

THE ARCHIVE AND THE DETAIL

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Carolyn Steedman, *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007; pp276, £17.99 paperback.

Mica Nava *Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture and the Normalisation of Difference*, London and New York: Berg, 2007; pp224, £18.99 paperback.

Arguably, what gives the cultural history of modern life its distinctive intelligibility is its close reading of the detail of historical circumstances at moments of change: the way individuals and groups lived their lives in specific historical contexts, the contexts of their thought and their feeling, the way they orient themselves towards new circumstances, and sometimes, form an aspiration to live differently. The elusive forces that make a life what it turns out to be - love and belief, behaviour and human relations - are, as Carolyn Steedman insists, aspects of material culture, just as much 'made' as a rag rug, wrought from the rhythm of everyday labour, the rub of bodies, manners and spatial transactions, the workings of human intention and relationality (27). In these ways, she suggests, individuals are of their time and their place, and part of the process of accounting for the 'eventuality' of those events which constitute a life is to trace those forms of affect, intimacy and attachment which are distinctive to a moment and place in the history of modern industrial culture.

This approach implies that the descriptive constitutes a form of inquiry in its own terms. Both of these writers, each in their different ways, are drawn to the archive to reread the dynamics of modernity through those texts that remain as the relics of a life, of conditions of labour and of a social formation. Steedman's archive includes the daily writings of an eighteenth-century clergyman across a lifetime (the diaries, commonplace books, the notes he took on the books he read, his letters and sermons, and the records of his writing and teaching) as well as those more conventional sources detailing a West Riding responding to the processes of industrial modernisation and their impact on topography, class and labour relations, and the nuances of individual interiority. Nava's ranges from the documentary ephemera of modern consumer cultures to the scattered writings of those - Jews, Caribbean migrants, political exiles and activists - whose histories are linked through the experience of diaspora. This is history with a sense of the contingent, that concentrates on the contextual, the incidental and the unexpected, history which is about what else could have happened as much as about what turned

out to be the case.

Both of these books, then, are about modernity in its detail - how people lived, felt and thought, made a place for themselves in the world, and wondered about what it might become - in two distinctive periods of change. But they are also about the forces that helped shape the world these actors confronted and in which they were situated: a world of working class labour, domestic service, love, belief and 'getting by' in the Yorkshire wool fields; a world of commerce and public leisure, sexual and racial politics, the experience of migration or exile in urban Britain. And, as a result of working at the level of detail, both allow space for the ordinary movement of intimacy in human relations - for their historical actors' capacity for tolerance, generosity, respect and kindness, as they challenge the prevailing historical accounts of how 'people like them' thought, felt and behaved.

The context of Steedman's historical account is an industrialising West Riding, the relations between master and servant, and the poor laws, as the 'major institutional expression of (social and religious thinking) during the long eighteenth century' (3). If this was a period in which 'new ways of perceiving, imagining and understanding self and others ... were consolidated', how were 'these large-scale social and philosophical developments ... experienced and thought about in the everyday life of three obscure inhabitants of the late eighteenth-century Yorkshire worsted field'? The event that motivates these questions is an unexceptional one: Phoebe Beatson, a domestic servant, becomes pregnant. What is exceptional is the way it turns out: against the pressure of local expectation and conventional mores, George Thorp, the baby's father, refuses to marry her. Why cannot be discerned. All we know of this happening - and of Phoebe herself, who could not herself write - is provided by the diaries of her employer, the 'ancient and amiable' (29) John Murgatroyd, an Anglican vicar, now widowed. What Murgatroyd did was also exceptional. Instead of paying off his servant so she would leave and remove the stain of scandal from his house, Murgatroyd lets Phoebe, his servant of 17 years, stay. He follows her pregnancy carefully (he and his late wife had had no children, so this is a revelation to him) and takes obvious and sustained joy in the presence of the child, Elizabeth, in his life. Against all contemporary narrative models, this is a happy arrangement, full of affection and centred on the delight that the child brought to his home. And when he dies, Murgatroyd leaves Phoebe the majority of his estate, giving her a place in the world that allows her to marry respectably and live with her family in her own home, that which she had 'mingled her labour with' since a girl.

All this is known at the beginning. What Steedman wants to discover is how these exceptional events became thinkable and doable for these people, in the context of this place and time and its everyday patterns of labour, service and industry - how they were able to respond to each other in ways which fell outside of the norms, and reconcile themselves to a pattern of their lives that was uniquely theirs. It would be a shame to disturb the delicacy of the trains of explanation and connection that allows Steedman to write her account of

these lives and what made them, the laying down of puzzles and questions, the trailing of factors which may come into play later in the story, the intersection of influences distinctive to this particular time and place, the introduction of this factor and that. For there is such a delight in the telling of the tale, the narrative rhythm and tensions underlying this most painstakingly methodical of histories, the recounting of her journey to understanding these events and these people, that this pleasure should be left to the reading of her book.

