterprise can only hope to disseminate a moral message, express a moral distaste with Israeli occupation, rather than be physically effective. I believe it is against this background that the academic boycott needs to be considered.

The first question that arises here is, why single out Israeli universities as the target of a boycott? After all, the most obvious targets for a moral condemnation are those institutions that are more directly involved with the machinery of Israeli oppression of Palestinians: the army, the forces of internal security, governmental ministries, and so on. However, since the call for a boycott comes from academic and arts circles, it cannot be effectively exercised against governmental institutions. They (we) have few dealings with those institutions and such boycotting would be void of practical delivery. Generally, it makes sense to promote those forms of action that best realize the potential of the international academy to have an impact. But even this principle has to target institutions that can be seen to connect with the Israeli machinery of oppression. It makes no sense to earmark for boycotting Israeli hospitals or social services, for example. So, here we face the crucial question regarding the academic boycott: can Israeli universities be seen to be tied up with the oppressive Israeli machinery with sufficient clarity to warrant the call for a boycott? The answer to this is not simple.

Academic morality

The army has its obvious links with academia. First, almost every university has a department or an institute of strategic studies, where detailed research is conducted into

diverse military matters, much of which is used by the army. However, strategic studies and military history are recognized and legitimate academic disciplines and it requires some extra arguments to condemn these enterprises. Of course, if one could show that the army influences the directions of research in these programmes, directly or indirectly, that would be very pertinent to our object here, but I am not aware of any study that has taken up this case in any detail. Second, some academic research is funded by the Ministry of Defence. I do not know the extent of this and have a feeling that it is much more extensive than what we can readily see. Again, I think that the investigation of this matter is an important undertaking, but I am not aware of it having been done. Still, consider the research I know of, say into the mechanisms and epidemiology of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Is its funding by the Ministry of Defence ethically problematic? Should conscientious researchers refuse such funding? Or is it only research that is more directly related to military operational capacity that should be condemned or boycotted, and then irrespective of how it is funded? Third, it is important here to consider more generally the role that academia plays in the militarization of Israeli culture. Consider the extent to which high-ranking military people are in decision-making positions with regard to higher education, and therefore have the ability to promote those who are dear to them. Compared to national and municipal politics, as well as to business and industry, which is saturated by high-ranking officers (perhaps with the exclusion of the banking and legal sectors), the universities are effectively officer-free. This probably does not result from a determination on the part of academia to remain free of military influence, but still, few other establishments that channel power in Israel are as free of military influence as are the universities. This point is not self-evident and does not originate only in career structures. Currently, the government is pursuing a very aggressive programme of restructuring university management. The running proposals are that all appointments from the level of dean upwards would be totally controlled by governing bodies that have a clear majority of non-academic personnel (say, civil servants). If successful – which they may well be – these changes will open up universities to an unprecedented level of influence by politicians and the military (whose long-term impact is frightening).

In Israel, like everywhere else, the academy provides considerable professional support for governmental institutions, especially legal, educational, diplomatic and economic institutions (incidentally, again, the Ministry of Defence is virtually professor-free). While I doubt that in Israel the level of engagement of academic personnel in governmental projects exceeds what is considered normal in the industrialized world, this involvement may nevertheless provide the ultimate argument in favour of the academic boycott. Universities are an inherent part of a state's power structure and as such the evils of the state's policies, in turn, project back onto them. The only way in which academics can steer clear of such projection is by actively resisting the evils of state power. To me this is a basic principle of academic morality, if there is such a thing. Academics have considerable benefits from their share in state power: a fine working environment, a reasonable and secure income, privileged pension schemes, tenure, privileged access to the media, and so on. The only way in which they can extricate themselves from the evils of state power is actively to resist it. But does Israeli academia take on this imperative? Again, the answer is not simple.

A qualified boycott

Let me start with an illustration of academic contribution to the evils of Israeli occupation that is probably the most baffling of which I am aware. It is so saturated with paradoxes that even its description is conceptually taxing. It features a well-known Israeli philosopher, a logician by training and reputation, who was, and for all I know still is, against the Israeli occupation. Yet he has been pivotal in writing the ultimate

text that serves to render military practices morally kosher, a text known as the army's ethical code. In promoting and popularizing the ethical code, he gives soldiers advice (in various media) on when it is and when it is not ethical to open fire on human targets. He develops semi-philosophical arguments in favour of targeted killings of Palestinians and tries to formalize the ethically affordable level of injury to innocent bystanders. Here a lack of active resistance to state power is, to my mind, taken to its limits and beyond. Space limitations do not allow me to cite more examples here, so let me just formulate the following cautious statement: Israeli campuses have so far been remarkably quiet, not only with regard to the occupation, the violation of civil rights in the territories, the economic and human degradation of Palestinians, and so on, but also regarding the persistent undermining of Palestinian higher education. This is particularly poignant considering that the Roses' petition in support of the academic boycott has stirred hundreds of Israeli academics to write angry letters to their colleagues and sign a counter-petition on the pretext that the boycott violates academic freedom... So marked was the absence of an academic voice against the occupation, that the drive to mobilize academics towards such activities called itself 'The Campus is Not Silent'. Not that there is no activity on the campuses; in fact there is quite a lot of it – meetings, demonstrations, petitions, lectures and debates – but it remains within the confines of a small margin. The majority of faculty and students have no idea about these activities and many have not heard of 'The Campus is Not Silent'. Silence, it seems, can take its own subversive measures.

Yet, viewed from the angle of those anti-occupation activities that take place on a day-to-day basis in Israel – marginal as they may be – academics play a central role in them. They take leading positions in such organizations as Checkpoint Watch, Ta'ayush, Betsalem, and others. And, perhaps most remarkably, they offer the widest and most consistent support for the most radical resistance movement in the Jewish community, namely the refusal of military service in the Occupied Territories. A couple of years ago, about three hundred and fifty faculty members signed the letter in support of selective objection (facing the call for legal action against them by the Minister of Education). This level of support is far from being state shattering, but it is also far from leaving the task of resistance to a numbered few, as these numbered few sometimes hasten to claim. Many departmental sectors in Israeli universities – notably, in my perception, those of philosophy, linguistics, mathematics (!), history, psychology, various arts and cultural studies – breed a considerable level of anti-occupation activism. Again, none of this is terribly remarkable, but it suffices to make me feel that I cannot support an academic boycott that is not qualified in a serious manner. Qualified in the sense that it is (1) well-researched and argued (as suggested above), (2) selective and targets those sectors of the academy that are most directly connected with either Israeli state power or symbols of that power (high-tech research comes to mind), and (3) responsive to and able to make allowances for anti-occupation activity within or by the academy. Only a call for an academic boycott that would be detailed in this manner stands a chance, to my mind, of circumventing the inherent blindnesses of boycotting.

Finally, I wish to note the special considerations that face the Israeli activist in publicly supporting the academic boycott. Many of her fellow activists will be especially sensitive and resistant to this idea. When the first FFIPP conference against the occupation (see www.ffipp.org) proposed discussing the academic boycott (academically), this sufficed to stir an angry reaction from within the circles of 'The Campus is Not Silent'. Some colleagues decided not to attend the conference. Public support for the boycott will alienate many fellow activists and put obstacles in the way of anti-occupation activities. In these times, when demonstrators against the separation wall are being shot at with live ammunition by Israeli soldiers, the Israeli activist must ask herself whether the academic boycott enterprise is of such a high priority as to risk the weakening of other crucial and urgent activities.

Notes on nuance

Rethinking a philosophy of modern music

David Cunningham

The study of contemporary music can often seem particularly neglected by philosophy, at least by comparison to the attention accorded to literature and the visual arts. It is caught between a still largely conventional musicology, whose received procedures are patently ill-equipped to deal with a vast range of recent musical production, and a cultural theory which is generally content to reduce it to little more than a background noise for the formation of subcultural identity. What then might today constitute a *philosophy* of modern music, as the title of one of Adorno's best-known books would have it, insofar as the 'philosophical investigation' of music is concerned 'not with ideas on style' but with 'the unprogrammable *concept* inherent in [its] object', a 'reflected immanence of works'?¹

If, according to a now famous definition, philosophy might indeed be understood as that 'discipline that involves creating concepts', then it is only in relation to the immanent logics of contemporary musical forms and practices that the plausibility and productiveness of any proposed concept must be judged.² Nonetheless, if this is to involve more than a mere terminological novelty a philosophy of modern music must also entail a moment of critical reflection upon the 'life' that inheres within those concepts which it inherits. It is thus in the criticism of the restrictions imposed by received conceptualizations that new conceptual terms may be developed, reconfiguring, in turn, the cultural field to which they relate. Moreover, to some still developing degree, such a process is in fact demanded by, and converges with, those historical transformations in the structures of social and cultural relations that mark the logics of the interlocking processes we have come to call 'globalization' and 'postcolonialism'. Modern(ist) music, it has been suggested, might well be thought to begin in Debussy's encounter with Javanese gamelan music at the Paris Exposition of 1889.³ And if the compositional forms which flowed from

this encounter can often seem to fit all too easily into a standard model of 'Orientalist' practice – though this is hardly the whole story – such a model should not in itself be taken as an excuse for prejudging the role that a recognition of cultural and *musical* difference has played, and (in changing contexts) continues to play, in the formation of musical modernisms,⁴ whether 'inside' or 'outside' the traditionally determined (and increasingly complexified) geopolitical and geophilosophical spaces of 'West' and 'non-West'.

What follows is an effort to reflect, critically, in the first part of this article, upon a certain concept – that of 'dissonance' – which has played a central role in existing 'philosophically oriented' considerations of musical modernism, most obviously in the work of Adorno, and then to attempt, more briefly, to elaborate alternate conceptual terms which might 'make us aware of new variations and unknown resonances',⁵ both in relation to the mediation of contemporary (and increasingly globalized) forms and, retrospectively, in relation to received accounts of musical modernism more generally. The central concept which, in this vein, these notes will begin to elaborate is that of *nuance*. This is a term that I adopt, and rework, from a number of sources: from the composer François Bayle's reference to a 'type of sound that attends carefully to the nuances of the material'; and from Walter Benjamin's early texts on colour, which invoke an intensive chromatic 'order consisting of an infinite range of nuances'. But, here at least, the term 'nuance' is primarily engaged in its rather elliptical presentation in the later work of Jean-François Lyotard, where it is implicitly proposed as the conceptual mediation of what Lyotard describes as an opening to 'a sort of infinity ... [which is] the distress and despair of the exact division'.⁶ It is, with certain crucial qualifications, the temporal *dynamics* of this 'distress and despair' that will be considered as a possible conceptual resource for a 'second reflec-

tion' upon the immanent logics of recent musical production.

Adorno, modernism, dissonance

As is probably already clear, in attempting to reflect philosophically upon these immanent logics, I would concur with Georgina Born, as with many others, that Adorno's work remains 'the best start that we have', if one which is often 'blind to aspects of itself'.⁷ That said, it is precisely in thinking the 'origins' of this 'blindness', as well as what is required for its 'overcoming', that I quickly part company with Born's own analysis. For while I would certainly agree, concerning the problems entailed by Adorno's undeviating identification of an 'authentic' musical modernism with the 'new music' of the second Viennese school, such forms of 'blindness' do not seem to me to result from the general concept of modernism as such, nor to be resolved by its displacement in favour of the kind of conception of 'postmodernism' elaborated by Born. Indeed, as several recent readers of Adorno – including Osborne, Zuidervart and Roberts – have asserted, part of the problem with many prevailing accounts of Adorno's work is a tendency to misconceive what is meant by 'modernism' in it, by virtue of this concept's now customary reduction to a form of 'generic-periodizing' category.⁸ Yet, for Adorno, the modernism of modern music is in fact to be 'defined by its inner qualities rather than by chronology'.⁹ Such 'qualities' are not to be elucidated by 'ideas on style' – with which something like a succeeding 'postmodernist' style might be contrasted – but, as I have argued elsewhere, are to be understood as relating to an immanently manifested temporal logic or dynamic of artistic production which is not, in principle, restricted to any fixed objective and generically defined referent.¹⁰ It is this conception that must therefore define any philosophical reflection upon the musically modern, and the specific ways in which the work 'participates in history and thus oversteps its uniqueness'.¹¹

The implications of such a reading – both for music and for cultural production in general – can apparently be drawn out in Adorno's work by focusing upon the particular significance he accords to the concept of *dissonance*, to the extent that, as Osborne argues, dissonance may well appear to be, for Adorno, the 'basic principle of modernism' itself. Dissonance is 'the seal of everything modern ... veritably an invariant of the modern', as Adorno writes.¹² What links dissonance and modernism conceptually is the sense in which the former only has 'concrete' meaning, as musical *experience*, by virtue of its non-identical relation to

tradition's ongoing determination of historical modes of harmony as 'second nature'. Dissonance therefore should not be understood, in principle at least, as designating any inherent 'property' of a constant musical referent (for example, particular intervallic pitch relations), but in fact requires a continual *renewal* of its non-identity to what is already given as 'music' within the cultural present. As Alan Dunant rightly states, 'in acquiring their intelligibility in relation to particular musical forms, dissonances have [an] *active* function'. On this basis, Adorno argues, the *dynamic* non-identity of dissonance and harmony can be thought of as 'exemplary' of that between modernity and tradition *in general*, in so far as both mark – at different levels of conceptual generality – the productive temporal logic of a *critical* encounter with the 'congealed history' immanent in what he calls 'artistic material'.¹³

It is at this point that aesthetic theory intersects, famously, with *social* theory, in Adorno's claim that the basis of art's relation to modern society is not 'the insertion of objective elements' into it, but the way in which 'the unresolved antagonisms of reality return to art works as immanent problems of form'. Artistic material is 'nothing less than the objectified and critically reflected state of the technical productive forces of an age with which any given composer is confronted'. As such, it is only in the modernist work that mimesis may 'unite with rationality without regression', in an attempt 'to aid the non-identical, which in reality is repressed by reality's compulsion to identity'. All this, I imagine, is now reasonably well known. Nonetheless, it is crucial in so far as it is this asserted isomorphism between artistic and social form (as well as philosophical form) – as 'an analogue which goes beyond mere analogy' – that provides an obvious basis for the privileging of dissonance in Adorno's own account of modernism.¹⁴ Yet, at the same time, it is, I would suggest, precisely the tendency towards a close *identification* of these two concepts – or at least the making of one the 'basic principle' for, or 'trademark' of, the other – that may also lie at the root of what is problematic about Adorno's understanding of a specifically *musical* modernism. No doubt this has to do, in part, with Adorno's personal identification with the Schoenberg School, of which he always considered himself to be a 'member'. Yet this oft-noted empirical truth does not, in itself, provide sufficient explanation for the 'blindness' to which Born refers. Rather, this requires a properly 'philosophical' (as well as 'musicological') examination of the presuppositions underlying Adorno's unswerving fidelity to Schoenbergian models of musical development, as he understood them, and

thus the roots of the conceptual resources he sought to develop through their ‘reflected immanence’. For it is, I would suggest, precisely these presuppositions which tend to produce in Adorno’s work something of a characteristic slippage between a specific (relatively limited) *musical* meaning of the term ‘dissonance’ and a more *expansive* (rather ‘looser’, even ‘metaphorical’) use of this term in relation to modernist art in general, as an expression of an alienated social reality and of the suffering subject within it; a slippage which, by virtue of a propensity to elide the musical sources of Adorno’s concepts, has tended to be passed over by most commentators on his work. This is certainly not to suggest that any extension of the term ‘dissonance’ beyond a musical reference is illegitimate. Rather, the initial problem comes, as it were, moving in the opposite direction; that is, once one returns to the issue of a philosophy of modern music itself, in so far as it tends to give an inbuilt privilege to the *specific* mode of ‘negation’ involved in the dismantling of tonality – where the non-identity of dissonance is understood in the essentially pitch-based terms of discord – and from which Schoenberg’s development of the twelve-tone row historically derives.¹⁵

Although it is not immediately obvious, it is this that finds a ‘practical’ parallel in ‘total serialism’, precisely by virtue of its self-defining move beyond the problems of pitch – and the totalizing definition of ‘new music’ in terms of the ‘negation of tonality’ that it insists upon – in so far as it is its progressive continuity with such a negation that serves to guarantee what Born describes as an ongoing ‘correct, rigorous direction of the avant-garde’ after Schoenberg.¹⁶ Nonetheless, if Born is surely right about this essentially unilinear determination, it is far less clear whether this has to do with problems internal to Adorno’s general concept of modernism itself, or, as I am suggesting, with the restrictions placed upon a philosophical account of its possible concrete forms of non-identity as a result of certain other theoretical presuppositions present in his work.

Now, it is evident that, by the beginning of the 1960s, if not earlier, serialism found itself facing an apparent series of impasses, acknowledged by almost all of its proponents. Perhaps most telling was the Hungarian composer György Ligeti’s analysis – in a paper first delivered at Darmstadt – of the essential arbitrariness of the ‘rationalistic’ forms in which the originally pitch-based twelve-tone row was extended to the other parameters of music, and by virtue of which ‘total determinacy comes to be identical with total indeterminacy’, at least experientially. As Alastair

Williams neatly summarizes: ‘There is no particular reason why a 12-note series should yield a meaningful organisation of duration [or of timbre] ... [Thus do] order and disorder map onto each other.’¹⁷ And it is in light of this apparent capitulation to a fundamentally irrational fetishization of *rationalist* construction – already noted of ‘twelve-tone rationality’ in *The Philosophy of Modern Music* – that, in a 1961 paper, Adorno frames his own intervention, in the debates going on at Darmstadt, with the famous call for a new *musique informelle* which would dispense with ‘all forms which are external or abstract’. Yet the persistent motif of a ‘return’ – to a lost moment of pre-serialist ‘free atonality’ which he dates ‘around 1910’ – despite all qualifications, only serves to indicate the depth of the historical impasse reached by Adorno himself.¹⁸ It is at this point, I am suggesting, that the limitations inherent in the conceptual constellation of modernism and dissonance may be most emphatically revealed, in a progressive incapacity to account for new historical experiences immanent at the level of musical form, even within the immediate context of post-serialism itself.

It is here, therefore, that one might begin to pursue that confrontation of historical categories with artistic experience that Adorno himself demands. Moreover, it is partially, *in response* to certain emergent historical experiences, broadly associated with this ‘context’, that the notion of a *post*-modernism has conventionally been elaborated, with – at the beginning of the 1960s – the increasing focus on problems of timbre, rhythm and dynamics, the extension of electronic music, the emergence of minimalism, as well as a renewed turn towards non-Western musical models and so-called popular forms.¹⁹ Yet, if our critical mediation of these events is to do more than remain on the level of disconnected empirical-stylistic analyses, then we need to attend, in a properly conceptual sense, to the reflected immanence of the works themselves. It is this that demands not an abandonment, but a *re-interrogation* of the concept of modernism, requiring an attention to the logics of non-identity which new ‘problems’ may themselves articulate in relation to a reconfigured cultural field.

Nuances

A brief (and rather simple) example: commenting recently on Morton Feldman’s *palais de mari* (1986), the pianist John Tilbury writes that ‘the softness of the music ... heightens consciousness and encourages attentiveness and alertness ... the performer, and the listener, become aware that the dynamic quality within

softness (so it's not just a matter of playing a "routine" *pp*) creates an extraordinary variety of sound.' Now, whatever one makes of Feldman's success or otherwise as (in Stockhausen's description) a 'specialist in music that is as slow, and as soft, as possible', the 'dynamic quality' alluded to here clearly involves an experience of non-identity in relation to standardized stratifications of 'loudness' (the 'routine *pp*').²⁰ At stake are the 'conceptual' demands made by modes of historical experience, and productive logics, which, in their 'pursuit' of 'new dimensions' of non-identity – whether in terms of dynamics, timbre, rhythm or, indeed, new 'non-tempered' harmonic relations – may well be understood as 'modernist' in form, but which it would seem inadequate to reflect upon in terms of dissonance. At the same time, this would also entail a retrospective dimension; one which would interrupt the restriction of Adorno's own dialectic of modernism to the poles of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, by calling up the names of those who would seem to have no place within it: Varèse, Harry Partch or Charles Ives, among others. For, problematic as her characteristic attempt to link this to some insurgent 'proto-postmodernism' might be, there is clearly much substance in Born's complaint that, 'aided by Schoenberg's substantial influence and pedagogic writings, it was the serialist lineage of musical modernism that became dominant [after the Second World War] ... [winning out over] other early modernist experiments, including the various forms of aesthetic reference to other musics'.²¹

Despite his own idiosyncratic claims for the idea of the postmodern, it is at this point that I want to turn to two essays by Lyotard, both written in 1987,

entitled 'Obedience' and 'After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics'. The first begins with a meditation upon Adorno's question as to whether 'new technologies, which allow a refined ... ("rational, abstract") analysis of musical material, also allow its liberation?'²² Perhaps something of what is at stake in this dialectic of refinement and liberation can initially be brought out by returning to Ligeti's analysis. For, if the attempted extension of the twelve-note row to the other parameters of music is necessarily revealed as arbitrary in relation to the starting point proposed, it also works, as it were, to reveal the essential arbitrariness of that starting point itself. Ligeti cites Luciano Berio on the concomitant 'suppression of discrete scale degrees and intervals', as a means of moving forward, and suggests that, for himself, 'the 12-note method ... has to be liquidated in order that [a new form of compositional] control can be exercised in the changed situation'.²³ Yet such liquidation also puts into question *any* idea of a 'natural fit between matter and form' in general, to utilize Lyotard's own philosophical terms, in so far as the very putative 'mastery' of the 'sound continuum' may be said to suggest simultaneously the arbitrariness of any specific division of its various parameters, including those sought by serialism.²⁴ (Hence, perhaps, Berio's own posited turn towards alternately conceived questions of 'sonic quality and register'.) It is this that might be seen to be registered, for example, in Boulez's quasi-structuralist assertion, in an essay from 1968, that 'language, whether musical or any other, is for me a convention – and any convention implies artificial means'.²⁵ Moreover, in this sense, it might perhaps indeed seem plausible to argue, as Lyotard does, that,



in the face of such a recognition, ‘the analysis of the regulation of pitch leaves as its remainder only the material, the enigmatic presence of vibration’; what he designates, with an explicit nod to the writings of Varèse, as its *liberation*.²⁶

Yet, it is at precisely this point that one needs to qualify such an emancipatory rhetoric. For this can easily risk drifting into a simple utopianism, envisaging a ‘matter’ totally liberated from all formal ‘domestication’; a utopianism which would tend to reinstate its own modes of ‘naturalization’ as an erasure of historical relationships. It is for this reason that what, in his own thinking of ‘material’, Lyotard terms *nuance* must be reconfigured as itself a radically *historical* and *social* category. In fact, Lyotard’s articulation of this concept is fairly brief, Against the ‘identity-card’, abstracted for the ‘note’ within traditional technology, scoring, and performance ideals, nuance, he writes, ‘introduce[s] a sort of infinity... Nuance [is] the distress and despair of the exact division and thus the clear composition of sounds and colours according to graded scales and harmonic temperaments’: ‘[T]he point is to make felt ... what is insensible in the spatial and/or temporal sensory field, what is ... inaudible.’ Nuance is that which – ‘for at least “an instant” [which] cannot be counted’ – escapes the determination of existing specification. The *experience* of the nuance is, in other words, an experience of the *non-identical*.²⁷

Such experience is, nonetheless, precisely historical, and it is in this respect that Adorno’s work might offer a partial corrective to Lyotard’s rather sketched presentation. For if the experience, or ‘perception’, of the apparently ‘imperceptible’ nuance – whether in the spheres of timbre, rhythm or dynamics – emerges from the ‘distress and despair of the exact division’, this is still dependent on that already given (‘conventional’) division of the continuum itself. The nuance which ‘escaped’ division *altogether* – as an abstract willing away of social and historical determinations – would cease to be a nuance, would cease to be open to experience. Moreover, this is historical in so far as the division itself is a product of the historical tendency of material, subject to a variation which it nonetheless strives to conceal in the construction of a second nature. The *critical* momentum of the nuance emerges in laying bare the historical relationships which constitute the illusion of identity. (It is this that marks its proximity to the concept of dissonance, as well as its excess.)

