



R E V I E W S
in CULTURAL THEORY

5.2
SUMMER
2014

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.

We can be reached by email at editors@reviewsinculture.com, or by mail at

Reviews in Cultural Theory

Department of English and Film Studies
3-5 Humanities Centre
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB
T6G 2E5
Canada

<http://reviewsinculture.com>

Editors: Sarah Blacker, Justin Sully, Imre Szeman

Associate Editors: Jeff Diamanti, Carolyn Veldstra

Copyright for reviews published in *Reviews in Cultural Theory* is owned by the review author.

©Copyright 2009-2014 *Reviews in Cultural Theory*

ISSN 1918-9710

Contents

- 1 Straight Sense
 ANDY CAMPBELL
- 6 Framed
 JOHANNA SKIBSRUD
- 12 On the Uncertain Status of Text in the
 Digital Age
 MARCO DESERIIS
- 18 Breeding ‘Post-Imperial’ Nations
 LESLIE ALLIN
- 24 The City Space of Asian Literature
 CHERYL NARUMI NARUSE
- 28 Rethinking Political Practice as
 Continuous Insurrection
 VIREN MURTHY
- 34 Literature and Labor under Neoliberalism
 WALTER OLIVER BAKER
- 39 Popular Media and the Rhetoric of
 Colorblindness
 SHARON YAM
- 43 Anthropocene Diplomacy
 HEATHER DAVIS

- 48 *Realism After Postmodernism*
 SEAN HOMER
- 54 *After the Aftermath*
 ROB COLEY
- 59 *Media Theory at the Limits of
 Communication*
 ALEKSANDRA KAMINSKA

Straight Sense

ANDY CAMPBELL

Jean-Luc Nancy. *Corpus II*. Trans. Anne O'Byrne. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. Print.

I often ask undergraduates encountering philosophical texts for the first time to initially read as though they were encountering poetry instead of philosophy. Not only does this tactic soften the array of feelings (overwhelmed indignation is perennially popular) that inevitably seem to arise when reading dense texts, but it also opens a student's capabilities to understand and imagine alongside a text. With Jean-Luc Nancy's new collection of essays on the body and sexuality, *Corpus II*, it might actually behoove the expert as much as the neophyte to read these essays as though they were poetry *as well as* philosophy.

Jean-Luc Nancy's contributions to philosophy are just now beginning to be felt in earnest throughout the United States, perhaps owing to fact that English translations of his texts only started to appear in significant numbers in the 1990s. A secondary literature on the philosopher followed suit in the 2000s. More recently, the Guggenheim organized an exhibition in 2012 of Southeast-Asian video/mixed-media art under the title "Being Singular Plural", which is also Nancy's formulation for a preliminarily relational foundation of Being (*Being Singular Plural* 12). A brief discussion of Nancy's essay "Shattered Love" appears in Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman's new dialogue-as-theoretical-structure, called *Sex, or The Unbearable*. And this is to say nothing of the countless authors discussing community with any modicum of criticality who continue to refer to, and riff on, Nancy's landmark text, *The Inoperative Community*.

Corpus II affirms Nancy, now in his seventies, as a strong technician of language. Encountering the essays in this collection is akin to meeting new members of an extended family at a reunion—they're all related, sure, but there are eccentricities and charms particular to each person. Likewise, we could place some of the key ideas operating in *Corpus II* within the atmosphere of Nancy's decades-long core concerns: when he says, "It follows that relation is not in any way a being: it is not anything distinct, but rather distinction itself" (*Corpus II* 7) he reiterates a longstanding interest in relationality's paradoxical structure. One might reasonably compare this statement with Nancy's earlier call to focus on and loosely hold the "in" of "being-in-common" (*The Inoperative Community*, xxxix). The essays in *Corpus II* are an extension of Nan

cy's musings on communitarian relationality, and they all concern, to lesser or greater degrees, the most vexing and (literally) exciting of relationalities: sex.

In the opening essay, "The 'There Is' of Sexual Relation," Nancy takes as his starting point Jacques Lacan's statement "There is no sexual relation." Mulling on Lacan's invective, Nancy allows "resonances to emerge for me that will not harmonize with the unison of the Lacanian program" (1). This essay is a circling-back for Nancy, whose first book *The Title of the Letter* (1973) was uniformly cool on Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts. Happily he admits to a desire to consider topics more dovish writers might shy away from: "When I fuck, I'm fucked, but how are we to understand this?" (3). One of the productive ways that Nancy understands this paradoxical embodiment is through a discussion of the concept of "zones" as "mobile and fleeting circumscriptions" of the body, too numerous and multifarious to adequately nail down. The zoned body "emblazons itself as the actual taking place of differing and deferring" (17). Some of the best passages in this essay, like many in *Corpus II*, are frustratingly victim to Nancy's exploratory style: important thoughts, –often framed as rhetorical questions, – get lost and become fleetingly tangential. For example, Nancy asks, "What is the mutual relation of the body of pleasure and the body of a child? The child's body could be understood as an erogenous zone that detaches itself and takes on an autonomous destiny" (17). Such an insight is bracing and thrilling, especially because this reframing of psychosexual development could fundamentally tug at accepted notions of childhood and motherhood (and thereby a whole slew of writers who find these relationships fascinating). Still, there's more to say; the generous assumption to make, and I think it's an accurate one, is that Nancy is merely pointing out trails for others to blaze.

The other disappointment is the archival breadth (or lack thereof) of Nancy's extended meditation on breasts, "The Birth of Breasts." The essay, which is the longest in the collection, wonders aloud what would happen if we took the breast as the primary expression of Being? "I am' forms the breast of thought," (44) Nancy suggests without a hint of irony. That in German 'breast' and 'Being' are homophones (sein/Sein) sweetens Nancy's premise. Nancy's essay is too much informed by the nurturing capacities of breasts, and their erotic possibilities, without paying much mind to their potential for negativity, anxiety, and loss. Nancy's thoughts on breast/Being are interpolated with the words of other writers. Some are novelists, some philosophers – but a disproportionate number are male. You would think women would have some interesting things to say about breasts. Deceptively, *Corpus II's* dust-jacket declares that Nancy's "beautiful reflection on human anatomy" is culled from a broad range of subjectivities and historical periods; "Sappho to Beckett" is the pitch. But Sappho appears once in "The Birth of Breasts", Beckett appears– twice, and Modernist writers like James Joyce more times than either. For all the discussion of embodiment,

Nancy's archive is fairly flat. One can't help but suspect that the inclusion of radical lesbian writers could have enriched Nancy's canon. The capitalized lists of body parts from Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, for example, would be a welcome tonal interruption of Nancy's archive. Or Cixous, for that matter. Or Kristeva. If we're raiding the Modernist closet: Virginia Woolf. Or Gertrude Stein. Or, if we're raiding the erotic closet (which is generally more fun than the Modernist closet): Anaïs Nin. Or Pauline Réage. Nancy dodges this responsibility early on in the essay by telling his reader that he is making "no treatise, then, no book of breasts. They exist" (25). And while Nancy rightly excoriates the "idiocies and obscenities" (50) of the fantasy of twinned undifferentiated and perfectly round breasts, the quoted interspersed texts develop a different argument altogether. Perhaps Nancy is merely playing descant to the canon's melody. My question is, where's the syncopation?

One final gripe, which would be small were this collection concerned with any other subject besides sexuality: Nancy sometimes misses the opportunity to *revel* in obscenity. Discussing the differences between the heart and breast in Kantian philosophy, Nancy states, "It is a matter of nothing less than the two meanings of *cum*: 'with' and 'together'" (47). Of course, "cum" has a third meaning, but then Nancy is primarily concerned with the Latinate meanings of the word, not the hard-parsed spellings found in toilet stalls.

Because of these issues, or more precisely my frustrations which arose from them, this 46 page essay took me the better part of a month to read. Yet the essay also contains a brilliant discussion of Freud's posthumously published note, "I am the breast", which makes an appearance more than once in "The Birth of Breasts." Going on a Foucauldian Archeological "dig" on Freud's wonky assertion, Nancy translates and presents a block of text (by far the longest of his array of quotations) from Theodor Lipps on the topic of empathy. Empathy is a fascinating import into a discussion of Nancy's mostly-male discussion of breasts, not least because many people physicalize empathetic response by touching their own breast. Lipps, who counted among his many fervent admirers a young Viennese student named Sigmund, surmises that "the aesthetic contemplation of female form is—or can be—the same for a woman as it is for a man, and vice versa" (61). Despite Lipps's suggestion otherwise, Nancy correctly points out that the German philosopher's text is really only "a matter of women's breasts for men and not for women" (62). Setting aside Nancy's capabilities to point out the gendered tone-deafness of his source material and not reflect critically on his own, Nancy's maneuvering of empathy and identification is generative and open: "[...] identification itself, like the eye that has no vision of a sameness that is differently disposed, indefinitely different—an insubstantial substance [...]" (66).

Perhaps I am unfair in my extended assessment of "The Birth of Breasts", because at

its best, this essay, like many in the book, takes the formal and material properties of its supposed subject and turns it into a kind of deliciously meditative droning on appositeness: “There is neither unity nor multiplicity. There is the one and the other, the one to the other, the one beside the other between the one and the other” (50). Reveling in Nancy’s language is one of the great pleasures of reading his texts, and reason enough to become familiarized with his catalog. For example, Nancy’s “Paean to Aphrodite” (previously published in English in *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, 2006) is literally a praise-song to the fecund foaminess of the Aphrodite myth. The “vague, effervescence weight that weighs nothing on the deeps” (80) is descriptive of Aphrodite’s birth as well as the general firmament of the essay, which contains the initial kernel of “The Birth of Breasts.”

Corpus II continues some of the body-centric work evident in his previous collection of essays, *Corpus* (published in English in 2008), where Nancy notably elucidated a deconstruction of Christianity—as architecture, as process. One of his most stunning and transparently personal essays to date, entitled “The Intruder,” is enfolded in that 2008 collection of essays (although I prefer the 2002 Susan Hanson translation published in *The New Centennial Review*, which I’ll quote from here). The intruder, by the way, is Nancy’s new heart after transplant and perhaps also the cancer growing in his body. In that essay, deadpan statements such as “my own heart in fact was worn out, for reasons that have never been clear. Thus to live, it was necessary to receive another’s, an other, heart” are tense with multiple-meanings. Posed with such existential questions Nancy’s mind soars, and he re-renders the dramatic experience of his surgery as a deep philosophical treatise on the self, “sharp and spent, stripped bare and over-equipped, intruding upon the world and on itself” (“L’Intrus” 13).

Similarly in *Corpus II* some of the shortest essays shine brightest. I read “Strange Foreign Bodies” as a companion-piece to “The Intruder.” This essay is enough to make a Romantic of any reader, and has quickly become a go-to text for me. In the hopes of conversion, I’ll quote at length for any nonbelievers:

[The body] is a stretched strap and a relaxed fist, the hidden mass of sleep, palm to forehead, the echo of the voice in his head, vertigo, magnanimity and perspiration, the meanest excoriation, hardenings and cramps, irritations, obstructions, extrasystoles, sneezes, a whole machinery that is too sensitive, to susceptible to what is only the ever-renewed excess of all things—and of itself—beyond the simple maintenance of its machine. For there is no machine; there is only desire and expectation, fear and hunger, need, want, impulse, and dependency. There is only the terrible struggle between forces that constrict one another, that pull and push on all sides from all the extremities of the skin and of the world (89-90).

In this paragraph of both “limitless expansion” (92) and constrictive forces Nancy gives voice to his particular gift—to turn and re-turn the subject at hand, in hand. It is here, and places too numerous to count in *Corpus II* that Jean-Luc Nancy fashions poetry from the crucible of philosophy. Perhaps in telling young scholars to read philosophical texts as poetry I am merely making good on Nancy’s dictum: “The poem is the jouissance of language and the language of jouissance” (22).

Works Cited

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Trans. Walter Hamacher and David E. Wellbery. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000. Print.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Corpus*. Trans. Richard A. Rand. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. Print.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Corpus II*. Trans. Anne O’Byrne. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. Print.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991. Print.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. “L’Intrus.” Trans. Susan Hanson. *The New Centennial Review* 2.3 (2002): 1–14. Print.

Andy Campbell, Ph.D., is a Core Program Critic-In-Residence with the Glassell School of Art/Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. He is an independent critic and curator. Recent scholarly interests include Black Negativity, Foliage and Modernism, Gay/Lesbian leather and BDSM communities, and #realness.

Framed

JOHANNA SKIBSRUD

Catherine Zuromskis. *Snapshot Photography: The Lives of Images*. MIT Press, 2013. 264 pp.

Like its subject, Catherine Zuromskis's *Snapshot Photography: The Lives of Images* straddles the realms of public and private, high and low art. She considers the "snapshot" within an American middle-class context: those who bought the first Brownie cameras and, over the course of the latter half of the twentieth century, took the requisite photos. Christmas trees, babies in bathtubs, prom dates standing awkwardly together at the bottom of the stair, all of these images shape not only our expectations for our own family albums, but also – therefore – what it means to lead a normative middle-class life. Though Zuromskis's consideration of the snapshot genre focuses primarily on amateur photographs taken of private moments, her aim is not to define the snapshot according to these specific terms. Instead, she seeks to destabilize our concept of what the term "snapshot" – as well as the terms "amateur" and "private" – might mean in a broader social and artistic context. By reading deeply into the "social life" of the seemingly innocent snapshot—its varied functions "as an object, a commodity, a set of conventions, a discourse, and a form of cultural and political agency" (11)—Zuromskis ultimately makes good on her promise to get her "hands dirty" by engaging "in the messiness, the real-life particularities and contradictions that roil beneath the surface of a genre that often seems too banal to merit scholarly consideration at all" (11).

Haunting the work, as is only just, is Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, and in particular the famous Winter Garden Photograph: the image of Barthes's deceased mother as a child. Though Barthes describes the photograph in detail, the photograph itself is withheld – suggesting both its ultimately private, and ultimately contingent value. By depicting through their very materiality what *is not*, or what is no longer, all photographs can, to a certain extent, be considered both present and absent. This peculiar quality – what Barthes, quoting Blanchot, refers to as the photograph's "absence-as-presence" (106) – becomes even more pronounced in the study of snapshots, which so often hold, like Barthes's Winter Garden Photograph, only highly subjective value and meaning.

Though Zuromskis's chief aim is to disrupt the romantic notion our culture continues to perpetuate about snapshot photography – that snapshots are "innocent,"

Barthes points to at the heart of the image. Despite its ultimate “conventionality,” as a cultural practice snapshot photography has, Zuromskis argues, “an unruly side as well, one that is perhaps most intensely evoked by the figure of Roland Barthes grieving over the photograph of his late mother as a child” (13). By recognizing and confronting the complex relationship between subject and object – on the one hand intensely personal, contingent and perhaps ultimately untheorizable, and on the other, socially constructed, decidedly *unoriginal*, and highly controlled – Zuromskis refuses to reduce the snapshot to either one or the other. Nor does she simplify her approach to the genre by pretending that aesthetic and cultural ideals can be easily separated. Instead, she looks at both together, urging us to recognize along with her that it is precisely those images we find “too boring or common to merit consideration” that “require a closer look.” (17). Embedded within our private lives, Zuromskis admits, these images may seem “natural and inconsequential;” but, for this very reason, “they have the power to function on the register of myth” (17).

Because of “the aspirational fictions” the snapshot often records, within a genre also invested with “documentary” truth-value, snapshots “allow us to record ourselves and our histories as we would have them remembered” (33). It is for this reason that the snapshot has often been used as a powerful tool for marginalized groups seeking to “construct alternative visual cultures to those perpetuated by mainstream society” (33). As the writer and social activist, bell hooks, has argued, for example, it was the rise of snapshot photography in African-American communities that – in distinct contrast to the “repressive social constructs advanced by lynching photography and racial stereotypes” (33-4) – allowed for the development and expression of a complex and individualized black culture.

More commonly, however, “alternative” relationships to snapshot culture are exploited only in order to reinforce the status quo. In Chapter Two, Zuromskis provides a fascinating analysis of the 2002 film, *One-Hour Photo*, as well as various episodes of the television show (1999-present) *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*. In both cases, Zuromskis argues, the “dangerous or deviant” (93) relationships to snapshot culture represented (voyeurism, pornography, violence), are used as negative examples to the norm, and serve ultimately to reinforce the idea that “criminal acts are a structural part of society, requiring ongoing policing” (95). In this way, Zuromskis acknowledges the ways our culture is shaped not by what is actively promoted but what is actively repressed.