Perhaps the most distinctive element of Steedman's approach is that while she manages to restore the female domestic servant to the history of the working class and industrial modernity, she also accords respect to the equally momentous restructuring of intimacy, affect and belief that accompanied social and economic transformations, and the imaginative demands that this lays at the feet of those whose stories unravel in her pages, as they meet such unprecedented changes in the course of their own brief and now long-gone lives (11). That this becomes such a moving account is due to the space Steedman allows individual interiority, ways of conceiving of the person, and the exertion of making a life that has coherence, in this period. It is this that brings her to accord the status of historical actor to a domestic servant in a context in which the personhood of servants was absorbed into that of their master (in the legal category of 'subsumption'), and to recognise the singular achievement of a lifetime spent divining a God and his ways, and in meeting the demands imposed by his benevolent presence, by a devout and scholarly Anglican clergyman. That Steedman treats both as complex historical actors - and that Murgatroyd's devotion is made as much of a puzzle as George Thorp's abandonment - is the result of her attention to that which is not said or known, to what may have been as much as to what historical sources record as having occurred, and to the oblique factors which sit at the fringes of historical narrative.

Industrial and topographical influences on the development of a lifestyle made from service, wool and worsted gives this household a material rhythm which depends as much on Phoebe's ability to spin as to cook and clean and sow the peas - and would have depended, in a different life, on her remaining without child. These interdependencies also link her fate to a broader community of the industrial working class at a moment in which new forms of contract and poor law provision redefine both the value, and their possession, of that labour which constitutes the means to sustain a livelihood. But what Steedman demonstrates as well, is that service is also lived - in the friction of daily living - as an emotional relationship, one that has to be understood through the affective and behavioural repertoires of humanness, rather than the explanatory frameworks that have predominated in accounts of class formations.

Through Murgatroyd's daily writings we are able to follow the pattern of a life spent burnishing the copper, tramping through the fields to collect the combed wool which she spun in Murgatroyd's home as an out-worker and back again to deliver the bundles of worsted thread, and the interruptions

to her pattern of comings and goings brought by nursing Murgatroyd's wife during her final illness and her pregnancy. We see how intertwined these two lives are: in this, their lives may not have been exceptional, though the mutual dependencies and intimacies of household relations and labour processes - Steedman makes clear that Murgatroyd is helping Phoebe with a system of outwork spinning that is *her own* - certainly complicate narratives of master and servant relations based on economic relations and the aggregate power of a class.

To this extent, both master and servant are bound in a common pattern, and it would be hard to say that one of them was in fuller possession of that life than the other. Murgatroyd's own living is made by his long Sunday walks to and from the scattered venues of his services. But these actors have fundamentally different relations when it comes to a 'major ideational component of modernity': writing as the major technology for conceiving of existence as 'a life'. Murgatroyd's writing provides an account of his thoughts and feelings, while Phoebe's inability to read and write makes her thoughts and feelings, her motivations and responses, the premises of her wishes, her decisions and her actions, inaccessible to us. This is a difference that inscribes their relations in terms of those specific disparities that influence the fabric of their material repertoires. In effect, Steedman indicates, Phoebe's relation to the world is that of her labour, the way she acts upon the material contours of her domestic and industrial environment, her love the love of doing and being proximate, falling into the category of the familiar. What governed her actions and underlay her commitments to those around her, and the life she lived with them, we cannot know, but though we can assume that she had an imaginative life as forceful as Murgatroyd's, we have also to recognise that her world of choice was not informed by the disciplined relation to God which was Murgatroyd's access to an ability to shape his life according to his own volition.¹ We get much further with what made Murgatroyd act as he did than with either of the others for that reason: 'getting by' was part of his world too, but the making of a self in the image of his God was the principle underlying all he did - and perhaps the major means to achieve an independence of mind in the period in which he lived, to experience the freedom that was so closely tied to the self-reflexive fashioning of a life of virtue. This is the unexpected kernel of the account of this mingling of lives. That Murgatroyd could act as he did is bound up with his faith, and its impact on his life - the patterns of his dissent from contemporary advice concerning the servant question and the way to respond to pregnancy in the unmarried, the correspondence of his belief in the equality of individuals in the sight of God to a newly psychological understanding of the female servant, the ascription to her of an *individual* subjectivity.

To my mind, this part of the book is its greatest *tour de force*: to show the contribution of Anglican thought to the making of the modern working class in a book about the nature of love in eighteenth-century West Riding. It was religious thought, as much as science, philosophy and other forms of

1. One of the more uncomfortable observations Steedman makes is that she has no means of understanding why Murgatroyd didn't teach Phoebe to read, if he saw her as demanding equal treatment in the sight of God, given helping children to read was the foundation of his work as a teacher in Slaitthwaite school.

knowing the world, that gave Murgatroyd a means to think about 'what kind of thing a human individual was', and it was through his reading, writing and teaching that he was able to develop a set of ideas 'about a self that it might know itself'. Murgatroyd's great achievement was to develop a practical and self-effacing religious ardour that allowed him to reap the reward of an ordinary range of loves - for his God, which he could contemplate with a understanding of virtue and sincerity of consciousness, for his wife, to whom he could remain devoted, to the servant whose life had become part of his and with whose labour he mingled his own, whose 'hopeful child' he could welcome to his household. And all these combine to create that unbounded love for an innocent and vulnerable child which turns Murgatroyd's life, so near its end, upside down.

