

# THE BACKWASH OF DIFFERENTIATED SOUND

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*Sarah Parry*

Charles Bernstein (ed), *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, 390pp; £42 hardback, £16.99 paperback. Adalaide Morris (ed), *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1997, 349pp; £43.95 hardback, £19.95 paperback. Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1999, 315pp; £37.45 hardback, £11.95 paperback.

These books are part of a recent surge of critical activity around sound, poetics, and acoustical technologies. All three address the impact that the technologisation of the spoken word has had on the production and reception of literary texts. All foreground the acoustic materiality of language in an age of secondary orality. Together, they represent exciting and clearly defined directions in an area that is rapidly consolidating as a new field of study.

In his introduction to *Close Listening*, editor Charles Bernstein notes that the poetry reading has become an important site for the dissemination of poetic works since the 1950s. He acknowledges that many factors are involved in the increased significance of poetry readings, but suggests that the iconicity of each poet's performance style is paramount. He contends that this iconicity arises from poets' increased use of highly stylised sound patterns that diverge from the rhythmic and metric emphases of everyday language and received poetic traditions. *Close Listening* attempts to develop a criticism that describes the vocal style of poets and ascribes meaning to the act of sounding texts.

The book's titular pun indirectly rehabilitates the formalist concerns of the New Critics by suggesting that 'close listenings' rather than 'close readings' are needed to analyze the sonic materiality of language. Such listenings, however, go against the grain of New Criticism by attempting, in Bernstein's words, 'to overthrow the common presumption that the text of poem - that is the written document - is primary and that the recitation or performance of the poem by the poet is secondary and fundamentally inconsequential to the "poem itself"' (p8). *Close Listenings* thus charts new ground in the domains of formal literary acoustics and performance studies alike.

Bernstein's call for a criticism that describes the centrality of poetry in performance depends on two space-clearing gestures. Bernstein contends that situating the study of late twentieth-century poetics within the field of performance studies will allow for the 'plural event' of the performed work

in both live contexts and recorded formats. Rejecting the reified linguistic object of literary studies will also allow for a new acoustic formalism. Bernstein believes that the issue of formulating a new, extra-metric theory of prosody is overdue. The need for a methodology that reflects 'duration and its microtones, discontinuities, striations, and disfluencies' is becoming central in the discussion of embodied performance, he suggests (p14).

In refiguring the study of mid and late twentieth century poetics within the framework of performance studies, Bernstein rejects uni-linear, progressivist models of language development. He dismisses Julia Kristeva's psycholinguistic model of poetic language as reductive, and rejects the technological determinism of theorists of literary media such as Walter Ong. Instead, he urges a re-orientation towards the listening/hearing distinctions elaborated by Roland Barthes and Reuven Tsur. Barthes and Tsur acknowledge that speech triggers a specific mode of cognition that other sounds do not. Following Tsur, Bernstein suggests that the poetic mode of speech and speech perception functions to 're-materialize' language, returning it from the status of speech to that of sound. By pre-empting habituated responses to language, highly stylised performances of poetic works thus function as 'alienation techniques' that re-orient the listening ear to the vegetative, animate, and technological worlds, as well as tuning it towards extra-lexical, transhuman communication.

Bernstein also advocates a kind of ethnographic criticism that recuperates the poetry reading as a creative site of dialectical exchange, what he terms 'the ongoing convention of poetry, by poetry, for poetry' (p23). With the exception of consumer-centred approaches to popular culture such as Janice Radway's, literary studies has resisted the ethnographic method. The collection's essayists - Susan Howe, Marjorie Perloff, Steve McCaffrey, and Ron Silliman among others - collectively constitute a *who's who* of contemporary American poetics. Their musings on the sociality, historicity, and phenomenology of the poetry reading ultimately constitute the closest any critics have yet come to undertaking an ethnology that is 'writer-centred'.

