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COMMENTARY

Longing for a Greener Present: Neoliberalism and the Eco-city
Ross Adams 2

What's So Great about 'Timeless'? Architecture and the Prince, Again
Victoria McNeile 8

ARTICLES

Capitalist Epics: Abstraction, Totality and the Theory of the Novel
David Cunningham 11

Noir into History: James Ellroy's *Blood's a Rover*
John Krainiauskas 25

Andeanizing Philosophy: Rodolfo Kusch and Indigenous Thought
Philip Derbyshire 34

REVIEWS

Gerald Raunig, *A Thousand Machines: A Concise Philosophy of the Machine as Social Movement*
Evan Calder Williams..... 43

Jean-Luc Nancy, *Identité: Fragments, franchises*
David Nowell Smith 46

Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life*
Timothy Hall 49

Nick Nesbitt, *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment*
Andrew Leak..... 51

Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*
Nina Power..... 53

Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadra, eds, *Crisis in the Global Economy: Financial Markets, Social Struggles, and New Political Scenarios*
Benjamin Noys 55

Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*
Alexander R. Galloway 57

CHESS NEWS

It Was Better Not To Know
Peter Buse 59

Longing for a greener present

Neoliberalism and the eco-city

Ross Adams

In recent years, architects have found themselves increasingly commissioned to design entire new cities: a phenomenon that has been accompanied by a commitment to those terms of ‘sustainability’ which now seem inseparable from the urban project itself. While ‘sustainability’ remains a vague concept at best, it nonetheless presents itself with an urgency similar to that which galvanized many of the great movements of modern architecture vis-à-vis the city. And, as in these movements, underlying such urgency is a rhetorical reference to collective fear of some palpable sort, whether it be fear of revolution (Le Corbusier in the 1920s), fear of cultural *tabulae rasae* (Jane Jacobs and Team X in the 1950s and 1960s), or our new fear: ecological collapse (‘green architecture’).

It is obvious that the myriad ‘eco-city’ projects popping up all around the world would not be viable if not for the fact that they appear against a background of imminent ecological catastrophe – a condition of terrifying proportions – and clearly the rhetoric of sustainability is driven by such fear. Yet upon closer inspection the precise essence of this fear is far from clear. Indeed, in light of ecological catastrophe, and amidst any fetish for windmills or vegetation, architects have cultivated what seems to be a curious nostalgia for the *present* – a pragmatism whose lack of patience for the past seeks a kind of reconstitution of the present in imagining any future. To understand this impulse, and the fear that lies at the core of today’s urban project – the ‘eco-city’ – it seems appropriate to interrogate the architectural rhetoric and forms of representation used to animate it.

Urban design

The eco-city is a mechanism conceived by neoliberal state politics, in which the nature of urban design itself, as both practice and form of knowledge, has changed dramatically. Most importantly, the operative status of the urban project today is strictly *intermediary*. Whereas in the past, architects and planners concerned themselves with highly precise, calculated and definitive plans, today’s urban designer has quite a different task. Because in the current political context, urban-scale design has become an increasingly accessible and unregulated venture for private investment, the central occupation of urban design has shifted to the construction of sophisticated, high-profile, branded advertisement campaigns used to leverage popular, ‘democratic’ support for large-scale real-estate development. Its inspiration is market speculation and its objective is the facilitation of growth. In so far as such projects in themselves no longer bear pretensions of actually executing what they propose (and often what they propose is left deliberately unclear), their service is to lend the architect’s endorsement to an

anonymous body that will carry out the project in its name. The drawings produced have little need for coherence with that which may or may not actually be built. Instead the success of urban design depends only on the composition of images and text, and their corroboration with the language of sustainability.

In light of this, architects and planners have adopted a rhetoric of sustainability that wholly embraces a humanitarian ethics in regard to ecological catastrophe. Avoiding at all costs the pomposity of a political position, such ethics are often conveyed by means of impressive data, statistics and impending notions of ‘tipping points’ quickly approaching. In this way the discourse on sustainability has given new life to an old humanist impulse, while raising the stakes with its implicit humanitarian call-to-duty. Not surprisingly, however, because such ideals feed off an economy of good intentions, they remain beyond scrutiny since the survival of our species seems to depend on their promise. Yet also implicit in such ethical posturing is a kind of imposed state of exception, paralysing the process of architectural criticism. Introducing this silent suspension of judgement, the language of sustainability plays a crucial role in the propagation of such work, for the purpose of urban design ultimately remains to equip the absolutely ordinary with a rhetorical supplement of ethical *goodness*. Thus, by posturing in this way, the rhetoric of sustainability at once deflects criticism while guaranteeing support for its virtuous cause.

To speak of the *design* of such projects is itself a convoluted task, since a truly ‘ecological’ city, rather than resulting from an architectural formalism, must *emerge* from the multiple systems of nature that prefigure it: it is now the task of the architect to identify spatial systems of nature. Thus the suspension of judgement grants the urban project a kind of formal liberty whose indeterminacy reflects the complexities of reality that the eco-city must now make use of. In this way, such ethical claims of virtue reach material confirmation in the very urban form realized in such projects. In a gracious gesture towards nature, great heed is paid to the habitats and migration patterns of animals dwelling on the site, native flora and fauna are catalogued, efforts are made to account for the unique systems of symbiosis that must be preserved, and so on. From this research, these various organizations of nature are mapped onto the site to provide the basic structural discipline to which the urban shall now submit. Complementing gestures like this, so-called ‘green corridors’ are deployed, which gently percolate through the urban, ‘reconnecting’ the natural passageways that the city would otherwise block. In, for example, Foster and Partners’ Biometropolis, a 71-hectare masterplan for a new urban biotechnology campus and ‘sustainable mixed-use community’ in Mexico City, the overabundance of nature conveniently relegates the architecture of the city to a small patch of the background. In this way, architecture, as a material and formal entity, must itself disappear: it is but an unfortunate necessity of the city that it has not yet been able to do without. Instead, the architecture of eco-cities must compensate for its burden to nature with the application of green roofs, vegetation on facades and an overuse of glass – architecture’s triumphant act of self-annihilation.

Perhaps more importantly, through its dazzlingly rendered imagery, the dominant visual language of (ecological) urban design has introduced a bizarre twist to the traditional relationship between figure and ground. The fundamental shift is in the treatment of the figure in the composition. In contrast to architectural renderings used to portray single buildings, where a precisely composed fore- and background frame the figure of the building, when a project becomes urban in scale, the figure of the image seemingly disappears, leaving only a constructed ground. This absence of figure, rendered in hyper-realist brilliance, confirms a growing appeal to both sensation and effect, while at the same time suggesting a retreat of the project *in and for itself*. The distance between fore- and background, no longer held in tension by an identifiable figure, collapses into a confused state of total atmosphere, leaving the viewer incapable of perceiving the project in any terms outside of pure appearance.

Liberalism, nature, urbanism

Despite all of the apparent methodological newness of contemporary urban design, one must ask how novel such an approach actually is. In this regard, it is instructive to recall briefly the history of modern urbanism itself. Indeed, if we trace the birth of the term ‘urbanism’ back to the nineteenth century as a category whose ideological content closely adhered to the political reforms of liberalism of the time, we can observe several important connections with the present notion of urbanism and urban design.¹ Nearly a century after the physiocrats’ discovery of the ‘naturalness’ inherent to social and economic relations, the transformations of the state would begin to realize the full potential of this nature through a nineteenth-century programme of political liberalism. And just as liberalism has its roots in physiocracy (the ‘government of nature’), so too did urbanism materialize a pseudo-scientific discourse of nature, which, instead of impeding the inherent ‘naturalness’ of society, sought to make use of its contingencies, realities and natural phenomena that characterize urban cohabitation. By the nineteenth century, planners had fully reformulated the city as a ‘biological organism’, whose naturally ‘functional parts’ were enabled through strategies of infrastructural connectivity. The focus of city planners and politicians turned towards optimizing systems of *circulation* as a means of unleashing the supreme capacities of a society left to its own nature. Instead of impeding modes of social and economic activity through disciplinary mechanisms, the city would instead make use of and enhance all the naturalness of human relations through a massive deployment of modern infrastructural systems.

Furthermore, envisioning the city through a scientific lens drained it of its political consistency. In doing so, urban form was rendered independent from the actual organization of the city. While major experiments in new formal configurations became prevalent in the late nineteenth century, nearly all products of such work – from Cerdà’s redesign of Barcelona to Haussmann’s reconstruction of Paris, to the development of the grid in American cities – rested on the simple idea of combining materially functioning systems with individual points of connection. In other words, through the administrative lens of urbanism, the city was reconstituted as a set of integrated infrastructures, which attempted to organize the city into a singular system of managed circulation. In this way, what is truly ‘modern’ about the city of the nineteenth century is its complete dependency on infrastructure. What was once based upon a representational model for the structuring of cities was abandoned for a more generative framework, where



Foster and Partners, Biometropolis, Mexico City.



Foster and Partners, Masdar, Abu-Dhabi.

functionally generic systems of organization could be reproduced and deployed at different scales and for different uses.² Thus, with the introduction of the sewerage system, for example, what started as a programme for the sanitization of the city was soon seen as a generalized model for conceptualizing not only other systems of infrastructure but the entire city itself: nodes and corridors, circulation and connectivity, production and consumption all seemed to characterize the generic repeatability of the modern city. Principled in this way, the city's form, whether rigidly composed, or loosely 'organic', would increasingly belie a common indeterminacy at the heart of the city's organization: by reorganizing it along systems of infrastructure, the city could be conceptualized as a kind of abstract grid, whose elements distributed across it would reveal a 'functional equivalence' between them. Space began to be characterized by seriality and interchangeability, rendering value and quantity indistinguishable.³ This condition only intensified during the twentieth century, from the Garden City of Ebenezer Howard to modernist experiments in functionalism, to the Metabolist Movement and countless other fascinations with natural systems.

As even a cursory study of the basic schema proposed by the eco-city makes clear, the new 'sustainable' urbanism sits comfortably within this liberal history of urbanism. First, at a fundamental level, the operative locus of sustainable design remains faithfully within systems of infrastructure and the strategies of their deployment in space. Second, indeterminacy plays an even stronger role in the category of 'mixed-use' – a designation of real estate that has come to play a central role in sustainable urbanism as a kind of economic stabilizer, assuring potential investors of a calculable 'vibrancy' the new city will harbour. This category of development is perhaps the degree zero of indeterminacy that displaces all decision from the realm of design to the whims of the market, guaranteeing the schism between urban form and organization. In this way, an eco-city optimized by considerations for weather and wind patterns, light, water drainage, and so on, can just as conveniently be 'sustainable' as one paying homage to a client by patterning itself as an extruded corporate logo. Lastly, the 'scientific' claims accompanying sustainability are, by and large, a simplistic rehashing of the same metaphors that were applied to the city in the nineteenth century, and only re-propose the same adherence to a dogma of infrastructure-based urbanism: nineteenth-century metaphors for biological

systems reappear today as 'strategies' peddled with arbitrary targets, whose only content is good intention.

In this sense, the eco-city is nothing more than the product of the centuries-old programme of liberal urbanism whose novelty now includes infrastructural strategies for the distribution of nature. This novelty renders the opposition between nature and city obsolete, since the city now appears as a kind of provider of nature's salvation. Strategies such as the 'ecological corridor' represent attempts to extrude nature, bringing its own patterns of circulation under the reign of the urban. This idea that nature can be reduced to a mirror image of the infrastructural systems that govern the city paradoxically reveals, if nothing else, a tremendous lack of faith in design itself.

Yet to say that the eco-city is simply the current iteration of modern urbanism in general would reveal little else about the underlying ideological objectives of such design. In fact there are several novelties apparent in 'sustainable' urbanism that are worthy of note. First, the incorporation of nature within the domain of infrastructural control is new in so far as it produces a rhetorical inversion with regard to the inherent virtue of urban design. Second, due to several key political and economic transitions that have taken place in the past decades, the city as a whole has become the object of private investment, creating for perhaps the first time in modern history the idea of the *private city*. This shift has attained its apogee thanks to the emergence of 'sustainability', exposing purely capitalist urban development to a discourse laden with salvation. Just when it was becoming clear that the history of the modern city coincided with the history of ecological disaster, the figure of the city was transfigured into a technological structure of redemption, granting an eschatological urgency for large-scale real-estate development. Fear, mobilized by ecological crisis, will remain at the heart of this urgency.

Crisis, fear, reform

'Crisis', at the end of the eighteenth century, became a 'structural signature of modernity', according to Reinhart Koselleck.⁴ Common usage of the term 'crisis' in Europe was not marked until well into the nineteenth century, and an expanded meaning and use of the term during this period closely accompanied the birth of modern urbanism. As derived from its original, constrained meaning in Greek, 'to "separate", to "choose", to "judge", to "decide"',⁵ 'crisis' was a central concept of justice and political order. Its eventual transformation during the eighteenth century saw an eschatological connotation attached to the term, and during the nineteenth century its use spilled over into the domain of economics, from which it would find a new use alongside liberal political economy, hence taking on a distinctly more optimistic tone.⁶ Through the modern concept of crisis, both revolution and reform were made possible. Its incorporation into popular language, together with its expanded meaning, made it a motivational historical force in liberal politics, legitimizing the categories of reformist 'progress' while secularizing its eschatological overtones. Crises, from the nineteenth century, would be seen as a cyclical register of history, whose flip side would be reform.

Modernist planners and architects alike have made use of this crisis-reform cycle to marshal political and economic force behind their projects. Le Corbusier's famous maxim, for example, 'architecture or revolution', is precisely such a cry for reform.⁷ In light of this economy, the specificity of 'crisis' in its modern application has been all but uniform. In its more contemporary proliferations, Koselleck tells us, '[t]he concept of crisis, which once had the power to pose unavoidable, harsh and non-negotiable alternatives, has been transformed to fit the uncertainties of whatever might be favoured at a given moment.'⁸ The lack of determinacy evident in the discourse of sustainability, which is then reproduced in the design of the eco-city, is only explainable by the apparent indeterminacy of the very nature with which ecological crisis is treated. The importance of the concept of crisis to today's urban design becomes clear.

Yet if the very consistency of ecological crisis is so vague, what is the true source of our fear? Let us recall the imagery of urban projects noted earlier, with its typically bizarre lack of figure. Upon closer inspection, it will become apparent that, rather than approaching the true depth of ecological catastrophe, such projects address an altogether different anxiety. Because in such images the appeal to sensation remains so prominent, it often conceals a clear reading of the image's actual content. For within the saturated ambiance there lies an implicit injunction to view the image with a kind of melancholia, as if it is a 'snapshot' of a life that seemingly 'once was' – an image which, indicating neither past nor future, asks not what could be, but what *should* be. Compounded by the rhetoric of ecological disaster embedded in the eco-city, we can view this imagery as a kind of visual catalogue of all that is threatened and must be preserved. Far from a concern for the annihilation of nature – for nature in such images appears not as an endangered wilderness, but as an abundant and manipulable surface, an (overused) *accessory* to the urban – such imagery makes visible another far deeper fear: the fear of loss, not of a threatened nature and its capacity to sustain life, but of *the conditions which sustain a threatened liberal utopia*. By simply stripping the technological and vegetal accessories from such imagery, this fear of loss becomes clear: the compositions propose little more than a liberal nostalgia for the present – a present which is ethereal, simulated. Ethics in this rhetorical structure ultimately serve to discipline the architectural imagination, reducing it to a pathological reinterpretation of the present.

The 'eco-city' stands as a token of our present notion of urban cosmopolitanism complete with its technological supplement: the paranoid apparatus necessary to sustain its liberal core amidst inexorable ecological havoc. From this perspective, the role of the eco-city becomes evident: it is merely a phantasmic screen, prohibiting us from confronting the true terrors of ecological catastrophe, while at once imploring us to silently identify this terror with the collapse of liberal capitalism itself. And while the notion of a liberal utopia has perhaps remained stunted by the realities internal to liberalism itself, for conceivably the first time in modern history the vague frivolity with which ecological crisis is dealt has rendered possible its construction in the eco-city. The zero-emissions 'technology cluster', Masdar, an eco-city project by Foster and Partners for Abu-Dhabi, for instance, presents itself as the liberal answer to ecological catastrophe: an enclosed, self-contained economic free zone.

If these claims are indeed correct, the fantasy that the 'ecological future' is also (and only) a liberal future must be dispelled if only because constructing such fantasies as 'eco-cities' is itself perverse. For what they promise is paradoxically to transform a crumbling political system into a terrifying condition of utter exclusion and deprivation: their only true assurance is the privatization of the urban realm itself. Liberalism's use of fear in the face of true crisis is neurotic since it can be so easily alleviated by partial and irrelevant 'solutions'. In this way, perhaps the true crisis we face is the persistently liberal treatment of 'crisis' itself, for such a 'tendency towards imprecision and vagueness ... may itself be viewed as the symptom of a historical crisis that cannot as yet be fully gauged.'⁹

Notes

1. See Françoise Choay, *The Modern City: Planning in the 19th Century*, Braziller, New York, 1969.
2. See Sven-Olov Wallenstein, *Biopolitics and the Emergence of Modern Architecture*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2009.
3. See Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City*, Verso, London and New York, 2003.
4. Reinhart Koselleck, 'Crisis', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 67, no. 2, April 2006, p. 372.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 358.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
7. A dictum evoked by Le Corbusier in several issues of his journal *L'Ésprit nouveau*.
8. Koselleck, 'Crisis', p. 399.
9. *Ibid.*

What's so great about 'timeless'?

Architecture and the Prince, again

Victoria McNeile

Whoever succeeds in redeveloping the Chelsea Barracks site will probably produce a small book to mark its completion. This will include an account of the site's history, illustrated with maps and engravings, rather furry black-and-white photographs and a selection of press cuttings. There will be timelines charting the schemes produced, the matings and divorces within successive development teams, the arrival of the Prince of Wales, and the point at which one particular architectural vision triumphed. All the competing designs will be documented, helping to write the strengths of the completed scheme into history. Just such a book was produced at the end of the Paternoster Square development, next to St Paul's Cathedral.¹

The redevelopment of the Chelsea Barracks site shows signs of becoming another Paternoster. There are the competing urban and architectural visions and the serpentine planning politics, pumped up by vast amounts of money. The chronicler of the early stage of the process may have a more challenging task than usual, however, because this time the Prince of Wales's intervention has been judged 'unexpected and unwelcome' by Mr Justice Vos in the High Court.

As part of the Clarence House programme of opposition to Richard Rogers's site plan, the Prince had written to the prime minister of Qatar with his personal response to the scheme. The existence of the letter was leaked, as it was bound or even intended to be. Extracts have been read in court as part of the dispute between the co-developers over the withdrawal of the planning application, and the letter has recently been published in full.² The strategies of all concerned are now being made public, but this letter deserves detailed consideration. Not because it so strangely identifies Rogers's scheme as 'Brutalist'. Nor even for the propriety of the intervention, the underlinings, the emotion and the shameless plugging of the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment and Quinlan Terry's alternative plans for the site. The letter needs examination because of the assumptions about cities embedded within it.

Value over time

Much is tied up in the Prince's use of the word 'timeless'. It needs to be distinguished from its kindlier cousin, 'old-fashioned'. 'Old-fashioned' descriptively supports a concept of urban virtues synonymous with seamliness. This topographically selective urban is epitomized by Mayfair, St James's, Bath, eighteenth-century Edinburgh: apparently places where 'so many people want to live'. There's a touch of commercial advantage shimmering in the background. Such places, writes the Prince, 'consistently retain, and increase, their value over time'. This particular trajectory seems to rule out a wider interpretation than asset value. Stretching its remit, 'old-fashioned' then offers a bit of flavour to 'beauty', leaving the question of whether the Prince is promoting an old-fashioned species of this particular commodity or simply beauty itself, the concept of which is old-fashioned.

'Timeless' is more complicated. The urban qualities the Prince praises are 'based on the "old-fashioned" – I would call them timeless – virtues of squares, mansion blocks and terraces'. Timeless here is an intensification of old-fashioned. These timeless virtues aren't named as such, but they either complement the character, elegance, livability and atmosphere the Prince has asserted, or, in a neat piece of circularity, are just those qualities. There's another important characteristic: squares, terraces and mansion blocks provide comparable development density to that achieved by high-rise blocks – that is, the Rogers approach to the Barracks site. Timeless, as virtue, doesn't rule out profit from development, the Prince is careful to imply.

The princely assertion of timeless virtues has been around for a long time. It's a strange proposition. You can't have 'place', the site of these virtues, without time butting in and carrying its baggage with it. The squares of Mayfair and St James's (Grosvenor, Hanover, Berkeley and St James's) are clearly palimpsests, retaining only in their footprints and a very few buildings the original intentions of their developers. Originally late-seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century spaces, they continue to evolve in response to the incentives and constraints of commerce, fashion and regulation. Trees have grown in them (only Grosvenor Square originally featured a garden) and many of the surrounding buildings been replaced by much larger ones. Ratios of footprint



to verticality have shifted: a sneaky move on time's part to make sure that its work can't be ignored. And even within the locale, these squares' diversity of form and connection to the surrounding city make generalization fairly meaningless. Probably only in the 1720s' world of Sutton Nicholls's engravings, with their bird's eye

view, might there ever have been a single means of representation to unify them and accommodate their variety – and that only if Berkeley Square had got under way a bit earlier. These squares no more exemplify timelessness than do those of Milton Keynes; unless 'timeless' actually means 'difficult to date with any precision'.

'Timeless' makes its second appearance in the letter in a reference to a planning and design approach existing as an alternative to modernism. Given the choice, asserts the Prince, 'communities ... invariably prefer the more timeless approach'. For non-initiates, this is the general proposition that architecture should be 'bound to place not to time';³ bound too to Nature and her organic forms and traditional architectural practice. It's all there in the writings of Christopher Alexander and the New Urbanists. The timeless design approach apparently 'enhances all those qualities of neighbourliness, community, human-scale, proportion and ... beauty'. Are these derived from the first context for timeless: the squares and terraces of Mayfair, Bath, and so on? Or do they exist everywhere and just need a bit of nurture to make them grow? Or are these the qualities that the timeless approach actually exists to institute?

In the timeless philosophy of the built environment, time is trumped by place in a hierarchy of design incentives. Yet timeless and timelessness are asserted as virtues without the assumption that time has been a bad boy. Rather, they imply that time must be simultaneously absent yet present; its accruals available but unobtrusive.

Or historical expression?

The Prince pointed to the Quinlan Terry scheme (developed for the Barracks site at the behest of local residents) as a means by which time might be put in its place, so to speak.⁴ The Terry scheme, with its assembly of terraces and quadrangles, is a highly selective response to place that takes in the nearby Royal Hospital by Wren, completes its enclosures in the manner of Oxbridge colleges and adds the comforting scale of the Escorial. Fronting the race track that is the Chelsea Bridge Road and the earlier Terry design of the new Infirmary building for the Hospital, it turns its back on the heterogeneity of Pimlico. It is hard to see how it can be regarded as timeless, given its obvious genealogy, and its impermeability and inward focus certainly offer as great a challenge to the locale as the Rogers scheme. But the Prince suggests that it is appropriate because it introduces the ‘ever-popular terraces, squares and crescents that are such an enduring and profitable characteristic of London’.

Perhaps what the Prince means by asserting the timeless quality of squares and their terraces is simply their familiarity as elements of London. Their formation was a distinctive and almost continual feature of the development of residential estates for nearly 250 years from the middle of the seventeenth century. The pattern of terraces surrounding a railed and planted space is distinctive and the subject of admiring commentary from architecturally minded historians or historically inclined architects. The Prince has often eulogized the nurturing qualities of enclosed spaces. Well-designed enclosures, he wrote in 1989, breed community spirit, ‘their virtues are timeless, still providing privacy, beauty and a feeling of total safety’.⁵ It is at once a powerful and a prescriptive representation, and one that shows a mutual making between ideas and the material world. But it is perfectly possible to feel constrained and frightened in enclosed spaces if you are locked in with uncongenial people. The erstwhile railed Chelsea Barracks parade ground probably did not exemplify all of enclosure’s timeless virtues, if privacy and beauty were top of the list. And even if community, safety and harmony were universal goods – and it’s perfectly possible to disagree⁶ – they too must be subjected to this hierarchy of timeless virtues.

In fact, as early as the 1840s there was a clash of evaluation between those who regarded London’s squares as the city’s lungs or as charming breaks in a forest of buildings, and those who saw in them only the exclusionary practices that kept London’s children in the filth of the streets. Contradictory representations – and urban rhetorics – persist. The recent re-Georgianizing of Bloomsbury is considered by some to be a successful heritage initiative and by others as an unwelcome sanitizing force. This is the big problem if you are a fan of the timeless: these disruptive ingredients in the would-be harmonious ordering of cities and their citizens. Timeless wants it all done: complete, controlled and impermeably valued. The fact that this is impossible does not stop it from being sinister. Time is inalienably a component of places, and even if you are a sufficiently discriminating observer of the past to enable you to construct its semblance in the present, something of the messiness of now will always mark it. What’s so uncomfortable about this that we would want to turn our back on it?

Notes

1. Nicola Jackson, *The Story of Paternoster: A New Square for London*, Wordsearch, London, 2003.
2. www.telegraph.co.uk/telegraph/multimedia/archive/01665/letter_1665159a.gif; accessed 25 June 2010.
3. www.architecture.com/TheRIBA/175thAnniversary/AnnualLecture/speech.aspx; accessed 27 June 2010.
4. www.e-architect.co.uk/images/jpgs/architects/chelsea_barracks_qt.jpg; accessed 5 July 2010.
5. Prince of Wales, *A Vision of Britain: A Personal View of Architecture*, Doubleday, London, 1989, pp. 86–7.
6. ‘Contrasting Concepts of Harmony in Architecture: 1982 Debate between Christopher Alexander and Peter Eisenman’, *Katarxis* 3.

Capitalist epics

Abstraction, totality and the theory of the novel

David Cunningham

How are we to read Georg Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel* nearly a century after it was written?¹ More specifically, how are we to reread its relation to Lukács's own later Marxist work, framed, as the latter was, by its self-consciously materialist attempt to rework the book's Hegelian categories in view of Marx's ambition to turn Hegel's idealism 'right side up'? In the wake of the apparent disappearance of a horizon of world proletarian revolution inaugurated, for Lukács, by the events of 1917 – a horizon which informs his later accounts of the realist and modernist novel at every point – in what ways have the possible meanings of *The Theory of the Novel* been transformed? What is living and what dead in Lukács's theorization of the novel? Is there perhaps new life in it today?