Murgatroyd's love for this child was deeply connected to his view of the condition of being human, his belief that we are all children of God, equal in his sight and dependent on his love. It was a form of love borne of a sentiment of delight in that which was dependent: as the littleness of children made them lovable, so too he could express a kind of love to a servant who needed his care and would benefit from his generosity. This 'other kind of love' was complemented - and this doesn't mean we can't recognise the imprint of those relations of mastery and service which position each of them - by that which derives from the kind of habitual care that a faithful servant undertakes, from the work of looking after a house and its inhabitants, a work of caring which itself produces a particular kind of devotion - though its contractual nature may define its limits - the visceral relations of dependency, familiarity and mutual imbrication in the intimacy of domestic proximity. There is a materiality to this notion of love, of being bound to each other in ways that couldn't be regulated by the law of contract, or explained by reference to economic positioning - and couldn't have existed in quite the same way in any other place or period, before or after. This is the moment of transition between one order and another. The way this transition is effected through an affective and visceral register becomes evident through Steedman's careful attention to the dynamics of religious thinking, and the way it deliberated on questions of human feeling and attachment, alongside the expression of piety.

Both of these writers emphasise the visceral as an aspect of connectivity and attachment. Steedman's derives from her history of a change in the idea of the servant-master relation and the ways that relation could be lived, while Nava's account of the development of cosmopolitan cultures in early twentieth-century Britain identifies a later break in the history of that relation. Nava's period is one in which labour relations were reforming in equal measure, changing the ways human relations and social presence could be thought, a moment in which urban consumption, work and leisure became the means to form new psychic and affective relations - to cultural and racial others, the exotic and the foreign, to elsewhere and 'abroad', to the politics of anti-racism - and gave rise to new kinds of 'vernacular, everyday, domestic expressions'

(3). The development of a cosmopolitan disposition is characterised by a distinctive openness and attraction to forms of cultural experience which take one outside the limits of the proximate and the commonplace, into the domain of the 'foreign', and which make difference itself familiar. This is to look at cosmopolitanism in the landscape of the everyday 'at home, in the family, in the neighbourhood, in the interior territories of mind and body' and 'in the micro territories of the local: at school, in the gym and the café, *at home*' (12; 135). It is this focus that legitimates Nava's claim that cosmopolitanism isn't just a political, intellectual or even aesthetic orientation, but one whose intimate, unconscious motivations and its vernacular and domestic manifestations give it its distinctive grounding in the domain of the visceral.

For Nava too, then, changes in affect, consciousness, manners and life narratives become evident through the incidental events and anecdotal detail of individual lives (4). Exploring her maternal grandfather's rebellion against his family of Dutch protestant colonial administrators, Nava asks her mother 'what did it mean that your father was a socialist?'. 'He used to raise his hat to the maid', she replied, investing a gesture seemingly ineffectual to later eyes with a resonance that can only be sufficiently understood as political in the context of those changing relations of service in the period, the everyday repertoires for acknowledging a common human dignity and recognising a proximate other who might regard herself differently as a result, and the importance of manners for styling the self in ways that recasts the hierarchies of social distinction (137). For this man, a life which reflected a different structure of belief was fashioned through his support of women's rights and dress reform; his vegetarianism; an aesthetic modernism and anti-colonialism expressed through his collection of Indonesian art; and above all, his commitment to Theosophy, its aspiration to a universal human brotherhood formed across of race, creed, sex, caste and colour associated as much with socialism as with those forms of Eastern spiritualism from which it drew (136-7).

This book is populated with such figures, their paths departing from the conventions of social positioning and affiliation, their lives testimony to their emotional and political investment in a cosmopolitan cultural imaginary which took them beyond the limits of what they knew and were expected to become, which drew them to the culturally different and the foreign, and which led them to act in ways which expressed solidarity and compassion in the face of social intolerance and actual violence. Muriel Gardiner, for example, whose activity in the political underground in Vienna exceeded a commitment to a political cause and whose 'instinctive extensivity', a visceral commitment to 'others', was expressed in her political, emotional and romantic, sexual involvements. What becomes evident in these and other biographies is a pattern of childrearing, common to upper- and upper-middle-class families in Edwardian Britain, which allowed these children to become estranged from their mothers and develop loving attachments to those from different

class and racial background - domestic servants, to all intents and purposes, though named as nannies, 'ayas' and nurses - as families passed the care of their children to working class, Irish or Indian women. Nava argues that this laid the unconscious foundations for them to identify with outcasts, with non-belongers, with the persecuted and the endangered, and for an emotional response to the genocidal impulses of racist, homophobic and anti-socialist fascism in Europe that went beyond recoil and protest and became expressed in the immediate and the intimate reaches of affect and attachment, identification and desire.