It would be interesting, in light of this, to learn more about Zuromskis’s thoughts on those snapshot images we do *not* see, those photographs – the “falling man” photos after 9/11, for example – that have been systematically withheld. I wonder further, what Zuromskis might have to say about the Abu Ghraib torture snapshots, or other

“unofficial” trauma and war documentation that has proliferated over the last fifty years? What insights she might have, that is, into the way these documents have worked to shape our cultural consciousness (or lack thereof) of the social and political issues that surround us.

Although Zuromskis acknowledges both the affirmative and restrictive role snapshot photography has played in shaping identity and reframing collective histories, the absence of any discussion of these more politically and socially charged chapters of snapshot history is conspicuous. One wonders where the pseudo-scientific phrenological studies that contributed so dramatically to racial profiling, and mug-shots fit into Zuromskis’ account, for another example – which begs the question as to whether these photographs actually qualify as “snapshots.” If we acknowledge – as Zuromskis argues we must – that even middle-class American “baby in the bath tub” snapshots are pre-meditated, culturally defined, and oriented toward a very particular end, what is the real difference between these politicized and racialized images and those that provide the focus for this study? Attention to this question would force Zuromskis to clarify her definition of the genre in worthwhile ways. Similarly, a consideration of trauma and war photography might further nuance Zuromskis’s discussion of the ways in which snapshots have participated in – indeed embodied – our tendency toward “the practice of manufacturing rosy revisionist histories” (65), and force the question regarding the difference between public documentary and private memory.

This latter issue is one that Zuromskis raises but ultimately leaves unresolved in Chapter Three, where she turns to the problem of situating the snapshot within the space of a museum. Though “the designation of the snapshot as ‘art’ in a museum context may valorize an underappreciated genre,” it also serves to neutralize “the affective and political possibilities of bringing this popular, vernacular image culture into a public sphere of reception” (118). Her examination of influential exhibitions –beginning with Edward Steichen’s famous show from 1955, “The Family of Man” –calls attention to the important shift that takes place with the advent of snapshot photography within the museum, whereby the role of the *curator*, not the artist, is brought to the fore. In presenting snapshots (the authors of which are often either irrelevant in the museum space, or unknown), it becomes the curator’s responsibility to situate the work for the public in both aesthetic and cultural terms.

Highlighting the polarities of the genre as a whole, such exhibitions emphasize either the *message* of the photographs to the exclusion of the *medium* (Steichen’s exhibition, for example, which was essentially documentary and ideological in nature – evoking, as Zuromskis notes, “diversity and difference only to magically dispel them in the name of a superficial and sentimental unity” [124]), or the *medium* to the exclusion

of the complex social and political network to which the snapshot is bound (John Szarkowski's 1962 exhibition *The Photographer's Eye*, for example, which focused on anonymous and private "snapshot" photographs in an effort to endow the genre "with the rarified air of high art" [137]). Steichen and Szarkowski are similar, however, at least in one regard, which Zuromskis notes. Both, she argues, managed to establish "radical new discourses for understanding [snapshot photography] and its function, and thus did not so much dismiss the author altogether as take his place, resituating aesthetic genius from photographer to curator or photographic visionary" (148).

In Chapters Four and Five, Zuromskis discusses the photographic oeuvres of Andy Warhol and Nan Goldin in similar terms. By emphasizing their distinctly different approaches – Warhol's distant and self-conscious, intent on exposing the limits and superficialities of image and relationships; Goldin's emotional and intimate, intent on exposing the "real" – Zuromskis draws attention to the ways in which both exemplify two very different, inextricable, aspects of the snapshot form. Andy Warhol's photography, particularly his early Factory work, has, Zuromskis argues, long been under-recognized for its complex social and political engagement. "Warhol's unique approach," she writes,

employed the visual and social dynamics of the photograph as a vital tool for problematizing social stratification and complicating binary separations between public and private, mainstream and counterculture, celebrity and fan, and art and life (188).

In the same way that Warhol's paintings "blur the line between art and commercial culture, painterly expression and mechanical reproduction," so his photographic work, notes Zuromskis, exposes "the gray area between photography's newly acquired status as a legitimate fine art and its commercial appeal as a domestic and social pastime" (205). Though she is intent on rescuing Warhol from the charge of "mere" superficiality, she also acknowledges and celebrates Warhol's emphasis on his art – and therefore his social and political existence – as essentially mediated. Warhol's pronouncement that "the reason I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine" (233) also applies, in Zuromskis' view, to his photographic practice. But this "mechanic" approach does not limit the emotional impact or social value of Warhol's work. Instead, Zuromskis argues, Warhol's insistence on "technological mediation" actually facilitated for the artist "a deeper psychological and emotional intimacy, a connective circuit, as his book title suggests, 'from A to B and back again'" (233).

In the work of Nan Goldin, the *message*, not the *medium*, is of primary importance. She insists, and is dependent upon, both a framing narrative (read: "rosy revisionist history") and the "innocence" or candidly honest quality she assumes to be implicit

within her photos. In this way, argues Zuromskis, Goldin aligns herself, especially in her early work, with normative middle-class American snapshot practices. But in an analysis of Goldin's 2004 exhibition, "*Soeurs, Saintes, et Sibylles (Sisters, Saints and Sibyls)*," the artist's "most tortured and most dramatic work to date" (300), Zuromskis recognizes in the artist's work "a new engagement with snapshot photography, its cultural function, and, significantly, its limitations" (304). Like Roland Barthes's treatment of the Winter Garden Photograph in *Camera Lucida*, Goldin's *Sisters* "seems to confront for the first time a presence that is always already an absence, a taunting reminder of the passage of time and inevitability of death" (304). It is only through this acknowledgement, Zuromskis contends – an acknowledgement of what the photograph "cannot show" – that there can be any true understanding of the nature of the genre itself. *Sisters* also gestures toward the oppressive cultural role snapshot images have played by including images by Jean-Martin Charcot, a celebrated doctor and acknowledged expert on the condition once known as "hysteria." Charcot worked at the Salpêtrière hospital – famously, a "repository of marginalized culture, housing prostitutes, the insane, the diseased, and the destitute" (Zuromskis 306-7). His research included frequent photographic documentation "of female hysterical patients...in convulsive and performative poses" (307). Zuromskis observes:

Evoking one of the foundational paradoxes of snapshot photography, Charcot's photographs are both transparent scientific documents of the patient's (invented) pathology and, at the same time, utterly contrived and framed by a cultural lexicon of emotional states from ecstasy and menace to crucifixion and self-sacrifice (307).

Over time, Charcot's patients began to realize that "the photographs for which they were posing ultimately reinforced the repressive pathology of the institution itself" (307). This realization is one that Zuromskis reads as implicit in Goldin's *Sisters*. It also serves as a powerful message with which to conclude her study.

A brief coda, which takes up the question of the ways snapshot photography has changed, or will, since the advent of the digital age, only further emphasizes the snapshot's significance. As snapshot technology changes, what does *not* – will not – change is the snapshot's intrinsic relationship (at once both reflective of, and resistant to) its contemporary social and political milieu. The paradoxes and polarities, which – as Zuromskis convincingly argues – have been evident within the practice of snapshot photography since the days of the very first Brownie cameras, will only continue to proliferate and abound. "While the conventions of snapshot culture stand as rigid as ever, the boundary between the private photographic practice and cultural ideology, between personal acts and public rhetoric is becoming ever more permeable," writes Zuromskis. It is for this reason, she concludes – and her own study proves a

powerful affirmation of these final words –that “the politics and possibilities of snapshot photography’s social life become ever more relevant” (319).

Works Cited

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

Zuromskis, Catherine. *Snapshot Photography: The Lives of Images*. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT Press, 2013.

Johanna Skibsrud is an Assistant Professor of Literature at the University of Arizona. Her scholarly articles and reviews have appeared in *Excursions*, *Dandelion*, *Mosaic*, *The Brock Review*, *antiTHESIS*, *The Luminary*, and *The Volta*. She is also the author of two novels, *Quartet for the End of Time* (Hamish Hamilton Canada/Norton 2014) and *The Sentimentalists* (Douglas and MacIntyre 2010/Norton 2011), a collection of short fiction, *This Will Be Difficult to Explain, and Other Stories* (Hamish Hamilton Canada 2011/Norton 2012), and two collections of poetry, *I Do Not Think that I Could Love a Human Being* (Gaspereau 2010) and *Late Nights For Wild Cowboys* (Gaspereau 2008).

On the Uncertain Status of Text in the Digital Age: A Comparative Approach

MARCO DESERIIS

N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman, *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013. pp. 331.

While comparative research is by no means new to the humanities and the social sciences, the field of media studies has been relatively untouched by explicitly comparative approaches. To be sure, influential strands of media studies such as the Toronto school of communication and the emerging field of media archeology are comparative in character. And yet, media scholars have by and large shied away from the formalization of a comparative methodology. One of the reasons for such hesitation may lie in the contemporary proliferation of information technologies and media cultures. As if the multiplication of the subjects of inquiry is preventing scholars from crystallizing common vocabularies and heuristics, without which any comparative endeavor can hardly take off.

Comparative Textual Media, a collection of essays co-edited by N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman, counters this tendency by suggesting that “the deepening complexities of the media landscape” may in fact be responsible for “a reawakening of interest in earlier media forms” (ix). But rather than approaching these earlier media exclusively through the lens of computation—as in the case of the digital humanities—Hayles and Pressman contend that the time is ripe for a comparative analysis of *all* textual media. Early twenty-first century scholars are in fact in the privileged position of witnessing the emergence of new textualities as the age of print is coming to a close. This migration of text from static supports such as parchment, papyrus and paper to the procedural time of computer algorithms poses a series of questions on the ontological status of text. The thirteen contributors—Rita Raley, Adriana de Souza e Silva, Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, Johanna Drucker, William A. Johnson, Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux, Patricia Crain, Lisa Gitelman, Jessica Brantley, Thomas Fulton, John David Zuern, and Mark C. Marino—provide a range of insights that help advance our understanding of “what is a text” *from a media perspective*.

Hayles and Pressman contend that such framework entails a focus on the materiality

of media, and the complex interplay between the way a text is produced, stored and processed and the interpretive practices that determine its cultural significance. Several chapters in the collection attest to this approach. For example, Johanna Drucker's fascinating chapter on the history of the typeface notes that font families emerge at the intersection of specific conceptions, technologies, and crafts. Thus, if the design of Renaissance fonts reflected ideal and classical notions of beauty, their implementation depended on writing techniques that reached their highest point only with "the virtuoso capacities of the writing masters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (89). This lack of synchronization across ideation, technology and technique, argues Drucker, reemerges also with the migration of the computer-generated typeface to the Web, when the limitations of early HTML barred Web designers from even choosing a font. Even more significant, perhaps, is the case of Donald Knuth's failed attempt to design a single meta-font that could algorithmically describe, and hence unify, all typefaces. Drucker notes that if in 1982 Knuth had believed "that letters did not need a body," the state of advancement of digital technology proved him wrong: "Sometimes technology leads, sometimes not" (85). The notion that a text should be gauged at the intersection of its material and ideational possibilities surfaces also in William Johnson's compelling analysis of the Roman "bookroll" (more commonly known as roll or scroll) at the end of the Hellenistic period. Johnson notes that after the Romans conquered the Greeks they adopted the *scriptio continua* of Greek literary texts, thus reversing the word segmentation of early Latin literary texts. While such choice appears impractical and inefficient to us, the uninterrupted flow of letters was meant to leave the task of interpretation to the reading circles that formed around each bookroll. These communities of practice were led by masterful readers who were able to convey the full meaning of the text through the right pronunciation, modulation, and phrasing. Because proficient reading skills were achievable only through the repetitive reading of a text, to become a master-reader one had to be able to *access* the rolls and hence to be part of the cultured elite that controlled their circulation. But if reading entailed skills that were as sophisticated as those of the calligraphers who transcribed the rolls, then a thorough analysis of this medium, argues Johnson, calls for an "understanding of reading cultures... that insists on the symbiotics of medium, literary text, writer, and reader as something deeply embedded within society, culture, politics, ideology" (119).

While sociological approaches to literature and media are nothing new, other chapters in this collection combine an analysis of textual media's formal properties with the social context of their production and reception. Such is the case of Patricia Crain's essay on nineteenth-century children's literature and Lisa Gitelman's chapter on job printing. Crain observes that as the modern publishing industry began to develop, books became some of the first commodities (middle-class) children got to own. On the one hand, some of these books reflexively tell the story of their own industrial

making, hence celebrating their own modernity, wordliness and availability. On the other hand, Crain notes that the container-like properties of these objects—which allowed children to store notations, poems, and other ephemera—made them key sites for the representation of the self as endowed with interiority and an individual sensibility. While Gitelman's essay is not concerned with subjectivity, it also looks at the intersection of a text's materiality, social function, and conditions of production. The texts in question incorporate the vast assemblage of unbounded materials—such as posters, bills, tickets, leaflets, coupons, newspapers, bonds, certificates, and the like—that goes under the name of job printing. Gitelman aptly points out that noncodex print items are generally authorless, lack publishers and hence are not subject to copyright. Yet their volume is far from insignificant, as job printing seems to account for 30 per cent of the industry's total output, meaning that “at least a third of this sector of the economy has gone missing from media history as well as from textual studies” (189).

The ephemerality of job printing raises questions on how scholars are to approach materials that are more made to be used than to be (carefully) read and stored away. In this respect, the shift from reader to user belies the larger question of ephemerality in digital culture, a subject that cuts across several chapters of *Comparative Textual Media*. In her essay on interactive public art installations that display text messages sent by multiple users in real time, Rita Raley recognizes that what she calls “TX-Tual practice” can present challenges precisely because there is no durable object to recover and present for future study” (9). While Raley is right to observe that “the *experience* of ephemerality may push the parameters of a discourse on comparative textual media to a kind of limit,” her insistence on using the term “practice” to define participatory and process-based interactions in public space is not unproblematic. Citing Nigel Thrift, Raley contends that “practices [are to be] understood as material bodies of work or styles that have gained enough stability over time, through, for example, the establishment of corporal routines and specialized devices, to reproduce themselves” (8-9). If texting is undoubtedly a practice, according to the previous definition, texting for public display is probably not, as it lacks precisely the kind of habitual qualities that would make it a practice. The fact that art critics and media theorists are able to link these projects does not mean that participants who stumble upon them in public space know what to expect or how to communicate with unknown yet co-present others. Perhaps it would be more productive to think of these situated interventions as textual performances that alter, if only temporarily, the perception of a public space by intervening on the communicative patterns that define a situation as either private or public (cf. Meyrowitz).

The difficulty in grappling with textualities that are unstable and ephemeral emerges also in the essays authored by Adriana de Souza e Silva and John David Zuern. De Souza e Silva's chapter approaches this question by focusing on location-based narratives that leverage mobile annotation technologies. While early location-aware projects such as audio walks and mobile storytelling projects were often run by artists, the growing popularity of smart phones has led to a multiplication of location-based applications (from SCVNGR to Foursquare and Yelp!) that allow users to annotate places for a variety of purposes. Yet de Souza e Silva does not seem concerned by the fact that the vast majority of these apps are commercial and as such rely on databases whose function and longevity is exclusively determined by the owning companies. The question of how the cultural heritage of the digital age is to be preserved is addressed by Zuern in his review of *My Name Is Captain, Captain*, a literary CD-ROM authored by John Morrissey and Lori Talley in 2002 and based upon Bertolt Brecht's 1929 cantata *Lindbergh's Flight*. After noting how Morrissey and Talley produced their CD-ROM using proprietary software that is no longer supported by the most recent versions of the Apple OS, Zuern concludes that as a literary object Brecht's cantata is more durable than its digital adaptation. The rapid obsolescence of digital text prompts him to sound an alarm bell for a comparative approach that is detached from a "curatorial commitment" and "practical efforts to keep those texts alive" (277).

