

Editorial collective

David Cunningham, Howard Feather, Peter Hallward, Esther Leslie, Stewart Martin, Kaye Mitchell, Mark Neocleous, Peter Osborne, Stella Sandford

Contributors

Meyda Yeğenoğlu is Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology at the Middle East Technical University, Ankara. She is the author of *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Morad Farhadpour is a writer and translator, living and working in Iran. He is the author of *Depressed Reason, The Western Winds* and *The Semiology of September 11* (with Yossef Abazari). His translations include works by Adorno, Agamben, Badiou, Benjamin, Nietzsche and Tillich.

Michelle Henning teaches Cultural Studies at the University of the West of England, Bristol. She is the author of *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory* (Open University Press, 2006).

Alison Stone is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Lancaster University. She is the author of *Petrified Intelligence: Nature in Hegel's Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 2004) and *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (CUP, 2006).

Stella Sandford is Principal Lecturer in Philosophy at Middlesex University, London. She is the author of *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* (Athlone/Continuum, 2000) and *How to Read Beauvoir* (Granta, 2006).

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The sacralization of secularism in Turkey

Meyda Yeğenoğlu

Religion is back in Turkey! This is the prevalent secular fear, anxiety and apprehension that finds various expressions in the social, cultural and political context of today's Turkey. But where has religion been all this time, to warrant the allegation that it is 'coming back'? Why is the return of the religious deemed so dangerous? To make sense of this situation requires a brief overview of the nationalist project that established a modern, secular and Westernized identity for Turkey at the turn of the twentieth century.

The nationalist project in Turkey instituted by Mustafa Kemal developed through successive waves of modernization, which took secularization and Westernization as their predominant ideology. The principles of the Enlightenment (science, rationality, secularism and progress) shaped the discourse of Westernized indigenous elites. This desire to modernize the country went hand in hand with the denunciation and condemnation of traditional Islamic values. The official ideology of secular modernization measured civilization according to the degree of Westernization achieved in different areas of social life. Concomitantly, progress was defined by a breaking with Ottoman backwardness, symbolized in the distance achieved from Islam. In the attempt to establish a new identity for the nation and to reach the desired level of 'progress', the abolition of the Caliphate was a necessary but insufficient step. In Bernard Lewis's words, 'a further shock was necessary – a traumatic impact that would shake every man in the country into the realization that the old order had gone, and a new one come into its place.' What Lewis called Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's 'great symbolic revolutions' marked the transformation of the nation from a 'backward/Islamic' to a 'civilized/secular' identity.¹

Since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, Turkish political elites have attempted the most radical secularization ever seen in a Muslim country. This project stretched far beyond the state apparatus. It idealized Western cultural codes, modes of life and identities; it penetrated into the lifestyles, manners and daily customs of the people. Most importantly, it entailed a change in the self-identification of the Turkish people. In so far as modern Turkey constituted its identity by progressively distancing itself from Islam, Islam functioned as its constitutive outside. As Islam was increasingly marginalized as the negative of the civilized national self, it came to represent a threat to the emerging secular, modern and enlightened Turkish nation. However, since such processes of exclusion can never be achieved *tout court*, the result always carries the traces of what is excluded in its constitution. The civilizational shift in Turkey from an Islamic to a Western identity created a cultural split. Modern Turkish identity has come to be inhabited by what it has tried to push outside of itself; its constitution is inevitably an unstable, contingent arrangement. It is this inability to completely erase Islam that best explains its recent 'comeback'. The main social, political and cultural

conflict between the secularists and the Islamists is rooted in the exclusion of Islamic culture, ways of life and codes from the public domain as legitimate markers of Turkish identity. Current demands for more public visibility of Islamic identity, aesthetics and ways of life should be seen in the light of this historically rooted split.

Redrawing the lines of membership

However, despite the historically deep-seated fissure between Islamists and secularists, and contrary to the clichés of modernization theory, the current political and cultural split over Turkey's desire to be part of the European Union is not between 'Islamists' and 'secularists'. Rather, it is between anti-EU 'authoritarian nationalists' (including Kemalist nationalists, far-right nationalists and a small minority Islamic view) and pro-EU 'liberal globalists' (who include liberals, the Islamic majority and a very small minority of Kemalists).² Indeed, this opposition cuts across left- and right-wing politics in Turkey. (It has had repercussions within the socialist Left as well.) Contrary to commonsensical expectations, the predominant Islamist discourse, represented by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), is liberal globalist and pro-EU. Indeed, it is the only major political force in Turkey that deploys elements of liberal multiculturalism in its discourse and programme.

After the military intervention in 1980, most of the Islamic parties in Turkey were closed down. However, the last two decades have witnessed the emergence of an interesting political phenomenon: the splitting of Turkish political Islam into two. The predominant tendency adapted itself to the modern liberal-democratic parliamentary framework, describing itself as a Turkish version of the European Christian Democrats and naming its politics as 'conservative-democratic'. Although it emerged from the tradition of an Islamic party, it questioned the place of Islamic politics in Turkey. In contrast, a minority tendency insisted on old-style Islamic fundamentalist politics. The former is pro-EU, while the latter is militantly against Turkish membership. The current party of government, the AKP, emphasizes human rights from a pluralist perspective. Differences in religion, culture and opinions are highly valued and secularism is seen as the principle that guarantees the freedom of expression of these differences. Turkey's ties to the West and the vision of Turkey as a secular democracy have been embraced without qualification. One reason that it is strongly in favour of Turkey's EU membership is that it sees the Union as a guarantor of religious freedom against the state and the army.

The institutionalized dissociation of religion from politics, the eradication of religion's public and political presence, and the desire to contain it within the private sphere of faith (the Enlightenment consensus on religion) was the backbone of secularization in Asia and Africa, as well as in Western Europe and North America. However, unlike those countries in Western Europe whose secularization resulted from an internal transformation of religion itself,³ secularization in Turkey was accomplished by the use of coercive power. The use of legal institutions of the state in directing and tailoring the nature and course of the process of secularization has been central both historically and to the present political conjuncture in Turkey.

The increasing presence of politicized religion, not only in Turkey but all over the world in a variety of modern and modernizing societies, indicates that the conventional peripheral modernizing effort to differentiate structurally the spheres of politics, economy, science and individual faith (and hence relegate religion to a non-political space) have proven problematic. In common with the worldwide religious response to modern global realities, Islamism as a political movement in Turkey has developed responses to issues of democracy, family life, the ways in which national education is to be structured, the sort of scientific projects that can and should be funded, how the economy should be structured, human rights, and so on. Islam has become an integral

part of these public debates and has developed quite singular responses to such contentious issues. As Talal Asad notes, objects, sites, practices, words and representations (even the minds and bodies of worshippers) cannot be confined within the space of what secularists name 'religion'.⁴ Yet the entry of Islam into such debates has created strong reactions on the part of defenders of secularism.

Paranoid nationalism

The public sphere is not a blank space; nor can it be constituted from scratch each time anew. The public sphere is constituted by the sensibilities, memories and aspirations, fears and hopes of its participants. It is a space that is historically inscribed. It is this inscription that helps explain why the 'return of religion' is deemed so distasteful and dangerous in Turkey. I do not mean to psychologize the reasons for the attribution of an abominable character to the presence of religion in the public sphere. However, secularist alarm at the idea of a religious invasion of the domain of the political can be understood as an instance of what Ghassan Hage calls 'paranoid nationalism'. Hage notes that there are different modes of belonging to the nation. The paranoid mode of belonging entails 'worrying' as a result of feeling threatened. Such a defensive attitude flourishes because of an insecure attachment to a nation that is incapable of properly nourishing its citizens. Worrying thus results in the exertion of 'a form of symbolic violence over the field of national belonging', obliterating other possibilities and modes of belonging. The paranoid nationalist imaginary forecloses the possibility of a relation with the other.⁵

One finds in Turkey a systematic and persistent questioning of the 'motives' of Islamists. The Islamic movement is attributed 'hidden motives' behind its apparent political behaviour, in particular via the use of the Islamic notion of *takiyye*. According to this concept, which can be translated as 'dissimulation', a Muslim is justified in hiding his or her real motives if the circumstances are unfavourable to the exercise of his or her faith. The concept of *takiyye* is often used indiscriminately as an umbrella term for Islamic politics in general. The whole of Islamic political behaviour is thus reduced to so many ways of covering up a larger secret plan to establish an Islamic hegemony and finally an Islamic regime of *sharia*. This attitude of wholesale accusation creates a paranoid political atmosphere that is increasingly inimical to democratic debate, which requires a minimal understanding of the political motive or rationale of others, and does not presuppose that everything is known in advance. Such an image of the 'dissimulating other' is familiar from Orientalist discourse. It demonstrates an unpleasant complicity between Orientalism and the authoritarian-nationalist version of secularism.

Secularism's standard argument is that religion must remain within the terrain of individual faith and devotion. Any public appearance of religion, and any political claim that the religious make in matters pertaining to the domain of the nation-state, are regarded as a threat to individual freedom. Yet it is inevitable, given the historical exclusion of religion in Turkey, that the religious can only claim a social space by disrupting the sanctioned and authorized patterns of political debates and practices.

In defending the secular heritage and principles of Turkey, new patterns of expression are emerging. Secular sentiments, ceremonial and ritualistic practices and symbols are being deployed, such as attending to Atatürk's mausoleum, excessive use of the Turkish flag, and the use of the slogan 'Turkey will remain secular' on almost every occasion, from protests about the AKP to football matches. Such expressions can be understood as a process of sacralization and transcendentalization of the principles of secularism. What needs to be asked is whether such ceremonialized and ritualized responses can also be considered symptoms of a new form of religion. The sacralized defence of the principles of secularism feeds the paranoid nationalist response. The insistence on the

categorical separation of the religious and the political leaves no room for a different and more responsible articulation of religion with the secular.

This is certainly not a good way to engage with the return of the religious in the public sphere. Given the urgent political task of creating a democratic and civil polity and society, it is important to develop a more positive and responsible ethical and political attitude to political Islam. Such a response would refuse to suffocate it with a self-righteous secularism. Instead, it would try to understand the social, economic, political and cultural conditions that have prompted Islam to emerge as a political movement. Beyond the simple humanist benevolence of allowing the Muslim to speak (which we often find in reaction to Orientalism), such understanding is the only genuinely ethical response to Islamic difference. Conventional, mainstream secularism offers no analysis of Islam and remains blind to the reasons behind its politicization and 'de-privatization', to use José Casanova's term. In so doing, it inhibits the possibility of the secularization of religious concepts, beliefs and practices.

As I finish this piece (23 July), the result of the general election in Turkey has been announced. To the dismay of the so-called social-democratic constituency, represented by the People's Republic Party (CHP), established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish electorate did not base its decision on fear of Islam. Ironically, manipulation of the fear of anti-secularism, articulated with nationalist sentiments and an anti-EU stance did not bring success to the CHP, but rather paved the way for the presence of the national-socialist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) in parliament.

There are important lessons to be learned from the choice made by almost 50 per cent of the electorate that the current government should remain in power. One is that fear of anti-secularism is increasingly losing its currency. Another is the Turkish people's disapproval of the military's intrusion into politics. Presenting itself as the guardian of secularism, the military had intervened into politics (by a so-called 'cyber coup') during the nomination of the AKP's candidate for presidency. The public's disapproval of this intervention can be considered an important step towards the achievement of civil liberties and democratic principles.

Presenting themselves as heirs to Atatürk's legacy, CHP supporters organized a series of large demonstrations during the election campaign. These demonstrations used secularism and anti-terror as their main discursive weapons against the current government. Some public intellectuals regard these demonstrations as indicators of a significant transformation of the modernist and Westernist tradition. It was suggested



that, unlike the secularism of the 1920s, which was imposed top-down, these demonstrations signified the reclaiming of the principles and ideology of secularism by *the people themselves*. This diagnosis is mistaken. First, it is dubious to regard these demonstrations as popular. Second, if Turkey's political and social conjuncture reveals a significant transformation of the modernizing efforts of the early republican period, it is nonetheless misleading to search for the indicators of transformation in these demonstrations. Rather, the true indicator is the entrance of religion into the public sphere, via a unique articulation of the religious with other social, political and cultural issues.

Notes

1. Bernard Lewis. *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1961, p. 268.
2. See Mahmut Mutman, 'The Nation Form', *Third Text*, forthcoming.
3. See Michel de Certeau, 'The Formality of Practices: From Religious Systems to the Ethics of the Enlightenment (the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries)', in *The Writing of History*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988.
4. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2003.
5. Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society*, Merlin Press, London, 2003, p. 23.

Secularism and politics in Iran

Morad Farhadpour

The establishment of an Islamic state in Iran and the imposition of a system of ideological discrimination have turned secularism into a magical concept. For its defenders, it signifies a sacred cure for all the ills of Iranian society; for the Islamic state, it is a kind of sacrilege. In Iran, the concept of secularism is wholly determined by these two great forces; its political function is thus problematic. It is as if religion and the state have filled the space of history, leaving no room for politics.

Secularism is no less ambiguous in Western societies. It comprises many different, even divergent, moments, from the expropriation of the Church to Republican anti-clericalism and a Weberian disenchantment of the world. This ambiguity, intensified through decontextualization, means that any analysis of secularism in Iran has to be selective. What follows is an attempt to analyse the relationship of secularism to the possibility of democratic politics – or politics as democracy – in Iran. This analysis is based on belief in the political potential of the 1979 revolution, which to this day has remained inexhaustible. Unable to tolerate the void of this potentiality, the official jargon of the state tries to fill it in with the word 'Islamic', understood in an adjectival sense, rather than as part of the proper name 'the Islamic Revolution', given to the event by the event itself. The question is: can the word 'secular' act as a gatekeeper that keeps open the strait-gates of politics, or is it just another adjective that fills the gap between the state and the community, but cannot be internalized by them?

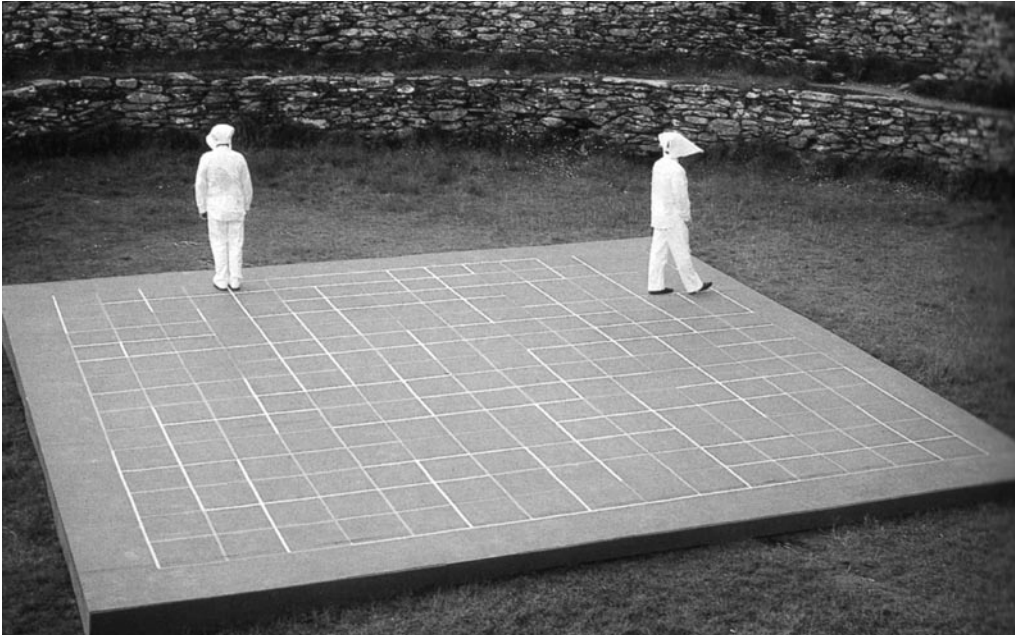
We can begin with a simple argument: every democracy or democratic state entails the formal equality of citizens before the law; a religious state, by definition, negates this condition; therefore, only a completely secular state can be considered democratic.

However, no actual or historical democracy can be grasped and explained by this logic. In the United Kingdom, the nominal head of the state is simultaneously the head of the national Church. The most aggressive democracy of our time, the USA, is governed by an administration that owes its power to the stirring of religious zeal. In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the situation is still more complex and confusing. In post-revolutionary Iran, secularism was first introduced as a demand for separating religion from politics, in contrast to its universal definition as the separation of religion from the state. This confusion, which persists to this day, has never been corrected by either the defenders or the opponents of secularism. In a country in which any popular action worthy of the name 'politics' has involved religion – for example, the anti-colonial boycott of tobacco at the end of the nineteenth century, the constitutional revolution of 1906–07, the nationalization of the oil industry in 1951–53, and finally the 1979 revolution – such a demand automatically leads to the exclusion of politics. Therefore it is clear: what the above-mentioned confusion involves is nothing but the reduction of politics to the state and hence the omnipresence of a statist ideology.

This statist ideology, expressed in explicit or implicit terms, is at the core of all contemporary debates for and against secularism in Iran. It is the secret common ground of both camps. Nonetheless, in a country with three thousand years of despotic rule, whose absolute synthesis of state and religion in the pre-Islamic Sassanid Empire (226–651) has been a model for the tyrannical and monarchical rules of early Moslem caliphs, statist ideology is bound to lead to the recreation of despotism, be it enlightened or religious. Such a judgement may seem unfair when applied to contemporary defenders of secularism, yet an old Marxian maxim tells us that the true political significance of a faction is determined not by what it says or believes but by the objectivity of its praxis. So let us consider the actual history of secularism in Iran and its implications as manifest in the actual actions of its friends and enemies.

Sins and positions

Nearly two years after the revolution, with the closing down of universities as a result of the 'cultural revolution' and the downfall of the first elected president of the Republic, all non-Islamic political activities and discourses were banned and excluded from the sphere of 'legitimate' politics. However, the dialectic of unfreedom did not remain limited to the outside, but very quickly spread to the core of the system. In the three decades that followed, not only Marxists and members of minority religions but also Sunnis and even the majority of Shi'ites were excluded from all higher and middle official positions of power. Later on, with the victory of conservative hardliners, these exclusionary tactics were also applied to other factions of the ruling elite such as the reformist followers of Khatami. It is therefore clear that discrimination and exclusion has always been a matter of state policy rather than religious fanaticism. The state has employed catchwords like 'secularism' or 'liberalism' to brand and ostracize its critics in a purely pragmatic manner, without the slightest regard for the content of beliefs. No wonder that the present Iranian rulers have never endeavoured to remove the aforementioned confusion or to criticize the separation of religion and politics for its anti-democratic tendencies, but only for posing a threat to the monopoly of state power. The spiritual mentor of the current administration, Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, has explicitly stated that the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic is by no means rooted in the people's will as expressed in elections. According to him, all people can do is to support the divine choice, and even their vote is somehow influenced by divine providence. The victory of the right-wing conservatives in Iran, as in any country in the era of global capitalism, is the product of rampant depoliticization and indifference, and, despite its populist trappings, it expands political apathy. As a result, secularism is now perceived as a sin against the state itself rather than a political position.



Brian O'Doherty, *F49, Vowel Grid*, 1970

The list of political groups, parties and individuals that in some way or other ask for different degrees of secularization is long. Nevertheless, most of them suffer from the same predicament of statism, or, as we shall see, are caught in the vicious circle of a statist interpretation of secularism. For the religious intellectuals such as Abdolkarim Soroush, who supported Khatami and the vast reformist movement that arose after his election, secularism was at least partly a political issue. It was a means to set limits to the ubiquity of the state. They did manage to introduce some gaps in the space filled by the official discourse, but the political significance of their demand for religious democracy kept changing as they vacillated between emphasizing its religious and its democratic dimensions. The strategy of 'pressure from below, haggling from above' coupled the political energy of the movement with the process of give and take between the ruling elites, thereby reducing politics to state policies once again. Some individuals, such as Akbar Ganji, eventually grew tired of this wavering and opted for a clean break, demanding the establishment of a pure secular republic through the tactics of civil disobedience.¹ Yet, even this orientation did not prevent them from getting involved in the paradox. Ganji called for passionate militant politics and exhibited readiness to pay its price. However, the ultimate goal of struggle for Ganji was the establishment of a liberal democracy. He aimed at overpoliticizing people in order to achieve a de-politicized society with free markets, a small state and minimum tension, where people could immerse themselves in their private lifestyles.

The futility of such conceptions indicates that the paradoxes of secularism are not so different from the paradoxes of democracy. The main paradox of democracy is that it is not itself democratically produced. The origin of democracy, whether in a long process of reform or a sudden violent change, remains external to it. Democracy itself is never put to the vote. In a situation like the Middle East, this means that the election can be won by the so-called 'enemies of democracy'. This is what happened in Algeria a few years ago, and is happening presently in Palestine with the success of Hamas. In the established state-oriented democracies, whenever the election erects obstacles to a continuous rule of capital and state oligarchies (as recently occurred in the Netherlands and France, when people said 'no' to the European constitution), one can always repeat the election. Yet such options are ruled out in the Middle East (even though the winners in Algeria and Palestine, considered as a threat to the dominant powers, never got the chance to prove their commitment to democracy). We are left with the paradox of establishing democracy before holding democratic elections.

This also holds true for secularism. The typical reaction to this impasse is to insist

on ‘the primacy of liberalism’ (the rule of law, individuals’ rights, etc.) over democracy. However, according to this view, in countries where people do not know ‘the rules of the democratic game’ the only solution is to ‘educate’ them from above. The military dictatorships of Atatürk in Turkey and Reza Shah (1925–41) in Iran tried to realize this logic, by imposing their own versions of secularism. None of the known historical routes to the secularization of the state – such as civil war between religious factions in the Thirty Years War, or gradual change through centuries of conflict between king and parliament, or the establishment of a new state on ‘virgin soil’ – applies to a country like Iran (95 per cent of whose population are Shi’ites) or the rest of Middle East. The present situation in the multi-ethnic society of Iraq shows that the survival of a semi-democratic secular state requires the presence of an occupying force. Recent events in Turkey prove that even half a century of ‘education’ by the army has not solved all the paradoxes of secularism. It seems that in this region a secular democratic *state* must come either from above or from outside. (Some people both inside and outside Iran are now even hoping for an external solution – that is, the military American solution.) But does this mean that here secularism and democratic *politics* are mutually exclusive? The answer is no.

The not-all against the state-all

Every modern state, particularly a democratic one, is an expanding force that creates an *all*. An Islamic state fills this *all* with religious ideology whose content is chosen from bits and pieces of tradition, myth or even superstition. The secular state tries to exclude all religions from this *all* and confine them to the so-called private sphere. Although, as can be seen in the historical examples of Egypt, Syria and Iraq, it may subsequently be filled with nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism. As long as the word ‘secular’ is conceived as a description of a state, we are forced to follow the logic of the *state-all*. But if we cut out its relation to the state, then secularism can be another name for politics. Using the Lacanian idea of the logic of *not-all*, secularism can act as a gap or a wound in the body of the state. In contrast to the impotent and depoliticizing emptiness of the secular state, secularism as politics would be a birthplace for political passions, inventions and subjects. Secularism would no longer be understood as a form of government; the formula of ‘the rule of state must exclude all religions’ would be replaced by that of ‘no religion can have a claim to total rule’. In political terms, this means that every religion would be separated from itself by secularism and would thereby be not an *all* that comprises every thing and every one, but a *not-all* divided from itself.

As to the compatibility of this idea of secular politics with the situation in Iran, until recently the theory of *Velayat-e-faqih* (the rule of clergy) had no political significance and was limited to authority over those who cannot manage their properties, such as orphans or the mentally handicapped. (This is still the opinion of the majority of independent Shi’ite authorities.) Moreover, Shi’ite political theology is essentially messianic: the establishment of the just universal state is deferred until the coming of the Twelfth Imam. It is a divine matter that cannot be decided by human action.

As Horkheimer and Adorno once wrote, ‘the particularist origin and the universal perspective of thought have always been inseparable’. History suggests that there will be no political truth or true political thinking as long as we remain inside the realm of state. A democratic politics that is not anti-Islamic and is not obsessed with the security paradigm created by the American war against terror is the only viable politics in contemporary Iran. A religiously inspired politics that internalizes the gap of secularism and abandons its claim to statist rule is a necessary part of democracy as politics.

Notes

1. Akbar Ganji, an Iranian ex-reformist journalist, was imprisoned in 2000. He was released in 2006 after almost eighty days of hunger strike. While in prison he wrote *Republican Manifesto*, demanding a fully fledged democratic republic.

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The pig in the bath

New materialisms and cultural studies

Michelle Henning

On 24 July 1945 the Austrian logical positivist Otto Neurath, who had been closely involved in the economic and social projects of Red Vienna in the 1920s, visited the borough of Bilston near Wolverhampton, to advise councillors on their new housing scheme. Bilston was an ex-mining and industrial town with an unusually large slum population and overcrowding problem. Over the past century, the methods used to extract coal had destroyed the drainage of the coal seams, causing flooding and the closure of the mines by 1920. After the coal industry, iron production at Bilston went into decline and by 1945 it was dependent on a single steel works. But from 1943, under the direction of the town clerk, A.V. Williams, plans began to be made for Bilston's regeneration, in anticipation of Britain's wider postwar reconstruction.*

The report of Neurath's visit was written by Williams. According to Peter Larkham, who has studied the roles of the various people involved in the reconstruction of Bilston, Williams's role was not just an administrative one – he had a great deal of influence in the planning process, and a keen interest in modernism (notably in Lewis Mumford's writings). He involved various eminent experts in town planning: initially the architect and town planner T. Alwyn Lloyd was commissioned to draw up plans for the new housing, but Williams also commissioned the Viennese architect Ella Briggs, who built the Pestalozzihof in Vienna, and in 1946 invited the architect and academic Charles Reilly (known for his communal housing projects centring around a series of oval 'greens') to present his ideas to the Housing and Planning Committee.¹

On the occasion of Neurath's visit, Williams wrote that the councillors expressed some worries

about the removal of people from highly unsanitary conditions into new houses of modern design. There was a fear that the bathroom might be converted into the coal cellar, also that the disinfection officer would very shortly be fully occupied removing bed bugs from the new houses.²

The town councillors felt that 'some scheme of public re-education' might be necessary if the tenants were to become 'good tenants in clean, happy and healthy homes' – that is, the rehousing was part of a larger reformist project. Against this, Neurath

stressed most emphatically that people only put coals in the bathtub for some very good reason, e.g. an inadequate or highly inaccessible fuel storage place, or because the hot water system is so expensive that the hardship involved in using the bath for its proper purpose renders the amenity worthless.

