Ornament and Kracauer

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Henrik Reeh, *Ornaments of the Metropolis: Siegfried Kracauer and Modern Urban Culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 2004, pp248 plus 36 black and white photographs; £25.95 hardback.

Henrik Reeh's pioneering study, which was originally published in 1991 in Danish under the title *Storbyens ornamenter: Siegfried Kracauer og den moderne bykultur*, is a most timely and untimely book. It is timely because, as part of a now-growing appreciation of Siegfried Kracauer's fascinating and multifaceted oeuvre, it will contribute to a fuller recognition of his rightful place in a generation of German writers who, enthralled by the contemporary cultural forms and quotidian experiences of the modern metropolis (especially, but not exclusively, of Berlin and Paris), transformed the feuilleton sections of newspapers during the Weimar Republic into unrivalled sites of intellectual observation, critical reflection and (albeit oblique) political engagement. These intellectual outsiders, exemplary exponents of fragmentary and essayistic texts, have experienced widely differing fortunes in recent years: Walter Benjamin is now, of course, celebrated as one of the most original and provocative thinkers of the twentieth century; thanks to the tireless translation work of Michael Hoffman, Joseph Roth is currently enjoying a revival of interest in both his journalistic and fictional writings; unchampioned, Franz Hessel, Benjamin's friend, colleague and model flaneur, has fared less well and remains a largely neglected figure, whose novels and urban odysseys are still yet to be translated into English. And of these mixed receptions, Kracauer's is surely the most mixed. He is still best known in Anglo-American academic circles for his two major studies of film written in post-war New York, books misread and unjustly maligned as simplistic psychoanalysis (*From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, 1947) or doctrinaire cinematic realism (*Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, 1960/1997). Reeh's distinctive focus upon Kracauer's interwar urban writings helps both to contextualise these film studies and to suggest the sophistication and subtlety of Kracauer's readings of cultural phenomena. And now is a most opportune moment for a fresh engagement with Kracauer's work, for this translation of Reeh's study appears, coincidently, just as the key Kracauer texts he examines are themselves newly available: the semi-autobiographical novel *Ginster*, out of print for many years, was reissued in 2004 in Volume 7 of Suhrkamp Verlag's *Siegfried Kracauer: Werke*; 2002 saw a new and complete edition of Kracauer's deft and witty 1937 study *Jacques Offenbach and the Paris of His Time* published by Zone Books. Reeh's study will certainly set a high standard for, and prompt future explorations of this most intriguing cultural theorist. It

is much needed and most welcome.

Curiously, Reeh himself sees his book in a rather different light, less as a contribution to Kracauer scholarship and more as an attempt: 'to gradually define the theoretical principles and the practical conditions for a true humanistic science of the urban' (p1). The study claims to be a 'counterweight' (p4) to what it sees as the dominant but limited discourses of urban planning and governance. Now, while Reeh's motives are certainly laudable, here the untimely character of the book becomes evident. Whether it was legitimate to claim back then that: 'the urban has rarely been the subject of particular attention and analysis on the part of the humanities and the social sciences' (p1) is a moot point, but, given the enormous renewal of interest in urban theory, culture, and representation over the last few years, it is completely unsustainable today. It is a shame that this new translation has not provided the opportunity for a revised edition or at least a preface or introduction reflecting upon the recent proliferation of studies of the city and the new contexts and debates to which Kracauer's work might contribute. To be sure, this sense of time lag inevitably afflicts all but the most immediate translations, but it becomes an acute problem when it threatens to discredit a work's boldest assertions and avowed intent.

Nevertheless, this should not detract from the substance of Reeh's book for there is much to admire here. His subject matter is a specific selection of Kracauer's writings on the city, texts chosen to demonstrate both the heterogeneity of literary forms and styles, and the consistency of his theoretical concerns: *Ginster*, Kracauer's fictionalised autobiographical text originally serialised in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*; two collections of feuilleton essays and articles, the *Mass Ornament* and the (sadly still untranslated) *Strassen in Berlin und Anderswo*; and the 1937 'sociobiography' of the composer Offenbach and the Paris of the Second Empire. These textual foci provide the book with its tripartite structure and trajectory. Reeh's initial consideration of Kracauer's own dissatisfactions with architectural practice and forms broadens to include his disparate insights into 1930s metropolitan culture, and, then, finally, encompasses his cultural-historical critique of the phantasmagoria of nineteenth-century Paris as the capital of capitalist modernity.

The intriguing concept of 'ornament' forms Reeh's leitmotif. His tracing of the intricacies and complexities of Kracauer's dialectical vision of 'ornament' in these diverse urban analyses is both original and insightful. On the one hand, ornament as a decorative architectural feature is an anachronism in the 1920s and 30s, the very antithesis of the austerity and functional forms of the prevailing modernist 'machine aesthetic', and anathema to avant-garde architects, designers and planners like Adolf Loos, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. In this hostile context, Reeh argues, Kracauer values ornamental designs as the products of the skill, imagination and craft of anonymous artisans, as forms of expression opposed to the reactionary cult of genius and celebrity that pervades 'fine art', and, indeed, fashionable architecture too. Ornament is part of the human, not the 'criminal' as

Loos would have it. Reeh contends that Kracauer privileges such surface manifestations and figures in that they enable the reading and remembrance of the built environment as human product, and thereby crucially point to a 'resubjectivisation' of the cityscape. For Kracauer, Reeh notes, 'Ornament as a concept is the common point by means of which the universe of the metropolis can enter into an active relation with a critically interpreting subjectivity' (p5). Here Reeh rightly connects Kracauer's ideas with those of his former teacher, Georg Simmel, and, in particular, Simmel's vision of the perpetual struggle between the subjective inner life of the individual and the ever more overwhelming demands of the external modern world as 'objective spirit'. Here, ornamental figures might constitute vital human inscriptions and traces upon, might provide useable crevices and niches for grasping, the towering, imposing monuments of the cityscape.

On the other hand, however, Kracauer is acutely aware of the dehumanising tendencies of another kind of ornamentalism, and this is the more familiar reading of his work. In his remarkable 'Mass Ornament' essay from 1927, Kracauer is bitingly critical of what he sees as the reduction of the human to ornament as the individual becomes no more than an infinitesimal element of a functioning totality. The fragmented body and the body as fragment compose the spectacle. The precision and synchronisation of the dancing Tiller Girls constitutes an exemplary instance of the erasure of individuality in both performer and onlooker. Dance is diminished to the level of the routine, the dancer to that of the industrial component. Here, the modernist antithesis between machine-aesthetics and ornament is reconciled at the expense of the human, and in anticipation of that even more catastrophic combination of the martial and the ornamental, that Fascistic 'aestheticisation of politics' of which Benjamin warns in his famous 1935 'Work of Art' essay. Ornament both opposes and evolves into mass mechanical, mass military forms. It contains both the image of the truly human, and the spectre of ultimate inhumanity.

Reeh's reading of Kracauer is especially impressive as he moves beyond architecture and into the realm of urban culture and popular entertainment. In his discussion of the *Strassen in Berlin* collection, Reeh looks to the contrast between the fluid movements and fleeting forms of acrobats in a theatrical variety performance and the regimented formations and disciplinary rigour of the dance troupe. Here Reeh highlights Kracauer's key urban category: 'improvisation'. In the continuous composition and decomposition of figures in the clownish display of the acrobats, Kracauer sees a privileging of the ephemeral and the contingent, an openness to the indefinite and a confidence in good fortune that lies at the heart of slapstick comedy and fairy tales. These are utopian impulses and moments whose antithesis is the cold, controlled instrumentalism of the Tiller Girls. Acrobats as the epitome of improvisation and Tiller Girls as the embodiment of mechanisation – Reeh astutely observes how Kracauer maps different concepts of human reason on to this opposition: reason as egalitarian and emancipatory, and

reason as calculation, as the *Ratio* of capitalist manipulation, domination and exploitation. What finally emerges here is a vision of a 'dialectic of the ornament' that both prefigures and concretises Adorno and Horkheimer's vision of the 'dialectic of Enlightenment'.