Unfortunately, Zuern's appeal does not find many echoes in a collection whose authors are more concerned with analyzing specific texts than with understanding how those texts may be integrated within a wider ecosystem that does not take obsolescence as manifest destiny. Before concluding, let us briefly consider the essays authored by Mark C. Marino, and Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux. Marino's chapter focuses on *exquisite_code*, a multi-authored text produced over the course of five days in 2010 by seven writers in a London art gallery. Networked via Ethernet hubs, the writers had to submit their contributions to a program that would randomly select and process their chunks of text by applying formal rules inspired by the Surrealist games of the exquisite corpse. Marino admits that the pleasure of reading the transcript of this collaboration—which includes the code that was used to process or "munged" the text chunks—resides more in "reverse engineering the process of creating the text" (285) than in interpreting its meaning. This means that *exquisite_code* can be experienced as a living text only through the performance-execution of machinic processes that subject it to constant transformations. Boluk and LeMieux reach toward similar conclusions when they describe the game *Dwarf Fortress* as a "process of intertwined production and play that is constantly engaged in a series of textual translations and remediations" (134). Free of set goals and playing rules—other than those of the algorithm that runs the game—*Dwarf Fortress* invites players to translate the impossible task of erecting a fortress into monumental accounts of their inevitable collapse. Similar to the munged text chunks of *exquisite_code*, these "dwarven epitaphs" are

fragmentary accounts that let us glimpse the complex mechanics behind the game. But rather than forming a coherent narrative, Boluk and LeMieux suggest that these fragments point to a theistic cosmology that has strong resonances with modes of historical writing, such as the medieval chronicles and annals, which favor the simple recording of events over human causation.

Perhaps the nonhuman cosmology of *Dwarf Fortress* can be read as a metaphor of the ontological status of text at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As previously noted, Hayles and Pressman suggest that a comparative analysis of all textual media acquires a particular significance in the postprint era. Yet after reading the contributions dedicated to digital texts, one wonders whether the codex's crepuscule is only a harbinger of a wider extinction of text as a machine for the production of sense. Whether they are intended to be ephemeral (Raley), bound to obsolete software or proprietary applications (Zuern, de Souza e Silva), subjected to algorithmic processing (Marino), or procedurally indifferent to human agency and causation (Boluk and LeMieux), the texts in question no longer seem to fulfill a text's etymological function of weaving the cosmos into readable patterns that resist entropy. Perhaps, then, these textual ephemerals and executables suggest that an important task for comparative textual media (CTM) could be to identify and develop resources that can counter accelerated obsolescence and support cross-platform analysis. Databases such as the Rhizome Artbase, the ZKM Media Library, the Whitney ArtPort, the Internet Archive Historical Software Collection, to name a few, host and make accessible digital texts bound to dated software, platforms and networks. The question is how academic institutions that are willing to embark on the CTM project can not only use these resources but feed them and expand them. In this sense, Hayles and Pressman's salutary invitation to think of the CTM approach as collaborative and hands-on can be complemented by an invitation to explore how the new relational technologies can not only be analyzed as texts, but also as technical prostheses that support and exteriorize our collective memory (cf. Stiegler).

Works Cited

Meyrowitz, Joshua. *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1985. Print.

Stiegler, Bernard. "Relational Ecology and the Digital *Pharmakon*." *Culture Machine* 13 (2012): 1-19. Web.

Thrift, Nigel. *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. London: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Marco Deseriis is Assistant Professor in the Program in Media and Screen Studies at Northeastern University. His book *Improper Names: Collective Pseudonyms from the Luddites to Anonymous* is a genealogy of practices of shared pseudonymity and is currently under contract at the University of Minnesota Press. Deseriis is the co-author of *Net.Art: L'arte della Conessione* (Shake, 2008), the first Italian book on Internet art. His writings on hacktivism, social movements, and the avant-gardes have appeared in journals such as the *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *Journal of Critical Communication/Cultural Studies*, *Theory & Event*, *Radical History Review*, *Subjectivity* and *Mute*.

Breeding ‘Post-Imperial’ Nations

LESLIE ALLIN

Nadine Attewell. *Better Britons: Reproduction, National Identity, and the Afterlife of Empire*. University of Toronto Press, 2013. 324 pp.

This work is a refreshing and timely intervention in the ongoing process that nation states formerly part of the British Empire use to determine who belongs within a political community. Nadine Attewell’s *Better Britons: Reproduction, National Identity, and the Afterlife of Empire* investigates how ideas about British and settler citizenship in the 20th and 21st centuries are forged through the policing and politics of reproduction. The work’s title gestures not only to the fantasy of constructing an improved national identity derived from the mother country, but also to the established tropes of constructing, via Australia and New Zealand, better Britains. Interrogating visions of the future articulated through ideas about reproduction, Attewell unpacks projects of identity construction and nation-building in order to unsettle narratives of settlement and destabilize colonial amnesias surrounding origins.

Examining the recent colonial histories and attendant reproductive discourses of Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, *Better Britons* insists that we recognize the enduring cultural blindness to the deployment of forced sterilization and visions of forced reproduction as weapons of colonial control. This work argues that, since settler identity has been largely based on imagining indigeneity for itself, the project of narrating a right to occupy territory has necessitated the erasure of the indigenous bodies on whom the illegitimacy of the colonial state is inscribed. Hence, through fantasies of reproductive control—that is, of reproducing legitimate bodies and foreclosing the reproduction of non-legitimate bodies—the state imagines it can limit the presence of Indigenous people within colonial territory, identify what kinds of bodies will be part of the nation, and obfuscate territorial challenges to the state that Indigenous people embody.

Rooted in feminist and queer theory and critical race studies, this work is in dialogue with other scholars interested in imperial legacies, such as Anne McClintock, Paul Gilroy, Ella Shohat, and Daniel Coleman. In further situating this book critically, Attewell addresses the problematic status of the framework of post-coloniality and

the dubious status of the “post” for contemporary Indigenous peoples, as well as the existence of ongoing neo-colonial projects globally. Similarly, Attewell uses the notion of empire’s “afterlife” in order to gesture to the lingering relationships of dominance that constitute imperial residue, and to articulate that the persistent denial of empire’s impact on the present itself still remains, although haunted by structures that refuse to die.

Attewell’s methodology is as refreshingly original as her subject of inquiry. While she considers fiction, poetry, film, and drama, Attewell also investigates modernist texts beyond literary genres, such as governmental memoranda, public debates, immigration policy, and other institutional writing, in order to underscore a broad and pervasive social preoccupations with the constitution of national identity. In this way, Attewell draws attention to broad and underlying cultural orientations rather than limiting her focus to a particular aesthetic. Although Attewell’s explicit discussion of generic expectations in her analyses of texts is light, she nevertheless offers her readers nuanced, historically integrated, and critically informed readings of the texts’ cultural and political concerns. This study’s structure reflects the integration of different kinds of texts in social discourses in order to outline the extensiveness of this socio-political project of nation-building through fantasies about reproduction. Moving from the early decades of the 20th century to 2012, and back and forth from Australia to New Zealand to Britain, Attewell powerfully demonstrates the temporal and spatial continuity of the mechanisms by which “post-imperial” and settler identity construction leverage discourses surrounding reproduction.

Part One, *Beginnings*, reads three works of science fiction alongside the Australian government’s intervention in the lives of Northern Territory Aboriginals in the 1930s. In a eugenic initiative called “breeding out the colour,” women of mixed Indigenous and white decent were encouraged to marry white husbands in order to shift the racial composition of the state. In an unconventional but highly productive pairing, *Beginnings* demonstrates that the institutional texts (from governmental memoranda to ethnographic photographs) that comprise part of this eugenic project share with contemporary modernist novels the belief that alterations in reproductive practice can determine social organization as they underscore the central elements in the enterprise of nation-building. Chapter one explores how Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), H.G. Wells’ *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), and Eleanor Dark’s *Prelude to Christopher* (1934) imagine radical social transformations as underpinned by systems of reproductive control. These works, Attewell argues, articulate imperial anxieties surrounding crossings of the boundaries dividing nation and colony, with the contact zone figuring as a threat to national reproduction. These fears about identity transgression lie behind fantasies of reproductive management as a means to control *who* constitutes the nation. Isolation and insularity, then, become modes of

guarding against contamination. Attewell thus teases out the key trope of “island solutions”—that is, the notion of geographical isolation and the retraction of national boundaries—in utopian projects of reproductive reform, biosocial engineering, and nation-building.

Against this insight, Attewell reads the machinations and implications of “breeding out the colour.” Examining a range of institutional writing and contemporaneous fiction, chapter two brings into sharp relief the process of the Australian government’s concerted “forgetting” of the presence of Indigenous people and their claim to territory. The project insisted that the Australian nation would be a white one; the control of reproduction—the invasion of the private lives of indigenous people through state promotions of interracial marriage and claims of guardianship of Indigenous children, along with the rendering of Aboriginal people into data through governmental surveillance and descriptions of their ages, complexion, and locations—attempted to produce such a society. The central mechanism of displacing Indigenous people from their land was erasure: governmental intervention was figured as white paternity as the state asserted custody of Indigenous children in order to replace Aboriginal parentage, thus erasing genealogy. Meanwhile, the disruption of Aboriginal structures of kinship obfuscated knowledge of Aboriginal bloodlines, thus erasing proof of biological descent and with it Aboriginal land rights. Drawing on the connection between this history of genealogical effacement and late 20th-century federal laws that base Aboriginal access to land on demonstrable biological descent from Indigenous groups, Attewell argues that the focus on the absorption of otherness—the erasure of an indigeneity that was entitled to space—through reproduction still obtains and is furthermore a crucial element of Australian modernity.

While Part One outlines efforts to breed better national subjects, Part Two, *Endings*, engages with fantasies of collapse in order to configure futures of national belonging. Chapter three returns to analyses of fiction and historically rooted close readings to continue an interrogation of how women are rendered responsible for the labour of reproducing the healthy nation and the “right sort” (115) of subjects. Here, Attewell investigates how abortion as a form of foreclosure is also a gesture to other possible futures—futures alternate to motherhood. The texts examined rework the dominant narrative that the need for abortion (i.e. premarital sex) was evidence of loose morals, and thus justified policing women’s sexual and reproductive actions in order to secure a moral citizenry of the future. F. Tennyson Jesse’s *A Pin to See the Peepshow* (1934) invites readers to think about the asymmetrical access to medically sound abortion along class lines and conveys the need for more complex understandings of female desire—ones that do not simply frame it within questions of degenerative morality or abnormality. This chapter also uses abortion to explore the genealogies between metropole and colony and questions about authentic and/or mutated Englishness. In

Jean Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), abortion, as undertaken by Anna, the Creole woman whose miscegenated white body threatens the biological division between the 'English' centre and colonial periphery, works to police reproduction insofar as it affirms dominant ideas about which classes are fit to reproduce. In the protagonist's case, unwed pregnancy and thus sexual conduct (which is also bound up with her ambiguous racial and national position) signifies as maternal incompetence. However, Anna's preoccupation with returning to Dominica and its troubled colonial genealogies, after she's taken to England to "[start] all over again" (134) reworks fantasies of home and belonging. As well, her own body of mixed heritage underscores what Attewell calls a "counter-genealogy of Britishness" (143) by bringing to the surface the messiness of Britain's imperial past in the face of a national investment in forgetting.

Attewell's next section explores the apprehension of loss (of children and/as nation) within marginal forms of maternity in the interwar period. New Zealand author Robin Hyde, in her late 1930s texts, *Wednesday's Children* and *The Book of Nadath*, imagines the foreclosure of reproduction as a way to think through resistance to the war machine—that is, the refusal to supply bodies destined to become soldiers—and explore fantasies of loss as apotropaic manoeuvres. Imagining the experience of loss (of children, of a future with an internationalist logic, of land and sovereignty, and of the seemingly ever-vanishing native), Attewell argues, potentially enables Pākehā visions of a utopic New Zealand nation that hinges on the imagined death of both settlers, whose bodies merge with the soil, and Indigenous people, who are constructed as already disappeared. These manoeuvres then enable Pākehā settler society to obscure Māori survival in order legitimate their own claims to indigenous land.

Attewell's fifth chapter links 21st century demographic panic about Islamic populations proliferating to outnumber dwindling white European ones to sensationalist warnings of race suicide in the South Pacific in the beginning of the 20th century. This contemporary panic, Attewell contests, is underpinned by contentions about defining Britishness (for example, along racial, geographical, or ideological lines) in the afterlife of empire. In considering the ways in which fantasies of collapse that emerge from anxieties regarding racial demographics articulate what the nation should become—who will be inside and who will be outside—Attewell analyzes Danny Boyle and Alex Garland's 2002 zombie film *28 Days Later* and its association of the Rage virus with foreign threats coming back to impact the metropole. Importantly, she notes, the trope of zombification in post-slavery Caribbean societies served to articulate the dehumanizing effects of the imperial slave system and its moral bankruptcy. The zombie was thus a historically complex figure who represented the injured slave, and whose proliferation—that is, reproduction of future slaves—was enforced by laws of the white slave-holding society that dehumanized enslaved people. Mean-

while, as Attewell points out, in *28 Days Later*, the role of non-zombies in zombie reproduction is entirely obfuscated by the viral element. Instead, a decontextualized, dehistoricized Rage, associated with decontextualized, dehistoricized Third World violence, is positioned as the root of the attack on Britain. The film, she argues, goes on to imagine the future through purification, gesturing to a fantasy of rebuilding society, and reconstituting the family unit in a pastoral setting. Attewell deftly demonstrates just how relevant camouflaging the violence of empire and demarcating insiders and outsiders is to recent pernicious British National Party efforts to align immigration with colonialism. In doing so, she powerfully argues for the importance of foregrounding the historical and political valences of “indigeneity.”

Attewell closes her book with a consideration of how otherness emerges in the family through the figure of the child as immigrant. In a captivating reading of Juan Carlos Fresnadillo and Enrique López Lavigne’s *28 Weeks Later* (2007), Attewell unpacks how the family—so central to a vision of the future in *28 Days*—becomes a site of violence and a source of infection: it is through familial relations and genetic inheritance that Rage is able to go global. Thus, this model of violence disrupts the notion of a healthy inside and a contaminated outside. At the analogous level of the nation, then, that children from mixed-marriages can access British citizenship suggests the promise of new histories of imperial genealogy that are, as Attewell puts it, “written ... on the surface of the body” (211). In other words, a careful consideration of bodies as archives potentially and productively disrupts the fictions of settler “ab-originality” (214), not by locating origins but by making visible ruptures and discontinuities in so-called “post-imperial” narratives of belonging and homemaking.

This rich and complex study forcefully encourages a redress of the ongoing amnesia regarding brutal racial histories of empire and reveals them to be very much alive in contemporary culture. While Attewell’s focus is on genealogies between Britain and the South Pacific, her study invites explorations, using similar critical perspectives, methodologies, and research questions, into the workings of discourses about reproduction in other Anglo-settler societies, such as Canada, the United States, and South Africa. Though there is some question of how the importance of the “island solution” as nation-building trope would translate to spaces with land borders, my sense is that settler-invader configurations of territory, boundaries, and narratives about inheritance of land feature key similarities to the kinds of fictions that Attewell teases out.

While *Better Britons* will be fascinating to scholars specializing in empire studies, indigenous studies, and critical race theory, along with those working within post-colonial, queer, and feminist perspectives, anyone working on twentieth and twenty-first literatures within the former British Empire would benefit from reading this

sophisticated book.

Leslie Allin is a recent doctoral graduate from the University of Guelph. She is currently working on her first book project, which, examining adventure fiction and government archives, argues that British aggressions and confrontations in Africa between the Anglo-Zulu War and the early twentieth century produced crises in identity that yielded profound reconstitutions of national conceptions of imperial masculinity and martial efficacy.

The City Space of Asian Literature

CHERYL NARUMI NARUSE

Jini Kim Watson. *The New Asian City: Three-Dimensional Fictions of Space and Urban Form*. University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 311 pp.