Lyotard’s difficulties here, it should be said, relate to his own characteristic (and ultimately disastrous) attempt to read this, philosophically, back into the

terms of the Kantian category of the sublime. A better model, as I implied earlier, might be Benjamin’s early attempt to elaborate the opening to an *intensive* and *immanent* infinity that he associates with colour, although this would require more analysis.²⁸ At any rate, it can at least be said that Benjamin’s conception would seem to correspond better to, for example, what Keith Potter describes in La Monte Young’s work as an ‘obsession with exploring the *innards* of a complex sound continuum’; or to, say, the processes that mark a piece like Stockhausen’s 1964 work *Mikrophonie I*, with its sustained exploration of the timbral range afforded by a single, electronically processed gong.²⁹

Of course, as this latter example suggests, nowhere is this dynamic of intensive extension more pertinent than in relation to the development of electronic means of musical production. And if I have largely stuck, up to this point, with the context of post-serialism, in order to draw out the aporias and impasses of Adorno’s own account of musical modernism, this is just as (if not more) significant in relation to forms outside of the conventionally delineated ‘art music’ tradition. That said, returning to Tilbury’s comments on *palais de mari*, one might argue that, to some degree, Feldman’s piece is precisely defined by its pushing up against the limits imposed by the technological possibilities of the piano itself, even if, famously, it was its own capacity for dynamic variation which, in part, allowed the piano to supplant earlier keyboard instruments. Today, it is above all electronic sound production, and amplification, which have opened up new technical possibilities for exploring extremes of dynamics. If the loudness of rock music, or much contemporary techno (with the direct bodily impact of its sub-bass patterns) is perhaps the most obvious example of this, the capacity for what David Toop calls – in relation to the use of contact mikes and studio processing in the work of Thomas Köner – ‘threshold sounds’ on the very fringes of audibility is also of considerable significance.³⁰ It is in this regard that we might then go back to Lyotard’s initial ‘Adornian’ question: to what extent do ‘new technologies, which allow a refined ... (“rational, abstract”) analysis of musical material, also allow its liberation?’ – whilst seeking to elaborate further the social dimensions that might be at stake in this.

Once again, the dilemmas of post-serialism are revealing. Williams argues that something like Stockhausen’s early electronic work ‘can be seen as a protraction of [the] impulse to maintain absolute control over the parameters of music’.³¹ This is no doubt true, up to a point, but this very dynamic of ‘explora-

tion' generates its own new *dialectics* of mimesis and construction, which, as I suggested above, cannot in fact simply be resolved on the side of 'absolute control'. Some of the complexities of this dialectic can be gauged in the dynamic of an ever-more reduced refinement of 'serial organization' that Boulez once envisaged electronics opening up: '[W]e shall be able, within a serial space, to multiply the series by itself. That is, if between *a* and *b* of an initial series we can express the series in reduction, this would give a great expansion of the sound-material to be used.'³² If this seeks to extend 'control' of the 'sound-material', it also raises the question of where such a process of simultaneous immanent expansion could ever, logically, come to a halt. At any rate, 'nuance', even as it emerges from it, must always escape it. That is to say, the impulse to 'precision' always also confronts, and itself 'contains', the 'excess' of that precision, the 'distress and despair of the exact division' which 'defines' the non-identical moment of the nuance, and which it may serve (knowingly or otherwise) to articulate critically in so far as it is dynamically produced through a confrontation with the historical sedimentations (including those of 'scientific analysis' and of technological production) immanent to artistic material. As Lyotard puts it, in a rather Heideggerian vein, 'music reveals a destination which ... exceeds the scope of techno-scientific research envisaged technically, yet thanks to which [it] is revealed'.³³

A great deal more needs to be said of this dialectic, particularly in relation to the increasing focus on timbre (over pitch) which it would seem to generate. Moreover, as indicated above, this can no longer be restricted (if it ever could) to a post-serialist (or 'post-Cageian') 'art music' development, but must be seen to intersect with, for example, the 'appropriations' of musical technology at work in rock music (the electric guitar) and various genres of contemporary 'electronica', as well as, more generally, what Gilroy defines as 'the interface of science and aesthetics which is the required starting point of contemporary black cultural expression and the digital technology of its social dissemination and reproduction'.³⁴ At stake in such 'appropriations' would be the capacity of music, from a range of different 'traditions', to register immanently the *tensions* that such an 'interface' entails, as well as its 'internalized' relations to the imperatives of commodity production.

Bernard Stiegler has observed that 'the pianist [for example] has an instrumental knowledge which someone who is not a pianist does not – including the instrument's maker ... The "knowing" pianist

has "appropriated" [the] kind of expropriation that constitutes the musical instrument as such.'³⁵ In the more recent context of electronic means of musical production, the same kinds of 'instrumental knowledge' also remain key. Indeed such appropriation constitutes one significant way in which the non-identical moment of the nuance is 'produced' in its critical and dynamic 'distressing' of the divisions which musical instrument design itself imposes, precisely to the extent that musical instruments themselves 'exist at an intersection of material, social, and cultural worlds'. If, then, whether in relation to timbre or dynamics, and in the light of the convergence of 'electronics and internal musical developments', the 'invasion of nuances' is to be understood as an immanent process of 'enlargement' of musical perception – the rendering audible of the inaudible – such enlarging is both a historical and a social experience in which the 'physical and historical dimensions mutually intersect' in a particular configuration of the *new*.³⁶ Furthermore, as Gilroy's work suggests, this may well be seen to take on new significance in the context of an emergent *global* modernity – partly driven by the 'same' technological advancements that certain contemporary music immanently engages – in which non-capitalist and previously colonial societies are progressively integrated into the accumulative structures of a transnational capitalism, with evident ongoing 'musical' repercussions, both inside and outside the traditionally determined borders of the 'West'.

Occidentalism, non-identity and the modern

The coming 'global public sphere', Susan Buck-Morss suggests in a recent interview, 'will be a visual culture – or musical, perhaps, but not dominantly print'. The appearance of music here as something of an afterthought is symptomatic, and itself reflects, I suspect, the established disciplinary priorities of Western academia. Yet it seems undeniable that 'the economic and cultural correlates of aesthetic appropriation through commodification are very highly developed in music in comparison with such fields as postcolonial literature or the globalization of the ethnic visual arts'.³⁷ If this historically converges with, for example, the complex spaces of flows which have long marked the extraordinary African musical diaspora across Europe and both North and South America, and which have few equivalents with regard to other cultural forms, it also indicates a movement and mobility which has evidently been intensified in recent times. While this has undoubtedly provided much fodder for

the contemporary culture industries, it has also produced new forms, from 'outside' the traditional sites of Western modernism, whose own immanent logics of non-identity, with all too clear social implications, are formed through the unique confrontations that a historically new situation produces; confrontations for which the term 'World Music' – part marketing tool and part ethnological anachronism – is all too obviously inadequate.

At the very least this suggests the need for an ongoing attempt to meet, for example, Gilroy's demand that we 'clarify some of the distinctive attributes of black cultural forms which are both modern and modernist', resulting from the African musical diaspora, but this will also have to take place within an increasingly expanded field no longer restricted to the conventional geographical parameters of the West, or even to those well-established 'countercultures of modernity' with which Gilroy is himself concerned. If, as Tomlinson reminds us, it was indeed in the context of a late-eighteenth-century 'philosophical' establishment of Western modernity that a new concept of music first 'came to function as a kind of limit-case of European uniqueness in world history' – meaning that 'modern musicology, and not just ethnomusicology [is] a discipline erected on propositions of cultural difference' – nonetheless, as Naoki Sakai asserts, 'there is no inherent reason why the West/non-West opposition should [continue to] determine the geographical perspective of modernity except for the fact that it definitely serves to establish the unity of the West.'³⁸

One could think here, in a rather different vein, of the 'international' nature of contemporary 'popular' electronic music by comparison to earlier forms of rock, and the 'countercultural' forms that it, too, may contain. For while, in the case of rock, a clear hierarchy was early established between an innovative 'centre' (North America and Britain) and various local peripheries, whose products were largely understood (not least by their 'home' audiences) as mere copies or mildly exoticized variants, increasingly no such clear cultural geography seems to be present in the case of newer forms. Of course this is to simplify somewhat – there are forms of rock which don't fit this model (Tropicalia in Brazil during the late 1960s, for example), and techno still partially retains its privileged sites (Detroit, Chicago, Berlin). Equally, one needs to be aware of the ongoing 'disproportionate influence of the West as cultural forum ... as place of public exhibition and discussion, as place of judgement, and as market-place'. Nonetheless, music, perhaps more than any other form of cultural produc-

tion, does seem to point to a radical 'geographical' expansion of the concept of modernism's potential 'denotation'; an expansion which follows from the emergent global generalization of the temporal dynamics of 'modernity' itself, with (for better or worse) cultural effects on both non-West and West.³⁹

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber relates that 'rational, harmonious music' – by which he means *tempered* music – is 'known only in the Occident'.⁴⁰ One might note, in this respect, that just as, say, La Monte Young, Ligeti or Ornette Coleman work, in the West, to open up the theoretically infinite non-identity of the nuances within the harmonic series, beyond the 'exact divisions' of tradition, so equal temperament – via the factory-installed tunings of the piano, the accordion and the commercial synthesizer, as well as globally distributed tapes and CDs – proves to be one of Western capitalism's most successful (and destructive) cultural exports into the new Empire of global capitalism, seeking to impose an effective demand that local forms undergo 'alterations' such that they may be represented in the global marketplace. Indeed, it is precisely this generalization of 'rational, harmonious music' that provides the critical social context, in some sense, for the productive logic of the artists cited, and for their own turn towards forms and practices to be found in non-Western musics.⁴¹ This is a turn which can undoubtedly work to inscribe its own contemporary forms of Orientalism, its own Rousseauian myths of an unchanging, pre-reflective voice of nature located outside the Occident – as has been expertly analysed by John Corbett.⁴² But, in its most significant forms, it can also serve to articulate the tension produced by the *non-identity* of different musical structures and conventions. Moreover, this clearly involves 'modernisms' that have emerged, uniquely, on the other side, as it were, of any traditional West/non-West divide, such as Japanese noise music (Merzbow, Keiji Haino), and that suggest theoretical and historical complexities of a genuinely unprecedented kind. This should require a reflection upon the different modalities at stake in, as Vieira de Carvalho puts it, 'structural fecundation by a musical Other', and 'collage as colonial appropriation'.⁴³ Yet, it is precisely such a distinction – never of course absolute – that dominant conceptions of 'post-modernist' eclecticism fail to reflect upon, without, at any rate, covertly resorting to an implicit concept of modernism. Moreover, the danger implicit in such unreflective conceptions of eclecticism is a familiar fantasy that art itself might overcome the contradictions and divisions of society, where an 'aesthetic

pluralism' (across a now global field) works to erase the differential musical *and* social relations that it simultaneously implies; a danger that finds its musical corollary in something like the 'utopian interzone' of Jon Hassell's 'Fourth World Music', where 'bits of non-Western music' are simply grafted onto 'Western structures' (of harmony and rhythm), burying 'the intricate hegemonic relations' that are 'inherent in such a programme'.⁴⁴

There is a great deal more that could be said at this point, but I want to come back, finally, to Adorno and to the conceptual constellation of modernism and dissonance which I have placed in question above. For it is in light of this, and of the proposed alternate concept of *nuance*, that one might return, as a last example here, to the presuppositions apparent within the much-disputed readings of jazz, particularly given the now general opinion that certain jazz works should, contra Adorno, be considered as properly 'modernist' in form. The question here becomes one of how such 'modernism' is to be understood. Once again, predominant accounts tend to approach this in terms of a periodizable 'stylistic' similarity defined in relation to a supposedly 'canonical' original. Thus, the forms or techniques of figures like Armstrong, Parker or Coltrane are 'redeemed' as 'modernist' in character through critical parallels made to the collages of Picasso, the parodies of Joyce, or the 'Africanesque' sculptures of Brancusi.⁴⁵ Yet, as I have argued, such a 'generic-periodizing' definition is itself problematic, at least with regard to its ineliminable tension with the temporal logic inscribed within the *concept* of modernism itself. At any rate, given this, it clearly cannot serve to counter Adorno's essential *musical* arguments concerning jazz. For, despite the blatant prejudices involved (and the spurious Freudianisms which often constitute their theoretical expression) these are not *simply* reflective of a contingent Arnoldian distaste. Rather they follow directly from the restrictions inherent within the conceptual identification of dissonance and modernism, in so far as it is this, it seems to me, that most clearly allowed Adorno not only to ignore the relative importance accorded to timbral and rhythmic innovations but also to *misrecognise* the very harmonic 'nuances' at stake in jazz, as nothing more than mere repetitions of developments already established in the nineteenth-century classical tradition. Thus, for example, the 'newness' of the so-called 'flattened fifth', characteristic of bebop harmonies emergent in the 1950s, can only be (mis)read by Adorno as replicating the far earlier incorporation of the 'tritone', as a 'dissonant' interval, which took

place as part of the negation of classical tonality. Yet, as Berendt points out, while these may well *look* like a process of 'what traditional European functional harmonies would call "diminution", it is, in principle, a different process'; a process relating to the immanent logic of what jazz musicians and critics call 'blue notes'.⁴⁶

Ironically, it is in fact precisely such a misreading which tends to be repeated in the work of many of those who would seek to defend the modernism of jazz against Adorno's critique. Thus, for example, Witkin writes that while 'the label "jazz" once applied to any dance-band music', today it 'encompasses' avant-garde 'composers' like Ornette Coleman who have 'assimilated many of the lessons of atonal composition'. Leaving aside the slightly dubious terminology of 'composition' employed here, the central problem with such a defence is that it concedes everything to Adorno's restricted account of modernism; placing jazz in a perpetual position of playing 'catch up' to the 'lessons' already learnt within 'art music'. Yet this simply does not correspond to the logic of non-identity that defines someone like Coleman's own relation to the jazz tradition, which, rather than marking any 'assimilation' of a model of atonality already developed elsewhere, is more akin to a turning of 'the whole scale into blue notes'.⁴⁷ My claim here is that it is this that constitutes the modernism of Coleman's work, and not any supposed stylistic proximity to canonical forms. This would go, too, for the appearance of 'imprecise pitch' in the playing of Coleman or other 'free jazz' musicians such as Albert Ayler. For such 'imprecision' is only such in relation to the 'precise' divisions codified in the instrumental technology and notational systems of 'European' music. To put it another way, what appears, in the modernist forms of jazz, as 'imprecision' is nothing less than the critical articulation of *nuance*: the production of a non-identity to received musical material which opens up to an 'infinite continuum' of such non-identical 'imprecisions'. Berendt cites Coleman's assertion that 'an F in a tune called "Peace" should not sound the same as an F in a context that is supposed to express sadness.' As Berendt comments, this is 'a blues musician's concept'. However, this is not simply a question – any more than the blues itself is – of mere 'emotional' impressionism, it relates to the historical structures and material of a quite different musical 'system'. The notion that 'all Fs ... must have an identical pitch ... merely illustrates the influence of the European tradition'.⁴⁸ At the same time, it is this which does seem to allow for a convergence with certain logics in post-serialism,

as traced above. (For example, Boulez concedes – and contrasts this, in somewhat Orientalist fashion, to the non-tempered ‘modes’ of non-Western musics – that modern Western harmony and instrumentation have tended towards a ‘standardization of intervals and of sounds in general ... If, for instance, I use a D or an E, it will be a D or an E that is absolute, not relative, and will have no individual characteristics.’⁴⁹) And it is, of course, precisely such convergences – given concrete form in many contemporary experimental musics – which allow for the suggestion that the problematic of ‘nuance’, as the ‘distress and despair of the exact division’, may (unlike, finally, dissonance) connect the modernisms of both jazz and ‘art music’ at such moments, as well as the developing interac-



tions between them (in a way that, incidentally, goes far beyond the cultural field of Lyotard’s own, fairly conventionally limited presentation). Nonetheless, one always needs, still, to register critically the different immanent logics by which different musics may appear to arrive at such similar concrete musical ‘problems’; and this as part of a more general recognition of the *tensions* (as well as connections) which persist between the ongoing formation of diverse, ‘local’ cultural forms and ultimately global processes of ‘transculturation’.

As the great Afro-American improviser Leo Smith asserts, in a self-published pamphlet from 1973, it is quite simply a mistake to imagine that the blues ‘is pitch-oriented’ in a ‘classical’ sense. ‘Rather, the blues

is determined by its sound [timbre] and its rhythm, and not by its harmonic function.’ As such, any ‘modernism’ which would develop from such ‘orientations’ – such as certain forms of jazz – should scarcely be expected to develop along the same unilinear path of ‘progression’ as modernisms developing from quite different musical ‘foundations’. What they have in common is not some set of determinate musical ‘properties’, but a certain temporal logic of negation, an affirmative articulation of the non-identity of modernity and tradition, which has historically marked their ‘belonging’ to certain (Western) societies, as well as their capacity to test its dominant forms and divisions. In failing to hear the distinct nuances of jazz, and of its *own* logics of non-identity, Adorno thus failed to recognize the way in which the ‘unresolved antagonisms of reality’ returned to it, too, ‘as immanent problems of form’. For the blue notes and ‘imprecise’ pitchings which the blues bequeaths as musical ‘problems’ to jazz (and, indeed, certain forms of rock) are themselves formed through a developing and productive cultural struggle between diasporic African forms and the ‘exact divisions’ of equal temperament which Western instruments, like the fretted guitar, work to impose. (A similar thing could be said with regard to aspects of rhythm.) This is not, of course, to imply that something like the blues itself, at least in its original ‘rural’ forms, should be understood as *modernist* (although it is certainly ‘modern’). Rather, it seems to me, jazz becomes modernist at the point at which the nuances of this non-identity come to be *critically* articulated and pursued according to its own immanent modes of negation. (Bebop, with its critical relation to the commercial imperatives of ‘swing’, would seem an obvious turning point in this respect.) It is in this sense that I think, for example, of what is indicated by Le Roi Jones’s description of the ‘wilfully harsh, anti-assimilationist *sound*’ of free jazz.⁵⁰

Contra dominant definitions of postmodernism, what is needed therefore is not so much a defence of heteronomous music, as Adorno defines it – though this is not without interest – but rather a consideration of the way in which musics, such as jazz, with roots outside of the so-called Western ‘art music’ tradition have for some time now developed their own modes of autonomy, even as they also increasingly come into contact with other ‘traditions’ and interpenetrate with them in a variety of ways. For autonomy is not identical to what is called ‘high culture’, even if Adorno’s social theory tended to promote their convergence. (This issue is particularly confused in music studies by virtue of an assumed identity between the historical

development of ‘autonomy’ and the specific ‘classical’ idea of an ‘absolute’ – non-vocalized, non-representational – music, which may also, via the fixity of the score, be abstracted from any contingencies of context.) Indeed, the ongoing *renewal* of a genuine autonomy – as opposed to what Adorno terms, in *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, a ‘hermetic’ art reified by aestheticism – is itself dependent upon a continual critical technical engagement with what is already given, as immanently registered within artistic practice; a process which is as much at work in (and between) certain forms of jazz, rock or electronica, as in the ill-named ‘classical’ tradition.⁵¹

The ‘question posed’ by every modernist artwork, Adorno suggests, ‘is how, under the domination of the universal, a particular is in any way possible’. Yet this does not point to a simple redundancy of conceptuality, but insists, all the more strongly, as a condition of drawing out its social and historical ‘substance’, upon art’s ‘elective affinity’ with concepts; ‘although admittedly’, Adorno continues, ‘to those whose telos is the particular’.⁵² It is in this vein that I posit here the concept of ‘nuance’, as a determinate theoretical negation of the historical conceptual constellation of modernism and dissonance, and, as such, a concept that might reveal ‘unknown resonances’ in the variegated historical character that defines the ongoing critical work of a musical modernism. Moreover, it is in this light that Adorno’s own conception of the productive logic of modernism, as a process at once artistic and social, is still so crucial – as a ‘starting point’ at least – because it refuses to give up on the necessity of a ‘second reflection’ through which the social substance of musical forms and practices may be theoretically registered and judged. But such reflection – the condition for a renewed philosophy of modern music today – is marked by its own radical historicity which breaks apart Adorno’s anxious restrictions of such a dynamic of non-identity. Finally, it is by music’s *own* reflection upon the material of which it is made, and the divisions that traverse it, that it confronts the compulsions of reality.

Notes

1. Theodor Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster, Continuum, London and New York, 2003, p. 4; Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, Athlone, London, 1997, p. 341.
2. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson, Verso, London and New York, 1994, p. 5.
3. See, for example, David Toop, *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds*, Serpent’s

Tail, London and New York, 1995, pp. 16–22; and Paul Griffiths’s now standard account, *Modern Music*, Thames & Hudson, London and New York, 1978, pp. 7, 124.

4. For an extremely interesting intervention here, see Jann Pasler, ‘Race, Orientalism, and Distinction in the Wake of the “Yellow Peril”’, in Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, eds, *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2000, pp. 86–118.
5. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 28.
6. Francois Bayle, cited in *OHM: The Early Gurus of Electronic Music, 1948–1980*, Ellipsis Arts, New York, 2000, p. 62; Walter Benjamin, ‘A Child’s View of Colour’ (1914–15), trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume One, 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1996, p. 50; Jean-François Lyotard, ‘After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics’, in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Polity, Cambridge, 1991, p. 140. Peter Osborne has pointed out to me that the term ‘nuance’ in Lyotard, and possibly in Benjamin also, may well have a Bergsonian provenance. In the case of the former this could, one might speculate, have come via Deleuze’s 1956 essay on Bergson, which proposes ‘the logic [*raison*] of nuance’ as a means to thinking ‘internal difference as such’, ‘difference itself’, as against ‘the dialectic of contradiction’. See Gilles Deleuze, ‘Bergson’s Conception of Difference’, trans. Melissa McMahon, in John Mullarkey, ed., *The New Bergson*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1999, pp. 42–65.
7. Georgina Born, ‘Music, Modernism and Signification’, in Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne, eds, *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics*, ICA, London, 1991, p. 174.
8. See, for example, Peter Osborne, ‘Adorno and the Metaphysics of Modernism: The Problem of a “Postmodern” Art’, in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *The Problem of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, Routledge, London and New York, 1989; Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1991, esp. ch. 2; and John Roberts, ‘After Adorno: Art, Autonomy and Critique’, *Historical Materialism* 7, Winter 2000, pp. 221–39.
9. Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 4.
10. David Cunningham, ‘A Time for Dissonance and Noise: On Adorno, Music and the Concept of Modernism’, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2003, pp. 62–3. This first section of the present essay seeks to extend the analysis begun in this article.
11. Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 358.
12. Osborne, ‘Adorno and the Metaphysics of Modernism’, p. 37; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 15. That this has a more general relevance for broadly ‘philosophical’ accounts of ‘modernist’ cultural production is suggested by the role that a certain concept of dissonance, explicitly drawn from Adorno’s work, plays in the readings of the visual arts to be found in the so-called ‘new aestheticism’. See, for example, the reading of Pollock’s paintings in T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999, pp. 336–42. A tracing of this use of a concept of dissonance – abstracted be-

