

STRATEGIC UNIVERSALISM?

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David Simpson, *Situatedness, or, Why We Keep Saying Where We're Coming From* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 2002, 302pp; £41.90 cloth; £14.50 paperback.

I am not David Simpson's Ideal Reader, and I think he might be glad, despite his arguments in *Situatedness*, that I have so situated myself. It is not really possible to write an 'unsituated' review of a book which so forthrightly aims to undermine the epistemological and rhetorical value of discourse located in the partialities of the speakers, so this review will constitute, as regards any communication with the author, a '*dialogue des sourds*.' Perhaps my response to Simpson's book will however be audible to some of his audience: if so it had better be clearly 'situated.'¹

1. For a mostly different point of view from my own, see the review by Simpson's colleague Martin Jay, *London Review of Books* Vol. 24, No. 23 (28/11/02).

Speaking then 'azza' woman (Simpson's satiric locution is borrowed from Andrew Sullivan), a feminist, a teacher, a half-baked middle-aged American leftist who has experienced criminal court up close and personal from several sides, and speaking also as a cultural and literary historian of early modern epistemology and member of Knowledge and Belief, a research project under way at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science which tends more to question and historicize than to share Descartes's anxious quest for 'clear and distinct' knowledge; speaking this veritable babble of tongues: I don't like this book. Speaking *azza* fellow toiler in the groves of academe, I do very much respect the thoughtfulness, the labour of mind (and, it seems from its insatiably unsatisfied tone, of heart) that went into this consideration of the contemporary rhetoric of 'situatedness' with its political and legal consequences and, importantly, lack of consequences. This is not a negligible topic, nor a negligible treatment of it. Whether it will itself have consequences I doubt. Most people worried about the issues that provoke the language of 'situation' are too busy trying to change the bits of the world they're up against to plough through 300 pages of hand-wringing over the philosophical sloppiness, the failure to explain the human world, that is attributed here to their operational lingo.

Simpson himself admits this: 'nothing I write here can of itself change the direction of the prevailing rhetoric of identification; but if those who read this are made more unsure about situating themselves and others, and more curious about alternatives [which go unmentioned in his text], then I will feel that I have been useful' (246). Few English professors are directly useful to the practical world of social policy primarily envisaged here as the world that counts, although Janet Halley's citation, for instance, of Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* in her successful brief to the Supreme

Court in the case of the Colorado 'Amendment 2' (nullifying all gay rights legislation at state and local levels) makes this reader more hopeful about the effectiveness of situated discourse. I never was in a position to wish realistically for philosopher-kingship, and so perhaps I am affectively as well as ideologically outside the circle of Simpson's Ideal Readership, one that has come to feel strongly the contemporary loss of direct academic impact in the political arena. But I think a book that concentrates as hard as this one does on the intellectual areas most influential in social reality should be judged as a kind of action as well as a kind of argument. I will give a 'situated' example of my difficulties with the book later, but first, a summary.

The fundamental problem as Simpson sees it is that there can be no resolution to a debate that simply stages and restages the antinomy of liberal free will *vs* what he often calls Foucauldian determinism: 'it is the entire dialectic of free choice and determined response that is discredited by the obscurity of situatedness' (241). Simpson frequently describes his aims and locates his arguments: a very useful habit, though he is not always as good as his word. Certainly I could support the intentions described in this claim: 'The aim of my study here is to appeal for an understanding of the prescribed dead ends that result from taking the rhetoric of situatedness at face value, without giving way to the reactive frustration that wants to accord it no value at all' (211). To the degree that the book does this, it advances a conversation the history of which it also masterfully, if partially, surveys. *Situatedness* has a large chronological and disciplinary range. The long arguments of its chapters take in and critique social and epistemological theory from Descartes and Locke to (dismissively) Haraway and Benhabib, via Bentham, Clarence Darrow, Mill, Sartre and Habermas, from the high Enlightenment to the tired post-Postmodern, from jurisprudence to the realist novel (here discussed, too generally, as 'literature', in a brief chapter mostly on novelistic character). It provides a useful and in many ways credible conceptual history of situatedness - a term Simpson takes from Sartre - and the antinomies to which it belongs. The debate around determinism never presented an antinomy that caught my own imagination as a serious problem (we act as we act in urgent matters no matter how much Kant we've studied). Simpson has, however, provoked me to review my long-standing sense of the problem as one belonging mainly to zesty boys in first-year college seminars on Great Ideas. He is of course right that Enlightenment assumptions and their contemporary liberal-capitalist elaborations about individual responsibility have considerable weight and influence in the legal arena. And he is right to see that once we open up the question of what is wrong with the 'Twinkie defence' (a notorious American criminal law case of about ten years ago, in which a violent criminal was permitted to claim temporary insanity caused by high sugar and chemical content in his favourite snack), we have more to look at than merely the problem of going too far with exculpatory arguments from situatedness. A can of worms lies

open here, and as citizen-intellectuals we ought to be engaged in the processes by which such open cans are partially closed again, or at least the worms are trained to dance.

But this big range has strange absences in it: lots on Sartre, nothing but a footnote to Simone de Beauvoir, and then only to a book *about* her. Lots on the pugilistic Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz (post-9/11 a supporter of citizen identity cards and legal police and military torture), nothing at all on the remarkable efforts, in the area particularly of the legal concept of the 'reasonable man', of for instance Sarah Buel (University of Texas School of Law) to make the courts a more sensitive arena for battered women and children. Many references to the Twinkie case, none to the much more difficult and interesting case of the 'Framingham Eight', a group of women imprisoned in Massachusetts for killing boyfriends and husbands in self-defence, mostly in the immediate situation of being threatened with a lethal weapon or overwhelming physical force. And although Simpson includes among concrete cases of problematic situationism the notorious *Bell Curve* and Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, the objects of critique most irritating to him are Donna Haraway's essay 'Situated Knowledges' (1988) and Seyla Benhabib's *Situating the Self* (1987), which (15-year-old) texts he takes as adequately representative of vast corpuses of critique in the general area of 'standpoint epistemology', an intellectual arena first mentioned on p218 and given next to no genealogy. A couple of times in earlier chapters he 'situates himself' ironically as a white middle-class male academic, but he does not make the effort to analyse what if anything that might have to do with the striking absence of women from his bibliography: there are twenty-five woman-authored or -edited works listed in the bibliography of a book on 'situatedness' of about 300 items, and Benhabib has to represent (along with a respectful paragraph on Gayatri Spivak's 'strategic essentialism') all non-European and non-Euroamerican thinkers and activists! I am not suggesting the bibliography of such a book programmatically match proportions of 'situated' theoretical and social policy work in the area of its subject. But it is noticeable in a work so irritated by the current mania, as Simpson sees it, for positionality, that he feels free to ignore so much of what has obviously moved him to demystify the ontologies subsumed within it.

It is in the area of ethics that Simpson is most daring, and seems most partial in his consideration of actual kinds of situation. 'Those of us in the habit of situating ourselves on a regular basis might stop to investigate the peculiar feeling of virtue we have as we do so, and ponder whether we have deserved it by any active connection with anything ...' (220). 'The imperative to situate oneself is perceived as ethical even as (or perhaps because) it is usually devoid of critical content and without consequences beyond the moment of utterance' (221). 'I might agree to respect my friend's declarations of situatedness as they succeed one another or accumulate ... but that is exactly where the process stops, with a gesture of respect ... [It] is one of



recognition or interpellation rather than description: it will be useless to me if I am trying to assess my friend's eligibility for some kind of restricted benefit or his personal responsibility for some sort of crime ... These models of the self ... can encompass few if any of the problems that a politics or a jurisprudence must decide' (221-2). I well remember the interpellation 'My name is Geraldine Ferraro,' memorably pronounced on the occasion of the nomination of the first female vice-presidential candidate in American history. It certainly encouraged a lot of women to throw their energies into the kind of problem that a politics can decide.

