



R E V I E W S  
in CULTURAL THEORY

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*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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# An Archive for Affect Theory

R U S S L E O

Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Duke University Press, 2010. 416 pp.

“There is no single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be” (3): Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth insist on this point, and *The Affect Theory Reader* demonstrates its critical import in contemporary debates concerning that most slippery term, “affect.” Seigworth and Gregg, under the artfully provocative heading “An Inventory of Shimmers,” attend in brief to a wide variety of theories of affect—from phenomenology, psychoanalysis, psychology, and post-Cartesian philosophies (read: Spinozism) to Marxism, feminism, science and technology studies, queer studies, and various histories of emotion. Their brief survey is by no means exhaustive, nor is it meant to be. Rather, from the beginning, the editors set out to complicate the concept “affect” across numerous contemporary permutations, where it takes various shapes:

as excess, as autonomous, as impersonal, as the ineffable, as the ongoingness of process, as pedagogic-aesthetic, as virtual, as shareable (mimetic), as sticky, as collective, as contingency, as threshold or conversion point, as immanence of potential (futuraity), as the open, as a vibrant incoherence that circulates about zones of cliché and convention, as the gathering place of accumulative dispositions (9).

Their inventory doubles as a litany, not without its patron saint: Baruch Spinoza. Indeed, the often-cited phrase from Spinoza’s *Ethics* (Book III, Proposition 2, Scholium) serves as a maxim for this cadre of writers: “nobody as yet has determined the limits of the body’s capabilities: that is, nobody as yet has learned from experience what the body can and cannot do” (Spinoza 280). *The Affect Theory Reader*, a collection of original essays, answers Spinoza’s challenge with great aplomb; the focus on affect enables contributors to probe the limits and capacities of situations, to produce more dynamic descriptions and prognoses, freed from the constraints of subjective and identitarian politics.

In this sense, *The Affect Theory Reader* registers the critical highlights of the recent

“affective turn.” It serves as an apt companion to book-length studies by several key contributors—namely, Brian Massumi’s *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), Lauren Berlant’s *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (2008), Sara Ahmed’s *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), and Patricia Ticineto Clough’s earlier edited collection *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (with Jean Halley, 2007). Yet, despite the increase in the number of publications dealing specifically with affect in the past fifteen years, there has been no single work of this kind to treat the cross-disciplinary purchase of affect. The great value of *The Affect Theory Reader* is its ambition to bring together the most vocal proponents of this declaredly-new field in order to showcase scholarship that continues to negotiate the provinces and definitions of affect, but which takes these debates as a crucible for politics and philosophy.

Many essays in the collection use affect and the theoretical tools afforded by the affective turn to develop approaches to experience: questioning both the meaning of experience and the ways it might remain, or cease to be, a useful category of anthropological investigation. Specific affects are indices of experience, attempting to describe the sense of the world in detail, with sharper attention to the rich lived realities of seemingly sterile concepts. Ahmed, in “Happy Objects,” defines affect as “what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connections between ideas, values, and objects”—a determination which confronts “the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near” (29, 30). In “Writing Shame,” Elspeth Probyn praises Primo Levi’s writing on shame insofar as he “challenges the current practice of writing about affects and emotion in a generalized and abstract way” (89); here, in contrast, the affect of shame enables a more thorough and nuanced approach to experience and subjectivity.

For these writers, following Spinoza, affect points to the priority of experience, the extent to which concepts like identity and person take and lose shape in experience. Affect is impersonal, the very *stuff* of experience; it is prior to both subjectivity and objectivity. This is Berlant’s focus in “Cruel Optimism,” where affect mediates between identity and desire, enabling a more pointed understanding of the labor of subjectivity, the tiring work of “life-building” (112). Contributors seem to write in concert, coming together to wrest affect studies from abstraction, to situate affect and to demonstrate the utility of affect studies for precise investigation and (to borrow a phrase from an earlier milieu) thick description. In “Eff the Ineffable: Affect, Somatic Management, and Mental Health Service Users,” Steven D. Brown and Ian Tucker pursue this further, taking the heralds of the affective turn to task for their inability to address the demands of social scientists. Against such theorists as Gilles Deleuze and Massumi (and, by extension, most of their fellow contributors), Brown

and Tucker affirm a determination of affect that is more interested in subjectivity and its vicissitudes than in some abstract “experience beyond subjectivity” (249).

*The Affect Theory Reader* is in these respects a very valuable resource: it presents essays in conversation in such a way as to provoke further discussion, to hone various definitions and approaches to affect. Gregg and Seigworth frame the conversations in such a way as to draw out the differences between approaches, and their substantial introduction serves as an apt survey of current work. But there are more similarities across the essays than the *Reader* might immediately lead one to believe. While Gregg and Seigworth have assembled an outstanding collection of essays, the “Reader” in the title *Affect Theory Reader* is potentially misleading. Generally, one expects a reader to introduce a field and to survey current work—in this case, across disciplines. Here, we encounter a limited sample of conversations, mostly taking shape around a select group of thinkers: Spinoza, Deleuze, Massumi, Félix Guattari, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Silvan Tomkins. Massumi, for instance, contributes more than an essay to *The Affect Theory Reader*. His name and work are ubiquitous across the collection, particularly the announcement in his *Parables for the Virtual* that “Affect, like thought or reflection, could be extended to any or every level [of investigation], providing that the uniqueness of its functioning on that level is taken into account” (Massumi 37). Massumi heralds, after Spinoza, the autonomy of affect. This is neither a fault nor a liability—on the contrary, this particular approach to affect reflects the most advanced work done in the nascent field of affect theory, or affect studies.

Save for Brown and Tucker (and, for a brief moment, Lawrence Grossberg, to whom I turn momentarily), *The Affect Theory Reader* registers a consensus. The majority of contributors follow Massumi and trace affect as a force in a political economy of bodies and becomings, affirming the degree to which “thought’s approach cannot be phenomenological [but] must be unabashedly metaphysical” (66). This is Clough’s ambit in “The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedicine, and Bodies,” where Massumi’s chief interlocutors—Spinoza, Deleuze, Guattari, and Henri Bergson, all of whom recognize the economy of affect as a metaphysics—inform her detailed historical treatment of biopolitics through an invigorating study of the affective dimensions of the passage from formal to real subsumption in late capitalism. This is quite exciting, a real advancement in the use of affect in contemporary Marxism and political economy, and both Clough and the editors do well to serve the reader with essays of this quality and ingenuity. It is worth reminding the reader, however, that her work is as much in conversation with the archive of concepts and authors showcased in *The Affect Theory Reader* as it is with Marxist and feminist studies of affect that stand outside of the scope of the collection—for instance, Michael Perelman’s *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (2000), J. K. Gibson-Graham’s *Postcapitalist Politics* (2006), Ann Cvetkovich’s *An*

*Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003),<sup>1</sup> or, more generally, the work of Raymond Williams, Michèle Barrett, and a lost generation of theorists which Lawrence Grossberg addresses in the splendid interview “Affect’s Future: Rediscovering the Virtual in the Actual.”<sup>2</sup> *The Affect Theory Reader*, however excellent, is less a survey of approaches and definitions as it is a concentrated effort, presenting a particular approach to affect, albeit from a number of standpoints. While I personally find the collection stronger for this focus, whether or not this is ultimately effective depends upon the reader’s expectations and the degree to which one is aware of the larger set of conversations on affect occurring across disciplines, many of which are not represented in the present collection.

Returning to the text itself, many contributors follow Spinoza/Massumi but nevertheless emphasize, first, that “affect” belongs to aesthetics and, second, how aesthetics, in turn, serves as a point of contact between the inextricable fields of politics and everyday life. Ben Highmore, in “Bitter After Taste: Affect, Food, and Social Aesthetics,” poses taste and its sensory grammars as a field of experiment and investigation at the level of the everyday. In this sense, affect, aligned with taste and sensation, serves to refocus our attention on the everyday as a crucible of politics rather than a sphere of application, where pure politics is merely lived. Nigel Thrift covers similar territory, but with respect to style and glamour, in “Understanding the Material Practices of Grammar.” Bertelsen and Murphie also delve into aesthetic territory in their treatment of affect in the thought of Guattari, for whom affects compose and mobilize situations in aesthetic/artistic terms. Anna Gibbs, in “After Affect: Sympathy, Synchrony, and Mimetic Communication,” offers a tour of psychological and phenomenological approaches to facial recognition in an effort to develop a robust theory of affect and mimesis. In her focus on mimesis, Gibbs attends to subjectivity and affect in a manner recalling Deleuze and Massumi while at the same time importing psychological explanations of affect regulation and various ways of knowing (recalling the work of Silvan Tomkins). This is directly related to Megan Watkins’ project in “Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect,” where recognition and affect are dually important to pedagogy. Investments in pedagogy and aesthetics also inform Kathleen Stewart’s poetic contribution, “Worlding Refrains,” an extension of her earlier anthropological experiment, the challenging and captivating *Ordinary Affects* (2007). Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie, in “An Ethics of Everyday

Infinites and Powers: Félix Guattari on Affect and the Refrain,” trace affects as impersonal or “pre-personal” forces, as elements which compose political situations prior to any discrete science of “politics.” The 2001 *Tampa* incident, where the Norwegian freighter *MV Tampa*, carrying Indonesians seeking asylum in Australia, was refused permission to enter the harbor, is exemplary. In a manner that recalls the work of Jacques Rancière (particularly his determination of aesthetics, “at the core of politics,” as the “distribution of the sensible” [Rancière 13]) as much as Guattari, Bertelsen and Murphie illustrate how affects, as abstract and impersonal forces, composed a political milieu wherein what was made visible—the red boat on the horizon—had a more immediate effect on viewers than any political abstraction (nation, belonging, citizenship, etc.). It was the work of the Howard government “to turn the powerful indeterminacy of affect to its advantage” (157). Ben Anderson takes a similar approach to affect and politics in his essay “Modulating the Excess of Affect: Morale in a State of ‘Total War,’” where forms or regimes of power traffic in affects, distributing intensities and impersonal qualities. Affect is here, declaredly, a form of excess—although it is certainly fair to ask, “In excess of what?”

Even when *The Affect Theory Reader* offers rich descriptions of various situations, politics, and works of art, we are still compelled to ask: Why affect? Why now? Gregg and Seigworth attempt to answer this as they frame the collection in such a way as to justify the new and exciting methods and experiments therein. They present the distinctions and dissensions between proponents of the affective turn, but what sits at the heart of the affect theory (and perhaps at the heart of the *Reader*) is a question regarding the efficacy and reach for said turn. What does an investigation of affect enable that a history of emotions does not? How is affect distinct from emotion, if at all? We have here an ontological rather than a cultural turn, yes, but how are the conclusions *really* any different? The limits of these essays—the challenges and provocations, as well as the difficulties and vagaries—tell us much about the problems of contemporary scholarship on affect, about the questions which these essays often eschew. In what strikes me as the most exciting and valuable contribution to *The Affect Theory Reader*, the interview “Affect’s Future: Rediscovering the Virtual in the Actual,” Grossberg says as much. We find here a subversive kernel, a comment on the affective turn which translates us back several generations, to the milieu of cultural studies and communications theory *à la* Marshall McLuhan: “Despite constant denials, I can’t escape the feeling that Brian Massumi’s recent work ... on the color-coding of terror alerts reduplicates a kind of old-fashioned media-effects model. ... Affect then becomes a magical way of bringing in the body” (316). Here a real dissent emerges, a concern that is seldom addressed in the varieties of writing on affect. Grossberg gives an oral history of affect studies, periodically pointing to the problematic assumptions undergirding current work in the field. His is the only substantive dissent from Massumi in the collection, however cautious his language. Grossberg,

<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Stewart’s “Worlding Refrains” does enter into implicit conversation with Cvetkovich’s wonderful book, but one wishes for a more direct engagement with *An Archive of Feelings* by many of the other contributors.

<sup>2</sup> This other history of affect informs his own important collection *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (edited with Cary Nelson, 1988).

with the editors, seems to pose the important question, “Why affect?” and, more pressing, the question that challenges *The Affect Theory Reader*, “Why is *this* tradition of scholarship, stretching from Spinoza forward to Massumi via Deleuze, *the* archive for affect theory?”

It is instructive to remember that other scholars have posed the same question, with much less sympathy for the nascent project of affect theory or the celebrated affective turn. Clare Hemmings, for instance, in her 2005 article “Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn,” takes proleptic aim at the assumptions which seem to buttress *The Affect Theory Reader*, or at least its chief intelligences, Spinoza and Massumi (and, although to a lesser extent, Tomkins and Sedgwick):

While many will concur with Massumi’s scepticism of quantitative research in its inability to attend to the particular, we are left with a riddle-like description of affect as something scientists can detect the loss of (in the anomaly), social scientists and cultural critics cannot interpret, but philosophers can imagine ... How then can we engage affect in light of the critical projects we are engaged in, or are we to abandon the social sciences entirely? In fact, both Massumi and Sedgwick are advocating a new academic attitude rather than a new method, an attitude or faith in something other than the social and cultural, a faith in the wonders that might emerge if we were not so attached to pragmatic negativity (Hemmings 563).