All of Lukács's work on the novel proposes itself, in some form, as a series of answers to the questions that begin Ian Watt's classic 1957 study, *The Rise of the Novel*:

Is the novel a new literary form? And if we assume, as is commonly done, that it is ... how does it differ from the prose fiction of the past...? And is there any reason why these differences appeared when and where they did?²

In this sense, Lukács's theorization of the novel is also, of necessity, a theorization of modernity, and of its specific relation to literary form. For despite the calls of Margaret Anne Doody and, more recently, Franco Moretti to 'make the literary field longer, larger and deeper', taking it ultimately back into the ancient world, Watt's questions remain, in a fundamental sense, ineliminable.³ David Trotter may be right to suggest that 'traces of novel DNA' can be found everywhere and anywhere within the history of literate culture, but there remains something more historically specific at stake in questions about the rise of the novel *as such*, whatever its lengthier 'polygenesis'.⁴ Certainly, as Benjamin wrote in the 1930s, while it is evidently true

that certain aspects of the novel might well 'go back to antiquity', it was in fact only in its encounter with the 'evolving middle class' of 'fully developed capitalism' that it found 'those elements' that were genuinely 'favourable to its flowering'.⁵ And, if nothing else, such an assertion indicates what, for much twentieth- and twenty-first-century criticism, has been thought to most crucially delimit the novel: that it is a (perhaps *the*) distinctively modern literary form.⁶

The character of this modernity has been conceived in many different, more or less 'mythical' (and thereby deconstructible) ways.⁷ But if it takes a dominant form, as Benjamin's account suggests, it is probably one that understands the novel, above all, as literature's great *bourgeois* form: the expression of some 'new centre of gravity' embodied in the 'self-confidence of the middle class as a whole'.⁸ The roots of such a conception – associated, variously, with the rise of individualism, the concretely everyday and secular, progressivism, or the fragmentation and dissolution of some pre-existing hierarchy of genre – lie, however, not so much in any developed account of the novel itself, but rather, negatively, in an account of the ancient *epic* to be found first in what comprises little more than a page or two of Hegel's *Aesthetics*, and from which, it is no exaggeration to say, almost the entirety of the conceptual apparatus of Lukács's work on the novel derives:

[I]t is quite different with the novel, the modern bourgeois epic. Here we have completely before us again the wealth and many-sidedness of interests, situations, characters, relations involved in life, the background of a whole world, as well as the epic portrayal of events. But what is missing is the *primitive* poetic general situation out of which the epic proper proceeds. A novel in the modern sense of the word presupposes a world already prosaically ordered ... the whole state of the world today has assumed a form diametrically opposed in its prosaic organization to the requirements... for genuine epic.⁹

As *the* modern literary form that attempts to recover the epic's many-sided range and 'wholeness', what nonetheless the novel necessarily lacks, according to Hegel, is the possible 'occurrence of an action which in the whole breadth of its circumstances and relations must gain access to our contemplation as a rich event connected with the total world of a nation and epoch'.¹⁰ For it is a structural feature of modernity, as regards its potential mediation by the artwork (if not the philosophical concept), that it precisely resists being grasped *as a totality*. Much as any individual 'story' might strive for universal significance so as to represent or embody totality, it will always resolve back into the contingent and 'unendingly particular'. As Lukács would sum up Hegel's argument and extend it some ninety years later, the novel is, *impossibly*, 'the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given ... yet which still thinks in terms of totality'. Such forms thus 'differ from one another not by their authors' fundamental intentions, but by the given historico-philosophical realities with which the authors were confronted' – that is, they become necessary manifestations (and hence indices) of the difference between the social 'realities' of the ancient and the modern *per se*.¹¹

The modern epic

Persistent as such a conception of the epic's negative relation to modernity has been, it is not, evidently, without its problems. Certainly, *The Theory of the Novel* leaves a good deal to be desired in this regard, given the degree to which it is so apparently bereft of *any* specific historical detail in social, technological or economic terms. In fact, as a characterization of modernity – most notoriously, through Fichte's description of the present as 'the epoch of absolute sinfulness' – the book would seem ultimately no less 'mythical' in form than is its projection of a lost ancient 'happy age' of perfect and unthinkable completion.¹² Nonetheless, or so I want to argue, stripped of its more ostentatiously idealist baggage, we should perhaps see this as a question less of the strict historiographic *actuality* of past epic wholeness in Lukács's work, than of the ways in which it articulates a certain self-consciousness of the historically distinctive social forms from which such lost wholeness is 'mythically' projected: the solidity against which, so to speak, the melting of all that is solid into air may be enunciated. This is important because failure to acknowledge such self-consciousness altogether risks simply dissolving the social conditions of novelistic form into an effectively transhistorical set of phenomena – individuation, secularity, entrepreneur-

ship, everydayness, and so on – that thereby become progressively unmoored from historical difference and change *per se*, an ahistorical 'bundle' of 'transcultural constants that can be more or less active from period to period and work to work', as Massimo Fusillo has recently proposed.¹³ As such, if the task today may well be to 'reorient [Lukács's] text away from its spatio-temporal nostalgia for premodern literary forms', this should not, I think, necessarily entail any suspension of 'its periodizing aspects' altogether.¹⁴ On the contrary: it ought precisely to connect it to what, for example, in the *Communist Manifesto*, is famously described as the conditions of a culture which is *itself* marked by an experience of 'everlasting uncertainty and agitation'.¹⁵

Of course, if *The Theory of the Novel* itself largely avoids any attempt to socially concretize such an experience of modernity, the task that Lukács explicitly set himself from the 1920s onwards was to provide the rise of the novel with a more historically precise materialist account in this regard. As such, I do not, of course, quote Marx at this point contingently. It is *the bourgeoisie*, writes Marx, 'who cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society'.¹⁶ And if the novel is, then, a distinctively modern moment in what Benjamin describes as a process in which literary forms, such as the form of the story, come to be 'melted down', then it is because, for such a view, it both reflects and *participates in* these ongoing transformations in the relations of society as a whole.¹⁷

However, from the perspective of the development of Lukács's work, this raises two questions. First, how exactly in the later writings are the essentially Hegelian categories of *The Theory of the Novel* – and, specifically, of the novel's understanding as a (fundamentally impossible) modern epic form – reworked in line with the version of historical materialism set out in Lukács's first great Marxist text *History and Class Consciousness*, and its subsequent developments?¹⁸ And, second, how, in doing so, is it around a new understanding of the novel as the specifically modern bourgeois epic that such reworking will come to be organized? More particularly, and outside of the legitimation with which the Hegelian text provides it, why, in any Marxian-inspired 'rewriting' of Lukács's earlier book, is it as the epic of the bourgeois class *rather than of capitalism itself* that the novel comes predominantly to be understood?

Now, it seems to me that this is a question that has gone strangely unasked, not only of Lukács's later work, but of dominant theorizations of the novel

more generally. To pose it is not, however, to suggest that the association of the novel with the bourgeoisie, and, specifically, with the individualism of the bourgeois subject (as opposed to, say, the communal forms of Benjamin's storyteller), is false. Far from it. It is however to note, as Jameson observes, that such theorizations can thereby work to bypass what should otherwise be regarded as 'the very centre of Marx's work, the structural account of the historic originality of capitalism'. As Jameson continues:

Marxist literary criticism – to limit ourselves to that – has less often tried to analyse its objects in terms of capital and value, in terms of the system of capitalism itself, than it has in terms of class ... [It has been] much simpler to establish the more direct mediation of a merchant and business class, with its emergent class culture, alongside the forms and texts themselves. Money enters the picture here insofar as only exchange, merchant activity and the like, and later on nascent capitalism, determine the coming into being of some historically original burgher or city merchant, bourgeois class life.¹⁹

This has certainly been the case with dominant theorizations of the novel, Marxist and otherwise. Yet, in a context in which, more clearly than ever, it is precisely global capitalism rather than either the bourgeoisie *or* the proletariat which seems to drive any revolutionizing of 'the whole relations of society', it raises the question of whether, if we are to revisit *The Theory of the Novel*, it is perhaps – against the grain of Lukács's own rereadings – not as an epic of the bourgeois 'people', but as a displaced account of 'the system of capitalism itself' that the latter's engagement with the novel's impossible epic form is best understood today.

Capitalism, modernity, the novel

I want to come back to this hypothesis in a moment, but, before doing so, it is worth noting that not for nothing might Watt's final question – 'is there any reason why these differences appeared when and where they did?' – remind one of certain debates concerning the origins of a *capitalist* modernity. Indeed, for Watt himself, the novel's eighteenth-century development is first and foremost traceable to the supersession of feudal relations of patronage by the increasingly powerful and liberated economic relations of the market, publishers, booksellers and the 'reading public'. Similarly, Benedict Anderson, for example, links the rise of the novel to not only the emergence of the 'revolutionary vernacularizing thrust' of bourgeois culture, but, materially, to the rise of what he calls 'print-capitalism'

and the production of the book as, in 'a rather special sense', the 'first modern-style, mass-produced industrial commodity'.²⁰ In this regard, the problem of how to define the distinction between 'aspects of the novel' and the rise of the 'novel as such' might productively mirror some not dissimilar questions concerning the historical development of capitalism itself. For, like Trotter's traces of novel DNA, we can clearly find central economic and social 'aspects of capitalism' – money, the commodity, and so on – across a far longer history than that within which anybody would identify the emergence of capitalism proper.²¹ Yet, to cite *History and Class Consciousness* itself, there remains an obvious 'qualitative difference between the commodity as one form among many regulating the metabolism of human society and the commodity as the universal structuring principle'.²²

Interesting and important as all this is, however, my own concern is rather less with a sociology of literature per se than with its relations to what is conceived as something like a *theoretical* 'history of forms' in Lukács's work. For this, the central question would be, not so much that of the novel's own status as a commodity, its links to print-capitalism, or even of its ongoing 'reflection' of capitalist modernity's development (in which, say, Moll Flanders appears as 'our classic revelation of the mercantile mind'²³), but of the extent to which we can grasp this in terms of its intelligibility as an effective 'model' of such capitalist modernity, a formal equivalent, at some level, to its social being. Precisely as an epic form, the novel, Lukács writes, carries 'the fragmentary nature of the world's structure into the world of forms'.²⁴ And whether or not one accepts the more or less mythical terms with which such fragmentation is posited in *The Theory of the Novel* – as Moretti puts it in an early work: what is 'unacceptable' here is 'not so much the description of form as the characteristics attributed to historical existence'²⁵ – it continues to raise the question of the degree to which literary form can be understood as something like a mediation of social form, the means by which social form appears somehow *within* artistic form itself.

It is worth noting then that, suspended from any implausibly simple coding as either negative or positive in character, this conception of the novel's 'form-problem' appears, above all, in both Hegel and Lukács, as an increase in the complexity, distance and objective extent of what Marx terms 'the whole relations of society' themselves. If the novel is the paradoxical epic form of a world in which 'occupations and activities are sundered and split into infinitely many parts, so

that to individuals only a particle of the whole may accrue', then it is because, as Lukács writes, this is a world which 'has become infinitely large and each of its corners ... richer in gifts and dangers than the world of the Greeks'. It is this very wealth that, by virtue of its unending richness, 'cancels out the positive meaning – the totality – upon which their life was based'.²⁶ No one event, no one narrative, so to speak, can ever be rich enough.

For the early Lukács, the novel, *any novel*, can thus only be 'the paradoxical fusion of heterogeneous and discrete components into an organic whole which is then abolished over and over again'.²⁷ Or, as Adorno will come to describe it, as epic form the novel can, unavoidably, only ever be some form of *negative* or *anti-epic*; a formal instantiation of its own negative relation to the possibility for totality given (however mythically) to the epic as such. For the Lukács of *The Theory of the Novel*, however, this is, crucially, still conceived in two possible ways:

[If a] totality that can be simply accepted is no longer given to the forms of art ... therefore they must either narrow down and volatilize whatever has to be given form to the point where they can encompass it, or else they must show polemically the impossibility of achieving their necessary object and the inner nullity of their own means.²⁸

In both of these possibilities – 'narrowing down' and 'polemical impossibility' – the work is constituted by failure when judged from the perspective of epic totality, but their essential forms of negativity in this regard are importantly different. In the first, if an epic wholeness survives, it does so only by, for example, fleeing 'from great national events into the restrictedness of private domestic situations'.²⁹ (A comment which appears now as a prophetic judgement on much 'literary' novel writing of late-twentieth-century Europe and North America.) It is in these terms that we would rightly be inclined to follow through the consequences of Benjamin's conception of the novel's 'birthplace' as the 'individual in his isolation' – whether embodied in the figure of author, reader or literary character (Benjamin typically cites the *Bildungsroman*) – as that which connects it to that 'which is incommensurable in the representation of human experience' as a whole;³⁰ an incommensurability which is, of course, also the *freedom* specifically proffered by bourgeois individualism in its break with feudal bonds and hierarchies. In this way, the novel is thus marked by an ultimately irresolvable collision between what Hegel calls the individual (bourgeois) subject's 'poetry of the heart and the opposing prose of circumstances',³¹ which,

in its more critical form, thereby functions, at best, *negatively*, as a means either of expressing 'the conflict between living human beings and rigidified conditions' – entailing that, ultimately, 'alienation itself' must itself become 'an aesthetic device for the novel' – or of constituting the artwork itself as some moment of non-identity resistant to the more or less violent closure of the whole, where that whole itself is understood as inherently oppressive.³² (By contrast, on Hegel's own terms, no epic hero or epic work can, by definition, possibly be in conflict with its world.)



In the second possibility set out by Lukács, however, in which the will to a genuinely epic totality is not so much abandoned as 'polemically' engaged in its very impossibility, negativity instead takes the form of something like an ironic formal expression of transformations within 'the whole relations of society' as such: not so much a direct, concrete witness to the (bourgeois) individual's alienation – whereby the 'individual confronts established systems of value and finds them lacking'³³ – as a rendering visible of the impossible task of grasping, in any finite literary form, the full and complex extent of those 'whole [capitalist] relations of society' which confront the individual, and which are increasingly objectified in properly *supraindividual*, even inhuman forms: administration, state law or, above all, the world market.

In short, if the novel as 'narrowing down' seeks, in the terms of *The Theory of the Novel*, an escape from the 'largeness' of the world, so as to find (critically or otherwise) a 'particle' of the whole that can be isolated and encompassed within it – a more or less self-enclosed provincial community or an individual consciousness on an individual day, for example – the novel as 'polemical impossibility' gestures *towards* this very 'largeness' as a means of registering something about the changing nature of this world's modernity itself. To employ a term familiar from the work of Jameson, its primary object becomes not so much the unfolding

of individual freedom and difference (or their limits), but, precisely as epic form, the impossibility of an adequate ‘cognitive mapping’ of any ‘total’ world *tout court*: ‘the symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the greater global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects’.³⁴

Becoming abstract

With this in mind, then, what I want to propose is that at least one fruitful way of approaching and focusing such questions would be through a critical attention to the problematic of abstraction apparent in Lukács’s writings, both pre- and post-1917. Or, more precisely, a certain relation of abstraction *to* the concrete at work within them. For, in some fundamental sense, Jameson’s rewriting of the novelistic problem of totality as one of a more general problem of cognitive mapping is simply *the* modern problem of abstraction itself.

Now, it would hardly be a revelation to note that a certain account of abstraction is indeed central to Lukács’s early analysis of the very nature of the novel. For what defines the novel’s specifically *epic* ambitions is the degree to which, within it, ‘totality can be systematized only in abstract terms’. Hence, for example, what comes to threaten the epic potential of the ‘chivalrous novel’, in the moment that gives birth to *Don Quixote*, is necessarily accorded a far more general significance:

The chivalrous novel had succumbed to the fate of every epic that wants to maintain and perpetuate a form by purely formal means after the transcendental conditions for its existence have already been condemned by the historico-philosophical dialectic. The chivalrous novel had lost its roots in transcendent being, and the forms, which no longer had any immanent function, withered away, became abstract.³⁵

This is an emphatically historical proposition. For if *every* novel must risk what, in an explicitly Hegelian register, Lukács calls ‘bad abstraction’, this is not a contingent possibility, but rather a necessary productive logic generated by some abstraction inherent to ‘the given reality’ itself with which the novel, in general, is confronted.

It is this argument that is, of course, one of the key targets of Lukács’s own self-critical preface to the book written in 1962, which precisely attempts to articulate and justify the subsequent development of its arguments onto a properly ‘Marxist ground’, informed by ‘concrete socio-historical realities’.³⁶ Indeed, it is in

such terms that Lukács diagnoses in his own earlier self a fatal weakness for what he terms *abstractionism*. But it also thereby entails a far simpler opposition of abstraction to the concrete than can be found anywhere in the earlier book; something apparent both in his notorious deployment of the Hegelian distinction between so-called ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ potentiality, as a means of distinguishing modernism from realism, and in the 1962 critique of an ‘abstractionism’ that effaces the particularity of the novel’s own ‘historical and aesthetic richness’.³⁷ As he wrote there:

The epilogue in *War and Peace* is, in fact, an *authentic* conclusion, in terms of ideas, to the period of the Napoleonic Wars; the development of certain figures already foreshadows the Decembrist rising of 1825. But the author of *The Theory of the Novel* ... can [only] find here ... ‘more melancholy than the ending of the most problematic of novels of disillusionment’.³⁸

However, this runs together two somewhat different problematics of abstraction in the earlier work: on the one hand, an abstractionism at the level of critical or theoretical approach – which reduces rich particularity to generalized models or types – and, on the other, an abstraction immanent to the *text itself*, which, in the case of realism, is thus countered by the claim to an ‘authentic’ concreteness now seen as grounded in some ‘real’ social history. It is, then, but a short step from this to an analysis whereby an increasingly simple positive-to-negative encoding of the concrete and the abstract can be progressively mapped onto the formal (rather than predominantly historical) division between realism and modernism per se, in which ‘abstraction’ comes to mean little more, in a reading of the latter, than a straightforward ‘negation of outward reality’ or ‘attenuation of actuality’ itself.³⁹

Against this, what I am suggesting is that, just as the later Marx himself reads a certain account of capitalism out of Hegel’s idealist categories, particularly from the *Science of Logic*, so, perhaps, it might be possible to do something similar here with regard to the ‘abstractionism’ of the earlier Lukács work – a reading which, in fact, the later Lukács himself will steadfastly resist. As such, what I thus also want to argue is that at least part of the problems that the later work is commonly thought to exhibit result from the questionable ways in which he pursues such a project of ‘translation’ of his *own* earlier Hegelian terms. To put it crudely, where the post-1917 Lukács will seek, positively, to restore epic totality under the name of realism, through a identification of class consciousness or ‘perspective’ with the expression of a quasi-Hegelian

‘subject of history’, what he will thereby abandon – or, at least, consign to the generic limitations of so-called ‘modernism’ – is the novel’s ‘epic’ connection to abstract form itself, as a confrontation with the social *reality* of a ‘totality [that] can be systematized only in abstract terms’: a totality which is best read as that of the capitalist system as such.

If, therefore, a certain conception of abstraction remains central here, it is because the key engagement with Hegel’s account of abstraction to be found in Marx’s own mature work is not so much (as in the early writings on religion and philosophy) a simple demand to render material what the older thinker had expressed in ‘abstract’ or ‘theological’ terms, but his own elaboration of the social forms of what he called *real* abstraction: that is, those forms of abstraction which, in the specific set of circumstances of capitalist modernity, come to have an actual (and thus paradoxically concrete) objective social existence. As Adorno puts it, if the later Marx himself places an apparently Hegelian emphasis precisely on *totality*, on ‘the ether that permeates the whole of society’, for Marx ‘this ether is anything but ethereal; it is rather the *ens realissimum*. If it seems abstract, this is the fault not of fantastic, wilful thinking, hostile to the facts, but of the *objective* abstraction to which the social process of life is subject – the exchange relation’.⁴⁰ While what defines the novel precisely as an epic form, for the early Lukács, is that it still *thinks* in terms of totality, the ‘objective’ reality which the novel confronts in capitalist modernity must be one in which the social totality can itself precisely *only* be understood in abstract terms. What would this mean, then, for a theorization of the historical development of ‘epic form’ as Lukács defines it?

Subjects of history

Before coming to this directly, we need to return first to Lukács’s own development of the Hegelian description of the novel as the modern bourgeois epic. Superficially, the meaning of such an assertion seems simple: the novel is the epic *of* the bourgeoisie, as a ruling class, themselves. And, certainly, this is how Lukács himself will apparently come to understand the novel in its classic ‘realist’ form. Yet, equally, Hegel’s proposition is an intrinsically paradoxical one. For the whole weight of his preceding argument in the *Aesthetics* is to demonstrate that the epic is in fact possible *only* within the ‘historico-philosophical’ reality of a specific non-modern world. Indeed, if Hegel’s (and the early Lukács’s) argument is followed consistently, there

can be no ‘modern epic’, strictly speaking, bourgeois or otherwise.

Now, one way in which the paradox apparent in all this might be dealt with is by approaching the novel’s bourgeois individual as, in the words of Nancy Armstrong, representative of ‘the claims of unacknowledged individuality in general’.⁴¹ That is, by treating such ‘claims’ precisely *as* ‘general’, the novel on this account turns individualism itself into a kind of socially progressive and collective (class) consciousness, and hence provides a kind of paradoxical concrete ‘unity’ from which an epic perspective of totality, however internally contradictory, might be constructed. The ‘assertion of the primacy of individual experience’, as Watt calls it,⁴² its very sundering from the communal totality of the feudal order, which should, in splitting ‘I’ from ‘you’, render impossible any claim to epic form, thus becomes, simultaneously – for a period (pre-1848) at least – the basis for some *universal* system of values.

Simplifying to the extreme, then, in reworking his earlier, broadly Hegelian account of the novel, what Lukács in fact takes, above all, from Marx is not a thinking of capitalist modernity itself, but a means of rethinking the novel as epic from the specific ‘historical materialist’ standpoint of the supposedly successive revolutionary roles played by two social classes: the bourgeoisie and proletariat. It is the idea that each of these classes may, at different moments, be understood as embodying what he famously terms the position of a subject *of* history (a term that Étienne Balibar suggests nobody but Lukács himself ‘invents’⁴³) – of history *as a whole* – which allows, in turn, for the supposed restoration of an epic perspective of totality. As such, the novel’s importance, more generally, is to be found now (that is, post-1917) in the degree to which it really *does* therefore formally, and ‘from the inside’, express the perspective of such a world-historical ‘subject’.⁴⁴

The question of why Lukács, while maintaining his Hegelian account of the novel as a continuation of epic form, abandons, contra Adorno, the fundamentally *negative* terms in which this continuity (and, hence, relation to modernity itself) is earlier understood, should be obvious. In his 1962 Preface, Lukács describes the earlier book as written at a moment marked by a mood of ‘permanent despair over the state of the world’ in the years preceding the Russian Revolution.⁴⁵ And it is 1917 that changes everything. As Löwy puts it: ‘Lukács perceives socialist revolution as a cultural restoration: organic culture again becomes possible’.⁴⁶ What is epic in the novel thus comes to turn not on a polemical demonstration of the impossibility

of achieving its necessary object, but precisely on the positive *possibility* of a new concretization of what in *The Theory of the Novel* could 'be systematized only in abstract terms'.⁴⁷ Hence, Gorki, for example, because of his relations to the 'revolutionary labour movement', is able, Lukács writes, to present 'the new kind of human being through whom the reader can experience directly and concretely the content of the new life'.⁴⁸ This is what Lukács calls 'the concrete nature of the new socialist perspective', where such concreteness 'involves an awareness of the development, structure and goal of society as a whole'. 'Socialist realism is in a position ... to portray the totality of a society in its immediacy and to reveal its pattern of development'.⁴⁹



In this way, however, socialist realism *also* picks up the 'progressive' perspective accorded to the pre-1848 novel itself, as the epic form of what Lukács calls 'the heroic struggle for the integrated man of the bourgeois revolutionary period'. Of course, the 'classical' bourgeois novel's claims to universality, and hence to a true perspective of totality, are still thereby always, in some sense, 'false', in so far as, ultimately, they continue to be based on class division, and hence will, for Lukács, necessarily break down. But they are never *entirely* false, constituting rather, for a specific historical span, a kind of heroic 'real illusion', at least at the level of felt or 'poetic' experience, able to produce a 'directly perceptible unity of the individual and the universal'.⁵⁰ And it is only on condition of this 'illusion' that the novel's own significance as a precisely epic form can be positively conceived.⁵¹

However – and this is my key point – Lukács's conceptualization of the bourgeoisie and, speculatively, the proletariat as successively filling such a role actually rests on some quite questionable premisses. This is not only, historically, a function of the fact that today it is clear that we do not stand on the cusp of some new socialist era but of capitalism at an ever more global scale. It is also a function of the fact that if there is

indeed a 'subject of history' in Marx's *Capital*, corresponding to the Hegelian Idea, it is neither, strictly, the bourgeoisie nor the proletariat, but, more obviously, self-valorizing capital itself. Of course, some of the difficulties here stem from Marx's *own* earlier tendency effectively to conflate the bourgeoisie with capital in ways that cannot be sustained.⁵² But if, then, Lukács writes, in realism, as in the epic, each 'narrative detail' is 'significant to the extent that it expresses the dialectic between man-as-individual and man-as-social-being',⁵³ according to the logic of *Capital*, it is what Marx calls, in explicitly quasi-Hegelian fashion, the actual abstraction of that 'self-moving substance which is Subject', in the 'shape of *money*', that constitutes the 'real' social being of modernity here.⁵⁴

This is not, of course, a question of somehow deleting the question of class, which remains central to any full understanding of capitalism as a system. Class division and antagonism, like the exploitation of labour, remain very much alive – more so, globally, than ever – even if it is far from clear that this is accompanied by any actual expansion in 'class consciousness' as Lukács might once have understood it. It is, however, to argue that Lukács's fundamental prioritization of class (or, more specifically, class *consciousness*), as a means to thinking a 'perspective of totality' specifically, systematically neglects the extent to which it is capital, rather than either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, which, via the abstractly unifying power of the universalization of exchange, most plausibly corresponds to the anything like the Hegelian Idea within modern societies. The problem is that, as *essentially* abstract, capitalist societies are, by virtue of their production of ever more complex and extensive forms of interconnectedness, in a sense 'collective', but they only assume the structure of a Subject in an objective, 'inhuman' form, quite different from that form of social subjectivity posited of the collective worker (or the 'classical' bourgeoisie). From the perspective of any problematic of *totality*, it is therefore, according to the logic of *Capital* itself, the form of capital not of class that assumes epistemological priority (in terms, for example, of any contemporary 'realism' in its widest sense), even as the latter, of course, remains as important as ever to its functioning and self-reproduction. As such, the earlier claim in the *Manifesto*, taken up by Lukács, that the proletariat stands somehow 'outside' of capital, as an emergent class consciousness in itself, both underplays the degree to which labour is also a form of 'variable capital', and, from a contemporary perspective, severely underestimates the ongoing tendency to subsume labour to capital in such

a way as to ‘block’ the formation of collective ‘class consciousness’ in practical terms. At the very least, then, we’d have to say that any attempt in the novel to articulate some ‘utopian’ or fictive form of ‘universality’, collective sociality or imagined community – historically, paradigmatically, but not exclusively, of a political-national form, as Anderson stresses – as the basis of its ultimately impossible epic perspective of totality, has always had, in more or less intense a fashion, to negotiate the problem of its relation to the real and expanding totality of capitalism itself, and to the always already global space of the accumulation of value. As regards the novel as a modern epic form – which still *thinks* in terms of totality – it must then be capital, on this reading, which constitutes its most properly ‘epic’ subject.

Paradoxically, it is, then, in this sense, the very *idealism* of Lukács’s earlier Hegelian ‘theory’ – with its far more complex account of modernity as a culture of abstraction – that allows it to grasp conceptually, in a way his later self-consciously ‘materialist’ writings do not, the immanence of an actual idealism to the modern social relations refracted by the novel (as ‘materially’ lived), for all that the novel’s relation to capitalism is, seemingly, more clearly foregrounded as a central problematic within the latter. For if the novel is therefore *the* modern literary form which attempts to recover the epic’s many-sided range and ‘wholeness’, is it not, we might ask, above all the ‘social being’ of capital which defines that totality at stake in any modern epic form as such: the ether which ‘permeates the whole of society’ but which is ‘anything but ethereal’? That is to say, if the novel is the epic form of a world which ‘has become infinitely large’, everywhere ‘richer in gifts and dangers than the world of the Greeks’, then surely the ‘form-problem’ of such unending richness will be constituted not, first of all, by the ‘perspective of totality’ engendered by either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat as a ‘subject of history’ – nor even by the imagined community of the nation – but, quite simply, by the impossible ‘totality’ of capital itself?⁵⁵

At the very least, the question is thus raised as to whether, as is most usually claimed, the modernity of the novel is actually best understood in terms of its specific relation to the *bourgeois* ‘era’, or whether it is rather the broader *capitalist* age that might most coherently define its historical locatability and form. The two propositions are not, at any rate, simply interchangeable. Rather, they open up quite different (if never, finally, exclusive) perspectives on the development of the novel itself.