Reeh's close textual readings are always thoughtful and thought-provoking, underlining the richness of Kracauer's conceptual armoury: dream images, hieroglyphs, memory traces, flanerie, patient waiting. One wonders, though, whether 'improvisation' itself, rather than 'ornament' might not have proved a more successful leitmotif for the book leading to interesting points of comparison with, for example, Benjamin on the mimetic faculty or Adorno's (in)famous jazz critiques.

Of course, Kracauer and Adorno did come into conflict (and bitter conflict too) over popular music albeit in a different context – in 1937, over Offenbach. Reeh's overwhelmingly positive view of Kracuaer's societal or sociobiography of Offenbach is a refreshing and much-needed response to the lamentable failure of subsequent scholarship to take this deft and delightful study of unserious music seriously. Adorno surely has much to answer for in this respect for skewing the book's reception. His cutting critique of the book, both privately in correspondence with Kracauer and Benjamin, and then publicly in a marginally more muted tone in the pages of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, condemned what he saw as the absence of technical musical analysis and the substitution of anecdote and gossip for rigorous historical exposition and theoretical mediation. Reeh's reconstruction and re-evaluation, of both Kracauer's text and Adorno's complaints, is very good. He perceptively recognises and appreciates the tone of Kracauer's study as one precisely in keeping with its playful subject matter. Immersed in, and inspired by, the world of the boulevard and salon, Offenbach's operettas are both the perfect expression of the phantasmagoria of the Second Empire and its satirical critique, both enchantment and disenchantment. In its wit, irony and utopian imaginings, operetta both voiced and punctured the pretensions and illusions of its time. The dialectics of operetta correspond to those of ornament. Hence, Reeh is able to argue convincingly that the apparent escapism of Offenbach is in no sense an attempt on Kracauer's part to escape the political situation of the exile in mid 1930s Paris. That there has still not been any major study of Kracauer's Offenbach book nor any sustained comparison between it and Benjamin's 'Arcades Project' is indicative of the neglect of Kracauer's writings and the enduring power of Adorno's unchallenged judgement.

Reeh is acutely aware of such potential opportunities, but his own book misses many opportunities itself as well. One is (and should be) reluctant to criticise a book for what it does *not* do, but some oversights are hard to ignore. To begin with, it is disappointing that Reeh has been unable to make use of the extensive Kracauer archive held in the Deutsche Literaturachiv in Marbach am Neckar. There he would have found the rest of Kracauer's 1919 Simmel study, in which Simmel appears as a quintessential alienated metropolitan personality (the full text is now published in *Werke* Band

9.1). There Reeh would have come across the film sketch derived from the Offenbach book, a text mentioned but unexplored. Above all, he would have seen not just Adorno's critical letter of 13 May 1937, whose argument he can only surmise, but the full *correspondence* (Kracauer sent an extended rebuttal to Adorno dated 25 May, Adorno responded two days later). The pertinent letters circulating between Adorno, Benjamin and Leo Löwenthal, Kracauer's closest friend and editor of the *Zeitschrift*, would also have provided Reeh with rich material. The absence of archive material is unfortunate but perhaps understandable. Less satisfactory, though, is why Reeh fails to mention, let alone examine, Kracauer's wider writings on the theme of the city: the fifth volume of Kracauer's *Schriften* published in 1990, for instance, comprises over a thousand pages of feuilleton fragments. The *Mass Ornament* and *Strassen in Berlin* collections are important, having been chosen and arranged by Kracauer himself but some acknowledgement of the wealth of material from which they were drawn would have been useful. Curiously missing, too, is any consideration of Kracauer's study of the detective story and the significance of the city and the flow of urban street life for the post-war film studies. Reeh's focus is too tight. As for secondary sources, David Frisby's seminal 1986 study of Benjamin, Simmel and Kracauer has surprisingly been overlooked. Cumulatively, these omissions do impact upon the scope of the analysis Reeh undertakes, and the extent to which he is able to pursue themes, concepts and motifs. This strikes me so clearly perhaps because I recognise similar limitations in my own study of Benjamin and the city. Stones should certainly not be thrown by those with shared interests in glass architecture.

Other missed opportunities: the translation of Reeh's book could have involved not only some updating, but also some judicious editorial work as well. The text is certainly rather uneven with elegant passages and lucid formulations contrasting markedly with some rather laboured and repetitious sections, ones far from that lightness of style Reeh so admires in the Offenbach book. Some pruning of the text and of the accompanying images, whose ornamental role is interesting but unspecified, would benefit the book, making it more compact and readable. A final quibble: it is rather unhelpful that the references to the Offenbach text are still to a German edition, whereas they could, and should, be to the recent English one.

The translation of Reeh's book is certainly to be welcomed, as would its appearance in paperback form, especially if this meant an opportunity for some authorial and editorial revisions. *Ornaments of the Metropolis* will hopefully prove a valuable contribution to the rediscovery and reappraisal of one of the twentieth century's most important cultural critics. For this, Reeh deserves a wide readership and our thanks; Kracauer deserves the widest and our wonder.

From Interactivity to Affectivity

Mara Mills

Mark B.N. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004, 333 pp; £22.95 hardback.

> What happens to me when I look at you?
> What happens to my body as I read these pages, when I take in the light from this screen?

The consequences of experience have long preoccupied philosophers and physiologists. A faith in the plasticity of the material body (and not just the ever-weak, spooky 'mind') predates performativity theories and obvious biotechnological manipulations. As an example, for hundreds of years the concept of the retinal image yielded a sort of opthamologic ontology whereby the world impressed its copy on eyes and brains.[1] William Molyneux, the authority on optical instruments whose 'problem' began when his young bride went blind, raised the question of the specificity of the senses to his acquaintance, John Locke. Does touching a cube give the same impression as seeing it? Thus began a line of inquiry into the body's contribution to perception.

1. Nicholas Wade's, *A Natural History of Vision* (MIT Press, 1998) is a sourcebook for the varieties of this mimesis-theory and its occasional challengers.

By the twentieth century, Molyneux's Problem had moved from the filterings of the senses to the invagination of the world into an active body. In the neurosciences, at least, the passive bodies that mimicked their surroundings disappeared. The experiments of David Hubel and Torsten Wiesel, beginning in the 1950s, gave evidence that the brain's structure is altered, *in non-linear fashion*, by experience. First, by temporarily blinding newborn kittens, they found that vision is partially learned - *a body that hasn't seen, cannot see*. Later, they found they could change the cortex of the brain simply by forcing kittens to squint. Although Hubel and Wiesel's squinting kittens showed normal ocular response to light, the *relations* between their neural cells were changed; electrodes placed through the kittens' skulls revealed cells responding to only one or the other eye, even though those cells were typically binocular.[2] In the remaining decades of the century, the retinal image would be reduced to the pattern of light from an object, focused on the retina. The eyes were in constant motion, and the retina itself was made up of photoreceptors (of two types) *and* neurons, transducing light into electrical impulses. And the brain's manipulation of sensory response – perception - was believed to begin in the eye.

2. For contemporary, non-realist theories of vision by cyberneticists (minus the alteration of brain structure), see N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1999, Chapter Six.

Performativity in biology (or, 'activity dependent development') is fairly restricted, and perhaps shows up the limitations of this theory in other fields. For most biologists, experience can do little more than 'sculpt' a

hardwired organ or system, and then mainly in 'critical periods' (immaturity, embryogenesis). What if the telescope-expert Molyneux (or Hubel and Wiesel) had asked the consequences of supplementing the eye, rather than blinding it? Or how particular histories (and not just anomalous anatomies) matter? More importantly, what can we say about the extension of a being back into the world?

Mark B.N. Hansen's *New Philosophy for New Media* takes on the riddle of embodiment and perception through a hitching of neuroscience, continental theory, and digital art. Hansen's first book, *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing*, initiated his ongoing project - to acknowledge pre-linguistic experience and to uncouple technology from instrumentalisation.[3] These two topics are linked by the problem of *technesis*, 'the putting-into-discourse of technology', which Hansen has found to be the predominant mode of relation between humans and things in the writings of major twentieth-century theorists. *Embodying Technesis* outs these unwitting logo-centrists - Heidegger, Freud, Derrida, Foucault - for failing to recognize that technology exceeds the 'material support' of human thought. Nevertheless, Hansen is one of our most important boosters for the continued relevance of high theory - namely, phenomenology (though this may be post-theoretical, in the most positive sense of that term). In his early work, Hansen takes on the 'experiential consequences' of Bruno Latour's project (his cosmology of active 'things', where nature and culture are indistinguishable). If technology defines modernity, then for Hansen it matters most outside the laboratory, in 'lived' use.