For Hemmings and a slew of skeptical readers, the affective turn ultimately risks obscuring politics and the investments of earlier generations of scholars—namely, feminism and Marxism (at least insofar as Marxism was part of a cultural studies purview). At best, the affective turn entails “a new academic attitude”; at worst, a mysticism, an apophaticism, a negative theology. With contributors Brown and Tucker, Hemmings seems to say “Eff the Ineffable,” or, at least, take the ontological thrust of affect theory, and the autonomy of affect, for what it is worth—an experiment and no more. An important caveat, Hemmings challenges us to read *The Affect Theory Reader* for what it obscures as well as what it makes clear, for the efficacy of the affective turn as well as its mere existence. As Nigel Thrift puts it, “The affective moment has passed in that it is no longer enough to observe that affect is important” (289). The next questions, which should guide our engagement with *Reader*, are “Why?” and “How?”

In the spirit of these questions, and despite the declared impossibility of any single, generalizable theory of affect, *The Affect Theory Reader* does present a controlled sample of cross-disciplinary work on the subject. Save for several bibliographical references and a handful of exempla, psychoanalysis is virtually absent from the collec-

tion—a frustrating lacuna given its rich archive of affects and theories of affect, from Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer (at the dawn of psychoanalysis) to André Green, Jacques Lacan, Adam Phillips, and Paul Verhaeghe. Psychology and psychiatry receive only marginally more attention. In 1995 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank proposed the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins as an alternative to the psychoanalytic preoccupations and pieties of their contemporaries; here, in *The Affect Theory Reader*, Tomkins is cited more often than Freud and with more authority on affects and their vicissitudes. While this is not necessarily wrong (I am certainly not arguing here for a particular mode or pedigree of psychoanalysis) it would be helpful to see how we arrived at this point. On this the editors and contributors alike are silent, eschewing Sedgwick and Frank’s thoughtful and stimulating question, “What does it mean to fall in love with a writer?” as well as their call to read Tomkins with Freud, to curate new histories and archives of affect as well as new applications (Sedgwick and Frank 23).

Where the absence of psychoanalysis is puzzling, the absence of *feminist* psychoanalysis from the collection deserves a harder look. Take, for instance, Julia Kristeva; both *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) and *Tales of Love* (1983) oriented the work of two generations of scholars, laying bare the intersections between affect, feminist theory and political praxis.<sup>3</sup> And just as feminist thinkers like Kristeva disappear from the archive of affect theory, so do their interlocutors. Consider the important chapter from *Tales of Love* on Bernard of Clairvaux (“Ego Affectus Est. Bernard of Clairvaux: Affect, Desire, Love”), where Kristeva mines nonmodern archives to complicate contemporary assumptions about affects and their provinces (Kristeva, 151-169). Bernard’s writing affords Kristeva insight into later, psychoanalytic distinctions between love and desire and, in turn, enables a more thorough historical approach to modern subjectivity via nonmodern approaches to affect. There is no such work in *The Affect Theory Reader*. Not only are feminist psychoanalysis and feminism underrepresented, the collection is distinctly presentist. Except for the frequent citation of Spinoza, there is scarcely a reference to any writer or event prior to the twentieth century. This risks losing sight of the development of alternative theories and approaches to affect that have marked much of Western and Eastern—indeed, World—philosophy, aesthetics (in the broadest sense), religion, and therapeutic discourses.

Again, this is only a critique of *The Affect Studies Reader* insofar as one might expect a comprehensive and exhaustive survey of approaches to and definitions of affect and affect theory—an impossible task, both practically and theoretically.

<sup>3</sup> One might say the same about Luce Irigaray (also absent) who, among other philosophers, figures prominently across Elizabeth Grosz’s feminist ontological determinations of affect—among the most exciting work emerging from the recent “affective turn.”

Gregg and Seigworth have assembled an impressive collection of essays and, in their introduction, certainly recognize the limits and scope of such a project. The work is impressive and will certainly catalyze further development in affect theory across disciplines. My hope is that it will also generate due responses from the exurbs and catacombs of affect theory, calling for revised histories of affect and its cross-disciplinary purchase—and, ultimately, making good on Gregg and Seigworth's insightful promise that affect will never be reduced to a single narrative, archive, or theory, the auto-critical promise that marks the highest quality of *The Affect Theory Reader*.

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Calvin and Baruch Spinoza as well as the work of tragedians William Shakespeare, John Milton, and Fulke Greville, Leo traces the prehistory of Spinoza's autonomous theory of affect, an approach that endures to our contemporary occasion in a number of permutations. Leo is also currently at work on a series of articles on affect and its purchase in contemporary Marxist and psychoanalytic debates.



# Provoking Matter

STEPHANIE CLARE

Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Duke University Press, 2010. 336 pp.

If a sentence could summarize Diana Coole and Samantha Frost's 2010 edited collection, it would be the editors' claim that "materiality is always something more than 'mere' matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable" (9). However, a sentence cannot capture the diverse arguments put forth in this collection, and hence, we must read on.

*New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* brings together essays that examine and contribute to a renewal of materialism in the humanities and social sciences, a renewal that likewise reworks understandings of matter, agency and capitalism. In their lengthy introduction, the editors claim that this new work follows from the recognition that textual approaches associated with the cultural turn and social constructionism are inadequate for understanding key issues in the contemporary world, such as climate change, biotechnology and global political economy. Moreover, modern particle physics, chaos and complexity theory, as well as the emergence of new concepts informing genetics research, have changed understandings of the composition of matter and life, calling for the formulation of new political and ethical theories. Although only some of the essays collected here explicitly respond to these concerns, the anthology as a whole contributes a substantial engagement with matter as a question or a problem. Read together, the tensions between the essays reveal—far from a simple metaphysics of presence, empiricism or positivism—the multifaceted, rich, creative and plural approaches that constitute contemporary cultural and political theory's turn to materiality.

New materialisms have been criticized for positing themselves as *new* only by caricaturizing poststructuralism as against matter and ignoring vast bodies of literature such as feminist work on embodiment. Indeed, Sara Ahmed's essay in the collection, "Orientations Matter," begins by explaining that she resists calling her work "a 'new' materialism" because she is indebted to "earlier feminist engagements with phenomenology that were undertaken during the period of 'the cultural turn'" (234). One of the strengths of this collection is that it does not simplify the past to generate itself. Instead, it returns to texts that one might expect "new materialists" to dismiss or ignore. Thus, for example, Pheng Cheah's astute contribution "Non-Dialectical

Materialism" excavates Derrida's materialisms without substance, Sonia Kruks' "Simone de Beauvoir: Engaging Discrepant Materialisms" considers, through Beauvoir, the "circular flow" between the body's decline and the social construction of aging, and, finally, Diana Coole's "The Inertia of Matter and the Generativity of Flesh" turns to Merleau-Ponty to develop an understanding of matter as "generative, self-transformative, and creative" (93). Rather than moving away from deconstruction or phenomenology, these essays reengage these methods differently.

At the same time, a second strength of this reader is its provocative novelty. The essays open lines of inquiry, explicitly calling for new research and providing seldom developed concepts. I am thinking especially here of Elizabeth Grosz's, William E. Connolly's and Jason Edwards's contributions to the collection. In "Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom," Grosz considers Henri Bergson's understanding of freedom, which posits free acts not as those that have been chosen from amongst givens but rather as those that open onto to the invention of the new springing from the subject, expressing that subject and being incorporated into that subject. Against queer theory's critique of identity and its understanding of subjectivity, Grosz's essay not only suggests, with Bergson, that an act "is free to the extent that 'the self alone will have been the author of it'" (144), but also that gayness is "an expression of who one is and what one enjoys doing, of one's being" (153). Both these statements rest in stark contrast to contemporary cultural theory and thus are ripe provocations for thought.

Likewise, Connolly's "Materialities of Experience" includes many original claims. The text reads a rapprochement between three philosophers of immanence: Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. While Deleuze and Foucault were critical of phenomenology, Connolly explains how Merleau-Ponty departed from those aspects of phenomenology the former philosophers criticized. Two of Connolly's arguments in particular are especially alluring. The first, stitching Foucault with Merleau-Ponty, is Connolly's claim that "power is coded into perception" (190). We are disciplined, in other words, to develop anticipatory expectations for what we will perceive. Connolly's connection here has the potential to push Foucauldians to consider the power relations involved in the production of perception itself. Next, Connolly also suggests that Merleau-Ponty, Foucault and Deleuze each show "how a spirituality of some sort or other is always infused into experience, interpretation, and action" (197). This is a spirituality of immanence that is expressed primarily as an attachment to this world. Once again, *New Materialisms* provokes us to rethink and reread.

Finally, Jason Edwards's concluding "The Materialism of Historical Materialism" may, at first, seem out of place in this collection. Unlike the materialisms developed in the earlier essays, Edwards brings attention to the material practices that reproduce

capitalism. Even more, Edwards distances his work from the others, contending that the concern over what constitutes matter has “little to do with historical materialism as an approach to social and political analysis” (281). Yet Edwards’s essay reads as a strong finale to the book because it offers a program for future research: to study the relationship between everyday practice and global capitalism. Edwards argues that although Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* claims to be materialist, this materialism ends at the level of theory. The authors do not show how material practices actually come to constitute the diagram of power they describe. Edwards thus leaves the reader with a challenge: to bring attention to everyday practices in order to make visible the reproduction of capitalism.

Overall, the essays collected here are varied and strong. For those new to the field, the editors’ lengthy introduction provides a good overview, and the essays offer multiple points of entry into questions of materialism, agency and politics. Given the variety of theoretical frameworks represented here, the book would have been stronger had the editors included an exploration of the tensions between the essays. For instance, are the practices that Edwards seeks to bring to light only human practices, or would a new materialism look to the agency, forces or vitality of non-human materialities in the reproduction of capitalism? How would this alternate focus change the understanding of global capitalism? New materialisms may exist in the plural, but the tensions between these pluralities are the points of interest that beg for attention.

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Stephanie Clare’s research interests include feminist and queer theory, humans’ interactions with non-humans, settler colonialism and science studies. She recently defended her dissertation, “Earthly Encounters: Readings in Poststructuralism, Feminist Theory, and Canadian Settler-Colonialism,” and will begin studying at Oxford University as a postdoctoral fellow in the fall. Her book manuscript investigates how taking into account the transformation of the earth under settler colonialism transforms central concepts that circulate in feminist thought: power, subjectivity, sexual difference and sexuality.

## We are Apocalyptic!

BRENT BELLAMY

Evan Calder Williams. *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse*. Zero Books, 2011. 264pp.

Evan Calder Williams’ *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* tracks apocalyptic visions of the future back to their occluded origins, which for Williams is to say, back to the present moment. In different contexts, Teresa Heffernan and Slavoj Žižek have similarly asked: what if the apocalypse has already taken place, and we missed it? (Heffernan 6; Žižek 150-151). Williams’ book takes this provocation seriously, theorizing and critiquing the pervasive “apocalyptic fantasies of late capitalism...in the cinema and the wider cultural, political, and economic landscape from the end of the ‘60s to now” (1).

Following Fredric Jameson, Williams puts pressure on apocalyptic narratives by reading cultural texts as symptoms and signposts of the contradictions of global capitalism. He declares that the symptoms accompanying crisis—specifically the 2008 financial crisis—can, and should, be diagnosed as terminal. Here, Williams depends upon a distinction between crisis, catastrophe and capitalist apocalypse that is useful. Williams maintains that crises happen as a part of the normal and smooth functioning of the capitalist mode of production. Collectively we pass through them without experiencing structural change. Unlike crises, structural catastrophe represents a broken system—an end to prosperity without meaning or hope. When compared with etymological understandings of *apocalypse* (from the ancient Greek *apokalupsis* meaning revelation or unveiling of the true order), catastrophe is an end “without revelation” (4). Finally, capitalist apocalypse involves an active recognition of the apocalyptic present—for example, a naming and acting on the 2008 collapse of financial capital as terminal for capitalism. Capitalist apocalypse

is the possibility of grasping how the global economic order and its social relations depend upon the production and exploitation of the undifferentiated, of those things which cannot be included in the realm of the openly visible without rupturing the very oppositions that make the whole enterprise move forward (8).

Given this reading of catastrophe and capitalist apocalypse, crisis is left aside as work for other analyses. The focus of this book is, on one hand, to theoretically analyze the symptomatics of apocalyptic thinking as they surface in contemporary film and, on

the other, to urge contemporary thought and action to respond and take responsibility for the apocalyptic presence in our everyday lives.

Following his introduction, Williams divides *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* into three sections: “Salvagepunk,” “Plague in the Gears,” and “Combined and Uneven Apocalypse.” The first chapter reads like a manifesto, urging new and critical ways of seeing and knowing the present. It attends to the cyberpunk and steampunk sub-genres of Science Fiction (SF), adding salvagepunk as a third, generative variant. Williams describes the relation of salvagepunk to its predecessors in the first chapter:

To put the punk into salvage is to occupy it too well, not to stand outside the logic of the game, but to track it to its far horizons. There we see the frayed hems of a mode of thought.... [Punk] had to do with the intersection of a close attachment to its historical present with the fact that it no longer believed in a future – the present is already the hollowed-out promise of that future (32).

With a similar understanding of political time, salvagepunk recognizes the apocalyptic nature of the present, and instead of grasping a wholeness or unity, it takes up the leftovers of the capitalist mode of production that do not fit neatly into the system of which they are a part. Principle among Williams’ examples in this vein are Richard Lester’s 1969 film *The Bed Sitting Room* and the *Mad Max* films (George Miller 1979, 1981, and with George Ogilvie 1985).