Williams goes on to say:

Dr Neurath said that he received a report, in Vienna, that one of the tenants was keeping pigs in the bath. He paid a visit to the house. 'Well, Dr. Neurath, last year I kept my pigs in the sty provided by the Town Council but there was no heating and the sty was so cold that all my pigs died; so now I keep them in the bath.' In such a case a small heating plant installed in the pigsty would enable the bath to be used for its proper purpose.³

The reference to coal in the bath is figurative as well as literal: coal in the bath is a vivid figure because coal is black and dirty, and (by 1945) not the most modern of fuels. By contrast, the bath is white, modern and functional. The act of keeping coal in the bath produces an inversion: wet becomes dry, clean becomes dirty, white becomes black. Thus coal in the

* This is a revised version of a paper presented to the *Radical Philosophy* conference, Materials and Materialisms, London, 12 May 2007. The two articles that follow also derive from talks at that event.

bath stands for larger anxieties about class and contamination, working as a synecdoche for the perceived filthiness and social perversity of an undeserving poor, the 'great unwashed'. The anxieties expressed about such things in the postwar period would soon be given official voice in the developing discourse of the 'problem family' in public health and social services and among eugenicists. An influential 1944 article by R.C. Wofinden placed great emphasis on squalid living conditions as a means to identify problem families. Recently, Gillian Swanson has pointed to how this pathologized 'domestic failure', as a symptom more significant than ill health or unhappiness, and situated those families identified as socially maladjusted in a negative relation to modernity: they are a problem because of their failure to 'modernize domestic habits', and if their children are happy, it is read as a symptom of 'their adaptation to abnormal – primitive, regressive, anti-modern conditions'.⁴ The attitude that ex-slum-dwellers were 'the sort of people who kept coal in the bath' was widespread in Britain both before and after the war, and affected their treatment in shops and everyday life, as well as at the hands of well-meaning reformers and council officials. Added to this is the long tradition of social hygiene within town planning and housing management: rehousing was seen as a means to normalize and reform slum-dwellers and paupers – hence the 'disinfection officer' charged with removing bed bugs.

Responding to the councillors' worries, Neurath does not initially acknowledge that the councillors are concerned about more than just bathing arrangements. But the pig trumps coal, with its greater figurative associations of uncleanness, and its rural, premodern connotations. Neurath himself makes nothing explicitly of this figure, presenting it as a practical problem of function, and defending both alternative uses of baths as rational uses of facilities whose functions are impaired, through high water-heating bills or lack of appropriate facilities (the pigsty heater). Against the implication that the ex-slum-dwellers are inadequately prepared for modernist rational living, Neurath suggests that they are the functionalists, the rationalists, dealing with faulty technology, with economically impaired heating systems, inadequate coal storage, and badly designed pigsties. Against the tendency to treat modernism and planning as reformist instruments of government, Neurath posits his belief in the right of the tenants to self-determination and in modernism as a means to enable people to realize their own goals (and humanity). The priority is not to police or re-educate the tenants but to make functional the tech-

nologies and facilities necessary to give them access to modernist living. Williams also reports that Neurath proposed that the administration of the estate should be handed over to the tenants, and the different aspects of housing and social provision should be joined up in a rational system.

This reported conversation may be read on one level as the meeting of ideologies and discourses that construct their objects differently. The objects of this discourse could be construed as the tenants themselves and modernity (the issue: who has ownership over it?). On this reading, the other objects referred to – bed bugs, baths, coal, pigs and heating systems – would be mere ciphers. But they are not. This is also a discussion of the ordering and arrangement of these objects, of their 'proper' and 'improper' places, of their functioning. The discourse of social hygiene is one of decontamination and elimination: the tenants and their wayward things may contaminate the envisaged efficient and modern housing solution; through education, things will be returned to their proper places, or be excised altogether. Neurath opposes this with a discourse in which things are not dirty or clean, or places improper and proper, but in which everything belongs to a network, each thing interlinked in a system, and made operational through decentralized rational planning.

The mobilization of things

This discussion of pigs and coal tells us something about two differently modern perspectives on the relationships between people and material objects. One of the achievements of recent materialist approaches to cultural theory and cultural studies has been to shift attention to this: to rethink the social in terms of a set of relationships between people, creatures and material objects. This involves returning to, and readdressing, both the philosophies that underpinned modern science and social policy and the philosophical and conceptual foundations of cultural studies itself. If, in its early forms, cultural studies moved away from the study of texts to lived and material practices, it has nevertheless long been dominated by an emphasis on signification, on everyday objects as texts. In cultural materialism, social reality has tended to be viewed as entirely circumscribed by ideology, within which subjectivity and consciousness are formed, and in which the only spaces for opposition and for dissidence are found in textual 'faultlines', as Alan Sinfield calls them – that is, in 'the conflict and contradiction that the social order inevitably produces within itself'.⁵

Writers have responded to the overemphasis on

text and discourse, and the impasses of this version of cultural materialism, in various ways: sometimes through a re-emphasis on subjective agency, experience and identity; sometimes by a turn to affect theory as a means to reintroduce material actuality. New materialist approaches to cultural studies have developed from a number of directions: via engagements with phenomenology, with Walter Benjamin's work on the 'petrified objects' of the late nineteenth century, with Heidegger's theory of the thing, with Deleuze, and with actor-network theory (especially the work of Bruno Latour). These kinds of materialism are very varied and in some ways incompatible with one another.⁶ In some cases they involve a return to a positivism close to Neurath's own, and to a pre-structuralist belief in the transparency of language. In other cases, they are premised on a critique of positivism. Where they abandon the emphasis on history and on language that characterizes earlier forms of cultural studies, they also lose the ability to reflect on their own methods and the means by which they encounter their objects. But at their most significant, they attend to the frictions and lack of fit between physical, actual stuff and signification or ideology, as well as the way ideology is distributed or disseminated through things. They suggest that, at its most successful, ideology cements itself at the level of felt experience, as a lived and incontestable reality. But this is also the ground of its failure, in those instances where the material and experiential refuse to line up and affirm it. This may not be because they are outside ideology or representation – things may carry remnants of older ideologies and older social orders, and as such expose the present as historically contingent. In recent materialist approaches to cultural studies, things are seen as having agency; they are not merely carriers of meaning, but socially shaping. Another way of putting this is that the social order is produced through the mobilization of things, and that things in turn help to produce it, and not always in predictable or humanly intended ways. Both modernism (as a broad cultural movement) and modernity appear in this light as a collection of diverse attempts to shape and manage human consciousness and subjectivity through the remodeling and reinvention of everyday material things, and thereby of experience, perception and habit.

This is evident in Neurath's work. Neurath's brief contribution to Bilston's redevelopment in 1945 may seem – should seem – remarkable now, but this involvement in British postwar town planning was part of a wider set of practices, which in prewar Vienna had been explicitly interlinked. Neurath's role in Red

Vienna had been rooted in a socialist commitment to democratization, which meant the democratization of knowledge, as well as of housing and modern amenities. Although the Vienna circle is associated by some with a technocratic politics, Neurath prioritized self-government. In a 1942 essay, 'International Planning for Freedom', he argued against giving more credence to technological expertise than to the comfort and preferences of people:

Assume the scientists tell the English people that their fireplaces waste calories – of course they do so enormously. But the fireplaces as an element of our environment are not 'happiness-neutral' as it were.⁷

Planning should proceed on the basis of scientific understanding, but must take into account human happiness. In keeping with this, Neurath returned to Bilston in November 1945 and set up a 'clinic' where for some weeks he 'met and chatted with many of the inhabitants'.⁸ This was the beginning of a process of increasing the involvement of Bilston people in the new development, which was cut short by his sudden death in December.

Isotype

To communicate the ongoing transformation of Vienna under the socialist administration, Neurath had established and ran several museums (most famously the Gesellschaft- und Wirtschaftsmuseum in Vienna), devised encyclopaedia, and overseen photography projects, film screenings and travelling exhibitions. Working with a team of people, including the artist Gerd Arntz, and Marie Reidemeister (who later married him), Neurath invented communicative techniques and devices that were to outlive both Red Vienna and himself, and which have had far-reaching impacts.⁹ Most significant among these was the Isotype system of visual statistics, a system of symbols of figures and objects that were designed by Arntz and incorporated as charts and posters into different exhibitionary media. Isotypes represented quantitative information in ways that could be read by both literate and semi-literate populations. In the context of Neurath's exhibition work, they were intended not as propaganda, but as ideologically empty statistics. Neurath and his colleagues were concerned not with a didactic one-way education of the working class, but with resurrecting the older sense of the museum as a site of gathering and debate.¹⁰ Isotypes were intended to enable informed discussion and decision-making among the working classes.

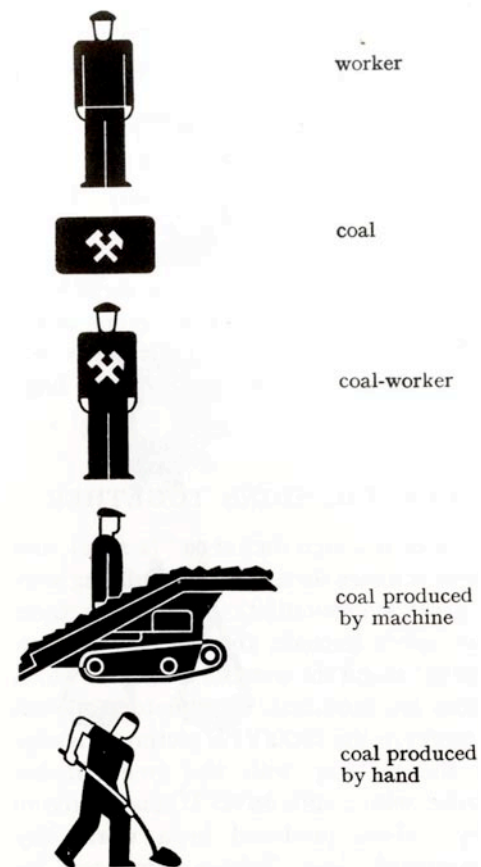
For Neurath these practices were part of a wider strategic means (involving museums, exhibitions,

documentary photography, and encyclopedia) to counter what he saw as a fundamentally bourgeois separation of scientific knowledge of things (positivism) from the spheres of the political and the lived. He gives the example of a whale exhibit. Rather than be exhibited in a natural history museum (a discrete and bounded context), a taxidermied whale or a whale skeleton could be the means by which people see their connections and dependencies – to and on other things (soap, corsets) and other people (northern fishermen).¹¹ In Neurath's vision, a rational modernism combined with scientific Marxism has the capacity to sort through things, to network matters of fact in ways that make them meaningful. Marxism, he argued, could do this because it has the virtue of being a total system, an explanatory framework which can encompass everything – and which can be directly put into practice. Together science, Marxism and modernism offer a way to shake off the weight of Victorian historicism, the obsessive and encyclopedic over-accumulation of knowledge, and to reintegrate knowledge with lived experience. A socialist modernism, in design, exhibitions and other media, would empower working-class people as agents in the construction of their own society, a world of interlinked relationships between humans, animals and raw materials. By ordering the over-accumulated knowledge of the era, it would protect the working class from 'the often disorganized educational endeavour of bourgeois enlightenment, which from the outset sees in merely increasing knowledge something worth striving for as such'.¹²

On the subject of bourgeois thought, Neurath argued,

The wealth of scientific detail is no longer held together by a unitary approach, and in a certain sense it is left to chance whether a man thinks about some linguistic formations in Chinese or about a medieval text, about African beetles or about wind conditions at the North Pole.¹³

Interestingly, this list is reminiscent of the one with which Bruno Latour introduces his book *We Have Never Been Modern*. Latour writes of the need to overcome the artificial separation of 'knowledge of things' from 'power and politics' by tracing networks of 'nature–culture'.¹⁴ Elsewhere, he states that 'Objects – taken as so many issues – bind all of us in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognized under the label of "the political"'.¹⁵ In many ways Neurath's vision seems similar to Latour's notion of things as 'matters of concern' around which diverse people assemble, and both actor-network theory and Neurath's Unified Science



take the view that nothing lies outside a network of relations that encompasses people and creatures, nature and technology. However, Neurath's own positivist materialism, which he termed 'physicalism', differs from Latour's variety of materialism: indeed it is the object of Latour's critique. Latour sees 'nonhumans' as 'actants' with social agency, while he argues that scientific positivism makes things speak while simultaneously treating them as mute matter.¹⁶ Paradoxically, it roots its own authority in the thing – in 'matters of fact', in the laboratory, in 'natural forces' and the 'silent behaviour of objects', while at the same time denying these things agency.

Certainly, for Neurath, everything comes back to 'man', and the world of things presents itself as empirical data. The science of statistics developed as a means to sort through data in the Victorian era. Out of empire came a vast accumulation of facts and the development of an enormous bureaucracy to handle them. The International Statistics Congress of 1858 marked the rise of statistics as the language of science, and the beginning of the separation of 'information' from its muddy roots in the actual. Transformed into data, actuality seems to be stripped of its ideological content, and both statistics and 'scientific' Marxism were put to use in a task Latour sees as characteristically modern: 'Sorting out the kernels of science from

the chaff of ideology.’¹⁷ Neurath’s Isotypes are one such sorting system, intended to give abstract facts visible, concrete form.

In 2005, working with Peter Weibel, Latour exhibited a number of Isotype charts at the conclusion of the exhibition *Making Things Public* at the ZKM Centre for Art and Media in Karlsruhe. In the exhibition and the accompanying publication, Isotypes are represented as quintessentially modernist, having ‘clarity, transparency, obviousness of matters of fact’, as ‘pure objects bathing in the clear light of the modernist gaze’.¹⁸ They were included in the exhibition as a ‘counter-argument’ to Latour and Weibel’s vision of a new, non-modern combination of philosophy of science, politics and aesthetics, in which ‘things’ are assemblages, disputed states of affairs, and mediation (by ‘stuff’, by thingliness) is the necessary condition of representation, not something of which representation ought to be purged.¹⁹ Latour and Weibel use the Isotype system to stand for the larger modern tendency to treat things instrumentally, as objects which can be made to speak through positivism, as ‘facts’ and evidence. Isotype appears as typically modernist: because it stands for a modernist dream of communication without mediation, interference or noise, of a pure language. For other writers, notably Peter Wollen, who mentions it in his essay ‘Cinema, Americanism, the Robot’, Isotype, as a standardized system of interchangeable parts, seems to exemplify the ways in which a certain kind of modernism mirrored the car manufacturing system established by Henry Ford, and in doing so perhaps uncritically celebrated uniformity, mechanization and alienation. Isotype is read as an attempt at a functional and ideologically neutral system of interchangeable parts: a kind of visual Fordist Esperanto, representing a modernist privileging of objectivity over thingliness, and of rationalism, positivism and functionalism over metaphysics and the figurative.²⁰

Such a reading of Isotype, though plausible, seems to splice it too straightforwardly into existing pictures of modernism. If we see the Isotype system and Neurath’s practices as typical or exemplary of Fordist modernism, or as consistent with Neurath’s own philosophy of logical positivism, the sense of it as a specific material practice that is part of a larger set of material practices gets lost. Such accounts recognize that Isotypes are intended to be instrumental and transparent, but they tend to treat them as *actually* transparent expressions of a set of ideas. Other materialist accounts would suggest that language, even spoken language, itself is material, the most famous example being Marx and Engels’s description of language in *The German Ideol-*

ogy as ‘agitated layers of air’, which Neurath himself cited in his 1931 essay ‘Empirical Sociology’.²¹

When Marx and Engels assert that ‘language is as old as consciousness, language *is* practical consciousness’ they are not arguing for the transparency of speech as an expression of consciousness, but for the non-existence of consciousness outside or prior to its material inscription. From a historical materialist perspective, language and consciousness are historically produced and transformed, so that in modernity they may gain specific features, and operate in ways quite different to those of pre-modern societies. Also, if we assume, as contemporary materialist cultural studies does, that things have agency, material resistance and affective pull, then the ‘picture language’ of Isotype must participate in this, and, like other things, it may prove resistant to the easy transmission of ideas and intentions. In other words, a theory of things needs to be able to handle the abstract and apparently immaterial ways in which we inscribe and represent things – symbols and signs and metaphors, hieroglyphs and Isotypes – as well as those things which are evidently thingly and substantial (tables, pebbles and so on). From this perspective, Isotypes do certain kinds of work; they act, and not simply as the expressions of an articulated philosophy. Furthermore, the work that Isotypes do might not always be consistent with the intentions or philosophy of Neurath himself, nor with the broader social and cultural environment from which they emerge.

Material symbols

If we continue to consider Isotype as a ‘language’ in materialist terms, we might say it is made up of a series of concrete utterances, which can be combined and recombined, can cross media, be endlessly reproduced, and mobilized to constitute different statements. There are a number of social contexts to which we can refer to understand its emergence that are more specific than a generalized modernism, positivism or Fordism. One is the social and housing programmes of 1920s’ Vienna. Eve Blau has drawn attention to the similarities between the use of standardized parts in Isotype and the ‘extensive and unprecedented’ use of standardized parts in Red Vienna’s municipal building programme. Blau writes of the standardized windows, doors, balconies and courtyards as the ‘typological markers ... of the new socialist housing’ through which the ‘discourse regarding architecture and politics in Vienna’ is disseminated. Through ‘a carefully conceived language of type’ both the built environment of the city and the symbols and charts of Neurath and

his colleagues were able to bypass the partisan press.²² In both Isotypes and buildings this meant a strong emphasis on legibility: for instance, a roof, whether sloped or flat had to be recognizable and visibly readable as such.

Yet, oddly, Isotypes are not necessarily as legible as older ways of visualizing statistics. Marija Dalbello and Anselm Spoerri have compared the representations of statistics in the Isotype charts with those in the popular almanacs published in the late-nineteenth-century Hapsburg empire.²³ There, statistics were usually visualized in organically unified pictures, often as volumes rather than quantities. Dalbello and Spoerri argue that the standardization of parts in Isotype does not actually contribute much to its legibility, since it is easier and quicker visually to compare volumes (as we do with the older illustrations) than it is to count up little figures. However, Isotypes do have the advantage of mobility: in the Hapsburg almanacs, similar codes could be used from one picture to the next (codes of dress for the different nations, for example), but the same pictures cannot be disassembled and rearranged to produce different interpretations of the same data, nor do they allow comparisons across one set of illustrations to another. The blank spaces around the Isotype figures make this mobility possible. The same figures, representing the same things, can be reproduced across different charts and also across a range of media and social contexts. Eventually Isotypes were used on charts and posters, in films and in children's books, in Soviet schools and British propaganda. They informed the development of a whole range of icon systems still used today, on street signs and architecture, machinery and visual interfaces. And, it has been argued, they introduced a new mode of reading – a 'browsing technique' available equally to the literate and the non-literate.

By making the figures countable, Isotype appears to make itself accountable. On Adorno's account, the automobile industry conceals standardization by parading the same as different through minor ornamental changes. But standardization also works as a guarantee, in industry, of uniform quality, and in Isotype, of objectivity or neutrality. At the same time, Isotypes, by being repeatable, combinable, able to be circulated and mass-reproduced without deterioration, make visible the similarities and connections between matters of fact. Similarity through standardization enables comparisons to be made between different statistical information.

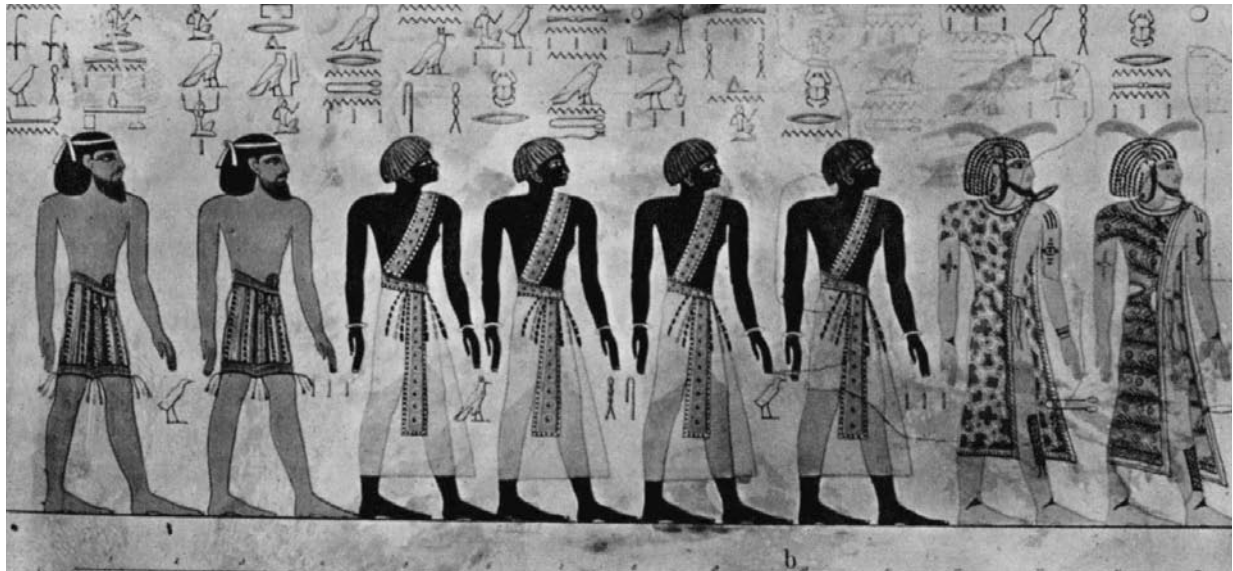
In the buildings, Blau argues, the standardized repeated parts operate as signs communicating the

use of each building, its place in the programme and in the history of Vienna. Crucially, she argues, the housing programme took the 'spatial patterns and markers of city and dwelling' of historical Vienna, previously 'resolutely denied the tenants of Vienna's outlying working-class tenements, and redistributed them, giving the workers ownership over the 'cultural symbols of Vienna'.²⁴ Similarly the practices of Isotype redistribute a cultural symbolism – a visual aesthetic associated with modernism, efficiency and rationality – to the working class. Neurath once argued that functionalism in modernist design had become a matter of appearance rather than anything to do with improved usefulness.²⁵ Nevertheless Isotypes themselves encode what it is to be modern (and rational, functional, efficient) in a set of visual appearances.

Isotypes are generally read as an attempt to rid communication of mediation, to elaborate a transparent language. Certainly Neurath himself was interested in finding a symbolic language that could present 'facts' across boundaries of literacy and spoken language. (He took an interest in, and wrote in, Ogden's *Basic English*.) In a definition of the Vienna Circle's scientific world-conception' he wrote of

the search for a neutral system of formulae, for a symbolism free from the slag of historical languages; and also the search for a total system of concepts. Neatness and clarity are striven for, and dark distances and unfathomable depths rejected. In science there are no depths; there is surface everywhere: all experience forms a complex network, which cannot always be surveyed and can often be grasped only in parts. Everything is accessible to man and man is the measure of all things ... the scientific conception knows *no unsolvable riddle*.²⁶

The rhetoric is highly figurative. Here the rejection of mysticism and obscurantism, of theology and metaphysics, is couched as the elimination of slag (*Schlacken*), dark distances (*dunkle Fernen*), depths and riddles. The figure evoked, and rejected, is the mine – the mine, that is, as it operates as a figure and an institution in early German Romanticism. For the Jena Romantics, the mine (not the industrialized coal mine, but the mine of precious gems and gold) was a repository of living, growing riches, and they were fascinated with stories of the stones and metals growing back when a mine was closed.²⁷ The mine represented the image of a world in which 'mind and matter are essentially identical'.²⁸ The Jena Romantics viewed object and consciousness as interdependent, and organic and inorganic nature as animate. In the Romantic world-view of Novalis, for instance, nothing



is simply as it appears: nature speaks to us, but it speaks to us in riddles and codes, in hieroglyphs.²⁹

Through the 'scientific world conception', even if everything cannot be grasped as a totality, it can all be known. In 1931, two years after the publication of the Vienna Circle manifesto, Neurath acknowledged the primitive, magical roots of this 'scientific attitude':

The scientific tendency to link everything with everything else, to regard nothing as indifferent, clearly already belonged to the age of magic ... unified science is the substitute for magic which also once encompassed the whole of life.³⁰

He also emphasized the closeness of the capitalism of his own time to the social organizations and modes of behaviour of so-called 'primitive' societies. But the scientific attitude is taken to differ from magic in its rigour, and from theology in its rejection of obscurantism and its insistence on empirical verification (for Neurath, metaphysics and theology are synonymous).³¹ While magical animism sees objects as subjects, positivism treats them as the raw material of data, as evidence. Against the Romantic vision of mysterious forces that link human beings with stones and crystals, Neurath proposed that everything that is not empirically accessible ought to 'vanish from science'.³² As the vehicle for the transmission of this data, language must be rid of the historical leftovers, the metaphysical 'slag' that renders it ambiguous and mystificatory. The picture language of Isotype appears as the antithesis of a Romantic world-view: in this language, coal miners are not the mystical figures of Romantic fiction but merely workers of coal, and the mine is merely one workplace among others.