3. Mark Hansen, *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 2000.

In her introduction to *Embodying Technesis*, N. Katherine Hayles resolves the fact that Hansen 'seems to shy away from actual technologies and our experiences with them in favour of verbal articulations' by explaining that this approach is the one required to attract literary theorists to the topic of technology (pviii). Could technocriticism have been so friendless, just five years ago? Where his first book relied on the critique of philosophers for the scientistic, 'machine reduction' of technology, *New Philosophy for New Media* takes several digital artists as exemplars of routing perception through the body. Extending Bergsonian phenomenology through the theories of biologist Francisco Varela and cyberneticist Donald McKay (among others), Hansen reworks perception into the *product* of an affective body with interconnected senses: 'the work of the culture theorist - like that of the new media artist - begins at the very point where the human is left behind by vision researchers …' (p96).

New Philosophy for New Media opens with some welcome theorizing of 'affect'. The humanities have long been the refuge of feelings and the intersubjective, but the last decade has seen a sudden turn toward affect as a materialist mode of communication, rather than an index to interiority. Silvan Tomkins, modern founder of this psychological subfield - and posthumous darling of literary theory - intended affect as an alternative to those schools that 'as in the case of Freud, attempted to discover the hidden agenda behind

opaque behavior or, as in the case of [John B.] Watson, attempted to delineate the instrumental nature of motivation'.[4] Attractively expansive, affect theory as worked out by Tomkins' student Paul Ekman was also central to wresting 'human universals' from postwar cultural relativism.[5] Hansen only briefly mentions Ekman, instead citing bio-phenomenologist (and former vision researcher) Francisco Varela and, to a lesser extent, neurologist Antonio Damasio. As a result, Hansen's definition avoids pinning homogeneity or predictability of response on affect, although his examples do not always bear this out. For Hansen, affect is not a collection of feelings; it is a mode parallel to perception and action. His innovation is to shift from affection to *affectivity*, meaning 'the capacity of the body to experience itself as "more than itself" and thus deploy its sensorimotor power to create the unpredictable, the experimental, the new' (p7). Affectivity exemplifies the autonomous and the pre-lingual championed in Hansen's previous book, and in *New Philosophy for New Media* he links it to 'tactility, proprioception, memory, and duration' (p101).

So, why affect? Hansen (and Timothy Lenoir, in his brilliant introduction) discuss the stakes in this turn from the 'ocular' to the 'haptic.' Hansen disagrees with the widespread prophecies in media studies that human vision is being automated, and that images and imaging technologies have been progressively detached from the body. Scholars in other fields, notably Hillel Schwartz, have questioned 'the hegemony of vision' as *the* modern mode of control and communication. Hansen, however, re-orients the technological determinists (Friedrich Kittler, Jonathan Crary), who argue that digital imaging technologies render humans and even other media obsolete. Namely, he draws on Donald McKay (a cyberneticist contemporary to Claude Shannon), who cared more about the highly particular *reception* of messages than the standardisation and transmission of information. Through Varela, affect becomes a means to 'render perception constitutively *impure*', heterogeneous within and between individuals (p4). Hansen also introduces the concept of *machinic vision* – 'whereas visual automation seeks to replace human vision *tout court*, machinic vision simply expands the range of perception well beyond the organic-physiological constraints of human embodiment … machinic vision functions precisely by challenging the human to reorganize itself' (p100). For Hansen, the various media are no longer mimics or 'extensions' of the same old human, but are profoundly *inhuman*, transformative, 'embodied prostheses' (p112).

New Philosophy for New Media, and each of its chapters, opens unexpectedly primer-style with tables outlining the main ideas and examples to follow. The first half of the book situates vision in the body, while the second half moves beyond perception to 'affectivity'. Throughout, the arguments rest on the 'philosophical redemption' of Bergson from the Deleuze of *Cinema 1* (with the help of Ruyer, Simondon, Varela, and so on). Where Deleuze calls attention to framing *techniques* - photographs, film stills -Hansen follows Bergson in taking the body to be the frame, or filter, 'subtracting' information

4. Silvan Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness, vol III, The Negative Affects: Anger and Fear*, New York, Springer, 1991, p67. Not that Tomkins was transparent; he believed that most of our 'feelings' are actually 'pseudo' or 'backed-up' affects, the result of learning.

5. See Ekman's history of emotions research in his introduction to the third edition of Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Oxford UP, 1998, ppxxi-xxxvi.

from an environment. Whereas Deleuze, according to Hansen, also displaces affect onto techniques, such as the montage and the close-up (which then 'inscribe' a viewer), Hansen returns to the 'embodied viewer-participant'. Deleuze's 'seers' are Hansen's 'actors' (p208). Lastly, where Deleuze finds an 'isomorphism of brain and cinematic apparatus', Hansen rejects cinema as the best example of Bergson's theory of affection. Rather, in the second and third chapters, the *digital image* is shown to be properly Bergsonian. Jeffrey Shaw's interactive panoramas (that is, *Place: A User's Manual*) and Miroslaw Rogala's *Lover's Leap* (in which video screens respond to a viewer's body movements), provide obvious examples of 'viewer control' and 'constructive reception'. Although participants may move or orientate themselves uniquely within these installations, it is not clear that they actually perceive the same image differently. Nor does this mild symbiosis of human bodies and new media *art* speak to the problem of what Lev Manovich has called 'totalitarian interactivity' in other uses of digital technology.

Thus, we move beyond the body as filter-subtractor in the second section of the book, and it is here that Hansen develops his theory of affectivity. The body is recast as a 'convertor'. Quoting Florian Rötzer, that 'seeing the world is no longer understood as a process of copying but of modelling', Hansen works from examples in which media objects are actualised, and not just selected, by the viewer (p106). Theorising the interface cleverly in Chapter 4, Hansen counters Deleuze's cinematic close-up with his own 'digital facial image' (DFI). The close-up is expressive and detached from the body; here affect is secondary to perception. The DFI (exemplified by the digitally-produced faces of such artists as Ken Feingold and Huge Harry) is a true *inter-face* - one that catalyses affective activity on the part of the viewer. The 'facialization of the body' occurs when the body's affectivity is the 'interface between the domain of information (the digital) and embodied human experience' (p134). However, as video artist René Beekman has astutely noted, Hansen's reliance on examples containing faces and bodies tends to humanize digital technology more than it re-makes the human.

Chapter 5 switches to the example of virtual reality, where the literal interface disappears and what's left is streaming affect. In VR installations such as Simon Penny's *Fugitive*, Hansen argues, the medium and the viewer are coupled. However, he does not detail the engineering of these technologies - VR is a widely applied term, but the 'immersive' versions use stereoscopic display devices that rely on human binocular disparity (the spacing of our eyes and how our brain resolves it) to simulate depth. In that stereoscopic devices signal a fixed and near-universal anatomical quality, rather than the impurity of affect or the singularity of being, I'm not convinced this is the best example for Hansen's argument. (Not to mention that this binocular fusion can happen without technological assistance at all, simply by looking at tiles in a bathroom, or a redundant pattern of trees in a forest.) Nevertheless, as Hansen explains, 'VR's achievement is to accomplish the passage from interactivity to dynamics, from image perception to body-brain simulation'

(p166). Through a process Hansen calls *spacing*, 'the body itself becomes the "place" where space is generated' (p214). Here, affectivity has the potential to become a two-way street, with the medium transformed. Overall, this theoretical move from inscription to affectivity is enormous, and goes further than performativity to sidestep the centuries-long revision of mimesis as *the* mode of artistic- and self-formation.[6] It is curious, therefore, that Hansen closes the final chapter of section 2 by describing 'seeing with the body' as the way the body imitates or 'mimes' its environment; what of an affectivity that is complementary, or that generates extensive space (p232)?

