RADICAL PHILOSOPHY
a journal of socialist and feminist philosophy

142

MARCH/APRIL 2007

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Copyedited and typeset by illuminati
www.illuminatibooks.co.uk

Production and layout by Peter Osborne and David Cunningham

Printed by Russell Press, Russell House, Bulwell Lane, Basford, Nottingham NG6 0BT

**Bookshop distribution**
UK: Central Books,
115 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN
Tel: 020 8986 4854

USA: Ubiquity Distributors Inc.,
607 Degraw Street, Brooklyn, New York 11217
Tel: 718 875 5491

**Cover**: *Big Banana*, Høvikodden, 2006.

Published by Radical Philosophy Ltd.
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COMMENTARY

# Mexico's long transition to democracy

**Pilar Villela Mascaro**

Mexico was not only the first country to have a revolution in the twentieth century; it also built its most long-lasting one-party government. When Vicente Fox of the PAN (National Action Party) was elected in 2000, he was the first president not to belong to the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), which had ruled Mexico for more than seventy years. His election was viewed with enthusiasm by large sectors of the population, who believed it represented the advent of an effective 'democracy': once the PRI had been thrown out of office, and a complex and expensive apparatus had been set in place in order to guarantee the transparency of elections – especially regarding the non-intervention of the party in government – the advent of democracy could be celebrated and its advantages enjoyed. Also, and for the first time in Mexico, Fox's government had to work with a plural legislative power, which would not entirely comply with the dictates of the executive. On 2006, the PAN won the election again, but it did so in one of the most conflictual and contested processes in the modern history of the country. The following is a short narrative of Mexico's so-called 'transition to democracy' in the light of two of the conflicts that arose during the last election: one in the arena of institutional politics, the other in that of popular movements.

## Andres Manuel López Obrador and the PRD

The Mexican political system that is currently collapsing derives directly from the order established after the 1910 revolution and the laws expressed in the 1917 Constitution. The PRI was also a direct outcome of the revolution – a complex and long-lasting civil war in which more than a million people died. The party that was to become the PRI was founded by President Plutarco Elías Calles, who managed to pacify the country by establishing allegiances with the chieftains of the strongest belligerent factions in the revolution, eliminating the weakest ones, and negotiating with both trade unions and businessmen. The resulting system was based on the almost absolute power of the presidential figure, whose term of office was six years and who was not open to re-election. Rather, the president chose his successor as the official candidate of the PRI, and the PRI managed – with dubious methods – to win every presidential election from its foundation in 1929 until 2000. Nevertheless, there was always an opposition, and the peace of the country often came at a very high price. The media were co-opted by the government and – except for certain crises – dissent was violently but not too visibly repressed.

This system, which carried with it a brutal inequality of income, unbridled and generalized corruption, and devastating economic crises every six years, began to fracture during the government of Miguel de la Madrid (1982–88), the first president to implement neoliberal economic policies and 'open the country' to globalization.

In those years a group of dissidents, under the leadership of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, separated from the PRI. This group, allied with the main left-wing parties, constituted the FND (National Democratic Front), which contested the 1988 presidential elections with the iconic Cárdenas as its leader. His main opponents were Manuel Clouthier from the old right-wing party, the PAN, and Carlos Salinas de Gortari from the PRI. Salinas appeared as the winner, but many Mexicans still consider that Cárdenas won that election.

For years, the PRI had built an elaborate system to guarantee them the majority of the votes. General elections were held regularly, but the full force of the state was legally and illegally geared towards making sure the PRI won each and every time. Under the PRI, the entire country was run (and perhaps still is) through a set of unofficial, illegal rituals and institutions which mirrored, or were mirrored by, the authoritarian presidential system of hidden loyalties, negotiations and small-scale violent repression, which extended to every aspect of Mexican life. Back in 1988, for instance, the computing system that was to count the votes 'collapsed' immediately after the election. Since the law considers that the ballots on which the citizens have voted should be destroyed after a certain period, the votes were never counted again, and there will never be a way to prove whether Carlos Salinas was, indeed, a spurious president.

Salinas, who was president from 1988 to 1994, took the neoliberal project even further, and disarticulated many of the old institutions and principles – factual or merely rhetorical – which came from the Revolution and its aftermath. For instance, he privatized state-run companies, re-established official relations with the Vatican and gave legal status to churches, amended the constitutional laws protecting the *ejidos* (communally owned farming lands) signed NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) with the USA and Canada, and supported an economy mainly based in attracting speculative foreign capital. With the surplus generated by the sale of state companies and the international money passing through Mexican banks, the first years of his government created an illusion of prosperity, supported by an intensive marketing strategy aimed at attracting foreign investment. Although Salinas's policies followed international trends, they also disrupted the internal and unofficial system of loyalties that had sustained PRI-run governments. Within the party, there was a struggle between the 'dinosaurs' – the authoritarian elites that maintained the order inherited from the Revolution – and the American-educated liberal-oriented 'technocrats'. The latter won.

Salinas's government irretrievably damaged the old system, but there was nothing to replace it. Drug traffic increased to unprecedented levels; the banking system went bankrupt and had to be rescued by the state; Luis Donaldo Colosio, the candidate of the PRI – virtually the president – was shot during his campaign; and a new guerrilla-like movement, the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation), spectacularly appeared in Chiapas on the precise day that NAFTA came into force. Once party discipline disappeared, and democratizing measures such as increased press freedom were advanced, the struggles for power of different factions, ranging from trade unions to the Catholic Church, and business organizations, were carried out in the open. The informal rules for political negotiations were broken and the formal institutions lacked the strength to act as mediators. With the structure weakened, the next PRI president was to be the last.

The death of Colosio, and other violent political assassinations, created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, which once again brought the PRI to the presidency. This time the president was Ernesto Zedillo, a considerably less charismatic man than Salinas. He pushed hardline neoliberal policies still further with the ensuing dissolution of the old regime. By 1999, after years of struggles and negotiations, a series of institutions had been created to guarantee the transparency of the elections. Vicente Fox, the tall ex-CEO of Coca-Cola Mexico, ran for the PAN; and when elected president, he

offered the illusion of a change in direction, from the one offered by the single-party government that had outlasted even the Soviet Union.

Fox's government was disastrous for most Mexicans, but not for all. The richest became richer, and the economy complied with the iron rules set by the IMF and the World Bank, geared towards stabilization of the macroeconomy and ignorant of everything else. On the other hand, the dismantling of the institutions, begun by Salinas, carried on. When Fox started his presidency, he made a series of promises as fantastic as any in Coca-Cola advertisements. He didn't offer a refreshing pause, but famously said that he would solve the Chiapas conflict in fifteen minutes, have an economic growth of 7 per cent annually, reach a migratory agreement with the USA, tackle insecurity and poverty, and carry out an integral reform of the state.

The changes never arrived. Fox's sympathizers blamed Congress for tying his hands. The Chiapas conflict is still there and spreading to other parts of the country. The macroeconomy is stabilized by neoliberal policies, but the main source of income for the country is the money sent home by migrant workers in the USA. Not only did Mexico not reach an agreement with the USA, but on October this year President Bush signed the Secure Fence Act, authorizing a 700-mile extension of the barrier that divides the countries, and promised to increase the number of border patrol agents to 24,000 by 2008. In the first part of 2006 more than a thousand people were killed in drug-related incidents – probably Mexico's largest export business aside from oil and human beings. Unemployment and informal labour have increased. Corruption is as bad as ever. Ex-president Fox's family is exemplary of it.

After the 1988 'defeat', Cárdenas's FDN became the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution). Cárdenas had run for president again against Ernesto Zedillo in 1994 and lost. But in 1997 he was elected head of government of Mexico City, or the Mexico Federal District. Previously the head of the district wasn't elected but directly appointed by the president. Cárdenas quit this job to run for president in the 2000 election and again came third after the PRI and the PAN. That same year, another politician who had been in the PRI and was now in the PRD ran for Mexico City: Andres Manuel López Obrador.

López Obrador, another charismatic personality keen on publicity, was attacked by the media, as well as by the PAN–PRI alliance, from the outset. He made some reforms in the city, although the endemic problems remained. Nevertheless, measures such as government aid for the elderly and single mothers made him popular, especially with the poorest sectors of society. His policies were far from being radical, but that didn't prevent the attacks he received from the Right. Probably the strongest was the so-called *desafuero*, or withdrawal of immunity. In May 2004, Congress asked for the withdrawal of immunity over the expropriation by the Mexico City government of some metres of land to build a road, and in the beginning of April 2005 the PRI–PAN majority in the Congress voted for immunity withdrawal. When, on 20 April, the Procuraduría General de la República started the penal process against him, two PAN congressmen, lucidly avoiding granting him martyr status, immediately paid the bail. On 22 April a judge cancelled the arrest order, and on the 24th more than a million people gathered in the Zócalo – the main square of Mexico City – to show their support for López Obrador. In spite of the media attacks, and several other scandals involving the PRD, as the presidential elections of July 2006 approached his popularity was soaring.

At that moment two big political machines were being launched: on one hand, the IFE (Electoral Federal Institute) performed its role by measuring the time allotted on television for each candidate, verifying caps to donations, making sure that the voting lists were consistent, and preparing citizens as observers for the election on 2 July; on the other hand, the financial elites allied to the countries with strong interests in Mexico started a desperate campaign to secure the continuity of the neoliberal project.

For instance, the Consejo Coordinador Empresarial (Business Coordination Council) – a self-righteous conservative organization in which the most powerful Mexican businessmen are involved – launched an advertisement on television in which a black screen was suddenly splattered with blood, followed by the caption 'López Obrador is a Danger for Mexico'. Later on, the IFE advised them to withdraw the ad. The CCE argued that they had the right to defend economical stability. The 'vote of fear' was being actively promoted once again.

In spite of that, López Obrador still had a good chance to win. The country was bitterly divided between supporters of Calderón and Obrador. The PRI had no hope of winning, especially since it had been hit by another internal fracture. Roberto Madrazo ran as candidate, but he fought with 'The Teacher', Elba Esther Gordillo, a woman who had come to public notoriety when – back in the days of Salinas – she had taken over as the leader of one of the strongest and most influential trade unions in the country, the SNTE (National Union of Education Workers), and been prominent in the PRI–PAN alliance. This became of particular importance in the conflict with the APPO.

When the preliminary results of the election began to appear, Obrador's supporters claimed that something was wrong. Mathematicians from the National University stated that the results could not be the outcome of a random process, such as counting ballots, but were consistent with an algorithm that showed the system had been tampered with. Throughout the count, Calderón was ahead of Obrador by a minimum percentage. People were fighting on the streets, and families and friends who had supported different sides avoided each other. When the victory was awarded to Calderón, by a difference of less than 1 per cent, the PRD filed complaints to the Electoral Tribunal and demanded a recount of all the votes. The Tribunal alleged failures in the complaints procedure and disregarded most of the complaints. Massive demonstrations once again took place in Mexico City's Zócalo. The Tribunal agreed to recount a representative proportion of the votes and, during that period, the supporters of López Obrador set up camp in the main avenue of Mexico City, closing it for weeks. The final verdict was that there had been inconsistencies, but not enough to justify recounting all the ballots or annulling the election. Calderón was the elected president and the ballots were to be destroyed.

With the memory of 1988 still fresh in the minds of many voters, the path chosen by López Obrador and his supporters was unorthodox: he decided to call for a National Convention and assume the presidency that he thought was his, constituting a parallel government. This measure was considered outrageous by the Right, and discouraged many of the supporters on the Left. To the Right it confirmed what they had always thought of this man – that he was a dangerous populist megalomaniac – although all the large demonstrations and sit-ins were peaceful. On the Left, many saw his moves as damaging, and considered that the best strategy would have been to accept defeat and continue working within the PRD, concentrating in the areas where they were elected and exerting pressure through their representatives in Congress, since Mexican institutional life needs to be strengthened. Others still support him. Accepting the defeat with his arms crossed would have meant following the strategy of 1988, which didn't allow the PRD to play an important role in the presidential elections for another eighteen years.

Despite the stories in the international press, López Obrador is not on the extreme Left, nor can he be compared to Chávez or Morales. Nevertheless he did offer a different project from Calderón (who may be considered on the extreme Right), albeit along the traditional lines of moderation marked out by the old PRI.

## APPO and other popular insurrections

The government of Vicente Fox started and ended with two serious popular insurrections – in addition to the ongoing Zapatista campaign. Both were brutally repressed. The first involved a town called San Salvador Atenco; I mention it because although it is not related to APPO, it did set a precedent in several ways. In 2001, the federal government saw the need to build an expansion to Mexico City International Airport. Given that the older airport had been engulfed by urban spread, the most reasonable solution was to build an airport elsewhere. The town of Atenco was chosen, not without serious environmental controversies. The government offered to buy the land from the local peasants at an outrageously low price, and promised modernization and development of the area in exchange. The local population refused. The conflict escalated to the point that local authorities fled the area and the people of Atenco marched into Mexico City sharpening their machetes against the pavement. Finally, on February 2002, the procedure for the expropriation of the land was declared illegal and the government decided instead to go ahead with the clearly insufficient works around the existing airport.

Five years later, on 3 May 2006, there was a row between flower vendors and the local police, who wanted to evacuate them from the streets. The people of Atenco reacted by blocking one of the highways leading to Mexico City, where they had several clashes with the police and captured some of them. The next day, by dawn, in a massive operation, the entire town was raided, two people were killed, foreigners were deported and there were several accusations of human rights abuses, including the fact that the police had the instruction to rape the women they detained. The disproportion of the response was, at the same time, revenge, a warning, and valuable proof to the Right – in tense pre-electoral times – that the Left was indeed a violent threat for Mexico.

A few months later, in Oaxaca, a poor southern state on the Pacific coast with 3.5 million inhabitants and seventeen different indigenous ethnic groups, another conflict arose. The governor of the state, Ulises Ruiz of the PRI, had won another dubious election back in 2004. On 1 May 2006, the teachers of the 22nd section of the SNTE threatened to go on strike in support of a wage increase. Unlike his predecessors – for whom this kind of strike had been nothing but the usual preamble to government–union negotiations – the governor ignored them. As a response, they camped in the main square of Oaxaca City on 22 May. There was already unrest in the state because of

land expropriations from indigenous peasants in order to start the industrial works needed by the Puebla–Panama Plan. Opposition had been violently repressed. The teachers and their supporters blocked roads and called another massive demonstration. The governor issued an ultimatum to go back to classes, but the teachers refused. Their leaders travelled to Mexico City to negotiate, but it was useless. In June, the state police tried to evict the protestors from the main square and failed. By then, their allegiances with other groups were consolidated under an organization called the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO). They demanded the immediate resignation of Ulises Ruiz.

After the elections, the conflict intensified. Barricades sprang up in Oaxaca City and the protestors broadcast their own news from radio stations under their control. APPO announced that they were being attacked by paramilitary groups and policemen dressed as civilians. Violent provocations grew but APPO maintained its position, especially regarding the removal of Ruiz. By the end of September, while the electoral controversy still ran high in the rest of the country, military planes and helicopters were flying over Oaxaca. APPO continued protesting and occupying the streets until Ruiz – who had not been able to work in Oaxaca City for months – quit his post. An APPO caravan walked over 500 km to Mexico City, and some negotiations took place, especially regarding the intervention of the federal government in the conflict. But no agreements were reached because APPO refused to negotiate with Ruiz. It also considered that the issues relating to indigenous populations were not being recognized as part of the agenda. In September and October, there were several attacks by unknown armed men against the camps and radio stations controlled by APPO. The Federal Congress refused to declare an official cessation of powers in Oaxaca. The PAN government could not move a PRI governor without jeopardizing the alliance between the parties.

On 28 October, a particularly violent crisis arose when an American citizen, Bradley Roland Will, was shot. The PFP (Preventive Federal Police) took over Oaxaca's main square. APPO retreated into the State University. Finally, on 25 November APPO called another demonstration to surround the main square still occupied by the PFP. According to APPO, the demonstration was infiltrated and violence erupted again. This time the backlash was merciless. On 25 and 26 November, there were several arson attacks and most of the files containing the documents related to Ruiz's administration disappeared in the fires. The police arrested 138 people, who were sent to a jail in Nayarit, on the other side of the country, making their defence almost impossible for their impoverished relatives. According to information that has not been denied by Ruiz, about 80 per cent of those people were not related to APPO at all. Though the authorities only recognize seven casualties, APPO and human rights organizations claim that sixty people have disappeared and twenty were killed during the conflict. Although many of the prisoners have now been returned to Oaxaca, and most of them have been released, the new head of the Mexican equivalent of the Home Office has promised no forgiveness, and an iron fist.

The way in which the government dealt with this situation has been as blind and inept as in Atenco. As the condition for negotiations, the Home Office is demanding from APPO that it should be constituted as a legal organization, and that it must discipline its members: in other words, it has to acquire a political configuration which the government can deal with. This inability of the political establishment to deal with constituencies that do not follow its rules has been one of the most interesting features of the ongoing seventeen-year-old Zapatista conflict in Chiapas. In these respects, the current state of the Mexican political system is exemplary not only of the workings of a multi-ethnic and 'post-colonial' nation, or of a poor country which borders a rich one, but of a situation in which terms such as *legality*, *legitimacy*, *democracy* and *politics* itself are being actively redefined.

# Slumming it

## Mike Davis's grand narrative of urban revolution

**David Cunningham**

Writing in 1970, the French philosopher and social theorist Henri Lefebvre proposed a 'theoretical hypothesis': by 'urban revolution I refer to the transformations that affect contemporary society, ranging from the period when questions of growth and industrialization predominate … to the period when the urban problematic becomes predominant, when the search for solutions and modalities unique to urban society are foremost.' Today this hypothesis is perhaps becoming the 'global reality' that Lefebvre foresaw. Yet while the contemporary 'urban fabric grows, extends its borders, corrodes the residue of agrarian life', the social and spatial forms of 'tremendous concentration' that it produces appear very different from what he and many of his contemporaries no doubt imagined.[1]

> In Nairobi's vast Kibera slum, UN–HABITAT's Rasna Warah studied the daily life of a vegetable hawker named Mberita Katela, who walks a quarter mile every morning to buy water. She uses a communal pit latrine just outside her door. It is shared with 100 of her neighbours and her house reeks of the sewage overflow. She constantly frets about contamination of her cooking or washing water – Kibera has been devastated in recent years by cholera and other excrement-associated diseases … Mexico City's residents [meanwhile] inhale shit: fecal dust blowing off Lake Texcoco during the hot, dry season causes typhoid and hepatitis. In the 'New Fields' around Rangoon, where the military regime has brutally moved hundreds of thousands of inner-city residents, Monique Skidmore describes families living in the sanitary equivalent of the mud hell of World War I trench warfare: they cook and defecate in the mud directly in front of the tiny plastic sheets under which they sleep … In Baghdad's giant slum of Sadr City, hepatitis and typhoid epidemics rage out of control. American bombing wrecked already overloaded water and sewerage infrastructures, and as a result raw sewage seeps into the household water supply.

The awful power of passages such as this explains why few recent books have prompted such an immediate and intense reaction as Mike Davis's *Planet of Slums*.* Published in March 2006, though based upon an earlier essay in *New Left Review*,[2] it had already inspired at least one journal special issue by the end of the year,[3] generated a veritable frenzy of web activity, and seen its collected data and speculations on contemporary urbanization seamlessly incorporated into accounts of an emergent global capitalist empire developed by Retort, Slavoj Žižek and others. Although Davis has been an important and distinctive voice on the intellectual Left for some time, as well as in urban studies, *Planet of Slums* is unique among his books in having been so quickly hailed as a 'landmark', 'seminal' text.

The precise conditions and dynamics of the processes that he describes are complex, to say the least. Certainly, if there has been what some regard as a distinctive 'spatial turn' within political and social theory over the last few decades, *Planet of Slums* suggests the need for a more specific and radical reinterrogation of the very concept of the urban today, and of its relations to dominant forms of capital accumulation, in understanding the contemporary configuration of political topologies. Noting the emergence of two new words from the Latin root *urbanus* in English at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Iain Boal remarks that the 'historical identification of "urban" with "urbane" may not survive contact with the developments portrayed [in Davis's book].… If urbanity seems outdated, even residual, it turns out that the career of "urban" is only just beginning.'[4] And, indeed, for Davis if Lefebvre's urban society has a 'brilliant future', right now it looks like much of it will take the form of Kibera, Sadr City, or 'New Fields'. Recent projections by the UN Urban Observa-

* Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, Verso, London and New York, 2006. 240 pp., £15.99 hb., 1 8446 7022 8. The quotation is from pp. 143–4. Further references appear within the main text.

tory project suggest that by 2020 'urban poverty in the world could reach 45 to 50 per cent of the total population living in the cities' (151). At the same time, poverty *in general* is, with the widespread expulsion of labour from agriculture, and the concomitant destruction of older forms of village life, becoming increasingly urbanized across the globe, a genuinely world-historical transformation.

The consequences of this are considerable. For if this constitutes an emergent global society in which 'the urban problematic becomes predominant', such a condition entails not only transformations in the relations between urban and rural, but also, with increasing importance, within and between different urban forms and processes of urbanization, and the heterogenous forces that generate them. As such, they open up, as I have argued previously, a historically new set of relations between universal and particular, concentration and dispersal, internal to the urban itself, that clearly demand new kinds of conceptual mediation.[5] For urban theory, and the forms of political thought associated with it, it is in the striking challenge *Planet of Slums* sets to such a project that its ultimate significance lies.

## A brilliant future

While Davis's opening observation that we have now reached the point of an epochal transition in which 'the urban population will outnumber the rural' is something of a commonplace in recent writings on the city, there is still something utterly startling in figures showing that places like 'Dhaka, Kinshasa, and Lagos today are each approximately *forty* times larger than they were in 1950', or that China has 'added more city-dwellers in the 1980s than did all of Europe (including Russia) in the entire nineteenth century'. Within the next fifteen years it seems certain that the total rural population globally will begin to fall. The result will be that all future population growth will effectively be an urban phenomenon. Of this new global urban population, more than one billion already live in slums, mostly in the metropolises of the South, many in conditions of almost unimaginable hardship. In sub-Saharan Africa, slum-dwellers today constitute nearly 75 per cent of the total urban population. In Ethiopia and Chad, UN figures show that an incredible 99.4 per cent of urban inhabitants may be classified as such – a truly jaw-dropping figure (23).

Materially, in Africa especially, this is an urban world built of scrap metal and wood, reclaimed plastic, concrete, straw and mud – one that is sometimes literally constructed, so Davis tells us, on top of shit and death. Around 85 per cent of urban inhabitants occupy their property 'illegally'. Without basic sanitation, little running water, and minimal access to medical or other welfare services, chronic diarrhoeal diseases threaten the lives of millions, particularly children. People squat in the 'empty' spaces around chemical refineries and toxic dumps, on the sides of highways and railways, as well as in various 'hazardous and otherwise unbuildable terrains – over-steep hill slopes, river banks and floodplains'. Famously, in Cairo's City of the Dead, 'one million poor people use Mameluke tombs as prefabricated housing components' in an act of *détournement* that restructures the vast graveyard as a gigantic 'walled urban island surrounded by congested motorways'. Davis quotes Jeffrey Nedoroscik, a researcher at the American University in Cairo: 'Cenotaphs and grave markers are used as desks, headboards, tables, and shelves. String is hung between gravestones to set laundry to dry.'[6] Elsewhere in Cairo, around one and a half million people live on rooftops; the formation of an effective 'second city' in the air (33, 36).

If, then, there is enormous suffering here, there is enormous ingenuity and innovation also – which have recently come to fascinate many contemporary architectural and urban theorists, most famously in Rem Koolhaas's 2001 study of Lagos. This is a text to which Davis, somewhat surprisingly, never refers, but to which *Planet of Slums* might nonetheless be taken as a kind of extended critical response. Like some overexcited post-colonial Jane Jacobs, what Koolhaas notoriously celebrated in the Nigerian metropolis was the unplanned 'organized complexity' of its social-spatial form. In its quasi-organic, self-regulating development (one of the oldest urbanist tropes in the book), such form had become, he claimed, a kind of 'collective research, conducted by a team of eight-to-twenty-five million', an investigation into the possible future of urban society globally. The 'Lagos condition might simply be twenty, fifty or a hundred years ahead of other cities with more apparently familiar structure and lifestyle'. Lagos, as Koolhaas characteristically put it, 'may well be the most radical urbanism extant today'.[7]

For some, these rather 'upbeat' speculations were a welcome affirmation of the creativity or constituent power of those more often regarded as mere victims of abstract forces beyond their control. Yet, as the geographer Matthew Gandy pointed out, much of the creativity celebrated by Koolhaas was, in the end, only another celebration of the market itself. The 'proof and evidence' that the radical urbanism of Lagos is 'one

that works' was, after all, the traders doing business underneath the dilapidated Oshodi flyover (part of a highway system built by the German engineering firm Julius Berger during the 1970s), and, by extension, the larger informal economy of poverty through which life in the African metropolis is (often barely) sustained.[8] Despite evidently different political intentions, such meditations concerning Lagos's brilliant future come rather too uncomfortably close to the more manifestly ideological claims of neoliberal thinkers like the Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto. Perhaps the nearest thing to an individual 'villain' in the story that Davis has to tell (intellectually at least), de Soto's hallucinatory vision of the informal economy as a 'frenzied beehive' of slum-dwelling 'micro-entrepreneurs', hitherto hampered by the Third World equivalent of the nanny state, is well known. So, too, is what it conveniently ignores or covers over – the horrific forms of exploitation and abuse (of woman and children in particular) that the informal economy hides; the acceleration of 'flexibilization' in which an extension of the working day is combined with an increasing irregularity of available work itself; the 'generation' of 'new' work not as the creation of new jobs but via the subdivision of existing jobs and incomes; and the simple fact that much of the work available in the informal economy is not entrepreneurial self-employment at all but, instead, good old-fashioned labour for someone else's profit.[9]

None of this stopped de Soto's theories from becoming the neoliberal 'answer' to the 'challenge of the slums' in Washington and at the World Bank. Its ultimate effect, as Davis says, was that '[p]raising the praxis of the poor became a smokescreen for reneging upon historic state commitments to relieve poverty and homelessness' (72). Such a retreat of the state, above all, lies at the root of the transformations taking place in an expanding urban society today. At the same time, the flipside of de Soto's paeans to the 'praxis of the poor' has been their easy reversibility into an account of poverty which holds those who suffer it effectively responsible for their own immiseration. The World Bank's supposed war on poverty in the cities becomes a fundamental attack upon the poor themselves.[10] At the heart of this is evidently the most basic aim of the neoliberal project: to ensure that the conditions for profitable capital accumulation hold throughout the potentially planetary space of a global economy. As David Harvey has baldly put it: 'In the event of a conflict between the integrity of the financial system and the well-being of a population, the neo-liberal state will choose the former.'[11]

While Davis finds the beginnings of a new urbanism as far back as the 1950s, its real lift-off comes in the late 1970s with the 'sink or swim' restructuring of urban economies via the IMF–World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), and the waves of 'so-called primitive accumulation' that followed from it. For much of urban society in the so-called developing world, the social state – apart from its most repressive apparatuses – has, as a result, simply withered away. Under the regime of General Babangida, during the late 1980s and 1990s, Nigeria, for example, pursued a series of policies that led to it being hailed as a model for other African economies by the IMF and the World Bank. These included, most crucially, a thoroughgoing programme of privatization and deregulation, along with the progressive stripping away of agricultural subsidies and what existing public health and education services there were. The result is described by Gandy: '"extreme poverty" figures for the country rose from 28 per cent in 1980 to 66 per cent in 1996. The small-farming sector, still Nigeria's biggest employer, was decimated. The population of Lagos doubled … as migrants from the countryside flocked to the city.'[12] As is also true elsewhere, many of these migrants are no doubt actually better off in the more established and central parts of such 'mega-slums' than in their previous rural settlements, with at least some basic access to amenities and housing (however poor or minimal). For others, however, particularly in the now vast 'peri-urban' belts at the edge of cities where urban form dissolves indeterminately into countryside (in a manner that gives a rather different meaning to contemporary notions of urban sprawl), it is far from clear how this can be the case.