Though Nava comes to those whose affective orientations took them into wilder territories, the evidence for her argument that cosmopolitanism constitutes an oppositional culture in the early twentieth century is also found in more familiar places: the journey this book takes begins with the expansion of commercial cultures in Britain. But it is not the story that is normally told of commerce and consumption, or even the story Nava expected to tell. For she finds, in the archive of Selfridges department store, a daily press column published in several newspapers, which ran from 1909 to 1939. In these columns, Selfridge promoted a utopian view of the cosmopolite as inclusive, progressive and modern: 'a citizen of the world, free from national limitations and prejudices' (5). It was in relation to this vision that he styled his department store, giving a new perspective on the way commerce harnesses the modern consumer's interest in the exotic, the culturally diverse and the sexually vivid, in ways that involves rereading the orientalist thesis for its contradictory impulses, and its reverse effect. In the context of utopian and cosmopolitan movements - such as Theosophy - interest in the East was refracted less through a colonial imperative than through an interest in its spiritual and philosophical dimensions. Important, too, is that it was a *modernist* East that formed the basis of the oriental presence in Selfridge's invitation to the Russian Ballet - its London staging of Scheherazade exemplifying the overturning of racial exclusiveness and cultural hierarchies, as well as sexual heterodoxy, and so bringing into vision 'a vibrating, brilliantly coloured, erotic, violent and exciting orient' (28). The costume, colours and furnishings associated with the East 'transformed the territory of the English female body, house interiors and even the visual landscape of the West End'. What becomes clear, of course, in the fact that this cultural shift is enacted through consumer culture - popular dance, cinema, fashion and new types of commodities - is that it is women who adopt this new cultural orientation with most alacrity, their responsiveness allowing them to imagine and recast themselves in relation to 'a new, less constrained, more insubordinate femininity' (32).²

Selfridge's non-conformist approach to consumer culture was mirrored in his support for women's suffrage - he offered his store as a venue for meetings, stocked goods in suffrage colours and advertised in the feminist press (46). Nava points out that as cosmopolitanism was often used by anti-Semites to denote Jewishness, Selfridge's promotion of the term constituted

2. Judith Walkowitz argues that urban cosmopolitanism in turn of the century London was associated with transnational forms of commercialized culture and with transnational migrants rather than with notions of disinterested humanitarianism, and that it simultaneously became regendered, in "'The Vision of Salome': Cosmopolitanism and Erotic Dancing in Central London, 1908-1918" *American Historical Review*, 108, 2 (2003): 337-76.

a direct challenge. In fact he also advertised in the Jewish Chronicle, stocked Jewish goods and kosher food, and supported free entry to Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria. These may seem 'odd alliances' (39) but they are evidence that cosmopolitanism, as part of modern consciousness, was associated with a diverse range of utopian movements, beliefs or practices oriented towards social transformation, and the transcending of personal, ideological or national limitations and prejudice.

The cosmopolitan disposition may have been absorbed into mainstream department store culture, and into the realm of commercial and popular modernism but it also had to wage battle with conventional thinking in Edwardian Britain. G.K. Chesterton, for example - whose antipathy to big business, state bureaucracy and Jews had been well-rehearsed by this time - proposed that the 'large modern shop' corroded traditional English values and ways of life. His comment that those who worked in the 'big shop' became nothing more than 'headless models' elicited an angry reply by Selfridge's loyal female staff, the debacle providing one of the most fascinating insights into contemporary responses to consumer culture and national defensiveness.

Nava shows that the conditions for British cosmopolitanism to become a 'visceral' relation were above all a pattern of diasporic cultural mixing which allowed interracial intercultural relationships, and the material and imaginative encounters created by both high and popular modernisms, to result in the normalising of cosmopolitanism in contemporary Britain. Popular dance and cinema - and the semiotics of American voice - in interwar Britain allowed white English women to (literally) embrace black American GIs in a way that unsettled official wartime observers. One of the central arguments of the book, is that however much racial differences were registered, not only did Britain in this period have difficulty identifying race as a positive category but that contrary to most historical accounts, Britain became reracialised only *after* the encounters which took place from the 1940s to 1960s, as race relations and the legacy of Britain's colonial past were brought into focus as terms in the formation of national identity by the movements surrounding black identity politics in the 1970s and 1980s. Black GIs, she argues, represented 'Americanness' for British women in wartime, rather than being seen in terms of race, while in the 1950s and 1960s, racial stereotypes and solidarities were both figured through repertoires of class or gender: racial consciousness had yet to be articulated, conceived in its own terms. And she emphasises women's part in engendering more 'hospitable' orientations to racial difference - showing, for example, that it was women novelists and social scientists who, in the 1950s, paid most attention to the dynamics of intercultural relationships and the experience of black migrants in Britain. Women's writing of both sorts provided the tentative beginnings of a racialised consciousness that would become more securely realised later in the twentieth century.