*Sound States* documents and theorises the interplay between literary textuality and twentieth century acoustic technology. The collection takes as its starting point the fact that modernist and postmodernist experiments with different media engage the ear as well as the eye. It aims to develop forms of criticism which are not deaf to the acoustic dimensions of literary texts, particularly in relation to poetry, 'the most sound-saturated of literary genres' (p5).

Editor Adalaide Morris positions *Sound States* in relation to early scholarship on literary media elaborated by Havelock, Ong, and McLuhan and more recent work by Lanham, Landow, and Kittler. Yet the collection departs from that technologically determinist tradition in several significant ways. Most notably, it foregrounds the engagements of particular writers and literary movements with different sounds and sound technologies. The 'author-centred' approach of literary studies dominates.

*Sound States* fits more easily within a smaller and less visible tradition of sound-centred studies. Books on radio, phonography, and tape are extremely rare because acoustic media translate into that format with difficulty. *Sound States* is to be commended for the CD that supplements its essayists' attempts to squeeze the world of literary soundings into print. Fittingly, several lines of argument come fully to life only with reference to the CD. Nathaniel Mackey's essay investigates how Federico García Lorca's 'Theory and Function of the Duende' was informed by the heterogeneous musical practices of Spain; subsequently, Mackey traces the ways that four American poets engaged with Lorca's ideas about how to perform the identity of others. On the CD, tracks by Pastora Pavón, Miles Davis, and Sonny Rollins complete Mackey's 'reading'.

Perhaps because many of its essayists are writers, musicians, and sound artists, *Sound States* is at the frontier of sound-centred criticism. Yet the collection doesn't always map that frontier effectively, in part because the organisation of the essays is somewhat artificial. Although not stated as such by Morris, one might suggest that the concept of 'interfacing' is central to the work that the collection does. Mackey's essay involves musical and literary trans-textuality, the first type of interface. A second type of interface involves the phonotextual dynamics of print as a sound storage media: Morris' analysis of the acoustic dimensions of H.D.'s epic of secondary orality, *Helen in Egypt*, is of this type. A third form of interface involves textual representations of the impact of audio technology on consciousness, as well as experiments with different formats of audio-text as literary media. This type includes Katherine Hayles' exploration of the relationship between audio-tape and the production of postmodern subjectivity in William S. Burroughs's *The Ticket That Exploded* and Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*.

The concluding section of *Sound States* brings together two of the most interesting and cogent theorists of literary acoustics and sound media. Garrett Stewart analyses the interface between literary and filmic writing with reference to the play of phonemic difference involved in the phenomenology of reading. His formulations are foundational in the emerging field. His *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (1990) has enabled a theoretically-inflected acoustic criticism that would have been impossible otherwise, given what he calls the 'phonophobia' that has arisen in the wake of Derrida's critique of Logos.

Jed Rasula contrasts the poet's interpellating voice as a technology of the Enlightenment with other cultural 'voice-over' scenarios in the age of media-speak. Although Rasula's hyper-citation of the humanist tradition of Western philosophy verges on parody and pastiche, his performance of each of the signs of the emerging field is masterful and compelling.

Neither *Close Listening* nor *Sound States* approaches the paradigm-shifting status of Friedrich Kittler's newly translated monograph. In part a material history, in part a philosophical investigation, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* examines the impact of two 'media shifts' that occurred after the monopoly

of alphabetised writing as an information storage system was exploded at the close of the nineteenth century. The first shift forms the book's subject, and involves the differentiation of information into acoustic, optic, and writing 'streams' as a result of innovations to communications technology made in the wake of the American Civil War. The second shift, which Kittler explores more elliptically, begins with the invention of the *Ur*-computer on the eve of the Second World War and extends to the present. It concerns the subsequent reunification of these differentiated streams in digitised technology.

The book is a media archeology which examines how the logics of structuralism and poststructuralism correspond with those of each media shift. Fundamentally, Kittler argues that the materialities of communication and information storage determine the epistemological system of any given era. In essence, he proposes a new kind of discourse analysis that allows for post-alphabetical writing technologies. Kittler applies this method to his own source texts by reading structuralist psychoanalysis with reference to the three media technologies that emerged within its historical moment, particularly the phonograph.

*Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* is deeply engaged with theories of culture, subjectivity, discourse and technology elaborated by McLuhan, Lacan, Foucault, and Virilio. Most notably, Kittler criticises Foucault for his failure to allow for the materiality of discursive practices. Kittler's periphrastic allusions and catachrestic use of Foucault's terminology demonstrate that he is both using and - to some extent - challenging Foucault's model. His own archaeology of technologised discourse is based on the determinist insights of Virilio, who ties transformations of consciousness to changes in military communications technology. Drawing on military archives, scientific treatises, literature, popular culture and technological schematics alike,

Kittler documents the trajectories of each of the book's three technologies from their invention through each of their many military and cultural forms and applications. He also includes representations of each technology from the writings of Rilke, Nietzsche, Kafka, Heidegger and others as evidence of the impact of differentiated media on thought and the psychic apparatus. Kittler contends that the logics of structuralism centre around differentiability and trace detection, and he ties these logics to changes wrought by the shift from alphabetised writing. Around 1880, according to Kittler's periodisation, alphabetised discourse splits into the non-symbolic, post-alphabetical media of gramophony and cinematography, which Kittler aligns with 'discourses' of the unconscious, and the mechanised typewriting of the symbolic, which eventually converts into an algebraic 'discourse'. Prior to the differentiation of information storage into acoustic, optical, and writing 'streams', all human thought and each of the five senses have to 'pass through the bottleneck of the [alphabetic] signifier' (p4). Gramophony and cinematography give acoustics and optics their own 'channels' apart from the symbolic system of alphabetised writing.

The transformation of the symbolic into a post-alphabetical writing system occurs in several stages beginning with the shift from handwriting, according to Kittler. He suggests that what 'matters' in mechanised typewriting is not only the alphabetical signifier, but also the spaces between elements of a system, which assert a logic of differentiability (p15). The transformation of the symbolic intensifies when the schematic of the typewriter begins to be used as an encryption device for military intelligence in the early 1920s. The cryptanalytic machines which successfully decode that intelligence, which are based on Alan Turing's theoretical paper of 1936, launch the second media shift and the age of the electronic, digital computer which relies on one signifier and its absence on the new mathematical symbolic. Today, the alphabetic schematic of the typewriter keyboard is a blind that negotiates an interface between humans and their information-processing machines, which read and write binary code and are capable of translating any medium into another.

Kittler suggests that the productive energies of the symbolic begin to be redirected with the shift to mechanised typewriting. Prior to the shift to differentiated media, the trace of a writer's body is preserved, if only partially, in 'the surrogate sensuality of handwriting' (p13). The typewriter as 'discourse machine gun' no longer 'stores individuals', according to Kittler (p14). In contrast to typography, gramophony and cinematography preserve traces of the body. Acoustic and optic images are a product of the body, they don't just resemble it'. The age of differentiated information storage thus gives rise to a series of phantoms and spectres based on a bodily real which escapes the symbolic grid of mechanised writing.

Under these conditions, the 'phantasms' of literature and alphabetised discourse in general lose their productive energies, Kittler contends. In their place, 'a knowledge assumes power that is no longer satisfied with the individual universals of its subjects, those imaginary self-representations ... but instead registers their distinguishing particulars' (p83). All late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century thought is subsumed by the logic of trace detection, Kittler contends. As a technology of power, the new knowledge concerns itself with real bodily signs - such as fingerprints, pitch, and tracks - which must be stored and evaluated in the new media (p83). In effect, written discourse - from Freudian psychoanalysis to the detective stories of Sherlock Holmes - begins to mimic the attributes of competing information storage technologies.

Kittler's most dazzling insight is his reading of Lacan's methodology as the historical effect of the differentiation of information into acoustic, optical, and writing streams. Kittler interprets Lacan's tripartite division of the mind as a theory of media machines, and cites the registers of the real, imaginary, and symbolic as evidence of these machines' structuring effect on perception. Noting Freud's technologisation of the analyst's ear in 'Recommendations to Physicians Practising Psycho-Analysis' (1912) and the emergence of psychoanalysis at the moment of the new acoustic technology

(1897), Kittler makes a compelling case for psychoanalysis and phonography as competing media technologies of the real.

