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COMMENTARY

Reckless trials?

The criminalization of the sexual transmission of HIV

Daniel Monk

In 1998 a report by the Home Office concluded that it would be contrary to the public interest to criminalize the reckless transmission of HIV. Moreover – and in keeping with received academic opinion – it also suggested that under the existing law such cases could *not* be prosecuted.[1] HIV organizations greeted the report with general approval and a sigh of relief: it seemed that sober, cool-headed, pragmatic public health arguments that focused on prevention rather then punishment had won the day. So the conviction in 2003 of Mohammed Dica under section 20 of the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861 for infecting two women with HIV – in law, 'recklessly inflicting GBH' – and the subsequent conviction of eleven other people in similar circumstances consequently came as a total surprise. And, predictably, the intervention of the criminal law in this area resulted in widespread confusion and turmoil across the HIV sector.

For clinicians the cases raised fears about potential third-party liability where they knew clients were engaging in risky practices. They also challenged the degree of confidentiality that could be offered to clients – always a critical factor in promoting sexual health; for advice to clients can now be used as evidence in court of a defendant's knowledge of sexual risks. More generally for health campaigners the cases challenged a long-established emphasis on harm reduction, as opposed to the elimination of risk. Safer Sex campaigns that promoted taking responsibility for oneself now appeared at odds with the legal expectation that one should be able to rely on a partner's disclosure of any infection. Moreover there are concerns that fear of prosecution and the increased stigma attached to HIV created by the trials might have a negative impact on attempts to encourage testing and accessing the new treatments that substantially reduce the likelihood of transmission.

These concerns have received little, if any, publicity. Rather, the media have reported the trials either unquestioningly or with loud approval. For the tabloids the cases provided a toxic combination of death, race and sex; resulting in headlines such as 'AIDS Assassin' (*Sun*, 15 October 2003) and 'Asylum Seeker Sentenced Lovers to Death' (*Daily Mail*, 15 October 2003). No surprise there. But the BBC has also repeatedly reported the cases inaccurately, blurring the crucial distinction between intentional and reckless transmission. For the record: all of the prosecutions to date have been for reckless transmission and all in the context of consensual sexual activity.

Since the initial shock of the first cases much work has been done by campaigners and activists to attempt to clarify the practical implications; and lengthy consultations with the Crown Prosecution Service, which claimed to have no knowledge of the Home Office's 1998 report, have resulted in a greater understanding of HIV.[2] But the prosecutions continue.

While it is difficult to establish with any certainty the precise impact of the trials, identifying the conditions of possibility that enabled the trials to take place, the convictions, and the silencing of attempts to challenge them remains a critical task. For the trials and the responses to them provide an insight into issues relating not just to HIV and the role of the criminal law but also to broader questions of governance and (sexual) citizenship and contemporary understandings of deviancy and intimacy.

The flawed self-understanding of law

Alan Norrie, a leading criminal law critical theorist, wisely reminds us that, 'In thinking about law one should not take law's own word on how it developed'.[3] This is particularly pertinent in this context, for if one accepts the legal arguments that enabled the criminalization of the sexual transmission of HIV, the development appears perfectly logical. The key cases here are the decisions of the Court of Appeal in *R* v. *Dica* (2004) and *R* v. *Konzani* (2005). The judges – in their usual creatively logical fashion – ensured that the facts of the cases fitted neatly within the offence under the 1861 Act. Infection with HIV is a form of 'grievous bodily harm' and the defendants were deemed to have 'inflicted' it on the victims. And while the victims had consented to the sex, they had not consented to the infection, nor, and this was the critical question, to the risk of infection. All perfectly logical. But in reaching this conclusion the courts had to creatively distinguish these cases from other earlier precedents.[4]

One problem facing the courts was a Victorian case of *R* v. *Clarence* (1889), which held that a husband could not be prosecuted for infecting his wife with a sexually transmitted disease. The courts dealt with this by arguing that it was out of date. Another problem they confronted was the House of Lords decision of *R* v. *Brown* (1993), which held that one could not consent to sadomasochistic activity (the infamous *Spanner* trial). To enable the defence of consent to be raised the judge in the *Dica* case gave the examples of Catholic couples and childless couples where one partner was HIV positive. The distinction between these scenarios is logical but it leads to a revealing conclusion: you are not allowed to consent to *safer* sex (if it involves sadomasochistic practices) but you *can* consent to *unsafe* sex if the aim is desiring a child or wishing to adhere to religious rules. That these rather than everyday sexual encounters are the examples referred to reveals a judicial distaste for and a reluctance to acknowledge 'sexual gratification' as a legitimate motive for (sexual) risk-taking. Consent to the risk of transmission is possible in other circumstances too, but the decision in *Konzani* suggests that evidence of disclosure of infection will almost always be required. While justified by the notion of informed choice, what remains impossible for law to comprehend is not only the realities of the stigma that makes disclosure difficult but also that sex is by its nature a risk-taking activity for a variety of physical and emotional reasons, and that consequently consent to sex is always implicitly a consent to a risk-taking activity.

Another way of revealing how the 'neutral' logic of law serves to mask judicial views of acceptable/unacceptable behaviour is by applying the law to very different circumstances. For example, it would, according to the logic of the cases, be possible to prosecute someone for visiting an old age home with the symptoms of a cold if one of the inhabitants subsequently develops flu. We might consider such an action thoughtless, but few would suggest we resort to the criminal law to prevent or punish it. Criminality and immorality are familiar bedfellows but the coupling can never be explained by legal principles.

The changing landscape of HIV

Catherine Dodds has argued that 'as the epidemic moves on so do the ways we collectively and individually interact with it'; and she identifies four significant changes that help explain the resort to criminal law.[5] First is the fact that those infected with HIV

are now living much longer as a result of the success of new treatments. Law is a long-drawn-out process and, very simply, the fact that defendants are alive and fit makes the trials more feasible. It might appear ironic that the heavy hand of the criminal law has been turned to at the time when HIV has become a far less serious condition, at least one that it is no longer accurate to describe as fatal. And it is important to remember that no new law has been passed; if one accepts the judgments in *Dica* and *Konzani*, then there is no reason, in law, why the criminal law has only been used recently. But for those conservative moralists who in the early days spoke of AIDS as 'God's Punishment', the criminal law can be seen to be filling a gap created by medical advances. Moreover, while in theory law applies equally to all, in practice it is able to differentiate far more selectively in identifying those perceived to be 'innocent' or 'culpable' sufferers.

Here Dodds's second change in the HIV landscape is significant: the number of women infected is unprecedented and nearly all the cases have concerned male to female transmissions. It is not too crude to suggest that gay victims were simply not perceived as 'victims of a criminal assault' but as victims of their own lifestyle. (To date there has only been one male-to-male infection conviction). The language used in the cases makes clear that the judges see themselves as protecting innocent women; dispelling the case of *Clarence* fitted neatly with a judicial desire to be perceived as progressive and sensitive to the vulnerable position of women.

The third change is the increasing diagnosis among black Africans – who now make up the largest group infected with HIV (although in relation to new infections gay men still represent the largest group). The majority of the defendants have been black men, and the well-documented and deep-seated cultural anxieties about black male sexuality were clearly evident in the tabloids' coverage of the trials.

The fourth change is what Dodds describes as 'The Harm Vacuum'. This is a recognition of the fact that harm reduction methods (pragmatic, stigma-free) arguably fail to provide a space to acknowledge the aggrieved feelings that individuals may experience on discovering that they have been infected. Law to a certain extent serves to fill this vacuum, but explaining the law in this way raises broader criminological and comparative questions. Why, for example, has the criminalization route been rejected in the Netherlands but applied in an even harsher way in Finland (where individuals with HIV are convicted for exposing somebody to the possibility of harm even where no infection tales place)?[6]

Comparisons may also be made with other demonized (and frequently criminalized) constructions: asylum-seekers, recipients of ASBOs, paedophiles, and so on. From this perspective the trials can be seen to reflect what the criminologist Andrew Rutherford describes as the re-emergence of the 'eliminative ideal', which 'strives to solve present and emerging problems by getting rid of troublesome and disagreeable people with methods that are lawful and widely supported', and 'sits all too comfortably with contemporary pressures for social exclusion, with notions of a culture of containment'.[7] The ideal provides a seductive but dangerously false sense of collective certainty and security. Rutherford argues that challenges to this trend need to address both the *instrumental* and *expressive* dimensions of the eliminative ideal. In this context while the anti-criminalization pragmatic public health arguments address the former, one of the reasons for their failure is that they have not addressed the latter.

The expressive dimension owes much to Durkheim's classic rejection of utilitarian explanations of punishment; that it is never 'a rational social defence against harm done or threatened' but 'a passionate reaction, a matter of feelings'. For the HIV trials cohere with more complex *continually* forming and reforming understandings of a community and of questions of intimacy within communities. Criminal trials rely not only on the existence of laws but also on individuals internalizing and expressing the feeling of having been the victim of a crime.

New Labour, new trials?

Bullen, Kenway and Hey, echoing the concerns of many, observed that, 'the vocabulary of New Labour (like that of the old radical Right) is emblematic of the search for a rhetoric of moral civility that will waylay and reinvent the wayward.'[8] Placing the HIV trials in this political context, it is telling that they occurred at the same time that the Civil Partnership Act 2004 was working its way through Parliament. While it is not suggested that there was a direct connection between these judicial and legislative law-making events, there are significant elements of coherence. Whatever one thinks of the Act it unquestioningly represents a critical moment in the history of the regulation of sexuality. In progressive narratives it represents (almost) the end point in a process that began with the (partial) decriminalization of homosexual acts. But, as many feminist and queer theorists and activists have commented, the inherent liberalism of the Act masks a more complex story of governance. The legal theorist Carl Stychin, for example, commenting on the government's own stated case for the Act, notes that:

> there is a message within the Act … that the encouragement of the rights and responsibilities of civil partnership through law will provide a disincentive for 'irresponsible' behaviour. In the context of New Labour politics, irresponsibility seems to include promiscuous sex, relationship breakdown at will, and the selfishness of living alone (or perhaps even living with friends and acquaintances).[9]

There is here, at least, a logic that links the construction of a new sexual deviant with the decriminalization and inclusion within civic society of an earlier one.

This trend has broader significance. Helen Reece describes similarly 'progressive' moves in regulating personal life, in the context of divorce law reform, as a form of (post-)liberalism. In contrast to both conservative morality and laissez-faire liberalism it represents in some ways a more invasive form of governance by demanding that individuals internalize a demanding model of 'responsibility'. Within this model 'psychological norms have replaced social norms, and therapeutic correctness has become the new standard of good behaviour.'[10] So, put simply, instead of divorce bad/marriage good we have responsible divorce good/irresponsible divorce bad. And instead of straight good/gay bad we have responsible sex good/irresponsible sex bad (the gender of the sexual partner no longer matters). Where people fail to internalize the responsibility, the space has been created for new forms of penalty. Separated mothers, straight or lesbian, failing to support contact between their children and their ex-partners expose themselves to new forms of court order. And those with HIV who fail to practise safer sex risk criminal actions.

In practice few mothers objecting to contact are imprisoned and very few people who practise unsafe sex are prosecuted. But the fact that fathers who, frequently through their own actions, and people infected with HIV, again frequently through their own actions, now have the possibility of turning to law sends out the message that these intimate complex familial/sexual disputes are *politically* legitimate sites of grievance which are deserving of the authority and protection of the rule of the criminal law.

The violence of law

There is no simple explanation for the trials. One or two policeman were outraged by the behaviour of a few individuals and decided something should be done and a local Crown Prosecution Service branch, willing to try its luck in the courts, found sympathetic judges. But 'times maketh the man' and their actions could only be possible through a complex concatenation of changes in the nature of the epidemic of HIV in the UK; the re-emergence of the eliminative ideal and increased penality in criminal justice; and the development of a new dominant morality of responsible intimacy. The cases do not fit neatly, if at all, in a familiar 'miscarriage of justice' paradigm. But it is precisely because

of this that critical thinking about the trials is important. For it requires us to go beyond the criminal law's seductively 'common-sense' logic of a simple perpetrator–victim causation model and in doing so confront if not the violence at least the recklessness of law.

Notes

1. Home Office Consultation Paper, *Violence: Reforming the Offences Against the Person Act 1861*, Home Office, London, 1998.
2. For up-to-date information, see: Terence Higgins Trust, www.tht.org.uk/informationresources/prosecutions/; and National AIDS Trust, www.nat.org.uk/Our-thinking/Law-stigma-and-discrimination/Criminal-prosecutions.aspx.
3. *Law and the Beautiful Soul*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2005, p. 8.
4. For an in-depth analysis of the cases, see Matthew Weait, *Intimacy and Responsibility: The Criminalisation of HIV Transmission*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2007.
5. 'Crime Punishment and HIV', paper presented at the HIV and the Law: Theory, Policy and Practice seminar at Keele University, 10 December 2005.
6. See UNAIDS, *Criminal Law, Public Health and HIV Transmission: A Policy Options Paper*, UNAIDS, Geneva, 2002.
7. A. Rutherford, 'Criminal Policy and the Eliminative Ideal', *Social Policy and Administration*, vol. 31, no. 5, 1997, pp. 116–35.
8. E. Bullen, J. Kenway and V. Hey, 'New Labour, Social Exclusion and Educational Risk Management: The Case of the "Gymslip" Mums', *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2001, p. 445.
9. 'Family Friendly? Rights, Responsibilities and Relationship Recognition', in A. Diduck and K. O'Donovan, *Feminist Perspectives on Family Law*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2006.
10. H. Reece, *Divorcing Responsibly*, Hart, Oxford, 2003, p. 217.

Undoing the aesthetic image

The displacement of critical energies from politics into aesthetics has a history as long as that of aesthetics itself. Indeed, a case can be made that in its immediately post-Kantian formation 'aesthetics' simply *is* the name for the displacement of political desire into a philosophical discourse about the structure of production of feelings through form. That this is a displacement, rather than an expansion or an overflow, has traditionally been attributed to the political 'underdevelopment' of Germany in the late eighteenth century, and what was effectively a kind of censorship of politics by history. Famously, in the analysis of the young Marx, the proximity of the historical underdevelopment of Germany to the political modernity of France had as its cultural consequence the compensatory hypertrophy of German philosophy. Aesthetics, in its proto-Romantic determination, was at once an internal reaction against, and a medium for the reflective continuation of, this hypertrophy of ideas. As an attempt to bridge the gap between ideality and the actual, it was simultaneously a representative of the will to politics within idealist philosophy, and of idealist philosophy within discourse on the arts. It thereby became the representative of the displaced presence of the desire for politics within the arts themselves.

But what of that 'displacement of politics which is aesthetics' in France? For Marx, France was the geopolitical signifier of modernity (democratic revolution). Yet, in the course of the nineteenth century, the failure of revolution became the functional correlate in French culture of political underdevelopment in Germany. Thus was the ground laid in France for the establishment of the problematic of aesthetics as the displacement of political desire. Its result, the intensification of aesthetics into aestheticism, usurped the cultural space of (post-revolutionary) classicism, while providing a new terrain on which to reformulate old problems. That what Rancière thinks as the transition from a 'representational' to an 'aesthetic regime' of art (poetics to aesthetics) might be argued to have taken place, emblematically, in France (Baudelaire) some eighty years after Germany (Lessing) perhaps goes some way towards accounting for what appears from the outside as a residual classicism in French philosophical aesthetics.

In the anglophone context, *post*-aesthetic uses of semiotics, psychoanalysis and cultural theory have dominated discourse on contemporary art since the 1970s. In France, it is the *image* that remains the central articulating concept of aesthetics, art history and art criticism. The classical problem of the relationship between image and word continues to delineate the parameters of debate. And with regard to contemporary art, discussion thus focuses on the *aesthetic image*, the image in its aesthetic determination as (conceptually) *under*determined, a disarticulation or undoing of meanings. (Ultimately, this is as true of Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics' as Ranciere's 'pensive image'.)

But does some contemporary art not *undo* or *remake* the aesthetic image itself? Is the conception of art as a political redistribution of the sensible constrained by or liberated from the aesthetic? What is the effect of photography and film on the indetermination of the image? Can the aesthetic image escape the symbolic determinations of sex? Can the aesthetic image distinguish itself from or within the spectacle? And might an art of forces not disengage itself from the very notions of image and form?

The articles that follow were presented to the conference 'Undoing the Aesthetic Image' held at Tate Britain on 24 January 2009, in collaboration with the Centre for Research in European Philosophy, Middlesex University, and with the support of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy. This was the third in a series devoted to problem situations in the European philosophy of contemporary art, organized along broadly national lines. Papers from the first two conferences – 'Spheres of Action' (by the Karlsruhe trio of Peter Sloterdijk, Peter Weibel and Boris Groys) and 'Art and Immaterial Labour' (by the post-autonomist quartet of Antonio Negri, Maurizio Lazzarato, Judith Revel and Franco Berardi) – appeared in *RP* 137 (May/June 2006) and *RP* 149 (May/June 2008), respectively.

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Notes on the photographic image

Jacques Rancière

In the relation between art and image, photography has played a symptomatic and often paradoxical role. Baudelaire made of it the sinister instrument of the triumph of technical reproduction over artistic imagination. And yet we also know of the long struggle of photographers (*pictorialistes*) to affirm that photography was not merely mechanical reproduction, but rather an interpretation of the world. But scarcely had they won their battle to endow the technical medium of photography with the status of artistic medium, when Benjamin turned the game on its head. He made mechanical reproduction the principle of a new paradigm of art: the productions of the mechanical arts were for him the means towards a new sensible education, the instruments of the formation of a new class of experts in art, namely in the art of interpreting signs and documents. Cinema was a series of tests of our world. Atget's photos were indices to interpret; Sander's collections were notebooks for teaching combatants in the social struggle to readily identify allies and adversaries. The photographic medium participated in the construction of a sensible world where men of the age of the masses could affirm their existence as both possible subjects of art and experts in its use.

It seems, nevertheless, that the destiny of the art of photography has no more confirmed Benjamin's diagnostic than that of Baudelaire. To support this claim, we can point to two phenomena more or less contemporary to one another that concern both photography and its interpretation. On the one hand, the 1980s saw photography invade art museums and exhibitions, taking on the dimensions of monumental paintings. These large-format photographs, amidst the proliferation of installations and video installations, assure, in a certain sense, the continuity of the pictorial surface. But, at the same time, what they present to us on this surface seems to turn its back on the forms of the pictorial revolutions of the twentieth century. Without even speaking of extreme examples like Jeff Wall's revival of the historical tableau, we can think of the multiplication of portraits and the new status of the portrait, illustrated by, for example, photographer Rineke Dijkstra's monumental portraits of otherwise indifferent individuals, represented without any particular aura: slightly awkward-looking adolescents on working-class beaches, young mothers still burdened by their babies, or apprentice toreadors, whose red-faced figures clash with the bullfighter's traditional suit of lights. On the one hand, these full-length portraits present themselves as documents on social types or age groups undergoing transformation. On the other, the absence of expression, combined with the formalism of the pose and the size of the image, gives these indifferent figures something mysterious: something that for us also inhabits the portraits of Florentine and Venetian nobility which populate the museums. The teenager in the green swimsuit photographed on a Polish beach, with her slender body, her swaying hips, and her unfurled hair (below) is like an awkward replica of Botticelli's Venus. Photography is thus not content to occupy the place of painting. It presents itself as the rediscovered union between two statuses of the image that the modernist tradition had separated:

the image as representation of an individual and as operation of art.

How should we think this new coincidence and tension between the grand pictorial form and simply the images of indifferent individuals? The interpretation seems, at first sight, split between two extremes: at the one end, an exacerbation of the sensible presence of the photographed subject, in its provocative power with respect to modernist logic; at the other, an integration of this photographic realism – or hyperrealism – into the modernist scheme. In the first instance, we think of course of Barthes and *Camera Lucida*, the absolute reference for thought on photography in the 1980s. Barthes's manoeuvre was to break the representation of the indifferent in two. The indifferent is, on the one hand, that which is identifiable by the intersection of a certain number of general traits. On the other, it is the absolute singularity of that which imposes its brute presence, and affects by this brute presence. We recognize here the principle of the opposition between the *studium*, conceived as the informative content of the photograph, and the *punctum*, conceived as its affective force, irreducible to transmission of knowledge. This affective force is the transfer of an absolute singularity, that of the represented subject, to another absolute singularity, that of the viewing subject. It is easy to underline the double paradox of this theorization in light of the ulterior evolution of photography. It privileges a vision of photographic reproduction where it is the *having-been* of the body that comes to imprint itself on the sensitive plate, and from there touches us without mediation. This raising of the stakes concerning the indexical conception of photography was immediately countered by the digital invasion. At the moment when large-format photography is about to overrun the museum walls and affirm itself as a visual art, it transforms the photographic gaze into the gaze of an individual who pages through albums. But this historical contretemps refers us back to a more fundamental torsion concerning the relation between photography, art and modernism. In a certain manner, Barthes contorts the formalist modernist, who opposed the form (artistic/pictorial) to the anecdote (empiricist/photographic). Barthes diverts the opposition by transferring the anecdote to the *studium*, in order to pit it against not the artistic form, but an experience of the unique that refutes the pretension to art as well as the platitude of information. However, this opposition between art and photography is perhaps more profoundly the leave given to another modernity, to which Benjamin's essay bore witness, and that inscribed photography among the instruments of a new social sensibility and a new social consciousness (three elements and not two). It is from this point of view that it seems useful to me to examine more closely the examples through which Barthes operates the opposition between *studium* and *punctum*. Let us take, for example, Lewis Hine's photograph of the two mentally disabled children (below).

Barthes tells us not to look at the monstrous heads or the pitiful profiles that signify the disability. Instead, he opposes to these the force of fascination that is exerted on him by the details without signification: the boy's Danton collar, the bandage on the little girl's finger.[1] But the *punctum* thus marked, in fact, obeys the same formal logic as the repudiated *studium*. It concerns, in both cases, features of disproportion. The privilege of the *punctum* here is simply to privatize this formal effect. We can read this analysis as the exact reversal of the critical logic previously put to work by the Barthes of *Mythologies*. What was at stake for him there, in a Brechtian logic, was to make visible the social hidden in the intimate, the history dissimulated as the appearance of nature. From this point of view, the very choice of the photograph is significant. The photo of the two disabled children appears as a *hapax* (ἅπαξ λεγόμενον '[something] said only once') in the career of a photographer who devoted numerous series to the representation of work and the campaign against child labour. The

'stupidity' of the detail drawn from the irreducible hardship and misfortune of the two disabled children can be read like a screen placed before other photos of children: that of the Polish child, 'Willie', working in a mill in Rhode Island, or Francis Lance, the 5-year-old newspaper 'salesman'. Yet, these 'documentary' photographs are the bearers of a tension between visuality and signification that is perhaps more interesting than the image of the two disabled children. They are in effect made for the purpose of denouncing the scandal of child labour. Yet, Willie's attitude, as he sits nonchalantly (taking his midday rest) in a doffer-box, or Francis Lance's, proudly standing his ground on a train platform with his newspapers tucked under his arm, do not testify to any suffering. What strikes us is precisely the opposite: it is the selfsame ease with which they show themselves capable of both adapting to their work and posing for the camera, thus obliging Lewis Hine to insist, in his commentary, on the dangers of their work, which they themselves seem so unconcerned about.

'Impovershed ontology'

The activity of the commentator seems to respond, in advance, to the 'Benjaminian' demand. It is, in particular, the relation between the child workers, the camera, the photo and the text that follows this logic, linking the appreciation of the photographic performance to new forms of 'expertise' and to the experimentation of a new sensible world. The Danton collar suffices to silently settle the accounts with this logic. The only sensible world that the photo witnesses is the relation of the absolute singularity of the spectacle to the absolute singularity of the gaze. Much the same can be said about Avedon's photograph of the old slave.[2] Here the procedure is reversed: no detail distracts from a socio-political reading. On the contrary, the mask of the photographed subject speaks of nothing else than the condition of slavery. But the effect is the same: it is slavery in person, as a historical singularity, that offers itself entirely in the singularity of a single face. To declare slavery to be present in person, in front of our eyes, between our hands, is, in fact, to diminish the singularity of the other photographs that speak to us about what took place between the abolition of slavery and our present. For example, John Vachon's photo, which shows us only the sign reading *Colored*, nailed high up on the trunk of a pine tree, next to which is the likely object of its discrimination: a simple drinking fountain. The multiplicity of racial discrimination's forms of sensible existence, and the multiple singularity of these photographs that vary, and thereby tell us of, the visual forms of the metaphor and of the metonymy, come to be crushed against this black mask that presents slavery in person. But this being of slavery identifies itself with its having-been. Avedon's photo represents the slavery that is no longer on the face of a man who, himself, is no longer, at the time when Barthes wrote his commentary. When all is said and done, the singularity of slavery written on a singular face is nothing other than the universality of the having-been; in other words, death.

It is to this singularity that the image of the two disabled children, which conceals those of the playing children of the factories, ultimately comes down. But this singularity of the image is itself determined by the power of words alone. Taking up again the two traits of the *punctum* of this photo, it is first of all the bandage on the finger of the little girl. The French word with which Barthes refers to the bandage is *poupée*. Yet the French reader who does not know this usage of the word immediately has another image. The ordinary sense of the word in French is 'doll'. And the identification of this poignant detail with the *poupée* inevitability evokes a whole series of images: from Hoffmann's automaton, commented on by Freud, to the dismembered dolls that are a part of the surrealist imaginary, and that contributed more than a little to the transformation of Winnicott's transitional object into Lacan's object *petit a*. In short, the effect attributed to the phraseless singularity of the detail is the power of a word. And this power of the word is further accentuated by the proper name that qualifies another poignant detail: the Danton collar. The French reader has no idea what a Danton collar might be. However, the name is immediately associated with that of a revolutionary who had his head sliced off by the guillotine. The *punctum* is nothing other than death foretold.

The analysis of the photo of the two mentally disabled children is therefore linked with that which Barthes devotes to the photo of the handcuffed young man. The photo is beautiful, Barthes tells us, and so is the young man, but that is the *studium*. The *punctum* is that 'he is going to die'.[3] Yet this death foretold is not visible in any of the features of the photograph. Its presumed effect rests on the combination of the brown colouring of the old photographs and the acquaintance with the individual represented, (in this case) Lewis Payne, condemned to death in 1885 for an attempted assassination of the then American secretary of state. But this affirmation of present death once again employs words to deny what constitutes the visual singularity of the photograph – that is, precisely that its present refuses any readings of the young man's history, of the

past that led him there, and of the future that awaits him. The half-nonchalant, half-curious attitude of the young man says nothing about this history, much the same as Willie's relaxed pose said nothing about the hardships of factory work, and the gaze of the Polish teenager on the beach nothing about what reasons she might have had for exposing herself, nor her thoughts as she stands in front of the camera. What they speak to us of is only this capacity to expose one's body at the request of the camera, without, for all that, surrendering to it the thought and the feeling that inhabit it. This tension between exposition and retreat vanishes in the pure relation of the viewer with the death that comes to view him.

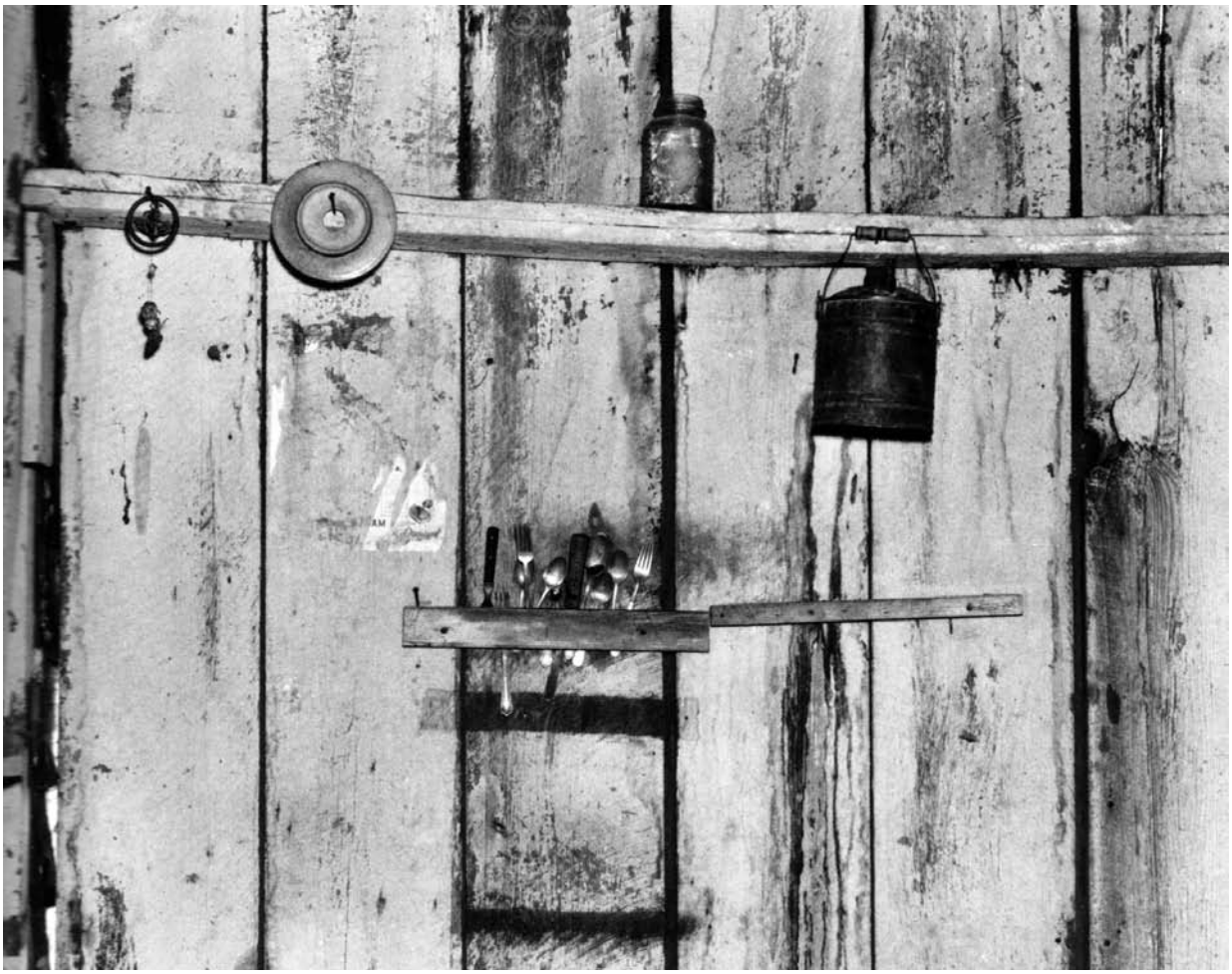
This disappearance is not only due to the fact that *Camera Lucida* is first of all a eulogy addressed to Barthes's dead mother. Behind the expression of personal grief, there is the expression of another grief, that of the gaze that endeavoured to tie the appreciation of the beauty of an image to that of the social reality that it expressed. Yet, his second grief also manifests itself in a type of reading which, contrary to Barthes, sees in the new modes photographic exposition the reaffirmation of a certain idea of the objectivity of the photograph. It is this thesis that was defended in 1988 by a period-defining exhibition entitled 'Another Objectivity' (*Une autre objectivité*).[4] The accompanying text, by Jean-François Chevrier and James Lingwood, redefined, in its own way, the relation between two fundamental aspects of the modernist norm: on the one hand, the fidelity to the law of the medium; on the other, the fidelity to a certain type of exhibition surface, the *forme-tableau* in its formal separation from the multiple social uses of the image. The fact is that the law of the photographic medium does not offer itself up to a simple interpretation. We can liken it to the instrumental conception that makes the camera a means to furnish some objective information about what is in front of it. But, from this, we still have not defined the specificity of the art of photography. We can liken it to the reproducible character of the photographic image. But it is hardly possible to discern the specific quality of an image from the fact that it is reproducible. This is why the theoreticians of photographic objectivity displaced the idea of multiplication in favour of the idea of a multiple unity. Reproducibility thus becomes seriality.