Any book titled *New Philosophy for New Media* must demonstrate the rupture it assumes. Dealing harshly with those who have a more archaeological temperament, such as Lev Manovich and Rosalind Krauss, Hansen makes a strong case that new media are truly new, because through them the 'image does not comprise a representation of a pre-existent and independent reality, but rather a *means* for the new media user to intervene in the production of the 'real,' now understood as a rendering of data' (p10). Thus, a decrease in the materiality of the medium yields a corresponding increase in the importance of the viewer (p22). In terms of new-ness, Hansen's 'affectivity' is a bold extension of Bergson, and Hansen's work at the overlap of science and media studies should be trend setting. Still, it's not clear that affectivity is necessarily (or most boldly) applied to digital art. Hansen's affectivity, for instance, sounds a bit like John Dewey's 'transactionalism', wherein things reciprocally change one another, with - and without - mediation. Extending his early 'reflex arc' concept - which had conceived 'reactions' as *actions-into* stimuli - Dewey specifically argued against Bergson's subtractive theory to think wholly in terms of the additive. (What happens when my porous body enters a room? When I see red, use water, touch a stone? When I call someone a vicious name?) New media art certainly makes affectivity plain; it remains to be shown how human heterogeneity is required, or increased, by these technologies … or that they account for a large share of 'lived experience'. Affectivity, transactionalism, and related non-representational philosophies (that is, Hayles' intermediation, Latour's actor-network theory) leave me wondering about the possibilities for non-participation, a tactic Hansen briefly flags with regards to Paul Virilio's ethical conception of blindness (p105). As these theories mature, I anticipate a closer attention to singular outcomes, the way collectives and habits form, and the relevance of a body's or an object's history.

6. Hansen, in fact, discusses the advantages of affect over performativity theory (which he equates with a mostly visual mimicry) in 'Digitizing the Racialized Body or the Politics of Universal Address', *SubStance*, 104, vol. 33, no. 2, 2004.

Modernity and the Concept of Experience

Michael Pickering

Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2005, 431pp; £22.95 hardback.

Experience is a fugitive term because that to which it refers is ubiquitous and continuous, fleeting and changing, inescapable yet recalcitrant when faced with attempts to formulate it as a concept. We cannot do without it, yet many thinkers over the centuries have been at odds with themselves and each other over precisely what to do with it, how to discern its darting meanings, how to grasp its seemingly ungraspable nature. For some it is an intellectual resource of inestimable worth, however awkward its representation may prove in any particular case; for others it is a term to be treated with caution, suspicion or distrust, however important its invocation may be for any particular person or collectivity. As a category, it has been deeply divisive, an endless source of argument and cause of rigid entrenchment, but it remains as pervasive and puzzling as ever. Its protean, shape-shifting manifestations, here startlingly vivid in its expressive forms, there seemingly beyond the scope of what can be expressed, in words, images or musical configurations, are what make it such a fascinating, as well as fraught, topic for rumination, discussion and interpretation.

We have for some time been in need of a wide-ranging, synthesising account that attempts to bring together its varied uses and applications, in different domains and traditions, in order to see how the meanings and values attributed to it have contributed to our understanding of modern conditions and the shaping of the modern world. This is what Martin Jay has accomplished in his majestic survey. Though he discusses certain earlier writers, such as Bacon and Montaigne, the focus is primarily on thinkers of the past three centuries and on a broad spectrum of work that covers experience in its epistemological, religious, aesthetic, political and historical manifestations, as these have been both part and product of the process of becoming, in some sense, modern.

One aspect of becoming modern is an increasing awareness that inherent in experience is a duality of structure characterised by its continual unfolding in time while also acting back on that ongoing development across time. For this reason, invoking experience usually involves a distinction between two senses of the term. These are far from exclusive. Both are set in play at once, and operate in mutual reference to each other. On the one hand, there is the notion of a subject's immersion in the flow of action, observation or feeling, of experience *as* process, where the meanings of events, encounters, episodes or

states of being are relatively inchoate, and not as yet realised in any developed manner that can be carried forwards into the future. On the other hand, the term refers to that which is derived by the subject from processual realities, to experience *as* object, where the meanings of what has happened are more fully constructed and assimilated, as the results of experience, against which change and development, or disruption and loss, can be assessed, now and in the future. Both of these dimensions of experience can be referred to as lived in that they cover what has been moved through, and learned from, in a vast array of possibilities and consequences. The qualities and values of different genres and modalities of experience are articulated, weighed and arranged, in the contingent and always provisional art of understanding, only on the basis of the transactional relationship between these two dimensions of experience.

It is because what this produces is diverse, heterogeneous, at times contradictory, that Jay speaks of the 'songs of experience', of experience as a semantically multiple term rather than a unified or absolute category. This is one of the book's merits, for the conceptual elusiveness of the term throws up the temptation to deny, dismiss or do away with its pluralities, ambiguities and uncertainties by claiming primacy for one definite, preferred sense, or by invoking some unassailable ground for the authenticity of some particular experience in which either personal or collective identity is deeply invested. Such tactics, as Jay notes, 'impose a rigid and atemporal singularity on precisely what should be acknowledged as having had a varied and changing development' (p9). Charting this development over the modern period is Jay's momentous task.

The focus on modernity seems appropriate when we consider that the value of experience for what we make of the world is, in itself, peculiarly modern. The premium on our own present and ongoing experience exists because experience under conditions of modernity is subject to relentless disruption, change, loss and renewal. An important consequence of this is that expectations of the future have gained ascendancy over past experience and what may legitimately be taken from it. This may be decried, as for instance in laments over the loss of a moral compass in the development of modern societies, yet at the same time the continual rejection of past criteria and paradigms has reinvested experience with a whole new significance.

Our own experience now seems to be all we have as a source of who we are or can become, in our own lives and in our different social and ethnic categories. That is why it is deemed by many to be the basis of their sense of individual or group identity. The connection is celebrated as psychologically and politically affirmative by some, critiqued as essentialist and unimpeachably self-validating by others. This may seem at times to involve people talking past each other, rather than to each other, but there is much at stake in these opposed views. The crucial presence of experience in feminist theory and historiography, or in the resistances of various marginalized ethnic groups, is undeniable, but it can be plausibly argued that using category-

based experience as a – if not the – primary source of identity legitimation is restrictive, since experience without otherness grows inwards and dies, and at times pernicious, in ways that have not been sufficiently recognised. Jay touches occasionally on these matters, but not in any depth. This is a shame, for it would have been helpful to have had a more thoroughgoing engagement with the relations of experience and identity.

In contrast, one of the strengths of the book is its attention to the relations of experience and knowledge. Jay initially explores these relations through the philosophical writings of Locke, Hume and Kant. This is an important part of his discussion because how they conceived of experience has been inherited by later writers, often of quite different intellectual orientation or political persuasion. At the same time, the reduction of experience to cognition and epistemological questions led, in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to attempts on the one hand at regaining a more integrated, unified and full-blooded sense of experience, and on the other at refining the sense of what is involved in specific forms or modalities of experience.

For this reason, Jay's discussion in the middle part of the book is directed towards these specific forms or modalities in the fields of religion, art, politics and history before concluding with the efforts made to move towards a more complete, even totalising understanding of experience, as for instance in pragmatism and phenomenology. In both these sections of the book, his approach is to take several key thinkers and delineate the leading components of their theorisations of experience. For example, in dealing with religious or spiritual experience, Jay focuses on Schleiermacher, James, Otto and Buber, while in considering politics and experience he moves from Burke, through Oakeshott, to the English Marxists. This selective strategy invites attention to those omitted or played down, but provides illumination in bringing different thinkers into confrontation with each other. Not everyone can be easily confined to any one chapter, and significantly William James and John Dewey appear in the subheadings of two.

