

# AVANT-GARDE DISSENT AFTER TIANANMEN SQUARE

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*Craig Clunas*

Geremie R Barmé, *In the Red: on contemporary Chinese culture*, Columbia University Press, New York 1999, 512pp; \$20.95 cloth.

Written before the US Air Force, 'losing its way' in the skies over Belgrade, made such an unpredicted but in retrospect almost inevitable intervention into the dynamics of contemporary Chinese cultural nationalism, *In the Red* opens with a different, if less fatal, example from its roster of its grievances. This is the failure of a contemporary Chinese writer, indeed any Chinese writer this century, to land a Nobel Prize for literature. However, in their refusal to oblige, the inscrutable Norwegians arguably simply reflect the common agenda of their European and American constituency, whose unawareness of and lack of curiosity about the culture of the world's largest state is striking. Although *putonghua* (so-called 'Mandarin' Chinese) now mingles increasingly with the Turkish, Kurdish, Greek, Somali and English spoken on the streets of the part of North London where I am writing this, Chinese writers are less read than South Asian ones, Chinese artists of the diaspora remain corralled in a pen marked 'Chinese artists', and Zhang Yimou's lush costume dramas remain almost the lone success among the global audience for film. Why this should be so is in no sense the central topic of Barmé's dense and excellent volume, but the book's very existence, and the sharpness of its analysis, ought to terminally damage lingering excuses about 'not knowing what is going on' in China. If we don't know, it's because we choose not to.

What Barmé does do is cast an acute and sceptical eye on a wide range of the cultural formations which have accompanied China's transition from Mao Zedong's revolutionary line, which died with its originator in 1976, to the current phenomenon of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' where, as he puts it, 'the rule of ideology [often] won the day in the centre, the laws of the market were victorious in the highly competitive periphery' (p141). He traces over the last twenty-five years a parabola from an authoritarianism of a high Stalinist kind to the 'velvet prison' of the present or near-present moment, using Miklòs Haraszti's formulation in a highly self-conscious way, designed to undercut the expertise of 'China hands' inside and outside the country, whose authority to speak is attested by their concentration on China alone, as utterly non-understandable in anything but its own terms. Barmé who knows more about China than most, is having none of this, insisting on the contrary that:

In considering Chinese culture after the 1970s, the writings from the once fraternal socialist states, as well as works by authors who have lived

under the strictures of official censorship, can be a valuable aid in understanding the predicament of urban elitist and popular culture in mainland China (p4).

He sees the traumatic events of 1989, subsumed today under the location 'Tiananmen Square', as provoking among at least some of China's elite intellectuals a consideration of 'the devastating effects of socialism on the cultural life of the nation'. This is a process he sees as still 'slow and reluctant', compared to the lacerations handed out by many of the same commentators of 'the Chinese tradition'. It is 4 June 1989 which is the inescapable pivot of much of the book's argument, or rather arguments, for one of its many merits is its refusal of any of the great narratives of Chinese culture, whether those promoted by the (still) great, glorious and correct Chinese Communist Party, or by any of the other proponents of a single solution to China's predicaments.

This is a book densely packed with detail, detail of who wrote or filmed or painted or printed what, when, and who said what about it (thank goodness it has such a good index, an increasing rarity even in academic publishing). It has an exceptionally confident grasp of the politics involved, the key players in the key ministries, the critics who were listened to, and what their agendas might have been at different moments. One of those key players is none other than Barmé himself, as the author of important cultural criticism published in Chinese in pre-handover Hong Kong, work which was read and appreciated and attacked elsewhere in China. Barmé is a participant-observer in much of what he writes about, though scrupulously careful never to flourish his presence on the scene as a guarantee of ethnographic or orientalist authority. The book's overlapping narratives and looping chronology make serious demands on the reader; it is no primer, and will, I suspect, be relatively little used as a textbook by the small but expanding group of academics attempting to teach cultural studies or the cultural politics of modern China. That does not have to be a criticism, although something as banal as a chronology in an appendix might have been helpful to many readers, including me.