Jini Kim Watson's *The New Asian City* is an exciting study of the dynamics between literary/cultural production and developing urban spaces in the context of East and Southeast Asia. Watson examines literary, filmic, and political representations of the capital cities of Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—three of the “Four Asian Tigers,” as the “Newly Industrializing Countries” (NICs) of East Asia are popularly known—that emerge in the 1960s to 1980s, in the periods following independence (excepting Hong Kong, which is not independent nation). The historical period of the 1960s to 80s is notable, as Watson points out, in the degree of urban development that took place in Singapore, Seoul, and Taipei and the roles that these cities played in the depictions of their respective nations as hyperdeveloped economic successes. Besides drawing necessary critical attention to geo-political contexts that are conspicuously absent in existing postcolonial studies and reminding us that postcolonialisms exist in the plural, Watson astutely demonstrates the importance of space for understanding postcolonial historical development as well as the significance of “New Asian City literature and film” for understandings of the relationship between (post)colonialism and globalization. Readers from a variety of audiences will find something of interest in Watson's study. Besides the fields the author identifies as central to her transdisciplinary method—literary, architectural, urban, and film studies—those from Asian studies, gender studies, comparative studies, and critical international relations will also find various chapters in *The New Asian City* compelling.

Throughout the monograph, Watson studies the “*logic and form* of developmental spaces—accessed through the fictional text—rather than the sites or buildings themselves as empirical objects in space” (5, original emphasis) in Singaporean, Korean, and Taiwanese literature and film. Rather than taking literature as a “vehicle of transparent expression” (6) however, *The New Asian City* examines what literature can tell us about the “unevenly productive role of spatial relationships” (7) and “traces broader homologies between narrative form and urban environment” (11). For Watson, attention to the ways space and built environment are *represented* productively keeps in tension the textual and the material. As Stuart Hall reminds us, the paradox

that “culture will always work through its textualities” and yet “that textuality is never enough” must be maintained in order to not lose sight of “intellectual practice as a politics” (272). These examples of the “New Asian City,” a term that Watson borrows from architectural critic Jeffrey Kipnis, exemplify a new model of development in which the city is a productive site of capital, labor, and national subjectivity (2) and intervene into the manner in which postcolonial culture and experience has been theorized by accounting for the spatial configurations that accompanied the economic development of these postcolonial nations (8). Watson rightfully reminds us that the postcolonial condition is not just about anticolonial liberation or the reclaiming of indigenous perspectives, but also about the “effort of postindependent states to transform their political economies under the newly minted banners of nationalism” (89). Perhaps most importantly, in the face of the more typical explanations of these so-called “Asian Miracles,” Watson’s study refuses a triumphalist or exceptionalist account of these New Asian Cities and instead situates Singapore, Seoul, and Taipei as “the profound product of the age of three worlds” rather than an exception to it or as “winners” of globalization (253).

Watson’s monograph is divided into three chronologically ordered parts—“Colonial Cities,” “Postwar Urbanism,” and “Industrializing Landscapes”—and the author provides transition chapters at the ends of Part I and Part II to explain the necessary context and rationale behind the conceptual moves that are made. The opening chapter “Imagining the Colonial City” highlights the centrality of the colonial city in the production of localized social relations between colonizer and colonized, as well as the colonial city’s role in making territorial distinctions within a world system. For those unfamiliar with spatial analysis and its relation to the production of colonial power, Chapter One is a useful primer. Chapter Two, “Orphans of Asia: Modernity and Colonial Literature,” draws on Edward Said’s notion of the “discrepant” as a means of revealing the “everyday level existential contradictions of modernity that in turn put new demands on literary forms” (54). Watson accomplishes this through a comparative reading of Korean author Yöm Sang-söp’s 1924 novel *Mansejön*, Taiwanese writer Wu Zhouliu’s 1945 novel *Orphan of Asia*, and Korean writer’s Yi Sang’s 1936 novella *The Wings*, texts that offer representations of modernizing and colonial urban spaces.

Part II centers on a historical period in which these NICs begin to differentiate from other postcolonies by “exploit[ing] . . . the neocolonial arrangement of global capital” (93). Watson asks what the literature of this postwar period theorizes about this shift and the ways that subjectivity is imagined within this new global arrangement. Chapter Three, “Narratives of Human Growth versus Urban Renewal” examines fiction that, in different ways, adopts the *bildungsroman* form: Korean writer Cho Se-hüi’s short story “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf” (1978), Singaporean novelist Goh Poh Seng’s *If We Dream Too Long* (1972), and Taiwanese Huan Chunming’s

story “The Two Sign Painters” (1974). Watson’s choice to focus on developmental narratives during a historical period characterized by urban growth poignantly draws out “tensions between youth and stability, individual and world, but . . . against a wholly different notion of growth” (100). Chapter Four looks at a seeming paradox that the postcolonial New Asian City woman faces: that despite modernization and industrialization, gender relations appear to remain largely unaltered (137). Through readings of Kang Sök-kyōng’s novella “A Room in the Woods” (1985), Su Weizhen’s short story “Missing” (1988), and Su-chen Christine Lim’s novel *Rice Bowl* (1984), Watson argues that although it may appear that gender relations have not changed, a closer attention to “new spatial arrangements of public and private space” (137) suggests the way that gender hierarchy is recomposed and that the New Asian Woman does not experience the same industrialized feminist consciousness as with the Euro-American context (134). Throughout, Watson’s readings make intriguing connections among the hyperdeveloping contexts in which these texts were written. Her analyses reveal a depth to the literature that indeed challenges “the monolithic logic of the production-orientated New Asian City” (95).

Part III, “Industrializing Landscapes,” examines the significance and effects of modernizing built forms that were hailed as necessary to secure the nation’s future (175). Unlike with the previous two parts, the chapters in Part III each deal with a separate national context, but Watson maintains her comparative focus by making links throughout her analyses. Each chapter looks at speeches and writings by former heads of state as well as literary and filmic texts that highlight “roads, planning, and infrastructure of national modernization programs” to very different, if not often competing, ends (175). Using Lee Kuan Yew’s memoir, *The Singapore Story*, as a point of departure, Chapter Five “The Way Ahead: The Politics and Poetics of Singapore’s Developmental Landscape” looks at the effects of Lee’s nationalized project of urban development as they are reflected in the poetics of Edwin Thumboo and Arthur Yap. Watson contends that the distinction between the two poets as propagandist and ironist oversimplifies their writings, suggesting instead that the difference between the two can be better explained in terms of the significance of Singapore’s developmental landscape (187). Chapter Six “Mobility and Migration in Taiwanese Cinema” reads the early films of Hou Hsiao-Hsien against speeches and writings of Chiang Kai-shek that extoll the benefits of urbanization and the Kuomintang’s emphasis on infrastructural development. Watson proposes that Hou’s films, with all their long shots that define characters by spatial location rather than individuality or personal agency, reflect what she calls a “sideliner aesthetic” (221). Though this aesthetic is a reflection of a particular social condition, the concept is a useful one that extends beyond the New Asian City context. Chapter 7, “The Redemptive Realism of Korean *Minjung* Literature,” compares former Korean president Park Chung Hee’s speeches on the modernization of houses and roads, which he believed essential for a prosper-

ous future, and his general belief in the importance of material development with Hwang Sök-yōng's "The Road to Sampo." In her reading, Watson shows how national consciousness arises *through* processes of modernization and infrastructure (239). She proposes that Hwang's fiction reflects a "redemptive realism" that highlights how "new environments encrypt a *social process* that then is the ground for shared experiences and eventually solidarity" (245, original emphasis). Such a term invites us to think about the ways that the development of New Asian Cities such as Seoul can act as a generative rather than repressive force.

There are many strengths to *The New Asian City*, but two aspects are particularly striking. The first is Watson's aesthetic analysis which is, at all times, attentive to political, historical, and cultural context. For those working in postcolonial studies, Watson's attention to and naming of different aesthetic forms that emerged from the rise of the New Asian City may be particularly intriguing, especially in light of a recently published interview with Robert Young who argues "the aesthetic qualities of postcolonial literature tend to be sidelined" (Noske 5). Watson's thoughtful close readings draw our attention to the craft of postcolonial expressions. At the same time, Watson never loses sight of the political significance of these texts how they index momentous changes both in the world and in their national settings. The second aspect of the monograph worth further comment is Watson's comparative method. The level of analytical depth that Watson is able to perform on the basis of her comparison of three sites is impressive. She certainly makes a convincing case for the New Asian City as a productive analytical category that allows us to better understand the effects of developmentalism. Moreover, Watson applies a meticulous attention to detail to each of the different contexts. Certainly the study is an ambitious one for its wide coverage of national contexts and genres, but Watson does not disappoint. *The New Asian City* a great contribution that demonstrates new directions in cultural theory and it is exemplary for its rigorous reading, theorizing, and historicizing.

Works Cited

- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies." *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing, eds. London: Routledge, 1996. 262-275. Print.
- Noske, Catherine. "A Postcolonial Aesthetic? An Interview with Robert Young." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. 12 Nov 2013. Web. 9 Dec 2013.

Cheryl Narumi Naruse is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Dayton, where she teaches classes in postcolonial literature and literary theory.

Rethinking Political Practice as Continuous Insurrection

VIREN MURTHY

Etienne Balibar, *Equaliberty: Political Essays*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, pp. 365.

The concepts of equality and liberty form the core of modern political culture. And yet, the definition of these terms changes depending on the qualifiers that are attached to them. For example, political theorists have long debated distinctions of positive or negative liberty, formal or real equality. At the crux of these debates lies a more fundamental, constitutive contradiction between these two concepts: freedom when exercised on the capitalist market leads to inequality and when the state enforces equality, it does so by undermining the freedom of certain individuals. Moreover, rights to both freedom and equality require some type of legal apparatus that is customarily bound within nation-state. The connection between nation-state and rights leads to another paradox: liberal ideals of freedom and equality—for instance as they are embodied in the idea of human rights—point beyond the nation-state, but their institutional backing is bound to a particular territorial boundary. While these are not new ideas for Etienne Balibar’s the present volume offers the most substantial collection of essays dedicated to the above issues available in English.

As is well-known, Balibar was one of Louis Althusser’s most famous students and a contributor to the now classic text on structural Marxism, *Reading Capital*. Since that book was published in the eventful year of 1968, Marxist theory has taken a great number of twists and turns, especially with respect to the political project of realizing freedom and equality. But the year 1968 was also a highpoint of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which I believe will offer some insights into Balibar’s theory. In particular, I will follow one strand of Balibar’s argument, which points to a continuous dialectic between a transformation of existing institutions and the reconstitution of new frameworks of governance.

As the subtitle, “Political Essays” indicates, the book is a collection of writings that tackle themes surrounding political theory, practice and Marxism from different perspectives. The book consists of a total of 12 chapters, which are divided into three sections, “The Statement and Institutions of Rights,” “Sovereignty, Emancipation, Community (Some Critiques),” “For a Democracy without Exclusion” and a conclusion,

“Resistance, Insurrection and Insubordination.” The chapters move from the large constitutive contradictions surrounding equality and liberty to problems of sovereignty, exclusion and social movements, to a final section on an ideal envisioning a new type of democracy without exclusion. In many ways, we can read *Equaliberty*, like much of Balibar’s work since *Reading Capital*, as a text that asks about how to continue the Marxist project today. This project implies rethinking and realizing democracy without the exclusions of class, gender, among of a host of other inequalities, while at the same time overcoming the systemic and structural domination of capitalism as a whole. Balibar’s work shows that this will be a continuous task.

Although *Equaliberty* is a quite different text from *Reading Capital*, we can identify a basic similarity, namely *Equaliberty* presupposes the critique of Hegelian Marxism that *Reading Capital* advanced in 1968. In the earlier text, Althusser famously remarked that “no Hegelian politics is possible strictly speaking, and in fact there has been no Hegelian politician” (Althusser and Balibar, 1990: 95). This critique of Hegel was actually geared at Georg Lukács’ reading of Marx and his visions of capitalism as a totality. Althusser countered Lukács’ vision of an expressive totality in which all elements express the same essence, with an idea of a structured or relational totality, in which various elements were articulated with one another to form a whole. Focusing on articulation allowed Althusser the freedom to develop the beginnings of a theory of the state-apparatuses, ideology and interpellation. While Althusser used such a theory to explain the process of subject formation, he did not really account for politics. Balibar’s book is precisely about how the constitutional order, along with its presuppositions, contains contradictions that could be productive for politics. His definition of equaliberty involves such contradictions and possibilities:

I proposed that we regard as crucial the moment of revolution that inaugurates political modernity, making equal right the concept of a new kind of universality. It would be essentially constructed as a double unity of opposites: a unity (even an identity of goal) of man and citizen, which from then on would appear as correlative despite all the practical restrictions on the distribution of rights and powers; and a unity (even identity of reference) of the concepts freedom and equality, perceived as two faces of a single “constituent power,” despite the constant tendency of bourgeois political ideologies (what we would generally call liberalism) to give the former an epistemological and even ontological priority by making it the natural right par excellence (to which the inverse socialist tendency to privilege equality responds). What particularly interests me is the element of conflict that results from the unity of opposites. It allows me to understand why claims for increased powers for the people or emancipation from domination that result in new rights inevitably take a revolutionary form. In simultaneously demanding equality and freedom, one reiterates the enunciation that is at origin

of modern universal citizenship. It is this combination of conflict and institution that I call the trace of equaliberty. (4)

Equal right inaugurates political modernity, with a new kind of universality that is contradictory because it cuts in different directions and is at once national and global. Balibar notes the opposition between the rights of man and the rights of the citizen. The former refers to a universal right that goes beyond national boundaries and the latter is institutionalized by the nation-state. Both, however, are in some way connected to capitalism. Balibar acknowledges Jaques Bidet's input in the forward of the book, and it might be Bidet's work that can ground this tension between the rights of man and rights of the citizen to the structure of capital.

Bidet also takes his inspiration from Louis Althusser and, in a series of books, argues that capitalism should be thought of as an intersection of two structures, namely market and organization (Bidet, 2004; Bidet, 2011). Market refers to the realm where people buy and exchange commodities as free and equal producers, often involving legally binding contracts. Organization, among other things, helps to enforce these contracts and consists of institutions such as the state, which would guarantee the rights of the citizen. In capitalist society, class relations pervade both market and organization. In the market, capitalist can dominate wage-laborers, and on the level of organization, people judged with competence have the power to rule the common people. Already in this conjuncture of structures we have the basis of equaliberty since the both the market and organization presuppose free and equal producers or free and equal citizens. Bidet calls this presupposition of freedom and equality the metastructure, which refers to the normative presuppositions that undergird the idea of the market. These presuppositions are both normative and ideological. They are ideological because although the market presupposes equality and freedom, once the market becomes capitalist, freedom and equality become extreme unfreedom and inequality. This is partially because in the circuit from money to capital to more money or surplus value, there is a social dynamic, which entails a distinction between capitalist and working classes. In short, when we compare capitalism to earlier societies, such as feudal society, we can conclude that a capitalist market entails formal equality, but this systematically turns into real inequality. Although the ideals of freedom and equality are buttressed by organization, the boundaries and scope of these presuppositions are not easy to discern.

In the book under question, Balibar is fundamentally interested in how to theorize various transformative movements that could enable to go beyond the domination and exclusions of the present world and bring about socialism on a global scale. In this context, his idea of the "active citizen" and "resistance" are crucial.

I suggested an association between the names “resistance, insurrection and insubordination,” taken as so many modalities of the critical, negative relation to the law and to power, and the symbolic events of our recent national history, yesterday or the day before, to which there are still living witnesses among us. (282-3)

Note the “negative relation” of the individual to law and power, which implies that citizens do not merely act within the law but push the law beyond its limits, thus expanding its inclusionary potential. From this perspective, the active citizen is precisely someone who is involved in insurrection. Balibar explains:

The active citizen is not, on this account, she who, by her obedience, sanctions the legal order or the system of institutions upon which she has directly or indirectly conferred legitimacy by an explicit or tacit contract, materialized in her participation in representative procedures that result in the delegation of power. She is essentially the rebel, the one who says *no*, or at least has the possibility of doing so. (283-284)

Given that Balibar invokes the citizen as rebel along with ideas of insurrection, it is natural to compare Balibar’s ideas with Mao Zedong’s injunction that “it is right to rebel” and the politics of the Cultural Revolution more generally (Zedong).¹ Recall that in 1966, Mao called on the Chinese masses, and especially the youth, to rebel against the system. This was his way of, at least in theory, rejuvenating society and making people into active citizens who could criticize the party. We can continue to see the Maoist overtones of Balibar’s book when he asserts that:

If some . . . do not take opposition on themselves and exercise the function of dissidence, then there are only passive citizens and therefore eventually no citizens at all but only more or less participatory, more or less governable subjects of administration or power. Democratic citizenship is therefore conflictual or it does not exist. But this also means that democratic citizenship—as revolutionary episodes illustrate par excellence—implies a certain intrinsic relationship to death. In order to save themselves or remain alive as a community of citizens, the city must run the risk of destruction or anarchy in a confrontation with its own members from which nothing can protect it, above all not criminalizing dissidence or suspecting conscientious objection of treason. (284)

The key difference here is between passive subjects and active citizens. In addition to Mao’s China, Marx’s “On the Jewish Question” could also help us understand this distinction. In both texts, there is a concern that people will become the mere objects

1 For a discussion, see Alain Badiou, 2005.

of rule, rather than subjects of political action. In a market capitalist system, where a realm of civil society is institutionally separate from the state, citizens tend to become subjects who merely consume, rather than participate in politics, which is often monopolized by a party-politics embodied in the state. Using Bidet's model, politics is left to the "competent leaders" (*dirigent competents*) in organizations such as the state. In the case of Mao's China, there is something similar in that it is the "competent" party members who lead and participate on behalf of the people. Notice from earlier citation that the active citizen does not merely participate through the mechanisms of representation; rather she rebels against them, thus intimating the mortality of the present political system.

