

REAL ABSENCES

Matt ffytche

Alenka Zupancic, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two*, Cambridge, MA, MIT, 2004; 190pp, £10.95 paperback.

'What is the shortest shadow of a thing, if not this thing itself?' Heidegger's brief sketch of the history of the Subject in the introduction to *Being and Time* draws attention to the term's shift in meaning in the modern period, largely under pressure from Descartes and then Kant. Having indicated the underlying ground of things, it now starts to refer more exclusively to human consciousness. Modern theory has added a further twist to this narrative: the subject of consciousness is increasingly associated with the individual and singular subjectivity of the person, so that the term has come to coincide with a certain apprehension of the psyche. Somewhere in the middle ground of these seemingly incomplete transitions is where one might locate Zupancic's - as also Zizek's - ingenious post-Lacanian ethics of the subject. Theirs is a 'subject' that has all the trappings of an essentially psychic individuality - their arguments launch out from questions of self-knowledge, desire, will, sexuality and guilt. But at the same time, their work shows barely a trace of interest in 'psycho-history' or a 'psycho-genesis' of the person as such. Rather, the rationale of the analysis, the terms and twists of argument, take their bearings from the Idealist and post-Idealist tradition. Where this book starts from, then, is not a Freudian unconscious, but a ghostly metaphysics of the subject, elicited from various sites of passional existence.

The Shortest Shadow is the second volume to appear in the series of 'Short Circuits' edited by Zizek, the first being his own *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Both authors increasingly share and repeat certain Lacanian reference points: desire in postmodernity, imperatives of the super-ego, the subject's enigmatic mis-reflection of itself, and, of course, truth games in various parallaxic and elliptical guises. Familiar too, by now, is the sophisticated and stimulating weaving together of psychoanalysis, art, continental philosophy and religion (four characters in search of an author in modernity), as well as a canonical set of textual reference points: the play within a play in *Hamlet*, the death of Antigone, Kant on the moral imperative. Yet another defining feature of their work - a polemical mannerism, really - is the way both Zupancic and Zizek pursue their arguments by staging and then upsetting binary categories - 'When it comes to the thesis concerning the death of God, we should be careful to distinguish between two claims that are by no means identical ...' - from which they elicit further binaries and further fields within which to inflect them. Which brings us to the terrible twos.

Within *The Shortest Shadow*'s manifold, but highly particular investigations

into Nietzsche, nihilism and perspectivism in modernity, one could identify a core (Lacanian) thesis that the subject is inherently split in ways that are not immediately apparent to it, and that the Real itself emerges through such a splitting. The Real is 'the stumbling block on account of which reality does not fully coincide with itself', while the subject can only ever recognise, or rather misrecognise, itself across such a paradoxical divide: 'the moment when "one becomes what one is" is not a moment of unification but, on the contrary, the moment of a pure split'.

Zupancic approaches the idea of this split from various and competing angles. One is the 'singular time loop involved in the relationship between the subject and the event', familiar from Lacan as the notion of the 'future anterior', but now connected with Alain Badiou's work. Here the 'very core of truth' is conceived as a temporal paradox in which truth must actively, and in some ways retroactively, 'become' what it is. Thus, in relation to the work of art, the identity of the subject as author, situated at the beginning of a process of creation, is at the same time assumed to be dependent on 'what will have become' in the finished work. Similarly, with regard to the Lacanian concept of the 'gaze', 'the subject finds itself on the opposite side of objects or things ... only insofar as there is a "thing from the subject" that dwells among these objects or things, a fragmentary remainder of subjectivity dissolved into the "stuff of the world" through the occurrence of a primordial severance'. And again, on the experience of love: 'We can respond to love with love (i.e., we can subjectivise ourselves in the figure of love) only if, in some radical sense, we do not know what the other sees in us, and cannot recognise ourselves in this'. Whether one conceives of these examples in terms of an enigmatic bridge between the subject and a lost component of itself, or of a necessary rupture in the form of its self-identification, identity in each case needs to be inaugurated as if 'from elsewhere'.