Chapter 2, “Plague in the Gears,” provides a loose cultural history of zombies and zombie films. Beyond clearing up misconceptions, including the fact that fast zombies were actually an innovation of Dan O’Brannon not Daniel Boyle<sup>4</sup>, Williams reads a host of zombie movies—for example, George A. Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*, John Carpenter’s *They Live*, O’Brannon’s *Return of the Living Dead*, and Boyle’s *28 Days Later*—tracking the historical development of what he calls the nightmare image of the day (72). He deploys ‘nightmare image’ in a twofold sense: first, zombies are a “reigning cultural bad dream” (72); and, second, they represent “an eternal present of the world not coming to an end” (72). Part of the work behind this cultural history of zombie movies involves dispelling surface readings and misconceptions common to thinkers and fans of the genre. Williams takes issue with academic and intellectual readings of zombie movies that just scratch the surface: “Simply because a film seems to point out problems of social inequality does not mean that it is a radical

<sup>4</sup> Williams’ description of O’Brannon’s 1985 film *Return of the Living Dead* features more than just fast zombies. It actualizes the cultural references and pastiche so common to post-modernism, entrenching both the aesthetic tenets of the zombie film and the deep symptoms of late capital.

film, or even one that is therefore ‘smarter’ and more aware than those films hell-bent on entertainment, social critique be damned” (79). In other words, for Williams there remains something to be desired in readings that take the movie’s setting, a mall for instance, to stand as a critique, of say, consumerism. Williams reads such interpretations themselves as reified thought, suggesting that lacking a theory of aesthetic or cognitive realism sufficient to the condition of late capitalist culture, “zombie films better capture the logic of the times, that opaque ‘almost-thought’ which always escapes the closure of facile critique” (86).

But the critical importance of zombie movies should not be over-read. For Williams, it isn’t that zombies no longer mean what they used to; rather, “they no longer mean what they could” (143). He identifies the problem, in the larger framework of apocalyptic literature, as a cultural blindness. These films seem to be unable to think beyond the individual, the family, or the lovers, beyond the smallest and least collective portions of human life and culture. But, Williams refuses to give up or give in to these objects. He still sees in them “apocalyptic potential” (156).

The final section, “Combined and Uneven Apocalypse,” operates doubly as a theoretical culmination and working through of the first two chapters on salvagepunk and zombies, and as a projection for and a program of action. With the term “apocalyptic potential,” Williams hopes for something that is not tied to forms of catastrophe or crisis and for a space generated by apocalyptic thought that has some level of autonomy (although I doubt he would use that word). Following the denotation of the word *apocalypse*, Williams calls for a “permanent visibility of the hidden” (156). By carrying on with his analysis through films and books, Williams reveals the nearest approximation of the structures undergirding capitalism’s totality: combined and uneven development (157). He considers such a view *post*-apocalyptic and reorients the implication of the ‘post’ from a temporal to a political axis. For Williams, a post-apocalyptic view is “a necessary optic onto the flourishing wastelands of late capitalism, the recognition that the apocalyptic event *has been* unfolding” (my emphasis; 158). At the heart of his project lies a commitment to the way things *could* be. If we are already apocalyptic, Williams’ book suggests that we begin the work of uncovering the image of the nascent post-apocalyptic subject.

An exposure to an object threatens to become, according to Adorno in “Culture and Society”, a “cultural criticism [that] shares the blindness of its object.” (27) There is a feeling that Williams’ book may at times be victim to this familiar critical tendency. I believe this closeness to the object, which at times risks becoming a problem in the text, also enables some of the more compelling aspects of the book. Of course this book, like the genre of narratives it engages, repeatedly spells out certain doom and a lack of future; but Williams shows that this need not determine how we read

apocalyptic narratives. *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* is not the mind trap that it could be, considering the pervasive tendency of contemporary apocalyptic narratives to foreclose revolutionary thought rather than generate it.

One element of the book I find immensely useful is the work Williams does in categorizing apocalyptic narratives in light of the different types of (capitalist) crisis covered earlier. For instance, his detailed taxonomy of eco-apocalypse narratives offers a valuable contribution to the very active scholarship on this sub-genre today.

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# Deleuze and Guattari Through the Looking Glass

MARGRIT TALPALARU

François Dosse. *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*. Trans. Deborah Glassman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. 672 pp.

François Dosse's account of the intellectual relationship between Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari starts from the thesis that the two played equal, albeit different, roles in the formulation of their influential works. Dosse constructs a strong argument for recuperating Guattari's significance to their collective theories and works. Indeed, from the structure of the book, which debuts its "Parallel Biographies" section with Guattari's intellectual and political trajectory, Dosse is intent on writing Guattari back into the well-known "Deleuzian" theories. Very early in the Introduction, Dosse explains that "the writing plan for *Anti-Oedipus* was that Guattari sent his texts to Deleuze, who then reworked them for the final version" (7). Dosse characterizes the collaboration between Deleuze and Guattari as one that drew strength from their divergent areas of specialization:

When we read the copious notes that Guattari took, we have some sense of how important his contributions were, particularly with respect to psychoanalysis and militant political activism, the areas where Deleuze wanted Guattari's competence, which was greater than his own (192).

This statement appears at the beginning of the second section of the book, as Dosse prepares to undertake the comprehensive description of the practical and intellectual ins and outs of Deleuze and Guattari's collaboration. These numerous iterations of the thesis serve as a lens through which readers can interpret the contributions both thinkers brought to their collaborative projects.

For this purpose, Dosse rallies a massive amount of information—as evident from the immensity of the book, which is over 650 pages in length—to illustrate the era of the two thinkers' encounter. A certain part of the 1960s in France—the intellectual, revolutionary decade—leaps with great force from the pages of this book. Indeed, the level of detail and documentation seems at times more worthy of a catalogue than a biography. For example, the number of people populating La Borde—the alternative mental health care clinic that Guattari ran together with Jean Oury in the 1950s and



60s—in the first chapters of the book can be overwhelming at times.

However, it is this comprehensiveness and level of detail that make this biography an invaluable resource for a varied audience, from a reader who wants a crash-course in Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis to someone whose understanding of their work can be enriched by a more in-depth knowledge of their contemporaneous political situation. Indeed, it seems as if not many questions remain unanswered in this biography that moves with ease from systematic explanations of major Deleuze-Guattarian concepts, to the political situation around May 1968 and beyond, and even to titillating details about Jacques Lacan's temper tantrums (185-87) or to information about Alain Badiou's student "brigades" (367) meant to disrupt and "prevent Deleuze from finishing his seminar" (366) at Vincennes.

Part 1, "Parallel Biographies," traces the personal, intellectual, and political biographies of the two theorists before their encounter and collaboration. Dosse spares no details. Guattari's formation as a "militant psychoanalyst" (1) at La Borde Clinic emerges from within a detailed description of both the daily activities, the organization, and many of the notable people who passed through the clinic. Dosse is careful to also trace the origins of some of the theoretical pylons of the later Deleuze-Guattarian theory within both Guattari's professional and revolutionary activities and Deleuze's intellectual formation, from Guattari's attempt to "enable another form of subjectivity to emerge from the 'collective arrangement of enunciation'" (87) to Deleuze's quest for what would later be theorized as the rhizome, when he was talking about "the importance of iris roots as a metaphor for networking" (117). This section also provides an excellent introduction to the formative theories and philosophies developed by Deleuze and Guattari, including Lacan's influence on Guattari, and Deleuze's genealogy of a "vitalist philosophy" (129), taking him from Spinoza to Nietzsche and Bergson. This first section ends with a discussion of Guattari's direct involvement in and Deleuze's intellectual support of the movement of May 1968, whose events and happenings enjoy a generous contextualization. The second section of the biography, "Unfolding: Intersecting Lives," chronicles the actual collaboration between Deleuze and Guattari, detailing the main points and the reception of their co-written books. Alongside the context of the latter's publication, one of the most valuable features of this part of the book is Dosse's tracing of the origins and intellectual genealogies of some of the crucial Deleuze-Guattarian concepts. In reading the two volumes subtitled *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*—arguably Deleuze and Guattari's best-known books—it is clear that the authors are writing in response to a number of theorists and intellectual movements. However, unless one is a specialist in the fields of continental philosophy, psychoanalysis, literature, music, and the physical sciences, some or many of these interlocutors may remain unidentified. It is here that Dosse contributes the missing pieces, by providing an annotated bibliography

of sorts for Deleuze and Guattari's intellectual influences and theoretical antagonists, thus remedying the opaqueness of their work in this respect.

Dosse's attention to detail and his lengthy explanations and contextualizations of the founding Deleuze-Guattarian concepts are sometimes undermined by a translation which, although generally seamless, does not always take into account the already established English terminology for these concepts. The well-known and avowedly "essential" notion of "arrangement" (10 and *passim*) is better known in the English publications as "assemblage"; in the English chronology of social machines, the first one appears as "Primitive" rather than "Savage" (200); the "collective arrangement of utterance" (263) had been previously translated into English as "the collective assemblage of enunciation" (*Plateaus* 79-80s); finally, what in this translation appears as "rules" (203) have become rather consecrated as "axioms" in the English Deleuze-Guattarian lexicon. While these minor slippages do not necessarily derail the reader familiar with Deleuze and Guattari, they might become rather frustrating for the newcomer who would rightly look at Dosse's biography as a companion to his or her introduction to the two theorists.

One of the most compelling qualities of this biography resides precisely in its far-reaching contextualizations. In this respect, Dosse not only explains Deleuze-Guattarian concepts, but he also illustrates their practice in two ways: by describing their adoption and application by the theorists' contemporaries, and by enacting them himself. The latter is probably the most subtle of Dosse's feats, but becomes visible on analysis of the structure of this book, which, even though arranged seemingly chronologically, constantly seeks the points of rhizomatic connection between theory, politics, and his subjects' lives. The detailed section on Guattari's work at the clinic La Borde can be viewed as immanence-in-action: Dosse vividly describes the daily life there and the non-hierarchical arrangements in which doctors, nurses, and patients worked side-by-side, displaying "the idea of a communist utopia whereby each staff member would alternate between manual labor and intellectual work" (44). Dosse credits this type of organization with attracting intellectuals with varied interests and specializations to LaBorde, something which, in turn, allowed for the already progressive psychiatry practiced there to be enriched with multi-disciplinary perspectives. As the author asserts at the end of chapter titled "The 'Molecular Revolution,'"

For Guattari, the CINEL represented the possibility of demonstrating the efficiency of a micropolitics endowed with minimal organizational means and simply linked to action, thereby breaking with traditional schemas. It would have been the political branch of the CERFI, whose activity dealt with the humanities (305).

In this manner, Dosse argues for a symbiotic relationship between Guattari's profes-

sional (LaBorde, FGERI, CERFI) and political (May '68, Italy '77, CINEL) practice and his theoretical contributions to the collaboration with Deleuze: "Guattari's ideas were inscribed within a whole series of social practices linked to Marxism, institutional psychotherapy, and a series of research groups like the CERFI, which were experimental sites for the concepts he had worked out with Deleuze" (313).

Dosse's constant return to some issues, e.g., the many concepts of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, further emphasizes the book's rhizomatic structure. Whenever he introduces a new subject, as, for instance, the importance of music or literature to Deleuze's philosophy, Dosse returns to a discussion of its appearance, use, and significance to the collaborative work of the two theorists. As much as this feature might frustrate a reader looking for a straightforward and self-contained discussion of *A Thousand Plateaus*, for example, it underlines Dosse's enactment of schizoanalysis at the same time as he is describing it. Moreover, this spiral movement, just as it functions in Deleuze and Guattari's work, serves to move the narrative ahead, rather than plaguing it with redundancies.

The final section of the biography, "Surplines: 1980-2007," completes the cycle: from individual biographies in the beginning, through the intersection of the two thinkers, and back to individual lives. This concluding section, like any description of a finale, stands rather in opposition to the vivacity and exuberance of the previous two. Dosse seems keenly aware of this melancholy tone, so he changes the structure from the first section. Instead of examining each individual biography separately, as he did in the first part, he alternately weaves the strands, allowing time to progress simultaneously for both Deleuze and Guattari's lives toward the inevitable ending, their deaths. If the structure of this section differs from that of the previous sections, the main feature of comprehensiveness endures, as we learn about the thinkers' publications post collaboration, their failing health, and their personal and intellectual relationships and struggles. Guattari's turn to ecology and Deleuze's turn to film theory are chronicled with the same minuteness as their work on *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Moreover, many of the final pages are dedicated to investigating the reception, followers, and influence of Deleuze and Guattari's collective works around the world. Finally, the very last arc closing the circle appears in the Conclusion, where Dosse reiterates his thesis: "Our study may help correct few [sic] blind spots that have led to minimizing and even eliminating Guattari's role, leaving only Deleuze's name" (519).

Dosse characterizes the two authors as dissimilar, yet complementary collaborators: Guattari is constructed as the dynamic political activist, always on the lookout for experimentation (433), and ready to birth a new, progressive, and more humane world, while Deleuze is the intellectual, physically subdued by his lifelong pulmonary problems, anchored in and forever returning to transform philosophy into a science

of triumphant life. In the "improbable marriage of the orchid and the wasp" (519), which author was the wasp? Whatever the precise answers to this question might be, Dosse has amassed an enormous amount of evidence in this "intersected" biography to prove both the complexity of Deleuze and Guattari as humans, public intellectuals, activists, as well as their manifold and enduring influences on philosophy, psychiatry, politics, and aesthetics.