An abstract art

I want to conclude with a suggestion made by Henri Lefebvre in one of his texts on modern life:

The predominance of the abstract in modern art accompanies the extension of the world of merchandise and merchandise as a world, along with the unlimited power of money and capital, very abstract and terribly concrete at one and the same time.⁵⁶

We are not so used to thinking of the novel as a kind of ‘abstract art’ in this way. Indeed, for most, the novel is quite correctly distinguished by a new kind of *concreteness*: the corollary of an emergent bourgeois empiricism and secularism, with its radical devotion to what Watt calls the ‘here-and-now’. (Hence, unsurprisingly, Watt himself associates the rise of the novel with the emergence of an ‘aesthetic tendency in favour of particularity’ and against ‘abstract and general terms’.⁵⁷) Yet it is, perhaps, more accurately a particularly conflicted combination and confrontation of abstraction and concretion – *at one and the same time* – that makes the novel such an exemplary modern art form in this sense. If the ‘elements of the novel’ are, as the early Lukács writes, ‘entirely abstract’, it is the very abstraction of the ‘social structures’ it confronts that the novel ‘renders sensuous as the lived experience of the novel’s characters’, and thus transforms ‘into an instrument of composition’.⁵⁸

The problem at stake in this is, then, an ultimately irresolvable one of how ‘to conjure up in perceptible form a society that has become abstract’, a problem perhaps best grasped in a passage that Adorno himself was fond of citing from Brecht:

The situation becomes so complicated because a simple ‘reproduction of reality’ says less than ever about reality. A photograph of the Krupp factories or the AEG provides virtually no information about these establishments. True reality has slipped over into functional reality. The reification of human relations, that is, the factory, no longer delivers human relations to us.⁵⁹

Now, if this point – which Adorno engages at length in his essay on Balzac – is one that is certainly *intensified* by early-twentieth-century modernism, it is, nonetheless, far from restricted to a more limited issue concerning the generic nature of ‘realism’. (As Adorno points out, already in Balzac ‘the individual foul deeds through which people visibly attempt to steal from one another the surplus value that has already been appropriated invisibly make the horror graphic.’ As such, the novel *necessarily* struggles with the problem of how ‘to conjure up in perceptible form

a society that has become abstract'.⁶⁰) Moreover, it goes to the heart of the tense relation between the novel's concrete and abstract tendencies, and, hence, between its alternate presentations in the form of bourgeois epic – of the world of its heroic entrepreneurs, ruined financiers, uppity governesses and alienated artists – or the form of the epic of capitalism, of the abstract world of money and circulation, universal exchange and 'functional reality', as such.

Turning, then, from the essay on 'The Storyteller', it is hence in, for example, Benjamin's relatively brief comments on Kafka that we might instead find one basis for an alternate development of the account of abstraction and concretion to be found in *The Theory of the Novel* itself. Kafka's work, writes Benjamin in a 1938 letter to Scholem, is 'the exact complement' of that precisely *social* reality which presents itself in 'the experience of the modern city-dweller'.⁶¹ For such a perspective, significantly, modes of abstraction are less a flight *from* reality and more an index *of* the various social forms of 'real abstraction' constitutive of the (sensuously) 'unrepresentable' totality of modernity itself.⁶² Yet – and Kafka is all too clearly a distinctive case – this should not be misunderstood. For despite, for example, Adorno's more apocalyptic pronouncements, capitalism as a social form is never *reducible* to the more or less 'purely' abstract social relations determined by capital and the value form alone. Indeed, capitalism positively requires other forms of social relation as concrete forms that can be reworked and refunctioned in the drive to capital accumulation. Like the novel it is nothing without it. Certainly, this dialectic of abstraction and concretion unique to each work would thus be central to any thinking through of the new paradoxical hybridities of form engendered by the novel's current wave of internationalization, following, as it does, those socio-economic processes through which the more or less 'concrete' social forms of non-capitalist and previously colonial cultures are progressively integrated into the accumulative structures of a transnational capitalism.

In 'the created reality' of the novel, the 'entire structure' of which can only be based in 'abstract systematization', Lukács writes, what 'becomes visible is the distance separating the systematization from concrete life'.⁶³ Yet rather than taking this as the pretext for mourning the mythical loss of 'an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given', one might instead see such 'visibility' – its capacity to *render visible* such distance – as, in fact, precisely the novel's own distinctive 'epic' mode; the irresolvable gap between the forms of abstrac-

tion intrinsic to modern social being and what Hegel called the 'unendingly particular' – the concreteness of 'things', and individual subjective experiences – with which the novel has, historically, been most persistently associated. In Balzac, Adorno writes, the novel already depicts, in its own ironic repetition of epic 'wholeness' and collective 'fate', the 'superior power of social and especially economic interests over private psychology', in the ways in which in the 'form of a medium of circulation, money, the capitalist process touches and patterns the characters whose lives the novel form tries to capture'.⁶⁴ And we can continue to see some extension of this – across any simple generic realism versus modernism divide – in various works today.

Writing of what he has termed the New Italian Epic, Wu Ming 1 – one of the Italian collective Wu Ming, responsible themselves for the contemporary historical novels of capitalism and class struggle, *Q, 54* and *Manituana* – describes Roberto Saviano's 2006 book *Gomorra*, around 300 pages of interweaving, often horrific stories of the Neapolitan Camorra that occupies some indeterminate space between fiction and non-fiction, the novel and journalism, in the following terms:

One of the most impressive things in *Gomorra* is the scope, the scale of the book: the journey begins at the docks of Naples and in the destitute outskirts of that city, but then Saviano takes us to Russia, Bélarùs, Scotland, the United States, Spain, the Middle East, Hollywood, Colombia ... Saviano's gaze makes incursions all over the world, because Italian organized crime makes business all over the world.⁶⁵

Thus understood as a kind of critical mimesis of capital's own global 'incursions', *Gomorra*'s own version of epic form is articulated by Saviano in the opening to his final chapter in very particular terms:

It's not hard to imagine something, not hard to picture in your mind a person or gesture, or something that doesn't exist. It's not even complicated to imagine your own death. It's far more difficult to imagine the economy in all its aspects: the finances, profit percentages, negotiations, debts, and investments. There are no faces to visualize, nothing precise to fix in your mind. You may be able to picture the impact of the economy, but not its cash flows, bank accounts, individual transactions.⁶⁶

As a framing of the book as a whole, *Gomorra* sets out, very concretely in this way, the degree to which any such epic 'realism' of capitalism can only be a polemical demonstration of the ultimate impossibility of *imaging* those forms of abstraction – harder

to imagine than ‘your own death’ – which nonetheless become the common denominator of all values in the urban worlds in which the book’s various characters are enmeshed. *Gomorrah*’s concluding frame echoes here the global scope evoked by its opening in the all-too-material world of commodity circulation represented by the Port of Naples: ‘Everything that exists passes through here’, comments the narrator,

There’s not a product, fabric, piece of plastic, toy, hammer, shoe, screwdriver, bolt, video game, jacket, pair of pants, drill, or watch that doesn’t come through here. The port of Naples is an open wound. The endpoint for the interminable voyage that merchandise makes.⁶⁷

It is in such terms, for example, that a comparison to, for example, that most celebrated of contemporary television romances – *The Wire* – equally springs to mind. And, in fact, more vividly than most novels, *The Wire* insists upon the capitalist ‘system’ itself as Subject, far more than either its ‘bourgeois’ or ‘proletarian’ characters. ‘You follow the drugs you get a drugs case’, says one character in the first series. ‘You follow the money, you don’t know where you’re going.’

Most importantly, it is in something like the depiction of the very *impossibility* of ‘imagin[ing] the economy in all its aspects’, of grasping the interminability of the ‘voyage’ that merchandise or money make, that both *Gomorrah* and *The Wire*, like several other contemporary ‘epic’ texts, thus render the abstract itself visible *as* invisible within the ‘work’. As John Kraniauskas puts it of *The Wire*: as ‘a work of narrative totalisation’ any contemporary epic form is, for all that it may manifest a ‘realist desire to accumulate social content’, ‘always already incomplete’, to the degree that its narrative momentum must inevitably bring it up against an ‘unreadable [that is, abstract] sphere of finance capital’ into which it cannot finally enter. In this way, he argues, of necessity ‘the narrative pursuit of money through the cycle (or loop) of accumulation from the streets into finance only goes so far’. This indicates, for Kraniauskas, a central paradox of the show: the further it ‘zooms out’ the ‘less socially explanatory its vision becomes’, indicating, in turn, a ‘narrative limit’ which is also a ‘generic limit of *The Wire* as a work of crime fiction’. And in this it is not untypical. Yet – quite apart from causing one to wonder for which ‘genre’ this would *not*, at some level, constitute a limit – one might equally argue that it is precisely the ways in which, formally, it renders visible the essential limits on any artistic or cultural ‘representation’ of ‘totality’ that makes *The Wire* such a powerful contemporary work. The epistemological

limits entailed by the forms of what Kraniauskas terms ‘police interpretation’ in the show’s plot then become metonymic of an intrinsic problem of interpretation more generally, which it is the merit of the programme to dramatize, and which lies at the heart of its framing of, for example, the ‘defeats’ of collective labour in its second series. In this sense, critically, the ‘failure’ of its ‘narrative pursuit’ is also arguably its success as a kind of contemporary epic form.⁶⁸

The dialectic ‘without synthesis’ between abstract and concrete tendencies is on this reading, then, the very ongoing condition of the modernity of the novel as an epic form as such. For capitalist modernity *really is* a social world constituted through abstraction. Very abstract and terribly concrete at the same time, the novel must, as the early Lukács understood, be no less so than the socio-historical reality of modern culture that it confronts.

Notes

1. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock, Merlin, London, 1971 – written 1914–15, first published in 1916. This article is a slightly different version of a chapter forthcoming in Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall, eds, *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*, Continuum, London and New York, 2011. My thanks to both of this book’s editors, and especially to Tim Bewes for the invitation to deliver the paper at Theories of the Novel Now, a conference hosted by *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, in Providence, Rhode Island in November 2008, from which the ideas expressed in this article initially derived. Thanks also to the editors of *Novel* for permission to reuse some brief passages from the version of this short paper, published in volume 42 of the journal under the title ‘Very Abstract and Terribly Concrete: Capitalism and The Theory of the Novel’ (pp. 311–17), within the material presented here.
2. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. 9.
3. Franco Moretti, ‘Introduction’ to Franco Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, Volume 2: *Forms and Themes*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2006, p. x. See also Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, HarperCollins, London, 1997. There is of course a longstanding debate between those who would locate Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* as the inaugural moment in the novel’s ‘when and where’, and those, like Watt, who would see it as originating with Richardson or Defoe. But texts like *The True Story of the Novel* have traced the form back not just to early seventeenth-century Spain but to the ancient world and its own cultural hybridities. Nonetheless, while Doody may be right that *The Rise of the Novel* manifests a profound British chauvinism – certainly Watt marginalizes the more ‘philosophical’ development of the French *roman* – it is surely a considerably more questionable move to project ‘the novel’, a ‘genre’ for which the Ancient Greeks and Romans had no equivalent word or concept whatsoever, back into the Hellenistic world itself. Moreover, to say so is not merely to assert some naive nominalism – the untenable assumption of some absolute rupture in the history of writing between one

- discontinuous epistemic system and another constituted by the mere invention of the *name* 'novel' – but is to observe that such accounts precisely miss what is novel about the category of 'the novel' itself, and hence what came, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gradually to *require* the elaboration of some new concept.
4. David Trotter, 'Into the Future', *London Review of Books*, 22 March 2007, p. 31.
 5. Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', in *Selected Writings*, Volume 3: 1935–1938, Belknap Press, Cambridge MA, 2002, p. 147.
 6. See David Cunningham, 'After Adorno: The Narrator of the Contemporary European Novel', in David Cunningham and Nigel Mapp, eds, *Adorno and Literature*, Continuum, London and New York, 2006, p. 199.
 7. As a 'myth of the modern', almost all divisions between the epic and the novel rely all too obviously, given the historical priority of the former, upon a canonically 'metaphysical' opposition of originary unity and secondary, 'post-lapsarian' fragmentation – although this does not, of course, necessarily have to take a strictly nostalgic form (fragmentation can always be affirmed as a mark of freedom). And, of course, one might well see this division of epic and novel as, among other things, a division organized around Derrida's own pivotal metaphysical binary of speech and writing (though Lukács himself devotes almost no attention to this): the authenticity of that which derives immediately from oral tradition versus the novel's irreducible reliance on technologies of writing, as intensified by the mass production forms of print-capitalism. For a defence of Lukács in particular on this point, however, see Bernstein's forceful argument that the latter's conception of the epic world explicitly criticizes any romantic conception of it as a utopia, along with any universal philosophy of history, and instead presents the epic merely as a necessary projection from within the world of the novel itself. J.M. Bernstein, *The Philosophy of the Novel: Lukács, Marxism and the Dialectics of Form*, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1984, pp. 47, 64–5.
 8. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 65.
 9. G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 2 vols, trans. T.M. Knox, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975, pp. 1092, 1109; translation modified.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 1044.
 11. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 56.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
 13. Massimo Fusillo, 'Epic, Novel', in Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, Volume 2, p. 40. Significantly, Fusillo refers, in a similar spirit, to some 'kind of metahistoric bourgeois dimension' at work here (p. 34), in so doing effectively effacing any historical specificity to the novel whatsoever. Indeed, tellingly, he goes so far as to read Homer's *Odyssey* as itself as much a novel as an epic, at which point, of course, any useful distinction between the two, as anything more than a question of *style*, effectively collapses. If Fusillo's reading here recalls, or so he suggests, Adorno and Horkheimer's own reading of Homer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (p. 38), with its implicit attribution of 'bourgeois' features to the shrewd and more 'individuated' Odysseus, then it nonetheless misses the historical complexities of the latter's account, placed within the context of a discussion of the Enlightenment and capitalist 'identity thinking' as a form of *myth*, as well as the specific critical-theoretical strategies underlying its provocative analyses. By contrast, if Fusillo's reduction of the novel to a series of transcultural constants tells us anything it is probably only about our ongoing tendency to project the forms of our own world, and its recent history, onto history as a whole.
 14. Timothy Bewes, 'Paul Auster's Cinematographic Fictions: Against the Ontology of the Present', *New Formations* 58, 2006, p. 87.
 15. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 2002, p. 223. In this sense, Bernstein is surely right that the conception of the epic in *The Theory of the Novel* is, at the very least, most productively read as 'a hermeneutical construct, an act of historical awareness from the perspective of the present by which the present can come to self-consciousness of its historical situation'. Bernstein, *The Philosophy of the Novel*, p. 47.
 16. *Ibid.*, pp. 222–3.
 17. Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in *Selected Writings*, Volume 2: 1931–1934, Belknap Press, Cambridge MA, 1999, p. 771.
 18. For a more immediately Marxist reading, see Bernstein, *The Philosophy of the Novel* – reviewed in *RP* by Keith Ansell Pearson, 'The Narration of an Unhappy Consciousness: Lukács, Marxism, the Novel and Beyond', *Radical Philosophy* 43, Summer 1986, pp. 22–8. Bernstein's book still remains the most lucid, sophisticated and extended attempt to reread *The Theory of the Novel* in the light of *History and Class Consciousness* in a relatively orthodox fashion. However, it does so at the cost of, first, effectively bracketing Lukács's own later attempts to rework the arguments of *The Theory of the Novel*, and, second, of – far too hastily – reading the latter text as already 'as a matter of fact if not intention, a Marxist work' (p. xii).
 19. Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, Verso, London and New York, 1998, p. 145.
 20. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London and New York, pp. 42, 38. Similarly, in Benjamin too – whom Anderson quotes extensively – by contrast to the story, as communal product of an artisanal world, in which the storyteller felt 'bonds with craftsmanship, but faced industrial technology as a stranger' ('The Storyteller', 150), the novel marks the displacement of that which 'can be handed on orally, the wealth of the epic', by the emergent forms of mass production and consumption, and commodity exchange relations (p. 146).
 21. This is a point which occasions, in turn, some interesting parallel issues of historical and geographical locatability that it would also not be unproductive to explore further. So, for example, there are some compelling symmetries between, on the one hand, the thesis of a unique eighteenth-century British origin – in which Watt's claims for the rise of the novel could be matched to those of Ellen Meiksins Wood concerning the 'origin of capitalism' – and the alternate claim, on the part of Arrighi or Walter Mignolo, for a far earlier and more diffuse 'Atlanticist' and/or city-state beginning, developing in the historical passage from late medieval Italian urban-based Mediterranean trading networks to the sixteenth-century Portuguese and Spanish colonial empires which spawned Cervantes and *Lazarillo de Tormes*. (See Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, Verso, London and New York, 2002; Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, Verso, London

- and New York, 1994; Walter Mignolo, 'Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2007, pp. 449–514.) Lukács himself, incidentally, suggests that it is Dante who 'represents a historico-philosophical transition from the pure epic to the novel', where 'there is still the perfect immanent distancelessness and completeness of the true epic, but his figures are already individuals' (*The Theory of the Novel*, p. 68) – a 'historico-philosophical transition' which might then also be read as the transition marked by the proto-capitalist trading networks of Italian city-states, between the Greek *polis* and the modern *metropolis* (of Dickens, Balzac, Joyce, Dos Passos, Dublin, Pynchon, and so on), in which the possibility of 'completeness' is finally dissolved in a world market system of infinite 'gifts and dangers' at a progressively global scale.
22. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone. Merlin, London, 1971, p. 85. So, for example, Watt proposes that the supposedly 'later' rise of the modern novel in France, with Stendhal and Balzac, corresponds to the later achievement of capitalist hegemony there in the wake of the French Revolution (*The Rise of the Novel*, p. 342), just as, in the work of a number of recent critics, magic realism is, more than a century on, typically interpreted as the literary outcome of uneven development and the encounter of pre-capitalist, peasant-based cultural forms with a nascent capitalism at a rather later moment of global capitalist development.
 23. Mark Schorer, cited in Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 105.
 24. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 39.
 25. Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, Verso, London and New York, 1997, p. 11.
 26. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 149; Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 34.
 27. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 84.
 28. *Ibid.*, pp. 38–9.
 29. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 1109.
 30. Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', p. 146.
 31. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 1092.
 32. As Adorno puts it, in this way the novel calls the 'reification of all relationships' by name. Importantly, it should be noted, this is not seen by Adorno as an exclusively twentieth-century modernist process, but is traced back at least as far as 'the eighteenth century and Fielding's *Tom Jones*'. Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, Volume 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991, p. 32.
 33. Nancy Armstrong, 'The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism', in Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, Volume 2, p. 349.
 34. Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, p. 16. Of course, in practice, we might say, most novels embody something of *both* these understandings of the negative epic (Joyce's *Ulysses* would be exemplary here, as, for that matter, would be Balzac). Yet the distinction, hardly made in Adorno's own theorization, seems worth insisting upon, if only because they give a rather different perspective, I think, on what we understand by the modernity of the novel as an epic – or anti-epic – form itself.
 35. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, pp. 70, 101.
 36. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
 37. Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander, Merlin Press, London, 1962, pp. 21–4; *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 13.
 38. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 14.
 39. Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p. 25.
 40. Theodor Adorno, 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?', trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2003, p. 120; translation modified.
 41. Armstrong, 'The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism', p. 349.
 42. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 15.
 43. See Étienne Balibar, Interview, in Luke Corredor, ed., *Lukács after Communism: Interviews with Contemporary Intellectuals*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 1997, pp. 115–16.
 44. Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p. 93.
 45. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 17.
 46. Michael Löwy, 'Naphta or Settembrini? Lukács and Romantic Anticapitalism', in J. Marcus and Z. Tarr, eds, *Georg Lukács: Theory, Culture, and Politics*, Transaction, New Brunswick NJ, 1989, p. 192.
 47. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 70.
 48. Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic, and Other Essays*, trans. Arthur Kahn, Merlin Press, London, 1970, p. 99.
 49. Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, pp. 96, 99.
 50. Lukács, *Writer and Critic*, pp. 96, 38. Tellingly, Lukács in this way actually associates realism proper (by distinction to 'naturalism') with the 'poetic' – as reflective of the 'poetry of the world' – as against the 'prosaic' – reflective of Hegel's *prose* of the world (see *Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p. 125): 'The domination of capitalist prose over the inner poetry of human experience ... all these are objective facts of the development of capitalism' (*Writer and Critic*, p. 127).
 51. It should be said that, in the essay 'Art and Objective Truth' at least, there is a slightly more complex relation of abstract to concrete proposed; one which effectively posits a 'good abstraction' in realist (as opposed to naturalist) art's (Aristotelian) acts of 'generalization', and which should be the subject of a lengthier study than is possible here. See *Writer and Critic*, pp. 45–8.
 52. See Peter Osborne, 'The Reproach of Abstraction', *Radical Philosophy* 127, September/October 2004, pp. 27–8; Christopher J. Arthur, 'The Spectral Ontology of Value', *Radical Philosophy* 107, May/June 2001, pp. 32–42. On the *Manifesto* specifically, see Peter Osborne, 'Remember the Future? The *Communist Manifesto* as Cultural-Historical Form', in *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, pp. 75–6.
 53. Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p. 75.
 54. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976, pp. 255–6.
 55. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 34.
 56. Henri Lefebvre, 'The End of Modernity?', in *Key Writings*, Continuum, London and New York, 2003, p. 94.
 57. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 17.
 58. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, pp. 70–71.
 59. Theodor Adorno, 'Reading Balzac', in *Notes to Literature*, Volume 1, pp. 122–3, 128.
 60. *Ibid.*, pp. 122–3.
 61. Walter Benjamin, 'Letter to Gershom Scholem on Franz Kafka', in *Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935–1938*, pp. 325–6.
 62. In its most radically modernist form, something like the later prose works of Beckett – no longer, perhaps, quite novels, but unthinkable outside the history of the novel

nonetheless – would be emblematic here. I am thinking, for instance, of *Comment C'est*'s world of undeviating organization and systematized violence; a textual world which is, in some sense, no more abstract than those social relations of the socio-historical world it apparently divorces itself from: relations of, say, administration, information, knowledge and power, the formality of the law, and commodity exchange. See David Cunningham, “‘We have our being in justice’: Formalism, Abstraction and Beckett’s ‘Ethics’”, in Russell Smith, ed., *Beckett and Ethics*, Continuum, London and New York, 2008, pp. 21–37.

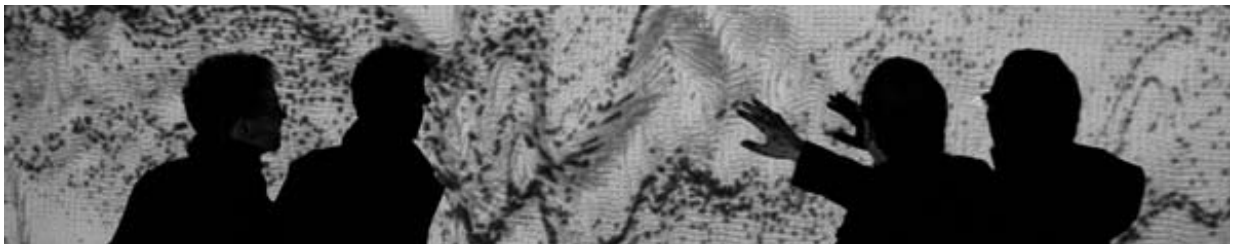
63. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 70.
64. Adorno, ‘Reading Balzac’, pp. 130, 132.
65. Wu Ming 1, ‘New Italian Epic: We’re Going to Have to be the Parents’, opening talk at Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, University of London, 2 October 2008, www.wumingfoundation.com/english/outtakes/NIE_have_to_be_the_parents.htm. Significantly, it is precisely this scope that is lost in the film version of *Gomorra*, which has to ‘narrow down’ instead to five or so interlocking biographical stories set almost entirely within Naples.
66. Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra*, trans. Virginia Jewiss, Pan Macmillan, London, 2008, p. 282.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 4. The opening to *Gomorra*'s final chapter ends with the suggestion: ‘Perhaps the only way to represent the workings of the economy is to understand what it leaves behind, to follow the trail of parts that fall away, like flaking of dead skin, as it marches onwards’ (p. 282). In this way, already beginning on ‘the trail’ of one

set of ‘parts that fall away’, *Gomorra*'s opening paragraph provides the reader with a horrific moment of literalization – uncannily similar to that which drives the plot of the second series of *The Wire* – in which a crane operator witnesses the ‘raining down’ from a shipping container, ‘like mannequins’, of the corpses of dozens of illegal Chinese immigrants, ‘their names scribbled on tags and tied with string around their necks’ (p. 3). Such are the ways in which this particular book renders the ‘very abstract’ character of global flows of capital ‘terribly concrete’ in their human consequences.

68. See John Kraniuskas, ‘Elasticity of Demand: Reflections on *The Wire*’, *Radical Philosophy* 154, March/April 2009, pp. 25–34. Here, returning to the notion of cognitive mapping introduced earlier, a comparison suggests itself between the fictional–novelistic form of *The Wire* and Jameson’s analysis of Marvin Surkin and Dan Georgakis’ book, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying, on the League of Black Revolutionary Workers*, which he reads as illustrative of ‘the proposition that successful spatial representation need not be some uplifting socialist-realist drama of revolutionary triumph but may be equally inscribed in a narrative of defeat, which sometimes, even more effectively, causes the whole architectonic of postmodern global space to rise up in ghostly profile behind itself, as some ultimate dialectical barrier or invisible limit’. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 415. It is in its rendering visible of such an ‘invisible limit’ that, I am suggesting, certain forms of the novel assume their epic form, in the most ‘properly’ epic fashion; and in a manner which is far from specifically ‘postmodern’.



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Noir into history

James Ellroy's *Blood's a Rover*

John Kraniauskas

'... history, the billiondollar speedup'

John Dos Passos, *USA*, 1938

Blood's a Rover (2009) is the final volume of James Ellroy's 'Underworld USA' trilogy, which includes *American Tabloid* (1995) and *The Cold Six Thousand* (2001).¹ It is one of a recent glut of long, serially formatted works of crime-detective fiction, others of which have also been trilogies – for example, Steig Larsson's extraordinarily popular, but disappointingly conventional, 'Millennium' trilogy; David Peace's 'Red Riding' quartet, filmed for television as a trilogy; and Andrew Leu and Alan Mak's outstanding three-part film *Infernal Affairs*, rehashed by Martin Scorsese as *The Departed*. Most, however, have been television series, *The Sopranos* and *The Wire* made by HBO are among the best known. Crime-detective fiction, *noir*, is now a transnationalized culture-industrial form as well as an important site of avant-gardist literary experimentation – witness, for example, recent novels by such writers as Ricardo Piglia in Argentina (*Money to Burn*, 1999) and Giuseppe Genna in Italy (*In the Name of Ishmael*, 2001), not to mention Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* (2009), Dennis Johnson's *Nobody Move* (2009) and Robert Coover's *Noir* (2010) in the USA itself. Ellroy's work now belongs in this experimental space too. This would suggest, paradoxically, that the ubiquity of crime-detective fiction is part of a vaster cultural process of hegemonization: not because all narrative fiction today is *noir*, but because so much is touched by its fictional procedures.²

For its part, Ellroy's trilogy shares the radical and totalizing artistic intent of David Simon and Edward Burns's television series *The Wire*, but eschews its anthropological and realist compositional procedures for a graphic modernist gestics, which is at times jazz-like, and at others cartoonish. Read contrastively in terms of content, however, *The Cold Six Thousand* and *Blood's a Rover*, in particular, reveal an important historical and political absence in *The Wire*: the lack of any political resonance of the radical black nationalist politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s in the bleak

neoliberalized local environments it portrays (the world of the 'corner boys') – the lack, that is, of a black community politics. Motivated instead by a nostalgia for a lost world of industrial work and trade-union labour organization, *The Wire* seems to empty out historically and politically the 'black' community experience it nevertheless insists upon representing. There is the church, there is boxing – forms of surrogate welfare – there are a number of more or less corrupt local black politicians, and then there is Omar (the outlaw urban cowboy) – arguably an individual stand-in for an anti-racist and anti-capitalist local politics whose memory has all but been erased.³

Pre-histories

One reason for this difference is that, unlike *The Wire*, Ellroy's 'Underworld USA' extends the procedures of crime fiction historically into the recent past. Each of its constituent parts is thus also a historical novel. Together they present a particular version of 'the Sixties' – at first negatively, and then more positively – as a transitional decade whose 'world historical' moment is precisely the emergence of 'black' reform-and-revolution and whose key figures are, on the one hand, Martin Luther King (in *The Cold Six Thousand*) and, on the other, the Black Panther Party (in *Blood's a Rover*). The perspective the novels offer on this process, however, is not a community one (a history 'from below'), but rather a statist one (a history 'from above'). In this respect, 'Underworld USA' is Hegelian: it is state-centred (the state is both the condition and the shaper of history's course for Hegel),⁴ and its principal characters are more or less subaltern 'enforcers' of various kinds, intent on containing and erasing reform-and-revolution (both 'black' and otherwise). Ellroy's state, in other words, is coded as 'white' and insists on violently maintaining its imaginary whiteness.⁵ Appropriately, what Hegel would have referred to as the history of 'freedom' that is embodied in successive states (and this is certainly a view the US state propagates of itself), Adorno re-baptized the history of

‘big guns’.⁶ Central figures in ‘Underworld USA’, in this regard, are the arms-and-entertainment industry magnate Howard Hughes (referred to as ‘Drac’) and J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI. Together, they form a capital–state alliance invested in the manufacture of forms of ‘fascination’ (that is, the capturing, ideological coding and capitalization of visual attention), on the one hand, and investigative surveillance, or spying (that is, its repressive instrumentalization), on the other – historical forms of vision that, with the Hollywood margins of Los Angeles at its centre, have been fundamental to the obsessions and anxieties explored in all of Ellroy’s fictions: the dream factory as psychopathology and nightmare.