## Grand narratives

The analytical ambition of *Planet of Slums* is to produce what Davis calls 'a periodization of the principal trends and watersheds in the urbanization of world poverty' since 1945. As such, his documenting of this new urban society is an intentionally panoramic one, ultimately motivated by the global question of what its new forms may mean politically and socially in the years to come. And while the critical reception of his latest work has been overwhelmingly positive, indeed effusive, it should be said that there have also been some voices of dissent. South African writer Richard Pithouse in particular – a contributor to the last issue of *Radical Philosophy* ('Shack Dwellers of the Move', *RP* 141) – has waged something of a one-man war on claims that, in the words of Arundhati Roy, *Planet of Slums* represents a genuinely 'profound enquiry'

into this 'urgent subject'. Writing from the classical perspective of a grassroots politics, mediated by Fanon and Badiou, Pithouse has taken Davis to task for an over-totalizing and over-apocalyptic account of slum politics and culture, as well as for effectively being more interested in the narratives of the oppressors – the World Bank, UN, NGOs, and US military – than of the urban oppressed themselves. 'The thinking of people who live in the shacks is entirely absent.' This is a planet seen ultimately, he writes, through 'imperial eyes'.[13]

It is not the first time that Davis has been accused of at least some of these things. In a 1991 review of his classic account of L.A. *noir* and defeated utopianism, *City of Quartz*, Marshall Berman also suggested that Davis's narration of 'the efforts of the comfortable to lock out the poor is more vivid than his descriptions of the poor themselves': 'The grandest narratives in the book are histories of money.' In thrall to Spenglerian visions of social and environmental catastrophe, when Davis tries to write of the 'good folks in the barrios and ghettos', rather than of the 'big guys moving the big bucks around', noted Berman, the prose inevitably 'sags'.[14] While 2000's *Magical Urbanism*, on the Latino city, could be read as Davis's answer to such criticism, *Planet of Slums* – following hot on the heels of a book about the global threat of avian flu – is back on familiar (albeit considerably geographically broader) apocalyptic terrain.

As a writer, Berman argued, Davis has always seemed torn between the democratic expansiveness of a Whitman and the remorseless nihilism of Céline. In his latest work, the privileged literary allusion is Dante's *Inferno*. Yet, for all its typical stylistic elegance, *Planet of Slums* is a long way from the sometimes poetic (and sometimes ghoulishly picaresque) accounts of urban disaster, chaos and simple everyday weirdness to be found in Davis's earlier books on the American metropolis. This book's forebears are less the poets of a vertiginous and energizing metropolitan experience famously celebrated by Berman himself, than documenters and compilers of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century urban poverty and deprivation like Mayhew, Riis and, of course, Engels. Indeed what *Planet of Slums* presents us with is more akin to a global contemporary version of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* than a Marxian theory of the urban indebted to the likes of Lefebvre or Benjamin. Davis has always loved his charts and tables, the marshalling of statistics and facts culled from a huge variety of sources. But *Planet of Slums* is his most syncretic enterprise yet, skilfully organized around its collaging together of others' research and fieldwork so as to construct its grand narrative of a new urban world. The footnotes alone serve to take a largely uncharted world of research on new urban forms and social-spatial relations out of their various disciplinary-specialist backwaters and place them squarely at the centre of contemporary political and theoretical concerns.

Given the breadth of material covered by *Planet of Slums*, as well as the critical thread that weaves it together, Pithouse's complaint that Davis 'relies so heavily on the work of the [World] Bank and other institutions of contemporary imperialism' seems misguided, for it misrecognizes the level of analysis at which a text such as this operates. The book's arguments stand or fall in relation to the specifically global perspective signalled by its title. To this degree, it is hard to see how it could not but be indebted to 'imperial' sources like the UN–Habitat's *The Challenge of the Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements* – a 'global audit', published in 2003, that provided much of the original impetus for Davis's work. While Davis's approach may thus entail certain undeniable risks – a flattening out of differences in both history and social-spatial form – it is, in fact, precisely the inherently totalizing and comparative project pursued in *Planet of Slums* that gives it its distinctive power. For in the social world of an emergent global capitalist modernity, the 'grandest narratives' just always *are* 'histories of money' in some fundamental sense. Which is to say: the contemporary proliferation of slum settlements, and their potentially catastrophic human (as well as wider environmental) consequences, simply cannot be understood except, in some way, via an account of global capitalist development at its highest levels of generality and, indeed, abstraction. Just as importantly, this means trying to grasp what is most emphatically 'modern' about the development of the slum in the geographically diverse but interconnected forms it takes today.

## Synoecism of the slums

As first used in Aristotle's *Politics*, the term 'synoecism' (*synoikismos*) described the processes underlying the formation of the *polis* or city-state. For contemporary urban theorists, it has come to designate, more broadly, the changing range of economic, social, political and technological processes that generate new spatial forms of urban agglomeration and 'tremendous concentration'. Cities are, as Manuel Castells has written, 'socially determined in their forms and in their processes. Some of their determinants are structural,

linked to deep trends of social evolution that transcend geographic or social singularity. Others are historically and culturally specific.'[15] Part of what is at stake in the global, comparative perspective that Davis adopts is an attempt to elaborate what might be called a synoecism of the contemporary slum, to ask why globally, over the last few decades, the stimuli of urban agglomeration productive of the slum, in particular, should have evolved at such an unprecedented rate.

It is obvious here to look back to a nineteenth-century precedent, to the Victorian metropolises of Manchester, Liverpool or, indeed, London. Not for nothing have the Chinese called in the services of a historian like Gareth Stedman-Jones to advise them on what to learn from Britain's own transition to a 'modern urban nation'.[16] And, indeed, as Boal notes in his review, something of the 'conceptual centre' of *Planet of Slums* is to be located in the 'theoretical connection' it establishes, on a number of different levels, between the twenty-first-century metropolis and the social-spatial character of its nineteenth-century forebear. Several of the chapter titles and subtitles alone may indicate this: 'Back to Dickens', 'Illusions of Self-Help', 'Haussmann in the Tropics'. Yet, as Davis also says, the contemporary 'dynamics of Third World urbanization both recapitulate and *confound* the precedents of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe and North America' (11; emphasis added).

One of the most controversial aspects of Lefebvre's argument in his 1970 book *The Urban Revolution* was his (undertheorized) claim that, socially, economically and culturally, some new specifically urban problematic was coming to displace and subsume, at a planetary scale, an older problematic of the industrial. For Castells, writing shortly after, this claim amounted to little more than an abandonment of a properly Marxian confrontation with the economic realities of class struggle in favour of spurious, and ultimately utopian, speculation.[17] Yet contemporary tendencies suggest that, for a number of reasons, these questions concerning the developing relations between the urban and industrial may indeed have to be reprised again, with considerably more complexity, today (albeit, it would seem, without the utopian hopes they once embodied for Lefebvre himself). For, while the extraordinary urbanization taking place in China may well have as its 'Archimedean lever' – as Victorian Manchester or Glasgow did – the 'greatest industrial revolution in history', elsewhere this can hardly be said to be the case. If Dongguan, Shenzen, Fushan City or Chengchow are, as Davis puts it, the contemporary equivalents of Sheffield or Pittsburgh, for much of the new urbanization it is, he suggests, Victorian Dublin (or contemporaneous Naples) that appears a more plausible model. In the explosive 'mega-Dublins' of the South, Davis argues, 'urbanization has been … radically decoupled from industrialization, even from development *per se*' (13).

If this is so it is undoubtedly because, as Davis puts it,

> [the] global forces 'pushing' people from the countryside … seem to sustain urbanization even

> when the 'pull' of the city is drastically weakened by debt and economic depression. As a result, rapid urban growth in the context of structural adjustment, currency devaluation, and state retrenchment has been an inevitable recipe for the mass production of slums. (16–17)

In the midst of shrinking economies and collapsing industry, Africa today continues to maintain an annual rate of urbanization considerably higher than the average growth of European metropolises during the peak years of nineteenth-century urban (and industrial) revolution (15). What prevented the formation of earlier mega-slums was either the fairly rapid generation of new regular employment *or* (as was the case in Ireland and Southern Italy) the possibility of emigration to settler societies in 'underpopulated' parts of the world. But the endless waves of people descending on the metropolises of the South today, increasingly unable to survive in the rural societies they are leaving, are far in excess of any new demand for labour that might support them, and there is nowhere else for them to go. The conception of the 'wage puzzle', referred to by some contemporary economists, names the obscene fact that 'wages have fallen so low in African cities that researchers can't figure out how the poor manage to survive' (156). What is thus produced, as the ultimate outcome of the various IMF–World Bank immiseration programmes, is a reserve army of surplus labour of a size and density that simply has no precedent in human history, one which is, among other things, transforming the nature of urban form itself.

In the nineteenth century it was 'the insertion into cityspace of large-scale manufacturing industry' that was, according to Ed Soja, the 'primary trigger' of a 'third Urban Revolution' constitutive of the specifically modern *capitalist* metropolis:

> From this moment on, there developed a fully symbiotic and expansive relation between the urbanization and industrialization processes on a scale and scope never before achieved.… It was a relation so formidable that it would define industrial capitalism as a fundamentally *urban* mode of production (and also imbue much of oppositional socialist thought with an associated, if at times somewhat quixotic, anti-urban bias).[18]

If this symbiosis has often been thought to be in the process of breaking down today it has generally been because the possibility of some *new* Urban Revolution is seen as the inevitable outcome of technological and social forms associated with the postwar development of a capitalist 'information' or 'network' society. Yet, as *Planet of Slums* shows, it is equally the case – whether we look to Africa, South America, the Middle East, or indeed much of South Asia – that 'urbanization without industrialization' appears (most immediately at least) to be the result of somewhat different processes in much of the world, 'the legacy of a global political conjuncture' that followed on from 'the worldwide debt crisis of the late 1970s' (14). In fact, the two are inseparable.

Geopolitically, the slum is something like a dialectical antipode to the global or informational city (as influentially described by Saskia Sassen or Castells during the 1990s), just as its dominant social class would appear to be the opposed term to a transnational capitalist class smoothly inhabiting some new global space of flows. From this perspective, it functions not only as the most concrete manifestation of 'uneven development', but also, apparently, as a dramatic confirmation of claims made by Alain Badiou and others that, today, the great majority of humanity 'counts for nothing', are 'named' solely as the 'excluded'. Yet it would be wrong to thereby view the contemporary slum as a merely delinked residue of a once-presumed-to-be-vanished spatial form, some simple 'space of place' 'left behind' by capitalist 'modernity'. For, to cite Gandy on Lagos again: both its 'creative' informal economy and its extraordinary population growth are, albeit 'inversely', precisely linked to regimes of capital accumulation which have their 'centres' elsewhere, in New York, London or Tokyo. And they are *produced* through specific policies pursued by successive military dictatorships at the behest of global institutions like the IMF and World Bank.[19] The network doesn't disappear here – far from it – but it certainly manifests itself in forms very different to those that have been primarily plotted by Castells, Sassen et al. to date.

Indeed if the 'new' urban spatial form of the metropolis of the twenty-first century is being developed in the Northern centres of the global economy, one of the clearest implications of Davis's book is that it is being developed just as much in the seemingly disconnected spaces of the Southern slum. To put this another way, conceptually, the re-formation of the metropolis today means that it is subject to an irreversible global generalization. Its 'natural terrain' can no longer be restricted, if it ever could, to the classical 'sites' of London, Berlin, Paris or New York: 'Europe was once the birthplace of the Metropolis', it may be that much of its future is in fact 'being defined in the developing world'.[20] Failing to conform to most conventional notions of metropolitan culture (or of 'urbanity'), as developed in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century 'West', it may be said of course that

the very concept of metropolis is no longer adequate here. Yet, in one sense at least, Lagos, Kibera or Kinshasa can – like the earlier slums definitive of the urban 'West' itself – still be regarded as contemporary forms of the metropolis in what might be its most basic 'conceptual' sense: as a name for the *generalized* spatial formation of a 'certain reality of pure forms' defined by its historical negation of the urban form of the *city* as *polis* or as *urbs*; the spatial correlate, primarily, of the general mediation and production of the social by the value form.[21] In the slum, too, it is, in crucial ways, still *money*, 'with all its colourlessness and indifference, [which] becomes the common denominator of all values … hollows out the core of things, their individuality, their specific value, and their incomparability'.[22]

Whatever one may make of his conclusions, Koolhaas was right about this: we should 'resist the notion' that a metropolis like Lagos is (or is not) 'en route to becoming modern … [even somehow] modern in a valid, "African" way'. Rather, as Koolhaas argues, it is, in key respects, 'a developed, extreme, paradigmatic case-study of a city at the forefront of globalizing modernity', albeit one that may be doing away 'with the inherited notion of "city" once and for all'.[23] In urbanist terms, the 'multiplicity of modernities' that may be said to define a global urban problematic has, as Peter Osborne argues, a 'conceptual shape, to which the idea of "alternative" modernities is inadequate'. For the latter tends merely to 'reinscribe the historically received geo-political particularisms of the modernity/tradition binary of colonial difference, within its generalisation (through simple quantitative multiplication) of the first term'. The multiplication of modernities that constitutes unevenness within a global *urban* modernity has, by contrast, a considerably 'more complex, *distributional* logic'.[24] And if there is one thing that Davis and Koolhaas can agree on it is that the 'engrained vocabulary and values' of contemporary urbanist discourse remain 'painfully inadequate to describe the current production of urban substance' itself in such a situation.[25] Moreover, it is in this sense, also, that the 'theoretical' question of what exactly 'uneven development' means today, in the context of a global *urban* society, most urgently arises. For if poverty is becoming urbanized across the world then clearly whatever defines 'unevenness' globally can no longer be construed either through any simple urban–rural opposition, or through the kind of (sociological or anthropological) opposition of the 'modern' and 'traditional' that is far too often, and too easily, taken to follow from it. If the concept itself is to remain at all adequate to what it would endeavour to describe, the social and spatial instantiation of 'uneven development' will increasingly have to be reconceived in terms of contrasts between different urban forms and life-worlds variably connected within the spread of a global capitalist modernity. Part of what this entails is that, as Harvey puts it, such unevenness must itself 'be understood as something actively produced and sustained by processes of capital accumulation, no matter how important the signs may be of residuals of past configurations set up in the cultural landscape and the social world'.[26] Whether we think of Lagos or Mumbai or Gaza, nothing more emphatically confirms this than the new social and spatial world defined by Davis's planet of slums.[27]

## Urban revolutions

Such theoretical issues are not ones on which Davis himself spends a good deal of time. What he does seek to do is to confront, in rather more detail, what might be the genuinely political ramifications of the developments he describes. Lefebvre's own 1970 conception of an 'urban revolution' contained two interrelated ideas. First, at an analytical level, it argued for a long, ultimately global, historical shift from a predominantly industrial to an urban world. Second, and more specifically, it identified as part of this the emergence of a new kind of political praxis with a distinctively urban condition and dynamic: 'Entire continents are making the transition from earlier forms of revolutionary action to urban guerrilla warfare, to political objectives that affect urban life and organization.… The period of urban revolutions has begun.'[28] Hence, for Lefebvre, the events of 1968, in particular, testified to a form of revolt made in the metropolis rather than the factory, a crisis of the social relations and forms of concentration produced by urban society rather than by industrial capitalism as such. The Paris Commune appears as prefigurative here – notoriously misrecognized by Marx and Engels as an industrial rather than urban revolt, even in the face of what Lefebvre calls the 'obvious fact[s]'.

Much of Lefebvre's argument might be read as a response to the Left's association with what Soja describes as an 'at times somewhat quixotic, anti-urban bias' throughout much of the last century. Politically, Davis notes, the twentieth century was, for the most part, 'an age not of urban revolutions … but of epochal rural uprisings and peasant-based wars of national liberation' (174). As the urban theorist Andy Merrifield writes, there are thus, unsurprisingly, more than 'a few antiurban skeletons in the closet of Marxist insurrec-

tions … [in which] variously, the city is portrayed as the site of corruption, of hell, of Mammon, and Sodom and Gomorrah'. For much of Maoism, and other Third World movements, the 'pull' of the metropolis 'contaminated real Marxism, unduly affected the "halo" of militant Marxist practice'.[29]

Yet there is little doubt that – for all that the urban is severely under-thematized throughout his *oeuvre* – Marx himself, writing in the 1840s, saw the 'enormous cities' of Europe (and indeed their 'slums' in particular) as one key space of relationality and concentration in which the new proletariat's strength would grow and it could feel 'that strength more'.[30] Not the least of the ways in which some 'return to Marx' might be visible today is in the necessity for a reconsideration of such an idea within the context of the new global urban reality that *Planet of Slums* describes. Certainly as Davis notes of Latin America: 'In 1970, Guevarist *foco* theories of rural insurgency still conformed to a continental reality where the poverty of the countryside (75 million poor) overshadowed that of the cities (44 million poor). By the end of the 1980s, however, the vast majority of the poor (115

million) were living in urban *colonias*, *barriadas*, and *villas miseries* rather than on farms or in rural villages (80 million)' (156).

Globally dispersed and culturally differentiated as they are, slum-dwellers constitute 'the fastest growing, and most unprecedented, social class on earth' (178). Yet how exactly to describe or to define the changing processes of 'class composition' at work in this remains a moot point. Huge parts of the population of the global South may be subject to what Deborah Bryceson calls 'de-peasantization', but it could hardly be said that, outside of China at any rate, they are thereby coming to establish a new industrial proletariat, in any usual sense. If they undoubtedly *are* a proletariat it is in the more basic sense of which Marx writes in the first volume of *Capital*:

> In the history of primitive accumulation, all revolutions act as levers for the capitalist class in the course of its formation; but this is true above all for those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled into the labour-market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians.[31]

What is distinct today about this tearing of 'great masses' from 'their means of subsistence' is expressed in a term coined by the Brazilian sociologists Thomas Mitschein, Henrique Miranda and Mariceli Paraense – *passive proletarianization*: the 'dissolving of traditional forms of (re) production, which for the great majority of direct producers does not [however] translate into a salaried position in the *formal* labour market' (175, emphasis added).

The political question that follows from this is, 'To what extent does an *informal* proletariat possess that most potent of Marxist talismans: "historical agency"?' Are 'the great slums – as Disraeli worried in 1871 or Kennedy in 1961 – just volcanoes waiting to erupt?' (201). Certainly, for Davis, the 'future of human solidarity depends upon the militant refusal of the new urban poor to accept their terminal marginality within global capitalism'. But he continues: 'This refusal may take atavistic as well as avant-garde forms' (202). The point is expressed more bluntly in the original 2004 *New Left Review* article: 'for the moment at least, Marx has yielded the historical stage to Mohammed and the Holy Ghost'.

It was such an analysis that was taken up, and extended, in Retort's *Afflicted Powers:*

> Already in the ten most populous Muslim states, half the population is urban. By 2015 that will be true of more than two-thirds. …This is the stage for the new politics of the Qu'ran Belt – in particular, for the crisis in the mega-cities of West Asia and Africa. In contemporary Cairo, Amman, Kano, and Kuala Lumpur, a new public sphere is emerging in and around the Islamists' response to this developing urban reality.[32]

They continue, while

> Islamism in its present forms, still mutating and metastasizing in the slum conurbations of the World Bank world, is very far from being a vanguard movement alone … never, alas, has the world presented such a classic breeding ground for the vanguard ideal as the billion new city-dwellers of Asia and North Africa. Classic, but also unprecedented.[33]

Clearly, if the retreat of the state would seem to be a common root for slum development globally, in the 'Muslim World' the retreat of the 'secular state' has left a vacuum that has been filled in very specific ways. As recent events made manifest, Hizbollah's political power and support in the southern slums of Beirut is, for example, in large part due to the fact that it is they alone who are now providing welfare provision and a social 'safety net' there. Such a pattern is repeated throughout the 'new public sphere' of a 'developing urban reality' that Retort endeavour to describe.

But it is precisely here that Davis's simple opposition between the 'atavistic' and the 'avant-garde' is most inadequate. Retort rightly emphasize what is specifically modern in the forms that a contemporary political Islam of the slums now takes, where elements of atavism and avant-gardism are most evidently (and complexly) intertwined. Davis is not always quite so careful, particularly where it is the 'end times' Pentecostalism of the Holy Ghost rather than Mohammed that is apparently elbowing Marxism off the stage.[34] No doubt the riskiest literary reference in the entire book is to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. You rather expect that it's coming, but Davis resists the temptation until a few pages from the end of the final chapter, where, reaching a certain frenzy of apocalyptic rhetoric, he ends with a vision of 'an existential ground zero beyond which there are only death camps, famine, and Kurtzian horror' (195). The accumulated historical force of this allusion threatens to tip Davis's account into a profoundly unintended discourse of 'primitivism' and Third World 'savagery'. At the very least, in the midst of an extended account of the 'witch children of Kinshasa', and of a 'return' to 'village magic' and 'prophetic cults', it flirts uncomfortably with Conrad's own inherited, iconic images of African 'darkness' and 'horror'.

Early on in the book, Davis traces a nineteenth-century genealogy of the word 'slum', taking us through the works of commentators like the Reverend Chaplin, who, in 1854, saw '[s]avages not in gloomy forests, but under the strength of gas-light' (22). The image is familiar in its distinctive mixing of the 'contemporary' and 'primitive', and finds its *locus classicus* in Charles Booth's borrowing of the vocabulary of darkest Africa from Stanley's famous journalistic accounts, so as to convey the 'horror' of London's Victorian slums; metaphorically transporting the darkness of the actual jungle to the new 'urban jungle' then taking shape. The current danger, perhaps, is in a transporting of such imagery back to the new conurbations of Africa. Not for nothing does the journalist Robert Neuwirth, in his recent *Shadow Cities*, object to the very use of the word 'slum' to describe these settlements, as a 'loaded term', 'laden with emotional values'.[35] Yet if the term retains a productive force today, in the context of a globalizing capitalism, it is precisely – through a recollection of its roots in the nineteenth-century metropolis – in the degree to which it recalls the distinctive modernity of the social-spatial forms it now so riskily names.

## The good old days, or the bad new ones

If *Planet of Slums* has appeared to be the intellectual event it undoubtedly is, this is no doubt in part because of a more widespread sense that, as one Negrian commentator puts it, the urban must be the locus today for any 'thinking of the antagonistic, or, at the very least, agonistic production of space'.[36] Certainly the Pentagon would seem to agree. In the final pages of the book, Davis cites the development of new discourses around what it now terms MOUT: 'Military Operations on Urban Terrain'. For the likes of Major Ralph Peters, 'The future of warfare lies in the streets, sewers, highrise buildings, and sprawl of houses that form the broken cities of the world' (203). As documented elsewhere by the likes of Eyal Weizman and Stephen Graham, around the Israel–Palestine conflict in particular – but the point is more general – for the military at least, it's clear that the urbanization of world poverty is also leading to 'the urbanization of insurgency'. The 'mega-slum', army theorists imply, writes Davis, 'has become the weakest link in the new world order'. The invocation of a certain Leninist topology is striking, and suggests a number of questions for the contemporary Left as well.

In a 2004 piece in the *London Review of Books*, citing Davis's then recently published article in *New Left Review*, Slavoj Žižek posited an 'area of "opportunity"' marked by the 'explosive growth of slums' that refers us back, once again, to the rather different nineteenth-century precedent of Marx himself:

> We are witnessing the growth of a population outside the control of the state, mostly outside the law, in terrible need of minimal forms of self-organisation. Although these populations are composed of marginalized labourers, former civil

> servants and ex-peasants, they are not simply a redundant surplus: they are incorporated into the global economy in numerous ways.… One should resist the easy temptation to elevate and idealise slum-dwellers into a new revolutionary class. It is nonetheless surprising how far they conform to the old Marxist definition of the proletarian revolutionary subject: they are 'free' in the double meaning of the word, even more than the classical proletariat ('free' from all substantial ties; dwelling in a free space, outside the regulation of the state); they are a large collective, forcibly thrown into a situation where they have to invent some mode of being-together, and simultaneously deprived of support for their traditional ways of life.… The new forms of social awareness that emerge from slum collectives will be the germs of the future.[37]

Given this final proclamation, it's not entirely clear that the 'easy temptation' has exactly been resisted. As David Harvey argues in his recent *Spaces of Global Capitalism*:

> Accumulation by dispossession [or 'so-called primitive accumulation'] entails a very different set of practices from accumulation through the expansion of wage labour in industry and agriculture. The latter, which dominated processes of capital accumulation in the 1950s and 1960s, gave rise to an oppositional culture (such as that embedded in trade unions and working class political parties) that produced the social democratic compromise. Dispossession, on the other hand, is fragmented and particular.[38]

It is, as such, writes Harvey, 'fomenting quite different lines of social and political struggle' today.