Benjamin based his argumentation on the typologies of August Sander, while Chevrier and Lingwood favoured the works of Bernd and Hilla Becher. But the analogy is problematic. Benjamin expected that Sander's series would help the combatants in the social struggle to recognize allies and enemies. There is manifestly nothing of the sort to be expected from the Bechers' series of water towers or disused industrial sites. They would even fall easily within the scope of Brecht's critique, which was taken up by Benjamin: photos of factories say nothing about the social relations that manifest themselves there. The interest of the series can therefore no longer be looked for in what it enables us to say about social relations. It boils down to an ethical virtue accorded to the multiple as such, in that it rules out the prestige of the one and of the aura, of the unique moment and of the ecstatic contemplation. But this principle is purely negative. Its artistic 'positivity' must thus come from a second manner of thinking the 'objectivity' of the medium. This is summed up, for Chevrier and Lingwood, in the notion of the *forme-tableau*, exemplified by Jeff Wall's backlit photographs. But what relation should we think between these large scenes in the form of historical tableaux and the identical rectangles that make the Bechers' views of water towers and smokestacks resemble pedagogical charts? None, perhaps, if not the Greenbergian idea of the surface that encloses the artist's performance and prohibits him from leaving himself, from showing empathy for his subject or from considering himself as a form of social experimentation. In this sense, the Bechers' industrial sites are a manner of concluding the dream of the artist engineers and factory builders of Peter Behrens's era, in much the same way as Barthes's fascination with the Danton collar served to repress photographer Lewis Hine's engagement on the side of the oppressed and forgotten of the factories and hospices. The reference to the essence of the medium is again here a manner of settling accounts with the epoch where the medium was thought of as the organ of a new collective world. Simply put, this settling of accounts is more complex in the case of the Bechers and the theoreticians of 'objective photography', for whom the repression of the constructivist dream also wants to be the affirmation of a fidelity to the values linked to the industrial universe and the workers' struggle: the sobriety of the documentary gaze that refuses the humanist pathos, the formal principles of the frontal perspective, the uniform framing, and the presentation in series that links scientific objectivity and the disappearance of the subjectivity of the artist.

It remains the case: that which is given to see by the objectivist mindset is fundamentally an absence – disused edifices in the place of social classes and types. Yet, photographing absence can be interpreted in two ways: it can be a manner of showing the programmed

departure of the industrial world and worker; but it is just as much a manner of playing on the aesthetic affect of the disused (*desaffecté*) that sends us back to the side of Barthes's 'having-been'. This tension in the objectivist idea of the medium is more perceptible still in the series of containers taken by a follower of the Bechers, Frank Breuer, presented during the 2005 Rencontres photographiques in Arles, in the transept of an ancient church, along with two other series, devoted to warehouses and to logos. From afar the spectator perceived them as abstract scenes or as reproductions of minimalist sculptures. Upon approaching, however, one discovered that the coloured rectangles on a white background were containers stacked in a large deserted space. The impact of the series was down to the tension between this minimalism and the signification that it concealed. These containers were to be, or were to have been, filled with merchandise unloaded at Antwerp or Rotterdam, and probably were produced in a distant country, perhaps by faceless workers in Southeast Asia. They were, in short, filled with their own absence, which was also that of every worker engaged to unload them, and, even more remotely, that of the European workers replaced by these distant labourers.

The 'objectivity' of the medium thus masks a determined aesthetic relation between opacity and transparency, between the containers as brute presence of pure coloured forms and the containers as representatives of the 'mystery' of the merchandise – that is to say, of the manner in which it absorbs human work and hides its mutations. It consists in the relation between presence and absence, in the double relation of a visible form to a signification and an absence of sense. Jean-François Chevrier bases his argument on the idea of an 'impoverished ontology' of photography. On one level, this is to say that photography does not have the strong ontological consistency that would enable its artistic forms to be deduced from its materiality. But we can give this poverty a more positive signification. If photography is not under the law of a proper ontological consistency, linked to the specificity of its technical mechanism, it lends itself to accomplishing the ideas about art formed by the other arts. This capacity of the mechanical art to realize what other arts had tried to accomplish by their own means was developed at length by Eisenstein, in relation to cinematic editing, which, via the temporal sequencing of shots, realized what painting had tried to accomplish in fragments. Serov, for example, tried to bring out on canvas the energy of the actress Yermolova through cutting, with the help of the lines of the mirrors and of the mouldings of a room, several different framings



for the different parts of the body.[5] The editing of the different shots of the stone lions in *The Battleship Potemkin* realized this dream of the painter. Photography allows an accomplishment of the same order by capturing a motionlessness that literature tried to attain through the movement of the phrase or the power of the mystery sought in the contortion of the uses of language. The poverty of photography permits it to realize this inclusion of non-art that literature or painting can only imitate by artistic means.

Exacerbating modernism

This is what can be demonstrated by a photograph situated in the interval between Barthes's 'having-been' and the objectivity of the Becher School. Walker Evans's photograph (left) represents to us a detail of the kitchen in a farm in Alabama. It responds, first of all, to a documentary function at the heart of a major investigation commissioned by the Farm Security Administration. Nevertheless, something happens in the photo that exceeds the task of providing information concerning a miserable situation: a kitchen with neither sideboard nor cupboard, tinplate silverware held in a makeshift rack, a lopsided wooden board nailed to a wall of disjointed and worm-ridden planks. What strikes us is a certain aesthetic disposition marked by disorder: the parallels are not parallel, the silverware is ordered in disorder, the objects on the high beam (functioning as a shelf) are placed in a dissymmetrical manner. This lopsided assemblage composes, in total, a harmonious dissymmetry, the cause of which remains uncertain: is it the effect of chance, the fact that the objects found themselves in front of the objective? Is it the gaze of the photographer, who chose a close-up of a detail, thus transforming a completely random or simply functional layout into an artistic quality? Or is it the aesthetic taste of an inhabitant of the premises, making art with the means available by hammering in a nail or putting a can here rather than there? It is possible that the photographer wanted to show the destitution of the farmers. It is also possible that he simply photographed what was in front of him without any particular intention, and that the photo thus benefits from the beauty of the random. And, it is possible that he took pleasure in seeing a quasi-abstract minimalist scene or, conversely, that he wanted to underline a certain beauty of the functional: the sobriety of the plank and of the rack could, in effect, satisfy a certain aesthetic of design, attracted by the simple and brute material, and the art of living and doing transmitted by generations of simple people. All in all, the aesthetic quality of the photograph stems from a perfect equilibrium, a perfect indecision between the two forms of beauty that Kant distinguished: beauty adherent to the form adapted to its function, and the free beauty of the finality without end.

We don't know what was going through Walker Evans's mind in framing his photo as he did. But we do know that he had an idea about art that he inherited, not from a photographer or painter, but from a writer, Flaubert. The idea is that the artist must remain invisible in his work, like God in his creation. But it would be going a bit too far to say that the camera realizes on the cheap – that is, by its mechanism alone – that which, for the writer, involves a never-ending work of subtraction. For impersonality is not the same thing as the objectivity of the camera, and the issue is perhaps not so much to subtract but rather to make the 'impersonalization' of the style coincide with the grasping of the opposite movement: that by which indifferent lives appropriate the aesthetic capacities that subtract them from a simple social identification. The photographer's gaze upon the singular arrangement of the silverware in a poor Alabama kitchen might remind us of the gaze that Flaubert lent to Charles Bovary as he looked at the head of Minerva, drawn by young Emma for her father on the peeling walls of Father Rouault's farm. This is not merely to say that the camera directly expresses a poetry of the banal that the writer could only make felt through laborious work on each sentence. It is also the power to transform the banal into the impersonal, forged by a literature that hollows out from the inside the apparent evidence, the apparent immediacy of the photo, just as pictorial silence overran the 'Flaubertian' phrase. But this effect of painting on literature and of literature on photography is not the same as a simple shared capacity to transfigure the banality of life into the artistic splendour of indifference. This 'indifference' is also the meeting point, the point of tension, between the subtraction of the artistic effect that characterizes the work of the artist and the supplement of aesthetic sensibility that is adjoined to the lives of indifferent beings.

The consideration of both the *punctum* and the objectivism of the *forme-tableau* also lacks this relation between social banality and aesthetic power that inhabits the photographic portrait of the indifferent being. To understand what the 'indifference' of the photograph of the kitchen in Alabama or of the Polish teenager has in common with that of 'Flaubertian' literature, and to what type of 'modernity' this indifference bears witness, one must no doubt integrate these images into a completely different evolution of representation (*figuration*). To sketch out this history, I would like to

dwell for a moment on a singular analysis that Hegel devotes, in his *Lessons on Aesthetics*, to Murillo's paintings of the child beggars of Seville, which he saw in the Royal Gallery in Munich. He evokes these paintings in a development whereby he attempts to reverse the classic evaluation of the value of pictorial genres according to the dignity of their subjects. But Hegel does not content himself with telling us that all subjects are equally proper to painting. He establishes a close relation between the virtue of this painting and the activity specific to these young beggars, an activity that consists precisely in doing nothing and not worrying about anything. There is in them, he tells us, a total disregard towards the exterior, an inner freedom in the exterior that is exactly what the concept of the artistic ideal calls for. They are like the young man in one of the portraits at the time attributed to Raphael, whose idle head gazes freely into the distance. Better still, they testify to a beatitude that is almost similar to that of the Olympian gods.[6]

There is one notion in particular in this passage that grabs our attention, that of being carefree. It seems to reply in advance to an analysis of the aesthetic revolution that holds sway today, that by which Michael Fried characterizes the theorizing and the practice of painting implemented by the contemporaries of Diderot. Presenting the characters in the scene as completely absorbed by their task is, for him, the means by which the painters of that period, following the example of Greuze, posed and resolved the big question of artistic modernity: how can a work be made coherent by excluding the spectator from its space? This 'anti-theatricality' is for him the essence of pictorial modernity, defined not in a 'Greenbergian' manner as simple concentration of the artist on his medium, but rather as definition of the place that it gives to the person who looks upon it. The *forme-tableau* of Jeff Wall's lightboxes or of the large-format cibachromes and chromogenic prints by Rineke Dijkstra, Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky or Thomas Demand seems to Fried to renew, in exemplary fashion, the tradition of this modernity. But it comes at a price, and the active 'absorption' of the pictorial character, originally illustrated with such impassioned attention by Greuze's characters, increasingly becomes an inability to see and to feel seen. Thus, for example, the tourists in Thomas Struth's photographs of museums are represented in the absence of what they look upon in the Accademia (Michelangelo's *David*) or blurred in the darkness in Tokyo in front of a *Liberté guidant le peuple*, itself separated by a glass pane. Likewise, Rineke Dijkstra's teenagers are valued first of all for the awkwardness proper to their age, for their lack of control over their bodies which makes them unconscious of what they offer to be seen.[7] The window cleaner who, in Jeff Wall's famous photo, washes the windows of Mies van der Rohe's pavilion, is not only separated from us by the back that he turns to us and by his relegation outside of the area directly illuminated by the sun; he is also 'deliberately forgetful' of the great event signifying the new day, 'the influx of the warm morning light'.[8] As for the traders at the Hong Kong stock exchange or the workers at the basket factory in Nha Trang, their 'absorption' excludes the spectator all the more effectively as it renders them almost invisible by depriving them of all interiority and making of their attention an entirely mechanical process. It would be off-key, Fried emphasizes, to see here any form of representation of capitalist dehumanization. This 'flattening of absorption' bears witness, on the contrary, to 'the consistency with which this artist resists or indeed repudiates all identification by the viewer with the human subjects of his images – the project of severing calls for nothing less'.[9]

'Objective' photography therefore demonstrates here the exacerbation of a modernist project of separation. The visual attention that is paid by the modest people, in Greuze's paintings, to each other and their surroundings is replaced by their ant-sized representation in Gursky's photographs. But this transformation, in turn, reveals the presuppositions of the analysis: the active absorption of characters by their task is, ultimately, only their passive absorption into the space of the painting. What they are or do matters little, but what is important is that they are put in their place. It is with regard to this positing named absorption that Hegel's insistence on the carefree inactivity of the young beggars becomes meaningful. Inactivity is not laziness. It is the suspension of the opposition between activity and passivity that aligned an idea of art with a hierarchical vision of the world. Murillo's child beggars belonged to the type of picturesque paintings that eighteenth-century aristocrats collected as documents on the exotic life of the working classes. Hegel's analysis removes them from there by giving them a quality which they share with the Olympian gods. This 'carefree' attitude is more striking than the new indifference of subjects and their common capacity to be 'absorbed'. It posits as the exemplary subject of art this 'doing nothing', this common *aesthetic* neutralization of the social hierarchy and of the artistic hierarchy.

The aesthetic capacity shared by the Olympian god, the young noble dreamer and the carefree street child

neutralizes the opposition between the subjects of art and the anonymous forms of experience. 'We have the feeling that for a young person of this type any future is possible', says Hegel.[10] It is a peculiar comment, which makes the figures represented in a seventeenth-century painting contemporary beings whose future we consider. The young beggars testify, in fact, for another modernism far removed from that of Michael Fried's absorbed characters, without, for all that, becoming identified with the young velocipede racing experts extolled by Benjamin. The future that they bear is the blurring of the opposition between the world of work and the world of leisure, between the naked forms of life and the experiences of the aestheticized world. It is to this modernity that the assertion of Walker Evans's master, Flaubert, on the indifference of the subject, belongs. This does not mean the possibility for the artist to apply the 'project of severing', symbolic of Greenberg's or Fried's modernism, to any subject. It is realized only in that space where the artist rids himself of all the habitual attributes of the artist style and comes to encounter the attempts of obscure beings to introduce art into their sensible life, or any other of those forms of experience which their social condition is supposed to forbid. Flaubert may ridicule Emma's artistic pretension, but her art is forever linked to this artistic aspiration of a farmer's girl.

It is, similarly, a form of this encounter that James Agee and Walker Evans try to capture, one by brandishing Whitmanian enumerations and Proustian reminiscences to describe the houses of poor peasants, the other by rendering minimalist art and social document indiscernible when framing a dozen or so pieces of cutlery in front of four planks of brute wood. Before our gaze, there is thus neither simple objective information about a situation nor a wound inflicted by the 'it has been'. The photo does not say whether it is art or not, whether it represents poverty or a game of uprights and diagonals, weights and counterweights, order and disorder. It tells us neither what the person who laid the planks and cutlery in this manner had in mind nor what the photographer wanted to do. This game of multiple gaps perfectly illustrates what Kant designated under the name of aesthetic idea: 'a presentation of the imagination which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e., no [determinate] concept can be adequate.'[11] The aesthetic idea is the indeterminate idea that connects the two processes that the destruction of the mimetic order left separated: the intentional production of art which seeks an end, and the sensible experience of beauty as finality without end. Photography is exemplarily an art of aesthetic ideas because it is exemplarily an art capable of enabling non-art to accomplish art by dispossessing it. But it is also such through its participation in the construction of a sensible environment which extends beyond its own specificity. What we are shown by the young beggars seen by Hegel, the head of Minerva on the walls of the Normandy farm, the lopsided cans on the beams of the Alabama kitchen, the nonchalant demeanour of the child-worker in his doffer-box, or the swaying hips of the Polish teenager, is that this dispossession which makes art cannot be thought independently of the despecification which removes all of these characters from their social identity. But this despecification itself is not the making of an artistic *coup de force*. It is the correlate of the ability acquired by the characters themselves to play with the image of their being and of their condition, to post it to walls or to set it up before the lens. Judgements about photography are also appreciations of this ability and of what it means for art. This link between artistic purity and aesthetic impurity both fascinated and worried the authors of *Spleen de Paris* and *Madame Bovary*. Walter Benjamin wanted to integrate it in a global vision of the new man in the new technical world. Barthes brought it down to the intimacy of the private gaze. Michael Fried now proposes to bring it down to the interminable task of separation attributed to artistic modernity. But this theoretical *coup de force* would not be possible if the art of photography today was not already the bearer of this tendency to break the historical complicity between the art of the photographer and the aesthetic capacity of his subjects.

Translated by Darian Meacham

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Hill & Wang, New York, 1981, p. 51.
2. Ibid., p. 34.
3. Ibid., p. 96.
4. Jean-François Chevrier and James Lingwood, *Une autre objectivité*, Prato, Paris, 1989.
5. S.M. Eisenstein, 'Yermolova', in *Selected Works*, vol. 2: *Towards a Theory of Montage*, ed. Misha Glenny and Richard Taylor, British Film Institute, London, 1994, pp. 82–105.
6. G.W.F. von Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik* I, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt, 1986, p. 224.
7. Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT, 2008, pp. 211–12.
8. Ibid., p. 75
9. Ibid., p. 173.
10. *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik* I, p. 224.
11. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. W.S. Pluhar, Hackett, Indianapolis, 1987, p. 182.

People exposed, people as extras

Georges Didi-Huberman

The title of the first film shown in history is *La Sortie des usines Lumière* – in English, 'Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory'. On 22 March 1895, in the rue de Rennes in Paris, in front of about two hundred spectators, Auguste and Louis Lumière showed for the very first time on a screen the lower classes in full movement. Their own workers had been carefully framed in front of the main gates of the Montplaisir factory, leaving their workshops during a break around midday. Thus, it was while making their exit from the factory that the people made their entrance – and thereby benefited from a new form of exposure – on the stage of the cinematographic era. This is all very simple, as we can see – but quite paradoxical too.

This *origin* was an origin, as such, only by appearing by *surprise*. The Lumière brothers probably had no intention of placing their 'lower class' employees in the foreground. They were, above all, proud to present to Paris an original process of colour photography called 'autochrome'. However, it is the Kinetoscope projector, appearing at the very end of a showing, that, to their own surprise, most surprised the spectators and filled them with wonder:

> With the help of a Kinetoscope that he invented himself, M. Louis Lumière has shown on a screen a most interesting scene: the personnel from the workshops leaving the factory at lunchtime. This animated scene, which shows all these people in full movement, rushing out onto the street, has produced the most striking effect.[1]

One saw, in a few seconds, about a hundred people appearing, as though this 'people of images' (the workers in Lyon) were suddenly invading the good society of the engineers and of the promoters of the industry (the spectators in Paris) who had come to the showing.

Furthermore, this was an *origin* only by appearing in the *difference* created between the subjects represented and the mode of their exposure: they are workers shown in the act of leaving their work. There is no violent protest in this exiting: these workers are simply taking advantage of the lunch break for some fresh air, while their boss is, for his part, taking advantage of the good sunlight necessary for the technical creation of his film. But this is where the difference lies, and on several different levels: they turn from being *workers* – that is, makers of photographic materials – to being suddenly *actors* in this first film. One of them, coming out on his bicycle, is called Francis Doublier: some time later he will stand behind the camera enjoying a new social status, that of cinematographic *operator*.[2]

A third paradox appears when we discover that this was an *origin* only by displaying itself completely in the facts of *repetition* and *rehearsal* – two notions contained in a single word in French, *répétition*. The celluloid film of March 1895 was preceded in the summer of 1894 by its 'final rehearsal' on paper – which of course could not be projected on screen; and it was followed by other *répétitions* or versions of the same scene until the end of the century.[3] We should add that, as the film measures only seventeen metres – for a total of about eight hundred photograms or *vues* (views) as they used to be called – the film lasted only one minute, 'and so a repetition of this projection was asked for by the whole wonderstruck audience.'[4]

Finally, this origin, quite strangely, contains nothing with a 'point' of departure: it appears rather like an imprecise territory, a *field* of possibilities both open and relative, not to the intrinsic value of the new technical medium, but to the multiple use-values with which it would gradually become invested. It suffices, first of all, to flick through the catalogue of the '*vues* Lumière' to understand the considerable meaning that the cinematograph has for a history of the exposure of the people: it is the social body in its entirety, under every latitude, that at the end of the nineteenth century becomes the principal object of this new atlas of the world in movement: bull races and baby competitions; political demonstrations and religious processions; bustling activity of the city, fruit and vegetable markets; dockers at work, fishermen, farmers; children at play; launching of ships; sports teams and circus performers; washerwomen and Ashanti dancers, wealthy bourgeois men and women in London and wretched coolies in Saigon, and so on.[5]

The question remains to know, finally, *by what means and with a view to what these 'views' were exposed*. We know that the figuration of the people was a crucial question for the 'primitive' and 'modern' cinema, beyond – or starting with – 'Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory'.[6] This goes from Griffith to Eisenstein, from Abel Gance to King Vidor. One must mention also Fritz Lang, who worried about the manipulation of crowds in *Metropolis* before Leni Riefenstahl glorified them a few years plus one dictator later, in *The Triumph of the Will*.[7] In this context we can understand the political urgency – and the conceptual difficulty – of an analysis of these 'media' phenomena in the age of conquering totalitarianisms, in the work of thinkers such as Siegfried Kracauer, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin or Theodor Adorno.[8] It is thus not enough that people be exposed *in general*: one must go further and ask whether *in each case* the form of such an exposure – framing, montage, editing, rhythm, narration, and so on – encloses them (that is, alienates them and, finally, exposes them to disappearance) or whether it frees them (by exposing them to appear before us, giving them a power of appearance or apparition).

The imaginary people

'Cinema', wrote Edgar Morin, 'allows us to see the process of penetration of man into the world and the inseparable process of penetration of the world into man' at a precise point, on a dialectical pivotal plane which serves as a conversion operator. This plane is nothing other than the *image* itself, the image in so far as 'it is not only the turntable between the real and the imaginary, but also the radical and simultaneous constituent act of the real and of the imaginary'.[9] If the man of the cinema is indeed that *imaginary man* that Edgar Morin suggested, our diagnosis must certainly not be limited to finding there the man of flight and illusion, the man of the unreal and of ignorance or misrecognition, the apolitical man and the man of indifference to the world. When the group of Lumière workers exited their workshops and went bustling out into the daylight, bigger than life-size on the screen, in front of a group of wonderstruck bourgeois spectators on the rue de Rennes, it was in some way perhaps already a *political meeting*, a meeting created by the image and not cut off from the real, since it linked – for the long duration of the social development of the cinema – the workers with the managers or the customers from the same nascent industry.

In what remains perhaps his most fascinating work, Jean Louis Schefer sketched a poetics and almost a metapsychology of this 'imaginary man' by calling him *ordinary man*, the 'man without qualities' of the cinema. And where our *solitude in front of the image* becomes – through fear, according to Schefer – *consistency or strength of a social body* with which our own solitude would become permeable or soaked, what is

> ... projected and animated is not ourselves and yet we recognize ourselves in it (as though a strange desire for the extension of the human … could be at work here). … It is not possible that my experience of the cinema is totally solitary: this, more than the illusion of movement and of mobility of things that it gives us, is cinema's own particular illusion; … it seems, because of this beguiling solitude, that a part of ourselves is permeable to effects of sense without ever being able to be born into meaning by our language. … Cinema works on every social being as on a solitary being.[10]

It is probable that the man of the cinema is an 'ordinary' subject – rather than a 'connoisseur' as in archaeology or the plastic arts – inasmuch as he contemplates the movement of human appearances from his own position as an anonymous individual plunged, with his fellow human beings, into the half-light of a screening room. It is thus, also, in so far as this 'strange desire for extension of the human body' works in the dark room like the grains of dust in the beam of light from the projector, between immobile bodies in shadow (the spectators) and moving bodies in the light (the actors). What, then, is the collective being that results from this meeting, the *social being* of cinema? It is impossible, no doubt, to deduce the

Lumière Brothers, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, 1895

idea either merely from the *cast* alone or from the *audience* alone (this audience that we generally fail to think about, as well as the community and solitude). It is rather the *meeting* – and not just the 'representation', on the one hand, or the 'reception', on the other – that would make it possible to construct this idea.

This meeting has to do, in each case, with a certain historic state of the relations between poetics and politics. Jacques Rancière traced back to Flaubert the typically modern idea by which 'in the subject-matter of art … there are no beautiful or ugly subjects any more: Yvetot is on the same level as Constantinople, and a farmer's daughter is on the same level as a society woman.'[11] But one could just as easily go further back and find this economy of figuration in Caravaggio's 'Madonna with the Serpent', in Callot's or in Rembrandt's beggars, or, later, in Goya's 'Disasters'. On the basis of this long history in which this 'theatre of the people' is unfurled, Jacques Rancière has examined the 'dominant ideas of a time and of an intelligentsia which think [today] that, with regard to the people, enough and even too much has been given', saying this in order to highlight the symptomatic value of recent films such as Bruno Dumont's *Rosetta* or the Dardenne brothers' *L'Humanité*.[12]

This diagnosis by Rancière can be divided into two symmetrical meanings. On the one hand, it seems, the people are exposed to the risk of being hypostasized – and above all reduced – in both a larger and more consensual entity, which is the idea of *nation*.[13] This is what gives rise to massive identifications, to military choreographies and to patriotic stories, from Busby Berkeley to the sympathetic and triumphant heroes of *Independence Day*. This is what gives the illusion of uniting a 'cast' on show and the 'audience' that judges them.[14] This is what makes it possible, with the help of digital technology, to create armies, whole societies, on the basis of a simple algorithm of cloning, as in *The Matrix* or in *The Lord of the Rings*. In front of such things, the archaic packs of living-dead in the series of films directed by George A. Romero appear like a political alternative to the distressing populism of the living-all-too-living who go about, in a completely interchangeable and alienated manner, in our sitcoms.

On the other hand, the people expose themselves to the risk of being hypostasized in the compressed entity of what is called *pic people*, that is, the 'people of images' – *picture* now, rather than *image* – according to the definition given by the very chic *Variety* magazine which specializes in entertainment industry news, celebrity photos and the box office, as its ads show: this magazine gives the term *pic people* to 'all those who participate in the existence of a film', from the humble technicians to the famous actors, and from the producers to the cinema managers.[15] Philippe-Alain Michaud cites this definition with regard to a progression where the notion of 'people' unfortunately gives way, eventually, to the *people* of the celebrity world and the happy few which the world of showbusiness and the contemporary art world go wild about: the 'beggar' of *Accattone* becomes 'idol'; and martyrdom – even the ancient stylite, all under the American term 'fashion victim' – is seen as a category of 'fashion', in other words as the creation of a stylist.[16]

The concept of *pic people* seems to be characterized by a typically capitalist competition of identificatory props: it is always one star against the other, better than the other; it is the perpetual wonder in front of a body hypostasized in a *trademark image* – which is neither the image in the anthropological sense, nor a mark in the sense of 'imprint' – of a rather unclear desire. The film buff's passion, with the reserved attitude that often characterizes it, enjoys concentrating on 'the best looks, the best actor'; even its reflection regarding a 'politics of actors' renews, by capillary action, the notion of author and thus the authority of the proper name as the symbolic power of Mount Parnassus where the love stories of the gods Gary Cooper, John Wayne or James Stuart are hatched…[17]

Harun Farocki, *Factory Exitings*, 1995

One of the great political powers of the cinema of re-edited/revisited (*remontées*) archives, such as we see in the work of Artavazd Pelechian, Basilio Martín Patino, Jean-Luc Godard or Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, consists in *going back through history* – and thereby performing a work of montage and re-editing – *in search of lost faces*, that is to say faces which have perhaps lost their names today, and which show themselves in their absence of power and their muteness, but which have lost none of their force when we look at them moving in the flickering light of time-damaged films. It is a way of finding once more an essential quality of the 'primitive' cinema which André S. Labarthe contemplated in the unique face of Falconetti filmed by Dreyer, as well as in the innumerable, nameless faces filmed by Eisenstein; those 'documentary heroes' as he calls them.[18] It is their traces, to a greater or lesser degree, that Harun Farocki sought in an extraordinary collection of *factory exitings* (*sorties d'usines*) where the opening gesture of the Lumière factory workers is diffracted so as to gesture to us, to make a sign to us, with the most contemporary political urgency.[19]

Extras

It seems that the cinema only shows or exposes the people according to the ambiguous status of 'extras' – *figurants* in French. The verb *figurer* in French means variously 'to appear, to represent, or to be an extra' and is related to the notion of the 'figure'. *Figurant*: it is a banal word, a word for the 'man without qualities' of a setting, of an industry, of a spectacular management of 'human resources'; but, also, it is an unfathomable word, a word from the labyrinths that every *figure* conceals. The *figurants* – the extras – constitute, above all, in the economy of cinematography, an accessory of humanity which serves as a framework for the role of the central heroes, the real actors in the story, the protagonists, as they are called. For the story which is told they are like the base, the underlying canvas made up of faces, bodies and gestures. They form the paradox, therefore, of being something that is not merely part of the set but that is human as well. In English, as in Spanish, one calls them 'extras'; in Italian they are *comparsi*, and in German they are *Statisten* – words which indicate the point to which they are not necessary to the story or to the dynamics of the film. They are the dark mass in front of which the 'stars' of the film shine (those considered worthy of being seen, compared as they are to the bright splendours of the night sky, those isolated points in the sky which still carry the names of ancient gods). The *figurants* or 'extras' are the night of the cinema when cinema strives to be an art that makes stars shine. To a certain extent, they are to the world of shows what the miserable wretches – the *misérables* – were to the industrial world of Victor Hugo's time.

The *figurants* or 'extras' would therefore represent something like an accursed share of the high art – and of the huge industry – of cinema. They are situated at the very bottom of the artistic and social ladder where actors who 'play themselves', and where 'secondary characters' and other supporting actors, gain the upper hand.[20] Even journals like *Cahiers du cinéma* only stop briefly to examine 'secondary roles', giving the 'extras' practically no chance of existence at all, poetically and politically speaking: they then disappear underneath the last level which is the 'third man' (*troisième homme*) or the 'minor figure'.[21] In her work on *L'Acteur de cinéma*, Jacqueline Nacache speaks quite justly of the extra as the 'piece-of-furniture-man, the anonymous passerby, the silhouette swallowed up by shadow, the lower-class people of films.'[22]

The extras are the actors of nothing. They are the *non-actors* par excellence, postulated by their semiological and institutional definition: 'All [of the human figures in a film] are not necessarily 'actorly [*actorielles*] figures.' In the first place is the cohort of extras. As individuals, they have no acting (*actantielle*) value: they are 'non-actors' since they do not constitute an acting force in the story. However, as a collective, they can indeed play such a role (like the troops who land on the coast of Normandy in *The Longest Day*).[23] The institutional definition would be as follows:

> The extra is there only for the costume he or she wears, or the spot of moving colour that he or she gives to the décor. … The setting parks him, as a consenting slave of the cinema, submitting him to shouted orders and to military discipline. Should he step out of line, he will put the set in danger (Jerry Lewis in a gag in *The Errand Boy*). … Each extra is taken on and paid by the production on the basis of his or her 'non-actor' status.[24]

In a professional manual from a film corporation, we can find the following: 'the choice of extras is up to the assistants', who determine the 'number of extras for the décor', combining the director's artistic demands with the economic demands of the producer.[25]

The *figurants*, the 'extras', exist in the plural. If we want to speak of a *figurant* in the singular, we will say in French *un simple figurant*, meaning 'a simple or mere extra'. Simple, mere: because he or she is missing that individuation which makes up the passionate complexity of the character, of the actor, or of the

subject of the action. The extras 'figure', and therefore do not act. When they move, they are rather part of a mass effect which drags them into a vast movement, a general design of which each extra is merely a segment, a piece in a mosaic, sometimes just a single point. The word *figurant*s in the plural appears in French around 1740: it was used to refer to a group of dancers who, at the beginning of the ballet, drew different figures with their collective arrangement. Around 1800, the word is used to speak of the characters in plays that only have a 'secondary role' – that is to say, who are there, on stage, but who have absolutely nothing to say. More often than not they exist only by their number, their mass, and their mute lack of differentiation. Around 1907 the word begins to be used in a more general sense to evoke a group of people whose role – in a society or in an historic situation – is neither effective nor meaningful, illustrated in the two expressions 'hidden role' and 'purely decorative role'. *Être figurant*, to be an extra: to be there but only so as not to appear in the spotlight. To melt into the mass and to serve no other purpose than to be at the base of the story, the drama and the action.