According to Lukács, the best historical novels narrate the past as prehistories of the present. Written between 1995 and 2009 – that is, during the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations – how might ‘Underworld USA’ be conceived as such? Ellroy does not resort to the Lukácsian realist compositional strategy of the ‘necessary anachronism’ in his novel.⁷ The connections are made, however, but more or less directly. For example, the traces of the present in which *Blood’s a Rover* is written are reflexively registered in references to a ‘now’ of narrative recomposition (2009) in the epilogue that brings the stories told to an end (where it is stated that ‘History stopped at that moment thirty-seven years ago’ – that is, in early 1972). Similarly, at the trilogy’s beginning, in the prologue to *American Tabloid*, the narrator addresses the reader – of 1995 and after – explicitly to make a comparison between Jack Kennedy and Bill Clinton: ‘He called a slick line and wore a world-class haircut. He was Bill Clinton minus pervasive media scrutiny and a few rolls of flab.’⁸ In this sense, the past narrated is explicitly framed by the present of narration (as well as by the history and experience of subsequent media technologies).

Closer to the Lukácsian strategy of ‘necessary anachronism’ is Ellroy’s account of the so-called ‘drugs wars’, a key feature of the foreign policy of both Clinton and Bush and waged especially in the US empire’s ‘backyard’, Latin America and the Caribbean – as portrayed in Don Winslow’s outstanding political thriller *The Power of the Dog* (2005). In Ellroy’s work, however, going back to his ‘Los Angeles Quartet’ (1987–92), the war on drugs is rather a continuation of a wider national biopolitical strategy of racist urban ghettoization. For Ellroy the drugs war is mainly con-

cerned with the production of drugs consumption – that is, of a ‘captured’ market that can be policed as well as strategically deployed (when, for example, containing potential ‘black’ revolution). It is, in other words, a modality of internal colonization: a spatial ‘fix’ of a racialized sort.⁹ In its overarching historical narrative of *imperium*, ‘Underworld USA’ thus constitutes the contemporary drugs war as the ghetto’s future horizon. (This is explicitly the case in *Blood’s a Rover*’s island of Hispaniola ‘casino’ adventure, for example.)



‘Underworld USA’ narrates the ways in which, after the Cuban Revolution (1959) and the CIA-sponsored Bay of Pigs fiasco (1961), the waning US empire contains reform and revolution in a continuous strategic deployment of low-intensity warfare against its own citizenry (as well as overseas, in Vietnam and Cuba). A number of the central characters in the trilogy orchestrate this. It includes the assassination of the Kennedy brothers and, more particularly (in *The Cold Six Thousand*), Martin Luther King – clearly, from the perspective of the trilogy, the era’s most important political figure, its ‘world historical’ individual, so to speak. As in Don DeLillo’s novel *Libra* (1988), an important influence for Ellroy, the fetish of the unified state is represented as a myth, as its various constituent parts – government, executive, repressive security apparatuses – feed on, combat and plot against each other, as well as the general populace. The racism of the ‘white’ state fuels this ongoing situation. (Loïc Wacquant has recently pointed out that after slavery and the ghetto, the prison has become the central institution for the ‘confine[ment] ... and control [of] African-Americans in the history of the United States’ – a fact that is borne out in *The Wire*.) In Ellroy’s trilogy of novels the USA is portrayed as living through a *permanent* process of what Althusser called ‘political primitive accumulation’.¹⁰

Blood's a Rover is, however, a surprising addition to the previous volumes of 'Underworld USA', principally because of the uncharacteristically sentimental swerve to the political left it traces – uncharacteristic because of the apparent absence of any ethical content to Ellroy's novels whatsoever, despite their evident moralism – through the 'wounded attachments' of its reactionary main characters and points of narrative focalization, the 'enforcers' Wayne Tedrow Jr. and Dwight Holly as well as their 'peeper' underling Don Crutchfield, serial killers all.¹¹ Surprisingly, we eventually discover that 'Crutch' is also the novel's archivist, composer and narrator. As it dramatizes each of their left turns, *Blood's a Rover* thus retrospectively reconfigures the historical perspective of the trilogy as a whole, hinting at a dramatic (and affective) development of a political kind: as it unfolds, and as it represents the guilt-ridden torsions that its central characters undergo, a new story emerges: a plot to assassinate J. Edgar Hoover himself. Might this be – the trilogy suggests – a necessary condition for Obama's election as president in 2009, the year the *narration* of 'Underworld USA' concludes?

Like its two predecessors, *Blood's a Rover* is a multi-levelled *noir* of extremely complex emplotment that weaves together a number of stories whilst reconstructing the course of US political history after the assassination of Martin Luther King. As he peeps and stalks, Crutch passes through riots in many US cities. Here, I will attempt to describe and analyse four of its narrative threads, all colour-coded. The first (above) is a *white* thread, which tells the story of the dominant 'white' imaginary as embodied in the US state apparatus and defended by Hoover, Hughes and their subalterns (until, that is, they rebel). The second is a *green* thread, and refers to a transnational political economy of sorts that is centred on the illegal circulation of emeralds ('green stones') across the USA and the Caribbean. The third is a *black* thread, and refers to 'black' revolution and reform (and its violent containment). It also inflects the writing – the letters – of the novel, its style and compositional procedures. The final thread is *red*. It refers to the affective left turn the narrative takes as the symbolic mastery of Hughes and Hoover wanes and the importance of a woman of the left (a 'red Goddess'), Joan Klein, emerges to counter-hegemonize all stories (and assault the 'white' state). Of the many ways to think through the levels of the text, one is through gender: the main characters of the novel are male (Wayne, Dwight, Crutch, Reginald), many of the secondary ones female (Joan, Karen, Mary Beth, Celia). But in terms of the political development of the narrative, the latter are

the most important. Needless to say, all storylines cut across and are stitched into the others – the work is a vast montage – such that, for example, the story of the green emeralds is also, at times, a story of 'white' finance capitalism (that is, state-backed and illegal), at others, of revolution (both 'red' and 'black').

Green: Hispaniola counterpoint

Blood's a Rover is a historical novel that takes the form of crime–detective fiction. How does this work? The novel opens – in the first of its two prologues, under the title 'Then' – 'Suddenly' (the first word of the novel), with a heist that occurs in early 1964, narrated film style: a robbery of emeralds (and cash) is immediately covered up through the murder and disfiguring of its perpetrators by one of the gangsters. It thus begins with an enigma: who? why? The desire to solve it follows. The key subjects of this desire are, first, the racist local cop Scotty Bennett; second, a young witness to the crime, Marshall Bowen, who becomes an undercover infiltrator of radical black militant groups for the FBI enforcer Dwight Holly (who has a direct line to both Hoover and Richard Nixon); and third, and most importantly, the young private eye, local peeping Tom and narrator, Crutch. The second prologue, under the title 'Now', then expresses in first person what Derrida might refer to as Crutch's 'archive fever' – that is, the process of historical archivization and investigation as pathologies of the scopic drive:

America: I window-peeped four years of our History... I followed people. I bugged and tapped and caught big events in ellipses. I remained unknown. My surveillance linked the Then to the Now in a never-before-revealed manner. I was there... Massive paper trails provide verification. This book derives from stolen public files... Scripture-pure veracity and scandal-rag content. That conjunction gives it its sizzle.¹²

The text of the novel then recommences, beginning in June 1968 and ending in May 1972, to narrate how the crime is solved; that is, it situates the 'suddenness' of the robbery of the emeralds in a conjuncturally more complex, temporally longer and geographically wider history. In this sense, the novel has the narrative structure of a classical work of detective fiction: it tells the story of the reconstruction of the history of the (criminal) event that is its occasion.¹³ Ellroy's is, therefore, not only a historical novel that takes the form of a crime–detective fiction, it is also (that is, simultaneously) a *meta*-historical novel whose very reflexivity takes the generic form of crime–detection. From 'peeper' to historian: this also means that the

novel is a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of Crutch's political education into history and narration. *Bildung* formally mediates detection and history such that the acquisition of knowledge that is associated with detection – an allegorical rendering of the social category of the intellectual, according to Jameson – becomes, in the novel's narrative content, the formation of a political subject (of the enunciation of) history.¹⁴

Indeed, 'sizzle' is all that Crutch ever wanted. He 'tailed cheating spouses' for a living, 'kicked in doors and took photos of the fools balling. It was a high-risk, high-yuks job with female-skin potential... He wanted to groove the job forever.' Addicted to peeping, the job combines his night and daytime activities. Crutch comes across the story of the emeralds by accident, pulled into history by his desire as he tracks down a woman who, it turns out, is 'a Commie. She's some kind of left-wing transient with more names than half the world.' She is 'Gretchen Farr/Celia Reyes'.¹⁵ Janus-faced, as the names suggest, she looks two ways, crossing the USA and the Dominican Republic in counterpoint, mapping out the political geography and economy of the text whilst bringing Crutch into the purview of Wayne Tedrow Jr and Dwight Holly – the other two main characters of the novel – and their spheres of operation: the first, an enforcer-chemist for Hughes and the Mafia; the second, Hoover's principal enforcer-agent provocateur. Both were involved in the covert COINTELPRO operation against Martin Luther King (and first appear in *The Cold Six Thousand*).¹⁶

Farr/Reyes belongs to a Dominican revolutionary organization, the 14th of June Revolutionary Movement. She is also Mafia boss Sam Giancana's lover (or 'squeeze') and has convinced him and 'the boys' (that is, the other leading Mafia godfathers, Carlos Marcelo and Santo Trafficante) that the Dominican Republic is the right place to invest in casinos now that Cuba has been lost to communism.¹⁷ Santo Domingo, the country's capital city, might replace Havana as a place – offshore – both to launder and to accumulate 'entertainment' capital (based on a particular combination of so-called 'immaterial' and 'affective' labour in which the moment of 'spectacle' is crucial). Tedrow is also a Mafia plant, instructed, on the one hand, to convince Hughes to finance the Dominican investment programme and, on the other, to launder both Teamster trade-union funds and other illegal gains through the black community in Los Angeles (via a taxicab business and a local investment bank – the People's Bank of South Los Angeles). These are the kinds of illegal activities that constitute the economic background for the whole of 'Underground USA'.

Apart from hitman and chemist, Tedrow is thus also an accountant, at the violent centre of the Hughes–Mafia regime of accumulation.¹⁸ Tedrow employs Crutch to assist, murderously, on the ground – in both Los Angeles and Santo Domingo¹⁹ – where, it turns out, the latter can also pursue his own desire: the emerald case. In counterpoint to these operations, Farr/Reyes also brings him close to her older political associate Joan Klein, the revolutionary 'knife-scar woman', with whom he becomes infatuated. He spots them first in an embrace, and stubbornly stalks and spies on them. At the same time, he discovers the body of a dead woman in a house near Klein and Reyes's hideout: a porno movie set become, in Crutch's mind, a 'Horror house'. The body has been dismembered:

The severed arm/the missing hand/the brown skin,
pure female. The geometric tattoo on the biceps.
The deep gouge through and beside it. The crumbled
green stones embedded bone-deep.²⁰

Crutch tracks the cuts and scars (from the 'tattoo woman' to Klein) and makes the 'emerald' connections (mistakenly, it turns out),²¹ whilst the tattoo hieroglyph eventually introduces him to Haitian voodoo – conceived in the novel mainly as a form of popular (even *guerrilla*) medicine and/or chemistry – in which Crutch learns to make potions, poisons, drugs of various kinds. Like Tedrow, he becomes an expert chemist, 'black' knowledge he will deploy against the 'white' state in the Hoover hit.

The figuring of counterpoint in 'Gretchen Farr/Celia Reyes' is thus important for an understanding of *Blood's a Rover*. This is not only because it is a narrative strategy that folds individual stories into a transnationalized economic and political geography – the US empire – but because Crutch, the eventual narrator, like Tedrow and Holly, also looks across this space in two directions at once: a murderous anti-communist and drugs dealer, working for illegal capital, he is also a voodoo apprentice and student of Frantz Fanon. Eventually, under the influence of Joan (his revolutionary 'mother'), and following in the footsteps of Tedrow and Holly (his cruel 'fathers'), he turns against the 'entertainment' capital he works for. In this respect, Crutch is a 'voodoo child'.

Joan Klein's account of the history of the green emeralds is crucial to the process of Crutch's *Bildung* and his political transformation into a subject of history, as it is to the compositional structure of the novel.²² It provides the narrative thread that unifies all counterpoints and stories as well as the political logic for the turn against Hoover and the 'white' state. Joan's



family was in the business of selling emeralds, but the emeralds they sold were *quaquero* emeralds, produced in pirate mines in Columbia. Over the years, the profits were used by the Klein family to finance left-wing causes in Latin America and beyond, and during the US Depression emeralds helped sustain impoverished families: ‘Green fire was the flame of magic and revolution’ (voodoo and politics once again).²³ Hoover discovered the family’s emerald stash and took it. Joan’s grandfather suffered a heart attack and died. Hoover financed military coups instead and enhanced his anti-communist myth both nationally and overseas. He then sold the emerald stash to a Paraguayan dictator. Joan, meanwhile, had become involved in financing left-wing causes through robbing banks and shipping heroin. With Celia they organized revolution in the Dominican Republic, but were betrayed by the ‘tattoo woman’. In the mid-1960s, Papa Doc Duvalier in Haiti and Joaquín Belaguer in the Dominican Republic decided to buy the emeralds. The shipping was to pass through Los Angeles. Joan found out and organized the heist, and the stones and cash were deposited in a local black community bank, the People’s Bank of South Los Angeles, run by Lionel Thornton. It is at this point that *Blood’s a Rover* begins. As Joan says: ‘The green stones formed a circuit back to Isidore Klein [her grandfather] and his struggle.’ As Crutch says: ‘The length of her tale matched the breadth of his surveillance.’ And they finally embrace.²⁴

It is Joan’s story that provides the novel with the formal requirement that crime–detective fiction

demands: the history of the event (the heist) that opens the text and explains its course. Arguably, however, it is either the weakest point of the work or its most formally symptomatic: as Joan ‘confesses’ to Crutch the history of the illegal production and subsequent circulation of the emeralds, from colonial Colombia to the present of her narrative, contextualizing it and her hatred for Hoover, her discourse reveals that the work’s formal requirement, as detective fiction, in fact becomes – meta-historically – the mirror of its own impossibility as a historical novel. The history told traces an internal limit of the novel: it cannot be incorporated as dramatic content but only as a formal *generic* condition. Refusing any historical relation or connection to the two previous volumes of the ‘Underworld USA’ trilogy, Joan’s story–confession rather foregrounds *Blood’s a Rover’s* autonomy and difference. This involves another generic – sentimental and gendered – twist to its hybrid composition.

The novel is composed in chapter runs of three, each dedicated to a character – Tedrow, Holly, Crutch – which are then repeated over the course of the novel, until Tedrow dies. Scotty Bennett takes over Tedrow’s place, but then he and Holly are killed towards the end of Part Five. At this point, from the beginning of the final Part Six (called ‘Comrade Joan’) – which is also the moment of Joan’s ‘confession’ – Crutch’s chapters are counterpointed with hers (in coupledness). In other words, Joan, becomes not only narratively dominant but also compositionally significant. Once detection has generically concluded in confession, the final ‘document’ in Crutch’s historical and investigative *Bildung* affectively binds him to what is revealed to be Joan’s personal political vendetta, and initiates what becomes a (post-detection) ‘criminal’-historical *romance* involving the assassination of Hoover.

Black: writing reform-and-revolution

In his reading of Peter Weiss’s trilogy *The Aesthetics of Revolution*, “‘A Monument to Radical Instants’”, Fredric Jameson develops Lukács’s formal account of the historical novel in ways that are directly relevant to Ellroy’s ‘Underworld USA’ trilogy of historical *noirs*. Weiss’s novel is also about revolution and its containment, but in the context of fascism and Stalinism. It concentrates on the experience of young militants before, during and after the Second World War in Europe. Jameson suggests that Weiss’s work challenges some of Lukács’s analytical categories, some of which need updating. New ones also need to be deployed, such as Jameson’s own notion of ‘cognitive mapping’, so as to explore Weiss’s use of space and

place, especially insides (where many of its formally important discussions of art and politics take place) and outsides, in a context of harsh repression; as is also the case for Ellroy's own probing of the geopolitics of US empire ('spatial fixes'). But Jameson also invents a category to understand the heightened discourse of Weiss's novel in which a militant collective is represented in the decentred language of its own present. He refers to this as a 'dialogical agon'.²⁵ Here, I would like to give this idea an Ellroyian twist, and suggest that it may be appropriate to understand the language of *Blood's a Rover* as a *performative gestic*.

As mentioned above, Ellroy's trilogy is state-centred, but this does not mean that it is centred on particular rulers – these are mentioned, and even appear as characters (some are assassinated), but minor ones. Executive power of that kind, as in the novels discussed by Lukács and Jameson, remains in the background. In the prologue to *American Tabloid*, the first volume of 'Underground USA', Ellroy is explicit in this regard, making his work a polemical intervention into extant versions of the 1960s:

It's time to dislodge [Kennedy's] urn and cast light on a few men... rogue cops and shakedown artists... wiretappers and soldiers of fortune and faggot lounge entertainers. Had one second of their lives deviated off course, American history would not exist as we know it. It's time to demythologize an era and build a new myth from the gutter to the stars. It's time to embrace bad men... Here's to them.²⁶

Ellroy's trilogy thus presents readers with a *populist* version of statism, writing its fictional history from the perspective of the subaltern front-line employees of the repressive state apparatus and those they press into service – for example, the doomed young film star Sal Mineo or the boxer Sonny Liston. Crutch is such a character-narrator. Commenting on the lowly bourgeois characters of the novels of the conservative Walter Scott, Lukács, again turning to Hegel, refers to them as 'maintaining individuals' – the stuff of civil (or bourgeois) society. As noted above, the principal characters of 'Underworld USA' are certainly such stuff, but of political society, specifically of the 'white state'. Lukács also called these characters 'mediocre heroes', insisting they have formal and compositional consequences that define the historical novel form.

The language of Ellroy's novels, however, is not simply written in that of its subaltern killers such as Crutch – even though he is ostensibly the narrator – and others of his ilk. Tedrow and Holly, the main characters of two of the trilogy's novels, are more like managers, in personal contact with – and so mediat-

ing readers' perspectives on – real, executive power: Hoover, Hughes, Nixon, 'the boys', and so on. Tedrow is the son of a wealthy Klansman (whom he murders at the end of *The Cold Six Thousand*). He and Holly are almost like brothers. These mediocre heroes are indeed maintaining individuals: what they maintain is the existing order, against reform and revolution, inside the state (the assassination of Kennedy) and out (the assassination of King). In *Blood's a Rover*, this means getting Nixon elected and the Mafia/Hughes casino deal arranged (Tedrow), and especially tracking and subverting 'black revolution' in Los Angeles occasioned by the rise of the Black Panther Party (Holly).²⁷

Building on the well-known COINTELPRO operations against the Black Panther Party by the FBI, Ellroy has Holly parodically call his operation 'BAAAAAAD BROTHER'. The discourse of the novel, its writing, thus registers the power of its object – a changing history, a changing language – as it negates it (here in a mock FBI report), producing a caricature or stereotype. Ellroy's use of anxious parody here gives a sense of his work with language and form.²⁸ Even Hoover and Nixon humorously take on such speech acts, the language of the supposed black 'other', as registered in telephone-conversation transcripts: 'Lay it on me, brother... Tell it like it is, because I'm cool with it...' (Hoover to Holly); 'Tell it like it is...' (Nixon to Holly).²⁹

The first word of Chapter 44 (Los Angeles 10/22/68) is: 'NEGROFICATION', written in capitals and underscored as if a newspaper headline.³⁰ It is an imperative – Marsh Bowen, Holly's undercover informant, needs to sharpen his 'black' image and militant Black Power performance (he is a black ex-cop) – but it also reads as a warning and/or, more neutrally, as signage with regard to a particular state of affairs. It is all of these, simultaneously. 'Negrofication' is what happens politically to the mediocre heroes/maintainers of the 'white' state as they turn against it. Holly's simulation of the requirements of black protest, its culture and anti-racist critique, convince Bowen that he actually really means it. Tedrow's guilt at his history of killing black men, inherited from his father, including his participation in the assassination of Martin Luther King, sends him, first, into the arms of Mary Beth, a black trade-union organizer and widow of another of his victims; and, second, to his suicide-death in Haiti whilst looking for her son, Reginald. In the Dominican Republic he blows up the casino construction sites ('fixed' entertainment capital) that belong to 'the boys', like a one-man guerilla unit. He also siphons off Mafia profits for Celia and Joan's revolutionary activities. Meanwhile, Holly

– following Tedrow’s death, increasingly aware of the waning mental powers of Hoover in his old age (he warns Nixon of the problem), and having organized the Watergate break-in with Howard Hunt – decides to arrange the FBI director’s assassination.

Just as it describes the left turns of Crutch, Tedrow and Holly, the sign ‘negrofication’ also refers to a tradition of writing in the USA that goes back to Mark Twain: the ventriloquization of the ‘black’ voice. As the musical culture of jazz hits literature, the strategy definitively takes off with the ‘beat’ writers in the 1950s. Their work ‘speaks’ jazz and its world. This is also evident in Ellroy’s work in the writing of *White Jazz* (1992), the final volume of the ‘Los Angeles Quartet’ – formally still his most important novel.



Like *White Jazz*, *American Tabloid* and *The Cold Six Thousand*, *Blood's a Rover* is written in short, almost brutal sentences, continuous brief bursts of language that in their grammatical structure are anti-discursive and repetitive. Almost any passage from the text illustrates this point. Here is one that represents Tedrow at work:

He had L.A. work and Vegas work. The Boys kept suites in the Count's [Hughes's] hotels. Nixon was prez now. He overturned LBJ's anti-trust injunctions fast. The Boys sold Drac the Landmark Hotel and two thousand prime Vegas acres. Drac's new fixation was atomic waste. Underground tests scared him shitless. He called Wayne in to explain nuclear fission. Drac believed that A-bomb rays enhanced the black sex drive... He met with Lionel Thornton again. They discussed money transfers and the final wash of assets. It was tense. Thornton sat him face-to-face with the Dr. King portrait. Some world-clash thing resulted.³¹

Property, the circulation of capital: racism, guilt and anxiety. But also a rigorous and insistent deployment of language, which has been described as telegraphic, but which is at once poetic – in its distribution – and musical, picking up on the open rhythms of bebop and

free jazz. In other words: improvisation conceived as ‘controlled freedom’.³² The lack of connectives and subordinate clauses opening up each sentence to the one that follows inhibits the developmental unfolding of discourse and narrative, interrupting, puncturing and denaturalizing it, to produce what reads at times like a repetitive but insistent rhythmic series of notes, riffs and/or shorthand. This is Ellroy’s constructivist principle at work, throughout the trilogy, over more than 1,500 pages. It asks readers to make connections between ‘shots’, like in an extensive Eisensteinian historical montage, as it passes through other semiotic systems (the media it deploys – for example, film and television) and incorporating codes, speech acts and sociolects, including the hate speech of the racists it represents and performs: ‘The spooks yelled spook-outrage slogans and spooked on back to.’³³ Moved by jazz, *Blood's a Rover* both ‘says’ racism and ‘shows’ racism, repeating the language of the ‘white state’ whilst, however, also overcoming it – turning against it and becoming semi-autonomous – in its very composition. The novel is both agonistic and dialogical: the ‘other’ ever-present and yet determining. This is what makes Ellroy’s writing a (modernized) form of what Brecht refers to as a dramatic ‘gestics’: it performs social attitude(s) whilst moving to musical rhythms.³⁴

The key aspect of Jameson’s conception of the ‘dialogical agon’ in Weiss’s novel, however, is that it succeeds in dramatically conserving the arguments and conflicts of a particular past in its language – as in Ellroy’s ‘sixties’ – whilst simultaneously radically depersonalizing its narrative discourse. Weiss’s mode of composition of his historical novel transcends the representation of typical individuated lives whilst, nevertheless, still being recognizable as a work set in a past that is readable as a present. The language and composition of *Blood's a Rover* effects such a depersonalization of its narrative too. However, it does so not, as in Weiss’s novel, by *representing* a militant collectivity dialogically through its arguments, but by de-individualizing the ‘voices’ of its characters and making them all versions of its anonymous third-person riff – because, in effect, the narrative neither belongs to nor expresses Crutch’s personality either (since he too appears as its object, in the third person). It is as if the discourse of the novel has turned against its mediocre heroes as individuated individuals of political society just as they have turned against the ‘white’ state that employs them. As the above passage makes clear, the narrative takes the form of free indirect discourse. Whilst breaking down the distinctions between third and first persons, however, it refuses to rest with any

of the latter either. Paradoxically polyphonic, the free-indirect style appropriates all subjectivity to itself: all characters, including their thoughts and experiences are given indirectly, in the same spectral voice that ‘speaks’ them. The narrative discourse of the novel is, in other words, a ‘jazzed-up’ and open version of what Jameson refers to as

the enigmatic third person of modern literature, more mysterious ... than any of its first-person characters, inasmuch as we can see and observe them, but must ourselves be confined to looking out through the gaze of this narrative one, which then takes on something of the unknowability of Kant’s noumenal subject, always adding ‘the I to all its acts of consciousness,’ while itself remaining unknowable and inaccessible.³⁵

In *Blood’s a Rover*, however, although unnameable and de-individuated, this ‘unknowable’ third person – the ‘other’ of its surveillance and repression – is historically accessible. The novel is written in and to the rhythms of ‘black’ reform and revolution.

Red conclusion

There are two plots to assassinate Hoover in *Blood’s a Rover*. The first is from Dwight Holly, Hoover’s principal ‘enforcer’ and investigator–subverter of the Black Tribe Alliance and the Mau-Mau Liberation Front. Holly, however, remains the most enigmatic of the novel’s characters. Like Tedrow and Crutch, he also turns against the state, and, like Crutch, his turn is mediated by a relationship with Joan Klein that focuses – like repeated close-ups – on her scarified arm. Read psychoanalytically, they are excited not only by the outlaw past the scar suggests, but by the ever-present threat to the symbolic order it also promises. And they identify, perhaps also seeing in (or on) her the mark of their own subordination. This means that there is also a little bit of both damaged men inside Joan, which facilitates their political turn against the ‘white’ state. Joan’s scar is the visual site of their wounded attachments. Holly is not captured by Joan’s confession-narrative of the emeralds. Nor does he know about Hoover’s part in her life. Moreover, he had already been ‘seduced’ by the Left: his partner (and, it turns out, the mother of his children) is Karen, an old friend and political sympathizer of Joan’s – who is happy to share Holly with her. But Holly decides to assassinate Hoover anyway, independently, moved by a mixture of other attachments, including anti-racist guilt. Having already sought and won the confidence of Nixon – himself wary of Hoover’s power – it may also be that the death of Hoover would suit his reformist

agenda, ensconcing him further in the higher echelons of the state, next to the new president. On seeing Hoover, however, Holly decides that the director is no longer in control, that he has lost his mind, and that he now belongs to the past.

