The Order and Disorder of Things

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Ruth Wodak, *Disorders of Discourse*, Longman, Harlow 1996, 200pp; £14.99 paperback. Sara Mills, *Discourse*, Routledge, London 1997, 177pp; £7.99 paperback.

For more than a quarter of a century now, 'discourse' has been a prominent keyword in debates within the humanities and social sciences. Across fields ranging from sociology, political theory and anthropology to psychology, linguistics and literary analysis, the concept has both helped and at the same time problematised how we understand the contribution made to the social construction of the real by what we refer to broadly as representations. Studies of discourse have shown how language is not only representational but also a behavioural practice: part of a web of social transactions and interactions through which social relations are enacted, reproduced, and challenged.

The scale of Foucault's influence in particular on current cultural debate is reflected in the extent to which discourse is viewed differently now: no longer simply as continuous stretches of text (as it mostly was in the never-fully-consolidated field of text grammar), or even as the behaviour of interpreters as they try to make sense of utterances, but rather as contextualised, representational practices which constitute objects they speak about within a larger social field in which a complex and uneven dispersal of power takes place. What makes the concept of discourse so attractive to the many different disciplines which discuss it is that it offers to mediate the relation between formal, linguistic regularities and the historical and political structures of the cultural. It is only when discourse is scrutinised as an analytic concept in need of a clearly-stated investigative methodology, rather than as an indication of general interest, that the instability inherent in that attractiveness is revealed: then investigation of 'discourse' is seen to stand awkwardly at an intersection between at least two potentially divergent traditions.

From the perspective of linguistic description, the notion of discourse has been central to accounts of linguistic organisation beyond the level of the sentence, especially various kinds of dependency between sentences. Study along these lines formulates theoretical concepts including cohesion and coherence, illocutionary force, and 'moves' made up of related speech acts within large chunks of text, especially conversation. Detailed enquiry is possible into the contribution made to discourse comprehension by implied meanings which result from presuppositions and implicatures. The social

contexts of discourse, and complexity of socially-acquired background knowledge, present continuing, fundamental challenges; and within discourse analysis it has also been difficult to analyse negotiations of meaning where conflict, rather than co-operation, appears a structuring principle, or where different categorisations of discourse units are required to represent the differing viewpoints of respective participants in a speech event. In exploring such topics, linguistic discourse analysis typically explores formal, functional, and cognitive categories largely independently from the changing forms of social and institutional life. Its interest lies rather in how cultural forms are represented in describable features of discourse, and in the cognitive processes through which discourse is produced and processed.

From the different perspective of social theory, the concept of discourse is used to describe groups of utterances, texts or (what Foucault calls) statements which are considered together on the basis of their role as building blocks of, or strands within, social organisation at a given place and time. The substance, boundaries and consequences of such statements can be discussed, as well as why one particular statement is formulated in a given context rather than another. Individual instances of language use are located within larger discursive formations or regimes, susceptible to analysis in terms of their overall social and historical functioning, especially with respect to ideology. For studies of discourse along such lines, Althusser's ISAs and Gramsci's concept of hegemony have been particularly important, as well as Foucault's own account of the constitutive as well as regulative properties of power. The work of Michel Pêcheux in France, as well as that of Norman Fairclough in Britain, represent a sustained effort to connect social theories of discourse to traditions of linguistic analysis.

The present, widespread appeal of 'discourse' depends largely on its invitation to bridge the material substance and organisation of language and socio-historical or political structures. Any given instance of discourse tends, for example, to be in implicit dialogue with other previous or surrounding utterances, in a complex kind of intertextuality; and features which confer unity on a given cluster of utterances - in virtue of formal regularities, who produced them, their topic, or their institutional setting - are not only reflected in generic conventions (or style) but form a deeper stratum of epistemological and social constraints or rules. To the extent that discourse conducts power, such conventions and constraints take on an additional significance: they ascribe to respective discourses different amounts of what Bourdieu has described as the symbolic capital each enjoys within the linguistic field, and are treated (or inhabited) accordingly by language users. On a case-by-case basis, interpretation of specific pieces of discourse can aspire to bridge text and society by explicating how language encodes culturally-acquired contextual assumptions which are embedded in the texture of discourse at a level where they are no longer self-evident. Such assumptions are retrieved by interpreters when triggered as different sorts of implied meaning and mobilised in larger readings of the world. By

making such processes open to reflection, we may hope not only to understand the workings of discourse better, but also to gain insights into how discourse organises point-of-view and perceptions of social experience and social relations.

There are a large number of accounts of discourse - of both an introductory and tendentious kind - which deal with particular strands within the wide range of approaches alluded to here. But few usefully compare or contrast the different intellectual traditions. Sara Mills' *Discourse* and Ruth Wodak's *Disorders of Discourse* are distinctive in explicitly acknowledging that the accumulation by the term 'discourse' of senses from different traditions poses important questions. Each writer disentangles different senses of 'discourse' while at the same time locating discourse studies within, and seeking to contribute to discourse studies on the basis of, a clearly-delineated paradigm.