On the problems a jurisprudence must decide, I'm going to start with an 'azza' because it invokes not only an experience but a source of information, and a good example of the difficult cases Simpson avoids confronting, perhaps because he is not forced to by his 'situation'. As one of the unlucky one in three American women who experiences the crime of rape in her lifetime, I was involved as chief witness for over fifteen years in a pair of aggravated rape cases that permitted me considerable first hand experience of jurisprudential changes in Massachusetts over that time period (1983-1998) - the period of the emergence of feminist involvement in social policy and the law; also the period of strong populist backlash against the rights of criminals. Some of the changes I had to deal with over that period were obviously for the good. The special (but hardly rare!) case of rape victims as chief witnesses in rape prosecutions has been recognized in ways that are transforming the social and legal consequences for women of reporting crimes of sexual aggression: the very term 'victim-witness' points to the inevitable undermining of the chief witness by her status as victim, and implies the exigency of handling such witnesses carefully, of not repeating physical aggression against them by means of public and verbal aggressions in the courthouse, of getting detailed accounts of the crime down as quickly as possible before traumatic amnesia sets in, and so on. On the other hand, the backlash in favour of victim's rights by 1997, when the second person charged in this case (who had jumped bail in 1983) had been apprehended, forced me indeed to state my situation in pre-trial considerations of sentencing. It was no longer effectively 'The Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. X,' but now 'Mary Baine Campbell v. X'. Azza victim in this case I had become a member of the prosecution's team. And anything I did, including refusal to consult, constituted a share of personal responsibility for the retribution of the state, while I myself oppose the concept of retribution in matters of criminal law. I had, in first taking action to pursue the case, considered the court an arena in which the participation of the Commonwealth in my situation gave me a solidarity with the whole population as a civic entity, rather than the vulnerable and provocative identity of an individual seeking revenge, and in particular a solidarity with the nearly 51 per cent of the population facing a high probability of sharing my situation (to which we must add the number of sexually abused children and overpowered men, such as the Haitian janitor

Abner Louima in the hands of the New York City police).

The women who had killed men to save their lives among the Framingham Eight were also compelled to state their situation, in a highly consequential drama pitting the prospect of life imprisonment against their difference from the legal model of the 'reasonable man'. The reasonable man, as Buel among others has argued, is usually considerably larger and stronger than the in many cases quite reasonable women being chased around their bedrooms by men with guns. Not always and everywhere of course, but the law is in fact capable of a certain amount of verbal precision, more than Simpson's habitual tone of near despair would suggest. I don't know how much peculiar 'virtue' they felt in situating themselves thus. I felt none in my own case, nor do I feel it now; the unpleasant facts are here to illustrate the difference experience and situation can make, not just to reason but to knowledge. But if I had felt virtue, perhaps he feels that as a rape victim I might have 'deserved it by ... actual connection with' something (200). As a citizen and member of the same society Simpson lives so thoughtfully in, I am distressed to think that even a thoughtful man could imagine, even ironically, such a thing as 'deserving' a feeling of virtue in relation to the disenfranchised position of aggravated powerlessness some people, in some situations, are required by law or common sense to articulate. Is this really 'a modern form of casuistry that we deploy not only at the expense of others but on ourselves?' (246)

To be fair, Simpson's tone of near-despair, or of implacable refusal to find any account of the social or legal human being that is adequate to reality - or simply 'clear and distinct' - is the tone of a near-philosopher. Simpson might say it's not his job to be satisfied with the intellectual work of the past, nor is it his job to suggest those 'alternatives' to current antinomies of reason that could make for a better or at least more reasonable and articulable world. Those would be OK things to say. They would be more OK if his own refusal - consistent with his argumentative aims - to 'situate' himself did not simply leave him situated *despite* himself, unconsciously, and thus unable to critique his own critique. 'I have none of the qualifications', he says, 'that would permit me to hold a view on the adequacy of [Daniel] Goldhagen as a historian of the Holocaust, and I intend no comment on that topic and therefore no approval or dismissal of the book' (206). However, the English professor seems to feel fully qualified to dismiss primatologist Haraway, and professor of government and political science Benhabib, and to sympathize with the philosopher Habermas's nostalgia over our lost 'authentic privacy': 'solitary time within the patriarchal household once provided for the cultivation (through reading) of a critical reason that created the basis for a genuine *public sphere*' (180). Whose reading? Whose 'public sphere'? Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981) is however rebuked for nostalgia, in its reliance on ethical narratives (224-5), as is Benhabib, whose own words are used against her: 'she wonders whether the whole tendency to declarations of situatedness



might not emanate from a postmodern “nostalgia for home, for the certitudes of one’s own culture and society” in a detraditionalized world’ (203). Some nostalgias are more moving than others to Simpson, but he doesn’t recognize it so can’t tell us why.

In the end, while admitting uncomfortably that his arguments critical of situatedness ‘could be taken to imply a basic comfort with the terms of our culture’, Simpson decides not to take a position on this question: ‘for to do so would of course be to situate myself and to encounter all the problems of so doing, the problems about which I have been writing’ (245). No need to worry. The positions of a man who chooses the Twinkie defence and *The Bell Curve* as objects of critique, rather than the large-scale and responsibly theorized interventions in social policy and legal activism of collectively ‘situated’ persons and movements over the last 40 years of American history; who represents those interventions largely by way of a few disparaging remarks about a single 1980s article by Donna Haraway; and who without irony adopts his favourite word ‘azza’ from a right-wing journalist, are clear enough to any reader who does not share them.

In writing a book that finds fatal fault with most of the serious social thinking of white men over the last 300 years, and with, via a strangely negligent metonymy, all that of women in the last fifty (and which basically ignores both men’s and women’s theorizing in colonial and postcolonial societies), one should be careful not to leave oneself open to the attack of unselfconsciousness. Simpson has failed in that, and I have reacted strongly because it takes a long time to read a serious book, and in these demanding times I feel that the book should, as an action, account for what it says it will account for, rather than choosing targets on the basis of unacknowledged situation and unexamined personal irritation.

THE RARITY OF THE EVENT: ON ALAIN BADIOU

Andrew Gibson

Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy*, Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (ed and trans), London and New York, Continuum, 2003, 208pp; £16.99 hardback, £9.99 paperback. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Ray Brassier (trans), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003, 120pp; £8.99 paperback, £26.95 hardback.