With Holly’s death, the novel changes its genre and compositional format, as noted above. But before Holly is killed he commits a last act of cruel *jouissance* (as if a superego in action): he wounds Crutch in such a way that he cannot but turn. That is, he ‘gifts’ his replacement with deep scars of his own. Holly visits Crutch in the Dominican Republic, where Tedrow has just blown up the half-built casinos. He finds Crutch there, amassing files and reading Fanon and tomes on voodoo medicine, and he carves the revolutionary date, 14 June, deep into Crutch’s back. In other words, he cuts Joan into him. Crutch is then captured by Joan’s story, and follows its generic – romance – logic through to the end, plotting Hoover’s assassination on the night of Labour Day (1 May), 1972.³⁶ He burns the director’s personal archive with voodoo chemicals; but the syringe containing the lethal voodoo poison breaks. When Hoover appears, however, Crutch holds out his hand and shows him an emerald: Hoover has a heart attack – like Isidore Klein, Joan’s grandfather – and dies.

Blood’s a Rover brings the ‘Underworld USA’ trilogy to an end, and in so doing traces the end of a particular era. Interestingly, the demise of both of its key overarching historical figures, Howard Hughes and J. Edgar Hoover, present throughout all three volumes of the work, chimes with a key world-historical shift. In *The Origins of Postmodernity*, Perry Anderson suggests that the 1970s – in the USA, the time of Nixon – marks the moment of the extinction of the bourgeoisie as a class ‘possessed of self-consciousness and morale’, which is replaced by new forms of capitalist administration and command.³⁷ Hoover, perhaps a typical representative of the state as a management committee of the bourgeoisie, already belonged to the past for Holly, and was now politically irrelevant. Similarly, Hughes’s waning presence in *Blood’s a Rover* is also interesting: a capitalist vampire who has become vampirized himself, he is plugged into new forms of capital, and only kept alive in a darkened anonymous hotel room in Las Vegas to finance the ventures of others. In such a context, if for Lukács the novel form is the epic of a ‘fallen’ bourgeois world, perhaps Ellroy’s trilogy marks – and *narrates* – the appearance of a new epic form, one that belongs to a post-bourgeois world of administered capitalism.

Notes

1. James Ellroy, *American Tabloid*, Arrow Books, London, 1995; *The Cold Six Thousand*, Arrow Books, London, 2002, *Blood's a Rover*, Windmill Books, London, 2009.
2. For example, a shared concern with the function and significance of the 'archive'. Fredric Jameson has suggested that detective fiction is the form taken by realism in a highly mediated and mediatized postmodern world. See 'Totality as Conspiracy', in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, Indiana University Press and BFI, Bloomington and Indianapolis and London, 1992, pp. 7–84.
3. Lukács might say that this is where *The Wire* falls out of realist narration into naturalist description. See his 'Narrate or Describe', in *Writer and Critic*, trans. A. Kahn, Merlin Press, London, pp. 110–48; and my 'The Elasticity of Demand: Reflections on *The Wire*', *Radical Philosophy* 154, March/April 2009, pp. 25–34.
4. For Hegel, 'it is the state which first presents subject-matter that is not only adapted to the prose of history, but involves the production of such history in the very progress of its own being ... and this produces a record as well as interest concerned with intelligent, definite ... lasting transactions and occurrences', *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, Dover, New York, 1956, p. 61.
5. On 'whiteness' as 'the very "center" of the dominant criteria for national prestige, decision-making, authority and intellectual leadership', see Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics*, 2nd edn, Verso, London and New York, 2009, p. 185.
6. Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Sherry Weber Nicholsen, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1993, p. 87.
7. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1981, p. 68.
8. *Blood's a Rover*, p. 639; *American Tabloid*, p. 5.
9. For 'spatio-temporal fix', see David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003.
10. Loïc Wacquant, 'From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the "Race Question" in the US', *New Left Review* 13, January–February 2002, pp. 41–59; Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us* (1994), trans. Gregory Elliot, Verso, London, 1999, p. 105.
11. For 'wounded attachments', see Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1995, pp. 52–76.
12. *Blood's a Rover*, p. 9; Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. E. Prenowitz, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1996.
13. See Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Typology of Detective Fiction', in *The Poetics of Prose* (1971), trans. R. Howard, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1977.
14. In this regard, Ellroy has used his own biography – in his youth also a peeping Tom, a sniffer and US Nazi Party member – as material for the invention of Crutch. For the detective as a representation of the intellectual, see Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p. 38.
15. *Blood's a Rover*, pp. 24, 56, 67.
16. Tedrow was a pointer for one of the possible shooters. Looking through his binoculars 'Wayne saw the impact. Wayne saw the neck spray. Wayne saw King drop.' *The Cold Six Thousand*, p. 638.
17. Marcelo says: 'We want some pliable, anti-communist *el jefe* type who'll do what we want'; *Blood's a Rover*, p. 21. They find him in Joaquín Belaguer, president of the Dominican Republic between 1966 and 1978 (and again between 1986 and 1996), for whom see Frank Moya Pons, *The Dominican Republic: A National History*, Markus Weiner, Princeton NJ, 1998.
18. 'Drac wanted to own Clark County, Nevada. The Boys wanted to sell him their share at usurious rates. Feed the cash funnel. Scour the Teamster Pension Fund books for loan defaulters. Usurp their businesses. Grab them, sell them and feed the cash funnel. Castro kicked the Boys out of Cuba. Find a new Latin hot spot, entrench and rebuild.' *Blood's a Rover*, p. 82.
19. Ellroy has evidently done his homework: in the Dominican Republic, Tedrow's anti-communist crew (including Crutch) are assisted by a death squad called 'La Banda'. See Moya Pons, *The Dominican Republic*, p. 392.
20. *Blood's a Rover*, p. 69.
21. 'Crutch flipped pages. This voodoo shit was a gas. Spooks were capering and bopping around in chicken-feather hats. Woouoo, then there's this... Geometric patterns. Crosshatched. Like the tattoo on the dead woman in Horror House.' *Blood's a Rover*, p. 203. Crutch believes that Klein and Reyes had the 'tattoo woman' killed for betraying their revolutionary group. In fact, she was murdered on the set of a porn movie by a dealer in Haitian exotica.
22. The colour of the emeralds, green, takes on symbolic value throughout the novel. Holly is shot by Bennett in a lime-green bar – 'Green walls tumbled...' (p. 575), and Celia Reyes is found by Crutch in Haiti living in a lime-green house (p. 611).
23. The novel expresses two views with regard to voodoo: '[v]oodoo was barbarous capitalism cloaked in magic' (*Blood's a Rover*, p. 590); but it also has revolutionary potential, as deployed by Tedrow and Reginald.
24. *Blood's a Rover*, pp. 583, 589, 560.
25. Fredric Jameson, "'A Monument to Radical Instants'", in *The Modernist Papers*, Verso, London and New York, 2007, pp. 380–419.
26. *American Tabloid*, p. 5.
27. See J. Lazaerow and Y. Williams, eds, *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement*, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 2006; in particular, Roz Payne, 'WACing Off: Gossip, Sex, Race, and Politics in the World of FBI Special Case Agent William A. Cohendet', pp. 158–80, for the kind of archival material that Ellroy uses.
28. See Homi K. Bhabha, 'The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism', in *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994, pp. 66–84.
29. *Blood's a Rover*, pp. 383–4.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 225. The compositional importance of the daily newspaper needs stressing, as does the language of the 'yellow press'.
31. *Blood's a Rover*, pp. 277–8.
32. Herbie Hancock, referring to the Miles Davis Group, in Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2003, p. 10.
33. *Blood's a Rover*, p. 99: Crutch driving through riots.
34. See Brecht on *Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett, A&C Black, London, 1964.
35. Jameson, "'A Monument'", p. 394.
36. See A. Summers, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover*, Corgi, London, 1994.
37. Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, Verso, London and New York, 1998, p. 85.

Andeanizing philosophy

Rodolfo Kusch and indigenous thought

Philip Derbyshire

The belated English translation of Rodolfo Kusch's *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América* (originally published in Spanish in 1970)* introduces this Argentine author to an English-speaking audience for the first time. What makes his work interesting is that it takes indigenous thinking seriously as philosophy – that is, as a contribution to truth rather than myth. Kusch refuses the default setting of anthropology, where the thought of the other is a local mapping of the world; rather, he sets out the truth claims of indigenous thinking and uses them to provide a critique of a tradition he regards as epistemologically erroneous and ethically dangerous. In this sense, indigenous thinking lies on the same conceptual plane as European thought and is coeval with modernity rather than belonging to a superseded epoch. Whilst such strong claims may turn out to be problematic, they provoke serious thought about the relation of European thought to its supposed Others and what emerges from their encounter.

The book arrives under the auspices of Duke University Press's *Latin America Otherwise* series, with a ringing endorsement and long introductory essay by that series general editor, Walter D. Mignolo, who claims that Kusch 'relat[es] mestizo consciousness and border hermeneutics' and that his work is 'deeply illuminating' of Du Bois's "'double consciousness'" and Anzaldúa's "'mestiza consciousness'". Kusch thus appears in English assimilated to Mignolo's own project of 'border thinking'. His translators make the claim that Kusch offers not merely a critique of 'the logic of control' that underpins Western thought but the possibility of another 'more organic' logic from which to reconstruct a sense of community as opposed to 'ideology-bound' forms of 'building collectivity'. Kusch, like Cherie Moraga, the thinker of Chicana consciousness, recovers a 'form of thinking rooted in América', a form of living that is 'body to body collective activity that pulls

the cosmos towards a renovation of life understanding of identity [*sic*]. Kusch, then, is placed in a new genealogy of 'border thinkers' and seen as the herald of 'liberatory, non-reformist, de-colonial, intercultural' activity. The translation becomes instrumental to a politics whose main site of enunciation and reception is the US academy and in the process the complexities and particularities of Kusch's writing – especially his own misreadings and misprisions – are overlooked and the rifts of his thought are sutured or ignored.

Arguably, then, there is a tension between text and appropriation, in part facilitated by the decision to translate this volume of Kusch's work first, which leaves its antecedents and development slightly obscure, despite the long introductory essay. And, of course, the very belatedness of the translation means that Kusch's singularity looks like the now-commonplace strategies of post-colonial critique and puts his work in the shadow of a much more articulate discursive production on and from the Andes.¹ Though the translation is serviceable, its occasional errors and general awkwardness also make already difficult thought less accessible to critical reflection. Nevertheless, Kusch's work should be read as a contribution to a transculturation of philosophy and 'thinking' and the construction of a wider surface of comparability. The current attempt to construct a form of politics in Bolivia that engages indigenous conceptions of the social demonstrates the stakes and risks of such a mobilization.

This article frames the book via an account of Kusch's context and earlier thought that stresses his debt to Heidegger. It goes on to outline the arguments and claims of *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América* and raises what I see as the main problems with Kusch's approach. Finally, it offers a critique of his conclusions and some further reflection on Mignolo's appropriation of the text.

* Rodolfo Kusch, *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América*, trans. María Lugones and Joshua M. Price, with an Introduction by Walter D. Mignolo, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 2010. £16.99 pb., 978 0 82234 641 8.

Backtext

Rodolfo Kusch was born to immigrant German parents in Argentina in 1922. He was educated as a philosopher, graduating from the University of Buenos Aires, but subsequently worked as a psychologist before undertaking anthropological fieldwork in northern Argentina and Bolivia – perhaps the most significant encounter of his intellectual life, whose fruits emerge in his extensive writings over the next fifteen years. His work and commitment to the *pueblo* did not endear him to the dictatorship that came to power in the coup of 1976, and (like many) he chose internal exile, in the northern province of Jujuy, in Maimará, close to the Bolivian border, where he died in 1979.

Kusch belongs to an intellectual generation marked by dissatisfaction with the state of Argentina – its politics, culture and way of life – that would lead many to Peronism and nationalist populism. Others would follow another Argentine tradition to seek solutions to this felt crisis in Europe and its various ‘-isms’; still others would see salvation in the pop culture of North America; and a few, like Oscar Masotta, would combine such various allegiances in serial or contradictory assemblages.² Kusch expressed his dissatisfaction philosophically by a rejection of the central figures that had come to mark the Argentine philosophical tradition. In a reflex common across the cultural field, Argentine philosophy is marked by importation of paradigmatic figures, both minor and eccentric – Ortega y Gasset and Count Keyserling – and major – Heidegger and Sartre. These add to a native tradition of positivist naturalism that had been consolidated in the early development of psychology and sociology in the work of Ingenieros and Ramos Mejía (itself perhaps pendant to the work of Taine and Spencer). Kusch characterizes this tradition as ‘academic’, even as the work of Heidegger and Sartre provide him with his definition of philosophy as ‘the phenomenology of the everyday’ and his emphasis on the non-separation of philosophy from everyday life echoes the vitalism that informed the Argentine field with the dissemination of the work of Max Scheler (the most translated European thinker in 1940s’ Argentina). The crisis of mid-century Argentina could not find an internal resolution: its solution had to be found elsewhere and Kusch is unusual within Argentina in turning to the indigenous cultures of America to provide the wherewithal for diagnosis and cure for the cultural malaise of modernity.

There was no important indigenist tradition in Argentina,³ in large part because Argentina had not been home to complex urban cultures prior to the

Spanish conquest of the kind whose material and ethnological legacies provided the basis for the cultural politics of post-revolutionary Mexico and 1920s’ Peru (although the Inca polity had extended south of modern Bolivia into the mountainous north of Argentina). What indigenous cultures had been present in the national territory had been acculturated early (in the North) or been the object of campaigns of extermination in Patagonia and the Chaco. The ‘indigenous’ had been assimilated to ‘barbarism’, the antithesis of civilization, in a long tradition initiated by the work of Sarmiento. As Kusch himself observed, ‘to be an indigenist in Argentina is mad’. So, when he first engaged with ‘the indigenous’ in his 1953 essay ‘The Seductions of Barbarism’, there was a sense of blasphemous profanation of national self-definition. This already grants him a singular importance in an Argentina that saw itself as a part of Europe misplaced on the American continent.

In turning to the indigenous, Kusch revisits and revalues the world-historical event of the conquest and the incorporation of America into the European domain. Here he parallels the narrative of ‘first modernity’ developed by Enrique Dussel, where the space and peoples that now denominate Latin American are seen as having been central to the very definition of Europe as a subject.⁴ The ‘otherness’ of the cultures of the Americas provided a problematic difference whose subordinate accommodation within the imaginary of Renaissance religion, science and politics constituted both the identity of Europe and the categorial framework that it deployed in its ordering of the world. The moment of conquest marks the emergence of anthropology and its ambivalent relation to its objects, but also the transformation of anthropology into a philosophical universalism for which differences become moments of the same. The great inquiries into indigenous beliefs undertaken by the sixteenth-century friars had as their aim the understanding of native religion the better to combat and extirpate it. The histories and genealogies that were drawn up had a functional aim of governance and control, even if such texts always allowed for resistant dissemination.

For Kusch, the return to anthropology allows a dismantling of the universalist claims of philosophy: the encounter with the repressed and negated in the form of living others permits him to offer a critique of European categories. In part, this is only possible because for Kusch the conquest and incorporation were incomplete: America is a riven continent. This division is expressed topographically: the urban is the site of the European and is marginal to a predominantly

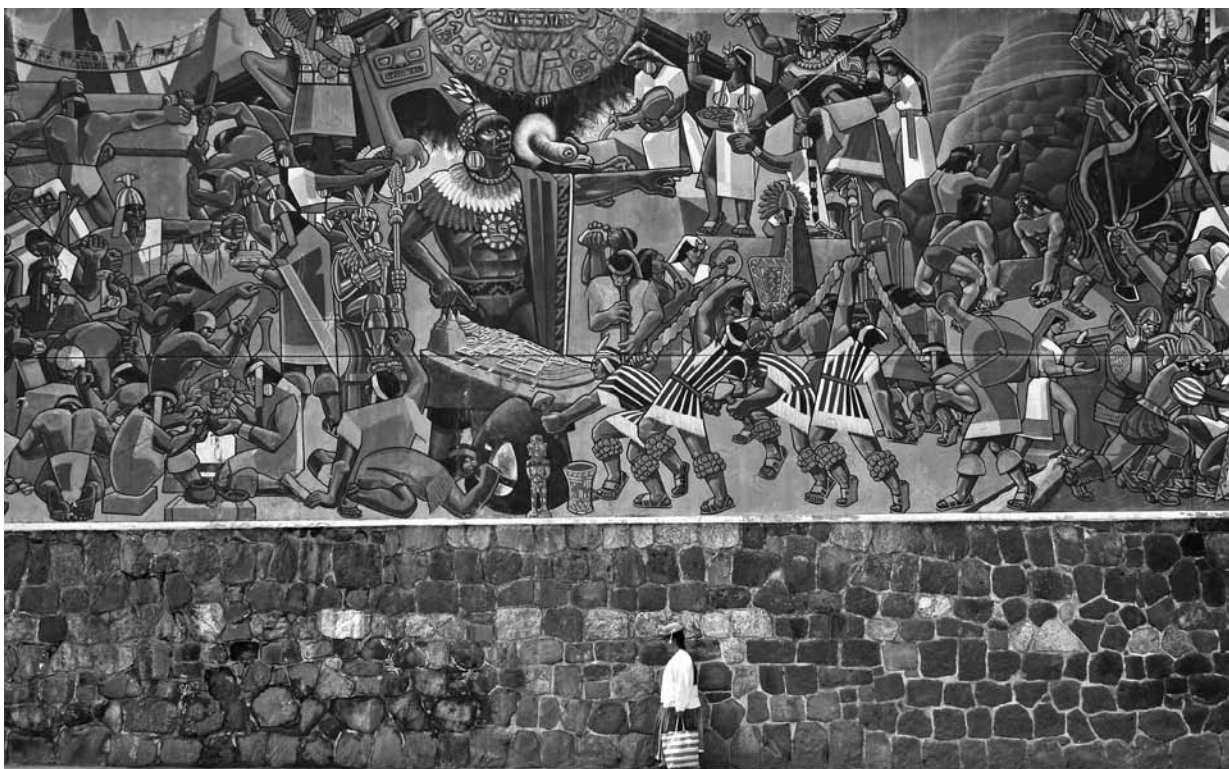
rural continent. Similarly, an upper rational stratum covers irrational depths. The journey from one to the other, the anthropological journey par excellence, is itself philosophically productive. The account of such journeys then becomes the privileged locus of philosophical work, and the staging of these trajectories and encounters is a central moment of the rhetorical construction of his essays. This maintenance of concrete distance, difference and spatiality distinguishes Kusch from Lévi-Strauss, whose re-encounter with the Latin American other (notably in Brazil) folds back into a new universalism, an abstraction that reconstructs European thought but confirms the subalternity of the ‘primitive’ moment (its materiality) as mere instance. For Kusch, the content of indigenous thinking, and not merely its form, has truth value.

Vulnerable

Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América first appeared in Mexico in 1970 and is one of the central works in Kusch’s oeuvre, along with the as yet untranslated *América profunda* (1962), *La negación en el pensamiento popular* (1975), *Geocultura del hombre americano* (1976) and *Esbozo de una antropología filosófica americana* (1978). It illustrates his methods and concerns as well as the central problems with his work and with what we might call his philosophical style. What object is he constructing under the heading ‘indigenous and popular thinking’? And how does he do it? What does he think this thinking as? And how

does his thinking express or transform what he is thinking about? The enmeshment of his own thought in what he would endeavour to escape from brings him close to the twentieth-century tradition of anti-philosophical philosophy.

His first significant essay, ‘Seductions of Barbarism’ (1953), is diagnostic, addressing the spiritual malaise of America,⁵ the ‘neurasthenia’ brought with the city. The cause of the malaise is the ‘scission’, the split that rends and troubles the region, detaching consciousness from the land. ‘The indigenous’ is the other of the urban consciousness that inhabits the ‘fictional’ city. In Kusch’s essay it has a phantasmagorical air, designated as ‘vegetal’ and ‘demonic’, a principle of rootedness or a ‘social unconscious’. It is illustrated by Aztec and Maya motifs – most saliently the Mesoamerican figure of Quetzalcóatl – and Kusch’s use of archaeology is often clumsy. The ‘indigenous’ is a cipher, a derivative abstraction rather than a real presence. Most problematically, culture is racialized: the ‘indigenous’ persists in the *mestizo*, the bearer of popular consciousness who is determined by the biological inheritance that allows him to be a return to pre-Columbian categories. This biologically transmitted demonism is then deployed as an explanatory principle to account for a ‘deep history’ of America. Sarmiento’s hierarchized binary, the two traditions of America, civilization and barbarism, is inverted. In this philosophy of history, the ‘indigenous’ is a ground for renovation – a site of potential – which exists biologically in the *mestizo*, who is the potential



subject of a new authenticity beyond the artificiality of the colonial and post-colonial forms of America. Barbarism identified with the rural masses is the positively valorized 'law of the earth' that returns after repression by the Conquest.

In this early essay, we can see the constants of Kusch's thinking: the unsatisfactory state of Argentina now written as the problem of Latin America; the possibility of a redemptive transformation; the bearer of redemption as the indigenous or popular other. If any desire informs the work it is a desire for wholeness, another constant that finds here an organicist expression in botanical metaphors. Later this yearning for the absolute is articulated ontologically. But the status of the subject in all this is problematic. 'Indigenous' is not *prima facie* equivalent to 'people'. The 'Indian' has a particular historical and cultural referent, whereas the 'people' emerges from the complex discourse of post-Independence nationalism and critical populism. But this 'people' is only crudely definable in ethnic or racial terms, and the connections between 'indigenous' and 'popular' (in the sense 'of the people') are opaque, buried in the claim of biological inheritance and the centrality of the racial category *mestizo*. It is Kusch's lived encounter with Andean culture that inflects this biologism in a culturalist direction, even if it never suppresses it. The indigenous subject takes on concrete form through the documentary writings of post-Conquest Peru, in the work of Guaman Puma and Santa Cruz Pachakuti Yamqui,⁶ and in the everyday world of the Bolivian highlands. The generalized 'native' of this first essay takes on a specific cultural form in *América profunda*, the Andean, but this always risks becoming paradigmatic of all American or non-European forms. Most signally, a radical topographical difference gives way to common existential experience that is lived in contrasting ways.

In *América profunda* Kusch outlines a schema of cultural development ('an epic of consciousness' in a later formulation) that bears striking parallels with Adorno and Horkheimer's 1944 *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The foundational experience of both European and Andean subjects is *desamparo*, vulnerability before nature. The difference that marks out their respective stances towards the world is a difference of the conceptual and material work done to manage that vulnerability. Europe, here seen as the urban civilization whose epitome is imperial Rome, produces a subject detached from a world constituted by objects: vulnerability is overcome by mastery of the external world made objective. The American subject, on the other hand, remains within the world, endures that

vulnerability through a ritual invocation of its potential opposite, shelter: the subject is passive, a moment of a wider process. These differential responses are contrasted ontologically: the European subject is, in the sense of being someone (in Spanish *ser alguien*); the American subject is, in the sense of being in a place (in Spanish, *estar*). The primary experience of the 'wrath of God', the terror in the face of nature, is transformed in the first case into 'the wrath of man' and becomes a moment of domination and aggression. In the second case, 'wrath' is placated by ritual and becomes transformed into the basis of fecundation.

These differing responses to a primordial vulnerability have massive historical consequences. The European subject becomes a nomadic agent of conquest reproducing the split world of primary separation. As self-subsistent yet dependent on the objects it manufactures and dominates, a slave one might say to its own *techné*, it can travel, but it can only reproduce the same world: it is never rooted in a particular terrain, its being is universal but empty. Its problems are soluble by the manufacture of more objects or by the exercise of power on the world. The American subject by contrast inhabits a world and a terrain; its being is specific and full, but also at risk. The dangers of the world are not overcome by a manipulation of the world but by a bringing of the world (and, importantly, the god that is immanent within it, both chaos and fecundity) within the subject, aligning subject and world in a harmony that will guarantee fertility and abundance.

Kusch's ontological distinction here has uncanny echoes of Adorno and Horkheimer's characterization of instrumental reason and the notion of mimesis. But whereas for Adorno and Horkheimer, the (Hegelian) subject has only its own internal moments as resource for overcoming its diremption, Kusch's different subjects encounter each other in a moment of dialectical fusion: *phagocytosis*, a term that plays a central role in *América profunda*, only to vanish in the later work. The subject of domination, *ser alguien*, is 'phagocytosed' by *estar* – that is, absorbed by its other into a new, fecund, integrated whole. The biological metaphors – phagocytosis is a process by which one cell absorbs another – continues the organicist thinking of 'Seductions of Barbarism' but also suggests the way the ontological split will be overcome at the level of corporeal reality. The power imbalance of European domination is not confronted directly but undermined by a slow and steady infiltration, transforming the subject of infiltration in the process. Kusch does not simply valorize *estar* against *ser alguien*, but suggests that the two modes of being are two halves that do not

make a whole. Rather, some form of dialectical ‘reintegration’ is necessary – and it is the destiny of America to provide the lead in this new form of community. Here we have a fusion of three lines of reflection: the implicit teleologies of Hegel (the self-alienation and self-reappropriation of spirit as the trajectory of history) and Jung (the notions of mandala and ‘integration’ mark the traces of the Swiss psychoanalyst) and the urge to unity and complementarity that are seen to mark Andean culture.⁷

The consciously anti-revolutionary status of ‘phagocytosis’ should be noted. Although it could be read allegorically in a quasi-Maoist fashion, with the countryside enveloping the city, phagocytosis is differentiated from the violent revolution that Cuba was suggesting as the cure for social ills. Anti-Marxism features as another constant in Kusch’s thought.

Indigenous and popular

América profunda reflects on a seventeenth-century text by Santa Cruz Pachakuti. In *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América* the sources are more varied: field work in Bolivia yields numerous encounters which are deployed against readings of classic post-conquest narratives and interpretations of archaeological material at the Bolivian site of Tiwanaku. The form of reflection becomes more discursive, almost deliberately abandoning the standard logic of presentation and development. Here there might well be an internal mimesis of his object. At one point Kusch says of Guaman Poma’s work that the ‘indigenous flavour is to be found in the lack of both clarity and syntactical co-ordination in the text’ (113). The antagonism to normative philosophy becomes more pronounced, reflecting a deeper engagement with indigenous categories and the life of the Bolivian *campesinos*. But the form of the text perhaps also expresses a felt anxiety about Kusch’s own position ‘in between’, since his existential project is a form of self-undoing via the other and his writing is the means by which he achieves it. It is not addressed to that other, but rather to his *similars* in the city. Much of the rhetoric of the book is characterized by doubt and a reflexive unsureness about its own speculation. Most signally, it is clear that Kusch cannot speak Aymara or Quechua. His is a text in Spanish that relies on translations by others (the great colonial dictionaries) and addresses a Spanish-speaking audience. In the classic sense of Cornejo Polar, Kusch’s work is heterogeneous; that is, it speaks of cultural objects made by one group in a language alien to that group and aimed at a third audience.⁸

Kusch’s focus on thought or ‘thinking’ means that he presents the defining (and symptomatic) contrast in America as that between an implicit thought lived in the street and the *campo* or countryside, and a formal, reflexive thought constructed in the academy. Clearly, indigenous and popular thinking is not the thinking of the academy. The latter is a function of an imported conceptualism that responds to a historical necessity found elsewhere. Kant and Heidegger are expressions of the experience of the European middle classes in determinate historical periods. The experience of America is other and can only be badly translated through the language of philosophy. Instead we need to turn to the languages that describe American experience *in situ*: Aymara and Quechua for the regions that provide Kusch with his existential impulse to transcoding philosophy. For example, the Aymara term *utcatha* provides an understanding of lived reality as ‘mere being’ but ‘linked to the concept of shelter and germination’, an understanding that is more apposite to the experience of America than (Kusch’s example) *Dasein*, which reflects the diminished being of the German bourgeoisie. Here, then, European thought is provincialized *avant la lettre*, its universalism returned to its local particularism.

