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REVIEWS  
in CULTURAL THEORY

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# Contents

*Reviews in Cultural Theory* is a journal of reviews and review essays, published twice annually. We welcome offers to review or suggestions of forthcoming books engaged with contemporary theories of culture. We also welcome suggestions for review essays and similar, lengthier variations on the review form.

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# Introduction

JUSTIN SULLY AND SARAH BLACKER

[A] thought which is worth anything at all must absorb the weight of reality and not simply flee from it. Otherwise, we end up with that which Kafka called “the empty, happy journey.” There is a difference, however, between integrating this power of the existent into thought and merely capitulating before it.

- Theodor Adorno, “On the Historical Adequacy of Consciousness.”

*Reviews in Cultural Theory* was formed in response to a conjuncture. The gradual instrumentalization of academic research, under the quantifying imperative to publish *more*, has long threatened to subsume even those tiny fragments of the academy engaged in locating and critiquing this process of instrumentalization itself. As all of us continue, in different ways, to critically confront the conditions that have come to define academic labour, each of us is left to cope with a daily frustration that stems in part from a diminishing ability to read *enough*. In striving to produce more, each of us helps to gradually ensure that less of what we collectively produce is actually being read by any one of us.

This unsustainable condition of our work is assisted, for better and worse, by the increasing prevalence of the electronic distribution and delivery of the information we need. Though electronic publication – the second aspect of the conjuncture out of which *RCT* was conceived – remains at an early, undetermined stage of development, if there is one aspect of the concrete practice of disseminating ideas today about which there is reason to be hopeful, it is the relative ease of access to the means of producing and distributing our work that this technology allows. And yet despite this unprecedented ease and speed of distribution and access to current research, even a quick look at the articles being accessed through these immense databases (to say nothing of what is actually read) suggests that, if anything, the scope of our reading may, in fact, be growing narrower.

The book review is a form with its own lineage, conventions, and capacities. Part of the project of *RCT* is to give greater prominence to the academic book review, so often buried in the miscellany of journals and even occluded entirely from online databases. It is also, in part, an effort to provide a space to test what this form can do today. The book review occupies a unique position between journalistic and academic writing, demanding a particular balance of the dual imperatives of explication and judgement. On one hand, the book review forces a reviewer to become subject to the dimensions and limits of another’s work and thought. A kind of public performance

of the act of reading, the review stages an uncommon form of impersonal intimacy. On the other hand, however, the success of a review also rests upon a certain discursive distance and even violence captured in the reviewer's effort to definitively name and frame another's work, to make it accountable to a language and context beyond itself. The review form is topical and timely; and perhaps it is in these last characteristics and the expectation that a review make a claim, however partial, upon the present that we might locate the particular politics and potential of the form today.

Many of the texts reviewed for this first issue were chosen by the reviewers themselves and these texts traverse a wide array of different disciplines, genres, methodologies, and contexts. Together, this collection of texts and reviews exceeds the notion of a single field or discipline and instead conveys a sense of the contemporary state of a *problem*. While *RCT* is intended to throw a wide disciplinary net, it also contributes to the work of lending coherence to the emerging lines of thought that today fill in the space between disciplines opened up by cultural studies. As we imagine it, cultural theory designates something that comes, in a sense, conceptually prior to and historically after cultural studies. *RCT* is intended to provide a means of following scholarship that addresses itself to the study of culture in a way that puts into question, as it were, the first principles—epistemological, methodological, political—of the dominant tendencies that characterize what was understood as the anti-discipline (that now has its own, albeit small, section in your local bookstore). To return to the exhausted opposition of theory and praxis to distinguish cultural theory seems an unproductive move that risks missing what could be new about the way that culture is practiced and signifies differently today. This first issue of *RCT* traces the way in which the approach to the study of culture and its rapid expansion throughout the academy has tended to shift the field of subjects and objects recognizable as 'cultural,' at least in terms of the quotidian meanings that continue to define and shape the idea of culture.

We would like to thank those who have helped to make the launch of this project possible. We're grateful to Harold Sikkema for his superb web design work. We want to thank the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University for providing us with a home base at the early stages of this project, as well as the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta for its generous support of the journal. Jake Pauls has provided *RCT* with its issue covers. We are particularly indebted to Sana Ghani, Brent Bellamy, and Jeff Diamanti for their research assistance. Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the support of the Canada Research Chair in Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta and the Senator William McMaster Chair of Globalization and Cultural Studies at McMaster University.

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# Something Ordinary

BEN HIGHMORE

Kathleen Stewart. *Ordinary Affects*. Duke University Press, 2007. 144 pp.

To name something as ordinary is not without risk. At once the founding act of all that is worthwhile in cultural studies, it also marks the source of all its troubles; the ambiguity of naming culture as ordinary is the stigmata of the burden that cultural studies (often unwittingly and unwillingly) carries. Inevitably bearing the freight of representing the fantasy of “average” life, mobilising the term ordinary is as likely to alienate as to garner assent. Thus an Amazon.com reviewer of Kathleen Stewart’s *Ordinary Affects* can write: “I was disappointed. I was looking for a serious work on feeling and ordinary life. Instead what I found was a literary and post-modernist account of weirdness and banality in America. There are of course people who like that kind of thing.” This reviewer gave the book one star out of five. “Ordinary,” like the term cultural studies, seems to promise something it never intends to deliver; a promise of what it is constitutionally designed to renege upon. To seek out *the* ordinary might suggest a desire for unity and cohesion, while all that culture offers are singularities (ordinaries) organised around conflict and unevenness.

When, in 1958, Raymond Williams demanded that “culture is ordinary,” he had in mind neither a sense of ordinary culture as representative of “the average Joe or Josephine,” nor of a commitment to a particular sphere of life (domestic life over public life, physical labour over intellectual work, for instance). For Williams, “ordinary” signalled a commitment to the messy, provisional and deeply corporeal “whole ways of life” of a community, a culture. And while we may argue about the entanglement of “community” and “culture” in Williams’ formulation, his use of the word “whole” was never intended to signal consistency or coherency: the dedication was to life in its fractured, effervescent, unmanageable totality. “Ordinary” is the world pulsing with life in its very singularity, existing across and in the interstices of the arbitrary and unhelpful distinctions we can’t help making between “labour” and “love,” “private” and “public,” “text” and “context,” “art” and “economics.” The term “ordinary” is a flag raised in commitment to a world in solution (and dissolution), a commitment to the heuristic, pre-specialised gestalt of life – an unachievable goal, no doubt, but one worth striving for nonetheless.

Stewart’s book conjures up a world of humdrum violence, banal perseverance, and unexpected tenderness. It is composed of a series of vignettes that neither lend themselves to structured argument, nor to discrete chapters (indeed the contents page reads simply: acknowledgements ix; *Ordinary Affects* 1; references 131). Its atmosphere is simultaneously small town gothic, blue-collar naturalism, and main street surrealism. The world that is painted is filled with correspondences and miscommunications, with mounting frustrations and outbreaks of intensity. Stewart is an anthropologist who studies the side of American life that is off the tourist map. Her book reads like a field diary of someone sensitized to a range of emotional ecologies as they are played out in the localised encounters of individuals, couples, and small groups. There is no overarching sense of America here, but also no feeling that you could be anywhere else. In a short introductory section (the closest thing that comes to a chapter in the book), she points to the theoretical work that is clearly threaded through the book as a buried seam. She takes her cues from Roland Barthes, Lauren Berlant, Gilles Deleuze, Alphonso Lingis, Michael Taussig, and Walter Benjamin. But once the name check is complete her practice is aphoristic, descriptive, and evocative. This is not a theoretical book in the sense of being a theoretical disquisition; rather it is implicitly theoretical in its inquisitive commitments and its descriptive style.

In one of the endorsements on the back of *Ordinary Affects*, Lauren Berlant claims that this is “a profoundly pedagogic book.” Yet, there is nothing explicit here that can simply be extracted and applied to something else, no easily borrowed system of thought or analysis, no quotable paragraph that would underwrite a methodology. Stewart’s pedagogy is deep and performative. As you read the book you become more and more alert to your surroundings. Your skin begins to prickle with the apprehensions of the lives of others, of resonances of care and indifference, of anxiety and ease. It is the pedagogy that Walter Benjamin claims is characteristic of fairground rides, of the mechanism of cameras, and the jarring attempts of crossing busy roads. It attunes and re-attunes the human sensorium. I read the book on a train journey from the South West of England up to the North Western coast (just below the Lake District). Passing through a dozen towns and cities of the English Midlands I saw countless down-at-heel Victorian terraced streets, peppered with corner shops, austere pubs, and boarded-up petrol stations. For anyone spending any time in England this is a familiar sight. Yet by about Birmingham the streets began to change: their familiarity was unsettled and I was filled with feelings that new places generate when you first set out on your own. Arriving in an unfamiliar town as an apprentice adult, such streets were never “mean” or “impoverished,” but the corridors of anticipation, possibility, trepidation, and disappointment. I swooned with a strange admix of lonely-excitement that I hadn’t felt for a couple of decades. The damp stone and brick of a forlorn landscape began to bristle with the possibility of adventure, with the possibility of endless somethings.

The thing-ness of *something* is Stewart's insistent object. Her guide is the action of listening-in, of observing, of passing-by, and taking-part. She is in a cafe in Ohio watching and listening as an ill-matched couple strive to get through what looks like a first date. The man is tucking into a high cholesterol plate of "biscuits and gravy" while his companion eats a grapefruit and a cluster of vitamin supplements while outlining her extensive fitness regimes. Stewart's practice is descriptive and in a few paragraphs she evokes a meal of awkward exchanges, of embarrassment and disdain. Her final sentence assesses the situation without judging the participants: "And things were happening, all right, even though 'it' was so 'not happening'" (31). The "thing" of experience here is the materiality of disappointment, of condescension received and given, of wishing away time, of suffering the ill-ease of not getting along. And in our turn, as "critical readers," what do we do? Do we judge Stewart's descriptions as adequate (or not), productive (or not), analytical (or not)? Such judgements seem to flounder in face of a much more pressing and immediate question. Do we recognise this scene? Do we know the hunched-over mumbling awkwardness of the meeting or not; do its affects resonate with us? Recognition and empathy are judgements more usually reserved for fiction than academic work, but here they are the only ones that really appear to matter.

My shelves sometimes seem to moan with the weight of obligation: books requiring reading; books demanding political allegiances; books decrying all kinds of scholarly misadventures and naïveties; books wanting theoretical acquiescence. Clamouring for position they all seem to want something of me, something from me. Not that this, in itself, is bad, it's just that such jockeying for position doesn't necessarily make me want to linger too long in their company. Fortunately, though, my shelves are also spotted with other kinds of books; those that sit there quietly like lucky-finds, happy to bide their time, content to be forgotten or remembered or dreamt about. Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* has joined this smaller, less needy, group. It sits winking slyly across the room at books like Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*, or Robert Bresson's *Notes on the Cinematographer*. I may not pick it up again for a week or a decade, but when I do I think I'll always recognize it for what it is – a gift.

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## The Trouble with Creativity

SARAH BROUILLETTE

Andrew Ross. *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times*. New York University Press, 2009. 254 pp.

In the first dozen or so pages of his new book, Andrew Ross suggests that high-end creative industries (CI) work and low-level service or manufacturing labour have something in common. Both manifest the spread throughout the workforce of conditions of "precarity," defined by the absence of social welfare, by "intermittent employment" and by "radical uncertainty about the future" (4). CI work, for its part, is at the vanguard of these changes, as CI policy leans on and props up a new rhetoric that turns creative entrepreneurs into models of contented freedom from workplace constraint. Yet a movement is afoot to imagine a "multi-class *precariat*" (6) united by common goals: promotion not just of any remunerative work, for instance making useless things that waste the earth, but of green jobs that will secure future livelihoods alongside "planetary life" as a whole (10); and creation of regulated flexible employment, maybe including a guaranteed social wage, that would allow people to select their own preferred balance between freedom and security. If we are interested in advancing these goals, Ross suggests, we should hold on to some of the core impulses CI management exploits, impulses inherited in part from the anti-work movements of the 1970s: namely, workers' longing for control over their "economic destinies," their rejection of routine and heavy management, and their desire for work that manifests their freedom, creativity, and self-direction in "just" and "vibrant" environments (6). Thus for Ross the idea of creative labour can still serve as a progressive model for all work, elite and low-level, mental and manual, valorized and victimized, but only if the "original vision of an existence freed from work-life alienation" can be taken back from its current "perversion" (5) and generalized throughout the workforce.

What follows these opening suggestions is a devastating account of what stands in the way. The idea that disparate classes are united by the experience of precarity is soon displaced by a focus on the realities of uneven development in the creative economy. Government bodies and their supporters, first in the UK and Australia but now nearly everywhere, have developed wide-ranging policy frameworks that boast their regions' unrivaled creative properties. These frameworks tend to present creative work



as the pinnacle of enlightened employment in advanced postindustrial societies. Ross shows how intimately tied they are to neoliberalism and to securing property values. He suggests CI talk provides a “new face” for entrepreneurialism, stepping in to fill the void left when the IT “new economy” dot-com boom failed (16), and absorbing IT into itself in the process, since maintaining the existence of a powerful creative economy has involved lumping together arts and culture and software development stats (24). More broadly, CI policies have been rapidly embraced as an inexpensive way to brand one’s polity as friendly to private enterprise and to investment and development. Attracting major manufacturing firms and large corporations requires tax breaks, infrastructure support and the risk of great loss. Appealing to creative labour just means setting up a few coffee shops, some loft-like work-life spaces, and renaming some areas “creative quarters.” Low-level service work may be pushed to the boundaries of this environment, but it hardly disappears. The expressive mental labour of an urban elite, exploited via long hours and devoted dissolution of work-life boundaries, depends upon a core of flexible service workers to whom ostensibly non-creative tasks can be outsourced. The class stratification is thus global and local: a new t-shirt design is born and patented in the creative economy and then assembled for pittance wages in an export processing zone; the creative class moves into and helps gentrify neighbourhoods whose residents were dispossessed when manufacturing jobs moved overseas. Old abandoned warehouses become posh lofts and work spaces, the defunct fire station a restaurant-café.

Attending these processes, and helping to entrench the split between high-level knowledge work and less elite employment, is an official romance with the idea of creative work. That this romance is meant to give contingent labour a rosy glow has been emphasized by others.<sup>1</sup> The sense one gets from Ross’s account is that it also helps to convince elite knowledge workers to overlook the growing economic inequalities that make their work possible. They are otherwise an infamously divided legion prone to radicalization, forming the frontlines in battles against programs and institutions ostensibly designed to reward them. Ross discusses as an example the “copyright” against the intellectual property (IP) regime. For its opponents, IP has become a regressive last bastion of faith in the ownership of the originating creator over her expressive productions, ironically thriving not because artist-originators are its greatest beneficiaries, but because the idea of their uniquely devoted work protects corporate capture of the economic value in what are so often socially authored products. Ross also mentions artists’ opposition to “the industrialization of bohemian cultural activity” (35), for instance to Unesco’s Capital of Culture program, which sells sanitized versions of a city’s cultural heritage and hides from tourists’ eyes its less attractive residents.

In this light, formation of the sort of self who can thrive in the CI environment is

hardly a given. It has required instead an active “reeducation” of peoples’ “sentiments” to create a new common sense (75). Particularly useful to the process has been the valorization of a labour profile typical to the struggling artist, which drums up understandable desires for creative and stimulating work, and emphasizes the inherent honour of activity motivated by virtuous non-materialist impulses. All because the real story is so grubby: the CI paradigm will spread so long as it can be shown to help reap value from “collateral, or parasitical, impacts like rising land value” (43), at whatever cost to the social fabric.

It may seem like folly to attempt to rescue from this morass an authentic and revitalized vocabulary of creativity, ready to inform “a genuinely progressive industrial policy” that is attentive to public health over private profit (23). If it is foolish, though, it is also extremely necessary, since CI policy will otherwise go on presenting its own mandate as the elaboration of a “progressive” and liberated forward-moving force. Governments now tend to position funding for arts and culture less as benevolent handout and more as an investment in future returns, including wealth creation but also, always in accord with it, public goods like jobs, diversity, access, social inclusion, and civic pride (25). The self-managing individual creative thus blurs into the team player, as does the autonomous artist into the socially-responsible citizen charged with improving everyone’s lot.

The pressing questions then are how to change the formula, how to link creativity to the kind of “public good” Ross advocates, how to speak on behalf of workers’ desire for autonomy without adding to the march of neoliberalism, and without fanning the fire stoked by creativity’s boosters since those first management gurus and policy wonks trumpeted the “new economy” and “generation entrepreneur.” Ross offers some answers. His suggestion that we treat creative work as “a basic human right, or entitlement, of the workforce” (47) is one that CI consensus builders like Charles Leadbeater and Richard Florida would heartily support; a worthy sentiment, it is unlikely to lead us out of the current impasse. His other ideas are more exact and compelling. Governments should stop collecting statistics about the size of the creative economy and start polling workers about what a good job entails. Regulations should be put in place to formalize the conditions of possibility for innovation. And the IP regime should be reformed to reflect challenges to the romance of the individual creator, which doesn’t tend to benefit most creative workers anyway. Through changes like these, the current obsession with creativity—how to manage it, how to exploit it, how to monetize it, how to nurture it—can be turned to better ends, and the promise of the desire for creative vocations can inch closer to realization.

Whither, then, that multi-class force? When people can choose their own schedules and move jobs whenever they feel stifled, precarity can feel like a personal choice,



even for those who make little money and know full well that their ostensibly autonomous desires have been shaped by the powerful rhetoric that makes heroes out of self-directing self-managers. It is hard to stop valorizing CI labour as the workforce with a promise of liberation from alienation at its core. Our conceptions of what it means to be free and creative are so intimately tied to longstanding tendencies to vilify regular, routine, and industrialized employment. Meanwhile, as Ross points out, in less elevated employment sectors it isn't unusual to experience flexibility as an imposition. Many would like nothing more than a job for life with benefits and a guaranteed livable wage.