Such a rebellion implies a democratic citizenship, which in turn is connected to the possible and actual death of society. Here again, Mao's cultural revolution serves to exemplify this idea of social death and rebirth, a radical reconstitution of society through active rebellious political practice. The Cultural Revolution tended of course towards anarchy, which gave rise various types of domination and Balibar is of course not advocating repeating this period of history. Rather, Balibar's work echoes that of the Chinese New Leftist, Zhiyuan Cui, who in the mid-1990s caused a great deal of controversy when he called for the institutionalization of the Cultural Revolution (Cui, 1997).² Cui's characterization anticipates Balibar's conception a continuous the dialectic between insurrection and institution. In various parts of the book, Balibar attempts to show how this contradictory dynamic of insurrection and institution has played out historically in various areas from issues of secularization, liberalism and the recent uprising in the banlieus of Paris. The book poses important questions for political theory and deserves to be widely read, discussed and debated.

Works Cited

Althusser, Louis and Balibar, Etienne. *Reading Capital*. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: Verso, 2011. Print.

Badiou, Alain. "An Essential Philosophical Thesis: 'It is Right to Rebel against Reactionaries,'" *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, Vol. 13.3 (2005): 669-677. Print.

Bidet, Jacques. *Explication et Reconstruction du Capital*, Paris: PUF, 2004. Print.

² The essay is also available at: <http://www.mitbbs.com/bbsann2/news.faq/Salon/temp3/M.990459091.A/> 崔之元: 毛泽东文革理论的得失与。Last accessed May 25, 2014.

Bidet, Jacques. *L'État-monde: libéralisme, socialisme et communisme à l'échelle globale*, Paris: PUF, 2011. Print

Cui, Zhiyuan. "Mao Zedong wenge lilun de deshì yu xiandaixing de chongjian" [The contributions and shortcomings of Mao Zedong's Theory of the Cultural Revolution and the Reconstitution of Modernity], in *Zhongguo yu shijie*, vol. 2. 1997. Print.

Viren Murthy teaches Transnational Asian History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is the author of the book, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan: The Resistance of Consciousness*, Leiden: Brill, 2010 and co-editor of *The Challenge of Linear Time: Nationalism and the Politics of History in East Asia*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, and co-editor of *Global Historical Thought*, London: Blackwell, 2014. His major interests include, Marxism, Postcolonialism and social theory.

Literature and Labor under Neoliberalism

WALTER OLIVER BAKER

Sarah Brouillette. *Literature and the Creative Economy*. Stanford University Press, 2014. 238 pp.

What is the difference between the worker and the artist under capitalism? Historically, the two can be distinguished by object of their labor: the artist works for the sake of work itself, a disinterested labor whose autonomy gives rise to creativity and self-expression, whereas the worker, compelled by the necessity, works for a wage whose function is merely to sustain and thus reproduce the worker's life. While freedom from the market stimulates and invigorates the mind of the artist, the market's relation to the worker, writes Marx, "destroy[s] the actual content of his labour by turning it into a torment. . . alienat[ing] from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process" (799). But what if this distinction between wage-worker and artist collapsed, and the object of labor for both became indistinguishable? Sarah Brouillette in *Literature and the Creative Economy* argues that collapsing the two produces the worker of the creative economy. Brouillette describes the creative economy as set of beliefs and practices in which in the figure of the artist is used as a model in the interests of capitalism for converting older forms of routinized and mechanized labor into new forms of post-fordist labor that appear creative and autonomous, yet less-secure and more easily exploitable.

Brouillette's aim in studying the creative economy is not to debate whether it exists, but rather, as she puts it, "to focus attention on how and why faith in its existence has become consequential" (2). Her project tracks creative economy ideology as it manifests in the policies of Britain's Labour party during the 1990s, postwar Maslovian psychology and its relation to business management theory, recent trends in urban development and gentrification, and the literary market of contemporary British fiction. While *Literature and the Creative Economy* offers close readings of five novels and book of poetry, it also scrutinizes the institutional discourse of government and business in which creative economy ideology is realized. Through this approach, Brouillette provides readers not only with an institutional history of the creative economy, but also an explanation of art's integral role in its formation, challenging the assumption that art inherently critiques or offers alternatives to capitalism. This is argument complements the work of Luc Boltanski and Éve Chiapello who demonstrate

in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005) that the “artistic critique” of capitalism, best expressed in the hippie cultures of the 1960s, precipitated new forms of capitalist production in which the demand for greater worker-autonomy “is exchanged against security, to the point where it is often a forced, involuntary autonomy, difficult to equate with freedom” (430). Like Boltanski and Chiapello, Brouillette’s aim is to call attention to the ways in which the desire to be autonomous from capital is often used to support rather than oppose its expansion.

Brouillette locates the inception of creative economy ideology in the work of celebrity academic Richard Florida and his book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), as well as in the policies of Britain’s Labour Party during the 1990s. Working as a high-paid consultant, Florida propagates the creative-labor model not only because, as he believes, it leads to greater happiness and pleasure, but because in doing so it increases worker productivity and efficiency, leading to greater profits for corporations who take up this model of employee management. Similarly, Britain’s Labour Party considered the investment in creativity a condition for Britain’s success in the global economy. Labour Party leaders surmised that increased access to art and culture would generate among British workers creative experiences in which they could gain the skills necessary for new forms of affective and communicatory labor of the world’s emergent immaterial economy. Furthermore, these creative experiences would teach workers that cultural equality is more important than economic equality, and that collective organizing leads to losses in freedom and autonomy. Brouillette thus considers the creative economy a neoliberal ideology that weakens collective labor, legitimizes economic inequality, and masks the antagonism between labor and capital.

By modeling forms of labor on the life of the artist, the creative economy also demonstrates a neoliberal belief in the concept of human capital in which the worker’s life and the skills and abilities produced therein are regarded one’s personal capital. This belief is best expressed in Brouillette’s chapter on famed psychologist Abraham Maslow and the business management theory that his work inspired. Maslow thought that work modeled on the artist provided opportunities for self-improvement and self-actualization, a kind of self-enhancement that would not only heal the psychosis of modern man, but also augment the worker’s capacity for innovation. In Foucault’s work on neoliberalism, he points out that neoliberal economists like Gary Becker considered work-place innovation the greatest solution for resolving capitalism’s problems. They also assumed that this innovation stemmed directly from “investments made at the level of man himself” (Foucault 231). Creative-economy proponents thus invest in creativity and the innovation that it produces by presenting work as a process in which the worker’s life can be formed into a life of the artist—a life whose value is measured by the innovation it provides to business. Creative-work consists less in selling one’s time to capital than it does in enhancing one’s life for

capital. In the creative economy, life no longer “begins . . . at the table, in the public house, in bed,” as Marx believed, but rather becomes a form of labor itself in which striving to live a creative life like that of the artist is the content and object one’s work (25).

The question *Literature and the Creative Economy* raises is if art can be used to challenge rather than legitimize capitalist power. In other words, is there a way out of this loop of capitalist appropriation? For Brouillette, the answer lies in abandoning the belief that creativity is a natural condition of human existence. Instead, we should understand it as a historically contingent concept that emerges as a product of rather than a point of resistance to capitalist modernity. In perhaps the most ambitious section of the book, chapter 2 “Work as Art/ Life as Art,” Brouillette argues that the critiques of immaterial labor offered by Italian autonomists Paolo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri implicitly contain this ahistorical understanding of human creativity. Comparing the autonomists to Richard Florida, Brouillette asserts that while the autonomists may oppose capital’s commodification of social and aesthetic life outside of the factory or office, a feature of creative-labor that Florida celebrates, they, like Florida, still “imagine creativity as located within individuals’ unconscious experimental energies and self-expressive capacities” (35). For the autonomists to believe in a universal creative-self found in the “mass intellect” of the “multitude” belies the relationship this image might share with the interests of capital. Thus, to historicize human creativity is to confront the ways in which this concept serves to uphold rather than subvert capitalist reality.

If Brouillette shows us how art and the life of the artist are used to support neoliberal capitalism, her account is also complemented by an examination of how contemporary artists themselves make sense of this relationship. In her chapters on contemporary British fiction, Brouillette explores the question of how literary artists come to terms with their own position as creative-workers, as well as how their fiction reflects, produces, or even perhaps critiques creative-economy ideology. Brouillette begins with Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008) and Monica Ali’s *In the Kitchen* (2009), two novels that not only represent the psychological pain of the creative-worker’s pursuit of neoliberal entrepreneurialism, but also reflect over their authors’ relationship to the kinds of creative-labor these novels attempt to critique. Brouillette argues that Adiga and Ali, like their protagonists, display an ambivalence toward their participation in a creative economy built upon the exploitation of cheap labor performed by the world’s material economy. Brouillette points out a similar problem in Daljit Nagra’s book of poetry *Look We have Coming to Dover!* (2007) and Gautam Malkani’s novel *Londonstani* (2006). These authors promise to represent the often overlooked ethnic or marginalized communities of Britain’s population, but confront a market in which these stories are only consumed for their cultural diversity and/or experiences

of “real-world” authenticity. The problem, then, is that these communities must live in conditions of poverty and violence in order for their lives to appear diverse or authentic in the first place.

If literature’s once subversive feature was its autonomy from the market, it is clear today that autonomy is literature’s most marketable feature. However, Brouillette suggests that for literature to be once again critical of the world it represents it will have to enact a self-conscious form that foregrounds the limits of its autonomy. Two novels that Brouillette believes exemplify this form are: Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005) and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005). McEwan and Ishiguro are writers who “tend now not just to position themselves as critics but [who] use their work to explore the barriers to effective critique” (17). These novels represent instances in which literature not only fails to critique capitalist reality, but also explicitly supports and produces it. *Saturday* reveals how literature is used to avoid political commitment, and soothe class antagonism, while *Never Let Me Go* shows how “social and political values conventionally ascribed to art’s critical capacities have been and can be challenged and undermined” (205). Both novels highlight rather than suppress the problem of the artistic autonomy, and in so doing, offer a way forward rather than a way back into the loop of the creative economy.

Literature and the Creative Economy provides us, then, with an important contribution to the study of art’s relation to capital, earning its place in a long line of thought from Theodore Adorno, to Pierre Bourdieu, Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton, among others, who have made the question of art’s relation to capital a core focus of their scholarly work. If for these scholars the question of art is how it can be autonomous, for Brouillette the question is how art might be self-critical of the limits and potentials of its assumed autonomy. “Pressing for me,” writes Brouillette, “is the way in which the arts reflect upon the possibilities of their own autonomous status. Art becomes a space where the struggle between autonomy and the market takes place—a space in which the possibility of establishing some sort of autonomous relation to capital is imagined and negotiated and in which the limits of the market are made plain” (207). According to Brouillette, it’s not a question of whether art can be once again autonomous; rather, it’s a question of whether artists can make the problem of autonomy itself the object of representation.

While Brouillette usefully clarifies the problems and potential for the artist and literary production today, her account remains located within, and arguably limited to the specific context of the immaterial economy of the global north. In other words, Brouillette’s study of the creative economy is largely a study of the world’s consumer society whose problem, she points out, is the emergence of a new ideology of creative-work that helps exploit more efficiently the labor of its workers. Yet, no study of the

global North's immaterial economy is complete without an account of its relationship to the material economy of the global South that structurally determines it in the first place. This is a relationship in which, as Richard Godden remarks, "the periphery bled tribute to the center and poor nations effectively subsidized rich ones by way of the cheapened, robbed, and abused bodies of their laboring populations. . . [material] labor, however peripheral to thought and geography, however seemingly disposable, retains its place at value's core" (421). While at times Brouillette acknowledges this correlation, particularly in her discussion of the novels of Adiga and Ali, her focus remains on whether artists of the global North can make sense of, or even critique, an immaterial economy that has found new ways to exploit their creative capacities. Perhaps a further question to ask, one that complements rather than counters Brouillette's concern over how art represents its role in the formation of a creative economy, would that of art's capacity to represent the structural relations of global capitalism in which the labor of the global North is dialectically linked to the labor of the global South.

Works Cited

- Boltanski, Luc and Éve Chiapello. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Gregory C. Elliott London: Verso, 2005. Print
- Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-79*. Trans. Michel Senellart. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.
- Godden, Richard. "Labor, Language, and Finance Capital." *PMLA* 126.2 (2011): 412-441. Print.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. Ben Fowkes. New York: Vintage Books, 1977. Print.
- . "Wage Labour and Capital." *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: Norton, 1978. Print.

Walter Oliver Baker is a PhD student in American Literary Studies at the University of New Mexico where he studies the relation of literary form and aesthetics to modes of economy from the late nineteenth century to the contemporary. His dissertation project compares the literary forms of American literature that represent capital's periphery—the site of primitive accumulation and proletarianization—to the literary forms representing capital's industrial and financial centers.

Popular Media and the Rhetoric of Colorblindness

SHARON YAM

Catherine Squires. *The Post-Racial Mystique: Media and Race in the 21st Century*. New York University Press: 2014. 243 pp.

Written in a time when public deliberation is suffused with conflicting discourses and representations of race, Catherine Squires's *The Post-Racial Mystique: Media and Race in the 21st Century* deftly interrogates how the increased popularity of the post-racial narrative of "colorblindness" intersects with the material conditions of systematic racism. Deploying a variety of research methods and analyzing cultural artifacts such as mainstream news media, network TV programs, and online political commentaries, Squires cogently argues that popular post-racial discourse serves the interests of white voters and consumers, while masking structural and systematic racism. Employing mixed-method research that includes data mining, focus group interviews and content analysis, Squires demonstrates that what she calls "post-racial mystique" is in fact conjured simultaneously by institutional racism and popular media texts that deny inequalities. In order to combat popular narratives that seek to erase or dismiss racial subjugation, Squires advocates for "a community-centered multi-racial approach to public memory [that] exposes both the democratic and undemocratic processes in our past" (206). Overall, engaged with critical race and media studies scholarship, *The Post-Racial Mystique* is a timely contribution that critically engages with both oppressive and potentially empowering discourses on race in the U.S.

Driven by the increased popularity of the term "post-racial" in popular media, the book explores how such a narrative is conjured, deployed, and used at "the juncture between the entrenched effects of institutional racism and the media texts that deny—or purport to resolve—racial inequalities" (5). Situating post-racial discourses in the current sociopolitical and cultural context, Squires argues that such narratives align with the neoliberal concern of the individual over the systematic. As a result, the effects of racial inequalities—such as unemployment, single parenthood, and incarceration—are commonly constructed ahistorically as individual irresponsibility. Organized into five main chapters, this book analyzes news discussions, Christian media, network TV, social media discourse, and finally, racially-aware and anti-racist independent blogs and websites that "move fluidly between identity groups, pop culture

and politics” (14). Throughout the book, Squires demonstrates her intellectual commitment to an anti-racist project by deploying a myriad of research methods over a large amount of primary data; that, in turn, serves to illuminate and debunk the different components that construct and perpetuate institutional racism through post-race discourse.