Thought is again split between two forms of subject. The first, the European, has a relation to the world that is one of knowledge and instrumentality: the threat of nature is overcome by its manipulation as problem. As Kusch puts it: ‘the end of knowledge is solution’. The world is analysed and then recomposed according to the principle of causality. The second subject, the Andean, seeks salvation. Here knowledge is closer to ritual and implies a form of augmentation, whose term in Aymara, *yachacuni*, brings it near to sowing and germination. In the first case, knowledge is the rectification of a problem, a dysfunction. In the second case, knowledge is an expansion, a moment of fertility. These contrasting modes of knowledge indicate a relation to what might be termed propositional truth. In the first style, the subject is not implicated in the assertion of a proposition about the world: truth is external. In the second, the proposition includes the subject who utters it: the world it refers to has the potential to destroy the subject. So we have a causal thinking that entails a reduced manipulative subject, and what Kusch calls a ‘seminal thinking’ that implicates the subject in the threatening but fecund world. These styles of thinking are associated with respective cosmologies. The ‘disenchanted’ or ‘enlightened’ world of ‘evaporated’ being is dominated by causality; the ‘mythic’ world that is ‘stretched between the Teacher

of Being and the Chaos of Non-being' is infused by seminality. But the urban world of manufactured objects is haunted by the absence of the second modality of thought: for Kusch, a stunted, undeveloped or infantile version of seminality is present in the drive to solution – a frenzied production and manipulation of objects is a displacement of a drive for an internal transformation.

This leads to a stress on what might be described as the existential moment of being (in Spanish *estar*, one of the two verbs 'to be'), the modality of being that characterizes the Andean world, against the mode of being of the urban subject. *Estar* is to be exposed, to experience the *así* (the 'thatness') of the world, the contingency that the world is at all. *Estar* turns out to be the place of a clearing where the two forms of thinking – causal and seminal – intersect and offer a potential re-appropriation of the absolute. Heidegger is invoked as the European thinker who saw the importance of *estar* but who gets its value wrong: the Heidegger of *Being and Time* remains in thrall to the Greek metaphysics of being and evades the issue of the inadequacy of *ser* by rushing to a frenzied activity marked by the centrality of time. There is an inauthentic *estar* which is mere survival (the figure of Agamben's 'bare life' is not too distant) and an authentic *estar* which is akin to dwelling.

The providential absence of industrialism is just what gives the space for *estar* to elude the fate of 'enterprise': 'Latin America is a world without an Industrial Revolution, at the margins of the West'. *Estar* – even though a Spanish term and hence in Kusch's historical linguistics a creation of the Spanish 'people' who sought to distinguish realms of 'being' – takes up a possibility of existence that is characterized by the term *pacha* in Quechua. The primordial moment of exposure is a disclosure of the unnameables that bound the cosmos. The space of *estar*, then, in its non-degraded mode, entails a demand on the world for fullness, a longing for completion: the sense of the absolute, which is the unity of opposites, the totality that just *is* (beyond *ser* and *estar*?). The rip in being which is the space of *estar*, lived either as dwelling or dispossession, is only tolerable through seminal thinking.

The ethical seriousness of Kusch's project can hardly be gainsaid and the recuperation of a devalued cosmo-vision is to be endorsed. But the problems of

his methodology are perhaps more obvious now than when his work first emerged, and the philosophical work he does has its own difficulties.

First, as indicated above, the category 'indigenous thought' has a shifting aspect in Kusch's work. The tendency to construct a homogeneous notion that makes continent-wide cultural productions expressive of some fundamental existential stance – where Mexica, Maya, Andean and Amazonian forms all reflect a fundamental *estar* – would now be seen as deeply problematic. On the one hand, the real differences between, say, Mesoamerican and Andean forms are occluded (the profusion of Mexica 'gods' against the abstemious and austere personae of Inca theology) or are reduced to surface phenomena of an underlying relation to nature.



On the other, the characterization of the Inca polity as governed by an urge to equilibrium is deeply mistaken. Such a characterization can hardly account for the extraordinary dynamism of its last century, its expansion across the length of the Andes and its relation to history and religion, as it retold the genealogies of dominion and the configurations of the sacred. Nor can it make sense of the transformations of the land that are an integral part of Andean society: solutions might have symbolic overcodings but irrigation systems and mountain terracing are nevertheless solutions to real problems of resource management. This leads Kusch to ignore the power systems of pre-conquest America – either refusing to engage with any analysis of Inca modes of rule through consciously manipulated symbolic recomposition or the 'biopolitics' of population transfer, or claiming that inequalities are a function of a legitimate preference for a 'seminal' economy over leftist 'causal' reform. A tendential idealization is the obverse of a staunch critique of progress and modernization.

Second, the status of post-conquest accounts of Andean belief is much more problematic than Kusch allows. Recent scholarship on the work of Guaman Poma and Santa Cruz Pachakuti points out how complex a weaving of Andean and Christian elements is involved in their production. Rather than being univocal texts that can be read transparently, they are rather semantically ambiguous essays in their own right, testing the limits of permissible equivalence between native and European designations, collocating patterns and motifs, eliding material that might have been considered ‘idolatrous’, and so on. Written when the effects of the Counter-Reformation made self-investigation a more urgent requirement for indigenous writers (whose purpose in writing was anyway tied up with the demands of evangelization), the texts are neither simple statements of native belief, nor fully accomplished syncretic productions. They are complex negotiations of what it is possible to believe and assert, products of an active dialogue by the subaltern.

And this perhaps is also true of the vernacular materials that Kusch adduces as supports for his reading of the ‘indigenous’. Elements of a pre-conquest belief system might survive in the logics and stances of Kusch’s native informants, but they may also be testimony to complex changes over time. There is a presumption of stasis, the persistence of the residual, which places the indigenous subject where he is later to be found.

Third, there is the problem of Kusch’s binary thinking, his drive to produce antithetical accounts of clearly differentiated subjects, whose totalized homogeneity at the level of theory belies the posited practice of phagocytosis or *estar siendo*, the later ‘unity of opposites’, and requires persistent rebinarization. On the one hand, he overlooks the ways in which his European subject arrives at moments of critique and rearticulation that echo his own critical alternative, and, on the other, he ignores the ways in which ‘causal’ thinking is at work in indigenous practice.

Kusch is clearly indebted to Heidegger in characterizing differences of culture as differences of being, and for thinking of these differences as having authentic and inauthentic modalities. Whereas the *Dasein* of *Being and Time* attains authenticity in resoluteness towards death, for Kusch this moment of Heidegger’s thought merely reflects the attenuated being of the individual caught up in German industrialization. Yet Heidegger himself comes to abandon this form of thinking Being on the basis of *Dasein* and sets out on a critique of technology and ‘calculative’ thinking, himself posing a redemptive other form of thinking

in what is usually translated as ‘meditative’ thinking (*Nachdenken*). The latter is a form of openness to mystery, and ‘releasement towards things’ that leads to a new ground, which, citing Hegel, Heidegger sees as the source of a new rootedness and fecundity.⁹ Despite Kusch’s animadversions, then, later Heidegger, the paragon of causal thinking, arrives at something like seminal thinking.

On the other hand, notions of causality are surely at work in the extraordinary taxonomies and accumulation of empirical data in ethno-botany and herbal lore that were part of the armament of traditional healers. Illness might well be a disturbance of health and wholeness, but restoration of health involved specific measures requiring agents and the manipulation of objects. Kusch needs the binaries, but they always threaten to collapse or mutate, and indeed his whole project is that they should. Yet it is arguably the diremptive moment that endears him to Mignolo.

Coloniality and beyond

For Mignolo, Kusch exemplifies a form of thinking that is not philosophy, which for him is tainted with the power–knowledge mechanisms of coloniality. Mignolo wants to suggest that engaging with the thinking that was subalternized during the expansion of Europe in the Americas allows thought to escape that coloniality in a way that critique from within ‘Western thought’ cannot. So the critical thinkers of the West – Derrida, Foucault, or earlier Nietzsche and Marx – are limited by deep structural ontological commitments premised on colonial forms of power. Only a thought outside has a hope of offering a place to think. Mignolo makes a number of claims about coloniality, which he understands (after Anibal Quijano) as the condition of the world produced by the great expansion of European empires from the fifteenth century onwards. Coloniality is not merely a form of rule or exploitation, the construction of subjects of power and accumulation. It presupposes a set of epistemological relationships: not merely the subject and objects of knowledge, but the form of knowledge imposed upon the colonized spaces are linked with the colonial project of subordination and exclusion. His famous example is the way in which alphabetization of the Indian languages translates a form of knowledge – analytical and causal – into cultural forms that have other ontological and epistemological commitments.

Coloniality is the central mechanism by which a unified Western subject is produced by social and epistemological elimination (of Islam and Judaism in

Spain at the perceived inception of modernity) and homogenization (more problematic, but work done on knowledge to render it serviceable for the project of domination). Coloniality always reproduces the site of origin of history, again subordinating other histories to a claimed universal narrative: so the histories of the Andes or Mesoamerica (Tawantinsuyu and Anáhuac in Mignolo's slightly suspect hetero-imperialist renamings) as told from the point of view of their inhabitants are reduced to superseded anteriorities of the Conquest. The encounter in Tenochtitlan or Cajamarca always has a European point of view. To evade this 'monotopism' it is necessary to shift focus and to speak *à partir de*, from another positionality, the border, the place where the hold of coloniality weakens, where another thinking occurs. Hence Mignolo's endorsement of Kusch's project, or at least his reading of it: he sees Kusch as an example of 'mestizo consciousness', attempting to think *à partir de* indigenous thought, even as he remains grounded in immigrant European thought (German thought in America is not German thought in Europe, he observes). His claim is that Kusch does not understand the *mestizo* biologically, a claim I have already disputed. Mignolo also elides the problem of the relation between 'indigenous' and 'popular' by making the 'popular' *mestizo*, but without clarifying the particularity of its content.

In Mignolo's introduction to *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América*, the great nineteenth-century Argentine poem *Martín Fierro* is posited as a form of *mestizo* writing: Mignolo claims Kusch's reading of the poem as a 'paradigmatic example of border thinking'. However, this precisely evades the question of the ways in which the poem is an imaginative recuperation of a devalued form of existence and its subordination through a certain positivist capture of territory and subject. In the second part of the poem the gaucho Martín Fierro voices the form of law and the substance of positivist naturalism, even as he 'conquers' the black representative of 'barbarism'. What this foundational work of both the Argentine state and Argentine literature actually exemplifies is a complex and unstable space of articulation and dialogue. Mignolo's reconfiguration of the term *mestizo* remains in thrall to a biologism and to a certain homogenization, just as his history itself performs the epistemological operation of unification that he claims is enacted by the Western subject.

If Mignolo refuses the heterogeneous nature of Western thought (in part for the worthwhile aim of re-engaging with subordinated forms of knowledge), then he also homogenizes the heterogeneous forms

of non-Western societies. Kusch's idea of the seminal economy is made universal and Mignolo characterizes all of 'the connected part of the planet' and the Andes and Mesoamerica as operating within its terms, save for the 'market economy' of the imperial West. Now this seems close to an economic Manicheism, both occluding the particularity of the Americas and denying the dynamic market forms of Ming and Qing China.¹⁰ Mignolo's 'grand narrative' seems to enact a horror of complexity even as he invokes its necessity.

As Mignolo's work has become more radical over the years (compare his more nuanced account of Kusch in his 2000 *Local Histories/Global Designs*),¹¹ he has come to find the constraints of Western metaphysics even more powerful. The rejection of coloniality comes to be a rejection of any possibility of internal critique, even as this problematizes Mignolo's own stance: the performative contradiction of writing his critique in English or Spanish within a conceptual framework embedded in a Western subjectivity. But this disavowal of self-implication in the parameters of Western thought is accompanied by a disavowal of the desire at work in the positing of the redemptive indigenous subject, which entails an apocalyptic misreading of non-Western thought. Redemption is only possible through the thought of the other. But this places a particular demand on the indigenous subject to be the subject of salvation, a form of neocolonialism all too common in Latin American (and other) thinking about the 'indigenous'.

Mignolo might retort that his 'border thinking' is not a search for a pure outside, but rather a demand for a thinking that begins with the experience and history of other subjects. His political theodicy implies that the suppression of that possible site of enunciation is a function of Western power/knowledge but articulates that suppression primarily as conceptual. Yet he is at pains to criticize Kusch for his treatment of women on grounds that owe much to 'Western' extensions of notions of democracy but might find difficulties in the 'traditional' apportionment of gender roles in some documents of the Bolivian Movimiento al Socialismo.¹² What grounds this critique of complementarity other than a conceptual and practical politics derived from Western feminism? And if this is the case, then the legacy of the West is not wholly negative.

The problem here is one that constantly emerges from the critical challenge of post-colonialism. If the self-image of the homogenous Western subject as uniquely charged with truth and the future is overthrown, how do we assess those knowledges

subalternized in its ascent? And how do we assess the particular truth claims (and indeed notions of truth more generally) articulated by the ascendant West? These debates parallel debates within the philosophy of science after the challenges of historicism (Kuhn), methodological scepticism (Feyerabend), sociologism (Bloor) and feminism (Harding). The intimations of answers in these cases lie in weaker, more flexible and dialogic notions of truth and knowledge. Similarly, answers to the former problems seem to lie in the opening up of the space of reflection to the numerous traditions of thinking that pre-date and parallel the rise of modern Europe. But such an inclusivity cannot ignore the contributions of Western sciences and philosophy, nor the ways in which they produce the possibility of their self-critique. The encounter can only be a consideration and critique of multiple sources of thinking, all examined under the sign of self-reflective argument. In Kusch, as in Guaman Poma, dialogue means argument, the deployment of forms of rationality (each expanding what might be included under such a heading): the making coeval of 'notions' from different traditions of thinking precisely requires articulation as the form of production of truth. The critical requirement for reading Kusch is recognition that his own dialogic work is done on 'indigenous' thought productions that were already dialogically engaged with Christianity (and Augustinian Tridentine Catholicism at that), as well as on contemporary folk beliefs that are posited as 'timeless' but that may betray traces of multi-sourced construction. His work is to engage in the production of systematicity and totalization, enacting what is surely the primordial desire of philosophy. But *pace* Mignolo et al., Kusch's work is only suggestive of how the task of critical dialogue might be pursued.

Some of the most interesting models of such a dialogue are taking place now in Bolivia, where *pachakuti*, revolution, has brought new subjects to political power. There, the state is attempting a project of industrialization, especially around mineral extraction, whilst seeking to embed notions of communality and nature derived from traditional social forms within the constitution and quotidian political practice. The results are often messy and contradictory, even risible as in the recent celebration of Inti Raymi as 'year 5574' of the Aymara calendar, which cut against anthropological disciplinary knowledge: the Aymara did not have such a calendar and the notional date is imaginary. Yet such inventions of tradition are part and parcel of the West's own imaginaries, and risible results can equally well flow from *bien pensant* attempts to see these subjects

as 'multitude', ignoring the complex cultural forms that constitute them.

Mignolo places Kusch side by side with Ernesto Laclau, as articulating different approaches to the 'popular', but one might equally well look at how Laclau's model of discursive surface could provide a way to read Kusch, as an example of the messy process of rearticulation.

Notes

1. Here the work of Denise Arnold and Juan de Dios Yapita is exemplary, for instance their *The Metamorphosis of Heads: Textual Struggles, Education and Land in the Andes*, Pittsburgh University Press, Pittsburgh, 2006.
2. See Philip Derbyshire, 'Who was Oscar Masotta? Psychoanalysis in Argentina', *Radical Philosophy* 158, November/December 2009, pp. 11–23.
3. Though the Argentine national anthem does refer to Argentines as 'sons' of the Inca, a legacy of the legitimation crisis of Independence and its search for forms of creole authority. See Rebecca Earle, *The Return of the Native*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2007, p. 3.
4. Enrique Dussel, *América latina: dependencia y liberación*, F. García Cambeiro, Buenos Aires, 1973; a recent restatement of his position is in 'Europe, Modernity, Eurocentrism', *Nepantla*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2000.
5. This is a Latin American genre whose examples include the Mexicans Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz – especially the latter's *Labyrinth of Solitude* (1951) – and the Argentine Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, with his *X-Ray of the Pampa* (1933).
6. Wamán Puma (Guaman Poma) was an indigenous writer of seventeenth-century Peru, whose *New Chronicle and Good Government*, a compendium of information and reflection on Inca history and contemporaneous political and social problems, was addressed to Philip III of Spain, although it was lost until its fortuitous rediscovery in Copenhagen in 1906. Juan Santa Cruz Pachakuti Yamqui was writing in Peru at the same time, and his *Account of the Antiquities of this Realm of Piru* (c. 1600) is the focus of Kusch's commentary in *América profunda*.
7. For an English discussion, see Sheila Arup, 'Symbolic Connections in Pachakuti Yamqui's Cosmological Diagram', in *Arte, historia e identidad en América: Visiones comparativas*, Instituto de investigaciones estéticas 37, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico, 1994.
8. See Antonio Cornejo Polar, *Escribir en el aire: Ensayo sobre la heterogeneidad socio-cultural en las literaturas andinas*, Editorial Horizonte, Lima, 1994.
9. Martin Heidegger, 'Memorial Address', in *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and Hans E. Freund, New York, Harper & Row, 1966, p. 57.
10. See Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2000.
11. Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2000.
12. See, for example, 'Socialism comunitario', in *Nueva Crónica y Buen Gobierno*, 24 November 2009.

Auto-sabotage

Gerald Raunig, *A Thousand Machines: A Concise Philosophy of the Machine as Social Movement*, trans. Aileen Derieg, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2010. 120 pp., £9.95 pb., 978 1 58435 085 9.

It's hard to know exactly who the audience is for this small book, the fifth in Semiotext(e)'s Intervention Series, and an uneasy bedfellow with its immediate predecessor in the series, Tiqqun's *Introduction to Civil War*. Taken broadly, it's an overview of the concept of the machine/machinic as formulated by Deleuze and Guattari, combined with post-autonomist Marxist thinking and an emphasis on contemporary 'creative' activism and political art practices, as in Raunig's previous *Art and Revolution* (reviewed in *Radical Philosophy* 148). It moves through six chapters: cultural depictions of bicycles; contrasting conceptions of the machine in Marx and in Deleuze and Guattari; machinic thinking in the theatre from Ancient Greece through to early Soviet Russia (Meyerhold and Eisenstein); the concept of the 'war machine' and its material forerunners in Roman military technology and tactics; the 'precariat' of the European Mayday celebrations/protests; and Raunig's own theory of 'abstract machines' against state and community.

The book is at its best when it's grounded in a discussion of particular things: discrete 'machinic' intersections of humans and things, as well as the social relations behind them. None of this is new historical or theoretical research, but Raunig offers nuanced and condensed accounts, and, if nothing else, one might read the book as an introduction to a wider body of notoriously difficult texts about capitalism, machinic assemblages, abstraction, instrumentality, and so on. Until you consider *how* it's written, at which point the question of who it's for, what it's trying to do and whether it offers us anything new becomes a lot harder to answer. There's an unsettled coexistence of different modes of research, focus and argumentation. Worse, barring the most hardcore devotees of a Deleuze-and-Guattari-inspired writing style, most readers, including those with a serious interest in precisely the issues covered here, will likely find the prose both frustrating and tired, so overburdened at times with a certain breed of jargon as to become nearly incoherent. A representative passage:

I understand abstract machines as transversal concatenations that cross through multiple fields of im-

manence, enabling and multiplying the connections in this field of immanence.... They do not exist before and beyond, but rather on this side of the separation of assemblages of signs and assemblages of bodies, forms of expression and forms of content, discursive and non-discursive *dispositifs*, what is sayable and what is visible.

Aside from the strange decision both to keep *dispositif* in French and not to investigate its meaning – a telling oversight for a book of machinic thinking: not to deal with an inherited concept of the apparatus/device, even as it repeats it again and again – such a mode of writing and terminological tendency basically limits the readership to those already in the Deleuze and Guattari camp. This isn't, however, flatly to dismiss it; certainly not because of a disagreement with the effects of this style. Rather, it is important to take Raunig's project on its own terms and consider its mode of thinking and writing as symptomatic of the tendencies, assumptions and consequences of a political and philosophical orientation of which Raunig's work is but one manifestation.

The central argument of the text is that as 'early as the nineteenth century, a machinic thinking emerged which actualized the concatenation of technical apparatuses with social assemblages and with the intellect as a collective capacity, and recognizes revolutionary potentials in this'. Such a thinking cuts against the 'commonplace concept', developed in the thirteenth century and taking shape especially since the seventeenth, that understands the machine as a 'technical object', a tool and an instrument that, however internally complex, acts as an extension of the body. Conversely, from a loosely Marxist standpoint that would miss the subtlety of Marx's theory, machines come to be the dominant term in the production process, abstract alien powers to which we submit: we become incorporated as extensions of the machine. Raunig's move is to sketch an overcoming of this concept, drawing on three main resources: etymological roots tying the machine back to the *machina* of theatre and war; Marx's now notorious and relentlessly cited 'Fragment on Machines' from the *Grundrisse*; and

the new perspective outlined by Deleuze and Guattari, with more emphasis on the work of the latter.

The account Raunig gives of Marx's theory is on target, even if you can sense the urge for all roads to end in Guattarian machinic assemblages of concatenation. Raunig sharply draws out the way in which Marx's writings on the question are not to be falsely equated with a simple dynamic of instrumentality and labour-saving/worker-dominating. (All the more, I would argue, in the less celebrated narrative of machinic development in *Capital, Volume 1*.) Rather, as Raunig describes the Marxist model,

the machine not only forms its subjects, it structuralizes and striates not only the workers as an automaton, as an apparatus, as a structure, as a purely technical machine in the final stage of the development of the means of labour; it is also permeated by mechanical, intellectual and social 'organs', which not only drive and operate it, but also successively develop, renew and even invent it.

This is indeed the critical aspect of Marx's account: the doubled fact of the workers as dominated by this 'purely technical machine' and as incorporated into it, inseparable from what can only appear as a structure alien to them. In Marx's description of the stages of increasing complexity of machinic labour, the machine functioned initially as an imitation of the worker's task: not yet a complicated assemblage, it imitated the predetermined task of the worker. As the speed, force and complexity of the machines increased, the factory itself had to be reorganized, its circuits of manufacturing remapped to account for the productive capacity of the machines. At that point, workers toiled to the speed, rhythm and pattern of the machines, becoming biomechanical caricatures of the machines. In short, labour became an *imitation of an imitation*. The uncanny specificity of this is reflected in Marx's 'Fragment', which strangely speaks of the 'automatic system of machinery' as 'set in motion by an automaton, a moving power that moves itself'. One might wonder if this isn't the very character of the machinic for which D&G, and Raunig with them, are searching: neither an extension of what already exists nor an addition of things that produces a whole that wasn't there, it is instead the chaining together of forces, materials and knowledge which coheres only in accordance with an abstraction of itself. A ghost in the not-yet-formed machine, the automaton that drives the automatic system may be only the concept of machine that makes such binding and construction possible in the first place.

Leaving behind Marx, what do Deleuze and Guattari, according to Raunig, want to undo in the commonplace version of machine thinking? Raunig writes: 'For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming a piece with something else means something fundamentally different from extending oneself, projecting oneself or being replaced by a technical apparatus.' In brief, their concern is to take the concept of the machine and dephysicalize it, debiologize it and deinstrumentalize it. It's not just, or ever, the material machine itself (i.e. without the workers, forces and flows that make it 'machinic'), it's not an alien organ extension of the body, and it frequently works against its potential tool-purpose (the war machine that threatens its state, for example). Instead, it's about the 'flowing of its components', exchange and communication:



The question should certainly not be: What is a machine? Or even: Who is a machine? It is not a question of the essence, but of the event, not about *is*, but about *and*, and concatenations and connections, compositions and movements that constitute a machine.

To be sure, we shouldn't dismiss the importance of the line of thinking Raunig picks up, especially in so far as it complicates a sense of machines as that which either uses or get used. However, a problem already present in this model becomes unmistakable here: the

question shouldn't be what is a machine, but what, for this philosophy, is *not* a machine? Arguably the central blindspot of the book is a casual and troubled slippage between 'actual' machines and relations that are machinic, with an accompanying dismissal of the former. (Such a slippage is apparent in the specificity of the title: machine as social movement, yet which also remains concerned with machines *for* social movement.) In rejecting the material or even 'metaphorical' specificity of actual machines, the concept of the machinic becomes spread inchoately wide. Given that its dominant criterion is the 'concatenation', it's nearly impossible to discern either what exactly it designates or what is gained by this insistent designation. We have the negative definition – machinic is distinct from a model of the organism or the ecological – yet lack a positive sense of why to call it a machine when it can include such an enormous range. Furthermore, the specifications that we do get, such as the 'non-conforming concatenation of differences, singularities and multitudes', come close to including nearly everything, if only we widen our perspective. Raunig writes of abstract machines that they 'have no form, are formless, amorphous, unformed'. The same must be said of the concept itself. In its frisson of concatenation and transversal movement, nothing links up and takes shape, and not in a monstrous way that opens the potent antagonism envisioned in these machines of communication and possible dismantling.

That's too bad. Because in the initially legitimate attempt to leave behind the overly literal, it covers over something compelling: the possibility of a thought grounded in the figurations of 'real machines' or even particular configurations of force and matter that deserve to be thought of as machines for secession and for sabotage. There are plenty of such figures here, and the chapters on war and theatre machines especially offer intriguing figures not fully followed out: the Trojan horse, the Meyerhold machine-actor, and, most striking, the *currodrepanus clipeatus*, a Roman device that spurs a horse on automatically after the rider has fallen, driving it forward. As such, we can glimpse the edges of another form of machinic thought that passes through the specificity of the machine without freezing it as mere instrument or extension. Rather than a philosophy of the machine, how can philosophy – and politics and aesthetics – sharpen itself via a binding to the particular figuration of distinct machines? What would it mean for politics to think itself through the ecstatic cream separator of Eisenstein's *Old and New*? Or philosophy as siege engine, speculation as the auto-horse spurrer charging its gates?

Raunig begins with the bicycle, and, as the final example of the 'abstract machine' that 'flees, avoids and betrays' the concepts of state and community, describes a 2007 Vienna *ladyride* in which

There was not only sight-seeing along the route, thought, but also collective traffic calming and spontaneous street blockades. 'Honk, if you love us!' was a motto then, or 'Wer ist der Verkehr? Wir sind der Verkehr!' [as Raunig notes, 'Who is the traffic/intercourse? We are the traffic/intercourse!']

This is then described as the 'insistence of a dissonant power, a monstrous potency and enjoyment' and 'ambiguous re-invention of *Verkehr* as a non-conforming concatenation'. I'm utterly unconvinced that 'traffic calming' and asking drivers to honk 'if you love us' constitutes anything close to a 'dissonant power' or 'monstrous potency'. And one need not slide all the way to a *Terminator*-style vision of our machines turning against us to grasp this difference. Jacques Tati, a favoured example for Raunig, shows us in *Mon Oncle* the horror of machinic assemblages, the threat of the mechanized house barely suppressed by the laughter.