What else might unite workforces across class divides, then? Why not opposition to capitalism or, at least, to its current neoliberal versions? If the total system of capitalist production is in our sights, then elite creative labour and low-level service and manufacturing workers simply *are* united. They're drawn together by their participation in a system that requires, exaggerates and thrives on economic inequality. By Ross's own account, a strenuous campaign has been required to convince even its ostensible victors that they are the embodiment of autonomous work that is both self-fulfilling and socially responsible. Already active is a core of workers quite capable of looking past the hype and seeing that there is nothing creative about work that, while expressing a social vision or interior life, also expands neoliberal power and capitalist value, and leaves one fairly poor and uncertain in any case.

Ross presents capitalism as subject to regulation, responsive to opponents and open to humanization. He suggests our aim should be to "discipline" and "direct" it toward "socially minded investment, fair trade, and more sustainable pathways for populations to subsist on" (210). Thus people can be convinced not to buy certain things and not to support their production (128), and new visions of the self can be fabricated and disseminated and can threaten the neoliberal consensus. Whether these goals are really compatible with something we'd still call capitalism is of course hard to say, and the question is beyond the scope of Ross's study. What is clear is that "disciplining" capitalism will require a lot of work, and Ross is surely right that academic labour should be taking more of it on. The university is, in Ross's vision, the knowledge corporation *par excellence*. We contribute to the creative economy, and our work entails many of the quintessential CI elements, including IP capture, class stratification, and valorization of those who accrue their wealth only incidentally, as a byproduct of their deeper passions (214). We are thus ideally placed to add to and nuance what Ross undertakes in this provocative book: examination of CI policies and vocabularies in relation to a global totality of economic relations; participation in a conversation about creativity and economics otherwise left to policymakers, consultants and managers; formalization of the terms of a better social contract for all workers; and, perhaps most difficult, transformation of this contract into the new

common sense.

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# Back to the Slaughterhouse

TRISTAN SIPLEY

Nicole Shukin. *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*. University of Minnesota Press, 2009. 288 pp.

While it may seem redundant to assert the *materiality* of animal life, the emerging branch of cultural theory known as “animality studies” has in fact been riddled with philosophical idealism. On one hand, poststructuralist approaches have tended to reduce animals to linguistic and cultural signifiers, overlooking their historical role as actual bodies. On the other hand, environmentalists have celebrated the sensuous existence of real animals in a way that fetishizes their immediacy at the expense of a broader socioeconomic, cultural, and political analysis. Into this theoretical impasse enters Nicole Shukin’s *Animal Capital*, a materialist intervention that dialectically walks a tightrope between the twin pitfalls of cultural idealism and flatfooted naturalism.

The basic premise of *Animal Capital*, Shukin’s first book-length monograph, and the sixth in the University of Minnesota Press “Posthumanities” series edited by Cary Wolfe, is that in the global-capitalist era “nature” is no longer external to human society, but is rather imminent to its processes, and has been transformed into an entirely recycled *second nature* (68). The text explores in detail the simultaneous “capitalization of nature” and “naturalization of capital,” explaining how the socioeconomic system feeds off of natural systems while at the same time integrating the signs of nature into its cultural logic. Put simply, we are faced with a dual exploitation in which the same industries that destroy animal bodies for profit use their symbolic representation as advertising.

In *Capital*, Marx famously traced the mystical abstraction of commodity fetishism back to its source in the exploitative social relations enacted at the site of production, systematically linking the trinket purchased in the market to the violence of the factory floor. *Animal Capital* follows a similar logic, this time moving readers from the representation of nonhuman animals in popular culture—especially advertising—back to the floor of the slaughterhouse: to the reality of animal life as part of the global foods and services industries. Thus Shukin relentlessly demolishes the prevailing neoliberal dream of a dematerialized, postmodern, cyber-capitalism that is able

to magically generate surplus value without slaughtering animals, felling trees, blasting mountaintops, polluting ecosystems or exploiting working-class bodies. Contemporary Western culture often pretends that “the material exploitation of labour, as well as of nature, is a thing of the past” (43). This myth is of course nothing more than a symptom of the global division of labour, under which the messy dealings with nature are spatially segregated from the eyes of middle-class consumers. Shukin troubles this myth by uncovering the material histories of violence that lie beneath the veneer of “ironic postmodern distance” in pop culture representations of animals (13).

*Animal Capital* begins with a theoretical introduction that proclaims a “double-edged intervention” into both left politics and animal studies (6). According to Shukin, Marxists and post-Marxists, including even theorists of biopower such as Hardt and Negri, remain blinded by the “species divide” and thus fail to take seriously the “problem of the animal.” On the other hand, Shukin argues, poststructuralist animal studies have paid little attention to the way animals and the claims made about them are circumscribed, mediated, and even produced by capitalism. She enlists the help of Slavoj Žižek in order to criticize the unhistorical aspects of Deleuze’s “becoming-animal” and Derrida’s “spectral” animal alterity. Shukin then proposes her alternative concept of “rendering.” She plays with the dual meaning of “rendering” as both the act of representation or translation and the processing of animal flesh. Animals are rendered aesthetically at the same time that their bodies are physically rendered into commodities. This double entendre allows her to trace two parallel and co-implicated genealogies: the development of mimetic representation and of industrial slaughter. Against claims made by Frankfurt School theorists that capitalism disrupts or distorts an innate biological mimetic faculty, Shukin more skeptically argues that this celebratory “naturalization” of mimesis is complicit with methods by which the rendering industry naturalizes its own exploitation, for example by publishing promotional materials comparing its activities to the use of the “whole animal” by primitive tribes. By contrast, Shukin argues that the development of the modern rendering industry marked a radical shift in the historical relation between humans and the natural world.

The core of *Animal Capital* is made up of three chapters entitled “Automobility,” “Telemobility,” and “Biomobility,” that contain three case studies representative of Shukin’s historical and cultural materialist approach. It is in these close readings that Shukin is at her most impressive, as she acrobatically plays with textual contradictions in order to open up forgotten material histories. The first of these studies links the development of slaughterhouses to both the automobile industry and modern cinema, pointing out that Henry Ford’s assembly line was modeled closely on the “disassembly” process of nineteenth-century abattoirs, and that the essential ingredient in early film production was gelatin made from animal tissue. The histories of animals, cars, and film all coalesce in a penetrating analysis of contemporary adver-

tisements that represent that the automobile as an organic part of the landscape. As cars displace animals as the primary form of transportation, they take on the “animal signifier” to the point that they are symbolically equated with nature, even as their increased production leads to the mass destruction of nature itself (117). In representing the SUV as a species of wildlife, the destroyer of nature is naturalized.

The second case study, “Telemobility,” presents another “triangulation,” this time linking Luigi Galvani’s eighteenth-century electrical experiments on amphibians to Thomas Edison’s filmed electrocution of the unruly elephant “Topsy” in 1903. Shukin reveals how these two forgotten histories of animal violence reemerge in the contradictions of contemporary telecommunications advertising campaigns. The telecom industry’s promotional materials use animal imagery in order to construct a “neoliberal fantasy” in which cell phones “grow on trees” (171). This “magical belief in the possibility of communication without cost, consumption without production” disguises the structural violence and exploitation that make mass communication possible, for example through the mining of the precious metal coltan, which has greatly contributed to war and political unrest, as well as environmental destruction, in central Africa (162).

Finally, “Biomobility” presents two discourses that illustrate the promise and the threat, the desire and the fear, surrounding “interspecies exchange.” First, Shukin analyses an environmentally oriented photography exhibit that depicts scenes of human/animal interactions in the global south. Under Shukin’s critique these seemingly positive visions of interspecies kinship actually reveal a racist orientalism and exoticism, as they conflate the bodies of subaltern humans and nonhuman animals. Rather than picturing the reality of contemporary third world subjects “working with [or] consuming animals,” the photographs construct the myth of a timeless, conflict-free, symbiotic, pre-modern unity (200). In the second half of the chapter, Shukin argues that the underside of this romantic interspecies “intimacy” is the widespread anxiety over pandemic disease. Shukin dissects the rhetoric surrounding “frightening” forms of trans-species contact such as Mad Cow Disease and Avian Flu (a list to which we might add the recent hype surrounding “swine flu”). While the specter of pandemic would seem to level and unify the population, making everyone equally at risk, its rhetoric actually works to identify, blame, and control the very humans, such as supposedly “unhygienic” peasant villagers, who are most vulnerable (211-213). In this way, pandemic speculation acts as an excuse for increased surveillance and discipline, and also for a new wave of primitive accumulation, as subsistence farmers are divorced from their own protein source and integrated into the global food system (214).

In a postscript, Shukin extends this critique of biomobility, pointing out how the

threat of animal-borne pandemic arises in practice not from subsistence producers, but rather from large-scale agribusiness. In their necessary drive to accumulate profit, agricultural capitalists must develop time- and cost-saving measures, for example the practice Shukin calls “animal cannibalism,” in which the flesh, brains, and spinal tissue of dead ruminants is fed back to livestock as a cheap source of protein source. The fact that Mad Cow Disease originated from this practice shows that ecological systems can only be pushed to produce so much, before systemic breakdowns occur and “nature,” as Engels famously put it, “takes its revenge” (241). Though the external environment may be imminent to the workings of global capitalism, it can never be fully integrated into the economic calculus without generating fissures and contradictions. However, Shukin is careful to note in her concluding statement that environmentally induced crisis is not necessarily a “problem” for capital; those in power seem to be doing a fine job of profiting from the very socio-ecological catastrophes they create. The book thus ends on an extremely cautious note, pointing the way to a political practice that does not yet exist.

If there is any argument to be made against Shukin’s analysis, it may be that in her fervor to emphasize the importance of nonhuman animals she spends much less time on their connection to human labourers. Although several passages deal with subsistence farming, structural racism, the scientific management of labour, and other “human-centred” issues, there are few overt statements regarding how animal politics might connect with, for example, environmental justice struggles for the rights of people exposed to toxic pollution in the workplace. While these issues could simply be beyond the scope of the study, this silence could also result from Shukin’s theoretical grounding in a so-called post-Marxism that, while remaining resolutely materialist, jettisons such basic concepts as “class struggle.” This is not so much a problem with Shukin’s work in particular as it is with radical environmentalism in general, which ritualistically rejects the classical Marxist tradition as “anthropocentric,” and frequently appears to speak as if the natural environment will rise up of its own accord and organize against its oppressors – as if the menacing cattle that adorn the cover of Shukin’s book will spontaneously sing the Internationale. This is a problematic tendency, for while the contradictions of nature under capitalism may supply the primary condition for political intervention, “nature” itself cannot be an agent of social transformation. It is perhaps a mark of the hegemonic triumph of capital and utter despair of the left that human agency in general and labour organization in particular have been removed from recent theoretical critiques of capitalism. To join Shukin in asserting, against Aristotle, that nonhumans too are “political animals” is not to deny that the primary agents of social change must be humans, and more specifically (if I may risk saying it) that portion of the human population that Marx identified as the proletariat. Nonetheless, *Animal Capital* stands as an urgent and much needed political intervention into a field that has so far merely reproduced the

logics of the very system it sets out to deconstruct. Shukin allows for a critique of the shortcomings of liberal individualist and consumer based “resistance” movements, always bringing us back to the slaughterhouse floor where culture meets nature. As a final note, it should be stated that Shukin, like all cultural critics, is at the mercy of an ever-expanding archive of newly published theoretical source material. Given that her analysis of biopower is based almost solely on Foucault’s classic *History of Sexuality*, one wonders what more she would have done had she had access to his Collège de France lectures from 1977 to 1979, recently published as *Security, Territory, Population and The Birth of Biopolitics*. Given the promise of Shukin’s first book, we likely needn’t wait long for a thought-provoking response.

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# Professor, Heal Thyself!

HEATHER ZWICKER

Frank Donoghue. *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*. Fordham University Press, 2008. 177 pp.

As soon as you spy the title’s keywords – professors, corporate, humanities – you suspect you’ve read this book before. But you haven’t. What sets Donoghue apart from the populous field of other hand-wringing institutional-critique narratives (Aronowitz, Bousquet, Giroux) is that he takes professors to task directly for our complicity in the dismal state of the twenty-first-century academy. Donoghue reiterates the grim facts we’ve all grown used to: the casualization of labour, the pursuit of institutional “excellence,” a migration of student enrolments away from humanities disciplines to science and engineering, the rise of for-profit colleges, the erosion of tenure, and corporate influence over research priorities. But then he turns his attention to how we’ve aided and abetted our own devastation, and the picture ain’t pretty.

On the increasing use of part-timers, for instance, Donoghue points out that as long as we remain reluctant to unionize, we are culpable (not solely responsible, perhaps, but culpable) for the trend. And why are we reluctant to unionize? Because we do not want to see ourselves as workers. Our idealized self-representation casts us as “curators of America’s strictest and most idealized meritocracy,” he charges, even though this rose-tinted view does not serve ourselves, our colleagues or our students well (19). Indeed, Donoghue argues that this perspective is actively harmful, serving to ensure that academics are never equipped to deal with the exigencies of working life. We are not alone in our ineptitude, though one might wonder at the company we keep in the professions:

... Professions do not prepare their members to deal with layoffs, chronic unemployment, or underemployment. ... When professors get fired, they cry. Moreover, no profession more fervently believes in the myth of meritocracy than academics. The conviction that somehow one’s talent alone ultimately determines one’s place in the hierarchy of academic labour gives rise to a constellation of fantasies: my charisma as a teacher will be properly valued; my completed dissertation or published book will confirm my rare intelligence. In short, someone will discover me and celebrate my intellectual powers. Since these epiphanies

almost never happen, meritocracies have the effect of making everyone feel insufficiently appreciated (63).

Sound familiar?

*The Last Professors* is equally scathing on the hypocrisy of our disavowed competitiveness. But wait: the People's Republic of the Humanities, *competitive?* Donoghue puts it a little more gently, discerning "a collective behaviour that ironically duplicates the very corporate values from which we humanists wish to distance ourselves" (26). Exhibit A: graduate school, which picks the best and brightest and then drives them to despair by demanding superlative performance in "a unique kind of competition in which the stakes are extremely high and the rules are never fully explained" (33). Exhibit B is the job market, typically experienced as "an intense personal drama about individual distinction and merit" (37). Exhibit C: the still-hallowed monograph, unpurchased, unborrowed, unread, and unassailable. In all of these cases, we define success in impossible terms. And I use the first person here deliberately: there is no "they" doing this to us. Don't believe me? Try striking up a conversation at the next academic meeting with, "We should forget about writing monographs." It is hard not to agree with Donoghue that our research models are "clearly broken" (55).

*The Last Professors* is at its best when it excavates the history of our current preoccupations, as with Donoghue's discussion of tenure. After rehearsing the tedious arguments for (protect academic freedom!) and against (shed the dead wood!), Donoghue turns to the events that led to the 1940 codification of the American Association of University Professors' Statement of Principles, still the most-cited authority on the principles of tenure. I won't give away the whole story, but it involves a railroad baron, a seditious speech and some powerful alumni. Donoghue's interest is not simply in historical storytelling. By putting a sacred tenet into historical context, he opens it up to question and critique. The mid-twentieth century saw the solidification of university teaching staff into a coherent system of assistant, associate and full professor – and then (here is Donoghue's contribution) the disintegration of that system into a jumble of low-cost, disposable adjuncts, part-timers and contract academics. In this context, Donoghue argues, tenure conceived as the protection of academic freedom does not matter: it simply does not apply to the majority of people who staff university classrooms. In fact, he goes so far as to suggest that insofar as the tenure system presupposes a vulnerable pre-tenure period of seven years, it is part of the problem. "So it is that we romanticize our jobs and fail to recognize how the tenure process works to deaden the possibility of radical freedom of expression" (77). He draws back from this strong position a little on the next page, stating that we should not exactly disparage tenure – but insofar as it applies to a minority of workers in the twenty-first-century academy, it is profoundly beside the point.

So what's "on point" for Donoghue, ultimately? First, he would have us see ourselves as we really are: thoughtful and well-meaning agents caught in a system that constrains our best intentions at every turn. Then he would have us think boldly and collectively. This would mean giving some things up: the phantasm of tenure, the comforts of merit, the pieties of monastic research. It follows (though he does not actually say this) that we would have to rationalize our workload and demystify some of its machinations and expectations. We need to continue resisting corporate incursions, but not by pretending that we are holier. Instead, Donoghue insists, we need to understand corporate logic and its contradictions – for instance, how the holy grails of efficiency and prestige work at cross purposes – so that we can strategize how to challenge corporate assumptions effectively.

Ultimately, I'm not sure whether Donoghue's challenge will be heard. Those who like a crisp enemy – the administration, managerialism, corporatization, anti-intellectualism, conservatism – will dislike this book. In addressing not just the conditions of our work, but also the fierce yet disavowed preconditions of professorhood, Donoghue calls for a lot. Institutional changes alone are insufficient, he opines: "We would also need to renounce the values that we think of as alien to the humanities, but that have nevertheless insinuated themselves into our profession and now control how we do our jobs" (26). Can professors in the humanities admit to careerism, ambition, competition, and a belief in merit? Even shattering the shibboleth of our altruistic service to students and knowledge – our noble vocationalism – sounds simple next to the final challenge Donoghue utters. "For professors to ... forestall their own extinction, they must first become not only sociologists but also institutional historians of their own profession" (138). They might even have to serve on a committee.

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# The Citizenry of Photography

JOHN M. WOOLSEY

Ariella Azoulay. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Zone Books, 2008. 500 pp.