It's fairly clear that Harvey, the 'orthodox' Marxist, is not entirely convinced by the political form these 'different lines' are taking. In some respects, much the same could probably be said of Davis. It is evident that for both the unique difficulty facing such struggles concerns their capacity to extract themselves 'from the local and the particular to understand the macro-politics of what neo-liberal accumulation by dispossession was and is all about'. 'The variety of such struggles was and is simply stunning', Harvey continues. 'It is hard to even imagine connections between them.'[39] There is something slightly odd about the idea of an *understanding* of 'macro-politics' as some revolutionary prerequisite here. But the point is fairly obvious. As the *World Charter of the Rights to the City*, drawn up at the Social Forum of the Americas in 2004, also recognized, the social divisions of the contemporary metropolis may favour 'the emergence of urban conflict', but its present formations mean that this is 'usually fragmented and incapable of producing significant change in the current development models' themselves.[40] For Davis, this newly expanding urban population, 'massively concentrated in a shanty-town world', is, above all, defined by the degree to which it lacks anything like the 'strategic economic power of socialized labour'. As a result, struggles in the slums tend towards the 'episodic and discontinuous', part of a reconfiguration we call the 'local' itself.

Set against this are some fairly classical 'grassroots' objections to what may be regarded as such peculiarly Marxian concerns. For Pithouse, 'The point is not that the squatters must subordinate themselves to some external authority or provide the "base" for some apparently grander national or global struggle. Squatters should be asking the questions that matter to them and waging the fight on their terms.'[41] Yet one can agree with all this and still observe that Pithouse's own ultimately fetishized localism can only take one so far. As Gandy rightly says in the context of Lagos, though 'informal networks and settlements may meet immediate needs for some, and determined forms of community organizing may produce measurable achievements, grassroots responses alone cannot coordinate the structural dimensions of urban development'.[42]

Clearly, there is no one urban revolution coming into being, stretching from Gaza to the former Second World to Lagos and beyond.[43] If the global 'slum collective' is part of some new multitude, such a notion tells us little about the directions of such a new politics, and even less about that notoriously empty concept of the multitude itself. Any idea of a slum politics as – in however dispersed and localized a way – somehow *immediately* free of capitalism, because of its very 'exclusion', is mere fantasy. This is the lure of Žižek's 'classical' conformity 'to the old Marxist definition of the proletarian revolutionary subject … dwelling in a free space, outside the regulation of the state'. But it fails to absorb the lessons of *Capital* if its consequence is simply to ignore the degree to which, in the slum too, it is capital that continues to overdetermine social and spatial relations, including those of politics itself. This is not to deny that hope for political imagination might reside in a new, quintessentially modern, urban situation where – 'deprived of support for their traditional ways of life' – people are compelled 'to invent some mode of being-together'. But, then, if whatever new forms of sociality and modes of cooperation 'emerge from slum collectives will be the germs of the future', for much of the world at least, it is unlikely that they will obey the good 'old definitions' anyway.

## Notes

1. Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2003, pp. 2–5, 14. Nonetheless, Lefebvre observes that 'so-called underdeveloped countries are now characterized by the fact that they undergo the rural, the industrial and the urban simultaneously. They accumulate problems without accumulating wealth' (p. 32).
2. Mike Davis, 'Planet of Slums', *New Left Review* 26, March/April 2004, pp. 5–34.
3. *Mute*, vol. 2, no. 3, Special Issue: *Naked Cities: Struggle in the Global Slums*, 2006.
4. Iain Boal, '21st Century Noir', *Naked Cities*, p. 12.
5. David Cunningham, 'The Concept of Metropolis: Philosophy and Urban Form', *Radical Philosophy* 133, September/October 2005, pp. 13–25.
6. In my previous article in *Radical Philosophy* 133, I suggested that the forms of spatial relationality characteristic of the modern capitalist metropolis, determined as they are by 'pure' exchangeability, mean that 'units' of urban form are always subject (in however minor a way) to a kind of potential *détournement*: 'A church can, in the formal structure of universal equi-valence, become a café, an art gallery, a recording studio, a set of apartments, a recording studio, or whatever' (p. 22). The squatting culture of the slum perhaps suggests a very different manifestation of what would nonetheless be the same kind of formal structure. In such a structure, by contrast to the earlier forms of what Lefebvre terms 'absolute' and 'historical' space – in which, as in the *polis*, the 'incomparability' of the intrinsic qualities of certain sites remains essential – 'specific values' (to use Simmel's phrase) are no longer, in themselves, definitive of the urban as such, but are constitutively mediated by a pure form of exchangeability.
7. Rem Koolhaas/Harvard Project on the City, 'Lagos', in Francine Fort and Michel Jacques, eds, *Mutations*, ACTAR, Barcelona, 2001, pp. 718–19. See also Koolhaas, 'Fragments of a Lecture on Lagos', in Okwui Enwezor et al., eds, *Documenta 11_Platform 4. Under Siege: Four African Cities*, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2003.
8. Matthew Gandy, 'Learning from Lagos', *New Left Review* 33, May/June 2005, p. 38.
9. As Davis notes, the occupants of shanty-town shacks are neither necessarily squatters, nor de facto 'owners' of their property. In many instances, housing is itself a generator of capital for 'slumlords' legally or illegally coercing economic 'tribute' from the poor.
10. See Paul Cammack, 'Attacking the Poor', *New Left Review* 13, January/February 2002, pp. 125–34.
11. David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Development*, Verso, London and New York, 2006, p. 27.
12. Gandy, 'Learning from Lagos', p. 46.
13. Richard Pithouse, Review of *Planet of Slums*, *Sunday Independent*, 2006, www.nu.ac.za/ccs/default.asp?3,28,10,2578; 'Coffin for the Councillor (or, The Left in the Slums)', *Interactivist Info Exchange*, http://info.interactivist.net/article.pl?sid=05/10/07/148251; 'Thinking Resistance in the Shanty Town', *Naked Cities*, pp. 16–31.
14. Marshall Berman, 'L.A. Raw', *The Nation*, 1 April 1991, pp. 417–21.
15. Manuel Castells, 'European Cities, the Informational Society, and the Global Economy', *New Left Review* I/204, March/April 1994, p. 18.
16. See Tristram Hunt, 'Lessons from Beijing Emerge from the Dickensian Smog', *Guardian*, 28 July 2006.
17. Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*, Edward Arnold, London, 1977.
18. Edward W. Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000, p. 76.
19. Gandy, 'Learning From Lagos', p. 38, 42.
20. Nanna de Ru, 'Hollocore', in OMA/Rem Koolhaas, ed., *Content*, Taschen, Cologne, 2004, p. 336. See also Cunningham, 'Concept of Metropolis', p. 22.
21. Cunningham, 'Concept of Metropolis', p. 20.
22. Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', trans. Hans Gerth, in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, Sage, London, Thousand Oaks CA and Delhi, 1997, pp. 176, 178.
23. Koolhaas, 'Lagos', p. 653.
24. Peter Osborne, 'Non-Places and the Spaces of Art', *Journal of Architecture*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2001, p. 185.
25. Koolhaas, 'Fragments of a Lecture on Lagos', p. 175.
26. Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism*, pp. 65–6.
27. Gaza, as Davis points out, could in certain respects plausibly be regarded as the world's single biggest slum – 'essentially an urbanized agglomeration of refugee camps (750,000 refugees) with two thirds of the population existing on less than $2 per day' (48).
28. Lefebvre, *Urban Revolution*, p. 43.
29. Andy Merrifield, *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, pp. 2–3.
30. Famously, Marx writes: 'The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life.' Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1967, pp. 84, 89.
31. Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976, p. 876.
32. Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, Verso, London and New York, 2005, p. 163.
33. Ibid., pp. 172–3.
34. In fact Pentecostalism shares some things with much twentieth-century Third World Marxism to the degree that it, too, has as 'its ultimate premise … that the urban world is corrupt, injust and unreformable'. See Davis, 'Planet of Slums', *NLR*, p. 33.
35. Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters in a New Urban World*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005, p. 16.
36. Alberto Toscano, 'Factory, Territory, Metropolis, Empire', *Angelaki*, vol. 9, no. 2, August 2004, p. 198.
37. Slavoj Žižek, 'Knee Deep', *London Review of Books*, vol. 26, no. 17, 2004.
38. Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism*, p. 52.
39. Ibid., p. 63.
40. *World Charter of the Rights to the City*, www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/2243.html.
41. Pithouse, 'Thinking Resistance', p. 26.
42. Gandy, 'Learning from Lagos', p. 52.
43. One of Davis's most startling observations is that the 'fastest-growing slums' are now in the former Second World. It is perhaps in places like Baku, Yerevan and Ulaanbaatar that 'urban dereliction' has accompanied 'civic disinvestment' at the most 'stomach-churning velocity' (24–5).

# Neo-classic

## Alain Badiou's *Being and Event*

**Peter Osborne**

If anyone was in doubt about the continuing grip of French philosophy on the theoretical imagination of the anglophone humanities, the reception of the writings of Alain Badiou must surely have put paid to such reservations. The translation of his magnum opus, *Being and Event*, in spring 2006, brought to eleven the number of his books published in English in eight years – a period following swiftly on, not entirely contingently, from the deaths of Deleuze, Levinas and Lyotard (1995–1998), and coinciding with that of Derrida (2004).* However, it is not simply the number of translations that is remarkable ('remarkable, but not surprising', as Wittgenstein would say), but the fact that a philosophy such as this – for all its idiosyncratic philosophical charms – could so readily have assumed the role of 'French philosophy of the day' within the transnational market for theory.

Badiou's philosophy takes a forbiddingly systematic form; it is anti-historical, technically mathematical and broadly Maoist in political persuasion. It has no interest in (in fact, denies the philosophical relevance of) 'meaning', and appears impervious to feminism. It takes a roguish self-satisfaction in its heterosexism.

Stylized individuality is a condition of branding, and 'difficulty' is a prerequisite of entry into this particular field, but there are more than market factors at work in Badiou's successful transition to international theorist. It is a gauge of a number of things: the desire still invested in the English-language reception of French philosophy; the theoretical heresies that a new generation of the so-called 'old' Left will overlook in exchange for political solidarity (Žižek, master of this field, is Badiou's mentor here); the strategic brilliance of two interventions – against Deleuze (*The Clamour of Being*, 1997; trans. 2000) and against the 'delirium' of ethics (*Ethics*, 1994; trans. 2001);[1] the inherent brilliance of *Being and Event*, for all its ultimate philosophical madness; and last, but by no means least, the rhetorical power of 'the (re)turn of philosophy itself' – title of an essay of Badiou's from 1992.[2] It is in the profoundly contradictory character of the return of philosophy in Badiou – at once avant-garde and breathtakingly traditional – that the historical meaning of his thought is to be found.[3] To anticipate my conclusion: *Being and Event* is a work – perhaps *the* great work – of philosophical neo-classicism. As such, at the level of philosophical form, it surpasses its ambivalent predecessor, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, in the rigour of its reactionary modernism. The modernity of Badiou's mathematics does not mitigate, but rather reinforces, the authoritarianism of his philosophical axiomatics and the mysticism of his conception of the event.

### From philosophy to Theory and back

It has been the fate of French philosophy within the anglophone humanities since the 1970s to represent contemporaneity in theory. Indeed, by a transcultural quirk of US hegemony, French philosophers are now beginning to *become* contemporary philosophers – that is to say, 'philosophers' in the strong, individualized sense of the word – even in France, via their English-language reception. The English 'philosopher' signifies differently when accompanied by the qualification 'French'. Yet while French philosophers have dominated theoretical developments in the anglophone humanities, it has largely been because of the power-

* Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, Continuum, London and New York, 2005. xxxiii + 526 pp., £19.99 hb., 0 8264 5831 9. Translation of *L'être et l'événement*, Editions du Seuil, 1988 (hereafter EE). Page references to the English translation appear in brackets in the main text. The first of Badiou's books to be translated was *Manifesto for Philosophy* (French edition, 1989), in 1999. 1999 was also the year of the first – and still the best – introductory critical essay on *Being and Event* in English, Jean-Jacques Lecercle, 'Cantor, Lacan, Mao, Beckett, *même combat*: The Philosophy of Alain Badiou', *Radical Philosophy* 93, January/February 1999, pp. 6–13.

fully *post*-philosophical character of their reception – post-philosophical in a delicately dialectical sense, whereby what is most philosophically productive has been manifest only in a non-philosophical setting.

There were several conditions of this situation, not the least being the *philosophical* problematicity of the disciplinary autonomy of philosophy. Recognition of this has been pretty much a criterion of philosophical modernity since Kant, and it comes in a variety of forms. Most significant in this context are, on the one hand, Derrida's modified extension of Heidegger's destruction of the history of ontology, whereby deconstruction came to occupy the space of Heidegger's postulation of a post-philosophical 'thinking'; and on the other, Althusser's introduction of the term 'Theory' (with a capital T) to designate what he had previously called 'Marxist philosophy' – namely, 'the theory of theoretical practice', or the theory of 'practice in general' – in order, as he put it shortly afterwards (while changing his mind and giving up the usage), to 'reserve the term *philosophy* for *ideological* philosophies'.[4]

In the Anglo-American context, there was a crossing and consequent de-specification of these two post-philosophical fields, and 'Theory' emerged as the name of the generic hybrid. The idea of Theory was adopted in a generalized *non*-Marxist form, in part precisely because this allowed for a sidestepping of the question of its complex relationship to philosophy. (The pragmatism of the native (post-)philosophical tradition had an enabling effect here too.) This was a nifty piece of footwork, in so far as it allowed for the investment of broad transdisciplinary fields by general-theoretical categories – be it the 'textuality' of a general semiotics, the 'discourses' of a Foucauldian historicism, or the topography of Lacanian metapsychology – uninhibited by their ties to philosophy's past. By the beginning of the 1990s, however, as political and institutional contexts changed, and Theory began to succumb to the reification and repetition of its commodification, the disavowal of its relations to philosophy became increasingly problematic. This was especially so once the far less equivocally philosophical work of Levinas and Deleuze was subjected to the same discursive conditions, under which it was (and still is) frequently travestied.

The reaction to this situation was a move away from 'T/theory' and a return to disciplinarity in the humanities, and with it the tradition virtues of both 'old' historicism and aesthetics. As a result, a dual pressure began to build up within the discursive space of Theory for a re-evaluation of the virtues of 'philosophy'. It is in this context that the *hyper*-philosophical approach of Badiou's *Being and Event* acquires its unique polemical force. Of the trio of post-Althusserians competing within the US academy for the honorary position of French philosopher of the day (the other two are Balibar and Rancière), Badiou is the one who most explicitly – indeed, massively – reinvests the field of Theory with the idea of philosophy. This time, though, (Badiou's Althusserian heritage notwithstanding) it is philosophy *without* Marxism – that is, without Marx's critique of philosophy – indeed, seemingly without any version of the critique of the self-sufficiency of philosophy which has hitherto been a condition of possibility of the continuation of European philosophy, ever since the critique of Hegel at the end of the 1830s.[5] The self-proclaimed 'return' of philosophy in *Being and Event* is a return to a classical conception of philosophy, with a vengeance. This is its polemical force. It is Badiou's self-declared aspiration 'to have done with finitude'.[6] The story of *Being and Event*'s place in the history of philosophy is a Gothic tale of the doomed attempt of a philosophical classicism to take revenge on modern philosophy. Its result is a magnificent philosophical folly.

The strategic brilliance of Badiou's *Deleuze* lay, in essence, in its reduction of the terms of Deleuze's thought to Badiou's, in the manner of a Heideggerian 'violent reading', by emphasizing its classically philosophical character. Badiou was aided in this task by Deleuze himself: specifically, by the disciplinary conservatism of his final book with Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (1991; trans. 1994), a text that tends to be read (erroneously, in my view) as a kind of methodological summation of Deleuze's thought. The traditionalism of the demarcation of philosophy in *What is Philosophy?* became the point of entry for Badiou's appropriation and destruction of Deleuze's thought. With *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze opened the door to Badiou and, after Deleuze's death, Badiou moved in, exploiting to the full his projection of the two of them as 'a sort of paradoxical tandem'.[7] In a way, this is where Badiou still resides in his philosophical reception in English – making-over his rival's house – although he also has a political readership, egged on by Žižek's Pauline 'new Lenin'.[8]

## Heidegger – Dasein + mathematics = Badiou

Surprisingly, given his frequently expressed antipathy to Heideggerianism,[9] Badiou's conception of the contemporary philosophical problematic appears at first sight orthodoxly Heideggerian in its starting point:

'Along with Heidegger, it will be maintained that philosophy as such can only be re-assigned on the basis of the ontological question' (2). Already, though, there is a difference. For by the ontological question Badiou does not mean 'what is the *meaning* of Being?' (Heidegger's version), but rather more simply 'what *is* being qua being?' Furthermore, Badiou takes this 'what is?' question to be answered by ontology as the 'science of being qua being' – precisely that Greek metaphysical enterprise that Heidegger sought in *Being and Time* to replace with a fundamental ontology, which would no longer treat 'being qua being' on the model of particular beings/entities, as the special object of a metaphysical science. At the very outset, *Being and Event* thus polemically opposes itself to Heidegger on the very ground that they ostensibly share, and in a manner that seems to reproduce the precise structure of the object of Heidegger's critique.

Moreover, the philosophical basis of this opposition does not derive from a critique of the early Heidegger's version of the question of being, with its ground in the ontic peculiarity of Dasein's being-ontological. Rather, it derives from Badiou's independent pursuit of another possibility, another path for thought: a restoration of the rationalist tradition's grounding of philosophy in a thinking of mathematics. This path is opened up not by a philosophical event, but by a mathematical one: Cantor's set theory and specifically its treatment of infinity. Yet it cannot be discerned, and hence travelled, without the philosophical thought of being as 'pure multiplicity'. This thought co-grounds the famous speculative thesis on which Badiou's system is built: namely, 'ontology is mathematics'. It is because mathematics is the science of multiplicity, and being is pure multiplicity, that, according to Badiou, mathematics is the science of being. The syllogism is a simple one. (Mathematics is not a method or a model for philosophy here: mathematics *is* ontology.) This is a genuine co-grounding because, as we shall see, it requires Cantorian set theory to make the idea of mathematics as ontology work – to make the speculative thesis productive. There is thus a simple formula for Badiou's opening move: Heidegger – Dasein + (set-theoretical) mathematics = Badiou.

But what of the ontic peculiarity of Dasein's being-ontological, which is what allows – indeed, for Heidegger, dictates – philosophy to *ask* the ontological question in the first place? Badiou maintains a symptomatic silence. The issue is crucial since the competing fates of existential ontology and the new classical ontologies of Deleuze and Badiou depend upon it. The latter are polemically anti-phenomenological. But phenomenology is a stand-in for the real enemy here, which is existential ontology. The question is not that of the possibility, or otherwise, of phenomenology as such (a relatively easy target), but that of the unavoidability, or otherwise, of the existential. Badiou seems to believe that the reduction of ontology to mathematics cuts the Gordian knot of the ontically-ontological ('existence', in Heidegger's sense). Yet while mathematics may be in a certain sense inhuman – a position to which defenders of Badiou tend to retreat at this point in the argument – philosophy as meta-ontology has a rather different discursive and historical status. Its inhumanity is no more, or less, than that of the (existential) inhumanity of the human itself.[10]

With regard to Heidegger, Badiou criticizes not the existential starting point and ground of his ontology, but the (conceptually independent) temporality of the 'Greek return' that is appended to it: 'the figure of being as endowment and gift, as presence and opening, and the figure of ontology as the offering of a trajectory of proximity'. (He rests on Derrida here.) Inverting Heidegger's terms, it is this, a poetic ontology 'haunted by the dissipation of Presence and the loss of origin' that appears as 'the essence of metaphysics' in the pejorative sense (9–10). In contrast, Badiou conceives his own project as thoroughly modern, 'perhaps even "more-than-modern"'.[11] Before we consider this paradoxical more-than-modernity, let us examine more closely the concept of philosophy in *Being and Event.*

## A self-sufficient circulation

*Being and Event* is a systematic work in that it proceeds more or less deductively from its founding propositions – 'being is pure multiplicity' and 'mathematics is the science of multiplicity' – to derive a series of fundamental categories of Being (Parts I–III), Event (IV and V), Knowledge and Truth (and, one might add, Politics) (VI and VII), ending up with the Subject (VIII). This fourfold structure underlies Badiou's own more diffuse division of his thirty-six 'meditations' into eight parts. In fact, it harbours an even more elemental, tripartite structure, Being–Event–Subject, in so far as the parts on Knowledge and Truth, whilst important, have a largely transitional structural function. Philosophy may have been 're-assigned' on the basis of the ontological question, but it is nonetheless towards the 'theory of the subject' (ch. 35 – interestingly, one of the few appearances of the word 'theory') that *Being and Event* drives.[12]

Progress is 'more or less' deductive in the conventional way of a system, with the steady introduction of

supplementary premisses (explicit and implicit) moving the process forward according to a pattern that, while immanently 'derived', is nonetheless structurally prefigured – the covert aim being logically to redeem, and thereby cover over, the prefiguration, or teleological projection. In this case, both the axiomatic and teleological moments stand out as philosophically decisive, while the demonstrations themselves take the form of a devilish logico-mathematical game, in which Badiou pits himself against a range of self-imposed tasks. The tasks are formidable and the detail of their execution is breathtaking in its ingenuity, even when accompanied by a growing sense of the philosophical redundancy of much of the mathematics, as elementary hermeneutical structures (the selective nature of interpretation, for example) are mathematically redescribed ('the operator of connection'), as the result of tortuous processes of derivation. (See Meditation 23, 'Fidelity, Connection'.) This is in many ways an Alice-in-Wonderland world, in which nothing non-axiomatic can be accepted until it has been deduced, mathematically recoded, as part of the system. In fact, this is an ethical imperative for *Being and Event*, in which deduction is 'the means via which, at each and every moment, ontological fidelity to the extrinsic eventness of ontology is realized' (242).

Yet Badiou's categories, the philosophical consequence of the thought that ontology is mathematics, whilst the result of a prodigious and highly abstract formal procedure, are in no way merely formal:

> The categories that this book deploys, from the pure multiple to the subject, constitute the general order of a thought which is such that it can be practiced across the entirety of the contemporary system of reference. These categories are available for the service of scientific procedures just as they are for those of politics or art. They attempt to organize an abstract vision of the requirements of the epoch. (4)

Badiou's categories thus appear to function much like the categories of Theory – that is, transdisciplinarily – although they have been derived quite differently, and aspire to a more lofty fundamental status. (Concept-formation in the field of Theory itself has been, historically, extremely eclectic, but generally involves some process of generalization and re-theorization of concepts from empirical disciplines, rather than deductive derivation, and the status of the result is usually ultimately pragmatic.) Precisely what the status of Badiou's more fundamental philosophical concepts is, however, is by no means easy to grasp. Everything hinges on, first, how Badiou arrives at the thesis that 'ontology is mathematics', and second, how we understand the operation of mathematics (qua ontology) both *upon* and *within* philosophy itself. For despite the Heideggerian starting point, Badiou insists that 'philosophy is not centred on ontology – which exists as a separate and exact discipline' (mathematics), but rather '*circulates*' between ontology (= mathematics) and its other conditions, or more broadly 'throughout the referential' (3, 19).

Despite appearances, Badiou is insistent that his philosophy has no 'foundational ambition'. The reason for this is that it recognizes that it has 'conditions'. This is a rare historical and material moment in Badiou's thought. Philosophy thus cannot be absolutely self-grounding; self-grounding is not the basis of its self-sufficiency. Rather, what philosophy does 'is propose a conceptual framework in which the contemporary compossibility of these conditions can be grasped' (4). The way it does this is 'by designating amongst its … conditions, as a singular discursive situation, ontology itself in the form of pure mathematics'. This designation is described as 'delivering' philosophy (*délivre* EE, 10 – 'setting free' would perhaps be better) and thereby ultimately 'ordaining' or preparing it (*l'ordonée*) for 'the care of truths'. (The Pascal epigraph to Meditation 21 – the starting point of Balibar's essay on Badiou in *RP* 115 – reads: 'The history of the Church should, properly speaking, be called the history of truth'.[13]) The role of philosophy here is thus a complex, if not a contradictory one. For it appears to act prior to its own constitution. Philosophy (i) *designates* one of its own conditions, as a consequence of which (ii) it is set free, allowing it (iii) to 'propose' a conceptual framework in which the contemporary compossibility of its *other* conditions can be grasped. Whether these other conditions are also 'designated', or have some kind of more brute factuality, qua conditions, is at this stage unclear. But it is the first move which is of greatest critical interest: philosophy's designation of one particular condition (ontology in the form of pure mathematics) grounds the possibility of its grasping the compossibility of its conditions as a whole. Even if the other conditions are designated, one designation is qualitatively different from the rest. But how does philosophy do this? How does philosophy arrive at the conclusion that 'mathematics is ontology'? And what, according to Badiou, are philosophy's other conditions? It is at this point that the historical judgements set out at the start of *Being and Event* reveal themselves to be no mere introductory contextualization (as might be thought), but the argumentative basis of a project that otherwise presents itself in a far 'purer' form.

Badiou offers varying overlapping descriptions of philosophy's current conditions in the introduction to *Being and Event* and elsewhere (principally in *Manifesto for Philosophy*). But in *Being and Event* these are initially grouped into three 'assumptions about the current global state of philosophy', which can be summarized as follows.

1. 'Heidegger is the last universally recognizable philosopher.'
2. Mathematics and logic have conserved 'the figure of scientific rationality' as a paradigm for thought.
3. 'A post-Cartesian doctrine of the subject is unfolding', which has *non*-philosophical origins and complications.

These three assumptions give rise to the following prescriptions and specifications:

1. Philosophy can only continue on the basis of the ontological question. (Otherwise, presumably, it would not be connected to 'the last universally recognizable philosopher', and hence its philosophical status would be in doubt.)
2. It is post-Cantorian mathematics (= set theory) that is the scientifically rational paradigm for thought.
3. The places of practical unfolding of the post-Cartesian doctrine of the subject are psychoanalysis, contemporary art and politics.