The major machine absent in Raunig's account is the car, perhaps because it feels less like a Guattari-machine and more like that auto-horse spurrer, massive blocks of steel, glass and restrained explosions. If he raises the *Themroc* example of the two workers riding side by side 'mutually support[ing] one another as *one* machine', why not expand it to that horrifying hybrid assemblage, traffic itself, the swarming machine of cars–bikes–humans? Sadly, one of the most common reasons for cyclists to 'concatenate' in the street, and intervene in the traffic, is when someone has been hit by a car and killed. There is no *if you love us*... There's a 'ghost bike', painted white and left to remain unriden at the site of the accident: a broken machine. Raunig's book can't grasp a chaining together with what is not just different but fundamentally opposed, not just a transversal motion but a flight that can't leave, secession that goes nowhere. Cars and bikes do not coexist: they constitute traffic, and traffic is nothing but the temporary deferral of a collision, accelerated yet suspended violence. Truly monstrous thought and action have to grapple with a binding to the hostile, the machinic assemblage that cannot exist with itself. A thousand ghost bikes without riders, crashing through lines of traffic to sabotage the auto plant. Now that would be a monstrous potency.

Evan Calder Williams

Rosé

Jean-Luc Nancy, *Identité: Fragments, franchises*, Galilée, Paris, 2010. 69 pp., €14.00 pb., 978 2 71860 820 4.

One of the ironies of the ‘debate’ launched in late 2009 by the French government on national identity is that it has been ‘French thought’ that has done so much to call the concepts of ‘nation’ and ‘identity’ into question over the last century. This irony is one not lost on Jean-Luc Nancy, whose own œuvre has constituted a singular contribution to such thought. Indeed, he writes, it generated the ‘stupefaction’ that led him to intervene in the ‘debate’ with the handful of ‘fragments’, cast off ‘in haste’, that make up *Identité*. Yet if the ostensible aim of these fragments is simply to prevent the debate ‘from going round in circles’, there is a far more ambitious thread running through them: a possible recuperation of the concept of ‘identity’ for left philosophical thought.

The government-stage-managed ‘debate’ on national identity is one of the sorriest chapters in recent French political life. On 2 November 2009 President Nicolas Sarkozy, with one eye on the upcoming regional elections, instructed his minister of immigration, integration, national identity and development (the link between the various briefs of the ministry being itself questionable), Eric Besson, to inaugurate a debate that would take place in town halls across the country. Besson himself is a highly divisive figure: a Socialist deputy, he was campaign manager for Ségolène Royal’s 2007 presidential campaign before jumping ship three months before the election with a highly personalized parting shot directed at Royal. Sarkozy rewarded him with a place in his government, and he has recently been at the heart of some of the most aggressive measures designed at repatriating illegal immigrants, or *sans-papiers*. The ‘debate’ itself coincided with the ban on Muslim women wearing the burqa, and both measures were widely seen as an attempt to play on insecurity and latent xenophobia in order to save Sarkozy’s ailing UMP party from defeat in the *Régionales*, in particular by scapegoating French Muslims for the country’s various economic and social ills. Predictably enough, the subsequent town hall meetings, boycotted by groups on the centre and the left, became a platform for unreconstructed racist vitriol directed towards immigrants, and especially towards the ‘Islamicization’ of France; amid much consternation with the direction it had taken, the ‘debate’ was abruptly called off in February. The upshot of all this was electoral disaster for the UMP, and the resurgence

of the extreme-right Front National, which had until then been in decline, something attributed to Sarkozy’s co-opting of populist stances on immigration and crime since his time as Interior Minister. The ‘debate’ on ‘national identity’, it seemed, was one triangulation to the extreme right too far.

Nancy initially presents *Identité* as a corrective to both right- and left-wing approaches to the ‘causes’ that would render any debate on national identity somehow necessary. Of course it is simplistic to complain, as does the right, that ‘these people don’t want to let themselves be integrated into the national identity’; but so, he says, is the left assertion that ‘the conditions given to [these people] do not allow them even to work out their own identity’. If this might give the impression that Nancy wishes to escape a right–left political spectrum, Nancy’s description of ‘the most visible causality’ should quickly disabuse this:

Without work, without places or conditions of life other than the by-products of an urbanism without urbanity, without education or training conceived as more than the patching up of an outdated model, it is impossible even to envisage a horizon of ‘identity’. ... Let’s be deliberately simplistic: either there is work, or there isn’t. If, by structure, there must not be any – or enough – we need to be open about this and take into account what the structure engenders. If by contrast there could be work – but in a reformed, transformed, structure, ... we need to bring it [i.e. reform or transformation] about.

If companies, in other words, are going to be able to lay off workers in times of recession as a means of keeping afloat, then so be it, but then we have to accept the social consequences. And if the most vulnerable are also going to be from second- or third-generation immigrant families, trained for non-existent jobs and then left to fend for themselves in glorified ghettos where they’re rendered invisible, then don’t be surprised if they ‘don’t want to let themselves be integrated’ into the very society that has conferred this fate upon them. Any attempt to resuscitate the political concept of ‘identity’ must start from this fact, and from its corollary: ‘In either case, we’ll have to make room for what cannot be compressed: not work, nor capital, but people, all of us included.’

This latter gesture is striking, given that most recent questioning of the concept of ‘identity’ – especially on

the part of that ‘deconstruction’ with which Nancy is, perhaps precipitately, associated – has also generally belonged to a ‘post-’ or ‘anti-humanist’ current in philosophy. It is also striking because, turning towards ‘people’ and away from work and capital, Nancy apparently wishes to distance himself from a Marxian Left that would interpret problems of ‘national identity’ as symptoms of a primarily *economic* predicament. Nancy’s claim is that even if such problems of identity arise from an economic structure that treats ‘these people’ as surplus, they are subsequently irreducible to this structure and must be approached from the perspective of ‘identity’ itself.

Nancy’s aim is thus to recuperate the concept of ‘identity’ as a political category for the ‘Left’, in the light of that current in ‘French’ thinking which has spent over half a century probing questions of ‘the relativity of identities, the intimate interweaving of this notion with an internal difference, the impossibility of assigning shatterproof identity markers as much to a “territory” as to a “culture”, a “person”, a “language”’. But he also suggests that ‘identity’ as a concept has for a long time been particularly fraught within France, above all, and to this end Nancy not only offers a genealogy of a self-identity already

aware of its internal alterity, but points to France’s singular place within Enlightenment universalism, and to the ‘republican’ values born of the 1789 Revolution. When this universalism realizes that it is not quite as universal as it thought, a country that defines itself by such universality finds itself shaken to the core. Nancy observes:

the thinking around identity ... was not an intellectual fashion: it took on that which European culture had called into question. This was a series of identities all of which were in solidarity with one another, that of man, of woman, of animals, of God, of a rational order founded on a ‘principle of identity’, and that of a Europe that had never before identified itself this much – distinguished itself from others and recognized itself – as when, before it propagated this desire for ‘nationalities’, it had believed itself able to impose itself on the world as the very identity of civilization.

At the same time, there is a second myth of origins that implicates France in particular in questions of identity: its status as the country of the Franks (*le pays des francs*). Nancy plays on this word to argue that one can only identify oneself by being ‘frank’ in two senses. To assert one’s identity requires both (i)

that one assert it truthfully, that one be ‘frank’ (*franc*), honest, to the point, open; and (ii) that there be ‘a free space [*une zone franche*] in which no authority is exerted’ in which to make the assertion, a *franchise*. This is not merely etymological opportunism; rather, *franchise* directs Nancy towards thinking an openness in which we can trace identity as an identificatory *movement*. This sets in motion a train of thought that one might feel tempted to dismiss as a series of standard deconstructionist tropes: we must ‘enter into the interstice, into the dehiscence that identity opens from itself into itself’, and thus find an ‘inscription’ at the source (Nancy’s preferred term is *point de chute*, literally ‘point of falling’, but with the colloquial meaning of a ‘port of call’ or temporary abode) of this identificatory movement, a



'point of infinite leakage, gathering, and dispersal' which 'frays a path' into singular-plural identity(ies), and yet which, dispersing infinitely, 'we can never reach'. Yet Nancy aligns this 'excess of origin' with 'a far more originary profusion: that of existing [*éxister*]'. Simply by existing, that is, we, as 'individuals' and as members of a 'people', are involved in plural identities, plural not only because each identity is defined in relation to other identities, but also in that each identity is plural internally, a tension or movement, reflecting the fact that 'being is plural or it is nothing'. The question of identity is thus traced back to an originary plurality in 'being', such that *Sein* is conditioned in advance by the *Mitsein* through which it can articulate itself.

This means that a second 'deconstructionist' concern is also refigured with specifically political valence: how to 'name' identity in such a way as not to deprive it of the movement that characterizes its excess over origin or *point de chute*. If identity is nothing 'extractable' from a person or people, as this would be to tear it from the tensions and processes through which it identifies – if, as Nancy puts it, it enters into language never as 'a thing nor a unit of meaning' but as the tracing of a multidirectional movement – then we find a tension between the identificatory movement that happens simply by virtue of existing, and the civil identity through which the subjects of a nation can be 'placed'. Whilst insisting that this is not in order to set up a 'Manichean' scheme around these kinds of identity, or of the analogous distinction between a self-identifying 'people' and an institutionalized 'nation', the civil state is nevertheless, Nancy argues, ill-equipped to grasp the infinite excess of human existence. The current fashion for official documentation, 'identity cards' and the like, if anything, makes this more, and not less, apparent – and more, not less, inevitable.

Any attempt to fix 'identity' as the object of a 'debate' will thus prove not merely fallacious and irresponsible, but obsolete. In this light, Nancy subjects to close analysis an instruction Sarkozy reportedly gave his ministers: *Je veux du gros rouge qui tache* (I want cheap red plonk that leaves a stain). *Gros rouge*, Nancy points out, no longer exists, a consequence of commercial pressures from globalization and changes in drinking habits which have led French wine producers to improve the quality of their produce (the *gros rouge* that remains, he notes, is almost exclusively the preserve of alcoholics swigging on the streets). Beyond the violent tone and the obvious exclusion

of those people, notably Muslims, who do not drink (although, in fact, Sarkozy is himself reputedly teetotal), the statement is striking for invoking a piece of France that no longer exists, and has not done for a generation. That the central tropes of French 'national identity' should be clichés of an irretrievable past is, however, not simply unfortuitous irony, nor the evocation of nostalgia, but arises from a fundamental misrecognition, and disfigurement, of what identity is and does. The attempt to render the metastasis of identity simplistically static contravenes the very temporality through which identity identifies itself. To 'debate' an identity or complex of identities is necessarily to deal in anachronism.

The fragments that make up *Identité*, then, for all their modesty, demonstrate the by-no-means-modest achievement of using the national identity debate as the catalyst for that which was lacking in the debate itself – a thoughtful consideration of 'identity' as a political category. This is a politics of identity far removed from any 'identity politics', a term conspicuous by its utter absence from the book, but which is the implied recipient of one choice dig: Nancy dismisses the 'multiculturalism that a "progressive" discourse exalts like a Dionysian invention, when this feeble and clunky term was forged merely to try to hold together different strands of a patchwork whose pieces, for the most part, remain in spite of all caught in the "monocultures" whence they came'. If each identity – of an individual, a people, or a 'culture' – is fatally entangled with, and conditioned by, its exposure to a plurality of identities from within and without, then the very basis of identity lies in a community or communality that would antecede 'monocultures'. To reconstruct multiculturalism after the fact is to remain blind to the originary plurality through which the categories of culture, individual, and even person, first become possible. The project of reconstructing plurality from an individual identity is no more than the futile gesture of a 'Left' which will not give up its 'liberal' assumptions, even at the cost of remaining in perpetual self-contradiction. And here we see the ultimate stakes of Nancy's politics of identity: a thinking of the communal that must do justice to the maxim 'being is plural or it is nothing'; where communality is both the fundamental condition of politics and its ultimate end. No longer the preserve of liberalism of whatever stripe, identity reveals itself to depend on, and to exact, a renewed philosophical communism.

David Nowell Smith

Wot? No critique of the social whole?

Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008. 308 pp., £18.99 pb., 978 0 52172 872 0.

There are few figures from the classical philosophical canon that we could say, unequivocally, that we understand better than we did thirty years ago. The one exception to this is Hegel. One only needs to cast one's mind back to the 1980s and 1990s – for anyone studying philosophy or the cognate disciplines in the UK at this time – to recall his almost complete absence from the curriculum. Where he did occur in sub-disciplines like political philosophy it was largely through received readings of 'organicist' accounts of the state with illiberal and even totalitarian leanings. Outside the mainstream, on the other hand, in the philosophies of difference that were then predominant in heterodox thought, he figured centrally. He was the arch thinker of the system, inimical to difference as such that only a constant critical vigilance could prevent one lapsing back into. And while such readings represented altogether more substantial engagements with Hegel than those evidenced in the analytical tradition, more often than not they functioned as pretexts and offered limited assistance for those concerned with demystifying the central categories of his thought.

Robert Pippin's work has been central to the reappraisal of Hegel's thought since this time. In *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (1989) he offered a pioneering reading of Hegel's thought that demonstrated how the argumentational structure of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* could be understood as an appropriation and development of Kant's theory of transcendental apperception. Instead of the absolute being presupposed at the outset as many commentators (including Heidegger) maintained, all that was necessary to get this account of the phenomenology of shapes of consciousness going was an acceptance of Kant's account of the reflexive structure of consciousness: that all consciousness was a simultaneous determinate taking of oneself to such awareness such that the subject could be described as spontaneously determining itself in accordance with a rule. It is this structure, Pippin argued, that generates the determinate failures, or negations, of a concept of an object in general to capture the sort of object awareness that it purported to, so characteristic of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

In *Modernity as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (1991),

Pippin defended this conception of modernity in a broader cultural context and contrasted it with rival conceptions derived from Nietzsche and Heidegger. In doing this he explicitly engaged with the dominant reading of Hegel in the modern European tradition as *the* thinker of system and identity and also challenged the claims of the philosophies of difference, drawing their inspiration from Nietzsche or Heidegger, to have dispensed with notions like freedom or the subject as the locus of intentional meaning. Central to this defence was his anti-metaphysical reading of the Hegelian concept of *Geist* and his interpretation of the Hegelian absolute as simply the developmental process of the self-realization of human freedom. *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* builds on these and subsequent works. It offers the most concerted and thoroughgoing account to date of what Pippin first referred to in an earlier essay as Hegel's 'ethical rationalism'.

Pippin summarizes Hegel's theory of practical reason as comprising two basic components:

That for Hegel freedom consists in being in a certain reflective and deliberative relation to oneself ... which is possible, so it is argued, only if one is also already in certain (ultimately institutional, norm-governed) relations to others, if one is a participant of certain practices.

In other words, it involves understanding the subject as at one and the same time self-determining *and* determinate. This distinctive approach to the problem of freedom runs counter to the prevalent schools of moral thought (contractarianism, utilitarianism, Kantian and deontological approaches, etc.) that, in their separate ways, have all viewed the account of how freedom is possible as necessarily entailing the switch to a level of abstraction. In Kant's practical philosophy, for example, the various forms of right are shown to depend on what the acting subject can consistently will in abstraction from any particular context of an action. Likewise John Rawls sought, much later, to account for the basic rationality and fairness of the principal social institutions on the grounds that they are underpinned by principles that all rational agents would agree were fair behind a 'veil of ignorance'. By contrast, Hegel's account involves showing how subjects come to 'stand

behind their actions' and recognize them as truly their own. This, in turn, involves showing how, on the one hand, practical reason is bound, primarily, to specific institutional contexts for Hegel; that we deliberate as members of families or civil societies or as citizens of modern states; that only in abstraction from this – ethical life – do we reason as 'abstract individuals' or as 'moral subjects' acting in accordance with their conscience. On the other hand, it involves showing how these institutions, as forms of objective spirit, are the



outcome or product of our own social-historical work which embody or objectify our collective notions of freedom. This distinguishes Hegel from thinkers like Hume and Burke who also insisted that ethical thought was tied to social institutions but via an appeal to custom and tradition rather than freedom and reason.

Pippin's book, which is largely an extended exploration of this Hegelian 'third way' – between an abstract rationalism and a naturalism – is divided into three parts. The first looks at claims around spirit: (i) the relation between spirit and nature; (ii) the claim that spirit 'is a product of itself'; and (iii) that norms be understood as self-legislating or self-actualizing. Of particular interest here is Pippin's account, in Chapter 2, of the rooted character of 'spiritual' life in nature. Part two considers the psychological and social dimensions of self–other relations. The final part looks at the theory of sociality underpinning this in Hegel's theory of 'recognitive status' and 'institutional rationality' and focuses specifically on the political dimension of Hegel's practical thought.

There is much to recommend here for anyone with a stake in the Hegelian project, whether positively or negatively. While Pippin would probably reject the moniker, his reading will be recognizably 'left-Hegelian' for many readers. The main reason for this

lies in the centrality he accords to the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* and his general scepticism towards the very idea of a 'Science of Logic'. Moreover, in his account of the convergence of subjective reason and objective spirit, in the claim that the intention of the action only becomes manifest retrospectively after the deed itself, and in his insistence that practical reason is ineluctably the reason of a participant in social practices, there are rich pickings for theorizing praxis. At the same time, however, this would have to

be set against Pippin's insistent defence of Hegel against Marx, in Chapters 4 and 9, that philosophy can only comprehend the world in retrospect, not change it. This is a claim that, at least in so far as it applies to Marx, patently needs further elaboration. If 'practical reason' cannot – at least not without distortion – be abstracted from 'thick' institutional contexts and if, in order for free action to be possible, there needs to be an adequation of subjective reason and objective (institutional) rationality, then why wouldn't this be *practical* (i.e. ontologically generative) with respect to the object? As will be seen, the reason why not, for Pippin,

turns on his qualification of the Hegelian claim to the rationality of the objective social order. However, to make such a claim stick he would, at a minimum, have to engage with Marx's concept of praxis and perhaps later reconstructions of this by Lukács.

In fact, the left-Hegelian tradition represents something of a blind spot for this study more generally. This is odd and as a consequence some of the discussions appear arbitrarily curtailed. An example of this can be found in Pippin's critique of Neuhausser's reading of Hegel for retaining the distinction between 'inner' and 'outer'. As Pippin astutely observes, in maintaining that individuals realize themselves when they find the source of moral authority in themselves rather than in something external, Neuhausser retains the inner–outer distinction that the primacy of ethical life over the sphere of morality was supposed to throw into question. The import of this would appear radical: what would it be like to no longer understand one's agency in this way? Yet whenever Pippin fleshes this out it appears anything but radical.

Over the page he offers a view of Hegel's contribution to 'critical theory':

Even though the structure of ethical life is overall coherent [the] tensions, pulls and counter-pulls in Hegel's account are essential to the continuing need

for reflective subjectivity in one's engagements. The departure of children from the family, the limits on the pursuit of private ends established by civil society and even more by the state, the claims by the state for the young for its wars, and so forth, are not treated by Hegel as seamless moments in an over-arching whole. A good deal of reflection will be needed to understand just what one's role calls for and what it does not.

But might we not expect more from Hegel's critical legacy than a capacity to reflect on our roles as parents, private individuals and citizens, and the boundaries that constitute these in a rational social whole? Has not Hegel-inspired critical theory already gone much further than this in questioning the rationality of the social whole and questioning whether the realization of freedom can be adequately 'housed' in the characteristic institutions of modernity?

Much depends on Pippin's deflationary account of Hegel's claim for the objective rationality of the social order. Whilst the substantive institutional conditions for the realization of human freedom are not formal, they are, he suggests, 'somewhat "light" in content'. This

enables Pippin to defend the rationality of the social whole while acknowledging the ongoing need for reflection at the level of specific social role. Thus while the family, civil society (comprising free markets) and the state as forms of objective spirit represent the realization of human freedom and as such the ineluctable backdrop for the modern subject, Pippin can remain non-committal on the specific character of these institutions (e.g. what state or corporate body regulates the pursuit of private interest and to what extent?). This is a perfectly consistent and defensible position in the contemporary context and an important addition to the roll-call of 'liberalisms' that Pippin offers in Chapter 8. In my view, however, Pippin's argument is significantly impaired by a seeming reluctance to engage with the left-Hegelian tradition, extending from Marx to Adorno, that has questioned the rationality of the social whole and insisted, in various ways, that the realization of human freedom cannot ultimately be separated from the capacity for ontological innovation at the institutional level.

Timothy Hall

The ghostly double

Nick Nesbitt, *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville and London, 2008. 261 pp., \$22.50 pb., 978 0 8139 2802 9.

One of the more shocking aspects of the aftermath of the earthquake that devastated Port-au-Prince on 12 January 2010 was the manner in which the catastrophe was reported, especially in France and the USA. Leaving aside the lunatic but influential religious Right in the USA, who saw in the earthquake the wrath of God visited upon a land of pagans, the media generally threw themselves with relish upon the weary old theme of Haiti as the land of the cursed. One might have hoped that Voltaire's *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne* – written fully 250 years ago – had once and for all burst the bubble of that rhetoric of providence and malediction, but such does not appear to be the case. After 1804, the year of its self-declared independence, Haiti swiftly became the rhetorical locus of barbarity: a place whose existence served to comfort the West in the certainty of its own 'civilization' and 'enlightenment'. Two centuries on, the rhetoric may be less brutal, but it seems that this land-that-God-forgot still has a useful role to play for our western liberal democracies.

The bicentenary of Haitian independence in 2004 prompted a flurry of academic conferences and publications revisiting the events leading up to 1804. At the same time, however, the overthrow of Haiti's democratically elected president shortly after the muted bicentennial celebrations (the bicentenary was snubbed by nearly every world leader), in a coup financed and orchestrated by the former colonial power and the contemporary hemispheric hegemon, suggested that an independent Haiti was as unthinkable in 2004 as it had been in 1804. Nick Nesbitt's new book, *Universal Emancipation*, sets out, among other things, to answer the question as to why Haiti remains as 'scandalous' today as it was two centuries ago.

The starting point for Nesbitt's book could well be summarized in a question asked by the 2004 Debray report on Franco-Haitian relations: 'How many French people know that the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was *initiated* in Paris but *instantiated* in Saint-Domingue, where human rights became, almost without our knowledge, truly universal?' Nesbitt

presents the Haitian Revolution as the culmination of the radical Enlightenment: whereas the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789 had, ultimately, subordinated universal freedom to property rights (the slave population of the United States actually tripled between 1776 and 1820; the after-tremors of 1830 and 1848–52 in France served merely to consolidate the rights of the bourgeoisie), in Haiti alone were human rights universally and unconditionally implemented.

If the thesis itself is straightforward enough, the way that it unfolds in Nesbitt's book is rather more convoluted. Universal emancipation is an idea with a history and with a future, and a sizeable proportion of the book is devoted to tracing the lineage of the notion – from Spinoza, through Diderot and the *Encyclopédie*, to the revolutionary rhetoric of Robespierre, and beyond, in the work of Kant and Hegel (here, Nesbitt picks up and develops Susan Buck-Morss's *Hegel and Haiti*). The futurity of the notion pulls in much more recent political philosophers, such as Rancière, Badiou, Habermas, Laclau and Mouffe. Other chapters deal with how the idea was disseminated, how it landed in Saint-Domingue, how it was understood and how it came to life, growing rapidly into a Frankenstein's monster that destroyed its creator. In all of this, the slaves of Saint-Domingue emerge as the 'unintended readers' of the Déclaration, eavesdroppers on a conversation taking place above their heads, but who had the audacity to believe that the words *homme* and *liberté* applied to them. Nesbitt has the slaves as jazz musicians *avant la lettre*, 'improvising' on the 'theme' of the Déclaration; one could perhaps equally well think of them as Lévi-Straussian *bricoleurs*.

The path that Nesbitt proposes is not always easy to follow. This may be due in part to the genesis of the book: most of its chapters have been published previously, in whole or in part, and there are some problems of continuity and repetition that should have been ironed out by a keener editorial eye. It is probably also due to the interdisciplinary nature of the approach. Nesbitt's interest and expertise lie in political philosophy and the history of ideas. But he is also interested in how the idea of universal emancipation was made concrete, how it passed into acts – in how it became *instantiated*, no matter how briefly, at a particular historical moment. It is clear that, despite claiming that *Universal Emancipation* is not, even secondarily, a work of historiography, the author cannot avoid, sooner or later, becoming implicated in the messy business of who actually did what to whom, and when. There are some minor historical inaccuracies,

and some claims that, I believe, would need further substantiation (for example, I am unaware of anything stronger than circumstantial evidence to support the claim that Toussaint was a Freemason, let alone a 'high-ranking' one), but more striking is the 'reverse teleology' of Nesbitt's account of the events after 1791. Because he already knows who the 'revolutionary heroes' of the Haitian Revolution will turn out to be, he fails to fully evaluate the contributions of other historic actors. For example, the *affranchis* Ogé and Chavannes merit only a couple of mentions, yet the exemplariness of their punishment surely indicates the scale of the threat to the plantation system that they posed, and an individual such as Sonthonax, who after all abolished slavery in Saint-Domingue in 1793, is given a bit-part compared to the leading role ascribed to him in C.L.R. James's classic account of the revolution. It is probably historians of the period in question who will be least satisfied with *Universal Emancipation*.

The central idea that informs this book (that the *idea* of universal emancipation was *made concrete* in Haiti) could itself appear puzzling as well. After all, as is well known, Toussaint – and after him Dessalines, Christophe and Pétion – wished to reinstate the latifundia system, forcing the erstwhile slaves back onto the plantations in an attempt to rebuild the shattered economy of Saint-Domingue/Haiti, while Toussaint's 1801 constitution scarcely provided the blueprint for an egalitarian utopia. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot and others have shown, the Haitian state that emerged after 1804 was a 'predatory state': little more than an agent for extracting surplus profit from the labours of the peasants. To that extent, the Haitian Revolution was a dramatic failure. But Nesbitt's claim is that the idea of universal emancipation was made concrete not in the Haitian state but in what Trouillot referred to as the nation: the *Bossales* (African-born slaves and their descendants, as opposed to the Creoles), who rejected the reimposition both of slavery (they formed the mass of the indigenous army that defeated Leclerc's expeditionary force) and of wage-labour (they ignored Toussaint's efforts to re-create the plantation system by, quite literally, taking to the hills in an act of mass *marronnage*). Known as the *moun andeyò* (the outside people) – paradoxically, as they constituted upwards of 90 per cent of the population of Haiti in 1804 – they withdrew to the mountainous hinterland, isolated, unrepresented, perhaps unrepresentable. Relying heavily on Barthélemy's seminal 1990 study of the Haitian peasantry, he sees theirs as a radically egalitarian, democratic society, viscerally hostile to liberal individualism and wage-labour: the true torch-bearers

of the revolutionary ideal of universal emancipation that had been betrayed by others well before Haiti achieved its nominal independence in 1804, and, to their misfortune, a glaring anachronism in today's global capitalist system.

Scorned, ignored and exploited for two centuries, under Jean-Claude Duvalier the Haitian peasantry found their unique society under attack from even further afield: a succession of neoliberal structural adjustment programmes imposed by a US-led IMF and World Bank have seriously undermined the peasants' capacity to feed themselves, let alone to feed the cities or produce a surplus for export. Cheap, subsidized US agricultural imports have devastated large swathes of the Haitian peasant economy, accelerating both the rural exodus and the ecological disaster playing out in the Haitian countryside. The *moun an deyò* started to emerge from political isolation in the 1980s, but today, despite the interlude of Aristide's Lavalas, they remain as much 'on the outside' as they always were, as the USA and the rest of the 'international friends of Haiti' decide how to 'rebuild' the country at conferences from which the very people who will have to live with that reconstruction are systematically excluded.

As Nesbitt remarks, the animus of the USA towards independent Haiti should logically have ceased in 1862, when slavery was finally abolished there, too. How, then, does one account for the numerous episodes of interference, destabilization and outright persecution that have set the tone of the USA's various dealings with its tiny neighbour? Nesbitt's book suggests an answer to that question: Haiti is the ghostly double, the scandalous reminder of a freedom that could have been – a freedom converted from the very moment of its enunciation into a rhetorical construct, and which is used today to justify the oppression of others across the globe.