Ariella Azoulay's *The Civil Contract of Photography* is, among other things, a political theory of photography that investigates and radically rethinks prevalent conceptualizations of citizenship. As a "political theory," Azoulay's argument poses a direct challenge to both modernist and postmodernist approaches to "photographs of horror" that depict injured populations. By considering such images in relation to questions of citizenship, Azoulay critiques other photography theories as being too narrowly focused on aesthetic considerations or limited to a psychological framework concerned with guilt, compassion, pity or empathy. Indeed, Azoulay argues that, along with national and market forces, these prevalent theories are a part of the socialization process limiting and controlling our photographic experiences, stabilizing what is seen in photos and making them objects of ownership and exchange. In opposition to this "wrong user's manual," Azoulay wants to develop a discourse that anchors photographic spectatorship in civic duty (14). Azoulay's five-hundred page book takes up a number of interrelated topics as ways to illustrate her central theoretical paradigm and model: what she calls the "ethics of spectatorship." As an Israeli citizen concerned with the plight of Palestinians, it is no surprise that the majority of Azoulay's illustrative examples pertain to photographic representations of Palestinians in the Israeli press. In fact, much of the book is given over to an explication of the structural conditions that either enable or prevent particular photographs from becoming "emergency claims" that demand immediate action in response to the catastrophic conditions of certain populations. It is in light of these larger social concerns that Azoulay develops her titular theoretical conception: the civil contract of photography.

Azoulay's formulation of the civil contract of photography posits that photography—as an ensemble of social practices—constitutes a "bind" or set of "political relations" between all parties involved in any act of photography: the photographed, the photographer, and the spectator. This theoretical "citizenry of photography" develops out of two conceptual valences shared by photography and citizenship: recognition and plurality. Azoulay draws directly on Jean-François Lyotard's theorization of *énoncés* to argue that photographs are structured as "statements" that depend on recognition to gain meaning. Likewise, citizenship for Azoulay is never a possession or fixed status,

but depends on an ongoing process of recognition between citizens and a governing power. The plurality at play in citizenship, which assures an equality between citizens and constricts the governing power, is paralleled in "photographs that bear traces of a plurality of political relations that might be actualized by the act of watching, transforming and disseminating what is seen into claims that demand action" (25-26). *The Civil Contract of Photography* is thus a (re)conceptualization of citizenship through the lens of photography and an analysis of photography through the frame of citizenship

In the book's opening chapter, "Citizens of Disaster," Azoulay traces the modern formation of citizenship as an "arena of conflict and negotiation" (31). Contra Giorgio Agamben, Azoulay argues for the need to "rehabilitate" citizenship as the "protection of all of the governed" (33). For Azoulay, the traditional distinction between citizen and non-citizen lies primarily in the former's entitlement to protection of a sovereign power. But, argues Azoulay, this distinction obscures the shared ground of all political subjects as "first and foremost *governed*," a status that precedes any distinction between citizen and non-citizen. Thus the fragility of the citizen and the non-citizen alike consists of their co-exposure to the power of the state. However, the citizen's (mis)identification with the collective identity of the nation-state has historically preempted the recognition of the shared conditions of the governed that would constitute political relations not aligned with the interests of the state. In her reading of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* (1789), Azoulay discerns two concepts of the citizen. First is the "pale figure" of the citizen as it appears in the declaration itself: a subject tethered to the particular interests of "Man" as the bearer of "natural rights" who restricts the citizen to the protector of these rights. The second image of the citizen is the invisible "addresser" of the declaration, which is the figure of citizenship Azoulay wants to "rehabilitate" as a political stance taken by the governed against the power of the state. In this form, citizenship loses its appearance as a status and becomes a set of civic skills that are exercised or employed to negotiate with a ruling power. Furthermore, for Azoulay, citizenship involves an obligation or duty to voice grievances on the behalf of all the governed. It is this concept of citizenship as the armor of the governed against the power of the sovereign and the essentialism of nationalism that Azoulay finds modeled in the space of political relations related to photography.

According to Azoulay, the social conventions and expectations that solidified around photography in the mid to late 19th century constituted the conditions of possibility for the civil contract of photography and its corollary form of citizenship. In contrast to the contractarian theories of Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the civil contract of photography is a "form of mutual obligation that precedes the constitution of political sovereignty" (109). In other words, it is a social contract in which membership does not involve granting power to an authority to which one is obligated; rather, the contract is an open framework of political relations that are not regulated

or exclusively mediated by a sovereign power. In principle, access to the practices of photography are unlimited; anyone can potentially be a photographed individual, a photographer, or a viewer of photographs. The movement of individuals between and amongst these practices of photography undermines any one party's exclusive claim of property rights to a photograph or its meaning. For Azoulay, a photograph and its meaning are the effect of the encounters between the participants—photographed, photographer and spectator—none of which have the authority to fix and determine its sense; photography thus denies any particular claim to sovereignty. While both market and national forces have looked to control the power of photography and turn it into a disciplinary tool of authority, the plurality of positions and virtual equal access to its practices have ensured that it serves no sovereign and “functions on a horizontal plane” (146) as a decentralized power enacted by each of its participants.

The civil contract of photography, the terms and conditions of which are “extracted” from current and past practices of photo production and use, grants the citizenry of photography rights to be an image, take and make images of others, and view the inventory of images created by others. The fundamental “tacit” agreement at play in any photographic encounter is one in which individuals “renounce their exclusive right to their image and consent to becoming an image” (110). The “signatories” to the civil contract of photography, which include anyone who has a relation to photography, by renouncing ownership of their own image and their right to preserve their own “autonomous visual field from external forces,” gain access to the “mixed economy of gazes” of photography's mass-produced images and acquire “an obligation to defend the gaze in order to make it available for others to enter and intermingle” (113). Thus the civil contract of photography demands an “ethics of spectatorship” in which the spectator moves from the passive addressee to the active addresser that reconstitutes a photograph's *énoncé*, especially in those situations in which photography serves as the vehicle for an injured party's grievances.

For Azoulay, the conventions of photography that bind together the citizenry of photography are based in two fundamental expectations that serve as a source of tension which necessitate an active role of citizen-spectatorship. The tension between the agreement that what appears in a photograph “was there” and the agreement that that appearance is always partial—it is “*not* all that was there” (159)—demands that the civil spectator “watch” an image in order to actively reconstitute the conditions of its production and attend to what it makes visible and invisible. In regards to the “images of horror” that are to serve as grievances for the injured:

The spectator is called to take part, to move from the addressee's position to the addresser's position to take responsibility for the sense of such photographs by addressing them even further, turning them into signals of emergency, signals of

danger or warning—transforming them into emergency claims. (169)

The proliferation of images of horror in the media and the attempts of national and market forces to contain their meaning necessitates the cultivation of a citizen-spectatorship that takes responsibility for the sense of such images and what they depict. But rather than being a normative concept that Azoulay brings to photography from the outside, the universal citizen-spectator is built into the civil contract of photography itself. What unites the participants in any act of photography is not only the tacit agreements of the social contract sketched above, but the assumption of a “universal spectator,” a “moral addressee,” who sees “beyond the narrow considerations of time and place or local interests. Such a subject is an ideal concept, a necessary logical postulate ... a limit concept embodying the ethics of the spectator” (390). Without the concept of such a “true spectator,” there is no explanation for the consent given by the citizenry of photography.

Azoulay demonstrates spectatorship as a practice of civic duty throughout her book by “watching” photographs of two “injured groups: female citizens in Israel and Palestinians living in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967” (36). Her analysis of photographs of the second intifada explicates the conditions under which Palestinians' non-citizenship prevents photo-*énoncés* of the horrors perpetrated against them from becoming emergency claims demanding immediate action (Chapter Four: “Emergency Claims”), keeping them in a state of what Azoulay calls “threshold catastrophe” (Chapter Six: “Photographing the Verge of Catastrophe”)—an ongoing state of catastrophe treated not as a state of emergency or exception but as a routine, “perpetually impending state” (289). Azoulay's attention to these issues in regard to the Israeli-Palestine relation is accompanied by an equally astute attention to the status of women as “flawed citizens” who are denied equal access to the body politic. Indeed, she convincingly argues that the absence of photographs of sexual violence against women in the public sphere amounts to a social prohibition against thinking about and responding adequately to acts of rape (Chapter Five: “Has Anyone Ever Seen a Photograph of Rape?”).

While the detail and care that Azoulay dedicates to the sense of the photos related to these issues make her work of unquestionable value for anyone interested in the political uses of photography, her readings often repeat the theoretical arguments introduced in earlier chapters without developing them further. Nevertheless, *The Civil Contract of Photography* is an invaluable source for those looking to think and practice the politics of visual culture beyond the critique of realism and the discourse of aesthetics.



# The Measures Taken

HUNTER BIVENS

Benjamin Robinson. *The Skin of the System: On Germany's Socialist Modernity*. Stanford University Press, 2009. 368 pp.

Twenty years after the opening of the Berlin Wall, a number of important thinkers (one thinks here, in differing registers, of Alain Badiou, Boris Groys, or Susan Buck-Morss's 2000 *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*) have been reconsidering what to make of the twentieth century's experience of really existing socialism. Is socialism a political and economic order—a discrete historical period for certain large parts of the globe? Is it a political project, an emancipatory vision and potential that stalks and shadows capitalism through its various stages and guises? Or even a particular mode of semiotic practice? In other words, what are our categories for thinking through “socialism”? Benjamin Robinson's *The Skin of the System* is a notable contribution to this discussion insofar as the book asks these questions directly, situating itself in the opacity between socialism as utopia and as actuality (to paraphrase a chapter title). Framing really existing socialism as a form of modernity is, as Robinson stresses, only the beginning of an answer. “The challenge socialist modernity posed—and still poses as a legacy,” he writes, “is not the challenge of alternate criteria per se, but of understanding how roughly the same criteria could refer to two distinct systems of modernity and to the qualitative difference between these systems” (222).

The specification of that difference was a life project of Franz Fühmann (1922-1984). *The Skin of the System* takes its literary case studies from Fühmann, particularly his later works, but it is not to be taken as a literary biography or monograph (we have a number of these already, including those by Hans Richter and Dennis Tate). Rather, this is a book about the relationship between literature and economics, as well as science and society. Robinson's book, to put it another way, takes up and amplifies Fühmann's own question of what difference socialism makes. A Sudeten-German of bourgeois Catholic upbringing, Fühmann experienced his Damascus moment, converting from true-believing fascist to committed socialist, in a Soviet POW camp. For Fühmann and many others of his generation, socialist commitment was framed in terms of complicity with Nazism and the attempts to negotiate guilt, both private and collective; “my generation came to socialism via Auschwitz,” Fühmann would write in his *Twenty-Two Days or, Half a Lifetime*. Fühmann would spend the rest of

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his life limning the contours of this conversion, writing and re-writing it, holding it against the obscure text of East German socialism. For Robinson, in the face of the increasing social inertia of the GDR after the decline of the Communist futurological utopia of the mid-1960s, the catalyst of Fühmann's mature works is "the anxiety that socialism might be a difference that makes no difference" (112). Working across genres and drawing from Greek mythology, the Bible, fairytales, Hegel and Marx, but also Nietzsche and Freud, cybernetics, German Romanticism, and socialist realism, Fühmann cobbled together one of the more remarkable oeuvres in East German letters in an attempt to take the measure of socialism's event and to measure the poles of his own conversion.

While studies proliferate on East German cinema and social historians continue to challenge and refine our notions of how things worked in the GDR, we have not, with few exceptions, seen a major English language study of East German literature since the late 1990s, when Julia Hell's *Post-Fascist Fantasies* (1997), with its exploration of the Oedipal complexities of East German antifascism, and David Bathrick's *The Power of Speech* (1995), which argued for literature as a vehicle for late modernist interventions into the GDR's complexly constrained public sphere, framed the discourses in which GDR literature continues to be received and taught. It will not be possible now to discuss East German literature without also discussing this book, and this is what Robinson's book shares with those two books: its ambition to re-situate the critical discourse on GDR literature into a contemporary theoretical project. In reading Fühmann's oeuvre, Robinson links the discussion of East German literature, and state socialism more generally, to current debates on modernity, biopower, and sovereignty. Robinson does this through a fascinating discussion of fascism, liberalism, and socialism as systems of modernity, distinguished by their respectively privileged regulative media: the camp, the law, and the plan. Fühmann's work is then read as a subtle apparatus for registering the slippage between these orders. "Fühmann's project," Robinson tells us, "distinguishes itself as an experiential search for the qualitative difference represented in the search for a socialist sovereignty of the GDR" (117). The recurring lesson of Fühmann's writings and Robinson's book is that the borders of this qualitative difference are not in fact where one expects to find them.

Robinson's book begins with the tempting offer of a vacation, of leaving "the drudgery of work behind." As Robinson knows, this is precisely what we in late capitalism cannot do. Each attempt to break into the realm of leisure reveals itself on closer inspection to be merely another guise of labour or, more precisely, of exchange, since, as Robinson reminds us, "culture, entertainment, erotics—they all seem to lead back to free market economics." Were we to get a vacation, this is what we would be getting some time off from: the common logic of circulation and exchange that marks the system of capitalist modernity, wherever you happen to find yourself located

within it. Socialism is thus, among other things, "an other system": not economics as a zero-sum game of supply and demand, but a flow of "plentitude, sensuality, and relaxation" (2). It is in the space between this promise and the empirical reality of twentieth century socialism, which as we know was utterly dominated by the economic logics of shortage and barter, that makes the specification of socialism so difficult and that renders the question of reference so acute. With this provocative characterization of socialism as "a vacation from economy," Robinson reminds us that socialism is not simply a historically discredited ideology or a subset of "totalitarian" regimes, but a universal alternative, "an other" modernity. Socialism in this account is not a politics, it is "a *system*, with a characteristic arrangement of subsystems" (4). It has become almost reflexive in leftist circles, particularly among those sympathetic to socialism as a political project, to denounce the really existing socialist states for their failure or to denounce their betrayal of some more authentic mode of liberation. Providing a theoretically subtle account of the hostility of critical theory and Western Marxism toward its poor relations in Central and Eastern Europe, Robinson challenges us to think about socialism on its own terms, not as what we might have wished it to be. "The problem," Robinson writes,

is whether critical scholarship should 'emancipate' the kernel of real socialism—as a set of utopian ideals carried by an independent popular culture—from the context of a discredited institutional history; or should that institutional history and the culture that emerged with it form a primary basis for our understanding of what was distinctively socialist about 'socialist' culture (22)?

In other words, instead of dismissing really existing socialism as no socialism at all, or as an absence of liberal modernity, why not attempt to grasp what it was on its own terms?

Terminology is in fact perhaps the most interesting and complicated aspect of Robinson's book, since it very much avoids the terms in which the GDR tended to thematize itself, either the ossified Marxist-Leninist discourse of East Germany's official public sphere or the "jargon of authenticity," to paraphrase Adorno, in which dissent from the GDR's general line was often formulated. What we get instead is a theoretical vocabulary largely drawn from Plato and Aristotle, the analytic philosophy of W. V. O. Quine, and the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann. Yet, if Robinson's sources here seem eclectic and perhaps counter-intuitive for the study of East German literature, they open onto an important discussion of socialism as a philosophical, indeed ontological, question. Thus, Robinson's readings of Fühmann are informed by a series of classical philosophical dilemmas of differentiation, which will guide our attempts to understand socialism in terms of systems and the antagonisms of system boundaries. Drawing on the discussion of mud and mana in Plato's *Parmenides*, Robinson

sharpens the theoretical dilemma posed above—is really existing socialism a system or is it not? For Robinson, this question is ultimately that of what Quine refers to as ontological commitment, which has to do with the coordination of provisional symbols to establish reference. This is what we seem to lack for socialism. What we have is the “mud” of the system, its “mundane world of queuing and spying” (44). This inert triviality of everyday life is not formless from Robinson’s perspective, and neither is socialism an empty signifier, as Lévi-Strauss famously characterized *mana*.

The question then becomes one of measure, or more precisely, of qualifiers. What allows us to refer to socialism not as nothing, but also not as merely empirical data—as some thing? This brings Robinson to the question of systems, since the provisional qualifiers that allow us to make reference to the some thing that is socialism are not only signs in a semiotic economy, but also indexes; they force us to react to them. In this sense, the index becomes operational in its capacity of marking “limits, boundaries, separations,” in other words, what Robinson is after here is the concept of a medium of the system, provided that we understand that “medium is not (to begin with) some third thing distinct from system, but is the way a system comes into being as a unity of difference” (50). In other words, a medium supplies the system with internal relationality, but an internal relationality in the form of “a limit marking the site of an encounter with another system” (54). This conception of socialism has consequences on the level of representation, which is to say, it gives socialism an event that can and must be narrated: the “new story” of socialism is change itself, but this is no straightforward affair. In a number of adept readings of texts from Fühmann, Robinson shows us how Fühmann’s seemingly innocuous stagings of scenarios of transformation culminate in acts beyond measure. There is, for example, his stark portrayal of the flaying of the satyr Marsyas at the hands of Apollo, God of music and measure, and “The Heap,” a science fiction tale in which a researcher from the year 3456 is given the task of proving that socialism has solved the philosophical quandaries of class society by attempting to ascertain the precise moment that a bunch of metal screws becomes a heap—a work that ends in an outbreak of chaotic violence. This metonymic violence, standing for the measurelessness of a leap across systems, is countered in Fühmann’s work, and here Robinson’s readings are particularly instructive, by his attention to the problem of duration and of the quotidian. The problem of the incommensurability of the sudden moment of transformation increasingly gives way to that of how the detritus of the everyday could possibly be read as an index of a socialist sovereignty in Fühmann’s later works. Disillusioned by the GDR’s stagnation under Honecker, he begins to articulate (as did many others at this time) a discourse of Germany’s “abject modernity” of power and humiliation, of complicity and betrayal. In his analysis of Fühmann’s essays on the late Romantic E.T.A. Hoffmann, Robinson writes: “for Fühmann it is no longer the unheard-of of transformation, but the heard-of of triviality that counts” (259).

This is then the sense in which Fühmann is not simply an East German writer, but a writer whose work, precisely in its locality and particularity, remains contemporary and relevant:

Fühmann recognizes the aporias, the undecidability that his society has opened into modernity without being able to close again... Fühmann’s inventions capture the necessity of a system whose simultaneously real and impossible difference from modernity causes the violence of sovereignty to turn in on itself (239).