For the New Critical Idiom's *Discourse* volume, Sara Mills sees her task as describing especially the senses that discourse has acquired from Foucault and which have been extended (or 'modified' or 'appropriated') in theories which characterise themselves as socially-engaged. To illustrate the connection between description and cultural engagement, Mills includes two useful case-study chapters, one on feminist applications, the other on colonial and post-colonial discourse theory. In early chapters, the book sets out key concepts, and contrasts an account of discourse and ideology (in Chapter Two) with an outline of Foucault's early views of discourse (in Chapter Three). These chapters describe arguments rather than offering summaries of particular works; it is left to later chapters to trace particular trajectories from Foucault's views, which they do by moving closer to summary of a series of specific, individual writers. A final chapter then assesses approaches to discourse in social psychology, linguistic discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis (including critical linguistics).

Written in a clear, expository style, *Discourse* is a combination of introductory and 'position' book. Emphasis is on what notions of discourse (and 'discourse theory') make possible in accounting for power relations, rather than on methodological or epistemological issues. After presenting its commitment to a general Foucauldian framework the book does not engage systematically in comparison between or critical evaluation of the different approaches it introduces. Instead it emphasises the general proposition that different meanings of discourse represent parameters of a 'complex matrix of issues concerning knowledge, truth and power' (p27).

The book is most persuasive when describing early-period Foucault, especially the interest and importance of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Arguably less convincing is its frequent appeal to 'theorists' without accompanying comment on theoretical problems raised by the relation of Foucault's early and later works, or between Foucault's own work and later studies influenced by it. It is difficult in fact to establish from Mills' commentary exactly what a theory can or must be in the discursively relativist

Foucauldian perspective she outlines. While the book clearly does not share the political pessimism implicit in some readings of Foucault, it remains slightly vague about what gives more than rhetorical legitimacy to theoretical and political work derived from Foucault's ideas.

Ruth Wodak's *Disorders of Discourse* is interesting not only in itself but also because of the contrast it provides. Like Mills' book, Wodak's *Disorders of Discourse* distinguishes initially between uses of the term 'discourse', and provides helpful background in a substantial first chapter. Wodak goes on to characterise her own work as 'critical discourse sociolinguistics', describing an intellectual formation which combines variationist linguistics and the text analysis of writers like Dressler and Van Dijk with social theory influenced less by Foucault than by Habermas. It is Habermas' appeal to communicative evolution, and an ideal of rational communication undermined by 'disorders of discourse', which provides the basis for Wodak's suggestive title. 'Disorders' occur in discourse where, for instance, there are deep conflicts between the world-view required to construct implied links needed to make a discourse coherent and the cognitive frames actually brought to bear in interpretation, or where asymmetries of power distort communicative relations (such as turn-taking rights) between social subjects.

While *Disorders of Discourse* might be described as introductory in terms of its care and clarity of exposition, it at the same time reports specific research projects in which Ruth Wodak has been engaged over a long period: research into the relation between comprehension and comprehensibility at points of interface between public institutions and everyday life. Case-study chapters present fieldwork in Vienna involving both quantitative and qualitative data (translated from German); and careful consideration is made of methodological problems raised by interdisciplinary critical research. In a series of close analyses, disorders are diagnosed within doctor-patient discourse, school committee meetings, understanding the news, and therapeutic interaction.

Wodak's discussion is less incisive, however, regarding the long-term effects of critical discourse analysis (CDA), especially how far the discourse reforms CDA might advocate may be simply appropriated by dominant social interests. In a final chapter, the general speculation is offered that discourse in the public domain might be beneficially remodelled along the lines of therapeutic discourse (which provides a 'model for change'). But while it is interestingly argued that disorders need to be at least acknowledged as part of the human condition if they are ever to be changed, the suggestion that such acknowledgement can be empowering rather than merely assimilationist is not fully developed, and discussion comes to a slightly abrupt end.

Discourse and *Disorders of Discourse* share a common supposition which distinguishes them from what most people in cultural studies would regard as mainstream discourse analysis: that investigating discourse should be critically engaged. In this respect, both books are concerned to amplify a

cluster of related insights which are worth briefly restating. Language (along with other forms of representation) plays an important role in social reproduction, but is at the same time contested within the overall social order. Because of its unsettled but influential position in these respects, language can be usefully investigated in terms of its relations to power and ideology, where power in such a context is not confined to the exercise of force or rule of law but also involves asymmetries between participants in discourse events, and a more general, unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed. Although underpinned at the level of the political economy of communications, much of the power invested in and circulating through discourse functions by consent; it is both created and maintained through specific constructions of subjectivity which involve habits, styles and unconscious motivations of desire and repression as well as surface patterns in language use.