One of the deft case studies through which the argument is constructed, is the case of the T-shirt entrepreneur Kong Yongqian, whose 'cultural shirts' caused a great furore in the summer of 1991 with their sardonic messages. These shirts form the centrepiece of a useful 'Photo Insert' in the middle of the book, which I for one could have done with more of. Barmé has a great ear for language, but native speakers of British English need to be aware that his translation of one of the most popular of the T-shirt slogans as 'I'm pissed, leave me alone' relies on American /Australian usage. Many of its wearers may well have drunk like fish in the macho style of the Beijing *liumang* (hooligan), but in British English, it says 'I'm pissed off, leave me alone.' Either way, it

definitely annoyed the police and the party, who described the shirts to Kong on his detention as the most serious political incident in Beijing since that of June 4, 1989, just before letting him go without charges. The limits of the state's tolerance were seen very starkly later that year when one of Kong's many imitators, a labour activist named Zhou Guangqiang, got three years in a labour camp for producing T-shirts carrying slogans advocating workers' rights. The T-shirt craze ran right through the first half of the 1990s, one of the most visible manifestations of a non-establishment (if not anti-establishment) form in Chinese popular culture. Barmé has written of it before, but never at such length and with such perspicuity, and this chapter is for me one of the most successful in the book.

Alongside it I would place the immediately following chapter on 'Packaged Dissent', looking at Beijing's 'unofficial' but highly commercialised art scene, dependent on the increasingly large foreign community for patronage. This patronage in turn allowed the party to deploy its classic strategy of demonising the Western Other in order to repress political and cultural opponents on the home front. It was always easier, and politically safer, to blame the canker of US cultural values, for example, than to confront the systemic problems behind the deleterious social impact of economic reform (p189).

Barmé shows how the censure by official cultural organs of Zhang Yuan's 'underground' movie *Beijing Bastards* was an essential part of the film's marketing strategy, almost necessary to land it a couple of awards in European film festivals, and a slot at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts and on Channel 4 television (albeit in the middle of the night). The theme of marketing, an obsession with Beijing's chattering classes, is taken up again in the next chapter on 'Artful Marketing', where Barmé compares the deployment by Chinese artists of the avant-garde of the once sacrosanct image of Mao, with the way Madonna had ten years earlier used the iconography of Catholicism, at one and the same time 'both culturally powerful and commercially exploitable' (p219).

If one had a criticism of this subtle and powerful book, which combines an admirable grasp of a huge amount of empirical data with a refusal to make that data the sole explanation in itself, it would be that the 'contemporary Chinese culture' it treats of so well is (by the author's own admission) the culture of the big cities, above all Beijing, and of a literary/artistic elite in that city. The culture of what used to be called 'the masses' and still is called 'the people' is harder to read. If Barmé does not anticipate the rise of the Falungong, the 'Palace of the Revolution of the Dharma', a mass movement which seems to refuse western categories of political/cultural analysis just as much as it refuses to play the games at which the Beijing elite is so adept, then neither did the Communist Party, or anyone else for that matter. Whether its exiled leader Li Hongzhi turns out to be a defining figure of Chinese culture in the

next century remains to be seen. What his influence suggests is that class distinction in cultural forms, whatever the Communist Party may say, has not entirely had its day in modern China, and that the 'popular' part of Chinese culture may yet prove to be richer and stranger than anyone imagined. I have no doubt that even now Geremie Barmé is turning his supremely well-tuned antennae to this new phenomenon. On the basis of this excellent book the outcome of his thoughts on the matter are to be anticipated with relish.

## A TREASURE BOX OF POSSIBILITIES

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*Tseen Khoo*

Michael Dutton (ed), *Streetslife China*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998; 304pp; £13.95 paperback.