In spite of their name, the *figurants* tend to disappear, to not figure, so to speak, since instead they melt into the base, always behind the acting figures. The noise they make is only a murmur. Their appellation is collective. If by chance the names of the extras appear in the credits at the end, their letters are so small and pass by so quickly in front of our eyes that they disappear very quickly to leave only a simple column, an unreadable list where each is supposed to 'figure', indistinctly. The extras are those who have not succeeded in 'making a name' for themselves, and this is why they are so badly paid. They wait for hours on the film set to do what is asked of them, which in general is very little. The make-up artists of course give them hardly any time at all. Their costumes are often chosen to form, all in all, only a great monochrome, as uniform as possible. The prototype of the extra is no doubt the anonymous foot soldier who, among the hundreds or thousands of his fellows, is just there to figure the battle scene – from which the hero will emerge triumphant or will become the wounded hero – and has nothing to do but walk, pointing a bayonet, and pretend to fall down dead at the given moment.

Extras are thus like the innumerable unknown soldiers of commercial cinema. They die forgotten, like dogs. It is no coincidence that the French word *figurants* refers, in slang, to anonymous cadavers exposed in the morgue waiting to be recognized and named – something which rarely happens in such cases. In his *Dictionnaire français-argot* published in 1901, Aristide Bruant cited this lament:

> Your man has not returned home for three days … Go to the *Musée des Refroidis* [in other words, 'the Stiffs Museum', slang for the morgue]… He is perhaps one the *figurants*.

If a friend tells you in French that he or she has *fait de la figuration* in a film – that is, appeared as an extra – and invites you to go to see it, there is a strong possibility that you will hardly see his or her presence on-screen at all. For such is the paradox of the *figurants* or the extras: they have a face, a body, gestures that belong to them, but the setting that calls on them wants them to be faceless, bodiless, and without any personal gestures.

We often have the impression that the extras take their revenge on the lack of differentiation that is imposed upon them with indifference – a discreet but sometimes easily perceptible indifference – which they turn against the story for which they form the decoration. You can see them bored to death, expecting nothing more from cinema, while every actor has the right to expect cinema to allow him at least to appear. Is it for this that the extras always act so badly, as though begrudgingly? Or else is it because the director simply does not know how to look at them, since he has eyes only for the 'true' actors? It becomes painful when the extras are supposed to play a group of people subjected to the same tragic fate as the protagonists, for example in Hollywood representations like *Holocaust* or *Schindler's List*. It is unbearable in these cases to see that the characters of a film are not equal confronted by the same fate that touches them. Against this, Claude Lanzmann gave much time to giving faces, words and gestures back to those that the Nazis called *Figuren* in the camps. But is it not an impossible task, or an infinite task, to account for each person's difference, each person's singularity, each person's irreducibility?

We can understand in this context that the extras oblige the film-maker to ask a crucial question, a question that is inextricably linked to aesthetics, ethics and politics. How should one film the *figurants*, the extras? How should one make them appear as actors in a story; how can one refuse to settle for making them indistinct but living shadows? This is the question of the relation established in a film between the little story and the big story, between the local *story* and the *history* in which it takes place. Eisenstein attempted to invert the established relation in Hollywood cinema between the peripeteia and the historic reality: in Hollywood, he said, what you place at the fore is the inevitable

trio made up of the husband, the wife and the lover, before choosing – as one chooses one's wallpaper for the house – to place behind them the 'local colour' of the decor and of the extras, be it Imperial Rome, an African safari or Chicago in the 1930s.[26] Against this, it was a matter of giving back to the *figurants* (who are to cinema what the people are to history) their faces, their gestures, their words and their capacity to act; to film them less as a *mass* than as a *community* – that principal actor, active rather than passive – of real history.

In *The Battleship Potemkin*, for example, Eisenstein devoted a lot of time to the faces and to the bodies of the extras to capture the way in which the death of Vakoulintchouk arouses a sovereign transformation of personal pain (religious gestures and lamentation) into collective fury (political gestures of imprecation and of calling for vengeance, all filmed close up), and very soon into a revolutionary decision. For *October*, the film crew tirelessly sought extras in the streets, the bistros, the night shelters. Among the eleven thousand

Mohsen Makhmalbaf, *Salam Cinema*, 1995.

people approached, many had been protagonists of the true story itself, the shooting on the Nevsky Prospekt or the taking of the Winter Palace, and it was decided, for the filming, that they should be given real rifles.[27] Eisenstein films them in a wide-angle shot and a high-angle shot, but he places himself also – in the astonishing rhythm of his mixed montage – practically on the ground to film, for example, the face of a soldier fallen into a puddle.

Finally, in *Strike*, Eisenstein exposes as crudely as possible the *body of the people* grappling with the exploitation that alienates them: bodies tied up, bodies crushed by work and social suffering. For the last sequences of the film, he had the problem of representing the 'bloody horror' of a mass shooting. The slightest sign of artifice would, in his eyes, have ruined the intensity, and therefore the necessity, of such a scene. In order to get around the aporia of staging extras who fall with more or less conviction under the blank cartridges of the soldiers, he chose to place his extras in the concrete situation of running desperately in a ravine, so that the physical urgency was a reality for each person. The result is a hallucinating, but somewhat documentary, vision of bodies genuinely precipitated by their own running. Then we see them strewn on the ground, without their having to 'play' any particular role there, while Eisenstein invents the wonderful counterpoint offered by the *documentary allegory* of the bullock with its throat cut in the abattoir, filmed close up:

> In order to make sure that the extras in the trades council do not look like they are acting … and above all in order to eliminate the effect of artifice that the screen cannot suffer and that is inevitable even with the most brilliant 'death scene', I have used the following procedure … intended to provoke the maximum effect of bloody horror: the associative alternating between the shooting and the abattoirs. The first, shown in group shots and medium shots, the fall of the 1500 workers into the ravine, the fleeing of the crowd, the shots fired, etc. … At the same time, all the close ups serve to show the true horror of the abattoirs where the cattle have their throats cut and are skinned.[28]

With his formal choices, Eisenstein wanted to give power back to the masses: to reassert their role as principal actors in the story, but also the specificity of their gestures, of their voice (their clamour, their words). And this is why the extras represented, in his eyes, a fundamental aesthetic issue. The question is still asked today: how should one justly film those who have no name, those who first of all have no voice other than their cry of suffering or revolt? How should one approach non-actors, how should one look them in the eye, listen to their words, and respect their gestures? There is an attempt of this kind in the films of Pier Paolo Pasolini (where we see, in each shot, his tenderness, his respect and even his admiration for every one of the extras), of Jean Rouch, of Alexander Sokurov (where we want to speak to every face that appears in *Russian Ark*), of Atom Egoyan or of Harun Farocki, to name but a few.

By deciding to commemorate the centenary of 'Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory' with a film dedicated to its extras, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, with *Salam Cinema*, came up with a complex set based on a casting call following which five thousand people presented themselves to the director. A film without actors 'about those who would like to work in cinema'. A film about the desire for cinema and about those who, animated by such a desire, see themselves confronted

with the very heart of the ethical questions that life asks us: to appear, to figure, or disappear, to remain silent or speak, to remain submissive to an order or to rebel, to be judged or to become a judge, to weigh fiction and lies, art and life, composed emotion and real affect, laughter and tears, intimate secrets and shared history. In the cruel but Socratic process which he employs, Makhmalbaf ends up giving the extras, to whom the film is dedicated, their due: 'You have all played a role. There was room for everyone. Cinema is everyone's business. If cinema speaks about life, then there is enough room.'[29] By this we must understand that a film might only be politically just when it gives a place and a face to the nameless, to those who have no part in the habitual social representation. So, it is a question of *making of the image a common place* where the commonplace of images of the people used to reign.[30]

Translated by Shane Lillis

Notes

1. *Bulletin du Photo-Club de Paris* 3, 1895, cited by B. Chardère, *Le Roman des Lumière. Le cinéma sur le vif*, Paris, Gallimard, 1995, p. 301.
2. Ibid., p. 293.
3. Ibid., pp. 293–301. G. Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma, I. L'invention du cinéma, 1832–1897*, Denoël, Paris, 1948; rev. edn, 1973, pp. 284–6. N. Burch, *La Lucarne de l'infini. Naissance du langage cinématographique*, Nathan, Paris, 1990, pp. 22–8.
4. *Bulletin du Photo-Club de Paris*, p. 301.
5. See J. Rittaud-Hutinet, *Auguste et Louis Lumière: les mille premiers films*, ed. Philippe Sers, Paris, 1990. P. Dujardin, 'Domitor ou l'invention du quidam', *L'Aventure du cinématographe. Actes du congrès mondial Lumière*, Aléas, Lyon, 1999, p. 277: 'The time of the cinematograph is indeed the time in which the people appear, whether they are apprehended under the category of the first-comer from the city and the working-class, or whether they are apprehended under the political category of the anonymous individual, that is to say, of that nobody-in-particular who is given the dignity of being a subject by right.'
6. See J.-L. Leutrat, 'Modernité. Modernité?', *Lumière, le cinéma*, Institut Lumière, Lyon, 1992, pp. 64–70.
7. See P. Sorlin, 'Foule actrice ou foule-objet? Les leçons du premier cinéma', *L'Image. Étude*s, *documents, débats* 1, 1995, pp. 63–74.
8. See M. Girard, 'Kracauer, Adorno, Benjamin: le cinéma, écueil ou étincelle révolutionnaire de la masse?', *Lignes* 11, 2003, pp. 208–25.
9. E. Morin, *Le Cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire. Essai d'anthropologie sociologique*, Minuit, Paris, 1956, pp. ix, 208.
10. J.L. Schefer, *L'Homme ordinaire du cinéma*, Cahiers du cinéma/Gallimard, Paris, 1980, pp. 11–12, 102.
11. J. Rancière, 'Le bruit du peuple, l'image de l'art (à propos de Rosetta et de L'Humanité)', in A. de Baecque and G. Lucantonio, eds, *Théories du cinéma*, Cahiers du cinéma, Paris, 2001, p. 214.
12. Ibid., pp. 213–19. Cf. J. Rancière, 'Le théâtre du peuple: une histoire interminable', in *Les Scènes du peuple (Les Révoltes logique, 1975–1985)*, Horlieu Éditions, Lyon, 2003, pp. 167–201.
13. Cf. J.-M. Frodon, *La Projection nationale. Cinéma et nation*, Odile Jacob, Paris, 1998.
14. See L. Gervereau, 'Échantillons ou masses symboliques? Le rôle des foules et du public à la télévision', *L'Image. Études, documents, débats* 1, 1995, pp. 97–123.
15. P.-A. Michaud, *Le Peuple des images. Essai d'anthropologie figurative*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 2002, p. 23.
16. Ibid., pp. 25–40, 195–248.
17. See L. Moullet, *Politique des acteurs: Gary Cooper, John Wayne, Cary Grant, James Stuart*, Éditions de l'Étoile/Cahiers du cinéma, Paris, 1993; R. Bellour, 'Le plus beau visage, le plus grand acteur: Lilian Gish, Cary Grant', *Trafic* 65, 2008, pp. 82–5.
18. A.S. Labarthe, 'Belle à faire peur', *Lignes* 23–24, 2007, p. 394.
19. H. Farocki, *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik*, video, 1995. Cf. H. Farocki, *Reconnaître et poursuivre*, ed. C. Blümlinger, Théâtre Typographique, Dijon-Quetigny, 2002, pp. 65–72, 118–19.
20. See J. Nacache, *L'Acteur de cinéma,* Nathan, Paris, 2003, pp. 92–9.
21. Cf. T. Jousse, 'Seconds rôles: l'album de famille', *Cahiers du cinéma* 407–8, 1988, pp. 60–61; N. Rivière, 'Le troisième homme et le second couteau dans le cinéma américain des années quatre-vingt-dix', in G.-D. Farcy and R. Prédal, eds, *Brûler les planches, crever l'écran. La présence de l'acteur*, L'Entretemps Éditions, Saint-Jean-de-Védas, 2001, pp. 339–47.
22. Nacache, *L'Acteur de cinéma*, p. 98.
23. A. Gardies, *Le Récit filmique*, Hachette, Paris, 1993, p. 60.
24. Nacache, *L'Acteur de cinéma,* p. 99.
25. V. Othnin-Girard, *L'Assistant réalisateur*, FEMIS, Paris, 1988, pp. 77–8.
26. S.M. Eisenstein, 'Les principes du nouveau cinéma russe', *La Revue du cinéma. Critique, recherches, documents*, vol. II, no. 9, 1930, p. 20.
27. S.M. Eisenstein, 'Une armée de cent mille hommes devant les caméras', trans. A. Vitez, *Octobre*, Le Seuil/Avant-Scène, Paris, 1971, pp. 149–52.
28. S.M. Eisenstein, 'Le montage des attractions au cinéma', trans. A. Robel, *Œuvres, I. Au-delà des étoiles*, UGE/Cahiers du cinéma, Paris, 1974, pp. 132–3. On the closeness of this montage to the work of Georges Bataille and Eli Lotar on the human figure in the journal *Documents*, see G. Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe, ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille,* Macula, Paris, 1995, pp. 280–97.
29. Cf. M. Haghighat and F. Sabouraud, *Histoire du cinéma iranien, 1900–1999*, Éditions BPI/Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1999, pp. 161–2. See also A. Bergala, *Abbas Kiarostami*, Cahiers du cinéma, Paris, 2004, p. 67, who rightly notes how '*Voyage to Italy* (also known as *The Lonely Woman*) [by Roberto Rossellini] and *The Wind Will Carry Us* [by Abbas Kiarostami] end with the same motion: leaving the anonymous people to invade the screen of fiction.'
30. This text is a fragment from a work in progress entitled *Peuples exposés* (*People Exposed*). The first version of the third paragraph was published under the title 'Figurants' in the *Dictionnaire mondial des images*, ed. L. Gervereau, Nouveau Monde Éditions, Paris, 2006, pp. 398–400.

Body without image

Ernesto Neto's Anti-Leviathan

Éric Alliez

> [T]he great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last.
>
> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

> The IMAGE-grip is dislocated and a more fundamental element emerges … in short, IMAGE is not the work's supreme motive or unifying end.
>
> Hélio Oiticica, *Block Experiments*

In the immense emptiness and sepulchral chill of the Pantheon, it seems to emerge, suddenly, like a ballooning, billowy suspension of innumerable artificial columns veiled in a delicate white material (stretchable Lycra), whose distended bases, which bulge with faintly perfumed ballast, descend randomly to many levels or reach as far as the ground. This forest of sorts is attached to the vaulting of the Pantheon like some monstrous parasite, in a sort of reverse shot to the strict alignment of the building's columns. High up, hanging liana-columns pass through holes in immense sheets of Lycra stretched out between the four branches of the Pantheon in an uneven sinuous network with long, undulating pockets that are constricted or bloated, and to which a number of shafts are also connected. Its capacities exceeded, the eye is led to *contain, at a distance*, this body that is radically heterogeneous both to the place that it invades and to any identifiable reality. It attempts to encompass it by means of an *aesthetic metaphor* – that of some giant, monstrously arborescent octopus-white whale whose entrails are distended and swollen from devouring the Pantheon.

Metaphorization confers the status of a half-figurative, half-abstract *image* – and therefore the character of a description (such as 'the innumerable suspensions of an inverted and parasitical forest') – on what is otherwise unidentifiable and whose radical alterity, in relation to image-effects, poses the question of knowing if it is *still* of an *aesthetic* order. It is therefore necessary here to recall briefly the two – in our eyes most significant – modalities according to which the aesthetic has recently seen its objects and its stakes redeployed. In the first, aesthetic alterity is a disengagement from vision that engages the gaze in the genesis of visibility at the heart of the visible. It is to this phenomenological 'opening' that Georges Didi-Hubermann has lent a second, more dialectical life, between knowing and seeing, that is less 'unrepresentable' to the extent that the labour of the negative in the image substitutes the *visual of a figuring figure* (a superior phenomenology) for the 'invisible'.[1] In the second, the aesthetic is the de-figuring of every representative relationship between the sayable and the visible in the free play of *forms–signs* whose discourse defines forms of visibility as much as modes of intelligibility. It is to this dialectical play of textual excess with regard to the life of forms that Jacques Rancière has given the name 'aesthetic regime', in so far as it participates in a metaphorics that is superior at every point (according the Schillerian principle of a *logos* identical to a *pathos*, etc).[2] One will not fail to notice here that a certain highly contemporary aesthetic turn takes place, or displaces itself, beyond the letter of our two authors, in this *double articulation*. It is in relation to this latter that it is necessary for us, at the outset, to distance ourselves somewhat.

This said, it cannot be denied that our initial descriptive approach to Neto's installation – which seems intent on *metamorphosing* its inevitably optical, distant, static, monumental capturing in view – presents itself as a heterogeneous *chaining together*[3] of metaphors (vegetable, architectural, landscapes, animal, biological…). But one could *imagine* other equally (in)adequate metaphors to whose descriptions the installation would lend itself (under such and such an *aspect*), whilst evading them globally. And perhaps it should be noted that in their own, 'theatrical' way, photographic images precipitate and aestheticize the putting into image of the installation, by fixing it in spectacularly distanced long or close-up shots. It remains that the multiplication of metaphors or images that are heterogeneous to one another, and

the possibility of interpreting them as the index of a mode of assemblage or of proliferating chains that is not of the order of the image, nonetheless poses the question of their (non-)relation to the image. Relation, non-relation, or relation of non-relation … relaunched by *Leviathan Toth*, the title of the installation, at first an enigmatic linking of two names, in turn poses the question of its relation to statements (*énoncés*).

However, everything changes from the moment that the spectator becomes ambulant: he or she becomes a sensori-motor *component* of this body, which ingests him or her, and into which s/he is plugged. The spectator experiences this body – which is defined only by the set of tensions which animate it (tractions, suspension, stretching, inflation) – in a kinaesthetic and tensive manner. But make no mistake: kinaesthetic deambulation is not a way of experiencing the immediacy of the naked, sensible presence of a body suspended in space or the properties of a hybrid material that would carry us along in the special effects of a *materia informis*. Hence it *is not* the bearer of an aesthetic experience, at least in the primary sense of a pure sensible apprehension. It is, rather, the way in which we sense, *in the first place*, a mobilizing energetic potential that acts on us in the manner of a field of forces, independently of any sort of discursive mediation or imaginary transport. And it is through this potentiality which envelops us with the inkling of forces that pass into sensation, that what one must resolve to call *a powerful non-organic life* is given to us to perceive in our own movement. A powerful non-organic life that 'overflows' the immanent but limited, fleeting but ceaselessly relaunched experience that we have of it, or rather that traverses us.

Via this kinetic entrance into the *œuvre*, a material introduction (*entrée en matière*), deambulation *starts up* what can only be 'interpreted' by beginning to experience the diagram of forces stretched out above our heads and around us – as we would experience 'the intrusion of another world into the visual world of figuration'.[4] Absolutely *disorganized* by the most direct connection between the body thus put in motion, the visible that it expresses (what it sees in the sensation without distance that put it in motion) and the virtual that it constructs in *realizing* the strange operation to which it is submitted. One might reproach us with extending the Deleuzean diagram well beyond its pictorial usage. But one will equally understand that Jacques Rancière can reproach Deleuze precisely for 'short-circuit[ing] the work of metaphor' whilst the diagram, following Rancière, 'only makes visible if its labour is rendered equivalent to that of metaphor, if words construct such equivalence' in separating the presence in/side art of 'any epiphany of the present'.[5] But this is to postulate the possibility of an equivalence between the work of forms, even if it is dynamic (the dynamic work of the sayable, hence metaphorizable) and the (non-discursive) work of forces. Now, the dynamic/dialectic of forms–signs animating the 'aesthetic regime' cannot in any way be equivalent to an energetics of forces because this participates in a completely different regime – an *aesthesic regime* whose diagrammatic apparatus must be *invested* as such. It doesn't aim at the negation of forms and the denegation of signs (participating, for example, in the symbolic montage of the Pantheon). Rather, it aims at fusing and deterritorializing them as *forces–signs* (which make the referential territorialization of significance and iconic territorialization of interpretance of the Pantheon take flight). Carried off in this *semiotics of intensities*, 'information' fissures and is dissociated from the discursiveness in which it was caught (its intelligibility is suspended, scrambled, put into crisis).[6]

The work of the diagram does not consist, then, in putting the chaotic genesis of a pure visibility of forms into presence, even if they are mobilized by a spectator who is equally mobile in an 'environmental participation'. *It tends* to the 'capture of forces', to making insensible forces (anaesthetized in the symbolic semiology of the national monument) sensible (*forces insensibles/insensibilisés*). The *real* stake of this agency (*agencement*[7]) of forces, in itself a-signifying and non-discursive, is to engage a 'diagnosis of our current becomings' in a *politics of experimentation*, a politics of experimentation which *really* begins with the production of novel conjunctions in the tissue of fluxes of materials and of signs… It is not that metaphor must be ignored, but instead of having the agency of the 'work' fall back on a metaphorical displacement (an equivalence reductive of forces and idealizing of forms, appealing to an imaginary discursiveness), it must be relaunched on the body by investing the process of enunciation which animates the formation of statements, engaging metaphoricity itself and the matter-sense of statements in a semiotics of sensation. Signs here do not form signifying chains transported into the imaginary by 'metaphor', but half-coded, half-decoded chains. They form Markov chains, connecting elements of every kind (words, figures, fragments of the architecture or installation, a whole multi-sensoriality mixed with a world of analogons and schemas and affects) that are caught up directly in 'physical' effects in which every kind of real distinction between form

of expression and form of content is abolished. This is because an *intensive machine of deterritorialization bearing on fluxes of signs* belongs to the diagram, and, more precisely, to the diagrammatic regime of contemporary art when the latter yields to it and is invested as such. It confers on signs a new material power of decoding (deductions of fragments of heterogeneous codes, a-signifying and post-signifying connections in continuous variation, intensive local recoding of the global expressiveness–movement of traits of expression…) that destratifies the space (physical, symbolic, discursive, institutional) in which it is inscribed by rendering sensible the trans-semiotic presence of insensible/anaesthetized forces.

In Neto's installation it would therefore be a matter of something completely different to an 'image', in the sense of an aesthetic *mise-en-scène*. Such a *mise-en-scène* would be charged with 'unveiling' an invisibility in a dialectic of hiding and showing internal to the image, or between images, or between the visible and the sayable. This invisible would be at one and the same time both the truth and the guarantee of the aesthetic operations of the *mise-en-scène*, even if this were at the cost of a permanent putting back into play of its operations (as it is with the sublime, for example). Rather, it is instead a matter of an *optically impenetrable* work which would in truth be better defined using two Brazilian passwords of the 1960s.

It is a *kinaesthetically 'penetrable' 'non-object'* (*Nao-objeto, Penetravel*). Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica, in whose line of descent Neto's entire œuvre is situated, effectively made use of these expressions to think the 'total incorporation (in-corporation) of what one previously saw as *environmental*', according to a formula Oiticica used in his Notes on what he ends up calling the Ready Constructible (1978). He presents this as the 'proposition of a meta-sculpture or a *new perception* going from the sculptural to a sort of art simultaneously situated on the ground and in the air'.[8]

Leviathan Toth, Autumn Festival of Paris, 2006. Ernesto Neto's installation can be *penetrated* and *reconstructed* from everywhere and from all directions as it has neither beginning nor end. Certainly there is a centre, but of decentring and axes which derive from it only to be twisted out of joint. *Leviathan Toth* is a 'counter-installation' or an 'environmental appropriation' (in Oiticica's words). It doesn't seek to profit from the space of the Pantheon in order to *exhibit itself* (environmental art), or to exhibit its *heterogeneity*, in a symbolic or dialectical relationship to its environment. Rather, it is *in situ* that *Leviathan Toth* acts or agitates but so as to take on the *site-specificity* of the Republic's temple and locus of national memory 'conceived ideally as the centre of the territory, the heart of the nation'.[9] (Unlike the temple of the Republic which, if one needed reminding, was – the usual

sacred duty – *installed* comfortably and statically in St Genevieve de Soufflot following the much more visual than structural developments undertaken by Quatremere de Quincy on the orders of the constitutive Assembly in 1791.)

Consequently, Operation Neto modulates into a critical and clinical operation. Critically, *Leviathan Toth* confronts the building and its sheer size and grapples with it by placing all its physical and metaphysical coordinates into and under tension. The operation thus engages with nothing less than the *image of power* related to the *power of the image* which animates it and gives it a discursive existence – because the *architectural denunciation* of the Pantheon produced by Neto doesn't occur without the (Hobbesian) *metaphysical enunciation* that is projected onto it. This enunciation is de-posed in the title of the 'contra' installation in the manner of a '*d/enunciation*' reinforced by the mysterious *Toth* appended to it, and the no less strange orthography adopted by Neto for the Egyptian god Thoth.[10] Clinically, it sustains the claim to the affirmative disposition of the operation: to the extent that this putting into tension is itself subtended by the fundamentally energetic nature of the process of environmental appropriation whose non-discursive seizing of being (*prise d'être*) liberates its effect as a 'counter-image', from the labour of the negative within the image as much as with regard to a purely critical relation to its aesthetic

forms, so as to introduce the intensive fact of a 'powerful non-organic life'.[11] Between the critical and the clinical, the pathology of the Body without Organs can thus awaken the anoptic quality of the Body without Image in a biopolitics of space which dismisses every metaphor of the invisible.

Political anatomy

The decentring of the site is set in motion throughout the vertical elevation of the axis of the cupola-covered transept. For the monument, it is a manner of falling from its summit to be brought back down (but not thrown) to earth. *On the ground*. The epicentre of a slow turbulent fall from which one begins (but which one could reverse). The part of Neto's counter-installation occupying this space presents itself as a sort of tall, broad cylinder of fabric forming a vast, stretched-out and deformed reticulation, as if the reticular structure of the cupola was *torn apart*. It opens out towards the ground, where it is solidly anchored around the oscillations of Foucault's Pendulum. Under the impact of other forces, the catastrophe extends by contamination to the domes and vaults that develop geometrically around the central cupola.

This cupola is covered with octagonal panelling that converges towards the summit, the design implying a hemispheric anamorphosis of the gridwork of the panels. This type of composition is repeated in the other cupola and on the circular floor tiling corresponding to them. As to the properly orthogonal grid, it is visible in the many criss-crossing patterns and tiles on the ground, and it provides a subjacent order to the whole plan of the work as the principle of its rationalization *more geometrico*.

One will notice straight away that the structure of the panelled cupola is not without analogy to the frontispiece of Hobbes's *Leviathan* as designed by Abraham Bosse, a major advocate of geometrically constructed perspective. The arrangement of the panelling in effect evokes that of the anonymous subjects presented from behind with their heads converging towards the sovereign, in an 'egalitarian' perspective, calculated in an egalitarian way. What is more, in the image, the sovereign associates the sword and the cross, in the same way as the Pantheon associates a secular temple with a church, one which is not consecrated but is still present symbolically, topped with a cross to sacralize the Republic. The analogy extends further since the eye of the cupola opens onto a second cupola occupied by a painting by Antoine Gros, *The Apotheosis of Saint Genevieve*, the base of which itself figures a corona of personae surrounding four sovereigns. The smallest eye of the cupola opens in turn onto a pure summit of light, which comes from the skylighting of the external dome, an ultimate supplementary dimension covering the system and the central void of Power to which all must equally submit.

It is *against* the ground and the aerial centre of this monument-image of power that Operation Neto works. The large and loose netting of the immense pseudo-cylindrical, spidery reticulation which descends from the central cupola is not the simple deployment in space of the patterning on the ground of large folded fabrics but the sensory diagram of forces which, by stretching, distend the grid and deform it, substituting for the geometric rigidity of a rigidly cellular world the perpetually changing dynamic of direct (immanent) relations between all the tensions. (One cannot but emphasize that here Operation Neto *naturally* incorporates, on the environmental plane, the dynamic-dynamiting operation produced by Clark and Oiticica with regard to the static, geometric and imagistic interpretation of the Mondrianesque reticulation of the plane of the tableau. Clark and Oiticica actualize the virtual energy of the tableau by beginning to *force* the tableau-form as much as the painting-form – before attacking, as their environmental explorations allow, the 'art-form' as such, according to Oiticica's expression.) Concerning the part of Leviathan we have just dealt with, Neto has said that it is the monster's head, 'the seat of fear … the seat of the purification of sentiments' by the cold

and calculating rationality of modernity. At its feet, Thoth, the Egyptian god of writing and calculus whom the Greeks associated with astronomy and 'politics', watches over Foucault's Pendulum, which hangs in the middle of this central piece. But this god is an ambivalent figure: the god of writing and of calculus, he is also the registrar of the dead; he counts down the days of the living and weighs up the heart–soul of death. He is thus qualified from every point of view to preside over the death of Leviathan, of which he is at the same time both the instrument of power and the first 'bureaucrat of death' (*un fontionnaire de la mort*).

The extendable fabric which (dis)incarnates the head of Leviathan – a sort of stripped off epidermis – is nothing but a bare surface, where the grid, both sign and operator of rationality in the cupola, is submitted to the dynamicizing and dynamiting of its geometry. The whole of the central apparatus is suspended at eight points from the eye of the cupola (by analogy with the octagonal structures of the edifice). Like everywhere else, it results from a system of equilibrium between the weights and counterweights of suspended masses, between the gravity to which they are submitted and the elasticity of the tissue which contains them. The disfigured cylindrical net, which constitutes a sort of 'dorsal fin' for the ensemble, comprises at its base four terminal prolongations in the form of weighted pockets, sinking to the ground, where they anchor it, divided up around the pendulum. The counterweight is assured by the hanging of four large pendentives that Neto calls 'drops', which descend halfway to the ground and whose weight overhead the visitor senses; while eight slim 'columns', on the contrary, run all the way to the ground which they are held just above or joined with (without settling on it). The body moving around the counter-installation experiences in a kinaesthetic manner the work of muscles tautened by the tensions this skeletal Leviathan undergoes from both above and below. It *participates* in this politically informed sensation *in situ*.