Critical approaches to discourse, such as Mills' or Wodak's, develop these insights by showing how far language is not an invisible window on the world, but a material practice. Discursive change is accordingly viewed as a transformative practice. While mainstream sociolinguistics investigates social variation in the forms and styles of language use, critical approaches to discourse argue that its insights need to be situated within the socio-cultural structures of a given political order if they are to be properly understood. For critical approaches, links between what we loosely call 'language and society' must be made more precise than the word 'and' signals: some more precise set of relations - of causation or at least mediation - must be specified between discourse and economy, ideology and the workings of power. Much of the political authority (or indeed credibility) of critical discourse analysis lies in the particular relation between different social levels it claims.

The precise form of such a relation in any given discussion is not always clear, however. Over the last decade, a significant (but not always explicit or theoretically resolved) intellectual shift has taken place away from Althusserian and Gramscian frameworks. Residual allusion to or reliance on such frameworks, alongside commitments warranted by Foucault's conception of dispersed power or by Habermas' communicative rationality (or for that matter by potentially any number of postmodernist alternatives), can obscure for a given approach exactly what connections are being claimed. Yet it is precisely the relation between utterance and society which gives discourse its significance, if the notion is to indicate more than the general effectivity of multiple co-existent representations or narratives. I am not sure myself that, despite their clear expositions, either Wodak's or Mills' work can help much with this problem - though one might see a dialectical contrast between them in their inclusion in two seemingly polarised projects, Routledge's 'New Critical Idiom' series and Longman's 'Real Language' series respectively.

Where the term 'discourse' is employed in empirical investigation of how language forms are distributed and processed (e.g. in studies of deixis,

bridging reference, or different sorts of implicature), scope for extrapolating from data is limited, sometimes even between genres let alone as regards large-scale historical or cultural arguments. On the other hand, where a bolder view is taken of accounting for discourse 'in the specificity of its occurrence' - such that in writing about whole archives discourse can be a central term without need for clarification where boundaries between discourses are, or why, or whether any given utterance can be part of only one or simultaneously part of many discourses being discussed - then discourse theory allows powerful insights, but only at the expense of at least one kind of theoretical rigour.

There is a risk in writing about discourse which marginalises (or even rules out on principle) the search for a formalism which holds as describable, for a specified class of utterances, the bases of their unity, regularity or contrastivity. The risk is that such writing (which might be called 'critical discourse narrative') invokes the notion of discourse less in order to investigate how things come to mean whatever they mean than in order to accentuate the linguistic constructed-ness of a specific cultural object as a basis for new claims about what it can be read as meaning. In work of this second kind, 'discourse' remains a keyword to the extent that it helps unlock difficult cultural material. But once a focus has been achieved on the constructed-ness and readability of the representations in question, the notion of discourse contributes relatively little to the analysis. For clarity rather than connotation, in such cases, it might therefore be better for such narratives to be described as cultural history, cultural criticism or critical hermeneutics, rather than 'discourse theory'; the term 'discourse' in such circumstances may be just too broad and nebulous to be helpful after all.

TRAVELLING THEORIST

Peter Hulme

James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and London 1997, 408pp, £26.50 hardback, £12.50 paperback.

James Clifford's previous book, *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), collected twelve pieces, eleven previously published between 1980 and 1985, dividing them into four sections, 'Discourses', 'Displacements', 'Collections' and 'Histories', and introducing them via a reflection on William Carlos Williams' poem, 'The Pure Products Go Crazy'.[1] *Routes* adheres to this pattern: twelve pieces, ten previously published between 1984 and 1995, divided into three sections, 'Travels', 'Contacts', and 'Futures', and introduced via a reflection on an autobiographical story by Amitav Ghosh, 'The Imam and the Indian'. The cover of *The Predicament of Culture* featured the striking Igbo 'White Man' mask. The cover of *Routes* has an equally striking picture of a New Guinea Highlander at a pig festival, sporting a fine feather head-dress and with the stub of a filter cigarette in the corner of his mouth.

1. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and London 1988.

A concern with the concept of culture is common to the two books although, with much of the earlier book's deconstructive work on more static anthropological notions of culture now widely accepted, *Routes* is freer to explore the heterogeneous spaces in which cultures get made and unmade. If ethnographic fieldwork has traditionally involved intensive dwelling in delimited 'fields', then Ghosh's story about a quiet Egyptian village in which the men 'had all the busy restlessness of airline passengers in a transit lounge' (p1) helps Clifford suggest that fieldwork is now, in the late twentieth century, more often a matter of travel encounters. *Routes* offers, he says, 'a view of human location as constituted by displacement as much as by stasis' (p2). 'As much as' is an important phrase here: a focus on displacement does not eliminate the need to understand stasis and Clifford is constantly aware of the complex interrelationship of 'routes' and its homophone 'roots'. Acutely conscious of the dangers of overplaying the 'travel' motif, he makes it clear that the goal of his work is not to *replace* the cultural figure 'native' with the intercultural figure 'traveller', but rather 'to focus on concrete mediations of the two, in specific cases of historical tension and relationship' (p24). Perhaps more so than in Clifford's previous work, the essays in *Routes* are prepared to look sympathetically on articulations of 'purity' and 'authenticity', understanding their embeddedness in particular historical or political situations. It is trying to comprehend the actual decisions that a curator has had to make in a

specific set of circumstances that leads Clifford to question whether 'inauthenticity' does not now function, 'in certain circles at least', as a new kind of authenticity (p178), and to recognise 'strategic claims for localism or authenticity as possible sites of resistance and empowerment rather than of simple nativism' (p183).