As I have already suggested, *Universal Emancipation* is not without its problems. It suffers from compositional and structural defects that sometimes dilute the force of its own arguments. It does not always convince when it attempts to line up the history of ideas with a specific history in which those ideas were supposedly embodied. It raises more questions than it is able to answer, but the very fact that it raises those questions now makes this a book that should be read by everyone who believes that it is urgent to find ways of thinking past the contemporary neoliberal hegemony.

Andrew Leak

Sisters grim

Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 2010. 315 pp., £16.99 pb., 978 0 82234 725 5.

'I just want you to be happy.' The strangeness of this ubiquitous desire for the other – one's partner, one's child – should alert us to the vexed question of contemporary happiness. What does it mean? What is it for? Can one be happy? Should happiness be part of a good life? Does it even exist? Ahmed's overview of the paradoxes of this desire for a thing that lacks any definitive content is timely and nuanced: the 'science' of happiness has reached new levels of academic respectability, and, as Ahmed points out, even David Cameron has spoken about happiness 'as a value for government', whatever that might mean in an era of enforced austerity, mass unemployment and widening social inequality. Ahmed is ultimately not at all on the side of happiness as it is currently understood, as something to 'aim' for, or composed of various 'happy' objects or relations (marriage, children, wealth, and so on). Her main aim, on the contrary, is to excavate figures of unhappiness – a rather pleasing triumvirate

of feminist killjoys, unhappy queers and melancholic migrants – in order to defend both a kind of politicized rage and the 'hap' of happiness, its contingent qualities, happiness as a 'happening' in an unexpected sense.

Ahmed's approach may be broadly termed 'queer phenomenology' (indeed, she previously wrote the book on it, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* in 2006, reviewed in *Radical Philosophy* 143). What this involves is a kind of non-normative reading of texts and films that pays attention to the strange moments – the lines that don't quite fit, the sentiments that don't correspond to our usual understanding of love and relationships, and so on. Ahmed's queer phenomenology involves a feel for awkwardness that aims not to smother or universalize singularity under the weight of philosophical generalization. Nevertheless, Ahmed wants to draw out certain stereotypical figures, namely the feminist, the queer and the migrant, in order to explore their role in a generalized economy

of happiness, and what it is they are supposed to be lacking in relation to and stealing from the mainstream. After a brief summary of the history of happiness in philosophy, and the idea of happy objects, Ahmed introduces her troubling figures, beginning with the feminist killjoy.

To her credit, Ahmed has no truck with the kind of post-Deleuzian affirmative philosophy that adopts the language of Spinozan affect in relation to happiness: 'I wonder what it means for joy to become a desirable mode, a way of transcending negative passions, which are assumed to be reactive.' Ahmed is right to be suspicious of such a tendency, particularly in relation to feminism. Ahmed's feminism remains gloriously stropic: 'To kill joy ... is to open a life, to make room for life, to make room for possibility, for chance.' Harking back to older, and now rather unfashionable, models of feminism, Ahmed argues that 'earlier feminist languages of "consciousness-raising" and even "false consciousness" may be useful in an exploration of the limitations of happiness as a horizon of experience.' The feminist killjoy is the heiress to a tradition of speaking out about unhappiness (Betty Friedan's problem that has no name, Wollstonecraft's attack on Rousseau's deeply conservative model for female education): 'The history of feminism is ... a history of making trouble.' The troublemakers Ahmed identifies – Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway, Claudia in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Audre Lorde's account of her experience of breast cancer – are all unhappy in more or less extroverted ways:

The figure of the female troublemaker ... shares the same horizon with the figure of the feminist killjoy ... Feminists might kill joy simply by not finding the objects that promise happiness to be quite so promising. The word *feminism* is thus saturated with unhappiness ... the feminist killjoy 'spoils' the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness.

By identifying the link between troublemaking and killing joy, Ahmed provides a useful way into linking feminist concerns up with race, something that has been missing in many recent theoretical accounts of feminism: 'we can talk about being angry black women or feminist killjoys; we can claim those figures back ... there can be even be joy in killing joy.' At

the same time, however, there is a kind of political joy in feminist unhappiness, and we are reminded of Shulamith Firestone's excellent call for a 'smile boycott': 'the feminist who does not smile when she is not happy wants a more exciting life.' Refusing to be happy in a conventional way opens up possibilities not visible from the standpoint of conventional heteronormativity or from within the passive acceptance of gender inequality.

Ahmed's second figure of discontent, the unhappy queer, involves readings of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, Léa Pool's film *Lost and Delirious*, and *If These Walls Could Talk 2*, directed by Jane Anderson, Martha Coolidge and Anne Heche, whose final instalment features Sharon Stone and Ellen DeGeneres deciding to have a baby together, via a sperm donor. This 'happy' queer film, though not one without its own frustrations ('And now in order to get pregnant

I have to have another man or at least part of the man in the bedroom and *it is not fair* so I hate it more' says one of the characters), is the culmination, Ahmed argues, of a 'longer genealogy of negative queer affect and activism', not simply an assimilation of queer desire to presiding heterosexual norms. This kind of teleology might be questionable, however, if politics drops out of the frame altogether. Consider Lee

Edelman's polemic *No Future* (2004), also a queer phenomenology of sorts, or at least a queer reading of various films and novels which is simultaneously viciously anti-political. Ahmed raises the question of 'whether all forms of political hope, all forms of optimism as well as utopianism, all dreams of "some more perfect order," can be described as performing the logic of futurism', which is an important point, but rather underexamined here – is Ahmed defending a negative teleology of unhappiness that nevertheless carries the seeds of new forms of unexpected happiness? (Ahmed concludes the book by suggesting that 'silliness' might be something to defend – I couldn't agree more.) An extended polemic against Edelman would have been welcome here, as the question of the temporality of happiness and unhappiness is left rather open, whilst, alternatively, the discussion of happy objects is much more filled out. Similarly, Ahmed's abrupt use of Lukács ('Consciousness might be about how the social is arranged through the sharing of deceptions that precede the arrival of subjects' is how she paraphrases his argument) represents too much of



a leap from the individual to the collective: we are left with a tentative queer Marxism that is stuck with the language of alienation and false consciousness, but it is not clear that this adds much to the nuanced queer readings of films and books that fill the rest of the book.

Ahmed is on much more solid ground when she turns to the figure of the 'melancholic migrant', where happiness is seen as the reward for 'loyalty to the nation', and an inability to give up on other narratives and identities is cause for both the unhappiness of the non-assimilable migrant *and* the native non-migrant. Migrants, she argues, 'are increasingly subject to what I am calling the happiness duty':

If in the nineteenth century the natives must become (more) British in order to be recognized as subjects of empire, in a contemporary context, it is migrants who must become (more) British in order to be recognized as citizens of the nation. Citizenship now

requires a test: we might speculate that this test is a happiness test.

Ahmed's psychoanalytically inflected account of the figure of the unhappy migrant gives us the clearest vision of the structural role of happiness in ideas of nationhood and identity, and Ahmed fuses her accounts of feminism and queerness with a broader discussion of racism and cultural difference: this is the major strength of her approach as a whole, which precisely allows her to link these different figures of unhappiness together in the wider political context. Ahmed strives to rescue something interesting from the desire for unhappiness, which perhaps indicates that, in the end, unhappiness is not the opposite of happiness, but rather that unhappiness is the opposite of boredom. Ahmed makes a fine plea for the contingency of politically inflected happiness that comes off the back of a history of pain, and a very interesting plea it is too. Long live misery!

Nina Power

Vampire squid

Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadra, eds, *Crisis in the Global Economy: Financial Markets, Social Struggles, and New Political Scenarios*, trans. Jason Francis McGimsey, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2010. 256 pp., £13.95 pb., 978 1 58435 087 3.

The 'metaphysical subtleties' of globalized finance have only, ironically, become fully visible in their moment of crisis. Signifiers emptier than any poststructuralist could dream, these frozen abstractions preside over a denuded social landscape of de-valorization, non-reproduction and insolvency. In reaction critics and theorists have found the language of apocalypse, the horror film and social devastation irresistible: 'crack capitalism', 'zombie capitalism', 'disaster capitalism', Matt Taibbi's description of Goldman Sachs as 'a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money'; it is Marx's Gothic metaphors which are getting up to dance. While it is hard not to feel some measure of *Schadenfreude* at capitalism's 1989, any concomitant politicization and rebound to alternative socialist or communist forms of agency appears, so far, to have been lacking. The very language of horror itself threatens to reinforce and return to a fantasy of capitalism as all-powerful, as if, in its collapse, the end of capitalism is equivalent to the end of the world (to put another spin on Jameson's remark that we can better accept the end of the world than the end of capitalism).

In response we should welcome this collection of responses to the crisis that emerges from the tradition of Italian *operaismo*, a tradition that has been preoccupied with the centrality of working-class agency as both the motor and the potential ruination of capitalist accumulation. *Crisis in the Global Economy* originated as part of the 'UniNomade' project, which is, inevitably, a 'network', and drew together researchers at seminars held at the University of Bologna, the Sapienza University in Rome, and a squatted social space, also in Rome, between 2008 and 2009. Its guiding thread is the historical novelty of the current financial crisis, and the need to think through new political scenarios in its wake, including, in a startling formulation, 'to experiment with the synthesis of an unprejudiced use of reformism'.

Unfortunately one initial cautionary point has to be made, which is that the rendering into English, without my being able to comment on the actual translation, is poor. Such phrases as 'a presumed glorious heredity of the past', included in an ungrammatical sentence, and a persistent and deeply irritating use of 'capitalistic', when 'capitalist' appears the only possible choice, hardly inspire confidence. This uneasiness is

only increased when reading the translator's note that defines *operaismo* ('workerism'), as 'a name given to different trends in left-wing political discourse, especially anarchism and Marxism'. Such basic failures, especially considering the density and precise theoretical language of much post-*operaismo*, leave the text deeply suspect.

To return to the project, as this is articulated collectively and ends with a common programme, rather than identify and analyse individual positions I will treat it in collective terms. We can identify a number of fundamental propositions on the crisis, and on new possible forms of resistance. At the core is the insistence that the financial crisis that emerged in 2008 is of a qualitatively new type, and does not belong to the cycle of switching between finance and production typical of this history of capitalism (according to Braudel and Arrighi). The singularity of the current crisis is that it indicates the erosion and disappearance of the distinction between the 'real economy' and the 'financial economy', in a new configuration of accumulation. Finance, it is argued, is consubstantial with goods and services, with credit card and mortgage borrowing financing consumption, for example.

To those familiar with post-*operaismo* this leads to the unsurprising conclusion that the financial crisis has put in stark relief the new form of cognitive capitalism or biocapitalism, in which valorization is not drawn simply from labour in the production process, but from a diffusive extraction of value from knowledge and life. In terms of the relation to financialization, which of course operates through forms of 'knowledge' and prediction deeply tied to life (most obviously in the case of insurance or the mortgage), this is visible through the 'becoming-rent of profit' (Carlo Vercellone). Capitalism extracts value through enclosing and controlling the forms of knowledge and life, through patents, titles, shares, and so on, and so draws profit from these 'rents' by privatizing the social cooperation which produces surplus-value. This accumulation regime rests on 'new enclosures', repeating the 'original accumulation' of early capitalism in new forms of colonization and subsumption of the productive forces that have resulted from capital's own subsumption of life and labour.

What the financial crisis reveals, it is claimed, is the exhaustion of capital's own productivity and its essentially parasitic nature in drawing value from the enclosure of the 'power' of the general intellect – capitalism itself as 'vampire squid'. This analysis offers the strange spectacle of passing through the 'mature' Marx's analysis of real subsumption – in which labour

is fully integrated into capitalist production – to return us to an analysis of life and labour that echoes the claim of the 'young' Marx that 'I am nothing and I should be everything'. The critique of capital seems to rest on it not living up to its claim to world-historical dynamism, which is fair enough (and recently stated by Gopal Balakrishnan in *New Left Review* 59), but with the implication that the multitude can burst through this integument to release new productive powers, which is less convincing.

A number of dubious assumptions are at work. The first is that capitalism's real subsumption, which penetrates into life and knowledge 'all the way down' to reorganize it for accumulation, engenders a situation in which capitalism is left as merely external and secondary to the productive powers of the multitude. Capitalism creates its own gravediggers not through the negating agency of the proletariat, but from an accumulation of powers that it can neither measure nor control. The second assumption is that this situation becomes evident in the crisis of capitalism, producing the opportunity to shuck off the 'vampire squid' of capital in the name of the affirmative and vitalist powers of the multitude. The philosophical provenance of this model is not so much Marx, but Deleuze, or a certain Deleuze and a certain Spinoza. Capitalism becomes an 'apparatus of capture' and resistance is re-coded as an irrepressible 'ontological' power that results from capitalism's harnessing of all the productive powers of life and knowledge. This model of capital as 'exteriority' or 'parasite' ignores the penetrative and shaping effects of the form of value, including its operation through forms of non-reproduction and social abandonment. At the same time, the globalized agency of the multitude is given very thin grounding, cast into eternal resistance we seem to have little traction on actual strategies of resistance. In particular what is largely left un contemplated is a capitalism that isn't working, but for which we still work.

We can address this difficulty by looking at the solutions proposed in *Crisis in the Global Economy* to the current crisis. Again these offer few surprises: a global basic income, to detach us from labour as value generation; a new appropriation of welfare in a 'commonfare' that would secure health, education, and social reproduction; and finally a more general reappropriation of the new commons generated by capitalism. Of course there is nothing wrong per se with these demands. The problem is *who* is going to achieve them and *how*. On the 'who' the unspecified and general notion of the multitude offers little purchase on the exact forms of politicization and

struggle necessary to seize these rights. In fact, in light of the crisis, if anything the turn seems to be to ‘reterritorialized’ religious and nativist identities rather than any global claims. This links to the problem of ‘how’. Like many in these currents the collection is repetitively insistent that there cannot be any ‘New Deal’, and in this they are in unfortunate agreement with the managers of capitalism. The reason they give for this is the loss of national sovereignty and the related mechanisms of global governance. The mantra of no return to Fordism, social democracy or the New Deal is irritating because the new demands of ‘commonfare’ seem firmly social democratic, but are left detached from any mechanism to implement them – that is, the state. Use of reformism, yes, but pending the emergence of a global multitude, produced by the dialectical irony of capitalist history, that is supposed to provide the means for global allocation, distribution and management of the new ‘commons’.

Nietzsche famously remarked that we have not given up believing in God because we continue to believe in grammar. Although not doubting the good intentions of the project, nor its attempts to specify the sharpness of contemporary contradictions, the key problem is that it fails to problematize the ‘grammar’ of neoliberalism, and it is not alone in this. A metaphysic of increasing flows, irreducible creativity and desire, uncapturable singularities, and so on, leaves the political terms of the crisis in place. We are called, once again, to another effort of production and acceleration out of frozen abstractions, whereas it is exactly this metaphysics of production we need to negate and destroy.

Benjamin Noys

In the community

Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2010. 264 pp., £24.95 pb., 978 0 80476 273 1.

Bernard Stiegler, hitherto known in the English-speaking world as a philosopher of technology with strong Heideggerian tendencies, has undergone something of a makeover in recent years. With *Prendre Soin: De la jeunesse et des générations* – the title and subtitle are merged in English as *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* – it is possible to see the normative aspects of this work in sharper focus. Indeed, today, Stiegler is in many ways best read as a moral philosopher, inspired

perhaps by Stoicism and its ‘art of living’: one who writes of the values of attention and of care, and of ‘the attentive life of the care-ful being’.

With a nod to Marx’s theory in volume three of *Capital* on the tendential fall in the rate of profit, Stiegler laments here a tendential fall in the rate of desire. By the withering of desire, Stiegler gestures towards the erosion of libidinal energy in contemporary life, the elevation of the consumer, the destruction of the classical Freudian subject, and the reorganization of this energy in terms of purely machinic ‘drives’. What an unfortunate outcome, he cries: to lose the desires and gain the drives. For in Stiegler drives are a form of bad repetition since one always wants more of the same, while desire is a form of good repetition since the object of desire changes in alterity. (This is part of a trend in recent years for various wanings and declinations: Jameson’s theory of ‘the waning of affect’, Hardt’s essay on the ‘withering of civil society’ or Žižek’s ‘decline in symbolic efficiency’.) Still following his moral compass, Stiegler lambasts what he terms a *je-m’en-foutisme* (I-don’t-give-a-fuckism): a general attitude of irresponsibility that pervades contemporary societies, as well as the rise in *bêtise* (stupidity, silliness, crassness), which he describes as ‘the destruction of attention, then irresponsibility, incivility, “the degree zero of thinking.”’ The former pushes us toward a generalized social irresponsibility resulting in the neglect of long-term interests for short-term ones, while the latter accelerates the corruption of attention and brings with it a rise in incivility and boorishness. Together they engender an erosion in the art of living. Writing recently in conjunction with his group *Ars Industrialis*, Stiegler ultimately offers an appeal that the world needs to establish nothing less than a new ‘industrial politics of spirit’ (see *Réenchâter le monde: La valeur esprit contre le populisme industriel*, Flammarion, Paris, 2006). Attention and desire thus emerge as moral necessities.

Stiegler starts from an assumption that is simple but perhaps not yet fully accepted by many: one must take Deleuze seriously, not simply as a philosopher, but also as a critic of political economy. That is, one must take the late Deleuze seriously, the Deleuze of 1986 when he wrote his book on Foucault, and of 1990 when he gave us the short ‘Postscript on Control Societies’ and spoke with Antonio Negri in an interview titled ‘Control and Becoming’. What are the repercussions of this? How can ‘control’ be a political concept? How can it be a philosophical concept? The answer lies in Stiegler’s ability to move beyond the two great anti-modern and anti-positivistic philosophical movements

of the twentieth century: phenomenology on the one hand, and structuralism and poststructuralism on the other. The problem is that both of these traditions are born from and find their energy in a reaction to the high modern mode of disciplinary society: phenomenology in its romanticist rejection of the very terms of disciplinary society, lapsing back to the virtues of sincerity, of authenticity, of the poetry of being; and poststructuralism in its hyperbolic race to outwit disciplinary society by creating ever more complex logics, pointing out the ever more corrupt systems of organization that in the end are defeated in their naive attempts at the universal.

To triangulate the theme of control and to probe its repercussions, Stiegler deploys with some regularity the twin terms ‘psychopolitics’ and ‘psychopower’. These can be understood easily by someone familiar with the field because they have an analogous relationship to the terms ‘biopolitics’ and ‘biopower’ in the work of Foucault. That is to say, psychopower refers to the way in which power is invested in the psychological or immaterial realm; it is often construed as normatively negative. Likewise, psychopolitics is any political relationship, or possibly a political critique, that exists within that same psychological or immaterial realm; it is often construed as normatively positive. The engagement with and transformation of these terms represents the way in which Stiegler *extends* the work of the late Foucault, particularly by way of Deleuze’s concept of control. Stiegler’s provocation to Foucault, then, is that one must not simply think of power at the level of biological life, but at the level of mind – something which Foucault himself admittedly addresses in his work on madness and psychiatric power. This does not mean a return to idealism, for mind too is material.

Taking Care of Youth and the Generations reads like two volumes revolving around a central axis. Chapters 1–6 form a continuous argument concerning the destruction of inter-generational relations, and hence the destruction of subjects as they are properly formed via desire and memory. The second half of the book, Chapters 8–11, consists of a discussion of Foucault on the theme of taking care followed by Giorgio Agamben on the apparatus. Yet the central and most important chapter is Chapter 7, ‘What is Philosophy?’ The title alone quickly transports the reader to Deleuze and Guattari’s 1991 book of the same name. And in some ways Stiegler is adding his voice to an ongoing French conversation – one recalls that Deleuze and Guattari were themselves partially responding to Alain Badiou’s interest in the same question in his then recently published *L’Être et l’Événement*, which

they took as something of an insurgency needing to be subdued. In offering his own answer to the query ‘What is Philosophy?’ Stiegler writes that the first question (and indeed the first practice) of philosophy is not being, not becoming, not technology, not poetry, not the concept, not the event, not the decision ... but *teaching*. Perhaps this is Stiegler’s Heideggerianism shining through again, that philosophy is a pathway, a process of questioning. He instructs us that philosophy is a third mode between two dogmas: on the one hand mysticism, and on the other hand what one might simply call the pure virtuosity of being too smart (‘sophistry’ is the more technical term). Philosophy

is a system of care located between dogmatic modalities: mystagogy, descending from the age of *muthos*, in which the philosopher calls to the *logos*; and a kind of knowledge that, having stopped questioning, has lost its object without knowing it, still believing more than ever that it *does* know. Plato calls this latter modality *polimatheia* (the knowledge of ‘Mister Know-It-All’: the Sophist as seen by the philosopher).

Thus philosophy, as an act of love, is as much a reaction to the lack of wisdom, the lack of knowledge, as it is a reaction to the instrumentalization of knowledge for its own ends. Mister Know-It-All is the wiz-ard, the soph-ist, the one who turns thinking into an extreme sport. The philosopher is the solicitous one, the one who cares, the friend.

Taking Care of Youth and the Generations thus hinges on the powerful distinction in Greek thought, presented in the late Foucault, between the Delphic dictum to ‘know thyself’ and the alternate proscription that one should ‘care for thyself’. Stiegler agrees with Foucault that there emerged a hierarchy of knowing over caring, and thus an eventual marginalization of the latter in philosophy. The dictum to ‘know thyself’ leads philosophy away from sophism, yes, but in so doing it also leads philosophy away from care, eventually coming to privilege *what is*, i.e. ontology, instead of what cares, what affects, or – shall we just say – *what does*.

I am not sure philosophy has a name for ‘what does’ but if it did it would probably be filed under either physics or ethics, these being the two branches of philosophy that consider the doing or the practice of things, the two branches that consider the machinic energies of the world that Stiegler so avidly entreats us to cultivate. Or perhaps one wanders too far afield. Perhaps this is simply what one calls the political.

Alexander R. Galloway

It was better not to know

What have we learnt from Andrew McGettigan's reconstruction (in *RP* 161) of the photographed Svendborg chess match? In a nutshell, that Brecht played bad moves and Benjamin failed to take advantage. For those of us who have long cherished the idea of these two playing matches of the highest standard to match their contributions outside the chess board, the twelve moves shown to us in *Radical Philosophy* are a great disappointment.

McGettigan looks on the bright side, concluding that Benjamin and Brecht show from their play that they are not mere 'wood-pushers'. Another point of comparison might be a favoured term of chess columnists – 'the average club player'. This figure of gentle condescension is generally invoked as a way of assessing the relative difficulty of any given chess problem. If it is within the grasp of the 'average club player', then it is fairly straightforward. Based on what McGettigan has provided for us (and it is hard to see, given the two photographed positions, any other move order), the average club player would make quick work of both Benjamin and Brecht.

Annotation

Brecht with the White pieces, playing first.

1. e4. The most common opening move in chess, and 'The primary cause of all White's subsequent difficulties.'¹
e6. Benjamin plays the French defence. What else?
2. d4 d5.
3. e5. The advance variation of the French, as McGettigan notes. Emanuel Lasker, World Chess Champion 1894–1921, says of this variation: 'What a pity that the first player has it in his power to reduce the French game to a sterile and lifeless position almost certain to end in a draw.' The advance, he concludes, is 'not to be recommended'.² Of Lasker, Gershom Scholem notes: 'In May 1919 I attended a philosophical lecture by the international chess champion Emanuel Lasker and then complained to Benjamin about the utter emptiness of that talk. Benjamin looked at me wide-eyed and said: "What do you expect of him? If he said anything, he would no longer be the world chess champion."³
c5. The correct response, attacking White's centre.
4. f4. A departure from the main lines, but not unheard of. John Watson in *Play the French* scores it as ?!, which is to say, a sharp but objectively weaker move, which may contain dangers for an unprepared opponent.⁴ Brecht's subsequent play suggests, however, that such considerations didn't come into it at all, rather that he was following that beginner's maxim 'When in doubt, push a pawn.'
c4. As McGettigan notes, with this move Benjamin takes the tension out of the position, and defeats the purpose of playing c5 the move previous, because he is no longer challenging Brecht's central pawn. With this move, the players have officially left 'theory', or the openings 'book' – rather early at the fourth move.
5. g3. Brecht, against all advice given to children learning chess, continues to push pawns rather than develop his pieces. As the empty-headed Lasker puts it, 'Avoid the moves of Pawns in the Opening as far as possible. The distrust of Pawn moves [is] founded on experience in tournament play. If one was worsted in the Opening, one could invariably point to a Pawn move as the original offence' (41).

- Bb4+. Developing his Knight to c6 is a better choice for Benjamin.
6. Nd2? Bxd2? The key point in the position. Brecht must block the check and repel the Bishop by moving his Pawn one square from c2 to c3. Now the simple pawn push from c4 to c3 would win Benjamin a Pawn immediately, make a mess of Brecht's centre, and virtually guarantee Benjamin a win with careful play (6... c3 7. bxc3 Bxc3 8. Rb1 Bxd4). The average club player would have found the move in thirty seconds, but Benjamin chose the exchange of Bishop for Knight, after his standard thirty minutes of thought. What is more, Benjamin has given up his strong dark-squared Bishop, and is left only with the light-squared one, which is locked in, a perennial weakness of the French player.
 7. Bxd2 f6 (or f5) Nc6 is still better for Benjamin, who has caught the bug of Pawn-pushing from his friend.
 8. exf6 (or exf6 *en passant*) Qxf6. Benjamin captures the f6 pawn with his Queen in order to threaten Brecht's Pawn on d4, but the threat is innocuous and easily defended. Benjamin should capture with his Knight (Nxf6) instead. Again, the usual advice to beginners is to leave the development of the Queen till later: 'do not bring out your Queen too early in the game. It is too valuable a piece to expose to the attack of lesser forces and you will only lose time and have to retreat if you make a premature sortie with the Queen.'⁵
 9. Be3 Ne7. When Brecht *should* be pushing a Pawn (still c3) he chooses to move a piece he has already moved. Probably even better for Brecht is Qh5+, with the Queen then coming to e5. If Benjamin had captured with the Knight on the previous move, Brecht would not have this threat.
 10. h4? Hopeless. Brecht still declines to develop a new piece, choosing instead to weaken the Pawn on g3 and expose his King further. The Queen check on h5 is still worth trying. Nf5 Benjamin has a plan. He wants simultaneously to threaten Brecht's Bishop on e3 and the pawn at g3, but Brecht has an easy defence, and Benjamin should move his undeveloped Knight to c6 (the move recommended at 5 and 7).
 11. Bf2 Having got himself into this bizarre position, Brecht now moves his Bishop for the third time in the opening to protect the Pawn at g3. The check by the Queen on h5 was still possible, messing up Benjamin's King-side.
Nc6. Finally!
Brecht should now castle Queen-side, offering the Pawn sacrifice, with many attacking chances, but instead he pushes a pawn.
 12. c3. Quite an achievement by Brecht, to have played twelve moves and developed only two of his pieces. And by Benjamin, to have made no headway. On the other hand, if the aim is not to win, but to produce an eccentric position with many dynamic possibilities, the two friends have succeeded.

Peter Buse

Notes

1. Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, John Calder, London, 1963, p. 167. Based on his annotation of the game between Murphy and Mr Endon, and taking into account his permutational talents, the smart money would be on Beckett against the other two chess-playing Bs.
2. Emanuel Lasker, *Lasker's Manual of Chess*, Dover, New York, 1960, p. 99. Lasker fled Germany in 1933 to Moscow, and escaped the Soviet Union in 1937 to the USA where he died in 1941.
3. Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, trans. Harry Zohn, Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1981, p. 83. Benjamin's statement is ambiguous. Does he mean that as a public figure Lasker could not risk saying anything controversial, or that to become chess champion necessarily means a lack of ambition and flexibility in the intellectual realm?
4. In chess annotation, ! = a good move, ? = a bad move, ?? = an immediately losing move, !? = a good move, but with potential pitfalls.
5. Harry Golombek, *The Game of Chess*, 3rd edn, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1980, p. 39.

Further discussion of the Benjamin–Brecht chess game will be restricted to the chess discussion board of the *Radical Philosophy* Facebook page. [Ed.]