But, perhaps more importantly still, the book does something to restore the still underestimated place of Jewishness in this history, and thus to

multiply the points of entry into the hybridised nature of Britain's cultural past. Tracing hybridity as an aspect of British history, as her autobiographical chapter demonstrates, is critical to understanding the extension of hybrid British identities in the present, as Eastern European migration, and the presence of Muslim communities, are not only drawn into a public discourse concerning Britain's racial formation, but become part of the familiarity with difference - the 'centering of marginality' in Hall's words (162) - that infuses the experience of living in contemporary Britain. In this chapter, we see how the family functions as a site for the fusion of difference and the development of an emotional disposition, that *attachment* to difference, which allows the recognition of mutuality and the 'indispensability of the other'. That Britain has a history of social tolerance and that its legacy can be discerned in contemporary cultural formations is an important argument in the context of new forms of racial and religious intolerance arising from a heightened anxiety over the self-determination of Muslim communities, the effects of European migration on the texture of rural communities, the identification of new indicators for tracing a disaffected underclass youth and the representation of Britain as a 'broken society'. As Nava's diasporic family history shows, the extraordinary efforts to find new patterns of connectivity following the displacements which occurred in the anticipation of war and after, find their very different realisation today in a mixed-race extended family which no longer positions itself within the polarities of belonging or not, but in the context of an 'imagined inclusive transnational community'.

The narratives of both of these authors tell us about those affective conditions of living with difference that characterise the modern. As such, they point to the ethics of a cultural history based in the descriptive, which recognises not only the contingencies of human happiness and mutuality, and the fragile dynamics of a human life, but the complexities of human singularity and collectivity, and the relations of interdependency, that constitute the condition of living in the world.

ART'S LABOUR

Esther Leslie

John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*, London, Verso, 2007, 249pp; £16.99 paperback.

In March 1994 the art journal *October* convened a panel to discuss the way in which the art of the 1960s was being received. Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloh, Annette Michelson, Hal Foster *et al* were all in a spin about the press' negative reception of a Robert Morris retrospective exhibition at the Guggenheim. Woefully they observed other signs of a misunderstanding or rejection or repulsion – put it as you will – of all that Morris represents: a compendium of post-60s art movements and techniques, from conceptualism and Minimalism, process art and performance, installation and land art. Morris' work that involves, in various ways, industrial materials or industrial concepts of design, the possibility of seriality, the challenge to uniqueness and skill, and an emphasis on labour and reproduction, as well as a more or less obviously articulated concern with political and social themes. The newspaper art critics of the mid-1990s – who, unlike their 1960s forebears, had no proper art education, according to the *October* panellists – reviled Morris and his ilk precisely because of the deliberate expunging of expressivity, emotion, the delicate and unique hand of the artist-creator, and, above all, pictorialism. In Morris' stead these same critics championed the subject of a concurrent exhibition that fulfilled all those criteria deemed proper to art: that of Lucien Freud, described by Krauss as 'a greater phoney of which there never was one, a proponent of vacuously representational art'.¹

In fact it was just one year later that Freud painted *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping*. That painting, with all its thick pigment directed to naturalistic effect, caused much furore in the press when it sold at Christie's New York in May 2008 for a record breaking £17.2 million, bought by the Russian investment oligarch and owner of Chelsea FC, Roman Abramovich. Freud reigns supreme at the summit of the art market. Have the New York critics' fears been amplified – and monetarily underpinned - in the last decade and a half? Are the retrograde tendencies in art victorious over the seemingly progressive moves made in the 1960s and immediately after, to expand or detonate the frame of art, to criticise art institutions, to redraft the work of the artist through modes of deskilling, reskilling, automation or seriality, to make form into anti-form and art into non-art? Is the stock of Conceptualism's derivatives at its lowest point, at least in terms of meaning-based value, if not in monetary terms, for as we know anything, however critical, ephemeral, 'streety' or self-immolating, can fetch a price, if a signature, can be at least

1. See 'The Reception of the Sixties', by Rosalind Krauss, Denis Hollier, Annette Michelson, Hal Foster, Silvia Kolbowski, Martha Buskirk and Benjamin Buchloh, *October* 102, 1994.

retro-attached. Or at least it could, until the arrival of the financial crisis that was headline news by the end of 2008.

John Roberts' book *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* is an attempt to think through the relationships between the avant-garde proto-conceptualists of the pre-First World War and post-1960s conceptualism and experimentalism. My reference above to Krauss and the *October* set is significant. It seems that to have a chance of being taken seriously as a major art critic it is necessary to write on Marcel Duchamp, the main focus of Roberts' book. Duchamp has been the fulcrum of art debates since the 1980s, key reference point for various art movements and a vehicle for the importation of 'theory' into art criticism. For the 'retrograde' art critics Duchamp is the start of all the rot. For the *October* critics, Duchamp is where art got interesting. Both fight over the significance of the unassisted readymade. Much as he is a post-war *cause celebre*, Duchamp's vast influence and notoriety has grown substantially since his death in 1968. It could be said that Duchamp burst explosively, onto the post-war art scene, like something that had been kept hidden, under pressure. Prior to that, his readymades were somewhat overlooked, as Roberts indicates in an extended reflection on blindness. Duchamp was co-editor of a magazine called *The Blind Man*. In the issue of May 1917 he published an anonymous letter – probably written by himself and the Dadaist Beatrice Wood – in support of his much-pilloried readymade *Fountain*, which had originated as a porcelain urinal. The letter was written apparently by a blind reader, who had not been able to see the controversial object, but nonetheless expressed 'blind solidarity'. Roberts points out the importance of this gesture: the blind see the readymade rather than the seeing being blinded by the readymade's refusal to return the spectator's gaze, that is to say, its refusal to provide aesthetic pleasure. *Fountain* does not want to be seen by the seeing, because they see blindly. The blind see differently and in good faith. Roberts takes the notion of blindness further – we are all blind in the face of *Fountain*, for we cannot see it. We can only see its substitutes, its photograph, its myth, which grows with each passing year. Indeed even in 1916 two of Duchamp's readymades on display at the Bourgeois Gallery in New York, *In Advance of the Broken Arm* and *Traveller's Folding Item* were mistaken for ordinary objects and so unseen. Roberts writes: 'The readymade blinded at birth gradually makes its way into the light'. The art object can move from its material presence to its immaterial, imagined status without any loss of visibility, at least of the kind that matters.