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# On Pinking the Commons

CAROLYN SALE

Caren Irr. *Pink Pirates: Contemporary American Women Writers and Copyright*. University of Iowa Press, 2010. 214 pp.

Straddling a quarter-century between Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), Caren Irr's *Pink Pirates: Contemporary American Women Writers and Copyright* (2010) has an exciting premise: it proposes to read the work of four novelists — Le Guin, Silko, Kathy Acker, and Andrea K. Barrett — in relation to select copyright or intellectual property cases to show how, by “darting back and forth across lines drawn by the law” (2), these writers “advance a critique of property and provide a glimpse of an actually existing commons” (2). There is no actual copyright piracy here — none of these writers has lifted a text in such a way that she has landed in court — but all of the writers take on the idea of “the individual, original, and paternal author” (35) central to copyright to challenge the proprietary logic of the copyright regime with “visions of creativity without property” (8). We need more work of this kind — work that shows literary texts envisioning a “new propertyless world” (162).

The assumption of the book is that all four of its showcased writers are implicitly engaged in a retroactive nose-thumbing at historical practices that did not permit their antecedents to claim proprietary rights in texts. Irr establishes this with an opening chapter on the relation of American women writers to the history of Anglo-American copyright, whose narrative begins with the 1710 English Statute of Anne. A longer view of copyright would help; as Irr has noted elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> Anglo-American copyright's origins lie in the letters patent by which Elizabeth I granted a monopoly over the printing of texts to the Stationers Company, but the chapter's commitment is to gendering the copyright regime. Irr's “pirates” are “pink” because the copyright regime, “organized with masculine self-ownership in mind,” is “blue” (7). These pirates make their “symbolic . . . assault” on this regime from “the safe parameters of the copyrighted work,” and their assault takes a variety of forms. In her account of *Smith v. Little, Brown & Co.* (1965), for example, Irr finds the emergence of “the pirate as a feminine ideal” (47) in two female employees of Little, Brown stealing from Carol Smith the manuscript of the tale of the sixteenth-century female pirate

<sup>1</sup> Caren Irr, “Literature As Proleptic Globalization or A Prehistory of the New Intellectual Property,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001): 773–802.

Grania O'Malley.

Each chapter begins with an account of at least one copyright or intellectual property case that establishes the concerns with which Irr sees the chapter's novel engaging. Sometimes the link between case and novel is very general. For example, Irr discusses the well-known late 1990s legal imbroglios of Donna Karan International at the outset of the chapter on Barrett's *Voyage of the Narwhal*, to conclude that “the turn toward a communal creativity” in the novel is “akin to the sort asserted by the Inuit women in the *amauti* dispute” (101). (Inuit women brought suit against DKI for selling *amauti* bought from them in Donna Karan's Manhattan store with Karan's labels sewn in.) The methodology here is nevertheless exciting. Irr sees herself as lifting narratives from an academic domain “notoriously vigilant” in “policing . . . contributions made by ‘outsiders’ and amateurs” (13) to demonstrate how her writers use the literary domain to speak back to the legal logic of copyright and intellectual property cases.

There does, however, seem to be a certain bias at work in the legal readings. In her account of the 1970s *Reyher v. Television Workshop*, for example, a case which saw Rebecca Reyher bringing suit against Jon Stone and Tibor Gergely, writers for *Sesame Street*, for allegedly stealing from her the story of a Ukrainian girl's search for her lost mother, Irr suggests that the tale's mother is “the voice of the commons” (60), a property to which Reyher as a “prototypical feminist foremother” apparently had a right that the “Sesame Street men” (59) did not. If Reyher had a “universal right” to the story's “maternal plot,” so too did Stone and Gergely, who claimed the story was “unownable,” and it should have made no difference that she had executed what Kathy Acker would call the “phallic scam” (113) of copyrighting her version in the form of a book for children. Surely the pirates of real interest to a commons here are Stone and Gergely!

Readers will find the same bias, differently inflected, in Irr's account of the DKI suits, where Karan, the Inuit women, and female factory workers who brought suit against DKI for allegedly intimidating them into working seventy-hour work weeks without overtime pay, are all simply “inhabi[ting],” despite their conflicts, “different corners of the pink and piratical commons” (80). But the reading of *Reyher* demands special attention because it begs, along with the book more generally, the question of whether the act of claiming copyright in a text contradicts the commons supposedly immanent in it. When she asserts, for example, that Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes* “joins [those] of Le Guin, Barrett, and Acker” in imagining a “positive piracy” that “affirms the ethic of shared and hybrid cultivation over proprietary containment” to produce along with them “a strong account of an ideally better world beyond the scope of intellectual property” (158), I wanted some discussion of the contradiction

that her pirates aim for this “better world” with published texts that circulate under the aegis of that sign of “proprietary containment” known as a copyright symbol. How much more provocative and politically potent it would be for a literary text not implicated in the “scandalous desire for copyright” (67) to do the work Irr claims these novels are doing — one going viral on the Internet, perhaps! As it is, I wonder just how much power we are to accord the commons “immanent” in these fictions when three of Irr’s writers do not make it possible for pirate-girls who own laptops to preview their novels on Google books.

The exception is, as those already familiar with the work of these four novelists will know, Kathy Acker, whose *Pussy, King of the Pirates* permits Irr to demonstrate one of the ways in which a woman writer might mobilize copyright — to challenge the constraints it imposes upon representation. Irr finds in Acker’s *Pussy* a creative manifestation of the philosophy of literary property set out in “Dead Doll Humility,” a story-cum-essay in which Acker expresses great anger towards Harold Robbins, who had objected to her use of four pages of his novel *The Pirate* in her 1975 novel *The Adult Life of Toulouse Lautrec by Henri Toulouse Lautrec*. The philosophy as expressed in the conflict between a “writer doll” and a Voodoo goddess called Capitol is one of violent opposition to property-in-persons as well as property in anything they create. In Irr’s reading, *Pussy* serves up ‘uncopyrighted sex’ (112) with accounts of the masturbatory pleasure of pirate girls to celebrate a “postgendered” world in which both pirate girls and pirate boys are free to fuck whom they please, and whose fucking Acker claims the right to represent in the forms and to the extent that she likes, in defiance of the legal logic of cases such as *Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders, Inc. v. Scoreboard Posters, Inc.* (1979) that permit corporations to control representations of women’s sexuality.

Within the novel’s pornographic landscape, actual and symbolic cunts loom large. As copulation is seen as a proprietary act, all of the pirates, even the boys, desire to become “a body that is all cunt and allows a continual, feminine coming” (125), a desire that finds an objective corollary in the search for the treasure of the “cave/cunt.” The pirates have a varied relationship to this treasure, as you would expect; those whose bodies are sexed as “women” by their culture will orient themselves differently in relation to the constructions of their bodies as property. This is not, however, as clear as it might be in Irr’s account, which refers only obliquely to a key detail: when O and Ange make off with the treasure from the cave/cunt, *Pussy* and her sidekick, Silver, remain behind, with Silver explicitly rejecting any such theft, and *Pussy* “staring out toward the ocean” before she and Silver exit the cave, without taking any of the treasure with them.<sup>2</sup> This is where the novel’s real challenge to the logic of private property lies: not in its rampant sexuality, but in the pirate who finds what has been

stolen but does not herself steal.

Irr’s emphasis falls, however, on gendering *Pussy*’s creativity: the “antiproprietary commons understood and recovered in Acker’s novel,” she writes, is “obscenely feminine” (129). But the “entire landscape” of *Pussy* may be “pornographic” because the characters have ceded *to* conceptions of themselves and others as property. It may not be the thing readers are to *valorize*; it may be the *problem*. The most important instance of the novel’s obscenity may lie in *Pussy*’s final gesture, which directs us away from the primary scene, to that which is out of sight or not explicitly staged;<sup>3</sup> for the anti-proprietary commons arises not in or from things in and of themselves, but rather from the actions we take in relation to them. And when the action under consideration is not one of theft, I wish Irr had liberated herself from her governing trope of the pirate as a swashbuckler sailing under a pink flag to “raid more settled and clearly regulated areas of literary culture” (1).

Irr had her best opportunity to do this with Silko’s *Gardens*, whose young heroine, the Indian girl Indigo, uses the seeds that she gathers from “European hostesses” she meets on a trip with her adoptive mother Hattie, to grow, with Sister Salt, gardens of hybrid flowers in the sands of the American Midwest. Despite the fact that she reads Silko’s use of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* through the definition of parody offered by Justice David Souter in *Campbell v. Acuff-Rose Music* (1994) to find Silko working within a “tradition of celebratory and creative fair uses of copyrighted material” (149), Irr characterizes the novel as engaged in a “revolutionary form of theft” (138). But if Silko was not in fact breaking any copyright law with her use of *Alice* and the seed-gathering of her young heroine is, as Irr argues, *not* biopiracy — if neither Silko nor her character is in fact *stealing* — is piracy really the apt paradigm within which to construe their actions? What might we gain if we characterized a text that asserts the value of an “inherently cosmopolitan and syncretic” (143) culture without recourse to a notion of “theft”? What if we talked not about “affirmative appropriation” (149) or thefts that are “sometimes figured as non-crimes” (148), but chose instead an analytic frame and a vocabulary that would undo the proprietary character of the things concerned or proprietariness as such? The goal, after all, is a “new propertyless world.”

I also wish Irr had done more with tantalizing details that suggest her pirate writers associate women with texts in ways that have nothing to do with asserting proprietary claims in them. I find one such detail in Irr’s reference to a female character in Barrett’s novel *Secret Harmonies* (1989) who “unintentionally duplicates [a] letter”

<sup>2</sup> Kathy Acker, *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (New York: Grove Press, 1996) 276.

<sup>3</sup> As the OED notes, the various speculative etymologies for obscene include a derivation from “scaena” drawn by Varro from folk etymology.



by a monk which she “uses . . . to comfort lonesome veterans” and through which the monastery “becomes a symbol of an alternative, nonproprietary community organized around writing” (85). I find another in Irr’s claim that Silko’s Hattie “is prohibited from researching the feminine principles of the Gnostic gospels” (154), but satisfied when their “authenticity” is verified (157). I haven’t read the novel, but other summaries I have read note that Hattie is prevented from finishing a thesis on the Gnostic gospels at the Harvard Divinity School when her committee will not approve her argument. It seems, then, that Silko’s novel attempts to recover principles that it associates with a suppressed body of writing signified by “feminine Gnostic texts” (157), and contests over textual authorization in which it implicates members of the academy. These details show both Barrett and Silko pointing back to historical sites and practices from which we might recover entirely different relationships to texts — custodial, for starters — that predate the rise of copyright’s proprietary author. There be treasure!

Irr is, however, interested in another tradition entirely. Her concluding chapter, “Toward a Pink Commons,” picks up on the final note of her introduction, where she asserts that the commons to which her writers are contributing is “not novel and futuristic so much as it is a special sort of neo-traditionalism” (15). In *Utopia’s* representation of an “idyllic domesticity rapidly disappearing even in More’s day,” for instance, Irr finds “More’s woman install[ing] a pinkness at the origin of the utopian concept of the commons” (160). It is hard to see what is “idyllic” about arrangements that (amongst other things) keep Utopia’s women from having any chance at an intellectual life — women are important in Utopia primarily as the preparers of food and the producers of children<sup>4</sup> — and baffling that Irr finds a commons in a place that in no obvious way supports what is supposed to be essential to her commons, female creativity. One can have “common storehouses” that women help to manage without having a commons.

Where Irr sees a “pinkness . . . install[ed] at the origin . . . of the commons,” I see a figure for “the virulent survival of forms of alienation specific to the oldest mode of production of human history, with its division of labour between men and women.”<sup>5</sup> Irr’s pretty-in-pink commons may “humanize and domesticate the potentially alien character of the commons for readers held in the intellectual grip of property” (164) — readers for whom “the category of ‘the commons’ slides too easily into ideologically repugnant calls for the abolition of property” (7). It may also have distinct ap-

peal for those committed to a certain strain of feminism. But radical feminism, which aligns itself with Marxism, as Jameson suggested some thirty years ago, when it pursues a “radical restructuring of all the more archaic modes of production,” cannot find in More’s woman anything other than a figure for the commons expropriated. Ideas of alternate forms of social organization may have been historically associated with female figures. They may also be associated predominantly with female characters in Irr’s pink-pirate fictions. But we are not going to reach any commons until we get rid of that property known as “woman.”

This is not to say that Irr could not argue that those who have been and are sexed as “women” have been and continue to be specially placed within historic and continuing forms of social organization to shape a commons from domestic spaces. Certain strands of materialist feminist theory would help her make this argument. But rather than explicitly engaging with materialist feminists such as Sylvia Federici, Irr simply cites Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri on their importance.