- yond its roots in Adorno's specific criticism of musical works – might give further substance to the critical analysis of Clark's 'historicizing' of modernism 'as a lost object' carried out in, for example, John Roberts, 'On Autonomy and the Avant-Garde', *Radical Philosophy* 103, September/October 2000, pp. 25–8.
13. Alan Dunant, *The Conditions of Music*, SUNY Press, Albany NY, 1984, p. 62 (my emphasis); Theodor Adorno, 'Vers une Musique Informelle', in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Verso, London and New York, 1992, p. 281.
 14. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 6; 'Vers une Musique Informelle', p. 281; *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 20, 4; Theodor Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1993, p. 136.
 15. Schoenberg's theoretical works are dominated by an account of the historical development of harmony. It is against the background of this that he defines the practices of his own 'school' in terms of 'the emancipation of dissonance'. Something of Schoenberg's own essential traditionalism can be recognized, however, in the claim that dissonances 'are merely more remote consonances in the series of overtones'. Arnold Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony* (1948), ed. Leonard Stein, Faber, London, 1983, p. 193. This is a conception that, for obvious reasons (given the homology with social form he wants to maintain), Adorno goes to some lengths to counter. See *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, pp. 85–6.
 16. Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez and the Institutionalization of the Avant-Garde*, California University Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1995, p. 50. See also Cunningham, 'A Time for Dissonance and Noise', pp. 65–7. The term 'total serialism' relates to the theories and practices of various composers after the Second World War who sought to extend Schoenberg's use of the twelve-tone row or series to the musical dimensions of rhythm, duration, dynamics and timbre. It was the various issues surrounding this idea that were the major topics of debate at the famous summer schools at the Kranichstein Institute in Darmstadt, from the early 1950s, which Adorno attended.
 17. Gyorgy Ligeti, 'Metamorphoses of Musical Form', in Robert P. Morgan, ed., *Source Readings in Musical History: The Twentieth Century*, W.W. Norton, New York and London, 1998, p. 113; Alastair Williams, 'Mimesis and Construction in the Work of Boulez and Cage', in Benjamin and Osborne, eds, *Thinking Art*, pp. 148–9. It is this arbitrariness that is revealed, for example, in Stockhausen's *Formel* for small orchestra (1951), which simply uses a scale of twelve 'durations' scored in conventional notational forms.
 18. Adorno, 'Vers une Musique Informelle', pp. 272–5.
 19. As well as the work of Born, see also various essays in Judy Lochhead and Joseph Auner, eds, *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002. The notion of a 'new musicology' has, more generally, tended to be closely linked to the reciprocal idea of a musical postmodernism.
 20. John Tilbury, programme notes for *Confessions of a Piano-Player*, concert at Leeds Town Hall, 10 July 2003; Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Stockhausen on Music*, ed. Robin Maconie, Marion Boyars, London, 1989, p. 52.
 21. Georgina Born, introduction to Born and Hesmondhalgh, *Western Music*, p. 15.
 22. Jean-François Lyotard, 'Obedience', in *The Inhuman*, p. 166.
 23. Ligeti, 'Metamorphoses', pp. 107, n. 2, 109.
 24. Lyotard, 'After the Sublime', p. 139.
 25. Pierre Boulez, 'Where Are We Now?', in *Orientations*, trans. Martin Cooper, Faber, London, 1986, p. 459.
 26. Lyotard, 'Obedience', p. 171. See Edgard Varèse, 'The Liberation of Sound', in Morgan, ed., *Source Readings*, pp. 69–76.
 27. Lyotard, 'After the Sublime', p. 140; 'Obedience', pp. 175–6; 'After the Sublime', p. 140.
 28. Benjamin suggests, if only figuratively, a certain basis for such a connection: 'For each basic colour there is an octave through to the ninth, and so forth on an ever more diversified scale.' Walter Benjamin, 'Aphorisms on Imagination and Colour' (1914–15), in *Selected Writings, Volume One*, p. 48. Such possible links between a philosophy of modern music and certain conceptualizations of colour might also be related to Varèse's conceptions of a musical 'prismatic deformation', as well as to the writings of the American composer Harry Partch, who constructed, from the 1930s onwards, his own instruments capable of playing a dramatically (intensively and immanently) expanded non-tempered scale: 'Consider the writer of music ... There are no shades of C-sharp, no shades of red, for him'. Harry Partch, 'Patterns of Music' (1940), in Morgan, ed., *Source Readings in Musical History*, p. 177.
 29. Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 12.
 30. See Toop, *Ocean of Sound*, p. 255.
 31. Williams, 'Mimesis and Construction', p. 147. Lyotard's reference to a critical 'remainder' which would consist only of 'the material, the enigmatic presence of vibration' probably in fact relates most directly to Stockhausen's experiments at Cologne during the late 1950s, which 'revealed' to him that the 'four basic components of music – pitch, timbre, rhythm and form – could all be seen as facets of the same phenomenon, that of vibration'. See Griffiths, *Modern Music*, pp. 159–60; and Stockhausen, *Stockhausen on Music*, pp. 91–6.
 32. Boulez, 'The System Exposed', in *Orientations*, pp. 141–2.
 33. Lyotard, 'Obedience', pp. 167–8.
 34. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso, London and New York, 1993, p. 77.
 35. Bernard Stiegler and Jacques Derrida, *Echographies of Television*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek, Polity, Cambridge, 2002, p. 110. The piano, too, is of course a form of technology; one in fact closely linked in its development to the industrial processes made possible by the precision metal lathe, which allowed, for the first time, precision (tempered) tuning on a mass production scale.
 36. Kevin Dawe, 'The Cultural Study of Musical Instruments', in Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton, eds, *The Cultural Study of Music*, Routledge, New York and London, 2003, p. 275; Adorno, 'Music and New Music', in *Quasi una Fantasia*, p. 266.
 37. Susan Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror*, Verso, London and New York, 2003, p. 132; Georgina Born, introduction to Born and Hesmondhalgh, eds, *Western Music and its Others*, p. 44.
 38. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 73; Gary Tomlinson, 'Musicology, Anthropology, History', in Clayton et al.,

- eds, *Cultural Study of Music*, pp. 32, 41; Naoki Sakai, cited in Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, Verso, London and New York, 1995, p. 16.
39. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994, p. 21; and see Peter Osborne, 'Modernism as Translation', in *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, pp. 53–62.
 40. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, Unwin University Books, London, 1930, pp. 14–15. It is on this basis that Weber thus relates the music of the Occident to 'rational, systematic science'.
 41. See for example the account of Ornette Coleman's musical encounter with the Moroccan Master Musicians of Joujouka in John Litweiler, *Ornette Coleman: A Harmolodic Life*, William Morrow, New York, 1992, pp. 151–2.
 42. See John Corbett, 'Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others', in Born and Hesmondhalgh, eds, *Western Music*, pp. 163–86. Drawing on Said and Fabian, Corbett discusses the 'conceptual Orientalism' of Cage – with its reference to the 'timeless emotions' of Eastern music and thought – as well as the early minimalist work of La Monte Young, Steve Reich and others. Nonetheless, Corbett is very careful to insist upon distinctions here, between a kind of 'contemporary chinoiserie' and the ways in which composers like Young or Henry Cowell, rather than merely 'reference' Indian or African musics, work to develop their own music 'out of them, developing new instrumental techniques' and thus approaching 'certain entrenched aspects of Western harmony anew' (p. 169).
 43. Mário Vieira de Carvalho, "'New Music" between Search for Identity and Autopoiesis', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1999, p. 133 n. 6. Vieira da Carvalho cites both Debussy and Luigi Nono as representative of the 'intercultural influence' at stake in the former.
 44. Corbett, 'Experimental Oriental', pp. 175–6.
 45. See, for example, Alfred Appel, *Jazz Modernism: From Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce*, Random House, New York, 2003.
 46. Joachim E. Berendt, *The Jazz Book*, Paladin, London, 1984, p. 160. See also Cunningham, 'A Time for Dissonance and Noise', pp. 66–7.
 47. Robert Witkin, *Adorno on Music*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, p. 199; Berendt, *The Jazz Book*, p. 124.
 48. Berendt, *The Jazz Book*, p. 124.
 49. Boulez, 'Where Are We Now?', p. 46.
 50. Leo Smith, 'Creative Music and the AACM', in Robert Walser, ed., *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1999, p. 320; Le Roi Jones, *Blues People*, Morrow, New York, 1963, p. 181 (my emphasis).
 51. See, for example, the interesting argument made for a reading of contemporary electronica in terms of its autonomy – while also acknowledging the dangers of a 'hedonistic' or quasi-scientistic hermeticism – in Dave Clarke, 'Musical Autonomy Revisited', in Clayton et al., eds, *Cultural Study of Music*, pp. 169–70. I think most of all here of the nuances produced by Oval, Pole, Autechre, or the various contemporary artists gathered together on the *Clicks & Cuts* compilations, with their fascination with the 'glitches', 'flaws' and unintended design 'faults' of digital technologies. In Sascha Kösch's words, non-identity appears here in the 'movements from one to zero made audible to and from a computer-

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The tragedy of listening

Nono, Cacciari, critical thought and compositional practice

Jonathan Impett

Music and philosophy follow the same principle of working, that of construction and deconstruction. They are both systems for arriving at a poetical structure.

Massimo Cacciari¹

Luigi Nono (1924–1990) occupies a key place in the development of contemporary music. Conventional accounts identify him as the composer who in the 1950s most coherently confronted the implications of serialism – an approach to structuring every aspect of musical composition developed from Schoenberg's ideas of order, structure and completeness in the use of the chromatic scale (the *series*). Through its evolution of the very nature of both composition and composed, Nono's work also directly addresses many of the major issues that music has subsequently had to acknowledge: the relationship of composition with social reality and with the performer, the nature of musical material, of representation and of listening, of musical time and space, and the uniqueness of the musical event. Richly grounded in music- and critical-theoretical concerns, his work transcends formalism precisely because of the depth of his historical-theoretical awareness and sense of place.

This article attempts an initial and necessarily broad survey of the role of critical theory – in this case, philosophical thought which has material implications for artistic activity – in the later work of Nono. In particular it considers the role of Italian philosopher and left-wing politician Massimo Cacciari. Nono first met Cacciari, twenty years his junior, in 1965, when the latter was a student and member of a very active group of cultural thinkers who came to dominate the intellectual and political life of Venice: Francesco Dal Co, Manfredo Tafuri and Marco De Michelis. Cacciari himself became mayor in 1993; the writings of Dal Co and Tafuri include a standard work on modern architecture; and De Michelis, brother of an ex-minister, now heads a new architecture faculty at

the university. When Cacciari was eighteen, this group founded a journal of critical theory, *Angelus Novus*, the title of which acknowledges their roots in the thought of Benjamin. Through this period Cacciari developed his early work on 'negative thought' from Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, which in his hands becomes effectively a tool for deconstruction, for seeking out fissures and contradictions. In a series of works, he presents negative thought as a *resistance*, presaging Nono's own conceptions of 'un-everything' and continuous questioning, which would lead him eventually to the writings of Edmond Jabès. There is also a sense of frustration apparent here: that Benjamin had described a post-dialectical work of art that neither the Adornians nor the espousers of political engagement had fully understood.²

The political trajectories of Nono and Cacciari are contiguous. A communism of social, intellectual and artistic responsibility informed all Nono's activity from early on: he joined the PCI (Italian Communist Party) in 1952, despite the ramifications of such actions for his international career, and was elected to the Central Committee in 1975, during the period of crisis and the 'historic compromise'. Much of Cacciari's early political writing concerns the *structural* issues of communism,³ and of thought and institutions in general.⁴ By the time of his full participation in politics he vociferously refused to engage with major parties and their dynamics.

Three lines of inquiry thus present themselves: the observable influence of critical thought on Nono's music itself, the wider role of such ideas in his development and practice as an artist, and the extent to which these conceptual tools might be instrumental in reaching an understanding, not only of Nono's music, but more widely of the dynamics of modernist cultural production and its relation to social reality. Such a wider understanding is afforded by Nono's own insistence on the nature of musical *thought* as a particular mode

of human activity and its essential relevance to the individual, culture, society and their transformation. These strands will intersect in the present narrative. The article will not, however, attempt an exegesis of Nono's own thought on these questions but rather trace some of the dynamics of their interaction through the development of his work. I shall try to show that the very depth of engagement with critical thought which underpins Nono's entire oeuvre is what allowed him to renegotiate radically and uniquely the relationship between text, representation, act and phenomenon in his later work.

Un-everything

From the outset, Nono's engagement with critical thought and text in general distinguished itself from that of his peers in two respects: the breadth of his humanistic education and his sense of cultural and political responsibility. Both emerge in a talk he gave in 1960 at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse, at its apogee as the locus of the New Music debate. It is an impassioned and articulate response to Stockhausen's suggestion of the previous year that in the work *Il Canto Sospeso* (1956) Nono had succeeded in removing all trace of meaning from the most emotionally charged of texts – words of the victims of fascism – and revealing them as pure compositional material.⁵ Before arriving at his refutation, Nono takes his Darmstadt listeners – presumably anticipating a rather different subject matter – through a rigorous analysis of the role and use of text in music from Lassus to Beethoven. He then demonstrates with legal precision the superficiality of the contemporary compositional discourse surrounding semiotics and the designification of text. He cites Merleau-Ponty: *no construct is without meaning. Text is a phonetic–semantic structure from which musical expression can emerge; its semantic properties are transposed into the musical language of the composer.*

If the role of critical thought is at issue here, why begin with Nono's views on the use of text? The relationship was to become explicit in his later work, but in his practice Nono's engagement with his chosen texts was such that subject matter and conscious reflection on his own activity are indivisible from the start. Both are rooted in a profound sense of historical continuity that allows his revolutions to be more radical than those of his ground-zero Darmstadt peers; Nono's strategy was quite the opposite of Boulez's or Stockhausen's desire to reimagine music *ab initio*. In all of the poetry set by Nono through the 1950s – Lorca, Pavese, Ungaretti, Machado – the semantic and sonic

properties of the words embody views of the role of the artist and the nature of his work: political struggle, the difficulty of post-Holocaust poetry, translation and the crossing of cultures, the origins of music and poetry and the fragility of individual expression. These are writers for whom aesthetic, philosophical and political engagement cannot be considered separately. In Nono's milieu of the time, the debate surrounding a communist aesthetics was informed by Gramsci rather than Adorno or Marcuse. As a student of law before composition, he had already absorbed from his mentor, political philosopher Norberto Bobbio, the social responsibility of the intellectual to be constantly questioning in a form of continuous cultural revolution.⁶ Significant for Nono's later work also is an article by Pavese he must surely have known, written shortly before the latter's suicide in 1950 and the source of much debate in the left-wing literary world.⁷ It might appear superficially that nothing could be farther from the specificity of the epic, socially engaged works of Nono's initial trajectory than the timelessness of Greek myth. However, Pavese seeks to rehabilitate myth at the centre of art, and suggests that the redefinition of myth is the foundation for each new epoch of artistic practice, the seed of every poem. The creation of a new work is therefore the construction of both a new aesthetic and a new ethos; in their absence, the work is simply a re-expression of something we already know and will lead *away* from the questioning that is the responsibility of the artist. The reinterpretation of myth and the process of continuous questioning frame all of Nono's late work.

The phonetic polyphony of *Il Canto Sospeso* and the evocation of Ungaretti's own voice in *Cori di Didone* (1958), for mixed choir and percussion, illustrate this indivisibility of sound, aesthetic and meaning. Nono's involvement with the earliest performances of Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* in 1954 is significant in many respects. In dealing with the inherent impossibility of a human being realizing its own self-vision, the opera provides an analogue for the task of the composer himself. While contemporary debate perceived this as reflecting a twentieth-century crisis in musical language, Nono's subsequent work demonstrates his understanding of its wider significance in terms of the very nature of music. This moment marks the start of his explicit concern with music as the activity of listening to the unsayable, and of composition as the mediation of this activity. As such it cannot be static or dogmatic but must be 'un-everything', as he liked to say. The dramaturgy, the unfinishedness and the *Sprechgesang* (speech-singing) of Schoenberg's

opera continued to fascinate him; he pointed out on several occasions, to Webern-centred (serialist) readerships, that Schoenberg presents a more complex set of questions than they imagined. This also marks the beginning of his involvement with Jewish thought in particular, and with thought on the philosophical and geographical fringes of Europe in general.⁸ Several strands feed this line of development: an understanding of composition as a hermeneutic activity, the figure of Schoenberg himself, communism as non-Catholicism, and Venice itself as an interface with non-European cultures, indifferent to the power of the Church and home to the first ghetto.

In an interview while working on *A Floresta* (1966) – a piece combining three voices, soprano, clarinet, copper plates and tape – Nono spoke of his increasing use of documentary texts:

I choose documentary texts ... because I believe they have a greater relationship to reality than pure poetry. We still live in the time that Brecht described: it was indeed beautiful to speak of flowers, roses and love, but unfortunately social conditions do not permit it. I am also convinced that as a musician I have a social duty to fulfil. I am convinced that as a musician one lives within a historical situation.⁹

‘Documentary’ itself conceals many levels of mediation and aesthetic complexity. The artifice in the work of politically engaged writers such as Lorca and Pavese is clear, but even in the case of *Il Canto Sospeso* the texts are drawn from an influential collection with its own art and agenda. Documentary, then, might refer rather to the signified – the truth of injustice, of political struggle – than to the signifying words themselves. This might be a valid argument in the terms of the 1960s, but too simplistic and counter to Nono’s stated position. The crucial authenticity seems to be that of the *voce*, the directness of communication whether from artist, hero or victim. *Sara dolce tacere* (‘it will be sweet to keep quiet’), lines from Pavese set by Nono in 1958, proved to be prescient. The inextricable interpenetration of music, text, aesthetic/philosophical thought and social engagement came to a head in the ‘azione scenica’, *Al gran sole carico d’amore* (1975). ‘Azione scenica’ (action on stage) is a term Nono adopted for his vision of music-theatre developed from *Il Canto Sospeso* onwards, and the irony that Venice should have given rise to both modern opera and its metamorphosis in a new aesthetic and social reality would not have been lost on him. Networks of multiplicity and simultaneity of text, material and identity are focused on a timeless point in the here and now of the work and its audience.

Pavese himself wrote of the depression of the artist following the birth of the manifestation of a myth.¹⁰ And, indeed, *Al gran sole carico d’amore* initiated a protracted period of intense difficulty in which, apart from a few occasional works, Nono produced only the textless work, ...*sofferte onde serene...* (1976), for piano and tape; itself a study in the very act of the production of music. Rather than polemical multimedia, ...*sofferte onde serene...* is a work of unique unitary immanence in Nono’s output, sculpting fragments of Pollini’s piano-playing into a modulated stillness that transcends the personal suffering which is at its origin and reflects his own Venetian physical environment. In the string quartet of 1979, *Fragmente – Stille, an Diotima*, a work which challenges and extends the activity of listening through its ‘suspended moments’ of long sustained chords and protracted silences, Nono printed short passages from Hölderlin for the players alone, and in rehearsals insisted on the observance of this inner reciting for the music to ‘sound’. The absence of the text itself from the sound of the work is one logical conclusion of his desire to extend their meaning into music. One is reminded of Nono’s account of Scherchen’s rehearsing of romantic orchestral works, when he would add words to a phrase to convey its sense to the performers. Here the textual multiplicity of works like *Al gran sole* is replaced by a new multiplicity: that of the constructive interpretation brought to bear by performer and listener. The model is not Hölderlin’s finished poems but his sketchbooks, in which alternative words, lines of development, and even languages, exist side by side with no apparent selection.

Musical thought

In talking of his discovery of a new productiveness and establishment of a new compositional practice, Nono most frequently referred to two factors: his work with live electronics at the SWF Experimental Studio at Freiburg, and his collaboration with philosopher Massimo Cacciari. The techniques of live electronics offered Nono a means of realizing new relationships with time, space, structure and text – both verbal and musical – which had seemed to have reached the limits of practicability in the works of the early 1970s, particularly since the *Al gran sole carico d’amore*. He could now apply these emergent ideas directly in his own practice. At the same time the formulation of these ideas and thus their subsequent development found a new catalyst in his relationship with Cacciari, who provided the text for several works over the next decade, particularly their *tragedia dell’ascolto* (tragedy

of listening), *Prometeo*, an ‘opera’ first premiered in 1984.

Writing of the piece *Das atemde Klarsein* (1981), for bass flute, tape and live electronics, Nono refers to the multiple nature of the instant,¹¹ which according to Cacciari had become something of an obsession for the composer.¹² Following Musil, Nono observed often that a sense of reality must imply a sense of possibility. *The Man without Qualities*, he suggested, is itself an ideal manual for composition. Indeed it affords a metaphor for Nono’s process in this period of eliminating not only the superfluous but everything that detracts or points away from the present; a ‘process of emptying,

Nono was thus presented with a very specific compositional challenge: how to bring the performer and listener to engage with the musical/poetical reality of the immanent present within the sequential context of musical times, structures and actions. The simultaneous doing and comprehending of a musical act in a multiple present, in which none of its possibilities is denied, becomes the central concern of *Prometeo*. For Cacciari, this concern with the moment of revelation is precisely what makes it a *tragedy*. The present moment becomes a node in structural and – in the multiple musical references of *La lontananza* (1988), for violin, live electronics and tape – historical networks:

Massimo Cacciari and Luigi Nono
(photo Graziano Arici, courtesy Archivio Luigi Nono, Venice)



erasing, purification’, in Cacciari’s words.¹³ Wittgenstein also figured, for both Nono and Cacciari, in this need ‘to break with schematism, with formulas, with mannerisms, with givens and the taken for granted, with repetition’.¹⁴ Characteristically, this was accompanied by a political repositioning; not an abandoning of principle, but a leaving-behind of dogma and orthodoxy as Nono ceased his active engagement with the PCI. *Prometeo* is mentioned in the letter in which Cacciari proposes extracts from Rilke and Orphic hymns for *Das atemde Klarsein*, and in which he summarizes his view of Nono’s relationship with text and thought:

What they [certain musicologists] understand is the dissolution (really: dis-solve – and, therefore, critical – no sudden illumination) of the relationship of the metaphysical with the signified – what they will never understand (as good ‘avant garde’...) is how *everything* is still given in the ‘sign’ – and thus certainly *also Fabbrica*, *also Floresta*. The ‘revolutionary’ side of what you’re doing today seems to me to be precisely in the non-resolving (still peacefully and...) of the metaphysics of the signified in her ‘sister’, the sign.... That it should be difficult, and painful, I can understand.¹⁵

At the opposite of a sole *movimentum*, common to all, an arhythmic succession of points, arbitrary, naked of their own sounds, is that of *Prometeo* which flattens paths, creates vast ‘free’ equal spaces, destroys presuppositions. In its laws, the past is simply has-been ... and the present is a plane from which we stretch ‘everything together’ out into the future ... Instead the time [of *Prometeo*] ... is polyphonic: its dimensions are presented simultaneously; the past of this line, of this idea, of this thought, of this single word can be the future of another. The present is not a plane common to all, but the unrepeatable instant, clear and alive, of this singularity.

Like the *Angelo Nuovo*, it sings a moment, but this moment is unique and unrepeatable, and for this uniqueness and unrepeatability it is necessary.¹⁶

The acrostic miracle of sixteenth-century polyphony – the relationship between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of musical space – had informed Nono’s work since his first studies in composition with Gian Francesco Malipiero and Bruno Maderna, particularly in his interpretation of serialism. It provides a plane on which events and thought can be simultaneous without being temporally identical, and vice-versa. In *Prometeo* and its related works, Nono thinks through the ‘disappearance of unique, unitary, unifying time’ in terms of an earlier *ars combinatoria*.¹⁷ He thus finds a logically consistent solution to the technical issues proposed in *Al gran sole*. In their very identification, he draws a line between the theorists of sixteenth-century polyphony – who by no coincidence mostly breathed the same Venetian air – and contemporary philosophy. At the same time, he ensures that our engagement can only be with the immanent – the underlying formal structures are unretrievable to the ear; moments are suspended, separated by silences of such density that listening removes itself from chronological time to deal with the contents of echoic memory; and repre-

sentation as a mnemonic for performance is separated from its affording a mode of analysis. Hence Nono's frequent later references to the centrality of *listening* in Jewish thought, as opposed to the representations and misrepresentations of Christianity.

The 'peacefully' of the letter above seems to refer to the 'weak Messianic power', 'which alone can transform'; 'the strength of the absence of violence which is at the heart of the assemblage of texts Cacciari presented to Nono on Christmas Day, 1982.'¹⁸ 'Do not waste it ... this weak Messianic power ... to put into silence in the moment the empty duration.'¹⁹ Fragments from Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, from Hölderlin and Hesiod are paraphrased and rearranged into what are termed *islands*; static areas between which composer and listener construct multiple trajectories and perspectives. The texts are spoken, sung, fragmented, counterpointed and layered, and absent, hidden in the score; *a cantar e a sonar* as Nono indicates on several occasions, in reference to earlier Venetian music. Their comprehensibility is constantly shifting. Multiplicity and the active engagement of the imagination of the listener are inseparable themes that run through Nono's writing in this period and Cacciari's later work *Dell'Inizio* ('Of Origins'). The very possibility of action in the present is opened to Nono's exploration by the new theoretical and technological tools at his disposal. This is the search for the Rilkean *Augenblick* (instant); the word that may not be anticipated or recalled.

Multiplicity and trajectory, rather than narrative line, also inform Nono's use of space; in this case the wooden ark constructed inside the Church of San Lorenzo by Renzo Piano. The physical space is not a canvas for narrative or drama but an ever-present analogue of the simultaneity of the sequentially presented music. With the suspension of chronological time, space or rather *place* becomes crucial.²⁰ Spatiality and movement are central to this use of sound. The real-time sound transformations of live electronics allowed Nono to explore the present in terms of parameters – space, resonance, time, frequency – which were already inherent in his own cultural past. The time-frequency domain relationship at the technological core of such operations literally abstracts sounds from their chronological context; an inevitable quantum trade-off between frequency and time constrains all knowledge about sound. There is a cognitive contiguity between the architectural movement of performers in *Prometeo*, the formal use of acoustic and virtual space as a compositional device in *Omaggio a György Kurtág* (1983), in the 'sound in continuous move-

ment' which he worked so intensively with particular performers throughout this period to achieve, and in the re-formation of each of the late chamber works in every different acoustic.