The 'shortest shadow', a passing figure of noon from *Twilight of the Idols*, is Zupancic's way of representing this non-coincidence of the subject with itself, suggesting that this is one of Nietzsche's principal accomplishments. Part of her project is evidently aimed at materialising the subject and its search for the Real, or the lineaments of its own reality (here 'subjectivity' reveals its covert attachment to the older notion of Subject as that which grounds the world). In this light, Zupancic is keen to present Nietzsche as the first metapsychologist, just as Žižek in *The Indivisible Remainder* aimed to read Schelling's *Weltalter* 'as a metapsychological work in the strict Freudian sense of the term'. Like Žižek, much of Zupancic's efforts revolve around enigmatic attempts to 'show' the subject to itself, to capture subjectivity at work, almost to trap it within the contours of a literal representation, to materialise its blindspots and dysfunctions. Thus the shortest shadow is an enlightenment metaphor with a twist: it is a representation of the subject as an object which *almost* coincides with itself. It is an attempt to give the clearest possible depiction of a subject without banishing the stains which blur 'the transparency of what we see'; the attempt at a portrait which, to another subject, would capture the

very *feeling* of what it is to be a subject.

At this point the metapsychological framing of the subject becomes inseparable from a second, ethical project. Part of the history of the subject, for Zupancic as for Žižek, is the record of ideological formations - grand narratives - to which it has become hitched in its incessant search for completion. These narratives organising the Real - whether God, knowledge, or even enjoyment itself - are in turn sustained by the subject's own passional attachments. Sections of the first half of the book narrate the passage from Catholicism to Protestantism in terms of the shifting nature of the subject's relation to such a legitimating Real. Following on from this, there is an investigation of what happens to the Real when such ideological structures become dissolved in modern nihilism. How is the subject now able to structure the possibility of an identity? What can be the manner of its enjoyment? Here, once again, we are returned to the metaphor of the 'shortest shadow' which aims to figure how the subject can appear to itself once it has been disentangled from master narratives and thrown back upon the subtle and contingent ground of 'life' itself. Noon, then, is 'this moment when life (with all that this implies: desire, illusion, enjoyment ...) stands still, and "draws a breath"' - which is a bid both to throw the subject into some kind of representational relief, *and* to relieve the subject of the darker pressures of its incessant and irresolvable desire for representation; a bid to calm things down, in a way, which Zupancic relates - perhaps rather too easily - to Benjamin's notion of dialectics at a standstill. 'It is a perspective on life from life itself, and this perspective is, in itself, liberating'.

However, here is the rub. For Hegel or Freud, 'reality' does not coincide with itself, because what they take as their subject - spirit, or psyche - is situated within a world that is too complex and mediated to be figured in terms of simple notions of self-presence. Despite the attempts of critics to reduce these authors to the proponents of a single dogma or *idée fixe*, each in his way aimed to overturn simplistic notions of consciousness. At the same time, their concept of the world is not so elusive in its structures that it can only be approached in terms of paradox or enigma. Rather, they seek to inform and persuade us precisely of the very different points of integration and reflection necessary to support what we might otherwise understand too naively as a world of simple presences and characters. But Zupancic, like Žižek, concentrates instead on isolating a hypothetical structural 'element' within reality, whose nature is itself 'non-coincidence'. The point here is that, even though the whole weight of their analyses is, in a general poststructuralist pattern, also to work against simple notions of presence, or self-reflection, they do this in a strangely gnostic way, one which aims to make 'non-coincidence' itself present - almost to the eye. Hence, perhaps, the continuing covert allegiance to the idea of a perspective on life 'from life itself', or to the moment when 'one becomes what one is', even if this moment is always disappearing round the back of the mirror.

This continued attempt to abstract and make manifest the core of the

subject, the core of its truth, within the frame of psychic attachments, lumbers the book with many problematic features. For a start, the 'psychic' limitations on the investigation of the psyche, twinned with the idealising bent of the abstractions, works to withdraw the theory and ethics of the subject from the historical and social realms in which these questions evolve and in which the principal content is formulated - whether this be God, or consumer enjoyment. Instead of the social, we gain (or do we?) the subject's hypothetical and enigmatic origination in relation to 'life'. Within these parameters, the investigation of the truth of the subject unfolds between a set of highly notional terms - the Thing, the Real, *objet petit a*, the event - whose points of reference are increasingly within and amongst each other, and ultimately back to the subject itself. That is to say, the working out of structures of mediation in experience gets reduced to a highly abstract projection of relations between what are themselves merely figural entities - such as the shortest shadow itself.