*Streetslife China* is an enthusiastic and important offering in the currently limited field of Chinese popular cultural studies. Michael Dutton has helpfully included a select bibliography and it only takes a quick survey to realise that the past decade's publications about contemporary Chinese culture are relatively few. This book is unique for pulling together many disciplines in the humanities, including sociology, cultural studies, literature, anthropology, and history. A lecturer in Political Science at the University of Melbourne and thrice holder of research fellowships in China, Dutton presents a far-ranging collection of disparate articles which has as its key themes 'the emergence of a market-driven consumer culture, and how this intersects with social outsiders; state strategies and the street's response' (p.i). Excellent and appropriate use of photographs and other graphics complements this pioneering collection of critical and descriptive articles, as well as interviews.

The editor has organised the articles (some of which are only a page long) by nesting them neatly into sections within the six larger parts. One of these sections, 'Defining Outsiders, Labelling *Liუმang*', spans three topics: the semantics of Chinese characters that designate hooligan, vagrant, or drifter; the social stigma of criminal 'reform' and the meagre options for these 'second-class citizens'; and the under-representation (and, indeed, non-representation) of homosexuals in Beijing. Dutton's juxtaposition of language issues alongside those of sexual identity and ingrained Chinese social hierarchies operates skilfully in presenting the diversity of research being undertaken in this area, as well as opening reader's minds to the myriad topics about contemporary Chinese culture and society which have not yet been explored. The common thread of 'outsider-hood,' and what this can mean politically and socially, remains consistent through the three contributions.

I was particularly drawn to the part titled 'The Architecture of Life' which included consideration of the physical aspects of space and construction with research about Beijing city as a compound (Zhao Dongri) and Confucian hierarchy in traditional Chinese architecture (Yang Dongping), as well as the community and other social interactions which follow on from these spatial restrictions. An intriguing conclusion is offered by Yang Dongping who refers to contemporary China as a 'walled culture': 'the difference

between rural and urban space (unlike the internal urban landscape) was never a sign of a social or hierarchical division'. The modernity of the rural-urban dichotomy for China contrasts strikingly with the almost constantly preoccupied 'Western' criticism on this issue.

A couple of the articles did seem somewhat simplistic, and I can only assume that Dutton intended them also as items of cultural interest in themselves. For example, Jin Ren's item about 'Homosexuals in Beijing' features prose such as 'How many homosexuals are there in Beijing? No one is able to accurately calculate, but one gay guy who is pretty familiar with the scene and a frequent visitor to Dongdan park, says he can recognise about 1000 regulars' (p70). The lack of research about homosexuality in China is undeniable and these generalisations, scattered throughout the four-and-a-half page item, do not provide much enlightenment about, or development of, the issue. Admittedly, Jin Ren's piece is reproduced from the *Economic Evening News* and is not intended as an 'academic article'. I found it very interesting to read it as representative of the awkward depiction of gayness in China (lesbianism is not mentioned at all), with its strongly anthropological perspective.

This initial foray into these formerly taboo topics is certainly a starting point. The primary sources suggested by the authors are importantly brought to light and topics seldom discussed in open forums are addressed. Dutton himself has commented that *Streetlife China* 'is like a treasure box of possibilities. Possibilities both for Chinese society and for those of us in the business of making sense of it' (pxii). Other sections in the book include 'Social Relations and the Architecture of Life,' 'Subaltern Tactics, Government Response', and 'Stories of the Fetish: tales of Chairman Mao'. This latter series of articles is accompanied by great shots of Mao clocks, fans, cakes, and statuettes. Dutton foregrounds each section judiciously with editorial commentaries which serve the articles well. The breadth of theoretical work that is represented in the book, and that which will certainly take place because of the book, signals a field of study which is becoming less populated by 'China specialists' but drawing more generally on cultural studies in contemporary Asian societies. This expansion of theoretical perspectives on contemporary China partners well the increasing work being performed on issues of globalisation and the influence of international media and 'world values' on local communities. These transitional phases, viewed from a cluster of cultural studies perspectives, would appeal to a wider audience than purely historical, empirical, or anthropological studies.