Cacciari dates discussion of *Prometeo* to a trip to Sardinia in 1976, and their collaboration is mentioned by Nono as early as 1977. An understanding of a common approach to *Prometeo* appears to have emerged soon, as well as a sense of the way in which contact with Cacciari had begun to influence his own practice:

above all in the relationship between laws and their transgression towards a new formulation ... I am interested in the struggle between the foundation of the principles of life and the continuous dynamic which leads to their transcending, even if in a continually conflictual relationship.... With Cacciari, through long conversations, I have managed to expand my methods of analysis, I manage to perceive new ways of thinking, to increasingly embrace the multiple, to overcome certain schematizations, certain habits, certain common categories.²¹

Nono adds: 'From Massimo I have learned very much. To begin with, to look at the text rather than the context, which becomes a banal sociology in one branch of the soviet school.'²²

This capacity to assimilate new and evolving modes of thought in the fabric of his work was rooted in Nono's early and thorough acquaintance with early Venetian music theory, which understands music as embodied philosophy – whether the conservative Zarlino,²³ the humanist Galiliei²⁴ or the pragmatic Zacconi²⁵ – as well as in an unceasing engagement with the issues that had brought music to its present state:

Composing musically isn't just a technical matter, it is not handcraft, it is *thought* ... Schoenberg taught to think, not to compose.... This is also demonstrated in the renaissance – from Zarlino, Zacconi and Artusi to Padre Martini – when one always spoke of differences of musical thought.²⁶

Cacciari describes Nono as 'always a composer, in the strictly artisanal sense of the word, in the classical understanding of the term'.²⁷ The mutual nature of their collaboration is acknowledged in Cacciari's own work, although he is careful to note that in neither case should such influence be read too literally onto the surface.²⁸ In the book *Icone della Legge* ('Icon of the Law') (1985, and hence contemporary with the revisions of *Prometeo*), the chapter 'The Mouth of Moses' is a meditation on the Moses of Freud and of Schoenberg; Cacciari thanks Nono for his hand 'in this chapter, the book and all the rest'. The silence

he describes in his conclusion is that of Nono (quite different to that of Cage, as Nono had observed):

The word which is missing is the name, that sound – missing is the word capable of expressing the silence without betraying it, to express the silence as silence, to hear the inaudible, to hear it truly in as much as it is truly inaudible.²⁹

L'Angelo Necessario ('The Necessary Angel') of the following year also addresses issues central to *Prometeo*: if pure representation refers to pure idea as a pre-given, how is immanence possible? Angels become 'gods of the instant'.

Cacciari's major work of the decade was *Dell'Inizio* ('Of Origins'), the importance of which was anticipated by Nono some years previously, and the first copy of which he survived to receive. Cacciari dedicated a chapter on hearing to Nono: 'until the absent God makes himself heard'.³⁰ And, as Röller has pointed out, the dialogues through which Cacciari's ideas develop could virtually be transcriptions of their conversations.³¹ Cacciari takes from Benjamin the notion that in representation, word and idea are one.³² The relationship between this dual unity and song is, according to Cacciari, what underlies all Nono's work, especially in his last fifteen years.³³ The death of listening is therefore inevitable when we no longer need to hear to understand; that we *write* music is symptomatic. That they describe *Prometeo* as *tragedia dell'ascolto*, 'tragedy of listening', has historic significance for both of them: it refers to Nietzsche's declaration of the inseparability of music and tragic myth, but also to Monteverdi's 'Tragedia in musica', *Orfeo*, a prime candidate for a starting point of modern Western music.

Cacciari was also instrumental in introducing the Egyptian–French–Jewish poet-philosopher Edmond Jabès to Italian readers, and to Nono. Jabès' short, dry questioning style offers no answers and affords no reduction; as poetic form it is descended directly from radical philosophy. To transcend or escape self and yet be able to act is at the ethical heart of aesthetic behaviour, and was Nono's abiding concern. Jabès suggested a certain model here. Cacciari writes that, in his *Book of Margins*, for example, 'Jabès breaks the "pact" of Levinas between the other and the face. The absolute other is also that which is other to every face.'³⁴ Nono meanwhile searched for open textual structures which could be organized like the textual 'islands' of *Prometeo*. In Jabès' *Little Book of Unsuspected Subversion* Nono found him theorizing 'continuous interrogation, continuous questions, continuous doubts, continuous research ... ancient memory, discoveries

of ancient memory'. It is in light of this that Nono claims the 'technology of today allows us to rediscover our past in a new way, to study it'.³⁵ Jabès' book also extends the biblical interdiction of representation to writing in general; and Nono's musical response was immediate.³⁶ *Découvrir la subversion: Hommage à Edmond Jabès*, the resultant work, persists only in its sketches and the fact of its performance. Perhaps we should likewise see Nono's use of material generated in the course of the research process in interaction with certain musicians as a process of structural self-effacement. The book, the text, as Jabès points out, is always too late:

To go into the silence is to measure oneself against the unknown, the unknowable. In no way to learn what one doesn't know, but on the contrary to unlearn, to be ultimately nothing but an antenna for the infinity into which we sink.³⁷

Transforming time

Which of the theoretical paths pursued by Nono could, then, help us to understand the later works, those in which conscious 'schematicization' has been explicitly banished, in which are heard the emergent product of a deep historical and theoretical awareness and a rigorous action-in-the-present? Cacciari's work would seem an obvious starting point, but analytical understanding arises from the friction, the difference generated between analytical model and object. The complexity of intellectual exchange is such that Cacciari's work is to an extent a product of the same common activity. Nono's library – every new volume identified by date and place – provides a map of the evolution of his intellectual environment. Levinas and Derrida are present, as Nono described, because he understood their work as a hermeneutical activity which demonstrates the passing of systematic thought, of the Enlightenment.³⁸ Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena*, the work dealing most directly with Nono's crucial relationship of speech, text and act, he bought in the French original and later in its Italian translation. Strikingly absent from Nono's library and discussion is Deleuze. Perhaps this is for circumstantial reasons, or perhaps precisely because Deleuze's work is *not* hermeneutic; like Nono's it proposes new *constructs*, the experience of which transforms our relationship with the others that surround us. 'Only by legwork' is Deleuze's formulation of Nono's *Hay che caminar* ('traveller – there is no path, only walking'; Nono's motto for his last series of works). 'Of the refrain', and 'Concrete rules and abstract machines', in *A Thousand Plateaus*, also provide parallels with Nono's own des-

stratified space which could constructively be enumerated. Nono's work is likewise the product of a search for 'pure immanence', a kind of new empiricism. In both cases this is founded on an intimate acquaintance with the gods which Nono tells us after Hölderlin and Nietzsche are dead and not yet reborn. However, to return to Pavese's article, this might reinforce an aesthetic appreciation of both artists rather than initiating the active, creative, personal response which Nono describes and affords.

Some articles by Cacciari published together in 1980 as *Dallo Steinhof* (translated as *Posthumous People*) – some of which had appeared in *Laboratorio Musicale*, edited by Nono – may appear at first sight to have little relevance.³⁹ In their reflection on Viennese thought at the beginning of the twentieth century – the cultural moment which is the subject of Musil's great book – Cacciari's essays point to the crucial role of a difference between language games, or rather between multiple language games and subject. Perhaps this is the difference that opens up new spaces wherein the 'moment of revelation', later referred to by Nono, becomes possible. He explores the commensurability of formal or logical, phenomenological and natural language spaces for the development of understanding. Language, he notes, brings to bear the power of *intentio*. He looks at the ambivalent relationship of text and music as described by Schoenberg and sees a strength in their non-coincidence. Nono uses text to keep this space open, to avoid any possibility of reduction. A space is kept open within which an *emergent* immanence is possible. It is not described or formally implied, and conceptual models will not adhere to the musical text. Exceptions to this strategy are few; *...sofferte onde serene...*, with its particular circumstances, may perhaps be one.

Finally, he considers the *violence of preaching/predication* identified by Nietzsche and which he sees Musil's book as attempting to eradicate at one point; a critique of the category of 'being', of the verb 'to be', the elimination of which Derrida says would leave us a language of pure invocation, of pure adoration. The utopia of language dispossessed of all 'being' can only be called from afar, says Cacciari, because it would ultimately become a form of listening. This 'divine' state, he says of Musil, is necessarily denied. He describes the essay in question as 'an attempt to give voice to the silence that embraces all preaching'.⁴⁰ In this analysis we find a mode of understanding, not just of the last period of Nono's work, the period of collaboration with Cacciari which this phrase describes beautifully, but of the historical trajectory that he

confronts in these works – the increasing hegemony of the musical predicate to the point where we *must* be freed from it. The musical predicate is how Schoenberg describes tonal music – comprehensibility, the decoding of 'is a' – and it is what he leaves behind in his vision of 'the unity of musical space [which] demands an absolute and unitary perception'.⁴¹ A more accelerated growth of predicational violence can be seen through the Darmstadt years, culminating in Nono's debate with Stockhausen.

The concerns of Nono's late work – the relationship of speech, text and act, space and the perpetual movement of sound, the suspension of time and action in the present moment, simultaneity, representation, the leaving behind of schemas – are all ultimately functions of *time*. They all address the same technical issue: how to mediate and transform the time of human experience and culture without denying or negating the power of its continuity and directionality? Perhaps the most useful key, finally, lies in Benjamin's famous evocation of a 'weak Messianic force', in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*:

The present ... as a model of Messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgement ... For every second of time [is] the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.⁴²

A postscript for any who may be tempted to regard real-world controversy surrounding the political actions of major thinkers as a thing of the past. Fifty metres from the Archivio Luigi Nono on Giudecca is the most visible trace of Cacciari's impact on the cityscape of Venice: the Molino Stucky, a vast nineteenth-century warehouse being restored as a congress centre over a decade, at great expense to the city. During the research for this article in the Archivio, the Molino burned down in an afternoon. Nobody has suggested this was an accident.

Notes

I wish to thank Nuria Schoenberg-Nono and Erika Schaller of the Archivio Luigi Nono for their generous assistance.

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2. Massimo Cacciari, 'Note sulla dialettica del negativo nell'epoca della Metropoli', *Angelus Novus* 21, 1971, p. 37.
3. Massimo Cacciari, 'Sul problema dell'organizzazione. Germania 1917–1921', in György Lukács, *Kommunismus 1920–1921*, Marsilio, Padua, 1972, pp. 7–66.
4. Massimo Cacciari, *Krisis*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1976.
5. Luigi Nono, *Scritti e colloqui*, 2 vols, ed. Angela Ida Benedictis and Veniero Rizzardi, Ricordi, Milano, 2001, Vol. 1, pp. 57–83.

6. See Norberto Bobbio, *A Political Life*, Polity, Cambridge, 2002, p. 42.
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8. Laurent Feyneyrou, 'Moses and the Warsaw Ghetto: Arnold Schoenberg According to Luigi Nono', *Avidi Lumi* V, 2002, p. 15.
9. Theo Gallehr, *Denn der Wald ist jung und voller Leben*, television documentary, WDR, Cologne, 1968.
10. See Pavese, *La letteratura americana*.
11. Nono, *Scritti e colloqui*, Vol. 1, p. 487.
12. Nicola Cisternino, 'Con Luigi Nono... per rivedere le stelle. Conversazione con Massimo Cacciari', in Gianvincenzo Cresta, ed., *L'ascolto del pensiero: Scritti su Luigi Nono*, Rugginenti, Milano, 2002, p. 24.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
14. Luigi Nono, *Scritti e colloqui*, Vol. 2, p. 262.
15. Letter from Cacciari to Nono, 19 August 1980.
16. Massimo Cacciari, 'Verso Prometeo, tragedia dell'ascolto', in Cacciari, ed., *Verso Prometeo*, Ricordi, Milan, 1984, p. 20.
17. Nono, 'Verso Prometeo, Frammenti di diari', in Cacciari, ed., *Verso Prometeo*, p. 15.
18. Nono, *Scritti e colloqui*, Vol. 2, pp. 425, 456.
19. Cacciari, *Verso Prometeo*, p. 74.
20. Cisternino, 'Con Luigi Nono', p. 26.
21. Nono, *Scritti e colloqui*, Vol. 2, p. 256.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 333.
23. Gioseffe Zarlino, *Le Istituzioni armoniche*, Venice, 1562.
24. Vincenzo Galilei, *Dialogo... della musica antica e della moderna*, Venice, 1581.
25. Lodovico Zacconi, *Prattica di Musica*, 2 vols, Venice, 1596/1622.
26. Luigi Nono in *Wie Hölderlin komponierte*, WDR radio broadcast, 1980.
27. Cisternino, 'Con Luigi Nono', p. 33.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
29. Massimo Cacciari, *L'Icone della Legge*, Adelphi, Milan, 1985, pp. 176–7.
30. Massimo Cacciari, *Dell'Inizio*, Adelphi, Milan, 1990, p. 707.
31. Röller, *Migranten*, p. 14.
32. Massimo Cacciari, *L'Angelo Necessario*, Adelphi, Milan, 1986, p. 78; translated as *The Necessary Angel*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1994.
33. Massimo Cacciari, *Conversazione con il prof. Massimo Cacciari*, documentary film, Arezzo, 1996.
34. Massimo Cacciari, in Röller, *Migranten*, p. 69.
35. Nono, *Scritti e colloqui*, Vol. 2, p. 390.
36. See Röller, *Migranten*, pp. 38–44.
37. Edmond Jabès, in Röller, *Migranten*, p. 21.
38. Nono, *Scritti e colloqui*, Vol. 2, p. 403.
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40. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
41. Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leo Stein, trans. Leo Black, Faber, London, 1975, p. 223.
42. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, Fontana, London, 1973, p. 255.

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Ruptured formalism

The challenge of bioethics and the limits of moral formalism

Konstantinos Kavoulakos

When one of the most famous living philosophers takes a stand on certain moral dilemmas that arise from the current boom in developments in the biosciences, it is natural that it should provoke great interest – all the more so as the pressure grows to find a reasonable orientation for society in the face of the gigantic technological power which contemporary science does not cease to feed.¹ Contrary to what one might expect, Jürgen Habermas's book *The Future of Human Nature*^{*} does not give a formula for rules that ought to govern the biotechnological manipulations of the human genome which are already feasible or which may become feasible in the future – even if this might have been what the author ultimately intended to do.² Anyone hoping to find definitive answers to urgent problems in this book is on slippery ground, since it is clear that we are not dealing with any 'determinant judgement' – that is, with the application of firmly founded general principles to particular moral dilemmas. On the contrary, we are dealing with a 'reflective' search which aims to find the general principle that could guide the way we deal with the particular problems which motivated the search. Habermas sets out from the intuition that not all types of manipulation of human nature ought to be allowed, and looks for those general ethical reasons for which certain manipulations ought to be out of the question. As one might expect in such cases, the 'solutions' offered are controversial, but this does not mean that they are also theoretically indifferent. On the contrary, it is precisely because of the 'reflective' nature of Habermas's attempt that it is of great interest to all those who puzzle over the *question of founding practical philosophy* but who probably remain sceptical about the formalism of the discourse ethics that Habermas formulated in the early 1980s.³

The limits of postmetaphysical formalism

Habermas's discourse ethics is a product of the attempt to formulate a cognitivist moral theory of a Kantian type based on the philosophy of intersubjectivity. It is based on the idea of analysing the necessary conditions of a highly demanding communicative process, analysing, in other words, the normative conditions of *practical dialogue*, and on demonstrating that the content of these conditions entails a principle of universalization which provides the criterion for the discovery of morally right rules within moral discourse.⁴ Following the formalism of Kantian ethics, 'procedural' discourse ethics strictly divides morality (*Moralität*) from ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), morality (*Moral*) from ethics (*Ethik*), universal norms (*Normen*) from values (*Werte*) which are tied up with a certain form of life, the right (*Richtige*) from the good (*Gute*), justice from the good life, and the deontological from the evaluative. According to Habermas's own formulation, 'ethical formalism is incisive in the literal sense: the universalization principle acts like a knife that makes razor-sharp cuts between evaluative statements and strictly normative ones, between the good and the just.'⁵ This is how 'the scope of application of a deontological ethics' is defined: 'it covers only practical questions that can be debated rationally, i.e. those that hold out the prospect of consensus. It deals not with value preferences but with the normative validity of norms of action.'⁶ What is interesting in his contribution to the debate surrounding bioethics is that Habermas is now forced to overturn this strict distinction and to abandon his refusal to deal with ethica-evaluative issues, with the result that certain issues that the formalistic perspective managed to lay aside come to the surface once again.

The book begins with familiar Habermasian

^{*} Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (2001), trans. W. Rehg, M. Pensky and H. Beister, Polity, Cambridge, 2003. viii + 127 pp., £13.99 pb., 0 7456 2987 3. Page references appear in brackets within the text.

claims: in the age of pluralism of world-views (2) and postmetaphysical thinking⁷ it is impossible to define ontologically or metaphysically a model of the good life to which all the members of society could then be aligned. The consequent ‘justified abstention’ from making judgements about the content of a community or an individual creates a certain gap in postmetaphysical morality, a deficit which is characteristic of Kantian deontological theories: the lack of *motivations* for ethical and political action (4), which are usually determined by the individual’s identification with a particular community or with a particular ethical world-view. Habermas once again stresses the view that philosophical ethics has nothing *substantial* to say about this deficit: ‘Theories of justice that have been uncoupled from ethics can only *hope* that processes of socialization and political forms of life meet them halfway’ (4).⁸ But then he takes a novel step. He poses the question, ‘why should philosophy shrink back from matters that psychoanalysis, for example, believes it can deal with?’ (5), namely to elucidate our intuitive understanding of the ‘clinical characteristics’ of a ‘successful’ life.⁹ Of course, the philosophical conception of ethics (the criterion of the good life) which Habermas has in mind can only be based on a highly formal ‘value’, which is formulated in reference to Kierkegaard: it concerns ‘being-able-to-be-oneself’ (*Selbstseinkönnen*), being able to define one’s own self-understanding (5). Such an ethics does not, of course, provide ‘*thick* descriptions’, since it ‘judges the existential *mode*, but not the specific orientation, of individual life-projects and particular forms of life’, thus satisfying ‘the conditions of a pluralism of worldviews’ (11). Be that as it may, it is clear that by now Habermas recognizes the need to connect autonomous discourse ethics with a ‘suitable’ and sufficiently formal ‘ethical self-understanding’ (*ethisches Selbstverständnis*), which *practical philosophy ought to elucidate as far as possible*.¹⁰

Nevertheless, Habermas’s next step overturns even this moderate stance on the question of a philosophical theory of ethics, in favour of a more radical approach. He now suddenly discovers the *existence of limits* on ‘justified abstention’ concerning judgements about the content of ethical self-understanding in cases when what is at stake is the *self-understanding of the human species as a whole*. The vital importance of the debate over whether the manipulation of human nature should be ethically regulated or whether we can proceed ‘*arbitrarily* according to subjective preferences whose satisfaction depends on the market’ (12) leads Habermas literally to rupture his formalism.

This postmetaphysical abstention runs up against its limits in an interesting way as soon as questions of a ‘species ethics’ arise. As soon as the ethical self-understanding of language-using agents is at stake *in its entirety*, philosophy can no longer avoid taking a substantive position. (11)

For those familiar with Habermas’s theoretical modesty over the past twenty years, this (albeit marginal) abandoning of formalism comes as a great surprise. Who would have expected statements like ‘today the original philosophical question concerning the ‘good life’ in all its anthropological generality appears to have taken on new life’ (15) to come from Habermas’s pen?

Biotechnological implementation, eugenics and the ‘ethics of the human species’

We are dealing, then, with an attempt to lay the *philosophical foundations* for handling important bioethical issues; an attempt which, despite the fact that it sets out from specific dilemmas that have to do with the implementation of certain genetic technologies, nevertheless seems to exhibit a very high level of abstraction. This is because, according to Habermas, in order to have a chance at success, the public discussion around bioethics must encompass a wider perspective and must take place before the developments actually become feasible (18–19). Therefore, while Habermas refers to specific issues – for instance the procedure of Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD), which provides a diagnosis of all the genetic defects an embryo brought about by artificial fertilization is likely to have, before it is implanted in the womb; and research on human embryonic stem cells which are thus ‘consumed’ (*verbrauchende Embryonenforschung*) – in reality it soon becomes clear that Habermas does not deal with such cases by isolating them in order to evaluate them in themselves. Instead, he considers them as steps in a more general, gradual process of ‘auto-transformation of the species’ (21), because they are techniques which pave the way to a ‘positive eugenics’, in other words to our being able to choose our children’s desired genetic characteristics (19).

It is interesting that Habermas does not exclude the possibility of a ‘negative eugenics’, despite the fact that he considers the boundaries between positive and negative eugenics to be ‘fluid’ (19), and seeks their normative regulation. Thus, the use of genetics should not be ruled out *a priori* in cases where it might prevent considerable harm (e.g. incurable or especially serious diseases), so long as a ‘clinical attitude’ is adopted in such interventions, and we can reasonably presuppose

the consent of the person the embryo will become, thereby having a *communicative, not an instrumental relation* to him (43, 52, 63). So, the criterion Habermas introduces in order to distinguish positive and negative eugenics is essentially the ‘attitude’ under which the particular intervention is carried out.

The correct application of this criterion is of utmost importance for the success of Habermas’s theoretical project, since the difficulties we face when trying to distinguish ‘therapeutic’ biotechnology from techniques which aim at the ‘improvement’, the ‘strengthening’ or even the ‘aesthetic enhancement’ of a patient, encourage liberal supporters of eugenics to seek the greatest possible freedom in their implementation.¹¹ Applying this criterion, Habermas claims that in the case of PGD the ‘conditional’ creation of embryos betrays a tendency to objectify them for the sake of their parents’ ‘preferences’, since there is no clear criterion for what a ‘problematic life’ might mean (i.e. a life which deserves to be destroyed before it is born), while the case of research on embryonic stem cells promotes a clearly unacceptable instrumentalization of human life, since it makes the idea of their exploitation at will less and less problematic (68–72).

Concerning the above analysis, one can first of all question the necessary connection between the two techniques under discussion and a future of ‘positive eugenics’. For instance, it is not a convincing argument that PGD constitutes a ‘new quality’ concerning the ‘choice’ of the embryo, given that until today it has been implemented only in cases where the parents have a history of particularly serious hereditary diseases, something which is already true in the case of prenatal diagnosis in normal pregnancies (and the corresponding decision to abort). PGD essentially replaces prenatal diagnosis in exceptional cases. Of course, we cannot rule out that the test will be (ab)used to choose between artificially produced embryos, even in cases where this would not be absolutely necessary. In any case, ‘selection’ is already implemented in human reproduction by contraceptives, artificial fertilization, and prenatal diagnosis, so that Habermas’s is a ‘slippery slope argument’.¹²

Furthermore, so long as (following Habermas) one doesn’t give absolute value to unborn human life (similar to that which discourse ethics naturally gives to the life of moral persons), then it is questionable whether the appeal to ‘the ethics of the human species’ will suffice to lay aside the projection of the benefit which would follow from research on embryonic cells in order to fight severe diseases. The arguments concerning the (controversial) status of unborn life

(which can also be graded according to phases of development) can, in principle, be combined with an evaluation of utility, without such evaluations being necessarily linked with the acceptance of positive eugenics.¹³ Habermas himself seems to be compelled towards such a point of view, since he finds negative eugenics acceptable. In his book, however, he does not get into detailed discussion about the various forms therapeutic biotechnology might take, which may include research on embryonic stem cells, adult stem cells, stem cells taken from embryos artificially produced for research purposes, taken from abortions, or ‘leftovers’ from exosomatic fertilization and so on, with all the special ethical features each case might present.¹⁴ Nevertheless, even if the analysis Habermas gives of these specific cases is less than wholly convincing, it would be a mistake to take this as nullifying his reflections in general.

Despite the fact that he sets out from particular dilemmas, the question Habermas poses is much wider: why does the prospect of positive eugenics go against our deeply held moral intuitions? Why does it provoke reasonable ethical unease despite the utopian promises of scientists, technocrats and supermodern prophets about longer life expectancy, a decisive victory against incurable diseases, creation of supermen, and so on? On what could we base the demand for a ‘moralizing of human nature’ (23), given that its universally binding religious ‘resanctification’ is impossible (24)? Habermas believes it to be in vain to give prenatal life absolute value based on the model of respect for ‘human dignity’ that we owe to moral persons; since, as it became clear from the discussion on abortion, it is impossible to give a universally binding definition of when an embryo is considered to become a member of a community of persons who have human rights (31–2), and thus from which point we owe respect to its dignity, to the extent that such judgements depend on ethical evaluations (36). In reality, the realm of rights and respect for moral persons comes into play at the point where there is (at least potential) mutuality and communication, and therefore, for Habermas, a human being enters this realm at the point of birth.