I wish there had been more of this kind of engagement; for Irr’s “pink concept of common property” (160) remains for me, at book’s end, a tautology. Irr asks that her commons be “symbolically coloured pink” because pink is associated with certain “feminine” behaviours such as collaborative negotiating styles or a preference for domestic harmony” as well as a “legacy of affirmative communalism” (8). The latter contention is only one of two oblique hints in the book that the “pink” has anything to do with a rhetoric of “pinkoes,” and Irr’s emphasis falls on a pinkness that derives from “a distinctly feminine sharing of cultural resources” (138) as well as an association between her pirates’ “overturning [of] the proprietary account of creativity envisioned in copyright law” — as the penultimate sentence of the book reiterates — and “domestic misrule” (165). This relation is best epitomized in Irr’s reading of Le Guin’s *Dispossessed*, whose female characters are “natural anarchists” (70) shaming men out of their proprietary ways to convert them into “male mothers” (74). But even if we are content to gender the agent mystified in the claim that her commons “is the place where our tangibly gendered everyday life enters writing and animates its nonproprietary potential” (165), why would we want to construe as pink the commons that results? Irr’s pinking, which derives from a sexed thematic that ties debilitating norms and sexist behavioural codes to bodies, involves a trouble that she does not adequately address. We may not want to put the matter quite as bluntly as the activists Abi and Emma Moore did, a couple of years ago, in their UK campaign against “pinkification” in the marketing of pink clothing and toys to girls, but there is something about “pink” that “stinks.”<sup>6</sup> If current forms of social organization are, as Marx and Engels hoped, to wither along with the law that protects them, the “new propertyless world”

<sup>4</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia*, eds. George M. Logan and Robert M. Adams (Cambridge University Press, 1975; rpt., 1991) 58.

<sup>5</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1981) 74.

<sup>6</sup> Jon Henley, “The Power of Pink,” *The Guardian*, 12 December 2009.

would, like the “future subjects” (162) Marx and Engels imagined it would give rise to, need a new vocabulary, not one drawn from an old sexist paradigm, to describe it.

Although Irr does not explicitly offer this rationale, we could argue that her pink-ing signifies an interim stage in which women writers copyright their work in order to take over a proprietary domain from which they were once excluded in order to undermine it from within. By this logic, the commons that is immanent in their fictions is, in turn, made immanent to the domain that it would destroy and, in their opposition to “blue copyright,” her writers are suitably figured as “pink” agents. But if the commons is immanent everywhere, in expropriated form, in the figures called “women,” then what we are really seeking to do is discriminate them from, and wrest them free of, a field of “blue.” In this case, if we must “symbolically colour” the commons anything, we might find a more suitable hue for the interim phase that takes us towards an anti-proprietary commons that is “ideally post-gendered” (52) in the name of Silko’s young heroine, Indigo.

Indigo is, of course, the colour of a dye made from plants of the genus *Indigofera*. It is also the hue that Isaac Newton imagined intervening between blue and violet on the colour spectrum. Another Isaac, Asimov, declared indigo not “worth the dignity of being considered a separate color.”<sup>7</sup> As a hue so finely discriminating between phenomena that some could deny its existence, indigo seems a fitting sign for the attempt to extract from an apparently homogeneous field what is buried, as the expropriated, within it. In this sense, to see indigo is to see the forces that will undo a world of private property not as existing in an “exterior to capitalist modernity” (15), but as already inside it, immanent in the current forms of organization, and resisting subsumption. And surely that is the point: that agents do not need to come from an “exterior” to move us “toward” something that is elsewhere, but rather that they arise from what already exists, that in which they are contained, to assert the possibility of other ways of being. Imagining the agents as emerging from a field of blue seems particularly fitting for four novels that were all published after satellite imagery had brought Earth — or that “natural world that sustains us all” (158) — into view as the “blue planet:” *The Dispossessed* was published four years after Apollo 8 offered the world “Earthrise,” and *Gardens* at the tail end of the decade in which the satellite Galileo gave it its most famous “blue marble” images.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Isaac Asimov, *Eyes on the Universe: A History of the Telescope* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975) 29. The reference is noted in the Wikipedia entry for “indigo.”

<sup>8</sup> “Earthrise” was published in *Life*, 26 December 1969, along with James Dickey’s poetic line, “Behold the blue planet steeped in its dream / Of reality.” See 113. As Robert Poole notes in *Earthrise: How Man First Saw the Earth* (Yale University Press, 2008), “the very phrase ‘blue planet’ has been bound up” ever since “with the ideas of caring for the Earth” (9).

Irr contends, in the end, that the feminist critique of property offered by these works “culminates in a vision of women’s creativity being nourished by the commons” (159). The more apt formulation might, however, be that the creativity that nourishes the commons has no gender. And so I find myself dwelling on the implications of the *tupilaq* of Barrett’s *Voyage of th Narwhal* — that thing of “bones of all kinds of creatures, wrapped in a skin” (99) made by the Inuit boy Tom, which Irr suggests is “analogous to Barrett’s own assemblage of epigraphs, illustrations, historical events, old manuscripts, and invented characters” (101). Do we not have, in Barrett’s *tupilaq* taking revenge upon the proprietary Captain Zeke by attacking him in Rappahannock river, a figure that suggests we can gender the enemy without gendering the solution?

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# Affecting Feminist Subjects, Rewriting Feminist Theory

ILYA PARKINS

Clare Hemmings. *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Duke University Press, 2011. 272 pp.

Clare Hemmings's *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* is poised to prompt a major rethinking of feminist theory, and more importantly, of how we construct our histories of this field – and what this says about feminists' intellectual investments and our futures. This is an engagingly written and highly original close reading of theoretical debates in the pages of top feminist journals including *Signs*, *Feminist Review*, *Feminist Theory*, and *European Journal of Women's Studies*, among several others. Hemmings offers a well structured analysis of what she argues are the three dominant narratives in feminist theory of the last fifteen years or so – progress, loss, and return – arguing that each emerges from and indeed reifies a particular kind of affect in the contemporary, Western feminist theorist. The result is a stimulating book, one that has the power to interrogate the reader's theoretical commitments, the stories she tells herself about her field, and the stories she tells others, including, if she teaches, her students.

Hemmings is interested in the pernicious ways that things get left out in narratives about the history of feminist theory since the early 1970s, and how both what is missing and the pieces that *do* get represented structure understandings of what feminists are doing when we write theory now. In her introduction, Hemmings steps away from the kinds of motivations we might attribute to an undertaking of this kind; rather than offering a “corrective” to the kinds of stories that are told over and over (and *over* and *over*, as her subsequent analysis makes alarmingly clear) about the points of theoretical contention in the feminist archive – over racism, imperialism, and poststructuralism, for example – she writes, “[t]he realization of feminist theory's multiplicity, then, leads me to want to analyze not so much what other truer history we might write, but the politics that produce and sustain one version of history as more true than another, despite the fact that we all know that history is more complicated than the stories we tell about it” (15-16). Instead of engaging in a contest of “better,” more “accurate” accounts of feminism's intellectual history, Hemmings wants to examine the motives for and effects of our portrayals: she wants to prompt a deep re-examination of the very terms of our engagement.

The first half of the book is the most eye-opening – and, for this feminist reader, the most unsettling. Hemmings devotes a chapter to each of the themes – progress, loss, and return – as they are solidified across a spectrum of debates in feminist journals from the late 1990s to the present. Her unique methodology involves an experiment with citation practices: she builds her argument through close reading and juxtaposition of excerpts from journal articles, but rather than cite them by author, she simply notes the journal and the year in which they were published. This allows her to do two things: first, to refrain from individualizing theoretical positions, instead seeing this citation strategy as the best way to locate repetitions, patterns that cut across the field, saturating it. Second, this methodology allows Hemmings to acknowledge the institutional conditions of the production of common positions – that “the writing of individual feminist stories situates us institutionally [in shared intellectual communities, editorial boards, and university departments] rather than only in relation to individual others” (134).

To expose these ubiquitous narratives, Hemmings's method is to cite three or sometimes even four quotations from various journal issues to underscore the uncanny similarities between articulations of various positions. Everyone, for instance, seems to recount the apparently earth-shattering break between materialism and poststructuralism in precisely the same ways, by referring to the same theorists and systematically blotting out references to others who might complicate the trajectory that is being presented. The overall effect for the field is deeply worrying, because it reveals the extent to which an unquestioned feminist “common sense” operates in our work, even though feminist theory has been developed to challenge the dominance of “common-sense” or hegemonic explanatory frameworks and narratives. Even without Hemmings's penetrating analyses of her excerpts, the citations in themselves are an important wake-up call. The patterns she reveals speak for themselves, which constitutes a needed interruption in narrative frameworks that are too comfortably lodged in the field. The comfortable entrenchment of such “common sense” positions, she argues, is animated by and also reinforces feminists' affective commitments to various accounts of themselves as feminist subjects.

Hemmings's respective chapters on progress and loss narratives show that these two most common stories that feminists tell are deeply entwined with, and even dependent upon, each other. The progress narrative is founded on the claim that feminist theory has evolved beyond its misguided roots, a past that relied on the concept of a singular and universalized ‘woman’ as the subject of feminism. That past, according to this story, was characterized by a lack of recognition of diversity among women. The account underscores the redemptive structure of the progress narrative; it supposes that shortcomings of early second-wave feminism have been overcome through the miraculous power of poststructuralist and anti-racist critiques. The loss

narrative reverses this claim, with its exponents lamenting a quasi-mythical ‘golden age’ of feminist theory in which the field was clearly aligned with its activist roots. Here, poststructuralism represents a de-politicization, casting contemporary feminist scholars as power-hungry careerists who use the field as a rung on the academic ladder, and prompting “a call for the restitution of experience as the ground of feminist criticism” (87). For Hemmings, the valorization of experience privileges the social scientific analysis of gender over work in the humanities, and implicitly questions the validity of the latter as a feminist tool.

In the third chapter, Hemmings highlights what she calls the return narrative, which implicitly reconciles the progress and loss narratives. The return narrative best describes the current moment in feminist theory. It could be seen as an attempt to find a “third way” by acknowledging the strengths and the excesses of both progress and loss narratives. Hemmings’s use of the collective first-person voice to describe this approach works well to highlight how this narrative has come to dominate as the common wisdom of feminist theory today. Glossing “return,” she writes,

we can agree that the last thirty to forty years have not been all bad, that there were some important political and intellectual lessons to be learned about difference and exclusion – but that it is now time to pull away from the deconstructive abyss – which has become its own orthodoxy anyway – and move beyond critique (97).

A way forward from this recognition, according to the advocates of “return,” lies in the “renewed interest in materialism” (97) that has been so visible in the past decade. This new materialism is principally articulated in response to the perceived absence of the body from feminist theory after the linguistic turn.

In outlining the three dominant narratives, Hemmings focuses in particular on the temporal logic that underwrites these narratives. This methodology assumes discretely bounded generations of feminist scholars, separated by decades: the 1970s was the ‘bad’ or ‘glorious’ decade, depending on the author’s affinities, the 80s was the decade of anti-imperial feminisms, the 90s brought the ‘posts,’ and so on. In an illuminating application of her affective analysis, Hemmings – someone whose own feminist history does not fit the generational distinctions being reinforced in these narratives – uses the example of her own emotional response to this temporal logic in order to trouble it, without becoming solipsistic. Another of her primary concerns with the temporal logic of these accounts of the history of feminist theory is that they exclude major figures and critical movements which do not fit the chronology they assume. She writes,

I still remember my surprise when I [...] realized that discussions about sado-masochism in the lesbian community had been raging long before the “sex wars” and that black feminist and transnational critique had been a consistent component of feminist theory, rather than one initiated in the late 1970s or 1980s (13).

One effect of the invisibility of this history is to confine interventions and their initiators in a single period, “temporally fixed” (46) and outside the mobile history of feminist theory: critiques written by women of colour, for example, become fetishized as a relic of the 80s and distinguished from the poststructural critiques which are said to have followed them. Hemmings suggests that affinities between these tendencies are rendered invisible, the work of those who do not follow from this decennial split goes unrecognized, and current anti-racist criticism is obscured.

Having traced the three narratives, Hemmings moves in the second half of the book to consider some case studies and various possible points of intervention in such narratives. The first chapter in this second half is a disappointment after the dazzling analysis that precedes it. This chapter, “Amenability,” begins by rehearsing Hemmings’s previous argument in too much detail – a tendency which is repeated throughout the book, unfortunately recalling the same repetition of discourses that Hemmings wants to challenge. The chapter then offers an account of the transcendent feminist subject that animates the ostensibly very different progress, loss, and return narratives. But the point has already been made, and this supposedly deeper exploration of affinities among positions obscures rather than clarifies the issue. This chapter offers some compelling ideas, but ultimately suffers from a lack of focus and unclear purpose.

Hemmings remedies this confusion with two final chapters that are meant to provide potential alternatives to the common narratives. In “Citation Tactics,” she returns to Judith Butler, having briefly traced the functioning of citations of Butler in both the progress and loss narratives. Butler, she argues, haunts every one of the arguments or tensions her book has traced. Here Hemmings’s chief intervention is to read Monique Wittig back into the histories of feminist theory, via Butler’s rich reading of Wittig in *Gender Trouble*. Her tactic is “recitation,” with the emphasis on “re,” on resignifying through near-repetition. What would happen, she asks, if Wittig – largely overlooked in stories of the “separation of feminism from poststructuralism” (181) – was consistently cited as a formative influence on Butler, rather than Foucault? Would this “exonerate” Butler in her apparent turning away from feminism and resituate her in the lineage of feminist theory rather than haunting its margins, as loss narratives would have it? Here Hemmings asks questions that one does not realize needed posing, but underscores in her answers just how crucial these questions are.