In the first chapter, Squires diligently traces the rise of the term “post-racial” in mainstream news media from 1990 to 2010. Connecting post-racial discourse to demographic change and electoral politics, Squires demonstrates how the color-blind narrative forecloses productive public discussions on institutional racism by recasting racial identity, practices and performances as merely a matter of personal choice and responsibility. Exhaustively sifting through news articles that have mentioned the term “post-racial,” Squires critically engages with a large amount of primary data and performs careful close reading of 300 relevant articles. Her rigorous research process thus allows her to persuasively argue that post-racial discourse continues to operate on existing racial stereotypes: even supposedly “post-racial” black politicians, for example, are constructed “as the other side of the binary—the angry black politician who plays ‘the race card’ and ultimately wants to punish white” (44). Most importantly, this chapter demonstrates how post-racial discourse masks existing racism in electoral politics by positing the invisibility of race.

Drawing on the intimate connection between electoral politics and religion, the second chapter examines the way candidates and religious leaders mobilize post-racial discourse to redirect the voters’ attention from racial identities to a supposedly more all-encompassing national identity. This chapter explores how white evangelical churches argue for post-racial political cooperation based on shared religious value. In particular, Squires examine “how they reframe histories of racist exclusion and/or domination of those publics” in order to convince their black audiences and voters. After performing rhetorical analysis on the third *Justice Sunday* religious conference, Squires presents data she has collected in a focus-group study with 11 religious African American students who identified as practicing Christians. Her study demonstrates that despite the post-racial strategies deployed by politicians and church leaders, African American voters remain suspicious. Ultimately, Squires cogently argues that “this post-racial strategy may really be for the benefit of white voters, for it provides them with a post-racial means of imagining solidarity with black people” (95).

After spending two chapters poignantly interrogating and criticizing the use of post-racial logics in politics, Squires directs her focus to network TV—particularly the series *Parenthood*—and viewers’ subsequent responses to the representations of the interracial family. In Chapter Three, Squires offers a critical content analysis of *Parenthood*, especially series’ portrayal of interracial relationships and the way race intersects with class and gender. She argues that “in the post-racial imaginary, the [hetero-

sexual] interracial couple (with whom no one has a problem) serves to bridge the gap between the racial past (which forbade such unions) and the future (when this won't be an issue)" (105). The problem of such representations, however, is that it overwrites racial struggles and presumes that racism no longer exists. In addition, Squires also argues that the series privileges the perspective and experience of the white father, while portraying the black mother through racial stereotypes. Post-racial portrayal of interracial relationships, in other words, only serve to dismiss systematic racism by encouraging viewers not to notice persistent forms of oppression and discrimination.

Since *Parenthood* is a network TV series popular amongst both white and black audiences, Squires sets out to explore audience responses across different interpretive communities. To do this, Squires collects, codes, and analyzes discussion threads on the show's Facebook page, particularly threads relating to the main characters' interracial relationships. While many white audiences evoke and reinforce racial stereotypes when discussing the show, Squires also finds members of the audience who contest such representations. Drawing on personal experience, their own interpretations of the show, and media history, certain discussants challenge their fellow viewers for either perpetuating racist representations or for "not seeing" racism. In addition to illustrating audience investment in the representation of interracial relationships on TV, Squires's study demonstrates that negative stereotypes about black women—together with misunderstandings related to the ways interracial families look and behave—persist. The series' attempt to be post-racial, in other words, obscures the circulation of knowledge concerning the forms of racism that many people of color continue to experience on a daily basis.

Exploring alternative racial discourse in popular media, Squires turns her attention towards narratives in independent web-based news and opinion resources, such as *ColorLines*, *Racialicious*, and *The Black Snob*. Juxtaposing these racially aware news sources with the mainstream post-race media, Squires is interested in how independent writers define the term "post-racial" as part of an anti-racist campaign, and how they intervene in a dominant racist culture that promotes color blindness. After discussing the way how these bloggers of color connect their personal experience to structural racism and the larger sociopolitical context, Squires argues that it is necessary for the public to develop a different orientation towards racial citizenship: one that does not see race "as a destructive and divisive mode of identification" that belongs to the private domain (167). Ultimately, Squires points out, "these bloggers illustrate how people of color, GLBT, and white allies share similar experiences with and analyses of racial hierarchy, discrimination, and abuses of power. It is through these shared experiences, they argue, that shared investments in organized struggle develop" (185).

In her conclusion, Squires forcefully restates the danger and downfall of post-racial discourses: she argues that “the dominant white-oriented ‘progress’ narrative attends only to triumph and glosses over the pain, struggle, and losses—losses that are the product of white supremacist domination” (196). By telling the story that racism no longer exists, post-racial discourse found in mainstream news media, entertainment sources, and political representations threatens to rewrite the social imaginary and collective memory of racial struggle. At the end, Squires poignantly calls for “a community-centered, multi-racial approach to public memory [that] exposes both the democratic and undemocratic processes in our past” (206). Passionately written and painstakingly researched, Squires’s *The Post-Racial Mystique* is productive not only to communication and media scholars, but also to researchers interested in the connections among citizenship, race, and representation.

Sharon Yam is a PhD candidate in Composition and Rhetoric at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research examines the intersections between transnational citizenship and critical emotion studies. She teaches writing classes on multilingualism, race, and immigration.

Anthropocene Diplomacy, or How to Negotiate Ecologization

HEATHER DAVIS

Bruno Latour. *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013. 489 pp.

In the wake of the terrifying fifth assessment report (AR5) issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Bruno Latour's latest book, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, makes a rather odd request: he asks his readers to stop, slow down, and reconsider the values of modernity. The book takes readers on a long journey to re-compose the understanding of what it means to be modern, with the goal that this evaluation will provide increased flexibility to confront the vastness of the ecological crises we are now faced with. This recent project can be seen as the flip side of *We Have Never Been Modern*, first published in French in 1991, which analyzed the ways in which modernity failed to live up to its own espoused beliefs, displaying, through painstaking detail, how modernity is constantly undone through its practices: that there cannot be, and has never been a unified project. In *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence (AIME)*, Latour performs the "positive version" of the predominantly critical *We Have Never Been Modern*, conducting what he calls "an anthropology" of the moderns, seeking to understand the Moderns' values while dissecting the epistemological assumptions behind them. In it he tries to fairly assess what might be worthwhile in our current institutional frameworks, in order to move from modernization to what he calls ecologization.

This project is gleaned from thirty years of questionnaires and careful note-taking, asking people in the domains of politics, economy, organization, religion, and art to describe their practices. Instead of looking at these disciplines through their epistemological assumptions, Latour examines the details of everyday engagement, the ways in which meaning is created in the actions of practitioners. The subtitle, "an anthropology of the moderns," is not incidental, but describes the ethnographic methodological approach underpinning the book, even as it reads as a "provisional report." Extending the critique of science that Latour has been developing throughout his career into these multiple arenas, *AIME* systematically works through all of our major institutions to account for the breadth and depth of modernity, paying particular attention to the moments where these institutions intersect and overlap, in order to begin the difficult task of re-composing a new kind of collective project, under the

name and terms of ecology, or Gaia.

It won't come as a surprise to readers familiar with Latour's work that his main target, underlying all of the institutions that he examines, is the divide between subject and object, which has resulted in what he calls a "metaphysical famine" (148). This critical terrain has also been carefully explored by Frédéric Neyrat, another theorist in the ecological tradition who has clarified that it is not separation itself that causes the problem, the goal is not a relativist flattening within an immanent field. The problem arises with a definitive split, a position that makes no relation possible (besides that of the negative) between the subject and object. Latour's philosophical project, drawing on the work of Étienne Souriau, Gabriel Tarde, Alfred North Whitehead, Gilles Deleuze, Isabelle Stengers and others, complicates this ontological division, without reducing everything to one smooth immanent plane, by examining the particular values of each domain. He reveals the ways in which both the idea of an autonomous Subject is completely untenable—a lonely, isolated, and bereft position—and that the reduction of Objects ignores and limits our perceptions of the world and the way that our attachments animate it. Latour turns to the term "modes of existence," borrowed from Souriau, to express ontological plurality beyond this reductive division. Modes of existence expresses, and classifies the multiple ways of addressing worlds. Each being must be addressed from within its own singular language, and respected within its modality. Modes of existence posits a pluralist ontology where "A mode of existence is...always both a version of BEING-AS-OTHER (a debiting of discontinuity and continuity, difference and repetition, otherness and sameness) and also its own regime of veridiction" (Latour 183). In other words, a mode of existence contains a consistency unique to itself, but one which constantly borrows from, is crossed over and into by the other modes, creating the generative possibility for dynamic change. And it is by tracing these crossings, using Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) methodology, that the scope of the project of modernity becomes apparent.

The philosophical premises of the book asserts a radical activity of the world itself, insisting on the plurality of the worlds which need to be addressed. Latour takes this demand of animacy seriously, asserting that, "It is *the world itself that is articulated*" (256, emphasis in original). By this he means that the world lends itself to a kind of narrativity, a metaphysical orientation in which it produces its own characters, its own actions, a vitality of the world that cannot be reduced to this simple binary. From this position one can see the political orientation of the project: if the world demands to be articulated then the stories we tell ourselves about the world fall into the realm of ethics. How can we begin to tell different stories in order to address the catastrophic ecological times we find ourselves within?

To answer this question Latour returns to a rather old-fashioned mode: diplomacy.

Diplomacy assumes that we need to re-negotiate the terms of self and other within each mode of existence, to see the value in each mode, even if we cannot take on its epistemic assumptions. For example, we need to respect the beings of religion, the attachments that religion calls for, without necessarily taking on a transcendent God. I call this turn old-fashioned because in a time when cities and municipal governments seem to be at the vanguard of ecological policy-making, Latour returns to the motif of a global war where the stakes and claims of each side need to be articulated clearly in order to set out on a new course. To a large degree this seems like a perfectly legitimate plan of action. It is clear that the catastrophes that we now face really do call for a new sort of globalization, or ecologization, but given that international committees, specifically the IPCC, have been attempting these negotiations since 1988 with few policy results, or results that are far outweighed by their failures, this seems an odd turn. Yet the diplomat—the one who is as devious as they are naïve—is a central figure for Latour.

Latour vehemently identifies the economy as the real stumbling block to any negotiation under the present terms. He asks, “can the Moderns finally become *agnostic* where The Economy is concerned?” (470). Latour identifies the ways in which the economy has ascended to the immovable and ahistorical position that Nature used to occupy, whereas nature, under the weight of the Anthropocene, is now thoroughly historical and in a constant state of transformation. But, if it were possible to shift our position towards the economy, perhaps the dream of diplomatic relations might become a possibility. The question remains how to proceed.

That the larger project of AIME consists of an online platform where people can access the book (together with notes, bibliography, index, glossary and supplementary documentation) and can also upload contributions constitutes an attempt to enact these diplomatic relations. Recognizing the necessity of moving beyond the Internet, the project also incorporates face-to-face meetings with ‘co-investigators’ to bring together practitioners of the modes of existence that the project addresses.¹ Here the contradictions begin to become apparent, not necessarily in the thought itself, or within the parameters laid out by the book, but in terms of the place of academic literature in relation to political, or diplomatic procedures. Asking readers to take on the task of reading and understanding an imposing book embedded in a particular philosophical tradition and then to meet Latour on his terms in order to begin the difficult task of forming a collective capable of facing Gaia brings up the question of the adequacy of traditional academic venues for such political projects. As Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira suggest in their new book *The Imperial University*:

¹ AIME operated from 2012 until July 2014. The project, including the website and international consultations, has since closed

Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent, the university is often a far more conservative institution than we might like to think—perhaps not the best place from which to launch political negotiations. What new languages and modes of existence need to be created in order for us to influence the political regimes that we are interested in? And wouldn't this type of project need to be built from the point of view of the practitioners from the beginning? And if this work seems rather far-fetched, what kinds of institutions should we be investing in, if not academia, in order to begin to enact the kind of change that we imagine? Latour's project may fail to even begin to achieve its stated goals, lofty as they are, but the value can be seen precisely in the questions that it leaves behind with the reader, especially for those of us invested in, or caught by academic institutions. Certainly, Latour is far from naïve about the ambition and feasibility of the project he proposes in *AIME*: “[Y]ou have to be *idiotic* to throw yourself into something like this, no question, but this sort of idiocy is a stage that may not be superfluous, if it serves to open up a space between experience and its institutional rendering” (480). The haunting thought that it leaves behind is that this gesture may not have come soon enough—our thought, politics, and modes of existence are both too fast and too slow in the terms of the earth.

Works Cited:

Ahmed, Nafeez “Nasa-funded study: industrial civilisation headed for ‘irreversible collapse’? *The Guardian*. 14 March, 2014. Web.

Chatterjee, Piya and Sunaina Maira, eds. *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg1/>

-----. *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*. <http://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/>

Johnson, Elizabeth and Frederic Neyrat “The Political Unconscious of the Anthropocene” *Society and Space – Environment and Planning D*. March 20, 2014. Web.

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993. Print.

Souriau, Étienne. *Les différents modes d'existence*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de

France, 1943. Print.

Heather Davis is a researcher and writer from Montreal. She is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at Pennsylvania State University. She researches the intersection of art, politics, and environmental catastrophe. She is the editor of *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Politics, Aesthetics, Environment and Epistemology* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, forthcoming). Her collected writing can be found at heathermdavis.com.

Realism After Postmodernism

SEAN HOMER

Fredric Jameson. *The Antinomies of Realism*. Verso, 2013. 313 pp.

In his 1977 “Afterword” to the volume *Aesthetics and Politics* Jameson observed that it was not only political history that was condemned to repeat the past but also literary history that experienced a certain “return of the repressed”:

Nowhere has this return of the repressed been more dramatic than in the aesthetic conflict between “Realism” and “Modernism”, whose navigation and renegotiation is still unavoidable for us today, even though we may feel that each position is in some sense right and yet neither is any longer wholly acceptable. (1977, 196)

For Jameson, at that time, it was paradoxically realism that offered the possibility of a new political aesthetic, as modernism’s aesthetics of fragmentation and estrangement had become irredeemably reconciled to the logic of the market and consumer capitalism. The renegotiation of realism and modernism was put on hold for the next two decades, however, as Jameson emerged as the most prominent Marxist theorist of postmodernism. Since the late 1990s Jameson has made a welcome, to some of us at least, return to the question of modernism and modernity with a series of works: *Brecht and Method* (1998), *A Singular Modernity* (2002) and the collected volume *The Modernist Papers* (2007). With *The Antinomies of Realism* we finally return to that long deferred renegotiation of realism but, as we will see below, against a background of the eclipse of modernism by full-blown postmodernism.

The Antinomies of Realism constitutes the third volume of Jameson’s sequence *The Poetics of Social Forms*, a literary project that is surely without comparison today. The sequence has a projected six volumes of which four have been published to date: *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of late Capitalism* (1991); *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005); *The Modernist Papers* (2007); while *A Singular Modernity* (2002) provides “the theoretical section of the antepenultimate volume” and a footnote in the book on Hegel’s phenomenology promises that volume two will be on allegory, entitled *Overture: The Harmonics of Allegory* (2010a, 126, n. 41). As Sara Danius describes it, *The Poetics of Social Forms* attempts to “provide a general history of aesthetic forms, at the same time seeking to show how this history can be read in tandem with a history of social and economic formations.” As always with Jameson, it is the form

that is historical rather than the content. *The Antinomies of Realism* reads realism in terms of shifting temporalities, as an evolutionary process in which its positive and negative aspects are inextricably tied together. In a sense Jameson's realism is akin to Lacan's *objet petit a* (1977 [1973]), that paradoxical object cause of desire that we are constantly searching for but can never possess, for as soon as we believe we possess it, it slips from our grasp. The temporality of *objet a*, therefore, is characterized by a paradoxical sense of anticipation and loss, we can never grasp the thing itself, it is always anticipated in the future or missed in the past. As Jameson puts it in relation to realism:

It is as though the object of our meditation began to wobble, and the attention to it to slip insensibly away from it in two opposite directions, so that at length we find we are thinking, not about realism, but about its emergence; not about the thing itself, but about its dissolution. (2013, 1)

Thus, Jameson's approach to realism will not follow any of the traditional approaches to the problem. He quickly runs through Auerbach, Bakhtin, Lukács and Sartre (2013, 1-5) only to inform us that he will not follow any of these directions, but will address the issue dialectically.¹ It is in this sense that Jameson will historicize realism, insofar as history and the dialectic are at one with each other, and history "can only be the problem of which it claims to be its own solution" (6).