Roberts tackles, then, the already much tackled question of Duchamp and yet does so in a manner quite distinct from the guardians of art theory in New York, indeed as if throwing down a gauntlet at them. He defends Duchamp not as a high-minded Kantian Conceptualist, cannily extending the vocabularies of art for some artworld-internal argument. He does not dwell on the supposed virtues of anti-sensuous, anti-corporeal non-representationalism. He does not pinpoint Duchamp as finding a pro-aesthetic mode of 'painting after painting', in what Roberts perceives as a defensive move to secure the

artworld from its outside. All these gestures are made by those who have lost their utopias and who wield theoretical sticks with which to beat the revolutionary avant garde (57-59). In *his* recovery of Duchamp Roberts makes a bold claim that none have made before. Duchamp, for him, exists in the orbit of the Russian revolutionaries such as the Constructivists and Productivists who, in a strong sense, investigated artistic labour alongside other types of labour (that is to say he aligns Duchamp with a specifically red 'October'). The recurrent theme is that Duchamp's readymades enact or render a deskilling or different skilling that takes place historically and is termed by Roberts, after Soviet Productivist theorist Boris Arvatov, 'general social technique'. Roberts wishes to return labour to art and he wishes to make useful a panoply of concepts related to labour that are concentrated in the readymades: productive versus unproductive, alienated and nonalienated, heteronomous and autonomous, artisanal and originary authorial, divided and collaborative. He wants to think of art – even art that has been claimed as 'conceptual', that is, of the mind – as an act of production, a result of production, a process of production. Duchamp's readymades of around the time of the First World War are the matter on which this claim is probed. It is not that Duchamp's readymades chuck it all away in a gesture of anti-art nihilism. Rather, the deployment in art of a readymade item, such as a urinal, leaf rake or wine rack, acknowledges the current state of socialised and technologised labour in the wider world within which the readymade exists. No concrete links between Duchamp and the Soviet artists and theorists are made. In some senses, Roberts' expositions of the Hungarian artist-theorist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy enable him to better carry through the argument that working with found materials and operating in the realm of the conceptual constitutes a conscious working through of the new and potential conditions of labouring in the context (actual or potential) of emancipation.

According to the book's thesis, Duchamp opened himself up to the technical forces that passed like a whirlwind through art. They are still passing and Duchamp's conceptualism not only addresses the changing shape of labour in the early part of the twentieth century. In its introduction of a reskilling, a forwarding of mental capacities, it speaks to contemporary debates on 'intellectual' and 'cognitive' capitalism and the question of 'immaterial labour'. Art, then, is cast here in its cognitive and precognitive role, as something peculiarly attuned to both what is and what is to come. In a sense the argument can be made in this way because labour, such a central category in the book, is so sketchily outlined. Labour is that which is done by the hand – whether the craft hand of the potter, the hand that activates the machine, the hand that places, orders or selects. Duchamp's call, after his unassisted readymades, is to: 'let *la patte* do some work again' (98). The hand gets busy in new ways. It is not a mechanism for 'expressive mimeticism', but rather the organ of a new 'dexterity and facility through the manipulation and transformation of the sign-values of extant symbolic materials' (98). This busy hand is, for example, the hand (Moholy-Nagy's) that picks up the telephone

to order five steel paintings from a factory. Dictating his order down the line, Moholy-Nagy is said to make 'direct contact with the anonymous hands which perform his labour' (148). Labour seeps in this book from material form to immaterial form, from work as managerial control to work as alienated factory grafting, from work in the studio to work at the computer. Of course it is all these things, but, despite (or because of) the amorphousness of the shapes it takes on here, it is cast both as prime analytical tool and the shifting ground to be analysed.

If labour, in a Marxist sense, is centre-stage, then the value-form must be close at hand. Much attention is given here to the exposition of the value-form in Marx and the ways in which this might apply to artistic and other forms of labour. One stated aim of the book is to show how 'the readymade brings into view the crucial categorical distinctions of the labour theory of value as a matter of aesthetic debate and cultural engagement'. Roberts sets himself on a par with Marx who, he says, at the beginning of *Capital* analyses the 'commodity-as-readymade as the conflictual form of a more fundamental set of conflicts' (33). The readymade becomes instructive, a model for the workings of the commodity system per se, because its play with authorship and context brings into view 'the complexities of exchange-value, use-value and the value-form' (34). Interestingly, the readymade does this exposition of complexity in a quite trick-free manner. The readymade is what it appears to be: an object of productive labour transposed into the category of art (49). Out of this fact Roberts unravels endless coils of significance in relation to use value and exchange value, commodity and non-commodity forms, abstract and concrete labour, individual and collective labour.