Beyond the 'browse appeal' of the collection, *Streetlife China* integrates several over-arching concerns in contemporary life for Chinese communities and individuals. In particular, the exploration of the present rural-urban split and emerging class issues for the increasingly mobile population is made more complex and intertwined. This is more specifically represented in the articles by Gong Xikui's 'Household Registration and the Caste-like Quality of Peasant Life'; Zhang Quingwu's 'The Resident Identity Card and

the Household Register'; and Dutton's own compilation of 'Beggars, Prostitutes, and Undesirables: The Internal Rules of the State'. The integration of official Chinese government documentation as primary material for future researchers is an aspect of this collection which deserves noting. I would have also appreciated a 'List of Contributors' to gauge the range and experiences of authors in the book.

The usefulness of this collection to a wide range of academics and also to the general public is testament to Dutton's talent for balancing the provision of specialist and background segments. Its refreshing viewpoints and styles, and its scope of topics and theoretical groundings, should ensure that *Streetlife China* remains a valuable resource for quite a few years.

## COLONISED INTO ADMISSION

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*Sarah Stevens*

Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: on Asian American cultural politics*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 1996; 252pp; US \$16.95 paperback.

*Immigrant Acts* investigates Asian American cultural productions in relation to the material history of Asian immigration to the United States and the exclusion of Asian Americans from US national culture. Lowe argues that the US national culture attempts to assimilate individuals and particularities into a system of representation which erases the historical specificity of the Asian American experience. She creates a richly textured work which theorises the racialisation of US citizenship, the flawed concept of multiculturalism, and the ways in which Asian American cultural products use techniques of displacement, decolonisation, and disidentification to critique cultural institutions.

Lowe's critical first chapter deals with the material history of Asian immigration and the racialisation of the American citizenry. She elaborates on the historical treatment of Asian immigrants, Asian Americans, and Asian nations, mapping a genealogy of racial formation. Lowe argues that national culture is the vehicle through which citizens are created and that the US national culture in particular posits the citizen against the immigrant, the American against the Asian. The development of Asian American culture must be seen in light of the historical contradiction between political and economic acceptance of Asian immigrant labour and the exclusion of Asian immigrants from US citizenry and national culture.

Lowe urges an analysis of Asian American cultural politics which pays strict attention to the reality of economic, racial, and gender inequities which have emerged as a result of the material history of Asian Americans. She points out that an emphasis on issues of legal equality or identity politics obscures the divisions within the broad term 'Asian American' by ignoring important material factors such as gender and class, in addition to the individual's specific historical context of immigration, level of English-speaking ability, and location within the US. The benefits and drawbacks of appealing to Asian American identity echo the debates between nationalist and feminist concerns, between the politics of identity and difference.

In addition, Lowe criticises the belief that an increase in 'multiculturalism' and the inclusion of Asian American material in academia will result in a re-making of US national culture. She observes that the use of the university as a grounds for establishing Asian American studies can lead to formalised ethnic/area/racial studies departments and an 'ethnic canon,' thus reifying



the same hegemonic institution which excludes Asian Americans. Through a close analysis of the 1990 Los Angeles Festival of the Arts, Lowe also critiques the current drive for 'multiculturalism' as a movement 'that aestheticises ethnic differences as if they could be separated from history' (p9). In this context, Lowe shows how the documentary *Sa-I-Gu* by Christine Choy, Elaine Kim, and Dai Sil Kim-Gibson contests the panacea of pluralist inclusion, both through the layered testimonies of various speakers and through the visual form of the video.

Lowe's alternative to the approaches of the 'ethnic canon' and multiculturalism is to examine Asian American cultural products as the site of contradictions which critique US nationalist domination. Her discussion of literary works includes Thereesa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*, Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, and Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*. Lowe contends that the form of the novel stands as a symbol for dominant, colonial culture. The novel (along with the historical narrative) is a cultural institution which privileges a realist aesthetic, an obsession with linear progress, and the narration of a single unified subject. National culture uses 'the formal devices of the novel as a means of situating Asia and narrating the incorporation of Asian immigrants into the US nation' (p101). Lowe draws a parallel between the novel form and the colonial use of language, both of which are used to coerce the colonised into an admission of their inferiority and to assimilate heterogeneous groups into a single representational system. Both, however, can also provide a means for the colonised to fight against this dominant schema. Lowe argues that Asian American writing can be read as a product of decolonisation. Asian American cultural products use the novel form to displace 'representational regimes,' by showing the limits and the breakdowns of the realist aesthetic. Such writings focus on the cracks in the dominant discourse, centralising concepts of displacement, decolonisation, and disidentification.