Zupancic aims to counter this abstraction by tying the theory to concrete reference points - but in rogue ways. For instance, she appeals to affirmation from experience - but experience of a rather enigmatic and not particularly affirmative kind, such as the 'uncanny' moment when we feel that objects are returning our gaze. Or she aims to underscore the 'concreteness' of the metaphors themselves: the 'neutrality of life' she derives from Nietzsche 'looks much more like the edge of a sheet of paper, separating and, at the same time, holding together the two surfaces', or it is 'located in the midst of these distinctions as the *stuff* from which these distinctions are made'. Surely this attempt to materialise 'neutral life' by naming it as 'stuff' is vastly counter-productive, especially when 'reality' itself has been so terminally deconstructed? Thirdly, there is, as in Žižek, the constant need to find her figures echoed in works of art or novels, to clinch a point by saying that this is what is happening in Malevich's *White Square on White Background*, for instance. This may link her notions to an object of a kind, but hardly concretises the notion itself. Freud's gesture towards Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* was a foundational moment in his understanding of the analytic project and his representation of it, but the *play* was hardly the cornerstone on which the whole case rested.

This leaves the reader facing a perpetual enigma: how real is this ethics which strains to get to the ultimate issue of what is at stake in subjectivity, which strains constantly to peer beyond everyday reality, beyond the reality principle, beyond the Real? Even if Zupancic's bent is to turn us back precisely from chimeras of the ultimate and towards the more operative nuances in the middle distance of subjective experience, can *The Shortest Shadow* escape the sense of pseudo-referentiality which permeates it? Does its thesis become more convincing, too, by being drafted out of the mouths of Nietzsche and Lacan?

AFTER THE CYBORG

Tiziana Terranova

Luciana Parisi, *Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Bio-technology and the Mutations of Desire*, London and New York, Continuum, 2004, 227pp; £18.99 paperback.

Published as part of Continuum's 'Transversals: New Directions in Philosophy' series, *Abstract Sex* takes issue with some key philosophical controversies within feminism, critical theory and cultural studies, most notably the relation between sex and gender, or nature and culture. As Donna Haraway observed in her "'Gender" for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word' (in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 1991), the relationship between sex and gender, understood as biological essence and social construction, holds a central place in the history of feminism. From Simone de Beauvoir to Gayle Rubin and Luce Irigaray, feminism has elaborated a thorough critique of what Parisi in *Abstract Sex* calls the 'biocultural' stratification of sexuality into human sex and its product, gender.

The problem for feminism has been twofold, as Judith Butler chronicled a decade ago in *Gender Trouble*. On one hand, feminism has aimed to free gender from the determinism of biological sex, and its entailment of form (the female body) and function (the primacy of the reproductive imperative). On the other, it has striven to hold on to the 'identity' of woman as a political subject. The result has been a deadlock which feminism in the 1990s addressed mainly through two figures: the performative body, where all sex is shown to be gender to start with, and the cyborg, a feminist figuration of hybrid identity where the relationship between nature and technology is understood as a cybernetic assemblage.

The starting point of *Abstract Sex* is thus post-feminism - the encounter of feminism with the postmodern episteme. Parisi articulates here a familiar critique of postmodernism: the dominance of the linguistic signifier ultimately cannot but reproduce its own aporias, such as the undecidability of the binary relation where each term is defined negatively through another. In particular, following the Guattarian critique, Parisi's book argues that the reduction of semiotics to signification has involved a neglect of other regimes of signs such as a-signifying semiotics (as with DNA). By returning to a radical type of philosophical monism derived from Spinoza and the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Parisi aims at nothing less than dissolving the binary opposition altogether (and the tyranny of the signifier), so moving beyond the postmodern impasse.

In a way, *Abstract Sex* takes Haraway's cyborg where Haraway would not go: beyond the hybridity model, which connects but preserves different

identities within itself, to a molecular femininity where identity dissolves into propagating mutations and assemblages induced by encounters between bodies. What this operates is a kind of inversion of post-feminism: whereas in post-feminism everything was gender (which gave meaning to sex), here gender dissolves into sex. As in second-wave feminism, gender is understood as nothing other than a 'stratification' - a 'thickening' of sex arising out of the cultural over-codification of meiotic or reproductive sex.