Over the past twenty years Roberts has been keen to negotiate the legacy of the 1920s avant-garde in relation to politics, technology and aesthetics, especially as formulated by Benjamin and Adorno, but he has done this always with an eye to questions of contemporary political aesthetics. It is not art history, neatly closed off. His touchstones have re-ordered themselves slightly over the years. Once the focus tended to be on engaged aesthetics, as they were moulded in relation to Benjamin's 'politicization of aesthetics' couplet and this necessitated much debate on Realism and what Realism might be in its Modernist guise. More recently Adorno's star has risen, as Roberts has seen that new exigencies have been brought to bear on contemporary artists after the culture industry's successful recuperation of technological and media culture. The question of what autonomy in art might mean has been a key area of investigation for Roberts, specifically in relation to the fashioning of autonomy in relation to labour – that is to say the consideration of art practice as a pre-figurative model of work after the end of exchange value. The artistic reference points are no longer the obviously 'political' (because technological and mediatized) artworks of the 1980s and 1990s, as constructed by Barbara Kruger or other latter day photomontagists who featured in Roberts' 1992 collection *Selected Errors*. Rather conceptual art, and in particular the work of Art & Language, and work done in the shadow of

that inheritance, has come to the fore. For Roberts, in an Adornian move, any contemporary art that adopts the mantle of avant-garde must be concerned to take into itself the conceptual questions of art's conditions of possibility. Perhaps this latest book could be seen as a further working through of the multiple, conflicting and complementary positions proposed by Benjamin and Adorno. But it works all this through in relation to so many concerns it is not easy to synthesize. The book's topics range from collective authorship in the Constructivists, Warhol and Art & Language to the politics of curating, the notion of aesthetic autonomy to the role of the hand in labour and art, from the determination of the value form in Marx to art's use of botching or making mistakes, from contemporary theories of the brain and mind to the poetics of Louis Zukofsky, from amateurism in art to 'fast thinking' and 'fast artworks'. The book also evokes many theorists including Benjamin, Adorno, Marx, Braverman, Habermas, Sohn-Rethel, Ulmer, Castoriades and Dennett. Perhaps drawing on all these theories, all this inherited thought is intended as an enactment of a recurrent theme in the book: collectivity, networking, being partial fragments of the whole.

A key discussion concerns collaboration, which has come back into art discourse forcefully recently, under the guise of relational aesthetics. Through the work of Bourriaud, there is now less talk of art as representation of the world and more of its presence in the world. Roberts, in discussing collaboration, busts myths and expands the debate. He contends that all is collaborative – along the lines of the 'general social technique' thesis. For a start, painting tends to rely on somebody else mixing the paint, stretching the canvas and so on. Roberts also considers the various modes of working within a group or collectively. In citing the Werkbund, Rodchenko's *Metfak* and Soviet Productivism what he pinpoints is not simply acts of collaboration but also the supersession of art in interdisciplinary practices, which certainly do not wane in significance as our age nears. The post-conceptual artists of the present day, as Roberts presents it, gather up their techniques from here, there and anywhere and is indeed reskilled through 'the network' that is the context of today's digital and media technologies of communicative action. The analysis is exemplary of Roberts' work. Here as elsewhere he introduces a concept into a widened span of debate (and thereby defamiliarises it), unrolling the historical backstory, to shock us into realising continuities of practices where perhaps we did not see them before. At the same time he identifies the specific conjunctural meaning of practices, as any good materialist critic should.

BOOKNOTES

Mick Smith, Joyce Davidson, Laura Cameron, Liz Bondi (eds), *Emotion, Place and Culture*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009; 318pp, £60 hardback.

'The fact that emotions are not easily located, defined, or measured should not be allowed to detract from their crucial importance to human ... geographies and lives' (3). Whilst emotions are present all the time, they tend to have formed the background rather than the focus in place studies. *Emotion, Place and Culture* foregrounds emotions and our embodied experiences in this collection of sixteen essays. The book is divided into five key themes: Remembering, Understanding, Mourning, Belonging, and Enchanting. Along with reinstating earlier phenomenological approaches, there is also a claim that 'emotional geographies will... not just extend the remit of current geographical research, they will reveal something lacking at the centre of geography... they will recompose it in terms of emotionally as well as socio-historically, situated theories' (5). It is these theories which are the framework for many of the essays in the collection. The major critical theories in emotional geography are non-representational, feminist, psycho-analytical and phenomenological geographies. All these approaches move away from the Cartesian distinction between body and mind, in which thought and representation are foregrounded and emotions are situated in a no-man's land.