If anything like a historical account of the Anglo-American intellectual world in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century ever comes to be written, one of the more important factors it should take into account is the history of the appearance of translations of French thought. The British and American reception of the thinkers in question has been comprehensively determined by this history. From the seventies to the nineties, this was strikingly the case with Deleuze. At the moment it seems likely that Badiou's career in the Anglophone world will be as patchy and erratic as Deleuze's was. If Badiou and Deleuze are the two great philosophical antagonists *de nos jours*, as some now see them in France, the similarity of their fates in translation is piquantly ironic. I don't mean to slight the dedication and expertise of the small group of (largely quite young) French-speaking philosophers and scholars who have been sedulously working on Badiou. Quite the reverse: apart from anything else, they have efficiently protected him against the prospect of being prematurely dumbed down - an issue I shall return to later - and we should be grateful for it. Beyond them, however, is a large readership that remains interested in contemporary French thought, if more fitfully and with less heady excitement than two or three decades ago. It is not clear, however, that this readership is being altogether well served by Badiou's English and American publishers. The corollary, of course, would be that Badiou is not altogether well served by them either. His progress in translation begins to look as though it might bear out some of his own more virulent polemics. For the problem is partly the increasing hegemony of a commercial logic to which he has always been fiercely opposed.

In the Anglophone world, Badiou's current reputation hinges chiefly on two volumes, his book on Deleuze and his *Ethics*.¹ This in itself is revealing: at the moment, Deleuze and ethics are sexy. A densely argued and extremely demanding book of mathematical philosophy (*Le nombre et les nombres*), apparently, is not.² Nor, *a fortiori*, is an extended post-Marxist meditation on politics as thought (*Peut-on penser la politique?*).³ Yet the first two books are no more central to Badiou's thought than the second two, and in some

1. Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, Louise Burchill (trans), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000; and *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Peter Hallward (trans), London, Verso, 2001.

2. Alain Badiou, *Le nombre et les nombres*, Paris, Seuil, 1990.

3. Alain Badiou, *Peut-on penser la politique?* Paris, Seuil, 1985.

ways rather less so. Badiou's fundamental differences with Deleuze, Levinas, and the contemporary ethics of alterity are abundantly evident in both the Deleuze book and the *Ethics*. But the false if temporary pre-eminence of these two texts can be misleading. For it suggests that Badiou is readily assimilable to the terms of contemporary debates, when in fact he cuts right across them. The *Ethics* is actually a polemical anti-ethics. Such 'ethics' as it puts forward seems fascinating, but crude and unelaborated. This impression could not survive a better knowledge of the larger philosophy, but that knowledge cannot yet be gleaned from English translations. So, too, in isolation, the Deleuze book looks like an engaging critique of Deleuze's transcendental materialism as not only vitalist but monist. In fact, like Badiou's other brilliant and largely uncollected essays on major philosophers - from Spinoza, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein to Sartre and Althusser to Rancière and Françoise Proust - it is also part of an ongoing series of important philosophical self-differentiations.⁴ These are painstaking, subtle and complex, but forceful and very clear. They are guided and spurred on by the belief that thought is above all conflictual: it begins in and steadily refines itself, makes itself exact, through divisions with others.



Some of the gaps are being filled in fast. The trouble is that other gaps are not, or not altogether satisfactorily. In some cases it's possible to imagine that they may not be filled in at all. On the one hand, we have a translation of Badiou's *Manifesto for Philosophy*. This book is a stirring but simplified version of ideas that take on more ample proportions elsewhere. It should really be set alongside Badiou's account of the importance of the modern manifesto itself (to be found in *Le Siècle*, due to appear in dual text from Seuil later this year).⁵ On the other hand, whilst we now have Nina Power and Alberto Toscano's welcome translation of Badiou's writings on Beckett, his essays on Mallarmé are possibly even more central to his thought, illuminating, not least, the significance of the manifesto. Will full translations with the appropriate scholarly apparatus - necessary, given how much of Badiou's work on Mallarmé consists of extremely detailed philosophical readings of specific poems - ever be available to the Anglophone reader? It seems inherently unlikely: whilst Beckett remains a commercial proposition in the English-speaking world, Mallarmé has seldom if ever been one.

But isn't there a risk of overstating the problem? We have at present no English version of the great spine of Badiou's thought, *L'Être et l'événement* and *Logiques des mondes*. But the first is promised for next year, and, as for the second, well, he hasn't even finished it in French yet. The *Petit manuel d'inesthétique* and other major texts are on their way.⁶ Isn't it pedantic and fussily purist to suggest that, as far as possible, the French Badiou should simply be 'made over' into English? The answer is, only up to a point. Firstly, the issue is more important in Badiou's case than, say, Deleuze's or Derrida's, because, alone among the best known recent French thinkers, Badiou is a systematic philosopher and in many ways a rationalist. His philosophy has a rigorous if extremely complicated structure into which all

4. See for instance 'L'ontologie implicite de Spinoza', in *Spinoza: Puissance et ontologie*, Myriam Revault D'Allonnes and Hadi Rizk (eds), Paris, Kimé, 1993, pp54-70; *Casser en deux l'histoire du monde?*, Paris, Le Perroquet, 1992 - on Nietzsche; 'Silence, solipsisme, sainteté: l'antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein', *BARCA! Poésie, Politique, Psychanalyse* 3 (Nov. 1994), pp13-53; *Jean-Paul Sartre*, Paris, Potemkine, 1981; 'Qu'est-ce que Louis Althusser entend par "philosophie"?', in *Politique et philosophie dans l'œuvre de Louis Althusser*, Sylvain Lazarus (ed), Paris, PUF, 1993, pp29-45; 'Rancière et la communauté des égaux' and 'Rancière et l'apolitique', *Abrégé de métapolitique*, Paris, Seuil, 1998, pp121-27, 129-38; 'Sur le livre de Françoise Proust: *Sur le ton de l'histoire*', *Les Temps modernes* Nos. 565-66 (August-September 1993), pp238-48; and 'Depuis si longtemps, depuis si peu de temps', *Rue Descartes* 33 (2002), pp101-4 - on Françoise Proust.

5. *Le Siècle*, bilingual edition, translated with a reply by Alberto Toscano (Paris, Seuil, 2004).

6. Alain Badiou, *Petit manuel d'inesthétique*, Paris, Seuil, 1998.



aspects of his thought can in principle be fitted. He is not a dogmatist: one of his most beguiling qualities is that he is so willing to address the questions others raise for his system, and to modify its features if he sees the need. But he is, truly, a thinker: he teaches the meaning of thinking, not least because he is rightly intent on restoring the force of a crucial axiom: thought begins in the break with *doxa*. Because he is a systematic thinker, Badiou does not produce collections of essays, but coherent philosophical texts. They can be placed within his system as wholes. To break them up and redistribute the pieces, as English and American publishers have started to do, may sometimes be defensible, as in the case of Badiou's disparate essays on specific authors. But it is already to engage in a kind of misrepresentation.

Secondly, this redistribution makes it more likely that the non-expert will misconstrue the relationship between Badiou's thought and its most significant modern philosophical contexts, which Badiou himself identifies as German and hermeneutic, French and postmodern-deconstructive, Anglo-American and linguistic-pragmatic. Badiou neither identifies his thought with any one of these three camps, nor does he pit himself against their great champions. Precisely because his system is essentially complex, he continually discovers points of agreement as well as differences with other philosophers. To adopt one of his metaphors, he 'traces diagonals' across philosophy. Whilst his disputes with Heidegger and his insistence on a return to Plato are crucial to his thought, it makes no more sense to see him as categorically 'anti-Heideggerian' than it does simply to label him a 'Platonist'. Compare Badiou the great proponent of the Platonic account of mathematics with Badiou on the grimness of the Republic, as exemplified in the draconian treatment of the sophists and the banishment of the poets.