It is the second and third of these three conditions, taken together, that will subsequently be presented, in *Manifesto for Philosophy*, as the 'four' conditions of philosophy, where they are further reduced to: the matheme, the poem, political intervention, and love. (Badiou may reject Heidegger's poetic ontology, but he accepts his anachronistic Romantic reduction of art to poetry.) The philosophically important condition – the one that secures the general compossibility of the other conditions – is missing from *Manifesto for Philosophy*. This is the 'singular discursive situation' of 'ontology itself in the form of pure mathematics' – the belonging together of the first two assumptions (above). Addressing the classical ontological question anew (having rejected Heidegger's approach as poetic), in the historical-intellectual context of post-Cantorian mathematics, leads to the sudden flash of insight that mathematics is ontology. In Badiou's words, 'mathematics is ontology' is 'a meta-ontological or philosophical thesis *necessitated* by the current cumulative state of mathematics (after Cantor, Gödel and Cohen) and philosophy (after Heidegger)' (15, emphasis added). This is the bedrock of Badiou's philosophy. Philosophy, which had thought it was – or, in any case, should be – ontology, finds itself 'originally separated from ontology' (13). Meanwhile, mathematics, although it turns out (unknowingly) to be – and hence always to have been – ontology, is nonetheless so discursively, not immanently, that is, only from the meta-ontological standpoint of philosophy. Mathematics, qua ontology, is 'commanded by philosophical rules, and not by those of contemporary mathematics' (13). To put it another way: philosophy *transcodes* mathematics into ontology. So although philosophy is not ontology, it nonetheless still governs the ontological meaning of mathematics (it is philosophy as meta-ontology that asks the ontological question), and in this way remains the 'queen of the sciences'. This is the paradoxical result of its history, which delimits the domain of ontology without itself ever having been able to answer the ontological question.

Furthermore, and crucially for *Being and Event*, philosophy is also concerned with the supposedly non-ontological and specifically modern topic of 'what-is-not-being-qua-being' (15). On Badiou's account, this topic was introduced into philosophy, historically, by the third item on the original list of philosophy's current conditions: the post-Cartesian doctrine of the subject. For, it is by circulating between this supposedly non-philosophical condition (although one can actually find it in Kant)[14] and the unifying condition of the thesis that ontology is mathematics that philosophy produces the category of 'what-is-not-being-qua-being'. 'What-is-not-being-qua-being' (the event) is the negative ontological register of a non-ontological condition that becomes thinkable via the post-Cartesian subject. It is the mark of the distinctively *post*-Cartesian, and hence truly 'modern', status of Badiou's philosophy, despite its (Heideggerian) assignation 'on the basis of the ontological question'.

Beneath its meta-ontological status, philosophy thus finds that it has its own quasi-ontological discourse after all. It is this quasi-ontological category of 'what-is-not-being-qua-being' that furnishes *Being and Event* with its project: namely, to give a philosophical elaboration of the concept of the subject by locating it, formally, via the philosophical rule over mathematics, in relation to a derivation of the categories of being (i.e. precisely what it is not). Hence the fourfold teleological structure of the book (above). In this respect, the text that *Being and Event* is rewriting/replacing is less Heidegger's *Being and Time* than Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*.

This is a strikingly original conception of philosophy, which, nonetheless, for all its originality, continues the pursuit of the mainstream of postwar French

philosophy: namely, a theoretical anti-humanism or critique of the subject that is *anti*-Hegelian and *post*-Heideggerian in its basic historico-philosophical affiliations. Like all singular philosophical trajectories, Badiou's thought is heavily weighted towards its beginnings, its inaugural philosophical moves. And, as we have seen, although pronounced as 'global' (*à échelle mondiale* – worldscale), these are highly specific. They carry with them three dubious philosophical assumptions:

1. In the reformulation of Heidegger's ontological question and the designation of its appropriate (mathematical) form of address, there is the assumption that ontology has no immanent existential-phenomenological or semantic presuppositions.
2. As consequence of its philosophical or meta-ontological treatment of ontology, there is the assumption that 'ontology' is exhausted by an all-inclusive opposition between 'being-qua-being' and 'what-is-not-being-qua-being'. (Here, not just despite, but even more by virtue of, Badiou's departure from Heidegger, the standard Hegelian criticisms of Heidegger would seem to apply.)
3. With respect to philosophy's historical conditions, there is the assumption that there are only four historico-philosophically privileged partners, or, as they are also called, 'generic procedures' or 'truth procedures'. One might ask, for example, as Žižek has asked, 'what about the economic?' Not in the quasi-disciplinary sense, to which Badiou restricts himself in specifying his conditions, but in the historical-ontological sense of the social conditions of biological reproduction. Is there really no 'truth' to be had there?

Badiou's lack of interest in this eminently materialist topic (oddly, he continues to insist on his 'materialism') corresponds to his neglect of philosophical critiques of the self-sufficiency of philosophy – a topic on which Marx's and Heidegger's thought converges. For while his image of philosophical thinking is the attractive one of a *practice of circulation* between its conditions, this practice is nonetheless conceived as fiercely self-sufficient in its taking up of philosophy's conditions into itself – including its ur-condition, mathematics as ontology, whereby, as he puts it, meta-ontologically, philosophy reorganizes the knowledge of mathematics by means of 'the imaging powers of language' (xiv). Ontology may be mathematical, but philosophy (mathematics' meta-ontological guide, without which its ontological status could never be known), remains fundamentally linguistic and conceptual in a manner that Badiou subsequently actively disavows. Philosophy's reorganization of mathematical thought must thus appear in the guise of axiomatic decision, as a philosophical, rather than just a mathematical, procedure.

Unlike a seventeenth-century philosophical system, Badiou claims no self-evidence for his axioms. Rather, they are taken over from mathematics – the nine axioms of set theory, it is claimed, concentrate 'the greatest effort of thought ever accomplished to this day by humanity'. They 'found' mathematics as 'theory of the pure multiple' (499). Within mathematics itself, these axioms are the result of 'decisions' with a variety of functional justifications, and they are the object of ongoing and intensifying dispute. Within philosophy, however, they are treated as authoritative, as a consequence of the prior and fundamental decision to give mathematics sovereignty over ontology. The content of this decision is an identification of the *concept* of multiplicity at stake in the thesis that 'being is pure multiplicity' with the *concept* of multiplicity at stake in mathematics, and in set theory in particular. Everything follows from this founding identification.

Using it, the Heideggerian distinction between being and beings (being qua being and the being of beings) can be re-presented as one between 'inconsistent' pure multiplicity and 'consistent' impure multiplicity. The former can be shown to be properly called 'the void', since it cannot be counted 'as one' ('prior to the count the one is not' [52]); and the latter can be shown always to be situational (restricted, structural) because it can. Set theory can then be rolled out to expound the intricacies of the different ways in which different things can be counted. Or, rather, what there is can be determined by the structure of the count. Ontology is severed from all phenomenological relations to objects. But only because Badiou *decided* to so sever it, in advance. He then has the awkward task of restoring a connection between his set-theoretical mathematical entities, philosophically received ontological concepts (like nature and history) and the world – itself conveniently reduced, decisionistically, to the 'four conditions' of philosophy (the matheme, the poem, politics and love).

The idea of the axiomatic decision re-presents the element of contingency inherent in all historical hermeneutics, logico-philosophically: that is, abstracted (or, as Badiou would say, subtracted) from its historical context – and hence from discursive justification – as the pure act of a philosophical subject. The authoritarianism of this philosophical axiomatics (philosophy by decree) is the political correlate of the mystery of the Badiouian 'event'.

## Idealism of the encounter (or, structuralism + faith = event)

One of the main effects of the reduction of ontology to mathematics is the de-temporalization of being and non-being alike. This is Badiou's fundamental difference from – indeed, inversion of – Heidegger's early philosophy. It is covered over, to a great extent, by the word 'event' and the quasi-existential terminology – 'situation', 'decision', 'intervention', 'fidelity' – that accompanies it. But, once grasped, it reveals the extent to which *Being and Event* is at heart a structuralist text. Time is reduced to two dimensions – synchrony and diachrony – and diachrony is no more than a serial ordering of synchronically defined situations. Situations are considered 'historical' in which there is 'at least one evental site' ('an absolutely singular multiple'), but there is no unity to these situations, no 'evental situation' and hence no 'History' (176–80).

The everyday meaning of 'event' (something that brings about a change, mediating a 'before' and an 'after' in three-dimensional time) is both temporal and narrative. But while Badiou's 'event' is indeed a moment of change – fundamental change – the change that it represents is understood to have *no relation* to the situation in which it occurs. It is conceived not as a link in a narrative chain, but as absolute novelty, a pure beginning, which is literally 'unnameable' in the language of the situation. This is both its grandeur and its pathos. Events do not occur within being. Events are subtracted from being. Events have situations as their 'sites', since there must always be a specific situation in which an event occurs, in order that it surpass it. However, even though the event 'belongs' to that situation, it is not 'included' in it. The event thus has the 'being of non-being' – not because it 'transcends' being qua being, but rather precisely the opposite, because of its proximity to it. (Being qua being – inconsistency multiplicity/pure presentation – it should be remembered, is the void.)

This is the central philosophical claim of *Being and Event*. The mathematical interpretation, and hence ontological demonstration, of the thesis of the non-being of the event is the hinge of the book. It joins 'being' to 'subject'. And it opens the way for the quasi-existential terminology that is the basis of Badiou's philosophico-political 'militancy'. It is via this 'militancy' that his thought communicates to whatever non-technical audience it can muster, through his shorter publications.

In brief, and without the formalization, Badiou's 'matheme of the event' is a set-theoretical (= ontological), axiomatic translation, and hence philosophical transformation, of the intuitive notion that events exceed the situation to which they belong. It holds that an event is a multiple (everything is a multiple) composed of the elements of its site *and also* itself; that is, it is a set that belongs to itself, or what the logician Mirimanoff called an 'extraordinary' set. However, 'extraordinary' sets violate the 'axiom of foundation', which Badiou had earlier made a 'metaontological thesis of ontology' (190). (The axiom of foundation stipulates that any non-void set must possess at least one element whose intersection with the initial set is void; thereby prohibiting self-belonging, avoiding Russell's paradox, and ensuring regularity and order in the realm of the countable.) The event is thus excluded from being: 'the event is not'. As such, however, it has 'the being of non-being' (what is not counted, and hence represented, within the situation), also described as 'the incandescent non-being of an existence' (183). In presenting the excess of presentation over what is representable, the event is said to be on the 'edge' of being itself, or on the edge of the void. Yet, in being composed, in part, by the elements of its site, it still has a relation to the representable. It is thus *not* an instance of the void (being) itself – there can be no such 'instances' – but of the void *within* a situation. It is said to impose itself 'between the void and itself' (182), although it would appear, rather, to stand between the void and the evental site, participating in but differing from each (a paradigm case of mediation, from a Hegelian point of view).[15]

This is all very technical, but it is crucial to Badiou because it provides a mathematical (= ontological) explanation of the *possibility* of what otherwise appears from the standpoint of a de-temporalized being as inexplicable: namely, novelty. Mathematics has a transcendental function here. The argument seems to be that since there is a 'place' for such an irruption within the set-theoretical count, this counters any possible accusations of arbitrariness or mysticism. However, this is not so clear, given that the demonstration is the result of a series of prior philosophical *decisions* (the mathematical restriction on the concept of being, de-temporalization, and the absolutization of novelty), which produced the 'extraordinary' status of the event in the first place. When the rationales of these philosophical decisions are taken into account, 'phenomenology' turns out to be harder to avoid than is supposed by the cheerleaders for axiomatics. On the other hand, *belief* – sheer belief – *is* nonetheless at the heart of Badiou's philosophy. And it is hard to eliminate its religious connotations. Indeed, in a kind of philosophical double bluff, Badiou courts them.

The main difficulty for Badiou's conception of the event is that being *absolutely* new it is unknowable and unnameable. It can 'only be revealed in the retroaction of an interventional practice' (178) which arises not out of knowledge, but out of faith: specifically, fidelity to the 'truth' of the event in question. In this respect, the event is the *product* of 'post-evental' intervention and can only be sustained by it. The interventional practice in question is the 'illegal choice' of a name for the unnameable event. More broadly, fidelity takes the form of being true to the implications of the event, as worked out by the 'operator of connection', by *organizing* a fidelity to its meaning. This is a two-stage procedure. Badiou expounds this problematic from the point of view of 'Pascal/Choice'. But the analogy is misleading, since the real problem here is not the same as that of Pascal's wager. It is the possibility and the consequences of *political delusion*. This is no small matter, especially given Badiou's personal political affiliations. It arises because Badiou separates truth from knowledge, absolutely. (A distinction between truth and knowledge is a condition of philosophy; their *absolute* separation, on the other hand, is the path to mysticism.) Yet the problem cannot even be thought from the standpoint of the separation, because fidelity to one's chosen event can never be cognitively mistaken. It is a matter of pure belief. Belief not only that the world will *actually* render up 'events' in Badiou's sense (his ontology only establishes their possibility), *and* that they will be 'revealed' to the retroactive agents of interventional practice, but also belief in these events themselves, irrespective of any cognitive or hermeneutical significance, manifestations of the truth of being. This is the religious dimension: the faith of 'militancy' or what one might call Maoism *without* the self-criticism. (Faith in the event is militant because it speaks in the name of the unnameable, and hence against the established order, or what Badiou calls, with a rather wearing pun, 'the state of the situation'.)

*Being and Event* provides the onto-theology for a religious conception of political practice. Badiou's only barrier to this slippage of politics back into religion is his linking of 'being in truth' to the thought of 'the generic'. However, since this link is made via truth's *in*discernibility, and a pure nomination of the indiscernible, one might be forgiven for thinking that it reproduces the structure of the problem, in a formal manner, rather than dealing with it.[16] Badiou embraces 'the randomness of the "militant" trajectory' (337). Indeed, it is 'randomness' alone that transcodes faith (fidelity to the encounter with the event) into 'materialism'– which is understood here, as in late Althusser, in a restricted Democritian sense. No residue remains of Marx's sense of materialism – a materialism of practice – as a critique of the self-sufficiency of philosophy.

Space prohibits entering into the complexities of 'the generic' – a term taken from the mathematician P.J. Cohen and prized by Badiou as the 'emblem' of his own thought (15) – save to note that, as a post-dialectical (abstract and indeterminate) substitute for *Aufhebung*, it is the procedural path to the infinity of truth, and functions as the final transition to the theory of the subject. The generic is said to 'found the very being of any truth', a truth being 'that which always makes a hole in knowledge' (327), just as, for Lacan, a subject is a hole in being. For Badiou, subjectivization is 'interventional nomination *from the standpoint of the situation*'. Only a subject can 'force' a new situation to exist. The 'entire being' of the subject is 'to encounter terms in a militant and aleatory trajectory'. It is 'solely … the local effects of an evental fidelity'. As such, ontology can 'think its law' but not 'the subject itself' (393, 342, 395, 406, 411). This leads to a hallucinatory terminological crescendo as the whole apparatus of the book is condensed into a series of attempts to describe this law:

> A subject is what deals with the generic indiscernibility of a truth, which it accomplishes amidst discernible finitude, by a nomination whose referent is suspended from the future anterior of a condition. A subject is thus, by the grace of names, both the *real* of the procedure (the enquiring of the enquiries) and the *hypothesis* that its unfinishable result will introduce some newness into presentation. A subject emptily names the universe to-come which is obtained by the supplementation of the situation with an indiscernible truth. At the same time, the subject is the finite real, the local stage, of this supplementation. Nomination is solely empty inasmuch as it is full of what is sketched out by its own possibility. A subject is the self-mentioning of an empty language. (399–400)

The 'theory of the subject' really does seem to have reached the end of the road here.

For Badiou, the event, politics and the subject are all extremely *rare* (344, 392). Historically, different fields of activity are taken to be defined by the proper names associated with events to which new forms of subjectivization correspond: 'Saint Paul for the Church, Lenin for the Party, Cantor for ontology, Schoenberg for music' (393). Apart from the claim for Cantor, the canon is conventional. But the historical content of Badiou's philosophy is not itself philosophical (how could it be?). Rather, it involves a massive operation

of philosophical re-presentation of the consequences of 'decisions' taken elsewhere. Badiou is insistent that his thought is modern, 'perhaps even "more-than-modern"'. However, it is in this 'more' (which is also less than modern) that his neo-classicism resides.

## Modernism + classicism = neo-classicism

It will be as well to start with Badiou's historical self-consciousness. This is indeed that of a combination of the classical and the modern, although the combination is understood thematically, within the time-consciousness of historicism, rather than as a matter of philosophical form; and Badiou's presentations of it are symptomatically inconsistent. In *Being and Event*, the classical philosophical problematic of being and truth is understood to come together with the distinctively modern problematic of the subject (inaugurated by Descartes, but moved decisively beyond him by Lacan), on the basis of the modernity of the mathematics of Cantor and Gödel and Cohen. *Being and Event*'s modernity is thus that of both 'the subject' and set theory as a paradigm of rational thought. In Badiou's 2003 Preface to his *Theoretical Writings*, on the other hand, his work is understood 'to allow us to transcribe the classical problematic (being, truth, subject) into a conceptual assemblage that is not only modern, but perhaps even more-than-modern'. Oddly, the subject is classicized here and Badiou's philosophy attains an autonomy from its own classical problematic via eight 'new technical concepts': mathematical multiplicity, the plurality of infinities, the void as proper name of being, the event as trans-being, fidelity, the subject of enquiries, the generic and forcing.[17]

This relative decline of the subject within Badiou's historical self-understanding corresponds to the shift of a greater part of the burden of philosophical modernity onto mathematics and its meta-ontological trans-codings. Yet it is precisely the idea that *philosophy* is to be pursued, systematically, through a thinking of mathematics that is Badiou's philosophy's primary classical, rationalist and idealist trait – its return to Plato – however modern the maths. This is the 'more' that is also less than modern, the carrier of the neo-classicism of Badiou's thought.

> [Those] who thrive on slogans, have always had the tactical advantage that they need only bring forth again, from a period of imprisonment, one single means … once cast aside as hopelessly antiquated, in order to launch it as an avant-garde achievement.[18]

This is particularly clear when we consider the broader polemical context of Badiou's thought: his expressed desire to 'undo' the 'disastrous consequences' of the twentieth-century linguistic turn, and more fundamentally, to turn away from Romanticism, very broadly conceived, by which Badiou means any temporalization of conceptuality. For Badiou, Romanticism is 'any disposition of thinking which determines the infinite with the open, or as horizonal correlate for the historicity of finitude'. It is the historical function of the philosophical understanding of Cantor's mathematics 'to have done' with this finitude'.[19] This is Badiou's neo-classical delusion and his own historicism of 'progress'.

Just as Badiou's conception of philosophical modernity is historicist and inconsistent, so his conception of neo-classicism is similarly temporally naive, and comes in two separate versions. On the one hand, at a philosophical level, in *Being and Event*, neo-classicism is associated with a 'constructivist' orientation in thought (exemplified by Leibniz), which

> commands us to confine ourselves … to the continuity of an engendering of parts regulated by the previous language. A neo-classicist is not a reactionary, he is a partisan of sense.… The neo-classicist fulfils the precious function of the guardianship of sense on a global scale. He testifies that there *must* be sense. (292)

This fits in with the role of mathematics in Badiou's thought in establishing continuity with classical philosophy. On the other hand, elsewhere, Badiou associates neo-classicism exclusively with scholasticism – 'academicization' and 'specialization' – and, in mathematics, with 'the little style', to which he opposes his own 'grand style'.[20] In neither case does he register the essential modernity of neo-classicism as a reaction against the modern *within* its own terms: a new beginning. Neo-classicism was (and is) a reactionary avant-garde – harbinger of the future of a past that is no more, if it ever was.

*Being and Event* is a philosophical neo-classicism because it exhibits a classicism that is taken up *into* its modernity. Formulaically: modernism + classicism = neo-classicism. In fact, in historicist terms, since neo-classicism was a phenomenon of the 1920s, Badiou's neo-classicism is a neo-neo-classicism, a *return* to neo-classicism, or neo-classicism squared. Badiou is to contemporary European philosophy what the Picasso of the 1920s was to the art of that day. Musically, Badiou thinks he is Schoenberg, but he is actually Stravinsky.

It should be clear from these formulations that I understand neo-classicism, primarily, as a historical category of cultural form and only secondarily a stylistic or formal term. This is not the neo-classicism

of conventional musical terminology – an objectivist reaction to the expressionism of late Romanticism (present in Badiou's 'academicization'). As Adorno puts it, 'expressionism *is* objectivity'. Rather, it is Adorno's sense of neo-classicism as a historical regression to means and forms that no longer have any *social* objectivity, however formally 'objectivist' they may appear. In artistic terms, this means appeals to beauty, harmony, consonance, tonality – 'a questionable orderliness' that provides 'a cloak of forced affirmation'.[21] Even when this forced affirmation is an affirmation of the new. We can see this in the compositional form of *Being and Event*.

Badiou identifies three strands, thematically, within the overarching form of a series of 'meditations': the conceptual, the textual and the meta-ontological, or philosophical interpretations of the mathematical. However, this is a weak (possibly ironic) rhetorical gesture to the Cartesian tradition. It establishes little linkage to the specificity of Descartes' practice: there is no narrative of the philosophical subject here holding it all together, in fact, supposedly, no narrativity at all. The presentational form of the book is better viewed from the standpoint of its combination of systematicity with digressive textual historical-philosophical self-consciousness. This systematicity encloses both Badiou's conceptual and meta-ontological strands. While the historical-philosophical digressions on particular thinkers (Aristotle, Spinoza, Hegel, Mallarmé, Pascal, Hölderlin, Leibniz, Rousseau, Descartes/Lacan – to each modern philosopher, his or her own history of philosophy) interposes an intermittent modernism at the level of form:

> neo-classicism practices the old custom of joining brokenly disparate models together. It is traditional music combed in the wrong direction. The surprises, however, fade away like little pink clouds; they are nothing but a volatile disturbance of the order within which they remain.[22]

## Notes

1. Reviewed by Keith Ansell-Pearson and Peter Dews in *Radical Philosophy* 103, September/October 2000, pp. 51–3, and *Radical Philosophy* 111, January/February 2002, pp. 33–7, respectively.
2. Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz, SUNY Press, New York, 1999, pp. 113–40. This was originally published in French in *Conditions*, Seuil, Paris, 1992.
3. Lecercle remarks, 'There is no point in a historical treatment of Badiou's thought, which is explicitly anti-historicist.' 'Cantor, Lacan, Mao', RP 93, p. 7. But this is a non-sequitur, quite apart from its conflation of historical thinking with historicism, shared with Badiou (and inherited from structuralism). In other regards, Lecercle is less concerned to maintain a strictly immanent approach to Badiou's thought. His example of an application of Badiou's system – to a reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* – is happy to violate the terms of its self-understanding (as one must) by treating it hermeneutically, as a metanarrative. Ibid., pp. 10–11. This is also the way it functions, practically, in its cultural dissemination.
4. Louis Althusser, 'On the Materialist Dialectic' (1963) – 'Remarks on the Terminology Adopted' (1965), *For Marx*, trans B. Brewster, New Left Books, London, 1969, p. 162.
5. One could say that Althusser's own philosophy rapidly became a philosophy without Marxism too, in so far as his attempt to produce a Marxist philosophy was plagued by a split between its 'Marxist' and its 'philosophical' aspects – forever converting Marx's critique of philosophy (his materialism) back into philosophical categories, which consequently clashed with the rest of Marx's thought, all the way down to his final 'aleatory materialism' of the encounter. See John Kraniauskas, 'Althusser after Althusser', below, pp. 38–42.
6. Alain Badiou, 'Philosophy and Mathematics: Infinity and the End of Romanticism' (1992), in *Theoretical Writings*, ed. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano, Continuum, London and New York, 2004, p. 25.
7. Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2000, p. 4.
8. Slavoj Žižek, 'Lenin's Choice', Afterword to V. I. Lenin, *Revolution at the Gates: A Selection of Writings from February to October 1917*, edited by Slavoj Žižek, Verso, London and New York, 2002, pp. 165–336. This political reading finds its philosophical correlate in the tendency to contrast the philosophy–science–art triad of Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* with Badiou's four 'conditions' of philosophy – science, art, politics and love – in order to imply that Badiou's philosophy is both 'more political' than Deleuze's and has a greater range. However, the precise opposite might also be argued: namely, that Badiou's strictly exceptionalist conception of politics is a narrow variant of a classical conception that cannot grasp the fundamental ubiquity and complexity of the forms of power in capitalist societies, and consequentially fails to grasp their political processes in their most basic – that is, ontological – aspects. It is precisely a similar narrowness in its conception of politics that characterizes the recently rechristened 'old' Left, albeit on the basis of radically different theoretical presuppositions.
9. See, for example, the opening chapters of *Manifesto for Philosophy*.
10. The question of the ontological status of mathematical reason is relevant to the critical meaning of Badiou's thought insofar as it is via mathematics that Badiou attempts to occupy the theological ideality of classical rationalism in a secular manner. On this model, mathematical truths are not merely eternal, but are unrelated to historical time. Mathematics has a (empirical) history as a discipline, but no immanent historicality. However, this question is subordinate to that of the ontological status of philosophical reason (in Badiou's terms, the ontological status of metaontology), into which mathematics is taken up. Appealing to the 'eventness' (that is, the non-being) of ontology itself (242) begs this latter question, which Badiou literally cannot think, since he

has no ontology of social being.