Along with Peirce, James and Dewey were of course formative influences in the development of philosophical pragmatism. James helped put its ideas on the intellectual map with his 1907 publication, *Pragmatism*, while Dewey proceeded to work from the point where James had left off. As contributors to the history of American philosophy, they have various concerns and preoccupations in common, some of which Jay notes while others he neglects. Especially important in what is neglected are the themes of belief and experience and the ways they interrelate. Bringing these themes into closer alignment in pragmatism gave philosophical enquiry in early twentieth-century North America a practical character and self-reflexive quality, with the world being regarded as ever incomplete, in process and without finality. With James, religious belief was a paramount concern, particularly because much of what is believed in a religious sense cannot be attested in practical experience. James paved the way for the sociology of religion and a central abiding concern of this field by developing an approach that is empirical yet

directed towards an object of study that is transempirical. In religion, it is a transempirical belief that invests the visible material world with meaning. It is what defines a theistic view of the world. James was concerned with how this kind of belief comes about – what is it based upon and what is it that permits it to flourish? His close interest in religious experience meant that he focused mainly on momentous experiences rather than the experiences of routine, everyday life. This is largely true of Dewey as well, though for him aesthetic experience was a paramount concern. Such experience was pivotal in his thinking about experience in general. This was not aesthetic experience conceived of as timeless or transcendent, but as a moment of fulfilment, located on a peak of time while at the same time integral to the change, adjustment and growth that is characteristic of temporal experience.

Along with pragmatism, where Jay is rightly critical of Rorty's etiolated contemporary version, he examines German critical theory and French poststructuralism for the ways these intellectual movements have regarded the relations between experience and modernity, with key figures including Benjamin and Adorno, Bataille, Barthes and Foucault. He has of course written to great effect on Adorno and Benjamin before, and his account of the pathos involved in their conceptions of experience here is just as insightful and compelling. Taking up some of the preoccupations of these two writers, as for example with the substitution of perishable news and information for more durable narratives transmitted across generations, or the substitution of commodified sensation for transformative experience, and applying them to contemporary experiences of media landscapes and cyberspace, might have made for a scintillating final chapter. Instead, as if as an antidote to an incipient sense of jadedness as he marches on towards completion of his 400 pages, Jay turns to ecstatic, or limit experiences. These are not usually associated with poststructuralism and its insistence on the mediations of language and discourse, but in Jay's three chosen figures of Bataille, Barthes and Foucault there is an interest in transgressive forms of experience involving a de-centring of the self. The account given of these is far less satisfying than his treatment of the 'crisis of experience' in Benjamin and Adorno. After the exciting pathways of the earlier chapters, it feels as if this chapter leads only into the briar patch, and when we emerge from it, the way forwards simply peters out. Jay offers a short conclusion that serves to reiterate some main points and bring various threads together, but it is too little, too late. It cannot compensate for the failure to advance his own line of argument.

This is what is missing in the book. The intellectual range, the prodigious erudition, the interdisciplinary versatility, and the concise quality of the writing, are shining features, making this book such a grand tour of ideas about experience, all the way from classical antiquity to postmodernism. But a non-committal, detached stance remains predominant. Though we may suspect that Jay's own sympathies mainly reside with Benjamin and Adorno, we're never told this. We're not made aware of what Jay himself thinks about the repeated warnings of the dissolution of experience in modernity, or what

is most at stake in the politics of experience. Throughout the book, he is content to walk up and down the fences dividing different conceptions of the term without ever pitching his tent in any of the adjacent fields and making it his own. He is good at pointing out the landmarks, poor at making his own mark on the land. This is why the book almost fades out amid tired clichés about journeys and destinations. If being experienced means being open to new experiences, operating with an approach to life that is the opposite of closure, of dogma and acquiescence in the status quo, then Jay shows many of the right credentials, but being open in this way does not preclude a willingness to take risks, pass judgment, be passionate as well as detached, or develop a position of one's own, especially on such key concepts as experience. The failure to realize this, in how the book manifests itself, is what makes it ultimately disappointing, especially after the vast territory that has been covered. To quote one of Blake's proverbs of Hell: 'The cistern contains, the fountain overflows'.

At the start of the book, Jay promises to address 'those thinkers who have put "experience" to greatest work in their thought, while expressing the emotional intensity that allows us to call their work "songs of experience"' (p4). Jay makes great work of other people's ideas, but it is the lack of that emotional intensity in his own writing that prevents the book from becoming its own 'song of experience'.

John Gray's Navigational Problem

William H. Thornton

John Gray, *Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern*, Faber and Faber, London, 2004, 160pp; £7.99 paperback.

Anyone familiar with John Gray's previous work will not be surprised that he finds a way to blame the Western Enlightenment for the global terrorism he addresses in *Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern*. *Al Qaeda* thus becomes a companion volume to Gray's many critiques of liberalism,[1] which is why many readers have complained that it deals less with its stated topic than with Western intellectual history. Nonetheless it offers some richly provocative insight into global Jihad. Whereas most Western observers, in secular Europe as well as 'born again' America, view al Qaeda as a reversion to medieval Islamism, Gray regards it as a modern and largely Western phenomenon. That is not because Gray is Eurocentric, let alone 'orientalist'. Indeed, *Al Qaeda* can be read as an exoneration of Islamic culture insofar as Gray is blaming the worst kind of radical Islamism on the worst kind of Western influence. In earlier works he defends the concept of indigenous modernization - most notably that of Japan - against those who would equate modernization with Westernisation.[2] This leaves the door open for a distinctly Islamic modernization, free from the machinations of Bush administration 'roadmaps.'

While the Islamic path to democratisation is not taken very far in *Al Qaeda*, a theoretical space is opened in this direction. That is enough to put Gray at odds with the most formidable Islamist in the Bush circle, Bernard Lewis, who traces the current terrorist crisis to centuries of Islamic decadence. Likewise Gray collides with Samuel Huntington, whose famous 'clash of civilizations' thesis did much (albeit through misinterpretation) to inspire Bush's 'us/them' mantra after 9/11. That virtual declaration of war was aimed not just at al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban (which a few years before had enjoyed US support by way of Pakistan) but also at any country that takes a more culturally nuanced or geopolitically balanced approach to the 'war on terrorism'. In short, any nation that does not swear fealty to Washington could end up in the President's 'them' column. For the neoconservative hawks who surround Bush, Osama bin Laden is the ultimate cultural Other, although ironically it is his globalist savvy that renders him so dangerous. An earlier generation of Western observers- ranging from Shia-phobic State Department analysts to cultural theorists like Michel Foucault - were equally fixated on the Ayatolla Khomeini. Foucault (at least briefly) took Khomeini as the paragon of both anti-capitalist and anti-modernist virtue. By contrast, today's neocons vilify not only Osama but Islamism in general. Gray avoids this trap for one simple reason: in his view al Qaeda and its ilk are *not the Other*. Their proneness to

1. For instance, John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the close of the Modern Age*, London, Routledge, 1995; and John Gray, *Liberalism*, Buckingham, Open University Press, second edition, 1995.

2. Concerning native Japanese modernization, see John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, New York, The New Press, 1998, p18.

violence as well as their whole revolutionary tilt, are, in Gray's estimation, products of *Western* radical traditions.

What propels this dark Western undercurrent - which Gray sees as engulfing even today's neoconservatives - is the notion that the world can be dismantled and remade for the benefit of all, including those who want no part of it (pp117-8). Gray sees this reconstruction project as the very essence of modernism. It is what the IMF shares with radical Islam, and what Marx shares with Fukuyama. For all the sound and fury of their public opposition, the Western Right and Left hold in common an unshakeable faith that the world can be revamped according to their particular ideological prescriptions. The World Bank and the IMF, fiscal vanguards of the New World Order, call this restructuration. Behind it all, however, Gray discerns a religious impulse that even Marxists cannot evade. Like Hegelianism, Marxism is but a secular mutation of the greatest teleological engine of them all: Christianity (p7).

That same engine of futurity drives today's neoliberal globalism. And with a neoconservative twist it energizes the Bush Doctrine's determination to handle foreign affairs unilaterally, and by force of arms if necessary. This Crusader mentality (which some on the Right, such as Max Boot, Robert Kagan, Victor Davis Hanson, nascent Rightist Christopher Hitchens, and Niall Ferguson, are pleased to call by its real name: imperialism) is sanitized through the belief that cultural differences are mere surface qualities. To rid cultural others of their tradition is to liberate them, making room for the wonders of globalisation. This moral imperative is now coupled with a growing sense that cultural otherness can sometimes pose a real danger to the global order, that is, to the world as envisioned (in descending order of public awareness) by the Washington Consensus, the G-8, Davos dignitaries, and secret Bilderberg insiders. The Bush Doctrine offers its services to all of the above in the spirit of armed globalisation, or what I have termed neoglobalism: the post-9/11 melding of neoliberalism and neoconservatism.[3] Though conservatives once opposed the liberal tendency to mind the business of other societies, neocons now join hands with neoliberals in a global war on cultural difference.