Again and again, attentive readers will find themselves on well-known ground only also to find it shelving beneath them, or in strange territory that turns out to be quite familiar after all. Thus, for example, with *Being*: Badiou both argues that philosophy should forget about the Heideggerian 'forgetting of Being', and yet, at the same time, that it must accept the Heideggerian premise: philosophy starts out from the question of ontology. As a philosophy not only of Being but of the event, his thought might seem close to that of some of his French contemporaries, notably Deleuze, Lyotard and Proust. But for Badiou, the event arrives as a supplement to Being, and is rare. One of his most powerful criticisms of Deleuze in particular is that Deleuze puts the event everywhere and thereby neutralises it (an argument, incidentally, that may do something to explain the strange eminence of Deleuzian philosophy in the neo-liberal and social-democratic phase of culture). Badiou vigorously resists the idea that a century of colossal disaster invalidates the philosophical enterprise: why should philosophers and not politicians, businessmen or the military shoulder the burden of guilt? But his call for an end to the thought of 'the end' does not mean that philosophy is not concerned with the consequences of the Holocaust, for example; rather, that such lessons as the Holocaust can teach are specific and, above all,

political. How could the enemy ever really be the philosophical tradition, as compared for instance to the disposition of mind that produces the disingenuous and slack-minded journalistic and popular conflation of Hitler with Milosevic and Saddam Hussein?

These are of course just meagre little fragments from a formidable philosophical architecture, but they may give some small indication of the sheer intricacy of mind at stake in it. To reconfigure its internal relations is to run the risk of quite serious distortion. Badiou's philosophy involves a host of specific judgments, or better, decisions about thought. It is through this great array of decisions that he shows us how thought matters. A set of translations altogether adequate to a thought intended to matter would be a remarkable achievement. In Badiou's case, such a set of translations will not be available for some time to come, if at all.

Infinite Thought is a significant addition to Anglophone Badiou studies. It contains some important material, notably the interview with Badiou with which the volume ends. In particular, for anyone who might have been wondering precisely where Badiou was heading since the closing essays in *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire*,⁷ Feltham, Clemens and their co-interviewers have skilfully extracted a succinct, clear and extremely interesting account of what is at stake for Badiou in *Logiques des mondes*. But - and in spite of the translators' rather good introduction - I am not sure that *Infinite Thought* is a very good introduction to Badiou's philosophy.

The problems begin with the great swirling nebula on the cover. This is presumably supposed to be an image appropriate to an infinite thought: 'thought, the final frontier'. It is precisely wrong for Badiou. If thinking infinity is crucial to him, it is only in rigorous contra-distinction to the theological or romantic uses of the concept. In the first instance, the concept of infinity is connected neither to a concept of time nor one of space. Infinity is banal and actual (in the Aristotelean and mathematical sense of 'actual infinity'). It is ready to hand, there at once. It is chiefly available to us through mathematics, as in the work of Cantor, Zermelo, Fraenkel, Gödel, Cohen and modern set theory in general. To think infinity in temporal or spatial terms is precisely to risk perpetuating the post-romantic 'pathos of finitude' that has dogged us since Hegel separated philosophy from mathematics.

Infinite Thought presents itself as a kind of sample of Badiou's thought, something close to a 'Badiou Reader'. It consists of a series of 'Philosophy ands' ... : 'Philosophy and Art', 'Philosophy and Politics', and so on. There is nothing inherently problematic about this: Badiou himself is responsible for some of the titles; indeed, he adopted the same format in his French text *Conditions*.⁸ But to compare the two texts is to register the difference between a major philosophical work and the logic of a commercially-driven compilation. In *Conditions*, philosophy is linked to its four major conditions, the truth-domains: science (specifically mathematics), art (specifically poetry), love, and politics; and to psychoanalysis, which Badiou has long been tempted to declare a fifth domain. Each of these concerns is worked

7. See 'Groupe, catégorie, sujet', and 'L'être et l'apparaître', *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire*, Paris, Seuil, 1998, pp165-77, pp179-200.

8. Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, Paris, Seuil, 1992.

through meticulously and in relation to a key set of concepts. One such concept is 'the generic', which Badiou illustrates through a long final meditation on Beckett. Because it is so dense and so precisely organised, *Conditions* emerges as one of Badiou's half-dozen most important works. Yet it must be open to question whether we shall see it in English at all, save as parcelled out here and there in journals and 'collections'.

Set alongside it, *Infinite Thought* is a miscellany. It prises essays from the philosophical and discursive contexts in which alone they are properly comprehensible, and juxtaposes them with essays from different contexts. Thus 'Philosophy and Art', for example, comes from *Conditions*, but has been separated from the marvellous, detailed essays on Mallarmé and Rimbaud which follow it and reflect on its argument. 'Philosophy and the "War Against Terrorism"', by contrast, comes from an altogether different discursive world, that of Badiou's recent engagements with contemporary politics - Le Pen, Kosovo, Iraq, the headscarf debate and so on - particularly in *Circonstances*, 1 and 2.⁹ These essays are a delight, not least in that they are pungent to the point of being scabrous. And they are important: Badiou is seldom as difficult as most of his French contemporaries - that is, if we leave the mathematics to one side. Yet he is as unashamedly mandarin and 'aristocratic' as they are. The essays in the two volumes of *Circonstances* seem part of an effort to marry serious thought to a more 'journalistic-intellectual' discourse than those Badiou usually chooses, without ever quite going pop. But philosophy does not belong with the 'war on terrorism' as it belongs with art. The two themes are not comparable. Whilst the editors clearly know this, the volume itself obscures the point. Insofar as *Infinite Thought* appears to suggest that the attack on the Twin Towers is of major importance for Badiou - and certainly insofar as it suggests that it might be important for him as, say, Celan or the mathematician J.P. Cohen are important - it is misleading. Part of Badiou's point about both the attack and the 'war on terrorism' is that both are philosophically insignificant. For they are encounters between nihilisms that bear no relation to any truth.

Infinite Thought should therefore be approached with a little care. It is more interesting to the already knowledgeable reader than it is illuminating for the beginner. If it is what the blurb calls it, 'a representative selection', it is so in a not altogether serious or helpful sense. I also have another reservation about it: some of the translation work is not especially good. There are more than a few clumsy Frenchisms of the kind that help to get French philosophers a bad name in the English-speaking world, and which are particularly unnecessary in Badiou's case: with the exception, perhaps, of Clément Rosset, he is the least difficult of contemporary French philosophers to translate. The problem is more worrying, in that Feltham is currently translating *L'Être et l'événement*. Given the extraordinary richness of that text, I hope he bears in mind the principle that English translations ought always to make sense as English to regular users of English.

Here he could learn from Ray Brassier, whose excellent translation of

9. Alain Badiou, *Circonstances, 1: Kosovo, 11 Septembre, Chirac/Le Pen*, Lignes, Éditions Léo Scherer, 2003; *Circonstances, 2: Irak, foulard, Allemagne/ France*, Lignes, Éditions Léo Scherer, 2004.