The key term in *The Predicament of Culture* (as in the earlier edited collection, *Writing Cultures*) was 'writing', as Clifford insisted, following Geertz, on examining the graphic nature of ethnography, the struggles of Malinowski, Lévi-Strauss and others with language as much as with alien cultural processes. 'Writing' is less discussed in *Routes*, but Clifford remains an elegant stylist and literary experimenter himself, attempting, he says in his explanatory prologue, to evoke the multiple and uneven practices of research, thereby 'making visible the borders of academic work' (p12). Though frequently and inaccurately described as a spokesman for 'postmodern ethnography', Clifford is very much a modernist writer in the vein of Michel Leiris or Edouard Glissant, struggling, as the last words of his prologue suggest, 'to sustain a certain hope, and a lucid uncertainty' (p13).

Like *The Predicament of Culture*, *Routes* contains different kinds of writing. The first chapter consists of a conference talk along with a transcript of the discussion that followed. There are more conventional scholarly pieces (four), including the important essay on 'Diasporas', which surveys recent uses of the term and maps the terrain of diaspora studies, analysing and developing the work done in this area by Paul Gilroy and Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin. There is a solitary three-page book review, and four pieces of not very successful experimental travel-writing, often using collage. More impressive are the remaining three pieces, which are personal and discursive, yet historically informed and analytical. Not accidentally, these all deal with museums as sites of cultural representation. 'Four Northwest Coast Museums' compares four museums around Vancouver, where indigenous groups are increasingly closely involved with the museums that display, care for, and interpret their cultural artefacts. 'Paradise' is an intensive consideration of a New Guinea Highlands exhibition at the Museum of Mankind in London in 1994 and the associated book by Michael O'Hanlon. The previously unpublished 'Fort Ross Meditation' is set on the site of the southernmost Russian settlement in the Americas, just north of San Francisco, abandoned in 1842. Museums bring out the best in Clifford because they are the sites where different discourses meet, where language and aesthetics play a role, where histories are well-documented, where the politics of representation are played out, and where, above all, choices have to be made and justified. These three specific analyses are well complemented by the survey essay 'Museums as Contact Zones'.

Although he travels physically (Palenque, Honolulu, Vancouver, London), offers travel writing of variable quality, and valuably puts academic discourse

into places it doesn't always visit, *Routes* is most impressive for its travels into contemporary cultural discourse: Clifford is a well-informed and sympathetic guide, as keen to understand as to analyse, even if his 'natives' are likely to be museum curators in Oregon or contemporary ethnographers themselves. Clifford is sometimes a tourist himself (though one sophisticated enough to use inverted commas when calling himself an 'independent traveler'), sometimes a more leisured traveller who can visit and revisit museums, and sometimes a visitor who is privileged witness to discussions (as 'consultant') because of his own expertise as cultural analyst. His analysis of Michael O'Hanlon's 'Paradise' exhibition responds to the use that O'Hanlon has made of Clifford's own writings, 'both as charter and foil for his undertaking' (p175).

As his use of the essay form might suggest, Clifford tends to be a scout or advance guard, a surveyor of terrain, a reporter of difficulties ahead, a clearer of ground; not himself a colonist or settler. He's more interested in questions than answers and, typically, whole bunches of them will cluster at the end of his paragraphs like heavy raindrops at the end of a branch. 'Travel' is offered by Clifford as a 'translation term' - 'a word of apparently general application used for comparison in a strategic and contingent way' (p39). If 'travel' is the master metaphor, it gathers around it a series of related terms that produce an impressive conceptual armada - routes, translation, hybridity, contact zone, diaspora, border, spatial practice. All such terms get us some distance, Clifford says, and then fall apart. Very much a cultural theorist for our times, Clifford's emphasis is on a conceptual repertory that can be used in ways dialogic, contingent, and tactical. Renegotiation is his favourite word. His prologue is appropriately entitled 'In Media Res'. As *Routes* leaves us to think through the questions posed in its pages, Clifford will already be opening up new paths, formulating new terminologies, asking new questions.