The decisive political stake of this apparatus is nothing less than the subversion of the art that Hobbes explicitly declares, in the introduction of his work, to 'create this great LEVIATHAN that is called COMMONWEALTH or STATE (in Latine CIVITAS)' ('Commonwealth', it will be recalled, is the English translation of *res publica*). In the optic of a constitutional reduction to the One, the art which stems from it bears the imperative of effectively producing a *public representation* of the body of the Republic, such that the multitude of subjects 'see' that they *constitute* its members, that the sovereign at its head is the bearer of the *most real image of Power*, capable of unifying the body of the people by representing all its members in a consenting organism, at peace with itself, which is nothing other than the 'State', the constitutional state. Such a representation can only *link or bind* its subjects together under the sovereign that they institute in a constitutive manner by defeating 'this other multitude which has no order, which is like a many-headed hydra' (*Leviathan*, VI, I).[12] Failing which, the Republican Contract which founds our democratic societies on Representation (nationally and in all the plasticity of the term) is unable to become effective. Magisterially analysed in all its visual strategies by Horst Bredekamp, this is what the frontispiece executed by Abraham Bosse for Leviathan teaches us.

> The gaze that men from everywhere direct towards the head of the colossus is directed back by its eyes to the observer, who embraces the ground-level view of the figures with back to us and is at the same time, at the level of the gaze of the sovereign, directly interpellated by it. The contradictory character of the body politic as the product of men subjected by the sovereign is already manifest in the exchange of looks between citizens, Leviathan and the observer.[13]

The common orientation of everyone towards the head of the sovereign proclaims the moment of contractual engagement of all, including the observer, who also *participates* in the apparatus, in this way verifying that representation is *tutela praesens*. 'It is only by its representative, that is to say, the sovereign, that the commonwealth is a person and has the capacity to do anything at all: the sovereign is the only legislator' (*Leviathan* XXVI). But again, as Bredekamp explains

> for conventions and laws to become controlled actions, words must be changed into bodies, and it is this mediating step that the image of Leviathan accomplishes … It [thus] becomes a powerful machine for definitions, a '*sovereign definer*'.[14]

One must understand that the contractual basis of the state *formally* founded on an egalitarian definition of citizens so as to suppress the state of nature (the perpetual war of the multitude maintained through a relative equality of forces) calls for the control of words as much as for the monopoly of violence. Relayed and represented by images which incorporate their sovereign majesty, the control of words is oriented towards 'the fact that we can command and understand commands'; it is the 'greatest benefit of speech' *(De Homine* X, *3*), the exercise of which requires 'perspicuous words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity' (*Leviathan*, V).[15] Hence the *representation* of Leviathan on the frontispiece of Hobbes's book is the centre of gravity of images because it is the exclusive sign of the *sovereignty* of the state related to the *right of representation*. We have seen one avatar of this sign in the structure of the cupola of the Pantheon that Neto literally tears up, by opposing to its 'regime of representation' something quite other than an aesthetic regime of the image, in Jacques Rancière's sense.

In this process, Neto also attacks the political body of Leviathan understood as an *Artificial Man*, in its modern constitution. In theory it is indifferent whether the representative is a monarch or a representative assembly – because it is the *representative* character of the sovereign, depositary of the 'personality of the republic', which founds absolute sovereignty on an egalitarian 'republican' contract of all with all (*inter pares*). Hence sovereignty is in truth the axiomatic corollary of representation (the *pact of representation*). Leviathan is thus the symbol of a *homo artificialis*, *automaton* or *machine*, whose power can only obey the principled rationality which created it in the name of the people (*Rex est populus*), whilst each individual recognizes him- or herself as the *author* of the acts and judgements of this *actor*, this sovereign representative that every individual institutes. In this way it is verified that the power of the legally represented 'subject' has no other condition of reality than the subjectivation of a power which finds here its first modern 'contractual' form, where right does not exist without *subjection* to a *possessive market society* (according to the expression proposed by Macpherson for the 'congruence of sovereignty and market society').[16] The legal-contractual representation which founds its own absolute political validity is in effect constitutive of this new notion which has the name POWER. Hobbes is, in this sense, both the 'founder of liberalism' and the 'Marx of the bourgeoisie' (Strauss, for example, explains that Hobbes is the 'father of Modernity', whilst Tonnies reminds us of the importance of 'Hobbes's theorem', mediated by Rousseau, for the constitutional beginnings of the

French Revolution). To speak like Hegel, it is that in Hobbes, the 'true idea is there'.

In *We Have Never Been Modern* – whose influence on his installation Neto acknowledged – Bruno Latour summarizes the situation:

> Hobbes invents the naked calculating citizen, whose rights are limited to possessing and to being represented by the artificial construction of the Sovereign. He also creates the language according to which Power equals Knowledge, an equation which is at the root of the entire modern Realpolitik.[17]

This is announced by the first phrases of *Leviathan*, grounding in the theory of art the mechanical creation of a political, or artistico-technological, android – which presides over the birth of modern political philosophy as a *science of submission* rationally founded on a calculus of interests (*philosophia civilis*).[18] It is the Order that is so defined, by the universalization of the calculus, and not Justice – if not the *market concept of justice*[19] – which makes the multitude a single body submitted to the will of one alone. The sovereign governs with unlimited power in the name of all those he represents, who in return *equally* authorize the 'public person' to decide and to act in its place. Failing this, there would only be an aggregate totality, a *multitudo dissoluta*, because it is via the head of the sovereign, who personifies the *common*-will thus represented, that the political Body lives and moves. In this way the civil 'unity' of the people, the people 'united in one person … called a COMMONWEALTH' (*Leviathan* XVII), strictly correlated with the existence of the state, is substituted for the 'dissolute' multiplicity of the multitude, a sort of *Moby Dick* avant la lettre.[20] (It follows that: 'that men distinguish not enough between a People and a Multitude... lead[s] to the dissolution of Government' *De Cive* XII 8.) Via this short circuit (which is also the shortest circuit) between aesthetics and politics, Operation Neto stages a sort of critical and clinical diagnosis of representation, in every sense of the term, aiming at an *expansive disorganization* of the multitude living under the republican regime of contractual representation, a regime for which the Pantheon is the temple as much *ex nostro abritrio* as *more geometrico*.

The disorganization that affects the centre of Leviathan extends out to the other members of its body so as to invest the *multitudo dissoluta* with a radical vital recomposition. If this is the more properly affirmative component of Operation Neto taking place alongside the critical moment that was necessitated by the political take on the Pantheon, both are part of the same lesson in political anatomy.

Hand–brain

It starts up again from the top of the reticulated cylindrical shape. The fabric of this volume, in a tension that runs counter to its vertical fall, is stretched towards the exterior in four long forking branches. At their extremities, these four forks are then fixed on to the two 'arms' forming extensions towards the centre of the members of Leviathan occupying the four lateral axes of the Pantheon. The ends of these forking branches fix these arms across the fabric which is stretched under the weight of their endings. They form a sort of suture between the heterogeneous parts of the body of Leviathan. Although there are similarities between them, and internal symmetries, each one of these developed branches of the 'installation' is different from the others and is assembled in a fashion that is both 'vital' and inorganic. Neto

calls this heterogeneous body a 'humanoid monster' and adds that 'in this highly masculine building it is a work of highly feminine contrast'. Rather than this contrast – the polarities of which could be inverted or associated within the terms of the opposition – a new ambivalence may be pointed out, related to the figure of Thoth. The statue which is on guard at the foot of Foucault's Pendulum isn't really Thoth (figured with the head of an ibis or a dog or a cynocephalus) – and in any case, the identity of the gods of the Egyptians is no less variable than their names. Rather, it is a copy of Bastet (or Bast or Ubasti), the cat-goddess, the peaceful avatar of a lion-goddess. Bastet has been

considered most notably as the protector of the home and of motherhood, and associated with the joy of music and dancing, those arts which Neto associates with the Brazilian life experience, the *vivência brasilieira* of his work.

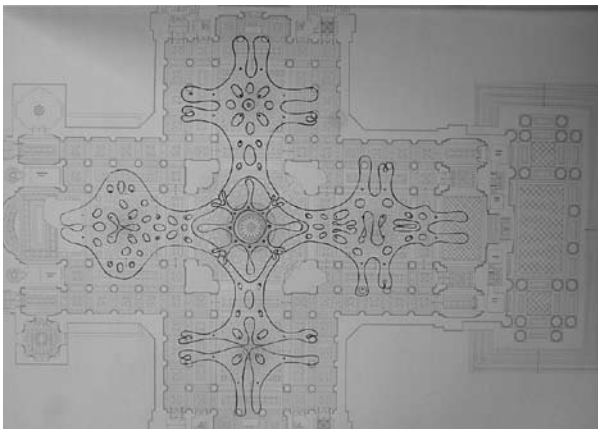
Nothing is positively figured outside of the 'representation' aimed at by the defection whose object it is and which is also that of the image whose aesthetic form is as if devoured by the omnipresent apparatus *which is the whole of what one perceives*. It is experienced corporeally, in a kinaesthetic fashion, as a sensational bloc of forces put into continuous variation. Thus, in the watering of the fabric filtering the light, it is not the optical effect which matters for itself, but the degree of tension of the elastic tissue-skin that results from the reciprocal, quantitative-energetic play of all forces, linking up step by step. If something akin to 'organs' appears – Neto talks of a head, stomach, arms, fingers and even alludes to sexual organs – they only function as pure intensities which accumulate in pockets or flow in a 'jet of energy' playing on the 'fluid aspect of matter'.[21] Forms here don't assume any function: they are the contingent result of a static energy (i.e. one that is frozen, *suspended*). This static energy itself results from the technically highly complex process by which the fabric, cut out in inert forms on the ground, is raised and stretched in such a way as to distribute both matter and the tensions of which it is susceptible so as to balance out the weights. Things only move now by a gentle, accidental oscillation incorporating the gradient of freedom belonging to the system. This is not without producing a rhizome-effect in the intensive–extensive continuum thus projected.[22] Tensions here function directly in an unformed matter, a matter-flux only presenting degrees of intensity, resistance, conductivity and stretching which condition its extension in space and which the ambulant relaunches kinaesthetically on his or her own body. Extension itself becomes the result of a fusional multiplicity whose 'quality' is the contraction, the *intension* of the quantity liberated by the *dissolution* of constant form as a *state function*, to the profit of dynamic differences which bring into relation the most diverse latitudes and longitudes, the most varied of speeds and slownesses. The organizing form of matter is in this way *suspended* by the putting into tension of the materials-forces, whose local results mobilize the ensemble of 'trajects'. *To suspend* is to struggle *with* the universal gravity which *striates* homogeneous space through 'the verticals of gravity, the distribution of matter into parallel layers, the lamellar and laminar movement of flows' summarized by Deleuze and Guattari as 'the space of *pillars*'.[23] But to suspend is equally to stop the regulated exercise of the organs (as forms subjected by the head) of the Leviathan-Body, and the relation that every human organism is supposed to maintain, using its head, with metric space in general. The organism's machinic enslavement to the abstract form of space-measure is part of the domain of Thoth. In this way Operation Neto is as much the putting to work as it is the result of a confrontation between two types of science or two modes of scientific operation. On the one hand, a science of the state, originally founded on the hylomorphic articulation matter/form and Euclidian geometry (the Pantheon, in which Foucault's Pendulum was located, is an avatar of the generalized rationalization of the world which stemmed from it). On the other hand, a nomad science, originally founded on Archimedean geometry and the physics of the ancient Greek atomists. It is the latter's turbulent and hydraulic models which are in a way revived by the materials-forces in heterogenesis resulting from the accidents which affect the members of *Leviathan Toth* submitted to gravity. For his part, Neto opposes Euclidian geometry to Riemannian geometry, the kind 'that addresses curves on minimal surfaces'.

But in the first place it will have been necessary to *skin* the Leviathan-Body *because organs stick to the skin before depending on 'this organic organization of organs that is called the organism*', from which the system of judgement of the Leviathan-God extracts a work that is useful 'to the *prosperity* and the *wealth* of all particular members' on which the whole 'force' of Leviathan rests (*Leviathan*, Introduction). The 'skin' here, which Neto specifies is neither the envelope

nor the outgrowing of any 'flesh', is this *rising to the surface* of the organs liberated by the emptying out of the Corpus-Socius. This emptying out will have made a 'body without organs' surge up from and in the disaffected space of the Pantheon-Leviathan (the expression 'body without organs' may be found in Neto[24]), bearing with it an entirely different social physics to that of 'work'. The body of the spectator is forced to displace itself incessantly, to wander around so as to see and take in the excess of what it sees. The body is forced to *perceive* the space of the experiment within which it is caught and against which collision incessantly menaces, at the very moment that the 'hybrid element' is stretched out overhead like a skeletal star of skin. In this way, the spectator is subjected to the experience of the Body without Organs of Space itself, the intensive *Spatium* rather than *Extensio*, in the haptic destruction of the optic of power, resulting from the fluidification of space by mass. This itinerant geography, which decentres every point of view in the continuous variation of orientations of a generalized elasticity, puts us in movement, in 'becoming'. We ambulate in the smooth space of a *Nonument* (in the words of Gordon Matta-Clark) that only exists in the critical and clinical confrontation with the 'historical' striated space of the Monument, whose *sensible matter* has thus been awoken. This sensible matter propagates here like a counter-image liberating itself energetically from the task of *imaging* because it projects a new type of reality. An infra- and supra-organic reality, which draws its 'energy' as much from the space of virtualities liberated by the concrete physics of the power that acts with the forces internal to gravity as from the forces of the *multitudo dissoluta* caught up in and liberated from the monumental history of the Leviathan that it *invaginates*. It is by means of this body without organs, which is *in itself* a 'body without image',[25] that Neto can give body *for us*, in a certain *Delirium Ambulatorium*, to the (rhizomatic and bioenergetic) subversion of the image of the state-machine, the *state-form* such as it is inscribed on the pediment of the Pantheon sculpted by David d'Angers, where Nation appears between Liberty and History.

Although Neto could not have conceived as complex a work as this without the support of an overall plan superposed on the ground and elevation plan of the Pantheon, the very course of the operation made this plan itself undergo a heterogenesis such that the result doesn't correspond to any prior image. Guided by this plan, together with a rough sketch and the help of a thread of red velour, Neto sized up and marked out the openings and multiple sections of fabric on the folded layers of material destined to become the diverse members of this inorganic body. The fabric was then cut out following this thread and sewn together before being filled with various substances (polystyrene, sand, lavender). *Cut out/sew in*. Confronted with the work, the plan appears as a graphical formalization, an optical blueprint of an operation which escapes it because it is of an entirely different nature. This supple line was drawn/weighed up/posed by what Neto magnificently calls a 'hand-brain'; it slipped between the fingers, was 'worked' by the displacement of the body, applied by gravity – all operations that transform an inert trace on paper into a living, fluid line, fluctuating according to the artist's intimate dance with all the parameters – both present and virtual. Because there is a 'pressure of virtuality which disquiets the image that is already available to make space for a new dimension' opened up by a gesture which 'is not a simple spatial displacement: it decides, liberates and proposes a new modality of "moving"' (as affirmed by Gilles Châtelet to explain how the *virtual requires the gesture*).[26] And the artist could only evaluate kinaesthetically the degree of elasticity of the Lycra at the moment he laid down his visually static but virtually dynamic line. In this regard, nothing is more striking than the distance between the sketched plan on the ground – right and proper, with the 'fine' curves and symmetries of its biomorphic and pseudo-organic regularity – and the body which takes on a life of its own in suspension in space. It is a life which is elastic as much as rhizomatic, so much does the plasticity of mass affirm here its irreducible difference from extension (*Extensio*), in suspension in space submitted to resistance – that is to say, to speak like Leibniz, *action and passion*. No direct deduction from the plan to the body can be made at all.

In the erection of the diverse members of the body ('the experience begins', says Neto),[27] gravity henceforth becomes the fundamental agent to which all the virtualities of both space and the volume of the cut and sewn material forms are subjected *by force*, giving



rise to continuous processes of transformation. In the course of this operation, which is carried out slowly, the relationship between the different tensions and the equilibrium between weights and counterweights become the object of multiple adjustments, engendering highly sensible singularities that animate the energetic materiality thus put in motion. The *modulation* of fluid matter into 'pockets', 'tubes' or 'pipes' in and by this immense living abstract machine clearly marks here the rupture with a hylomorphic scheme. Simondon has shown that this hylomorphic scheme was in the first place and above all informed by a social representation of work where

> form corresponds to what the man in charge has himself thought and which he must express in a positive manner when he gives his orders … to those who will manipulate matter; it is the very content of this order, that by which he governs …; it is in the content of the order that the indication of matter is indeterminate whilst form is logical and expressible determination.

He concludes that it is through the same social conditioning that 'the mind is distinguished from the body in the same way as the citizen from the living human being'.[28] From the point of view of whoever accomplishes the material operation, the idea according to which 'modulating is moulding' a flowing matter that can only be *followed* 'in a continuous and perpetually variable manner' expresses a total deconditioning which is as much physical as it is social. It is a *temporal modulation* at the heart of which what is produced becomes an *event*, the event of an active force which affects matter with a *baroque* expression (Deleuze's definition of mannerism is rediscovered in Simondon's modulation).[29] Or rather a matter of expression that is *neo-baroque* in its manner of raising its deformations to the state of tense fluxes which make classical-modern reason[30] radically diverge and whose operational machination appeals to an intuition in act as much as to an extension of its act, which redefines the artist as an *artisan* and the artisan as *the itinerant, the ambulant*.[31]

One may recall that the operation began well before the setting up of the installation, when Neto bundled up the Lycra in his workshop in Rio (the workshop of a couturier rather than the studio of an artist) before laying it out in the Pantheon, as he says, like 'a travelling salesman, a street vendor', a *camelot* carioca. These *camelots* are the 'natural' inhabitants of the favelas and champions of the 'informal' economy which informs and deforms the landscape of Rio, deployed in an 'unplanned order'. They are, Franck Leibovici summarizes, 'the social equivalent of the favelas, which are themselves the urban equivalent of *bromeliae* growing all the way down the trunks of palm trees'.[32] It is also this 'tropical forest' that in a sort of environmental mutualism Neto makes grow (processually, not iconically) right in the middle of the Pantheon, as it grows all over Rio, with the favelas whose physical and human geography clings to hillsides. If *natural* or, more broadly – Foucault's Pendulum obliges – *cosmic* mutualism (as Brazilians also say, à la Deleuze) has some paradigmatic (or *cosmopolitical*) relevance here, Operation Neto evidently shows that it is on condition of understanding environmental mutualism in a strictly constructivist sense – in the words of Oiticica, 'anti-naturalist' and 'multi-transformable'. As Latour puts it definitively, between 'nature' and 'society', 'if we are constructivist in one instance, then we have to be constructivist for both'.[33]

As to the whiteness of the material Neto unpacks in the Pantheon before he cuts it up, this ready-made

colour immanent to an industrial-synthetic material, which confronts us strangely with the 'white without form' denounced by Hegel in the Preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, is directly incorporated into the environmental value of the installation. It works away haptically in the light under the effect of the tensions which the Lycra undergoes, but in the manner of *a bodily restraint* (*une contrainte par corps*) which violates and blinds the optical reception of light in the 'total activity of the eye'.[34] (Im-penetrable, *white without form* is *a tangible white* forbidding any 'division of retinal activity', *gathered, crushed, forbidden, deranged* in the ready-made white.) It is worth recalling here that Oiticica conceived, even hallucinated, Malevich's *White on White* as 'a necessary step in which the 'plastic arts' shed their privileges BY WHITENING THEMSELVES SO AS TO BECOME SKIN/BODY/AIR'. It is exactly the 'nonumental' components that Neto utilizes which he comes back to in the text presenting *Leviathan Toth*, specifying their tensive or intensive values so as to define the mutualism of his apparatus – giving a meaning to what he calls the 'ethic of action' (*a ética da açào*).[35] There comes a moment when, as he writes,

> the touching, the intimate relation, the spatial limit between skin and matter, solid in its essence but liquid in its spherical envelope, which adjusts to every movement like the sand which flows through the neck of an hourglass, whose fluid mass defines the body of the work, are intensified in ascension … Like mutualism … in a tropical forest …, everything is reorganized in this space of passage, of tensions, volume adapts and forms itself again here and there in a dance of calculations and chance.[36]

Translated by Andrew Goffey

Notes

1. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*,, Penn State University Press, University Park PA, 2004.
2. Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, Verso, London, 2007.
3. The French *chaînage* has been variously rendered here as 'chaining together', 'chain' or 'linking' [*trans*.].
4. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Continuum, London, 2003, p. 100.
5. Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, p. 82.
6. Félix Guattari, 'Echaffaudages Sémiotiques', *Révolution Moléculaire*, Encres, Paris, 1977.
7. The author prefers to render *agencement* by 'agency' wherever possible, in contrast to its standard rendering as 'assemblage' [*trans*.].
8. Helio Oiticica, 'Notes sur le READY CONSTRUCTIBLE' 1978, *Helio Hoiticica* catalogue, Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1992, p. 200.
9. Mona Ozouf, 'Le Panthéon: L'École normale des morts', in *Les lieux de la mémoire,* ed. P. Nora, Gallimard, Paris, 1997, p. 155.
10. Neto told me that he had wanted to introduce a principle of variation that accorded with his own 'operation' on Leviathan. I therefore respect the spelling *Toth* where it is a question of the title of the work and use the normal spelling for the figure of the Egyptian God.
11. On the 'powerful non-organic life' in its relation to the body without organs, see Deleuze, *Francis Bacon,* pp. 46–7.
12. The citation is from the Sorbières translation of Hobbes, *De Cive*.
13. Horst Bredekamp, *Strategies visuelles de Thomas Hobbes*, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris, 2003, p. 9.
14. Ibid., pp. 128–9.
15. From which it can be verified that an analytic definition of philosophy cannot work without its a priori being conditioned by political information. Hobbes appears here as the proto-founder of linguistically defined analytic philosophy.
16. C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1962, p. 95.
17. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2006, p. 26.
18. *Philosophia civilis*, which, if we are to believe Hobbes in the epistle dedicatory of *De Corpore*, '[is] no older than [his] book *De Cive*'. Its modernity is thus inscribed in the wake of the scientific revolution of Copernicus and Galileo (to which Hobbes adds the name of Harvey, the principal physician to King James and King Charles).
19. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, p. 86.
20. Which one must take literally: Mob = the dangerous mass and Dick = the devil.
21. According to the declarations made by Neto in the video accompanying his installation.
22. 'the final global result [is] synchronized without a central agency', Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minnesota University Press, Minnesota, 1987, p. 19.
23. Ibid., p. 408; emphasis added.
24. In the catalogue, Ernesto Neto, *Leviathan Toth*, *Festival d'Automne*, Éditions du Regard, Paris, 2006, p. 35.
25. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley et al., Athlone, London, 1984, p. 9.
26. Gilles Châtelet *Les enjeux du mobile*, Seuil, Paris, 1993, pp. 32–3.
27. Neto, *Leviathan Toth*, p. 35.
28. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*, PUF, Paris, 1995, p. 49.
29. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Athlone, London, 1993, p. 19.
30. Because the Baroque is 'the ultimate attempt to reconstitute a classical reason', ibid., p. 81.
31. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 409.
32. Franck Leibovici in Neto, *Leviathan Toth*, pp. 29–30.
33. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 95.
34. 'The sensation of white or of light, that is to say the total activity of the eye', writes Schopenhauer in his letter to Goethe, 11 November 1815, when he tries to push his master's anti-Newtonism to its final physiological limit. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Textes sur la vue et sur les couleurs*, Vrin, Paris, 1986, p. 125
35. In an interview given in the review *Artes & Ensaios*, 16 July 2008, UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro, 2008, p. 16.
36. Ibid., p. 53.

This is not my body

Elisabeth Lebovici

> Indeed there are not two genders, there is only one, the feminine, the 'masculine' not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine but the general.[1]

These two sentences, written by Monique Wittig in 1983, pronounce a regime of visibility and invisibility for the feminine in language. They can also be applied to the image. They signal, to me, one of the major shifts, or even one of the major 'kicks', that women artists have delivered against the classical thinking of visibility and invisibility in the iconic image, even before second-wave feminism began to redefine the very notion of the 'canon'.[2] Women artists have been undoing the autonomy and the universality of the aesthetic image, by developing their art, not only for the production of effects in signification or communication, but as a form of agency.

Difference and the 'neighbourhood' of the sexes

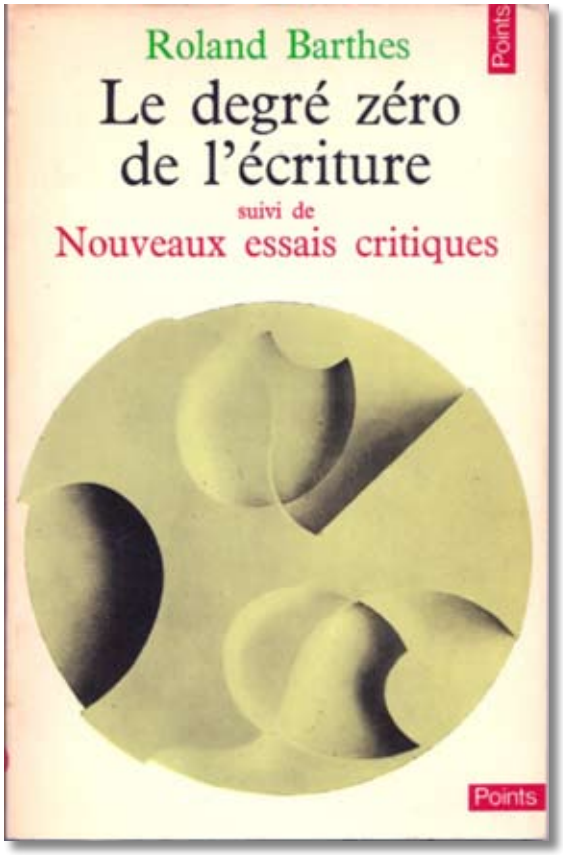
Let's exchange, for a moment, visibility for invisibility. The French 1979 paperback edition of Roland Barthes's *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* features on the front an artwork which generally goes unnoticed. Inside one finds a caption which quite imprecisely says: 'Painted relief by Sophie Taeuber-Arp, 1938.' A woman artist is in the foreground but stays more or less invisible.

Yve-Alain Bois's essay 'Sophie Taeuber-Arp Against Greatness' discussing her depictions of white shapes in relief, which figure in the catalogue of the exhibition: *Inside the Visible (an elliptical traverse of 20th century art, in of and from the feminine)* notes the near invisibility of the artist, this 'maker of works as beautiful and intelligent as *Relief rectangulaire, Cercles Découpés* or *Cônes surgissants* with its cut out background and menacingly protruding elements.'[3] Yet Sophie Taeuber (1889–1943) went unnoticed for almost fifty years. This didn't happen to Hans Arp, an artist who always admitted he owed her much. They lived together. But there was more to this artistic couple. There was a common wish for anonymity, a refusal to be named as singular authors. Their work in common culminated in a threesome with producer Theo Van Doesburg in the painted decoration of L'Aubette in Strasbourg, which eventually added to the invisibility of this woman artist in art history.

Sophie Taeuber has a much more interesting œuvre than this account of her life as a victim of patriarchy suggests. She is one of the most compelling artists of the twentieth century, partly because she extended her production into multiple fields, encompassing dance and performance, puppet theatre, textile design – the so-called 'feminine' disciplines; although Hans made textiles and embroidery, too. She was commissioned to design for a gallery, an office, villas and apartments, and of course, for the entertainment complex of L'Aubette, but she also supervised the construction of the couple's home and studios in Clamart-Meudon. She involved herself in teaching, in arts counselling, in journalism as an editor of the magazine *Plastique*, and she was the first woman artist to be taken into account at the Black Mountain College. She also provided for cultural exchange between France and Poland and visited herself the avant-garde museum Sztuki in Lodz. The exchange of roles seems to have happened on many occasions in the activities of the couple.

In the *Tondo* relief on the cover of *Le Degré zéro*, neither painting nor sculpture, which looks like a maquette as well as a finished work – a far more interesting ambiguity than with the first one – the questions go back and forth from contiguity to continuity: a paradox with which Sophie plays. She works with several layers, irregular portions of ellipses and discs, which suggest a life of their own, a rotation of their own, and a common displacement. As Yve-Alain Bois suggests, 'these works are highly compositional, but the composition itself is given as transient'.[4] This implies vocabularies other than formal ones. The pairs 'continuity/contiguity' and 'compositional/transient' are at work and play a role in undoing the paradigm of sexual difference.

The difference between the sexes was one of the most passionately discussed issues of the twentieth century. In the late 1990s, notably in France, with debates on gay marriage and homosexual kinship, it was made into a principle transcending all other dualism in



Western thought. Even some non-religious 'experts' of the Left raised their voices in order to maintain the 'Symbolic Order', invoking Jacques Lacan as well as Claude Lévi-Strauss, as the Names of the Fathers. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship (de la parenté)* became dogma. The 'specialists' were to talk as social scientists, as anthropologists, like Françoise Héritier, as psychoanalysts, like Julia Kristeva, or as philosophers, like Sylviane Agacinski, when they raised their voices against what they would call a rupture with the Law. Françoise Héritier, for instance, as a (famous) anthropologist, asserted that sexual difference

> is at the ground of the creation of the fundamental opposition that enables us to think. For thinking is first to classify, to classify is first to discriminate, and the fundamental discrimination is based on the 'difference des sexes'. This is an irreducible fact: one cannot argue that these differences don't exist; they are impassable 'end stops' of thought, as day and night. Our modes of thinking and our social organizations are thus based on the principal observation of the difference between the sexes.[5]

This discourse was countered by feminist anthropologists and psychoanalysts, such as Sabine Prokhoris, who in her book *Le Sexe prescrit*, challenges the very notion of sexual difference as 'observed': 'a difference isn't some thing but a way within other possible manners, to interpret, to treat, the relation and thus the discrepancy between things observed'.[6] Therefore, she writes, why not observe it through the effects of resemblance or neighbourhood, for instance? That Sophie and Hans thrived collaboratively making or exchanging collages, textile designs, wood sculpture, or drawing 'with four hands', constitutes for me a good example of this *voisinage*; not in marital life, but in collaborative works. In the series of *Duo Collages*, for instance, they worked together towards dissolving the singular notion of a sexed subject.

This is not my body

Sophie Taeuber and Hans Arp were dancers, too. As artists, they exemplified an intriguing possibility that bounced back and forth during the twentieth century, weaving a strong relationship of *voisinage* between the body and abstraction. As Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck put it: 'In that period as we danced, sang and recited night after night, abstract art was tantamount to absolute honour.'