11. Alain Badiou, 'Author's Preface', *Theoretical Writings*, p. xv.
12. 'Theory of the subject' is the title of an earlier book by Badiou, *Théorie du sujet*, Seuil, Paris, 1982. It was followed by *Peut-penser la politique*, Seuil, Paris, 1985 (*Can Politics Be Thought?*, Duke University Press, forthcoming), which contains initial versions of the concepts of event and intervention. *Being and Event* takes up the thought of these two previous texts in order to re-present it, systematically, on the basis of its 'ontological conditions' (489), in the course of which it is, inevitably, modified. The telos driving the systematic structure of *Being and Event* thus comes from these earlier works.
13. Étienne Balibar, 'The History of Truth: Alain Badiou in French Philosophy', *Radical Philosophy* 115, September/October 2002, pp. 16–28.
14. See Étienne Balibar, Barbara Cassin, Alain de Libera, 'Subject', *Radical Philosophy* 138, July/August 2006, pp. 15–42, especially pp. 29–32. Kant simultaneously founds and 'decentres' the modern philosophical concept of the subject. As such, he is both the first truly 'Cartesian' and the first 'post-Cartesian' philosopher – hence his unparalleled, and continuing, centrality to contemporary philosophy.
15. Badiou is less fastidious with linguistic/conceptual determinations than mathematical ones, despite his (formal) acknowledgement of 'the imaging power of language' as the necessary medium of philosophy. Note the shift in the use of 'existence' in his argument above, from a conventional ontological meaning – the axiom of foundation 'forecloses extraordinary sets from all existence' (190; EE, 210, trans. altered) – to a de-temporalized and generalized existential one, according to which it is precisely this foreclosure from 'existence' (meaning 'being') that *defines* the singular 'existence' of the event, in a manner not so dissimilar from the later Heideggerian *Ereignis*. In this respect, Badiou's thought might be compared to a traditional metaphysical (= scientistic) version of the later Heidegger. Although generally absent from the text after his inaugural citation, Heidegger lurks in the shadows of Part V, 'The Event: Intervention and Fidelity', in its final meditation, named 'Hölderlin'.
16. Badiou's model for such fidelity is Saint Paul. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (1997), trans. Ray Brassier, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2004.
17. Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, p. xv.
18. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1948), trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (1973), Sheed & Ward, London, 1987, p. 210.
19. Badiou, 'Philosophy and Mathematics: Infinity and the End of Romanticism', in *Theoretical Writings*, pp. 21–38, pp. 24–5.
20. Badiou, 'Mathematics and Philosophy', in ibid., pp. 3–20, p. 5.
21. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, pp. 48, 209.
22. Ibid., p. 208.


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# Deleuze and cosmopolitanism

**John Sellars**

The status of the political within the work of Gilles Deleuze has recently become a topic of contention.[1] Two recent books argue the case for two extremes among a range of possible interpretations. At one end of the spectrum, Peter Hallward has argued that Deleuze's personal ethic of deterritorialization and self-destruction is so disengaged with the actuality of social relations that it is unable to offer any serious political philosophy.[2] At the other end of the spectrum, Manuel De Landa outlines in his most recent book an entire social and political theory modelled upon Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of machinic assemblages.[3] In what follows I offer a contribution to this literature on Deleuze's political philosophy.[4] To be more precise I should say Deleuze and Guattari's political philosophy, for Deleuze's most explicit comments on politics appear in the co-authored *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. If *Anti-Oedipus* is the critical and destructive polemic, then *A Thousand Plateaus* is the creative and constructive manifesto, and so my focus shall be on the latter. In particular I shall focus upon the 'plateau' entitled '1227: Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine', but I shall also draw upon material from Deleuze's solo work *Difference and Repetition* that prefigures the central theme of that section. I shall argue that the political philosophy developed by Deleuze and Guattari shares much in common with, and should be seen as part of, the cosmopolitan tradition within political thinking. This broad tradition holds that all human beings belong to a single global community and that this universal community is more fundamental than the local political states into which individuals are born. As we shall see, this tradition has its origins with the ancient Cynics and Stoics.

The claim that Deleuze stands within a cosmopolitan tradition stretching back to the Stoics is a striking one, especially when one bears in mind Deleuze's explicit interest in Stoicism in *The Logic of Sense*, where he engages with it on a number of fronts. Drawing upon the Stoic theory of incorporeals, Deleuze outlines an ontological surface populated by bodies on one side and incorporeal effects or events on the other. He also draws upon what he calls the Stoic theory of *aiôn* and *chronos*, a dual reading of time each part of which corresponds to one of the two sides of his ontological surface (the extended present of *chronos* is the time of bodies, while the durationless limit of *aiôn* separating past and future is the time of the incorporeal transformation or event). As it happens, none of this bears much relation to what we know about the ancient Stoics' ontology and theory of time, and in the latter case Deleuze's confusion reflects that of his source.[5] His briefer remarks about Stoic ethics come closer to what we find in ancient Stoicism – especially the later Stoics – and the very positive tone suggests that he felt a real affinity with the ancient Stoa.[6] It is in the light of his claim that Stoic ethics offers us the only meaningful form of ethics left, namely 'not to be unworthy of what happens to us',[7] that I argue here that Deleuze also proposes a Stoic politics, even if he never explicitly conceived it as such.

Before turning to Deleuze and Guattari directly, I shall begin by introducing ancient cosmopolitanism. I shall then focus in on one particularly important ancient text relating to the *Republic* of Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, analysing it alongside an equally important passage from *Difference and Repetition*. Then I shall turn to *A Thousand Plateaus*, and suggest the ways in which Deleuze and Guattari's political philosophy may be read as a contemporary version of ancient Stoic cosmopolitanism.

## Ancient cosmopolitanism

The origins of ancient cosmopolitanism are traditionally attributed to Diogenes the Cynic. Asked where he came from, Diogenes is reported to have replied 'I am a citizen of the cosmos.'[8] This is the earliest attributed use of the word *cosmopolitês*, 'citizen of the cosmos', although it is interesting to note that a number of other Socratic philosophers roughly contemporary with Diogenes are recorded as having expressed a

similar thought, and that this thought is also attributed to Socrates himself.[9]

What did Diogenes mean by this claim? His Cynicism has often been presented as a primarily nihilistic philosophy, and so one might assume that he simply meant to reject any tie to a traditional state and to reject the responsibilities of being a citizen. Yet elsewhere Diogenes is reported to have used the word *apolis* when wanting to assert that he was without a city in the conventional sense.[10] So Diogenes' use of *cosmopolitês* suggests something more than mere indifference to existing political institutions, namely a positive allegiance to the cosmos.[11] Unfortunately the evidence for Diogenes is thin and his *Republic* – which presumably outlined his political thoughts – is lost.[12] Nevertheless, his modest contribution would bear significant fruit.

Cynicism continued after the death of Diogenes under the stewardship of his pupil Crates, accompanied by his Cynic wife Hipparchia. According to tradition, when Zeno of Citium first arrived in Athens he became a student of Crates, and so it is reasonable to assume that Zeno was familiar with the Cynic idea of being a citizen of the cosmos. Zeno too wrote a *Republic* and it is reported that it was written when he was still a pupil of Crates.[13] Thus ancient sources joke that it was written 'on the tail of the dog'.[14] The surviving evidence for Zeno's *Republic* is greater than that for Diogenes' *Republic*, but it is still thin enough to make reconstruction of its doctrines difficult. Among the many attempts at reconstruction, two broad approaches stand out; I shall call these the 'Platonic' and the 'Cynic' interpretations.

The Platonic interpretation of Zeno's *Republic* places particular weight on the claim that it was written as a response to Plato's *Republic*, and takes Zeno's choice of title as a deliberate reference to Plato's work of the same name.[15] It also notes a number of fragments of Zeno's *Republic* that appear to echo material in Plato's *Republic*, such as the rejection of traditional education. It also draws attention to an extended fragment in which Zeno is mentioned alongside Plato as fellow admirers of the Spartan king Lycurgus.[16] Thus the Platonic interpretation suggests that in his *Republic* Zeno outlined an ideal state – an isolated political community modelled on Sparta – which differed from Plato's ideal state by only admitting the wise as citizens,[17] thereby avoiding the problem of how to ensure harmony between the social classes. Zeno's ideal state, this interpretation suggests, is an egalitarian community of sages, uninterested in the outside world.[18]

The Cynic interpretation offers a quite different reconstruction. It notes that Zeno is reported to have written his *Republic* under the influence of Crates and so it suggests that Crates' influence would have left its mark. It argues – contra the Platonic interpretation – that the choice of title might just as well refer to Diogenes' *Republic* as it might to Plato's, and so the title alone is not enough to warrant the claim of a Platonic influence. It also argues that the fragment connecting Zeno, Plato and Lycurgus does not say what the Platonic interpretation supposes. It notes that many of the other fragments report ideas that might just as well suggest a Cynic ancestry as they might an echo of Plato's utopia, such as the rejection of traditional education, temples, law courts and currency, and the advocacy of open sexual relationships.[19] More importantly, the Cynic interpretation draws attention to an extended fragment that appears to call into question the claim that Zeno proposed an isolated community limited to just the wise:

> The much admired *Republic* of Zeno, the founder of the Stoic sect, is aimed at this one main point, that our household arrangements should not be based on cities or parishes, each one marked out by its own legal system, but we should regard all human beings as our fellow citizens and local residents, and there should be one way of life and order, like that of a herd grazing together and nurtured by a common *nomos*. Zeno wrote this, picturing as it were a dream or image of a philosopher's well-regulated society.[20]

The word *nomos* has been left untranslated and we shall return to this in the next section. In the meantime we can note that this passage implies that *all* human beings (*pantas anthrôpous*) will be citizens in Zeno's ideal community, not just the wise. In the light of the claim that Zeno wrote his *Republic* under the influence of Crates, the Cynic interpretation suggests that this image of all humankind sharing one way of life is an expression of the cosmopolitanism first articulated by Diogenes. Zeno's ideal, this interpretation argues, is one in which all human beings are citizens of the cosmos, sharing a common way of life, indifferent to the geographical divisions embodied by traditional states. This may be reconciled with the claim that only the wise will be citizens by placing this universal community in a utopian future in which everyone has become a sage, and it is reported that the Stoic sage will follow the Cynic (and thus cosmopolitan) way of life.[21] It is to this interpretation that Kropotkin ascribed when he proclaimed Zeno the finest ancient exponent of anarchism.[22]

Although the evidence is thin and both interpretations involve a considerable amount of conjecture, the Cynic interpretation seems the more plausible of the two. It gains further weight when one places Zeno's *Republic* alongside the works of subsequent Stoics, such as the following passage from Seneca:

> Let us grasp the idea that there are two commonwealths (*duas res publicas*) – the one, a vast and truly common State (*vere publicam*), embracing gods and men, in which we look neither to this corner nor to that, but measure the boundaries of our citizenship by the path of the sun; the other, the one to which we have been assigned by the accident of birth.[23]

Seneca's unbounded common state – measured by the path of the sun – embraces the entire cosmos and is clearly no isolated community. Like Diogenes and Zeno, his ideal is in contrast to traditional political states. Epictetus takes up the same theme:

> What other course remains for men than that which Socrates took when asked to what country he belonged, never saying 'I am an Athenian', or 'I am a Corinthian', but 'I am of the cosmos'? For why do you say that you are an Athenian, instead of mentioning merely that corner into which your paltry body was cast at birth?[24]

The same thought reappears throughout the *Meditations* of the emperor-turned-philosopher Marcus Aurelius, from which the following is just one example:

> The cosmos is as it were a State (*polis*) – for of what other single polity can the whole race of humankind be said to be fellow members?[25]

This broad Cynic–Stoic tradition of cosmopolitanism is not without its tensions, however. It is one thing for Diogenes to proclaim that he is a citizen of the cosmos; it is quite another for Marcus to declare that the cosmos is a state of which *everyone* is a citizen. What these thoughts do have in common is a rejection of one's membership of the traditional state. Diogenes of Babylon (head of the Stoa in the second century BC) provocatively claimed while on a trip to Rome that, given that a city should be defined as a group of virtuous people living together under a common law, Rome itself was not a true city.[26] Only the cosmos – running according to its own immanent cosmic law – should be called a city, for it alone fulfils the requirements of this definition. Moreover, only the wise can claim citizenship of that city, for 'among the foolish (*aphronôn*) there exists no city nor any law'.[27] Here we are back to Zeno's claim that only the wise will be citizens in his utopia, suggesting a limited community.

In order to overcome these tensions it may be helpful to think of cosmopolitanism as a political model with three distinct phases.[28] The first phase would be the lone individual who claims to be a citizen of the cosmos. This first phase is *in itself* Diogenes' apparent political ideal. However, in a world with more than one cosmopolitan sage, such individuals would acknowledge one another as equals and fellow-citizens of the cosmos, following a shared way of life. Thus they would constitute a community of sages, regardless of their individual geographical locations. This community of sages – whether dispersed or gathered together in one place – would form a second phase. The third phase would be a hypothetical future in which everyone has attained the wisdom of a sage and thus everyone has become a fellow-citizen of the cosmos. In such an ideal situation all existing traditional states and laws would become irrelevant and there would be what might best be described as an anarchist utopia. In this third phase, all humankind would share one way of life, 'like that of a herd grazing together and nurtured by a common *nomos*'.

## Nomos

Plutarch's account of Zeno's *Republic* in *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander* is arguably the most important fragment that survives. It is worth citing again in full:

> The much admired *Republic* of Zeno, the founder of the Stoic sect, is aimed at this one main point, that our household arrangements should not be based on cities or parishes, each one marked out by its own legal system, but we should regard all human beings as our fellow citizens and local residents, and there should be one way of life and order, like that of a herd grazing together and nurtured by a common *nomos*. Zeno wrote this, picturing as it were a dream or image of a philosopher's well-regulated society.[29]

As before, the word *nomos* has been left untranslated. We are perhaps most familiar with the Greek word *nomos* from discussions associated with the political theory of the ancient Sophists. In that context, *nomos* is usually understood to refer to custom or convention, and, later on, law. Thus some readers of Plutarch take Zeno to be saying that all human beings should follow one common law, rather than different legal systems in different states. However, *nomos* has a much wider range of meanings than just custom or law, and altogether a total of thirteen distinct senses of *nomos* have been isolated.[30] Before *nomos* took on the meaning of custom or law it was also used to refer to the pasture, the unregulated space outside the

confines of the city-state (*polis*).[31] Thus other readers of Plutarch take Zeno to be saying that all human beings should live like a herd grazing together on a common pasture, namely an undivided Earth. Greek as it is written today includes a system of accents, and the difference between *nomos* as custom or law on the one hand and *nomos* as pasture on the other is indicated by the presence of an accent on either the first or the second omicron: *nómos* = custom, law; *nomós* = pasture.[32] Some textual scholars have disagreed about the location of the accent, but for Zeno, writing before the introduction of accents, the word would have been inherently ambiguous. The general sense of the text as a whole, however, is clear enough: rather than live according to the local customs and conventions of different city-states, people should instead aspire to living according to one common law, like a herd grazing on a common pasture.

The word *nomos* also features in the philosophy of Deleuze. In particular it appears in *Difference and Repetition* during a discussion of Duns Scotus' univocal ontology (see *DR* 53–4/36). Deleuze is concerned with outlining a concept of distribution appropriate to a univocal or immanent conception of being. In order to do so he draws a contrast between two types of distribution: distribution according to *logos* and distribution according to *nomos*. A distribution according to *logos* is a distribution in which that which is distributed is divided up; the distribution of parcels of land to different sedentary farmers, for instance. Such a distribution requires a *logos* in the form of a judgement or a principle; it is a proportional determination. A distribution according to *nomos*, in contrast, is a distribution in which this relationship is reversed. Rather than individuals dividing up a territory and distributing it to themselves, instead individuals distribute themselves across an open and undivided territory; nomadic shepherds scattered across an undivided plain, for instance. This is a distribution according to *nomos*, a nomadic distribution:

> We must first of all distinguish a type of distribution which implies a dividing up of that which is distributed.… A distribution of this type proceeds by fixed and proportional determinations.… Then there is a completely other distribution which must be called nomadic, a nomad *nomos*, without property, enclosure or measure. Here, there is no longer a division of that which is distributed but rather a division among those who distribute *themselves* in an open space – a space which is unlimited, or at least without precise limits.… To fill a space, to be distributed within it, is very different from distributing the space. (*DR* 53–4/36)

Drawing upon the work of Emmanuel Laroche,[33] Deleuze uses *nomos* in its earlier sense of pasture and stresses the meaning of its root *nemô*, to distribute.[34] A nomadic distribution is one in which, for instance, shepherds distribute themselves and their livestock over an undivided and unregulated territory, namely the pasture (*nomos*) beyond the borders of the city-state (*polis*). For Deleuze a nomad is simply one who operates according to this model of distribution, just as in Greek a nomad (*nomados*) is simply someone who lives on the pasture (*nomos*).[35] It is worth stressing that his references to nomads – both here and elsewhere – should not be taken either too literally or as mere metaphors. Deleuze presents us with a functional definition of what it means to be nomadic, namely to relate to a space in a specific way. This functional definition should in theory apply to traditional nomads, such as those who wander the steppe of central Asia, but it is by no means limited to them. Nor is it merely metaphorical, for it contains within it a precise meaning against which particular cases may be assessed.[36]

Returning to Zeno, let us note two key points in Plutarch's important testimony. The first is the thought that human beings should share 'one way of life and order', following a single common *nomos*, understood as custom or law. The second is that this common way of life should transcend the traditional boundaries that demarcate cities or parishes, like that of 'a herd grazing together and nurtured by a common *nomos*', understood as pasture. Zeno's ideal, according to this testimony at least, is a way of life in which individuals do not divide up territory into distinct states (distributing the territory to themselves) but rather live together in one undivided territory (distributing themselves across the territory). It is of course impossible to attribute to Zeno a theory of different models of distribution along the lines that Deleuze provides, and there is no evidence to suggest that Deleuze was familiar with this fragment from Zeno's *Republic*,[37] but nevertheless the resonance is striking.

## Nomadology

Deleuze's concept of a nomadic distribution forms the foundation for what is arguably the nearest thing to a political philosophy within his *oeuvre*, namely his analysis with Guattari of the 'state apparatus' and 'nomad war machine' in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In *Difference and Repetition* we have seen that Deleuze draws a distinction between distributions according to *logos* and those according to *nomos*. Yet *nomos* was also presented as that which is beyond the boundaries

or control of the *polis* – it is the occupied space without precise limits, the expanse around the town.[38] The *polis* is by contrast the place in which everything is ordered according to a *logos*. There is thus a natural shift from a contrast between *logos* and *nomos* (in *DR*) to one between *polis* and *nomos* (in *MP*). Deleuze and Guattari flesh out this abstract distinction between *polis* and *nomos* by casting it as a distinction between the 'state apparatus' and the 'nomad war machine'. These are not merely two alternative modes of political operation; they are diametrically opposed to one another: '*nomos* against *polis*' (*MP* 437/353).

Building upon Deleuze's analysis in *Difference and Repetition*, the state apparatus is a principle of organization that distributes territory to individuals, marking out borders, erecting boundaries, and creating spaces of interiority. It is a principle of sovereignty and control. In contrast, the nomad war machine is a principle of movement and becoming, a principle of exteriority indifferent to the boundaries laid down by the state apparatus. From the perspective of the state, the war machine is violent and destructive, but on its own terms it is simply in a process of continual movement. It is nomadic because its natural habitat is on *nomos*, operating according to a nomadic distribution. The nomads distribute themselves across the open undivided steppe while the state allocates portions of land to individuals.

An important source for Deleuze and Guattari here is the work of Jean-Pierre Vernant, who has dealt with the close relationship between these varying modes of spatial distribution and the rise of the *polis*.[39] In his analysis, the reforms of the Athenian Cleisthenes overturned the previous tribal political organization that was qualitative and mobile, replacing it with a homogeneous and geometrical allocation of plots; the social organization of the clan was replaced by one of the soil.[40] Vernant emphasizes that this was primarily a shift in categories of thinking about space and suggests that Plato, in his use of a similar mode of spatial distribution, can be seen to express this form of allocation raised to the status of an ideal model. For Vernant, Plato is the archetypal theorist of distribution according to *logos*.[41] In contrast to this geometrical allocation of land undertaken by the *polis*, *nomos* refers to the unallocated common land outside the boundaries of the *polis*. A nomad is simply one who traverses this open space without dividing it.

This contrast between *nomos* and *polis* is, however, a formal one. In concrete situations both traits may be found together in varying measures; smooth spaces may be found in the centre of the *polis* while striations can divide the smoothest of spaces (shipping lanes across the open sea, for instance). But rather than conceive these as two antithetical types of *place*, it may be more accurate to present them as two distinct political *modes of operation*, based upon differing models of distribution. Deleuze's nomadic distribution forms the foundation for a nomadic ethic, a certain way of relating to any particular space or situation. What we are offered is a political ethic in which individuals distribute themselves across a territory rather than distribute territory to themselves. It is, fundamentally, a cosmopolitan ethic, a rejection of political ties to particular locations, and a reorientation of the way in which one relates to social and political space: 'it is possible to live striated on the deserts, steppes, or seas; it is possible to live smooth even in the cities, to be an urban nomad' (*MP* 601/482).

This antithesis between *polis* and *nomos* – state apparatus and nomad war machine – is developed further. The former uses the 'royal' or 'major' science of geometry to distribute territory and demarcate an

interiority that forms its zone of control. The latter uses the 'nomad' or 'minor' science of the numbering number, allocating ordinals to individuals, in order to assist their movement across an open space (*MP* 484–5/389). This distinction between major and minor science is presented in terms of Lucretius contra Plato; becoming and heterogeneity opposed to 'the stable, the eternal, the identical, the constant' (*MP* 447/361). Deleuze and Guattari outline four differentiating characteristics – hydraulic versus solid, vortical versus linear, becoming versus eternal, problematic versus theorematic – all of which have ancient origins.[42] In

fact, the distinction itself comes from two ancient sources: Proclus and Plato. Deleuze and Guattari draw upon Proclus' account of the theorematic-problematic argument between Speusippus and Menaechmus.[43] Speusippus (Plato's nephew and his successor as the head of the Academy) is reported to have made the clearly Platonic claim that 'there is no coming to be among eternals'.[44] Consequently nothing needs to be created or solved; instead there is only contemplative understanding of the already perfect Forms and abstract theoretical speculation. Menaechmus (a pupil of the mathematician Eudoxus), on the other hand, begins with the empiricist proposition that 'the discovery of theorems does not occur without recourse to matter'.[45] For him, science is the art of solving concrete problems that originate in specific situations; it is always a question of engineering and pragmatics. Deleuze and Guattari also cite Plato as a source for this distinction. In the *Timaeus* Plato proposes becoming as a counter-model that could rival identity, only to reject it as a serious possibility.[46] Both of these sources make it clear that major science is simply another phrase for Platonism. Consequently minor science refers to everything that escapes from the Platonic model. Platonic major science is, in the words of Michel Serres, 'a science of dead things',[47] whereas minor science is a science of becoming. For Deleuze and Guattari the difference between these two scientific models also reflects the difference between an ontology of transcendence and an ontology of immanence – in other words, the difference between Platonism and Stoicism.

This distinction between two modes of distribution and two models for science is also reflected in a distinction between two types of space: the smooth and the striated. The undivided *nomos* is a smooth space; the divided and bounded territory of the *polis* is a striated space. The former is two-dimensional vectorial space that can be explored 'only by legwork' (*MP* 460/371). The latter is a three-dimensional metric grid in which locations can be determined in an absolute space. We might characterize these as Leibnizian and Newtonian conceptions of space respectively, the merits of which were famously debated in the correspondence between Leibniz and Clarke, and the challenge to reconcile them was later taken up by Kant. Nomads occupy a smooth vectorial space, following a trajectory without a predetermined endpoint. They distribute themselves in smooth space and this is more important than physical movement; indeed, nomads need not move at all (*MP* 472/381). Migrants by contrast travel from A to B, from one fixed point to another within a predetermined grid (*MP* 471/380). The latter requires an additional dimension in order to make a representation of the grid as a whole.

Deleuze and Guattari's conceptions of the state apparatus as primarily a principle of order and organization and the nomad war machine as a principle of movement and becoming looks at first glance as if it is simply an expression of the wider ontology developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, *Difference and Repetition*, and elsewhere. In Deleuze's process philosophy of Nietzschean forces, movements of becoming or deterritorialization have an ontological priority over moments of stability, sedimentation or reterritorialization. Or, to be more precise, such stability is only ever apparent: in reality everything is in a continual state of flux at various levels of speed and slowness. This might lead us to assume that for Deleuze and Guattari the apparent order and stability of the state apparatus is merely a slowing down of the processes that constitute the nomad war machine, but in fact they insist that in this case there is an irreducible opposition: 'in every respect, the war machine is of another species, another nature, another origin than the state apparatus' (*MP* 436/352). They are thus not two aspects of their ontology but rather two modes of distribution that imply two quite different modes of existence. The distinction is not a correlate of Deleuze's ontology; it is a part of his ethics.

## Deleuze's cosmopolitanism

Deleuze's conception of a nomadic distribution across an undivided *nomos* has much in common with Stoic expressions of cosmopolitanism in which the wise conceive themselves as citizens distributed across an undivided cosmos. The intriguing connection between these two models of spatial distribution is Zeno's utopian image of all humankind living on a common *nomos*. There are some important terminological differences, however, reflecting differences in ontology. For the Stoics, the cosmos is conceived as a *polis*, the only true *polis*, for the cosmos is the only entity governed by a common rational law (*logos*). The Stoics contrast this rationally ordered cosmic *polis* with actual cities that fail to meet their standards of rationality. In Deleuze and Guattari's *nomos–polis* dichotomy, the undivided *nomos* functions as the Stoics' ideal cosmic *polis*, while the striated *polis* fulfils the role of the actual cities criticized by the Stoics. Both the Stoics and Deleuze and Guattari aspire to the undivided territory of a cosmic *polis* and *nomos* respectively, but Deleuze and Guattari's rejection of the concept of a rationally ordered cosmos and its replacement

by their concept of a 'chaosmos' means they would never attempt to conceive their cosmic *nomos* as an idealized *polis*.[48]

Notwithstanding the inevitable ontological differences between the ancient Stoics and Deleuze and Guattari, their shared concern with how individuals relate to spaces is striking. In the light of this I would suggest that Deleuze and Guattari stand within a tradition of cosmopolitan political thought that begins with the ancient Cynics and Stoics, a tradition in which indifference to traditional political boundaries is combined with a positive allegiance to an undivided space in which everyone can move without restriction. This affirmation of a broadly Stoic politics stands alongside Deleuze's explicit affirmation in *The Logic of Sense* of a Stoic ethics.

Thus, Deleuze's politics is ultimately utopian.[49] It does not offer a model for collective political action but rather outlines a personal ethical project of self-transformation in which each individual alters their own relation to space and to traditional political states. The preferred relation is ultimately one of indifference to traditional politics and to traditional conceptions of political revolution.[50] The political transformation that the cosmopolitan tradition envisages can only be brought about one person at a time. This is both its strength and its weakness.