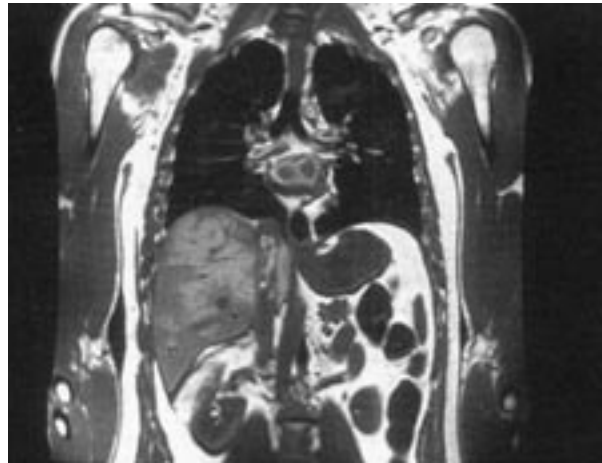
Of course, one soon finds that the criterion ‘birth’ that Habermas uses, based on the idea that ethical life begins at the moment when communicative interaction becomes possible, and relations based on symmetrical rights and duties are set up, is just as problematic as any other; since a more ‘lenient’ theorist might point out that ‘interaction’ (especially with the mother) begins well before birth, and a paradox also ensues since premature babies will be ‘privileged’ in their being

recognized as persons who have moral rights. On the other hand, a 'stricter' theorist using the same criterion could set the boundary at, for example, around two years after birth, since it is then that the communicative faculties are fully formed, not at birth or even months after. Contrary to Habermas's reasoning, this difficulty in applying the 'communicative' criterion to determine the moment a human being enters the world of ethically regulated behaviour actually encourages a conservative commentator like Robert Spaemann to emphasize the necessity of recognizing the absolute value of prenatal human life.¹⁵ Be that as it may, for Habermas it is clear that protecting human nature before birth must be based on something other than the principle of respect for 'human dignity', given that this can only apply among free and equal subjects.

We have now reached the nucleus of Habermas' argument: that the universal morality of human rights and the principles of freedom and equality are 'embedded' in the wider context of a 'species ethics' (*Gattungsethik*) (40). Habermas now undertakes to clarify theoretically our moral intuitions, which are offended at the prospect of 'liberal eugenics' (the marketized custom-building of human offspring according to parents' wishes) (19, 48–9). The implementation of this kind of eugenics would lead, according to Habermas, to a transformation in the 'ethical self-understanding of the species' (*ethisches Selbstverständnis der Gattung*) (40), which, until now, allowed the formation of the appropriate 'framework' for the constitution of moral agency. In other words, the danger in putting positive eugenics into practice highlights the fact that humans have a self-understanding which is characteristic of moral persons. This self-understanding is based on the idea that there is a *discernible distinction between the made and the grown*. It is based on the (until now) unquestioned presupposition that all moral agents possess the bodies they are 'given' by chance or nature (and so, neither they, nor their parents, nor anybody else can be held morally responsible for these bodies), and with this physical nature they enter the realm of culture and moral responsibility, which is also the realm of (potential) symmetry among free and equal subjects. Both these components of the 'ethical self-understanding of the species' are violated in cases of intervention into the genetic material of an embryo which will later become a moral person. Why is this?

First, because the knowledge that someone else has 'programmed' my body will most likely affect my self-understanding as an autonomous subject who deserves respect, impeding my identification with my body as

a stable point of my identity against its social definition (59–60). Therefore prenatal intervention into my physical nature will probably overturn a fundamental anthropological precondition of my moral freedom, since 'we experience our freedom with reference to something which, by its very nature, is not at our disposal' (58). Here Habermas links his thoughts on natural conditions of the individual's moral freedom (the body being the absolute source of actions and aspirations, which cannot be controlled by anyone else) with the concept of 'natality', which was introduced by Hannah Arendt in order to connect the 'new beginning' that is the natural fact of birth, with our ability to make 'new beginnings' within the framework of cultural life.¹⁶ Second, the manipulation of my physical nature by my parents irreversibly damages my chances of ever acquiring a relationship of equality with them through the conscious undertaking of moral responsi-



bility for my biography (63–4). In other words, a made-to-order intervention into my genetic material creates an irreversible paternalism (64), since an outside will determines how my body should be, a will which is impossible for me to comprehend or override through reflection, which is what happens with characteristics acquired through socialization (62–3). Habermas is no doubt right that the analogy put forward by supporters of eugenics between biotechnological manipulation of genetic material and the process of socialization¹⁷ is flawed. I leave aside the question whether acquiring equality with one's parents is a reasonable goal, given the insights of psychoanalysis, because it would lead us too far in a different direction.¹⁸

Habermas is forced to turn to this deeper anthropological level, precisely because he wants to maintain formalist morality. However, it is clear that the appeal to the formal principle of autonomy would not be sufficient to do away with positive eugenics, since one could easily claim that improving human nature enhances the autonomy of subjects, and therefore

could even be considered a duty.¹⁹ Thus the formalist morality of autonomy doesn't conflict with practices of positive eugenics, but on the contrary demands them. Bioethical questions are not abstract problems of 'humanity', but problems of a developed *liberal (capitalist) society* based on formalist normativity. Rejecting positive eugenics as a positively evaluated content of social life must therefore rest on a material criterion beyond liberal formal equality.

Conceptual ambiguities

By introducing his theory of 'species ethics', Habermas takes an important step in distancing himself from the formalism of discourse ethics. As much as he might see his project as a *contribution* to a public discussion, it is clear that his aim is nothing less than the binding 'moralizing of human nature', based on a strong positive evaluation of keeping its integrity intact. In other words, prepersonal human life is not to be thought of as one value among many others (67), because it has a '*specific weight of its own*' (71):

Participants in this discourse whose contributions rely on standard ways of weighing competing goods ... seem to be out of step. It is not that unconditional existential rigor, as set against the weighing of interests, would be *a priori* superior to the balancing of interests. But many of us seem to have the intuition that we should not *weigh* human life, not even in its earliest stages, either against the freedom (and competitiveness) of research, or against the concern with safeguarding an industrial edge, or against the wish for a healthy child, or even against the prospect (assumed *arguendo*) of new treatments for severe genetic diseases. (68)

Habermas realizes that logocentric and formalistic discourse ethics could not support such a 'moralizing' and so tries to give an especially exalted position to the good of human nature's integrity, considering it a constitutive condition of the 'self-understanding of the species', without which the reproduction of post-conventional morality and modern democratic politics would be most problematic. In the end Habermas himself admits that to adopt a restrictive attitude towards the free development of techniques that meddle with human nature presupposes that we *want* the communicative cultural formation-process, as we know it today, to remain untouched (72), that we *want* to be a 'member of a community that requires all its members to show equal respect for every other member and to be responsible in their solidarity with all of them', in other words that we *want* the autonomous morality of the free and equal (73).

In the above enumeration of what we must want in order to decide in favour of restrictions on the instrumentalization of human nature, there appears to be an identification of the conditions of the 'cultural formation-process' and the conditions of an autonomous, postconventional morality. Therefore the decision not to want the normative framework of modern societies could only mean its replacement by 'systemic' or 'biotechnological' mechanisms of steering and coordinating human action (92).²⁰ Habermas repeats the ethnocentric fallacy which characterizes his whole theory concerning social rationalization.²¹ He considers the emergence of autonomous morality and democratic principles to be at the highest level in the unfolding process of universal (anthropologically determined) structures of rationality, and respect for the integrity of human nature to be a precondition of upholding this level of rationality, and he therefore tends to interpret this ethical value as the 'ethics of the *human species*'. In this way Habermas presents as *anthropological* a category that, within the framework of a more hermeneutic practical philosophy, should be considered *historical*. It is noteworthy that while he refers constantly to ethics (*Ethik*), Habermas never once in his book uses the conceptually similar term 'ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*), perhaps because with its historical connotations it would immediately create the suspicion that what is presented as an 'anthropological value' is probably historically determined.²²

Nevertheless, the tension between the anthropological and the historical perspective can be felt within the text. After explaining that the desirable form of life for individuals as well as communities is determined by evaluative concepts which vary according to the given culture and the personal or collective history (38–9), Habermas continues:

The questions raised, in contrast, by our attitude toward prepersonal human life are of an altogether different calibre. They do not touch on this or that difference in the great variety of cultural forms of life, but on those intuitive self-descriptions that guide our own identification *as human beings* – that is, our self-understanding as members of the species. They concern not culture, which is different everywhere, but the vision different cultures have of 'man' who – in his anthropological universality – is everywhere the same. (39)

Though it may seem that he has ensured, at least rhetorically, the universality of the 'self-understanding of the species', just a few lines later Habermas contradicts himself by accepting the obviously more plausible view that such images of man are 'of course ...

plural', while 'cultural forms of life are bound up with systems of interpretations that explain the position of humanity in the universe and provide the "thick" anthropological context in which the prevailing moral code is embedded' (40). After such an admission, what remains is only the 'historicist' connection of a particular self-understanding with the autonomous normative-practical structures of the modern age. At some points in the text, Habermas really seems to claim this, sticking throughout, of course, to anthropological phraseology:

Like the great world religions, metaphysical doctrines and humanistic traditions also provide contexts in which the 'overall structure of our moral experience' is embedded. They express, in one way or the other, an anthropological self-understanding of the species that is consistent with an autonomous morality. (40)

The very use of the term 'self-understanding' (*Selbstverständnis*) indicates the historical-hermeneutical nature of such anthropological views. As is clear from this passage, we are dealing with a historically constructed image of man and not (as he claims in the previous passage) with a transhistorical image of 'man'. The 'ethical self-understanding of the species' is thus a part of a 'cultural tradition', without which modern moral consciousness would be impossible.²³ One wonders what point there remains in maintaining the much-debated 'priority of justice over good' after Habermas's admission that 'the abstract morality of reason proper to subjects of human rights is itself sustained by a prior *ethical self-understanding of the species*, which is shared by all *moral persons*' (40). If it is a historically and culturally determined ethics (in Charles Taylor's terms, a 'hypergood') that constructs our self-understanding and thus explains why we should want the morality of reciprocal recognition between free and equal subjects, and our corresponding democratic political principles, then the differences between Habermas and his communitarian critics start to fade away.²⁴

Precisely because of his fear of retreating into relativism and communitarianism, Habermas turns – without avoiding certain ambiguities – towards the unhistorical perspective of the 'species ethics'. Thus the mere facticity and particularity of the 'values of our community' are contested only by an abstract anthropological determination of the human species, which leaves the historical emergence of biotechnology within a specific social reality theoretically uncomprehended. However, there still remains the fact that Habermas recognizes the responsibility of philosophy

to enter the controversial realm of ethical life, in order to try to clarify some acute questions for the sake of practically orienting society.²⁵ Thus the way is paved towards a less formalistic, historical-hermeneutic approach to modern normative structures and their fate.

From the ethics of the species to ecological ethics

Let me conclude with a few thoughts that go one step beyond the apparent 'turn' Habermas makes in the face of the challenge set by bioethics. Let us presume that Habermas is right to place autonomous morality and the democratic ideals of the modern age in a wider framework of ethics, which commands respect for the integrity of human nature, an integrity which, in the end, must be unnegotiable against any intention to instrumentalize it for any other purpose (e.g. the freedom of research, the development of the national economy, even the prospect of improving health, etc.) (68).²⁶ Such a strict moralizing of *human nature* cannot but affect our stance towards *nature in general*. This would require, however, a much more radical reorientation, since it goes against Habermas's own logocentric and anthropocentric prejudices, which have so far led him to downgrade nature, seeing it as a simple object of exploitation by human beings.²⁷ Of course, such a project of reorientation has to face being identified with a complete abandoning of our anthropocentric, rational and scientific world-view in favour of, for example, a biocentric 'religion' or a controversial dialectical philosophy of nature. I have the supporters of 'deep ecology' in mind²⁸ and the rival 'dialectical naturalism' of Murray Bookchin.²⁹ The first 'school' tends to obscure the relationship between ecological problems and social relations, and often ends up in a mystic deifying of earth with political extensions ranging from controversial to dangerous, while the second leads to a unified approach to nature and society alike, deducing objective 'rules' about the one from the other (evolution, tendency toward greater complexity and subjectivity, etc.). But perhaps these are not the only options. If I'm right, Habermas's attempt to reevaluate human nature provides us with some alternative avenues for a more general ethical reflection.

First of all, the criterion for an undistorted self-understanding does not necessarily need to be limited to the relationship with our bodies. This overlooks the countless links that bind our body to the environment. It is also possible to accept the existence of a continuity between body and environment, without

falling into some paganistic, pantheistic conception of a deeper unity among all entities.³⁰ This continuity is self-evident within the framework of a ‘holistic self-conception’, which would take into account how humans are interwoven and coexist with nature.³¹ Once we have agreed that the formation of an ‘undistorted self-understanding’ is a valuable thing, it is unclear why we ought to have such a narrow conception of nature that it should extend only so far as the external boundaries of our individual organism. If the modern ‘image of humanity’ has separated humans from nature, or even considered them to be in a hostile, competitive relationship with nature, maybe the time has come to replace this image with one that places more emphasis on our links with nature, and the possibility of ‘communicating’ and ‘cooperating’ with it, without necessarily retreating into an overly romantic ideal of a ‘complete reconciliation’ with nature.³² Besides, the continuity between internal and external nature can also be supported *negatively* by recognizing the fact that the will to dominate, which is expressed in visions of positive eugenics or human cloning, is nothing but the culmination of a more general tendency to objectify and instrumentalize nature, a tendency which has definitely played a significant role in modern technological and scientific developments and in the mutilation of nature to which it leads. This can be seen even by those who hold reservations about the *necessary* internal connection between the development of the processes of ‘enlightenment’, the intensifying of the domination over external nature and the increase in the oppression of internal nature, as this connection has been analysed by Habermas’s fore-runners.³³ Habermas himself describes the merger of the theoretical stance with the perspective of the technician in modern empirical science, and the unfolding of a gradually intensifying objectification of nature which culminates in the self-objectification of human nature (81–6). Certainly, apart from conceptual analysis, what we also need here is an increased sensitivity to the exploitation of nature (like the one Habermas holds concerning the exploitation of *human* nature); we need the ability to hear the often silent cries of pain we have induced and continue to induce.

Second, having broadened Habermas’s scope in this way, it becomes obvious that freedom in the modern world is possible only within a framework of an *ecological democracy* of free and equal citizens. Those who are committed to the universal emancipatory ideals of the modern age cannot but also support the preservation of nature’s integrity. Indeed, if the choice in favour of mutual moral recognition of free and

equal subjects is connected to a deeper acceptance of our finite, vulnerable and corruptible nature and the attempt to deal with the suffering which stems from this (33–4) – in other words, if it is connected with the consciousness of our mortality – then the ethos of a free and democratic society will first and foremost be an ethos of self-limitation in all the dimensions of social and political life.³⁴ And as such, it is completely incompatible with the project of rational domination over internal and external nature, in the way this was constituted and applied in our capitalist modernity – alongside and in competition with the powers which struggled and continue to struggle for the realization of a free and democratic society.³⁵

Translated by A. Orosz

Notes

1. The phenomenal dynamic of modern bioscience is stressed not only by the supporters of its unbridled development but also by its enemies. For instance, Jeremy Rifkin considers the technological revolution of our age to run so deep that it heralds the ‘end of the industrial age’ and the beginning of a new civilization, that of the ‘biotech century’. See Jeremy Rifkin, *The Biotech Century: Harnessing the Gene and Remaking the World*, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, New York, 1999, ch. 1.
2. Despite the explicit claim that the main text of the book is ‘quite literally ... an *attempt*, seeking to attain more transparency for a rather mixed-up set of intuitions’ (22), it is clear that Habermas’s aim to define the general outlines of an ‘ethics of the human species’ (*Gattungsethik*) is exceptionally ambitious (this is why the title of D. Bimbacher’s book review is particularly apt: ‘Habermas’ Ambitious Evidentiary Goal’: ‘Habermas’ ehrgeiziges Beweisziel’, *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2002, pp. 121–6).
3. See the texts in Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. C. Lenhardt and S.W. Nicholsen, Polity, Cambridge, 1990.
4. See Jürgen Habermas, ‘Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification’, in *ibid.*, pp. 43–115.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
6. *Ibid.*
7. According to Habermas, after ancient ontology and modern philosophy of consciousness, postmetaphysical thought concerning linguistic analysis corresponds to the third, most recent, ‘paradigm’, which marks a radical turn in the history of philosophy. See Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, trans. W.M. Hohengarten, Polity, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 12–14.
8. See also Habermas, ‘Discourse Ethics’, p. 109.
9. In order to judge the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of a particular life-history, one obviously needs a ‘measure of normality’, a substantial criterion, on the basis of which we can identify the ‘pathological’. As in psychoanalysis, we are faced with the same problem in social philosophy when we wish to criticize the ‘pathology’ of a (collective) form of life. See Axel Honneth, ‘Pathologien des Sozialen. Tradition und Aktualität der Sozialphilosophie’, in *Das*

- Andere der Gerechtigkeit*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 2000, pp. 54–69.
10. Thus it seems he has learned from the criticisms of formalism and of the abandoning of socio-philosophical inquiry to the possibility of a postmetaphysical conception of ‘ethical life’. Axel Honneth went from such a criticism to a ‘formal concept of ethical life’. See Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. J. Anderson, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1995, pp. 171–9.
 11. See, for example, John Harris, ‘Is Gene Therapy a Form of Eugenics?’, in Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer, eds, *Bioethics: An Anthology*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1999, pp. 165–70. In the same volume, Nicholas Agar (to whom Habermas refers) questions the point of distinguishing between therapeutic genetic engineering and eugenics, given that the concept of disease itself is so fluid, in order to prepare the ground for an argument in favour of positive choice of the characteristics of human individuals. See Nicholas Agar, ‘Liberal Eugenics’, in *ibid.*, p. 173.
 12. See Ludwig Siep’s criticism in Ludwig Siep, ‘Moral und Gattungsethik’, *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2002, pp. 117–18.
 13. See *ibid.*, pp. 119–20. In the ‘postscript’ that was included in the English edition of the book Habermas undertakes to reply to Siep’s criticism (95–100), without, in my opinion, managing to provide anything further to what can already be found in the main essay of the book.
 14. Concerning this interesting debate, see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, ‘Biotechnology, Ethics and the Politics of Cloning’, *Democracy and Nature*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2002, pp. 456–61. Habermas makes only one short related remark towards the end of the ‘Postscript’, where he denies that there would be any point in distinguishing the various forms of stem cell research from an ethical point of view (99–100).
 15. See Robert Spaemann, ‘Habermas über Bioethik’, *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2002, pp. 107–9.
 16. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989 (1958), pp. 8–9.
 17. See, for example, Agar, ‘Liberal Eugenics’, pp. 172–3.
 18. These arguments have already been set out in Habermas’s essays on cloning first published in 1998, then translated in English in Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, trans. M. Pensky, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2001, pp. 163–72. In the framework of that discussion, Habermas already emphasized the probable distortion in the self-understanding of human clones, (*ibid.*, pp. 166, 171) and the disruption of equality relations by the clones being ‘genetically dependent’ on their ‘producers’ (*ibid.*, pp. 164, 167–8, 170–71).
 19. Ludwig Siep points this out very clearly. In his opinion, what is certainly violated by positive eugenics is the principle of equality, as it applies to issues of *social* equality. See Ludwig Siep, ‘Moral und Gattungsethik’, pp. 112–13. However, such issues do not fit well with Habermas’s formalist moral perspective. This is probably the reason why he does not discuss them at all.
 20. The short references to the visions of futurologists and science fiction writers who envisage the future fusion of man and machine or our marginalization by intelligent robots (41) contribute to the dramatization of the dilemma between moral regulation and systemic integration, between communication and the self-instrumentalization of the species.
 21. See Konstantinos Kavoulakos, *Jürgen Habermas: The Foundations of Reason and Critical Social Theory* (in Greek), Polis, Athens, 1996, pp. 165–72, 206, 284–8.
 22. Theorists with a more starkly hermeneutic perspective like Albrecht Wellmer are less hesitant to use this term. See e.g. Albrecht Wellmer, ‘Models of Freedom in the Modern World’, *The Philosophical Forum*, vol. 21, no. 1–2, 1989–90, pp. 227–52.
 23. Edward Skidelsky (lead reviewer of the *New Statesman*) identified this dimension clearly: ‘The spectre of genetic engineering forces liberalism to acknowledge its ethical and religious origins.’ Edward Skidelsky, ‘Divine Creation’, *New Statesman*, 31 March 2003, p. 49. Similarly Ludwig Siep: ‘Questions concerning the identity of the species are evaluative questions of an evaluative anthropology which in turn presuppose an evaluative “worldview”. It is within these axes that the interpersonal ethics of autonomy is “embedded”, so much in the sense of “suitability” ... as in the sense of a possible justification as to why we want to see ourselves as moral beings.’ Ludwig Siep, ‘Moral und Gattungsethik’, p. 116.
 24. For the priority of the good over the right, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1989, Part I. See also Taylor’s criticism of Habermas, which focuses on the ‘priority of the right over the good’: Charles Taylor, ‘Language and Society’, in Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, eds, *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas’s ‘The Theory of Communicative Action’*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1991, pp. 23–35. See also Habermas’s reply in which he defends his initial position: Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. C. Cronin, Polity, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 69–76. Feeling the danger of retreating into the communitarian position, Habermas explains in the ‘Postscript’ that his argument wants to show that only one particular ethics of the human species can be harmonized with our autonomous morality, but that, despite this, the latter’s validity does not depend on this ethics, but on the ‘reservoir of rational reasons’. For the sake of ‘justification’ we again simply have to suppose that this reservoir just ‘exists’ in a vacuum.
 25. This tendency, which is justified by the pressing questions brought about by technological developments, pervades the text: ‘The new technologies make public discourse on the right understanding of cultural forms of life in general an urgent matter. And philosophers no longer have any good reasons for leaving such a dispute to biologists and engineers intoxicated by science fiction’ (15).
 26. In the case of manipulating genetic material (of humans or of other living organisms), one could question the very attempt to weigh costs and benefits, since it is practically impossible to calculate all or even a significant part of its consequences, given that in the foreseeable future we will be able to appreciate only a fraction of the interdependencies which will determine the final outcome. This highlights the limitations of any consequentialist approach to such matters. See Urs Thurnherr, *Angewandte Ethik*, Junius, Hamburg, 2000, pp. 43–52.
 27. See the critical reconstruction of Habermas’s views on

- nature in Konstantinos Kavoulakos, 'Nature, Science and Technology in Habermas', *Democracy and Nature* 10, 1998, pp. 112–45. See also Joel Whitebook's important essay on the subject: Joel Whitebook, 'The Problem of Nature in Habermas', *Telos* 40, 1979, pp. 41–69.
28. See, for example, Arne Naess, 'Deep Ecology and Ultimate Premises', *Society and Nature* 2, 1992, pp. 108–19.
 29. See, for example, Murray Bookchin, 'A Philosophical Naturalism', *Society and Nature* 2, 1992, pp. 60–88.
 30. One example of an attempt to overcome the dualisms of modern philosophy and science with non-religious arguments is the 'philosophy of organism' by Hans Jonas. See Hans Jonas, *Das Prinzip Leben*, Insel, Frankfurt am Main, 1994. The question remains, of course, how we can go from the 'ontological' formulation of a 'continuity' between human and non-human living beings to evaluative judgements. Jonas's suggestion sets out from the 'self-affirmation of the living organism' in the pursuit of goals and self-preservation; he then links 'is' and 'ought', deducing the 'principle of responsibility' that should guide humans, who are the only living creatures capable of conscious action. See Hans Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung, Versuch einer Ethik fuer die technologische Zivilisation*, Insel, Frankfurt am Main, 1979, ch. 4. The classical utilitarian position bases our duties towards animals on their ability to suffer (something they share with humans). This view has been rejuvenated by Peter Singer. Peter Singer, 'All Animals Are Equal', in Kuhse and Singer, eds, *Bioethics*, pp. 461–70. But there have also been other suggestions; for example, Ludwig Siep attempts to formulate a 'holistic' normative framework for bioethics, based on the ancient Greek concept of 'cosmos', which he modifies so that it does not conflict with the contemporary scientific world-view or with autonomous morality. See Ludwig Siep, 'Eine Skizze zur Grundlegung der Bioethik', *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 50, 1996, pp. 236–53. See also Skirbekk's use of discourse ethics to support a framework for ethically grading nature from humans to inorganic matter, without completely abandoning anthropocentrism, in Gunnar Skirbekk, 'Ethischer Gradualismus: jenseits von Anthropozentrismus und Biozentrismus?', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 43, no. 3, 1995, pp. 419–34.
 31. It is on the idea of a 'holistic self-conception' that Klaus Meyer-Abich bases his suggestion for a practical philosophy of nature which could provide guidelines for dealing with the contemporary ecological crisis. See Klaus Meyer-Abich, *Praktische Naturphilosophie. Erinnerungen an einen vergessenen Traum*, C.H. Beck, Munich, 1997, pp. 257 ff.
 32. See Andrew Whitworth, 'Communication with the Environment? Non-human Nature in the Theories of Jürgen Habermas', *Politics*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2000, pp. 145–51. As Bernard Williams also realized, a non-anthropocentric conception of nature need not entail adherence to a mythical 'naturalness'; rather it requires *the modification of our cultural conception of nature*. Bernard Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 233–40. Peter Dews stresses the limitations of denying the philosophy of nature by Habermas and rightly points out that a non-physicalist (and thus 'metaphysical') conception of nature need not necessarily be accompanied by the idea that there is only one true world-view; rather it can be aware of its own temporality. See Peter Dews, 'Lifeworld, Metaphysics and the Ethics of Nature in Habermas', in *The Limits of Disenchantment*, Verso, London and New York, 1995, pp. 151–68.
 33. See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. J. Cumming, Verso, New York, 1979.
 34. I think Hannah Arendt missed this when she linked 'praxis' foremost with 'natality' rather than with 'mortality', which she considered the two determining factors of the 'most general condition of human existence'. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 8. Referring to the ancient Greek model of the city-state, which she admired, she stressed the fact that political action aimed at the realization of great works which would render the agent 'immortal' – that is, able to overcome his 'mortality' (ibid., pp. 18–19). In this way, however, mortality does not turn into consciousness of the need for self-limitation. In contrast, Cornelius Castoriadis saw very clearly the need to connect the value of freedom with an 'ethos of mortality' and self-limitation. See Cornelius Castoriadis, 'Power, Politics, Autonomy', in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays on Political Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1991, pp. 173–4. Jonas's 'critique of utopia' which leads to the 'ethics of responsibility' also leans in the direction of self-limitation. See Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, ch. 6.
 35. See Cornelius Castoriadis, 'World Imbalance and the Revolutionary Force of Ecology', *Society and Nature* 5, 1994, pp. 81–90; and 'From Ecology to Autonomy', in *The Castoriadis Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1997, pp. 239–52.