Sophie Taeuber's work embodies this sense of neighbourhood: in 1916, in her hometown of Zurich, she enrolled in a course in artistic expressive dance with choreographer Rudolph Laban, who had arrived from Germany. There, she became friends with dancers such as Mary Wigman, who would perform at the Dadaist soirées of the Cabaret Voltaire (under the disgraceful sobriquet 'Labanese girls'). At the opening

of the Galerie Dada in 1917, Sophie Taeuber performed with a rectangular mask which covered her face, and wore over her arms tubes of cardboard, which ended in mechanical pincers for fingers (left). These determined a limited movement, rejecting mimetic gestures. In the journal *Dada*, one reads: 'Miss Sophie Taeuber. Delirious bizarreness in the spider of a hand vibrates rhythm rapidly ascending to the paroxism of a beautiful capricious mocking dementia.' Her dances were driven by bodily reflex reactions, without preconceived scores, and stimulated by the noise of a gong, which motivates not only the muscles but also the nerves, not only movement but fragmentation. Hugo Ball recounts:

> It was a dance full of peaks and edges, full of a glare, of a body torn in pieces. Each gesture is broken in a hundred – sharp, bright, pointed. To the hypersensitive nervous system, the silliness of perspective, of lighting, of atmosphere opens the way to a spiritual fun, to an ironic glose; her creations are full of the grotesque and ravishing spirit of fables. Her body has a feminine intelligence and enriches the world at each new dance.[7]

Here the body is described with more intensity than the figure: a kind of continuous discontinuity challenges binary divisions between mental and physical, poetry and performance, machine and human. But, on the other hand, Sophie also wears a mask, so that she isn't recognized as 'Ms Sophie Taeuber', the teacher at the Zurich School of Applied Arts. This tension between visibility and invisibility in the image is, therefore, also driven by her status as a woman, which constrains her public appearance.

This tension can also be recognized as a paradox, of the kind that Joan Wallach Scott has historicized under the title 'Only Paradoxes to Offer', in order to consider the relations between 'the feminine' and 'the general', between different feminisms and universalism, equality and difference. Each time that feminists argued for political rights in the context of liberal democracy, she argues, they have faced an impossible choice. On the one hand, they have insisted that the differences between men and women are irrelevant for citizenship. On the other hand, by the fact that they acted on behalf of women, they have reintroduced the very idea of difference they sought to eliminate. This paradox – the need both to accept and to refuse sexual difference in the public sphere – has been the constitutive condition of the long struggle by women to gain the right of citizenship. This paradox may equally be used in our reflections on the work of women artists.

As has repeatedly been written, the 'body' appears as a signifier for 'women' in Western discourse. Yet

the shortcut taken by women artists in engaging their body – the bodies they have at hand – to make art never appears as essentialist. The shortcut of the body is used to activate and reactivate forces, to display what a body can do or where it can go, as well its alienation, its obstacles. The notion of a shortcut can also be used to handle the way women have quickly adapted to and adopted 'new technologies' in art making: photo, video, cyberfeminist… These are media which you learn without having to go through the traditional master–apprentice relation, and many women have been passing on their knowledge to others. The current wave of 're-enactments' of so-called historical performances of the 1970s can also be understood in terms of embodiment, interweaving representation and materiality. And there is again a shortcut to be acknowledged here between activist use and aesthetic use, even if today all these means are absorbed into exhibition, museum or gallery spectacles.

Although she only performed as a dancer for a few years, Sophie Taeuber imbued all of her work with dance: not only in the realization of L'Aubette, the restaurant, cinema, bar, tearoom, nightclub leisure complex in Strasbourg (see over), but also in her *Line drawings* (1940–43), which are like performative trajectories. Like the *Dance Diagrams* (1962) by Andy

Warhol, they are driven from the floor to the wall, still branding the work as horizontal choreographies that make concrete – or act as quotations of – the bodily gestures.

The irruption of gendered bodies by women artists who stepped into the world as art-activists has moved away from the social norms regarding sex. For since the 'female sex' does not imply a *reciprocal* 'male sex', and as sex can be understood as a political and cultural interpretation of the body, women become ontologically suffused with sex: they are their sex, and reciprocally, sex is necessarily feminine. So the use of the body by women artists reclaiming their own images raises issues in sexual politics that go way beyond images.

Smashing the glass bubble

In New York at the beginning of the 1960s, Louise Bourgeois short-circuited this concern by smashing 'the glass bubble that encapsulated sculpture in a world of illusion, representation, idealization'[8] and also in the general language of art. In her work of the time, the encounter implied going face to face with the reality of the body, without metaphor – body as egg, body as cylinder. Breasts, anuses, mouths, penises, faeces appear as 'desiring machines' shaking the economy of visual representation.

Not very far away in place and time – New York, the 1960s – at the Judson Dance Theater, in a medium traditionally disdained as minor art, artists of all types used the body as a medium to affirm new intellectual possibilities, smashing the hegemony of mind over flesh. As Yvonne Rainer, one of the Theater's main protagonists, put it: *The Mind is a Muscle*.[9]

Before joining the workshops of the Judson Dance Theater, Carolee Schneemann had been close to the scene surrounding Happenings and Assemblage in New York. *Eye Body* (1963), one of her first actions (though only for the purpose of producing photographs), features her actual body combined in the work as 'integral material'. In the repertory of notes and pictures in which this was theorized in 1979, in *More Than Meat Joy*.[10] one can read how in 1962–63, she foresaw the development of her artwork into performance situations, which already struck her as 'too much'. This excess is not only in the situation but also in its duration and space, transferred to the audience, from the optical to the physical, from passivity to activity:

> In this way the audience is actually *visually* more *passive* than when confronting a work which requires *projective vision*. … During a theatre piece the audience may become more active *physically* than when viewing a painting or assemblage; their physical reactions will tend to manifest *actual* scale – relating to motions, mobilities the body does make in a *specific* environment. They enlarge their kinaesthetic field of participation; their attention is required by a varied span of actions, some of which may threaten to encroach on the integrity of their position in space. Before they can 'reason', they may find their bodies performing on the basis of immediate visual circumstances.[11]

Schneemann is looking here for something that has the capacity to undo the boundaries of the self in the face of an overwhelming sense of pleasure, indicating the presence of an experience that exceeds the limits of an individual's discursive position.

In its beginnings, as narrated by dance theorist Sally Banes, the strongest concern at the Judson Dance Theater was the notion of 'letting go', as in Yvonne Rainer and Charles Ross's *Room Service*, an open-ended game of 'follow the leader'; or in Carolee Schneemann's *Lateral Splay*, in which the dancers ran as hard and as fast they could until they collided with some obstacle, an 'explosive and linear refrain, a propulsive jet of movement cutting through the sequences of other works and materials of the environment'.[12] Special exercises were designed, such as performing blindfolded, keeping in constant contact by crawling 'over each other's arms, legs, bellies, back, in order to arrange a kind of organless, collective, body', as Lygia Clark too would propose

in her experimental environments. But the other side of breaking with technique was the suppression of energy, and relaxation of the body, negating the physical tension of usual ballet dancing.

Reworking sexual imagery was at the core of Schneemann's *Meat Joy*, combining semi-nudity (wearing underwear), bodies and matter, various textures and flesh. This event was first staged in Paris in 1964 at the Festival de la Libre Expression, at the invitation of the artist Jean-Jacques Lebel (before going to Dennison Hall in London and then to the Judson Church in New York). To Nouveau Réalisme's use of the walls, the signs and the debris of the city as aesthetic substance, Schneemann added her own particular incorporation of self-produced, sexualized and erotic imagary. This celebration of flesh as material required raw fish, chickens, sausages, wet paint, transparent plastic, rope, brushes and paper scrap as physical equivalences. Performed as a 'psychic and imagistic stream in which the layered elements mesh and gain intensity by the energy complement of the audience', it included certain constant parameters – sequence, light, sound, materials – but other components varied, such as attitude, gesture, duration, and the relationships between performers, including 'several women whose gestures develop from tactile, bodily relationships to individual men and a mass of meat slices'.[13]

Schneemann breaks out of the categorization by which her gender is reduced to an image. In directing every aspect of production – performing troupes and technicians, as well as lights, sound, props, electronic systems, costumes – and then physically moving in what she has created, Schneemann shifts from image-maker to creating her own self-images. Therein, perhaps, lies the 'obscenity' of which she has been accused. Acknowledging that Schneemann's performances and films are 'self-shot, without an external controlling eye', what is found most obscene in her work is the lack of an external gaze.[14]

This is even more controversial when the artist's body figures prominently as an erotic subject. Presented at the Cannes Film Festival in 1967, Schneemann's *Fuses*, a 22-minute film about sexual intimacy, explores sexuality from her perspective as both subject and film-maker. Combining photographic footage of sex between herself and her partner, with layers of paper, collages, painting and tinting applied directly to the celluloid frame, Schneemann provides a cinematic eroticism, challenging dominant representations of sex in cinema and proposing an alternative to patriarchal representations of sexuality. In her insistence that she is and can be both image and image maker, Schneemann is a forerunner both of performance art and new media installations, as well as of much contemporary feminist art as well.

In 1967, invited as a body that 'speaks louder than the word'[15] to the Roundhouse in London, for the 'Congress of the Dialectics of Liberation', organized by the Institute of Phenomenological Studies, with the participation of Gregory Bateson, David Cooper, Ronald Laing, Erving Goffmann, and Herbert Marcuse, among others, Schneemann encountered the hostility of the group, leading to the rejection and sabotage of her work. She would later identify the prejudice underlying this ostracism as resentment over the participation of a woman as 'a sort of unclassifiable physical extension'[16] which unleashed a profound somatophobia in philosophy's phallic economy. After all, what are these actions, performances and films, if not the reshaping of sculptural representation?

In the work of Carolee Schneemann, Yoko Ono, Ann Halprin, Yvonne Rainer, Meredith Monk, Atsuko Tanaka, Yahoi Kusama, Esther Ferrer, Jackie Raynal, Gina Pane, Valie Export or Lygia Clark (to refer only the works of the late 1960s) the body 'captures the image'. It will not appear again as a 'passive' medium – as inert matter, as Christian precedents have it – nor as mere 'facticity', anticipating some meaning, as if the body were alienated or indifferent to signification, and signification was disembodied consciousness. These women artists opened a field of visibilities that would

be claimed by feminism, in its 'second' wave, as it expanded into the 1970s.[17]

Incorporating gender

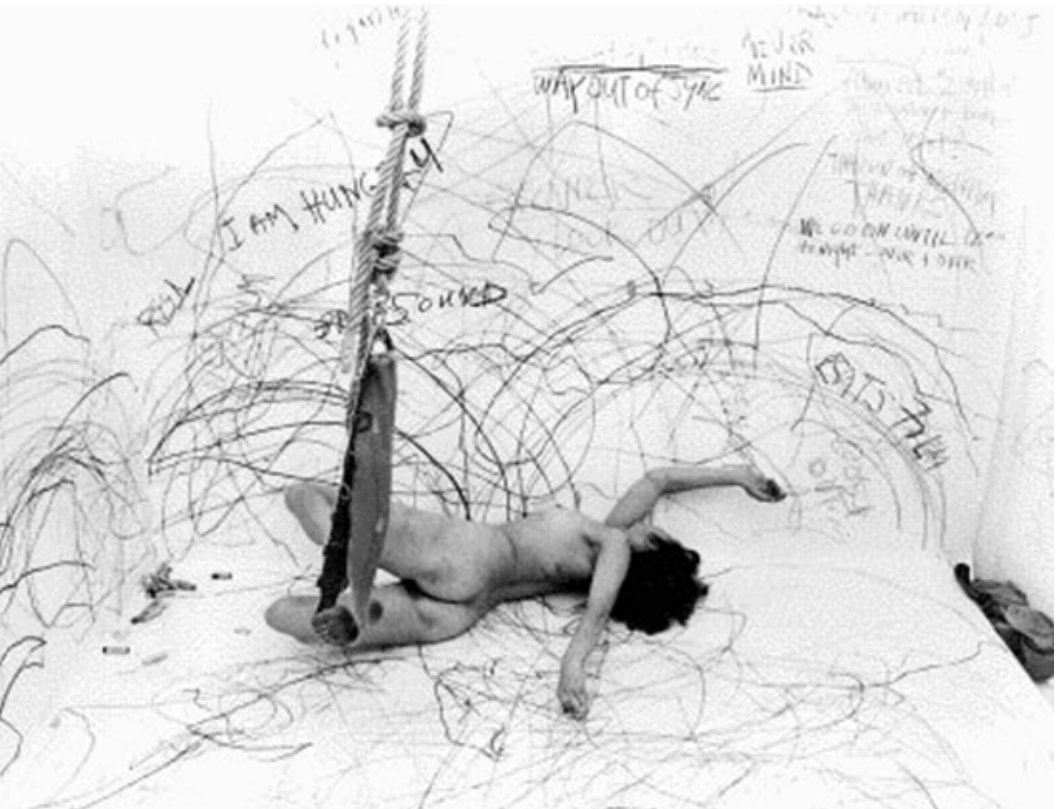
In the late 1980s, when the photographic self-portraits of Claude Cahun begun to re-emerge, and as they started to circulate in the early 1990s, the time was perfect for them to engage in renewed discussions of sex and gender. It is as if they came into existence as 'readymades' for discussion. Producing multiple images of gender that seemed outside both feminine and masculine norms, these self-portraits seemed to embody Joan Rivière's 'Masquerade of Femininity' (1929).

Cahun's self-images have circulated under the rubric of 'queer' theatricality, with a strong appeal to emerging theories of gender performance. Many noticed coincidences between the photographic works and theoretical writings of the 1980s, so that it now takes more of an effort to reconsider Claude Cahun in her own space and time than it does to reconsider her work in a postmodern context.[18] It is only after this initial reception that new readings of these self-portraits (which appeared publicly around thirty-five years after Cahun's death) began to re-envision a specific time and space for them. Paris between the wars appeared then as the site for a construction of a visual culture in which a network of women were able to emancipate themselves from the constraints of gender, and recognize themselves as part of a lesbian culture.

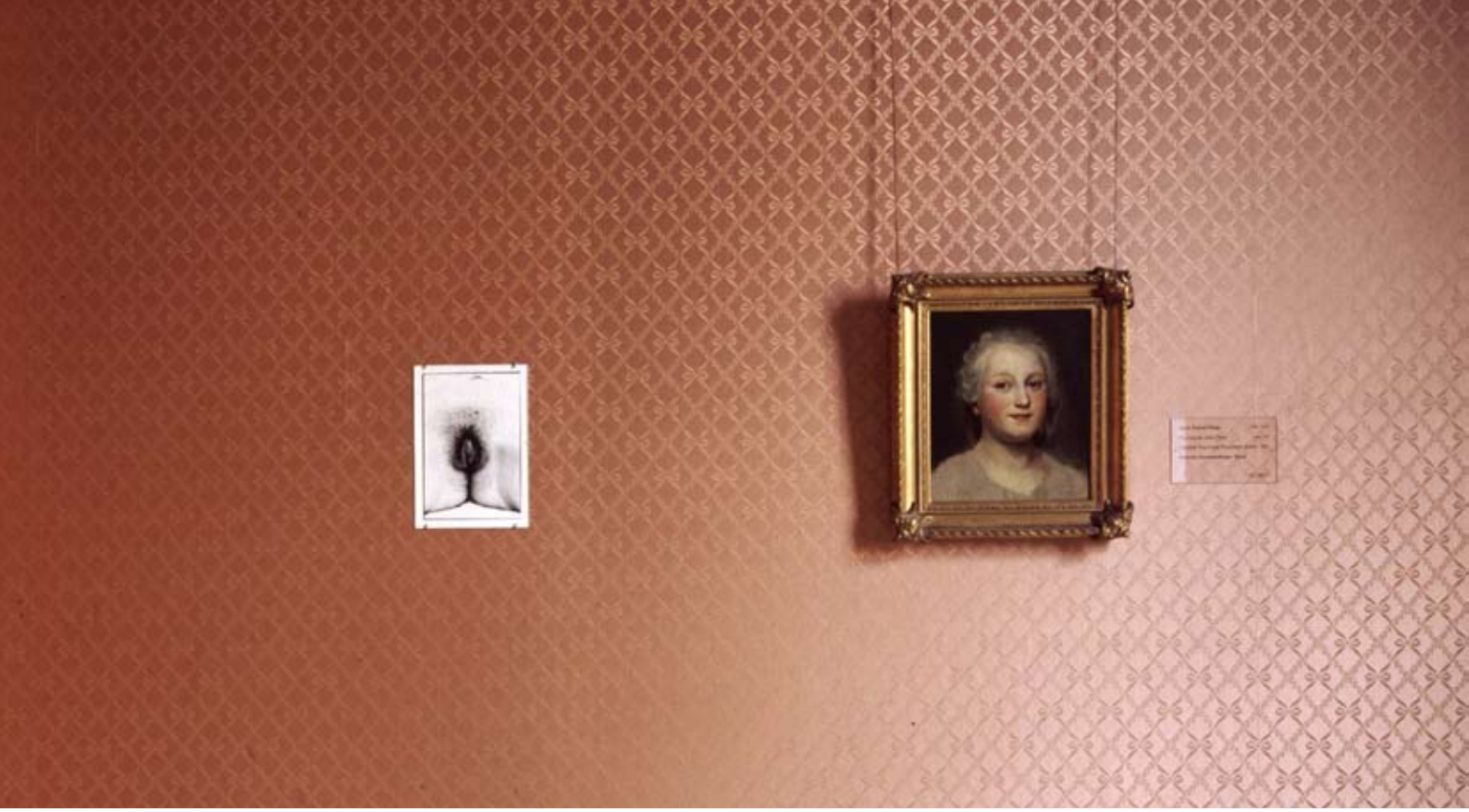
In Wittig's terms, a lesbian is not a woman. If 'woman' only exists as a term that stabilizes a binary opposition to 'man', and that relation is heterosexual, then refusing to appear as a woman is choosing to appear as lesbian.

So what is left, when the body, which had been 'rendered coherent through the category of sex, is disaggregated, rendered chaotic'?[18] Cahun's self-portraits do not just go against an inner truth of gender, they also scatter the very notion of self. A 'massacre' of the self is the object of both writing and image-making in the book *Aveux non Avenus* (*Avowals Unavowed*) produced in 1930 by Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore – the names being 'drag' identities for two women, lovers, partners, companions and co-authors. Cahun's text is intertwined with ten inserts by Marcel Moore, as cut-outs, disassembled and reassembled fragments and quotations from the self-portraits. Each of these montages revolves around vision but mostly plays on the 'I', the subject, and its relation to the 'eye', the eye and the lens which regard this 'I'. The coded language for the couple thus plays with the formation or deformation of a body in process, a 'becoming lesbian' as a collective body.[19] The 'I' of autobiography has been doubled and replayed by a twofold, collaborative 'You'. It is not only by chance that the collaborative formation in the production of Cahun's self-portraiture was foregrounded in the late 1990s, precisely at the time when the experts of the 'Symbolic Order' made their case for sexual difference. In the case of Cahun and Moore, it was not the old story of an artist using assistants, but a lifelong game between two companions, so that Claude Cahun's name is now put together with that of Marcel Moore, as a twofold artist. The success of today's cooperative or socially engaged artistic identities should thus be considered in the context of resistance and counteraction to the transcendent differnece between the sexes (*difference des sexes*).

Display of gender/gender as display



As an activist, in 1992 Zoe Leonard made a poster of a woman's vagina which read: 'Read my lips before they are sealed'. At Documenta 9, the same year, Leonard chose to exhibit, without the traditional devices (framing, matting, protective glass, etc.), black-and-white photos of female genitalia. Each picture was a kind of cut-out in the style of traditional museography, with its wallpaper decor and its framed pictures representing 'women', or rather



an essentialized woman, painted more or less in the nude. By proposing a close-up shot of particular female genitalia, Zoe Leonard introduced a particular point of view into the universal language of the museum, by foregrounding its sexual politics and its politics of domination. In her earlier photographs taken in museums or galleries, Zoe Leonard had already shown the display of gender assignation, in dolls, in wigs, in fashion shows, in anatomical figures, as a norm that can't be fully internalized. In the Natural History Museum, the 'transition to upright walking' diagram charts the 'evolution of man'; but the subject is, as well, two little girls looking, trying to find their place in the patriarchal culture, which includes science as well as museography. One girl is absorbed in what she observes, the other is more sensitive to the presence of the photographer, recording the scene. For Leonard 'the conflict between the act of observation and the one of performance appears often in my work.'[20] Who is looking? What are they looking at? What are we looking at, whose agency are we looking at? These questions about the order of seeing and its subversion are part of Leonard's case studies.

What exhibition of gender allows certain people to be identified as human, so that they have rights, to be cared for when they are sick, or to mourn when they are dead? In Leonard's photographs or installations, there are numerous examples of gender presentation, displaying the various ways in which a body performs its cultural significance: whether a bearded woman as chopped head specimen in a glass bell, photographed from five different angles; whether a female anatomical model engaged in a defensive gesture as an indication of chastity; whether a mustachioed doll in its transparent package. The unbearable violence of the apparatuses disciplining the body (*Beauty Calibrator*, *Gynecology Instruments*, *Chastity Belt*) sits alongside the triumphant flesh of the performer Jennifer Miller, photographed twelve times as a non-conformist bearded 'Pin-Up Calendar'. This way of including uncategorized genders, as well as showing the invisible violence inflicted by gender-based norms, has stretched to other forms of racial and sexual constructions (e.g. creating a fictional character through the archival function of photography, such as in Fae Richards Photo Archive), all of which encounter discrimination and erasure. Positing the body, not as an outside to representation, but as a site for rendering visible normative statements founded on the refusal of alternative possibilities, provides new perspectives on old questions about images.

Notes

1. Monique Wittig, '"The Point of View": Universal or Particular', *Gender Issues*, vol. 3, no. 2, June 1983, pp. 63–9; republished in M. Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Beacon Press, Boston MA; 1992, p. 60.
2. See Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, Routledge, London, 1999.
3. Yve-Alain Bois, 'Sophie Taeuber-Arp against Greatness', in *Inside the Visible (an elliptical traverse of 20th century art, in of and from the feminine)*, La Chambre, Courtrai, 1994–95, p. 413.

4. Ibid.
5. Françoise Héritier, interview in *La Croix*, November 1998.
6. Sabine Prokhoris, *Le Sexe Prescrit, la différence sexuelle en question*, Aubier, Paris, 2000, pp. 146–9.
7 Hugo Ball, 'Uber Occultismus, Hieratik und andere seltsame schöne Dinger', in *Berner Intelligenzblatt*, 15 November 1917.
8. See Rosalind Krauss, 'Louise Bourgeois: Portrait of the Artist as Fillette', in *Bachelors*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1999, p. 54.
9. This was the title of a choreographed, multipart performance for seven dancers, interspersed with film and text, built upon a backbone of variations on Yvonne Rainer's former dance solo, Trio A.
10. Carolee Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings*, Documentext/McPherson, Kingston and New York, 1979.
11. Ibid., p. 10.
12. Ibid., p. 49.
13. Ibid., p. 62.
14. See Shana MacDonald, 'Carolee Schneemann's Fuses as Erotic Self-portraiture', *CineAction*, Winter 2007.
15. Carolee Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, p. 151.
16. Ibid.
17. Abigail Salomon,Godeau, 'The Equivocal: I', in Shelley Rice, ed., *Inverted Odysseys*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1999, p. 114.
18. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, p. 161.
19. Cf. Tirza Latimer, *Women Together/Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick NJ and London, 2005.
20. Zoe Leonard in an interview with Anna Blume, in *Zoe Leonard*, catalogue, Secession, Vienna, 1997, p. 23.

Images

Book cover of Roland Barthes, *Le Degré Zéro de l'Ecriture suivi de Nouveaux Essais Critiques*, with Relief Peint de Sophie Tauber-Arp, 1938. Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1972; 1979, Collection Points 35.

Sophie Taeuber in masqued performance, Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, 1916. Courtesy Stiftung Hans Arp und Sophie Taeuber-Arp e.V., Rolandseck.

Marie Vassilieff, Rhodoid Vowel Dress for the theatre company Art et Action at the Exposition Universelle des Arts et Techniques de Paris, 1937. © D.R.

The Foyer-Bar from l'Aubette, Strasbourg, by Sophie Taueber-Arp, 1928, as restituted in 2006. © Mathieu Bertola/Les Musées de la Ville de Strasbourg.

Carolee Schneemann, still from *Meat Joy*, 1964, in *More Than Meat Joy, Performance Works And Selected Writings*, ed. Bruce R. McPherson, Documentext, New York, 1979. © Carolee Schneemann.

Carolee Schneemann, still from *Up To And Including Her Limits* (1973–76). Studiogalerie, Berlin, 1976. Photo Henrik Gaard. © Carolee Schneemann.

Zoe Leonard, Untitled, 1992, Installation in the Neue Galerie, Documenta IX, Kassel, Germany. Photo Markus Tollhopf, Kassel.

An omelette of men

Stefan Jonsson, *A Brief History of the Masses: Three Revolutions*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, viii + 231 pp., £21.50 hb., 978 0 231 14526 8.

What forms can collective political action take today? As it works through its long, hesitant goodbye to the working class and grapples with this question, much of today's left political thought seems to be drawn to a political vocabulary which marks its distance from the talismans of classical Marxism (party, proletariat, class, revolution…) while drawing on a radical tradition in which notions like people, multitude or democracy take centre stage. Though it may be coded in terms of radical sameness or incompressible difference, the political subject that is invoked is generally unspecified in terms of its social location or composition. Indeed, evading placement and identity, slipping through the categories of the powerful, is often taken to gauge the very radicality of the challenge posed to the status quo by collectives variously described as invisible, indiscernible, uncountable or molecular. In this respect, the claims of the multiple against 'the One' (of sovereignty, authority, supremacy), and the idea of a politics that will not suffer 'representation' are present among a host of otherwise disparate thinkers.

But this is a peculiar predicament. How, after all, can one resurrect ideas of the people or of democracy without positing a moment of unity, for instance in the concept of popular sovereignty? Likewise, what does it mean to think a process of collective emancipation without some organizational and representative – which is not to say parliamentary – dimension? Are we simply to decree the formlessness of the collective? If we simply take the notion of 'people' as an index of these problems, we can see how the field of radical theory splits into different orientations: those who pit an immeasurable multitude against a sovereign people compelled to dominate and measure itself, those who seek to identify the excess of an unruly *plebs* over against a normative *populus*, those for whom the people is a merely formal and empty signifier prized by struggling particularities, and so on and so forth.

As Stefan Jonsson's references to the likes of Rancière and Agamben suggest, the volatile amalgam of political ontology (the one and the multiple) and political aesthetics (the representability of the collective) that lies at the core of much recent radical thought plays a significant role in this book. In a familiar gesture, the ontological and the aesthetic are woven together through the theme of *exclusion* – the many *unseen*. As Jonsson announces, *A Brief History of the Masses*

> is dedicated to the uncounted and countless ones who have ended up outside the frame. But above all [it] is about the frame, the ways in which human beings are partitioned, separated, and divided, about the visible and the invisible lines drawn through the social terrain that prohibit the majority from approaching the centre of the picture.

The book is divided into three essays, each taking its bearings from a 'revolution' – the French 1789, the Belgian 1889 (or, more precisely, 1886), the East European or global 1989 – and an artwork, respectively David's *The Tennis Court Oath*, James Ensor's *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* and Alfredo Jaar's *They Loved it So Much, The Revolution*. Each of these 'size XXL artworks' is intended to convey a kind of truth about 'the beginnings of politics: society degree zero', and to gesture towards 'the ultimate end of politics: a self-sustaining democracy, or a permanent revolution'. The 'masses' in the title thus indicate the ambiguity, registered here at the level of its visual figuration, between the excluded and menacing many (mob, crowd, *populace, foule, canaille, misérables, Pöbel*) and some kind of constitutive and constructive collective force (the revolutionary masses storming the stage of history).

Jonsson is also sensitive to a dimension that is only tangentially registered by the artworks under consideration: the question of number. Number is both an index of the strength of popular claims (as in the 'unlimited numbers' called upon by the London Corresponding Society in 1792) and the primary element of the new 'biopolitical' science of population control – variously described as 'political arithmetic', 'moral arithmetic' or 'social mathematics' – which conjures up, as in the work of Adolphe Quételet, an average man (*l'homme moyen*) out of the instruments of probability. The ambivalence of the masses (excluded and constituent) is also reflected in the contradictory ways in which they

come to be ideologically demonized and governmentally managed. Despite Jonsson's periodization – which sees the masses moving from the democratic majority, to the destitute poor, and further to the workers' movement and the faceless crowds confronting the solitary artist – we could say that the Burkean fear of the masses as bearers of fanatical abstractions is never fully supplanted by the statistical formatting of populations, or indeed by the liberal democratic representation of a people which is thereby neutralized.

The principal merit of Jonsson's book, abetted by an essayistic approach which turns digression into a virtue, lies in exploring these ambivalences, particularly through the horror and fascination that characterize the voyages of the 'included' into the dark and crowded recesses where the masses seem to dwell. We thus encounter Carlyle's romantic paean to the 'fever-frenzy' of the sans-culottes in *The French Revolution* of 1837, the plebeian Phoenix romantically depicted as 'the Death-Bird of a World'. Victor Hugo's phenomenology of Parisian *misère* is traced to its origins in contemporary populationist and criminological reflections on the 'dangerous classes', but again under the sign of ambivalence: though for Hugo the masses are 'brutishly and fiercely voracious', they can also 'be made sublime' – that is they can become a people. In Flaubert instead, whose *Sentimental Education* is the focus of one of Jonsson's sub-chapters, the masses are simultaneously an object of disdain and of cold observation. Flaubert, writes Jonsson, 'is the first writer to systematically turn the masses into an aesthetic object', the consummate people-watcher, ignoring the political impetus behind the crowd, and contemplating it instead as 'a field of black corn swaying to and fro', or 'like a spring-tide pushing back a river, driven by an irresistible impulse and giving a continuous roar'.

This turn to organic and inorganic metaphors for the mass or crowd as threatening but inconsistent multiplicity – among which 'swarm' perhaps reigns supreme – recurs throughout. Emblematically, it features in Adolphe Thiers's juxtaposition between *le peuple* and *la multitude confuse*, a disorganized mass which seems refractory to law and sovereign control. But the most potent emblems of how the political upsurge of the masses comes to pose an aesthetic problem concern two barricades: the painting *The Barricade* by Ernest Meissonier, a grim rendering of the corpses of the defeated workers of 1848 by an ex-captain of artillery of the National Guard (right), and Victor Hugo's stunned description of the barricade raised in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in *Les Misérables*. The first, which Jonsson takes up from T.J. Clark, gives us the mass not as excluded but as exterminated, an *omelette d'hommes* (as a contemporary critic condemned it) where the bodies of the vanquished are initially indiscernible from the street, the paving stones and the surrounding houses. Not exclusion, but depoliticization as death, a terminal becoming-inorganic, is the fate of these masses. But, as the second barricade, Hugo's, intimates, sometimes the political force of the mass can also be grasped through its products. Accordingly, even though the masses remain 'off-screen' in what Jonsson calls 'the most spellbinding description of urban architecture in all world literature', the political ontology of a multiple-without-one makes its menacing mark. Anarchic material multiplicity and a kind of rebellious cacophony translate the elemental politics of the masses into a kind of monument of destruction, a combative work of installation art:

> Of what was it built? Of the material of three six-storey houses demolished for the purposes, some people said. Of the phenomenon of overwhelming anger, said others. … Everything had gone into it, doors, grilles, screens, bedroom furniture, wrecked cooking-stoves and pots and pans, piled up haphazard, the whole a composite of paving-stones and rubble, timbers, iron bars, broken window-panes, seatless chairs, rags, odds and ends of every kind – and curses. It was great and it was trivial, a chaotic parody of emptiness, a mingling of debris. … The shouting of orders was to be heard, warlike song, the roll of drums, the sobbing of women, and the dark raucous laughter of the half-starved. It was beyond reason and it was alive; and, as though from the back of some electric-coated animal, lightning crackled over it. … It was a pile of garbage, and it was Sinai.