## Notes

1. Note the following abbreviations: *DR = Différence et repetition*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1968; *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton, Athlone, London, 1994; *LS = Logique du sens*, Minuit, Paris, 1969; *The Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester, Columbia University Press, New York, 1990; *MP = Mille plateaux*, with F. Guattari, Minuit, Paris, 1980; *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi, Athlone, London, 1988. Abbreviations are followed by French, then English, pagination. For ancient authors I have made use of the Loeb Classical Library editions published by Harvard University Press.
2. See P. Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, Verso, London, 2006.
3. See M. De Landa, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, Continuum, London, 2006.
4. Previous studies include: T. May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania, 1994; P. Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, Routledge, London, 2000; N. Thoburn, *Deleuze, Marx, and Politics*, Routledge, London, 2003.
5. The Stoics in fact posit four types of incorporeal, of which linguistic meaning or sense (*lekton*, that which is said, often translated as 'sayable') is just one (the other three are time, place, and void). Deleuze's supposedly Stoic 'incorporeal effects' are merely examples of these incorporeal linguistic predicates. There is no Stoic concept of an 'incorporeal event' along the lines that Deleuze suggests. Nor is there any conception of parallel series of bodies–causes and incorporeal–effects inhabiting two sides of a single surface. Deleuze's account of *aiôn* and *chronos* does not correspond to what we know about Stoic thoughts about time either, and is the fabrication of Victor Goldschmidt, on whom Deleuze draws (see J. Sellars, 'An Ethics of the Event: Deleuze's Stoicism', *Angelaki*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2006, pp. 157–71, at p. 169 n35).
6. On Deleuze and Stoic ethics, see ibid.
7. See *LS* 174/149.
8. Diogenes Laertius 6.63.
9. See e.g. Epictetus, *Dissertationes* 1.9.1 (quoted below). For a general survey of the idea in antiquity, see H.C. Baldry, *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1965.
10. See Diogenes Laertius 6.38.
11. For the positive content of Cynic cosmopolitanism, see J.L. Moles, 'Cynic Cosmopolitanism', in *The Cynics*, ed. R.B. Branham and M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, pp. 105–20.
12. The surviving evidence is discussed in D. Dawson, *Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, ch. 3.
13. The most significant study is probably M. Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991. The fragments are collected and translated in J. Sellars, 'Stoic Cosmopolitanism and Zeno's *Republic*', *History of Political Thought*, forthcoming.
14. Diogenes Laertius 7.4.
15. For examples of the Platonic interpretation, see A.-H. Chroust, 'The Ideal Polity of the Early Stoics', *Review of Politics* 27, 1965, pp. 173–83; Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City*; and C. Rowe, 'The *Politeiai* of Zeno and Plato', in *Zeno of Citium and His Legacy*, ed. T. Scaltsas and A.S. Mason, Municipality of Larnaca, Larnaca, 2002, pp. 293–308. For the claim that Zeno's title alone must imply a close relationship with Plato's *Republic* see Rowe, 'The *Politeiai* of Zeno and Plato', p. 295.
16. See Plutarch, *Vita Lycurgi* 31.1–2.
17. See Diogenes Laertius 7.33.
18. Chroust, 'The Ideal Polity of the Early Stoics', pp. 179–80, argues that all foreign travel would be banned in Zeno's ideal state and so this small community of sages would be totally isolated from the outside world.
19. See Diogenes Laertius 7.32–3; 7.131.
20. Plutarch, *De Alexandri Magni Fortuna aut Virtute* 329a–b.
21. See e.g. Diogenes Laertius 7.121.
22. In his 1910 article for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* Peter Kropotkin described Zeno as 'the best exponent of Anarchist philosophy in ancient Greece' (repr. in P. Kropotkin, *Anarchism and Anarchist Communism*, Freedom Press, London, 1987, p. 10). For a cursory account of Cynicism and Stoicism within the anarchist tradition see P. Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, HarperCollins, London, 1992, pp. 68–71.
23. Seneca, *De Otio* 4.1.
24. Epictetus, *Dissertationes* 1.9.1–2.
25. Marcus Aurelius 4.4; see also 2.16, 3.11, 4.3, 10.15.
26. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.137, where it is reported that, according to Diogenes, Rome was not a real 'city' (*nec haec urbs nec in ea civitas*) at all.
27. See D. Obbink and P. A. Vander Waerdt, 'Diogenes of Babylon: The Stoic Sage in the City of Fools', *Greek,*

*Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 32, 1991, pp. 355–96, at p. 376.

28. Here I follow the analysis of Diogenes' cosmopolitanism in J.L. Moles, 'The Cynics and Politics', in *Justice and Generosity*, ed. A. Laks and M. Schofield, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 129–58, at pp. 141–2. It seems equally applicable to later Stoic cosmopolitanism.
29. Plutarch, *De Alexandri Magni Fortuna aut Virtute* 329a–b.
30. See M. Ostwald, *Nomos and the Beginnings of the Athenian Democracy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969, p. 54.
31. See E. Laroche, *Histoire de la racine nem- en grec ancien*, Klincksieck, Paris, 1949, pp. 115–29.
32. See H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon*, rev. H.S. Jones, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1940, p. 1180.
33. See Laroche, *Histoire de la racine nem- en grec ancien*, cited in both *DR* and *MP*.
34. Both senses of *nomos* discussed here share this root; see Liddell and Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon*, p. 1180, and Laroche, *Histoire de la racine nem- en grec ancien*, pp. 24–5.
35. See Liddell and Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon*, pp. 1178–9.
36. Deleuze has been accused of relying on metaphors by a number of commentators, notably A. Badiou, *Deleuze: La clameur de l'Être*, Hachette, Paris, 1997, p. 8. For a defence of Deleuze against such charges, see M. De Landa, 'Immanence and Transcendence in the Genesis of Form', in *A Deleuzian Century?*, ed. I. Buchanan, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 1999, pp. 119–34, at p. 121.
37. Deleuze's principal source, Laroche, *Histoire de la racine nem- en grec ancien*, refers to an enormous number of ancient textual examples, including many in Plutarch's *Moralia*, but I have not found a reference to this particular passage.
38. See *DR* 54/309.
39. See J.-P. Vernant, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1983.
40. See ibid., pp. 212–34; note also Vernant's *The Origins of Greek Thought*, Methuen, London, 1982, p. 99: 'The city was thus no longer organized according to … blood ties. Tribes and demes were established on a purely geographical basis; they brought together dwellers on the same soil rather than blood relatives'.
41. See ibid., pp. 230–31, where he writes that Plato 'specifies how to organize the space of the city-state to conform with his laws', and Plato himself offers the following example: 'twelve regions … [divided] into five thousand and forty allotments … [then] bisected' (*Laws* 745e). Vernant goes on to suggest that this model of 'political space treated geometrically' (ibid., p. 233) finds its most complete expression with Plato despite his other divergences from the model of the classical city.
42. The hydraulic/solid and vortical/linear characteristics originate with Lucretius and Archimedes, and Deleuze and Guattari draw upon the discussion of them both in M. Serres, *La naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrèce*, Minuit, Paris, 1977; the becoming/eternal opposition comes from Plato's *Timaeus* 28–9; the problematic/theorematic distinction comes from Proclus, *in Primum Euclidis Elementorum Librum* (translated in G. R. Morrow, *Proclus, A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1970). See *MP* 446–64/361–74.
43. See Proclus, *in Primum Euclidis Elementorum Librum* Prol. 8; Morrow, *Proclus*, pp. 62–7. For Deleuze and Guattari see *MP* 447–8/362 with 448 n16/554 n21. Deleuze also draws upon this text by Proclus in *DR* 211/163 and *LS* 69/54.
44. Proclus, ibid.; Morrow, *Proclus*, p. 64.
45. Ibid.
46. See Plato, *Timaeus* 28–9 and *MP* 457–8/369 with 457 n29/555 n34. Deleuze also discusses this in *DR* 167/128 where he describes this 'terrifying' counter-model as 'the anti-Platonism at the heart of Platonism'.
47. Serres, *La naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrèce*, p. 136.
48. In *MP* Deleuze and Guattari have no problem with the word Cosmos (see e.g. *MP* 402–3/326–7) but they supplement it with 'chaosmos' in order to stress that their cosmos is not rationally ordered in the way that the Greeks understood *kosmos*.
49. Of course, following the example of De Landa, one might be able to develop a quite different social and political philosophy using other parts of Deleuze's philosophy, but this will not necessarily be consistent with Deleuze's explicit comments on politics discussed here.
50. Although I do not subscribe to all of the details of Peter Hallward's complex and sophisticated interpretation of Deleuze's ontology, I would agree with him that Deleuze's political attitude is utopian and ultimately indifferent to traditional politics (*Out of this World*, p. 162).


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# Althusser after Althusser

Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987*, ed. François Matheron and Olivier Corpet, trans. and introduced by G.M. Goshgarian, Verso, London and New York, 2006. 300 pp. £50.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 1 84467 069 4 hb., 1 84467 553 X pb.

'I am looking, in the history of philosophy, for the elements that will enable us to account for what Marx thought and the form in which he thought it', writes Althusser in 'Philosophy and Marxism'. The statement arguably describes his project as a whole, from *For Marx* onwards, in which he tracks down the ways in which Marx avoids epistemological capture by Hegelianism and political economy and breaks away into a new science of history. But here it also refers specifically to a more positive turn in his endeavours: the articulation of a possible 'materialism of the encounter' or 'aleatory materialism'. 'Philosophy and Marxism', a long interview, originally published in Mexico in 1988 (interestingly, aimed 'exclusively' at a Latin American audience of students and political activists), is the most recent text collected in this volume and the only one published in his lifetime

Althusser's use of the present tense to describe his ongoing search puts the rest of the collection into perspective, suggesting that the longer and earlier 'Marx in His Limits' (1978) and 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter' (1982–3) – extracted out of a longer repetitive manuscript by the editors – remain incomplete, works-in-progress that he may have deemed unsuccessful and therefore unpublishable. In this sense, they have much the same status as many of the works by Marx on which he comments, critically for the most part, hinting that some, like the theses 'On Feuerbach', knocked off quickly in pencil, should perhaps have remained confined to the archives. Indeed, so insistent is he in this regard that the suggestion becomes a defining trope, which cannot but reflect back on and frame the reading of Althusser's own unpublished texts collected here. Yet, as Peter Osborne has pointed out in his recent book on Marx, many of the most important works of modern European philosophy were unpublished – unfinished and unpublishable – in their own time, for epistemological and other reasons, precisely because they *broke away* from the present of their composition.

Are Althusser's drafts worth publishing today? Yes, they are, as long as their philosophical and political incompleteness is recognized and worked through. Althusser most dramatically addresses the question of non-publication in reminding us of Marx's refusal to publish the theoretically invaluable 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' at a crucial moment in the historical institution of Marxism. Meekly resisting his own status as a 'Marxist' (when he could rather have deployed the 'theoretical-personage effect' emerging around him), Marx, paradoxically for a critic of political idealism, refused to intervene theoretically in party political practice: the founding of the German Social Democratic Party on completely misguided 'communist' grounds. Maybe these texts by Althusser – together with their associated correspondence – will prove to be politically and theoretically invaluable in the future too.

In the contemporary theoretical context, in which post-Marxist thought is so heavily marked by the experience of 1960s and 1970s Althusserianism (in the form of the ongoing influence of the writings of Balibar, Rancière, Badiou, Negri and Laclau), the publication of these post-'Althusserian' texts by Althusser himself is of interest for the light they throw on the different paths taken. For example, on the one hand, 'The Underground Current' arguably presents itself as closer in political (if not affective) spirit to the 'democratic materialism' that Badiou associates with Negri and Deleuze, than to Badiou's own more 'aristocratic' dialectical materialism (Badiou's joke). On the other hand, the Epicurean notion of the 'void' outlined therein – which, Althusser writes, '*began by evacuating all philosophical problems* … in order to set out from *nothing*' – is suggestive of the 'aleatory rationalism' that Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano have imputed to Badiou.

'Philosophy and Marxism' and 'The Underground Current' seek to think Marx anew with regard to the philosophical tradition. 'Marx in His Limits' looks to settle philosophical and political accounts, re-engaging official CP-centred Marxisms, from 'Leninism' to contemporary Eurocommunisms, in order to complete tasks associated with *For Marx, Reading Capital* and *Lenin and Philosophy* (especially the 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' essay) – that is, with

classic Althusserianism. In other words, whilst 'The Underground Current' may be considered a work of post-Althusserianism, 'Marx in His Limits' remains – just – within Althusserianism's limits. It starts with a devastating question, born of political and theoretical impatience, and asked of a perspective that, ironically, has stubbornly presented itself as self-consciously attuned to historical analysis: 'How could a history made in the name of Marxism – the theory of Marx and Lenin – remain obscure for Marxism itself?'

In Althusser's view, misguided concrete analyses of concrete situations have not only led to major political catastrophes, they have remained misunderstood. (What, one wonders, would he have thought if he were writing today?) The mistakes begin not with Stalin, but with Marx and Engels, and embrace Lenin and even – in a final, short but hard-hitting chapter – Gramsci. But the solutions begin with Marx and Engels too; especially, it turns out, with Engels. In effect, in 'Marx in His Limits' Althusser seeks to provide the beginnings of a Marxist theoretical critique of Marxism based on what is rescuable from it.

A good example is his short reflection on what he terms the 'double inscription' of Marxist theory. One *good* reason for Marx rejecting his own Marxist-belonging was that it underlined the real determining factor in the production of Marxist theory, beyond its supposed three 'component parts' (British political economy, French political theory and German philosophy): Marx's and Engels's experience of working-class organization and struggle against exploitation (in England, France and Germany). Indeed, Althusser insists on the primacy of class struggle – and within that, on the primacy of struggle over class – over any idealization of intellectual labour and any suggestion of the importation of theory into the working class from 'outside', be it from Lenin or Kautsky. Marxist theory is, in his view (precisely because of this dependence), 'internal' to the workers' movement. This is one reason Althusser foregrounds its 'double inscription' within the otherwise inadequate base–superstructure model of the 1859 *Preface*: if, on the one hand, Marxist theory accounts for the 'object as a whole' – 'the structure of a social formation in general' – on the other it simultaneously locates itself, as ideas, inside that object, its 'class relations and their ideological effects' – that is, within the 'superstructure'. Marxist theory thus becomes active 'in and through … *mass ideological forms*'. Shifting between the 'truth' of its theoretical form, and its 'efficacy' as ideological form, Althusser points out that Marxist theory – including its 'truth' – was then fatally grasped by history (which it did not, however, comprehend) and ironically transformed back by a 'whole history of deviations' into what it originally negated: an institutionalized 'doctrine' (the 'omnipotence of ideas').

So, what are the 'limits' Althusser refers to in his title? There are many, including the well-travelled one of Hegelian 'interference' – or more precisely (because it perhaps explains its perseverance) its Feuerbachian and materialist 'inversion' – in Marx's *oeuvre* as a whole. Especially troublesome for Althusser is its presence in *Capital*, dividing the book into two: one part 'abstract' and Hegelian, the other part 'concrete' and Marxist. The abstract part is dedicated to the theory of value, which imposes a specific idealist 'order of exposition' on the work – and especially a 'beginning' (the relation between use value and exchange value established by the commodity form) that Marx derives largely from Hegel's *Logic*. Such idealism interferes in *Capital*'s analyses by imposing, for example, 'an "economistic" interpretation of exploitation' that is presented in a purely mathematical illustration of the extraction of surplus value. For, Althusser insists, 'exploitation cannot be reduced to the extraction of a surplus value'. However, Marx seems to recognize the inadequacy of this account: hence the importance of the historical chapters 'that stand *outside* "the order of exposition"' and detail the 'concrete forms and conditions' of exploitation – for example, those about struggles over the length of the working day and 'so-called primitive accumulation'. These, according to Althusser, 'have nothing to do with any abstraction or "ideal average" whatsoever'.

From the point of view of *Capital*, however, the commodity arguably constitutes one of Althusser's own severest limits: he has never really had anything to say about it as a social form or about the *real* abstraction involved in exchange (for example, the exchange of labour power); nor does he engage with the idea that, rather than an abstract philosophical imperative, it is the everyday social experience of this form that provides Marx (and others) with a 'beginning' whose conditions are then systematically exposed. Nevertheless, there is a goal behind Althusser's symptomatic reading of the theoretical and compositional dissonances of *Capital*: namely, to uncover the *absolute* limit of Marx's (and Marxist) thought in the 'superstructure', or, more specifically, *the state*. According to Althusser, the state is constitutively present in exploitation. Again, he notes, Marx clearly intuits this in his historical chapters, but erases its overdetermining effects (we are now back on the terrain of *For Marx*) in his abstract and dialectical emplotment of value.

Yet this is also where Althusser's disagreement with Gramsci's *over*-politicization of the social occurs in 'Marx in His Limits'. In his reflections on hegemony and the state – that is, in Gramsci's own attempt to 'cross the "absolute limit" of Marx on Ideology and the State' and its resulting economism, whilst in Fascist jail – the famed theoretician of the superstructures theoretically delinks them from exploitation, and thus from working-class struggle, with a view (and here Althusser's eyes are fixed on Gramsci's afterlife in Eurocommunism) to

> a political examination of the 'nature', hence of the 'composition' or internal arrangement [*dispositif*] of the states of the day, undertaken with a view to defining a political strategy for the workers' movement after all hope that the schema of 1917 would be repeated had faded…

Althusser is referring to 'war of position'. With Gramsci (and today one can add Laclau) 'everything is political … "political society" has no outside' because the state (and force) is sublimated into hegemony, bracketing out 'the determination of the state on the basis of the productive relation'. In this way, Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' occludes what for Althusser constitutes the special character of the machinery of the state. An alternative interpretation might be that Gramsci in fact *expands* the state to include more than force, across the whole of the social, so as to think the emerging corporativist and/or democratized 'integral state' and the process of de-differentiation of politics and economics it implies. (This is registered more recently, for example, in Negri's notion of 'command'.)

Building on 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1969) – as well as Gramsci's theoretical forays – Althusser dedicates much of 'Marx in His Limits' to sketching out elements for a theory of the capitalist state, critically recovering ideas from Marx and Lenin whilst, as usual, purging them of their Hegelian–Feuerbachian idealism, as evidenced in the line of thought that runs from 'alienation' to 'fetishism'. (In Althusser's eyes, it is the state, rather than the commodity, that is 'enigmatic'.) Much of this is familiar. The starting point is that the state is an instrument of class domination (Althusser prefers the word 'domination' to Marx's and Lenin's deployment of the post-Paris Commune notion of 'dictatorship', as well as to Gramsci's 'hegemony'). To act as an instrument and secure the reproduction of the social relations of exploitation and domination, however, the state must be *separate* from class struggle ('that is what it is made for, made to be separate from the class struggle'). This is because (as in the legislation instituting a shorter working day discussed in *Capital*) it may have to act against particular bourgeois fractions in the interest of the class as a whole. Althusser refers to the inculcation of 'state values' as one of the ideological means through which this separation is produced: these are 'inscribed in its structure, in the state hierarchy, and in the obedience (as well as the mandatory reserve) required of all civil servants'. They make up the military's, the police's and the bureaucracy's *esprit de corps* as law enforcers.

As a separate instrument, the state is also both an *apparatus*, a unified ensemble of elements or combination of apparatuses working to 'the same end', and a special *machine* 'which is obviously external

to the apparatus'. It is this idea that is new. It makes good the supplementary character of his evocation of class struggle in his 1970 postscript to his 'Ideology' essay. Althusser comments that Marx's and Lenin's unelaborated idea of the state as a 'machine'

> adds something essential to 'apparatus': to the idea of the simple utilization of a given amount of energy, it adds that of the transformation of energy (of one type of energy into another: for example, of caloric energy into kinetic energy). In the case of an apparatus, one kind of energy is sufficient; in the case of a machine, we have to do with at least two types of energy and, above all, the transformation of one into the other.

Echoing Marx's famously reductionist evocation of the steam mill in *The Poverty of Philosophy* ('The hand-mill gives society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist'), Althusser resorts to the steam engine to explain the machinic character of the state. It rests, he writes, on a 'conflictual difference': it transforms *force* – the excess of force – into political, mainly legal, *power*, the stuff of the apparatus. Force, in contrast, is the stuff of class struggle, which now rests at the centre of Althusser's conception of the state – essentially, the 'groups of armed men' referred to by Lenin. This force ('energy A') is the 'Violence of class struggle… that has "not yet" been transformed into Power… into laws and right' ('energy B'). As the state machine transforms force into power it also becomes the means by which the dominant class – whose demands are 'recognized' by the state – disavows the very class struggle it nevertheless depends on (so much so that it remains 'secret'), thereby (re)producing the state's 'separation'. Althusser hints that this account of the state machine also accounts for the fetishism of the state: the sense not only of its separateness but also of its experience as a subjective agency. Finally, and more strategically: it is this disavowal-in-separation, nourished by 'state values', that seriously limits the – for Althusser – over-optimistic political idea that class struggle *actually* traverses the state.

There is no real continuity between 'Marx in His Limits' and 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter', written four or five years later. There are indications, however, that the aleatory materialism outlined in the latter might have provided a new theoretical space, a positive philosophy, into which a number of Althusser's early ideas – conjuncture, overdetermination, structural causality – could have been relocated and reconfigured. The hunt for Hegelianism remains, but the form the critique now takes is the formulation of a positive alternative philosophical tradition to which Marx (and Althusser himself) might belong – whether Marx knew it or not. The contemporary representatives of such a materialism of the encounter are, surprisingly, Derrida and Deleuze. But they are only mentioned; their inclusion is not explained. The other philosophers are mainly political, and include: Epicurus, Machiavelli, Spinoza, Hobbes and Rousseau. The other two important presences are Heidegger and Engels.

Althusser begins his account with Epicurus (not with Marx on Epicurus) and Heidegger. The latter provides 'a prospect that restores a kind of transcendental contingency of the world' consonant with Epicurus, centred on the notion of 'there is' (*es gibt*): we are thrown into a facticity that 'makes short shrift of all the classical questions about Origin' and is just 'given'. It is Epicurus, however, who provides Althusser with his principal concepts, which are then reconfigured, historicized and politicized through short commentaries on Machiavelli (rehearsed also in his *Machiavelli and Us*), Spinoza (ever present in Althusser's work), Hobbes and Rousseau. 'The non-anteriority of Meaning is one of Epicurus' basic theses', as is the idea that the 'swerve was originary', according to Althusser. Epicurus begins with the image of atoms falling horizontally in a void, parallel to each other. A swerve or 'clinamen' intervenes, inducing 'an encounter with the atom next to it, and, from encounter to encounter, a pile up and the birth of a world'. Althusser refers to this world as 'accomplished fact', an effect of contingency. It is only when encounters last, because they may not (and all may be otherwise 'at a drop of a hat'), that Reason, Meaning and Necessity are established. This is a theory of 'the fact of contingency, the fact of the subordination of necessity to contingency, and the fact of the forms which "give form" to the effect of the encounter'. Epicurus' swerve thus becomes in Althusser's hands something like the constitutive outside of all social formations: the might have been and/or the might be.

There is, however, a tension in Althusser's extension of this 'theory' to history and politics – a tension between history and politics. In his reading of Machiavelli, history becomes a series of accomplished facts the relations between which is unknown, except by 'working backward'. This is because

> History here is nothing but the permanent revocation of the accomplished fact by another undecipherable fact to be accomplished, without our knowing in advance whether, or when, or how the event that evokes it will come about.

However, as suggested by Machiavelli's *Prince*, politically, it is possible to know and thus to act upon the diverse elements that make up a conjuncture – a structured and lasting encounter of elements – and transform it (in that particular absolutist historical context, so as to create a nation). It is here that the well-known tension between the political idea of conjuncture and the idea of history, which characterized classic Althusserianism, re-emerges in Althusser's philosophy of the encounter. In other words: political determination 'works forwards', but it is as if it does so outside of history, or as if it is constituted through its negation.

A final word about Engels: in this philosophical context he appears as a crucial influence on Marx,

particularly in the chapter in *Capital* on so-called primitive accumulation – Althusser's favourite, which, more than any other, is taken to exemplify his aleatory materialism. Clearly influenced by the account of the emergence of capitalism to be found in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (as noted by the translator), Althusser denounces Marx and Engels for saying that the proletariat was 'the product of big industry'. Such a statement is, in Althusser's view, articulated from the position of 'accomplished fact', that is, from the standpoint of the reproduction of the proletariat on an extended scale, which cannot countenance things being otherwise. This is what the chapter on primitive accumulation exemplifies: the stories of the emergence of a dispossessed workforce and the accumulation of money-capital did not *necessarily* have to culminate in their encounter, since they are radically different narratives. This way of telling the story undoes necessity with political effect: things can be different. Althusser insists that this is a story Marx learned from Engels, specifically from *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. From the perspective of the philosophy of the encounter, the most Marxist section of Marx's *Capital* is Engelsian.

**John Kraniauskas**

# Matters of sense

Jean-Luc Nancy, *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, ed. Simon Sparks, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2006. x + 270 pp., £45.50 hb., £17.50 pb., 0 8047 3953 6 hb., 0 8047 3954 4 pb.

The theme of the artwork's singularity is one that has been resourcefully developed by a range of recent critics and theorists. At varying distances from (but still within sight of) Jacques Derrida's thought, much of this work – Derek Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* (2004), for instance, and, more adventurously, Timothy Clark's *The Poetics of Singularity* (2005) – has resulted from widespread dissatisfaction with the forms of cultural studies currently dominating humanistic research in Europe and North America, and the identity politics that usually informs them. At the same time, a renewed interest in aesthetics has also figured in these reactions in various ways. Indeed, saying that artworks signify in excess of what determinate judgements or discursive rationality are capable of compassing, and that they do so by promoting a specific experience tied to the singular form of the work, is one way of presenting Kant's understanding of the aesthetic judgment of beauty itself – and a way of thinking about art that should hardly be unfamiliar (even if Kant himself was thinking for the most part of nature).