Saint Paul is crystalline throughout. In fact, *Saint Paul* is a better introduction to Badiou than *Infinite Thought*. For *Infinite Thought* implies that Badiou's philosophy is best grasped as a loose set of grand abstractions, whereas *Saint Paul* is about a specific truth-procedure in its concreteness; and for Badiou all truth-procedures are specific and concrete. Paul is a key figure in Badiou's select pantheon, and a key element in the structure of his thought; many of his most important emphases are here. Paul is the subject of a truth: that is, in Badiou's terms, he is propelled towards a new way of being by an event that fractures an established order of things. A truth is an extension of this event in and by its subjects, a process of which Paul is a classic instance. Truth is not separable from a subjective trajectory. It demands commitment and must be sustained with a militant persistence - not least for others: the subject of a truth is a universal vector (the universality in question existing, of course, only in anticipation). Paul's truth determines its own specific modes of communication; that is, it requires the invention of new names. It also requires a subjective discipline. Paul subtracts his truth from established knowledge through the austere concentration involved in 'investigations' (*enquêtes*). He identifies his truth in the future anterior, in terms of the laws that 'will have structured' it. He also operates his own version of 'restricted action', a term Badiou gets from Mallarmé: everything must be organised around the few themes that matter.

The trouble with using *Saint Paul* as a starting-point, however, is that it really needs to be precisely placed in the context of Badiou's thought. In this respect, it is a pity that his publishers did not urge Brassier to provide a succinct introduction. For in some ways, *Saint Paul* invites misconstruction. Its historical and scholarly detail is part of what makes it so accessible. But the detail is untypical of Badiou, and is even at odds with his larger philosophy, which is resolutely ahistorical. History has no objective content and does not supply explicatory contexts. It is a subjective discipline of time founded on events. Indeed, although the point is not immediately evident, *Saint Paul* does say this: Paul's truth cannot be named from within established discourses. He adamantly resists any dissolution of truth into opinion, into the perspectival world of historicity and 'culturalism'. This specifically involves him in a work of radical dehistoricisation. Thus the book does not exactly bear out its own theory of history in its practice.

Even more importantly, there is the initially perplexing matter of Badiou and Christianity. Serious readers can already be heard grumbling that there is too much residual Christianity in the philosophy for comfort. No doubt at some level the residue is perceptible. But deconstructing Badiou is a project of negligible interest and value, certainly at the current time: there are other, much more important things that we can be doing with his thought. One crucial point in *Saint Paul* is that the Pauline truth is not that of the Damascene conversion. It is not the truth of a *coup de foudre*, a revelation or a moment of illumination. The Pauline event has an intellectual structure, the structure of a fable. The fable in question is the resurrection, understood

10. Alain Badiou, *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire*, op cit., pp9-24.

11. Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

as 'a mythological assertion'. The logic here can only be fully grasped in the context of Badiou's great essay 'God is Dead'.¹⁰ Apart from anything else, that essay effectively provides us with an axiom the force of which runs right through the philosophy: no thought is possible save on the further side of the atheist decision. It is not often that we can ignore this point in Badiou's work; but we might do so in reading *Saint Paul*.

In the end, the character of Badiou's philosophy is such that it might be better not to start with one of his books at all, but with Peter Hallward's *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*;¹¹ or perhaps with Hallward's book alongside the *Manifesto for Philosophy*, the *Ethics* and *Saint Paul*. Hallward's book is a remarkable achievement: erudite, richly informative about the relevant philosophical, mathematical, political and historical contexts, precise, accurate and extremely well-written. It is an excellent base to set out from, but it also leaves room for further exploration, not least of Badiou's aesthetics. Hallward, incidentally, provides a great example of how to fight the current pressures to trivialise, formidable as they are, in the UK at least. In this he is faithful to Badiou; for Badiou's work enters a plea that can also be heard coming, in one form or another, from various uniquely powerful voices of the time, from Agamben, Proust and Rancière to Coetzee, Morrison and Sebald. Quite simply, without resorting to any of what Badiou calls the current set of 'spiritual supplements' - from the doctrine of rights to the self-deceiving sentimentality of contemporary humanitarianism, to obscurantist chatter or quasi-religion - it is time we started getting serious again.

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THE MODERN PRINTS

Jon Klancher

Terry Cochran, *Twilight of the Literary: Figures of Thought in the Age of Print*, Harvard MA, Harvard University Press, 2001, 288pp; £27.95 hardback.

This is a demanding meditation on the concept of modernity, a lucid and carefully orchestrated book that ranges among Italian, French, German, Spanish and even Portuguese texts, and from the fourteenth to the twenty-first centuries, as well as between humanist, materialist, and poststructural vocabularies. Its aim is to seek a better grounding for materialist, critical thought in a global situation where the fundamentals of modernity - the subject, the national, vernacular writing - no longer hold together in a coherent 'world picture'. Theories of modernity have ranged widely in recent years, from substantive efforts to define the logic of a historical era, to a sceptical reluctance to credit this category as more than a narrative device used in countless ways to affirm the modern (or capitalist) age as such (as Jameson argues in *A Singular Modernity*). Cochran presses the sceptical view in a different direction. To recognise how the category of modernity functions narratively or ideologically is not to 'dispel its necessity, for it rests on the conceptual needs of secularisation, on the need to show that human beings largely control their own fate'. Humans control their fate in modernity by inscribing their thought in a particular and complex material form, print - a medium that has required complex institutions for steering thought into modes of effectiveness and power over time. And though the twentieth century introduced powerful new media (film, digital, and so forth) that disturb and bid to displace the centrality of print, Cochran makes the provocative case for a prolonged 'twilight' in which our thought continues nonetheless to be figured by print and the modern institutions printed knowledge has required.

Cochran grasps this process by attempting to link the complexity of figuration with the needs of hegemony in the modern. He links 'figures' in the poststructuralist sense (*prosopopeia* is the most extended instance) with the historical meaning given to 'figura' by Erich Auerbach, where the divine is shadowed forth into the human as the shape of its history. In a chapter on 'The Use and Abuse of the Human' Cochran considers modernity's project to ground knowledge in the human subject by reading Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* in the light of Heidegger's 'Age of the World Picture'. Much of this illuminating discussion is retrospective, clarifying how an Enlightenment anthropology dispelled the figuration entailed by religion and myth by means of the secularising notion of *anthropomorphism*. "Nothing whatsoever could be thought" about the cause of the world', as Cochran



cites Kant, without the anthropomorphic centring in human imagination. Even when we no longer believe in the gods or divine origins, this account goes, we maintain in the anthropological idea the same discursive framework while adopting the figure itself 'from the prosaic world'. Pragmatic anthropology - the human sciences more broadly - pushes the figurative to the ornamental edges of discourse and 'dispenses with personification [as a figure] because the (human) object can be experienced daily as a living referent'. Thus figuration lives on, unacknowledged, like a god lurking in the materials of the everyday. Late twentieth century questioning of this process exposes it by criticising transcendent or ahistorical essences, rendering them immanent, explained as resulting from historical or epistemological circumstances and interests.

Turning to Baudrillard's pessimism about the ensuing loss of a transcendent place for critical reflection, Cochran then asks why genuinely critical thought needs a 'transcendental fiction' (the human) at all. What, dispensing with that fiction, would a 'truly secular historical vision' be like? Evidently it would have to leave behind not only the anthropomorphic subject, but the central place of print as well. In a fascinating chapter on 'The Collective Culture of Print', Cochran considers some little-read writings of Gramsci on print and communications technologies, contrasting Gramsci's situation - and embeddedness in the national vernacular history of print and 'tradition' - with Benjamin's. Gramsci understood print as radically democratising, the basis for 'a new culture on a new social base' that had not yet, by the early twentieth century, been fully realised. He associated, on Cochran's reading, the traditional intellectual with an aristocratic oral culture where education and speaking are absorbed, as Bourdieu would say, through the class habitus and not formal education. Among the media, he dismissed journalism as more or less a transcription of 'oratory and conversation', not a fundamental print genre. The contrast with Benjamin's placing of print and oral-visual media at the centre of 'social, political, and cultural agency' is indeed striking.