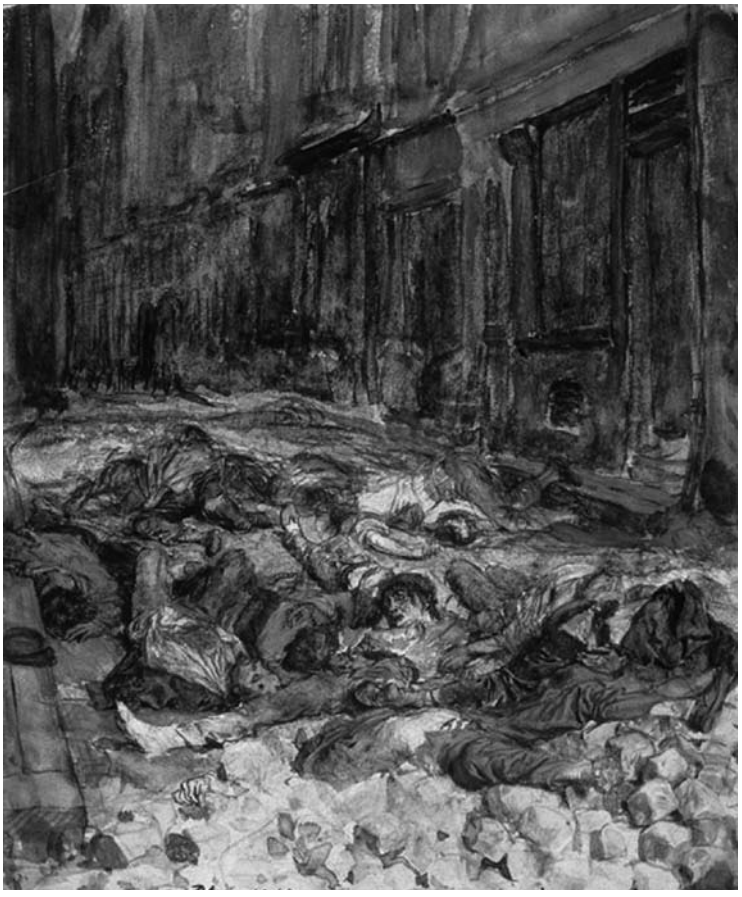
I've followed Jonsson's beguiling tangents rather than honed in on his focal points. In part, this is because the organizing principle (three artworks, three revolutions) is quite loose. But it is also because, at least as concerns two of the three 'size XXL' pieces, those of David and Jaar, the artworks raise problems for Jonsson's overall project. In the case of the David, we are clearly dealing with the passionate display of an assembled constituent 'people', which bears a very ambiguous relation to the excluded masses (the *sans-culottes*) which will soon thereafter make for a far less presentable revolution. Jonsson compellingly traces David's passage to a spiritualized symbolization of the people in the dead Marat (who interestingly appears in *The Tennis Court Oath* writing, with his back to the delegates), also noting the painter's role in organizing the revolution's spectacles of civic religion, but the theoretical lens he adopts, that of Pierre Rosanvallon's

distinction between a political people-as-sovereign and a serial people-as-society, is unpersuasive. It leaves out any sustained reflection on the 'self-activity' of the masses, and how the latter may not just exceed but also reshape the capacities of representation – something that Hugo's barricade certainly dramatizes.

The weakness of Jonsson's approach lies in the ease with which he slips into a number of commonplaces in contemporary political-aesthetic discourse, for instance the ubiquitous refrain about the 'unrepresentability' of the political. Often this entails conflating the philosophical and political senses of representation. It also makes patent the dangers in thinking of politics primarily under the modes of appearance or visibility. When Jonsson declares that 'Possibly, the primal scene of democracy resists representation altogether', we might be tempted to retort that there is no such thing – except, as with any primal scene, as a legitimating myth or founding fantasy. This problem also bedevils the weakest of the three essays in the book, the one which takes its cue from Alfredo Jaar's light-box installation on the melancholy resonances between 1989 (the date of its exhibition) and 1968. Though not devoid of further edifying digressions, this essay exemplifies the widespread tendency for political aesthetics to slip into negative theology.

Jonsson proposes that, like the Commune, the Eastern European revolutions of 1989 are marked by the fact that no images come close to attaining their 'core', their 'political essence and social pathos'. The model here seems to be one of incarnation, as if, beyond the iconic freeze-frames, we could have been given the truth, whole. But why should art abet this drive to hold the real thing in our gaze, to 'see' the revolution? Can't it partake in revolutionary processes, or even reflect back on them, without this ultimately melancholy wish for representation-as-revelation? The melancholy is evident as Jonsson turns to Jaar's works on Brazilian gold mines, the representation of Third World child poverty and the Rwandan genocide. The artistic articulation of mass politics slips here into the rote quandaries about representing the unrepresentable, which so much recent thinking about aesthetics has been mired in, with the attendant, and potentially trivializing, confusion between horrendous carnage and aesthetic sublimity. It's very unclear whether this rumination on missing images can really, as Jonsson suggests, 'give voice and representation to those who are marginalized', or whether it doesn't instead function to further obscure political dynamics, transforming oppression, exploitation and even extermination into issues at once aesthetic and metaphysical, but not truly political.

The obvious absence of *the* revolution of the twentieth century, 1917, is here not simply an oversight, but serves rather as a symptom of the short circuit that affects much contemporary theorizing about political aesthetics, with its peculiar oscillation between, on the one hand, the nineteenth-century promises of a democratic politics of appearance and, on the other, the mourning for the closure of the short twentieth century and the dissipation of its 'passion for the real' – for which '1989' may serve as a shorthand. Exclusion from representation was not the dominant concern of the militant modernism of the tens and twenties, which did not reduce the problem of political aesthetics to that of being visible or invisible, represented or unrepresentable, appearing or not appearing. The broader belief that politics is fundamentally about new ways of being seen, about forcing inclusive transformations in the regime of the sensible, is a sign of how difficult it is to think a politics beyond democratic recognition, a politics where the collective reorganization and emancipation of the senses might be on the agenda. Beyond a salutary nod to



the tradition of direct democracy, and the customary suggestion that democracy is a conflicted signifier, Jonsson's book does not address whether democracy should indeed be politics' last word, its one and only regulative ideal.

Jonsson's book is strongest where his attention to the historical material takes him away from the contemporary generalities that affect art-political discourse, and which he himself succumbs to, running together into a bland and imprecise admixture of Derrida and Rancière, Balibar and Rosanvallon, Negri and Agamben (with the latter improbably but tellingly presented as an advocate of the 'indefatigable power of people to cooperate'). Whence the interest of the middle essay, which enlists the sprawling phantasmagoria of Ensor's *Christ's Entrance into Brussels in 1889* for an investigation into the shifting relations in the *fin-de-siècle* between madness, Messianism and mass politics. The most arresting dimension of Ensor's painting – which Jonsson brings into contrast and contact with Le Bon's psychology of mass contagion and Strindberg's *Little Catechism for the Under Classes* – is its neglect of the aesthetic canons that oversee the depiction of the relations between the individual and the collective, but above all its evasion of the choice between the mass-people as heroic symbolic actor and the mass-mob as merely biological enemy or inorganic debris. Under the red banner of *Vive la Sociale!*, Ensor depicts social ontology as a kind of collective hallucination, neither obviously benevolent nor definitely threatening. And, as Jonsson perspicuously notes, what we are given is no longer a single, homogeneous mass, but an aggregation of masses with different compositions and varying origins. Ensor maximizes the divergences and contrasts within the painting, rescinds the border between faces and masks, and refuses any point of identification (the Christ figure, crucially, provides neither leadership nor resolution; he is simply, as Jonsson notes, 'a mediatory figure that neutralizes the forces that block change'). Ensor's painting, with its emancipatory model of collective hallucination, its social disorganization of the senses, shows that a political aesthetic of the mass (or the crowd, or the multitude) cannot be reduced to an unproblematic democratic striving for visibility, recognition or representation. *Larvatus prodeo* ('I advance masked') could also serve as the motto for a political art which evades, as Ensor did, the melancholy idea that art is there to make the people visible and recognizable, as though such an aesthetics of democracy held the secret of emancipation.

Alberto Toscano

Masculine holes

Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2007. 197 pp., £35.50 hb., £12.00 pb., 978 0 81665 043 9 hb., 978 0 81665 044 6 pb.

After two decades of writings on network societies, network culture, network science and actor-network theory, the network seems far from having exhausted its power to pose a problem for contemporary thought. This collaboration between Alexander R. Galloway (author of *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*) and Eugene Thacker (author of *Biomedia* and *The Global Genome*) recapitulates the theory of networks to throw it off again, pushing it a little bit further on the way to formulating new understandings of more adequate and productive forms of power and resistance. As the authors of *The Exploit* put it: 'The existence of networks invites us to think in a manner which is appropriate to networks.' For Galloway and Thacker, the network is not simply a technology, but a political ontology. It is clear by now that such political ontology cannot be an 'essence' of networks that automatically places them beyond power. It is no longer possible simply to oppose networks to hierarchies, because networks appear today as a technology of power, and because hierarchies and power centres have 'evolved downwards'. As perspectives as diverse as those of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, on the one side, and John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, on the other, have clarified, we are confronting a 'fearful new symmetry': that of networks fighting networks.

This demystification of networks, then, is what propels the new network theory today, which must now confront almost two decades of knowledge about and of networks. Three issues appear crucial to the theory of networks as explicated in this book: the problem of the 'life' of networks; their topological features; and the reformulation of sovereignty and political conflict. The problem of the life of networks is obviously crucial to the re-elaboration of the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics, which is key to contemporary reformulations of

the nature of sovereignty. As a biopolitical technology, Galloway and Thacker argue, networks are technologies for the management of vital processes. At the most basic level, we can speak of the bio-informatization of life – of biological processes as flows of data that allow for a constant monitoring of the life of populations – but also of the abstraction of 'biological protocols' from the natural to the social level. If informatics is the mode of representation of life under biopolitics, networks are the mode of its control. However, beyond this subsumption of life by networks, the relation between biology and networks presents other challenges. It poses, according to Galloway and Thacker, the question of the inhuman/unhuman character of life. This nonhuman quality, which the authors find politically challenging about networks, is constituted by the power of that which one can find below the level of the individual (the virus) and that which overtakes it and carries it along (the swarm). The biopolitical nature of networks, their peculiar kind of life, then, exposes the limits of a *too human* understanding of networks, and questions modern notions of political agency

The question of the life of networks is a critical point for this book. The network in fact needs active subjects in order to exist, but at the same time undermines their agency by its very nature, by embedding it into sets of relations, and by the fact of being somehow *alive*. This is not the anthropomorphic agency of actors to be found in actor-network theory, but a non-humanity that affects directly the powers of the subject. Networks thus undermine from within the political liberalism which informs much network theory with its emphasis on universality, contingency, agent-based action, negotiation, public vetting and openness. They create a 'tension between intentionality and agency, of individuals and groups, on the one hand, and the uncanny, unhuman intentionality of the network as an "abstract" whole', on the other.

The notion that networks present natural features, and in particular that they are subject to natural laws, has been the subject of many popular science books that publicize the findings and theses of an emergent network science, at whose heart we find the mathematics of graph theory. By positively introducing a topological approach to networks, which pictures them topographically as a 'finite set of points connected by a finite set of lines', graph theory has produced the most common representations of networks. In so doing, it has engendered sets of universal topologies (such as centralized, decentralized and distributed), and formulated the so-called 'laws of networks': 'Network science assumes a minimally vitalistic aspect of networks – a metaphysics of networks, seeks universal patterns that exist above and beyond the particularity of any given network.' One needs only to think about the popularity of 'power laws', which postulate that distributed networks over time will inevitably tend to produce a concentration of links (from which one could deduce that democracy also inevitably produces inequalities). In this passage from a natural-statistical law to politics lies an obvious problem, which the book underlines. It is not simply a matter of denouncing the political 'incorrectness' of network science, but of providing a more substantial critique of the understandings of networks fostered by graph theory. Graph theory tends to freeze networks in static snapshots, which make invisible their inner complexity and variability, while also proposing a reductive division between active nodes (as subjects) and passive edges (as actions carried out by the nodes). Networks, for Galloway and Thacker, thus need to be thought starting from their heterogeneity and duration, from the unstable relations between internal and external differences, and from their processes of individuation, which individuate a network as well as its nodes. If a network is, in the first place, a set of relations, then it must be made clear that these relations are variable and complex, internally and externally, and hence, in a sense, edges precede nodes, as relations precede individuals. Networks participate in a topological continuum within which they acquire limitless numbers of dimensions and multiple, exceptional topologies, thus fostering divergences as well as convergences (a kind of 'metamorphosis' as the book suggests). In this sense, the process of individuation of a network is never complete. By missing out on the intrinsic heterogeneity of networks, and underestimating their variability and complexity, network science proves misleading in providing a political ontology of networks. Galloway and Thacker thus suggest we need to turn, on the one hand, to Bartallanfy's 'general systems theory' (in opposition to Wiener's cybernetics and Shannon's information theory) as a more adequate science of networks, and, on the other, to the medieval concept of individuation, as renewed by Gilbert Simondon, for philosophical inspiration.

An adequate political ontology of networks then proceeds from this primacy of the edges over the nodes, from the notion of the intrinsic inconsistency of networks, from an understanding of multiple network topologies as evolving within a varied topological continuum, and as expressing a life which is not quite human. From these premisses follow a key question of this book: the challenge of networks to sovereignty, and to the forms, stakes and modes of political conflict.

The book starts with a recollection of a provocation launched by a major network theorist to the authors. In an email exchange, Geert Lovink challenges one of the main theses of the book, which continues, in this regard, Galloway's solo reflection in *Protocol*. Real political power does not reside within the protocols that Galloway and Thacker posit as the key location for the expression of power in networks. Real political power is exercised by people such as George W. Bush, not by Jon Postel, the former administrator of

the Domain Name System. Galloway's contention, in fact, is that the control of networks proceeds immanently through the informing power of protocols that regulate relations within and across networks. Thus the distribution of power to the nodes is the very condition for their control. Lovink's provocation stimulates a challenging engagement by Galloway and Thacker with the transformations undergone by sovereignty and the possibility of individuating new kinds of 'networked sovereigns'.

Galloway and Thacker contest Lovink's statement by pointing out how even the sovereign command expressed by the power of the president of the United States to declare war implies a whole set of relations, which, à la Foucault, sustain it and enable it. It was the merit of Hardt and Negri's book, for them, to have pointed out the networked character of Empire, and the fact that Empire is not America. On the other hand, this leaves open the question of the forms and modalities that sovereignty assumes in networks. The authors hence construct an interesting theory of how networks, which superficially appear as free from external control, are not only internally controlled through protocols, but also subject to 'topsight and oversight' and can in some cases be mobilized by a single global command; what they call 'global command events'. A networked sovereign is characterized by its capacity to turn the network into a weapon system by forcing its nodes to act as executers of a single command. Such a command does not need to be overly dramatic; it could even just be a matter of releasing a new version of software. The network sovereign is he or she who can 'flip the switch' and get a network to obey and carry out its command.

This is, however, an exceptional topology inasmuch as the regulation of networks is usually achieved in a much more mundane and daily manner, through the invisible power of protocols which 'sculpts' the life of networks. And, yet, this life that, according to Galloway and Thacker, is sculpted by protocols remains too narrowly defined at the level of bioinformatics. One cannot help but think at this point about another book, unfortunately as yet untranslated into English, Maurizio Lazzarato's *Puissances de l'invention*, where the organizing power of networks clearly operates within a social ontology of difference and repetition which foregrounds the 'forces of memory'; that is, those forces of subjectivation which express themselves through the actions of wanting, desiring and believing. The power of protocols, their immanent power of control, needs to address the problem of the double individuation, of bodies and minds, and the power of the impersonal ontological forces of memory.

Galloway and Thacker argue that the notion of resistance is problematic in understanding political conflict in networks. Resistance implies a defence of something that has been achieved and an active shift of power from one set of agents to another (as in negotiations between unions and employers). Resistance belongs to other types of struggles, which networked conflict does not render obsolete so much as supplement. Successful counter-protocological action works through the 'exploit'; that is, those 'resonant flaws' which networks produce by virtue of their working too well. The exploit, a term taken from hackers' vocabulary, indicates not simply a 'hole', but also a line of flight through which to project a potential for transformation, thus creating new and exceptional topologies out of which the new asymmetrical threat to networks might

arise. In the case of network conflict, what seems important to the authors is not so much resistance as 'impulsion', a 'thrust' and even a 'hypertrophy'. And yet if the ontology of networks is that of relations – that is, as Sadie Plant has argued, a feminist ontology – why centre its political tactics around such masculine 'thrust'? What about those processes of topological and ethical 'invagination', which also seems necessary for the purposes of collecting, nurturing and consolidating antagonistic network forces?

Tiziana Terranova

Neuromanticism

Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, trans. Sebastian Rand, Fordham University Press, Bronx NY 2008. 104 pp., $55.00 hb., $18.00 pb., 978 0 82322 952 9 hb., 978 0 82322 953 6 pb.

In a post-Fordist era of 'cognitive capital', in which scientific and quasi-scientific discourse are increasingly pressed into service in and as the knowledge economy, a critical engagement with those sciences in the ascendant under this regime is crucial. Whilst numerous attempts have been made – typically as some variant of Foucauldian biopolitics – to ascertain the strategic stakes of the life sciences, a detailed engagement with the sciences taking cognitive processes as their focus has remained somewhat in abeyance. To be sure, skirmishes with the cognitive and the neurological have been assayed here and there, but a detailed conceptual analysis of the implication of the brain in broader strategies has been lacking. In this short book Catherine Malabou has 'rectified and sharpened' the analysis of the concept of plasticity that she proposed in her book *The Future of Hegel* (2005) in order to explore what she sees as the 'exact correlation between descriptions of brain functioning and the political understanding of commanding' and thence to propose the development of what she calls a culture of 'neuronal liberation'.

Where her work in *The Future of Hegel* had focused on the way that Hegel takes up and transforms the concept of plasticity through his reading of Aristotle, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* makes a slightly different move: shifting from canonical texts in the history of philosophy to a corpus of texts – incarnated by cognitive science – which are somewhat more difficult to delimit. *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* examines four versions of the concept of plasticity: developmental, modulational, reparative and a sort of intermediate plasticity – a figure of plasticity that allows Malabou to make the links between the other three figures clearer, as well to provide a more convincing account of how one can move from the biological givens of the neuronal to the realm of experience and freedom, an undoubted problem for an ensemble of sciences which have firmly nailed their colours to the mast of reductionism. The first three figures of plasticity can be explicitly reconstructed from out of the findings of neuroscience as descriptive of states of fact. However, the fourth figure, which Malabou argues to be implied by the other three, reinstates a fissured and discontinuous dialectic of the nature–culture relation where scientists generally see smooth continuity (when this relation concerns them at all).

This fourfold figuring of the concept of plasticity endeavours to account for the fashioning of identity through the play of the negative, which, Malabou thus argues, is at work within the neurosciences. More pointedly, it aims to awaken a 'consciousness of our brain'. The fundamental Hegelian point here is that the plasticity of the brain, as she repeats (at numerous points throughout the book), 'is a work, and we do not know it'. Malabou's fourth, 'meta-neurobiological' (i.e. theoretical) figure of plasticity, distinguished from the ostensibly neutral descriptive quality of the three other figures, is thus closely tied to the key claims of this book.

Perhaps the most important of these is that scientific descriptions of the brain and its functioning have historically worked so as to legitimate specific configurations of the structure of work. With the breakdown of the Fordist model of production and the emergence of a new era of post-Fordist flexible specialization, the prevailing neuronal metaphor is no longer one of centralized command but one of connectionist networks. Drawing on Boltanski and Chiapello, Malabou argues for slightly more than a close fit between neuroscientific discourse and political discourse: there is an exact correlation and the biological and the social 'mirror' each other in the new figure of command put into play under post-Fordism. Whilst this claim obviously places quite a specific burden of responsibility on scientific discourse for thickening the ideological screen separating us from reality, it also has a bearing on the motivation for arguing for both the desirability and the necessity of articulating Malabou's claim for her figure of *intermediating* plasticity. The claim is that without taking into account the breaks or gaps in the account that the neurosciences offer of the transition from the biological to the mental,

these sciences are necessarily led to make ideological assumptions, such as the crudely Darwinistic one made by Damasio about those humans who benefit from more and richer connections among their neurons. These 'most harmonious and mature of personalities' (presumably those individuals who can lose billions in ill-advised banking deals in the day time, go to the opera at night and sail a yacht at the weekend) have the mental flexibility to be the managers and erstwhile masters of the universe incarnating the contemporary spirit of capitalism. Such ideological characters are interposed within an account aimed at explaining the transition between the neuronal 'proto-self' to the consciousness of the singular individual and, of course, are not instantiated with the warrant of properly produced scientific evidence.

Malabou claims that the specific ideological functioning of neuroscientific discourse becomes particularly evident in the way that it tends to elide the difference that should be made between *flexibility* and *plasticity*. Where plasticity implies – in various ways – an activity of self-forming which moves 'between sculptural moulding and deflagration, which is to say explostion', its cognate term, flexibility, tends only to imply the passive register of adaptation to external circumstance (the same harmonious and mature personality naturally reselected for fast-track retraining as a schoolteacher). It is, of course, not difficult to see where this leads: look at the plethora of books published on the borders between management science and New Age self-help that exult in flexibility at work. Or attend a back-to-work interview at your local Job Centre. It is flexibility that, Malabou argues, occludes the more unruly concept of plasticity in the neurosciences and accounts for the ambivalent, ideological functioning of the latter.

Unlike the flexibility which makes us all into multitasking minions able to take the initiative to do all the work our bosses prefer to delegate, the concept of plasticity contains a nuance of explosive energy which the flexible new entrepreneurial worker, apparently, knows nothing about. Malabou evinces an intense interest in developments in cognitive science and is at pains to point out the ways in which current research depicts the brain's curiously self-organizing historicity. For an organ that was for many years considered the model of automated, deterministic functioning and for a generation of critical thinkers raised to display a practically innate scepticism towards the reductionist strategies of the natural sciences, this is a remarkable situation. Indeed it is this non-deterministic, a-centred quality to brain functioning that leads Malabou to posit the necessity of a new culture of *neuronal liberation*. Almost in spite of themselves, the cognitive sciences – not withstanding the residual advocates of what is charmingly called 'good old-fashioned AI' – have started to disclose an image of the brain and of the neuronal components of thinking processes that is radically at odds with the deterministic automaton which still suffuses – and confuses – discussions about the 'hardwired' nature of our neuronal 'circuits'.

For Malabou, the rearticulation of the different figures of plasticity at work within the neurosciences thus entails a politico-philosophical task: to cultivate an awareness of the plasticity of the brain. The historicity of the brain supports her claim that 'we' 'make' it and 'biological alter-globalism' is the form that neuronal liberation for her takes – a dialogue between philosophers such as Hegel and the neurosciences in which the negativity of the dialectic allows us to substitute a different possible world for the ideologically shaped world implied in 'neutral' scientific description.

What Should We Do with Our Brain? poses some

interesting and challenging questions about the role of cognitive science in the contemporary era. However, there are a number of problems with this account. The specific claim about the ideology implied in scientific discourse is not, of course, particularly new – well before Althusser posited the 'spontaneous philosophy of the scientists', Marx's acerbic comments about Darwin and Hobbesian individualism made clear the problematic discursive articulation of scientific research in biology. More particularly, whilst Malabou develops her argument with panache (albeit at times allowing the labour of the negative to be become quite laboured), one cannot help but think that an opportunity to develop a more detailed exploration of the articulations of neuroscience and production has been missed here, beyond the seductive play of representations. Take the current popularity of drugs such as Prozac. Presumably

in Malabou's view, such forms of medication are the product of an ideologically informed vision of brain functioning – and of the highly capitalized production models of the pharmaceuticals industry. Does this mean that a person suffering from debilitating depression is living an alienated relationship to his or her brain? And what kinds of medication might a newly 'non-ideological' neuroscience yield? Should militants take Prozac? Of course, for the Hegelian that Malabou is, following the play of representations in the development of a concept is only right and proper, but it does yield its own synaptic misfirings, such as the question 'is the difference really all that great between the picture we have of an unemployed person about to be kicked off the dole and the picture we have of someone suffering from Alzheimer's?' Equally, the less dogmatic reader might twitch a little at the claim that Gilles Deleuze is one of the 'rare' philosophers to take an interest in neuroscientific research.

Ultimately Malabou's call for cultivating an awareness of brain plasticity seems a little fruitless beyond the specific interest of pointing out some of the gaps and tensions in recent neuroscientific research. Whilst her claims about the ideological padding of such research are persuasive, it is difficult to see how a neuroscientist might respond to her call for them to attend to the ideological implications of their work: scientists stopped listening to philosophers a long time ago and the congruence between a Hegelian narrative of dialectical identity and their own accounts of brain functioning is not likely to make them jump for joy in their laboratories. The 'we' in Malabou's account is necessarily a 'we' which accepts the authority of a specific set of scientific discourses to pose the questions that are worth asking – only then to deconstruct those discourses. But more pointedly perhaps, the book's strategy of developing a reflexive appeal for the cultivation of neuronal self-knowledge focuses energy where it isn't needed. A more concrete and productive act of resistance might be to exploit the plasticity of one's own neurons so as to ask questions which refuse the auspicious claims of science to legislate on which are the questions worth asking. In a world where work impels us to be flexible but not to be plastic, surely it would be better to cultivate neuronal plasticity as such, not just our awareness of it.

Andrew Goffey

Childing the mother

Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption*, Routledge, London and New York, 2009. xi + 185 pp, £45.00 hb., £14.95 pb., 978 0 415 45500 8 hb., 978 0 415 45501 5 pb.

Maternal Encounters is an original, creative book, meticulously thought out and crafted. It will be a necessary starting point for future work on mothering and maternal subjectivity. In it, Lisa Baraitser develops a novel approach to the possibility of a specifically maternal subject position. Drawing on Christine Battersby's account of the female subject position, that of an embodied self able to become-two in giving birth, Baraitser aims to uncouple maternal from female subject positions. She suggests that the former is the position of someone female-identified who is (in addition to being female) in a relation of something like care for a child. Thus, 'I use the maternal to signify any relation of obligation between an adult who identifies as female, and another person whom that adult elects as their "child".'

Baraitser situates her exploration of maternal subjectivity in particular opposition to the traditional psychoanalytic focus on the mother as an object in relation to the child – whether as the first and deepest object of the child's desire, as an object internal to the child's psyche, as in Freud, or as the most important external object (person) who becomes the crucial internal structuring figure within the child's personality, as in object-relations theory. Baraitser convincingly shows how this limited focus on the mother as object persists even in the psychoanalytic feminism of Jessica Benjamin, despite Benjamin's adamance about the importance of recognizing maternal subjectivity. For Benjamin, it is vital for gender equality that the child come to recognize, through the mother's surviving his/her attempts to 'destroy' her in fantasy, that the maternal other is beyond his/her control and is an autonomous subject. This in turn requires that the mother must be able both to respond benignly and creatively to the child's fantasy attacks and to actually manifest autonomy by engaging with things outside of the child – work, a lover, and so on. Thus, Benjamin's

focus is still on the benefits of these things to the child, not the mother, while her theory despite itself burdens mothers with the expectation that they should 'survive' the child's attacks. But, as Baraitser asks, what if they don't? And is caving in to the child's demands really so bad anyway?

Against these kinds of objectifying approach, Baraitser explores the potential of maternity to generate new experiences and, ultimately, a new mode of subjectivity. Her 'quasi-methodology', as she calls it, is 'anecdotal theory', a member of the family of more-or-less autobiographical approaches which feminists (among others) have adopted to avoid the authorial God's-eye-view. Baraitser draws on her own experiences as a mother, specifically experiences that jarred in some way – that were uncomfortable, inexplicable, that did not fit with her preconceptions or expectations of motherhood: her struggle around town encumbered with toddler, toddler's pram, arsenal of bottles and food containers; bursting into tears when her child goes off into sleep; feeling uneasy about having given the child his name. She takes such dissonant experiences as the starting point from which new and distinctive aspects of maternal subjectivity can be articulated. Thus, as she also says, her book is a 'partial phenomenology' of maternal experience; but the experience serves as 'raw material' on the basis of which Baraitser re-examines and revises relevant discussions from Levinas, Kristeva, Irigaray and Badiou among others.

Let me isolate four elements of Baraitser's partial account of maternal subjectivity: alterity, interruption, love and the encumbered body. First, regarding alterity, Baraitser adopts Sara Ruddick's view that a child is an '"open structure" whose acts are irregular, unpredictable, often mysterious'. To be responsible for a child is to be responsible for one who is unassimilably other to oneself, who is living in their own time, oriented away from the mother towards the future, out of symmetry with the mother whose orientation is towards the child. Yet the mother returns to herself changed out of this encounter, discovering herself in the child for the first time – discovering herself *as* a mother, someone called into being *by* the child, and who is new and strange from the perspective of her pre-maternal self. (Baraitser draws on Levinas's view of the father–son relation, wilfully adapting it to mother-and-child.) At the same time, Baraitser does not want to see this becoming-a-mother as the dramatic, wholesale transformation of the self which it seems to be according to much recent life-writing about the experience of motherhood. Baraitser instead suggests that the maternal self undergoes change as a result of the mundane, repetitious everydayness of caring for the child in their alterity. Out of this mundane repetitiousness, something new emerges.

Baraitser's exploration (second) of interruption and maternal time is one of the most novel parts of her book, and it especially spoke to my own experience of motherhood. Whatever the mother is doing, however she feels, she is constantly interrupted by the child's demands – what Baraitser describes as micro-breaches to her durational experiences. The child's cries and extreme affective states call forth a response from the mother, whether she likes it or not. Repeated interruptions of this kind bring about a 'change in the mother's experience of her temporal being' – in particular, they tend to make sustained reflective thought impossible. Baraitser suggests that a new form of self-relation can emerge here:

> Though thought is arrested by the constant interruptions that a child performs on the maternal psyche, a more 'organic apprehension of the present moment' is made available – those intense moments of pleasure or connectedness that mothers report, moments that … allow access to a somatic or sensory mode of experiencing which may have been unavailable previously.

The new form of self-relation that we glimpse here is non-egoistic, a somatic immersion in the flow of events.

Third, Baraitser seeks to distinguish maternal love for the child from maternal desire for a third term different from the child, by identification with which the child can separate itself from its mother. Versions of this latter emphasis on desire are found in Jessica Benjamin, as we saw, and in Kristeva. For Kristeva, the loving mother *is* the desiring mother – the mother who desires the father, as opposed to the excessively caring, clingy mother who, by being excessively absorbed in her child, impedes his or her efforts to separate. The mother can love by identifying with her *own* mother who (hopefully) loved her in the same way. This identification gives the mother the narcissistic satisfaction that compensates her for lovingly sacrificing her union with the child for that child's own sake. So, Baraitser objects, there's no room in Kristeva's 'herethics' for *alterity* in the child, since the child is loved as the mother's own self, relative to the mother who is identified with her own mother. In contrast, Baraitser puts forward a picture of maternal love as love directly for the child, crystallized in moments when the mother realizes that now there are two, looking at the world from the point of view that there are two radically disjunct experiences, hers and the child's.