Kant's reflections on aesthetics are, of course, famously rich, compacted and tense, and it matters in drawing inspiration from this source how, among many other things, his account of the feeling of pleasure is unpacked, or how compelling his notion of form is taken to be. Most specifically, it matters whether the fundamentally non-cognitive and disinterested nature of aesthetic judgement is accepted and re-protected, or whether, instead, such judgement's sketching of the possibility of an expanded *somatic reason* is noticed and developed. Among the best known theorizations of an aesthetic singularity eluding capture by an enlightened, and damaged, discursive reason, Adorno's for example emphasizes an important correlative: how art's own materials or media equally resist reduction to meaning-indifferent stuff. The 'singular' would thus be the apparent sense or meaning which belongs to this very 'art' object or thing, and its materials, or which *is* my sensory experience of them – a sense or meaning that cannot be translated out of these terms. One of the key arguments developed by Adorno in regard to this concerns, then, what distinguishes and connects the *different* arts, their privileged if complicated relations to the different senses and to their own media. For Adorno, these are neither to be dissolved nor united in an originary art (as, he argues, happens with Heidegger's ontological *Dichtung*), nor hierarchized within the regime of the sign. Rather, singularity of artwork and multiplicity of arts imply each other. The arts *are* arts in their mutual resistance and their implied critique of disenchanting reason – as well as of a commodified, Kantian modernity where sensate experience has lost its authority. Translation of artistic materials into (arbitrary) signs, and signs into discourse – in a manner that is customary today – loses this sense of singularity, precisely by losing experience.

Given the concerns signalled in its title, Jean-Luc Nancy's new book, *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, is thus a particularly valuable and timely addition to what is now a large, philosophically substantial and extremely wide-ranging corpus. For it is perhaps in

the work of Nancy that the most sophisticated, sensitive and elaborated form of a Heideggerian version of artistic singularity is to be found; one that has distinctive things to say about the aesthetic issues sketched above. Crucially, it is articulated in a manner that is alive to many of the questions that Adorno raises, even though there is little sustained explicit philosophizing along these lines. The new volume collects twenty-five various pieces, published over two decades (1980–2000, though most are from the 1990s), almost none of which has appeared in English before. Simon Sparks, as editor and one of the principal translators, has performed a useful service in bringing together these scattered and often occasional writings to make up a second volume of *The Muses*. The resulting book is, however, just about summary-proof. Nearly all the pieces demand repeated reading and thinking through. They manifest a variety of approaches, and deal with a disparate set of themes, concepts, works and authorships. Brisk digestion and assessment are, at any rate, impossible where there is such a sense of instability, as well as of specific engagement.

The book is divided into two halves, 'Literature' and 'Art'. The first discusses poetry, literature and politics, addressing, with reasonable directness and clarity (and certainly criticality), the idea of a linguistic or poetic determination of the arts – a notion to which the limitless discursivity envisaged by much current theory contributes. It also contains responses to several individual writers, including Flaubert, Michel Leiris, Michel Deguy and others. Some of these latter pieces can be extremely indirect, dense and allusive, as are several of the essays in the book's second half, which deal with painting, photography and sculpture (including the work of François Martin, Soun-Gui Kim, Henri Etienne-Martin, On Kawara and Johannes Gumpp). Nancy utilizes different formats and styles of writing; indeed, some pieces are effectively 'artworks' themselves. There are dialogues, mini-dramas, interviews, etymological allegories, occasional pieces of all sorts. There is also plenty of intense, abstract probing of general concepts. Clearly much of this is intended to encourage a feeling for the fragmented and singular exposure to what Nancy himself calls 'sense'. Ironically, this volume could be the ideal introduction to Nancy's general approaches to, and involvements with, artworks just because the reader is likely to want guidance from some more 'philosophical', exoteric or programmatic pieces to be found elsewhere. Indeed, instructions for stuffing and mounting these writings within a philosophy of fragmentation are largely missing, or at least thankfully various and fleeting, in *Multiple Arts*.

Nancy has of course concerned himself throughout his career with the relations of art, literature and philosophy. From his early Derrida-inspired reflections on literariness and philosophy, his well-known work with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe on Jena Romanticism (*The Literary Absolute*, 1978; trans. 1988), through to *The Sense of the World* (1993; trans. 1997) and beyond, Nancy's larger philosophical interests in technology, community, ethics and religion often linger over questions of art and readings of artworks. The first volume of *The Muses* (1994; trans. 1996) is only one work taking on art and its philosophy extensively, but it is an important one. Other recent writings on painting and the image have been collected and translated into English in *The Ground of the Image* (2004). All of these reflections are dominated by Hegelian and Heideggerian problematics, and the outlines of Nancy's official approach are generally clear, though often mobile, in these other writings. (Many of the details are intriguingly obscure, however, at least to me.) 'The Girl Who Succeeds the Muses', for example, which is in the earlier *Muses* volume, offers a subtle reading of the complexities of Hegel's account of the overcoming of art in religion and philosophy. In the course of that reading, however, not only Hegel's linkage of the end of art with questions of objective spirit, religion, society and politics, but also the high stakes of the analyses of modernity that this controversial thesis has inspired, are – entirely characteristically – displaced and reconfigured into a *quasi-transcendental* reflection on the entwinement of philosophy, art and the senses. Nancy's typical point is a demonstration of how philosophy repeats art's finitude, its inability to gather itself up and ground itself, to make a presence of the event of presentation itself. Throughout his mature work, in fact, Nancy is interested in artworks' presentation or indication of the *sense* that opens the world, a sense that grants presence and signification but that must remain forever beyond them. And it is true, as several critics have argued, that Nancy's thought thereby risks eternal detention in a factitious 'presenting' obsessively picked clean of whatever gets presented. As it apparently falls to art to present presentation as such, the issues should thus be legible here, and not only in the abstract.

In 'Making Poetry', the first essay in *Multiple Arts*, poetry is understood as what occurs when there is an access to sense, a sense-*making*, whatever the art-medium or object. Access is always singular, exclusive and 'unexchangeable'. But, says Nancy:

> Making accomplishes both something and itself each time. Its end is its finish: it thereby posits

> itself as infinite, each time infinitely beyond its own work… The selfsame thing that is both abolished and posited is the access to sense. Access is unmade as passage, process, aim, and path, as approach and approximation. It is posited as exactitude and as disposition, as presentation.

While, then, Nancy is very explicit in the opening essays in rejecting any installation of poetry as *the* art, in this sense of 'making' there is still something he is clearly content to generalize. The cutting-off of any route to sense, while at the same time positing it immediately, aims to guarantee singularity, a rupture in experience. The debt to Heidegger in this account of 'art in general' is obvious, but so, too, is the echo of Kantian purposelessness and the stress on singularity. Nancy wishes to emphasize a contact-in-separation ('touch') with the event of sense-making, even if he often then moves towards an abstract distinction and separation. The bridges are sometimes burned once they have been crossed. As Adorno argues of Heidegger, such an approach tends against thinking thought's dependencies on *what* is thought. It places what are really unthematized, socially particular experiences beyond the reach of criticism. Hence, it would seem, automatically, to have little critical purchase on art's concrete *social* dimensions. Yet for Nancy, the making of sense will always be technically specific; the different senses concretely involved in the sense they 'touch' upon.

Another formulation connects production to the image and to a particular sense: 'It does not show something – its form, figure, and colour – but shows that there is this thing. It shows the presence of the thing, its coming to presence.' Here what sounds like a dichotomy between the abstract singular, which *is* rather than being 'something', and the specific qualities which manifest the withdrawal of this sensible-intelligible 'sense', is presented, perhaps softened, through the term 'image'. Rather than indicating a stuck transcendence, making the artwork a sign of an exterior meaning or event or of its non-self-coincidence (still less a brute datum), the aim seems to be to emphasize and phenomenologically capture the particular quality of the work's appearance and artifice of self-explicitness, the way the work presents its sufficiency, attends to, re-articulates and refreshes sensate experience by making apparent the newness of a new configuration.

Anyway, Nancy's thinking of the arts stresses the techniques of their making as much as their material instantiation and sensory appeal or availability. Each artwork's singularity is bound up with its status *as* art, which is here no empty cover-concept. Just as each sense (sight, hearing, etc.) is involved with the others, and 'touches' the others in touching on itself, so the different arts (whose divisions are not simply to be derived from or mapped onto the senses) touch on one another also. Sense is plural and heterogeneous and splintered, as is art itself, its techniques and materials. The world's unpresentable sense is somehow glimpsed, overheard, or touched on in, and as, all the fragmented and singular arts. It is the emphasis on the corporeal and affective dimensions of what Nancy does not call aesthetic experience that makes the ramifying 'quasi-transcendentals' of his writing compelling.

Material embodiment is required by any meaning-making. But this moment, whether a technology of production or the material of the work itself, cannot appear within meaning for Nancy. He can talk of both bodies and technologies of writing in this regard, which could imply an equivalence between living and dead 'apparatuses' where poetry, for example, might only ever be mere prose – whatever that is – stuck on a ventilator machine. Getting the body into sense

must involve more than a mute pointing at mechanical functions. Yet Nancy wants to treat these material aspects in their specificity. He is after all precisely interested in a sense, not a senselessness or blankness. Signifying touches these things, relies on them. Nancy allows no mimesis as resemblance to characterize this relation, but another mimesis, of affinity among the senses and between them and what is sensed, may be pertinent. He has some interesting comments on voice in this regard. This could help unfix what threatens merely to inflect, rather than dislodge and criticize, an inert separation of domains.

Nancy recalls philosophy to art because of art's defining involvement with and attention to matter and the senses, through whose differential plurality the sense of the world is presented. This simply means that art sets forth, makes available, the opening or sense of the finite world as such. The sensuousness and materiality of art, its medium's insistent contribution to its sense, is what secures art this elevation. Art is not for Nancy the discardable (or undiscardable) husk of ideal contents, a mere blank thing, any more than it is the achieved sensory manifestation of the idea. The essay entitled 'Res extensa', for example, confronts directly sculpture's relation to its materials and illustrates some of these large themes. Etienne-Martin's *Dwellings* (*Demeures*) inspire a line of thought about the *expression* of matter, about an expression that is not the material's giving form to some alienable content, but one that is its own response 'to its own massy thickness'. This matter, the wood, remains (*demeure*) in itself by a minimal distention of its mass that presents its dwelling with itself, the way it inhabits its own solidity. This also suggests to Nancy the resistance offered to the sculptor's hands and tools. So the title of the sculptures leads to reflections on their materiality, but by opening up a sensing of and attention to the wood itself. Likewise, the word 'material' is explored to open the world lit up through its etymology, and leads to the touching of wood, the display or showing of a 'thickness' that gives way to touch, 'a finger that sees'. The word 'title' prompts another synaesthetic flight, or burrowing, wherein names become a 'signature of substance'. One sense touches on another sense, or is porous to it, one medium to another, reception to production. Further aspects are disclosed through the title of the sculpture *Janus-Torso* (1969), which triggers a sequence of associations – mythic, material, artefactual. The torso presents and withholds; it is not a body but a 'fossil of the origin', a presencing frozen, truncated. Janus-faced, the sculpture offers to twist and face itself, 'slowly like a heavy vessel whose anchor drags in the depths', facing its own mass rather than making itself available for 'spiritual assumption': there is a singular, sensory, matter-bound experience that withdraws from or resists the various senses it recruits and presents. Most obviously, it is linguistic associations, anthropomorphisms and similes that try to lever the artwork into experience, but that fizzle out, regroup, fall silent again.

There are many spurts of reflection and fantasy here; but the essay coils round the work in a way I have squashed and simplified in order to string together examples of the opening of one sense and medium onto another. Nancy's reading wends a path towards what sounds like an allegory of the world's emergence – with the subsequent, abrupt production of a split, embodied subject. 'The cogito here belongs to a substance, not to a subject.… What is sculpted is this – the subject.' Nancy appears to be interested in a cognitive potential only realized in the singular experience of the work. Is this betrayed by discovering there a concept secreted by the still-philosophical reader? Or is a rethinking of that concept enjoined by crystallizing out *this* subject's experiential contents?

One of the two essays on Blanchot defends that thinker from hasty calumniation of his politics, and Nancy there advances some bald formulations about the political thrust of his own thinking. Demythologization is the order of the day, which means here that we are to confront in thought the absence of any collective and subjective foundation, of all 'imaginary totalizations'. But, apart from anything else – we might complain – the brusque eviction of myth by thought is itself myth. The question of an infinite self-legislation of finitude is at the heart of Nancy's close but vexed relations with aesthetics. When he endorses the desiderata of a more familiar aesthetics, and protests against a disenchantment of art's thinghood, the tensions are all legible, rather than camouflaged:

> There's no silencing it and no saying it, as if, before any intention to speak on my part, there were something there, set down like an inert or formless thing simply awaiting its seizure and petrification into signification.… It's not as if there is the thing on the one hand and its saying on the other. The taking-place of the thing, its beginning-and-end, is both saying and thing.

Nancy is not content always to seal this taking-place in an airless limbo. And while there is 'no silencing it', there is a silencing to be heard in his readings, one that cannot be made good by philosophy: the confiscation of what is due to material and the senses.

**Nigel Mapp**

# Creative writing

Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, Verso, London and New York, 2006. 199 pp., £50.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 1 84467 079 1 hb., 1 84467 555 6 pb.

In this much anticipated monograph, Peter Hallward wastes no time announcing his aim 'to go right to the heart of Deleuze's philosophy'. This for Hallward amounts to the claim that Deleuze 'equates Being with unlimited creativity'. In so far as such Being-as-creation is 'univocal', it will be creatively 'said' in a single way for all creatures. Thus, like the version of Deleuze that we get in Alain Badiou's earlier study, *The Clamor of Being*, Hallward's Deleuze turns out to be an essentialist, neo-Platonist thinker of the One-All, rather than a thinker of multiplicity. Before looking at some of the specific arguments Hallward offers in support of this series of claims (which amounts to a book-length tour of Deleuze's entire *oeuvre*), it might be useful, first, to return briefly to the mini-polemic that unfolded in the pages of *Radical Philosophy* around Christian Kerslake's 2002 article 'The Vertigo of Philosophy'. For we might see Hallward's book as a protracted appendix, not only to Badiou's earlier monograph, but also to this later exchange.

In his original article in *RP* 113, Kerslake places Deleuze in a philosophical genealogy that would treat *Difference and Repetition* as, among other things, an idiosyncratic inheriting of Kant's First Critique, and finds an important affinity between Kant's critical project and Deleuze as a thinker of immanence. In so far as the First Critique was itself an attempt at a totally immanent epistemology – such that the conditions of possibility for experience might be situated at the level of *a priori* intuitions and categories within the thinking subject – we find already in Deleuze's insistence on this term a Kantian imperative. But the more explicit link between Deleuze and Kant, Kerslake tells us, is around the terms 'idea' and 'problem'. Despite Deleuze's slightly flippant comment about Kant as an 'enemy' – from the over-read and over-interpreted 'Letter to Michel Cressole' – problems for Deleuze should be understood as the making radically immanent of those transcendent ideas which, for Kant, caused the faculty of Reason to become bogged down in illusion through unavoidable speculation about the Soul, the Cosmos and God. To the extent that such ideas (which are nevertheless salvaged, in the First Critique, as the regulative horizons within which concepts are applied to experience) are for Kant precisely problems – because things like the Soul, the Cosmos and God can never themselves correspond to any object of experience – Deleuze reworks them in a very literal way. For Deleuze, such 'problems' will be reconceived (following Albert Lautman) as yet-to-be-actualized distributions of points and relations in reciprocal determination, a transcendental field he calls *différence-en-soi*, or the virtual. Indeed, the closest thing to a 'transcendental unity of apperception' in Deleuze's ontology is the virtual itself. This idiosyncratic inheriting of Kant is what Deleuze calls 'transcendental empiricism' (clearly riffing on the transcendental idealism of the critical project), and what Kerslake describes as Deleuze's 'apocalyptic transformation' of Kant.

While acknowledging that 'some of the most sophisticated and original new work on Deleuze centres on … his relation to Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy', and conceding that 'it would be much too simple … to treat Kant exclusively as Deleuze's adversary', Hallward nonetheless prefers to de-emphasize this post-Kantian dimension in *Out of This World*, telling us instead that Deleuze 'presents himself as a non- or even pre- rather than a neo-Kantian thinker'. If this is so it is because, as Hallward rightly points out, 'instead of a logic of representation Deleuze proposes a logic of creative expression or sense'. Yet if we consider Deleuze's transcendental empiricism, it becomes clear that what Kerslake calls Deleuze's post-Kantianism in no way contradicts such a 'logic of creative expression'. If the project is one of deducing a unity of apperception, such that *a priori* categories and intuitions hook up logically (and thus, for Kant, necessarily) with objects of possible experience, then this unity is, in Deleuze, repositioned as an impersonal transcendental field, such that the conditions of possible experience become the conditions of *real* experience. This move from 'possible' to 'real' is in parallel with the move from transcendent ideas to immanent problem; a move that nonetheless ceases, for Hallward, to be 'Kantian' in any meaningful sense, since 'unlike Kant's ideas … Deleuze affirms problems precisely in so far as they *do* allow for the immediate and adequate intuition of reality as it is in itself'. The obvious objection would be that such a knowing inversion of Kant remains itself Kantian.

How, then, might Hallward's creationist Deleuze and Kerslake's post-Kantian Deleuze intersect? The crucial notion here is perhaps one Deleuze borrows from the late essays of William James, of relations being 'external to their terms'. Acknowledging the irreducibly empirical dimension in Deleuze's thought (and James was careful to distinguish his own 'radical' empiricism from Hume's associationist psychology), Hallward reminds us that Deleuze 'retains the truly fundamental position … that relations are external to their terms'. This is a position Hallward himself calls a 'non-relational theory of non-relation'. Presumably he has devised this unwieldy formulation in order to draw attention to the paradox that if relations are genuinely external to their terms then nothing is related, since relations which operate independently of terms do not, by definition, relate anything. Externality of relations would then rather amount to something like relationality *as such*. But this type of externality has a more explicitly 'creationist' consequence – namely, the thinking of multiplicity as an experimental pluralism of undetermined relations and their unforeseeable terms, *en train de se faire*.

Daniel Smith (for whose 'detailed engagement with some of the more contentious aspects of the argument' Hallward tells us he is 'especially grateful') has recently elaborated this experimental and improvisatory aspect of Deleuze's thought. Describing how relations work at the level of virtual problems (again, those 'problems' Deleuze borrows from Kant, turning the regulative idea into an immanent distribution) Smith tells us that in Deleuze's ontology,

> relation persists even when the terms of the relation have vanished. It is thus a pure relation, a pure relation of difference … not only is [such a] relation external to its terms, it is also constitutive of its terms: the terms of the relation are completely undetermined (or virtual) until they enter into differential relations.

If transcendental empiricism is, therefore, not only a pluralism, but the condition under which the New is produced, then Hallward's thesis need not lead to a Manichaean stand-off between creationist becoming and post-Kantian critique. And if the repositioning of problems – from an undeterminable (but regulative) idea to an unforeseeable (but immanent) idea – is a matter of thinking becoming as the reciprocal determinations of relations which are external to their terms (pure relation or relationality-as-such), then it is precisely the Kantian inheritance which allows Deleuze to think Being as *différence-en-soi*. Relations which are external to and as real as their terms are then accordingly free to link up the terms of real experience such that, as Hallward describes it (sounding very Jamesian), the 'human subject comes to be constituted within the flux of experience'. Thus, when Deleuze writes, in his essay on Walt Whitman, that relations, when thought of as external to their terms, will 'consequently be posited as something that can and must be invented … [such that] we can invent non-pre-existing relations between them', we have the basis for that harlequin-patterned multiplicity which we find in both the style and substance of all of Deleuze's writing. Far from the primordial squirmings

of proto-organic molecules, or the eternal throb of a cosmic pulse, Deleuze's 'creationist' philosophy is an empiricist logic of open-ended experimentation at the level of real relations.

We might, then, want to look for a rapprochement between Kerslake's post-Kantian 'critical' Deleuze, and Hallward's affirmative 'creationist' Deleuze, and suggest that Deleuze is: (1) a post-Kantian thinker in the way Kerslake and Smith want him to be (in making the regulative ideas of reason into the immanent problems of the virtual, where problems are composed of reciprocal determinations of relations, such that relations are external to and as real as their terms); but is, also, (2) still radically empiricist enough to posit that such immanent ideas can be affirmed (even 'thought') through a kind of pure experience of relationality-as-such. Thus we might say that Deleuze, following Bergson, makes Being-as-difference accessible through what the latter calls (in his own transformative borrowing of a Kantian term) 'intuition'. Indeed, Deleuze saw in Bergson's notion of 'intuition' nothing less than a rigorous philosophical *method* – what he called, in his 1966 monograph, Bergson's '*superior empiricism*'. This is no doubt an early rehearsal of the 'transcendental' empiricism Deleuze will elaborate in *Difference and Repetition*, and it prefigures the way the unlikely pairing of Bergson and Kant will form a strange alliance in the latter work. To return to Hallward's objection that Deleuzean 'problems' cease to be Kantian because they – unlike Kant's subjectivist conditions of possibility – enable the direct intuition of Being as such (indeed, nothing less than an access to *noumena*), we might nevertheless read 'transcendental empiricism', still using Hallward's own language, as itself the 'intuition … of the true reality of things'. Putting thought into connection with Being is a matter, for Deleuze, of a miscegenation of Kantian and Bergsonian terminology, such that a bypassing of the categorical generalizations of the concept, as an intuiting of immanent ideas, leads to an access to the real, as a continuity of difference and becoming.

Part of the pleasure of reading Hallward's book is the extraordinary lucidity he is able to bring to Deleuze's extremely difficult philosophy. Some examples of this total mastery of Deleuze's polymathic archive are his unpacking of Deleuze's use of the differential ratios of the infinitesimal calculus; his hugely clarifying discussion of how the surface–depth relation works in *Logic of Sense*; and his brief but somehow thorough sketch of Spinoza's ontology, and how it relates to Deleuze's use of the term 'expression'. There are many such moments in *Out of This World*. Still, after reading in the introduction that 'the question to which Deleuze's project will itself be submitted in the following pages may be to reveal … the degree to which his work, far from engaging in a description or transformation of the world, instead seeks to escape it', it then comes as something of a surprise that it is only in the last six pages of this 200-page book that Hallward decides to give Deleuze a slap on the wrist for apolitical otherwordliness. If, as Hallward tells us in his reply to Kerslake, Deleuze is a 'naturalist' (a claim with which I agree), then this can only mean that Deleuze is nothing if not *in* the world, and thinking Being will amount to something closer to Bergson's extreme empiricism, whereby an intuitive bypassing of the conceptual intelligence recovers the smoothness of Being as *durée*. In this way, we ought to agree with Badiou's claim that 'Bergson is [Deleuze's] real master, far more than Spinoza, or even Nietzsche', but directly at the expense of Hallward's final forbidding warning that '[while] few philosophers have been as inspiring as Deleuze … those of us who still seek to change our world and to empower its inhabitants will need to look for inspiration elsewhere'. This judgement is finally premissed on a false dichotomy: we must make a choice between either an otherworldly escapism or a concrete engagement with the here and now. It is a choice Deleuze's transcendental empiricism prevents us from having to make.

**Paul Grimstad**

# Nothing in common

Simon Glendinning, *The Idea of Continental Philosophy: A Philosophical Chronicle*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2006. v + 144 pp., £45.00 hb., 0 7486 2471 6 pb.

The title of this book is a problem for reasons indicated by the subtitle, *A Philosophical Chronicle*. The contrast suggests a Kierkegaardian engagement with a paradox concerning truth as 'idea' and its narration in time, as chronicle. The book does indeed advance a paradoxical hypothesis, but without direct appeal to either Kierkegaard or his great twentieth-century successors, Bertrand Russell and Gilles Deleuze. In place of the paradoxes of faith, number and concept, paradox here turns on a psychoanalytical notion of projection and incorporation, derived perhaps from a reading of Derrida, Lacan and Levinas. This paradox, however, is not referred to these writings, nor is it revealed in its full complexity when Glendinning arrives at an

account of an irreducible 'other in me': the decentring of subjectivity by its investments of energy in others and in object-relations. In this respect, this is a very analytical book, in both the psychoanalytical and the philosophical senses, which supposes that testimony may be allowed to stand and that concepts need not be traced back to their textual origins.

The book's main aim is to diagnose the institutionalization of a non-existent difference between two strands of philosophy, one of which is supposed to exist, and the other of which is to be shown as the phantasmatic other of the first. To mark this hypothesis, 'analytic philosophy' is to be written thus, and 'Continental philosophy' thus, the capital letter marking the surmised phantasmatic status. Analytic philosophy is provided with a table of defining characteristics (in Dummett's phrase) and is thereby deemed to have determinacy. The claim appears to be that, since no such table can be provided for continental philosophy, it does not exist. Both parts of the proposal seem to me suspect. The notion of a phantasmatic other, written 'Other' to distinguish it from other others, is borrowed from the tradition which has been declared not to exist. This is the paradox that Glendenning seems not to have detected, although a careful reading of the writings of Climacus and Anti-Climacus might have alerted him to it.

There is also a problem of scope. The institutionalization in question is discussed in terms of the UK scene, and the strand of philosophy deemed to exist, analytic philosophy, is represented in the main by those domiciled in the UK: Dummett, Glock, Ryle, Hare and G.J. Warnock. The arguments concerning the value of the supposed Continental strand are derived from writings of those domiciled in North America, Simon Critchley, John McCumber and Robert Pippin, who might themselves not claim to be continental – or, indeed, 'Continental' – in any obvious sense. This, then, appears to be rather a dispute between North America, where Continental Philosophy (capitals for both, indicating sub-disciplinary status) has a kind of institutionalized presence, and the UK, where it has yet to make an impact. This shift of focus is underlined by a lack of engagement with the distinctive concepts of the supposedly alternative tradition: Critique and Antinomy, Dialectics and Inversion, Genealogy, Phenomenology, its transformation into an Existential Analytic, and so on. Here capitals may be deployed to suggest that, until these terms are put to work in the development of philosophical argument, they are closer to names than recognizable concepts. Husserl's distinction between a formal indication and a fulfilment of intended meaning gives an account of how a term may shift from one status to another. The unmotivated introduction of an exception, in the role attributed to a concept of the 'Other', reveals that the author must presuppose what he seeks to disprove: a distinctive continental tradition in which sense can be made of this key concept.

The book begins autobiographically with our young Wilhelm Meister in search of a discipline. It proceeds in a tone part ethnographic and part journalistic, such that a response to it in terms of philosophically based protocols might seem supererogatory. However, it does contain the following declaration:

> While most of the discussion is negative, I will also be providing what I will want to call a philosophical (and not merely, say, historical or sociological) account of the emergence of the idea of a 'wide gulf' between the kind of philosophical analysis pursued in the English-speaking world and its Continental Other.