To his credit, the arch-conservative Gray contests this neoglobalist ambition as surely as any leftist must. But unlike many arch-critics of US foreign policy, such as Noam Chomsky or Chalmers Johnson, Gray does not point an accusatory finger at Washington specifically. For him the current world crisis does not stem from the exceptional nature of American empire, though a contributing factor may well be America's unblinking appropriation of modernist assumptions in its policy decisions. European adaptations of those same assumptions - under sanguine labels such as the 'Third Way' or cosmopolitanism - would hardly solve the problem. Nor will a still modernist left revisionism help much, as many anti-globalists assume. Gray sees no alternative to the sweeping anti-modernism that he posits in *Straw Dogs*, his last and most unqualified blast at his old Enlightenment foe. From this vantage neoliberalism and Marxism not only evince a family resemblance in their economic determinism, but share something even more fundamental:

3. William H. Thornton, *New World Empire: Civil Islam, Terrorism, and the Making of Neoglobalism*, Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.

the cardinal faith, inherited almost en bloc from Christianity, that there is one right way for all mankind.

What made this secular universalism possible was the advent of eighteenth-century futurism. As surely as their Christian forebears were out to save souls for the great Hereafter, Enlightenment philosophers were out to improve mankind in the great Tomorrow (p102 and 104). Neither had much patience for cultural resistance, and subsequent modernism has proven equally intolerant. As Foucault underscored with regard to liberalism, resistance has seldom been free from disciplinary consequences. This is no less the case with neoliberal globalism, which in the name of economic restructuration attempts to cast the whole world in its image, implanting American culture in what Senator Henry Cabot Lodge once called 'all the waste places of the earth'.[4] Such a sweeping global remake is no less cultural and political than economic. Thus Voltaire's injunction to 'crush the infamous thing' ('*ecraser l'infame*!') has been extended beyond church dogma to every vestige of cultural recalcitrance.

4. Henry Cabot Lodge quoted in Howard Zinn, 'The Power and the Glory: Myths of American Exceptionalism', *Boston Review: a Political and Literary Forum* (Summer 2005), <http://bostonreview.net/BR30.3/zinn.html>.

Gray adds that even Enlightenment tolerance - presumably its finest gift to the modern world - was not so original as is commonly assumed. We are reminded that the harbingers of liberal tolerance were quite at home in the Ottoman Empire, in Moorish Spain, Buddhist India, and imperial China. If there is a lesson in these antecedents, it is that there is no single and incontestable path to modernity. Western liberalism is only one way to 'get along' in a post-traditional world (p113). But a simple rejection of liberalism - such as Foucault attempted in the midst of the Iranian Revolution - would leave a dangerous void. The liberalism we jettison would almost certainly be replaced by some other form of modernism, and as Gray admonishes, there are many reactionary modernisms waiting for such a chance. Fascism and al Qaeda, Gray's prime examples (p20), would appreciate his assistance in ridding the world of their chief competitor, liberalism.

Gray and Foucault - strange bedfellows in the war on global liberalism - fail to see that their case rests on a very liberal intolerance of intolerance. But the biggest problem with *Al Qaeda*, the book, is simply that it presses its case too far. Undeniably there are modernist elements in al Qaeda, the movement, but its ultimate objectives are another matter. In that respect it can be compared to the Ayatolla Khomeini's shadow government in Paris before his fateful return to Iran in 1979. Only in terms of *some* of its means and ends (certainly not suicide bombing and doing Allah's will) can Gray justifiably describe al Qaeda as a globalist multinational (pp76-7). He is right that globalisation, try as it will, cannot squeeze all difference from wayward societies (p113). So too it enlists a wide variety of religiously-oriented players, ranging from Pope John Paul II to Osama bin Laden. On this point Benjamin Barber was wrong in his assessment that McWorld and Jihad are on opposite tracks, as the former consists of centripetal forces and the latter of centrifugal ones.[5] The agents of globalisation are too diverse to allow for blanket convergence, while the cellular fragmentation

5. Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1995. Oddly Gray never mentions this classic study.

of al Qaeda still requires a good deal of central organisation - hence the strategic importance of Osama himself. Where Barber was right, and in broad agreement with Gray, was in his contention that the liberal democratic terminus of Fukuyama's 'end of history' is anything but a central feature of globalisation. It is the anti-democratic proclivity of McWorld and Jihad alike which links them in a dialectic of global terror (p6).

In holding that there are many ways of being modern, and some of them are monstrous (p2), Gray set the stage for a culturally conservative anti-globalism. It is arguable that in one way or another *all* globalist modernisms are monstrous. All certainly trade in cultural repression, and the most advanced ones also run a thriving trade in arms. In this respect al Qaeda and McWorld are fraternal twins. One can acknowledge this without agreeing with Gray that al Qaeda's worst qualities are globalist imports. Rather, its relationship with globalisation is largely instrumental. This includes a public relations dimension, for the glaring defects of McWorld well serve the organisation's legitimacy within the Muslim world.

Likewise McWorld depends upon Jihad for public approval of its newly activated militancy - its neoglobalist turn. Jihad licenses it to act as if it were at war, even as its captured adversaries are denied the basic rights guaranteed all prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions. Names such as Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo have become synonymous the world over with US indifference to international law, not to mention the values that once commanded profound 'soft power' advantage.[6] Acting on the erroneous belief that it can dispense with soft power, unipolar America now lays siege to every form of cultural difference (except, of course, where oil or mineral extractions are at stake, as in Saudi Arabia, or where there is thought to be some compelling geopolitical advantage, as in Pakistan or Uzbekistan). The resistance this evokes is doing more to destabilize the global periphery than Cold War bipolarity ever did (p53). The result is mounting global disorder, with countless new zones of anarchy that are perfect breeding grounds for jihadic terrorism. One of these zones is Iraq, which has become the chief training centre for a new generation of urban terrorists (pp73-4).

6. See Joseph Nye, Jr, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 9.

Obviously the 'war on terrorism' has been falsely advertised. Jihad provides a vital service to the post-9/11 Washington Consensus: the perfect excuse to transform the power economics of neoliberalism into the power politics of Empire. Gray is certainly no friend of neoglobalist imperialism, and even readers on the far Left could mine useful points from *Al Qaeda*. The problem is that here, as in most of his recent work, Gray overshoots the mark. He has a serious navigational problem, rather like the travel agent who gets us from New York to Boston through L.A. He insists that we address the twin evils of McWorld and Jihad by first eradicating the evils of modernity, if not the problem of evil itself. The result is political retreatism on a scale that only an arch-conservative could endorse. The idea that Gray has totally abandoned Thatcherism may need reconsideration. Granted, he has been a vociferous critic of globalisation, which seems to run against the Thatcherite grain.

But globalisation does not require much active support. It simply needs the absence of active political resistance. It was none other than the father of conservatism, Edmund Burke, who said that 'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.'

Fortunately there are more direct routes to global security than those adumbrated by Gray. *Al Qaeda* should be read for its many valuable insights into the nexus between radical Islamism and equally radical globalisation. But, along with *Straw Dogs*, it should also be read as a cautionary tale on why Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* is a better guide to the roots of our cultural morass than is Jules Vernes' *Five Weeks in a Balloon*. In his capacity as an International Relations theorist, Gray soars so high that he misses not just the trees but the forest as well. For him the issue, once again, is the twin crises of modernity and liberalism. But in laying so much stress on Jihad as a manifestation of modernism, he entirely misses its role in the power politics of a putative Cold War II, where Jihad replaces Soviet communism as the rationale for continuous military buildup. His bold search for final solutions would be admirable (in the tragicomic sense that Don Quixote's exploits are admirable) if it did not lead to an untimely politics of inertia. We look forward to Gray's eventual re-entry to earth orbit, where political actions do count, but where solutions are partial at best. Outside of science fiction, partial is as good as it gets.

If You Don't Know Me By Now – Cultural Studies' Perpetual Introductions

Melissa Gregg

Angela McRobbie, *The Uses of Cultural Studies*, Sage, London 2005, 211pp; £18.99 paperback; £60 hardback.

Simon During, *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, London 2005, 244pp; £14.99 paperback; £45 hardback.