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Afterwards

Gilbert Achcar, *The Clash of Barbarisms: September 11 and the Making of the New World Disorder*, trans. Peter Drucker, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2002. 128 pp., \$15.95 pb., \$55.00 hb., 1 58367 081 5 pb., 1 58367 082 3 hb.

Verna V. Gehring, ed., *War after September 11*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham MD, Boulder, New York and Oxford, 2003. 99 pp., £10.95 pb., 0 7425 1468 4.

Stanley Hauerwas and Frank Lentricchia, eds, *Dissent from the Homeland: Essays after September 11*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003. 226 pp., £16.95 pb., 0 8223 3221 3.

Alain Joxe, *Empire of Disorder*, trans. Ames Hodges, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, Semiotext(e), distributed by MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2002. 221 pp., £6.50 pb., 1 58435 016 4.

September 11, 2001 for most of us now signifies not so much the terrorist attacks that took place on that day as the start of the military campaign which the US government, supported with especial enthusiasm by the British, began to wage within weeks. These books and essays, all written before the invasion of Iraq (though some of the authors foresee it), discuss the assault on Afghanistan and assess some likely implications, internationally and for American politics and society, of the 'War on Terror' which it inaugurated. The monographs by Paris-based academics Alain Joxe and Gilbert Achcar review current policy within a longer-term critique of American global strategy. The contributors to the Gehring collection consider issues in legal, political and moral philosophy. The writers brought together by theologian Stanley Hauerwas and critic and novelist Frank Lentricchia represent a cross-section of dissenting opinion from within and around the American academy, supplemented by a trio from outside the 'homeland' – Slavoj Žižek, Jean Baudrillard and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams.

Joxe's *Empire of Disorder* is dogmatic, self-indulgent and ill-translated. There is no index, and its footnotes contain a bare dozen passing references to work by fellow-scholars. Its publication was sponsored by the French Foreign Ministry and the Cultural Service of the French Embassy in the USA, which have made some amends by also sponsoring Gilbert Achcar's much better book. Achcar draws on Freud and Foucault, Marx and Greek myth, in a careful discussion of the hateful energies that the 'clash of barbarisms' centred on the Middle East is engendering. Like several writers under review, he distinguishes between the pity we may properly feel for all those who suffer and die violently, and the ultimately self-regarding sentiments which the media encouraged a

global audience to indulge in after the destruction of the Twin Towers. Achcar calls this mediated emotion 'narcissistic compassion' and notes that while the politicians and opinion-formers who orchestrated it posed as universal humanists for the occasion, it is in fact 'evoked much more by calamities striking "people like us," much less by calamities affecting people unlike us'.

Achcar states well the familiar argument that US strategy in the Middle East, while it has its own fatal dynamic, pursues long-standing global goals. He quotes Theodore Roosevelt's address to Congress of December 1904, where he finds 'all the interventionist leitmotifs ... up to and including humanitarian intervention and war against evil'. To this policy which seeks to make America the Leviathan of the world, Achcar contrasts what he sees as Franklin Roosevelt's progressive Lockean liberalism, expressed in the founding Charter of the United Nations. Recent actions – in Kosovo, the Gulf War, Afghanistan (and, we can add, Iraq) – demonstrate that the USA now maintains only an instrumental relationship with the UN, which is at best 'a postwar management tool for territories ravaged by military interventions decided in Washington'. Hubristic US militarism, policing the Hobbesian anarchy of the globalized market, is more likely to inflame than to assuage the vengeful anger of the dispossessed. In a particular nemesis, Washington has paid the price of supporting Islamic fundamentalism, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, as a preferable alternative to communism (Achcar does not discuss the American-backed slaughter of Iraqi Leftists during the Cold War, however). Meanwhile the sufferings of Iraqis under sanctions, and Israel's oppression of the Palestinians, have given plenty of reasons for Arabs and Muslims to hate the West.

Unlike Joxe, Achcar does not suppose we already have, in today's nation-states of Europe, the model and basis for the law-governed international polity that they would both prefer. Achcar hopes the movement against globalization can fill the vacuum left by the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' and lay the basis internationally for an 'alternative to neoliberal capitalism'. In the space usurped by identity politics, including political Islam, a project of progressive secular democracy might then be rebuilt. However, Achcar does not consider whether the ideology of 'anti-globalization' is in fact compatible with the social-democratic politics and intergovernmental approaches to international security that he also advocates. And can we really assume today that Islamic fundamentalism is just a temporary displacement of dammed-up socialist energies in the Arab world?

Joxe and Achcar address an international readership. *War after September 11* is written for an American public, imagined as uncomplicatedly patriotic (one chapter originated as a paper given to the US Army War College) but still concerned about the legitimacy and legality of its government's deeds. These essays discuss the ethics of retribution and 'asymmetric war', the role of development in redressing the immiseration that is taken to be one cause of terrorism, and the need for international institutions. (Again Hobbesian and Lockean models are contrasted.) They are very clearly written and exemplify the uses – but also the limitations – of abstract philosophical argument as immanent critique, within a community whose shared assumptions they do not always test. Judith Lichtenberg is not alone in taking it for granted that on 12 September 2001 the USA occupied 'the moral high ground', or in arguing that Americans in pursuing terrorists should try to behave virtuously for virtue's sake, but also for America's: 'Appearing to be sensitive to humanitarian concerns is an important element in persuading the international community ... that we are not simply self-interested.'

Yet should the state behave morally and lawfully even if its selfish ends (to get information from detainees, for example) might be more readily gained by ill-treatment? This is one implicit theme of the excellent essay by David Luban. Luban shows how the US authorities, in constructing the black hole of Guantánamo Bay, have drawn just as it suits them on the very different legal-moral frameworks appropriate to war and to judicial proceeding. Prisoners of war must not be treated as wrong-doers or made to answer questions. Putative criminals should not be arbitrarily imprisoned and must be tried by due process. The

US administration, however, detains people through mere force, as defeated combatants, while interrogating them with a view to staging eventual pseudo-trials. In reply to those who say such measures are designed for a temporary emergency, Luban points out that the 'War on Terrorism' may go on indefinitely. It is inconceivable that all potential enemies of the USA will ever be killed or captured, so such a war 'can only be abandoned, never concluded'. Meanwhile it has spawned 'a model of politics, a worldview with its own distinctive premises and consequences', which include the 'hybrid war-law model.... So long as it continues, the War on Terrorism means the end of human rights, at least for those near enough to be touched by the fire of battle.'

Thanks in part, maybe, to interventions like Luban's, some members of the US establishment have spoken out to deplore the harm the Bush administration has been doing to the rule of law. Few have distanced themselves unequivocally from the 'war'; but if this is to be abandoned, pressure from Americans will be crucial. The cost to US forces will count heavily, soldiers being more than ever shown and seen as 'people like us'. Catherine Lutz notes in her contribution to *Dissent from the Homeland* that in the two decades before 2002, 525 US soldiers were killed by enemy action. In early January 2004, the Pentagon stated that 346 of its personnel had died in Iraq in just eight months since the end of that war was announced. As more people become aware of the evidence that alleged Iraqi weapons of mass destruction – even if any are ever found – were a pretext for an invasion the neoconservatives had long since determined on, majority American opinion may reject Bush's whole strategy.

The best reason for reading *Dissent from the Homeland* is that it illustrates a range of positions, from radical ecology to Christian pacifism, on which minority opposition in the USA has been based. It is a miscellaneous volume, with little sense of a clear editorial project. Some contributions read as though this were just another opportunity for writers to go through their paces. Baudrillard is the worst offender, in a woeful display of sham dialectics in a reprinted piece:

When the two towers collapsed, one had the impression that they were responding to the suicide of the suicide-jets with their own suicide.... The symbolic collapse of a whole system happened through an invisible complicity, as if, by collapsing on their own, by committing suicide, the towers had played their part in the game, in order to crown the event.

Others proceed with more respect and more thought. They include several representatives of the American left (though Hauerwas wonders if ‘there is a Left left in America’). The contributions of Fredric Jameson, Catherine Lutz and Susan Willis combine critique, analysis and guarded hope that we can still find a political way forward. Anne R. Slifkin, in an essay that complements Luban’s in the Gehring collection, discusses the arraignment of the ‘American Taliban’, John Walker Lindh, captured in Afghanistan. Exploring questions of law, patriotism and free speech, she reminds readers that ‘the Taliban to which ... Lindh was attracted’ early in 2001 was receiving US financial aid for its anti-heroin policy.

Contributors like these, whose arguments are not faith-based, find themselves in company that would look odd in much of Europe, for half their fellow essayists write as members of religious communities (one American Jew, one American Muslim, and half a dozen Christian pastors and theologians). The pres-



ence of so many believers reflects American realities. Srinivas Aramudan cites surveys showing that while in many Western European states three-quarters of citizens are atheists or agnostics, about 80 per cent of Americans believe in a divinity. Aramudan notes that the US public sphere is characterized not by secularism but by a tolerance of religious differences, originally framed to allow rival Christian sects to coexist: ‘The fundamental attributes of US nationalism have always derived from the moral doctrines of a nation of passive religious freedoms... [which can be] conveniently kept alive and renewed by the state when in pursuit of militarist agendas.’ Bush withdrew his too hastily uttered word ‘crusade’, but Christianity went on being invoked as America went to war after September 11. Michael J. Baxter, a Catholic priest, records his distress at seeing on the day the bombing of Afghanistan began, the cover of a church bulletin showing ‘a large cross

with a banner of the stars and stripes draped over it.... Emblazoned over the image was the Prayer of St. Francis, beginning with the words, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace”.’ Aramudan points out that while a Muslim cleric was invited, unprecedentedly, to open the memorial services held on 14 September, ‘these services anyway featured a military choir singing “Onward Christian Soldiers” to an assembly of the entire current political leadership’.

It was timely to bring together religious voices speaking against war and for an active, substantial dialogue between faiths. Hauerwas notes in his Introduction that while George Bush has assured Americans that Islam is a ‘tradition of peace’, it was ‘curious, given Christianity’s history, [that he did] not find it necessary to assure us that Christianity is a tradition of peace’. One applauds this well-directed irony, and assents to much that Hauerwas and other religious contributors say. Overall, however, I found myself uneasy with many intimations and implications of

these faith-based chapters. John Milbank urges Americans to reject Locke along with Hobbes and Machiavelli, in favour of ‘a more truly radical legacy of Christian (and at times Jewish) associative agrarian and civic Republicanism’. This brew is strange, but more palatable than what some others proffer. Not everyone who shares Baxter’s unease at the draping of the cross with the flag will follow him when he suggests that one reason not to fight for the USA is the fact that abortion is legal there. Socialists may struggle to frame arguments which we know lack popular support, but few of us will opt for the language used by Peter Ochs, who speaks as one of the faithful minority privileged to see the ‘as-yet-invisible Event’. If what is left of the Left risks being caught between crusade and jihad, it seems more important than ever to criticise the human limitations of our societies in terms of the good life and secular citizenship.

There is a hint in some of these essays – some phrases in Ochs and Žižek, a sentence in David James Duncan’s eco-spiritual reflections, Hauerwas’s repeated references to ‘an apocalyptic event’ – that what happened on 11 September had an aspect of redemptive sublimity, calling our minds to higher things. I agree, rather, with Jameson, who says clearly that the attacks and their predictable consequences have brought nothing but ill, in a disastrous dialectic that offers little prospect of transcendence and may lead to the common ruin of the antagonists.

Martin Ryle

Critical convert

Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, foreword by Slavoj Žižek, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2003, xxxvi + 467 pp., £54.50 hb., £18.00 pb., 0 8166 3460 2 hb., 0 8166 3461 0 pb.

This is an admirable book in every way, and it is hard to imagine how, as an introduction to a contemporary philosopher, it can be surpassed, so amazing are its range and depth. Peter Hallward has an intimate knowledge of the Badiou corpus, a corpus both vast and extravagantly diversified. Little of it has been translated so far; much of it, for instance the early pre- or proto-systemic work, will in all likelihood never be translated; a lot of it, consisting in essays, articles and pamphlets scattered in little-known journals or issued by very small militant publishing houses, is hard to come by and remains uncollected. The Badiou scholar must possess all the qualities of the collecting enthusiast. And this knowledge of the corpus is first hand, the texts are read in their native French, and no nuance in the language escapes the eye of the analyst, who thus avoids the usual pitfall of translation-induced mistakes that so often cause the French philosopher rendered into English to pass for a charlatan. But Peter Hallward's qualities are not merely in the realm of philological criticism: his author being a modern version of that long-gone figure the polymath, he has had to acquire a wide range of competence, and one unusual in our field, for instance in mathematics (the book comes complete with an appendix on the essentials of set theory). And his commentary shows considerable pedagogic skill: an always possibly bewildered reader is taken through the difficult terrain step after logical step, his flagging attention is gently jogged by sentences beginning with the verb 'remember' ('and remember that a situation is...'). The result is a book that is complex (Badiou is not an obscure, but is certainly a difficult, philosopher), but always clear, challenging yet always readable.

The main quality of the book is that it skilfully negotiates the two pitfalls that await such books. It avoids the Anglo-Saxon pitfall of carping criticism, whereby the great philosopher is firmly put in his place by an even greater critic, and the continental pitfall of hagiography and sectarian discipleship. In the case of Badiou, because of the systematic nature of the system, and the decisionist conception of truth that lies at the heart of it, and requires conversion and fidelity, the second pitfall is particularly hard to avoid, and at times Peter Hallward comes very close to the brink, like Charlie Chaplin rollerskating blindfolded on the brink of the abyss in *Modern Times*. But this

is only because he wants to provide a full account of the system, and to let its power of fascination, which is considerable, operate to the full (he even goes to the length of treating *l'Organisation politique* seriously, as if it were a major political force), only allowing himself rare moments of ironic distance, as when he describes Badiou's 'retreat from history': 'in a word, the movement of history failed to live up to Badiou's *confiance*'. When the mountain fails to come up to Muhammad, he turns his back on it and sulks.

That Peter Hallward, who is clearly a disciple, is a critical disciple, is evident in the last but one chapter. Here some of the most obvious failings of the system (its incapacity to account for the phenomena of culture, its denial of any relevance to the concept of society, the anti-unionism of the 'axiomatic' politics derived from it) are firmly pointed out. True, this announces the last chapter, where Badiou's next, as yet unpublished and largely unwritten, masterpiece, *Logique des mondes*, is presented as an answer to the questions raised by the limitations of the system, and as a correction. Incidentally, this is the only book of its kind I know that accounts not only for all the published work of the author, but also for his future work. There is more than a joke in this, as this state of affairs demonstrates the closeness of the critic to his object.

Peter Hallward has erected a critical monument worthy of what is, it is increasingly clear, one of the major philosophies that have appeared in Europe in the last fifty years. A monument all the more welcome as, in spite of the translation of a number of the shorter works, the *magnum opus*, where the system is expounded, *L'Être et l'événement*, hasn't appeared in English yet. So the English reader will have to work her way through this book to feel the full force and fascination of the system and grasp the philosophical and political gains that conversion entails: a principled defence of universalism, against all forms of communitarianism and identity politics; a philosophical and political firmness, to the point of stubbornness, that will not, in spite of the various 'turns', linguistic or liberal, that have afflicted the contemporary scene, give in to opinion; a refusal in particular to give in to the currently prevailing turn to ethics and the woolly ideology of human rights, an ideology near to exhaustion (with proponents such as Tony Blair, who needs opponents?).

Yet there is a point at which one must leave the system, and try to view it from a critical distance. This, Hallward does not do himself (his criticism is internal to the system, it attempts to move it a little further on its majestic way), but his exposition is so clear-headed that it allows the reader to take the necessary steps.

I shall start with what is, to my mind, the only thing missing in Hallward's exposition. The chapter devoted to Badiou's 'inesthetics', with its analysis of 'artistic configurations', shows how Badiou's poetics derives from his ontology and is fully integrated in the system. What it fails to show is the potential contradiction between a high modernist canon (Mallarmé, Beckett, Proust – there is nothing strikingly original in this) and the theory and practice of drama (Badiou is an established playwright), with the choice of comedy as the militant philosopher's mode of dramatic intervention. The claims of closeness to truth routinely made for poetry are not usually made for comedy, and Badiou is perhaps closer to Brecht (whom he obviously despises) than he would like to think.

Yet the section of the book that really allows a critical distance is the beginning, where the history of the system is carefully described. For this system, which demands – eternity of truth *oblige* – to be viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, has of course a history. Hallward is the first to do full justice to this, and especially to the first, tentative and now abandoned, version of the system, in *Théorie du sujet*. The historical development of the system, away from Sartre into Marx, Mao and Althusser, and then away from Marx, Mao and Althusser and back to Sartre, is in sharp contrast with the principled ahistoricism of the result of that history. There lies the major problem I have with the system. Not in the mathematical turn, not in the resistance to the linguistic turn, with its consequent refusal to ascribe any importance to the question of language (a paradoxical position in a philosopher who is also a novelist and playwright), not in the ultra-decisionist aspect of an 'axiomatic politics' which does not protect the faithful (not least the author of the system) from the most elementary errors of judgement (I am alluding, of course, to Badiou's support of the Pol Pot regime against the Vietnamese intervention), but the absence of a concept of history. For events, as defined by the system, are historical occurrences, they appear in specific conjunctures, and the truths they induce are deemed eternal (as eternal as the charm of Greek art in that famous passage in the *Grundrisse*), but there is no continuity of history, only a dotted line of historical sequences, whose capacity to engender political or artistic truth is soon exhausted. For the system involves

a strange form of temporality. It is not concerned with the past, or with the future, as Hallward acknowledges, but neither is it concerned with the Marxian present of the conjuncture and the social formation. In fact the system is not concerned with the present either, rather with the eternity of truth, outside time, and the future anterior of the event (the event *will have occurred*), the time of decision and conversion (the event *shall have occurred*). Hence the paradoxical statement that each event creates its own time.

This, of course, raises a number of questions. What do we do when we find ourselves between a historical sequence that has done its time (the sequence of the May events is now exhausted, as the meagre results of *L'Organisation politique* amply demonstrate) and an event that is yet to emerge? And since the event, by definition, escapes any formulation in the language of the current situation, how do we prepare for this emergence (that is, how do we justify the choice of stubborn militancy rather than the ivory tower and the sulk)? From this point of view, the religiousness of the system (in spite of Badiou's total atheism) compares unfavourably with that of its natural competitor in that field, Bloch's *Prinzip Hoffnung*. And since there is no way of anticipating the event, of working towards it, as the system does not admit of programmes, intermediate or long-term goals or tactical moves, how do we recognize it when it comes, except through conversion?

Here Badiou does provide some answers, in the form of an array of concepts (the militant construction of truth, the infinite series of investigations, the dangers of betrayal through suture), but they are hardly satisfactory. In particular, they hardly account for the overinterpretation of historical occurrences as events by those who convert to them, the best instance being the pseudo-revolution of national socialism: only the usual facile hindsight makes such things clear. The lack of a concept of society, the lack of an analysis of the economic structure of the situation, preclude any real analysis of the eventual (as opposed to 'evental') emergence of the event. The extent to which Badiou has abandoned Marxism and Althusser, his old master (remember that for him Marx had opened up the continent of history for science), is now clear. It is one of the many beauties of Peter Hallward's book that, even if this is hardly his objective, he allows the reader to perceive this movement of the system so clearly. For the book is not only a worthy monument to the grandeur of Badiou: it is a critical monument in its own right.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle

Ostalgie

Charity Scribner, *Requiem for Communism*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2003. 245 pp., £22.95 hb., 0 262 19488 0.

Charity Scribner's book has a striking cover. It is a photograph of the Platz der Vereinten Nationen in Berlin. In fact, it shows an image of a huge postwar housing block, grey with a little yellow light relief around selected windows, and entirely typical of the Western image of the Eastern bloc. Uniformity, drabness and plainness are what state socialism erected in its perversion of modernist architecture to make mass homes on the cheap for mass man. Invisible in the photograph is the backstory. Platz der Vereinten Nationen was, until 1992, Lenin Platz and it housed East Berlin's Lenin Statue, the breeze-blockish Soviet leader silhouetted against one of the tower blocks in this 1970 complex. Some of the Left today still insist on calling the square Lenin Platz. Such insistence is a form of memory work, as much as it is defiant. It is the fate of memory that Scribner hopes to access in *Requiem for Communism*, through a study of art and curatorial practices in the Eastern bloc and Western Europe. These are represented by critical, semi-dissident works, such as Andrzej Wadja's *Man of Marble* (1977) and *Man of Iron* (1981) and Christa Wolf's novels. She also analyses culture produced amidst the aftershocks of the fall of the Berlin Wall, such as Judith Kuckart's *Melancholia I* (1996) and Joseph Beuys's use of GDR products, at Documenta IX, alleged by Heiner Müller as per se a challenge to capitalist commodification. Scribner also reflects on the 'nostalgia' of the Western labour movement, in works, from the United Kingdom and France, made after the 'fall' of the welfare state: Tony Harrison's *Prometheus* (1981), John Berger's novels and Mark Herman's *Brassed Off* (1996). Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993) features as an engagement with memory in the context of socialist crisis, understood through Lacan's notion of 'foreclosure', which serves also as an apt pun on house repossession after the failure to repay a mortgage. (It is rather odd to have the UK understood as a kind of 'socialist state' because of its National Health Service, but perhaps from the distant vantage point of the United States all welfare states are grey.)

All these and more are seen to register the transition from one type of world to another. This world in dissolution Scribner calls the 'Second World' and 'second' is a freighted term. In the Second World there was a collective that laboured industrially and it

remembered. Its memory and its history were bound up with labour, and also with its refusal or withdrawal. Scribner writes of 'factory seconds', which signify 'downtime' moments in the factory as well as those products that have incorporated flaws. Factory seconds are evidence of the tiny moments that escape The Plan, and so connote the refusal of the subject to be instrumentalized. These moments of opposition, sometimes subtle, relied on worker solidarity. Worker solidarity relied on the factory.

Scribner locates the changes in Europe in a wider framework of deindustrialization, which means that the working classes of the East and the West are disappearing, overcome by automation and scuppered by the death of the factory. Promisingly this book aims to take seriously the experience of labour in societies that claimed to be organized for the benefit of the labouring classes. The real loss that occurs in the collapse of the Soviet satellite states is not the loss of a social-economic system but a loss of collective memory, for memory is tied to collective labour. Scribner writes of an analogy that is also the new labouring actuality. As collective labour is laid off and the factories where workers communed and struggled and worked, in dissidence or in unity with the 'socialist' ideals, new types of memory emerge. These are the memories of computers, random access and decidedly non-human, the 'immaterial' industries of the future. On this terrain, faced with IBM, backed by the US military, the planners in Eastern Europe, who had staked their economies' success on microchips and memory boards, were bound to fail. 'In the late nineteen eighties, East German authorities, in particular, found themselves caught in a context between computers and collapse.' Collapse came, and then the Western computers arrived. As memory gives way to computer memory, the field of economic operations also goes international and the 'second world' is subsumed in the one world of global capital. Returning to the analogy, Scribner notes that, instead of human memory, working memory now designates 'random-access memory', and she asks whether the recollection of life under socialism will 'be permanently inscribed into Europe's collective memory or merely deleted from the disk'. Scribner wishes to write 'at odds with postmodern flux'. Her book 'fixes its attention upon the local, the concrete', and insists that, before moving forward, we must take stock of what remains.