The one previously unpublished essay, 'Fort Ross Meditation', returns Clifford to 'home', to California, a good place in which to observe travel and immigration, a place in which questions of translation, in all its senses, have become urgent. Fort Ross allows Clifford a local focus which nevertheless brings together a heterogeneous set of groups who interacted in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, leaving a complex inheritance which Clifford is at his best in disentangling. Far from being the golden west of a frontier society, California here becomes a contact zone of the North Pacific: 'I want to ask some large and ultimately unanswerable questions in a personal way' (p302). There's a constant danger that these Californian meditations will become a little too 'Californian' for cynical easterners; and there's an awkward moment in this last essay when he admits to a hankering to ask the 'absurd question' of what the history of changing environments in this Pacific area might look like to sea otters (p325). Ultimately, however, the path Clifford clears for himself is amply justified: his scholarship is always careful, his questions

honest and probing, his use of the first person discreet. One could not ask for a better informed, more intelligent or probing advance guard.

Routes is a beautifully produced book with plentiful illustrations, an intelligent index, and almost no misprints (although not all the embedded references appear in the bibliography).

THE NEW SECLUSION

Ian R Douglas

Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, translated by Julie Rose, Verso, London 1997, 160pp; £35.00 cloth, £10.00 paperback.

'Europe', once wrote Napoleon, 'will never be tranquil until natural limits are restored.'[1] A typically emblematic and mysterious statement from the figure that cast so deep a shadow over Occidental modernity, and whose ghost has haunted so profoundly the investigations of Paul Virilio.[2] *Open Sky* is no different, in this regard. But it marks - for those familiar with Virilio's work - an important threshold in his thinking; one that is both critical and creative, opening new lines of thought, and of flight. No longer do Bonaparte's kinetic campaigns flash like fireworks in Virilio's narrational imaginary. No longer the genealogy of that general displacement of peoples, indeed whole societies, under the allure and the pull of the motor. Now, even more daringly, Virilio warns us of an oncoming confinement - indeed a perfect tranquillity - as a result of the restoration of natural limits; or more precisely, the working to the ends of that fascination with speed that is for him the unwritten history of Occidental modernity. *Open Sky* is a radical book, and a political one. It is perhaps the most important critique yet written of the 'information age'.

1. Jules Bertaut, *Napoleon in His Own Words*, A.C. McClurg & Co., Chicago 1916, p135.

2. See in particular, Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, Semiotext(e), New York 1986; Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War*, Semiotext(e), New York 1983; and Paul Virilio, *Popular Defense and Ecological Struggles*, Semiotext(e), New York 1991.

Information: not quite the field of dreams we were told it would be! Indeed, Virilio argues the opposite; the information-universe into which we're slipping is actually incarcerating us. Not content to destroy dimension we're now set on eradicating duration; the two in their absence defining the 'no place' of light-speed existence (virtuality, cyberspace, cyberspace). This 'slip', argues Virilio, is not only felt by civilians. The codification of real space, that until our own century was the first principle of urban planning (infrastructure) and population control (biopolitics), is now giving way to the urgency of managing *real time* (the 'intra-structure'), with its own array of blockages and asperities, viruses and delinquencies. From a culture of imperial geophysics (the politics of territory; its regularisation and mapping) we pass into the 'state of emergency' of chronographics (ubiquity, immediacy, information intensity); all of us passive witnesses to the radical recasting of governance and citizenship alike.

This passivity is, for Virilio, latent within communications technology. Now that everything arrives on the screen without the incumbent having even to leave, only the control of the real instant will remain; an illusive control that we have already passed over to the domain of sensors, captors and various microprocessing interfaces (DataGlove, DataSuit, trackpad) allowing us to meet at a distance (telepresence); indeed, see, hear and feel

at a distance (television, teleaudition, tele-tactition). This new generalised 'remote control', made possible by electromagnetic, now optoelectronic communications, is revolutionising - argues Virilio - man's relation to himself, to others, to technology, to politics, and most particularly to the planet itself. Where the last century's revolution in transportation gave rise to an age of generalised mobility, our own tools of instantaneous transmission are reversing the trend. With the dissolution of the scale of our human environment (prefigured by the telescope and intensified exponentially in the age of satellites), the very reality of the world is reduced to nil (or next to nothing), leading inevitably to a 'catastrophic sense of incarceration now that humanity is literally deprived of horizon' (p41). Having lost our sense of the journey in the commutation of space during the industrial age, we now lose *departure* in the age of electromagnetics and the speed of light.