Yet, Isotype is not as distanced from a magical, animist world-view as it first appears. In any attempt to

transform actuality into facts and information, thingliness refuses to be banished and is felt as an interruption, as friction, as interference and noise. As Kafka wrote, 'Written kisses don't reach their destination, rather they are drunk on the way by the ghosts.'³³ As an attempt to eliminate the ghosts of mediation, Isotype ends up proliferating them and demonstrates that the distance of positivism from Romantic animism is not so great. Aesthetically, Isotypes recall forms that have become associated with directness: prehistoric cave paintings, for instance, which Arntz was reportedly interested in, and silhouettes, a proto-photographic technique by which a shadow might be held, the image of a person directly imprinted. Neurath cites as inspiration Egyptian hieroglyphics and wall paintings – thought at one time to be a direct encoding of things and concepts, unmediated by spoken language. By Neurath's time, it was known that hieroglyphs are related to the spoken languages of Ancient Egypt, and can represent sounds (phonemes), words/concepts (logograms) and classes of words/concepts (determinatives). Nevertheless, mystical associations still clung to the notoriously difficult-to-decipher hieroglyph, and the term 'hieroglyph' has continued to be used to refer to enigmatic representations, and the idea of a visual language not subordinate to the verbal. If Neurath intends that his hieroglyphs will be eminently legible and if, for him, Egypt offers a model of clarity not mystery, he nevertheless shares the assumption of directness.³⁴ If Isotype was to be unmediated and mobile, able to transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries, it would need to be dissociated from any existing verbal language. And if language is not to be thought in metaphysical terms, there can be no recourse to an abstract system (such as Saussure's *langue*) that exists outside/before its inscription and only in speakers' minds.

The same process, the same set of moves that attempt to rid the picture language of mediation, also reduces language to the utterance (*parole*). To succeed as modern hieroglyphs, Isotype must bypass verbal language altogether. And if it does not separate itself from spoken and written language, if for instance we note that Isotype is dependent for its rules of combination on the German language with its compound nouns (coal + worker = coal worker), then Isotype cannot transcend Babel, and cannot realize the dream of a universal language. Isotype reveals the proximity of positivism to Romantic animism: a world in which stones, fossils and stars 'speak' directly, as natural symbols, not brought to speech by ideology or culture. In their use of visual style to suggest directness, modernity and objectivity, in their ability to transform acts of reading and redistribute cultural capital, in their mobility that is nevertheless always a reinscription, Isotypes are far more than an attempt at a neutral, transparent language purged of metaphysics, or a visual expression of a scientific positivism. If, as Latour suggests, Isotypes represent the 'delineated' and 'discrete' objects of modernism, they do so in the form of material utterances, propositions and speech acts, and as things which speak in a language steeped in the slag of history, and the dark depths of the mine, riddled with metaphor and figuration.

Neurath's practices, from his exhibition work and the Isotype system to his involvement in planning, worked to put things (which withdraw from our awareness) to the foreground, to make them present and to show our dependence on them.³⁵ But in doing so, these practices also expose things, not just as compliant matter, but working, as actors. Neurath reinstated material language in the form of the hieroglyph. If it seems odd to find traces of Romantic animism persisting in such an unlikely place, a place that seems at first sight to epitomize the modernist and positivist dematerialization of actuality into information and 'pure objects', it is perhaps no more odd than finding a member of the Vienna Circle in Bilston.

Notes

1. Peter Larkham, 'People, Planning and Place: The Roles of Client and Consultants in Reconstructing Post-war Bilston and Dudley', *Town Planning Review*, vol. 77, no. 5, 2006, pp. 557–82. Neurath had been approached by one of the councilors, J.N. Smallshire, who had attended a lecture by him at the International Friendship League in Wolverhampton. Williams later directed the Peterlee Development Corporation. Larkham attributes the failure of the plan at Bilston to the deaths of Neurath and Reilly and the departure of Williams. His research is based on the Minutes of the Development and Reconstruction

- Committee in Wolverhampton Archives and Local Study Collection and on Reilly's correspondence.
2. A.V. Williams, excerpt from the 'Memorandum of the visit by Dr. Otto Neurath to the Borough of Bilston, July 24, 1945', in Marie Neurath and Robert S. Cohen (eds), *Otto Neurath: Empiricism and Sociology*, D. Reidel, Dordrecht, 1973, p. 75.
3. Ibid., p. 76.
4. Gillian Swanson, 'Serenity, Self-Regard and the Genetic Sequence', *New Formations* 60, Spring 2007, pp. 56–7.
5. Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992, p. 41.
6. The interest in Walter Benjamin's thought, for instance, may well be incompatible with a 'thing theory' rooted in Martin Heidegger's work, of which he was highly critical.
7. Otto Neurath, 'International Planning for Freedom' in Neurath and Cohen, *Otto Neurath*, p. 427.
8. Smallshire cited in Larkham, 'People, Planning and Place', p. 562.
9. Also involved were Erwin Bernath and the architect Josef Frank.
10. On this conception of the museum, see Theodor Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and its Institutions*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1990, pp. 212–13; and Steven Conn's introduction to his *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876–1926*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998.
11. Otto Neurath, 'From Vienna Method to Isotype', in Neurath and Cohen, *Otto Neurath*, pp. 219–20.
12. Otto Neurath, 'Personal Life and Class Struggle', in Neurath and Cohen, *Otto Neurath*, p. 293.
13. Ibid., pp. 294–5.
14. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1993, pp. 3, 7.
15. Bruno Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik – or How to Make Things Public', in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2005, p. 5.
16. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 35.
17. Ibid.
18. Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik', p. 13.
19. On their use of Isotypes as a 'counter-argument', see Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, 'Experimenting with Representation: Iconoclasm! and Making Things Public', in Paul Basu and Sharon Macdonald, *Exhibition Experiments*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2007.
20. Peter Wollen, 'Cinema, Americanism, the Robot', in *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture*, Verso, London, 1993.
21. Otto Neurath, 'Empirical Sociology: The Scientific Content of History and Political Economy', in Neurath and Cohen, *Empiricism and Sociology*, p. 351.
22. Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1999, pp. 397–400.
23. Marija Dalbello and Anselm Spoerri, 'Statistical Representations from Popular Texts for the Ordinary Citizen 1889–1914', in *Library and Information Science Research* 28, 2006, pp. 83–109.
24. Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna*, p. 400.
25. The criticisms of functionalism made by Neurath's colleague, the architect Josef Frank, are perhaps more interesting than Neurath's. He makes the case for ornament as supporting sustained looking, and sees anti-

- ornamentalism as a stripped-down aesthetic belonging to a class that had passed through luxury, and forced this aesthetic onto a class that had not yet gained access to luxury and ornamentation, and whose working experience meant a very different relationship with their material surroundings. See Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna*, pp. 194–8.
26. Otto Neurath, 'The Vienna Circle of the Scientific Conception of the World', in Neurath and Cohen, *Otto Neurath*, p. 306. This is the Vienna Circle manifesto in which Neurath describes the group's common position as a 'scientific world-conception' both free from and opposed to metaphysics (p. 304).
 27. On the connections between Romanticism and the mine, see Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and its Institutions*, ch. 2; and Esther Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry*, Reaktion Books, London, 2005, ch. 1.
 28. Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and its Institutions*, p. 30.
 29. Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds*, pp. 38–9.
 30. Neurath, 'Empirical Sociology', pp. 320 and 329.
 31. Neurath's father, the economist Wilhelm Neurath, had written in 1880 of his own intellectual trajectory, moving from a religious (Mosaic) upbringing to become a materialist, aesthete and communist as a young man, heavily influenced by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, as well as by Fichte, Herbart, Schelling and Hegel. By the time of Neurath's birth he had formed a 'pantheistic-theistic conception of the world' and found comfort in 'mysticism as expressed in the German Middle Ages'. Wilhelm Neurath, 'Autobiographical Sketch', in Neurath and Cohen, *Otto Neurath*, pp.2–4.
 32. Though this doesn't preclude the identification of invisible forces such as magnetism, electricity and so on, where they can be empirically shown to exist. See John O'Neill and Thomas Uebel, 'Horkheimer and Neurath: Restarting a Disrupted Debate', *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2004, pp.75–105. The Neurath quotation is from 'Empirical Sociology', p. 325.
 33. Frank Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, Schocken Books, New York, 1990, p. 223.
 34. See Otto Neurath, *From Hieroglyphics to Isotype: A Visual Autobiography*, in Neurath and Cohen, *Otto Neurath*, p. 5. A fuller version is available online at www.fulltable.com/iso/is03.htm.
 35. The thingliness of things is notoriously hard to deal with, since our only measure is often our own distance from them – we only deal with things in so far as they are things for a human subject – and this is arguably equally true for positivism, phenomenology and the Romantic theory of reflection. In other words it is not just a problem of science. For more on this in relation to Heidegger's concept of the thing (*Ding*), see Graham Harman, 'Heidegger on Objects and Things', in Latour and Weibel, *Making Things Public*. As with Adorno, Harman defends metaphysics as necessary to any theory of the thing.

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The incomplete materialism of French materialist feminism

Alison Stone

According to one important and influential line of feminist interrogation of the category of sex, we only believe that there are two biological sexes because our thought and perception are constrained by the two-gender social system under which we currently live.¹ The French materialist feminists – Christine Delphy, Monique Wittig, Colette Guillaumin and Nicole-Claude Mathieu, among others – are among the earliest and best-known exponents of this line. In this article I will take issue with their position on sex, by way of an initial reconstruction of the history of the English-speaking feminist reception of French materialist feminism. I will use this reconstruction to bring out two key elements of French materialist feminism: (1) its proposal that gender can and should be abolished; (2) its – related – denial that sex division is a biological reality. I will then suggest that this latter denial damages the claim of French materialist feminism to be materialist, and that – contrary to the French materialists' claims – it is possible to affirm the biological reality of sex division and still pursue the abolition of gender. This is possible, I will suggest, if we adopt a cluster-based understanding of sex; some strengths and potential limitations of this cluster-based understanding will be considered in conclusion.

The specificity of French materialist feminism

Critics of the category 'French feminist thought' that emerged in the 1980s have observed that it is an eminently Anglo-American construction, in which the so-called 'holy trinity' of Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous rank as the canonical figures.² Among those excluded from this construction are the French materialist feminists. Toril Moi has suggested that, ironically, 'these [materialist] feminists have become less frequently translated and less well-known [than Irigaray et al.] precisely because of their relative similarity [to Anglophone feminism]: they have ... been perceived as

lacking in exotic difference'.³ The French materialist feminists were perceived to be 'relatively similar' in two particular ways. First, like many English-speaking socialist feminists of the 1970s, their account of women's subordination focused on the exploitation of women's labour within the home.

Second, and more relevantly here, the French materialist feminists made use of the concept of gender, a concept that was also central to anglophone feminism of the 1970s and 1980s. The French materialists insisted that women's subordination was caused by social arrangements and not biology, and, being social, could be removed. Thus it appeared that the French materialists adhered to the same sex/gender distinction that English-speaking feminists did, with both groups (apparently) holding that there are biological sex differences between males and females but that these do not cause the gender division between men and women, which is social in origin.

Actually, though, the fact that the French materialists used the concept of gender obscured the fact that they understood their conception of gender to differ from – and to radicalize – the prevailing anglophone conception. Delphy claims that most feminists who use the concept of gender accept that because there are two sexes, there must be two genders, which means that these feminists can only aim to redefine the genders non-hierarchically but not to abolish gender altogether.⁴ In contrast, Delphy maintains that the gender division is necessarily hierarchical so that feminists must aim to abolish gender, and hence need to show that this division is entirely independent of, not necessitated by, biology (otherwise, we may assume, the division could not be abolished any more than biology can).

Because Delphy (and other French materialists) reconceive gender division as completely independent of sex difference, they rename this reconceived division, largely avoiding calling it a 'gender' (*genre*) division. Nicole-Claude Mathieu renames gender 'social

sex' (*sexe social*), while Delphy (in earlier work) renames the genders 'sex-classes' (*classes de sexe*).⁵ This seems puzzling, since their talk of 'social sex' and 'sex-class' might lead us to suppose that Mathieu and Delphy are discussing sex and not gender. This supposition would be mistaken. To see this, let us focus on Delphy's concept of 'sex-class', which belongs within her broader account of women's subordination as presented in *Close to Home* (1984). For Delphy, this subordination rests on men's appropriation of women's economic, sexual and reproductive labour within the home.⁶ This relation of exploitation divides human beings into two genders. One is made feminine (*féminin*) or masculine (*masculin*) – produced as a woman (*femme*) or a man (*homme*) – by one's position as victim or beneficiary of this exploitative relation.

If being a woman is being a victim of exploitation, how do women differ from other exploited groups such as proletarians? Delphy's answer is (1) that the exploitative relation that produces women has a distinctive form: it (a) occurs in the family and (b) involves those exploited having to labour for their upkeep rather than for a wage; (2) that the labour that is being exploited here includes sexual and reproductive labour (in accordance with the traditional, unwritten marriage 'contract' whereby wives are obliged to have sex with and bear children for their husbands). So the economic–gender hierarchy is simultaneously a sexual hierarchy in which those who are exploited are sexually objectified. This is one reason why Delphy speaks of 'sex-classes'. A second reason why she uses this term is to indicate that what it is to be a woman (or a man) is to belong to a particular exploited (or exploiting) *class*, within an exploitative relation that is a social reality and not a consequence of biology. Thus, by renaming gender 'sex-class', Delphy intends to highlight how gender, as a fundamentally economic division, is entirely independent of sex (whereas, she thinks, speaking of 'gender' would disguise this independence, given the normal view that because there are two sexes there must be two genders).⁷

Other French materialists share the same underlying commitment to a concept of gender. Mathieu speaks of 'social sex' in preference to 'gender' for two main reasons: (1) to stress that this division primarily oppresses women (i.e. those who are 'the sex', whose sex is marked); and (2), most importantly, to stress that the division into two categories (men and women) is a social division, and one that gives rise to the mistaken perception that these categories are grounded in nature – that is, to the belief in two sexes. In contrast, Mathieu claims, the usual conception of

gender is that it is overlaid onto a pre-existing sex, so that talk of 'gender' carries with it uncritical belief in biological sex.⁸ Nonetheless, since Mathieu talks of 'social sex' so as to stress that the man/woman division is completely social, her 'social sex' is still actually a reconception of, not an alternative to, the concept of gender.

The French materialists, then, sought to radicalize anglophone conceptions of gender by emphasizing gender's total independence of sex. However, so far the French materialist standpoint still seems to resemble that of anglophone feminism in that both groups appear to accept that there are two biological sexes. For instance, Delphy remarks that it is almost always females who are exploited in the family, and who are made into women through undergoing this exploitation.⁹ This remark seems to presuppose that females (and males) exist biologically.

Elsewhere, though – more prominently in her later work, particularly the article 'Rethinking Sex and Gender' (1993) – Delphy denies the biological reality of sex. She and other French materialists argue that we only believe that there *are* biological sex differences, and only perceive human beings as members of two different sexes, because society's gender division constrains and limits our thought.¹⁰ Whenever any social division into two classes or categories of human beings has been instituted, we begin to assume that certain of people's biological features make them into members of these two classes, and to perceive those features in that light. Because in this case the two classes are *sexual* subjects and objects, we find salient those of people's biological features which are relevant to sex and reproduction (the internal and external genitals, sex hormones, etc.), and we perceive these features as dividing people into two biological sexes. In short, gender (or 'sex-class') determines sex, or to be precise determines our belief in and perceptions of sex, which for the French materialists is all that there *is* to sex.

The French materialists are not denying that some people have, among other properties, breasts, vaginas, wombs, and so on, while others have penises, testicles, and so on. Rather, the French materialists are claiming that society and not nature makes these features salient, and that society and not nature causes us to define those with breasts and vaginas (etc.) as members of one sex, those with penises and testicles (etc.) as members of another. All this illuminates a third reason why Delphy and Mathieu use terms such as 'sex-class' and 'social sex': they do so because, in their view, gender-class membership determines what sex one is perceived to be and so, effectively, what

sex one *is*. (Moreover, this means that Delphy's claim that it is almost always females who are exploited and thereby made into women in the domestic mode of production, while males almost always exploit and become men, must be qualified. She herself comments that it 'remains to be proven ... that women are (also) females, and that men are (also) males'.¹¹ As this comment hints, Delphy should, consistently, say that it is almost always those who have certain bodily features – wombs, breasts, and so on – who are exploited and are thereby made into women *and* into females, but who are not females prior to being exploited.

Thus, the French materialists again differed from most anglophone gender feminists in that the former denied, while the latter affirmed, that sex difference is a biological reality. This difference went largely unnoticed in the initial English-speaking reception of French materialists (perhaps because that reception focused almost exclusively on Delphy's *Close to Home*, in which, as I mentioned, her questioning of the category of biological sex was not yet so well developed). In any event, during the 1990s, many anglophone feminists themselves came to believe that sex is just as much of a 'social construction' as gender, due largely to the influence of Judith Butler (herself significantly influenced by Monique Wittig). By a circuitous route, anglophone feminism has, as it were, caught up with French materialism.

But should the French materialist feminists' denial of biological sex be accepted? I will argue not, and specifically that their position that gender determines sex undermines their claim to be materialist. I will go on to suggest that feminists can accept that sex is a biological reality *and* follow the French materialists in pursuing the abolition and not merely the restructuring of gender.

How to have sex without gender

Delphy explains, as follows, in what the French materialists take their 'materialism' to consist. Materialism, she says, is the view that: (1) 'the way in which life is materially produced and reproduced is the base of the organization of all societies';¹² (2) the social relations under which the production and reproduction of life takes place are always relations in which one class exploits the work of another;¹³ (3) historical change results from changes in these relations of exploitation;¹⁴ and (4) what ideas and beliefs people hold depends on these exploitative social relations, which people's ideas reflect.¹⁵ Evidently, then, 'materialism' for Delphy means 'Marxism', which she is extending so as to analyse women's oppression as consisting at root

in material exploitation. Thus, for Delphy, 'materialist' feminism holds that the material exploitation of women by men is primary and that ideas about men's and women's 'natures' or proper roles, and the belief that there are two sexes corresponding to the two genders, are secondary consequences of this exploitation.¹⁶

It may be argued that 'materialism' as Delphy defines it is not fully materialist. The Italian Marxist Sebastiano Timpanaro argues that the traditional self-understanding of Marxism as 'materialist' in respect of its recognition of the primacy of economic life (an understanding which Delphy evidently endorses) makes Marxism into a theory that is *not* completely materialist.¹⁷ This is, Timpanaro argues, because Marxism so understood takes it that humans relate to nature solely by working on it actively, which ignores how natural environments condition human life and how we human beings are conditioned by our own biological nature, a nature which gives us strictly limited powers and makes us insurmountably subject to ill health, old age and death. To be fully materialist, Marxism must acknowledge these facts, Timpanaro claims. Extending his claims, we might say that part of our biological nature as limited, finite beings is that we reproduce sexually – we are neither immortal nor capable of asexual reproduction – so that to be fully materialist, French materialist feminism would have to acknowledge this biological reality of sexed reproduction and, concomitantly, of the sex division. (Ironically, Timpanaro himself does not mention sex difference among the limiting aspects of human nature.)

But, of course, Delphy and her co-workers would deny that sex division *is* a biological reality. In their view, we only believe in this division because there is a socially instituted gender division. One of the clearest statements of the materialist feminist argument on this point comes from Monique Wittig. Wittig denies that any physical property or group of physical properties in itself makes someone male or female. Rather, certain physical properties – those which enable heterosexual sex and reproduction – are only believed to make people sexed against the background of particular assumptions about gender – namely, assumptions that women's role is to have reproductive sex with men and bring up men's children. These assumptions derive from the material relation of women's sexual, reproductive and economic exploitation by men within the family. Wittig says:

What we believe to be a ... direct perception [of someone's sex] is only a sophisticated and mythic construction ... which reinterprets physical features

(in themselves neutral ...) through the network of [social] relationships in which they are perceived.¹⁸

According to Wittig, because our social arrangements produce an expectation that women and men should have heterosexual sex and reproduce, we come to find the properties that enable heterosexual sex and reproduction salient and to classify people in terms of just these properties; hence, we come to regard people as 'sexed'. She sums up: 'It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary.'¹⁹



There are problems with Wittig's argument. To see these problems, we first need to recognize two features of this argument. (1) Wittig's argument presupposes that people do have certain physical properties – the genitals, sex glands, sex hormones, and so on – which, together, really do enable people to engage in reproductive sex. More precisely, (most) people have either the set of physical properties which enables them to play the 'male' role in reproductive sex (that is, to be able to get erections, ejaculate, etc.) or the set of physical properties which enables them to play the 'female' role (to be able to ovulate, enclose penises vaginally, etc.). (2) Part of Wittig's argument is the claim that there is a social norm specifying that men

and women should have reproductive sex. But for it to be possible for reproduction to become a social norm, the sets of properties that enable reproductive sex must occur together fairly regularly – regularly enough that this co-occurrence cannot be accidental but must be caused by the properties encouraging one another's presence. (For instance, having XX chromosomes encourages a human embryo to form ovaries, which, in turn, tend to secrete relatively high quantities of oestrogen, which, in turn, encourages the growth of female genitals.) Unless these properties encouraged one another's presence in this way, a norm prescribing reproduction could not become as firmly and widely established as it has.

Now, according to one account from philosophy of biology, when certain biological properties tend to occur together, and when this happens non-accidentally (because these properties encourage one another's presence), *and* when the co-occurrence of these properties has important causal effects (in this case, enabling individuals to play one or the other role in reproductive sex), then those properties form a cluster. The initial point of this account from philosophy of biology is to specify that things belong to a natural kind when they have most of the properties in a given cluster.²⁰ But to apply this analysis within the context of sex, individuals belong to either the male or female 'kind' – or sex – when they have enough of the properties in either the 'male' or 'female' clusters.²¹ (On this cluster model, individuals do not have to have *all* of the properties in the relevant cluster to be male or female – for instance, one can be female while having had a mastectomy or while being a post-operative male-to-female transsexual who lacks XX chromosomes.)²²

So Wittig's claim that there is a social norm prescribing reproduction, when put together with her presupposition that some sets of bodily properties enable reproductive sex, already implies that these properties are clustered. And given that these properties are clustered and, specifically, form two clusters each relating to a different reproductive role, (most) individuals are male or female, depending on whether they have more of the properties in one or the other cluster. So contrary to what Wittig claims, her own arguments imply that most people are biologically male or female, regardless of what gender divisions society erects.²³

Delphy would be worried by my criticisms of Wittig. She argues that if there really is a biological division between the two sexes, then people will inescapably be led to classify one another by sex and will then, in any possible society, use the sex division as a basis for

assigning different social roles, and different types of work and activity, to differently sex-classified people. And in practice it is unlikely that any such division of labour could ever be other than hierarchical. Delphy's worry, then, is that if two sexes exist then there must be two hierarchically organized social genders as well.²⁴

I would suggest that this worry need not arise if we understood sex, as I have very briefly proposed, to be a matter of having enough of the properties in one or the other cluster. On this view someone can be female or male by having enough but not all of the properties in the relevant cluster and, in fact, while having some of the properties of the other sex as well. Consider again here a post-operative male-to-female transsexual who has the XY chromosomes that form part of the 'male' cluster. This does not prevent that person from being female, as long as they have enough of the properties in the 'female' cluster and do not also have enough of the properties in the 'male' cluster to be male.²⁵

Now, if we had this understanding of sex in the background when we classified one another by sex, then our classifications would not imply that all females should be expected to act in one set of ways that is systematically different from how all males should act. This implication would not follow, because our classifications would be based on recognition that females (and males) differ greatly from one another in terms of which, or how many, they have of the properties in the relevant cluster. (This would contrast with the current situation, in which our classifications tend to be based on a misplaced expectation that all females – or males – should have all of the relevant properties or should invariably have one single supposedly sex-defining property, such as XX chromosomes.) Additionally, if a cluster-based conception of sex were in the background, then our classifications would be based on recognition that females and males can be more or less similar to one another physically (because females often have some of the properties of males, and vice versa). In this situation, then, we would have no reason to expect all females to act alike and all males to act alike. We would therefore have no reason either to allocate all females to one position within a division of labour and males to another. Thus, if this cluster-based understanding of sex came to prevail, then sex could be, and be acknowledged to be, a biological reality without this having to lead, as Delphy fears it would, to an undesirably gender-divided society. Contrary to Delphy and her co-workers, it is possible to affirm the biological reality of sex *and* to pursue the abolition of gender.

Materialism of sex, idealism of nature

At least two worries might be raised concerning the cluster-based model of sex. First, this model might seem to imply that some individuals are more female (or more male) than others in virtue of having more of the properties in the relevant cluster. But potentially the idea that some people are more female (or male) than others is in itself normative, suggesting that it is desirable to be as female (or male) as possible. And if so, then sex classifications *would* lead to a gender division – for if a sharp sex dimorphism were considered desirable, then it would also be considered desirable to differentiate the sexes further by constraining them to act in systematically different ways, with those people who are less female (or male) than others being expected to conform to this gender-dimorphic pattern as best they can.