Given the number of cultural studies textbooks now on the market it is fair to say that any new take on the field is likely to come under some scrutiny. On the one hand this is because cultural studies incites a particular passion among its adherents (indeed, among its detractors as well). It is also because the field is in many ways characterised by its anti-canonical bent. If the function of the introductory genre is to impart an identifiable history of thought and practice, it is certainly the case that a conventional legacy for cultural studies has been well established, with the most precise measure being the number of attempts that have also been made to dismantle or re-imagine this narrative. Two recent books cite their immediate contexts for teaching as the key to understanding their decision to join this history. Angela McRobbie begins *The Uses of Cultural Studies* stating that she wants it to emulate the famous Open University U203 course which ran through the late '70s and early '80s, offering 'accessibility without simplification' and a discussion of cultural theory alongside various forms of cultural practice (p2). McRobbie likes this method as it provides students 'with the means by which they can pursue particular interests in more depth without getting lost or straying too far from the starting point of what is usually called course content' (p1). While students may be initially 'keen and eager' to delve into the theories offered in class, she notices they are 'often frustrated by what they perceive as their own weaknesses when they find themselves struggling with unfamiliar terms, with new vocabularies and with the much wider intellectual context which the writers themselves inhabit' (p1). The book's response to this problem is to concentrate on specific aspects of the work of particular theorists: Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Judith Butler, Homi Bhabha, Pierre Bourdieu and Frederic Jameson. These readings are finessed by a series of 'extended notes' following each chapter, which use various examples to add texture to the theories such as Yinka Shonibare's 'Double Dutch' images which form the book's cover. With two final sections of Further Materials, McRobbie's tactics are an acknowledgement that in the 'inter-disciplinary academic environment' of today, 'students have to learn how to draw limits on what they can realistically engage with, across diverse

fields of intellectual activity. And there are also more limits on time than was the case some years ago' (p1).

Simon During adopts a similarly practical position when he warns readers in the first line of his book that it 'is not quite the usual introduction to cultural studies' (p1). In line with McRobbie's aversion to any conventional narrative of cultural studies, During's aims are to 'stimulate discussion and thought in the classroom, although not only in the classroom' (p1). He does this with a series of short essays – nineteen in total – grouped according to seven parts: 'The Discipline', 'Time', 'Space', 'Media and the Public Sphere', 'Identity', 'Sexuality and Gender' and 'Value.' This theme-based approach is 'not aimed at absolute beginners […] but more at those who are feeling their way further into the subject on the basis of some preliminary study, as well as at old hands intrigued by what I hope is a fresh take on the field' (p1). The immediate question I had in response to During's description was, 'Then why call it an introduction?' It is surely too much to expect the 'critical' in the book's sub-title to absolve the function of genre. And yet it is more fitting to address such questions to the book's publisher than to the author, who is hardly alone in seizing the invitation of a commissioning editor keen to trade on a bankable name and a proven formula.

To the extent that the themed essays are informed *by* cultural studies and assume a degree of knowledge about it, they are actually a series of the author's own speculations in response to the themes rather than a definitive catalogue of the debates which establish them as key dimensions of the field. While this risks some arbitrariness in his selection, During's organisation of the text is clear and effective. It is certainly likely that students will appreciate its approachable language and exploratory tone which have the combined effect of addressing readers as participants in a conversation. This fittingly meets the description of cultural studies teaching During mentions, which sees it as having 'a different relation to its students than had older disciplines':

> Ideally at least, it listens to its students; it takes on board their interests and knowledge. The student is figured not as an empty subject to be filled with scholarship, a capability to be trained, but as an interlocutor with whom certain modes of thought and perspectives on the world are to be presented and with whom teachers are in dialogue (pp62-3).

How rewarding can this dialogue expect to be considering the book's arguable misnomer? And does the range of issues tabled for discussion risk the threat of disorientation that McRobbie describes? These are questions best left to the discretion of pedagogical preference and actual classroom dynamics. But with thorough accounts already showing how cultural studies' themes have developed throughout history[1] and others demonstrating how they might be utilised by research students,[2] I'm still not entirely sure how this text fills a gap – unless it is a market deemed to be so US-centric that these existing volumes would not be considered.

1. For instance Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, second edition, Sage, London 2003; Jeff Lewis, *Cultural Studies – The Basics*, Sage, London 2002.

2. Ann Gray, *Research Practice for Cultural Studies*, Sage, London 2003; Richard Johnson, Deborah Chambers, Parvati Raghuram and Estella Tincknell, *The Practice of Cultural Studies*, Sage, London 2004.

During is best in those sections where an overarching perspective gives a necessary balance to the subject under discussion. For instance, the theory of postmodernity 'only covered the world's urbanised rich, wherever they may live. And that was why the world it described was unprepared for the geopolitics of the war on terror':

> … the self-contradictory image of a postmodern world presented by progressive critics expressed their various fears at least as much as it formed an accurate picture of the world. Yet it may be that the expression of those fears can help us commit to an order where they are indeed baseless – and therein might lie the very usefulness of the diagnosis (p68).

Readers of both books will find this a nice complement to McRobbie's reading of Jameson. The section on 'global justice' gives a good overview of new social movements gaining momentum prior to, and now largely effaced by the context of 9/11, while the following passage addressing the theme of 'Space' attests how rarely During's ethical compass strays from his critical assessments:

> The merging of the social and the spatial means that it is easy to over-emphasise the degree to which market forces and capitalism are extending into all corners of the world. In particular, it is easy from the fastness of middle-class life in the world's 'metropolitan' regions to forget that, for instance, much production in sub-Saharan Africa is not capitalist at all. Or that about 2 billion of the world's population are not on the electricity grid while 4.5 billion have no access to telecommunications (pp81-2).

It is clear in these passages that During's attraction to cultural studies rests in its capacity to grant space for the ethical considerations that are part of scholarly preoccupations. I am looking forward to reading more of his writing in this area free from the constraints of the shorter essays in this collection. As it stands During's book offers readers important measures by which they can begin to think about the place of their own culture in relation to a wider world.

My own investment in cultural studies had me particularly focused on the sections addressing 'The Discipline' under the headings 'Going Global', 'Enterprise Culture', 'Genres and Genealogies' and 'Problems'. The latter was a particularly interesting attempt to create coherence for a field which so often refuses it. One small question I had was whether the subsection dedicated to 'individualism, subject position and disciplinarity' may have too quickly obfuscated the distinction between 'subject' and 'speaking' position that has been important to feminist critiques of cultural studies. The politics of speech and representation are such a constitutive aspect of the field's development, even from the early period at Birmingham, that it seems appropriate to recognise it at this point (rather than, or as well as,

the terrain of separate chapters on gender, race and multiculturalism). The subsection on 'Cultural studies' pasts' (pp34-7) makes useful distinctions between 'precursors, sources and past practitioners' in order to navigate the contested histories of, and influences on the field, and while I welcomed the geographical specificity in the 'Genres and Gealogies' section, the brevity of the chapter arrangement leads to some inevitable generalisations such as those that have been debated with some vehemence on a local email list in Australia.[3] During is understandably intent on pointing out cultural studies' 'discomforting harmonies' with neo-liberalism (p11) but also writes that 'it is unfair to complain that cultural studies has traversed politics; rather it is the political domain that has been emptied out by larger social forces':

> … it is within this diminished politics that cultural studies' political aspirations need to be viewed. And it is because politics is increasingly informed by culture that cultural studies can claim to be political (pp40-1).

Here During's perspective is symptomatic of a wider problem cultural studies has always had in defining politics (see also pp38-9). But when he notes that 'in the ebb and flow of academic fashion, the tide is going out for queer thought and practice, however much political work remains to be done' (p189), there does appear to be an implicit hierarchy of political investment in his own thinking. I say this because anyone cognisant of the performative effects of speech at the heart of so much queer theory and politics would surely hesitate before announcing the death of something they would like to see continue.