As one example of this de-centring of dominant culture, Lowe discusses the role of gossip within Hagedorn's novel *Dogeaters*: 'Extravagant and unregulated, gossip functions as an "unofficial" discursive structure - or perhaps we might better characterise it as an antistructure or a destructuring discourse - running distinctly counter to the logic of verisimilitude and the organised subordination of written narrative' (p113). Blood, as a symbol of dismembering the body-as-unified-subject and refusing official representation, is utilised as another means to sever dominant discourse in *Dictée*. The limits of official narrative structures can also be revealed through an emphasis on mapping spaces, instead of creating a linear narrative which fetishises progress. Such cultural products which resist realist assimilation and universal representation are 'immigrant acts', attesting to the historical and political reality of the Asian American experience.

Lowe's clever textual references prove that these cultural products can be better understood by situating them within the historical context of colonial reality and the process of decolonisation. In so doing, however,

Lowe tends to essentialise colonialism and its generic effects on the Asian American experience. This aspect of her work could be strengthened if she paid more attention to the material reality of particular colonial situations - as she does so brilliantly when investigating the historical reality of immigration. Lowe's discussion of *Dictée* benefits from a discussion of the Korean experience with Japanese colonialism and the history of the US political involvement in Korea. Her other references to decolonisation and Asian American cultural products would profit from similar detail. Do the cultural products of Chinese Americans and Indian Americans reveal similar attempts to disrupt colonial cultural politics, even though China was a semi-colonial nation under the dominance of several colonisers and India was a long standing colony of the British Empire? Lowe's investigation of colonialism - and her contribution to colonial theory - would be enriched by more attention to such historical specifics.

In Lowe's defence, however, she is generally very careful not to essentialise the category of Asian American. She continually shows that Asian American cultural products are full of 'heterogeneity, hybridity, multiplicity' and criticises simplistic understanding of themes like generational conflict and filial piety in the works of Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan. Lowe emphasises the importance of differentiation and examining the particularities of Asian American experience. Along this vein, her study would further benefit from more attention to the work of South Asian Americans. Since Lowe defines Asian American in a way which includes countries like India and Pakistan, including South Asian American cultural products in her analysis would explain the logic of this choice and broaden her study. The majority of her discussion focuses on East Asian American cultural products. A quick browse through the index reveals very few references to South Asia or even Southeast Asia (in contrast, references to China, Japan, and Korea are numerous enough that East Asia does not appear as an index term). If Lowe wishes to continue to use the umbrella term 'Asian American' to encompass all of these heterogeneous, hybrid, and multiple identities, she should justify her choice by expanding her selection of visual and literary texts.

Lisa Lowe's greatest strength lies in her ability to reveal the ways in which Asian American cultural products are linked to both the historical treatment of Asian immigrants and the treatment of Asian nations under the linked systems of imperialism and capitalism. *Immigrant Acts* encourages differentiation between the various experiences of Asian Americans and complicates our understanding of this vital arena of cultural politics. Her work has important implications for understanding the racialised foundations of the United States, the relationship between former imperial systems and modern Asian nations, and the racial implications of the global reorganisation of capitalism. In addition, Lowe proves that Asian American cultural products engage in a process of decolonisation, by showing the limits of the grand narrative and representational politics.

## BOOKNOTES

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James Boon, *Verging on Extra-Vagance: anthropology, history, religion, literature, art ... Showbiz*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, 351pp: £33.50 cloth, £14.95 paperback.