The apocalyptic tone of *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* is perhaps appropriate given Kittler's contention that the productive energies of a post-alphabetical symbolic have essentially resulted in new machine-subjects. Kittler's thesis that 'under the conditions of high technology, literature has nothing more to say' (p263) will of course be resisted. In the age of binary code, literature may indeed be outdated 'programming'. What Kittler really seems to suggest is that we are still in some sense bi-symbolic: the program called literature is produced on one channel, the orders of the so-called 'upper echelons' on another. It may be true, as Kittler asserts, that 'the wonderfully resistant power of writing ensures that the poem has no words for the truth about competing technologies' (p19). The experiments of modern and postmodern writers with alternative media in *Close Listening* and *Sound States* suggest an alternative scenario - a kind of 'heteroliteracy' as Bernstein coins it - one that is more akin to the heterogeneity of discourse as outlined by Foucault (p20).

Each of these books attempts to theorise the backwash of differentiated sound exactly at the moment of transition into a new era of digitised multi-media. Each has shortcomings. Recorded performance is relatively poorly analysed in *Close Listening*. Given the decontextualising effect of mediatisation, it is not always possible to read vocal style, which is shaped by both context and audience, as essentially as Bernstein suggests. Several essays in *Sound States* depend on idiosyncratic periodisation and would benefit from distinctions found in the related field of musicology, including those between acoustic hardware/software, technologies of amplification/mediatisation, and one-way or two-way technologies: without this attention to materiality, some risk being theory-driven exercises in mystification. Finally, Kittler's hyper-correctional insistence on the post-alphabetical base of twentieth-century discourse is long overdue, yet to my mind Kittler never entirely overcomes a certain inconsistency about what constitutes a writing technology in the age of media. Furthermore, Kittler's conflation of 'writing' with 'programming' and 'media' with 'discourse' is likely to be seen as overly deterministic by many.

Nonetheless, I highly recommend each of these books. All break new ground in complex and highly useful ways.

# CURIOUS GUARDIAN IN THE MARGIN

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Yogita Goyal

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1999, 449pp; \$24.95 paper.

Gayatri Spivak's long awaited book, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, sets out to challenge the very fields Spivak has herself been most associated with - postcolonial studies and third world feminism. Representing a consolidation of her earlier work rather than a departure from it, *Critique* exhorts its implied reader - the migrant postcolonial feminist - to be sensitive to the pitfalls of representation of self and other in a globalising world. The book is remarkable for the warnings it provides - powerful critiques of diverse positions structure the author's stance - as guardian in the margin.<sup>1</sup> Spivak forcefully interrogates the practices, politics and subterfuges of intellectual formations ranging from nativism, elite poststructuralist theory, metropolitan feminism, cultural Marxism, global hybridism, and 'white boys talking postcoloniality' (p168). These warnings are situated by a lateral tracking of the 'axiomatics of imperialism' (p113) through four disciplines - philosophy, literature, history and culture. Spivak enters some of the debates in each sphere to pick out a moment of transgression within a text, and uses it as a deconstructive lever to unravel the assumptions that enable and inform that analysis. Woven into the text is a call for acknowledgement of complicity of the native informant in its various mutations (colonial subject, postcolonial migrant), an acknowledgement that is a precursor to successful counter-hegemony, rather than a debilitation of the same.