The method assembled by Parisi will not be unfamiliar to those acquainted with the latest wave of Deleuzo-Guattarian work in cultural studies and feminism. Indeed, the book is uncompromisingly difficult in its determination to be rigorously aligned with Deleuze and Guattari's methodology. Key concepts that the reader is assumed to be familiar with include: the abstract machine, stratification, the virtual/actual, planes of consistency and of organisation, coding, decoding and overcoding, the double articulation of form and substance, matter and expression as adapted from Hjemslev and proposed as an alternative to Saussurian semiotics. On top of this, the book is also a detailed engagement with molecular biology and evolutionary theory (including a thorough critique of neo-Darwinism), and as such it is ripe with intricate scientific details. This makes for some intense but rewarding reading.

What, then, is the overall contribution that *Abstract Sex* aims to make to contemporary feminism? This is most obviously found in the concept of 'abstract sex', which Parisi puts at the centre of the work. If the binarism between sex and gender is to be properly tackled, then it should start at its foundation: the separation between an inert nature and a human subject endowed with agency - with power to represent and thus re-make the world. One of the long-term effects of postmodernism has been a lingering strong suspicion of all ontologies. *Abstract Sex* goes against the postmodern tide by endorsing a strong ontology of matter as an intensive matrix or virtual/actual circuit which emphasises the potential of propagating mutations in networks of hyperconnected bodies, rather than differences given within a domain of possibility.

The book thus proposes a potentially controversial solution to the postmodern impasse. It understands sex not as a representation, but as a stratification involving connected and differentiated, interacting and networked levels of organisation of matter; and it also defines sex as an abstract machine of variations triggered by the encounter and recombination of bodies - a kinetic relation involving particles and affects rather than a construction of gendered human bodies. Thus Parisi extends our understanding of sex from the organic to the inorganic and the technical. Sex entails both an absolute mode of viral becoming (that of variation, recombination and transduction arising out of collisions between bodies) and an infinity of potential actualisations of sex, out of which the book selects three: the biophysical (bacterial sex and meiotic sex, where meiotic sex emerges out of the capture of bacterial sex within the body of the cell);

the biocultural (human sex entailing the entanglement of meiotic sex, reproduction and death); and the biodigital (the current dissolution of 'human sex' into genetic engineering, IVF, cloning, cybernetics and bioinformatics). These levels are, for Parisi, coexistent. They define an intensive body-sex which expresses itself through mutations (body-sexes) and reversible feedback loops. Levels are not self-confined entities, but linked through reverse causalities, intersecting and differentiating at singular points. The biophysical level expands into the biocultural and biodigital, it is not replaced by them; and all mutations affecting singular planes can spread to the others in non-linear fashion (thus the emergence of the biodigital affects the biocultural and biophysical too).

Abstract Sex thus relies on a strong ontological model. The most philosophical part of the book is concerned with how to think that which cannot be reduced to the plane of organisation - to stratification or representation. If a stratification is not simply a structure, it is because it arises out of (and stays adjacent to) what Deleuze and Guattari define as the plane of consistency (and Parisi as 'hypernature'). The nonlinear microphysics of the plane of consistency (or the non-stratified) thus provide the non-deterministic ontological basis of politics.

These are pretty strong philosophical claims; almost outrageous ones when thirty years of poststructuralism have failed to displace the Kantian injunction that the mind should confine itself either to what is given in experience or to its own emendation. The strong ontological claims put forward by this book fall onto a critical terrain which has been almost exclusively occupied with epistemological questions about the nature of the knowing subject and its relation to signifying networks of signs. This return to ontology is bound to provoke some productive debate.

But what becomes of feminism in this context? Should we take it to be an expression of a biocultural production of sex which cannot quite venture outside of such strata? Parisi is careful not to dismiss the enduring importance of what she calls the macropolitics of representation. But the book decidedly aligns itself with micropolitics. And it finds in 'abstract sex' a model for what such micropolitics might look like: not simply a return of the organic intellectual to 'local' issues (as some postmodern theory would have it) but a molecularisation of political tactics inspired by such unlikely role models as viruses and bacteria - an endosymbiotic micropolitics or microfeminine warfare. If the historical project of feminism has not only been that of achieving equality with men, this is because feminist theory has made us aware of the repression of feminine desire (and all that it is capable of) by the closed cycle of male pleasure always implying a desire for reproduction of the same. As this book makes clear, human sex is oppressive for both men and women. For Parisi, microfeminine warfare defines the lines of destratification of human sex in favour of a proliferation of body-sexes. Thus, all bodies are sexed, sexes are multiple, and all sexes are connected by this overall dynamics of codification, decodification and overcoding. The

destratification of human sex is already given in the biodigital domain of genetic engineering and cybernetics, which untangles sex from reproduction and death, only to reinscribe it within new modes of abstract control.