As much as socialism was an other system, an opening vis-à-vis the increasingly sclerotic and crisis-ridden circulation and exchange of our own late modernity, it was also in the end undecidable in and of itself. After the expulsion of Wolf Biermann in 1976 and Fühmann’s marginalization as a public figure in the GDR, his ontological commitment to socialism again founders on this inability to find it, and “mud, dirt, indignity—that is really existing socialism—imposes itself between Fühmann and the *mana* of sovereignty (262).” For a writer like Fühmann, in this stalled dialectic, this filth of really existing socialism could only be renounced on the penalty of reverting to fascism. This is not, to be sure, the choice we face in our own difficult conjuncture, but despite the events of 1989, this opening of undecidability into *our* modernity remains, and we can begin to perceive it in the limitations to capital that seem everywhere on the horizon.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> On the coming undone of neoliberalism, see Gopal Balakrishnan, “Speculations on the Stationary State.” *New Left Review* 59 (2009): 5-26.

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# Adorno's Non-Waking Life

IAN BALFOUR

Theodor W. Adorno, *Dream Notes*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Polity, 2007. 128 pp.

When was the last time you dreamt of showing up at a party that Trotsky was at? And have you ever dreamt about Fritz Lang after having lunched with him earlier in the day? Are a lot of your dreams about brothels? If not, you are probably not Theodor Adorno, whose recently published (even in German), recently translated, dream 'protocols' record some of the singular dream experiences of this extraordinary thinker and writer. But you could compare notes.

*Dream Notes* reproduces numerous short accounts (some a few pages, some just two lines) of dreams Adorno had, many of them from his period of exile in Los Angeles, many in the shadow of WWII. His practice was to try to record his dreams as such, virtually without interpretation or supplementary commentary and with no significant after-the-fact changes. He seems largely to have succeeded in doing so, though we cannot know for sure. The dreams are not all highly charged, much less profound. Adorno is content at times to present banalities simply because they occurred. But, thankfully for us, this exceedingly compelling thinker sometimes had downright interesting dreams and provocative accounts of them – interesting in themselves and for their resonance with Adorno's waking life of intense thinking, writing, moving about and acting in society.

Adorno was primed by his early engagement with psychoanalysis to be interested in dreams. His interest was philosophical and practical, with one eye on what they said about human selves, subjectivity, and their challenges to inherited notions of the self, and another eye on how things might be improved by attention to all the dynamics that Freud and company uncovered, many of which – but especially repression – would become pivotal for the Frankfurt School. The centrality of the dream has faded for psychoanalysis, given advances in awareness of so many other manifestations of the unconscious and of the wealth of materials just at the level of consciousness as such. But the dream continues to fascinate, and some dreams more than others.

Here, as a tease and a touchstone, is one of the more spectacular entries jotted down in Adorno's dream-book:

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I had been invited by the headmaster of my high school, which is now called the Freiherr vom Stein-Schule, to contribute something to a *Festschrift* in honour of its fiftieth anniversary. Dream: a ceremony in which I had been solemnly installed as head of music of the high school. The repulsive old music teacher, Herr Weber, together with the music teacher, danced attendance on me. After that there was a great celebratory ball. I danced with a giant yellowish-brown Great Dane—as a child such a dog had been of great importance in my life. He walked on his hind legs and wore an evening dress, I submitted entirely to the dog and, as a man with no gift for dancing, I had the feeling that I was able to dance for the first time in my life, secure and without inhibition. Occasionally we kissed, the dog and I. Woke up feeling extremely satisfied. (62)

Sometimes Adorno wakes up in shock, sometimes laughing. The extreme satisfaction expressed here is probably the most positive moment of anything recorded in any of the dreams. All the problems of daily life and the horrors of current world history have receded and for a change Adorno can live a non-self-conscious life, dancing gracefully (the very sign of anti-self-consciousness in Kleist's great "Marionette Theater" essay). A few moments of freedom emerge from the often crushing un-freedom from the administered, damaged life. These are available only in the dream, but they provide pleasure on the far side of the dream and perhaps prompt a little thinking.

"In dreams begin responsibilities," Delmore Schwartz's dictum goes and certainly Adorno's recorded dreams are shot through with a sometimes burdensome sense of responsibilities and duties: essays to write, meetings to attend, and quite a few tests to take (long after he was an established professor and a highly regarded intellectual). Adorno's superego informs a good deal of his super ego, not least while asleep. It's not exactly the Protestant work-ethic working overtime, but a huge sense of responsibility looms, including that of the most pressing sort, or skewed versions of real responsibilities, as in the face of Hitler's Germany, both painfully and happily experienced by Adorno from abroad. So many things to do and to suffer, so much anxiety attached to them.

But in Adorno's dreams begin also ir-responsibilities, sometimes accompanied by a sense of helplessness. Among these ir-responsibilities, the most prominent is a kind of sexual abandon that exceeds, if gossip and the occasional fact are to be credited, Adorno's libertine proclivities that he acted upon in his daily and nightly life. Thus: many trips to brothels, kissing of boys, and quasi-erotic relationships with animals turn up in these dreams. Sometimes the abandon and responsibility impinge on each other, as when Teddy, the dreamer, is accompanied to a brothel by his wife and mother, without anything seeming terribly amiss. And yet for all this, the act of sexual intercourse in a dream is never recounted or, as far as we know, experienced.

Dreams come unbidden: we are not at all free to dream them or not. And once in motion, with the minor exceptions of lucid dreaming and some pockets of the possibility of the dreamer exercising her or his will, we are the 'subjects' of our dreams in that we are subject to them. Adorno wrote in *Minima Moralia*: "Between 'a dream came to me' [*es träumte mir*] and 'I dreamt' lie the ages of the world. But which is the more true? No more than it is spirits who send a dream, is it the 'I' that dreams" (190). In a good many dreams, we are so much freer than in daily life, far less inhibited by societal mores and the laws of nature. Still, the materials of dreams are not of our own making or choosing, as Marx said of the circumstances of history. As an involute of freedom and un-freedom, the dream performs something of the negative dialectic that drives life—and death. (Adorno proclaims: "dreams are as black as death"). Perhaps in exile, wish fulfillment may have been an even more pressing concern, consciously and unconsciously, than otherwise.

Might it be said of dreams what Benjamin maintained, in his *Moscow Diary*, of facts: that they are "already theory"? Yes and no. "No" because there is something irreducibly singular about the dream: it is one's dream on a particular day and time and no one else's. Even the so-called recurring dream or quasi-recurring dream (as in Adorno's multiple dreams of execution and even crucifixion!) is marked by its own singularity of a sort, *as* a repetition, as a dream that has occurred before. But "Yes," in part because dreams so often seem to be allegorical or at least to point beyond their surface, and often we have a sense that we can learn something from them, even if they successfully elude the interpretability Freud dreamed of early on. Moreover, in Adorno's case, the dreams can serve as mini-exemplars, brief allegories of his philosophy of non-identity. Adorno often notes a much-attested feature of dreams, namely, that a certain thing or person or entity both is and is not what we normally think of it as being, as when the Vienna he visits in a profoundly affecting dream about the death of Alban Berg (which first made Adorno realize the magnitude of his loss, even though he had been feeling the loss for a good while) both is and is not the city most people would objectively recognize. The wavering, ambiguous status of dream-entities thus can stand as one emblem of the principle of non-identity, requiring not an elaborate Hegelian argument in its favour, but only the striking lyric moments of the dream-work that hardly seems like much work: the 'leisure of the negative,' as it were.

Dreams, we can glean from Adorno, present us with more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophies. A philosophy that cannot dream, and respond to dreams, would be an impoverished sort of thinking.

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# It's The End Of The World As They Know It, And They Feel Fine

MICHAEL TRUSCELLO

The Invisible Committee. *The Coming Insurrection*. MIT Press, 2009. 136 pp.

In their astute history of the anarchist tradition, Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt suggest that anarchists generally practice one of two broad strategies: insurrectionist anarchism or mass anarchism. The insurrectionist tradition “argues that reforms are illusory and organized mass movements are incompatible with anarchism, and emphasizes armed action—propaganda by the deed—against the ruling class and its institutions as the primary means of evoking a spontaneous revolutionary upsurge” (123). The second strategy, mass anarchism, “stresses the view that only mass movements can create a revolutionary change in society, that such movements are typically built through struggles around immediate issues and reforms (whether around wages, police brutality, or high prices, and so on), and that anarchists must participate in such movements to radicalize and transform them into levers of revolutionary change” (124). Arguably, insurrectionist strategies have played a “decidedly minority part” within the anarchist tradition (128); however, in the past decade insurrectionist practices, especially by Neo-Situationists and Anarcho-primitivists, have received inordinate attention, and the general public has come to view all anarchisms as insurrectionist, if anarchism is considered at all. Internally, anarchists have always maintained a healthy debate over strategies, as witnessed by platformist Wayne Price’s recent essay on “The Two Main Trends in Anarchism.” The publicity surrounding the publication of *The Coming Insurrection* ensures that these trends will continue.

Price’s “two main trends” roughly correspond to Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt’s distinction between insurrectionist and mass anarchism; Price does not see labels as terribly useful, but their respective positions on revolution, class, and unions are important. Uri Gordon recently described the division as “Old School” versus “New School,” and David Graeber ascribes the labels “big-A” and “small-a” anarchism. Clearly, *The Coming Insurrection*, anonymously authored by The Invisible Committee and published in France in 2007 (and officially translated into English in 2009),



reflects the traditions of insurrectionist, New School, small-a anarchism. I would add to that list “academic,” since many of the New School anarchists embrace ideas that became canonical in Western graduate programs during the past forty years. In the case of *The Coming Insurrection*, the label of “academic anarchism” may also apply because the suspected author, Julien Coupat, wrote a dissertation on Guy Debord at the EHESS (L'école des hautes études en sciences sociales).

Of even greater significance than these theoretical disputes, however, is the context of *The Coming Insurrection's* circulation. Much like the “Unabomber Manifesto,” the publication of *The Coming Insurrection* was replete with charges of terrorism against its author(s) and endorsements from celebrity leftists (Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Rancière, Slavoj Žižek, etc.). On November 11, 2008, twenty French youths were arrested in Paris, Rouen, and Tarnac, on trumped-up charges of terrorism related to a variety of attacks on high-speed train routes. After eleven suspects were freed, the remaining suspects became known as the Tarnac Nine; the accused had developed an organic co-op in their home village.<sup>1</sup> Coupat, the last of the Tarnac Nine, was released from “preventative arrest” in May 2009.

By July 2009, 27,000 copies of *The Coming Insurrection* had been sold. Glenn Beck, celebrated loon of Fox News, reviewed the book as some kind of representative for militant leftism. *Adbusters* editorialized the book “may become a key manifesto of our generation's uprising.” But few bothered to examine the manifesto's ideas.

At its heart, *The Coming Insurrection* reads like a cross between Anarcho-primitivism and Neo-situationism. It is part jeremiad, part intervention: a clever combination of astute observations and half-considered, apocalyptic solutions that recommend taking up arms (in self-defence), forming an “assembly of presences” rather than a General Assembly (123), and finding the means to “permanently destroy computerized databases” (116). Conceived in the context of the 2005 Parisian uprising, *The Coming Insurrection* describes the collapse of the welfare state, the end of political representation (23), and “the emergence of a brute conflict between those who desire order and those who don't” (12). In such a “crisis situation” emerge the “many opportunities for the restructuring of domination” (13), a domination called Empire. Readers of Hardt and Negri will recognize the Invisible Committee's definition of Empire:

Empire is not an enemy that confronts us head-on. It is a rhythm that imposes itself, a way of dispensing and dispersing reality. Less an order of the world than its sad, heavy and militaristic liquidation (13).

Against Empire stands the insurrection, “not like a plague or a forest fire—a linear process which spreads from place to place after an initial spark. It rather takes the

shape of a music, whose focal points, though dispersed in time and space, succeed in imposing the rhythm of their own vibrations, always taking on more density” (12-13). The Invisible Committee's writing is dense and metaphorical, sprinkled with poststructuralist tendencies. Power, for example, “is no longer concentrated in one point in the world; it is the world itself, its flows and avenues, its people and its norms, its codes and its technologies” (131).

The Invisible Committee claims to advocate for a middle ground between insurrectionist and mass anarchism; however, most of its advice (not to mention the title) is decidedly insurrectionist. For example, the Invisible Committee writes,

There is no need to choose between the fetishism of spontaneity and organizational control; between the ‘come one, come all’ of activist networks and the discipline of hierarchy; between acting desperately now and waiting desperately for later; between bracketing that which is to be lived and experimented in the name of a paradise that seems more and more like a hell the longer it is put off, and repeating, with a corpse-filled mouth, that planting carrots is enough to dispel this nightmare (14-15).

Almost immediately they declare organizations to be “obstacles to organizing ourselves,” recommending instead forms of affinity grouping based on “the intensity of sharing” (15). In the context of societal collapse—when “the general misery” is exposed as “a thing without cause or reason”—they locate “the possibility of communism” (16). “Cultural and activist circles” should also be avoided, they argue, because they are “old people's homes where all revolutionary desires traditionally go to die” (100). Instead, the Invisible Committee calls for the formation of communes:

Every commune seeks to be its own base. It seeks to dissolve the questions of needs. It seeks to break all economic dependency and all political subjugation; it degenerates into a milieu the moment it loses contact with the truths on which it is founded (102).

The definition of commune is, naturally, a key element in *The Coming Insurrection*. The Invisible Committee articulates its preferred organizational principle through this concept, and it's an anti-organizational principle at once appealing as a tactic and somewhat delusional as a long-term strategy. Who can deny the appeal of this sentiment: “communes come into being when people find each other, get on with each other, and decide on a common path” (101)? Within this category the Invisible Committee includes “every wildcat strike” and “every building occupied collectively,” as well as the “action committees of 1968,” “the slave maroons in the United States,” and “Radio Alice in Bologna in 1977” (102). But the long-term effectiveness of such



a tactic—especially against a class war machine that plots and executes with the luxury of enormous time, wealth, and resources—is limited, and perhaps this is why mass anarchism has dominated the anarchist tradition historically.

At times the writing in *The Coming Insurrection* is splendidly declarative, ready for immortalization on a car bumper sticker (“We are not depressed; we’re on strike”; “We have to see that the economy is not ‘in’ crisis, the economy is itself the crisis”; “Attach yourself to what you feel to be true”); at other times, often concomitant with the sloganeering, the propositions resonate but do not educate or prepare (“Get organized in order to no longer have to work”; “Create territories. Multiply zones of opacity”). Typical of the clash between prosaic revolutionary sentiment and pragmatic resistance in *The Coming Insurrection* is its characterization of “territory”:

For us it’s not about possessing territory. Rather, it’s a matter of increasing the density of the communes, of circulation, and of solidarities to the point that the territory becomes unreadable, opaque to all authority. We don’t want to occupy the territory, we want to be the territory (108).

The sentiment is reasonable: create overlapping practices and affiliations so dense that authorities no longer recognize the patterns of your existence. However, there is a good reason people *possess* certain territory, rather than *become* the territory: only some land is arable, some water drinkable; certain territory is coveted because it sustains human populations. States understand this principle quite well.

The antiorganizationalist perspective of *The Coming Insurrection* “is flawed by its failure to consider the dangers of informal organisation and its dogmatic view that it is impossible to establish a formal organisation compatible with anarchist principles” (Schmidt and van der Walt 262). The primitivist ethos of the tract—for example, its belief that the “only realistic option” that remains in the struggle against Empire “is to ‘break the bank’ as soon as possible” and spur civilizational collapse (82)—frames our options in terms that favour people with mobility and access to arable land. In other words, this is a privileged perspective with no organizational principle for working class self-emancipation or against statist or nationalist propaganda. “At this juncture,” *The Coming Insurrection* proclaims, “any strictly social contestation that refuses to see that what we’re facing is not the crisis of a society but the extinction of a civilization becomes an accomplice in its perpetuation” (94). Certainly, ecological collapse is probable, maybe inevitable; however, the collapse will occur unevenly over an unspecified period of time—thus suggesting the uniform declarations of the Invisible Committee could use some modifications for context, and the Anarcho-primitivist suppositions suffer from a preponderance of Western white privilege, an idealization of hunter-gatherer societies, and a deficit of pragmatic thought.

One particular dilemma—and this is where the “middle ground” between insurrectionist and mass anarchism should be defined—seems to interrupt the insurrectionary sentiment: “How will we feed ourselves once everything is paralyzed?” the Committee wonders (125). Or, similarly, “How will we communicate and move about during a total interruption of the flows?” (105). The Committee does not provide adequate answers for these essential questions. They simply assert, “[Every commune] seeks to dissolve the question of needs” (102), and recommend urban gardening. That said, they should be credited for attempting to address the central challenge of modern revolution: the concept of *necessity*. They have identified the problem: “Our dependence on the metropolis—on its medicine, its agriculture, its police—is so great at present that we can’t attack it without putting ourselves in danger” (106). They simply have not provided a workable solution.

*The Coming Insurrection* is an important radical text at least for its attempt at a synthesis of contemporary post-Left anarchism, especially primitivism, and insurrectionism. At times, its language is eloquent, even inspiring. However, the manifesto that remains of a bogus government initiative to resurrect the spectre of “homegrown terrorism from the ultra-left” is a document more interesting for its literary flourishes than its pragmatic designs for revolution.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a more complete history of the document, see Alberto Toscano, “The War Against Preterrorism: The ‘Tarnac Nine’ and *The Coming Insurrection*.” January 16, 2009, [www.anarchistnews.org/?q=print/6030](http://www.anarchistnews.org/?q=print/6030).

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# The Depths of Design

MELISSA ARONCZYK

Guy Julier and Liz Moor, eds. *Design and Creativity: Policy, Management and Practice*. Berg, 2009. 224 pp.