Memory remains, and it takes the traditional tools of Freud to dig it out. Recourse is made to the famous essay on melancholia and mourning, and Freud's notion of disavowal is also used. Mourning,

melancholia and disavowal are understood as signal modes of collective memory, once they have been supplemented by Lacan's sixth seminar 'Desire and its Interpretation' (1959) and Negt and Kluge's *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (History and Obstinacy) (1981). These reconceptualize mourning as a collective process. Each chapter of Scribner's book proceeds under a weighty term: the collective, solidarity, nostalgia, mourning, melancholia, disavowal. The ostensibly political cedes to the psychoanalytical. What is mourned? What is melancholically recalled? This is a requiem for dead ideals, for the loss of hope, and the belief in utopia; even if the systems analysed were inadequate, at least they held open a space for such thinking. Scribner is intrigued by the fact that 'real existing socialism' is largely seen as a failure, and yet still intellectuals mourn its passing. And it is this very mourning that releases so much artistic reflection, in the build-up to the collapse of the system and in the aftermath as the shards and rubble of the ruined social experiment are collected and collated in museums, novels and films. Art appears to be a kind of therapy for sad post-communist intellectuals. Scribner too wants to rescue the idealism of the socialist project and to bring out not its actuality but a certain spirit that animated it, be that its political social vision (however distorted) or be it the critique of 'real existing socialism' in the name of what it claimed to be. Scribner wants to salvage something of Marx, while criticizing the Eastern bloc system. In a sense, what is mourned is the possibility of dissidence. With the disappearance of bad socialism, all socialism threatens to disappear. Its space may now be presumed closed, along with the Lenin Shipyards, the collieries and the 'People's Palaces'.

The wider framework of this book is fascinating, and it is true that the culture of the 'Second World' is threatened with obsolescence and forgetting. The second world's culture marks sites of reflection and resistance. There is something intransigent and persistent in culture, which continues to have a material presence, and can be mined for meaning. Culture is the worked-over zone of memory. But it is not the only place of memory, even after the end of Western factory labour. Scribner mentions briefly the concept of 'ostalgie', a term coined to describe the sense of loss felt on the disappearance of Spreewald Gherkins, Ersatz colas and East Berlin's squat traffic-light man. This 'ostalgie' mourns the loss of products that were generally poor but were the stuff of habit. There is something ridiculous about it. Other writers have spoken of the absurd but nonetheless disconcerting panic that set in for some East German shoppers

confronted with a large choice of yoghurts and the like in supermarkets. Thinking about 'ostalgie' – and all its attendant irony and contradictions – gets at the textures of experience of the Eastern bloc. It is what gives the film *Good-Bye Lenin* (made by a West German) its interest, despite or because of the fact that it turns the fate of the GDR into a comedic Oedipal drama suffused with nostalgia for the shoddy and sold-out, which, because of its defectiveness is annexed to innocence.

At Lenin Platz/Platz der Vereinten Nationen, the name and the statue were removed, but the buildings, which were 'showcase socialist homes', remain, and in the late 1990s even had millions of euros poured into them for modernization and asbestos removal. These housing blocks are a landmark and are now protected as architectural treasures. Such are the contradictions of material culture. The overt symbols of a regime disappeared, but aspects of the material fabric of life in the Eastern bloc remained. The memories of the new citizens are stored in a new setting, where new names and new ideologies prevail. These living, walking memories are barely accessed by Scribner's art-oriented project. Most interesting is her discussion of the Open Depot in Eisenhüttenstadt, where citizens of the former GDR give up their old goods, their VEB radios and reel-to-reel machines, which they have now replaced by Chinese stereos. They also submit themselves to interviews for an archive of ordinary experience. It is only here that the voices of participants other than the intelligentsia begin to pipe up conceptually in Scribner's book, allowing a fleeting access to the mass of living, walking memories, without which there can be no political action and no potential realization of the now bruised ideals.

Esther Leslie

Open sesame

Jean-Michel Rabaté, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003. xxviii + 290 pp., £60.00 hb., £15.99 pb., 0 521 80744 1 hb., 0 521 00203 6 pb.

Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003. 4 vols, 1392 pp., £475.00 hb., 0 415 27862 7 (set).

'What will you do with all that I say? Will you record it on a little thing and organize soirées by invitation only? – Hey, I've got a tape by Lacan!' This passage

from Seminar XVII demonstrates that Lacan was well aware of the fact that his teachings would, sooner or later, inevitably be incorporated by what he disdainfully named the university discourse. However, one fundamental question remained open at that time and still remains at least partly open today: *in what way* would such an assimilation occur? Despite the pessimism expressed by the cynical remark above, we now know that it is possible for academia to recuperate his work whilst at the same time preserving its subversive power. It is on the basis of such a productive compromise that, for example, Badiou reads Lacan through the latter's self-professed role of 'antiphilosopher', and describes the contemporary philosopher as 'one who has the unfaltering courage to go through Lacan's anti-philosophy'. Yet the risk of a belated fashion for 'Lacan soirées' and the hegemonic imposition of a 'soft' approach to his work is probably higher than ever in anglophone university circles.

The Cambridge Companion to Lacan and the colossal four-volume *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory* both witness and – given their editorial format – tacitly delimit a particularly vibrant period for Lacanian reception in anglophone academia. The articles they contain are, with a few exceptions among the cultural studies-oriented contributions to the *Companion*, of a very high standard. The declared intent of Rabaté's 'specially commissioned essays' is to bring 'fresh, accessible perspectives' to bear on Lacan's work. Although the texts in *Critical Evaluations* are all reprinted and, due to their theoretical density, could hardly claim to 'accompany' students in their initiation to Lacan, Žižek's goal similarly consists of proposing a work 'which proves that Lacan is still *alive*, able to trigger debates that matter'. It is significant that forty essays out of fifty-six in this enormous enterprise were written (or translated) in the last fifteen years.

This temporal specification highlights what is probably the most obvious failure of these two collections: they both neglect to assess in an adequate manner what made them possible – that is, the specifically anglophone renaissance of Lacanian studies during the 1990s. Neither of the editors asks himself, why is a critical evaluation of and/or an academic introduction to Lacan in English possible precisely at the present time? And, more importantly, what remains to be done in order not to confine this unexpected revival to drawing-room gossip? What should have been made more explicit is, in the end, the existence of a *global* reinterpretation of Lacan as a key theoretical figure beyond the specific domain of psychoanalysis; a reinterpretation which is similar, in its wide scope, to



the one that Nietzsche underwent during the 1950s and 1960s. Despite often writing in English, many of the authors collected here are from outside the anglophone world – as are the editors of the two collections. However, it is surely not a coincidence that this English-language renaissance of the 1990s was concomitant with the release of four seminars – out of the ten published – and of the *Autres Écrits* in France. (Oddly enough, although some of the best secondary literature available on these works – or even on unpublished seminars – is in English, they still await official translation: publication of Seminar IV and Seminar XVII has been forthcoming for years.)

The merit of Rabaté's collection is emphatically to proclaim that the sterile controversy concerning Lacan's alleged impenetrability should definitely be laid to rest. The clear-cut statement according to which 'if Lacan is difficult, he is perhaps not *so* difficult', contained in the preface, should be regarded as its most appropriate epitaph. However, the reader who wants to engage philosophically with Lacan might find it difficult to agree with Rabaté when he goes on to infer from this that 'the time of simple exegesis [of Lacan's oeuvre] has passed'. On the contrary, given that Lacan is at last no longer deemed forbiddingly gnostic and, despite the renaissance of Lacanian studies, his reception has thus far often been less than satisfactory, one is inclined to believe that the time for serious exegesis can finally

begin. In order to be fruitful, editorial initiatives like the *Companion* and *Critical Evaluations* should ultimately be interpreted as an invitation to read Lacan without the prosthesis of secondary literature. Colette Soler is therefore perfectly right when, in her excellent contribution to the *Companion*, she distinguishes ‘true [Joyce] and false [Lacan] unreadables’. Lacan has been reputed unreadable because he undoubtedly is difficult to understand. However, as Soler maintains, ‘in twenty years, we have greatly reduced the unreadability of Lacan, except of course to people who do not want to read him’.

Mentions of Lacan’s irreverent style and openly contradictory pronouncements are usually an alibi for mental laziness. At least, the (inconsiderate) critic who has not yet found the ‘unfaltering courage’ advocated by Badiou should be humble enough to admit what two of Lacan’s best-known friends had the honesty to admit: as Lévi-Strauss confessed, despite sensing the importance of Lacan’s theories, ‘I’d have had to read everything five or six times. Merleau-Ponty and I used to talk about it and concluded that we didn’t have the time.’ Interestingly enough, the position according to which ‘Lacan is impenetrable’ (even after having read him six times) is adopted by two opposing categories of scholars: aprioristic anti-Lacanian, for whom, as Chomsky stated not long ago, ‘Lacan was a conscious charlatan’; and aprioristic pro-Lacanian, for whom Lacan is a sort of prophet who has to be interpreted rhapsodically. In both cases, what is rejected is the working hypothesis, if not the assumption, that Lacan is a paradoxically *systematic* thinker.

It is precisely the problematic character of Lacan’s thought qua ‘open system’ that Rabaté’s call for an end of exegesis overlooks. Contributors to his collection do not necessarily share his views. If, on the one hand, a loose exegetical approach leads Feher-Gurewich’s highly misleading theoretical essay on perversion to rely on empirical oxymorons such as ‘my patient’s unconscious intent was...’, on the other, Leader’s piece on Lacan’s use of formal structures as a particular kind of mythical construction, and Burgoyne’s related essay on ‘Lacan’s scientific method’, should both be considered excellent examples of a textual confrontation with the Lacan’s ‘proto-mathematical’ challenge to philosophy.

Why is Lacan a *paradoxically* systematic thinker? Because, despite formulating a highly elaborate and consistent theory, he decided to present it to us through the work in progress that led to its emergence (in his seminars) and the inherent questions, doubts and dead-ends that all consistent, ‘closed’ and completed

philosophical systems end up silently confronting (in the *Écrits*). This is why Lacan can appropriately define himself as an ‘anti-philosopher’. As Burgoyne reminds us, Freud (and Lacan after him) thought that ‘philosophy, while using much of the methodology of the sciences, has a tendency to gloss over incompleteness in its results ... it lacks this scientific ability to bear incompleteness.’

Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations offers a clever selection of what most Lacanians would definitely consider ‘the best of’ existing secondary literature. Contributions range from seminal essays by (‘orthodox’ and ‘unorthodox’) members of Lacan’s inner circle (Jean Laplanche, Serge Leclaire, Octave Mannoni, Jean-Claude Milner, Moustapha Safouan) to the work of authors who initially introduced Lacan to the anglophone world (Fredric Jameson, Jacqueline Rose) and those who subsequently disseminated his thought (Joan Copjec, Darian Leader, Bruce Fink). Considerable space is reserved for the Žižek-inspired Ljubljana school (besides two important articles by the editor himself, pieces by Alenka Zupančič, Mladen Dolar and Miran Božovič are included) which played a key role in its renaissance in the 1990s.

The four volumes of *Critical Evaluations* correspond to the four main domains of the Lacan debate: psychoanalytic theory and practice; philosophy; social science (with particular emphasis on the critique of ideology); cultural studies. The volume dedicated to philosophy is judiciously selected: apart from influential contributions by Badiou, Milner and Žižek himself, the editor also proposes a sample of a hermeneutic reading of Lacan (Lang), as well as some examples of a long-established but usually underestimated Heideggerian approach (Boothby, Casey and Woody). However, not enough is said in the introduction to assess the current state of the relationship between Lacan and philosophy: Žižek’s indication that ‘almost all of today’s main philosophical orientations ... propose their own Lacan’ may be considered more as an optimistic encouragement than as a de facto reality. (Who would dare to persuade a Wittgensteinian that Lacan’s reading of Wittgenstein in Seminar XVII is convincing?)

The volume on cultural studies is opened by Žižek’s unashamed admission of ‘purposefully neglecting the feminism/cinema theory/literary studies complex that almost monopolized the reception of Lacan’. We can imagine that he might be referring here to terrifying post-mortem encounters such as the one which is analysed in ‘Lacan’s Afterlife: Jacques Lacan Meets Andy Warhol’, possibly the worst essay of *The Companion*. Despite directly quoting Lacan only a

couple of times – and in the most disparate contexts – Catherine Liu deems to have located sufficient evidence for a comparative reading of these two figures in the fact that ‘they [both] represent different faces of masterful opacity in their relationship to recording devices’. In this case one cannot but agree with Jacques-Alain Miller’s remark: ‘if at their best [Lacanian cultural studies] disclose one of the bearings of discontent in civilization, at their worst they are simply being part of it’. Nevertheless, even a reader who is entirely sympathetic to this attack against ‘soft’ (or simply bad) Lacanians could not avoid the suspicion that Žižek’s provocative choice to start the tome with an article by Badiou entitled ‘Complementary Note on a Contemporary Usage of Frege’ may be too bold. The decision is well motivated by the necessity to explain correctly the notion of suture (key for Lacanian cinematic theory), but one can guess that it will deter many a cultural studies adept from even opening the book.

If the overall quality of the articles and the crafty way in which they are grouped is indisputable, considerable doubts persist about the general aim of Žižek’s anthology. This concerns three main aspects of the project. First, there is the editor’s decision to include extracts from easily available texts such as Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense* and Althusser’s *Freud and Lacan*, which provide idiosyncratic re-elaborations of Lacan’s work rather than a ‘critical evaluation’ of it. In the case of Deleuze, it is difficult to see what the reader will make of two paragraphs about Lacan extrapolated from twenty dense pages almost entirely dedicated to discussing other intricate issues. In that of Althusser, his highly misleading ‘ideological’ reading of the Lacanian Imaginary would probably be of use only to those readers who are already well acquainted with Lacan’s own arguments on the topic. (For a preliminary interpretation of Althusser’s inconsistent appropriation of Lacan – and not, as its title deceptively claims, for Lacan’s own ‘Marxism’ – one should refer to Joseph Valente’s contribution in *The Companion*.) Second, there is the decision of the publishing house to leave in the original French a couple of articles which had not yet been translated into English. A chance was therefore missed to make available to a wider public Mannoni’s essential ‘Je sais bien, mais quand même’ (whose main tenet about fetishist disavowal has been proficiently resumed in Žižek’s own theory). Finally, there is the ludicrous price, which remains unjustified, even if one takes into consideration the prospective overseas library market, the elegance of the binding and the total number of

pages (or, as my invoice specified in bold type, the net weight of 3.190 kilos).

It is well known how Lacan defended his subversion of the psychoanalytic establishment by advocating a ‘return’ to the true spirit of the Freudian revolution. Lacan’s inventive additions originate from his insistence in confronting and partially overcoming the many deadlocks of Freud’s oeuvre. In a similar fashion, in order to be constructive, the return to Lacan we have been experiencing for the last fifteen years, and which is somehow implicitly monumentalized by these two collections, should avoid dogmatizing Lacan’s work. It is essential to encourage what Rabaté defines as a ‘dynamic usage’ of Lacan in several contexts. What is nevertheless needed in order to (re)direct properly this interdisciplinary endeavour is a detailed analysis of Lacanian concepts: this would probably show that they are less deliberately elusive than they may initially seem. Soler’s *mot d’ordre* is more than ever timely: ‘We just need to read Lacan closely.’

Lorenzo Chiesa

Reading Hegel’s entrails

Christopher M. Gemberchak, *The Sunday of the Negative: Reading Bataille Reading Hegel*, SUNY, New York, 2003. 291 pp., £58.25 hb, £20.00 pb., 0 7914 5631 5 hb., 0 7914 5632 3 pb.

From the very beginning of this book Gemberchak argues that he is responding to our ongoing failure to read Bataille properly. Part of the reason for this failure may lie within the challenging and labyrinthine nature of Bataille’s work itself, which Gemberchak memorably describes as resembling more ‘a midnight journey through a ravaged city than a body of philosophical thought’. However, this study argues that a much more significant reason for our failure is a lack of understanding of the way in which Bataille’s thought became mobilized as a very specific type of reading of and challenge to Hegel – ‘Without fully understanding Bataille’s profound intimacy with, and *détournement* of the work of Hegel, one quite simply fails to fully comprehend Bataille.’ Yet Gemberchak acknowledges that his ‘theoretical’ study inevitably misses the radical experience that Bataille had ceaselessly sought to communicate, and as such even his attempts to read Bataille

properly represent a profound 'betrayal'. For Gemerchak what remains important, despite this 'betrayal', is the repetition of Bataille's fundamentally religious gesture – 'like a living Zarathustra, he urgently tried to communicate a religious feeling that has been lost.' Gemerchak's study is orientated by what he argues is Bataille's religious reconfiguration of Hegel's notion of determinate negativity as *gratuitous* negativity.

Gemerchak begins the work with a brief overview of the complex texture of Bataille's life. He identifies Bataille's decisive philosophical encounter with Kojève's lectures on Hegel in the 1930s at the *École des Hautes Études*. Gemerchak argues that before one can proceed to any genuine analysis and evaluation of Bataille's specific challenge to Hegel, one must excavate Bataille from 'the layers of Kojévian sedimentation through which we must pass'. As part of this effort at excavation, he traces Bataille's transfiguration of Hegel's notion of the 'Sunday of Life' (a notion derived from Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*). For Hegel, religious faith was the realm where one's worldly concerns (those governed by the 'labour of the negative') are humbly suspended and subordinated to an elevated region free from the critical reflection intrinsic to the 'labour of the negative'. Within Kojève's lectures on Hegel this notion of the 'Sunday of Life' lost its religious characteristic and was subjected to a secular reconfiguration. For Kojève it was the world of the well-educated and bored individuals who simply have nothing to do at the 'end of history' apart from 'filling their mouths' and 'watching time pass'. Gemerchak shows how Bataille adopted this bleak picture of the post-Hegelian age from Kojève as his own starting point. Bataille reconceived the Hegelian/Kojévian 'end of history' as a moment of messianic suspension holding an eschatological promise of deliverance from 'the homogenous course of history'. Gemerchak convincingly demonstrates that for Bataille such post-Hegelian deliverance will *once again* take on a religious form. Bataille became obsessed with exploring radically different possibilities for humanity with regard to its intrinsic negativity once the 'labour of the negative' had been completed. For Bataille there remained a post-Hegelian possibility for the revelation of ourselves and that it could only occur after the working week, on Sunday – the day of rest. For Bataille this was never simply a matter of straightforward worship but of what he called the 'inner experience' of risk, chance, eroticism, play and laughter. From the Hegelian perspective of the labouring determinate negative these things have no meaning and are essentially gratuitous and useless.

However, to remain constrained within the Hegelian perspective was, for Bataille, radically to subordinate our lives to a degrading and somewhat impoverished chain of secular utility.

Gemerchak's text consists of two distinct parts. The first part concentrates on the anthropological, economic, religious and philosophical elements that form the basis of Bataille's work. He begins by analysing Bataille's 'laughter' in response to Hegel, but argues that it was a laughter provoked by a deep sense of recognition and affinity with Hegel. Bataille had realized that he was obliged to take Hegel seriously, and that he had to immerse himself within the entrails of Hegel's rational immanence and engage in a sophisticated form of haruspical reading. From within the entrails of that immanence Bataille discloses a profound but hilarious pretension within the activity of Hegelian *Aufhebung*, in particular its attempt to master conceptually every event it encounters, and to recover meaning even in the meaningless. What Gemerchak's study admirably explores is the degree to which Bataille's reading sought to reveal the profound and inescapable truth of Hegel, whilst fundamentally challenging its sense. So Bataille's haruspical gesture involves reading and communicating the essential truth of Hegel in order to demonstrate how it ultimately leads to non-sense – 'Hegel against the immutable Hegel'. At various points throughout the book Gemerchak mobilizes some distinctly Derridean insights in order to explain how Bataille's reading proceeds through a method of appropriating Hegelian concepts and reversing them, a *détournement*. He concludes the first part of the book with a detailed analysis of Bataille's economic theory, concentrating on the influence of a certain genealogy of 'sacrifice'. In particular he traces the influence of Mauss's discussion of potlatch in *The Gift* and Weber's analysis of the movement from the religious to the economic.

The second part of the book attempts to present a consistent account of how Bataille proceeded to apply his thought, together with an assessment of the relative success of these applications. The main focus here is Bataille's attempt to reveal the elusive 'religious' experience of what he termed 'intimacy'. Gemerchak emphasizes the degree to which Bataille's thought repeatedly challenges the mastery of rational philosophical discourse with a specific notion of poetry – a notion that for Bataille indicated the dispossession of the subject by language itself, leading the poet into a profoundly mystical or religious type of silence. For Bataille the space of the poet was one where the philosopher's discourse of knowledge fell silent. In

the final chapter Gemerchak brings together many of the major elements excavated from Bataille's thought into a powerful assemblage of mysticism, eroticism and sacrifice.

Throughout the book Bataille's thought is presented as the ceaseless search for religious 'intimacy', for an unknowable depth to Being. Gemerchak shows how his challenge to Hegel was governed by an insistence upon the disturbing awareness that something irreducibly 'sacred' remains regardless of thought's claim to completion, which defies inclusion within the systematic parameters of speculative reason. For Bataille Hegelianism remained utterly blind to this sacred remainder. Whilst Bataille clearly acknowledged Hegel as a thinker of difference, he claimed that difference is only ever thought in order to 'eliminate' it, to 'absolve' absolute knowledge from a dependence on anything 'other'. Hegel's Absolute permits nothing outside it, so its notion of difference is no real difference at all. The Absolute generates differences like a type of machine, a machine constructed simply to reconcile itself to its own generated differences. Hegel's machine logically coerces negativity into collaboration with meaning through the *Aufhebung* and its process of conversion of every negative into a positive, through its activity of generating sense from the senseless. However, for Bataille (and for Derrida also) Hegel's machine simply cannot work. So when we try to think through or read the workings of this calculative machine, a machine that seemingly functions through and is fuelled by the impossible activity of the incorporation and transfiguration of the energetics of negativity, it will always destroy itself – it will always explode. Bataille insisted that if a state of complete knowledge is claimed in the style of Hegelian philosophy it is only ever a false *sense* of completion achieved through a complete assimilation of the other to which it is in relation. This is an inadmissible operation for Bataille in so far as the radical other always remains the locus of something not merely unknown but utterly unknowable. For Bataille genuine self-consciousness emerges from an acknowledgement of a necessary relation to that which is eternally beyond us (the impossible), that which escapes conscious knowledge, eludes our grasp, and indeed calls our self-certainty radically into question (death, God).

For Bataille from this necessary relation to the unknowable comes another form of knowledge – 'knowing non-knowledge', a type of conscious unknowing that marks various forms of religious comportment. From an examination of the very entrails of Hegel's system comes the irreducible awareness of this

unthinkable remainder. Bataille's fundamental insight upon reading Hegel was that the very ground upon which he had staked his claim to full self-conscious being or knowledge was in fact no ground at all. It was always a dark abyss over which he was suspended by his knowledge claims. Bataille's challenge to Hegel illuminates the way we are intrinsically bound to something 'in us' that we can never know or master; there is something 'in us' that always fundamentally exceeds us. For Bataille the active component in the search for intimacy with this fundamental excess (what Bataille called the 'sovereignty' of beings) is the religious 'sacrifice'. For Bataille the gesture of religious 'sacrifice' was to be understood as a much more profound effort to achieve some type of 'genuine' or 'authentic' experience of the impossible beyond than Hegel had ever acknowledged. By reading Bataille reading Hegel, Gemerchak manages to show Bataille as a twentieth-century haruspex, crouched over the very entrails of Hegel's system in search of the impossible.

Darren Ambrose

No novel

Roland Barthes, *La Préparation du roman I et II: Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1978–1979 et 1979–1980)*, ed. Nathalie Léger, Seuil/IMEC, Paris, 2003. 478 pp., €25.00 hb., 2 02 047845 5.

Graham Allen, *Roland Barthes*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003. xvi + 169 pp., £45.00 hb., £8.99 pb., 0 415 26361 1 hb., 0 415 26362 X pb.

The publication of *La Préparation du roman I et II (1978–1980) (Preparing for the Novel)* represents the completion of Éditions du Seuil and the Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine's collaborative issuing of Roland Barthes's lecture courses and seminars at the Collège de France, given between 1976 and 1980, and made possible by the entrusting of Barthes's manuscripts to IMEC in 1997. These volumes present us with a scholarly edition of Barthes's own lecture notes, in conjunction with MP3 recordings of the lectures themselves. These last two lecture courses have a shared focus on Barthes's desire for a new life and a particular form of writing: the 'romanesque' or 'novelistic'. As such, they can be read as the tentative culmination of Barthes's ethical reachings toward a peaceful and non-doctrinal intellectual life in the previous Collège de France courses, *How to Live Together* (Spring 1977) and *The Neutral* (Spring 1978).

However, it seems more useful and compelling to consider the *Preparing for the Novel* courses in the context of Barthes's more familiar work from the same period, which can perhaps be seen as the 'practice' of the lectures' 'theory'.