Allied on the one hand to polemical Marxist critiques of postcolonial studies like those of Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik, and on the other hand to various guises of postcolonial feminism (Sara Suleri, bell hooks, Chandra Mohanty), *Critique* charts an uneven path between multiple points of identification that bring each other to crisis - deconstruction, Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, and ecology. Spivak's chosen methodology is her familiar use of catachresis - wrenching an image, trope, or metaphor out of context to displace the oppositions that structure the text and using it in a wholly different context to open up new areas of meaning. A striking example of this practice is her use of Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason, a white Creole, as an embodiment of the place of the colonised subject. Thus, Spivak reads her act of burning the house down as recalling other kinds of widow burnings, that can be plotted by the postcolonial feminist. Catachrestically reading Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* with the monster as the colonised subject, Spivak again argues for an interested political reading of literary texts. The

1. In a reading of Coetzee's *Foe*, Spivak represents Friday thus: 'The curious guardian at the margin who will not inform' (p190). I take this to represent Spivak's own oeuvre more broadly.

overarching trajectory of the book is from a position of critique within disciplines (like literature) to a gesture towards the excluded, the subaltern - the latest avatar of which is the woman from the South, credit-baited into micro-enterprise by forces of globalising capital. Thus, delineating a pedagogical practice, Spivak calls for transnational literacy among academics - feminists and postcolonialists - to avoid perpetrating epistemic violence yet again on the subaltern.

In the interest of this practice of transnational literacy, in the first chapter, Spivak turns to the 'last Three Wise Men of the Continental (European) tradition' (p111) - Kant, Hegel, and Marx - reading them for their necessary foreclosure of the native informant as colonial subject. Her point here is not merely to indicate the persistent trace of the other in philosophical texts, but to demonstrate the continued usefulness of such texts for cultural critics today. Thus, Marx, diverted through a 'wild psychoanalysis,' (p284) turns out to be a useful ally in the post-Fordist era, in his insistence upon the primacy of the economic. Here, the 'concept-metaphors' of 'value' and the 'Asiatic Mode of Production,' re-constellated, offer productive points of entry into a fluid, speculative reading of Marx in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari rather than cultural or traditional Marxists. This kind of re-constellation is targeted equally towards interventionist academics and deconstructivists, in an attempt to re-align the separated camps. The recuperation of Marx thus works 'in a deconstructive embrace' with 'ethics as the experience of the impossible' that Derrida offers (p427).

Brilliant, sporadic insights like these form the body of the book. Offering the hint of a practice for emulation, *Critique* refuses to provide either a clear, sustained argument, or a distinctly aligned methodology. It performs the eclecticism it enjoins upon postcolonial feminists in its negotiation through literature, history and culture. None of this is unexpected from Spivak, who has consistently enacted this practice. The newness of the book lies not so much in new readings as in older readings stitched together, in sometimes surprising combinations. For instance, the chapter on history promises the long-awaited revision of 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Here, what we have is an intricate disquisition on historiography itself. For Spivak, the colonial 'worlding of a world on uninscribed earth' (p211) has to be displaced not through nativism or the adoption of the position of Caliban. To avoid the nostalgia for lost origins, the critic has to turn to historical archives and perform both a textualist reading of the archives (in the vein of Hayden White and Dominic LaCapra), and a historicisation of the institutionalisation of both literature and history as disciplines. Thus, history and literature are seen as intricately linked, 'each other's repetition with a displacement' (p205). Spivak uses this as a paradigm for the retrieval of marginal and hegemonic histories, using the specific case of the Rani of Sirmur to demonstrate how attention to the triad of race, class and gender is insufficient in the colonial context.<sup>2</sup> The Rani's archival 'ghost' cannot be laid to rest by deploying these three discourses. What an analysis of the

2. The Rani of Sirmur forms the object of inquiry of one of Spivak's earlier essays ('The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory*, Vol 24, no.3, 1985, pp247-272). The Rani has a brief textual presence in colonial archives as guardian of her minor son in one of the princely states of India. Although the British remove her husband from governance, on account of his supposed dissoluteness, the Rani expresses a wish to commit *sati*.



Rani needs, according to Spivak, is an attention to the figures of over-determination and transference. To read the Rani thus is to see her as the 'harbinger' of global gendered exploitation, and yet be aware that she is not the 'subaltern'.