Approaching realism through temporality and what he sees as the twin sources of realism, the narrative impulse and affective investment, Jameson generates a startlingly original reading of realism. As the narrative impulse is clearly older than the realist novel, a modern but not modernist form, Jameson locates this particular impulse in the tale and storytelling, or *récit*, and this introduces the first complexity into our sense of temporality. Storytelling is based on a notion of irrevocability, or an unheard-of event that becomes memorable and worthy of retelling over and over again and, as Walter Benjamin taught us some time ago, what binds such events together is the experience of death. Storytelling, for Benjamin, is not so much biography as obituary, as the event has always-already happened and is in the past, hence the centrality of death to the novel (1968 [1936]). The temporality of this irrevocable but memorable event is thus redefined in the story as 'what cannot be changed, what lies beyond the reach of repetition or rectification, which now comes to be seen as the time of everyday life of routine' (2013, 19). Affect, on the other hand, points us towards not the past but the present; to speak of affect, observes Jameson, is to speak of the body or

¹ Although, as David Cunningham (2014) notes, *The Antinomies of Realism* does carry on a subterranean dialogue with Lukács, in particular the essay "Narrate or Describe?" (1970), as Jameson seeks to redeem Zola from Lukács' critique.

the postmodern “reduction to the body” and its specific temporality of a “perpetual present.” The discussion of the narrative impulse, death and affective investment in the first two chapters of *The Antinomies* resonates with Peter Brooks’ Freudian inflected model of narrative in *Reading for the Plot* (1984), especially with Brooks’ interest in nineteenth century literature, but as we will see below Jameson steers away from the psychoanalytic perspective. In short, Jameson approaches realism as a paradox or aporia, a literary form constantly struggling with its own conditions of possibility to narrate the past and its dissolution in the literary representation of affect in a perpetual present. It is this historically new realm of affect that creates the irreconcilable tension of realism; as Jameson notes, “to resolve the opposition either way would destroy it” (26).

Affect is a notoriously slippery term. Within psychoanalysis affect is sometimes taken as simply a synonym for feelings or emotions (see Rycroft, 1968, 3) and, at other times, affect is carefully distinguished from both (Johnston and Malabou, 2013, xvii). For Catherine Malabou, affect is generally speaking a modification, that is to say, the result of “the impact of an encounter, be it with another subject or an object” (2013, 5). Jameson is not using the term in a strictly psychoanalytic sense, however, and his own discussion of affect is restricted to questions of representation and literary history, that is to say, the representation of different forms of affect and their impact on realist narratives. He does distinguish between affect (feelings) and emotion or “named emotion,” as he terms it, to register the impact of language and the fact that emotions are conscious states insofar as “the nomination of an experience makes it viable at the very moment that it transforms and reifies it” (2013, 34). On the other hand:

affects or feelings which have not thus been named are not available to consciousness, or are absorbed into subjectivity in different ways that render them inconspicuous and indistinguishable from the named emotion they may serve to fill out and to which they lend body and substance. (34)

But he does not go further into the technicalities of affect or the controversy around whether or not one can meaningfully speak of “unconscious affects.” In contrast to named emotions, affect does not “mean” anything. What is important for Jameson is affect’s relationship to the body and the possibilities of its combination with the longer-range forms of temporality of storytelling, *récit* and destiny (46). Thus, for example, Zola’s novels offer us immense accumulations of bodies in movement across space, where the sheer overload of sensations and intensities inscribed on these bodies intersects with the pseudo-scientific notion of “tainted heredity” as a unique form of temporality. History intersects with personal histories in the sheer excess of “bodies in full effervescence, paralysis or decay” as affect thus becomes “a symptomatology

reinforcing the great realist project at the very moment it imperils it" (76).

The Antinomies is such a wide ranging book that it is difficult to capture its sheer breadth in a short review. In the first half of the book Jameson focuses on the twin sources of realism, analyzing the formal function of happiness in Tolstoy and *mauvaise foi* in George Eliot. He moves from an analysis of plot in Zola to character systems and the waning of "protagonicity" in Pérez Gladós (that is to say, even the protagonists of Gladós are essentially minor characters, as the historical conditions slowly render individualism meaningless), the role of the villain in Eliot to problems of genre and the function of pronouns in Flaubert and Henry James. Jameson's own narrative arches from the emergence of realism in the tale and récit to its dissolution in modernism's "uncontrolled linguistic production" (187) in the works of Joyce, Woolf and Henry James. It concludes with a brief coda on the sundering of narrative and affect in the, perhaps, anachronistic work of Alexander Kluge. I must admit that at times I was not sure affect was the right word to describe what Jameson was talking about here, which was often much more to do with the transformation of bodies and subjectivities than affects as such.

Part two of *The Antinomies* shifts the focus from specific authors to more general issues of form. "Experiments of Time" addresses issues of salvation, providence and destiny. "War and Representation" concludes that war is fundamentally unrepresentable and virtually non-narrative today. The long concluding chapter "The Historical Novel Today" draws together many of the preceding discussions arguing that the popularity of the historical novel today must be grasped as a symptom or symbolic compensation for the decline of historical consciousness itself. Jameson does not cite specific examples here but refers to "Harlequin histories" or romantic tales set against this or that costume setting; the attempt to reconstruct historical situations in which "real" historical figures made some fateful decision; and finally, the attempt to capture the "feel" of some great event through the eyes of an imaginary character. In other words, he identifies the very kind of postmodern historicism and pastiche that we are familiar with from his long standing concern for the loss of historicity in the era of postmodernity. This shopping list of potential responses to the progressive impossibility of the historical novel in the Twentieth century thus underlines Jameson's long standing concern for the loss of the historical referent and its dissolution in the globalized economy of the image. Paradoxically, then, the historical novel is an impossible form or genre that is still massively practised and hugely popular. How, asks Jameson, can we account for this when the conditions of possibility of such a form, the nation state, have declined? The answer to this lies in the fact that the "true historical novel, today, is not the historical novel at all but rather realism as such" (262). Hilary Mantel stands in for the contemporary historical novel and her huge popularity certainly attests to its continuing cultural centrality. If Mantel provides us

with a model of the historical novel today what is the future for this impossible form? Here we shift to familiar Jameson territory. As Jameson writes, “the historical novel of the future (which is to say of our own present) will necessarily be science-fictional inasmuch as it will have to include questions about the fate of our social system” (298). The examples Jameson provides here are drawn from film, in particular Christopher Nolan’s *Inception* (2010), but the appearance of film and mass culture at the end of this discussion of the historical novel raises an issue that he does not explore here. Surely the best examples of the persistence of realism in our culture today are to be found on television. I am not thinking here of reality TV as such but of those magnificent series that have been produced by US commercial television in the past two decades such as *The Wire*, *Breaking Bad* and *Deadwood*. This would surely have been the place to bring in these contemporary forms of realism, not least because Jameson himself has written so insightfully about them in the past (2010b).

Works Cited

- Benjamin, Walter. “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov.” *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn. London: Fontana Press, 1968 [1936]. Print.
- Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984. Print.
- Cunningham, David. “The contingency of cheese: On Fredric Jameson’s *The Antinomies of Realism*.” *Radical Philosophy*. 187 (2014): 25-35. Print.
- Danius, Sara. “About Fredric R. Jameson.” *Holberg Prisen*. Holberg Prize, 2008. Web. 25th June 2014.
- Jameson, Fredric. “Reflections in Conclusion,” Adorno et al. *Aesthetics and Politics*. London: Verso, 1977. Print.
- . *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit*. London: Verso, 2010a. Print.
- . “Realism and Utopia in *The Wire*,” *Criticism*, 52: 3-4 (2010b): pp. 359-72. Print.
- Johnston, Adrian and Malabou, Catherine. *Self and Emotional Life: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Neuroscience*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. Print.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Trans. Alan Sheridan, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977 [1973]. Print.

Lukács, Georg. "Narrate and Describe?" Trans. And Ed. Arthur Kahn. *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*. London: Merlin Press, 1970. Print.

Rycroft, Charles. *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968. Print.

Sean Homer is Associate Professor of Literature at the American University in Bulgaria. He is author of *Fredric Jameson: Marxism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism* (Polity Press, 1998) and *Jacques Lacan* (Routledge, 2005). He is co-editor (with Douglas Kellner) of *Fredric Jameson: A Critical Reader* (Palgrave, 2004) and (With Ruth Parkin-Gounelas and Yannis Stavrakakis) of *Objects: Material, Psychic, Aesthetic*, a special issue of *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism* vol. 14 (2006). His recent publications have been on Balkan Cinema and he is currently working on a book on Slavoj Žižek and radical politics in the Balkans.

After the Aftermath

ROB COLEY

Siegfried Zielinski. [*...After the Media*] *News from the Slow-Fading Twentieth Century*. Trans. Gloria Custance. Univocal, 2013. 276 pp.

Media theory has a problem with the new. The new is an obstacle, it is obsolete, it is yesterday's news. Of the many responses to a late 20th century obsession with "new media," current attempts to rethink the dominant historical narrative of media culture best encapsulate the problem. This disruptive set of methods and approaches has come to be known as media archaeology (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011). For figures associated with the emergent field, such as the German theorist Siegfried Zielinski, conventional histories of media are too selective, too closely aligned to a restrictive linear progression from past to present. For Zielinski, the unquestioned authority of this narrative produces a problem with the term media itself. Media becomes aligned to the spectacle of progress, synonymous with the bright universal future (Zielinski 2006: 32). In [*...After the Media*] *News from the Slow-Fading Twentieth Century*, Zielinski employs archaeological methods to reexamine media after the future. As he makes clear from the outset, this is not motivated by paradigmatic posturing but by the urgent need to redeem media criticism at a time of crisis.

Appropriately, he begins in polemical terms. We are told that the radical and revolutionary promise of media technologies has proven ersatz. Our current state of permanent connectivity should instead be understood, in Foucauldian terms, as a *dispositif*, which is to say that media are now "practical constraints," cultural techniques at which we are required to become adept. In the 21st century, media takes the form of socially anesthetizing routines which "are at the greatest possible remove from what whips us into a state of excitement, induces aesthetic exultation, or triggers irritated thoughts" (19). As he later says, for today's "digital natives" technology is simply a set of commodities, it has little experimental attraction. The result is ossification: a state of "stabilized boredom" in media thinking and practice (20). Importantly, Zielinski considers media education to be entirely complicit in this situation. In the tragic reduction of multiple interdiscursive practices to a state of institutional discipline, the middleness of media has been lost. Consequently, he argues, contemporary criticism requires a different perspective, "a profoundly dislocated point of view" (21) that works in opposition to the comfort of the disciplinary center.

Elsewhere, Zielinski has similarly described a "deep time" perspective, a political

maneuver aimed at salvaging difference from homogeneous history and bringing this variation into a relationship of tension with the present. In this, he is influenced as much by Benjamin and McLuhan as he is by the paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould, from whom he adapts the concept of deep time. However, similar strategies are not entirely unfamiliar to other areas of media theory. For McKenzie Wark, “high theory,” or media and cultural theory proper, is paralyzed by the disappointments of failed revolution, by the collapse of the future. A traumatized, grief-stricken victim of a bloody defeat, high theory does little more than sift through its own ruins, piecing together its dismembered remains (Wark 2011: 156). In response, Wark calls for “low theory,” for a theory that draws on forgotten figures and repressed events, theory as political tactic for exposing false promises, for revealing “the void between what can be done and what is to be done” (ibid.). Zielinski describes this opposition as one between the general and particular, between *the media* and *media*. In his account, *the media* is a strategic generalization of variable and competing discourses into a single discursive mechanism. Yet, he insists, simultaneous to this, *media* (without definite article) has always been practiced by certain individuals and small groups—media as radical experiment. This is media that belongs “to the resistant particularities, to the free-floating singularities”, all of which means that the theorist’s job is to reveal such singularities by excavating “the machinery of the systemic” (24). In [*...After the Media*], Zielinski does this by setting aside his typically “deeper” perspective for an “aerial” viewpoint of 20th century history in which the past is viewed “not as a collection of retrievable facts but as a collection of possibilities” (14). The book is conceived as a swift flight across such possibilities.

Accordingly, Chapter 1 takes the form of a one hundred page *tour d’horizon*, a rapid genealogical expedition to map the ways in which media has been conceived over the last seventy years. Zielinski does this by identifying certain years that appear to have magnetizing properties—these were moments of intensity in which radical possibilities became repressed by *the media*. He initially presents these moments as hand drawn clusters of names, diagrams in which canonical figures come into collision with unconventional or dissenting individuals. Attracted by the pull of 1948, the year in which Norbert Wiener defined cybernetics, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver are diagrammed with, among others, John Cage, Mark Rothko and Hans Bellmer. In 1961, the year the Berlin wall was constructed, Noam Chomsky and Roland Barthes are brought together with Felix Guattari, Alain Robbe-Grillet and William S Burroughs. And so on. In a journey in which relations and linkages are not immediately obvious, the chapter begins with cybernetics and ends with Baudrillard’s simulacrum, interspersing the usual Anglo-American trajectory with less familiar accounts of the academic, art and scientific scenes in Germany.

In Chapter 2, Zielinski offers an “operational” development of his methodology,

aimed at engaging with “the history of the special frictions between the arts, sciences, and technologies” (127), in order to map a certain *cultura experimentalis*—a culture that confronts the “functional circuits” of the media with other possibilities (162). As indicated by the dense constellation of names that appear earlier, part of Zielinski’s attempt to map this frictional between-space involves a search for artists who grasp the particular in opposition to the general. Initially, this involves a series of new clusters, and an extended commentary on the work of Nam June Paik. But it also allows Zielinski to better define his schema of different relational qualities. He outlines this, first, in terms of art *with* media, a situation familiar to the instrumental relationship produced by the communication and entertainment industries. Second, he refers to art *through* media, in which he excavates the experimental origins of media that is now disciplinary and algorithmic. And, third, he calls for art *after* the media, here carefully distinguished from reactionary fantasies of flight from, or rejection of technical media, in favor of an engagement with media in a newly reflexive manner. Finally, though, he emphasizes that any truly experimental culture must draw on techno-receptive art *before* the media. This archaeological conception of the past is less concerned with what has been, with actual media, than it is with what might have been, with imaginary media: “If I am looking to extract options from the future, then I have to grant the past the right to exist in the subjunctive” (133).

Frustratingly, though, Zielinski’s method fails to generate the friction that is promised. Brief glimmers of oppositional figures are quickly lost amidst historical layering. His dizzying excursion through the 20th century certainly avoids high theory’s hermeneutic trap by mapping out particular intensities, but for all his insistence on experimentation, on the development of profane rather than sacred relationships with media (261), Zielinski tends to glide along a familiar surface, pausing only occasionally to uncover something obscured from view. He does acknowledge the subjective nature of his technique, but his insistence that there is more to this method than personal selection never quite stands up to scrutiny. Indeed, the danger with his method is that decisions about what to sweep past and what to dwell on often appear to be motivated by little more than opinion and prejudice. Style is undoubtedly an issue here, and Zielinski’s references to philology, computer writing, and cut-ups reveal that style is something he takes seriously. Yet, on occasion, the consequence of this style is an insensitivity to the actual differences between theoretical positions. For example, in his hurried passage through Italian Autonomist thought, Hardt and Negri are lumped together with Maurizio Lazzarato, Paolo Virno and Matteo Pasquinelli, but the important subtlety of their differences is missed. Furthermore, though Zielinski contributes to important and ongoing attempts to demonstrate the exclusion of German media theory from the discipline’s Anglo-American narrative (indeed, media archaeology itself is nothing new, and Zielinski charts the misfortunes of German research that, decades after its original publication, still awaits translation), he

sometimes gives the impression that redressing this balance is akin to settling scores.

In Chapter 3, Zielinski's journey traverses 21st century media theory. Here, he reserves his most trenchant critique for obscurantism, "merry postmodern transgression" (201), and the naïve techno-utopian rhetoric of cyberculture. He also targets canonical figures of new media, including Geert Lovink, founder of nettime, and Lev Manovich, author of *The Language of New Media*, accusing the latter of employing a bogus historical method and merely repackaging existing ideas in a form easily marketable as media studies handbook. There are, understandably, more appreciative nods toward the work of Manuel DeLanda, who is noted for his own method of non-linear history, and some positive words for contemporary theorists who directly address the social consequences of continual connectivity. This last point becomes the focus for Chapter 4, in which Zielinski addresses the integration of cybernetic logic into "a psycho-social context" (244). Here, *psychopathia medialis* is figured as a technological unconscious, a state of "existing" that amounts to "little more than engaging in technology-based communication" (251). Again, Zielinski's response is to call for a reflexive state of "being," a state that is attuned to "the interwovenness of its communicative activities and in a broad sense can realize itself relatively independently from them without adhering to any disastrous notions of essential unities" (251).