In her final chapter, Hemmings analyzes the affect of feminist horror. Relying on Kristeva's theorization of horror, she dissects discussions of practices that Western feminists have grappled with – female genital cutting, for example – and draws out the horror at the “unthinkable” that pervades feminist writing. This, she says, is evidence of the limits of empathy and relationship with the feminist “other” in a framework that can only write feminist history in singular, linear narratives. Hemmings argues that horror functions to “cast out the object, to reconfigure...feminist subjectivity as coherent, and to mark others as fully readable” (223). This, she says, “make[s] it impossible to challenge assumptions about inequality in anything but the most banal ways,” and she ends with a plea for new narratives, ones that give us a future with “some unpredictability” (226).

Indeed, Hemmings shows us that unpredictability has been sacrificed for the comfort of theorists and the security of our positions as feminist subjects. Though feminist theory has, in the last decade, embraced mobility and contingency as watchwords, these values have not translated into our own narrations of the field. The great contribution of *Why Stories Matter* is to ask feminist theorists to be accountable, in our tellings, to the political commitments that animate our story-telling in the first place. Hemmings manages to articulate a host of nagging but unformed worries I have had about the state of this field as I represent it to students, prompting me to an immeasurably valuable rethinking of how to translate the field in my everyday practice as a feminist teacher. Since much of the potentially transformative impact of feminist theory is felt in its teaching, this kind of mediation fundamentally *matters*.

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## The Meaning of Christ and the Meaning of Hegel: Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank's (A)symmetrical Response to Capitalist Nihilism

MITCHELL M. HARRIS

Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank. *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* Ed. Creston Davis. MIT Press, 2009. 320 pp.

In *The Monstrosity of Christ*, Creston Davis, the book's relatively unnoticed editor, brings together an unconventional pair of contemporary thinkers: the Hegelian, Lacanian, Marxist materialist philosopher Slavoj Žižek and his orthodox, Western Catholic theologian counterpart, John Milbank. Davis writes an admirable introduction to the book, reminding its readers why the “unlikely debate” between a strict atheist-materialist and Christian-metaphysician is not only necessary but also the only proper response to today's capitalist nihilism, by which thought itself is reduced to operate along the coordinates of “a false dichotomy between reason and faith” (4). The “need for a theology of resistance is necessarily dependent on the Žižek/Milbank debate,” Davis suggests, “because it helps to open a passage beyond the deadlock of the twin ideological structures of capitalist Empire, namely postmodernism (philosophy) and Protestant and Catholic liberalism (theology)” (5). The point is fair enough. Given that the postmodern, and even the current post-secular, epoch seemingly demonstrates that “reason's stance against myth, superstition and the theological in order to access reason, pure and autonomous reason, has proved at least wanting, if not downright irrational” (5). Though not explicitly acknowledged, Davis's claim is a Kantian one, evoking the antinomical confusion of pure reason: “If the Middle Ages failed to employ enough reason . . . then secular modernity has employed too much of it (even to the point of contradiction!)” (5).

So how is it possible for Žižek and Milbank to move beyond the inability of faith to interact with reason (and vice versa), when the two thinkers seem to epitomize the dualistic counterpoints of rationalism (Žižek) and fideism (Milbank)? Davis answers this very question by pointing out that both Žižek and Milbank are committed to in



terrogating “the very foundation of reason as such,” thus helping stage “a theology that resists global capitalism” (10). His fundamental assertion is that this critique of reason is Hegelian at its core. By confronting reason, the Žižek/Milbank debate encounters reason’s “terrifying hidden supplement, that is, reason’s otherness that does not show its truth so long as we naively accept its face value (what Hegel called the ‘Ruse of Reason’)” (10). As such a response implies, the meaning of Christ (and Christianity) in relation to the postmodern and post-secular crux, for both Žižek and Milbank, is necessarily determined by how one reads Hegel—that is, the meaning and legacy of Hegel.

Certainly, such an answer is bound to raise eyebrows. Is Hegel not, after all, the philosopher who successfully ushers in modernity, preparing the way for Nietzsche to successfully bring about the “death of God” and for Marx to develop a secular, materialist philosophy? On one level, both Žižek and Milbank would agree to this figuration of Hegel. For example, Žižek quietly concedes that the power in Hegel’s *Aufhebung* resides in its negative capacity—its ability to wipe the slate clean by opening us to the Real of the Void. Milbank, more orthodox in his approach, acknowledges the negative capacities of Hegelianism and is concerned by its “negative” or “nihilistic” adherents (118). On another level, however, both authors are suspicious of this figuration of Hegel: it is too easy to caricature Hegel in this way. What raises this apprehension for both Žižek and Milbank is how Hegel has been treated by philosophers of all kinds. That the majority of post-Hegelian philosophers have been quick to disavow themselves of Hegel seems to suggest an uncanny underbelly worthy of greater attention.

*The Monstrosity of Christ* is thus designed to examine this underbelly as much as it is designed to examine the Christian legacy. Žižek is given the first opportunity to present his case in the book’s first chapter, “The Fear of Four Words: A Modest Plea for the Hegelian Reading of Christianity.” While Žižek ultimately appears to side with the God-is-dead philosophy of Nietzsche *vis-à-vis* Hegel, Hegel is, in his opinion, infinitely more complex than the reductionist vision that sees him as a mere materialist thinker. The complexity of Hegel, according to Žižek, is made visible by how Hegel is prematurely dismissed in one of two ways by the philosophy that emerged after his work. First, post-Hegelian philosophers are quick to dismiss Hegel as the Absolute Idealist. This Hegel, argues Žižek, is a bogey, a “fantasy-formation intended to cover up a traumatic truth” (27). Paradoxically, then, Žižek contends that the “post-Hegelian turn to ‘concrete reality, irreducible to notional mediation,’ should rather be read as a desperate posthumous revenge of metaphysics, as an attempt to reinstall metaphysics, albeit in the inverted form of the primacy of concrete reality” (27). The second reason why Hegel has been rejected, according to Žižek, is because of the “teleological structure” of Hegel’s philosophy of religion—the point that “it openly

asserts the primacy of Christianity, Christianity as the ‘true’ religion, the final point of the entire development of religions” (27). These two versions of post-Hegelian thinking reveal, however, that “something happens in Hegel, a breakthrough into a unique dimension of thought, which is obliterated, rendered invisible in its true dimension, by postmetaphysical thought” (26–27). By presenting this break in the very fabric of thought, Žižek contends that Hegel himself is “the ‘vanishing mediator’ . . . between traditional metaphysics and postmetaphysical nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought” (26). And Hegel becomes this vanishing mediator through his reading of Christianity.

Here, Žižek reminds us of the orthodox, Catholic thinker, G. K. Chesterton, who, to a certain extent, had an incredible ability to think through Christianity in a proper dialectical fashion, especially in his “Oracle of the Dog,” where he declared that “you are afraid of four words: He was made Man” (25). Of course, the problem with Chesterton, in Žižek’s philosophical framework, is that he did not go far enough. The proper Hegelian reading of Chesterton’s “He was made Man” would entail thinking the materialist implication of the phrase through to its very end: yes, he was made man, and therefore the God incarnate dies on the Cross, emptying himself of his very reality (that is, material being) and as a result leaves humanity to the devices of the Holy Spirit. After Christ’s death, “there is neither Father nor Son but ‘only’ the Holy Spirit, the spiritual substance of the religious community. Only in this sense is the Holy Spirit the ‘synthesis’ of Father and Son, of Substance and Subject” (33). In this manner, Christ “stands for the gap of negativity, for subjective singularity, and in the Holy Spirit the substance is ‘reborn’ as the virtual community of singular subjects, persisting only in and through their activity” (33).

The key insight derived from this statement, for Žižek, is that subjectivity can only be derived from absolute singularity. Thus, Žižek intends to confront “the core question of Hegelian Christology: why the idea of Reconciliation between God and man (the fundamental content of Christianity) has to appear in a single individual, in the guise of an external, contingent, flesh-and-blood person (Christ, the man-God)?” (73). As Žižek concludes, the “monstrosity of Christ” resides in what he reveals to humanity, that “while Understanding [Davis’s “reason”] can well grasp the universal mediation of a living totality, what it cannot grasp is that *this totality, in order to actualize itself, has to acquire actual existence in the guise of an immediate ‘natural’ singularity*” (79). Hegel’s Christ is that very singularity. As Žižek puts it, “that is the monstrosity of Christ: not only the edifice of the state, but no less than the entire edifice of reality hinges on a contingent singularity through which alone it actualizes itself” (80). Strictly speaking, therefore, from a metaphysical standpoint, Žižek properly announces the death of God, but where his “materialist theology” deviates from previous post-Hegelian materialisms is in its unabashed embrace of belief in the

epistemological and even ontological framework of Understanding. “[W]hat if,” he asks, “in a kind of negation of negation, true atheism were to return to belief (faith?), asserting it without reference to God—only atheists can truly believe; the only true belief is belief without any support in the authority of some presupposed figure of the ‘big Other’” (101). In such a negation of negation, he suggests through an analogy to modern figurations of the zombie, “‘unbelief’ is still the form of belief, like the undead who, as the living, remain dead” (101).

John Milbank’s response to Žižek, “The Double Glory, or Paradox Versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek,” directly addresses what he determines to be one of the key components (and flaws) of Žižek’s materialist theology. “My case is that there is a different, latent Žižek,” he argues, “a Žižek who does not see Chesterton as sub-Hegel, but Hegel as sub-Chesterton. A Žižek therefore who has remained with paradox, or rather moved back into paradox from dialectic” (113). Such a Žižek, he claims, would be “able fully to endorse a transcendent God” (113). In order to make this case, however, Milbank necessarily must reject the metanarrative that Žižek embraces regarding the inevitable and undeniable movement of Christianity from Orthodoxy to Catholicism to (ultimately) Protestantism. In rejecting this metanarrative, Milbank realizes the possibility of another modernity that would “persist with the alternative dynamism of paradox and not pass over into the hypocritical sterility of dialectics” (116). Milbank proceeds to demonstrate a theo-philosophical quirki-ness similar in kind to Žižek’s. Certainly, he never relents his elevation of paradox over dialectics. Nonetheless, the narrative that he constructs also relies upon a certain hedging of bets that mirrors (in a literal sense: left becomes right and right becomes left) Žižek’s. For example, at one point, Milbank suggests that Kierkegaard, like Meister Eckhart and G. K. Chesterton (the theologians Žižek most frequently cites in the first chapter), was “radically orthodox” in that he tended to highlight the “aporetic features” of the overall logic of Christian belief “and come to terms with” those features “by suggesting that this overall logic is a paradoxical logic” (177). While the line of reasoning is intelligible in its own right, there can be no doubt that comparing Kierkegaard to Eckhart and Chesterton would give pause even to some of the most conservative theologians and philosophers who, like Milbank, would openly reject altogether Žižek’s metanarrative that sees Hegel as the *telos* of the Orthodox-Catholic-Protestant trajectory. In short, it is hard to believe that Kierkegaard finds equal company amongst Eckhart and Chesterton. Moreover, Milbank’s reading of Eckhart pushes Western Catholicism to its farthest ends. Yes, one can claim that in Eckhart one finds something that is characteristically Thomistic in nature, but the consistent apologies Milbank must make in aligning Eckhart with Aquinas seems to reveal a special sort of pleading that draws attention to itself.

Despite these criticisms of Milbank’s efforts to call Žižek back to the land of paradox,

it is undeniable that Milbank probes, challenges, and provokes Žižek’s “materialist theology” in ways that have not been accomplished before. This is to say that in Milbank, Žižek has clearly met his intellectual match. Nowhere is this more discernable than in Žižek’s response to Milbank, “Dialectical Clarity Versus the Misty Conceit of Paradox.” Here one must note the asymmetry of the collection: Žižek is given the benefit of the last word. And one is tempted to suggest that the asymmetry is unfair. Žižek is given ample opportunity to rebut Milbank, but, here, the asymmetry breaks down. Despite the opportunity for rebuttal, we realize that Žižek is merely shadow-boxing, which, in a way, proves Davis’s point that the Žižek/Milbank debate might just be the only debate truly capable of moving beyond the deadlock that prevents the discursive intercourse of rationalism and fideism (7). For after Žižek outlines his points of rebuttal, he quickly leaves them behind, turning instead to a matter “more dark and awful,” quoting Chesterton. Here, Žižek reveals that his philosophical and theological opponent(s) is not Milbank, but rather figures like Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, John Caputo, and Gianni Vattimo. Perhaps no statement is more telling of this true opposition than one he makes while discussing Caputo’s *On Religion*. “Caputo professes his love for Kierkegaard—but where here,” he asks, “is the central insight of Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments*, his insistence on the central *paradox* of Christianity: eternity is accessible only through time, through the belief in Christ’s Incarnation as a temporal event?” (258; my emphasis). Such a question seems to suggest that while there are fine points that separate Žižek and Milbank, those fine points are not so large as to separate them from successfully entering into dialogue with, or speak on the same plane as, each other. Žižek is just as quick as Milbank is to invoke paradox when necessary, and Milbank is often (though tacitly) caught following the dialectical method.