Qualified access to her story still leaves in shadow the lives and voice-consciousness of rural unorganised labour working outside what used to be the Rani's palace (p223). Between the Rani, instrumentalised by patriarchy and the colonial state, and Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, the suicide who attempted to speak her body but was unspoken by others, Spivak locates her famous reading of *sati*, offering a graph within which one can see how the subaltern is rendered unrepresentable (silent), shuttling between the determinations of the two sentences: 'white men were saving brown women from brown men,' and 'the women wanted to die' (p287). The new wrinkle on the question of the subaltern is Spivak's extension into the figure of Bhaduri's grandniece - the agent of transnational capital who conjures up what she occludes - the female from the South being super-exploited in the regime of globalisation. This concern with the new gendered subaltern in the South under the dispensation of the new world order 'invaginates' her book. This serves as the basis of Spivak's injunction to feminists who presume global sisterhood, but only on their own terms. It also undergirds her famous critique of Foucault and Deleuze for their failure to mark the ethnocentric limits of their arguments (unlike Derrida), and their refusal to acknowledge their own complicitous institutional location in the international division of labour.

Spivak's earlier itinerary of ensuring vigilance against imperialism in US feminism is also rehearsed in this book, especially in the section on literature. Older essays like 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' and a reading of Coetzee's *Foe* suggest that the issue is not so much to give voice to the native, but to foreground the institutional complicity of postcolonial migrants with neo-colonial intellectual production. Spivak proffers a model of 'wild anthropology' (p157) which will both be more alive to the existence of imperialism in supposedly radical practice (be it feminism or cutting-edge theorists like Foucault and Deleuze), and more nuanced because of a foregrounding of (structural) complicity and (cultural) continuity rather than antagonism. Answering Benita Parry's charge of not letting the subaltern speak in a brief footnote, Spivak inadequately asserts that 'we are natives too. We talk like Defoe's Friday, only much better' (p190).<sup>3</sup> She deflects other charges about the incongruity of looking for the subaltern in a queen by defining her project as one that does not seek to either make the subaltern speak or find the ideal subaltern, but to chart out the impossibilities which haunt the project of feminist retrieval. Thus, for Spivak, information retrieval can cohere with neo-colonialism in the same way that Foucault and Deleuze's grand gesture of giving up representation can also work to preserve the hierarchies of neocolonialism.

From here, Spivak moves to globe-girdling movements (where the

3. See Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', *Oxford Literary Review* 9, 1987, pp27-58.

demarcations between local and global are confused) as a productive shift from the unproductive binary of unexamined nativism and global hybridity. Her final chapter espouses this counter-globalisation stance, which punctuates the earlier chapters in numerous footnotes which threaten to take over the text. Attempting to track culture 'in the vanishing present,' Spivak lays out an exemplary strategy - one that welds together Marxism and feminism, but deconstructively. She criticises Jameson's *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* for instance, as it sets up an opposition between Marxism and deconstruction, even as it evinces unexamined cultural arrogance in its presuppositions about dominant culture. Arguing that every self-styled ruptural gesture contains within it a repetition, Spivak proffers a model of cognitive failure rather than one of cognitive mapping. This is in line with her best work so far - Spivak is powerfully adept at indicating the limits and anxieties that haunt enunciation, and the dangers that make representation im/possible. Moving through the Japanese fashion designer Rei Kawakubo's exoticisation and Roland Barthes's will to power over Japan (*The Empire of Signs*), Spivak renders explicit her agenda - she continues the persistent though somewhat surprising analogy with Marx, arguing that her project is also to provide agency not victimage - her focus being not the wage-labourer but the hyphenated American. This figure of the new immigrant occupies such centrality in Spivak's work for a number of reasons. As the most visible and accessible form of otherness in the metropole today, the new immigrant's visibility helps shield both the racial underclass and the vast populations of the decolonised world/developing nations from view. Hence, for Spivak, the term 'postcolonial' must be jettisoned since it has come to represent the migrant from the South. This visibility is the flip side of the invisible labour - sweatshops, child labour, and gendered micro-enterprise.