As an answer to this shift, Parisi proposes that feminism pursue an understanding of the ethological composition of body-sexes which underlie and undercut the binarism of gender. While ethologically describing these mutations, however, feminism also entails the production of an ethics of composition directed at relations *among* bodies. Abstract sex thus aims at the reinvention of a commonality arising immanently out of a dynamics of affection, rather than transcendently - through the imposition of a signifier/identity. Microfeminine warfare is thus not confined to women, but it aims to provide a model for the active expression of all those differences that have been captured by the game of self-representation of the biocultural stratum. The deviation from identity, understood as a point of equilibrium, is performed by way of tactics that involve a whole array of abstract machines of consistency: contagion, proliferation, mutation, code hijacking, parasitism, side-communication and meta-communication, endosymbiotic mergings and information trading.

Those feminists who are committed to issues of equality, access or poverty among women might wonder what this will do to better the lot of women worldwide. On the other hand, Marxists might wonder about the political implications of a shift from a Gramscian war of position to a Deleuzo-Guattarian bacterial warfare. And yet it is hard not to acknowledge that Parisi's concept of abstract sex resonates with the turbulent and diffused edges of contemporary culture, where the threshold between the social, biological, technical, economic and cultural seems to be less and less determinate. These networked relations of reversible causes and effects, these code-hijackings, mutations and recombinations, the small concatenation of quasi-causes which produces unpredictable effects, the coding/decoding/overcodification of information flows, the proliferation of connectable and connected singularities do not replace old forms of power and struggle but express their extension and modification within a new socio-technical organisation. Increasingly, cultural politics are waged around the nonlinear dynamics of information across a multiplicity of coexistent levels (local, regional, cultural and global; biological and technological; networked and stratified; representational and recombinant).

This shift is playing out very differently from how early fears of the rise of a disembodied, 'virtual' space imagined. The dynamics of information are material, inasmuch as they involve relations of composition and decomposition among material bodies. Political theorists such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have described such processes as entailing the emergence of a full (but non-unitary) social quasi-subject which they call 'multitude'. However, unlike Hardt and Negri, Parisi refuses to name a subject (even a quasi-one), and declines to turn her virtual body-sex into a singular agency producing the commons by riding on the transformation

of the mode of production. The decodification of the biocultural performed by biodigital capitalism leave space neither for a subject of feminism nor one of labour. Labour, like woman, shares the fate of the human to be dissolved into an omnipervasive micro-femininity - a line of flight from the stratification of the biocultural and the content of new machines of control. The dissolution of the subject - of the human as such - is uncompromising. Like the characters in Greg Bear's *Blood Music*, the human dissolves into a bacterial endosymbiotic soup. What displaces it from the central position it enjoyed within modernity are *assemblages agencements*. Here, nobody can speak on behalf of anybody else; all the elements are communicating, caught in an asymmetrical relation of affection, and all that can be done is a kind of engineering of assemblages among bodies enacted not by a subject but by a kind of non-human, distributed intelligence. This implies a paradoxical task: commitment to the proliferation of intensive differences, while remaining engaged in the active production of common notions.

Of all the debates that work in this vein is bound to call forth, I would suggest that the polemic against epistemology and signification, the critique of human sex, and the concept of micropolitics are the most challenging. What have the pursuit of epistemological questions and an almost exclusive emphasis on signification done for/to feminism? Is the cyborg still too human to capture the socio-cultural ecologies of the biodigital age? And what are the real implications of the shift to micropolitics as demanded by cultural expression and political experimentation in the twenty-first century?

TOWARDS VERTICAL TRAVEL

Alasdair Pettinger

Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (eds), *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, Aldershot and Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2004, 210pp; £45 hardback.

The renewed public interest in travel writing in the 1980s was soon followed by a new wave of scholarly work on the subject. Drawing on an already established body of work on the Renaissance and the era of imperial conquest, it soon embraced a vast range of material from the ancient classics to the latest whimsical offering in the press.