It must have been inconceivable to the audience at the 8th International Design Conference, held in 1958, why the sociologist C. Wright Mills was invited to give a lecture. Only a few sentences into his speech, Mills thrashed the design industry for pulling art and craftsmanship under the umbrella of the market, and for joining the ranks of ad men, PR flacks and market researchers to ally “the struggle of existence with the panic for status” (Mills, “The Man in the Middle” 70):

The silly needs of salesmanship are thus met by the silly designing and redesigning of things. The waste of human labor and material become irrationally central to the performance of the capitalist mechanism. Society itself becomes a great sales room, a network of public rackets, and a continuous fashion show...and in the mass society, the image of beauty itself becomes identified with the designer’s speed-up and debasement of imagination, taste and sensibility (73)

As members of what Mills called “the cultural apparatus” – those artistic, scientific and intellectual institutions that mediate the “second-hand worlds” of human experience – designers were supposed to translate the political potential of culture to the public. His speech was meant as a warning bell, a shake of the design industry’s (white) collars: by squandering their responsibility as “observation posts,” “interpretation centres” and “presentation depots,” designers succumbed to the commercial imperatives “which use ‘culture’ for their own non-cultural – indeed anti-cultural – ends” (74).

Over fifty years later, Guy Julier and Liz Moor’s edited volume, *Design and Creativity: Policy, Management and Practice*, lands rather more softly into its cultural context. Not because the book isn’t relevant or insightful – it is – but because in the contemporary setting, the gap between “commercial” and “culture” is harder and harder to discern. Terms like “creative industry,” “experience economy,” and “nation brand” have ceased to be oxymorons and instead become symbolic manifestations of the imbrication of culture and the economy in everyday life.

As *Design and Creativity* makes clear, the contingent meanings of these terms make them fertile sites for intellectual investigation. While the book’s primary focus is on the ways in which work deemed to be “creative” has been incorporated into economic systems and public projects, it is also an indication that the social sciences are starting to take more seriously the work of design (as well as related industries of advertising, marketing and branding) as a constitutive part of culture rather than as its antagonist. It is simply no longer realistic to point to these industries as the “debasement” of all things creative, as classical cultural theory has done; recent work has rather acknowledged their impact – for better or worse – as sources of knowledge, technique and expertise within political and societal spheres.

The book’s introduction offers a provocative and detailed summary of these shifts, situating the massive expansion of the design profession over the past twenty years in the contexts of the aesthetic demands of advanced capitalism, the adoption of “creative industry” paradigms in public policy, and the need to adopt an instantaneous and internationally recognizable shorthand to convey global market imperatives. The turn in urban, regional and national settings toward so-called New Public Management (NPM) – an approach to governance that applies private sector methods and metrics to the delivery of public services – is an important factor in design’s ascendancy. If an earlier generation of design work emerged *from* production, as an overlay of form after the establishment of function, contemporary production processes in both private and public sectors now rely on design at every stage of development (Julier and Moor 3). The ballooning of the industry is a direct outcome of this production perspective: design consultancies now sit at the table for decisions around conception, strategic planning, communications and delivery systems.

The strongest features of the book emerge in the analyses of how these worlds collide. As creativity becomes the watchword of 21st century governance, business, and culture, the term’s radically different interpretations make for unintended outcomes. Traditional notions of creativity as individual, organic, and unstructured rub up against injunctions to render creativity measurable and transparent for the purposes of economic accountability, government policy, and corporate planning. Chapters such as AnneMarie Dorland’s “Routinized Labour in the Graphic Design Studio,” reveal how designers are regularly caught between the Scylla of providing scripted, systematized, and auditable material and the Charybdis of modeling behaviors and approaches that are “unstructured,” “authentic” and “improvised.” Meanwhile, business and government leaders themselves are increasingly encouraged to think and work more “creatively,” absorbing lessons from the world of design. As Julier and Moor point out, the tensions that arise in these instances reveal “a sense in which the actual practices of creative workers are always both more and less systematized than they appear to be, and more or less ‘free’ than they appear to be” (266).

The book is divided into three sections, each of which addresses this cross-pollination of design culture, the public sector, and the corporate bottom line. Part I, “Design and Policy,” explores how design has been instrumentalized to meet the requirements of NPM. Liz Moor’s chapter, “Designing the State,” shows how the current climate of political leadership in the UK places emphasis on citizens as active “users” who ought to take responsibility for acquiring the government services they need. In this context, communications design is used to promote the “empowerment” of citizens as active agents in their self-management, while service design is used to mediate interactions between government and citizen in the form of branded websites, helplines and text message interfaces. The problem with such techniques, as Moor deftly points out, is that “they provide a proxy measure for ‘effectiveness’ (by proving that someone has taken an action in response to a message), whilst also fostering some kind of agency – even if that agency is only sending a text message” (36). In other words, such technological and design innovations in government service delivery can often mask a real decline in accountability, a decrease in the responsibility of government toward its citizens, and the depoliticization of citizen participation.

In Part II, “Managing Design in Context,” various authors explore the ways in which design, as concept and as profession, has been affected by new commercial environments. Here the contradictions of the creative industries loom large: Paul Springer’s chapter, “Auditing in Communication Design,” notes that the emphasis on speed of delivery and a focus on sales have led to increasing digitization of design work, which orients creative output toward customer profiling. In “The Turn to Service Design,” Lucy Kimball demonstrates what happens when design interfaces are used to mediate relationships and modulate consumer practices, echoing developments in the corporate sphere to value the “informational capital” provided by consumers to promote commercial goods and services.<sup>1</sup>

The book bravely includes a number of perspectives by designers themselves, both in the analytical case study chapters and in full force in the third section of the book, which is devoted to interviews with design practitioners. I say “bravely,” because despite social scientists’ recognition of the need to take seriously the activities of the persuasional professions, there remains a categorical divide between the kind of analysis conducted from within the industry and that emanating from the academic realm. Writing by designers about design, advertisers about advertising, and marketers about marketing can sound – to this social scientist at least – a lot like hyperbole. Though the authors in this volume do not go as far as the manifestos by designers like Bruce Mau to claim “the legacy and potential, the promise and power of design in improving the welfare of humanity,” some of the chapters read suspiciously like promotional pieces (*MASSIVE CHANGE*). In “Design, Innovation and Policy at the Local Level,” Katie Hill and Guy Julier’s chapter on the influence of NPM on a public

sector project to develop a children’s playground, the story is told as one of the good (sensitive, innovative, collaborative) design consultancy versus the bad (bureaucratic, audit-oriented, over-regulated) government. Though C. Wright Mills might have enjoyed this classic good-versus-evil fable, the narrative would have been more convincing were Hill not a design consultant with the firm under discussion. Similarly, in a chapter on the integration of creative industry policy into the practices of the Victoria and Albert Museum (a design museum in London), author Jane Pavitt, one of its curators, describes how the museum’s adoption of creative industry approaches has led to its successful modernization and ongoing relevance, while “return[ing] full circle to the intentions of its founders” in the nineteenth century to serve a civilizing function as educational and moral influence (93-94). If these chapters make for an insider perspective, they do so at the cost of more rigorous critical analysis.

Given the background and research interests of the editors, it is not surprising that the book’s case studies are largely situated in the UK, though some chapters do attend to design practices in Canada (Dorland) and in the U.S. (Sutton; Waisberg), with a few of the interviews in Part III covering locations farther afield. Waisberg’s chapter offers a particularly interesting perspective. She explores the contributions of the “people people” to American design – the anthropologists, psychologists, statisticians, market researchers, and others whose work “anchors the constraints of design in the realm of human experience” (139). Like the other chapters written by or with design practitioners, Waisberg’s remains a relatively uncritical piece (she is a market researcher), but her insights on the nature of the work help to underscore an important aspect of her argument: that “researchers are just as much of a creative force as designers.” In one section, Waisberg describes how researchers spend a lot of time undoing the tendency to lump people into categories of “consumer” or “user” or “baby boomer.” The chapter exemplifies many of the shifts Julier and Moor identify in their introduction – the influence of systematization and audit within design fields, for instance, or the ways in which notions of creativity are reworked within the context of current public and private sector imperatives – but it does so in a way that defies an unhelpful us-versus-them binary.

At the end of his speech in 1958, C. Wright Mills called for designers to return to the principles of craftsmanship. “As ideal,” Mills insisted, “craftsmanship stands for the creative nature of work, and for the central place of such work in human development as a whole. As practice, craftsmanship stands for the classic role of the independent artisan who does his work in close interplay with the public, which in turn participates in it” (74). For Mills, the true craftsman makes no distinction between work and culture; his self-expression is at once a societal contribution.<sup>2</sup>

Some readers may see a parallel between Mills’ view of craft and recent critiques of

the role of labour in the creative industries, where the division between work and leisure is increasingly blurred. There is a fundamental difference. In the creative industry paradigm, individuals are encouraged to think of themselves as brands, rolling their profession, their proclivities and their personalities into the flexible figure of the “cultural entrepreneur.”<sup>3</sup> In my view, Mills’ understanding of craft is more akin to a distant, albeit nostalgic ideal: one of working for the satisfaction of a job well done, without regard for the accumulation of social or reputational capital.<sup>4</sup>

In at least one respect, *Design and Creativity* is not far from Mills’ ideals. By giving us perspectives on design from within and outside the academy, Julier and Moor provide a portrait that is much more honest, and ultimately more revealing, than many academic works that profess to know what such “creative” industries are really up to. One of the more important contributions of this book is to humanize not only the world of design but also the people engaged in it. In this way, the contradictions and inconsistencies that arise seem less like the trivialization, distortion and marketization of culture and more like the contingent, relational, and dynamic product of – dare I say it? – creativity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Adam Arvidsson’s *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture* (Routledge, 2006), which examines the ways in which consumer communication about a product or service, such as blog posts or online forums, are increasingly identified as sources of economic value (“informational capital”) for a corporation.

<sup>2</sup> See Richard Sennett’s *The Craftsman* (Yale UP, 2008), for a discussion of the legacy of these ideas.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Andrew Ross’s *Nice Work if You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times* (NYU Press, 2009) [reviewed by Sarah Brouillette in this journal]; and Sarah Banet-Weiser and Marita Sturken’s “The Politics of Commerce: Shepard Fairey and the New Cultural Entrepreneurship,” in *Blowing Up the Brand: Critical Perspectives on Promotional Culture*, ed. M. Aronczyk and D. Powers (Peter Lang, forthcoming) for a detailed description of the contemporary cultural entrepreneur.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in a 1946 essay, Mills decried the rise of the “competitive personality” that accompanied postwar industrialization. See C. Wright Mills, “The Competitive Personality (1946),” *Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills* (Oxford UP, 1970).

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# Marxism as Science Fiction

GERRY CANAVAN

Mark Bould and China Miéville, eds. *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*. Wesleyan UP, 2009. 304 pp.

In 1972, Darko Suvin published “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre”, where he announced science fiction’s importance as “the literature of cognitive estrangement” (372). “SF,” Suvin writes, “is then a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” (375). Suvin’s definition of SF, a genre of fiction which is “wiser than the world it speaks to,” is famously exclusionist; not only are fantasy and the fairy tale anathematic to the high cognitive ambitions of SF, but—by his own estimate—95% of what is published as SF does not deserve the name either (381). Suvin foregrounds his indebtedness to both Viktor Shklovsky’s *ostranie* and the famous *Verfremdungseffekt* of Bertolt Brecht, and notes in passing that SF (as a “fundamentally subversive genre” [379]) has a great deal in common with the classic pastoral, whose “imaginary framework of a world without money economy, state apparatus, and depersonalizing urbanization” stands in relationship to SF “as alchemy does to chemistry and nuclear physics: an early try in the right direction with insufficient sophistication” (376). Though the words “Marx” and “Marxism” appear nowhere in Suvin’s essay, the necessary political orientation of both SF and its audience is unmistakable.

In his introduction to *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*, Mark Bould describes “the Suvin event”—his publication of “Poetics” combined with his founding of the journal *Science Fiction Studies* with R.D. Mullen in 1973—as the foundation for all subsequent SF theory (18). (The SF-flavored image Bould chooses to characterize Suvin’s influence is a black hole, whose event horizon one might choose either to inhabit or attempt to escape, but around which one will always be in orbit.) Bould and his co-editor, writer and critic China Miéville, had earlier considered “the Suvin event” in a special issue of *Historical Materialism* they co-edited in 2002 devoted to the question of “Marxism and Fantasy,” where each argued that the Suvinian prohibition on fantasy should finally be lifted on the grounds that (for Miéville) “‘real’ life under capitalism *is a fantasy*” of commodity fetishism (41–42) and (for Bould) that

“the very *fantasy* of fantasy as a mode ... gives it space for a hard-headed critical consciousness of capitalist subjectivity” (83–84). *Red Planets* continues this critical trajectory with important interrogations of other aspects of the Marxist approach to SF articulated by Suvin and by the well-known theorist of Marxism and SF most often associated with Suvin’s approach, Fredric Jameson. For decades, Jameson has focused Suvin’s “cognitive estrangement” around what he calls “the desire called Utopia”: our attempts to imagine and shape big-H History by recasting the present as the fixed historical past of some projective future.

Perhaps the most pointed of *Red Planets*’ critiques of Suvin and Jameson comes from Miéville’s own essay (the last in the book), which continues the argumentative trajectory of the Historical Materialism issue with a smart deconstruction of the very notion of “cognition”:

To the extent that SF claims to be based on “science,” and indeed on what is deemed “rationality,” it is based on capitalist modernity’s ideologically projected self-justification: not some abstract/ideal “science,” but capitalist science’s bullshit about itself (240).

Where Suvin and Jameson privilege the supposed rationalism of SF over other modes of fantasy, then, Miéville argues they are often doing so purely on the grounds of the genre’s ideologically infused “scientific *pretensions*” (241). What is most needed in SF theory, then, is for Miéville not further elaboration upon so-called cognition (i.e., pseudoscience), but rather a theory of *alterity* as such that can account not only for the differences between SF and fantasy but also for possible unrealities beyond the utopic (243–244).

Other essays make similar theoretical moves. Darren Jorgensen imagines a kind of alternate history for SF theory in which it was dominated not by Jamesonian Marxism but by Althusser; in this approach, “SF is not so much a Suvinian cognitive estrangement as an identification with revolutionary possibility, producing the consciousness of the absolute difference that creates it” (208). This, he suggests, would be a good corrective for the Western Marxist tradition as a whole, for which (shackled by the failures of 1968) “the revolution might just as well be SF, belonging as it does to the imagination of some speculative future” (207–208). For Andrew Milner, it is a return to Raymond Williams that is needed, particularly his insistence on the specificity of SF as a genre *distinct* from utopian writing rather than one that is coextensive with it. For his part, John Rieder notes that in SF cinema at least, the operative mode of SF spectacle is not Brechtian estrangement but rather *absorption*, and shows, through a reading of the three “cuts” of Wim Wenders’ *Until the End of the World* (1991), that SF often bears less the imprimatur of cognition than the scars of a particularly fraught

relationship with market forces.

Not all the essays in the book define themselves in opposition to either Suvin or Jameson; in fact, a number locate themselves to one extent or another within that theoretical tradition. Phillip Wegner's reading of Ken MacLeod's *Fall Revolution* quartet, for instance, draws heavily on Jameson for its theoretical grounding, particularly on the affinities Jameson draws between the emergence of SF and the emergence of high modernism (141-142) in order to read MacLeod in the context of the failure of the 1990s Pax Americana. Likewise, Steven Shaviro's reading of Ray Kurzweil and Singularity fictions locates itself squarely within Jameson's theorization of our fundamental *incapacity* to imagine a Utopia beyond the limits of the present (106), while Matthew Beaumont's essay on anamorphosis draws an analogy between Suvinian estrangement and painting, most notably Hans Holbein's 1533 painting *The Ambassadors* (29-33). Still other essays sidestep the question of Suvin altogether, as Sherryl Vint does in an intriguing essay on animals that argues "there are multiple species-beings, and that animals can be alienated from their species-being as much as humans can be from ours" (130), and as Rob Latham does in his multivalent reading of Thomas Ditsch's 334 in the context of neoliberalism and so-called urban "renewal."

In his introduction to the book, Marc Bould begins with Jameson, specifically with Jameson's characterization of cyberpunk as a manifestation of globalization's "geopolitical imaginary." Bould argues that SF has mapped the flows of capital as far back as Verne's stories about Captain Nemo and the fantasy of unrestricted circulation of international capital that is his *Nautilus*: "SF world-building," Bould says, "is typically distinguished from other fictional world-building, whether fantastic or not, by the manner in which it offers, however unintentionally, a snapshot of the structures of capital" (4). But despite this very Jamesonian view of the genre's potential for cognitive mapping, Bould nonetheless claims that there is no necessary relationship between Marxism and SF, only a contingent one; the Suvin event just happened to happen, in our timeline, but things might easily have been otherwise.

It falls to Carl Freedman (a former student of Jameson's, and the writer who in his 2000 book *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* is arguably Suvin's St. Paul: at once his most full-throated disciple and his most ambitious reviser) to make the case for a necessary relationship between Marxism and SF. In his contribution to the collection, Freedman begins by identifying a dialectical disjuncture in Marxist thought between deflationary and inflationary modes of critique. "The deflationary dimension," he writes, "is represented by the attempt to destroy all illusions necessary or useful to the preservation of class society in general and of capitalism in particular" (*Red Planets* 72). This can be seen fairly clearly in ideology critique, but also in the more structural discussion of the "secret" of surplus-value in *Capital, Vol. 1*. Defla-

tion, Freedman suggests, has a certain figurative relationship with *noir* in prose and film (73-74); while *noir* does not necessarily produce usable knowledge about the workings of capital, the genre's preoccupation with individual greed "allegorically gestures towards... the kind of knowledge discoverable through application of Marx's principle of the ultimately determining role of the economy" (74). It produces a kind of affective intuition that points us in the right direction, so to speak, if not getting us much of the way there.

Inflation, by its nature, is much more fragmentary and affective than deflation; inflation is effusive and intangible, a mode of prophecy and dreams. Marx, after all, had famously little to say about what the world would be like after communism, but the utopian impulse towards a liberatory fulfillment of history—Marx called it history's true beginning, Engels called it "humanity's leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom"—is nonetheless always the beating heart at the centre of the Marxist project. For Freedman, the genre most closely associated with this utopian impulse is SF, and he goes on to argue that, unlike the case of *noir*, SF narrative sometimes provides *better* pictures of the inflationary future than straight expository prose can; because it is impossible to produce concrete knowledge of the future in the same way we can produce it of the present and the past, it is SF (itself a dialectic between deflationary scientific extrapolation and unbound inflationary speculation) that produces our best cognitive maps of potential futures (74).