Fundamentally, phenomenologist, feminist, psycho-analytic and non-representational geographers recognise that emotions are what make geography important. It is our relationship with place that creates geography. Phenomenologists focus on what is experienced rather than upon what the experiences are supposed to represent, feminist geographers focus on the gendering of emotions and space, and the psychoanalytical theorists show the interaction of the individual with space. Non-representational theory (NRT) is concerned with the necessary incompleteness in the act of representation itself. NRT highlights the ineffable and the ways in which affect relates to the more immediate embodied engagements with the world beyond language. This again challenges the Cartesian priority accorded to thinking in and through words. Although some non-representational work such as that by Giles Deleuze uses abstract language, the key proposition in NRT is that words cannot adequately represent emotions. Here we see the importance of the performative in which crying, for instance, signifies beyond words.

A number of interesting theoretical mixes occur. For instance, Mick Smith cites Heidegger in his discussion of man's fatal encounters with animals in a chapter on *Road Kill*. Nigel Thrift, who has written on non-representational theory, discusses affect, contagion, and reception. Thrift draws attention

to our tendency to imitate those around us, to mirror their expressions, processing others as 'like me'. This is an innately physical non-representational behaviour (89). Such imitation is 'rapid, automatic and unconscious and involves emotional contagion'; we love to imitate, and most of the time we do not know that we are imitating. Thrift emphasises the automatism of this behaviour, understanding affect as a semiconscious phenomenon. Thrift also refers to such automatisms as being inscribed at childhood (91). Waves of affect are transmitted and received relentlessly, 'constantly challenging the Lockean citadel of the consenting self' (92).

In further sections, Anh Hua analyses personal and collective memory. Katy Bennett discusses the role of nostalgia in the re-creation of collective identity and Frances Dyson discusses human-computer interactions and the relations of affect between man and machine. This book contains interesting theoretical overviews in the field of emotional geography and presents a series of essays from key scholars in the area. It is a diverse array of current research on place and culture, some of which make use of these newer theories. It provides a wide overview of current research in the area, and interesting applications of the main theories.

Jane Mansfield

Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*, Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2007; 180pp, £21.99 paperback.

Along with Tia DeNora's *Music in Everyday Life*, published in the same year, Michael Bull's first book-length enquiry into the uses of mobile sound technologies (*Sounding Out the City*, 2000) signalled an important shift in the sociological study of music consumption. Inspired in large part by the work of Adorno, they both combined a willingness to analyse the role of music as a resource in the constitution of the self with an empirical focus on routine acts rather than the sort of subcultural gestures favoured by scholars in media and cultural studies. Since then, the commercial success of MP3 players, with their unprecedented storage capacity, connectivity and flexibility of use, has done much to validate Bull's framing of the relations between music, self and society in terms of technological mediation and public spaces. Based on a survey of more than 1,000 early iPod users, *Sound Moves* sees the author pursue his interest in the interpretative potential of mobile listening as part of a wider analytical project to bring the auditory dimension to the foreground of contemporary urban living.

Far from yet another thinly disguised panegyric to the Apple brand and the marketing nous of its charismatic leader, *Sound Moves* spends little time on the more evidently iconic character of the device itself, preferring instead to examine 'the dialectics of iPod culture', characterised by greater possibilities for the auditory control of space and experience on the one hand, and by further distancing from the immediate social environment on the other. By following the iPod wherever its users' accounts take him –from the home

to the office, in the street or the car and the countless other non-spaces in between— the author assembles a comprehensive inventory of the spatial and social micro-strategies deployed in order to maintain a sense of continuity amidst the contingencies of daily life. In this perspective, the iPod comes to represent the material incarnation of an immaterial work of constant emotional and cognitive self-management; a technology perfectly tuned, and consequently tuning its users, to the requirements of what Bull terms *hyper-post-Fordism*.

Throughout *Sound Moves*, the pleasurable and empowering aspects of listening on the move are systematically put in contrast with vignettes intended to convey the more dystopian flipside of ‘auditory privatisation’. To take one of the most striking examples, the quasi-filmic sensation commonly experienced when watching one’s visual environment being magically animated to an iPod’s soundtrack leads Bull to argue that such aestheticising effect potentially threatens the cosmopolitan ideal of self-realisation. In the life-world of many users, direct encounters with otherness are found relegated to the safer status of a fleeting on-the-go digital playlist, with World music favourites thrown in for good measure before being discarded or overwritten. One might see the same logic of neutralisation at work in the hollow, featureless but unmistakably wired for sound silhouettes that once served as the visual signifier of the iPod experience.

One of the book’s greatest achievements lies in its ability to defamiliarise for the reader a mode of music consumption that is not only easily taken-for-granted, but also subject to two powerful discourses: naïve techno-utopianism and the perception of music as an intrinsically positive social resource. By the end, it is hard not to subscribe to Bull’s argument that ‘the warmth of privatised and mediated communication produces the “chill” that surrounds it’ (p107). The compelling virtual dialogue that *Sound Moves* weaves between iPod users and a range of social theorists, from Simmel to Sennett, testifies both to the effectiveness of large-scale online surveys and the enduring significance of critical theory for making sense of the values and social implications embedded within even the smallest of media technologies.

Jérôme Hansen