*Verging on Extra-Vagance?* Only that? James Boon takes his title and one of his epigraphs from Thoreau, who spoke of his fear 'lest my expression may not be *extra-vagant* enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced'. I may not be the only reader of Boon's new collection of essays - a work of immense learning, originality, and wit - who will want to assuage whatever Thoreauvian qualms the author maybe feeling on this point. Intellectually omnivorous, disarmingly self-aware, dashingly insouciant, perkily polymathic, he has turned a batch of occasional essays and reviews into a Great Big Postmodern Roller-Coaster of a Book whose idiom, when all is said and done, seems plenty extra-vagant indeed - and then some.

Boon may claim Thoreau, and Kenneth Burke, as the guiding light for his forays into 'AnThoreaupology' (see Preface), but one might be forgiven for thinking that certain modernist (proto-postmodernist?) figures - Jocoserious Joyce, or the protean-ventriloquist Pound, of 'Kulchur' fame - also inform the tone of this seemingly speed-enhanced Cook's tour of 'disputatious paths of interpretive theory, semiotics, area research, fieldwork, media studies and cultural critique' (pxvi). Each chapter, or 'essay-*étude*', as Boon prefers to call them, 'offer[s] nondogmatic ruminations that twist, dart, and swerve with the subject studied' (pxiv); reading through several in a row can induce feelings similar to those brought on in childhood (or even after?) by too-strenuous sessions of the American floor-game *Twister*.

So short a review can do little more than indicate that this volume contains three so-called 'Rehearsals' (on Burke, on Opera, and on Melville. Cavell, commodities, and other matters), followed by thirteen chapters divided into three parts. Part One, a more or less anthropological section, treats of Ruth Benedict, of Montaigne, foreskins, and a good deal else, and of Bali. Bateson, Jane Belo, and disciplinary development. Part Two ranges more broadly, giving us 'Cosmopolitan Moments: As-if Confessions of an Ethnographer-Tourist (Echoey "Cosmomemes")', 'Why Museums Make Me Sad (Eccentric Musings)', and 'Litterytoor'n'Anthropolygee: An Experimental Wedding of Incongruous Styles from Mark Twain and Marcel Mauss.' Part Three packs in seven smaller chapters, mostly reviews and lectures, slightly reworked and repackaged and attending to various subjects in and around anthropology. In a final 'Encores and Envoi', Boon, acting rather like Keats'

'Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips, bidding adieu', revisits Burke, Cavell, Thoreau *et al.*

Boon admits '[i]t would be idle to claim for [his] anecdotal episodes any rigor beyond what ultraobjective readers may be generous to credit in uneasy vergings on extra-Vagance' (p99). His book does not advance anything so 'ultraobjective' as a thesis but rather provides repeated instances or embodiments of an attitude, a 'relatively relativist' bearing toward a world of 'manifold cultures, diverse disciplines, and rival critiques - identifying with none, friendly toward many, wary of some' (p278). Truly amazing in his scope, seldom less than 'brilliant' (but oh! the awful wearisomeness of 'brilliance!'), the profligately neologising Boon invites from his reader an answering attitude of *adexaspiration*, *enthusenniusiasm*, even (sometimes) *contraviction*. Yet in the end one wants to render the same verdict on this challengingly playful, playfully challenging writer that Boon himself renders on Derrida, at the end of a painstaking review of *Given Time*: 'OH, WHAT THE HELL. Just take the thing; pay the guy; let him get away with it' (p220).

James Buzard

Ian Burkitt, *Bodies of Thought: embodiment, identity and modernity*, Sage, London 1999, 163pp; £45 cloth, £14.99 paperback

At work in much recent theory has been the desire to overcome the perceived deficits of the post-structuralist project. These deficits centre around the issue of a concrete and grounded analysis that takes questions of differential embodiment and embeddedness seriously, rather than as another layer of signifiers. In this light, we can begin to understand the corporeal wave that has swept across the contemporary theoretical landscape, in feminist theory, philosophy, social theory, post-colonial theory, geography and so on.