In this way, Freedman seems happy to take Jorgensen's dare that "the revolution might just as well be SF," writing that the "visionary, material transcendence" of SF "has, at least since the final lines of *The Communist Manifesto*, been the ultimate point of Marxism itself" (82). As Freedman puts it, "For Marxism, visionary transcendence is the necessary completion of astringent demystification" (73)—which is to say not only that the dream of liberation arises out of the demystification of the actual, but also that it is only *through* an accurate, scientific understanding of capitalist reality as it exists that we can begin to imagine plausible alternatives to the actual in the first place (75). (This sort of cognition is, after all, precisely the line that separates communists from Marx's scorned "utopian socialists," those mere wishful thinkers...). And this turns out to be exactly where Suvin began: visionary transcendence (estrangement) as the necessary completion of astringent demystification (cognition). Not Marxism and SF, then, but Marxism *as* SF, and for that matter, SF *as* Marxism.

Of course in making this provocative equivalence we should not overlook the science fictional imagination's often cozy relationship with capital, colonial violence, racism, and oppression, nor allow ourselves to believe that leftist political commitment might begin or end with reading the novels of Kim Stanley Robinson. But we can, I think, buy Freedman's basic line: the specificity of SF as the literature of quasi-scientific fu-

turological projection—the literature of cognitive estrangement—gives it a particular and (yes) even *necessary* relationship with Marxism that cannot be put to one side, nor matched by any other genre. In this way Suvin's forty-year-old definition of the genre remains in some basic sense both vital and inescapable in mapping SF's limits and its possibilities.

Near the end of his recent *Valences of the Dialectic* (2009), Fredric Jameson writes along these lines when he claims that “the worldwide triumph of capitalism ... secures the priority of Marxism as the ultimate horizon of thought in our time” (605). Marxism here describes the boundaries for our extrapolations and speculations, the theoretical constellation in which we might start to grasp History in its totality and through which the imagination of alternatives to capitalist hegemony is still possible. Such a proposition again suggests Marxism as a science fiction, in that best Suvinian sense. No wonder, then, that the images that close Jameson's book shortly thereafter turn to the language of speculative physics—one might say science fictional physics—to describe our fleeting ability to catch glimpses of Utopia: “It would be best, perhaps, to think of an alternate world—better to say the alternate world, our alternate world—as one contiguous with ours but without any connection or access to it. Then, from time to time, like a diseased eyeball in which disturbing flashes of light are perceived or like those baroque sunbursts in which rays from another world suddenly break into this one, we are reminded that Utopia exists and that other systems, other spaces, are still possible” (612). For Jameson, there turns out to be nothing beyond the utopic, as Utopia is just another name for alterity; Utopia, like Suvin himself, has a kind of event horizon, and in the end our speculations always pull us back there, like gravity, like home.

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# Rebuilding the Machine

MATTHEW MACLELLAN

Gerald Raunig. *A Thousand Machines: A Concise Philosophy of the Machine as a Social Movement*. Trans. Aileen Derieg. Semiotext(e), 2010. 128 pp.

A follow-up to his *Art and Revolution* (2007), Gerald Raunig's *A Thousand Machines* uses a combination of Marxian theory and Deleuzian philosophy to examine today's radical social movements as they negotiate the post-fordist landscape. Combining theoretical rigour with an approach that is part genealogical exploration, part activist reportage, *A Thousand Machines* theorizes artistically inclined or inflected social movements in an attempt to determine how these "art machines" resist the imperatives of transnational capital while altering the ways in which protest movements imagine themselves under twenty-first century capitalism. In the first instance, the force of *A Thousand Machines'* thesis would seem to turn on the dialectic between a Marxian-Deleuzian theoretical framework and the book's particular contents: do these artistic social movements gesture toward some real critical potential, or are they simply further symptomatic manifestations of a neoliberal hegemony in which all utopias can only be imagined as a rupture or flight from a repressive statism? However, against this somewhat limited view, I would suggest that the real critical potential of *A Thousand Machines* is manifest in the way in which the text implicitly collapses this binary itself. By way of its clear enunciation of the ideological similarities between the 1968-inspired anti-capitalist movements and the logics of global capital itself, *A Thousand Machines*, above and beyond its actual content, is ultimately a call to dialectically think the implications for resistance to capital when both oppressor and the oppressed champion the same ethos of creativity, freedom, authenticity, and production.

*A Thousand Machines* unfolds in a tripartite movement. The first move sets up the Marxian-Deleuzian framework through which the various social movements discussed later are examined and assessed. Following the widely-held premise that Marx's "Fragment on Machines" offers an analytic of the machine or "fixed-capital" that is very different from the more sustained discussion of technology found in *Capital*, Raunig conceptualizes machinery as the *materialization* or *objectification* of collective human intellect, knowledge, and labour, a construct Marx called the "General Intellect." For Raunig, as for Marx, objectification in this context should not be viewed

as simply the ossification of "living labour" within the cast iron of the machine, but rather as the ongoing dialectical re-organization of scientific knowledge, labour power, and social relations which, in the contemporary post-fordist era, threatens to break down the barrier between intellectual and manual labour and engender novel revolutionary conditions:

The concatenation of knowledge and technology is not exhausted in fixed capital, but also refers beyond the technical machine and the knowledge objectified in it, to forms of social co-operation and communication, not only as machinic enslavement, but also as the capacity of immaterial labor [to] destroy the conditions, under which accumulation develops (9).

Raunig furthers Marx's epistemology of the machine by way of the singularly machinic categories found in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's double-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, which posits that "man and nature are not two opposite terms confronting each other ... rather they are one and the same essential reality, the producer-product" (*Anti-Oedipus* 4). For Raunig, the Deleuzian deconstruction of "man" and "nature" necessarily implies deconstruction of the "opposition of man and machine, of organ and mechanism developed over the course of centuries, on the basis of which one is explained by the other," and thus offers an entirely different, but commensurate, platform through which to extend and expand Marx's approach to the question of technology, machinery, and social relations (10).

Conceptually, Deleuze and Guattari's central contribution to Raunig's project is the notion of the war machine. In the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari's first axiom that the "war machine is exterior to the state apparatus" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 351), Raunig offers a sweeping catalogue of artistic movements that, in the style of the war machine, verge toward the exterior of state systems in search of new lines of flight. Moving from a discussion of the *deus ex machina* in ancient Greek theatrics to the radical experimentation of post-revolutionary Soviet theatre, Raunig suggests that art and theatre might be productively viewed as an "abstract machine" that exists within, yet operates in contradiction to, the purely technical machine of the state apparatus. From this, Raunig jumps to a discussion of contemporary social movements (many of which have already been dealt with in *Art and Revolution*) that he also conceives as fitting the definition of the war machine. Raunig gives an account of the Vienna-based transnational activist troupe "PublixTheatreCaravan," which travels across Europe transitionally linking and delinking with national and international solidarity movements that challenge international capital. He also discusses the Spanish performance group "Yomango" – which translates into English as "I steal" – and its organization of mass acts of shoplifting as a means of liberating commodities from their branded imprisonment by way of a performance that celebrates shoplifting as a subversive life-

style: “seven couples ... skilfully dance the tango ... at the same time that they pocket bottles of champagne in their specially prepared clothing, which they later consume with pleasure during a collective visit to a bank” (31). These movements, according to Raunig, fit Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the war machine not only insofar as they “turn against the concrete states that are still powerful players in the constellation of neoliberal globalization,” but also through their constant problematization of their own representational closure, or the “development of state apparatuses within themselves” that representational politics have a tendency to generate (32).

While the middle section of the book certainly proves interesting reading, the crux of *A Thousand Machines* turns on its capacity to re-incorporate this social movement “artisanal nomadism” into a neo-Marxist theory of revolution. Somewhat disappointingly, however, the previous and interesting discussions of social movements fall by the wayside in the book’s last chapters and Raunig, following the lead of other Marxist-inflected theorists inspired by Italian radicalism, fixes his attention on the ongoing transformations of “class” under post-fordist conditions. Principally, Raunig contrasts the negatively conceived geographical isolation of France’s small-holding peasants (from Marx’s *The Class Struggles in France*) with the physical dispersion of a technologically advanced post-fordist precariat:

Instead of the clearly negative connotation of dispersion as obstructing all social intercourse, the present conditions offer an ambivalent situation, which manifests both a lack of direct communication [like the small-holdings peasants] and the potentiality of new forms of communication in the dispersion. Thus, to the modes of existence in abstraction, in diffusivity, there also inheres the potential in itself to generate concatenations of singularities instead of identitary and community forms of societization. (49).

In this passage, I want to suggest, we find *A Thousand Machines*’ most trenchant insight. Where Marx had assumed that the physical agglomeration of wage workers on the industrial shop floor would, as a matter of course, generate a historically unprecedented form of class-consciousness which would set an otherwise static sociological category – the working class – into motion, Raunig’s thesis suggests that the flaw in Marx’s theory was not that the proletariat was too weak, but rather that it proved, in a sense, to be too strong: subjective over-identification with the Union, Party, or State simply subordinated revolutionary praxis under yet another oppressive apparatus.

Today, however, conditions have become very different. Under post-fordism, Raunig suggests that Marxist praxis and poststructuralist machine theory now definitively overlap as production and language become increasingly synonymous and overdetermined: “in postfordism,” Raunig writes, “the raw material and means of production

of living labour is the capacity for thinking, learning, communicating, imagining, and inventing, which is expressed through language” (51). For Raunig, these conditions make possible a new mode of *formless* collectivity that sets itself against both the (artificial) state and the (natural) community. Presumably, this formless revolutionary machine is aware (if only structurally) of the temptation to forge a collective identity “without cracks,” and thereby embraces the constitutive fractures that invariably plague aspiring collective totalities. In other words, it is precisely because the post-fordist precariat is forced to negotiate its collective identity through networks of communication technologies, which necessarily imply a certain distance, that it is predisposed to forestall the construction of a fixed revolutionary subject: a formless form, it dissolves itself at first sign of hierarchical ossification only to re-compose in a different virtual space as a new revolutionary agent.

At the same time that *A Thousand Machines* makes this important contribution to neo-Marxist scholarship, the book also suffers from the principle shortcoming of the wider Marxian-Deleuzian genre. Namely, it is sometimes difficult to discern whether the revolutionary movements Raunig outlines represent real critical engagements with global capital or whether they are merely symptoms of a post-Keynesian neoliberal orthodoxy which perceives the “state apparatus,” in the broadest possible sense, as the root of all evil. To a certain extent, this seems to me an inevitable outcome of Raunig’s all too common appropriation of Deleuze and Guattari. Despite the fact that the third section of *Anti-Oedipus* advances an entire theory of capital built from Marx’s work, Raunig draws almost exclusively from the nomadic rhetoric found in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Invariably, the real enemy for Raunig is not capital as such but rather the hidden “state mentality” that lurks not only in the international economic and juridical order but within the global anti-capitalist movement itself. The logic of resistance that this emphasis on Deleuze and Guattari’s work embraces is thus problematically *mimetic* to that which global capital has mounted against numerous forms of collective or democratic control over the past thirty years: both are driven to flee state structures, create new lines of flight, and open new worlds outside the coded flows that state machines continually erect to restrict movement. But where Deleuze and Guattari consistently foreground capital as, at its essence, “the generalized decoding of flows, the new massive deterritorialization, the conjunction of new deterritorialized flows,” the conspicuous absence of this aspect of their work in *A Thousand Machines* only serves to mask the underlying similarity between artistic protest movements and the logic of global capital (*Anti-Oedipus* 224).

For assuming that theorists from Lukács to Adorno to Jameson were on to something when they argued that capital’s reifying code had rendered direct opposition, from an exogenous “critical” distance, unthinkable, then today’s resistance should not so much search for some absolute exterior to capital in order to get a better look at the

system, but rather attempt to alter capital's logic from within based on whatever critical vantage one is able to gain under conditions that, to paraphrase Marx, are not of our choosing. Yet it is in this regard that Deleuzian philosophy ultimately complements Marxist thought, and proves useful for Raunig's project: the moment when neoliberal utopianisms equate the unrestricted flow of capital with the superimposition of nature, or rather the natural, into a fraught history of human intervention into economic affairs, a Deleuzian approach works against this utopian naturalization and tells us that neoliberal capitalism is simply one socio-economic machine among others and of no particular ontological distinction. There is thus no imperative to exit the space of capital, as this concession already grants too much authority to an economic system that, as the recent economic crisis has surely demonstrated, is far from hermetically sealed. It is in this final sense that the political message of *A Thousand Machines* is ultimately democratic and emancipatory: Raunig insists that capitalism is not the Fukuyamian juggernaut it is often depicted as, but rather one machine operating among many, and a machine that can be built differently once its downtrodden masses actualize the desire to do so.

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# Modernism's Lost Causes

EVAN MAURO

Seth Moglen. *Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism*. Stanford University Press, 2007. 344 pp.

On its face a study of American literary modernism, Seth Moglen's *Mourning Modernity* opens onto an urgent question: how to remember and use histories of political radicalism. Moglen's book reanimates a turning point for American revolutionary movements in the 1920s and 1930s, tying that era's comprehensive state repression of the left into the development of a distinctly melancholic modernist sensibility. By returning to this conjuncture, Moglen makes an important contribution to the ongoing etiology of political melancholia, which, as Wendy Brown and others have argued, continues to delimit American political discourse. In our moment, with Tea Party nativism misdiagnosing chronic unemployment as the result of lax immigration policy and not thirty-plus years of concentrated outsourcing, and with some polls reporting that a majority of respondents understand Obama's capital-friendly legislative remedies to be somehow “socialist,” who could argue that genuine left alternatives haven't been disavowed or foreclosed?

*Mourning Modernity* looks back to the early twentieth century for the entrenchment of today's melancholic political rationality, and argues that American modernism is a meaningful exploration of its dynamics. Moglen proposes that modernist writing alternates between a disaffected melancholia and a more politically engaged and reparative mourning, two structures of feeling he derives from Freud. Both are responses to the losses, injuries, and foreclosed possibilities imposed by an accelerated capitalist modernity at the turn of the twentieth century. But where melancholic works tend to naturalize or eternalize alienation—think of T.S. Eliot's mythic method in *The Waste Land*—the literature of mourning faces up to the causes of modern anomie and takes on the difficult work of identifying the mechanisms of dispossession that capitalism engenders. Some modernist texts, like Eliot's, adhere to one position or the other, but some others, like John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy, oscillate between the two.

Moglen uses the mourning-melancholia distinction to cut a materialist path through modernist scholarship in his book's remarkable first half. He argues that the diverse and productive modernist criticism of the past twenty years, or the so-called “new

modernist studies,” can be reframed and politicized in a coherent way. Briefly, the field of American modernism was a mid-century, Cold War invention that, like Clement Greenberg’s veneration of abstract expressionism, subsumed politics to a set of formal properties and promoted seemingly apolitical works that stood as cultural evidence for the arrival of the American Century. That melancholic, new critical canon has been gradually eroded by the new modernist studies’ rehabilitation of authors, traditions, and genres initially marginalized or ignored, which are then leveraged against the cultural capital of high modernism. These rediscovered texts, Moglen claims, tend to feature more overtly political content that mourns the effects of monopoly capitalism on modern life, whereas the melancholic canon displaces alienation into self-negating strategies of formal indirection. If the concept of a new modernist studies sounds like a more general tendency in late twentieth century humanities criticism, then this may explain why it has been able to operate until now without a mission statement. The importance of Moglen’s periodization is that it shows how both the melancholic and mourning traditions, or the modernisms of the new critics and the new modernists, can be constellated in a single field, as contrasting responses to the same historical conditions.

But such a summary implies a starker division than what, in Moglen’s book, is a far less reductive framework for American modernism. The literary works he includes in both the mourning and the melancholic traditions are carefully selected to avoid a belated canon debate, mixing authors rehabilitated by the new modernist studies with more canonical choices in each category: T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, but also Jean Toomer and Willa Cather write in the melancholic mode; mourning, on the other hand, is evident in the writings of Zora Neale Hurston, Tillie Olsen, Langston Hughes, but also Hilda Doolittle (HD) and William Carlos Williams. Instead, Moglen’s focus shifts to these texts’ affective dynamics: how does a widespread sense of loss, absolutely constitutive of modern experience, register in the writing of the period? What political possibilities does it prohibit or enable? Moglen argues that modernism is typified by an “experience of growing alienation, a crisis in the capacity for social solidarity at the public level, and for emotional and sexual intimacy in the private” (5). Where melancholia manifests itself in a series of psychic symptoms that have become definitively modernist affects (anxiety, war trauma, libidinal despair), the literature of mourning pushes through these to reflect on the forms of love, desire, and solidarity that existing social formations make available or foreclose. This is where Moglen’s use of melancholia and mourning reveals its most suggestive possibilities: in its ability to link literary explorations of the most intimate registers of psychic life to the political, or to an often frustrated desire for social transformation and alternative forms of living. Mourning is, in a sense, another word for this desire, wherever it manages to avoid the psychic and representational displacements of melancholia and can “raise to consciousness”

(22) the social forces responsible for injury and loss.

But despite a series of terrific close readings in these early chapters that demonstrate the adaptability of his critical framework to a potentially vast range of modernist writing, Moglen’s own analysis tilts the field towards what he sees in Olsen and Dos Passos especially as a “materialist form of mourning” (68): one that privileges a left-radical strain of literature as the most fully developed response to the losses brought on by modern capitalism. The second half of the book is devoted Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.* trilogy, which was intended as a memorialization of the early-century radicals — Wobblies, anarchists, communists, unionists — repressed, executed, and deported in the Red Scare of the 1910s and 1920s. Dos Passos’s trilogy alternates between four very different narrative modes, and two of them, Moglen argues, pit mourning against melancholia. The first mode, *U.S.A.*’s biographical prose poems of fallen radicals, were designed to produce a book “so fiery and accurate” (Dos Passos, qtd. in Moglen 125) that it “would prevent Americans from forgetting the suppressed traditions of democratic anticapitalism” (Moglen 125). This effort to mourn is attenuated by a second mode, the trilogy’s narrative prose sections, which also treat the radical left; these, Moglen argues, ultimately succumb to a naturalist fatalism and a reified use of language that blocks mourning with an embittered political defeatism. The tension between the biographies and the prose narratives runs through the trilogy. Moglen also weaves in important events in Dos Passos’s own biography, which is marked by an increasing frustration with the radical left and with his public image as the leading light in a proletarian literary movement of the 1930s—an estrangement that grows palpably over the course of the three novels, to the point where later decades saw him praise an idealized “Anglo-Saxon democracy,” make anti-Semitic dismissals of the US Communist Party, and then offer support for anti-communist luminaries like Joseph McCarthy, William Buckley, and Barry Goldwater. Moglen builds his case on solid ground here: if these aren’t the self-consuming symptoms of a melancholic, I’m sure that I don’t understand the term.