'Behavioural inertia' sets in. A rigor mortis all-too-evident in the soon-to-be-ideal 'terminal-citizen'; 'decked out to the eyeballs with interactive prostheses based on the pathological model of the "spastic", wired to control his or her domestic environment without having physically to stir' (p20). In obliterating space, this 'armchair navigator' (p124) replicates the experience of the astronaut in breaking through the vertical littoral of universal attraction - poking a hole through the sky no less - only to find that 'beyond Earth's pull there is no space worthy of the name, but only time' (p3); a universal inert time patently self-evident to the passengers of Apollo 11, landing on the lunar region named so aptly thereafter, *Tranquillity Base*. Back here on Earth, optoelectronics, having restored natural limits by exhausting all possible forward acceleration (nothing, we are reminded, moves faster than light), will indeed have secured, as Napoleon predicted, a kind of brutal tranquillity. Walled-in at home with our various interactive apparatuses - a veritable life-support system - and soon even an 'electroergonomic double' (the Datasuit, our virtual alter ego), we find ourselves the unwitting victims of a domestic enslavement identical to that of the para- or quadriplegic (p16). Our only salvation is to be found in illusion, in 'flight from the reality of the moment'.[3] Hence the masochistic popularity of the 'virtual dimension'; which is of course nothing of the kind, 'existing' as it does quite literally nowhere. The circle is squared. A perfect panopticism where the inmate runs to the prison guard for protection against the institution within which he finds himself!

A radical dislocation, indeed physical removal from the space of politics and political existence. An individualism, as Virilio suggests, that has 'little to do with a liberation of values' (p11). No one, of course, is informed in advance of this informational downside, nor of the immediate physiological pathology of having 'everything within one's reach': the surreptitious obsolescence rendered on the body (in particular the muscles, but soon also memory and consciousness) through the proliferation of remote control. Much of *Open Sky* is in fact devoted to this very question; the revolution that *follows* that of transportation and transmission (bear in mind that we have scarcely come to terms with either of these, especially the latter). This 'third

3. Paul Virilio, *The Art of the Motor*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1995, p132.

revolution' - that of *transplantation* - is, for Virilio, a natural consequence of the commutation of real space and the universalisation of real time associated with the proliferation of transportation and transmission technologies respectively. Having nowhere left to go by way of extension, and no time by which to get there in duration, we find suddenly an inversion of the technological trajectory. Reductionism and miniaturisation take over where networking and urbanisation left off; mechanical communication supplanted by 'electromagnetic proximity'.

The profound nature of this inversion is, for Virilio, seen best in the microphysical invasion of our very bodies by the 'nanomachines' of biotechnology. This invasion - of all kinds of stimulators, grafts and implants, quite apart from the usual array of prostheses - is reversing, he argues, the very principle that has hitherto determined the social history of technology. Instead now of inhabiting machinery (the motor car, the elevator, the moving walkway, etc.) for the sake of conserving one's own energy (what Virilio calls 'the law of least effort'), now - in the age of telepresence - *it is energy that instantaneously inhabits and governs us* (p54). The 'tragedy of the fusion of the "biological" and the "technological"'(p57), is thus that we lose - potentially - the very *being of intentionality*. Convenient for those that profit, politically, socially and economically from this 'total, unavowed disqualification of the human in favour of the definitive instrumental conditioning of the individual'.[4] We shouldn't forget that such 'self-reproducing automata' were the very dream of cybernetics in the first place.[5] And the idea of 'zero-intelligence' not gaining currency in economics?[6]

Such coincidences are hard to swallow. But governments are losing out also. As Virilio writes; the 'journey without a trajectory' becomes 'fundamentally uncontrollable' (p.19). Like the Formula 1 racing cars outgrowing the capacity of the circuits upon which they compete, so information at light speed is not only eliminative of the *civitas*. It also provokes a radical insecurity at the very heart of the state; though who, we might ask, is better equipped to cope with such 'information shocks'? The possibility nonetheless is opened, argues Virilio, of a 'generalized accident' supplanting the 'specific accident' that has hitherto dogged our experience of rapidity (the shipwreck, the derailment, the car crash). Though good news for no one, it is interesting to speculate as to what use this new social threat (the information bomb that replaces the atomic one) will be put, perhaps not so much by the terrorist-hacker as the state itself. Could it be that the accident of instantaneous interactivity is working as a new form of social deterrence, akin to that which accompanied the nuclear umbrella; ensuring the hyperproductivity of whole societies through a constant regime of displacement for the fear of being 'caught' in the wrong time and place as the accident happens? Not so much a vision of the sedate paraplegic, as a hyper-frantic DataGlove making all sorts of weird gestures in the effort to endlessly delocalise the individual who was in fact nowhere anyway.

What Virilio proposes in response to all of this - to the desertification of the world's surface (inherently dematerialising duration); to the inertia-

4. *Ibid.*, p135.