To this end, the asymmetry of the book’s format is not an entirely unproductive one, if it exists at all. In fact, I am tempted to suggest that while, yes, it might have been nice to see how Milbank would respond to Žižek’s rebuttals, Žižek’s concluding remarks ultimately bring about a fitting Hegelian synthesis of sorts. As he reminds us, through his examination of a cheap magic trick at the heart of Christopher Nolan’s *The Prestige* (2006), “We should thus fearlessly admit that there is something of the ‘cheap magician’ in Hegel, in the trick of synthesis, of *Aufhebung*” (286). In *The Prestige*, this cheap magic trick occurs when one of the magicians performs a disappearing bird act by first smashing a bird cage and then producing a living bird in his other hand, much to the surprise of a traumatized boy in the audience who insists that the magician has killed a bird. Later, Nolan takes his audience behind the stage, showing the magician throwing away the carcass of a flattened bird (the boy was right all along). For Žižek, Hegel’s cheap trick resides in the fact that in synthesis, “the good news is the bad news”: paradox. Yes, the good news of the living bird is the bad news of the bird that was sacrificed. However, “in order for us to see that [‘the good news is

the bad news'], we have to shift to a different agent”: dialectics (286). In other words, we have to shift from the agency of the dead bird to the agency of the living bird. The ultimate example of this shift for Žižek is “from Christ as individual to the community of believers” (286). Of course, Milbank would never accept this conclusion—a kenotic emptying of the Godhead into the material being of Nothingness. And that’s the point of the pseudo-asymmetry: we know how Milbank will rebut Žižek, by suggesting that the greatest threat to the materialist philosophy-cum-theology of resistance to nihilistic capitalism both is and is not Žižek’s dialectical materialism, so long as there are thinkers like Derrida, Levinas, Caputo, and Vattimo littering the philosophical and theological landscape.

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## Reading Age and Disability in Film

DILIA NARDUZZI

Sally Chivers. *The Silvering Screen: Old Age and Disability in Cinema*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011. 213 pp.

Sally Chivers’s *The Silvering Screen: Old Age and Disability in Cinema* is an important volume because it examines “contemporary film to ask why claims of physical and mental ability are necessary for older actors – and older people more generally” (xii). Beyond this, Chivers looks to film to ask how representations of aging reflect on “contemporary culture more broadly” (xii). While inter-sectional feminists have been arguing that human identities operate in tandem for many years now, age often does not receive the attention that other identity categories do and is routinely relegated to the backburner of discussion. Thus, there has been no sustained study of how age is typified in film until *The Silvering Screen*.

Chivers theorizes how thinking gerontology and disability studies together affords her analysis of the silvering screen solid ground. Noting the difficulty in reading these two groups together (older people and disabled people)—i.e. which group is considered to be more vulnerable—there are still ways in which the two theoretical frameworks offer much by way of their collaboration. Specifically, Chivers notes “silvering screen films rely on illness or disability narratives to convey the social burden of growing old” (8). Thus, in this representative milieu—on the screen, at least—old age and disability have plenty in common. In a book that is strong on many levels, I would venture to suggest that Chivers’s proficient ability to read disability and age as informing one another is the book’s most important contribution. By arguing that “‘old age’ requires disability to be legible within an ‘efficient’ capitalist society” (8), Chivers offers cultural studies and film studies theorists a glimpse into the complexities of the representation of age in cinema: older people must be disabled to be read at all. This gesture, then, begins to unpack the complexities of the relationship between disability and old age, both on-screen and off. Chivers highlights the fact that, “in the public imagination, disability exists separately from old age, but old age does not ever escape the stigma and restraints imposed upon disability” (8). By acknowledging the interconnections and cross-readings of old age and disability, it becomes more obvious that reading the two frameworks together could be crucial for the enrichment of both fields of study.



Once Chivers has delineated that using disability studies in conjunction with gerontology works for her larger analysis of contemporary film—the fact that “popular film” operates “as one site of ‘elderhood’ that merits scrutiny for its cultural formation of old age” (28)—she turns to the multiple ways in which old age figures on the (mostly) Hollywood silvering screen. Broadly, these categorizations include analyses of femininity, the marriage system, care (both familial and institutional), the way in which Alzheimer’s disease figures as a “quick way to symbolize ... old age in general” (60), and white masculinities (and to a lesser extent, non-white masculinities). To underscore the complexities of these above-mentioned topics, Chivers offers close readings of a bounty of recent films organized around what she proposes as dominant cultural concatenations of the contemporary problem of old age and its representation.

In the chapter entitled, “Baby Jane Grew Up: The Horror of Aging in Mid-Twentieth-Century Hollywood,” Chivers argues that actresses who once played starring roles in 1930s films get downgraded to holding “a bit part, a grandmotherly role” (38). This knowledge is not particularly new, but Chivers’s focus on the fact that, as she argues, some older actresses are placed in “a major horror role” (38) is compelling. Actresses such as Joan Crawford and Bette Davis, for example, experienced career renewal only “when [they] agreed to play a horror role” (39). For Chivers, aging women actors are presented as “horrifyingly disabled” (39) in particular films of the 1950s and 60s. In these examples — *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) and *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) — Chivers explores the manner in which women actors are compelled to reproduce the image of aging as pathology (40). Furthermore, accepting that disability, aging, and gender are positioned together on screen highlights “the impossible standards placed on all non-normative bodies (that is, all bodies) by mid-twentieth century Hollywood cinema” (41). Age and disability become related to horror, monstrosity and pathology (56-7). What is more, audience members watching such films either identify or reject the representation on the screen; in both cases, viewing offerings from the silvering screen crystallizes something about their own identities.

In subsequent chapters, Chivers proceeds to underline a startling phenomenon on the silvering screen: the way in which it “over-stories the cognitively disabled characters, revealing ... Alzheimer’s as a simple and horrifying loss of self [that] is in fact strangely forced in order to illuminate a broader range of late-life experiences” (62). Tracking the Alzheimer’s narrative through several films, Chivers exposes how representing the late-life illness “symbolizes the overall horror that is assumed to be a part of the aging process” (73). She pushes the analysis even further by delineating the ways in which caring for these bodies becomes an “imagined burden” (74). Films such as *Pauline and Paulette* (2001), *A Song for Martin* (2001), *Iris* (2001) and *Away From Her* (2006) are capably interpreted for their emphases on how the

cognitively disabled body gets reads in relation to “normative aging—of peaceful but lonely retirement” (62). Further, in the case of the latter two films listed here, the “importance of heteronormative, monogamous” marriage units regarding the care of the Alzheimer’s patient is deftly interrogated and highlighted by Chivers.

Finally, Chivers turns her attention to depictions of masculinity on the silvering screen. Focusing on screen legends such as Paul Newman, Clint Eastwood, and Jack Nicholson, Chivers suggests that white (aging) masculinity holds a certain invisible privilege (99). Films starring these actors “transform the older male figure from a man whose masculinity is perceived to be fading to a man whose masculinity is exaggerated” (99). Chivers also rightly points out that Morgan Freeman is placed in a supporting role in “countless films” (99) and his roles often “demonstrat[e] the apparent expendability of the racialized body to the silvering screen” (99). Thus, white patriarchal power—in films such as *Nobody’s Fool* (1995) and *Unforgiven* (1992)—is alive and well in cinema, even if age does become a theme in the films. While all of the film analyses have something interesting to offer in *The Silvering Screen*, I found Chivers’s analysis of Eastwood’s *Gran Torino* (2009) to be one of the most engrossing. Chivers shows how the film works to solidify the American Dream through the elucidation of particular racist “American values” (114). Interestingly, *Gran Torino*, Chivers argues, “indulges in overt intolerance while simultaneously appearing to condemn it” (115). Eastwood’s character both “rescues and abuses the Hmong body” (117), his neighbours in the ‘declining’ all-American suburb where he lives, while also perpetuating great violence both for and against them in the film’s final dramatic execution scene (119). In *Gran Torino*, then, Eastwood plays “a violent vigilante reinstating [stereotypical, patriarchal] order,” even as he grows old (102).

Interestingly, *The Silvering Screen* concludes by noting that while aging is variously represented on the silvering screen, death itself rarely becomes a subject matter. Chivers argues that “a focus on death within the silvering screen would be a focus on the death of the current socio-economic system, a phenomenon that many of the films work together to obscure” (146). Raising numerous crucial questions concerning the politics of aging, disability, and filmic representations of a stratification of productive capacities, Chivers’s latest book is a must-read for critics working in feminist film studies, cultural studies, gerontology, and disability studies.

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Dilia Narduzzi recently completed her PhD in English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University with a dissertation that addresses the biological, cultural and queer manifestations of the reproductive process. This research discusses how reiterative processes of physical and cultural reproduction operate to entrench bodily and socio-cultural norms. Current research interests include apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives, specifically how the concept of nature factors in these stories.

# Filling in the Blanks

CORRINE LEON

David Hugill. *Missing Women, Missing News: Covering Crisis in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*. Fernwood Books, 2010. 111 pp.

Bernard Cohen is often quoted in communication studies for his maxim: “While the news media may not be successful in telling the public what to think, they are quite successful in telling the public what to think *about*” (13). In “making certain contextual references, choosing certain pictures or film, giving examples as typical, referring to certain sources and so on” (McQuail 381) news media have the ability to define a situation by legitimating public debate surrounding certain topics, ordering and structuring political reality, and allotting greater significance to some events either directly or through absences and exclusions (Lippmann; Hall et al.; McCombs and Shaw). Framing is defined by Robert Entman as a process involving *selection* and *salience*, creating a specific reading that is then frequently used to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements, and suggest remedies (52).

David Hugill wants to present a useful corrective to the dominant frames that were put forth by Canada's national print media in reportage on the more than sixty women who were murdered or went missing from Vancouver, British Columbia's Downtown Eastside between 1978 and 2002. *Missing Women, Missing News: Covering Crisis in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside* focuses on how media coverage worked to “camouflage the functioning of structural and cultural systems of domination” (14). This slim volume considers how press reports operated to support commonly held ideological assumptions, through the use of a number of “frameworks” through which audiences understand the crisis of missing and murdered women. A key theoretical point of departure between the author and a number of studies that he draws on is his “insistence on the use of the term *ideology* to describe the ways in which the *logics* of domination function” (22).

Hugill analyzes media coverage between 2002 and 2007—from the arrest of Robert Pickton for the murders through to his conviction—in three of Canada's principal English-language daily newspapers: *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The National Post*. He guides the reader through the various narratives used to allow audiences to make sense of the crisis, centering his argument around four main points. The first is that the early focus on a police negligence narrative limited or erased the state's role in this tragedy by assigning it to individual error. The second point is that

as a result of “the retrenchment of state systems of social solidarity, the ongoing effects of colonialism, and the criminal regulation of prostitution” (23) the state *was* directly complicit, which brings us to his third and fourth points. The state's role in marginalization is obscured through an emphasis on narratives that explain what a sex worker is and why she works the streets; and through a characterization of the Downtown Eastside as a lawless area of criminal behaviour and mayhem, a space where violence is to be expected for those who choose to be there. These dominant explanations share the neoliberal ethic of self-reliance and individual choice; Hugill seeks reassign responsibility for the perfect storm of “marginalization and dispossession that give this tragedy its particular form” (23).

He turns first to the creation of what he terms the negligence narrative, that is that the negligence of local authorities allowed Robert Pickton to continue to commit these horrible acts for so long. This narrative was the go-to for media in their early reports. Stories of a few incompetent individuals who failed to recognize the gravity of what was in front of them, or a lack of information sharing between forces (30) fit in well with what friends, families, and supporters of the women had said all along: that the police did not do enough, and did not take the reports of missing women seriously. As the first narrative to come to the surface, it had “preliminary potency” to define the boundaries of the crisis in terms of who was involved and who was responsible. Although its dominance as a narrative waned once Robert Pickton was arrested, Hugill holds this narrative development significant as the first framework provided through which the crisis was understood. The first explanations often “come to ‘command the field’... setting an ideological limit” for further analysis (29). Despite the fact that the issues surrounding the crisis were much too complex to consign to this simple narrative, this ended up being the only sustained criticism of the state in the coverage, obscuring the contradictions of the “universality of state protection” (30).

The second chapter goes on to refute the negligence narrative by highlighting three ways that the state has put marginalized women in danger and can be held responsible. Though these were rarely, if ever, addressed in news reports most of the missing and murdered women were affected by one, if not all three, of the following conditions explained in more detail below: the implementation of neoliberal state policies that led to a decline in social services, amendments to the Criminal Code targeted at curbing street prostitution, and Canada's colonial practices. While wary of assigning media messages too much influence or claiming that the media operate as “simple propagandists” (52), Hugill contends that all three factors helped to create a state of affairs where dozens of women could disappear, with no alarm raised until 1999, and that “news coverage that omits or downplays specific state culpability have the effect of rationalizing and resolving contradictions to the state's claimed commitment to basic egalitarianism” (54).