For Benjamin the global perspective, not the national vernacular language, was the point of departure. Cochran cites a passage in Benjamin that attributes the power of the sound film to its merger of 'new capital from the electrical industry with that of the film industry. Thus, viewed from the outside, the sound film promoted national interests, but seen from the inside it helped to internationalise film production even more than previously'. Since sound films appeared, unlike silent film, to limit the reach of film to a national audience sharing its (spoken) language, Benjamin's shift of analytic register to the connection between industries rather than filmmakers and spectators jarred the familiar grounding of language-based media in national forms of union. Both film and electrical industries *were*, of course, mainly national in the 1930s; retrospectively, Benjamin anticipated the globalisation of mediatic relationships in a way

Gramsci's assumptions, deeply grounded in the transcendent value of the national vernacular, could not.

Much of this book reworks critical insights that have been won in the past three or four decades, from Benjamin and Heidegger to Said and de Man, by placing them in a larger framework, not the 'end' of modernity but the transformation, globally and mediatically, of its framing conditions. Not only critical thinking but a range of humanist disciplines of knowledge are at stake here. Critical thinking itself, Cochran concludes, 'results from the struggle to detach thought from the means of thinking; that is, it is the sediment from the effort to think the figures of thought'. If we need figures in order to think, and we can only think in language, then the question of how language, discourse and print is inscribed institutionally becomes fundamental. Cochran offers perhaps the most imaginative and serious reading of Gramsci since Raymond Williams, finding in his work both the recognition of the powers of figuration and the means of 'institutional critique'.

The discrediting of transcendence by way of contextualist or historicist 'debunking' today marks the dominant method across the range of knowledge production, from literary studies and art history to the cultural history of science and other disciplines. As they expose this situation, however, the humanities disciplines find they are simultaneously 'losing their own objects of knowledge'. I wish Cochran had pursued an analysis of this disciplinary crisis further in this book, an issue which has something to do with how a book like this will be read now and who will read it. *Twilight of the Literary* speaks cogently across several conceptual divides - poststructuralist and materialist, the printed and the mediatic, 'figuration' and 'hegemony' - and especially to a literary discipline that does not seem to know what to do in the twenty-first century with its own humanist, theoretical, and cultural-historical legacies of thought. But it speaks hesitantly, and much less clearly, to the 'what now?' question. At most there is a cautious hopefulness here that the perspective that Cochran calls 'linguistic materialism' may give us a 'new approach to historical intervention'. The shape and point of that intervention remains elusive in this book; nevertheless *Twilight of the Literary* offers an indispensable critical reflection on what modernity *has* entailed, an unusually rich resource for the critical imagination at a disorienting turn of the modern.

MAKING IT NEWER

David Cunningham

Jane Goldman, *Modernism, 1910-1945: Image to Apocalypse*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave, 2004, 312pp; £45 hardback, £14.99 paperback.

What's in a date, or rather a pair of dates? For the contemporary scholar of something called 'modernism', apparently everything. How wonderful it must be to work, by contrast, in a cultural field named 'Victorian', where everything is apparently so clear: 1837-1901, coronation to death. So little ambiguity or doubt in that. Even a less obviously 'periodising' category like Romanticism seems subject, at least in literary and art history, to an agreed historical 'placing' that allows everybody to know (roughly) what they're talking about when the term pops up in conversation. But for 'modernism', beginnings and endings are a different matter. Even if we can agree that it must surely begin at some point, we can never seem to agree when. And as to its ending - well, we can't agree on that at all (nor even whether it has yet, or can ever, occur).

For Anglo-American literary studies, Malcolm Bradbury's and James McFarlane's dating of modernism from 1890 to 1930, in the title of a much reprinted collection of essays from the late 1970s, has (despite numerous challenges over the years) proved most persistently influential - an influence reflected in hundreds of undergraduate course syllabuses throughout the English-speaking world. The immediate interest in Jane Goldman's new book - published in Palgrave's *Transitions* series (the stated editorial aim of which is 'to address anew questions of literary history and periodisation') - comes therefore from the historical situating (and shift) that its title points up: lopping off twenty years at the beginning, and extending Bradbury and McFarlane by fifteen at the end. It is, for me, the impact that these last bonus years have on the field more generally that proves to be the most fascinating and productive aspect of this book.

Let us begin at the 'beginning' though. Goldman's rationale for starting a decade into the twentieth century, rather than in the dying embers of the nineteenth, is clearly articulated, and is not without pedagogical persuasiveness: '[T]o approach the heights of modernism gently via the foothills of Symbolism and the Yellow period ... tends to defer and diffuse rather than sharply define the specific topics and shock tactics of the various movements in modernism ... [so that] new readers and students of the period often find it difficult, in my experience, to discern the "modernist" aspects of this complex narrative' (22). The 'potency' of 1910, as the more precise inaugural date, is reinforced by both its 'mythical' status in Virginia Woolf's essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' - the moment when 'human character

changed' - and (more originally) the connection Goldman suggests it might have to the political context of the suffragette movement and the demand for 'material improvement for women workers' (159). (Goldman is particularly good on the 'gendering' of modernism throughout, while rightly questioning any 'gender apartheid' in its theorisation). Regarding 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', as is usual Goldman links Woolf's historical caesura to the impact of the London exhibition of Post-Impressionist painting organised by Roger Fry in that year. And this is certainly not unconvincing, if we accept Bloomsbury as being at the centre of modernism as a cultural moment. But it risks - despite Goldman's own detailed attention to figures like Paul Celan and Kurt Schwitters elsewhere in the book - a certain provincialism in relation to what was a very 'international' and 'cosmopolitan' era. For if the Yellow Period might well seem 'tame' by comparison with the likes of Pound, Joyce or Lewis, the same surely cannot be said - to take a few French examples - of Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Nerval, Jarry or Rimbaud. Moreover, as Goldman acknowledges, Fry's 1910 exhibition presented work that was itself 'not strictly contemporary "modern" art. Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh ... were all by 1910 dead' (43). Meanwhile, continental Europe had already seen Picasso's *Demoiselles D'Avignon* three years earlier.

As for Goldman's posited closing date: in a book which concludes (in some of its most interesting passages) with the 'apocalypse movement', centred around poets like Dylan Thomas, David Gascoyne and W.S. Graham, 1945 makes obvious sense as an ending: *Modernism, 1910-1945* concludes with the sound of the atom bomb exploding. In terms of the book's general coverage its immediate effect is very welcome. For it works to disturb a critical *doxa* concerning the 1930s which has been allowed to stand for far too long: that this is a decade dominated by a 'retreat' from the dynamics of modernism, a 'return' to 'realist reportage' legitimated by a crude conception of 'political commitment'. As Goldman shows, in many ways this is, rather, a period of 'further flourishing', with the belated arrival of Surrealism on British shores and the formal experiments of a new generation of poets. Considering the 1930s from this perspective, Goldman is wonderfully rude about the likes of Orwell, whose work is often taken (like that of Larkin and Amis later) to represent English Literature's return to the straight and narrow after its 'avant-garde' flirtations. For Goldman, Orwell's is rather 'a dreary, melancholic residual modernism ... mutilated by liberal guilt, worthiness, and didacticism' (xxii).