Spivak writes in a somewhat messianic tone, '[F]rom our academic or "cultural work" niches, we can supplement the globe-girdling movements with "mainstreaming," somewhere between moonlighting and educating public opinion' (p379). While the function of the native informant was foreclosed in high colonialism, the informant is called upon to perform a much more visible function today. Asked to step forth as the exemplary postcolonial within global capitalism, this subject legitimates violence on the subaltern; violence which is coded as development and globalisation, whether in the name of biodiversity or electronic technology. The manifesto Spivak lays out for the interventionist academic is to resist culturalism and try and rethink globality from a non-ethnocentric perspective, recognising the self-legitimising gestures from Kant to Brontë, from Barthes to Kristeva, from native informant to postcolonial migrant, from Macaulay's mimic men to transnational corporate agents like Bhaduri's grandniece. The goal remains transnational literacy that keeps the economic visible under erasure, recognises that high theory can be complicit, and most importantly, following the insights of Derrida, recognises its own complicity as an enabling move.

One of the most laudable aspects of this book is its clear articulation of the need to end subalternity by bringing the subaltern into citizenship (p310). Spivak does not offer a deconstruction of rights, and castigates the desire to museumise subalternity (thus dismissing all these charges that have been levelled against her at some point). The insistence on cognisance of the economic realities of labour is also commendable; however, her stylisation of herself as an 'old-fashioned Marxist' is an almost unrecognisable gesture (p357). Rather than a blueprint for action, Marx furnishes her with an entry into ethics and responsibility, defining a critical approach (p84). Despite this, there seems a persistent doubleness woven into the text. On the one hand, Spivak exemplarily marks the limits of her position - she clearly marks her audience as someone like herself - a metropolitan diasporic feminist. Calling for perpetual vigilance, she uses the second person plural to invoke this implied reader. On the other hand, however, her last chapter also suggests the desire to speak to the activist in the field, even after earlier ridiculing the desire of a colleague that theory should lead to practice (p196). She presents the book as charting a shift in her work from colonial discourse studies to transnational cultural studies. She offers it at the intersection of a 'three-point division': where the 'intellectual, activist, and entrepreneur are not necessarily united' (p421). Here, she calls upon somewhat incongruous figures like Amartya Sen, the Nobel prize winning economist, who stands in as a model for 'global mainstreaming;' and Seema Das, a grassroots activist in Bangladesh, who is disappointed with Spivak's espousal of deconstruction (pp379, 421). Allowing that her focus on praxis might be obscured by her emphasis on theory, wanting to hold too much together, Spivak ends the book with some doubt: 'Marx could hold *The Science of Logic* and the Blue Books together; but that was still only Europe; and in the doing it came undone' (p421).

## BOOKNOTES

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James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City*, Athlone Press, London 1999. 216pp; £45 cloth, £15.99 paperback.

In a move to sidestep worn-out arguments about the primacy of either 'representation' or 'reality', James Donald elegantly proposes the actuality of imagining the modern city. Here the modern city is grasped as a social imaginary that exists both as experience (it is through imagination that we perceive the world) and as a vast material archive. This archive is an accumulation of imaginings that have found material form in films, novels, journalism, diagrams, drawings, photographs, planning reports, buildings, streets, and so on. Donald trawls this archive, not in the hope of 'getting to the bottom of it', but for the purpose of locating the modalities of urban experience: the hopes, fears, perceptions and possibilities of the city. Here, the unmanageability of the archive precludes any claim to exhaustiveness; instead Donald's writing evidences the productivity of generating tactical juxtapositions. His continual shifting between the singularity of described urban experience (Dickens, for instance) and the generality of utopian and governmental prescriptions for the city (Le Corbusier, for instance) suggest a practice that is close to cinematic montage. Oscillating from point-of-view shots to sweeping crane shots, Donald moves between a street-level perspective (for example in his discussion of the modernist fiction of Virginia Woolf) and the 'view-from-above' (the perspective of people who Henri Lefebvre caustically referred to as 'technocratic subdividers' - planners, social engineers and the like). By foregrounding the diverse practices of 'imagining' the city, Donald's book is able to cut across different registers of the urban to insist on the imbrication of these different imaginings.