A renewed interest in radical formations of the modernist period is a welcome intervention and, as Moglen’s excellent close readings show, also a powerful heuristic for some of the era’s more famously elliptical and difficult writing. But exploring modernist anti-capitalism also requires a renewed attentiveness to modernist-era capitalism itself. Moglen’s term, monopoly capitalism, serves as a useful shorthand, but the risk of reifying a static picture of industrialization and urbanization should be clear. Modernist regimes of accumulation were neither monolithic nor monocausal, and Moglen’s reliance on terms like “modernization” and “development” tends to obscure substantial temporal and geographical disparities in capitalism’s effects—not only within but, of course, beyond America’s borders. If critical sensitivity to a range of affective states will, as Moglen argues, provide a cognitive map to modern capitalism,



then this might be usefully accompanied by a more thorough investigation of that era's self-representations of economic organization. The turn of the twentieth century saw the establishment of economics as an autonomous discipline, with its own internal disputes (for example the currently sanctified figure of J. M. Keynes, and the free market reaction against him detailed in Foucault's recently-translated *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures) and external critiques (especially the economic debates within the Second International, where the concept of monopoly capitalism originates), both of which point to a rather more unstable and contested object in monopoly capitalism than is typically understood. If further research could approach the range and scope of literary texts accommodated by Moglen's framework with analysis of a corresponding set of modernist-era representations of capitalism itself, scholarship in this area would be well served.

All of which is to reiterate that capitalism itself is not static object, but a process that requires cultural mediation to sustain it. And if Moglen's study returns us to still-relevant questions of form and mediation, so much the better. For instance, one wonders how Moglen's paradigm can be applied beyond America to that rich strain of modernist art and writing – Futurism, Constructivism, (some) naturalism, automatic writing, and so on – that bases itself in a fetishism of machines, modelling aesthetic form after new kinds of technologically-mediated experience? This, too, was often based in revolutionary desire, if not actual revolutionary collectives and avant-gardes; its radical break with history and tradition, more a liberation than a loss, was seemingly free of melancholia's usual symptoms and self-lacerating structures of feeling. Moglen's reading of Dos Passos omits most of *U.S.A.*'s more formally experimental Newsreel and Camera Eye sections, which arguably participate in this machinic tendency in form. Instead, Moglen's analysis tends to privilege authors and works able to "raise to consciousness" the social causes of alienation, which applies more easily to texts with some conventionally realist, or at least representational, content in them. In this respect, *Mourning Modernity* bears more than a passing resemblance to the literary criticism of György Lukács, whose categories of "healthy" realist and "sick" modernist styles are in a sense an earlier iteration of Moglen's mourning-melancholia opposition.<sup>1</sup> Lukács, too, was impatient with any mythical abstraction or eternalization of capitalist alienation: for him, realism named the ability of literature to foster historical self-awareness, and to keep open the possibility of socialism, within a concrete capitalist totality. If melancholia is indeed a political disaffection that set in with even the most committed of American modernism's leftist writers, and mourning stands for these writers' more politically responsible moments, then Moglen seems to share Lukács's aims. *Mourning Modernity* opens the door to reconsidering Lukács's categories outside of his problematic formal absolutism, with an eye to the variety of affective modes that historical self-awareness can take. This is no small achievement, and offers a key vantage on the constitution of America's resentment-filled present.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> From Lukács's essay "Healthy or Sick Art?" Lukács continued to use the distinction, but in different terms, in later works: for example, in "Franz Kafka or Thomas Mann?" he counterposes a literature of "angst" to a literature of "ethical conviction."

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# Power of the People?

JUSTIN PAULSON

Mark Fenster. *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (revised and updated edition). University of Minnesota Press, 2008. 400 pp.

Was 9/11 an inside job? Stickers declaring so can be found on stop signs and utility poles in urban centres throughout North America. And many of them are new: I recently watched a young, well-dressed gentleman plastering such stickers around downtown Montréal. The fine print includes an address for a website belonging to the talk show host and conspiracy theorist Alex Jones; articles on the site detail such abuses of power as TV mind control, the police state, the flu vaccine, the coming “food wars,” and of course the events that purportedly took place on 9/11. But Alex Jones and his protégés make up only one piece of a larger group that calls itself “The 9/11 Truth Movement,” and its adherents are far more diverse than our stereotypes in Hollywood and on TV would suggest. It seems that conspiracy theory is not just about tinfoil hats and Fox Mulder wannabes anymore. Mark Fenster’s *Conspiracy Theories* argues that it never really was.

Fenster, a law professor at the University of Florida, positions himself squarely in the cultural studies tradition with respect to the hoary debate over ideology and “false consciousness.” He is intrigued by, and at times sympathetic to, conspiracy theories that deal in “fact” (e.g. 9/11, or the Kennedy assassination, or the Contra-crack connection) and fiction (such as *The Da Vinci Code*), but this book is not about proving or debunking any alleged conspiracy; rather, it sets out to explain why people believe conspiracy theories in the first place, and why those who dismiss them out of hand are missing an important part of the picture. If conspiracy theorists are not merely kooks and nutjobs after all, and we take them seriously as at least an expression of protest, what do they tell us?

The book begins with a survey and critique of the predominant scholarship dismissive of conspiracy theories and theorists, and here focuses heavily on the work of Richard Hofstadter and Chip Berlet. Arguing against Hofstadter, who maintains that conspiracy theories are fundamentally pathological (in contrast to the normative consensus understanding of historical events), is relatively straightforward. Mainstream interpretations of events can prove pathological as well; so why should we consider

conspiracy theory any *more* pathological than the consensus view? Fenster chooses a slightly different tack: some conspiracy theories might indeed be pathological, he argues, but that doesn’t make it a rule. Not all conspiracy theories are as detrimental to society as, for example, the one about Israel warning all the Jews in the World Trade Center to stay home prior to the 9/11 attacks.

Berlet’s position is more problematic to dislodge; he argues that conspiracy theories tend to be quite a bit more fascist than consensus interpretations. Fenster simply disagrees: if there is any necessary political affinity to these theories, he doesn’t see it. He tries instead to conceptualize conspiracy theory outside of designations of Left and Right, suggesting that either can utilize it as they see fit. What all conspiracy theories have in common, he argues, is populism, and the whole thrust of the book is a hermeneutics of conspiracy theory in which there is a consistent populist logic: a critique of power that is, if not a correct interpretation of historical events, nevertheless an “historical and perhaps necessary” part of capitalist democracy. He does not address the question of why some populist movements invoke conspiracy theory and others do not, nor why many communities of conspiracy theorists hardly constitute social movements at all (whether or not they are self-styled as such, as in “The 9/11 Truth Movement”). Instead, Fenster simply identifies what he calls the populist impulse behind any conspiracy theory: the government, the media and the “experts” all represent a dangerous, totalitarian “other” that is quite separate from “the people”. In this account, it is only with “the people” that positivism and common sense are challenged and politics, economics, and history appear connected, even if only through shadowy conspiracies. If conspiracy theories long for anything, they long for transparent democracy. In Birmingham School terms, this is the “truth” behind the “false consciousness” of conspiracy theory.

But it is a strange dichotomy Fenster draws between this anti-positivist populism and everybody else—who apparently accept uncritically the consensus view of the world and of major events. By equating conspiracy theory with populism, Fenster tries to argue that any critique of the former is really anti-populism in disguise; this is unconvincing. To assert that Berlet and others on the Left are dismissive of conspiracy theories because they don’t trust the masses is to overlook the real historical uses to which conspiracy theories have been put. Certainly the Left-wing critics’ dismissals of the concerns of conspiracy theorists, without trying to understand what people get out of participating, might be too abrupt, but the dangers they perceive in the theories may nevertheless be quite real.

The subjects of analysis in Fenster’s book veer from militias to fiction and film and then back to shadowy politics, millennialist movements, and finally the theories surrounding the 9/11 attacks. On the whole, this works: Fenster is looking for the com-

monalities behind all of these theories, and how conspiracy theories in politics and in cultural practice inform each other. He pays particular attention to the elements of play and pleasure associated with conspiracy theory—and the “rush” that its proponents get out of trying to unravel the plot, whether of the Kennedy assassination or the X-Files. New to this edition are the chapter on The 9/11 Truth Movement and the Afterword, in which Fenster’s tone shifts to one of greater scepticism as he addresses some explicit uses of conspiracy theory by the Right (via *The Turner Diaries*) and the Left (via John Fiske). The thread holding all of this together is Fenster’s insistence that no matter what else it is, conspiracy theory is always a critique of the social order and at the very least an expression of resistance.

Of course, if conspiracy theory indeed has no necessary political alignment, one could expect to find an historical event—any event—in which it contributed in some way not only to fascism (as it did with the spread of secret societies and anti-Semitism in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century) but also to freedom, equality, and liberation. Yet, while revolutionary movements have frequently acted in conspiratorial ways, that is quite different from conspiracy theory itself promoting a hegemonic or counter-hegemonic discourse that propels the Left forward. Actual conspiracies of all political stripes, from the Gunpowder Plot to the Bolshevik Revolution to the terrorist attacks on 9/11, either happen or are thwarted; it is difficult to perceive how a belief in the conscious and surreptitious ongoing exertion of power by a cabal of conspirators, or in the systematic erasure of the truth of an event, can successfully interface with a social movement of the Left. The best example on which Fenster can draw is Fiske’s insistence that various conspiracy theories circulating among some African-Americans—such as the theory that HIV/AIDS was developed as a genocidal weapon against black men—constitute important “counterknowledge” that might provoke a political opening. This seems to be where the progressive promise of conspiracy theory would lie, but Fenster notes (rightly) that racist and anti-Semitic tracts such as *The Turner Diaries* also provide counterknowledge, and so one is still left having to distinguish between the two. Of course, if counterknowledge is important for progressive politics, one might ask why we need conspiracy theories to generate it in the first place; certainly it can come from plenty of other sources as well. The book does not address this. Fenster concludes the book by noting how conspiracy theories and their longing for a better world typically fail, by not providing a way to make the leap from narrative to praxis. Certainly that rings true of the Left. If only it were as true for the Right.

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## War, Modernity, Critical Theory

RICH DANIELS

Nelson Maldonado-Torres. *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*. Duke University Press, 2008. 360 pp.

Initially this book seems very promising, for at least three reasons: 1) in our time of small, nasty imperial wars and other efforts by the West to police the global south and periphery, analysis of and argument against such war from a new or unusual perspective is most welcome; 2) to bring together the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, Frantz Fanon, and Enrique Dussel promises updating of serious ethical arguments and new application of aspects of critical theory and perhaps even of Marxist analysis of the present stage of global capitalism; 3) and from these three thinkers developing an emphasis on the role of the global south, especially indigenous, insurgent, and resistance movements in Latin America can help us see the directions of social change, not to mention helping it along.

Maldonado-Torres writes that there is a Eurocentric “master morality of dominion and control that can be found at the core of racial policies, imperial projects, and wars of invasion” (2-3). His aim is “to provide here a philosophical and historical account of modernity as a paradigm of war, as well as a counter-paradigm based on the reflections of three twentieth-century philosophers who critically engage Western thought, particularly phenomenology, from three different but related experiences and geopolitical sites” (4-5). He argues that a new “critical theory” forms when and where the works of Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel intersect. There has been, he says, a “decolonial turn” which “includes the definitive entry of enslaved and colonized subjectivities into the realm of thought at previously unknown institutional levels. It introduces questions about the effects of colonization in modern subjectivities and modern forms of life as well as contributions of racialized and colonized subjectivities to the production of knowledge and critical thinking” (8). Elaboration of this claim, which surely has much truth to it, is a major purpose of the book, which also has a strong, consistent ethical strain that argues from peripheral perspectives for love over conflict and difference over (forced) identity. Nor is the book’s underlying theological emphasis surprising, given the influence of Levinas and Dussel. Indeed, the problems presented globally by the intersections of critical theory, Marxism, and religion, especially in the global south, are very much in need of being addressed.



Reading on in this book, however, one grows increasingly distracted by an argument that often doesn't appear to know its own limitations and is too often characterized by an apparently weak grasp of field of thought and the thinkers with which the author should be at least familiar—Gramsci, Adorno, and Marx, among many others—given his claims to be performing a critique of dominant modes of Western thought. What is at issue here is not wholly a critique of Eurocentrism or of dominant Western thought—not even, alas, a critique of war itself in any clear way—but rather a circuitous argument (the book needs a firm editorial hand) within the realm of phenomenology, especially the thought and influence of Husserl and Heidegger; in other words, an in-house debate within a specific segment of Western thought which does not amount to “dominant Western conceptions” (5). The author has, indeed, some very interesting things to say about Husserl's thought, especially, and this would be a better book had it focused more on that philosophical thread and its continuing influence in modern thought. He wants his book to be or at least call for “the transgressive praxis needed to effectively oppose the forces that sustain an imperial world” (101), but an argument rooted in phenomenology is too complicit in that world and too passive to do this, try though it might.

“The decolonial reduction,” Maldonado-Torres says, “makes explicit the challenges posed by the colonial condition to theories that assume a unified world where humans live and coexist” (101). But what exactly are these theories? The best answer he can give is modern liberalism, both secular and religious, the world view of Western elites, as represented, for example, in the works of Hannah Arendt, Jurgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Richard Rorty. Maldonado-Torres also identifies European thought with the French revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity (one could do worse, of course), but doesn't acknowledge in any way that the dominant self-critical thought of the West (again, those names of Gramsci, Adorno, and Marx) promulgates far more radical goals, and international ones to boot. Still, the author's treatment of the thought of Levinas (Part I, 23-89) is often very interesting in terms of its ethical arguments, although Levinas's Zionism, including his justifications of the Sabra and Chatila massacres of 1982, should give one pause, at least, in this regard. It's hard to square a pro-Zionist position and Israeli state policies towards the Palestinian people with concern for the wretched of the earth. Still, Levinas as concentration camp survivor and Jewish ethical and religious thinker clearly has great appeal to many people.

The treatment of Frantz Fanon in Part II (90-159) is also often compelling and worth reading; it's titled “Of Masters and Slaves, Or Frantz Fanon and the Ethico-Political Struggle for Non-Sexist Human Fraternity,” which gives a fair general sense of the argument. Here, Maldonado-Torres focuses on Fanon's 1961 book *Les Damnés de la Terre* (in English usually *The Wretched of the Earth*), a passionately argued work

that over the decades has lost none of its force. Maldonado-Torres uses Fanon's title term *damnés* (often as “the damned” or “condemned”) in various forms throughout the rest of his book to refer to the poor and indigenous peoples of the global south, which makes good sense, except that never once in the entire book does he show that he knows the origin of Fanon's title: from the opening line of *The Internationale*, the hymn of the international communist movement (recently sung in its entirety at a large open-air rally in Kathmandu). Is it possible that he does not know the source of Fanon's title? Or does this silence (there are others) betray an anti-Marxist bias in the book? I suspect that both are true.

Part III of the book (163-236) treats the compelling thought and work of Argentine-Mexican ethical and political philosopher Enrique Dussel, the notable thinker of liberation theology. Dussel's work has had a major impact on Maldonado-Torres' thinking about philosophy and the global south, but it also leaves him somewhat uncomfortable. He sees Dussel's continuing importance as a philosopher and critical theorist of the global south and critic of international capitalism (a term our author seldom uses, preferring “modernity” instead). This section of the book is also accomplished, not least because it enacts the author's struggle with Dussel's philosophical thought, a struggle that I think Maldonado-Torres loses in large part because he's simply not a critical philosopher, not schooled enough in what philosophy is and means in our time. This is certainly not true of Dussel, who has written extensively on Marx's work, among other things, and who clearly considers himself to be, in his own way, a continuer of the work and thought of the Frankfurt School and the critical theory they developed. As far as I can tell from this book, our author is not conversant with the major works of, say, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer. In 2008 at the World Congress of Philosophy in Seoul, Korea, Dussel presented a paper titled “A New Age in the History of Philosophy: The World Dialogue Between Philosophical Traditions” in which he argued that philosophy today, to be itself, must “assume the responsibility for addressing the ethical and political problems associated with the poverty, domination, and exclusion of large sectors of the population, especially in the global South (in Africa, Asia, or Latin America). A critical philosophical dialogue presupposes critical philosophers, in the sense of the ‘critical theory’, while we in Latin America name our own tradition of critical theory as ‘philosophy of liberation’.” I am wholly, but by no means uncritically, in sympathy with this claim and feel compelled to engage with it.

I find myself in sympathy, too, with much of Maldonado-Torres' project in the book *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*, but it also has the shortcomings I've tried to indicate; and it needs much more of the knowledge and philosophical and critical spirit indicated in the quotation above from Enrique Dussel.

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# Querying Transnationalism

EMILY JOHANSEN

Inderpal Grewal. *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms*. Duke University Press, 2005. 296 pp.

Inderpal Grewal's monograph *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* invites its readers to consider the overlapping spheres of postcoloniality, American nationalism and transnationalism, and neoliberalism—and the impact they have on subject formation. Of particular concern for Grewal is the centrality of neoliberal consumerist narratives to anti-racist and feminist social movements. While Grewal points to the widespread diffusion of neoliberal rhetoric, *Transnational America* is especially interested in "the production of middle-class Asian Indian and American subjects in the 1990s" (Grewal 1). Grewal considers a wide variety of case studies, effectively making the case for the widespread transmission of a transnational America: *Transnational America* takes as its archive fiction in English by Indian-American authors, Mattel's "Indian" Barbie, migrants of various classes and female asylum seekers.