This was accompanied by a rapid anthologisation of forgotten and out-of-print writings - particularly important for those seeking to displace the dominance of white male authors in the emerging canon. By the late 1990s its institutionalisation seemed secure, with regular conferences on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, the International Society for Travel Writing (established in 2001) plays a co-ordinating role; in Europe, the main forum has been the series of conferences held under the title of *Borders and Crossings / Seuils et Traverses*. Two British-based journals - *Studies in Travel Writing* and *Journeys* - publish key work in the field, the *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* appeared in 2002, and the three-volume encyclopaedia *Literature of Travel and Exploration* in 2003. Research centres at the Sorbonne and at Nottingham Trent University promise to assure the expansion of the subject.

The volume under review is edited by the organisers of the first *Borders and Crossings* conference (Derry, 1998) and some of the essays it includes grew out of papers originally presented there. Tim Youngs is editor of *Studies in Travel Writing* and of a number of collections of essays, including the *Cambridge Companion*, as well as his own, pioneering *Travellers in Africa* (1994). Glenn Hooper has published widely on travel writings about Ireland; his work includes the anthology *The Tourist's Gaze* (2001) and an edition of Harriet Martineau's *Letters from Ireland* (2001).

As the title suggests, *Perspectives on Travel Writing* does not attempt to be foundational or prescriptive; rather, it offers a series of snapshots of recent work which, collectively, foreground its diversity. This diversity is evident in two respects. First, in the range of primary materials that scholars of travel writing select for analysis; and second, in the range of conceptual and methodological tools they use to carry out this analysis. Each case raises pressing theoretical questions concerning the definition of 'travel writing' and the institutional and disciplinary locations of its study. These questions are addressed directly in the opening and closing essays respectively.

The main body of the collection consists of nine essays, four concerned with a single text or author, the others dealing with a wider range of writings within a specified geographical-historical context, but further unified by their use of a recurrent trope or common ideological project. They are arranged roughly chronologically, from the late sixteenth to late twentieth centuries.

Of the single texts or authors that form the focus of four essays, only one is at all well known. Betty Hagglund considers writings by Anne Grant, a Scot who spent her early childhood in Albany, New York in the 1750s and 60s. She wrote about the colonial settlement many years later - mainly from memory, shortly after publishing letters from her first experiences of the Scottish Highlands following her return from North America. If drawing parallels between Indians and Highlanders is rather commonplace in eighteenth-century writing, it seems that few authors spent time among both; hence Grant's unusual interest.

After a review of themes in travel writings on Ireland in the early nineteenth century, Glenn Hooper focuses on the post-famine texts that helped promote Ireland as a place for the English to settle, particularly in the work of John Hervey Ashworth, where the previously dominant image of Ireland as utterly different is challenged by techniques of description that render the country not just like England, but as an extension of it. If the first-person singular is a common feature of the narrative voice of both travel writing and autobiography, the work of the Londoner Estella Canziani (1887-1964) suggests significant variations. In 'Between Gender and Genre', Loredana Polezzi shows that the travels recounted in her autobiography are narrated by a self that is often merged with the author's mother, while her three travel books alternate 'I' and 'we' as she describes journeys with her Italian father to his homeland.

The much better known *In an Antique Land* by Amitav Ghosh is the subject of Madmini Mongia's contribution. Ghosh's own travels as a student anthropologist are interweaved with those of his subject, a twelfth-century slave, to explore encounters between Indians and Egyptians over a vast time-span. Here, this generically unstable text serves as a test case for discussing the possibility of a category of 'post-colonial' travel writing.

The five essays which dwell on a particular conjuncture, rather than a single author, also range widely and deal with unfamiliar material. Helga Quadflieg discusses the way the representation of the 'other' in Tudor travel writings at the same time forges domestic identities, in particular Protestant and English. Jean-Yves Disez considers the figure of the animal in Victorian travel writings about Brittany in the second half of the nineteenth century: although signalling different dangers for different authors, they 'occupy the same strategic position in the general economy of their texts', emerging whenever 'the Self is threatened by a sudden invasion of otherness'.

Peter Hulme discusses representations of indigeneity in writings on Cuba and Dominica at different points in the twentieth century: the way the native

Caribbean is usually represented in terms of a rhetoric of 'survival', typically expressed through observations of facial characteristics, rather than one of 'transculturation' that might lead one to talk to and listen to Caribs and learn how they might define themselves - in terms of traditions and practices, for example. Indigenous traditions are also the focus of Erdmute Wenzel White, who considers the ways in which twentieth-century Brazilian writers and film-makers have reworked two classic figures of early European ethnography of Brazil (birds, cannibals) in an attempt to transcend colonial discourse.