However, even if the cluster model does indeed imply that some individuals are more female or male than others, this model does not in itself suggest that being highly female or male is desirable. Only against the background of a two-gender social system does it make sense to regard being highly female or male as desirable. Within this system, where all individuals are expected to conform to one of two opposed genders, being highly female or male appears desirable because it seems to enhance people's ability to realize their assigned gender. But were we to eliminate the two-gender system (as I have suggested we can, in principle), the cluster model would cease to carry these invidious normative implications.

In any case, the cluster model need not be interpreted as implying that some individuals are more female or more male than others. Instead, the model can be interpreted as stating that anyone who has enough properties from the relevant cluster crosses a threshold into belonging to that sex, where all those who cross this threshold²⁶ are equally as female or male as one another (irrespective of whether they have, say, all of the properties of their sex, most of these properties, or just some of them). As Natalie Stoljar says of this interpretation of cluster concepts, 'once an individual satisfies enough of the features in the concept, it is fully fledged; there is no room for satisfying the concept to a greater degree.'²⁷

A second worry about the cluster model is that it treats sex in humans as the same as sex in other animal species. Certainly, the particular ranges of properties that are relevant to being a human female or a human male may well differ, in whole or part, from those relevant to being a female or male of another species: for instance, female birds have ZW rather than XX

chromosomes, and male birds ZZ rather than XY. Nonetheless, on the cluster model sex in humans is the same *kind* of thing as sex in other species: namely, for humans and other animals, being sexed consists in having enough of one of the clusters of biological properties that are relevant to reproductive sex. On this view, there is nothing ontologically distinctive about sex in humans.

Yet this view has difficulties from a feminist perspective. Because feminists have wanted to insist that gender norms can be changed or removed altogether, they have generally maintained that gender – and the social, cultural and historical dimension of human life of which gender is part – is irreducible to humanity's natural or biological side. But if we also maintain that human sex difference is the same kind of reality as sex difference in non-human animals, then we seem to be picturing human beings as split between a uniquely socio-cultural side and a still animal, sexed side. Even if it is accepted in this picture that the two 'sides' interact, this interaction appears powerless to alter the mode of being of human sex, which seemingly remains the same as that of animal sex.

Let me tentatively suggest that we could relieve the cluster model of these uncomfortable implications by combining it with elements of German Romantic and Idealist philosophies of nature. Arguably, the



German Romantics and Idealists think that the cultural and historical domain that is unique to humanity is essentially characterized by normativity – that is, this domain is organized around epistemic, ethical, aesthetic and other values which operate as norms guiding various human activities. On one line of interpretation, the German Romantics and Idealists take it that this norm-guidedness makes human cognitive, moral and cultural activities irreducible to the causal order of nature.²⁸ But we need to complicate this interpretation, given that the German Romantics and Idealists think that nature itself contains a normative dimension. According to Hegel, all natural things develop rationally – that is, in accordance with norms of rationality – and so have a rational, conceptual side that is irreducible to their causal, material side. For the early German Romantics, nature is a self-organizing whole that develops, through self-differentiation, into an infinite multiplicity of things and processes.²⁹ On this view, nature's way of endlessly, creatively, unfolding parallels the process by which works of Romantic literature unfold in an unfinished, fragmentary way, which reveals that nature as a whole, and the many component natural things, are developing according to aesthetic norms.

On both these views – Hegel's and that of the early German Romantics – the norm-guided character of human cognitive, artistic and cultural activities is a further development and realization of the norm-guidedness within nature. As such, humans are only able to develop a cultural side because they – in common with other animals – are organisms whose organization is norm-guided (as part of nature's overall norm-guided self-organization), a norm-guidedness that can be developed into further cultural forms. Even if our cultural activities affect and change our natural, organic side, then, they cannot alter its basic mode of being *as* natural and organic, for these cultural activities could not exist unless our organic nature persisted as the soil out of which they are constantly regenerated. Humans, qua cultural, must also be natural and organic. Moreover, for Hegel and the German Romantics, an essential part of the character of higher organisms is that they reproduce sexually and are differentiated into two sexes with different roles in reproduction³⁰ (which need not imply that every single higher organism must be unambiguously sexed). On these grounds one might suggest, following Romantic and Idealist *Naturphilosophie*, that sex in humans must be the same kind of thing as sex in (other) animals because humans, although unique in respect of their cultural activities, can only be unique in this respect

because they retain an organic, and sexed, nature in common with other higher animals.

The French materialist feminists conceived their account of sex as materialist in that it treated gender as a socio-economic reality which is not merely independent of biology but, indeed, constructs sex out of non-sexed biology. I have argued that a more completely materialist feminism would recognize sex to be a biological reality, according to a cluster model of sex which allows that gender can be eradicated. But, ironically, it may be that to defend this cluster model we need to combine it with German Idealist philosophies of nature – philosophies whose ‘idealism’ consists in their attribution to nature of not only materiality but also rational or aesthetic normativity (i.e. ‘ideality’). A fully materialist feminism may require an idealist approach to nature.

Notes

My thinking about the ontology of sex has benefited from discussions with Stella Sandford.

1. Versions of this position can be found in: Judith Butler, ‘Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault’, in *Feminism as Critique*, ed. Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987; Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, Basic Books, New York, 2000; Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1985; Suzanne Kessler, *Lessons from the Intersexed*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick NJ, 1998; Georgia Warnke, ‘Intersexuality and the Categories of Sex’, *Hypatia*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2001, pp. 126–37; as well as in the French materialist feminists discussed here.
2. The publication of the anthology *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1980) was the founding moment in the emergence of this category.
3. Toril Moi, Introduction to *French Feminist Thought*, ed. T. Moi, Blackwell, Oxford, 1987), p. 6. More recent anthologies of and books on ‘French feminism’ recognize the need to be more inclusive; e.g. Dani Cavallaro, *French Feminist Theory: An Introduction*, Continuum, London, 2003; Kelly Oliver, ed., *French Feminism Reader*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham MD, 2000; Kelly Oliver and Lisa Walsh, eds, *Contemporary French Feminism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004.
4. Christine Delphy, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women’s Oppression*, ed. and trans. Diana Leonard, Hutchinson, London, 1984, pp. 24–5.
5. Leonard and Adkins (‘Reconstructing French Feminism: Commodification, Materialism and Sex’, in *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism*, ed. Leonard and Adkins, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 16) argue that because the French materialists use terms (‘sex-class’, ‘social sex’) other than ‘gender’, they oppose the concept of gender. In contrast, I think that they use these terms as part of a programme of conceiving gender in a new, improved way – as something fully independent of


sex and hence eradicable. Delphy is most explicit about this (*Close to Home*, pp. 25–7). However, I shall argue – with reference to Mathieu – that the same commitment to a reinterpreted concept of gender is effectively, if less explicitly, present in the other French materialists too.

6. Men’s economic exploitation of women in the family constitutes what Delphy calls the ‘domestic mode of production’, which is patriarchal in that it benefits men and which, Delphy claims, exists alongside and entwined with the capitalist mode of production.
7. In later work Delphy argues directly for retaining the term ‘gender’ (*genre*): see ‘Rethinking Sex and Gender’ (1993), in *Sex in Question*, p. 36.
8. See Mathieu, ‘Sexual, Sexed and Sex-Class Identities [*Identité sexuelle/sexe/de sexe*]’ (1989), in *Sex in Question*, pp. 59, 68.
9. Delphy concedes that some younger brothers and male agricultural workers are also exploited by male heads of household. (Her account of the domestic mode of production is based on her studies of French agricultural families.)
10. Sometimes the French materialists follow Simone de Beauvoir in holding that only women are seen as ‘the sex’, defined by their genitals as members of a class, whereas men are seen as sexually unmarked. But elsewhere the materialists claim that *all* individuals are seen as sexed because of the existence of a gender division. For instance, Guillaumin claims that, given gender, people’s reproductive organs are treated as the ‘sign’ or ‘mark’ of their (sex-)class membership. ‘The Practice of Power and Belief in Nature’ (1978), in *Sex in Question*, p. 107.
11. *Close to Home*, p. 24.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 212–13.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 159, 212–13. According to Guillaumin, the idea of natural sex is just ‘the mental form taken by certain determined social relationships’ (‘Practice of Power’, p. 74).
16. However, suppose we ask Delphy *why* it is almost always those who have wombs, breasts, etc. who are exploited. Plausibly, this is because of the prevalence of certain *beliefs* about what tasks/social positions it is appropriate for people who have those bodily properties to do/occupy. That is, certain beliefs or ideas look like preconditions, not merely consequences, of the exploitative social relation. Delphy objects that granting ideas this much status is ‘idealism’, but arguably a viable feminist analysis just has to be more ‘idealistic’ than Delphy wishes. For unless we grant ideas and beliefs this preconditional status, then it looks as if it must be the sheer fact of possessing wombs, breasts, etc. which tends to render their possessors liable to exploitation. In short, we would have returned to the very biological determinism from which Delphy seeks to distance herself.
17. Sebastiano Timpanaro, *On Materialism* (1970), trans. Lawrence Garner, New Left Books, London, 1975, ch. 1.
18. Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Beacon Press, Boston MA, 1992, pp. 11–12. Wittig stresses that the domestic mode of production is not only patriarchal but also, equally fundamentally, heteronormative. This mode of production, under which women must work for their husbands, needs women to

- be tied into marital relationships and therefore requires women and men to be heterosexual, so that they will be motivated to contract heterosexual marriages.
19. Ibid., p. 25.
 20. For this account, see Richard Boyd, 'How to Be a Moral Realist', in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1988), pp. 96–9.
 21. This account of the clusters of properties involved in sex might seem circular, since it says that someone is male (or female) if they have enough of the 'male' (or 'female') cluster of properties. But I am speaking of the 'male' (or 'female') cluster only as a shorthand for all the relevant properties – e.g. XY chromosomes, penis, prostate gland, etc. – so that listing all these properties would remove the circularity. However, I have also said that part of what makes these properties a cluster is that they enable those who have them to play the 'male' (or 'female') role in reproduction. Again, this circularity can be removed if we spell out all the elements of that role, e.g. production, storing and ejaculation of sperm, capacity for erection, etc. Let me stress, I am not claiming here that what it is to be female or male is to be able to play the relevant role in reproductive sex. (This would exclude those who are too old or young to reproduce or who are infertile, and would, problematically, imply that males and females ought to realize their natures by engaging in reproductive, heterosexual activity.) Rather, to be female or male is to have enough of the relevant cluster of properties, where part – but only part – of what makes these properties cluster is that, together, they generally support particular kinds of reproductive activity in people of suitable age (unless causes of infertility are present). So one could be female or male by having enough of these properties while not having enough, or the right combination of, properties to be able to contribute to reproduction.
 22. I explain this cluster-based approach to sex more fully in my *An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007.
 23. To clarify: Wittig accepts that some individuals have breasts, vaginas, etc. while others have penises, testicles, etc., but she denies that these biological properties as such suffice to make those individuals sexed. Yet, contrary to her intentions, Wittig's own claims imply that individuals' possession of those properties *does* make them biologically sexed.
 24. Delphy, 'Rethinking Sex and Gender', pp. 37–40.
 25. Those with enough properties from both clusters to be both female and male are hermaphroditic (e.g. they might have one ovary and one testis, produce both egg and sperm cells and develop internal and external genitals which mix male and female attributes).
 26. Unless they also cross the threshold into the other sex, in which case they are hermaphroditic.
 27. Natalie Stoljar, 'Essence, Identity, and the Concept of Woman', in *Philosophical Topics*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1995, p. 285. Stoljar contrasts this to the view that those who have crossed the threshold into femaleness/maleness (or into 'womanness', the subject of Stoljar's interest) can be female/male to greater or lesser degrees.
 28. For example, Wayne Martin argues that for Fichte the fact that cognition is guided by a norm of representing outer reality makes cognition irreducible to the causal order of nature; see W. Martin, *Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte's Jena Project*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1997, ch. 2.
 29. See Frederick Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2003. Here I follow Beiser in assuming continuity between early German Romanticism and the Idealism of the earlier Schelling and of Hegel.
 30. See, for instance, Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Petersen, SUNY Press, Albany, 2004, pp. 36, 40–42.

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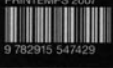
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Sexmat, revisited

Stella Sandford

As a genre of intellectual production, ‘feminist theory’ emerged in the 1980s, hot on the heels of the criticisms of the white Eurocentrism and heterosexism of classic second-wave writing. The conjunction of these criticisms and the growing influence of various philosophical and psychoanalytic theoretical elements developed, in one strand of feminist theory, into a questioning of the foundational categories of feminist theory and politics itself: ‘sexual difference’, ‘woman’ and ‘man’. In particular, under the influence of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in specific fields – notably film theory in the UK – the role of the ‘representation’ of reality in the constitution of reality itself became a central concern. In feminist theory, then, this meant a concern with the constitutive role of the ‘representation’ of sexual categories and a denial that these categories – ‘man’, ‘woman’ – referred unproblematically to a pre-linguistic, pre-social reality. ‘Woman’ was not to be taken for granted; the construction of ‘woman’ as a category was, instead, to be explained. This position was retrospectively characterized as ‘constructivist’ or anti-essentialist, though feminist anti-essentialism is by no means reducible to this strand of feminist theory.¹

Despite the unsurprising scepticism, if not hostility, of some Marxist and socialist feminist theorists (for example, Michèle Barrett – at least for a while – as discussed below) to these allegedly idealistic new developments, many of these ‘constructivists’ conceived of their theoretical project as part of the ongoing attempt to bring Marxist and feminist theory together. In the UK the relatively short-lived but academically high-profile journal *m/f* was for a while the main place of publication for this strand of feminist theory. In the first number of the journal (1978) its intellectual-political *raison d’être* explicitly concerns the development of Marxist feminism.² Even so, by the mid-1980s, the first introductions to ‘feminist theory’ were distinguishing between Marxist and socialist feminism, on the one hand, and psychoanalytic and ‘poststructuralist’ feminisms, on the other. Radical feminism and liberal feminism were the other two main strands identified, though radical feminism, identified with its US variant, was already generally seen

as a thing of the past. With this distinction, theoretical innovations concerning the basic categories of feminist theory – man, woman, male, female, sex, gender – were mostly presumed to be the preserve of psychoanalytic and poststructuralist (including Foucauldian and Derridean) feminists.

This categorization overlooks the fact that the most far-reaching attempts to reconsider the foundational categories of feminism came – in the 1980s, continuing into the 1990s – in the work of the French materialist (and methodologically Marxist) feminists, most famously Christine Delphy and Monique Wittig.³ In contemporary anglophone feminist theory the dominant reception of one of the most important aspects of this work – its systematic questioning of the category of sex – has been mediated through its transformation in the work of Judith Butler.⁴ This questioning is now usually framed, in a predominantly philosophical debate, in the following way: Is there such a thing as ‘sex’? Does sex exist?

This article revisits some emblematic moments in the short history of the relations between Marxist and feminist theory to reconsider the pertinence of the questioning of the category of sex for that relation. It aims to clarify the specificity of the French materialist feminists’ part in this questioning in order to criticize the form that the debate over ‘sex’ now tends to take and to explain some of the problems with it.⁵

The reproduction of sex

The problems for a Marxist feminism are well known. Can historical materialism give an account of the specificity of women’s oppression? Relatedly – to the extent that the sexual division of labour founded on the different roles of men and women in biological reproduction is part of women’s oppression – what is the relation between social and biological reproduction?

Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*, first published in 1970, proposed bold answers to these questions. Although it is little read today, aspects of *The Dialectic of Sex* are, surprisingly perhaps, instructive as a way into the contemporary debate about ‘sex’. Firestone addressed the problem of a properly *feminist*

materialist analysis of sex by reformulating it. Rather than asking how to fit sex and biological reproduction into materialist analysis, she asked how materialist analysis must be adapted when sex is prioritized analytically. Firestone's aim was 'to develop a materialist view of history based on sex itself', a project she conceived as a transformative expansion of historical materialism, claiming to follow the analytic method of Marx and Engels. 'We shall need a sexual revolution much larger than – inclusive of – a socialist one to truly eradicate all class systems', Firestone wrote, and as the theoretician of this revolution she claimed to take the class analysis of Marx and Engels one step further, 'to its roots in the biological division of the sexes'.⁶ There is, Firestone claimed, 'a whole sexual substratum of the historical dialectic' that Marx and Engels perceived only dimly, if at all. Reformulating Engels's definition of historical materialism, the main thesis of *The Dialectic of Sex* is that

The sexual-reproductive organization of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of economic, juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical and other ideas of a given historical period.⁷

The 'dialectic of sex' is the 'great moving power of all historical events'.⁸

For Firestone economic class analysis needed to be given its basis in what she called 'sex class' analysis. Unlike economic class, sex class – by which she seems to mean the oppressive social form of relations between men and women – 'sprang from a biological reality', 'the sexual division itself'.⁹ Radical feminism, she argued, was the first truly materialist analysis of socio-economic forms and their forms of oppression because it was the first to acknowledge this real basis. And although this insistence on the analytic priority and explanatory function of sex is typical of certain radical feminist accounts of women's oppression, what follows in Firestone's account is not. On the main points that constitute her distinctive contribution to feminist theory she finds herself in opposition to the mainstream of US radical feminism.

The biological reality of sex division is, she argues, in itself fundamentally oppressive: 'men and women were created different, and not equal', and '[t]he immediate assumption of the layman that the unequal division of the sexes is "natural" may be well-founded'.¹⁰ Women's role in reproduction is fundamentally oppressive; that is, nature is woman's first oppressor. The reproductive functions that define sex division neces-

sitate the development of a sex class system based on domination – what others called 'patriarchy' – until such time as women are freed from this role. This natural-biological problem becomes a political problem – as it is now – when our capacity to overcome it exists but is not exploited. Sex is a natural material condition constraining and limiting human possibility, but 'now, for the first time in history, technology has created real preconditions for overthrowing these oppressive "natural" conditions, along with cultural reinforcements'.¹¹ Existing (natural) relations of reproduction will soon be in conflict with the material (artificial) means of reproduction at our disposal, creating the conditions for a sexual revolution, the transformations of which are necessary for the liberation of all, not just women. Thus Firestone's first revolutionary demand is 'the freeing of women from the tyranny of reproduction by every means possible [ultimately, artificial, ex-utero reproduction], and the diffusion of the child-rearing role to the society as a whole, men as well as women.' In the post-revolutionary period, when we will discover whether such a thing as the 'instinct for pregnancy' really exists – Firestone doubts that it does – 'pregnancy ... would be indulged in, if at all, only as a tongue-in-cheek archaism'. Let me be blunt, Firestone writes: 'Pregnancy is barbaric ... the temporary deformation of the body of the individual for the sake of the species.' For this reason revulsion at the sight of the pregnant female body, the waning of male sexual desire for the pregnant woman, is, she says, a wholly natural phenomenon, not a cultural habit.¹² If, for Marx, the human species first distinguishes itself from other animals through the social production of the means of subsistence (social-historical reproduction), for Firestone women are effectively still animals until biological reproduction, a merely natural phenomenon, becomes social through its being technologically mastered. Biological reproduction is part of the prehistory of the species.

Firestone is a fascinating anomaly in the history of feminism. Although she saw Simone de Beauvoir as her closest theoretical co-worker, the status of *The Dialectic of Sex* today is closer to that of Valerie Solanas's SCUM Manifesto, rather than *The Second Sex*. And it is not hard to see why *The Dialectic of Sex* became, in Ann Snitow's phrase, 'a demon text'¹³ of feminism. Criticism tended to focus on Firestone's account of women's role in reproduction and its misogynistic and/or masculinist assumptions. In the context of the Marxist and socialist feminist debates over the nature of women's oppression and its relation to capitalism, especially in the 1970s at the height of Firestone's

notoriety, the more typical radical feminist claim of the analytic and explanatory priority of sex was also attacked.

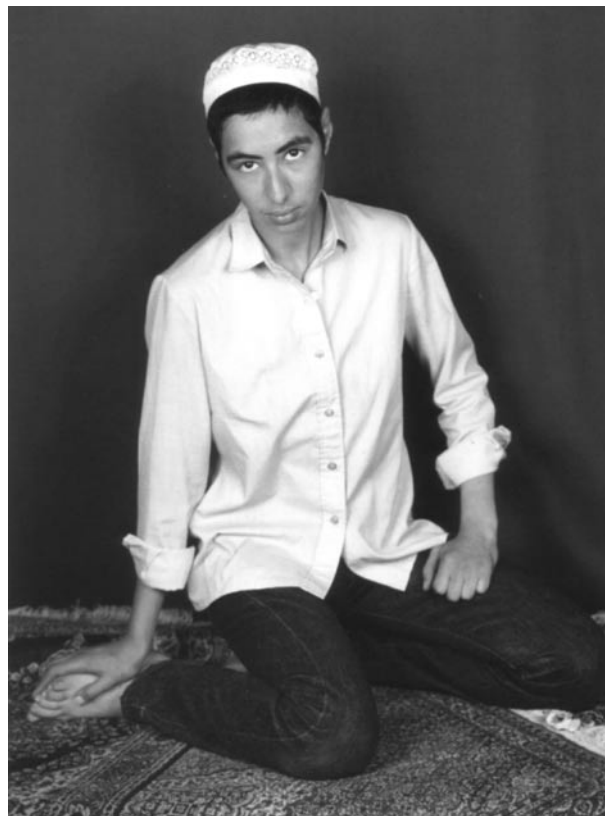
And yet Firestone was worth taking seriously. According to Michèle Barrett (in her 1980 *Women's Oppression Today*), 'Attempts to combine an analysis of social reproduction with an analysis of patriarchal human reproduction represent the fundamental problem Marxist feminism faces.'¹⁴ Firestone at least tackled this head-on. She also correctly identified the family as the central locus of women's oppression,¹⁵ although for Firestone this means the 'biological family'. The family is, according to Firestone, the 'basic reproductive unit of male/female/infant', a biological reality prior to any particular, historical 'form of social organization' and from which women's oppression naturally springs. The biological family is 'an inherently unequal power distribution' constituting a natural but oppressive division of labour on the basis of 'the natural reproductive difference between the sexes', a division of labour in which women and children, via women, are dependent on men.¹⁶ These claims represent, for Barrett, the clearest example of the tendency in radical feminism to biologism, the reactionary retreat into the naturalization of historical-cultural forms posited as causes.¹⁷ As such, we may add, Firestone has not expanded historical materialism, as she claimed, but moved onto an altogether different theoretical terrain, and despite the title of her book there is no more a 'dialectic of sex' than there is a merely natural dialectic.

In fact we may distinguish two separate claims in Firestone's analysis so far. First, the claim that there is a natural, biological division of the sexes, easily identified; second, that this division is inherently unequal and, as the foundation of the biological family, is the basis of the oppression of women. It is this second claim that sets Firestone apart from the mainstream – indeed, the central and defining thrust – of most second-wave feminism, and that is most at odds with the radical feminism with which she is nevertheless often grouped. For Barrett, as for so many feminist theorists, 'one of the early triumphs of feminist cross-cultural work' was the establishment of the distinction between a biological category of sex and a 'social' category of gender.¹⁸ In identifying a causal link between sex division and social oppression Firestone's analysis undid this distinction, Barrett argues, and fell back into pre-feminist assumptions, speaking against its own professed feminist aims. For Barrett, the fundamental problem for Marxist feminism – the combination of 'the analysis of social reproduction with an analysis of patriarchal human reproduction' – must, *contra*

Firestone, be addressed through the category of gender, analytically distinguished from sex.¹⁹

Now Barrett is surely right to question Firestone's category of the biological family – at best an ill-chosen metaphor, at worst a vicious contradiction in terms. But Barrett's position has its own problems. Her focus on the category of gender, consequent upon the enthusiastic embrace of the sex/gender distinction, leaves the question of the status of sex unasked, allowing various untheorized assumptions about sex to stand. That is, Barrett questions Firestone's second claim, but not her first. Barrett attempts to chart a path through Firestone's biologism and what she sees as the idealism of the kind of feminist theory that collapses sex difference into the social construction of gender. In *Women's Oppression Today* Barrett explicitly refers to the feminist theory propounded in the pages of the journal *m/f*.²⁰ Had Barrett's book been written fifteen years later, Judith Butler would have been identified as the main anglophone exponent of this tendency. In contrast Barrett, like Firestone, identifies sex difference – or biological differences more generally – as simply existing at a level of reality not open to question. For Barrett, following Sebastiano Timpanaro,

sex differences, along with other biological characteristics of human beings, ... form part of the raw material on which social relations are constructed and which they transform in the course of history. ...[B]iology, the realm of the naturally given, [i]s



Lafita Eshach, *Pin-Up (Self-Portrait)*, 1999–2000

the infrastructure on which human social relations must necessarily be built.²¹

Thus Barrett asserts her materialist credentials, accepting, further – rhetorical hesitations notwithstanding – the idea of the ‘biological liabilities’ of the ‘female condition’.²²

In her basic ontological commitment, then – the naturalistic presumption about the being of sex – Barrett completely agrees with Firestone. For Barrett, as for Firestone, sex just is nature and natural-biological facts are, in themselves, unavailable for analysis or further consideration. Thus Barrett’s ‘materialism’ on this question, because of her reliance on Timpanaro, reduces to a crude naturalism. Although her anti-idealism allegedly consists in insisting on the relation between the natural and the social, the natural – sex – is merely mentioned, and then completely subsumed in the analysis of gender relations, such that it is difficult to see, in the final analysis, how her account is effectively of a different type to the ‘idealist’ ones she dismisses. Thus, there is no analysis of sex in Barrett, and – despite her claim that it constitutes the most important question for Marxist feminism – no account of the relation of social reproduction and patriarchal biological reproduction, *qua* biological reproduction. If this, at least, is not an accusation that could be levelled at Firestone, it is because she, on the contrary, foregrounds sex in an analysis that seems not to recognize a distinction between sex and gender.