In some ways, then, there is something in *Transnational America* for everyone. The varied nature of her archive gestures to Grewal's multi-valent focus and wide-ranging theoretical approach; "it was only by combining a postcolonial perspective with textual literary analysis, social and cultural theory, and feminist and ethnic studies approaches that I could begin to engage with the questions in which I was interested" (Grewal 33). *Transnational America* provides a useful model of what Grewal and Caren Kaplan term "transnational feminist cultural studies" (Kaplan and Grewal 67) but also, more broadly, the transnationally-inflected scholarly work that many in the humanities and social sciences are now undertaking. She points to the way the cultural work done in a variety of different formats and genres all gesture to a similar set of questions about what it means to be human and, more specifically, American. Instead of positing the work done by novels or by Barbie as inherently less serious or rigorous than that done by non-profit groups, Grewal demonstrates their complex interaction across disciplinary boundaries—allowing for the different kinds of work done in different spaces but which, nonetheless, all intervene in subject formation.

While Grewal's work here points to the overlapping questions that arise in myriad

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different cultural forms and locations, it also echoes the fluid notion of “America” at work in *Transnational America*. This fluid notion of “America” is one of the book’s biggest strengths as Grewal differentiates between the United States as a particular geo-political entity and America as an imagined community that is both national and international. While Grewal’s terminology is slippery at times, it helpfully points to a distinction at work throughout: the differing impacts of a state and a nation. Thus while the United States is clearly a central figure in *Transnational America*, Grewal is particularly interested in the imaginative work that America-as-nation performs both at home and abroad (also noting that America as imagined community is roughly contiguous with neoliberalism). Through this differentiation between the United States and America, Grewal allows for a more nuanced consideration of the way both interact globally—suggesting, for instance, the way the United States as a geo-political unit might have vocal critics throughout the world, while America retains its allure of fantasy: “many in the United States and outside ... mourn its perpetration of violence *and* feel a solidarity with it that they would not feel for most other countries around the world” (Grewal 220; emphasis added). While this is perhaps not a new revelation, Grewal marshalls this observation in a useful way as it reveals much about how actually-existing transnationalism—this prominent theoretical buzzword—operates.

However, Grewal’s focus on America as the discourse through which this particular model of transnationalism is articulated points to the limits of transnationalism as a broader theoretical paradigm. Is transnationalism primarily (even exclusively) synonymous with America-as-imagined-community? While this question is mostly implicit in *Transnational America*, this question has been raised more explicitly elsewhere by others. For instance, Timothy Brennan, in *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*, asks whether “cosmopolitanism is the way in which a kind of American patriotism is today being expressed” (26). While Grewal explicitly addresses the limits she’s placed on her study—stating her focus on middle-class Asian Indian and American subjects in the 1990s on the first page, we must continue to query whether transnationalism is primarily to be used in reference to discourses surrounding the U.S. Indeed, it would be helpful to have Grewal address this more explicitly. Is her focus on transnational America a result of her archive, or does it reflect something central to transnationalism? Both are reasonable arguments (though the second option is worrying, given the academy’s recent turn to transnational studies), but these particular stakes remain implicit throughout the text.

Similarly, Grewal’s suggestion that America is coterminous with neoliberalism introduces another term into the definition of transnationalism. In other words, is transnationalism necessarily a by-product of neoliberalism? As Grewal usefully points out, the rhetoric of neoliberalism is one that has been taken up by a variety of groups,

including some that are on the surface critical of neoliberal policies. For instance, she makes the important argument that “the concept of ‘choice’ as a central ethical framework for feminist as well as neoliberal consumer practices [has led to the] imbrication of feminism with consumer culture” (3). Grewal traces, through an examination of the transformation of women’s rights into human rights, and the gendering of refugees, the way that neoliberal rhetoric and actions get taken up transnationally. She argues that “human rights discourses evolved at the end of the twentieth century as an ethic of neoliberal governance that produced subjects who saw themselves as ‘global citizens’ and ‘global feminists’” (158). Grewal asks difficult—and often disconcerting—questions about social movements, demanding that her readers approach no social movement as above scrutiny.

For Grewal, this emphasis on a neoliberal model that privileges “choice” above all else overlaps with transnational projects that similarly emphasize commonality: “discourses of rescue erased histories of various economic, state, political, and cultural formations and human rights, as an ethical regime replaced historically contextualized analyses of women’s lives” (153). So while choice remains central, the limits placed on choice are made invisible. If, as Grewal states in the introduction, “this book is about the 1990s, when a new phase of neoliberalism brought together market logics with concerns for reducing welfare and poverty, and in the process rearticulated feminist and postcolonial subjects out of longer colonial histories and epistemologies” (15), it is also a book concerned with the way the turn to transnationalism has similarly rearticulated subjects out of histories and epistemologies. Grewal does not cite Sara Ahmed’s *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*—a text which would be helpful to have in conversation with Grewal’s with its discussion of the way, what Ahmed terms, “stranger fetishism” “invests the figure of the stranger with a life of its own insofar as it cuts ‘the stranger’ off from the histories of its determination,” suggesting the importance of revealing “the social relationships (involving both fantasy and materiality) that are concealed in stranger fetishism” (5; emphasis in original). Both texts suggest the ways that discourses of transnationalism work to de-historicize the subaltern—frequently the subaltern woman—though in different locales, pointing to an overlapping theoretical conversation.

Grewal’s skeptical account of transnationalism is a useful intervention into a field that too often divides into those celebrating it or those decrying it. Grewal, instead, demonstrates the possibilities of thinking transnationally but also the dangers and limits of this kind of thinking. *Transnational America* works to re-historicize transnationalism: “the ‘global,’ by the last decade of the twentieth century, was a powerful imaginary produced through knowledges moving along specific transnational connectivities [which] constituted a web of connections that moved along historicized trajectories” (22). Grewal’s use of the phrase “transnational connectivities,” rather

than diaspora or cosmopolitanism, points to her repeated attention to the trajectories of mobility available:

within the networks of information linked to trade and consumer culture, cosmopolitans were produced by transnational connectivities within which particular knowledges about cultures and nations circulated. As such, divisions based on gender, race, class, caste, religion, and ethnicity were rearticulated within varied transnational connectivities” (79).

Grewal’s consideration of the routes from which cosmopolitanism is imagined to emerge enables a discussion of both cosmopolitanism and transnationalism that takes unevenness as being at their core—rather than something that cosmopolitanism and transnationalism utopically erase. As her discussions of Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices* reveal, visions of a happy cosmopolitan multiculturalism often fall back onto neoliberal rhetoric of choice and self-determination. *Transnational America*, then, offers an important challenge to existing discourses surrounding both cosmopolitanism and transnationalism by emphasizing the need to constantly question what is at stake in transnational subject formation.

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# The Indelible Mark of Exile

VERONICA THOMPSON

F. Elizabeth Dahab. *Voices of Exile in Contemporary Canadian Francophone Literature*. Lexington Books, 2009. 246 pp.

In *Voices of Exile in Contemporary Canadian Francophone Literature*, Elizabeth Dahab introduces readers to a relatively unexamined field of Canadian literature – Québécois writers of Arabic origin – a field she describes as “weakly institutionalized and largely unknown to mainstream scholarship” (vii). *Voices of Exile* contains six chapters: an introduction and five comprehensive, descriptive analyses of five Canadian-Arabic writers, four men and one woman. Before moving to in-depth discussions of individual authors, Dahab carefully contextualizes the *francophone* writing she will explore, arguing that what this literature shares is “the indelible mark of exile” (ix).

In an introduction titled “The Odyssey of Québécois/Canadian-Arabic Writers,” Dahab delineates the objectives of her study. The first is to clarify her choice of Québec as the site of her study, and in doing so problematize the term *francophonie*, and the relationship between minor literatures of Québec and Québécois traditional literature. The second is to trace the field itself. Dahab accomplishes this by providing relevant demographic information about the Canadian-Arabic community; by summarizing the writers and their work; by tabulating authors, their locations, genres, and awards (12-16); and by demonstrating the reception of this literature in Québec. Introducing these broad objectives, Dahab also establishes the field of theories and theorists that will inform her analyses. They include Seigfried Schmidt, Jean Sgard, Deleuze and Guatarri, and Edward Saïd. While Dahab defines her approach as New Critical, there is much poststructuralist and politicized theory applied, and “minor literature” as defined by Deleuze and Guatarri underscores the entire study. Dahab’s introduction finally names the project of “detect[ing] tendencies in Arabic-Canadian writing” (2), following a more substantial account of historical context and theoretical framework in Chapter One, and this project organizes her focused analyses of writing from representative Canadian-Arabic writers: Saad Elkhadem, Naïm Kattan, Abla Farhoud, Wajdi Mouawad, and Hédi Bouraoui.

The next five chapters all share a similar pattern: a brief biography and overview of

each author's work, followed by a closer critical analysis of a selection of works. This structural repetition avoids becoming tedious as Dahab varies and adjusts the number of texts and genres explored in light of each author's oeuvre. Chapter Three, for example, touches on seven of Naïm Kattan's works, including a trilogy and two collections of short stories; Chapter Five on three of Wajdi Mouawad's plays; and Chapter Six on one exemplary novel of Hédi Bouraoui's. Indeed, the wide array of forms and genre examined in Dahab's study moves between – poetry, novels, short stories and plays – itself forms a sustained theme in her analysis, bringing into focus the challenge to traditional delineations of genre and literary form posed by several of these Arabic-Canadian writers.

After introducing Egyptian-born Saad Elkhadem, and briefly recounting the themes of his two earliest novels, Chapter Two provides an insightful analysis of the tantalizingly titled, and “highly experimental” (53), *Trilogy of the Flying Egyptian*. It is interesting to learn the details of Elkhadem's personal and professional life: that he taught at the University of New Brunswick, retired to Toronto, wrote in Arabic; that his books were banned in Egypt, were translated into English (not French), and were highly critical of Nasser's regime. All of this provides insight into the thematic, stylistic and structural elements that Dahab teases out. As Dahab explains, Elkhadem's works are “neither short stories, nor novellas, novels, diaries, or biographies per se, but reconstructions and deconstructions of elements of each” (32 and 63), and they demonstrate economy of style, multiplicity of language, and self-reflexive hybridity. Overarching themes of isolation and alienation result from and exemplify Elkhadem's narrators', protagonists' and characters' equivocal relationships with Egypt and Québec: “We arrived in 67, leaving Egypt humiliated and beaten and in ruins, and came to rich, lovely, joyful Canada” (*Canadian Adventures of the Flying Egyptians* qtd in Dahab 54), but the 1970 October Crisis, the War Measures Act, and the declaration of French as Québec's official language alienate them in Montréal: “they hated us in Montréal. We can't speak it. We don't want to speak it” (*Canadian Adventures of the Flying Egyptians* qtd in Dahab 58). The chapter ends with a summative list of the features of Elkhadem's writing, features that are shared with many exilic writers and that are posited here as part of his legacy to Canadian-Arabic literature.

Chapter Three moves on to the motif of absence and the themes of exile and expatriation that suffuse Naïm Kattan's writing. A prolific, award-winning writer, having produced thirty-four novels in thirty-six years and won the *Prix France-Canada* (1971), the *Prix Anthanase David* (2004) and the *Grand prix Hervé Deluen* (2007), Kattan has and continues to influence French and Canadian literature, as well as literary criticism through his contributions to *La Quinzaine Littérature*, *Critique*, and *Le Devoir*. Kattan's first novel, described as “a portrait of the Artist as a Young Iraqi Jew Trying to be French” (69), introduces “the multiplicity of his cultural, linguistic,

and ethnic make-up” (69) that mark all of his subsequent writing. Dahab attends to Kattan's semi-autobiographical “transcultural, transnational” trilogy, comprised of *Adieu Babylon*, *Les Fruits Arrachés* and *La Fiancée Promise*, which resembles his own experience moving from a Jewish community in Baghdad to Paris to Montréal, while it “inscribes the beginnings, intentions, method and the life-long project of Kattan-the novelist” (70). Kattan's writing is characterized by multiplicities of language—colloquial and literary Arabic, Hebrew and Yiddish, English and French, and dualities of discourse—fiction and autobiography, diaries and letters, public and private. It is through these dualities and multiplicities, Dahab argues, that Kattan resolves the problems of identity that are common to immigrant, exilic writers, achieving a “plasticity of cultural experience” (91).

Québécois-Lebanese playwright and novelist Abla Farhoud is the subject of Chapter Four. Farhoud is notable as the first Arabic-Canadian writer to dramatize “the collective experience of immigration . . . the communal experience of exile,” and “one of the first Québec writers to represent the experience of immigrant girls and women” (99). Having pointed out Khattan's attentiveness to multiple languages in his work in Chapter Three, here Dahab identifies “five registers of language in [Farhoud's] writings: Québécois slang (*joual*), standard French, colloquial French, English, colloquial Lebanese-Arabic and classical Arabic” (99), the uses of which, she argues, exemplify the postcolonial linguistic strategy of “othering” the dominant language, in this case French, to establish identity. “[S]yntactic calques” (100) are another stylistic feature of Farhoud's writing—these literal translations of Arabic proverbs and colloquialisms further contribute to an “othering” of language. The experiences of girls and women, and the relationship between mothers and daughters are prominent in the examples of Farhoud's plays and novels, such as *Les Filles du 5-10-15 Cents* and *Le Bonheur à la Queue Glissante*, that Dahab plots and parses. Death also preoccupies Farhoud's oeuvre. Dahab identifies these subjects and Farhoud's treatment of them as having universal resonance, and Farhoud herself rejects the label of “migrant writer”: “My writing is migrant to the extent that I am always in search of the elsewhere” (qtd in Dahab 128). Dahab argues that Farhoud's diminution of her migrant experience is belied by the political themes that are implicit in her drama and explicit in her latest novel *Le Fou d'Omar*. Dahab closes this chapter with the conclusion that in Farhoud's fictional world exile and the exilic are represented both literally and metaphorically.

War is the central motif that is explored in the chapter devoted to Wajdi Mouawad. Also a Québécois-Lebanese playwright, Mouawad alludes explicitly to the Lebanese civil war, without ever naming it. The focus in this chapter is on three plays of a tetralogy: *Littoral*, *Incendies* and *Forêts* (the final play, *Ciels*, was not complete at the time of Dahab's writing); particular attention is given to *Incendies* and the play's horrific revelation. Mouawad's success (like Elkhadem, he is a highly acclaimed and awarded



writer) and his innovative style are noted; Dahab references the power of the so-called “Mouawad touch” and positions his plays within the “newly founded tradition of the *théâtre engagé* of contemporary Québec” (138). As in the previous chapters, familiar stylistic elements and themes emerge from Dahab’s readings of these dramas; these include language play—in this case heavy use of the vernacular, québécois slang, and “highly scatological language” juxtaposed with the poetic and “a puissant ‘soufflé littéraire,’ or literary breath” (138)-; and the intersections between collective and individual experience. For Mouawad, “Exile and literature have always been linked” (qtd in Dahab 160), and as Dahab explains the exilic manifests in Mouawad’s work as metaphysical, and Kafkaesque.

Chapter Six attends to Hédi Bouraoui’s *La Femme d’entre les lignes* [The Woman between the Lines] and is the book’s most theoretically complex chapter. Here Dahab engages Roland Barthes’s *jouissance* as she unpacks the “plurality, multiplicity, and diversity” (174) of Bouraoui’s writing. Bouraoui’s neologisms – “*migramourir* ... *amourir*, *livramour*, *migramouriant*, *amourliser*” (189) – effectively exemplify the “double nature or reality of the human body and the literary text alike” (179) famously embodied in Barthes’s *Leplaisir du Texte* and demonstrated in Bouraoui’s writing. As Dahab contemplates Bouraoui’s themes and leitmotifs, she mimics his style, and coins her own neologisms, such as “*amour-mots*” (183), that exemplify, clarify and characterize his writing. “Transculturalism,” a term credited to Bouraoui (175), thematically mirrors his blending of words and genres, and presents a blending of cultures as “an alternative construct [of migrant experience] ranging somewhere between ethnicity and total assimilation” (175); this concept of exilic identity is enacted through the relationship between Marguarita Felice (Lisa) and the unnamed francophone narrator of *La Femme d’entre les lignes*, a relationship that for ten years takes place exclusively through letters, quite literally between the lines.

*Voices of Exile* is an innovative and insightful investigation of a nascent field of scholarship, and is poised to become a seminal text in the study of Arab-Canadian writing. This book introduces readers and scholars of Canadian literatures to prolific, critically acclaimed, prize-winning Canadian authors of whom they may not yet be aware. Much of the work discussed here is also published in English translations, so it will be available – with the added complexities of studying work in translation – to Anglophone Canadian readers, but Dahab also provides practical and valuable translations of all titles and quotes used in the study. The book is heavily footnoted, which is obviously the publisher’s documentation style, but for such a thoroughly researched study the large number of footnotes (well over a hundred for each chapter) may be distracting for some readers. As Dahab explores major themes, motifs, and stylistic and structural elements in this emergent field of literature, she reveals “how it bears the mark of the political, the collective value of utterances, and the deterritorializa-

tion of language” (200).

In her conclusion, Dahab notes the gender imbalance in this study of Canadian-Arabic writers, an imbalance that complements and counterpoints her previous work, *Voices in the Desert: The Anthology of Arabic Canadian Women Writers* (Guernica Press, 2002). As part of her attempt to open up this field, Dahab provides substantial detail about these writers, their works, and the implications of their individual expressions of the exilic experience of Arab-Canadian immigrants in Québec. The abundance and diversity of Arab-Canadian francophone literature that is encountered in Dahab’s study will undoubtedly inspire further research in this area, and may very likely result in “the canonization of the literature of Francophone Québécois writers of Arabic origin” (xii and 203).

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