During has long maintained that cultural studies is distinctive because it is an engaged set of practices, a formulation I have always found immensely helpful. It is a refrain that appears again in this text, in some detail:

> Cultural studies is *engaged* in three different senses. First, in the sense that it is not neutral in relation to the exclusions, injustices and prejudices that it observes. It tends to position itself on the side of those to whom social structures offer least, so that here 'engaged' means political, critical. Second, it is engaged in that it aims to enhance and celebrate cultural experiences: to communicate enjoyment of a wide variety of cultural forms in part by analysing them and their social underpinnings. And third, and this marks its real difference from other academic work, it aims to deal with culture as a part of everyday life, without objectifying it. In fact cultural studies aspires to join – to engage in – the world, itself (1).

It is precisely the merit of this description, and its repetition in the book's conclusion, that makes me sensitive to the ways in which During's own practice sometimes lacks this sense of engagement. I am thinking in particular about the way that he seems challenged by what could be seen as the task of a great textbook: 'communicating enjoyment' of the field itself. During concludes by

3. The debate on the CSAA forum email list took place over a two week period in August 2005 and is archived at this address: <http://lists.cdu.edu.au/pipermail/csaa-forum/>

suggesting that the description of cultural studies he has offered 'doesn't quite add up,' listing a series of questions that testify to its 'loose ends, irresolutions, contradictions and frictions' (p214). These loose ends are argued to be 'what energises the discipline, what keeps it fresh, exciting, open to the future' (ibid) and as someone already well acquainted with cultural studies I agree with this assessment. However I'm not sure someone who didn't already know cultural studies would be so easily convinced. In my experience, contradictions and loose ends are not suffered gladly by time-poor undergraduates. I therefore wonder if the book's disavowed title can be understood as a way of avoiding any need to suggest that cultural studies is the paradigm which defines During's own point of view. To the extent that the book comprises the author's estimation of themes that typify a cultural studies perspective, it retains a detached ambivalence that avoids ever fully identifying with such a perspective. For many academics and teachers, I'm sure this is exactly what is thought to be lacking in the field today – histories of cultural studies are often seen to be driven by the agendas of their proponents, not the least because they have been written so quickly and so often. But what this also means is that During's text adds to a situation in which those who may identify more strongly with cultural studies, and can therefore be expected to have a lot more to say about its future, may face even greater difficulty having such a book commissioned.

As a contrast, even the wording of McRobbie's introduction, 'Privilege and Delight', denotes enthusiasm, an 'engagement' in her discipline. It is a book operating on a quite different register. The experience and location of the writer flavours the account from the outset, so that if there is the opposite problem to During - that of over-identification with the field - at least this partiality can be recognised. For McRobbie, after so many years at the forefront of cultural studies research, one would hope that a degree of joy and conviction as to its 'usefulness' might be possible. But again the title is a red-herring if taken literally. McRobbie's book would be better described as *The Uses of Cultural Theory* because it is a compilation of preferred theorists rather than an overview of the discipline. (Some readers may also presume a degree of homage to Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* in the title. This does not prove to be the case in any explicit sense, although Hoggart is mentioned in places.) This doesn't prevent McRobbie from speaking on behalf of the field when the need arises. For instance, in highlighting three key junctures in Stuart Hall's theorising – the television work of the mid-1970s, the 'authoritarian populism' of Thatcherism in the late 1980s, and multiculturalism debates arising out of the Parekh report in 2000 – her readings demonstrate that 'there is not a single moment where Hall can be seen to do what cultural studies is often accused of, which is to over-emphasise the capacities for resistance' (p27). McRobbie's sympathetic reading of Hall follows some recent criticism of his legacy[4] and is an appreciative account of his tendency to experiment with research. The 'inventiveness of cultural studies' in this chapter's title is a way of conveying 'the marks and even untidiness'

4. Chris Rojek, *Stuart Hall*, Polity, Cambridge 2003. For a spirited rejoinder, see Bill Schwarz, 'Stuart Hall,' *Cultural Studies*, 19, 2 (2005): 176-202.

evident in Hall's collaborative work, where the authors often 'do not attempt to conceal the way in which they seem to be testing the waters … to see how well their reading of Althusser and Gramsci stands up when transplanted into the heartland of the British media and the day-to-day workings of the UK political establishment' (p16). For McRobbie, Hall's contribution 'is simply different from and more than that of an entirely academically oriented social or cultural theorist' (p37). She also notes the difficulty cultural studies faces in a climate of continued conservatism: 'Voices like that of Hall now have to function as "productive singularities", and there is a certain loneliness in such distinctiveness' (p38).

McRobbie's examples strive to avoid the tendency to 'apply' abstract theory to a popular culture product or some aspect of everyday life 'in so far as it suggests two quite separate systems, one of which has the ability to unlock the key to understanding the other' (p115). Instead she hopes that the theoretical works and cultural practices she discusses form 'an interlocking, intersecting series of flows, overlaps and cross-fertilisations', from the victim of the make-over television programme who 'presents his or her class habitus for analysis and critique by the experts' (p147) to the postmodern, hyper-real setting of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (p172). The value of this approach is that it attacks the fallacy of the theory/practice divide which has been such a feature of cultural studies' debates over method. This is what McRobbie sees as crucial in the work of Butler and Bhabha: 'both legitimate a textual politics of transformation in language and writing; both resist a kind of easy politics which is referred to as somehow outside the text, "in the real world"; both inevitably resist calls to action as though in preference to the act of doing theoretical work' (p106).

It could be argued that the combination of figures McRobbie chooses is unusual because a number of them have forged ambivalent and at times strained relations with cultural studies. Yet the choices tend to stand as more evidence that there is no clear consensus, no party line for the field. I like that the book dispels so many clichéd takes on cultural studies which would reproach its banal optimism, or take the critic's role to be one of pinpointing moments of consumer resistance and agency. The detailed reading of Butler will trouble any cherished belief that individual agents are 'endowed with some capacity to bring about change in the [in this case gender] system, as this is to ignore the way in which the effects of power define the contours of possibility for opposition or transgression' (p87). Just as McRobbie leads the reader to realise the full immensity of one theory, subsequent chapters quickly juxtapose it with another so that the claims of each linger in the mind. Ideas rub up against each other; the foundations previously laid start to tremble under pressure from unexpected sources. McRobbie does such service to the chosen aspects of each theorist's project that their competing political emphases appear equally convincing in isolation. When placed in such proximity, readers (and importantly, students) have no real option other than to realise that things are very complicated. So theory doesn't provide

any easy answers, but McRobbie's talent as a teacher and writer is to share useful resources with which we can begin to come to terms with, and take responsibility for, the intricate workings of our cultures.

As we might expect, such theoretical complexity has its drawbacks too. In isolating a few main thinkers McRobbie has to make difficult decisions about the kind of language and depth of knowledge she can realistically expect to summarise. Her reading of Butler is a much needed addition to the teaching resources for post-feminism, but there are moments when the author's own familiarity with Lacanian psychoanalysis will not be shared by undergraduate students, especially in the later, additional essay on *Antigone's Claim*. This is another context in which the classroom will allow further discussion and clarification, but attempting to explain major concepts in a few bracketed phrases of a wider description is if nothing else grammatically ugly - we always have the source texts if we want a subclause extravaganza! In other sections, though, McRobbie's grasp on the minute distinctions between different disciplinary traditions gives her resolve. The stunning critique of Bourdieu towards the end of the book forcefully reveals the 'cost he must pay for his antipathy to cultural studies' (p183).

These two further essays on Bourdieu and Butler essentially take the place of a conclusion in McRobbie's book. While they point to future research opportunities and priorities, I would have liked someone in her authoritative position to speak in greater detail about the state of the field more generally. The lack of conclusion also means that the essay on kinship is the closing note for the book, and, somewhat surprisingly given McRobbie's pioneering work in the area, I take it to be a fairly depressing one for feminism.

I'm no great fan of the song, but the title for this review essay is intended as a stimulus for thinking about the incessant appetite for cultural studies textbooks which persists despite the already formidable number on the market (even as I finish writing this review I note in the latest association newsletter another 'introduction' will be published by Sage in 2006). Perhaps the shared hesitancy on the part of two well-known authors to provide strong concluding statements may be attributable to their own hyper-awareness of having to position their work in a saturated field; of having to manufacture a new claim upon something already cherished. The moment for introductions has surely passed. As indications of academic publishing's peculiarities, though, these texts create lasting impressions of other kinds. One is a renewed desire for outlets better suited to scholarship which seeks to question the inevitability and the amnesia of the imperative present.