Barrett saw very clearly that the distinction between biological and social reproduction, which is necessary for any non-reductive account of the relations of women’s oppression to capitalist relations of production, brings with it its own problems. In particular, the need to include alternative or supplementary categories of analysis, or even systems of relations – such as that of ‘patriarchy’ – leads to conflicts over analytic priority and to difficulties, which even after 1980 Barrett still saw as insuperable, in theoretical harmonization.²³ She did not, however, see the extent to which her embrace of Timpanaro’s naturalism replicated and intensified these problems at a deeper level. Her reliance on Timpanaro leads her to the contradictory position of claiming that a materialist analysis of women’s oppression must ‘take account of the relationship between the natural and the social’²⁴ (here, the relationship between biological and social reproduction), whilst simultaneously having nothing to say about it beyond assertions of the explanatory irrelevance of nature (biological reproduction).²⁵ But this is not an oversight. It is because there is nowhere else to go with a naturalistic concept of sex in the attempt to say something about the relation

between social and biological reproduction, or nowhere that does not, finally, concede the assertion of a causal relation between sex and gender, however attenuated. As Barrett admits, at the end of her brief discussion of Timpanaro: ‘in so far as the social oppression of women rests – in however small a way – on biological difference our task is to challenge and change the socially wrought meaning of that difference.’²⁶ In the end, then, Barrett does not really contest Firestone’s second claim either – the claim that the appropriation of women has a natural-biological basis.

Politicizing sex

In the context of her criticism of Firestone’s biologism, Barrett acknowledges the ‘major achievement of the work of Christine Delphy and others ... the development of a more properly materialist analysis of women’s oppression’.²⁷ Ironically, from the perspective of Delphy’s later work, Barrett’s naturalistic presumptions about sex are as ‘reductionist’ as the biologism Barrett herself criticizes, and for exactly the same reasons: ‘they subsume complex socially and historically constructed phenomena under the simple category of biological difference’.²⁸ Indeed, Barrett occupies precisely that position on sex against which Delphy and others – to the extent that they constitute a recognizable theoretical grouping, ‘French materialist feminism’ – seem to constitute themselves.

For Delphy and Monique Wittig, for example, the ‘traditional’ concept of sex as a natural, biological given (contrasted with the ‘social’ category of gender) is revealed as an ideological misconception masking the *socio-economic* nature of the relation of oppression called ‘sex’. Delphy and Wittig redefine sex in an avowedly materialist way as social sex hierarchy and social sex opposition, refusing not only the traditional concept of natural, biological sex as the determining basis of gender relations, but also the sex/gender distinction in so far as, they argue, it cannot but reproduce the traditional concept of sex. These accounts are ‘materialist’ to the extent that ‘sex’ is thought as a particular social relation enabling the reproduction of the means of existence in a particular social form.

In ‘Rethinking Sex and Gender’ Delphy argues that ‘sex is a sign’ – not a natural fact preceding the hierarchical division of gender but the marker of this social division. Sex ‘serves to allow social recognition and identification of those who are dominants and those who are dominated’.²⁹ This marker ‘is not found in a pure state, all ready for use ... [T]o be used as a dichotomous classification, the [several and variable] indicators [of sex] have to be reduced to

just one.’ Although there exist ‘anatomical sexual differences’,³⁰ it is a social act to reduce these to the existence of an irreducible dichotomy (the production of the sign) correlating with the functional differences between participants in biological reproduction. Thus even ‘male’ and ‘female’ (and not only ‘man’ and ‘woman’, as Colette Guillaumin seems to argue³¹) are social categories denoting membership of a class – a sex class – which is both constituted by and maintains a relation of exploitation: the appropriation of the labour of one group (‘women’) by another (‘men’).

Even more explicitly – and in direct opposition to Firestone’s fundamental presupposition – Wittig famously claimed that ‘there is no sex. There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary.’³² For Wittig the apparently natural fact of sex is rather an ideological production of social life: the effect, masquerading as the cause, of the exploitation of the compulsory domestic and reproductive labour of women – women who are at the same time defined precisely *as* women through the social obligation to perform this kind of labour. As such sex is, for Wittig, ‘a category of dominance’,³³ naming an oppositional relation between socio-economic groups (or classes), the reality of which is masked by its naturalization.

Delphy’s and Wittig’s achievement here is the formulation of a properly political concept of sex. Their materialist feminism is thus a form of analysis in which ‘sex’ and ‘the social’ already exist on the same analytic plane, such that sex is not a problem for materialist analysis, as it was for Barrett. Sex division or sex class is a political category referring to a specific form of social relation, such that it makes sense to urge its abolition.³⁴ It does not, on the other hand, seem to make sense that Firestone, with a conflicting conception of sex and a reversed claim about the relation between sex and oppression, should also end up with the same aim: ‘the end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist movement, not just the elimination of male *privilege* but of the sex *distinction* itself’.³⁵ This reveals, however, both the fundamental strength and the fundamental weakness of *The Dialectic of Sex*. Its strength lies in the systematic insinuation of sex as a fundamental category of analysis. But with no distinction between a political and a biological concept of sex, Firestone’s thoroughgoing and often pitiless account of how sex matters in every aspect of social and economic life, its structural importance, falls, disastrously – and, it must be said, sometimes comically – into the grounding thesis of the inherent inequality of biological sex difference and its

primary explanatory importance and the proposals for the abolition of biological reproduction. The contradiction between the assertion of the ‘biological reality’ of sex division and its eventual disappearance³⁶ is in fact the dialectic of *The Dialectic of Sex*, the exposure of the error of its starting point.

The fact that the concepts of sex in Delphy, Wittig and other French materialist feminists refer to a constituting social relation leads Alison Stone to the conclusion that the concepts are, in fact, reconfigurations of the anglophone concept of gender.³⁷ As this posits a certain shared theoretical concern between the French materialist feminists and the anglophone tradition of gender theory, the specificity of the former, according to Stone, lies not in the form of their concepts of sex (i.e., for Stone, gender) but in their additional, and in Stone’s view analytically independent, denial of the traditional biological concept of sex. Stone then defends a biological concept of sex against Wittig et al., and claims that such a concept is in fact, after all, presupposed by their own non-biological concepts of sex.

Stone is right that the French materialist feminists’ concept of sex is not the ‘sex’ of the anglophone sex/gender distinction, but this does not mean that it is therefore a concept of gender. For there *is* something specific about it as a concept of sex, distinguishing it from the prevailing anglophone concept of gender. The French materialist feminists’ concept of sex is the central element of a specific *political* analysis of society, outside of which it is meaningless, whereas the prevailing anglophone concept of gender is the name for a social-psychological set of injunctions, behaviours, identifications and so on, basically a sociological concept which may or may not be part of a political analysis of society. It is precisely this – the relative theoretical autonomy of the concept of gender – that caused Barrett and others so many problems in the attempt to produce a historically materialist account of women’s oppression. According to Barrett, Marxist feminism ‘must identify the operation of gender relations as and where they may be distinct from, or connected with, the processes of production and reproduction understood by historical materialism’.³⁸ The fundamental theoretical gap between classic historical materialism and a feminism based on the concept of gender – an ad hoc concept in relation to historical materialism – is encapsulated in this ‘as and where ... distinct from ... connected with’. This does not mean that feminist analysis must bend its will to historical materialism, meekly accepting its terms and conditions. It means that feminist analysis needs a

new concept in the formulation of a new materialism. For the French materialist feminists that concept was, precisely, 'sex'. 'Sex' is thus not the disguised object of a gender theory, or the disguised name for the social-psychological phenomenon of gender, but a conceptual innovation that avoids the theoretical impasses of a Marxist feminism based on the concept of gender.



Milena Dopřová, *Dance*, 2003

The French materialist feminists' political concept of sex is a conceptual innovation intended to displace, through the revelation of its ideological functioning, the reign of the traditional biological concept of sex. This does not, however, equate to a simple denial of biological sex. It is therefore regrettable that Wittig should have said, in 'The Category of Sex', that 'there is no sex', for this obscures the nature of the problem, allowing (indeed encouraging) the terms and domain of the debate to shift unhelpfully. It allows attention to be diverted from the political analysis, with its political concept of sex, to a problem couched in the terms of a natural-realist ontology: do we, or do we not, find a thing called 'sex' in nature? Does sex (by which is meant 'biological sex') exist, or does it not? In response, texts like Stone's 'The Incomplete Materialism of Materialist Feminism' reassert the privilege of the biological concept of sex in setting the naturalist, realist terms of the debate – terms, according to which, *only* a naturalist, realist concept of sex can be defended.

Wittig's claim that 'there is no sex' is, however, followed immediately by an assertion of its existence: 'there is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses.' This parallels her claim that "'woman" does not exist', while 'women' – 'the product of a social relationship' – do.³⁹ Wittig's point in both cases is that the dominant biological category of sex and its terms 'man and 'woman' are not 'eternal' categories, existing 'a priori, before all society',⁴⁰ *although they function as if they are*. The denial of 'sex' is really the denial of the legitimacy of this function.

Again, it is regrettable that Wittig should have chosen to explain this with a distinction between 'being' and 'social relations': 'The category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual. As such it does not concern being but relationships (for women and men are the result of relationships), although the two aspects are always confused when they are discussed.'⁴¹ This means: the function of the dominant, biological concept of sex is premised on an idealist, metaphysical ontology, according to which the 'being' of sex and man and woman is determined outside of social relations. Wittig's political concepts of sex, man and woman, on the other hand, afford them no being outside of their constituting social relations. But it is not therefore necessary to claim, as Wittig does, that the political concepts do not 'concern being', as this illegitimately presumes that all ontological claims are metaphysically ideal, that all claims about the being of sex must be claims about its natural being. On the contrary, the possibility of a *social ontology* of sex is attested in the very definitions of sex provided by Wittig and Delphy, definitions that, precisely, make claims about the social nature of its existence.⁴²

Sex matters

The French materialist feminists claimed that the functioning of the biological concept of sex masked the socio-economic nature of the relation of oppression called 'sex'. The misinterpretation of their work as a denial of the existence or reality of sex has the same result: it masks the political form of their concept of sex. In the context of the wider debate in feminist theory, this suggests that the question of sex ought not to be either that of *whether* it exists (though it is now predominantly presented that way), or *whether* and how it can be *identified*. It ought to be the more precise and extremely difficult question of the character of its existence.

As I have said, a political concept of sex need not involve a denial of biological concepts of sex, in the sense that such a denial would refuse the discourse

of biology the right to its own concepts. The political concept of sex is political in the strong sense – both constitutive of and constituted by the context of a political analysis. As such, the introduction of the political concept of sex is, though, a criticism of the ideological functioning of an uncontested biological concept of sex, in which the latter is itself revealed as political, in the weak sense of mattering politically.

Can there be a biological concept of sex that does not matter, politically? Perhaps, in another world. But the point is: there is no biological concept of sex that does not matter politically so long as the common biological concept of sex continues to perform the ideological function that Delphy and others have identified. Under these conditions, *any* biological concept of sex matters politically, regardless of the claims made for its neutrality and its analytic independence from gender.

The political concept of sex does not entail a denial of anatomical differences, including anatomical differences relevant to biological reproduction. But part of the work of the political concept of sex in Delphy's and Wittig's analyses is to reveal how the acknowledgement of anatomical differences is overdetermined by the ideological function of the biological concept of sex. That is, 'anatomical differences', which are multiple and various, are overdetermined *as* 'the anatomical differences between the (two) sexes'. Strictly speaking, any further claims about anatomical differences, just like any further claims about the biological concept of sex, are outside the remit of these analyses. However, in relation to the concept of sex at the most general, transdisciplinary level – which is only mistakenly equated with a biological concept of sex – the political concept has the following virtue. It exemplifies the way in which the question of sex in which feminists have a stake does not concern opposing knowledge claims. The struggle over the meaning of sex is not a dispute to be settled; the struggle over 'sex' is part of its meaning.⁴³

Notes

1. For example, the influential anti-essentialism (and anti-biology) of Lynne Segal's *Is the Future Female?* (Virago, London, 1987) was not exactly 'constructivist'.
2. Some of the best known of the papers, and some of the editorials, from *m/f* are collected in Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie, eds, *The Woman in Question: m/f*, Verso, London/New York, 1990.
3. Delphy led the French challenge to the anglophone category of 'French feminism', a category which tended to include Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva to the exclusion of all other French feminists. To the extent that its reductive, homogenizing gesture made

these theorists exotic to their Anglo-American readers, Delphy sees the category as imperialistic. It is worth noting that the category of Marxist feminism is also an anglophone one. Delphy and Wittig identify themselves instead as 'radical feminists'.

4. Of course some anglophone feminists were propounding and defending the French materialist feminists' work before Judith Butler hit the big time in 1990 (Stevi Jackson, for example.) But Delphy's and Wittig's historical presence in anglophone women's studies and other disciplines is now overshadowed, in contemporary internationalized feminist and queer theory, by their mediation via Butler, for good or for ill. See Stevi Jackson, *Christine Delphy*, (Sage, London, 1996) for an account of the reception of Delphy's work (passim) and Butler's non-materialist appropriation of Wittig, in particular (pp. 136–7).
5. This article is a revised version of a paper given at the *Radical Philosophy* Conference, 'Materials and Materialism', 12 May 2007, incorporating a response to Alison Stone's paper 'The Incomplete Materialism of French Materialist Feminism', which is also published in this issue of *Radical Philosophy*, above.
6. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1972, p. 20. See also pp. 12, 15.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 193, 216, 224, 188.
13. Ann Snitow, 'Feminism and Motherhood: An American Reading', *Feminist Review* 40, Spring 1992, p. 34. Mary O'Brien's *The Politics of Reproduction* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981) is another interesting anomaly. A Marxist like Firestone, O'Brien valorizes the female role in reproduction and sees the oppression of women as a reactive result of men's alienation from this natural process.
14. Michèle Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*, Verso, London, 1980, p. 29.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
16. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 17.
17. Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today*, p. 195.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
19. According to Barrett, Marxist feminism 'must identify the operation of gender relations as and where they may be distinct from, or connected with, the processes of production and reproduction understood by historical materialism' (*Ibid.*, p. 9).
20. *Ibid.*, p. 87. Barrett singles out one of Parveen Adams's essays from 1979, 'A Note on the Distinction between Sexual Division and Sexual Differences', reprinted in Adams and Cowie, eds, *The Woman in Question*, for particular opprobrium.
21. Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today*, p. 74.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 75. Again, Barrett takes the idea of 'biological liabilities' from Timpanaro.
23. See *ibid.*, pp. 10–29.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
25. See *ibid.*, pp. 76–7.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.
28. Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today*, p. 12. This criticism

- of Barrett is explicit in Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard, 'Parts of Capitalism: Accounts of Women's Oppression in the Family by Traditional Marxists', in *Familiar Exploitation: A New Analysis of Marriage in Western Societies*, Polity, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 46–7, 48 fn 7. In the second edition of *Women's Oppression Today*, with the new subtitle *The Marxist-Feminist Encounter* (Verso, London, 1988), Barrett acknowledges criticisms of the sex/gender distinction but maintains a common-sensical attachment to the evidences of biology (p. xxv). She did not, however, maintain her attachment to Marxist analysis. Barrett's 'traditional Marxist' criticisms of Delphy can be found in Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, 'Christine Delphy: Towards a Materialist Feminism?', *Feminist Review* 1, 1979. Delphy replied with 'A Materialist Feminism is Possible', trans. Diana Leonard, *Feminist Review* 4, 1980.
29. Christine Delphy, 'Rethinking Sex and Gender' (1993), trans. Diana Leonard, in Kelly Oliver, ed., *French Feminism Reader*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham MD, 2000, p. 69.
 30. Ibid., pp. 69, 71.
 31. In 'The Question of Difference' (in Oliver, ed., *French Feminism Reader*) Colette Guillaumin argues that the categories of 'man' and 'woman' are 'social groups which maintain a determined relationship' (p. 114) in concrete forms – her example here is the hierarchy of wages – which guarantee 'the physical material maintenance of one class, that of men (and the children of men), by another class, that of women' (p. 112). Like Delphy and Wittig, Guillaumin claims that the social form of the sex group or class is masked by its ideological confusion with the biological category of sex.
 32. Monique Wittig, 'The Category of Sex' (1976/1982), in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Beacon Press, Boston MA, 1992, p. 2.
 33. Ibid., p. 5.
 34. See Wittig, 'The Category of Sex', p. 3: 'The class struggle is precisely that which resolves the contradictions between two opposed classes by abolishing them at the same time that it constitutes and reveals them as classes. The class struggle between men and women, which should be undertaken by all women, is that which resolves the contradictions between the sexes, abolishing them at the same time that it makes them understood.'
- See also p. 8, where, it is claimed, it is about time to abolish the 'declaration' of sex.
35. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 19.
 36. See *ibid.*, pp. 16, 180–81. On the goal of the abolition of sex in Firestone see Mandy Merck, 'Prosthetic Gestation: Shulamith Firestone and Sexual Difference', *New Formations* 46, The Prosthetic Aesthetic, Spring 2002.
 37. Stone, 'The Incomplete Materialism of French Materialist Feminism', p. 20. To be fair, Delphy, at least, has often proclaimed the usefulness of the category of gender, and on occasion even her preference for it. See Delphy, 'Rethinking Sex and Gender'; Jackson, *Christine Delphy*, Chapter 5, 'The Question of Gender', p. 115 ff.
 38. Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today*, p. 9.
 39. Monique Wittig, 'One is Not Born a Woman' (1981), in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, p. 15.
 40. Wittig, 'The Category of Sex', p. 5.
 41. Ibid., p. 5.
 42. The same kind of formulation of the problem occurs in Colette Guillaumin's 'The Question of Difference': '[T]he idea of characteristics "appropriate" to a group relies heavily upon a completely mythic belief in the independence of the opposing groups, in their existence *per se*. As if the groups of *men* and *women* could exist in themselves and show a permanence which would allow them to be defined outside of their relationship to each other... In summary, somewhere behind all that there lurks a conception of the sexes in terms of BEING' (p. 107). Guillaumin also supplies the reply: 'human societies consider themselves to be divided into men and women. In this they are not wrong, without, however, being right about the mode of existence of the two groups. For there do exist in fact two groups in the heart of society in which we live, two classes which are born of a social relationship, and whose social existence is masked by anatomico-sexual division' (p. 108). For an argument for the cogency of a non-essentialist existential ontology of sex, see Stella Sandford, 'Contingent Ontologies: Sex, Gender and "Woman" in Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler', *Radical Philosophy* 97, September/October 1999, pp. 18–29. On the material reality of gender categories see Jackson, *Christine Delphy*, pp. 116–7, 137–8.
 43. See Isabelle Stengers, 'Diderot's Egg: Divorcing Materialism From Eliminativism', *Radical Philosophy* 144, July/August 2007, p. 7.

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Analogical nostalgias

Antonio Negri, *The Political Descartes: Reason, Ideology and the Bourgeois Project*, trans. Matteo Mandarini and Alberto Toscano, Verso, London and New York, 2007. 344 pp., £6.99 pb., 1 84667 582 3.

Antonio Negri's *Political Descartes* presents two thinkers at pains to make nostalgia productive. First there is Descartes, who, following an explosion of humanist fervour that promised to reconcile man and world (the Renaissance), seized upon this lingering hope to develop a 'reasonable ideology' that could provide solace and coherence to a nascent class – the bourgeoisie – whose very existence was independent of, and antithetical to, the absolutist state apparatus. But we also have Negri, who, following an explosive yet unfulfilled desire to reconcile man and world (Marxist communism), has seized upon this lingering hope to develop a 'reasonable ideology' for a burgeoning 'class' – the multitude – whose very existence is independent of, and antithetical to, the political apparatuses of the modern state. Readers who follow Deleuze in understanding Negri as a 'profoundly Spinozian thinker' may be surprised at the degree of identification between Negri and the object of this study, first published in 1970. As Matteo Mandarini and Alberto Toscano note in the introduction to their excellent translation, the work was more than a requisite exercise for the advancement of Negri's academic career; it was also a salvo in his quarrels within Italian Marxism over the putative 'autonomy of the political'. At the forefront of Italian workerism, Negri sought a coherent theory of spontaneity to justify his break with a Communist Party set on making inroads towards state governance through available political channels. Descartes' unlikely appeal for Negri drew from his ability to maintain in theoretical tension universal insights of an ontological or metaphysical variety alongside sober assessments of the socio-economic constraints that rendered the 'truth' of these insights impossible to realize in a given historical moment. The political utility of such an evidently esoteric 'project' lay precisely in its capacity, in Negri's view, to think, conceive and talk about the political without the intermediary of a political apparatus; indeed, to make the structures and proceedings of state administration – the domain of a 'politics' whose birth pangs were witnessed by Descartes – irrelevant to the historico-ontological nexus constitutive of 'the political' as such.

But if Descartes, situated at the inaugural hinge of the modern era, was the spokesperson for a politically homeless social stratum 'caught between a nostalgic fantasy of the past as a place of the absence of struggles and an uncertain and dangerous future', Negri presents himself as a spokesperson for an epochal transition in which the terms of this formula are reversed. The theoretical value of Descartes' reasonable ideology was that it did not forget its inaugural insight – that being is univocal – even as it articulated a programme which paradoxically allowed the nascent bourgeoisie to exist with confidence in its essential separation from the absolutist state on high. Negri suggests that Descartes' late writings intimate the reconciliation of state and civil society in Hegel's project; but it is deemed more urgent to preserve the ambiguity in Descartes' thought that permits ontological univocity and metaphysical separation to be equally 'true' propositions without reconciliation. In the end, Spinoza's dogged realism, which Negri would affirm with fewer reservations a decade later, would be no match for Descartes' accommodating pragmatism.

Much like the later study of Spinoza, *The Political Descartes* follows a biographical narrative tweaked to suit the metaphysical narrative that is Negri's chief concern. Its four long chapters correspond with the key moments in Descartes' philosophical itinerary. The general argument is that Descartes' metaphysics expresses the development of bourgeois ideology as a reconstructive project rooted in a metaphysical, and thus, in Negri's view, political failure. The *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (1628) reveals the persistence of a Renaissance faith in science's ability to articulate being directly. Despite evidences of rupture with this moment following the introduction of radical doubt, Negri argues that the memory of this faith informs all of Descartes' subsequent thought. The next major step is the *Discourse on Method* (1637). Negri focuses on this work's gestation period where memory becomes nostalgia and the search for a relationship between the terms of fractured separation – correlated as mind and world, and state and civil society – leads to an honest appraisal of the humanist project's failure

to reconcile them. The *Discourse* is part of a 'war of position' against the libertines that seeks to salvage a space for freedom from their mechanistic world-view. As the impossibility of science's actual possession of the world is increasingly taken for granted, nostalgia is emboldened and the 'exclusive valorization of the I' becomes 'the basis for the (distant but not impossible) reconstruction of a hope (untimely but active) of domination'. In the book's third chapter, political science is rejected in favour of reasonable ideology by way of the *Meditations* (1642). Reasonable ideology involves a projection of the I as a valorized ego onto a divinity that is at once the authorization for, and fully absent from, the *cogito*'s efforts to make its way in the world. 'Cartesian ideology discovers itself as the political ideology of the epoch', Negri argues, precisely because authority – be it God or the absolutist state – gets bracketed as elsewhere and is thus unable to interfere in the bourgeoisie's (re)constructive project to make the world in its image. Ideology finds its highest expression as pedagogy in the *Principles of Philosophy* (1644), the main text of Negri's final chapter. There the affirmation of the soul points to a reformist project, and hope becomes faith in the 'actuality of potential'. The *Treatise on the Passions* (1649) serves as a coda, wherein the key passion *l'admiration* – usually translated as 'wonder' – names both 'the actual, immediate, liminal unification of essence and existence' and 'the fully retrieved humanist nostalgia'. Negri concludes with the observation that this reconstructive project, whose essence is productive nostalgia, is inherently unable to actualize itself fully in historical time.

Such is the basic narrative of Negri's work. Readers will see the conviction that all metaphysics is political and vice versa firmly in place; also recognizable is the image of the thinker of the epoch as one who deftly negotiates the 'truth' of his ontological insights with the exigencies of historical determinations. Each rupture or shift over the course of Descartes' philosophical development is qualified as immediately political, a qualification that is not so much argued as affirmed. Given that at one point Negri describes the political as the blend of a 'total, critical adherence' to humanist univocity and an 'appreciation of the surrounding reality', perhaps an argument is not necessary. How an adherence can be at once total and critical is not entirely clear. But since, for Negri, the domain of the political is tantamount to 'surrounding reality' his conviction that the political is never operationally autonomous nor absent becomes less puzzling, which is not to say more persuasive: if the political is everywhere, a discussion of politics *qua*

politics not only becomes moot; the very proposition of such a discourse becomes nonsensical.

And yet to read this work as merely an antiquated iteration of Negri's own metaphysics, prior to the Spinozist turn and lacking the Deleuzian vernacular, risks overlooking the merits attendant to the book's appearance in English thirty-seven years after its original publication. It is striking that a book whose central problematic concerns converting nostalgia into a productive theoretical project is, as its inclusion in Verso's latest classics series attests, effectively a nostalgia piece itself. More to the point, we see the roots of Negri's tenacious contention that 'metaphysics is political' in a dated research apparatus that itself will not fail to evoke a vague sense of nostalgia in many contemporary readers.