While Goldman's re-readings of Eliot, Woolf and Pound, in the first half of her book, are well-judged and often novel - particularly in her contextualisation of their work by re-placing it within the pages of the little magazines and journals where it was first published - it is, then, the second half of the book, introducing the likes of Gascoyne and the remarkable 'Renaissance man' of modernism John Rodker, that is the most rewarding and inspiring. The downside is that it leaves you wanting more. Perceptive as is her reading of *The Waste Land*, I would happily have sacrificed the

space it takes up here for more of Goldman's thoughts on marginal figures like David Jones, Hugh Syke Davies, Basil Bunting or Mary Butts.

Nonetheless, Goldman's book does a good deal more than one can usually expect from a book of this type, aimed as it is at an already over-saturated 'introductory' market. Insightful in its readings, this is a book which is never dull, manifests an entirely infectious enthusiasm, and is at times downright funny. If it is most obviously aimed at an undergraduate audience, it also has a lot to say - perhaps most - to those who have been working in this area for a long time, and who might consider themselves to be largely familiar with all it has to offer.

And as for those irritatingly fluid historical co-ordinates of its subject? Well, perhaps the problem lies less in the difficulty of fixing the co-ordinates themselves than in the scholarly and pedagogical assumption that periodisation is what is actually required here. For 'modernism', after all, is not a term like 'Victorian', and cannot be made such, since its *temporal* implications as a concept - concerning the production of the historically 'new' through a non-identity to tradition - will always be in tension with the historicising, chronological logic of periodisation itself. It is entirely to her credit that, somewhat slyly given the stated aims of the series in which this book appears, Goldman clearly recognizes as much. She refuses the usefulness, for example, of the epithet 'postmodernist' (22) and reiterates the ways in which 'avant-garde' and 'modernist' movements 'themselves' have always manifested a dynamic energy resistant to any reduction to a 'fixed category of aesthetic qualities', or an 'impoverished sense of historicism and periodisation' (xvi). Despite the implication of the title, 1945 emerges here not as the 'end' of modernism *per se*, but as 'a post-war place from which modernism's and the avant-garde's new ladders start' (xxii). As Goldman states: 'Transitions continue'.

QUEERING THE SPHERES

Judith Surkis

Eric O. Clarke, *Virtuous Vice: Homoeroticism and the Public Sphere*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2000; 233pp; £11.95 paperback.
Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, Zone Books, Cambridge, MA and London, 2002, 334pp; £19.99 hardback.

Eric Clarke's book *Virtuous Vice* and Michael Warner's collection of three new essays and five previously published articles *Publics and Counterpublics* draw upon a well-established body of literature on the uses and abuses of 'the public sphere'. They do so, however, in a way that seeks to break with the normative ideal that has guided the field of Habermas criticism to date; namely, of public discourse as a domain consecrated to the 'public exercise of private reason'.

Since the 1989 English translation of Habermas's classic text *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas's model of the institutions and associations of bourgeois civil society has circulated widely in the writings of Anglo-American critics interested in the past, present and future of participatory democracy. In seeking to appropriate this model, critics called attention to the exclusions upon which the historical emergence of the bourgeois public sphere was based, while themselves remaining largely beholden to the ideal of "critical-rational" debate"praised by Habermas himself. They brought into relief the limitations of Habermas's account, its lack of attention, on the one hand, to the bourgeois public sphere's marginalization of women, the working-class, and racialised subjects, and, on the other, to efforts by those who were so excluded to enter into "the public sphere", or to form subaltern spheres of their own. In other words, numerous critics sought to demonstrate how Habermas's vision of the public sphere was at once too large and too small - in any case not quite right. Responding to these challenges, Habermas concurred that his 1962 text was both overly homogenising in its class analysis and insufficiently critical of how the consignment of women to the realm of private domesticity had structuring significance for political and public life. He nonetheless reaffirmed his commitment to the normative ideal of public rational-critical debate which emerged, in his view, with bourgeois humanism, and, further, reiterated his concerns regarding the erosion of this ideal by market-driven, mass media culture and politics.¹

Eric Clarke and Michael Warner extend these analyses of the public sphere's constitutive exclusions. They do so, however, in order to lay bare the heteronormative presumptions which structure access to socially

1. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger (trans), Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1989. For a good introduction to the existing body of criticism on the Habermasian public sphere, see Craig Calhoun (ed), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1992. This volume includes Habermas's essay 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', pp421-461.

2. For a particularly good account of how the public sphere is frequently described in spatialised terms, see Harold Mah, 'Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians', *The Journal of Modern History* 72 (March 2000), 153-182.

legitimate publicity and privacy. Both authors focus their attention on the sexual norms and proprietary codes of publicness. This emphasis takes their analyses in a new direction: towards a rhetorical rather than spatial understanding of social marginalisation.² For Clarke and Warner, the limitation of the Habermasian model is less a question of capacity (that is, of inclusiveness) and more one of socially acceptable language and behaviour. Both writers are suspicious of political endeavours which emphasise more and better representation for women, the working-class, people of colour, and gays and lesbians within the existing framework of publicness. They point to the risks involved in strategies which adhere too closely to reigning norms of acceptable public representation. And finally, they express concern that such tactics reinforce reified conceptions of identity and perpetuate the social exclusion and political abjection of 'queers' who do not conform to these norms.

The creative power of language is also central to the arguments of both authors. The essays collected in Warner's volume highlight the 'performative' or animating character of public discourse by emphasising how modes of address constitute and call into being the very publics that they imagine as addressees. Warner is consistently critical of how the 'language ideology' of the public sphere - as a dialogue between disembodied and theoretically interchangeable subjects - obscures this poetic function (146). For Warner, the idealisation of 'rational-critical debate' by Habermas and his critics poses limits to social movements - like those around gender, sexuality or race - which directly engage issues of embodied subjectivity and identity. The self-abstraction and disembodiment required in order to participate in this model of the public sphere, supposedly available to all, is in fact a privilege of the few. Warner explores the socially transformative possibilities of the 'counterpublics' which he discerns in seventeenth-century British satirical texts, Christopher Street bars, nineteenth-century African-American theatre, and Walt Whitman's poetry. These contexts create, in his view, 'new individuals, new bodies, new intimacies, and new citizenships', and, in the process, remake publicness itself by giving it 'a visceral resonance' - as well as, one might add, a certain erotic charge (62).

Clarke's book similarly identifies a performative fiction, or what he refers to as a 'subjunctive mood', which is constitutive of 'bourgeois publicity'. That is, he highlights how participation in public debate demands that 'one act *as if* the material practices and organisations associated with the public sphere unproblematically embody the ideals of democratic publicness' (7). Clarke examines the familial and material value judgements that, according to Habermas's own analysis, have historically structured legitimate publicness and its exclusions. He further claims that gay and lesbian public visibility - in, for example, the popular television show *Ellen*, or as a valuable consumer market with an expensive 'lifestyle' and disposable income - is often mistaken for political and civic equality. What is more, he suggests that these mediatised representations may provide ideological cover for

the perpetuation of inequities and normalising valuations of gender and sexuality. Like Warner, he interrogates how and whether a social movement which seeks to promote 'fair' and 'true' representations of gays and lesbians as 'normal' rather than, as Ellen Degeneres remarked, 'scary homosexuals' (32), and hence deserving of rights (to marry, to serve in the army, as viable consumers), recapitulate the at once moralising and commercial value judgements on which bourgeois publicity is based. He does not reject these rights claims *per se*. He does, however, express concern with how the 'erotic indeterminacy' characterising queer subjectivity and ethics is remarginalised and, indeed, 'demonised' by such representations.