Our author then reasonably points out: 'the question of "what philosophy is" is itself a contested concept within the subject we call "philosophy".' This 'we', however, is fatal, since only some philosophers will conduct an analysis in terms of 'contested concepts'; others suppose that their task is to construct philosophical accounts of problems, and perhaps even answers to questions, in which concepts are borrowed from extraneous sources, but are then 'essentially' reconstituted in the performance of the philosophical task in question.

After two chapters entitled 'Starting Points' and 'A Meeting of (Some) Minds', the book descends into encyclopaedic mode, with the third chapter consisting almost entirely of lists of names and movements. This demonstrates that eighteenth-century means cannot provide a specification of common characteristics for those arraigned under the unlovely title 'The usual suspects', listed first by date of birth, and then in groupings entitled 'Movements in the Stream'. It is tempting at this point to suggest a reading of Blanchot's 'The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common', or of Nancy's remarks on 'Unworking Community', and to point out that these thinkers, along with Jean-Luc Marion, Giorgio Agamben and Dominique Janicaud, have not made it into these lists. It is also tempting to point out that in a very great work by Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*, which is mentioned but not used, there is an analysis of the dynamics of such an ordering of things.

For there is nothing philosophical in this kind of naming of names, although the question of how to

understand names dominates at least one strand of the so-called Continental tradition, from Husserl to Derrida and indeed Deleuze. It also turns up under another description in the enterprise of distinguishing names, definite descriptions, and rigid and non-rigid designators. This chapter, with its lists and even a map of Continental philosophy, cannot provide the promised philosophical account of either 'the Idea of Continental Philosophy', or a 'gap' between the Continental and the analytic.

The next two chapters are more promising, but prove paradoxical in ways again unanticipated by the author. The first, 'The Analytic Perspective on the Idea', rehearses some less considered remarks by Ryle, Hare and Geoffrey Warnock on a certain style of philosophy with which they were not in agreement. At this point it might have been worth canvassing a distinction between a practice of analytic philosophy, which can be done well or badly, and a non-philosophical practice of denouncing the otherness of others, distinctive of some who call themselves analytical philosophers. The following chapter, 'The Continental Perspective on the Idea', by sleight of hand, seeks to confirm the hypothesis under interrogation – that the 'Idea' of Continental philosophy is a projection of analytic philosophy – by discussing only the views of commentators on that tradition, separating a history or commentary on philosophy from the activity of philosophy itself. However, there are inventors in philosophy, Austin and Heidegger, Aristotle and Nancy (again, Deleuze and Russell are also good examples here), who write the history of philosophy they need in order to launch their conceptual transformations.

Next, we are invited to consider the 'Idea' of Continental philosophy through the following lens:

> So taking our bearings from the discussion to this point, what then *is* Continental philosophy? Not, I would suggest, a style or method of philosophy, nor even a set of such styles or methods, but, first of all the Other of analytic philosophy; not a tradition of philosophy that one might profitably contrast with analytic philosophy, to a distinctive way of going on in philosophy, but a free-floating construction which gives analytic philosophy the illusory assurance that it has methodologically secured itself from 'sophistry and illusion'.

Such a deployment of psychoanalytical categories in relation to institutions, however, requires a radical challenge to Freud's deployment of terms, and a discussion of their transformation in the work of later thinkers, such as Reich and Levinas, Lacan and Žižek. For a need for reassurance cannot in any obvious sense be attributed to a style of philosophy. This requirement to attend to textual origins and the transmission of concepts are two of the distinguishing marks of the alternate tradition, which make no impact on the kind of enquiry adopted here.

The notions of illusion and sophistry are provided with a sketchy genealogy by invoking Plato's *Sophist* and perhaps, by implication, the stranger of his *Parmenides*, and by a gesture towards David Hume, but not, at this point, to Kant. There is no analysis of the concepts of illusion and of sophistry themselves. This, perhaps, is not so reprehensible, for any attempt to explain Kant's refinements of the notion of illusion would have taken rather more than a couple of footnotes. However, variant responses to Kant's notions of illusion form the basis for distinguishing between some of the main strands of philosophy since his day, so more attention to this would have helped. (For instance, Hegel supposes that attention to a relation between idea and content can resolve and dispel antinomy and illusion.) Glendinning hopes instead to show that a picture holds us captive. He declines to discuss these other notions of illusion.

Yet he presumes that it is evident what the difference might be between an 'other' and an 'Other':

> In any case, with this assumption in place Continental philosophy begins to emerge in the second half of the twentieth century as analytic philosophy's Other. And it is true: the primary texts of Continental philosophy are not works of analytic philosophy. They *are* something *other* than analytic philosophy. However they are other to analytic philosophy without being reducible to *its* (own) Other.

This, of course, is incomprehensible, even offensive, to an 'analytic' philosopher, and the implied reference back to a discussion of capitalization is insufficient to fix meaning. But according to Glendinning, there is no tradition other than the analytic, and so there is no tradition in which his distinction makes sense. The attempt to make it is therefore self-refuting, and in more ways than one. For his distinction to make sense, he would have to discuss the writings of Freud and Sartre, Hegel and Levinas (for whom a capitalization of Other is important), Blanchot and even, God forbid, Derrida, who refines Levinas's notion of the 'other in me', in a tradition and style of philosophy declared not to exist. These prior uses of the term, and the typographical device, are apparently simply not relevant.

Even more disastrous for the claim that this book offers a philosophical account of a non-existent difference is the failure to discuss what is here meant

by 'idea'. This indicates that Glendinning is to be situated firmly in an analytic*al*, rather than an analytic, camp, supposing that concepts work perfectly well until proven otherwise. This is what makes this strand of analytical philosophy no more than a passing phase, and marks it out as methodologically distinct from the forms of philosophy preceding and succeeding it, to which the insultingly named 'usual suspects' also belong. If Plato and Hume, Kant and Austin, are to be brought into a discussion, in which light might be cast on some current philosophical labels, discussion is required of the differences between them on how to think with and about an 'idea'. Instead, the 'Idea' of Continental Philosophy is allowed to morph into the 'Idea' of a division or gulf between analytic philosophy and Continental philosophy, which then leads to an improbable 'Idea' of analytic philosophy's phantasmatic Other, and all without reflection on why, how or if these three might be called 'ideas' at all.

There is no philosophy in *this* 'Continental philosophy', because this is not the philosophy practised by those whose names are currently associated with it.

**Joanna Hodge**

# Rhetorical devices

Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra, eds, *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2006. 297 pp., $34.95 hb., 0 2621 9530 5.

The stated aim of this collection is to interrogate the figural trope and the material reality of prosthesis. The diverse interests and methods of the writers and disciplines in it certainly speak to a remarkable range of theoretical activity – crossing cultural and visual studies, philosophy of science, art, new media, and technology theory, historical and philosophical inquiry. Theoretically, the volume is motivated by a particular concern with how the 'material and metaphorical figurations of prosthesis in modern Western cultures initiate considerations of the historical, conceptual *edges* between "the human" and the posthuman, the organic and the machinic, the evolutionary and the postevolutionary, and flesh and its accompanying technologies.' And, indeed, the operating trope throughout the book is not so much prosthesis and prosthetics themselves, but rather the deconstructive *gap* that such concepts serve to imply. It is this gap that is, for most contributors, clearly the condition of possibility for a re-imagining of 'the human' qua the humanization of technology, which, by extension, operates as a counter to any fetishism of embodiment, perception and memory. Focused on both what Freud famously described as 'magnificent' extensions of the body, and its 'troubled' borders, the various essays thus seek sophisticated negotiations of the interstices between metaphor and matter, the 'real' and 'represented.'

The texts take a decidedly 'eclectic approach' to this process, however, ranging from accounts of the evolutionary compulsion of the artistic drive (Alfonso Lingis) to the reconceptualization of genes and genetics in recent medical discourse (Lennard J. Davis) to the study of mimetic 'bugs' and 'bugging' in military intelligence and cyberculture (Gary Genosko). Explicitly positioned against the privileging of phantasmagorical discourses of prosthesis as lack and compensation, the case studies collected here are, nonetheless, orchestrated by a specific and fairly consistent framework of critique: the systematic dismantling of the often careless deployment of figural designations or semiotic tropes that have heretofore troubled the logic and lived reality of prosthetic fusions. Typical of this is Vivian Sobchack's highly self-reflexive contribution 'A Leg to Stand On', which directs our attention towards the often banal experience of actual prosthetics wearers themselves, whose daily familiarity with limb appendages undermines many of the fantastical notions of science fiction and techno-cultural theory, and their tendency to privilege the abstract 'exquisite corpse' of the cyborgian hybrid. Taking her own prosthetic leg as a point of departure, Sobchack reveals the significance of the inter-subjective and inter-objective exchange that is meant to 'ground and expand the tropological premisses of "the prosthetic" as it informs the aesthetic and ethical imagination of the humanities and arts'. As such, she methodically outlines what is termed here the 'scandal of the metaphor' and the ways in which the semiotic activity of prosthesis has rendered the actual material *experience* of the prosthetic a somewhat vaguely 'un-fleshed' out figuration, severed or ultimately overdetermined by an instance of totalized discursivity.

Sobchack's contribution is characteristic of most of the essays in the collection, in so far as it attempts to suggest the interpretative *promise* of prosthetic engagement, in all of its material, experiential, metaphorical and speculative forms, while simultaneously trying not to succumb either to nostalgic fictions of the (un)naturalized body or to the kinds of conceptual lapses of fantastical 'opportunism' that are perhaps more typical in cultural theory today. Supported by

recent critiques of the 'prosthetic imagination' in the work of Steven L. Kurzman and Sara S. Jain, and calling on the rhetorical analysis of Paul Ricoeur's study of metaphor and metonymy, Sobchack herself deftly demonstrates the possibility for a productive move away from the 'literalization of desire' in contemporary material/literary prosthetics.

The disconcerting complicity of Aimee Mullins – an American double amputee, paralympian sprinter, fashion model, and star of artist and filmmaker Matthew Barney's *Cremaster 3* series – with the erotic fetishization of her own various 'legs' ('Cheetah', 'Barbie', and otherwise) figures as an exemplary subject of investigation in this regard. Marquard Smith also pursues a reading of the ways in which medical, commercial, fashion and moving-image culture each play out certain erotic fantasies of the prosthetic 'Other' (here, of woman with double or triple lacks). Although some of the questions raised are left hanging, Smith takes care to avoid the supposed rupture of the symbolic order in the various discourses of prosthesis by effectively reformulating the question of fetishism itself, locating its problematic convergence with the 'metaphorization of the prosthetic body' in the erotic paragon of female amputation and representation.

If the essays in this first section are grounded in a dialectic of prosthetic embodiment – both phenomenological and psychical – the texts in the book's second half produce a more direct investment in the technological procedures and relational oddities of prosthesis, interrogating various notions of internal and external projections of the world (and work) of subjectivity. Of particular note, in this regard, is Elizabeth Grosz's essay 'Naked', a consideration of the mediated nature of nakedness as the corollary of an evolutionary human movement towards display and exhibition. Exploring the plausibility of certain well-known genealogies of human history (Nietzsche, Freud, and André Leroi-Gourham), Grosz tracks the gradual incorporation of the internal and external development of the visual narcissist in sexual spectacle and representation across broad cultural lines. By exploring the 'interface between sexuality, bodies and art' and the 'threshold between what is bodily possible and impossible', she successfully demonstrates the continuing primacy of vision as augmentation. Such multiple extensions of vision are also productively examined in Lev Manovich's study of new kinds of representations that are enabled by modern visual technologies. Raiford Guins and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz's provocative deconstruction of Marshall McLuhan's (often troubling) rhetorical devices, and their resulting analysis of the prosthetic extensions of a multi-sensorial turntablism in contemporary urban youth culture, meanwhile, opens up some genuinely new readings of technology's critical presence in our everyday lives – even if its inclusion in this particular anthology seems somewhat curious.

For rather different reasons, this is true also of what is perhaps the most directly philosophical (and elusive) contribution to the volume: David Wills's chapter, 'Techn*e*ology or the Discourse of Speed'. Asking us to consider 'extra' amplification of a somewhat different sort, Wills's essay is organized around a critical, if fairly abstract, exploration of the writings of French philosopher Bernard Stiegler. Charting the uncanny effects of technology as laid bare by Stiegler, Wills, at the same time, instigates a Derridean critique of sorts directed at Stiegler's own Derrida-inspired conceptions. While the details of this argument are too complex to go into, suffice it to say that Wills's concern is with the 'prosthetizing effect' of spatio-temporal disjunctions in our contemporary technological discourse, specifically as it relates to the rapidity at which *language itself* 'plays' and 'mutates' – that is, the ways in which the supposed certainties of technological 'progress' are undermined by the nature of language's own properly technological function. As Wills points out, the very 'prosthetic mutability' of language allows for a re-reading of a technology of the body that signals its continual linguistic 'displacement into an otherness whose contextual bonds it cannot itself foresee or control'. At the same time, it nevertheless 'obeys' what he describes as 'the teleology of a simple hermeneutic operation, the electronic certainty of a digital impulse'. For this very reason – so Wills argues – the ceaseless flow of text, sound and image, which demands our compulsive attention in contemporary culture (and leaves its own psychical marks), might actually provide the kinds of 'techno-differentiations' necessary to the ongoing reorganization of our perceptual systems.

Whatever one thinks of this argument, in this case, linguistic mutability, and its perpetually mobile 'displacement into otherness', is patently being called upon by Wills to perform something of the metaphoric role potentially accorded to prosthesis more generally. Something similar happens with regard to the materiality of language within the province of artistic representation in Joanne Morra's concluding essay, which considers both the literal and speculative understandings of prosthesis so as to facilitate a critical reconception of the role of drawing in the work of Robert Rauschenberg and its relation to the 'gap between art and life'. While these essays by Wills and Morra may expand our understanding of prosthesis in

various ways, their presence in this volume appears both awkward and arbitrary. Rather than contributing to a sense of thematic coherence across the volume as a whole, they risk offering up the kind of metaphoric exhaustion that other essays here warn against.

Still, as a whole, *The Prosthetic Impulse* brings together a set of voices and topics that certainly rub against one another in productive ways, inciting their own friction and disclosures. The majority of the case studies fulfil their brief in demonstrating the critical possibilities of an attention to the material of prosthesis and prosthetics. At their best they operate as a testing of the conditions of our 'posthuman present' and of our 'biocultural future' – even if those conditions fail, finally, to be fully determined or defined here. Perhaps inevitably, the collection remains fundamentally vague as regards what exactly a 'posthuman present' or 'biocultural future' might actually be, and, more to the point, how prosthesis would materially or metaphorically relate to it. For all its qualities, therefore, readers seeking more clearly explicated accounts of the practices and politics of prosthetics might find more immediate gratification elsewhere.

**Nicole L. Woods**

# Anarchism strikes back

Benjamin Franks, *Rebel Alliances: The Means and Ends of Contemporary British Anarchisms*, AK Press, Edinburgh and Oakland CA, 2006. £15.00 pb., 1 9048 5940 2.

Benjamin Franks's new book is one directed at readers tired of the presumptive academic treatment that this subject often receives. It reflects a new seriousness in much recent work concerned with examining the deeper theoretical underpinnings of contemporary forms of anarchism, and their basis in the social movements of the present. From the winning allusion of the title – to that most influential generational marker of pop culture, *Star Wars* – to its interweaving of theoretical analysis set against political practice, the book is conceived as being as much a contribution to the movements under consideration as a scholarly study. At the same time, it provides a welcome focus on substantive questions surrounding class struggle and revolutionary currents of anarchism – as well as heterodox Marxisms – rather than the non-revolutionary traditions that seem too often to absorb foundational inquiries into the subject.

The book begins with a comprehensive survey of the history, and political and cultural influences, that helped shape contemporary movements in Britain. Franks's opening chapter covers a vast amount of detail whilst succinctly defining central conceptual arguments against relevant concrete examples. From exiles and radical immigrant communities, to the innumerable groups and individuals involved in day-to-day struggles, we get a taste of the distinctly cosmopolitan flavour of the anarchist and libertarian communist movements as they took shape in the late nineteenth century and across the twentieth. Experiencing something of an eclipse in the decades following World War II, these strands re-emerged in their more recognizable contemporary form in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Yet *Rebel Alliances* is not a simple 'history' of British anarchism. Instead, the book offers an explicitly philosophical analysis that situates its subject matter within a historical context. In doing so, it sets out to examine the ethical dimensions of contemporary anarchist and autonomist currents in a way that is framed by a critical overview of moral philosophical concepts more generally, as well as of their practical political applications. Most particularly, for Franks, what he calls an 'ideal-type' anarchism must be understood in terms of a specific logic whereby the 'outcomes are prefigured by the methods', without one being sacrificed to the other.

Now, critics of anarchism frequently argue that the theory is narrowly focused on a future-to-come, whilst ignoring the reality of the present. Or, conversely – and somewhat paradoxically – that it is overly concerned with immediately realizing its aims to the detriment of any longer-term goal. Such arguments would seem to betray their own fallacious 'bad faith' more than they shed light on the ethical dimensions of anarchism. Nonetheless, it is often difficult to address the more pertinent criticism that anarchism as a political idea does not offer logical or consistent moral criteria by which to measure itself. It is in response to this difficulty that chapters 2 and 3 offer an incisive exploration of the real ethical considerations underlying anarchism as a theory and movement. Noting the unease which many associated with the movement would have with applying the standard meta-frameworks of moral reasoning to it, Franks then goes on to present a convincing argument for what he calls a specifically 'prefigurative' anarchist ethic as distinct from either consequentialist or deontological theories. The

importance of this ethic could be understood in terms of the (negative) 'dialectical' relation that it establishes between motive and goal, means and ends. By contrast, Leninism's emphasis on instrumental methods in advancing – if not attaining – a declared goal has, in practice, meant the (so-called) end becomes reducible to its immediately prescribed means. As Franks argues, anarchist and autonomist practice makes no such distinction.

It is on this basis that Franks puts forward a bold argument that the prefigurative ethic does indeed comprise a consistent evaluative logic for the reflexive practice of contemporary anarchism(s). Whilst anarchism could hardly be accused of neglecting future-oriented goals, what remains indivisible from any such ends-based standpoint is that they must be consistently reflected in the means. In this sense anarchist and autonomist theories resist any essentialist paradigm, whether Kantian universalism or straightforward utilitarian instrumentality, through what Franks calls their 'self-creative' criteria. In keeping with the anarchist and libertarian critique of instrumental political action, these criteria attempt to measure effectiveness in the primacy given to developing methods and modes of action that reflect their own normative bases, including: a complete rejection of capitalism and the market economy; an egalitarian concern for the interests and freedoms of others in creating non-hierarchical social relations; and a rejection of state power and other quasi-state mediating forces.

Franks explores in some detail the 'anti-political' nature of class-struggle anarchism, as a dynamic, negative 'anti-power' aimed at subverting and challenging hierarchical power in all its forms. As such, he goes some way to countering successfully the accusation often made by critics, hostile and sympathetic alike, that such movements merely propose passive withdrawal, because they reject the traditional goal of political action embodied in the state-form. Taking this as its evaluative standpoint, class-struggle anarchism emphasizes the self-affirming – or self-valorizing – agency of the oppressed themselves, as the emancipatory 'anti-political' force capable of ending oppression and at once developing 'the autonomous composition of new types of living'. Later chapters examine the forms this prefigurative dynamic takes, central among them being the anarchist emphasis on direct action. According to anarchist principles, direct action must aim to embody the materiality of 'anti-power' in itself, as a force capable of contesting existing hierarchical social relations, and act as a prefigurative means for creating and expanding new liberatory modes of being. Such a moment of immanent critique is necessarily contingent, as Franks argues, on the needs and experiences, or 'subject positions', of the agency in question, the multiple identities cohering into the revolutionary social subject of class-struggle anarchism(s).

The potential weaknesses of such variable approaches are not ignored by Franks, and the book poses many prescient questions regarding the problems of differing methodologies. Questions of agency and the difficulties inherent in avoiding both formal and (perhaps more pressingly) informal organizational and structural tyrannies are followed in the final, and longest, chapter of the book, which draws together the many modes of action favoured by contemporary anarchism(s), with substantial explanation of the consistencies and tensions these offer. From insurrection, via strikes and sabotage, to the 'refusal of work', we are left with a thoroughly comprehensive overview of anarchist and autonomist practice, of the material 'anti-power' of the prefigurative dynamic elucidated throughout the course of the book.

**Christian Garland**

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# Headed west on the A30

## International Conference on Contemporary Capitalism Studies, Changshu, November 2006

The A30 in question runs west of Shanghai Pudong Airport through what can only be described as 'another Canary Wharf every 5 miles'. The occasion for the road trip was the 'International Conference on Contemporary Capitalism Studies', organized by Nanjing University and Changshu Institute of Technology, to which six UK 'scholars' had been invited: myself, Bob Jessop, Sean Sayers, Andrew Chitty, Mark Neocleous, and Martin McIvor. We were goggle-eyed throughout the two-hour trip from the airport. This was an up-close view of what it's like in a country where 'official' annual growth rates in the region of 10–15 per cent are regarded as underestimates, and *China Daily* runs articles explaining in unworried and rather thankful tones that export growth will fall from 25 per cent to a mere 15 per cent, ditto the vast trade surplus, and the surplus of foreign currency conservatively valued at US$1 trillion.

It is difficult to convey the sheer scale of mile after mile of brand-new expressway scenery running through a landscape filled with high-rise, high-tech work and living structures on a scale that dwarfs Dallas. The postmodern touches were the pastiche columns, arches, cupolas, domes, architraves, friezes and the like appliquéd to last month's facades. The communist touch was the vast red banner (in English) alongside the zooming traffic exhorting the citizenry to promote a harmonious society through urbanization. The conference hotel itself caught our collective eye from quite a distance: in the flat industrializing landscape we could see the campanile of St Mark's, Venice, spiking the evening skies of Asia-Pacific.

Still reeling from our collective apprehension of this Hollywoodesque, science-fictional brainwashing, and having been asked to make some formal opening remarks, I announced to the conference, 'China is the best place in the world to study capitalism.' Instantly realizing that this flat declaration would require some quick rephrasing, I regrouped. After all, this is a communist country in some self-declared sense, although this could hardly be gleaned from a quantitative study – though my observation was admittedly limited to English phrases, logos, icons, symbols, and other Barthesian paraphernalia, all of it commercial. To say that China is the best place in the world to study capitalism because it has so much of it, and is so obviously successful at it, was probably in the realm of the unsayable. It is one thing to know that China has a number of carefully defined 'enterprise zones', generally along the coast, well away from the interior, yet what we had seen suggested rather a large elephant in the room. I sensed that throughout the conference, and in particular in informal discussions, we would find intellects eager to enlighten us on the evident fact that the landscape was walking, talking and quacking to us like capitalism, well beyond the occasional KFC or Starbucks outlets that decorate China's shiny new airports.

Further down the line in the order of welcoming speeches was the municipal representative of Changshu City (pop. 1.3 million), Jiangsu province. His delivery and PowerPoint enthused about the awards that his city and its various enterprise zones had won. He informed us how far up the league table of Chinese municipalities his own had clawed its way: bank deposits, 'civilian' bank accounts, private car ownership, urbanization of the countryside, roads, total retail sales, 'Best Chinese Commercial Cities', even 'green issues', having first set the context of industrial and commercial success. At the end of the conference, another civic representative pressed the glossy Changshu Development Agency prospectus into our hands, urging us to invest.

Given that the Chinese government has recently chosen to fund at least three centres of excellence for the pursuit of Marxism Studies, and in particular for a huge 'catching up' exercise on Western Marxism – and that the Communist Party of China itself funds a very large 'Central Compilation and Translation Bureau' pursuing much the same things, including a new large-scale version of Marx and Engels in Chinese, not to mention government funding for several state-funded academies of social sciences to which the conference attendees were all connected in one way or another with this vast enterprise – it was just faintly surprising that no one was very interested in the official line relating China to Marxism at the moment. We had to ask. The cheerful answer was that China is officially socialist and is therefore developing its productive resources as rapidly as possible for the benefit of its people, and in order to build socialism in an international context of peaceful nations. Of course, this technocentric line erases and forgets what some might think were obviously central Marxist concepts, such as class and class struggle. No one volunteered even a Rawlsian justification for inequalities of income and wealth, or mentioned exactly what aspects of socialism were being built (with capitalist cash). The closest we got to those lines of thought were references to state management of conflict, otherwise known as building the 'harmonious' society. I suggested that this was perhaps an approximation to Western social democracy, where socialism strikes a 'deal' in terms of class compromise to be managed by a strong, and sometimes rather one-party-ish, state. This produced some giggles. 'Democracy' is not a viable subject here – too close to human rights, free press and other Western ideas (not that 'the West' is entirely up to speed on these native issues, of course). My best interlocutor on some of these subjects was forthcoming, so I politely enquired as to the nature of his work. 'I study social democracy', he said. He then put the situation more succinctly: 'We can't give up Lenin, and we can't follow Bernstein.'

How, then, do philosophers in China study contemporary capitalism? We shouldn't be surprised to learn that they do it through a hit parade of familiar names, or at least those invited to this conference took that approach. The faves were the Frankfurt School and Habermas, Gorz and Baudrillard, Poulantzas and a fast-forward to Laclau and Mouffe, and Hardt and Negri, with considerable emphasis on précis and overview. Most of the discussion concerned issues of definition and translation between the Eurospeak of Marx and Marxism (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, civil society, etc.) and Chinese. One Chinese delegate volunteered some comments on the differences between Marx and Engels. This was surely one of the higher stages of open unorthodoxy. I asked if anyone in China was actually studying the labour theory of value (either pro or con). The answer was 'not really'. Moreover, we were also told that economists no longer wanted to study capitalism, since it was no longer bad! Obviously a space has opened up there for other interests, hence the conference.

My overall impression is that Marxism occupies an intellectual and political space in China much like that of liberal-democratic thought in the West – a none-too-coherent array of ideas, texts and icons that can be cited and interpreted selectively to cover most exigencies, supported by various national and ideological investments in university curricula and philosophical research. The barely mentioned Mao was clearly fading into kitsch. In a country that has achieved a 'socialist market economy' (we are told), and is 'building socialism with Chinese characteristics', the queue of capitalists wanting to invest stretches right round the world.

**Terrell Carver**

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