Navigating one's way through the book's scores of footnotes is like touring some hybrid museum with one wing devoted to mid-twentieth-century Western Marxist historical research and another to similarly dated French Descartes scholarship. The latter will certainly be the more exotic wing to anglophone readers, but it is an unexpected benefit of Negri's book to introduce the arguments of such French institutional dons as Henri Gouhier, Martial Gueroult, Jules Vuillemin and Ferdinand Alquié. Negri's recapitulation of Descartes' metaphysics is a selective mosaic of these various, often radically disparate, interpretations. In the main wing we find the theses of the *Past and Present* school concerning the socio-economic crisis of the seventeenth century; we come across affirmative references to C.B. Macpherson's 'balanced and comprehensive' reading of Hobbes, marshalled against Leo Strauss's 'violent' disentangling of natural and moral philosophy; Negri endorses the methods and conclusions of Lucien Goldmann's study of Pascal as a purveyor of a Jansenist tragic vision of the world. Each of these displays time-warps the reader back to the heyday of Marxist scholarship, and Negri's reading shows all the virtues and limitations of this moment. The situating of Descartes as a class actor, a product of the *robins* (effectively a cadre of French civil servants, and the bourgeoisie 'in embryo') watching their relevance dwindle before the rise of an absolutist politics, serves Negri's study well. The separation between state power and civil society's productive capacity felt so acutely by these *robins* finds a correlate in Descartes' effort to locate authority in an inaccessible God and productivity in an interior will become intellect. Moreover, this reading of Descartes reveals a concept of labour whose importance will become more important to Negri's critical project over

time. Cartesian method is indeed nothing less than 'analytic division and productive reconstruction'. The production of a 'reconstructed cosmos ... greater than the given cosmos' requires razing the indeterminate given to make way for the reconstruction of the will of the subject. This process can only be a matter of at once admirable resilience and disastrous usurpation. In a smart rejoinder, Negri suggests that, rather than the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the *Discourse on Method* 'is perhaps the first *Bildungsroman* of bourgeois thought'. Descartes' philosophy, like the bourgeois ideology it expresses, anticipates by two centuries Marx's own ambiguous relationship to the historically productive yet stillborn role of the bourgeoisie.

Operating by a process of metaphorical links and a keen attention to form, the virtues of Marxist reading methods have been clear since Lukács's dazzling juxtaposition of the reactionary naturalism of a progressive Zola alongside the progressive realism of a reactionary Balzac. In each case, the form, not the intent, reveals the contours of the epoch. A similar approach informs Negri's *Political Descartes*. It is illuminating at points, banal at others, and farcical in certain cases. For Negri, metaphysics, like literature, can be deemed immanently political because it presents *formally* the tensions of the historical moment. Negri's interpretation of ideology as philosophy-become-constructive-project, for which Cartesianism is an ideal model, is compelling as a Marxist effort to theorize ideology as a self-perpetuating discourse. And yet, in order to contribute to a Marxist understanding of the political, Negri's analysis requires more than a formal similarity between the philosophical terms of Cartesian dualism and the divide between state and civil society. Negri pre-emptively critical responses to his anachronistic pre-dating of the latter, socio-political division with the claim that Cartesianism is the expression of a class that is only 'in embryo'. He concedes that Descartes' project doesn't really correspond to the *robins'* historical experience, but rather will provide the 'mnemonic content' of the bourgeoisie's collective class memory.

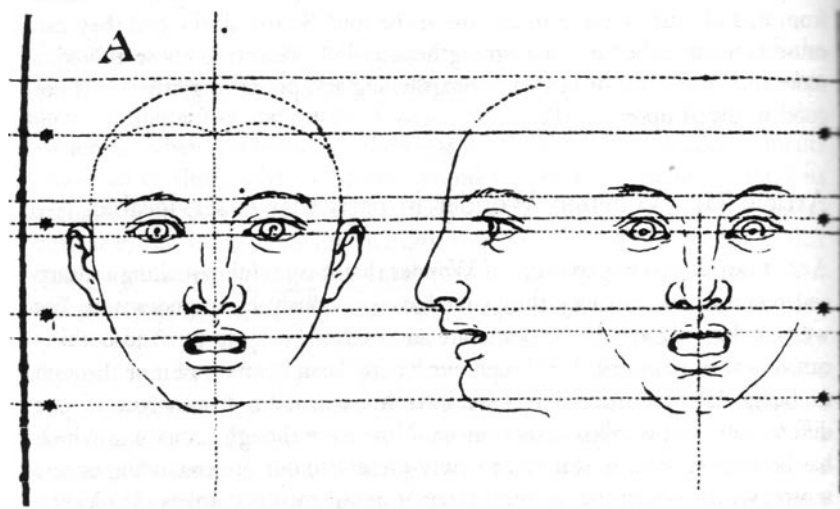
Labelling his analytical object 'mnemonic content' – thus making of Cartesianism a kind of dreamwork – permits Negri to skirt the relative dearth of political, or even social, concern in Descartes' texts and to pursue an analysis almost solely through metaphor, a method which is not only Marxist in inspiration, but is also, in Negri's view, authorized by Descartes' philosophy itself. This procedure produces some amusing moments evocative of a facile identification between forms, no less naive than the Marxist identification between base reality and superstructural ideology that

Negri purports to detest. At one point, suggesting that the example will give us some purchase on the existential angst of a not-yet-existent class, Negri cites from the *Treatise on Man* wherein Descartes describes having a limb torn from one's body and the mechanism by which this bodily experience is registered in the mind as pain. Negri's take: 'Here nostalgia clashes with separated reality. Pain is the sign of the one and the other.' Notwithstanding its admitted 'anthropomorphic resonances', this example is clearly a stretch.

Granting that metaphor might still be a plausible mode of political theory makes it all the more incumbent upon Negri to present a coherent version of Cartesian metaphysics. On this score, he maintains in the new Postface that his account can be squared with contributions to Descartes scholarship that postdate his study: Foucault and Derrida's dispute over the *cogito*, the 'limp' readings of the 'Popkin school', and Luce Irigaray's feminist critique. The exception is Jean-Luc Marion's work, berated as 'a re-emergence of reactionary thought that withdraws all progressive character from Descartes' philosophy, definitively confining it within theological dualism'. Regardless of one's take on Marion's disputed theological agenda, his trilogy on Descartes is formidable, as even Negri admits. To speak of scholarship in terms of its being geared towards withdrawing certain tendencies and activating others may suit Negri – it certainly seems to be an accurate description of his own procedures in the history of philosophy – but in the case of Marion's reading of Descartes, Negri's acid distaste seems little more than an excuse for refusing to engage with an interpretation of Descartes that is devastating for his own.

Negri criticizes Marion for the 'operations' he 'effects', chief among them the 'theological "whitening"' of Descartes' ontology, as if Marion's scholarly 'moves' were merely an ulterior agenda, rather than a powerful heuristic for making sense of theology's role in Descartes' philosophy. Indeed, Marion's concept of 'white theology' points to the deepest fissure between his and Negri's interpretations. The original French – *théologie blanche* – makes use of a pun apparent to anyone familiar with the expression *carte blanche*. The function of theology in Descartes' philosophy, according to Marion, is as a placeholder for an anonymous guarantor – a blank cheque – of radical contingency in a world manifestly inexhaustible through scientific purchase. Descartes' 'white theology' was the product of his own doctrine of the creation of eternal truths, first developed in his correspondence with Mersenne in 1630. It was this doctrine above all that would

render Descartes inaugural for modern thought by revealing the bankruptcy of the concept of univocal being. Marion argues that Descartes realized that the *formal* univocity of reason (univocal because universal in its application) cannot but lead to a concept of *ontic* equivocality (ontic, and not ontological, because at this stage we're dealing with facticity and not yet any metaphysics or logic of being) precisely because the foundations or 'authority' of reason cannot be inherent to reason itself. This is so according to the Cartesian principle *causa sive ratio*, the forerunner of Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason, which states that everything that exists must have a *reason for* – that is, a *cause of* – its existence. The key point is that, according to reason, reason itself must have a cause that makes it exist as reasonable. Indeed, Descartes'



L'admiration—Wonder

break with Scholasticism was to move from an idea of God as an 'uncaused cause' to that of the *causa sui*, that which is self-caused; but he maintains that it is God that causes everything else, everything that is *not* God, which, in Descartes' view, is literally and truly *everything* available to human contemplation or human experience, the domain of science and philosophical thought. God as the creator of reason is also truly the 'exception' to reason, and thus the site of a potential contingency that cannot itself be 'reasoned' about or known in advance.

With Spinozism, the Cartesian order of reasons is effectively reversed. As Deleuze's and Negri's efforts have shown, Spinozism very much involves an affirmation of univocal being. For Spinoza, self-caused substance is the point of departure, and the impossibility of an outside is thus integral to the system as an article of faith; creator, created and creation are deemed coextensive from the outset. In Descartes'

case, however, the *causa sui* was a deductive *result* of the rationalist principle of *causa sive ratio* when, in his quest to secure the foundation of his own existence and reasoning capacity, he applied the latter principle to an inherited concept of God. In Marion's view, Spinoza represents a kind of regression from the Cartesian advance. Descartes' genius was to recognize that if the concept of God as a perfect being involves the capacity to create, then even God, as perfect and as cause, is not beholden to the 'eternal truths', including the mathematical ones, that he himself has created; he cannot, by definition, be coextensive with them. The result is the paradox that the integrity and veracity of human reason is only granted if its foundations, theological or not, remain in essence incomprehensible and inaccessible. To make God as guarantor – à la Spinoza, but in Marion's account à la the Scholastic Francisco Suarez – coextensive with eternal truths like a sun to its rays, straitjackets epistemology in an analogical procedure whereby every theoretical pursuit can be deemed futile given that it is always reducible to a singular pre-existent principle. In such circumstances, innovation is de facto impossible. More important, this critique of ontic univocity is inseparable from a critique of analogical thinking, the epistemic enemy of the geometrically inspired Cartesian method, not-

withstanding Descartes' own pedagogical recourse to metaphors. Analogy means saying the same thing in a multitude of ways; it is not so much an iteration of the novel or of the unforeseen as it is the reiteration of what is already believed to be the case. Marion's reading of Descartes' philosophy as a critique of analogical thinking is ultimately ruinous for Negri's interpretation, rooted as the latter is in a concept of univocal being that only permits a process of reasoning by metaphor – that is, by *analogy*.

Negri's revulsion for Marion is thus no accident, and a comparison of Marion's Descartes with Negri's is by no means gratuitous. Rather, it sheds light on tensions in Negri's thought that go back at least thirty-seven years but still inform his contemporary project for the multitude. The political imperative for the multitude's move from potentiality to actuality is drawn from its ontological status as the essence of being as such, despite state power's or 'history's' rebarbative efforts

to deny it. The argument, then, is that what already 'really' is, is *also* what should 'actually' be. The ontological reality of univocal being is 'true', despite its apparent epistemological dead ends and materially evidenced obscurity. The explanation for this paradoxical, if not outright contradictory, situation – in which what is 'true' is not yet what 'is' – must either confess its own theological underpinnings or reaffirm the concept that has been the trouble spot of Marxist theory for decades, and in our post-Althusserian world has become increasingly indiscernible from thought itself: *ideology*.

Descartes' ideology in particular is 'reasonable ideology' not only because it proves efficacious, but because it is smart enough to recognize that it is *only* ideology, that it functions as a gauze over the truth of singular being that Descartes will never forget. It is ultimately ironic that Negri charges Marion with evacuating Descartes' method of historical sense, because

Negri denies any true historical development to Descartes' thought *as thought*; it becomes a dramatized series of strategic and palliative moves that obscure his thinking's essential reducibility to the painful grasp of an (historically) impossible truth. Instead of realizing the inadequacies of univocal ontology and inaugurating modern philosophy with an intense theoretical effort – certainly a plausible scenario – Descartes' 'philosophical' development becomes an illuminating exercise in damage control.

The Political Descartes is a sophisticated work of Marxist scholarship whose conclusions are reaffirmed in the current English edition. It is a testament to the intensity of Negri's own nostalgia and the intransigence of his faith in the univocal truth of the multitude that even the philosopher who did most to decimate that concept's ontological foundations can still be read, assimilated and ultimately enlisted in its cause.

Knox Peden

Abstract art

Pascale Casanova, *Samuel Beckett: Anatomy of a Literary Revolution*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, London and New York, 2006. 119 pp., £12.99 hb., 1 84467 112 7.

Andrew Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2006. xii + 322 pp., £50.00 hb., 0 19 920775 5.

Last year's centenary of Samuel Beckett's birth saw an especially frenzied flurry of activity around the work of an author who, nearly twenty years after his death, still inspires a level of respect, even affection, among both artists and critics that is almost unique in postwar literature. Appearing at the very end of 2006, these two books are among the most substantial outcomes of such birthday celebrations. First published in French in 1997, Pascale Casanova's text is already known to many. Coming in the wake of the success of her study of 'world literature', *The World Republic of Letters* (1999, trans. 2005), this typically lucid and stylish translation by Gregory Elliott will hopefully assure it of a wider readership. Andrew Gibson's book, which follows a number of essays published in the last five years or so, yokes Beckett to the fashionable name of Badiou, while surreptitiously undoing at least some of the latter's own much-debated claims concerning the Irish novelist and playwright. Each makes a compelling claim that, as Gibson puts it, 'though he has his rivals', Beckett's remains 'the most important of the serious post-war [European] literary œuvres'.

Beckett has, of course, long been the late-twentieth-century philosopher's writer of choice – he is the only primarily 'literary' author to be honoured with an obituary in *Radical Philosophy* – and both these books appear in the context of an ongoing revival of explicitly philosophical readings of his work. Simon Critchley's *Very Little... Almost Nothing*, published in 1999, with an extensive final chapter on Beckett, no doubt bears some responsibility for this, as does the 2002 Palgrave collection *Beckett and Philosophy*, to which Gibson was a contributor. The question of the status of 'philosophy' in current Beckett scholarship underpins the key arguments of both these new books, in markedly opposed ways. For Casanova, Beckett's distinctive *artistic* revolution has been misunderstood precisely to the extent that it has been subject to 'annexation by philosophers'. Maurice Blanchot's influential early reading of the *Trilogy* stands in here for the sins of philosophy in general, though the fact that, as Leslie Hill has pointed out, Casanova takes Blanchot to task for a set of views – an odd melange of sub-existentialist and pseudo-romantic forms of pathos

– that are pretty much the opposite of what he himself proposes does not exactly inspire great confidence in her grasp of philosophical argumentation. The relationship of literature to philosophy set out in Gibson's book is altogether more complex than Casanova's, as indeed *Beckett and Badiou* is on almost every level. The difficulty here, for Gibson, is how to defend Badiou's tendency to read his favoured Beckett works (specifically *Worstward Ho*) as 'short philosophical treatise[s]', while registering what in the rhythm of Beckett's writing escapes such a reading – the point at which, as Gibson puts it, 'the philosopher's account of art as thought falls short'.

Interestingly, both critics approach this problematic of literature's relation to philosophy through what each describes as a powerful 'will to abstraction' in Beckett's work. (*Beckett l'abstracteur* is the original French title of Casanova's book.) Beckett once remarked in a rare interview that, like Schoenberg in music or Kandinsky in painting, 'I have perhaps turned towards an abstract language'. Yet Casanova and Gibson interpret such a process of 'abstraction' – which both also equate to the 'quasi-mathematical' – in very different, even opposed, ways. Where they concur is in the observation that this most clearly manifests itself in Beckett's apparent 'evacuation of history from his world', 'the vigour with which he expunges or holds at bay the density of specific, historical time', in Gibson's phrase. But this is where any agreement comes to an end. For in Casanova's account, if Beckett's texts amount to a 'modernity at the level of form' they do so, necessarily, as a form of specifically *literary* abstraction – one which she explicitly relates to a 'pictorial abstraction' in painting – that certainly marks a turn away from 'the world', but that leads not towards the austere logical form of the 'philosophical treatise' but emphatically away from it. Where philosophy appears in Beckett's texts – and Casanova devotes much energy to tracking its presence as parodic allusion or 'latent framework', particularly via Beckett's interest in the Flemish Cartesian Arnold Geulincx – it does so merely as a 'literary operator', in which philosophemes are only ever 'employed' in specifically non-philosophical ways. Thus what are taken by Blanchot among others as 'philosophical questions' – 'Where now? Who now? When now?', for example, in *The Unnamable* – are in fact solely 'technical' ones.

It is not clear why such questions cannot (indeed might necessarily) be *both* 'literary' and 'philosophical' in some way. (In actuality, this was part of Blanchot's point.) However, such rigid distinction is

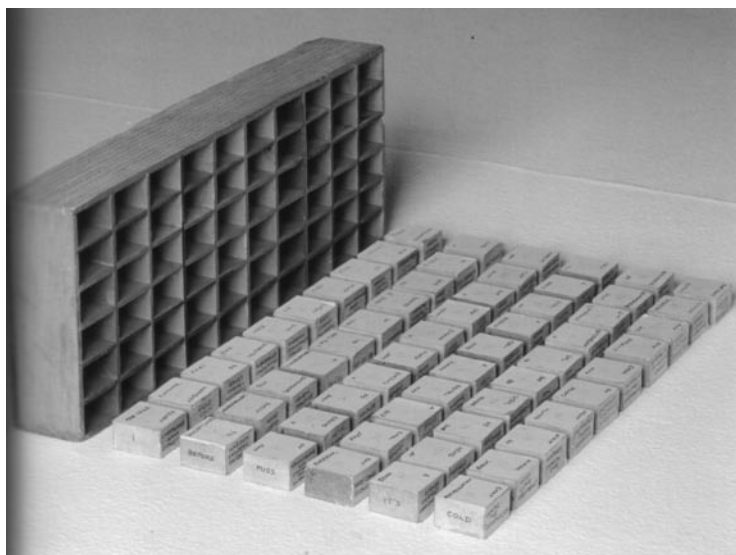
essential to the kind of clarity that Casanova seeks in pinning down the 'revolutionary' significance of Beckett's 'aesthetic modernity'. This clarity is one afforded by what appears to be a somewhat belated *formalist* approach to Beckett's writings, in which his 'project' is presented as one directed towards 'an absolutely self-sufficient writing' in a 'pure space of the text', although this is seemingly complicated by Casanova's strong insistence on the merits of what she calls 'historical inquiry'. Nonetheless, while this may well distance her from the kinds of explicitly anti-historical approaches associated in an Anglo-American context with New Criticism (and which has its fairly hegemonic equivalents in the French academy), in the end it's not so far from someone like Clement Greenberg in its assertion that, 'historically', Beckett's 'greatness consists in his confrontation with the set of aesthetic issues and debates that were contemporaneous with him'. 'History' here is, in other words, simply the 'history of a literary space' – one which Casanova (very expertly) reconstructs in a lengthy examination of both the Irish and Parisian scenes from which the mature Beckett's art emerged.

Fittingly, Casanova is at her strongest in her close readings of the texts, particularly *Worstward Ho*, which (like Badiou, intriguingly) she sees as the summit of Beckett's career. Underlying these readings is an understanding of Beckett's self-appointed task as working towards 'autonomous form, self-generated by [a] mathematical matrix and attaining a kind of abstractive purity'. This is then manifested in what Casanova terms a 'mechanism of *ars combinatorial* in the mathematical sense ... [which] attempts, on the basis of the minimum number of elements ... all the operations and combinations that can be syntactically realized'. Whether or not one accepts their ultimate interpretation here, the tracking of such processes through the later Beckett's work is masterful and overwhelmingly persuasive in its attention to textual detail.

The problems lie elsewhere. Eagleton does a manful job in his rather generous introduction to the book, but no amount of finessing can convincingly claim Casanova as some latter-day Lukács or Adorno, 'remind[ing] us [that] there is no more truly historical phenomenon in art than form, which is quite as much saturated in social significance as so-called content'. Casanova may well, as Eagleton glosses it, understand Beckett's writing as exemplary of a modern situation in which, '[f]reed from social function, art can now unfurl its own inner logic', but she has no real conception of such autonomy as *itself* a social fact, nor any ambition

to understand what specific marks it may leave upon the form of modern artworks themselves. Casanova is simply not interested in form as *immanently* historical in this way – as, in Adorno's phrase, that to which 'social contradictions' return as 'immanent problems' of the work. Mobilized without any attempt at actually mediating between them, the formal and historical dimensions of Casanova's readings thus become merely formalist and historicist in turn.

There is little doubt that, like many such works of single-mindedness, Casanova's short text nonetheless has a luminous and often seductive clarity to it. The same could not quite be said for Gibson's book, at nearly three times the length. Yet, in fact, *Beckett and Badiou* is all the better for its inherent difficulties, and even uncertainties, for its ultimate twisting and turning in on itself. What it lacks at times in elegance – and the book feels in parts, unlike most of Gibson's other criticism, almost self-denying in its stylistic dryness – it makes up for with a nuance and rigour that make it a far more richly satisfying and productive account of Beckett's oeuvre than Casanova's, for all that its



fundamental aims are ones to which I find myself profoundly unsympathetic.

While Casanova reads Beckett's 'turn towards an abstract language' as a turn towards linguistic form as such, for Gibson this abstraction is precisely akin, in some way, to the characteristic abstraction of philosophical form. Hence, the legitimacy – up to a point – of Badiou's confidently 'philosophical' reading of *Worstward Ho*. At the same time, Gibson argues, this 'will to abstraction' suggests a specifically 'aesthetic', and 'radically heterogenous', grasping for 'truth' in Beckett's work – a kind of *ethico-political* 'faith' in 'quasi-mathematical' abstraction pitted against a 'world apparently surrendered to the logic of embodiment'. If

philosophy plays a far more affirmative role here, this is hardly surprising, given that the 'novelty' of Badiou's own contemporary position rests, in good part, upon his emphatic claims for a 'return' to philosophy *qua* philosophy, against apparently more 'sceptical' currents of post-Kantian thought. Nonetheless, from the very beginning, Gibson rightly notes that Badiou's own Platonic conception of what the true affirmative 'theme' of philosophy should be hardly implies an obvious connection to Beckett. Briefly put, then, what allows for this seemingly unlikely conjunction are the repercussions of Badiou's (famously anti-Deleuzian) assertion that the 'event' has only a 'rare existence'. It is this very rarity, and the 'bleak light' that it casts 'into the shadows it does not transform', which generates, in art in particular, what Gibson calls a 'pathos of intermittency' (the subtitle of his book) apparent in 'the gap between events and their remainder'.

This notion of intermittency – a term that Gibson takes from Daniel Bensaid's *critique* of Badiou – is certainly a productive one, and allows for some remarkably original readings of Beckett's work. (I found the very striking account of *The Unnamable* as a fundamentally 'aggressive', even 'furious', text, powered by a 'sheer rage against doxa', particularly unexpected and compelling.) At the same time, it resonates, as Gibson points out, with the most immediate and familiar aspects of Beckett's work, encapsulated by the world 'without events' of his most famous play, *Waiting for Godot*, in which 'Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful.'

Yet, even given its 'legitimation' in the basic idea of the event's rarity, the connection this establishes to Badiou is a rather odd one, to say the least, in which the latter's work is deployed in the form of something like a photographic negative, whereby everything that is left dark in Badiou's philosophy becomes the light under which the distinctive shapes of Beckett's world are revealed. It also means that, despite the dutiful (and no doubt sincere) admiration expressed for Badiou's own readings of Beckett, Gibson most often finds himself heading in an almost completely opposed direction. 'Pathos' does not, as Gibson acknowledges, play a great role in Badiou's writings, and, as such, he 'tends to skirt around such Beckettian moments in favour of those he finds more affirmative'.

It may be this tension that explains why by far the least convincing part of Gibson's book is its attempt to

enrol Beckett in a more directly Badiouian enthusiasm for the mathematical sovereignty of set theory. Gibson is clearly correct, like Casanova, to see the 'bleached world of mathematics' as a certain model for Beckett's forms, but it is surely stretching matters to suggest that an 'irony' that 'strikes specifically at Pythagorean mathematics and Euclidian geometry' indicates some actual affinity with 'developments in contemporary set theory'. Even allowing that Gibson is careful not to overdo the implication of some direct influence here, the analogies are forced. For while it is one thing to dispute that Beckett merely indulges in an 'ironic mockery' of mathematics in his writings – this seems right, and Gibson does a good job of demonstrating the problems with such a straightforward reading – it is quite another to somehow find an affirmation of the mathematical (as 'ontology') per se in the manner of Badiou himself.

The relationship to philosophy itself is, as one might expect, a good deal trickier to negotiate. I am myself upbraided, at one point in *Beckett and Badiou*, for the 'by now almost conventional' distrust of 'the clarity of a philosophical reading', apparently displayed in my review of the English translation of Badiou's *On Beckett* (*Radical Philosophy* 126, July/August 2004). Yet, the complications of Gibson's encounter with Beckett require an admission on his own part of the problems generated by the fact that, in the end, the philosopher cannot quite 'conceive of an aesthetic trajectory, whether the artist's or the work's, other than within the frame of a philosophical logic, or as having a logical structure'. Whether this might in fact be *intrinsic* to what Peter Osborne has called the 'neo-classical' character of Badiou's conception of philosophy itself (see *Radical Philosophy* 142, March/April 2007) is not something that Gibson is inclined to ask. Instead, it means that his text finds itself progressively marked by a series of qualifications regarding each of the terms that it takes from Badiou's formidable system. Most interestingly, I think, it is precisely some kind of *historicization* of this negation itself that comes to be gradually sketched in the later sections of the book.