However, his insistence on this point highlights a contradiction that runs throughout his work. As he argues elsewhere, the problem with any discourse of technological progress is that such accounts overlook the fact that technology is "deeply inhuman" (Zielinski 2006: 6). This means that being or becoming "after the media" must also take place after the *human*, after an anthropocentric conception of media and mediation. And yet, Zielinski's archaeological approach—based, as it is, on disrupting a dominant narrative of invention by excavating the suppressed histories of great men—remains a thoroughly human centered exercise. In the end, where Wark proposes low theory as a negative tactic, one that confronts absence, impossibility and paradox, Zielinski tends to affirm alternative layers of an otherwise familiar story. Indeed, even if we were to ignore this impasse and celebrate the inclusion of figures previously absent from Anglo-American media studies, the fact remains that many of these figures are simply not profane *enough*.

As a case in point, Zielinski offers the work of Jake and Dinos Chapman, darlings of what was once called the Young British Art scene, as exemplars of radical experimentalism. He commends their iterative techniques of acceleration, transgression and excess as tactical incursions into history, as defamiliarizing assaults that provoke a subjunctive perspective on the future. And yet the ironic detachment and humor of the Chapman brothers' most recent work not only anesthetizes any residual capacity to

shock, but aligns their work far more closely with the glib ironies of the postmodern Zielinski so derides than it does with the properly reflexive practices of the modern he venerates. In this, the idea that the Chapmans maintain some kind of insurgency from within the art world is unconvincing to say the least. If Zielinski directs us to look here for signs of a contemporary avant-garde, then it seems clear we will find only a neoliberal avant-garde, an avant-garde fully immanent to the flows of the market. If he believes there are other more genuinely radical forms of contemporary practice, forms that exist outside of the gallery circuit, then he gives no indication as to what these might be or where we might look for them. Perhaps the book's closing manifesto, "Vademecum for the Prevention of *psychopathia medialis*," is aimed at bringing such practice to the surface. Ultimately though, there is little sense as to whom such a declaration is addressed and Zielinski's final gesture obfuscates as much as it rouses. As the tour comes to an end, his passengers are left stranded. .

So after the aftermath, after the postmortem of the new, does media archaeology really open up alternative ways to make media, or, as Wark (2014) has recently asked, "is it just a way of filling the scholarly archive with more and more stuff?" After racing through the rags and refuse of contemporary media culture, it remains unclear to what extent we *are* after the media, or whether this remains an as yet unrealized goal.

Works Cited

Huhtamo, Erkki, and Jussi Parikka., eds. *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications and Implications*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011. Print.

Wark, McKenzie. 'Where Next for Media Theory?' *Public Seminar* 9 April. 2014. Web. 3 June. 2014.

Wark, McKenzie. *The Beach Beneath the Street: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*. London: Verso, 2011. Print.

Zielinski, Siegfried. *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006. Print.

Dr Rob Coley is a lecturer in media theory and practice at the University of Lincoln, UK. He is the author, with Dean Lockwood, of *Cloud Time: The Inception of the Future* (2012, Zer0), and with Adam O'Meara and Dean Lockwood, of *Photography in the Middle: Dispatches on Media Ecologies and Aesthetics*, (forthcoming on Punctum Books). Rob is a founding member of The Society for Ontofabulatory Research.

Media Theory at the Limits of Communication

A L E K S A N D R A K A M I N S K A

Alexander R. Galloway, Eugene Thacker and McKenzie Wark, *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation*. University of Chicago Press, 2014. 210 pp.

“By being off the radar, you move in a different space, a jubilee zone of exception.”

— John Durham Peters, “Speaking Into the iPhone”

Like all such rare and catastrophic events, the disappearance of flight MH270 during a routine flight between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing in March 2013 spurred a frenzy of media coverage and public fascination. But what made this particular incident unusual was that there was no story, in the sense that the story was unknown, its telling based on hypothetical theories rather than fact; the missing aircraft could not be found, there were hardly any traces to follow and the leads were ambiguous at best. Indeed, the mystery of flight 370 became so unsettling because it broke the illusions of a media age: despite the highly sophisticated technologies of space exploration, global communication, satellites, personal mobile devices, surveillance and monitoring, it was still possible—despite the efforts of governments, industries, experts and families—to lose a plane with 239 passengers and crew on board. The infrastructures of hyper and excess communication, it turned out, still allowed for a commercial plane to disappear from the grid without a trace, the usual signals, tracking and communication methods providing no definite answers to its whereabouts. What the public learned in the endless hours of news coverage, which for weeks spun increasingly outlandish and hyperbolic stories to fill airtime and the appetite for some, any, information, was how fragile and flawed our infrastructures—of communication, not to mention aviation—really are. To compound this unsettling realization, as the search for the plane progressed and turned to the Indian Ocean the public also learned that its depths are more mysterious than the moon, and that our technologies and knowledge are extremely limited when it comes to assessing what is deep inside the waters that cover most of our planet. The general confusion caused by the vanished plane turned into a confrontation with the mysterious, unknown and insurmountable limits of communication and with the possibilities of being excommunicated—of escaping, disappearing or going missing—from the world’s communication channels, networks and tracking systems. There quickly surfaced a

host of conspiracy theories to explain this bewildering, inconceivable even, situation, turning to everything from aliens to supernatural occurrences to account for this loss of sight, this silence, and the absence of not only communication, but of communicability itself. A fundamental aspect of the human condition, as John Durham Peters argued in *Speaking Into the Air*, is the problem of communication, of finding empathy through communication, and thus of finding ways to bridge the gap to the other that ultimately allows us to coexist together. It is remarkable, considering this political and ethical significance, that there is so little attention paid to what happens not only when communication fails, but when it becomes impossible.

What is beyond the possibility of mediation? How is it possible that we may miscommunicate so thoroughly as to lose a plane, or shoot one down by accident (as was allegedly the case of Malaysia Flight 17 while flying over Ukraine in summer 2014)? This broad and multifaceted concern into that which cannot be communicated and where mediation is impossible is at the centre of *Excommunication: Three Inquires in Media and Mediation* by the seasoned New York-based media scholars Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker and McKenzie Wark. The book is structured around a co-authored introduction, which is followed by discrete ‘inquiries’ contributed by each of the three respectively. Each of these may be read as an independent essay though there are clear threads that weave them together, for example through a shared conceptual and theoretical approach built on the German media theory of Friedrich Kittler and an explicit engagement with Continental philosophy in general. The authors of the book are in particular indebted to the writings of François Laruelle—“the most important author today for any theory of excommunication” (52)—who has developed a philosophy of the “non-communicability of the real” (164). Also apparent throughout is the influence of figures like Jean-Luc Marion and Raoul Vaneigem, from whom they draw to investigate this idea of communication at its limits.

In the introduction the authors boldly lay out their dissatisfaction with the current state of media studies, and sketch out a manifesto for a new kind of media theory. Arguing that the story of media theory in the 20th century has yet to be written, that “media studies today operates with a somewhat limited conception of what media are” (7), the authors aim to expand the boundaries of this often ambiguous field. The ambition of the volume, as set out in the introduction, is that of pushing the study of media and mediation across the vast terrain of humanities scholarship, transcending disciplines to move towards a “media theory without qualification” (3) where “mediation does not merely add something to the existing list of topics that scholars study. It changes the practice of study itself” (1). Though the study of communication and media is often preoccupied by its responses and reassessments of the ‘new’ (new media, new gadgets, new technologies), the authors argue that the exertion of so much energy on all of this ‘newness’ is a distraction. The conditions and problems

of mediation and communication, which we are working so feverishly to resolve through ‘newness,’ are in fact ancient and distinct from questions about the tools, or media, of communication: “does it have to be new to be an object of a theory, can we think about media without thinking about temporality, about whether it is new or old; what exactly is new?” (1). Having a grasp of media as material is essential, but the authors urge us look passed the smokescreen of novelty and look at our media conceptually, as mediating particular processes and transformations that “affect conditions of possibility in general” (1). They locate their discontent by pointing to influential traditions such as the Frankfurt and Toronto Schools, which, by laying the groundwork of ‘media studies’ in a focus on devices have put aside the exploration of mediation itself. The authors move freely in the language of philosophy, the classics, religion, hermeneutics, materiality, literary theory and art history, outlining a media theory that addresses their fundamental concern: “Have we not forgotten the most basic questions? Distracted by the tumult of concern around what media do or how media are built, have we not lost the central question: *what is mediation?* In other words, has the question of ‘what’ been displaced by a concern with ‘how?’” (9).

Pushing the questions of mediation to its limits by entering the space of excommunication, the authors’ bold intervention compels us to consider what happens when mediation is not enough, when it becomes insufficient or impossible, when what is on the ‘other side’ of media is unknowable, incomprehensible or radically unhuman. Turning away from the Socratic tradition, where communication is tied to truth, presence and reciprocity, the authors position excommunication in the realm of theology, where it is tied to judgment and “implies an original infraction, an infraction which elicits some kind of removal” (15). Specifically, what they have in mind are those “mediative situations in which heresy, exile, or banishment carry the day, not repetition, communion, or integration” (10). Excommunication, in this Christian ecclesiastical meaning, is a termination of communication tied to the ousting from a human community. To explain this exclusion the authors propose “not so much a post-media condition but rather a non-media condition, not so much extensions of man but the exodus of man from this world....a glimpse into the world of the *nonhuman*” (21).

In “Love of the Middle,” Galloway lays the ground of a theory of excommunication that is still centred around the human, and sets up four models of mediation—what he calls middles—that explain the kinds of relationships that happen in the quest for communication. He first turns to the Greek classical figures (“avatars”) of Hermes and Iris as the canonical binary that has shaped thinking about how we communicate. From the influential Hermes came the hermeneutic tradition, where mediation became rooted in ideas of interpretation and meaning, and aligned with concepts such as representation, circulation, exchange. The counterpoint to complicated Hermes

was the clarity of Iris, where light as pure information formed a tradition of communication based on iridescence and illumination, and from where come the ideals of communion, immediacy and immanence. Galloway proposes an additional model based on the Furies as a reflection of our current world, characterized by infuriation, the dissolution of the human body and the introduction of new complex system like swarms, assemblages, networks and rhizomes that dissolve the traditional models based on Hermes and Iris. All three of these modes however also contain paradoxes, excesses or perversions, and by acknowledging the possibility of the unknown that happens at their limits they “incorporate the logic of excommunication into themselves, since they each acknowledge the impossibility of communication, whether it be via deception, immediacy, or multiplicity” (30). Galloway’s fourth and final model is based on Aphrodite, where after the formless frenzy of the Furies there is a return to presence and the body. As a sexual mediation Aphrodite transforms her reputation as *genial* in the sense of convivial, “the lover of smiles,” to include the desire of sexual appetites, “the lover of the sex” (68). Galloway argues that Aphrodite brings together and traverses the other modes of communication as the mediation of the middle, a pure communication before or beyond the chasm between bodies has been created, a communication without division, “never lost in foreign lands like Hermes, or so ethereal and light like Iris, or horrifyingly chthonic and nonhuman like the Furies” (64).

In “Dark Media” Eugene Thacker takes the reader into the world of the Furies and the nonhuman. He reaches to the spiritual and supernatural realms, where communication becomes uncanny and strange, and media become haunted, dead or weird, not because they are malfunctioning or misused, but because they are working too well, transformed from mediating the epistemological, to mediating different realities and ontologies (101-102). In excommunication, he argues, there is an attempt to mediate not between humans, but with the ontological other. At this limit, beyond this threshold, is an annulment of the very possibility of communication. In Thacker’s dark media, media are not mere artifacts but rather portals into other worlds, to ‘other-worldiness’ or the divine, trying to mediate that which is inaccessible to overcome the space between object and thing. He points to an interesting paradox of today’s devotion to technology: though the public has become savvy to the machinations, manipulations and distortions of media and mediation, it also holds on to a belief or hope that perhaps these media may mediate something yet unknown, that these machines could explain, reveal or lead us to a somewhere ‘beyond.’ Thacker turns to medieval mysticism and the genre of supernatural horror to explore the dark media that bind the human and the nonhuman, this world and another, asking “what role media play in this charged space between scientific reason and religious belief” (87). In the ‘Information Age’ we still wonder about other dimensions, and in this lies the appeal of the portals of dark media, the mystical passage that may lead us to another ‘unreasonable’ world.

Finally, in “Furious Media: A Queer History of Heresy” McKenzie Wark moves the conversation to another kind of excommunication, from the supernatural to the heretic. He develops the concept of xenocommunication, a “communication with the impossible, with the infinite, with the great outdoors—the totality,” (161) focusing in particular on Christianity and its “authority to speak of, and speak with, God” (184). The portals of xenocommunication, of communication with the ‘other-worldly’, claimed by philosophy and religion, in turn produce heretical disruptions where “what has to be excommunicated is the swarm, the plurality of protocols, the free openings and closings of portals of xenocommunication outside of central control” (178). Only through excommunication is communication possible; only through excommunication is the Christian church possible. Inspired by Raoul Vaneigem, Wark plots a heretical counter-history of Judeo-Christianity, where heresies become tactical media theories (195), and the protocol of xenocommunication is one of controlled access and exclusion to the portals of mediation.

Excommunication provides an inroad to a new kind of media theory and philosophy and exactly the kind of original response we now need in order to engage the novel media situations that are transforming how we ‘do’ media studies (Lovink). Drawing on French philosophy and Greek classicism results in a book with compelling proposals for the philosophy of media and mediation. Taken together, the three ‘inquiries’ collected in this volume point to the versatility, complexity and usefulness of the idea of excommunication. References to the supernatural, alien and divine notwithstanding, where the idea of excommunication may be felt most immediately is in tapping into the simmering desire, for those who have such a choice, to disconnect from the frenetic energies of hypermediation, and to find opportunities of contemplation and reimagination in the spaces of communicative exclusion. The book provides a model for productively engaging with those messages—emerging, for example, from states of personal or political apathy, silence or refusal—which declare that there will be no more communication (10). The search for silence, retreat, withdrawal, unplugging, all reflect a longing to step outside of the limits of communication, to remove oneself, to indeed excommunicate oneself, if temporarily, from the excesses of the Furies.¹ Through this mode of inquiry, the authors suggest some important questions that

¹ See, for example: *The Retreat*, eds. Sarah Blacker, Imre Szeman and Heather Zwicker, *PUBLIC Journal: Art Culture Ideas* 50 (Fall 2014); Daniel. A. Gross, “This is Your Brain on Silence,” *Nautilus*, 21 August 2014, <http://nautilus.us/issue/16/nothingness/this-is-your-brain-on-silence>; Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2014); Chloe Schlama, “Silence Is Now a Luxury Product,” *New Republic*, 4 March 2014, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/116846/how-silence-became-luxury-product>; Pico Iyer, “The Joy of Quiet,” *The New York Times*, Sunday Review, Opinion Section, 29 December 2011.

update media studies for a current age, acknowledge the limits, the overabundance, the exhaustion and dissatisfaction that characterize this moment, and rightly remind us that there exist worlds outside of what can be communicated and mediated, and that this is where media studies, beyond disciplines, must take us.

Works Cited

Kane, Carolyn L. and John Durham Peters. "Speaking Into the iPhone: An Interview with John Durham Peters." *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 34.2 (2010), 122.. Print.

Lovink, Geert. "Hermes on the Hudson: Notes on Media Theory after Snowden." *e-flux*, 54 (April, 2014). Web.

Peters, John Durham. *Speaking Into the Air*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. Print.

Aleksandra Kaminska is a Mitacs Elevate Postdoctoral Fellow at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver and a Research Associate at Sensorium: Centre for Digital Arts and Technology at York University, Toronto. Her first book, *Polish Media Art in an Expanded Field* is forthcoming from Intellect Press. www.aleksandrakaminska.com