But if Donald's camerawork is inventive, his narrative drift seems more conventional. As the book progresses the heterogeneity of these imaginings gets traded in for a more directed discussion of how to live in the contemporary city. Here, imagination is called upon to fashion an ethics that can negotiate the vivid diversity and divisiveness of the lived urban imaginary.

*Ben Highmore*

Graham Lock, *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington and Anthony Braxton*, Duke University Press. Durham 1999, 314pp; £12.95 paperback.

*Blutopia* is the title of an Ellington tune, but Lock here establishes the concept as a central symbolic mode in describing jazz music; a literal encoding of

blues remembrance whilst imagining libidinal futures. Intellectuals in the black American musical tradition, like Sun Ra, Duke Ellington and Anthony Braxton, have often been traduced for moving the music too far into the cerebral by a battery of critics who prefer their jazz earth-bound and funky. As Braxton himself says, 'only in jazz is thinking a dirty word.'

Lock's brilliant work first describes how ludicrous the notion is, that any of these musicians are somehow detached from and outside African American cultural valences, by showing how all their praxis is deeply imbued with cultural signposts to their black cultural history. So that Sun Ra's space trip is not only other-worldly, but 'deliberately based on the heavenly journey of the Baptist sermon'. Likewise, Braxton's seemingly Eurocentric musical praxis is shot through with references to the African-American musical tradition and the Duke's large scale pieces are not the flawed attempts at aping a European tradition but exemplify a 'telling inarticulacy' which is central to the whole jazz tradition.

The interdisciplinary scholarship here is often remarkable and the prose has a fluidity and passion which more established academics could learn from. As Lock himself says, '[t]rying to reconcile the imperatives of the utopian impulse with those of the remembering song is no easy task'. That his book does this effortlessly is a testament to a lifetime spent unearthing the rich treasures of an improvisational tradition which renders up its multifarious and mutable meanings only to those willing to listen beyond the clichéd and obvious.

*Alan Rice*

Vikki Bell, *Feminist Imagination: Genealogies in Feminist Theory*, Sage, London 1999, 168p; £45 hardback, £15.99 paperback.

This book examines various ways in which feminist theory in the twentieth century has been forged in relation to wider political horizons, in particular, discourses on 'race'. Familiar and expected figures such as Kristeva, de Beauvoir, Arendt and Butler feature alongside authors who would appear to have a more problematic relation to feminism: Nietzsche, Richard Wright, Frantz Fanon.

Bell shows how the suspicion of 'solidarity' in feminism is haunted by fears of the appeal to nations and races in fascism, even as the post-modern formulations that seek to avoid them often give rise to similar worries of their own. Rather than try and theorise away these anxieties, she argues that we should take them more seriously. 'They tell us something about our historical positionality, and about the affective economy of political imagination', she writes, identifying two of her main themes.

The following chapters explore different ways of reading the various parallels made between, for instance, the suffering of women and of black men, and between the performative character of gender and of ethnic and

religious identities. Hannah Arendt's scandalous objection to the enforced desegregation of US schools, grounded in distinctions between private, social and political spheres designed to forestall totalitarianism, is subjected to close, critical analysis, which nonetheless acknowledges the importance of its reservations about a politics that is 'merely' about visibility.

Among the key concepts interrogated in the book - together with 'trauma' and 'genealogy' - is that of 'embodiment', which, Bell argues, has been too cautiously avoided by those keen to theorise an anti-essentialist feminism. In a startling and refreshing juxtaposition, she discusses an early article by Levinas, which suggests that the liberal failure to address the body left Hitlerism free to code it in a racist way. Turning to the work of Fanon, Bell finds examples of ways of coding it otherwise. He thus anticipated more recent attempts by feminist theory to admit the value of essentialism, at least as a strategy, which can be used to liberating effect.

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