Rather generously (as always), Gibson suggests that Badiou's work 'contains the seeds' of some theory of modernity that might be mobilized here. But, in fact, given his principled 'evacuation' of all history (not only, that is, *historicism*) from thought – and the straightforwardly disastrous separation of 'truth' and 'knowledge' upon which it insists – it's hard to see how any such adequate theory could be developed from such arid ground. Gibson makes as good an

attempt as could be imagined, but it requires decisive supplementation from elsewhere – specifically, the work of Benjamin, Rancière and Françoise Proust – in ways that shift the terms of Badiou's thinking to a rather larger degree than Gibson is prepared to acknowledge. As its intriguing by-product, this also entails the revelation (previously noted by Christian Jambet) of a far more 'melancholic' conception of Badiou's own thought than would be customary; one which is, I think, not so unconvincing as might be supposed. 'Vestigial modernity' is the term that Gibson proposes as 'useful' in this respect for 'characterizing the work of both Badiou and Beckett'. For if the event, like 'politics', is 'intermittent' for Badiou, this has, Gibson writes, as its 'logical corollary', a certain 'melancholy', albeit one that should not be 'confused with pessimism'.

This may well push 'the mood of his [Badiou's] thought far closer to, say, Adorno and Benjamin than he would ever find permissible', as Gibson argues in his preface, but it then begs the question of why, given what is at stake in the text, one might not approach the vital issues it raises via such thinkers in the first place. If one wants the melancholia of 'vestigial modernity', Adorno is a rather more obvious resource than Badiou. More to the point, Adorno's remorseless focus upon (even, at times, damaging obsession with) the kind of 'pathos of intermittency' that is, for him, life under the administered society of 'late capitalism', means that he, at the very least, actually has some account of its precisely *historical* and *social* force and character.

At one point, in the context of a reading of *Endgame*, Gibson cites Benjamin's concept of the 'prehistoric' from his writings on Kafka. I would be inclined to draw attention to a rather different passage, from the essay on 'Max Brod's Book on Kafka', in which Benjamin quotes from Eddington's *The Nature of the Physical World*. 'In all of literature', Benjamin writes, 'I know of no passage which has the Kafka stamp to the same extent.' It is in this sense that Kafka's *work* is 'the exact complement', Benjamin argues, of 'that reality of ours which realizes itself theoretically, for example, in modern physics, and practically in the technology of modern warfare'. It is in such terms, too, that Beckett's 'interest in mathematics' might be understood as *neither* simple mockery *nor* simple affirmation, but as an 'interest' formed around a sense of quasi-mathematical abstraction as a significant index of the *social* forms of 'real abstraction' constitutive of modernity itself. It is this that allows Adorno, taking much from Benjamin, to read Beckett's 'abstraction' as

itself a form of realism in its relation to the tendencies of advanced capitalist social form.

Gibson is surely right to argue that '[a]dvanced capitalism breeds and intensifies the experience of intermittency as the irrevocable underside of the myth of plenitude.' Yet, it is precisely here that Badiou has, as a matter of principle, little to say. The irony is, then, that while Gibson probably takes us further than any other recent reader of Beckett – certainly further than Casanova – in the direction of grasping the full social and critical form of his art, the Badiouian system that provoked the work is also what prevents it from pursuing this reading as far as it requires. In the end, no less than Casanova's formalism, it fails to engage abstraction itself as a means by which the work of art engages with socio-historical reality and form.

David Cunningham

Maybe it was something he ate

Massimo Montanari, *Food is Culture*, trans. Albert J. Sonnenfeld, Columbia University Press, New York, 2006. 168 pp., £14.50 hb., 0 231 13790 4.

Some readers of *Radical Philosophy* will remember, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, that moment in the early 1980s when books and articles on the topic of 'pleasure' began to appear. Suddenly, the myriad ways in which people have fun – in bed, at amusement parks, listening to music, dressing up – were thought worthy of critical attention, and in particular the attention of intellectuals of the Left. But for all the initial variety, it was clear from the outset that the queen of all enjoyment was sex, the paradigm case of 'the body and its pleasures'. Sex had a reasonable claim to being, well, just more pleasurable than even the best day at Blackpool. It had the not inconsiderable edifice of psychoanalysis as its superstructure. And it put issues of sexual identity, critical to the feminist movement and to gay politics, front and centre. All in all, it was the pleasure with the best prospects.

Reading Massimo Montanari's eloquent and shrewd little book, however, it's hard not to wonder whether we might have been better off if eating, rather than sex, had provided the template for thinking about pleasure. While sex is a *necessary* pleasure from the perspective of the species, at once labour and recreation, the process of producing and consuming food is a necessary pleasure for each and every one of us.

While sex is an everyday pleasure only for the lucky few, eating is everyday for all, for every conceivable society, and its centrality is only underlined by the shameful fact that so many die, also every day, for lack of it. As a form of popular culture, food has no rival. Montanari points out that many of its greatest achievements are 'common subsistence foods' – the tortilla in Mexico, couscous in North Africa, pasta in Italy – that demanded 'hour after hour of highly specialized labour carried out daily by women (the eternal heroines of the kitchen and custodians of the techniques that define cooking), all this handed down by practice and imitation'. In what other sphere can 'the people' claim to have left so inventive, so impressive, and so intensely pleasurable a legacy?

More compelling than all these considerations, however, is the fact that the satisfactions people take from food represent a unique nexus between 'production' and enjoyment. 'The fascination of culinary history', Montanari notes, 'is basically this: to discover how mankind, with effort and imagination, has sought to transform the pangs of hunger and the anguish of nutritional privation into potential occasions for pleasure'. Discussions of pleasure over the last thirty years have tended to narrow to analyses of 'leisure' and recreation, disquisitions on the means and methods of ideology and its distinct apparatuses. But food, even when reduced to multicoloured splodges on a large, white plate, is inevitably tethered to agriculture, fishing and the raising of livestock, commanding heights of the economy that are covered over – often literally – by heavy industry and Big Oil. No other pleasure is so immediately bound to production and reproduction; no other pleasure is haunted so remorselessly by the suffering and death that attend its absence.

Although *Food is Culture* contains the kinds of discussions one might expect from such a title – on the 'grammar' of cooking and of meals, the social formation of taste, the role of food in the construction of national identities – its analysis continually harps on the fact that in this case 'culture' is first and foremost a matter of staying alive. For the 'nature' to which food responds is not a resource or an environment, but hunger and the fear of hunger. When Montanari, quoting the sociologist Giralomo Sineri, remarks that 'Canning is anxiety in its absolute state', he reminds us that 'culture', whatever its etymological roots, is not a pacific tending of nature, but a desperate attempt to transcend the animal state. Hence the tenacity with which ancient and medieval societies insist that agriculture and cooking stand for the irruption of civilization itself. *Food is Culture* is an assertive title,

but by the end of this book the reverse claim seems just as plausible.

In Europe it is through bread, above all, that culture is wrested from hunger. Montanari locates the origin of European cuisine in Greek and Roman agriculture, which robbed the cultivation of grain in the myth of Persephone and bequeathed to Christianity the holy trinity of bread, wine and oil (rice played a similar role – real and mythical – in Asia, as corn did in North America). '[B]read does not exist in nature and only man knows how to make it', and as a consequence it is endowed with enormous symbolic value. This value, however, is (as we have known since Saussure) dependent on its place in the grammar of European cuisine, the food system through which products are combined first into dishes and then, syntactically as it were, into meals. Those who think such grammatical niceties are only superficial elaborations of real needs can look at how the European peasantry responded to wheat shortages. The predominant reaction was *substitution*, that is the preservation of the grammar of bread by merely varying its 'lexical' ingredients, replacing wheat with inferior grains, fava beans, chestnuts or – as things get worse and worse – acorns, grass and dirt. Under the severest pressure imaginable, consumers of food try to maintain continuity with conventionalized food practice.

When hunger, pleasure and production sit cheek by jowl, subtle changes in food syntax can have explosive effects. Montanari's examples show how market crises and the introduction of foods from the New World restructured the food system in various Italian regions, but a more instructive illustration lies closer to home. E.P. Thompson's famous article on the 'moral economy' of pre-industrial England demonstrated that the popular food riots of the period were calculated responses to disruptions in 'the eighteenth-century bread nexus' ('The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present* 50, 1971). Thompson wanted to prove that the rioters were motivated by a cultured understanding of economy – not just hungry plebeian bellies – but the bread nexus was also the sign of a cultured understanding of food itself. For popular agitation enforced not only a fair price for the stuff of life, but also a sense of how it should be made and from what. Given today's culinary sensibilities, it's amusing to note that the 'Brown Bread Act' introduced by the British government in December 1800 – which commanded millers to make whole wheat bread only – had to be abandoned two months later after a furious popular response.

While tin miners rioted over bread prices, Kant was busy distinguishing 'the taste of the tongue, the palate, and the throat' – tastes of sense – from the taste of reflection. Objects of the former merely gratify inclinations; objects of the latter please by virtue of their form. Kant considered the pleasure drawn from food to be both private and fleeting, an incommunicable experience with no durable effect. Montanari's grammar tells us that the pleasures taken at mealtime are neither inchoate nor private, but it is his history of food culture that does the real damage to Kant's prejudices.

While few will expect a plate of tortelli di zucca, however sublime, to awaken our moral feelings, the historical intimacy of gustatory pleasure and bodily well-being suggests that food culture might be more than a matter of temporary excitation. The first printed cookbook, written by Bartolomeo Sacchi and published in 1474, was titled *De honesta voluptate et valetudine* (On Honest Pleasure and Good Health) because, as Montanari argues, premodern culinary thinking bound mealtime pleasure directly to the welfare of the body. Physical well-being in an age before cheap industrialized food was assured by 'the construction of a gastronomic culture', not by stomach stapling and the Atkins Diet. In Kant this link is clearly broken, leaving the pleasure of food, as it were, stranded in its moment. 'Of a dish which stimulates the taste by spices and other condiments we say unhesitatingly that it is pleasant, though it is at the same time admitted not to be good' (*Critique of Judgement*, §4). Kant's blind spot may tell us more about the limitations of modern – and, dare one suggest, Northern European – cuisine than anything else. It could be an instance of his 'ocularcentric' prejudice against taste and smell, but maybe it was just something he ate.

Kant's unhappy experience with spicy food tells us something else as well. Landowners and their kin could distinguish their food from that of the peasantry by the mere fact that they had a reasonable amount of it, but, not being content with being content, they naturally devised strategies for maintaining the symbolic distinctiveness of their food culture as well. When spices were a rarity they became the means through which common foods could be 'ennobled'. As they became more generally available, even to philosophers, the wealthy and powerful turned to different means for distinction: the use of butter, the presentation of fresh fruit, the eating of game, the arrangement of meals at which one *could* eat voraciously, but didn't.

None of this is news, of course: Bourdieu laid out the pattern of gustatory distinction in one of his

inimitable diagrams over thirty years ago. But the lines are drawn differently today. Coffee, Montanari's 'beverage of bourgeois intelligence and efficiency' and now the world's second most valuable export, is available widely, but in such a bewildering multitude of varieties that its purchase seems to demand the exercise of theoretical, ethical *and* aesthetic judgement. Overeating is no longer a sign of noble virility, but of proletarian self-indulgence, and the bond between physical well-being and diet is in danger of becoming a middle-class hobby. As talk about food clutters the airwaves, and supermarket shelves groan under the weight of every piece of exotica agribusiness can think of, it's tempting to conclude that discussion of 'pleasure' should focus on something simpler, like sex.

It's a temptation worth resisting. The over-elaborate intricacy of our food culture cannot be decoupled from the no-longer-natural hunger suffered by so many of those at the producing end. To that extent, a radical aesthetics of food, one that tied the formal features of a food system to a long-term politics of physical well-being and happiness, would also have to be a plan and method of food production, a plan in which no one goes hungry (and, ideally, no one dies of overeating, either). Few pleasures carry so great a burden. In food one confronts a form of culture that is not only arguably a way of life, but its means as well.

Ken Hirschkop

Voodoo materialism

Dave Boothroyd, *Culture on Drugs: Narco-cultural Studies of High Modernity*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2006. 219 pp., £50.00 hb., £14.99 pb., 0 7190 5598 9 hb., 0 7190 5599 7 pb.

The motto of this book comes from Nietzsche's *Gay Science* (#68): 'Who will ever relate the whole history of narcotica? – It is almost the history of "culture", our so-called high culture.' Dave Boothroyd's aim is to present a series of reflections on the role played by illicit psychoactive drugs in the work of some of the central figures in modern Western thought. After an opening 'Deposition' stating his methodology, the two first chapters are devoted to Derrida's thought – implicit and explicit – about the relationship of deconstruction to drugs; a third is devoted to a deconstructive reading of Freud's ambivalence about his professional and personal involvement with cocaine in the 1880s and 1990s. The second half has chapters on

Walter Benjamin's writings on hashish, the relationship of Sartre's theory of hallucination to his own brief experimentation with mescaline, and Foucault's and Deleuze's various remarks about LSD and other drugs. The book tails off with a rather loosely organized chapter on the role played by heroin in cinema. Theoretically, all this is rooted in Derridean deconstruction and British cultural studies analyses of 'subculture'. Boothroyd wants to claim that drugs play a persistently ambivalent role in the thought of all these writers. His aim is to engage in an 'experimental affirmation of the reciprocal supplementarity of deconstruction and drugs ... [in order] to discover whether drugs can serve as an "ally" in the deconstruction of the rational normality Reason imposes on thinking in general'.

On the one hand, Boothroyd takes very seriously Derrida's remark in a 1995 interview entitled 'The Rhetoric of Drugs' that 'there is not any *single* world of drugs'. Drug experience is always placed within a cultural context, even and especially when it claims to be outside it. All knowledge about drugs is 'ultimately subject to culturally specific epistemologies, taxonomies, conceptual frameworks and so forth'. Taking what he calls a 'post-anthropological perspective', Boothroyd rejects all 'pharmaco-anthropologies' that harbour 'underlying transcendentalist assumptions'. The notion that drugs might offer some kind of 'transcendental experience' is rejected as a species of the metaphysics of presence.

On the other hand, Boothroyd situates other aspects of his analysis within a quasi-Foucauldian analysis of the ubiquity of 'narco-power'. In recent times, he argues, specialist knowledge about drugs (by pharmacists, lawyers, drug educationalists, criminologists and physicians) has been illegitimately generalized, and used as a means to 'control and regulate the modern subject', with the result that '*we are all modern subjects of narco-power*'. The thinkers discussed are presented as dynamically resisting the encroachments of this global, governmental narco-power. Boothroyd connects this shift to the emergence of a 'chemical generation', for whom taking drugs is allegedly of no greater moment than having a cup of tea. As a result of these social changes, "'recreational" and "lifestyle" drug use' has become 'a pandemic phenomenon and "addictive" drug use is becoming increasingly widespread in all Western societies'.

Perhaps because Boothroyd is most concerned with reading individual thinkers, these Foucauldian historical speculations are left somewhat undeveloped. While he is right to contend that the sheer proliferation of consciousness-altering substances in contempo-

rary Western capitalist culture – substances both legal (Ritalin, Prozac, etc.) and illegal – indicates that we are entering a phase where culture appears to be inescapably ‘on drugs’, the historical conditions of this shift require further examination. He does not comment on the fact that the global prohibition of drugs in the 1920s paradoxically coincided with the emergence of a model of capitalism based on the ‘production of consumption’. From a Marxist perspective, there is a clear contradiction within consumer capitalism on the issue of drugs. If the desires of the young are to be stimulated for profit, where does the line get drawn? The truth is that Boothroyd’s methodological deconstructionism leaves little space for the identification of clear historical contradictions.

Boothroyd’s book is part of another discourse. It is hard not to think that the cultural studies discourse of ‘technologies of the body’ has long been converging on this problematic zone. Over the last decade or so, a steady trickle of books has been making this tendency ever more explicit. Avital Ronell’s *Crack Wars* (1992) set the tone and David Lenson’s *On Drugs* (1995), Sadie Plant’s *Writing on Drugs* (1999), and Anna Alexander and Mark S. Roberts’s collection *High Culture: Reflections on Addiction and Modernity* (2002) proceeded to push this convergence further. In Boothroyd’s book, the problem of drugs arrives in cultural studies with all the violence of a symptom.

For him, drugs are the most potent ‘technology of the body’ available for resisting and challenging the sovereignty of ‘Reason’. He bluntly suggests that

There are indeed good reasons to suppose that LSD, and no doubt other drugs, can function as ... technological agents of individual creative becoming. They have this power by virtue of the linkages they make and unmake between the intensive body ... and the surface of discourse. And, it is therefore reasonable to suggest that drugs could serve the undertaking of making the subject-life of ‘oneself’ a work of art.

Boothroyd takes evident pleasure in depicting Foucault’s decision in ‘Theatrum Philosophicum’ – his review essay on Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense* – to render explicit Deleuze’s allusive remarks in those texts about psychedelia and LSD. This latter substance, Foucault boldly asserted, ‘eliminates the supremacy of the categories’ and frees thought from its ‘catatonic chrysalis’. Boothroyd says



that ‘where to idealist thinking drugs appear as the enemy of truth and the friend of artifice, to materialists like Foucault and Deleuze drugs and drug-effects are at least potential means for countering “regimes of truth” and the self-assertion of Reason’.

However, when Boothroyd asserts that ‘taking the drug LSD allows direct experimentation on the nerve centres of the self and on its singular connection with Reason’, his position risks collapse into a sort of voodoo materialism. Does the *self* have ‘nerve centres’, and, if so, how? And what is their ‘singular connection with Reason’? These are the questions one wants tackled, but the uneasy vacillation between deconstructionist method and Foucauldian approach to ‘narco-power’ blocks further enquiry.

Boothroyd’s gestures towards a ‘materialist’ account of the effect of drugs on the mind are in conflict with his deconstructive position. He states that

the idea of the good use, or ‘good repetition’ of drug use is not exhausted by medical expertise, whose prescriptions aim only at health understood on the basis of the *medical body* and the use of drugs may be measured independently of their medical use ... The use [of ecstasy] may also be ‘measured’ in relation to its stimulation of the *dancing body*. Opium may be measured in relation to dreaming, amphetamines in relation to energy,

hashish in relation to the imagination, nitrous oxide in relation to laughter, Viagra in relation to sex and so on. The technology of drug design and manufacture today presents the possibility of future drugs used for optimizing various species of aesthesiological experience.

In this vision of a future 'aesthesiological' drug culture, mental and physical faculties are capable of discrete enhancement according to one's desires. But here we seem to fall out of deconstructionism and into a quasi-biological and essentially hedonic account of drug experience.

A different historical perspective generates an alternative Deleuzian approach to the problem. Even before the global prohibition of the 1920s, drug use was referred to in veiled terms and related to a predilection for sleep (Mordecai Cooke's 1860 *The Seven Sisters of Sleep* being a good example). It developed its own language of sleep and dreaming, and perhaps found a niche as a compensation for the attention-sapping and energy-draining procedures of industrialized labour. (Compare Anson Rabinbach's *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity*, University of California Press, 1990, for an account of the cultural and intellectual background to what became identified as 'Taylorism', the 'scientific management' of the labour process.) In France, where Bergsonian vitalism had gained some influence, Taylorism was resisted in quasi-Bergsonian terms as homogenization incarnate. For this line of thought, independent of Marxism, drug experience was to be opposed to industrial labour *tout court*, and identified with a slackening of attention to the present.

Since Boothroyd omits any distinction between the drug experience and communication about that experience, an important channel of transmission between drugs and philosophical thought in French culture is overlooked. In late-nineteenth-century Paris, there were strong connections between drug use and a self-styled 'esotericism' that systematically cultivated a 'clandestine' approach to drug experimentation, wreathing it in symbols, rites and reference to 'eucharists', viaticums and 'regenerative' substances. One of Deleuze's first articles was on one of the initiators of the nineteenth-century revival of 'esotericism', Johann Malfatti de Montereggi, a 'Brunonian' physician who attempted to develop the connections between Schellingian *Naturphilosophie* and Indian theosophy. The focus of Brunonian medicine was the use of intoxicants such as opium and alcohol in regulated doses to restore 'vitality'. Deleuze's own interest in drugs may well have arisen within such 'esoteric' contexts.

These Bergsonian and 'esoteric' perspectives were compatible with qualified affirmations of the notion that drug experience has 'transcendental' aspects. As mentioned, Boothroyd is dismissive of the notion that drug experience can provide what is called 'transcendental experience', for deconstructive reasons. But he overlooks the real problem, which is that this notion of 'transcendental experience' is derived from a diffuse, uncritical idiom. From the post-Kantian perspective of modern philosophy, this term is obscure and ambiguous, as it conflates the transcendent and transcendental. Is it that drugs offer a perception of transcendent or 'spiritual' realities, or that they offer a privileged reflexive insight into the conditions for consciousness? Bergson's account of the mind's oscillation between the 'poles' of dream and action permit the development of a properly transcendental approach. In *The Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley explicitly derived his theory of consciousness as a 'reducing valve' – with drugs as a trigger for a reverse expansion of the mind – from Bergson's theories about the mind in *Matter and Memory*. According to Bergson's theory, says Huxley, 'each one of us is potentially Mind at Large', but to make biological survival possible, this mind 'has to be funnelled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system'. By tearing consciousness away from its biological function, drugs such as mescaline allow it to rediscover this Mind at Large.

Boothroyd's reading of Deleuze is in any case undermined by his use of a series of mistranslated passages from *A Thousand Plateaus*. Although he stresses Deleuze's ambivalence towards the problem of drugs, he contends that the section on drugs in that book (in the 'Memories of a Molecule' subsection of the 'plateau' on 'Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible') concludes with an 'overwhelming rejection of drugs as a fuel for "becoming"'. However, although Boothroyd is right to note Deleuze and Guattari's vivid depiction of the dead ends, 'black holes', paranoias and dependency produced by drug addiction, they do not by any means reject the use of drugs as a means for becoming. Massumi's English translation has it that

Drug users have not chosen the right molecule or the right horse. Drugs are too unwieldy to grasp the imperceptible and becomings-imperceptible; drug users believed that drugs would grant them the plane, when in fact the plane must distill its own drugs.

However, it should read:

Drug users have not chosen the right molecule or the right horse. Too coarse [*gros*] to grasp the

imperceptible, and to become imperceptible, they believed that drugs would give them the plane [or plan], but it is the plane which must distil its own drugs.

It is not *drugs* that are too ‘unwieldy’, but the drug *culture* of advanced Western societies that is too ‘coarse’ to be able to master the subtle and differential processes made possible by these substances, and to understand that becoming-imperceptible also demands the cultivation of secrecy. Massumi’s translation has it that ‘Drugs do not guarantee immanence; rather the immanence of drugs allows one to forgo them’, but ‘forgo’ is an erroneous translation of *s’en passer* – to pass through, move beyond or transcend. Drugs have their own special ‘immanence’, in so far as they immanently lead towards their own overcoming.

As to how this passage is to be achieved, Deleuze and Guattari retreat to the position of clandestinity (the ensuing section after ‘Memories of a Molecule’ is ‘Memories of a Secret’). One of the avowed aims of *A Thousand Plateaus* was to reconnect the apparently isolated space-times of drug users, creative artists, masochists, schizophrenics and nomads by showing their ontological identity in a shared field of ‘intensities’. These groups are all implicitly complicit with each other in attempting to subject the body to aims other than evolutionary and collective social norms. Deleuze and Guattari’s aim is to get these distinct ‘subcultures’ to realize their complicity with each other. From *this* Deleuzian perspective, in the light of Boothroyd’s analysis, the question becomes whether it is possible for future subcultures to re-emerge from the milieus of our generally drugged culture, and define their own practices collectively, at a distance from the state.

Christian Kerslake

It’s space Jim, but...

Noel Castree and Derek Gregory, eds, *David Harvey: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge MA, 2006. ix + 324 pp., £20.99 pb., 0 631 23510 8.

Kant’s thoughts on how left- and right-handedness only make sense as a spatial relation served as a rejection of the Newtonian conception of space and reinforced the rival Leibnizian view, namely that space was not a void but a relation constitutive of objects themselves. Alexander’s edition of the *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence* celebrates the Newtonian victory in this particular philosophical tussle and the consequent

scientific revolution, but, as Harvey’s work demonstrates, the Newtonian hegemony was something of a poisoned chalice. The debates in *David Harvey: A Critical Reader* highlight the importance of thinking about space as something materially produced and in process, which allows capital to be accumulated, destroyed and relocated where there is greater productive potential. The discussion also leads to considerations of the urban as a way of life. The tension between these two strands makes this anthology fertile ground for attempts at a synthesis.

Harvey uses a complex philosophical repertoire to push the boundaries of Marxism. The notion of a ‘spatial fix’, the coalescence of factors of production with mutually reinforcing logics, a kind of elective affinity, clearly owes something to the Leibniz/Deleuze continuum and its focus on particularity. And, indeed, Harvey makes the point that monadologically the social can be broken down into ever smaller constituent parts which, following Whitehead, have some spatial permanence. Some of Harvey’s critics in *A Critical Reader* read him as a holist and reductionist, where economics flattens out any sense of the heterogeneous. Melissa Wright, for example, suggests that a consideration of gendered differences gets lost among this economism. Gender must also be a constitutive factor in the way capital is accumulated, a point reinforced by Nancy Hartsock’s focus here on dispossession as an accumulation strategy where female agricultural labour is central. Some of these issues might be squared when Noel Castree mentions that Harvey’s dialectic operates in the Althusserian mode – that is, via displacement – such that gender is simultaneously a relation of production and something which translates into the irreducibly different, its particularity. There is here an emphasis on the particular as something which *unites*, brings together discrete or opposed positions. Inter-relationship has the effect of drawing things together in a resembling mode. And, of course, paradoxically, this resembling is what gives meaning to difference. Hence the ‘spatial fix’ is Harvey’s monadology where use values move towards rhythmic coalescence as complementary temporal logics and in so doing express their difference.