Building on their influential critical survey of contemporary travel writing *Tourists with Typewriters* (1998), Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan explore 'varieties of nostalgia' in a number of writers, including Newby, Chatwin, Thesiger, Van der Post and Baudrillard. Heeding the irony of fact-bearing texts making use of such an anti-referential devices, Holland and Huggan acknowledge both the colonial or imperialist function of nostalgia and its power to criticise or displace ethnocentric assumptions. Because it continues to be 'one very strong constituent of travel writing', their characterisation of the 'contradictory, even paradoxical' nature of nostalgia as 'veering from illusion to strenuous exercise of memory, from cultural self-congratulation to self-critique, from blatant acquisition to property divestiture' (151) may serve as a suitably condensed remark on the genre itself.

But whether travel writing is best thought of as a 'genre' is open to question. In the essay that opens the collection, 'Defining Travel', Jan Borm elaborates the distinction made in English (also echoed in French and German nomenclature) between the 'travel book' and 'travel writing'. The genre of the 'travel book' or 'travlogue', he suggests, is an account of a journey or journeys actually made by the author, nearly always given in the form of a first-person narrative, and may be usefully thought of as belonging to a wider category of 'travel writing', understood as 'an overall heading for texts whose main theme is travel' (19) and may include more imaginative works, such as *Moby-Dick* or *The Tempest*.

Borm complicates this distinction as he goes, insisting on the inescapable literary dimension - and generic hybridity - of even the most mundane 'travel books', and happy to acknowledge his unease at any attempt to formulate a definition too closely. He urges us to accept works of fiction as 'travel writing' while at the same time warning us not to treat fiction and non-fiction as identical. After all, we might add, the referential aspect of factual writings carries with it certain ethical obligations that do not apply to fiction.

This willingness to keep the borders of travel writing open is clearly shared by the collection as a whole, whose contributors include fiction, autobiography, film, and sociological writings among their objects of study. This ecumenical approach could certainly be extended. The phenomenon of what has been called 'vertical travel' (the minute descriptions of familiar

surroundings, narratives of short local journeys, transcriptions of overheard conversations), on one hand, and those works of science fiction that offer, in effect, imaginary ethnographies or alternative histories, on the other, raise the question of how far a writer needs to move at all in order to produce a heightened sense of place. If 'travel writing' is something that emerges as soon as distinctions between 'home' and 'away', however small, come into play, then we may begin to find it even harder to identify it with a delimitable corpus of texts.

Tim Youngs's closing essay notes the varying disciplinary affiliations of recent scholars of travel writing. Historians, geographers, anthropologists, linguists, literary and cultural critics, sociologists all appear among their ranks, and considerable cross-fertilisation of ideas and techniques has been the result. But one unfortunate effect, according to Youngs, has been the increasing convergence in the use of travel metaphors across different fields. Terms such as *borders*, *margins*, *displacement*, *exile* and *nomadism* are now used so casually and freely as to validate what Janet Wolff (in a much-quoted but, he says, still too little-heeded article) calls the 'notion of universal and equal mobility' (quoted 177).

In travel writing studies, language that apparently acknowledges the existence of migrants, exiles, refugees or slaves is largely deployed, ironically, not to study accounts of *their* experiences (which continue to be neglected - and, indeed, are poorly represented in the volume under review), but to speak of those privileged few who have the wealth and documentation that allow them to travel where they will (and get paid for writing about it).

Youngs's final remarks neatly take up where Borm's opening essay left off. If the definition of 'travel writing' is to remain open to a wide variety of texts, this must not be at the cost of neglecting the differences between the forms of travel they depict. There are travel writings that address the *difficulty* of crossing borders, of leaving or returning home, as well as those that take for granted the *ease* of being able to do so. Hitherto, scholars of travel writing, no doubt partly out of a reflex from their own experiences of travel, tend to privilege the latter, which are then assumed to be the norm. Only when they explicitly acknowledge the location from which they write, concludes Youngs, will they develop a more precise critical vocabulary able to take account of the diversity of the field they study.

The contributors to this collection largely avoid the temptation to generalise about travel writing. Their close attention to the interplay between the formal properties of particular texts and the ideological work they do is impressive. But it is in its invitation to take risks and extend the scope of the subject and the terms of its scholarship that the innovation of this volume lies.