Fourth, and in contrast to feminist writing on pregnant embodiment, Baraitser explores the mother's distinctive modes of interacting materially with objects in the long years *after* the birth of her child(ren). She identifies a pervasive tension between the mother's heightened sensory awareness (of her surroundings, the dangers they pose, the child's demands and needs, the various constraints to be juggled) and her slowed-down movement, slowed down by the child and the plethora of objects that the mother has to manipulate around a world of largely parent-unfriendly places and things. She compares the encumbered mother to the free-runner who also finds new ways to move around the environment and who re-creates that environment's spatiality in the process.

Let me raise some questions. Baraitser defines the maternal subject position by the mother's relation to the *child* – in the neutral. However, I take it that for Baraitser subjectivity is necessarily male or female: for her maternal subjectivity includes the idea that the mother is female; like Ruddick, she is wary of the proliferation of talk about gender-neutral 'parenting'. Isn't the child too, then, as the mother and others relate to them, necessarily male or female? From this perspective, I wonder whether the kind of maternal relation to the child which Baraitser explores is more of a relation to a male than a female child. In many psychoanalytic accounts of the child's early relation to the mother, the child turns towards the (empirical or symbolic) father as the personification of difference, of the future, the new, the adventurous, the outside – as opposed to the mother as the past, the home, the old and familiar, the inside. Perhaps mothers might therefore be more prone to experience mothering a son as 'interrupting' a (symbolically maternal) past. And if the child's time is not the mother's, is future-oriented, then does this tacitly imagine the child to be male, in contrast to the female time that is typically seen as past-oriented, cyclical, repetitious? Moreover, Baraitser draws her idea of two radically disjunct experiences from Badiou on sexual difference, which again suggests that the child in question may be symbolically male.

But to raise such questions is to return to what Baraitser calls the 'backward-looking' view of maternal experience which psychoanalytic thinkers have adopted when they have addressed the mother as subject: the view that the mother's relation to the child is the repetition of her past relations to others and especially of her relation to her own mother. That is, in mothering the mother draws on her internal image of her own mother; and/or she relates to her child *as* her mother, as the one with whom the mother–child bond of her own infancy is restored; and/or she identifies with her own mother in relation to the child positioned as her younger self; and/or she corporeally becomes her mother, singing and babbling in her mother's voice. Baraitser does not deny that all of this may go on, but she wants to highlight alternative, relatively unnoticed, aspects of maternal experience: the newness of the child and of the mother as called into being by that child.

However, perhaps the child's calling the mother into being is itself the repetition of the mother having had her subjectivity elicited by her own mother in infancy (taking it, with Kristeva as Kelly Oliver reads her, that the maternal body elicits difference from the child prior to any intervention by the father – Baraitser discusses this). Perhaps, then, the mother cannot avoid identifying her own mother in her child and (simultaneously) in herself, because in undergoing a transformation at the call of the child, she passes back through the transformations of her own infancy which her mother called forth in her – she is reminded, somatically, not necessarily consciously, of how fundamentally constitutive of her this relation to her mother was. The newness of the child may be the maternal past of the mother, a past that remains ever-new because no self can ever fully digest it.

Alison Stone

A matter of emphasis

Damian F. White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal*, Pluto Press, London, 2008. xvii + 236 pp., £50.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 0 745 31965 0 hb., 978 0 745 31964 3 pb.

In a 1966 article in the journal *Anarchy*, entitled 'Ecology and Revolutionary Thought', Lewis Herber (aka Murray Bookchin) argued that 'ecology is intrinsically a critical science – in fact, critical on a scale that the most radical systems of political economy have failed to attain.' Ecology has this 'critical edge' precisely because it reveals the ultimate dependency of modern urban, industrialized states upon nature and also how the disruptive consequences of these supposedly progressive social forms effectively turn humanity into a 'destructive parasite' feeding off and destroying the complex and diverse organic basis of its own existence. The global scale of these interventions was, Bookchin claimed, 'literally undoing the work of

organic evolution'. Interestingly, in this same article he suggested, as an example, that the 'mounting blanket of carbon dioxide, by intercepting heat radiated from the earth into outer space, leads to rising atmospheric temperatures, to a more violent circulation of air, to more destructive storm patterns, and eventually … to a melting of the polar ice caps'.

This, perhaps, exemplifies what White refers to as Bookchin's 'eerie prescience', which was by no means restricted to forebodings about 'global warming'. Just before Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* hit the bookstores in 1962, Bookchin (as Herber) was publishing his own critique of *Our Synthetic Environment*, exposing the reckless use of pesticides like DDT, the dangers of feeding hormones to domestic livestock, the health effects of excessive urbanization, and warning about 'low-level' radioactivity. As always, his ecological concerns were inseparable from his political analysis, because his argument, as the *Anarchy* article stipulates, was that we face 'a crisis not only in natural ecology but, above all, in *social ecology*' – a term that was to become synonymous with his work. Interestingly, the rather different version of this essay reprinted in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971) simply states: 'what we are seeing today is a crisis in social ecology' – arguably an omission of some significance, but perhaps also an indication that Bookchin now understood social ecology in 'synthetic' Hegelian terms. Obviously, then, his reference to destructive ecological parasitism must be read in this light, not as a biologically reductive critique of human beings per se (for Bookchin remained wedded to an Enlightenment humanism and rationalism), but as a wide-ranging and fundamental socio-political critique of contemporary social systems. And, of course, it is this admixture of ecology, left-Hegelianism, humanism and libertarian socialism that still incites admiration and hostility in varying proportions.

Bookchin's polemical excesses and argumentative intransigence were certainly a major cause of such hostility. As White remarks, Bookchin was 'a harsh and often ungenerous critic and this was often returned in kind'. While he was highly critical of Marxism, he often seemed, especially to other anarchists, to have inherited the doctrinaire attitude of so many of its adherents; albeit as an apparatchik of his very own 'party line'. Movements that initially appeared to be potentially complementary with, or even directly indebted to, his ideas would later find themselves condemned as manifestations of a politically dangerous *irrationality*. For example, in 1973, we can find Bookchin, like all subsequent radical ecologists, making a vital distinction between a resource-based, reformist, instrumentalist *environmentalism* and an *ecological* approach that regards 'diversity as desirable for its own sake'. What is more, he goes on to claim that diversity is 'a value to be cherished as part of a spiritualized notion of the living universe'. This neatly mirrors Arne Naess's distinction between 'shallow' and 'deep' ecology, also published in 1973 (although Bookchin wisely avoids making any claims about biospheric egalitarianism). Indeed, as late as 1984, Bookchin was happy to contribute a chapter to Tobias's edited collection *Deep Ecology*, where he again extolled the virtues of an ecological 'ethics' and 'a vision of the world that has been raised to the level of an *inspirited* metaphysical principle'. Yet, by 1986, the new introduction to *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* complains of the 'cooption' and 'tarnishing' of social ecology and the 'utterly reactionary perversions of its truth', and by 1987 this 'perversion' has been explicitly identified with deep ecological 'deviations'. Deep ecology is now labelled a vague form of 'spiritual Eco-la-la' and 'an ideological toxic dump' that is potentially 'eco-fascist'.

In a later interview Bookchin would, quite typically, feign surprise that anyone could possibly have been upset by the 'tone' of his argument, while simultaneously claiming that he had known that deep ecology was reactionary 'from the beginning'. And indeed the biological reductionism and espousal of lifeboat 'ethics' by *some* individuals associated with deep ecology certainly justified a forthright response. But Bookchin explicitly helped polarize the debate into two supposedly 'incommensurable' parties – a 'rational humanism' *versus* an 'irrational anti-humanism' – just as he would later polarize debates with other anarchists, and on very similar grounds, in his *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (1995). Perhaps these 'deviant' anarchists' fault was to take Bookchin's own accounts of an idealized primitive past in *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982) too seriously. Certainly the anti-civilization rhetoric that characterizes some of his targets is crass (if taken too literally), but then the simplistic binary, either 'for or against' social anarchism/ecology distinction, espoused by Bookchin can seem closer to George Bush than Bakunin. Even if *some* of these anarchists do appear 'mystical and irrationalist' from a scientistic perspective, it is not clear why their beliefs are inherently any more mystical, irrational or politically dangerous than Bookchin's notion of an 'immanent world-reason … the latent subjectivity in the inorganic and organic levels of reality that reveals an inherent

striving towards consciousness' finally revealing itself in human self-awareness. This quasi-Hegelian, totalizing and teleological, understanding, which regards nature as already saturated with (an ill-defined) 'rationality' is, apparently, the inner truth of social ecology, but the idea that it is supported by contemporary scientific understandings of evolution or ecology is, as White notes, wide of the mark.

All this makes White's task of providing a balanced critique of Bookchin's works extraordinarily daunting; all the more so because his key frame of reference is not environmentalism or anarchism per se, or the writings of Bakunin or Proudhon (who are not even referenced, let alone discussed), or even Kropotkin, but *Marx*, as read through geographers like David Harvey, Noel Castree and Neil Smith. How can this be reasonable? Well, White claims that 'few of Bookchin's key writings draw from or engage to any great degree with the classical anarchist thinkers'; that it would be oversimplistic to trace Bookchin's intellectual evolution as one from 'orthodox Marxism to Trotskyism, and then to anarchism'; and (citing Clark) that 'the specific lineage of Bookchin's social theory is found less in anarchism … than in critical theory, defined in the broadest sense and ranging from Hegel and Marx to … the first generation of the Frankfurt School'. But this radically underestimates the influence of anarchism on Bookchin's thought and, in part at least, excises him from the ecological and anarchist milieux that gave his work much of its originality and vitality. Of course it may facilitate a comparison of Bookchin with more mainstream academic currents but the danger is that his work comes to be evaluated as being a more (or less) adequate socio-theoretical precursor to recent forms of neo-Marxist discourse in their engagements with ecology.

This is not by any means to say that White presents a Marxist reading of Bookchin. In fact Bookchin is later praised for his 'welcome' turn to 'liberal constitutionalism' and described as advocating a 'Dionysian Republicanism'! Hardly terms I think Bookchin would be happy with. Nor, for that matter, is it to say that White's analysis lacks political/intellectual breadth, or that the insights he generates are misplaced. Far from it; this is a sophisticated and considered work that exhibits a genuinely rare critical engagement with the intricacies of Bookchin's thought. But Bookchin's, explicitly anarchist, works are also *extremely* critical of both Marx and Marxism. Of course, like many other anarchists, he borrowed from Marx's analysis of capital, but he despised the tendency of Marxist exegesis to judge everything in relation to the Master's work or to reduce politics (which he understood in quite Arendtian terms) to 'bourgeois social theory' – *his* description of Marxism. Indeed, he claimed that 'the development of a revolutionary project must *begin* by shedding the Marxian categories from the very beginning.… It is no longer simply capitalism we wish to demolish.' And yet Bookchin's critique of centralized industrial societies is often glossed by White in terms of a necessary but, for Bookchin, hardly sufficient critique of capitalism. (A critique that White suggests, in any case, is partly undermined by recent developments of 'green capitalism'.) For example, when discussing Bookchin's comments on André Gorz, White argues, quite rightly, that he was sceptical of the 'Neo-Malthusian' aspects of Gorz's work. However, this is hardly 'the central point' of Bookchin's critique, which was precisely that Gorz was too indebted to a 'sectarian Marxist orthodoxy'. 'What makes Gorz's book particularly distasteful', says Bookchin, 'is that it attempts to refurbish an orthodox economistic materialism with a new ecological anarchism' without even giving that anarchism any intellectual credit. (I'm reminded of Woody Allen's joke about the two residents of the Catskill retirement home – 'the food here is dreadful' says one. 'Yes and the portions are so small.') While White remarks that 'it is striking how much of Bookchin's central critical claim [that a 'grow or die' capitalism must devour the natural world] draws support from Marx', Bookchin's actual argument is that Marx (and, by implication, Gorz) fails to recognize the full (ecological) implications of this situation. Bookchin, as usual, is hardly trying to build bridges with a 'Marxian corpus' that he says 'lies in an uncovered grave, distended by gases and festering with molds and worms'. But, more importantly, it is Gorz's Marxist-inspired reduction of ecology to 'environmentalism', his failure to recognize any difference between the two 'ecologies' that Bookchin had noted back in 1973, which is absolutely central to their disagreement.

Again, the point here is not to posit an 'unbridgeable chasm' between Marx and Bookchin's anarchistic social ecology, still less to deny the relevance of Bookchin's thought to contemporary debates. White does an excellent job of bringing aspects of Bookchin's work into dialogue with, for example, 'ecological modernization' and 'new urbanism', revealing in the process the coherence, contradictions and contemporary relevance of his thought. But from Bookchin's perspective such debates are limited precisely to the extent that they fail to give due recognition to the creativity and diversity that characterize the 'natural' (more-than-human) world

– in Bookchin's terms, the 'first nature' that industrial societies reduce and consume. And this due recognition is, as Bookchin always insists, *ethical* as well as political. It does not simply treat first nature as a resource to be distributed according to the dictates of new hegemonic discourses, even those revelling in the name of '*environmental* justice'.

In this context, White needs to do more to maintain a separation between Bookchin's thought and the various forms of 'pragmatic' humanism that try to paint all radical ecologists as a-theoretical, neo-Malthusian wilderness freaks uninterested in urban issues. Bookchin's critique of asocial and ecologically reductivist strands of 'ecologism' was timely and important but also has to be understood in the particularly North American context of a 'wilderness' debate that has only ever constituted one strand of an extremely diverse 'environmental/ecological' movement. This movement has been infused with a radical ecology that engages in very fundamental ways with almost every aspect of social life, from public transport to recycling, from power production to pollution and political decentralization. Radical ecologists have been campaigning on urban and human health issues for generations, constantly arguing that the 'social' and the 'natural' are inseparable *and* concerning themselves with issues like species conservation and biodiversity. To paraphrase Bookchin, one might say there is nothing new about 'environmental justice' except the way it is being used to 'refurbish' neo-Marxist and left-liberal politics. An unfortunate consequence of this refurbishing is that radical ecology is all too frequently tarred with a Malthusian brush and their espousal of ethical concerns for 'first nature' invokes charges of implicit anti-humanism.

Again, I don't think this is White's intention (although I could be wrong), but it is a consequence of reading Bookchin's work through the socio-theoretical lens he has chosen. And, of course, Bookchin, too, must bear some of the responsibility for facilitating such a reading because of his own divisive polemics. Perhaps the omission of the term 'natural crisis', noted above, was also, unfortunately, eerily prescient? Certainly one doesn't get much of a sense of *ecological* urgency from those we might dub the new productivists, who sometimes seem to think they have resolved any 'natural crisis' by the judicious application of social theory. Maybe this is all just a matter of emphasis, but emphasis *matters*. Early on, White notes, for example, Bookchin's claim that, in defining people as 'what they produce and how they produce', Marx and Marxists effectively posit a 'stunningly impoverished view of humanity'. He also identifies this same economic productivism as being at the root of Marx(ism)'s focus on the expansion of productive forces necessary to overcome material scarcity – with all the ecological problems that this invariably brings in its wake. It also underlies the resourcism of Gorz's political ecology. But then surely White's own attempt to change the focus of analysis from Bookchin's concerns about the ideological 'domination of nature' to questions concerning the 'production of nature' risks reinscribing yet another form of this same (albeit now extraordinarily attenuated) social productivism. Perhaps, after all, we all still have something to learn from Bookchin.

Mick Smith

The elevator effect

George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race*, Rowman & Littlefield, New York, 2008. 265 pp., $29.95 pb., 978 0 7425 5298 2.

'We average Americans', observed Eric Holder in February 2009, 'simply do not talk enough with each other about race.' The Attorney General's diagnosis of this deficit was a national failure of nerve: 'We always have been and continue to be, in too many ways, essentially a nation of cowards.' Seeking to overcome such cowardice in his new book *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race*, George Yancy's tools are as varied as his subject: phenomenology and existentialism, literature and current events, calm analysis and charged classroom illustrations. The result is a blueprint of racism's mechanisms that Cornel West has pronounced 'the most philosophically sophisticated treatment we have of the most visceral issue in America and modernity.' Bringing together the insights of numerous thinkers – Douglass and DuBois, Husserl and Sartre, Toni Morrison and Frantz Fanon – Yancy attempts to unpack, in turn, the white gaze and how it denigrates the black body; how this denigration threatens to violate its victims' subjectivities, and how such violations can be resisted; and, finally, how whites evade responsibility for the wreckage their gaze still wreaks, but can yet recognize, and resist, its 'ambushes'.

Even 'unthinking' actions can reflect sophisticated expectations. I place my notebook on the table; I expect the table to withstand the notebook's weight. Yet, if

Hume was right about induction, then my present expectation(s) outrun any evidence I could muster (viz, concerning my *past* commerce with the table). If Berkeley (*sans* Deity) was right, my expectation that the table will even exist after I leave the room, too, outruns the sum of my observations. In numerous such ways, my habitual dropping of the notebook on the table reveals expectations that, in turn, presume table-properties which aren't found by 'just looking'. Rather, my mind projects these features upon (my thoughts of) the table whenever I encounter one. As Husserl noted, the discovery of my nuanced expectations and projections takes a special act of reflection; in ordinary life, the Natural Attitude spares me from dwelling on (or even noticing) these details. And when the topic is notebooks and tables, my blinkered Natural Attitude is, probably, all to the good. But, as Yancy argues, the same dynamic is at work in racist encounters – with profoundly demoralizing results. Take what Yancy dubs the 'Elevator Effect': a black man enters an elevator; the white woman inside 'sees' him and clutches her purse. Expectations, on the white woman's part, have been uncovered. But, as with our table encounter, none of these expectations – that the man is criminal, violent, and so on – justified by the man's phenotypic blackness. Rather, in the act of 'seeing' him, the woman's furtive mind has projected unfounded properties upon (her idea of) him. Strictly, the woman seizes in response to fear of not the *man*, but a 'ghost … of [her] own creation'.

Like a funhouse mirror, then, this white gaze exaggerates (or invents) certain features, which renders the black body 'hypervisible'. The white gaze, also like the trick-mirror, diminishes other features. More specifically, what the woman sees by 'just looking' triggers an anxiety-inducing false caricature, a *phantom*: 'she "sees" a criminal … a threat … a peripherally glimpsed vague presence of something dark, forbidden, and dreadful.' This hypervisibility, in turn, crowds out other things she *ought* to see. 'She does not see a dynamic subjectivity', Yancy observes, 'but a *sort*, something eviscerated of individuality, flattened, and rendered vacuous of genuine human feelings'. This treatment goes a long way to illuminate, among other literary examples, Ralph Ellison's pivotal notion of 'visible invisibility'.

Matters grow more complex, however, once witnesses enter the situation. This is easy to see with regard to our table example: when I'm alone, my actions manifest unspoken expectations and beliefs concerning the table. But now add witnesses; in such a case, not only do I exemplify my expectations, but these actions become important *performances*. In short, my behaviour vis-à-vis the table reinforces like expectations in those witnessing this performance. So, too, when we add witnesses to Yancy's elevator. Suppose a white male bystander sees our woman grab her purse; her actions then become a performance for the bystander. The woman's performance reinforces the bystander's own distorted expectations of, and projections upon, the black man in their midst, if he shares them; conversely, if he doesn't share the woman's prejudices, he may nonetheless reinforce those prejudices if (as often happens) he remains silent in the face of the woman's performance. Such performances – which range from gasping purse-grasps in elevators, to Malcolm X's maths teacher 'counselling' him to 'be realistic' and abandon his ambition to become a lawyer, to 'praising' an African-American scholar at an APA conference for 'speaking English well' – fall under the rubric of '(performances of) whiteness'.

Sartre notoriously defined hell as other people, and the gaze is a pivotal reason why. Others inspect my behaviour, but, since they're unable to introspect my subjectivity, their judgements of me are bound to be starker, harsher, than my self-evaluations. Sometimes, this is to the good, as when an interlocutor can confront my self-deception (*mauvaise foi*) and corner me into taking responsibility. I become aware of how my interlocutor sees and interprets my actions, and realize that her unflattering explanation should supplant my self-serving rationalization. An analogous dynamic is at work in racist encounters, but the upshot, given the wild invalidity of the projections of the white gaze, is pernicious: 'To have one's dark body penetrated by the white gaze then to have that body returned as distorted is a powerfully violating experience.' One understandable response to such violations, and the 'double consciousness' they engender (à la DuBois), is resignation; hence Pecola Breedlove's tragic trajectory in Toni Morrison's iconic novella *The Bluest Eye*. Yancy devotes a full chapter to interpreting this work, situating it in the just-sketched scaffolding of the white gaze, and, conversely, employing the work to illustrate the interlaced skeins of the white gaze, performances of whiteness, and the 'phenomenological return of the black body'. In light of how heavily the existential and socio-economic decks are stacked towards the white gaze and whiteness' performances, Breedlove's tragic resignation is understandable. For this reason, it's crucial to see how resistance is possible – and what it means. At its foundation, black resistance to the white gaze begins by manifesting the very subjectivity erased from black bodies by the white gaze. 'It is alleged',

wrote Frederick Douglass, 'that [we] are so low in the scale of humanity … that [we] are unconscious of [our suffered] wrongs, and do not apprehend [our] rights'. To resist, then, is already to confute the white gaze.

The specific vehicles of resistance are as diverse as intelligent imagination. At a quotidian level, the man in the elevator might resist the white woman's oppressive gaze by '[n]aming her fears' and explicitly disavowing them. At that point, the woman must now *see* that the target of her prejudices *sees* how her consciousness is turning, thus 'effective[ly] reversing her gaze'. In the more perilous times of Jim Crow, African Americans resisted by '"conform[ing]" to white myths while undermining those myths simultaneously' through self-conscious mental reservation – that is, irony; hence the deathbed advice of an elderly black man in Ellison's *Invisible Man*: 'I want you to overcome 'em [whites] with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction.' Even in the most dangerous times of slavery, resistance occurred, as Yancy discusses at length, by disrupting the status quo – using such 'guerilla tactics' as breaking tools, poisoning food, destroying crops, and effecting slow-downs in plantation operations. In all such tactics of resistance, we find a common thread: 'deflect[ions] of the Black imago in the white imaginary that depicted them as submissive and re-narrat[ions of] their identities as agential'. For this reason, *pace* bell hooks, resistance need not merely be negative; rather, '"to take a stand" is linked, existentially, to … [self-]affirmation.'

The issue of black resistance to the white gaze (and its performances) prompts an obvious parallel question: 'should[n't] *she*', wonders Yancy, referring to the woman in the elevator, 'be the one doing the work to challenge *her* racism?' This obligation ought to go without saying; yet, problematically, the white gaze 'covers its tracks'. Blacks, aware of how they are so-*seen*, suffer epistemic violence (and more) when their bodies are *returned* to them, distorted in every way – aesthetically, emotionally, intellectually, existentially. And yet whites by and large do not see their projections as caricatures, nor even as projections. Whites like our woman in the elevator don't, as Yancy puts it, see themselves as 'seeing as if'. They see themselves as 'seeing as *is*'.

In fact, the white gaze not only distorts black bodies; it also, when that gaze is reflected inward, distorts *white* bodies. The white gaze, trained on the black body, renders it hypervisible by perverting it into a gross caricature. But, trained on the white body, the white gaze renders it innocently invisible. For instance, while whites *may* concede that African Americans suffer unjust disadvantages because of their darker skins, it's a rare thing to find whites inferring the obvious corollary: we have incurred unjust advantages – *privileges*, in Peggy McIntosh's sense of the word – from our lighter skins. The white gaze erases whites' bodies from the factors responsible for white individuals' affluence. Such successes, instead, end up rationalized in a manner reminiscent of Horatio Alger: affluence is the simple result of making virtuous choices. In this way, the white gaze stretches white subjectivity into hypervisibility: free will, for instance, ends up bloated into a self-serving abstract individualism, flatteringly uncomplicated by material conditions or financial factors.

For this reason whites' self-esteem is bound up with denying racism's privileging effects. By extension, this also prompts denial of the far-reaching role that racism's practice (via performances of whiteness) bears in disadvantaging African Americans. Denial, as always, is a resourceful opponent, and Yancy provides example after example of how such denial arises in the classroom: from the student who dismisses Yancy's elevator example with a self-satisfied 'Bullshit!' to students who insist that the young DuBois 'misread' the reason for a white girl's refusal of his visiting card (not racially motivated but just 'how little girls generally treat little boys'), to students who jejunely insist on the validity of racial essentialism

('Of course race is real. Why do you think so many blacks dominate the NBA?'). And so on and on.

Despite the obstacles, Yancy holds out hope. It's often possible – and easier – for whites to 'double down' in their self-deception. But another way is possible. What, for instance, should our recurring woman in the elevator do to *undo* her role in sustaining whiteness? Yancy counsels that she – we – must not underestimate the commitment involved; 'undoing whiteness', he writes, 'does not presuppose an ontology of the self that is capable, through a single act of will and intention, of rising above the white discursive streams within which that self is embedded'. Instead, the *recovering* performer of whiteness (if I may make the comparison) is not unlike the recovering addict or alcoholic. Because of a lifetime of ingrained habits and attitudes involving certain substances, the addict is still vulnerable to *cravings*. The mark of the recovering addict is, then, not the extinction of cravings, but rather the ability to avoid identifying with, or indulging in, such cravings. So, too, a lifetime's exposure to anti-black tropes and performances can't help but leave their own behavioural tracks. There will be, even for whites who sincerely commit to (and persist in) renouncing their performances of whiteness, the haphazard prejudiced thoughts, turns of speech – or even seizures of one's purse (or wallet) in elevators. Yancy terms such unwelcome temptations towards relapse *ambushes*: 'Even as one attempts to shift the white gaze, as if it were solely a question of removing tinted glasses, one continues to "see" the "violent" black body as it approaches … and "lazy" Black bodies as they commune on street corners.' So seen, the mission of renouncing the performance of whiteness is daunting. And yet Yancy is confident that it's possible. After all, when ignorance is claimed, the rejoinder is obvious: 'But he/she *ought* to have been aware!' In this, Yancy notices the ability that such judgements presuppose; for, 'where he/she *ought* to have been aware, he/she *can* indeed be aware'. And where one can be *aware*, we might add, one can, indeed, resist such ambushes.

Timothy Chambers

The ignorant spectator

Jacques Rancière, *Le Spectateur émancipé*, La Fabrique éditions, Paris, 2008. 150 pp., €13.00, 978 2 9133 7280 1; forthcoming in translation as *The Emancipated Spectator*, Verso, London and New York, 2009. 128 pp, £12.99 hb., 978 1 84467 343 8.

Le spectateur émancipé is Jacques Rancière's practical appendix to his more theoretical yet lapidary draft on aesthetics, *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Unlike many other philosophers who, when invited to art events and conferences in order to ally their radicalism with contemporary art, show no actual interest in the 'contemporary', Rancière here shines as a curious and well-informed, albeit cautious, spectator of both new forms and newly old problems in theatre, photography, art and curatorship. What links the book's five studies together is the argument that the politics of art today lies in its capacity for emancipation, in a way that is opposed to the critical operations by which contemporary art itself seeks political effects. Hence, this book supplements his well-known theses on the rupture of the sensible, as the politico-aesthetic form of 'art revolution', with a vivid and incisive analysis of specific artworks and debates.

The opening essay, written from a perspective informed by Rancière's account of emancipation in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987), makes the issue of 'spectatorship' the nexus of a discussion about so-called political art and critical discourse. The spectator is the one who watches the spectacle but doesn't know the conditions of its production, and, while watching from her seat, isn't given the power to act or intervene. The history of modern theatre, and its contemporary struggle for political revitalization, has been shaped by its struggle with spectatorship as a necessary evil. Theatre's main concern has thus been how to turn the ignorant and passive spectators into actors. Brecht's alienation-effect sought to activate the self-consciousness of a critical viewer; Artaud's magic power of ceremony sought to recuperate the vital energy of an observer liberated from the constraints of reason. These are the two poles, Rancière argues, of a general effort to turn theatre into a form of community's self-activity.

Contemporary theatre still suffers from an obsession with its true essence: theatre as the only

place where an audience confronts itself as a collective. Rancière reads this as an opposition of the self-presence of community to the distance of representation, and thereby connects this distance of representation, between gaze and knowledge, activity and passivity, with Debord's critique of the spectacle. If 'separation is the alpha and omega of the theatre', similar in form to the externality of images that dispossess subjects of their experience (Debord), then 'dramaturgy' (which for Rancière means the art of drama in theatre) specifically teaches spectators how to become performers of a collective activity that has been stolen from them. For what is expected from theatre – as avant-garde, radical, politically engaged – is to reconstitute community in the collective experience and action of an audience. The critique of representation upon which the discourse of contemporary performance relies is therefore often like a 'pedagogy' which aims to reduce the gap between ignorance and knowledge. The dramaturge (whether as theatre maker, playwright, director, actor) is a figure compared with the schoolmaster who stultifies the ignorant. His role is to ensure the efficient communication of intentions on the assumption that affecting or raising consciousness will necessarily lead to (political) action. Whereas stultification assumes the unilateral determination of cause and effect, emancipation begins with their dissociation – with the distance built into the very situation. The performance is a third term that stands between the spectator and the dramaturge, and that separates them. It also divides the audience into individual spectators (therefore the singular form of 'spectator'), where each one is active in observing, selecting, comparing and interpreting what the master-dramaturge might not know. Only when each spectator is challenged in her capacity to perceive and understand is she on the way to emancipation, to creating her own voice of subjectivation. So, 'the collective power which is common to the spectators is not the status of members of a collective body. Nor is it a peculiar kind of interactivity. It is the power of translating in their own way what they are looking at.'

Evocation of this last power makes it sound as if Rancière were advocating a relativist post-*opera aperta* openness of reading for the sake of the spectator's reappropriation of the self. He is, however, wary of such hyperactivist consumer-individualism, and the sort of emancipation he has in mind is by no means about the spectator identifying herself in her own story. It only begins when a new intellectual adventure – a stage that redistributes the visible, sayable and thinkable – calls for competences and roles to dissociate from one another or to reinvent themselves. Theatre that plays without words, and dance that plays with words, installations and performances instead of art objects, video projections turned into cycles of frescoes, photographs turned into living pictures or history paintings, sculpture which becomes hypermediatized show – these are, in Rancière's words, the 'dissensual forms' that bring the common of the community, or the regimes of the sensible, into creative disagreement.

The next three essays revolve around image and the discourse about its critical and political operations. In 'Intolerable Image', Rancière addresses the infamous polemic about the unrepresentability of the Holocaust generated by the 2002 Paris exhibition of photography, *Mémoires des camps*. Instead of choosing to argue for the evidence of the image (insufficient and, therefore, illusory) or for the testimony of speech (incomplete but true), Rancière finds a third way in yet another 'dissensual' example. Alfredo Jaar's *Real Pictures*, about genocide in Rwanda, is an installation detaching words from the voice and isolating the gaze from the face of victim in a kind of textual image. It serves here to illustrate that the problem is not about whether to show horror or not, but about how the victim is constructed. The representation cannot be judged on its fidelity to the real, as there is no outside to art, no reality to oppose to its false and 'evil' appearance in image. The politics of art, Rancière reasserts, lies in the fiction of spatio-temporal apparatuses (*dispositifs*) and their capacity to construct other realities in other communities of words, images and things.