However, in one of the more critical contributions, Bob Jessop argues that Harvey’s spatial fix sloughs off the world of concrete things, in that through the fix they are voided and exist only as abstractions in the valorization process. Hence the fix is, on this view, purely internal to capital logic and ignores the concrete circumstances in which accumulation occurs. Capital in general operates in this context as a perpetual

motion machine, propelled between fixes and crises by over-accumulation. With no concrete geographical-historical means of support, capitalism looks like an illusionist's trick of increasing magnitude which allows no exit strategy.

As Marcus Doel points out, there is a constitutive ambiguity at the heart of capitalism where value as 'value-in-use' is also concrete labour. Here Marx becomes a Derridean *avant la lettre*, and the endless dissimulation of value-in-use mirrors that of the fix. Harvey's own notion of relational space – based on Ollman's philosophy of internal relations – may provide a way out of what seem to be two parallel yet incommensurable worlds. Jessop sees the relation of capital accumulation to use value – for example, the specific geographical locations to which capital migrates – in terms of a 'constitutive outside'. But Harvey's rejection of Euclidean space might take us further. If use value is nothing to capital and hence incommensurable with it, nonetheless, as capital's (spatial) void, it is *something* – Leibnizian material space, if we are to be theoretically consistent about internal relations. However, Harvey does not pursue relationality in this context. If he did it would be reasonable to argue that concrete labour and other use values are value's absent presence, a kind of negativity or space of resistance within the functioning of capitalism. Elsewhere David Cunningham has noted such a move in Massimo Cacciari's criticism of the idea of space as full presence in Heidegger's 'dwelling place'. Cacciari's phenomenology of non-dwelling offers a way of thinking about abstract labour as differentially spatialized, an 'almost-void', so to speak, a site of utopian promise. Again, this might offer Harvey a way of thinking the outside of the abstraction process inherent in, for example, the structuring impact on urban space by property values. One is reminded of that utopian promise of the everyday in Lefebvre's *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, where the everyday serves as the verso of modern capitalism, and vice versa, something humdrum, barely registering and yet potentially explosive. Similarly, in *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre argues that the abstractions of urban space can be modelled by analogy with linguistic structuralism's presence-absence relation, where absence denotes virtual presence.

It is with this in mind that we can pursue the 'urbanism as a way of life' theme, much in evidence in Harvey's own contribution to the volume, 'Space as a Key Word', which covers the routine organization of the everyday, the cultural life and aesthetics of urban space to which Lefebvre's 'spaces of representation', as the domain of 'lived experience', proves central. Here

space is clearly overlapping but discontinuous, visited by its absences. The past of spaces as collective memory haunts their present and the built environment provides a ground for this. For Harvey the materiality of buildings as occupying physical ('absolute') space suggests settled networks of relationships, a kind of permanence after the fashion of Merleau-Ponty's 'institution', which gives both objective shape and directionality, and therefore a kind of authority that is sedimented in lived experience. In other words, this permanence shapes discourse. Harvey provides a couple of examples of the relational nature of spaces and the way that its heterogeneity produces the surprises simply missing in his treatment of the geography of valorization. The Basilica of Sacré Cœur is a building which constitutes a kind of irruption in the landscape, its very exoticism a cover story for a narrative lacuna, which leads us to excavate its meanings as the displacement of the site of the last stand of the Communards. Ground Zero also provides a locus both for the recuperation of memories and for multiple contesting readings. The discourse of the World Trade Center as a centre of world-economic power and US imperialism was not something thought up by bin Laden, but a commonplace idea given flesh, for instance, in Don DeLillo's *Mao II* where it is a terrorist target. The point here is that the hegemonic readings and constructions of urban space offer a resistance, a 'practically untellable' (Lefebvre) but imaginatively reconstructable space of representation.

This suggests that we need to make sense of urbanism as a practice in which buildings function *processually* as both symbols and tools of a practice of incomplete space, as embodiments of historical traditions and spatialized movements. Despite acknowledgement of the processual, Harvey moves between the symbolic, hermeneutic and the specific materiality of buildings to a generalized aesthetic here; as in his *The Condition of Postmodernity* where he does so via an account of flexible accumulation, which, as Wright notes, when combined with the theory of uneven development becomes a powerful analytic. The problem is that there is no mediating term. Urbanism may be a way of life, one which organizes capitalism through everyday, routine activities, but it has no specificity in the manner of Simmel or Lefebvre. Hence the dreaming spires of Oxford and the Manhattan skyscrapers represent different modes of economic organization but not historical forms of urbanism *as such*. There is a displacement here: whilst for writers such as Marshall Berman the urban *together with capitalism* has come to represent modernity, Harvey's elision of the urban with evocativeness of place serves

to suppress the logics of both the urban and the modern in *modern capitalism*, which is essential to the way that Lefebvre, among others, frames 'the urban'.

Bruce Braun's response is to view capitalism as constituted through Deleuzian networks and hence as *rhyzomic* rather than *rooted* in an underlying logic. The 'outside' is thoroughly incorporated, but at the same time constitutive of whatever logic emerges from the articulation of networks. However, if the networks are to preserve their Deleuzian heteronomy there must be at least two logics operating here, an implication which undermines the coherence of accumulation strategies. Alternatively, Castree picks up on Harvey's references to the rootedness of capitalism in everyday life. On this account, capitalism itself becomes a 'way of life' – that is, the agency which organizes otherwise disparate activities into the routine structure of the everyday, whose hidden logic requires a 'detour of theory'. In this Althusserian formulation capitalism both articulates everyday life and is in turn an economic activity constituted by this articulation. The logic of capital is nothing other than its interconnect- edness with the other aspects of the social formation that it articulates. The flip side, as with Harvey, is that through perpetual displacement capitalism becomes the logic of *difference*.

Harvey's own thoughts on the place of everyday life in the unfolding of capitalism – see his recent *Spaces of Global Capitalism* – indicate a dialogue with Lefebvre's writings on the everyday. Harvey characterizes the everyday as the locus of critique, a space where reality challenges ideas and vice versa. It is here that transformations occur in the routine order that is built on but also contested in its geographical unevenness. Urbanism is here a way of life where cities develop *individually*, not abstractly. Here, too, theory is transformed as a 'representation of space' by its internalization within the particular.

Despite its appeal to the concreteness of a 'way of life' this reading lacks Lefebvre's concern with the ontology of the everyday – that is, its existence as a general feature of the social world, as something with its own temporal structure which both represents the virtual existence of capitalism and is virtually represented in the objectifications of modern capitalism. Its tendency to absorb whatever is thrown at it signifies a weak ontological force through which the everyday transforms itself by appropriating the structures of economy and state, which Lefebvre encapsulates by counterposing the *cycle* of the carnivalesque to the *repetition* of (re)production. Transformation depends on the recouping of collective memory – that Benjaminian

moment in Harvey – which is precisely the repetition of the 'practically untellable'. Harvey's discussion of Sacré Cœur and Ground Zero inter alia demonstrates this potentiality well enough and shows his work to be a 'journey into space' of intergalactic scale.

Howard Feather

Unequal and uneven humanity

Pheng Chea, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2006. 336 pp., £29.95 hb., £16.95 pb., 0 674 02295 5 hb., 0 674 02394 3 pb.

Are current discourses of the human capable of helping us to understand actual forms of the inhuman? This is the central question raised by Chea's ambitious book. It frames several objectives: to criticize regimes of human rights which seek to humanize the field of instrumentality rather than offering a radical critique; to criticize (what Chea sees as) a too rapid burial of the nation-state in so far as it still offers a normative source for defending peoples; and, finally, to criticize a cosmopolitanism that celebrates a unified world produced by globalization, ignoring its central tenet: unequal and uneven development.

Chea's goal, however, is not simply to develop a critique of European reason. Rather than seeking to 'provincialize Europe', he attempts a (provisional) universalizing of one corner of postcolonial Asia. From this position, he explores the notion of the 'cosmopolitical', rejecting the idea that the nation-state is passé, that the nation is simply an ideological instrument of the state. But first he returns to Kant, whose vision of a common humanity was neither anti- nor post-nationalist, but a framework for regulating the behaviour of states. He then moves to Marx, who defended an anti- and post-nationalist cosmopolitanism because of his contempt for nationalist feelings. However, from the point of view of anti-colonial Asia, progressive nationalism is an ally of genuine cosmopolitanism. Current forms of globalization have given a heightened urgency to the debate on the national and the global. Is the global really weakening the national and is it a positive move for democratic struggles? Are we really witnessing the emergence of a strong trans-national political network of cosmopolitan solidarities or are we exaggerating their importance in our frantic

search for a new form of 'internationalism'? To Chea, the answer is closer to the second hypothesis. He does not think that a 'popular global consciousness' exists. Why? Because of the 'partial and uneven character of globalization' that hinders its formation. Samir Amin's account of uneven development is mobilized to challenge a cosmopolitics that chooses to ignore or dismiss the field of material forces, and the role of the nation-state in protecting peoples against the violence of transnational capital.

To develop his argument, Cheah reviews the work of seminal contemporary authors of cosmopolitanism: Habermas, Bhabha, Clifford. He argues that it is Habermas's elision of the postcolonial world that enables its 'utopian projection of a model of global political regulation from a prototype derived from the republican welfare in the economically hegemonic'. European populations' welfare rests on the deprivation of similar rights and entitlements in the so-called 'South'. Homi Bhabha's and James Clifford's ideas on cosmopolitanism are, for their part, predicated upon an understanding of 'culture as the human realm of flux and freedom from the bondage of being-in-nature'. Both ignore the role of material conditions in the making of consciousness and culture. According to Cheah, the belief in the autonomy of the human condition that national liberation leaders like Amílcar Cabral (and Fanon) advocated, and the claim that cultural activity precedes and lays the ground for liberation from political, economic and social oppression, cannot be sustained because they ignore or marginalize the role of economy. We must never forget, he insists, the consequences of uneven development.

In the three following chapters, Cheah turns to concrete examples to illustrate his argument. He first shows the shift from a mutual reinforcement of nationalism and cosmopolitanism among the Chinese diaspora in Asia to a new form of mercantile Chinese chauvinism. In the following chapter, he examines human rights practices by NGOs susceptible to 'co-optation by competing states on both sides of the North-South divide', arguing that an all-inclusive universality is an illusion. In the third, he explores the strategies of bio-power of labour-receiving states and of sending states through the case of foreign female domestic workers in Singapore. Throughout the book Chea seeks to prove why and how the inhuman consequences of capitalist globalization upset the idea of freedom. In fact, the inhuman is constitutive of the human; inhuman techniques generate the soul of humanity. Yet, we should not confuse this argument with a statement on the impossibility of finding a common humanity. Cheah,

as a good dialectician, concludes that we must learn to track how this 'inhuman field (of global capital) induces effects of humanity'.

I said it was a challenging book. Indeed, its insistence on the materiality of life, on the role of material conditions in identity formation, networks of solidarity, ideas, re-engages the reader with the debate on the *economy* of current globalization: what kind of 'humans' does it produce? What kind of inhuman conditions does it entail? How have the illegal 'alien', the disenfranchised and disposable immigrant worker, become the latest figures of an economy of predation that justifies *both* techniques of bio-power and abolitionist practices? This surprising marriage existed already under imperialism, and before that under slavery. The inhuman conditions of our times, the precarious lives of those who are not remembered in public stages of national mourning, hark back to the figure of the slave, who did not 'matter', was a 'thing', condemned to social death, to the figure of the colonized, of the native. They all speak of the long history of this condition: being made inhuman because of being human.

Young men and women drown every week in the Mediterranean, on the coasts of the Canaries, of Senegal, of Morocco, because ships' captains are warned by their bosses not to rescue them, and no country agrees to receive them. Hundreds of men and women, coming from as far as the Congo and Mauritania, are expelled every week from South Africa. 'Immigration' has become everywhere a central question: who can be allowed as a 'full human', unthreatening and productive, and who represents a danger to society and to themselves? 'France cannot welcome all the poor of the world', declared Michel Rocard some years ago, a former socialist prime minister of France. The line was drawn between the 'poor' and the others whose better conditions of life rested on the deprivation of the former. Poverty traces across states and nations a political, cultural and economic frontier, but, if political discourse must learn again to articulate the demands of the poor so that they are not left to the vagaries of the West's charity or the temporary warmth of religious communities, it is not clear that the answer will be found in a renewed alliance between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, as Cheah argues. The word 'poverty' itself is difficult to use to describe the conditions of billions of people: it reeks of paternalism, seems to deny agency. Perhaps we should relearn how to speak about this poverty and its inhuman condition.

Françoise Vergès

A Haitian boat disaster

Every now and then something happens which serves to illuminate with particular clarity the way our newspapers distinguish between what counts as news and what does not. Consider the way the British press handled two very different disappearances, on the nights of 3 and 4 May 2007.

In early May two British doctors, Kate and Gerry McCann, were on holiday in the Portuguese resort of Praia da Luz. On the night of 3 May 2007 they went out to dinner at a tapas bar near their hotel, leaving their three-year-old daughter Madeleine behind with their two other young children. At some point that evening, Madeleine left or was abducted from their unlocked apartment, and she hasn't been seen since.

Nobody who lived within reach of the British or indeed European media in the late spring of 2007 is likely to forget its extraordinary response to this event. Madeleine McCann's disappearance remained one of the lead stories in most of the British papers for a full week, and immediately became the object of obsessive national attention. The phrase 'Madeleine McCann' appears in no less than 164 articles published by the *Guardian* newspaper between 4 May and 13 July, an average of two or three articles per day. Tabloid papers like *News of the World* and *The Sun* still strive to outdo each other in their commitment to 'leave no stone unturned', to use the phrase adopted by the official website of 'Madeleine's Fund' (a site that apparently received 58 million hits and 16,000 messages of support within 48 hours of its launch on 16 May). Author J.K. Rowling and her publishers recently instructed every shop in the world that wants to sell the latest Harry Potter book to put up posters of Madeleine asking 'Have you seen this child?'

The night after the world's most visible missing person vanished, early on 4 May 2007, at least eighty other people disappeared when a boat sank in the Caribbean. This time British authorities were directly involved in the disaster, and there is good reason to suspect that the deaths may have been the result of criminal negligence, if not deliberate police violence. Some of the dead were eaten by sharks; many were women and children. A UK government enquiry is currently under way and the publication of its report is due in August. How many stones might we expect newspapers like the *Guardian* or *Independent* to overturn in their coverage of such a story?

Before answering this question it is worth remembering what actually happened on the night of 3–4 May. On Wednesday 2 May, a 25-foot sloop set out from the northern Haitian city of Cap Haïtien, heading for the neighbouring Turks and Caicos Islands. US and UK officials estimate that it was crammed with around 160 people. These were people who had decided to abandon the certainty of crippling destitution at home in exchange for a one-in-a-million shot at a precarious low-wage job abroad. Haiti is a country where, according to the best available study, around 75 per cent of the population 'lives on less than \$2 per day, and 56 per cent – 4.5 million people – live on less than \$1 per day'. Punitive international trade and financial arrangements ensure that such destitution will remain a structural fact of Haitian life for the foreseeable future. Every serious political attempt to allow Haiti's people to move (in ex-president Jean-Bertrand Aristide's phrase) 'from absolute misery to a dignified poverty' has been violently and deliberately blocked by the US government and its allies in the international community. As a result, in a normal year, an average of around a thousand of Haiti's most desperate or most reckless citizens try to escape this misery by sea, first selling whatever few possessions they might have accumulated in order to pay the hundreds of dollars that traffickers charge for passage on a boat.

The Turks and Caicos Islands are the sort of small British overseas territory that until 1981 went by the more accurate name of 'Crown colony'. They are located north of Haiti and south-east of the Bahamas. London is responsible for their security, defence and foreign affairs. Legal T&C residents are full British citizens, although a large proportion of local 'belongers' take advantage of their island's much-hyped offshore status to avoid paying full rates of British tax. Per capita income in T&C is around \$10,000. According to online tourist brochures, T&C is 'one of the most popular destinations for Hollywood Stars'. In recent years, it has also become a popular destination for impoverished Haitian emigrants. In T&C, as in Florida or the Dominican Republic, it is legal and illegal Haitian workers who take on most of the poorly paid jobs in construction, street-cleaning and hotel maintenance. As the numbers of would-be migrants have risen in recent years, so has the violence of the police response. Among other incidents, in 1998 another boat-load of escaping Haitians died off the shore, after the police fired at their boat.

Both the US and UK governments have long treated Haitian migrants with exceptional severity. Whereas Clinton's so-called 'wet foot, dry foot' policy still facilitates the naturalization of many Cuban emigrants, Haitian migrants to the USA cannot even apply for the 'temporary protected status' occasionally enjoyed by the citizens of countries like Honduras or El Salvador when their homes are threatened by war or natural disaster. Almost without exception, the US Coast Guard immediately and automatically repatriates every Haitian migrant or asylum-seeker that it intercepts at sea.

Around 4 a.m. on Friday 4 May, the Cap Haïtien sloop was intercepted by the T&C Islands' police launch *Sea Quest*, about half a mile south of Providenciales Island. What happened next is the subject of some controversy. The survivors say that the T&C launch rammed the boat, and then tried to tow it further out to sea. Moments later the bow was dragged under and the sloop capsized. Many of its passengers were unable to swim. The luckiest survivors claim that T&C police left them waiting in the water for around fifteen minutes; others 'alleged that police beat them with wooden batons when they tried to scramble aboard the patrol boat from the shark-filled waters'. Associated Press (AP) went on to note, on 8 May, that 'reports about the alleged involvement of the Turks and Caicos boat [in the disaster] have taken days to come out because the survivors are locked in a jail-like detention centre and barred from speaking to the media.'

The T&C police initially claimed that the boat had already capsized before they arrived on the scene. A little later they changed their story (after some gentle prompting from US Coast Guard personnel who assisted in the rescue operation), acknowledging that the boat sank as they tried to tow it into port through 'heavy seas'. Between them, the T&C and US coastguards managed to pick up 78 survivors. A total of 61 dead bodies were also recovered at the same time, though the real death toll was probably closer to 90 people. It was the worst disaster to befall Haitian migrants in recent years.

In line with standard procedures, after spending almost a week in detention the survivors were forcibly transferred back to Cap Haïtien. The badly decomposed bodies of the dead followed them home ten days later. In a final insult, in a country where life is so desperately cheap and many Haitians take funerals extremely seriously, the bodies were dumped in a common grave before relatives had time to identify and reclaim them (AP, 21 May). Pending the publication of their report in August, investigators from the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) of the UK's Department of Transport 'concluded that while the two vessels had touched, there was no evidence to support claims that the migrants' boat had been rammed'. Richard Mull, the lead British investigator, acknowledged that 'the decision to tow the overcrowded sloop in stormy seas without giving the migrants life jackets also raised concerns, but said Turks and Caicos police were following the standard operating procedure' (AP, 8 May).

A government that refuses to contemplate prosecution of its police when they execute an innocent bystander, like Jean Charles de Menezes in July 2005, is not likely to worry too much about standard operating procedures that kill people who are guilty

of being both black and poor. However, anyone with even a little experience of boats knows that when you tow an unstable and heavily laden vessel through heavy seas it is virtually guaranteed to sink. The British MAIB investigators more or less admitted as much in their initial report. There may thus be some grounds for questioning a government that defends such a procedure as 'standard', especially when it is applied to scores of terrified and exhausted people in shark-filled waters in the middle of the night, without first trying to offload any of them onto another vessel and without providing them with life-preservers or assistance of any kind.

But what questions were raised in the British press? As far as I can tell, neither the *Daily Telegraph* nor the *Guardian* ever mentioned the event. The *Observer*, the Sunday paper that belongs to the Guardian group, had by 15 July devoted a grand total of 135 words to the story, clipped from a single Associated Press wire, published on 6 May 2007. The *Independent* has likewise published just one short article about the disaster, on 12 May, a full week after the story broke. *The Times* dispatched it in a single two-sentence snippet from the AP on 11 May. Their coverage reads as follows: 'Survivors of a sunken boat carrying 160 Haitian migrants said that a Turks and Caicos coastal patrol rammed their vessel, towed it into deeper water and abandoned them. At least 61 people died.' End of story. So far no British newspaper has bothered to investigate the truth of such claims, let alone consider the implications of this indifference.

Peter Hallward

LETTERS

I trust that my pleasure in finding Adorno's writings on music taken so seriously in a journal of philosophy will not seem dimmed by my referring back to issue 143 (Ben Watson, *DJ rottweiler*, review of Adorno's *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, pp. 47–51).

Watson commends Adorno for restricting his analysis to what he knew. Watson's own domains of expertise are clearly those of the blues, jazz, rock and pop, and it would be good, for instance, to read a detailed analysis of the music of John Coltrane by him. When it comes to Adorno's 'polemic against the kind of analysis musicologists call "Schenkerian" (and everyone else calls those deadly dull lists of successive scherzos and rondos in classical sleeve notes)', however, he is so wide of the mark that one cannot help beginning to question his reliability on other matters, too. Schenker analysis is precisely the antithesis of such descriptive lists, being concerned to strip away the surface of themes, motifs, formal models like 'scherzo', even (and for this Schenker has been much criticized) rhythm, in order to uncover the underlying (and often deeply buried) structural skeleton common to all tonal pieces – or those that Schenker thought good – and to describe that skeleton by means that figure very rarely in sleeve notes: tonality, key-structure, species counterpoint.

I leave it to Ben Watson and others to relate such a theoretical, analytical and aesthetic endeavour to the socio-political sphere. But it is worth remembering that Adorno had studied composition with Alban Berg and was, therefore, at least on the fringes of the Schoenberg circle. Schoenberg disapproved of Schenker analysis precisely because it stripped away from music like Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony the surface events that he liked best; also, of course, because it does not work for atonal and twelve-note music such as his own. Schoenberg did not realize (and for this Schenker himself was to blame, for he neither explained, nor even probably realized himself) that the aesthetic consequence of his reductive method, as opposed to its normative aspect and its function in training musicians' ears and minds to perceive deep structures, was precisely to highlight the deviations of an individual piece's foreground from the universal background and thus account for their affective qualities. (See Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, University of Chicago Press, 1956, for the classical

account of such implication-realization processes.) This, again, has sociological implications; but the point here is that the reasons Adorno, partly at least under Schoenberg's aegis, rejected Schenkerian theory and analysis were the opposite of those implied by Watson's remark, which applies rather to Adorno's scorn for 'music appreciation'.

As for 'ultra-modern "noise" rather than "music"', I trust Ben Watson is using 'noise' in the British Standard Glossary's sense of 'sound undesired by the recipient' and not in the acoustic sense of an aperiodic (indefinitely pitched) sound. If Watson means 'noise' in the acoustic sense, he might rather have cited Varèse's *Déserts* and *Le Poème électronique* as antecedents and works by such composers as Lachenmann today. As for 'ultra-modern', Zimmerman died in 1970; the aesthetic of his later music, involving a tapestry of quotations from other music, may have been ultra-modern at one time, but is now a commonplace of postmodernism, and the style of his music derives from the expressionism of Schoenberg and Berg.

Michael Graubart

REPLY

It is heartening when *Radical Philosophy* does its job, and garners a protest from a champion of unreflecting specialism. Nevertheless, Michael Graubart's flip comment about leaving the 'socio-political sphere' to 'others' remains disgraceful. This was a pose Adorno targeted throughout his life, and with good reason: it's a fond illusion with atrocious consequences. I admit my words on Schenkerian analysis lay me open to criticism: viewed from the high towers of academic musicology, Schenker's 'deep' analyses are indeed the opposite of popular explanation. However, sleeve notes on classical releases are frequently written by Schenkerians, and – unlike a grounding in Adorno (or Leroi Jones) – such training doesn't allow them to escape descriptive formalism and articulate listener response. (Readers of *Radical Philosophy* will I hope be especially aware that, *contra* Graubart, 'individual deviation' and 'universal background' cannot constitute genuine alternatives – with Leonard B. Meyer on the side of the former and Heinrich Schenker on the side of the latter – but, like other well-worn couplets – figure and ground', 'agency and structure' – share the same transhistorical metaphysic.) As to Graubart's remark about my own competence to write about anything other than 'blues, jazz, rock and pop', I find it astonishing that anyone who professes to know about modern music can rest assured that these are known and watertight categories, both from each other and from the musics lionized by Adorno (whether these be called 'classical', 'serious', 'European', or – as I would contend – 'revolutionary'). Whoever would like to talk about John Coltrane had better not remain silent about Arnold Schoenberg and the crisis of bourgeois romanticism.

In my review I described hearing Siegfried Palm playing Bernd-Alois Zimmermann on the radio, not as a claim about Zimmermann's entire oeuvre – in the manner of those whose 'expertise' depends upon the ignorance of others – but to report an experience which made me question everything I knew about music. This kind of contingency and subjectivism – the real factual basis for an objective musical analysis – is of course inadmissible for the species of petty expertise claimed by Graubart. The final suggestion in his letter – that noise as 'undesired by the recipient' should be distinguished from indefinitely pitched sound ('nice noise', anyone?), and that I might check out Edgard Varèse and Helmut Lachenmann – evinces precisely the combination of retarded knowledge and blithe condescension which made me flee academia for music journalism (and then *Radical Philosophy*). The cataclysmic music of the Romanian composers Iancu Dumitrescu and Ana-Maria Avram will see all those who don't know their Black Sabbath – as well as their Beethoven – in a noisy hell of their own socio-political limits!

Ben Watson