*Bodies of Thought* is another such attempt at a more existentially nuanced approach to thinking embodiment and embeddedness. What is distinctive and fresh in his text is the lucid overview and critique Burkitt provides of some of the key sources in this growing field, enabling the different thinkers to complement, dialogue and provoke each other as they are threaded together. Among the theoretical cast we find the usual suspects: René Descartes, Michel Foucault, Friedrich Nietzsche, Mikhail Bakhtin, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Judith Butler, Iris Marion Young and Norbert Elias, as well as those less well trodden in this particular arena, for instance Evald V. Iyenko, A.N. Leontyev and Richard Dawkins.

Burkitt's central thesis is to move beyond the legacies of Cartesian dualism by arguing for the experience of human reality that is derived from and transformed through the body and its relationship to the environment, as well as material and symbolic systems. Unlike 'discursive constructionism',

where the body is always reduced to (passive) forms of signification content. Burkitt's body is multi-dimensional and is as capable of modifying the world as it is of being modified by it. As such, Burkitt emphasises the body's capacity as a productive, communicative, powerful and thinking being and therefore the core of possibility for a transformative praxis.

The most effective and thought-provoking argument in the book is Burkitt's strong rejection of the view shared by Nietzsche and Foucault on the primacy of violence in the formation of ordered society, which amounts to a self-fulfilling prophecy in that stories of origins project self-images of society with necessarily futural portent. In its stead, Burkitt develops a much more participatory and creative model which stresses the significance of artefacts and exchange in the transmission and transformation of culture. A constant theme of the text is the stress placed on the dynamic relationship between humans and non-humans, objects and subjects, artefacts and the body to show how they fold and animate each other in the birth of meaning.

There are only two minor disappointments in an otherwise thoroughly stimulating book. Firstly, the text omits a sustained treatment of race and class, which is odd considering the attention Burkitt places upon the body's multi-dimensional complexity. Secondly, a deeper and more penetrative reading of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* would, for instance, have supplied him with many resources on the way to conceptualising an active and creatively embedded account of bodily being. Burkitt's book is however a welcome contribution to this field.

*Bibi Bakare*

Anke Glebe, *The Art of Taking a Walk: flânerie, literature, and film in Weimar culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1999, 283pp; £35 cloth, £13.50 paperback.

*The Art of Taking a Walk* takes us on a guided tour of some of the familiar and not so familiar landmarks in the culture of flânerie. For Gleber, flânerie is a primarily visual (or visualising) art of uncovering different temporalities within urban space. By being 'out of step', by refusing to 'keep to the path', flânerie reveals memories, fears and pleasures that are the less apparent aspects of urban modernity.

Focusing on Weimar Berlin, Gleber gives a detailed reading of the work of Franz Hessel - a novelist and essayist (his flâneur essays were collected in the appropriately titled *Spazieren in Berlin*) and a close and influential friend of Walter Benjamin. Via Hessel, Gleber offers a dialectical understanding of flânerie as being both outside the instrumental movements of the planned city while still being caught in the visual web of the spectacle. For Gleber, Hessel's work is exemplary of the attitude of flânerie: distanced, potentially critical, politically ambivalent and 'cinematic'. Indeed a meta-theory of

flânerie is supplied through a work on cinema: Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film* with its provocative subtitle 'the redemption of physical reality'. If flânerie is to be found in cinema's ability to apprehend actuality through its scrutiny of insignificant details, by its constant slowing down and speeding up of the urban flow, then a theory of flânerie is not limited to the physical actuality of 'being in the street.' *The Art of Taking a Walk* works to destabilise a separation between urban modernity as illusion or representation and as experienced reality.

The benefits of this approach are clearly visible in her discussion of the gendering of flânerie. Instead of rehearsing arguments about the impossibility of the (female) flâneuse, or arguing for a different, feminine urban modernity, Gleber resuscitates a tradition of female avant-gardist flânerie through the work of Irmgard Keun and Charlotte Wolff.

While at times the book seems to mirror the slow ambulatory attention of flânerie, the impression it leaves is not of a culture consigned to history, but of a cultural potential that is far from exhausted.

*Ben Highmore*