By contrast, Josephine Meckseper's *Untitled* (2005), showing protesters against the war in Iraq turned with their backs to a pile of consumer garbage, becomes the centrepiece of Rancière's 'critique of critique'. The image without title stages, as if it needs 'no comment', the commodity-equivalence of terrorism and consumerism. Its patronizing tone of vanity and blame epitomizes the irony and melancholy of the Left and produces the same cynical effect as the recent (hypo)critical furore of the Right over the riots and protests in France. Rancière makes Alain Finkielkraut's statement – that all that the young rebels burning schools in the suburbs of Paris want is 'money, brands and girls' – resonate with the critique of a leftist sociologist like Luc Boltanski. The perversity of the argument that 'the more you are trying to resist, the more you are contributing' is simply the denial of any possibility of emancipation.

This requires a critique of critique that will build a new trust in the political capacity of images. Images can contribute by drawing a new configuration of the sensible, but on the condition that they don't work for a political effect.

With this we arrive at the conclusion of Rancière's argument. In a chain of affirmative examples, Rancière analyses what he calls the 'pensive image' – title of the last essay. Cutting across a selection of twentieth-century photography and cinema, from Walker Evans and Lewis Payne to Abbas Kiarostami and Rineke Dijkstra, the pensive image encapsulates the principle that Rancière defends in his concept of the aesthetic regime: undecidability or indetermination due to the suspension of any attribution to the work of social or political origin, intention or destination. A pensive image hides a thought which affects the spectator without allowing her to attribute it either to the author of the image or to the subject of the portrait in the image. This is not a given condition for any artwork after 1800 – the modernist status of autonomy – but a result of sophisticated crossings between heterogeneous regimes of expression, which 'create new figures, awakening the sensible possibilities that have been exhausted'.

Although Rancière's account of contemporary mediality as relocation of the effect of one medium into another is strikingly acute, he doesn't theorize like a curator, who might go so far as to baptize a distinct aesthetic on the basis of a particular artistic operation. His agenda, and the performative success of these essays, is to disarm such curatorial debates. The question is who is destined for what message. *Le Spectateur émancipé* recommends that the artist 'experiment more', and the curator 'speculate less'; look into the possibilities of recasting the sensible, Rancière suggests, and you will find them abundant. But this precisely indicates the limit of Rancière's plea for emancipation. It remains bound to an analysis of representation in the form of the sensible without accounting for those registers of art's operations that concern the political economy of art production, as well as experiments with the forms of labour and sociality through which art might challenge the part in which it has been cast within society. However, this might well be to demand more than that which *Le Spectateur émancipé* actually aims for. For, in the end, what we are given is, above all, a figure of the spectator whose capacities to sense and think are greater than we have – since Lacan, Debord, Irigaray and other French 'denigrators' of the spectacle – been prepared to conceive.

Bojana Cvejic

Number theory

Alain Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, trans. Robin Mackay, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2008. 240 pp., £16.99 pb., 978 0 7456 3879 9.

One of the more astonishing aspects of Alain Badiou's philosophical position is that the key to what is most distinctive about it can be summarized in just three words: mathematics is ontology. His major work, *Being and Event*, kicks off with this stark assertion, and proceeds to derive a series of bold conclusions – the wresting of ontology from Heidegger's embrace, the construction of a rigorous and rationalist metaphysics, and a wholesale refoundation of the relationship between philosophy and science, the latter henceforth being conceived as one of philosophy's 'conditions'.

It should be noted, however, that while Badiou identifies ontology with mathematics in its most general sense, *Being and Event* by and large concerns itself with a very specific field of mathematics, namely set theory. Badiou recasts this as the theory of 'pure multiplicity', a reference to the fact that sets do nothing more than gather together their multiple elements and count them as one. There are reasons for this choice, of course, not least of which is the role that set theory plays within mathematics. Set theory acts as a kind of internal ontology of mathematics, certainly in the weak sense that any mathematical entity can be thought of as a kind of set, and arguably in the strong sense that mathematical entities actually *are* sets. For example, the mathematical concept of an ordered pair $\langle a, b \rangle$ is distinct from that of the set $\{a, b\}$. The former has an ordering that makes a its first element and b its second. The latter, in contrast, is a pure multiple without any kind of order inscribed upon it. But although ordered pairs are conceptually distinct from sets, they can be implemented as sets by defining the ordered pair $\langle a, b \rangle$ as the set $\{\{a\}, \{a, b\}\}$. The reader can check that given any set of this form, one can extract the first and second elements from it. Ordered pairs can thus be simulated through the intricate weaving together of pure multiplicities. The same, arguably, is true of any other entity used in mathematics.

But while set theory plays an important foundational role in mathematics, that is almost all it does. The concepts and techniques it deploys are of little interest to the 'working mathematician', most of whom get by with only a smattering of knowledge of the field. Only occasionally does a problem in general mathematics turn out to revolve around set-theoretic considerations – though such occasions can and do arise, which is

why set theory cannot simply be dismissed a province for pedants and philosophers.

All this opens up an intriguing problem: what is the ontological significance of the rest of mathematics, the overwhelming bulk of mathematics, once one moves beyond the limited terrain of pure set theory? Far from being the final word on the question of being, Badiou's identification of mathematics with ontology opens the door to a vast 'meta-ontological' research programme, one that scours the entirety of contemporary mathematical thought, elucidating its concepts and thinking through their metaphysical implications. Indeed, Badiou's own work occasionally hints at this larger research programme. In his essay 'Group, Category, Subject', he argues that the mathematical theory of groups can act as a grounding framework for the psychoanalytic notions of subjectivity found in Lacan and Freud. In 'One, Multiple, Multiplicities', his rejoinder to Deleuzean critics, Badiou argues that notions of the 'open' and the 'closed' should ultimately refer back to the way these concepts are deployed in topology.

The most systematic exploration of a region of mathematics outside its foundational core comes in Badiou's short book *Number and Numbers*. It was published in 1990, a couple of years after *Being and Event*, and has now been expertly translated into English by Robin Mackay. In it Badiou examines what mathematicians call the 'surreal numbers' – a class of number-like entities that incorporate familiar species of number, such as the integers, the rationals and the reals, but also encompass less familiar ones such as transfinite ordinals and infinitesimals (i.e. infinitely small quantities). The surreal numbers were introduced by the mathematician John Horton Conway as a by-product of his investigations into Go, the ancient Japanese board game. Conway simply called his creations Numbers – the term 'surreal numbers' was coined by Donald Knuth in his peculiar 1974 booklet of the same name, the text that introduced Conway's creations to the wider public. Knuth's terminology has since stuck. Significantly Badiou reverts to calling them Numbers, despite the fact that in other respects his approach is diametrically opposed to Conway's recursive and constructivist presentation.

Badiou sets out his stall in the polemical opening pages of *Number and Numbers* – a chapter numbered zero and entitled "Number must be thought". In it he notes the profusion of different types of numbers, both within mathematics and in culture at large, and contrasts this empirical extravagance with the stubborn absence of any unifying *concept* of number. It is to remedy this deficiency that Badiou turns to the surreals and presses them into service. He notes that the class of surreals subsumes all the heterogeneous entities we ordinarily like to think of as numbers, and a whole lot more besides. Yet as a class they can be defined in a uniform and relatively straightforward manner. They are both comprehensive and simple – and for Badiou the simultaneous presence of these two virtues is the calling card of the properly ontological. The surreal numbers are thus more than a curiosity or a neat trick: they capture the essence of number itself. The Numbers tell us what number *is*.

Much attention has been paid to the political gloss Badiou puts on his project here. The book's back-cover blurb presents his attempt to construct a rigorous concept of Number as a broadside against 'the political regime of global capitalism' and its reliance on a concept-less and ramified numerosity. Despite my sympathies with Badiou's leftist politics, I find this claim overblown. While it is certainly true that capitalism presses numbers into its ideological service, it is not clear how a rigorous concept of Number would per se challenge such abuses. And surely the problem with opinion polls, stock-market prices, econometric models and so on resides not in the maths as such, but in their tenuous relationship to reality. The now-discredited formulae used to price financial derivatives are still perfectly effective and compelling when used by physicists to model Brownian motion.

These caveats aside, Badiou is right to point out that contemporary thought has a blind spot when it comes to number, and right to attempt to remedy this deficiency. The next half-dozen chapters proceed to survey earlier attempts to think number by Frege, Dedekind, Peano and Cantor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is the most accessible section of the book and is valuable in its own right as a thorough introduction for non-specialists to the philosophical and mathematical issues at work here.

The treatment of Frege gives an insight into Badiou's approach. We start with a firm focus on the metaphysical stakes of Frege's project – the conviction that numbers can be engendered from pure thought. We are then guided through Frege's construction of number, its demolition and partial repair at the hands of Russell and Zermelo, before coming to Badiou's materialist critique. Frege ultimately fails because one cannot derive the existence of objects from pure thought. The existence of something rather than nothing is an ontological axiom, not a logical necessity. Yet there is a twist in the tail – Frege's masterstroke of starting his consideration of number from zero rather than one turns out to lay the foundations for a materialist

ontology capable of providing a framework for the thinking of Number. All this is achieved in nineteen terse, numbered paragraphs.

Having completed his historical survey, Badiou moves on to recapitulate certain aspects of set theory and ontology – material that will be familiar to those who have read *Being and Event* and that acts as a useful companion to that work. He then proceeds to use this set-theoretic machinery to define Numbers, demonstrate that they have a natural linear order, and prove a variety of theorems about them. The book culminates in the definition of basic arithmetical operations such as addition and multiplication, and the verification that these operations obey the standard algebraic laws one would expect. As is often the case in Badiou's work, the mathematics he presents is standard, though the presentation of it is tweaked to reflect his philosophical agenda. For instance, Badiou defines a Number to be a specified subset of a specified ordinal. This is not a standard definition, though it can be shown to be equivalent to those found in mathematical literature.

The merit of Badiou's approach here is its low ontological overhead. Number is defined more or less directly in terms of the basic set-theoretical relationships of belonging and inclusion. In particular, the definition goes through without reference to any prior notion of order, seriality or counting. Number is thus sundered from any kind of intuition or empiricism and rendered purely as a 'form of Being'. It is also worth noting that Badiou's approach to Numbers makes them appear 'all at once', so to speak. The entire field of surreal numbers is defined in one fell swoop – the weirdest and wildest Numbers born simultaneously and alongside familiar entities such as 2, –17 and ¼. This is in sharp contrast to Conway's generative approach that starts from the integers and progressively creates ever more complex surreals. The contrast is even sharper with Knuth's take on Conway, which is framed in explicitly theological terms as a creation parable involving God and a pair of maths-besotted hippies.

These and other fascinating technical intricacies aside, the big question is whether any of this works. Does Badiou supply a coherent, unifying concept of number that is consistent with his wider ontological project? Does he manage to succeed where others have failed in 'thinking Number'? In my judgement the answer is a provisional and cautious 'yes'. Badiou's metaphysical take on the surreals is bold and startling, but it does provide an answer to the question 'what is number?', albeit one that is most persuasive to those already partial to Badiou's views on these matters.

Nevertheless, some warnings are in order, most of which revolve around the mathematics of surreal numbers. Despite the astonishing beauty of the surreals, attempts to make use of them in wider mathematics have so far foundered (at least so far as I am aware). For instance, while the surreals admit particularly neat definitions of addition and multiplication, exponentiation proves to be significantly more awkward. Moreover, these definitions do not easily yield a practical algorithm for calculating arithmetic sums and products, as one might have hoped. And while the surreals include all manner of infinitesimal quantities, it has proved exceptionally difficult to develop calculus using these infinitesimals. The surreals promise much, but have so far delivered little.

But is it just a coincidence that the surreal numbers, like set theory, turn out to be of little practical use for the working mathematician? Perhaps there is a necessary disjunction between ontological importance and practical utility. Perhaps the 'use' of these regions of mathematics is precisely to act as an ontological foundation for the rest of mathematics, and we shouldn't expect anything more of them. Perhaps ontology is the discourse that picks up precisely at the point where practicality has nothing left to say. This would be an surprisingly Heideggerian conclusion to draw from Badiou's austerely rationalist vision, but one that would be in keeping with his distrust of the dimly empirical.

Anindya Bhattacharyya

Neither last nor least

Edward Skidelsky, *Ernst Cassirer: The Last Philosopher of Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2008. 288 pp, £19.95 hb., 978 0 6911 3134 4.

Following his death in 1945, Ernst Cassirer tended to be viewed in the anglophone world as a formidable and erudite intellectual historian with little of substance in terms of his own philosophical position, while in the German-speaking world he was seen as the most significant of the last generation of Marburg Neo-Kantians. Cassirer's magnum opus, the three-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–29), came to be viewed as the final defence of German idealism before Heidegger dealt it the final blow. This milestone was marked by the famous Davos encounter of March 1929, in which a young and ascendant existentialist

encountered the established idealist and, to the general consensus of those present, the former won on points. Davos famously marked a 'parting of the ways' in European philosophy, after which the continental and analytical trends finally broke apart, leaving idealism behind as a sloughed skin.

Of course such characterizations are a caricature of the real situation, for neo-Kantianism found a whole series of at least partial adherents who are of undoubted importance in the contemporary world: Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas to mention just three. Both Bakhtin and Habermas affirmed the undiminished value of Cassirer's work and this has encouraged renewed attention to be paid to Cassirer's work itself, with J.M. Krois's 1987 book *Cassirer: Symbolic Forms and History* marking a particularly important landmark in highlighting the original contribution Cassirer made to philosophy and challenging the notion that his work can simply be regarded as a continuation of neo-Kantianism. Edward Skidelsky has now produced another landmark with perhaps the first real intellectual biography of Cassirer in English, tracing the emergence of his thought among the Marburg School, his movement beyond its scientism into the philosophy of culture, his ongoing engagement with competing intellectual trends such as *Lebensphilosophie*, logical positivism and existentialism, and his final attempts to engage with the questions of technology and politics.

The book is structured into nine chapters dealing with different periods or points of focus throughout Cassirer's career. The main parts are the Marburg School, Goethe, Cassirer's philosophy of culture, logical positivism, *Lebensphilosophie*, Heidegger, and finally Cassirer's attempt to discuss politics in his final book *The Myth of the State*. While the main focus is on the development of Cassirer's own philosophy in relation to the theorizing going on around him, there is little attention devoted to some of Cassirer's best-known works in the anglophone world – his works on intellectual history. While this is understandable in an intellectual biography of this type, the reader may have benefited from some reflection on Cassirer's understanding of the history of philosophical thought, especially since the author is here trying to place Cassirer's ideas within the history of the philosophy of the first half of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, Skidelsky should be congratulated for presenting us with an extremely readable and compelling account of Cassirer's work, delivering it from the stratospheric abstractness of the Marburg School and revealing a dynamic and engaging thinker who was open to every philosophical innovation. The impression of Cassirer as a mere chronicler of intellectual trends is shown to rest on his abhorrence of confrontation and his repeated striving for conciliation, which at times masked a critical encounter no less acute and searching than those better known through their polemical force. This also contributed to the perceived defeat at Davos, as Heidegger repeatedly attempted to foreground the fundamental differences between his own and Cassirer's interpretations of Kant's legacy, while Cassirer repeatedly tried to make peace. While Heidegger insisted that it is drawing attention to the finitude of human existence that marks Kant's greatest achievement, Cassirer retorted that this is but the starting point for Kant's illustration of how humanity can transcend such limitations and aspire to universality. Skidelsky argues that while worthy of much greater scrutiny as the basis of a possible counter-strategy to Heidegger, Cassirer himself failed finally to get to grips with Heidegger's radical vision, and the history of philosophy since this time has been written accordingly. A new look at the potential implicit in Cassirer's response is due, and this also extends beyond the engagement with Heidegger as such.

Thus, in two fascinating chapters, Skidelsky examines Cassirer's engagement with logical positivism and *Lebensphilosophie*, which are viewed as two sides of a single philosophical problem, with Cassirer attempting to mediate between them. While the former strove to cleanse philosophy of everything that was not rooted in logical syntax, the latter strove to dissolve reason into the ineffable processes of life. The two trends were seen as reinforcing the excesses of each other, with the first aspiring to ever greater logicism, scientism and physicalism, and treating its adversary as irrationalist nonsense unworthy of serious engagement, while the latter presented rational arguments as divorced from the most important aspects of human existence.

While Skidelsky absolves Wittgenstein of responsibility for this, he shows that the new positivists, especially Carnap, who attended the Davos encounter, distinguished between expressive and logical meaning, relegating the former to a pre-philosophical and metaphysical status. While he never really addressed all the issues raised by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, and he never wrote a sustained work on logical positivism, Cassirer is shown to have engaged with the ideas at various points, seeking to uphold the Vienna Circle's advocacy of 'scientific civilization' while hoping to counter its ever-narrowing focus of concerns. Here we see a similar process at work as that which led Cassirer to move away from the 'one-sided rationalism' of

the Marburg School. For Cassirer the excesses of the Vienna Circle were akin to the 'mathematical dogmatism' of Hermann Cohen since they tended to identify the unity of culture and the unity of reason and as such abandoned all other aspects of human life to irrationalism and mysticism. While the dangers of this approach were evident already in the period before World War I, by the later 1920s the dangers were very clear to see, and were no longer mere questions of philosophical taste, but increasingly of a political nature.

Skidelsky thus presents Cassirer's emerging philosophy of culture not as something indifferent to political developments, but as something that needs to be understood in relation to those developments even if he was rarely to discuss politics itself. There is no doubt much truth in this: the Marburg School were champions of a liberal social democracy and were associated with the revisionist trend in German socialism. It is clear that Skidelsky is generally sympathetic to this trend, and he makes several comments on neo-Kantianism as a force which allowed a 'liberation' from allegedly Marxist economic determinism. Indeed, Cassirer is shown to have viewed the failure of the Weimar Republic as the result of the leaders being 'determined Marxists' who concentrated only on economic conditions and thus ignored the appeal of the Nazi myth. But there is no sense that the author has actually familiarized himself with the actual political commitments of Weimar leaders, nor with the analyses of fascism then being developed by the most sophisticated Marxists. Indeed, while Cassirer is presented as anticipating some of the ideas of the Frankfurt School, there is no attempt to discuss the role of Marxism in those ideas. Instead Cassirer's commitment to liberalism is simply upheld, though with intelligent comments on his inability to deal with political questions in anything but the most oblique way, and his failure to come to grips with the issue of technology.

Indeed, Cassirer's main motivation here appears to be the need to combat the positivist alienation of reason from other aspects of social life, and a strong case is made for this. His early writings on the natural sciences, which opposed Mach's positivism, continue through to his sporadic engagements with logical positivism, and are shown to have motivated a sustained engagement with *Lebensphilosophie*. In contradistinction to the positivists and *Lebensphilosophen*, Cassirer rooted all experience in a process of symbolization which progresses from the lowest form of myth to the higher forms of culture such as art, science and religion. Here we clearly have the influence of Hegel and Goethe on Cassirer's work, which Skidelsky shows quite clearly. However, there is a problem here, as the narrative which underlies Cassirer's philosophy of culture is not as radically anti-positivist as Skidelsky claims, for the presentation of positivism here is limited to that of Mach's approach to natural science. The Comtean tradition is passed over with scarcely a mention, and there is curiously no mention at all of Cassirer's complex relationship to the most important positivist theorist of mythical thought, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. This is significant, since while Cassirer clearly differed from the positivists in philosophical terms, he nevertheless adopted many of the same formulations without significantly amending them. Cassirer thus tended to transpose positivist formulations into the territory of German idealism rather than opposing positivism as such throughout his career. This idealization of the positivist narrative runs throughout his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, and was to facilitate the assimilation of Cassirer's ideas about mythical thought into Soviet cultural theory of the 1930s. It is therefore arguable that Cassirer's engagement with positivism was as sustained and constructive as with *Lebensphilosophie*.

These quibbles aside, Skidelsky's book manages to highlight the fact that the history of philosophy of the period is much more complex than the caricatures of most textbook accounts, and Cassirer emerges as a figure who mediated the various trends of the time prior to the split between the analytical and 'continental' traditions. As a point of such mediation, Cassirer appears a figure worthy of renewed attention, whose works are full of features that might spur on the renewal of philosophical thought about culture. But the main relevance of Cassirer's work, according to the author, is its capacity to strengthen the philosophical and cultural bases of liberalism. According to Skidelsky, formal democracy and the 'freedoms' of the market economy are vulnerable precisely because of the lack of a firm cultural undergirding. Anglo-American liberalism appears to need some lessons from the German liberal thought of which Cassirer was a late champion. Yet it is unclear exactly what Cassirer has to offer in those very spheres where his ideas were most deficient – politics and economics. For all Cassirer's philosophical insight and erudition he has so little to say about the sources and institutions of power that it would appear that such philosophical thinking needs to be radically restructured. This is something progressive thinkers who have been influenced by Cassirer such as Habermas and Bourdieu have recognized rather better than the author of this book.

Craig Brandist

OBITUARY

J.G. Ballard, 1930–2009

I always suspected that eternity would look like Milton Keynes.

J.G. Ballard (1993)

With the recent outpouring of tributes to the late J.G. Ballard on the part of mainstream literary culture, it is easy to forget that he was in the 1970s the recipient of a reader's report that read 'This author is beyond psychiatric help. Do not publish.' Ballard was belatedly launched onto the features pages of the broadsheets by the success of his 1984 semi-autobiographical novel *Empire of the Sun*, and his domestication as the acceptable face of a very British avant-gardism – all too apparent in his obituaries – disguised the degree to which he had once been genuinely regarded as more akin to 'a grenade tossed into the sherry party of English fiction'. Indeed, Ballard, who always remained profoundly estranged from the provincialism of a national literary culture defined by the particularist study of 'human relations' and the instrumentalized 'craft' of creative writing, was, up until the 1980s, disparaged twice over: first as a practitioner of that disreputable genre science fiction, and second as that most un-English of figures, the experimental artist.

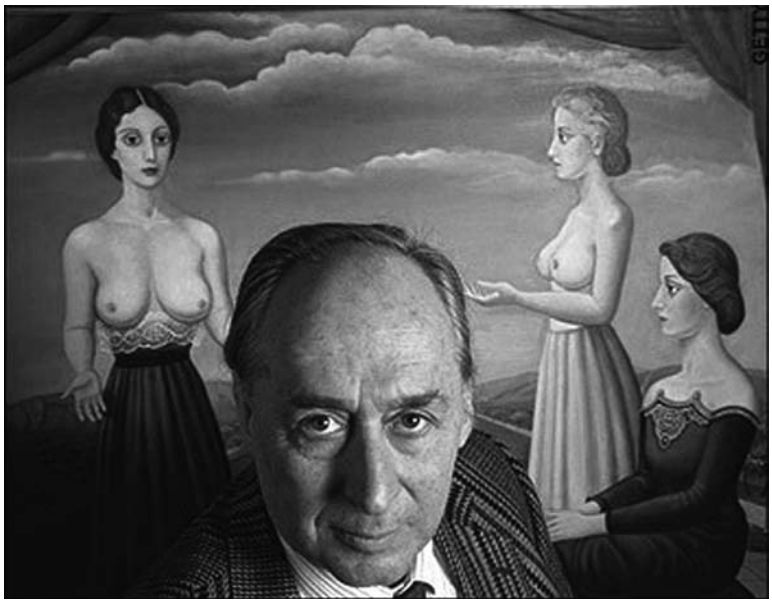
In fact, he may be best remembered as a rare late-twentieth-century embodiment of the novelist of ideas (unsurprisingly it was the French who first paid him any serious critical attention), and one who sought, more successfully than most, to confront the postwar 'crisis' of the European novel itself in the face of new and ever more ubiquitous mass media forms. Hard though the work is to locate politically, beyond the kind of basic libertarianism that is notoriously resistant to positioning in conventional Left–Right terms, its critical significance resides in its ruthless engagement with the social forms of developed capitalist societies.

Like those of many of the most significant British and North American writers of the last few decades, Ballard's roots lay, crucially, not in so-called 'literary fiction' but in the new mass cultural forms of genre. Ballard was drawn to the 'ultra-low-budget' B-movie crime thrillers coming out of postwar America; however, his immediate inspiration came from his discovery of commercial science fiction in the bus depot magazine racks of Moose Jaw, Canada, where he was stationed with the RAF in the mid-1950s. While dismissive of the 'planet yarns' largely dominating the s-f of the time – stories of 'an American imperium colonizing the entire universe', 'populated by Avon ladies in space suits' – Ballard discovered a distinctively modernist 'vitality' in other stories of 'the present or very near future'; stories that directly engaged an everyday 'world of cars, offices, highways, airlines and supermarkets that we actually lived in, but which was completely missing from almost all serious fiction'.

While Ballard's own early s-f novels belong most clearly to a genre of post-apocalypse – 'visions of world cataclysm' depicted in a hallucinatory but sharply focused landscape of deserted half-ruined buildings and desolate natural terrains – they are also marked by an attention to landscape itself, as a generator and manifestation of unconscious collective drives, indicative of his debts to the 'modern mythology' of surrealism and to its Lautréamont-like conjunction of scientific and poetic imagery. Precursors of the later fiction are, however, more obviously to be found in Ballard's short stories of the period: in the consumerist paranoia of 'The Subliminal Man' or the encroaching urban landscape of 'Build-up', which seems to communicate directly with the contemporaneous architectural visions of Archizoom and Superstudio.

Ballard's first published short story appeared in 1956, the same year as the Whitechapel Gallery exhibition 'This is Tomorrow', which effectively launched Pop Art in Britain. In his 2008 memoir, *Miracles of Life*, Ballard recalled being most impressed by the exhibition's projection of a 'world entirely constructed from popular advertising', as well as by the brutalist modernity of the architects Alison and Peter Smithson's design of a 'terminal hut' for post-nuclear habitation. The social, architectural and psychological landscape evoked here, in which 'thermonuclear weapons systems and soft drink commercials coexist in an overlit realm ruled by advertising and pseudoevents, science and pornography', was to become the central subject of almost all his work from the late 1960s, apparent in the fictional 'Advertisements' that Ballard began to produce at this time – short abstract texts superimposed on glossy, high-quality photos, which at one point he applied for Arts Council funding to have published in *Vogue* – as well as in a series of provocative events staged at venues like the ICA and the Arts Lab. Most importantly, around 1966 Ballard began working on a series of short interconnected prose pieces that would ultimately form the text of his 1970 'novel' *The Atrocity Exhibition*, his most significant, and certainly most experimental, full-length work.

Made up entirely of short titled paragraphs, and reflective of a world where the 'public dream of Hollywood for the first time merge[s] with the private imagination of the hyper-stimulated TV viewer', *The Atrocity Exhibition* constructs a radically non-linear narrative of obsession, in which a cast of often interchangeable characters or 'psychological roles' – like abstract elements in some 'geometric equation' – act out an 'authentic mythology of the age of Cape Canaveral, Hiroshima and Belsen'. The book also marks an explicit turn towards what Ballard called 'inner space': an *interiorization* of the catastrophic landscapes of his earlier science fiction that would seek to investigate 'the pathology that underlay the consumer society, the TV landscape and the nuclear arms race'. As in the apparently more conventional work, *Crash* (1973), that came after it, the novel thus becomes here less the nuanced Jamesian study of human relations prized by English literary criticism than something akin to a clinical case study or test report, in which the novelist's role is to be 'that of the scientist, whether on safari or in his laboratory, faced with a completely unknown terrain or subject'. The brutalist urban novels which followed, *Concrete Island* (1974) and *High-Rise* (1975), similarly suggest some pulp modernist revision of the novel of ideas, reconceptualized as the vehicle for 'extreme hypotheses' and a fictionalized social anthropology of those 'new lifestyles' which modern technology produces. As he put it in a 1975 interview:



> Above all I'd like to examine the psychological modifications which occur without the knowledge of the inhabitants themselves, to see to what degree the mind of someone who drives a car or lives in a concrete high-rise has been altered. … The life led there seems to me very abstract, and that's an aspect of setting with which I'm concerned.

Ballard's last series of novels continued to advance this concern with 'setting'. Starting with *Running Wild* (1988), and extending into the more thriller-like *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Super-Cannes* (2000), such works follow an increasingly standardized

narrative pattern in which the apparent emotional deadness and tranquillity of some near future gated enclave of corporate or domestic bourgeois privilege descends gradually into atavistic, socially transgressive violence and criminality. Presaged by the Debordian revelation that, as he once observed, there was nothing at all surprising about the emergence of a group like the Baader–Meinhof gang from a world that promised a future that 'was going to be like Dusseldorf … a consumer goods paradise with not a leaf out of place', these late writings flirt with a formal banality and blank evenness of prose which, fittingly, suggest some attempt to infiltrate the literary space of the middle-class airport novel, of 'fictions wrapped in metallized jackets that we scarcely notice on our way to the duty-free shop'. In such ways, with their stripped-down language of dislocation and unvarying stylistic register, they appear self-consciously mimetic of what, in the late 1960s, Ballard had already described as a mass cultural 'death of affect'. As Manfredo Tafuri writes of Mies van der Rohe's postwar buildings, Ballard's texts progressively 'assume *in themselves* the ineluctability of absence that the contemporary world imposes on the language of forms'.

The spaces that (far more than the flattened characters traversing them) thus constitute the central subjects of these late fictions read, as several critics have remarked, like an effective checklist of what Marc Augé, in his 'Anthropology of Supermodernity', famously designates as 'non-places': 'areas peripheral to great airports [which] are identical all over the world', populated by retails parks and flyovers, 'the same car-rental agencies and hotel rooms, with their adult movies and deodorized bathrooms'. But, unlike Augé, and despite his frequent (mis)identification as a dystopian writer, Ballard also finds, elsewhere, in the afterlife of utopian–modernist urbanism – in the 'high-rise sink estate', the brutalist concrete plains of the Barbican development and London's South Bank, or the glass atrium of Michael Manser's Heathrow Hilton – the generation of some *new* logic of social being-in-the-world to be glimpsed within their abstract spaces of encounter and exchange. Such spaces harbour not simply a tragic negation of place, nor mere existential absence, but a kind of occluded phenomenological intensity, an unintended *deliriousness* at the heart of contemporary metropolitan life. (Not for nothing were Ballard and Rem Koolhaas the two last defenders of Salvador Dalí's kitsch, paranoiac surrealism during the 1970s.)

In his 1936 essay 'The Storyteller', Walter Benjamin saw the novel, which had once deposed the story as a 'present force', being itself displaced by a 'new form of communication': a form he called 'information'. Today, this is the linguistic terrain of what Ballard termed 'invisible literatures': 'scientific journals, technical manuals, pharmaceuticals company brochures, think-tank internal documents, PR company position papers', and 'faxes and electronic mail'. As he once wrote of his time working as an editor of the journal *Chemistry & Industry*, 'any scientific magazine is the most wonderful mail drop. It's the ultimate information crossroads … [and] I was filtering it like some sort of sea creature sailing with jaws open through a great sea of delicious plankton'. The power of Ballard's writings come from the ways in which they imply the irresistible submission of the novel's narrative modes to these forms of an 'electronic present, a realm where instantaneity rule[s]'. As in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, found texts of medical procedures have celebrity names inserted, to create an uncanny neo-surrealist spark, and fiction most plausibly assumes the form of psychiatric assessments or war reports. The interpolation of a distinctively modern language of abstraction and dislocation – of advertising copy, journalism, technocratic jargon and cheap pornography, 'sinister bureaucratic memos and medicalese' – into the very fabric of the novel becomes the fundamental condition of its social contemporaneity. Few other writers of the late twentieth century did as much to remake and remodel the novel itself as a truly contemporary form.

David Cunningham