5. John Von Neumann, *Theory of Self-Reproducing Automata*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL 1966.

6. D. Gode and S. Sunder, 'Allocative Efficiency of Markets with Zero-Intelligence Agents', *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol.101, No.1 (Feb 1993), pp119-137.

point of collision with real-time (entailing not only behavioural immobilism but the end of history itself); to the inward turn of technology on the human organism, not to mention the virtualisation of perception and the frightful demographic consequences of not only acting at a distance but now even *loving* at a distance (cybersex) - is a radical new ecology and ethics of perception. New, for as Virilio sees it, environmentalism has consistently failed to question the 'man-machine dialogue', and most especially the birth of machinic temporality. By way of a corrective, Virilio proposes that we engage the event at the *speed* it occurs; bringing forth not only a 'true sociology' of interactivity, but a 'public dromology' of the pace of public life (p23). A 'grey ecology' ('speed destroys colour') would no longer deny the pollution of the 'life-size' (scope) of the planet, or matter in general, by our various tools of technological proximity. On the other hand, an 'ecology of images' would mark a 'conscientious objection' to the hold of the public image by photo-cinematographic and video-infographic 'seeing machines'. For with the speed of light we are not only talking of the *de-location* of the event (the confusion of here and there, now and then), but also a radical *distortion* of the event. As Virilio reminds us, until our own century man's perception of existence - of time and space, the earth in its detail - was bound, acknowledged or not, to universal gravitation: precisely the force by which we measure the world, seeing with our own eyes the near and the far, the high and the low, depth and perspective, extension and duration, dimension and position. An 'ethics of perception' engaging the event necessarily would question the 'immediacy' of an image whose speed far outstrips the 'escape velocity' hitherto necessary to launch a vehicle off the earth and into the stratosphere (now infosphere); breaking open the sky, stripping all weight (and meaning), a radical 'flattening' of reality and perception.

Taken together, Virilio's grey ecology and 'hyper-vigilance regarding immediate perception' constitute a radical reaffirmation of not only the life of the planet, but our own lives, our memories, the *anima* of our souls; everything that distinguishes us from mere automata. The right not to be rushed. The right to find distances - the true measure of the world - in one's own heart. The right to screen out motorised appearances; to affirm one's freedom of perception and imagination. The right to protect the meaning of our immediate environment, our loved ones, the very bodies around us, from the stream of sequences rendering reality less than relative, if not irrelevant by optoelectronic fetishism (p90). Ultimately, *Open Sky* is about a kind of politics that is not so virtual. What Virilio ends up taking on - and he says as much himself - is the whole question of being; 'of *being here and now*, being located *in this world*' (p67). His re-reading via 'dromology' (his own neologism for the 'science of speed') is both courageous and profound, taking its place alongside the nomadic materialism of the likes of Deleuze, the pataphysical irony of Baudrillard, as well as the microphysical resolutely political investigations of Foucault, as one of the most important of all

rethinkings of the nature of the question of man and technology.

It is this rethinking that will secure Virilio's reputation as one of the most innovative and challenging writers of our time. In the shorter term, *Open Sky* is yet further evidence of the practical and immediate significance of this rethinking: taking on, as it does, the present in the name of returning truth; liberating the reader from the radical dissimulations of the age of information; swimming backstream in the defense of society. When the stakes are so high - the future political view of community, the very horizon of the species - one can only hope that the voice of Paul Virilio will not be lost in the endless noise of media pollution faced by us all in this age of universal communication.

Booknotes

Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing, Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, Routledge, London 1997, £12.99 paperback, £40 cloth

Only a small number of books fall into the category of an introductory text which is sufficiently intelligent and lucid to be essential reading for a more informed audience. *Rootprints* belongs to that even more select group of texts: the essential introduction written by the primary source.

It is more a collection of brilliant pieces than a conventional exposition. The text (perhaps the only appropriate term) opens with an extensive interview between Cixous and Calle-Gruber, interspersed with windows containing extracts from Cixous' notebooks, and sub-titles which break and guide the conversation, stressing the implications of the 'inter' in interview. There follows excerpts from essays by Derrida on Cixous and Cixous on Derrida, a relationship which is perhaps the least adequately considered and most underrated aspect of the phenomenon of deconstruction. There is a detailed critical commentary on Cixous' writing and an indispensable chronicle of her life by Calle-Gruber; an autobiographical fragment accompanied by a selection of photographs from her family album; and the bibliography is rigorous if not definitive. The final section, written by her translator Eric Prenowitz, inevitably raises the question why Cixous is so under-translated compared with, say, Derrida or Lyotard.

Ultimately, *Rootprints* has more in common with Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, or Derrida's 'Circumfession' than it has with the best of the 'theory primers'. Like these texts it is a coherent and beautiful whole which extends the genre and theory of autobiography while managing to do justice to the singular intimacy of the person it performs. While we wait for a reliable translation of *Beethoven à Jamais* this excellent rendering of *Photos de Racine* will suffice.

Martin McQuillan

Re-Situating Identities: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity and Culture, Vered Amit-Talai and Caroline Knowles (eds), Broadview Press, Peterborough, Ontario 1996, $21.95 US paperback

A striking feature of many North American texts on race and ethnicity is their ignorance about relevant research in other parts of the world. This excellent collection avoids this parochialism - perhaps because the editors teach in Canada but have also worked in Britain. Another strength of the volume is the close relationship which the contributors establish between theoretical debates and empirical research. On these two counts alone the book is worth recommending to both undergraduate and post-graduate

students who want to escape the parochialism and fragmentation of the race and ethnicity literature.