In interrogating the heteronormative character of dominant conceptions of legitimate publicity - historically and in contemporary political debate, in both literature and social theory - Clarke and Warner's texts have much in common. Yet there are significant differences in their approach to and analysis of publicness itself. As the titles of their books suggest, Warner is largely concerned with 'publics' and similarly plural 'counterpublics', while Clarke examines 'the public sphere'. Warner's model of publicity insists on multiplicity and open-endedness, taking as its point of departure the circulation of texts in print culture. Clarke figures 'the public' as an ideological totality and notably deploys a rhetoric of vision and visibility. Both authors point to how the power of public discourse is founded on a paradoxically real fiction. Warner tends, however, to highlight the creative potential of this performativity, while Clarke understands its mystificatory potential. This difference in focus has important implications for their respective arguments.

Clarke concentrates on how the ideological fiction of democratic publicness, and the proprietary values - at once moral and economic - which it frequently sustains, obscure and perpetuate social inequality and marginalisation. His argument, laid out in two opening theoretical chapters, appeals to Marx's reading of commodity fetishism and Adorno's discussion of the public sphere as an instrument of bourgeois hegemony. Clarke here critiques the moral and economic value judgments which inform dominant notions of personal worth and which often structure access to representative publicity. His third chapter provides a compelling reading of Kant's writings on morality in order to illustrate how the master-thinker of the Enlightenment public sphere correlated human dignity, citizenship, and married, monogamous (hetero)sexuality. Two final chapters are devoted to nineteenth-century English literature and canon formation. 'Inseminating the Orient' examines how authors such as Lord Byron, at the beginning of the century, and Arthur Symonds, at the end, reclaimed ancient Greek homoeroticism as virile and Western, while projecting the feminising aspects of pederasty onto the Orient. In the process, Clarke suggests how 'affective historical reflection' (131) may consolidate and sustain national, sexual, and racial identity. The last chapter illustrates how late-nineteenth century literary critics negotiated and managed highly ambivalent, passionate

attachments to Percy Bysshe Shelley as a figure and writer, by attempting to pass off their risky perversion (known as ‘Shelley love’) as ‘normal’ and culturally valuable humanistic scholarship. He here interrogates the ambivalent character of strategies of cultural legitimation, and insists in an epilogue that an outright rejection of ‘publicity’ in and through a celebration of ‘romantic alterity’ (170) is at once unworkable and politically unproductive. He rather aims, in this work devoted to demystifying the dissembling claims of the dominant public sphere, towards a more far reaching transformation of the terms of public- and, by extension, political and civic legitimacy.

Warner’s book, by contrast, opens with the striking claim that ‘publics are queer creatures’ (7). He works to identify a ‘queerness’ at the heart of publicity itself. The essays that follow attempt to demonstrate how and why this is the case. In other words, they seek to ‘out’ the promiscuous ‘stranger-relationality’ (75) that is at work, in Warner’s view, every time ‘a public’ is called into being by an address. Warner argues that critiques which remain focused, for example, on the dominant whiteness or maleness of the public sphere, obscure the ‘fruitful perversity’ (113) of public discourse, a perversity that he seeks to celebrate. Indeed for Warner it is impossible to grasp the creative and transformative ‘world-making’ possibility of counterpublics without seizing upon how they reveal and exploit the promiscuous relationship to strangers that characterises all kinds of public address. Warner’s vision of the queer dynamics of publicity are thus implicitly informed by an ethic of stranger-intimacy that one might associate with those privileged tropes of queer criticisms: cruising or bathhouse subcultures.

Warner’s more theoretical and programmatic chapters, devoted to critical overviews of the relationship between ‘Public and Private’ and ‘Publics and Counterpublics’, are complemented by essays with a more precise focus. A chapter on recent debates about the status of the public intellectual and the valorisation of ‘clear writing’ provides an occasion for reflection on the politics of styles of address, especially in the work of leftist academics. Another essay, ‘The Mass Public and the Mass Subject’, contrasts the historical public sphere’s ideal of self-abstraction with the kinds of iconic embodiment mobilised in the modern ‘mass public’. ‘Sex in Public’, co-written with Lauren Berlant, provides a concrete articulation of how sexual subcultures or counterpublics implicitly critique a heteronormative privatisation of intimacy, and can hence be seen fundamentally to rework the relationship between private and public life. In ‘Something Queer about the Nation-State’, Warner proclaims the affinity between the norms of liberal modernity, as instantiated by the ideal of a civil society independent of the state, and queer politics, in order to caution against the largely state-oriented character of recent struggles for gay and lesbian rights. Another co-written, scrupulously documented essay discusses a performance which almost certainly took place at the first African-American theatre in the United States (established in New York in 1821), entitled ‘Soliloquy of a Maroon Chief in Jamaica’. The little noticed speech, according to Warner, addressed its

audience as a 'counterpublic', and may thus be read as intervening in and commenting upon wider contemporaneous debates surrounding the racialisation of citizenship. Warner's final chapter on the author of a mid-century temperance tract, who turns out to be Walt Whitman, suggests how Whitman's early engagement with that major American social movement sheds light on the kind of stranger-relationality that, Warner suggests, subtends all forms of public discourse. The book ends with an evocative reading of how Whitman's 'To a Stranger', in its apostrophe to a vacillating addressee (a 'you' that is either a 'he' or a 'she'), simultaneously invokes the codes of intimacy *and* the anonymity of print circulation. For Warner this text, 'like so much of Whitman's poetry ... mimes the phenomenology of cruising' (287).

In their mixing of history and literature, theory and politics, both Clarke's and Warner's texts bring about a creative interaction between genres and disciplines. In the process, both engage in a challenging project to interrogate and remake the norms and forms of cultural legitimacy and democratic public participation. Like Habermas himself, they construct 'the public sphere' as an object of critique and a site for the elaboration of political and ethical ideals.

Clarke and Warner seek to counter the charge that queer theory and politics are overly invested in a kind of blind anti-normativity that refuses affective bonds and social attachment, arguing that such a charge is hopelessly bound up with an ideological construction of privatized subjectivity or identity.³ Both authors put forward a seemingly paradoxical ethics - in Clarke's case, of 'erotic indeterminacy' and in Warner's, of 'stranger relationality' - that is suspicious of psychic interiority, and which appears to privilege a paradigm informed by male homosexuality. While they invoke new kinds of social relations created by queer counterpublics, their texts fail to provide sustained explorations of the affects and attachments that these relations might involve. In a current context in which debate over the right to marry more than ever structures the terms of acceptable gay and lesbian representation, the exploration of the political implications of this alternative ethics require even greater clarification and specification. While 'erotic indeterminacy' and 'stranger relationality' are seductive and suggestive formulations for what this might entail, they remain, here, largely allusive and elusive. What these books do successfully demonstrate, however, is the significance of queer theory for any effort to rethink the norms of democratic public life.

3. For critical analyses of this anti-normative tendency see Bidy Martin, 'Extraordinary Homosexuals and the Fear of Being Ordinary', *differences* vol. 6, issue 2-3 (1994), 101-125; Brad Epps, 'The Fetish of Fluidity', *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*; Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (eds), Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, pp412-431.