Reading the courses one realizes, for example, that Barthes's celebrated Proust lecture, 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure' – repeated almost word for word in the first lecture of this series – is no less than the incipit and kernel of these two years of research and speculation. The primary object of this work is the personal and ethical imperative that the writer find a form that will express 'la vérité d[e ses] affects' without attenuation or gloss. This imperative is worked out in the public sphere, with varying degrees of success, in Barthes's *Chroniques* for the *Nouvel Observateur* (contemporaneous with the first *Preparing for the Novel* course), which he saw as being 'like test starts for a novel', and in *Camera Lucida*. *Camera Lucida* – written between the delivery of the two lecture courses, in the summer of 1979 – appears from this perspective as the hinge that holds together and illuminates these two courses, and fulfils the hope for new and truthful form, a hope that is often frustrated within the courses themselves.

Preparing for the Novel opens with Barthes's insistence (reprising 'Longtemps') that he needs a new form for his writing. The origin of this imperative is located in his grief for his deceased mother: the certainty of the reality of death cuts him off from his former self and his former writing (of which, in any case, he has grown weary, comparing his situation as constant essayist to that of Sisyphus '[who] is not content'). There must be a new departure, and, 'for he who writes ... a *Vita Nova* can only come about with the discovery of a new writing practice'. Hence the preoccupation of both courses with the choice and execution of a form of writing which, by truthfully presenting affect, will encompass and thereby transcend suffering. Barthes's ideal of this form is named 'romanesque' (the word is familiar to us from *Roland Barthes* by Roland Barthes and *The Pleasure of the Text*): here we discover in detail the hope – and 'preparation' – for a novelistic work which is not a novel, that is, a work which consists, intensely, of 'moments of

truth', emotion and constative description, undiluted by any apparatus of narration or characterization.

For Barthes, the extant formal encapsulation of the 'moment of truth' is the Japanese haiku. Much of the first course is taken up with analysis and description of the composition and effects of the haiku. Barthes's affinity with the haiku takes the form of an almost breathtaking faith in the ability of these tiny poems to designate, and resonate with, the truth of the human's being in the world. 'With the haiku', he asserts, 'I am in the *Sovereign Good* of writing – and the world.' He then goes on to explain that the haiku's project is coextensive with that of this course, which seeks to 'clarify...the transition from *Life* (and the haiku is taken straight from life, *without remainder*) to a form which constitutes it after the event as memory, emotion, intelligibility, kindness.' The haiku, for Barthes, cannot but be true – rather like the photo, the *noème* or 'inimitable feature' of which is the subject of a three-page section here, which prefigures *Camera Lucida*.

The course in its entirety figures a perhaps rather naive equation of contingency, subjectivity and authenticity:



indeed, contingency reinforces one's certainty that this is real: the more [the writing] is contingent, the more it is authentic. Haiku: a type of Testimonial. The paradox is this: it is upon subjectivity (of enunciation) that the authenticity of the testimony is founded.

This citation illustrates to what extent the unabashed assumption of personal taste ('I am interested in the haiku *for myself*') is employed by Barthes, after Nietzsche, as both criterion and guarantor of truth and rigour. This tactic will be familiar to readers of *The Pleasure of the Text*. In the context of the course, Barthes's elaboration of *his* certainty of the haiku's 'goodness' (in every sense) does not go far enough, however, given the implicit belief that the haiku perforce represents a 'sovereign good' for everyone who reads it: the means by which a delight in the aesthetic of the haiku morphs into ethical benefit for writer and reader are simply not made sufficiently clear.

Another problem – of which Barthes is fully aware – is that the perfect intensity and clarity of the haiku form are unsustainable. Barthes notes the paradox of focusing on this shortest of forms and wonders, throughout, how the leap will be made to the longer form of the novel. If we have not begun to doubt already, it is here that we realise that in fact the leap will not be made; that the novel for which we are preparing (or being prepared) will not be written, precisely because of Barthes's need and desire to preserve 'moments of truth' without sequence, narration or omniscience. He sees himself as 'assuming the futility' of 'not giving a meaning, any meaning' to any of these moments. He refuses to envisage a 'novel' which, by linking together 'novelistic moments', would confer 'a general, systematic or doctrinal meaning' on the whole work. Such a construction, by Barthes's lights, would be both arrogant and false. He therefore explicitly renounces the idea of writing a novel. 'Finally, then, the resistance to the novel, the incapacity for the novel (for its practice) seems to be a moral resistance', he announces at the end of the first course.

Thus, before the second course of *Preparing for the Novel* is opened, the reader knows that these endeavours are a 'preparation' for nothing, no novel, but themselves. This fundamental gap should not, however, be regarded as a flaw in the courses' construction. Barthes has given us to understand, in 'Longtemps', that he regards the process of production as being more important than any possible product. What counts is that one thinks prospectively, utopically: 'I must act as if I am going to write this utopian Novel.' It is postulation or simulation that informs the work, rather

than any actual 'thing' (novel). This accords with the emphasis, throughout, on questions of form rather than content. (Perhaps bizarrely, Barthes at times appears to regard the issue of content as incidental, if not petty.) This emphasis holds true for both the course at hand and the postulated but impossible novel.

The second course is more rigidly constructed than the first, with its 'plan' set out in the manner of a dramatic piece: the prologue, treating 'the Desire to write', cedes to a study of the three 'trials' faced by the would-be writer. The trials are those of choice (choice of form), patience (in one's everyday endeavours) and separation (the writer must, says Barthes, accept that his chosen mode of life sets him apart from the majority of his fellows). The discussion of the second trial consists largely of examples of Barthes's favourite writers at work. Thus the timetables, menus, drugs of choice, rooms, quirks and habits of all kinds of such writers as Chateaubriand, Kafka, Flaubert and of course Proust are examined and described in detail. Finally, the course closes with 'a Conclusion? An Epilogue? No... a Suspension, rather'.

The opening section, on the desire to write that stems from reading ('amorous reading' engenders 'a fertile writing') reiterates a familiar Barthesian theme; it is most strongly reminiscent of *Criticism and Truth* (1966). In the context of the Collège courses themselves, the issue of the writer's desire for writing – for the word – becomes more fraught and contradictory as we see Barthes explaining and interrogating his own opposing impulses towards writing and towards silence. In the *Neutral* course, as elsewhere, he figures his life as a permanent oscillation between the blissful exaltation of language and the desire for a rest from language, for a suspension. The first *Preparing for the Novel* course gives us another take on this problem. We now realise that the suspension of writing, from having been the subject of occasional weary wishful thinking, has become Barthes's overwhelming realization that what he wants to write – the novel of 'moments of truth' – is *not possible*. The 'suspension' is therefore imposed upon him in the form of his inability to attain the desired sustained truth in writing. A concomitant cause for the sadness and regret infusing the end of this course is Barthes's perception that the desire to write – frustrated or otherwise – is no longer recognized as worthwhile in a world in which, he asserts, literature is dying. This belief informs the pained tone of the section on the third trial, the moral test of the writer's anguished separation from the social world. The necessity for these courses, as it appears to Barthes, becomes apparent:

Perhaps this great drama of the Desire-to-Write can only be written in a time of decline, when literature is fading away: perhaps the 'essence' of these things only appears when they are dying.

Barthes writes elegantly, if perhaps melodramatically, of his sadness at feeling that his own desire and need for literature render him 'out of time'; he feels 'viscerally excluded from the contemporary. My whole being is rejected by current History, sent back, passionately and desperately, to an abolished History, to the Past.' This seems profoundly pessimistic. The postulated novel, the acts of speculation and reflection, and the assurance of ethical benefit which may be derived from the writer's personal redemption through the assumption of a 'Vita Nova' – all seem rendered pointless by Barthes's belief that the realm of literature now belongs to the *inactuel* (irrelevant to the present day) and the past. However, in the last ten pages of the course, Barthes recuperates his own position and the postulative trajectory of both courses with an audacious flourish: the old becomes new again, he affirms: 'We should no longer consider *classic writing* as a form which we must defend in so far as it is an outmoded, legal, conformist, repressive form. Rather, we must think of it as a form which the rotation and *inversion* of History is rendering new again.' The 'classic' becomes new: 'Classic Writing, no longer part of the Durable ... becomes *Fresh*' – or, the *inactuel* becomes *actuel* again. Barthes hereby justifies his own faith in the saving powers of literature, and his avowed ultimate desire, in the aftermath of avant-garde discordancy, to 'write a work in C major'. As the course closes with this statement, it may occur to us that Barthes had already written this C major work; reactionary and unique, 'banal and singular', momentary and continuous – the impossible novel, *Camera Lucida*.

Preparing for the Novel will be of most interest to those already familiar with the oeuvre it extends and illuminates. Graham Allen's monograph provides a concise and unintimidating introduction to the work of Barthes, aimed particularly at students who have read little, if any, of the original. Allen's *Roland Barthes* forms part of Routledge's *Critical Thinkers* series. Allen writes lucidly and fluidly within the confines of this structure. Evidently at ease with the many subject areas through which Barthes's work slides, the author manages to convey without reduction Barthes's complex positions in relation to the thinkers and theories of his own time. Such is Allen's skill, in fact, in presenting the trajectory of Barthes's career, that

this introductory guide brilliantly exceeds its limits. It deserves to be read by those familiar with Barthes, as a timely reminder, analysis and interrogation of his cumulative significance.

Allen sets out Barthes's 'Key Ideas' in nine chapters. The thread is run from Barthes's first book, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), to his last, *Camera Lucida* (1980). The theory of literature set out in the former – the idea that all writing is permanently assimilated by the dominant culture – is seized upon by Allen as the dialectical 'thesis' informing Barthes's overarching theoretical strategy: because 'writing as defined ... in Barthes's first book ... is threatened, if it does not regularly change itself, by a general and irreversible acculturation', the writer must constantly shift expectation by altering his focus and method. Following this logic of 'acculturation', Allen's exegesis follows a similar path to that taken in studies by Jonathan Culler, Michael Moriarty and Rick Rylance; as such this volume is complemented by a reading of those longer-established monographs. Its advantage is that, in being more recent, it is in a better position to analyse Barthes's 'legacy' as it has crystallized in the twenty-odd years since his death. For example, Allen rightly emphasizes and debunks misconceptions which pinpoint Barthes's 'killing' of the author as the originary articulation of poststructuralism, by pointing out that 'with its focus on system ... structuralism had already dispensed with the figure of the author'. Other important moments include the analysis of hedonism and its implications for literary criticism, and the inspired juxtaposing, in the commentary, of Barthes's *S/Z* and his articles on Sollers. In tracing the connections between Barthes's criticism of classic and avant-garde texts, Allen hints at the fundamental tension between taste and engagement which is played out in the later works.

The analysis of *Camera Lucida*, towards the end of the text, acts as a summing up of Barthes's career and ideals, in line with the author's justified belief that acculturation was *the* demon fought by Barthes. With this work on photography, Allen argues, Barthes manages to balance in language and retain a singularity of affect which usually is lost: 'Barthes's last book is a stunning act of defiance, a text which defies (writes in spite of) the knowledge of its own impossibility. It is a text written against the force with which he had struggled all his writing life: language's power to assimilate the new and the particular into that which is culturally accepted, generalized and thus disembodied.' It is a powerful conclusion.

Lucy O'Meara

Reading lessen

Warren Montag, *Louis Althusser*, Palgrave Macmillan, London and New York, 2003. 192 pp., £45.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 0 3339 1898 3 hb., 0 3339 1899 1 pb.

For Althusser there was no such thing as an innocent reading, and Warren Montag's book is no exception. For what is presented as a general monograph on Althusser is in fact centred on his contributions to literary theory. Montag attempts a new reading of Althusser's work and applies its theoretical insights to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Althusser's own autobiography. Montag is both sympathetic to and knowledgeable about his subject. However, there is something misleading about presenting Althusser as a literary theorist. While the author validly insists on the significance of Althusser's pieces on theatre and art, the accuracy of his overall presentation of Althusser's work is more questionable as he neglects central texts, such as 'Contradiction and Overdetermination'.

Montag attempts to read Althusser's work in a new way. How can we produce a reading that is genuinely new? Through reading Althusser's work 'to the letter', in the same manner as Althusser read Marx. Althusser's work remains unexplored territory, Montag claims, in so far as nobody had paid attention to its text in its literal, material existence. 'To read his work carefully, to the letter as he liked to say, is to retrace voyages on waterways that, however promising their beginnings, proved finally to be impassable; it is also however to rediscover rivers still open and unexplored before us, perhaps leading to seas still to be found.' Montag's originality is his orientation towards the materiality of the Althusserian texts rather than the ideas or arguments that can be abstracted from his writings.

Reading Althusser in this 'materialist way' is, first, to recognize that texts in their historical existence are irreducibly real. They are a 'surface without depth' irreducible to anything else, internal or external, such as the intentions of the author or the world-view of a social class. They do not express, reflect or represent something more real. This irreducibility constitutes the material existence of the work. Second, it is to recognize the essential contradictory nature of the text. Far from finding a 'system' of Althusserianism, with the predicates of order, coherence and homogeneity of meaning and style postulated by both admirers and detractors alike, Montag is interested in lacunae, inconsistencies and contradictions in his work. He says of Althusser's work what Marx could point to in

Adam Smith: 'the text does not see all that it does'. Every literary or philosophical text says more than it wants to say or knows that it says. A symptomatic reading presupposes the existence of two texts, one of which becomes visible only when we notice the gaps of the first. To produce knowledge of a text is to grasp not only what it says, but what it does not and cannot say: 'The silences, these empty spaces are the signs of the work's incompleteness, the signs of its relation to history.' Of the text's incompleteness, discrepancies and absences, Montag concludes: 'it is not only what Althusser says, but the way that conflicting tendencies of thought coexist without the conflict being addressed or even acknowledged, that constitutes the dramatic experience of reading Althusser.' Finally, a materialist reading insists that the text is incomplete and unfinishable. A text is not reducible to the historical conditions of its emergence and can never be explained once and for all.

This 'new reading' of Althusser is in fact the thinker's own practice of symptomatic reading, which is also, according to Montag, his major contribution to literary studies. However, Althusser's thought is at once valorized and displaced in Montag's book. Althusser's originality was to extract a number of ideas present in the classical Marxist tradition – the 'relative autonomy' of superstructures, 'differential temporality', the 'overdetermination' of historical conjunctures, the distinction between 'real objects' and 'objects of knowledge', the permanence of ideology – and to construct from them a distinctive problematic for historical materialism which would enable it to produce new knowledge, both theoretical and empirical. However, if Montag correctly shows the similarities between Althusser's approach and Spinoza's reading of the Scriptures, at worst he neglects and at best he does not insist enough on the links of Althusser's writings with Marxism, at the levels of both theory and practice. Althusser's theoretical intervention 'for Marx' was framed within the debates of the world communist movement. If insisting on the reality or materiality of texts and their contradictory and incomplete nature produces a new concept of literature and identifies many of the theoretical obstacles that block the way of knowledge, it is not clear how this is intrinsically related to the problematic of historical materialism. Althusser was not simply a materialist: he was a Leninist. One can only make sense of his work if it is placed within the critique of the capitalist mode of production from the point of view of labour. However, the only labour in Montag's book seems to be the 'labour of reading'.

Liam O Ruairc

Walls of theory

NOISETHEORYNOISE#1, Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy,
Middlesex University, 6 March 2004

'Noise is an unmapped continent, in comparison with which everything we recognize as music remains a parochial backwater', announced the organizers of this conference. Disdaining 'postmodern academicism's ostentatious displays of theoretical chic', noise will invent its own theory. With its large and attentive audience, NOISETHEORYNOISE certainly felt as though it had trapped a beast with life in it, as yet unpinned to the racks of either commerce or academe. The music/noise couplet did, however, allow speakers to rehearse the neo-Kantian paradoxes beloved of poststructuralism, where knowledge is always tragic because it misses out on the unknown.

Yet continental philosophy was not what brought in the hundred or so punters: it was Noise. Although definition is endlessly contestable, *Radical Philosophy* readers should be told that Noise emerged as a subgenre in the mid-1990s. Noise makes the apparatus of rock amplification the main event, displacing the song form (now demoted to 'mere rock'n'roll'). It's been particularly active in Japan. Finding shapes in random inkblots has a long history in oriental landscape painting and Japanese painters responded to abstract expressionism in a peculiarly pretty (or at least 'not ugly') manner. The Japanese take on Noise is characterized by a similar aestheticism: Merzbow and Keiji Haino have become celebrated exponents of Noise, with countless releases and many prestigious appearances. *The Wire* became house journal for the movement, and there are Noise sections in record shops. As Scanner informed us in his response at the end of the conference, Noise has arrived: it was recently granted a half-hour window on BBC Radio 1. The slippage between 'noise' as a description of non-music and Noise as a genre was occasionally awkward and baffling, but had to be accepted since it was the conference's premiss.

In his talk, 'Noise & Modernism', David Cunningham tried to forestall some undialectical oppositions which might hinder debate. He quoted Jacques Attali saying that noise is not the opposite of music, but music's way of articulating social conflict. He quoted Theodor Adorno saying that noise is the residue of the physical in music, and can no more be extirpated from it than nature can be extirpated from history. Using Sonic Youth, Merzbow, Oval and John Cage as examples, Cunningham voiced a gentle critique of some of the more exaggerated claims of Noise to emancipate the sonic 'in-itself', and reminded us that, according to Adorno, what sounds like the immanent historicity of an art work is actually a social development. A fiercer critique would need Marx's concept of alienation: if the critic doesn't explain how capitalism alienates us from musicality by reducing musical traditions to commodities (whether the classical 'heritage' or pop product), emphasis on the 'social' can sound like a pious wish.

Nick Smith's title – 'Why Hardcore Goes Soft' – was another critique of Noise ideology. Having listened to Japanese Noise artist Masonna's CD on headphones on a transatlantic flight, Smith found its jagged transgressions (achieved by overloading PA systems so the sonic picture breaks up, the equivalent of an artist ripping into the canvas) 'predictable, redundant and boring'. His curiously banalized Adorno – essentially an extension of Kant's 'beauty is ruleless' – resulted in a 'but porn is so boring'-style put-down of Noise. As Colin Cod from the group Zion Train pointed out from the audience, Smith had failed to notice the sarcasm and satire in Masonna's work, its reflection on its own limitations, and hence its musicality.

Paul Hegarty's 'Voice as Noise' resembled a hack 'primer' feature in *Wire* magazine: a string of examples from the twentieth-century avant-garde presented as positive culture, omitting the only principle that can make sense of such works – the avant-garde's negational dynamic. Kant was quoted on bird song as if Olivier Messiaen's researches hadn't proved him wrong, and we were played gruesome snippets of avant-exhibitionism by Antonin Artaud, Joan La Barbara and Diamanda Galas. Anyone who casually refers to Kurt Schwitters' *Ursonate* as 'rubbish' is unlikely to convince this listener that he has anything useful to say about either noise or music. In the discussion, Nick Smith revealed more of the Cage-inflected version of Adorno which circulates in the United States, where his sublime has become 'contentless' and 'intentionless'. But Adorno had no time for Zen, and interpreted the formal transgressions of Schoenberg as recognition of painful social facts.

Greg Hainge's talk reminded us that the sensual rush of much Noise comes from focusing on the sound of a needle in a vinyl groove. His use of PowerPoint to illustrate his musical examples with images and texts exposed the *slowness* and *inertness* of bureaucratic technologies compared to the directness and physicality of Noise (improvised visuals is something only the French group Metamkiné has so far cracked). We were shown tattooed arms and told we needed to 'map music at the molecular level'. Hainge's glamorous post-structuralist buzzwords weren't getting us anywhere.

Steve Goodman's 'Turbulence: The Art of War in the Art of Noise' resembled an article in *Mute*, full of fascinating facts about sinister new technologies of domination, but somewhat unclear about what to do about them. Although the (brilliant) Jungle artists he played from black pirate radio use names like 'Turbulence', 'Rocket Science' and 'Vortex', the connections drawn to Paul Virilio seemed forced. Using Michel Serres on Democritus, Goodman followed Deleuze in leaping from physics to crowd theory. The relative quiescence of anti-capitalism means that Goodman's talk of 'swarming' sounded less sexy than it did two years ago, while the Deleuzian jargon's reduction of political agents to things is somewhat sinister in itself. As a way of voicing alienation it packs an aesthetic punch, but as a blueprint for revolutionary politics, it's thin indeed. Marx also began with Democritus and his doctrine of the immanent tendencies of atoms, but his dialectical critique of the Platonic split between matter and form didn't jump straight to mapping riots; it went on to criticize capitalism's own rationality. Marx opens the door to conscious left politics, which Deleuze closes.

Rather than drawing genuine connections between consumerism and war, comparing Jungle to the US military's research into the use of sound to disorientate the enemy at long distance ('sonic war machines') is a *Loaded*-style fantasy. Genuine analysis would need to factor in youth unemployment, new technology, the price of oil, the rate of profit, international relations. The stunning, uncompromisingly de-referenced rhythms of Jungle are certainly blows against the black middle class's concept of heritage, but merely to celebrate Afro-diasporic polyrhythm versus bad 'laminal' thinking is dualist and wishful. Some concept of social identity and class oppression, the motivational eroticism of new beats and the packaging of black music as a racialized



commodity might help. The problem with Deleuze is not simply that he was a confused anarchist with a corny taste in literature and painting, but that his ability to feed adolescent fantasy immunizes his enthusiasts from the deeper radicalism of Freud and Marx.

Aled Rees presented a poetical polemic called 'Location and Forces: Sound, Noise and Human Reality'. Rather than succumbing to their jargon, he used Deleuze and Guattari to voice what he wanted to say: the noise/music distinction is irrelevant; what needs to be studied is affects inculcated by sound; the intent of the noise-maker matters; sound needn't be manipulative, it can be organized to make listeners aware of how it works. Rees was speaking from a genuine engagement with music. Peter Osborne's characterization of his stance as 'Deleuzo-mysticism' failed to dent it. Rees made a crucial observation when he said musical pain is not absolute: given the presence of open-minded, unrepressed listeners, the 'pain' of Cecil Taylor's piano playing or the 'racket' of *Trout Mask Replica* may be experienced as joy.

However, this aesthetic fact introduces a dimension which Rees's Deleuzian subjectivism, lacking class analysis, cannot use. One suspects the Deleuzeans' view of music would be broader if they took fewer drugs and went to more weddings: certainly, by the time commitment to Noise as genre has become this partisan, we are very far from Marx's 'nothing human is foreign to me'. Musical forces like Ornette Coleman, Frank Zappa, Derek Bailey and Eugene Chadbourne may be dismissed as noise by their detractors, but they ask their listeners to open up to musics outside the range of the cool and saleable: practical rebuttal of conspicuous consumption of commodities in favour of musical use value. Rees took Keiji Haino (Japanese guitarist, hurdy-gurdyman, speaker-in-tongues) to be the very pinnacle of the Noise aesthetic. In genre terms, that may be so, but such unquestionable aesthetic 'facts' (Glenn Miller as the king of swing) are usually covers for mass deception. To these ears, Haino is a bombastic and incompetent thespian-in-black hyped by ex-*New Musical Express* journalists astute at selling rebellion to alienated and sexually frustrated young men: a prime example of the commodity fetishism Rees thinks Noise contests. But even if Rees's judgements were clouded by his identity as a Noise consumer, his paper broke the ice and created some theoretical turbulence.

Down with a bump for Julius Nil, whose unwittingly absurd presentation data-projected portrait photos of Adorno and Barthes as he quoted them, thus fetishizing the anti-fetishists. Using as examples three recent *Wire* favourites (Helmut Lechenmann, Autechre, Resplendent) Nil tried to apply Adorno's Beckettian concept of 'failure' to them. Seldom have theory and music been less well matched, since all three musics shine with musical and technological competence. Nil lacked the courage to voice his own opinions (one missed the soul-baring which made you warm to Rees), using theory as a machine for distributing Brownie points. Nil no more got inside his theory than his music, a failure no amount of laptop software could hide. He was pretentious, derivative, paratactic, unconvincing... to use his own, oft-repeated phrase, *I could go on*.

The conference was capped by a chill slice of classical Adornoism from Wesley Phillips: 'On Incomprehensibility in Music'. For once, a philosopher was found with something helpful to say: Schlegel observed that incomprehensibility is a means of creating artistic tension. At one blow, the neo-Kantian antinomy of noise/music had been smashed! Phillips explained Adorno's belief that music surpasses the mind/body distinction with impressive eloquence. This linked with the materialist monism of Rees's pointing out that all sounds (whether environmental noise or deliberate music) have an emotional affect. As often at a conference, you felt the best papers laid a foundation which should become the premiss of another day's discussion. Aided by Rees's commitment to musics outside the canon, Phillips's ideas could be sprung from the upholstered chamber of classical composition and be given some real explaining to do. Judging by the way Colin Cod – probably the most knowledgeable musician and pop/noise enthusiast in the audience – was gradually silenced by the shifting walls of theory, such a breakthrough is sorely needed.

Ben Watson

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