The volume is divided into four parts which are neatly integrated by editorial introductions. After a brief, well argued editorial introduction the book engages in a general discussion of race and racism which is followed by a section on the politics of identity. A fascinating examination of memory and histories is then developed and the edition ends with two chapters on nationalism and transnationalism. The analyses range across academic disciplines (sociology, anthropology, history and psychology) and countries (the USA, Canada, Britain and other European lands, India) and uncover the spaces between them created by the interweaving of theoretical frameworks and global migrations of people.

The editors have succeeded in producing a wide ranging, clearly structured and challenging volume which brings together eminent writers as well as those who are less well known. In the crowded field of race and ethnic studies this is one edited volume which deserves to be read in its entirety!

John Eade

LAW AND THE COURTS OF LOVE: MINOR JURISPRUDENCES, Peter Goodrich, Routledge, London 1996, £45 cloth

Goodrich's distinctive style combines pedantry and erudition with an exhilarating conceptual verve. *Law in the Courts of Love* offers an archaeology of a plurality of lost, repressed and 'alternative' minor jurisprudences which he announces as a form of 'scholarly terrorism'.

The title is taken from a provocative study of the codes of courtly love developed in the twelfth century, which are presented as constituting a feminine form of legality documented in literature, but excluded from the official - intrinsically misogynist - annals of legal history. Goodrich asserts their relevance to contemporary social concerns. He also deals with the continuities between legal, religious and poetic forms of iconography and modes of textuality.

His stated aim is to do battle with the 'closure of the legal mind', to attempt to diminish the distance between the 'dogma of law' and persons and emotions. This goes beyond theoretical performance to call for a humane revision of modern law.

Stella Swain

WOMEN INTELLECTUALS, MODERNISM AND DIFFERENCE: TRANSATLANTIC CULTURE, 1919-1945, Alice Gambrell, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, £13.95 paperback, £37.50 cloth.

This is a fascinating study of the work of five women writers and artists who were closely associated with surrealism (Frida Kahlo, Leonora Carrington),

anthropology (Zora Neale Hurston, Ella Deloria) and psychoanalysis (H.D.) between the two World Wars. What interests Gambrell is the fact that they all actively engaged with cultural formations in which they would otherwise figure only as the exotic 'untutored other' (such as the prostitute, the 'native', the hysteric).

Emphasising their hyphenated status as 'insider-outsiders', Gambrell aims to avoid the usual moralistic assessment in terms of collaboration or resistance, which - either way -allocates them a fixed position in relation to a single institution. In fact these women constantly *changed* their position and were *multiply* affiliated, an argument she pursues in several directions. Firstly, she draws attention to the practice of self-revision common to all five. And secondly, she identifies ways in which they engage with traditions other than surrealism, anthropology and psychoanalysis. Such intertextual complications are not only the occasion for a subtle critical *response* to the schools which claimed them but they also uncannily parallel the disciplinary uncertainties of their founding fathers (Breton, Boas, and - particularly - Freud).

Perhaps the least satisfactory section of the book is the one where Gambrell tries to show how the women engaged with *each other*. She offers only one substantial example - Deloria's re-writing of Hurston - and she admits it is difficult to establish direct links between them. After all, women intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s did not belong to a 'network' as perhaps they do today. But they did not exactly stand alone either. And thus offer an interesting historical perspective on what turn out to be not-so-recent preoccupations with inter-disciplinarity and 'othering'.

Alasdair Pettinger

VERY LITTLE ... ALMOST NOTHING, Simon Critchley, Routledge, London 1997, £14.99 paperback, £45 cloth.

It is difficult to write a dull book about Blanchot or Beckett (although some have managed this singular feat). However, it is also very difficult to write an excellent book about either author. In this sense the title of Critchley's book may refer to the critical force it is possible to exert on these 'cult writers' for deconstruction. *Very Little ... Almost Nothing* manages, with some aplomb, to pull off the extraordinarily difficult task of saying something new *and* interesting about Beckett *and* Blanchot.

In his introduction, 'Travels in Nihilon', Critchley attempts to tie in his readings around a discussion of nihilism and the question of finding a meaning to human finitude without recourse to anything that transcends that finitude. In other words this book wants to understand the meaning of life and death. Fortunately, his readings are rich and suggestive enough to live up to this philosophical ambition.

His opening chapter examines Blanchot's essay 'Literature and the Right to Death' by way of de Sade, Hegel and Levinas. The second consists of an

exemplary reading of Stanley Cavell, Jena romanticism, the fragment, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and America as 'a philosophical event that can never happen'. This leads inevitably to Beckett and his antithetical formulation 'Imagination Dead Imagine'. Critchley modestly suggests that imagination as a response to nihilism is 'very little ... almost nothing' but his rhetorical humility is in danger of smothering the 'achievement' of narrative which Beckett's dark humour celebrates.

Martin McQuillan