Hugill is careful to not to claim an exclusively causal relationship between the disappearances and what he describes as the violent rise of the neoliberal state: the curtailing of “state social programs designed to ensure a basic level of equality and security” (33). Yet it is evident that with thirteen per cent of people in the province classified as low income, nearly three points higher than the national average, the potential for economic marginalization forces an increasing number of people to experience “the series of physical and social dangers associated that come with limited economic power” (37). Part and parcel of this rise of neo-liberalism is a greater emphasis placed on the ‘individual transgression’ argument, whereby vulnerability comes from making bad life choices and not from the state’s shirking of its duty. In addition, Canadian law forces sex workers into situations that make them vulnerable to violence, yet only eight of the 157 articles Hugill examined make any reference to the law. Prostitution is not illegal in Canada, though a number of Criminal Code provisions essentially make it so, yet while street trade accounts for only a small proportion of the sex industry (five to twenty per cent), more than ninety per cent of prostitution-related offences reported by police in British Columbia fall under the “communication” provision that in essence can only be committed by street-level sex workers (43). As a result, sex workers are forced to work in isolated or marginalized areas where they are more susceptible to violence in order to avoid police harassment and complaints from other residents. Finally, Canada’s colonialism and the overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in the list of murdered women is under-reported according to Hugill’s findings. Less than two per cent of people in Vancouver classify themselves as Aboriginal, yet research shows they account for more than half of sex workers in the Downtown Eastside (45). As many as thirty-nine of the sixty women missing or murdered were of Aboriginal descent and while coverage acknowledged this, no further link was made as to why such overrepresentation existed. Instead the familiar story of the drug user is emphasized, while the ongoing effects of the state’s colonial practices that contribute to the large number of marginalized Aboriginal women working in the sex trade in the Lower Eastside are concealed.

The third chapter focuses on the media’s steady portrayal of the sex worker as a “part of a dangerous underworld ... and as an agent of moral corruption” (75) providing audiences with a narrow lens through which to conceptualize sex work. Through a continuous referencing of addiction, disease, sex, and violence, we are asked to believe that sex workers belong to a deviant class and that they are inherently criminal. Sympathetic portrayals from families, friends and advocates obscure state complicity by creating individual narratives that link personal stories of abuse, addiction and marginalization thereby concealing other types of oppression. A reliance on certain sources over others, namely relying on information from the allies of street-involved women instead of the women themselves, creates a hierarchy of credibility with sex workers themselves at the bottom. This frame allows for the reproduction of the view

that sex workers are the authors of their own misfortune, fitting in nicely with neo-liberal notions of self-reliance.

In the final chapter, Hugill discusses the media’s characterization of the Downtown Eastside as a place of urban chaos via provocative text and images to establish it as a zone of illicit activity, degeneracy, and danger. Hugill found dozens of references to the neighbourhood described as “seamy,” “seedy,” and “squalid,” creating a spatial understanding that “symbolically situate[s] the neighbourhood as a distinct and disconnected urban segment” (77). Even more successful at reinforcing this idea were articles that took the neighbourhood itself as the subject of the story. That the majority of the neighbourhood’s 16,000 residents have no involvement in crime is rarely acknowledged, nor is there much mention of any grassroots activism and cooperation between groups whose needs state support systems have failed to meet. Analyses that define the neighbourhood as a space where a group of deviants congregate place responsibility on the individuals for the area’s social problems while ignoring the community’s strength and resilience in the face of stigma and deprivation.

In no way did the coverage in the newspapers investigated challenge the view of Canada as a tolerant, egalitarian society thereby missing out on an opportunity to launch an inquiry that could have led to change. For Hugill, this is a betrayal. “It is moments like these - when our collective failures are so on display-that our media institutions are most important” (97). *Missing Women, Missing News* is less a call for journalists to reclaim their responsibility as watchdogs and to critically engage the state, but rather for us to look for leaders in the Downtown Eastside for inspiration and analysis. Hugill’s diagnosis that something was amiss in the dominant frames of Canada’s three major newspapers makes for convincing and compelling reading and is a welcome contribution to ongoing attempts to address the Canadian state’s treatment of the disenfranchised.

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## Pattern Pre-Recognition

RUSSELL KILBOURN

Richard Grusin. *Premediation: Affect and Mediality in America after 9/11*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 208 pp.

"The future bursts amid remembrances."

Jean-Luc Godard, *Histoire du Cinema* III: 12

While visiting Amsterdam recently, I asked a friend if he had heard the weather report for that afternoon. He responded by calling up a 'real-time' satellite weather tracking website on his laptop, which showed us in convincing graphics that it would rain at 1:00 pm that afternoon. Sure enough, while walking down the Damrak later that day I felt a rain drop and checked my watch: exactly 1:00 pm. My friend's online forecaster is not simply a predictor of future bad weather patterns, but also a mode of proleptic preparation for always already imminent future shocks, surprises, or disappointments. (I emphasize bad weather for a reason: the stakes are very different when the forecast is for sunny weather...). Like weather forecasting, the nature of mediation – and mediality – has evolved since the 1990s, the most significant change coming in its temporal relation to its subject matter. Now it is no longer the past or present but the future that is not simply mediated or remediated but *premediated*. Richard Grusin's new book elaborates this concept, expanded from a journal article of the same title.

According to Grusin, premediation, unlike run-of-the-mill prediction, gambles on being wrong: it mediates possible negative future scenarios in order to "protect us from the kind of negative surprises that might await us in an unmediated world" (127). In other words, premediation keeps us in a kind of purgatorial present indexed to an apocalyptic future that we hope never arrives, a state of perpetual anticipation whose function is cathartic insofar as its predictive potential always fails. This is as close as we get in this hyper-mediated life to paradise.

But first, what does Grusin mean by the two terms, *mediation* (or mediality) and *remediation*, which are the necessary preconditions for premediation – and yet whose functions today, according to Grusin, are always already subsumed by the new term? "By mediality I mean generally to call attention to what media do, to the ways in which they function as agents within the heterogeneous assemblage of twenty-first-century American and global society" (72-73). Furthermore, "people and things

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function actively together to create or invent new forms of mediation” (76-77). In other words, mediality in Grusin’s usage is an updated version of Stuart Hall’s “productive consumption” model of individual engagement with popular culture, going beyond the production of consumption or manufacturing of desire symptomatic of more classically modernist models, exemplified by Adorno and Horkheimer’s culture industry essay. Grusin opposes mediality to representationality, whose regime it supplants. And, where representationality “concerned itself chiefly with a referential fidelity to its object,” mediality concerns itself with “modulating affect” (79). For Grusin, mediality and affect replace ideology and psychoanalysis, respectively, both of which involve the interpretation of signs, images or symptoms. But, while it is interesting to note that “the mass media are not mediating anymore – they become direct mechanisms of control by their ability to modulate the affective dimension” (80), there is also the great danger here of forgetting what remains useful in the Althusserian definition of ideology as the representation of our imaginary relations to the real conditions of our existence – i.e. there is no ideology without image – hence the danger of overlooking the formal, pre-affective, mediating dimension of the image. Grusin distinguishes between mere emotions, which after all qualify as signs--being visible, readable, and interpretable--and affect proper, which in this view is some sort of pre-signifying quantity or quality: “an unqualified bodily response independent of, and perhaps phenomenally prior to, our understanding of the emotions they evoke or the meanings they entail” (81). If we accept this definition, it is difficult to not question how can such a thing as affect be theorized? Without images, mediation, form, content, and structure, etc., there is no meaning and therefore nothing to discuss; again, no ideology without image. In this view affect exists in some kind of pre- or extra-ideological zone, and yet Grusin insists on giving it precedence in his subtitle: “Affect and mediality after 9/11”.

Ironically perhaps, the meaning of remediation is much clearer, deriving as it does from Grusin and J. David Bolter’s ground-breaking (and more clearly argued) book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. The definition of remediation is initially two-part: mediation is everywhere, and always works hard to render itself invisible. Remediation is to new media what adaptation was to the old paradigm epitomized by intertextually determined literary or cinematic narrative. Under this new dispensation, new media forms do not simply repeat or reproduce older ones; they “claim to entail improvements of older media forms, or *remedies* of past defects” (145; my emphasis). This is the “*reformative* aspect of remediation” as remedy for the ills brought on by mediation gone wrong (145; my emphasis). In this meaningful pun, remediation is to hindsight what premediation is to foresight, the latter revealed as a kind of post-9/11 Promethean mediatory anticipation, forestalling future disasters not by “getting the future right” ahead of time but “by making futurity present” (146).

At 179 pages *Premediation* is not long, but it appears to have been hastily written and edited, as sentences such as the following attest: “For individual and collective media users the maximization of positive affect by striving to mediatize the entire world helps to prevent a recurrence of shocks like those produced by 9/11 by producing a feeling of anywhere, anytime connectivity” (127). Such stylistic *faux pas* work unconsciously to underscore the central themes of a media-saturated post-9/11 world determined by the logic of what Derrida famously called *toujours déjà*: the future anterior tense in which most of us supposedly eke out our wirelessly connected, socially mediated, hyper-securitized lives. This is a view of the contemporary world in which the twenty-first-century mass media at once produce and mitigate the ‘shock of the new’ endemic to twentieth-century artistic modernism, and still a central pop cultural myth.

Although by this name it is a firmly post-9/11 phenomenon under consideration in Grusin’s book, it is both ironic and appropriate that its theory of premediation should be reminiscent of other, older ideas about how culture continually produces versions of reality that variously prepare us for, protect us from, or conceal outright the social reality just ahead in what we fondly call the future. I do not intend it as a criticism to say that there is something ‘unoriginal’ about premediation, despite Grusin’s repeated claims to the contrary; in part, he is justified in arguing for its twenty-first century currency, tied as the concept is to contemporary technologies of cultural mediation, most prominently the internet and other manifestations of the new media that now pervade everyone’s life to some degree. To put it another way: to accuse premediation of being ‘unoriginal’ is to miss the point that its ‘unoriginality’ is precisely the point. For, according to Grusin, in the post-9/11 period, the U.S. strove to ensure “that the American public never again experienced *live* a large-scale catastrophic event that had not already been premediated” (12; my emphasis). In other words, premediation means that an *actual* catastrophe like 9/11 is replaced in the media by a ‘real-time’ simulacrum of itself – the intention being that, should the American public of necessity undergo another such catastrophe, at least it will not be one, like 9/11, that was mediated, and continues to be remediated, but was so woefully un-premediated. But is this really true? And what exactly *is* premediation?

Grusin’s answers waver between the repetitive and the contradictory, a situation stemming from his perhaps understandable desire to distance himself from his antecedents in this theoretical field, especially Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Žižek (13). Grusin acknowledges that both thinkers point out that the events of 9/11 did constitute an instance of proto-premediation in that the now iconic images of planes crashing into skyscrapers and buildings collapsing had been seen before in Hollywood films, especially for some reason in pre-millennial late-90s films, like *Independence Day* (1996) and *Fight Club* (1999) (14). On this point Grusin neglects to mention Susan Sontag,

who was one of the first to observe the contradictory, even chiasmic, nature of eye-witness accounts; to wit: it can't be real, it looks just like a Hollywood movie; it looks just like a Hollywood movie, therefore it must be real. Nor does Grusin clarify the degree to which Žižek gets all of his best ideas on 9/11 straight from Baudrillard (via the Wachowski Brothers): welcome to the desert of the real, anyone? Premediation therefore means: before it is 'real' the future appears as a simulacrum of itself; how this is not equivalent to Baudrillard is not clear to me. It remains unclear as well just how the theory of premediation differs so significantly from, say, Baudrillard's 'precession of simulacra' (45), as Grusin repeatedly claims. But perhaps he protests too much; it may be that his protestations fail to hide the fact that these ideas fall under the same paradigm, and that premediation is a useful concept insofar it *extends* rather than differs from previous theories of that thing formerly known as 'postmodernity'.

The emergence of what Grusin calls 'premediated time' (33) is really another name for the perpetual present of consumption, no matter how much Grusin talks about the necessity of remediating the *future* after 9/11. For, if the future signifies at all for the average person in the present it is on an affective level, and not as a distinct temporality as it were visible from the present, as in certain Sci-Fi scenarios. And, after all, such filmic and televisual visions of possible futures are on a conceptual level ultimately extensions of the present, while ontologically, like all photographically based images, they are uncanny emanations of the past. All this talk of the future or futures is highly misleading, as, once the future arrives, it is always already present. In this sense Grusin's critique of Baudrillard becomes a distraction, as the question of the 'real' vs. simulacra becomes moot when the object is the future as such (and not just its representations): the future *as such* has no empirical existence; therefore it is not 'real' except as something that can be imagined, predicted, or feared – i.e. as image or representation whose reference is always ultimately the past. If anything, premediation is entirely dependent upon Baudrillard, as an extension of the concept of simulacrum as a term beyond the binary of real vs. unreal, model vs. copy, or referent vs. image. Grusin seems to forget that the ultimate thrust of Baudrillard's theory is not the disappearance of the real as something to be nostalgically mourned, but as something forever rewritten in our new relationship to events via their representation in the media; their 'mediatization'.

But my final point here is this: rather than the pre-emptive anticipation of possible futures, Grusin's book is really all about *memory*, insofar as premediation describes a process whereby the subject, confronted by the future, recognizes it as something always already seen and therefore, in a certain sense, known. The future is thus stripped of its unknowability, its otherness, reduced to a version of the same, the present, which is all we ever really have anyway. What premediation represents, then, is the further erosion and impoverishment of the imagination as an organ of creativity,

balanced by the final consolidation of memory as prosthetic technology whose form, content and function are entirely determined by forces outside of and often wholly at odds with the best interests of the individual subject. That said, in reading *Premediation* one gets the sense quite strongly that it is one of those concepts which, to paraphrase Voltaire, if it did not already exist, would be necessary to invent.

### Works Cited

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