

# NO REST FOR THE WICKED

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*Ken Hirschkop*

Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart (eds), *Restless Cities*, London, Verso, 2010; 344pp, £12.99 paperback;

Susan S. Fainstein, *The Just City*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2010; 232pp, £18.50 hardback

It seemed like a good idea at the time: rather than review the collection *Restless Cities* on its own, I would twin it with something harder-headed - a careful, sober study of the politics of urban development. *Restless Cities*, I surmised, would be a witty, clever, and well-written set of essays in cultural criticism, devoted to anatomizing and celebrating the fluidity of urban life. It would mix political comment and cultural scholarship with shrewd, first-person observation of and reflection on everyday urban experience. It's a well-established genre by now and while I fully appreciate its virtues, I was beginning to wonder whether we needed further reminding that cities, particularly huge metropolitan ones, are sites of 'endless making and unmaking'. Maybe it was time to focus on something a little less exciting: how cities limit us with soul-destroying routines, with terrible housing and terrible jobs, with the experience and the scene of massive and enduring inequality.

Things didn't quite work out as I had planned. Not because *Restless Cities* didn't turn out to be, in fact, just as witty, intelligent and well written as I'd expected. It's a thoughtful book, covering a wide range of urban experience with considerable flair and insight. Nor is it because it contained perhaps the most eloquent essay ever written on the subject of coffee and baked goods ('The donut I ordered that day was a ring donut and it was an amazing donut': that threw me, I'll admit, though that may be because I live in Toronto, a city intent on turning itself into one giant bakery). No, the problem was that halfway through Susan Fainstein's *The Just City* - an admirable and also well-written study of the injustices that have attended postwar urban planning and development - I realised that *Restless Cities* was more hard-headed than the book I had chosen as its foil, which tends to go soft round the edges. Fainstein's explicit aim is to examine the degree to which considerations of justice have entered into planning and development practice in New York, London and Amsterdam. She discovers - to no one's surprise, I assume - that they haven't had much impact at all (although a great deal more in Amsterdam than in New York or London): planning is driven by the profits that accrue to developers and the desire to provide the wealthy urban middle class with places to live and places to spend. But Fainstein is no angel of history: she finds silver linings even in progress's worst hurricane. Speaking of the conversion of New York's Battery Park district into posh housing and posh

shops (with planning directed by a wholly unaccountable board) Fainstein claims it was 'not a clear-cut example of an unjust policy: it did not displace people, it generated substantial tax revenues by attracting major firms, and it provided ample public spaces that were open to the general public' (p100).

By contrast, the ruminations on waiting, imaging, lodging, driving, gardening, the use of phone boxes and so on in *Restless Cities* (the chapter titles are, in fact, a series of verbs in tidy alphabetical order: 'Archiving', 'Bombing', 'Commuting' . . . 'Waiting', 'Zigzagging') are haunted by the immovability, the unjustifiable givenness of the structures around them. 'Waiting', for instance, written by Michael Sayeau, begins with a discussion of the British Airport Authority's cynical manipulation of those waiting for flights at Heathrow's Terminal 3, where the dearth of seats and the placement of departure boards far away from what seats there are ensures that waiting passengers spend their 'free' time in profitable shopping rather than fruitless sitting. From this everyday observation Sayeau extemporizes on waiting as a 'barometer of political atmospherics', in which queues for buses, food and the NHS show us how the powers-that-be demonstrate their mastery by making us wait for the delivery of the stuff we need. As is so often the case with critical analysis of the city, the discussion turns out to be an analysis of modernism as well, now construed not as a time of shocks and suddenness but of time that must be filled up with the kind of nonsense that fascinates the likes of Fredric Moreau and Leopold Bloom.

Sayeau finishes with a discussion of Benjamin's anteroom to revolution, where Social Democrats supposedly lounged around while History delivered social change to them on a plate. But the evocation of Benjamin's voluntaristic call to arms doesn't say much against the main point, which is that the very fact of waiting is often an index of our powerlessness to alter the received social and political arrangements. We wait, daydream, dawdle, complain about waiting and so on because, in the end, we aren't the ones who decide when, or where, things will happen.

Some of the essays - David Trotter's on the meaning of the once ubiquitous red phonebox, Rachel Bowlby's on commuting, Patrick Keillor's on photography, and Mark Turner's on 'zigzagging' - are accounts of how meanings are made and remade from the received structures of London life (to be honest, the book could have been called *Restless London*: if you think Leeds or Manchester tell us anything about modernity, this is not the book for you). Exploring the 'representation of the phone box in folk memory, in literature and film', Trotter meditates on what it means to be private in a public place: how phone boxes evoke both the disgust that attends being very close to strangers in a densely inhabited city and a certain tenderness and interest in the lives of those we see in these urban aquaria. Bowlby's account of that notorious creature of routine, the commuter, notes the parody directed at it in Dickens, Arnold Bennett, Woolf and Yates' now better known *Revolutionary Road* before offering her own more sympathetic account of how commuters

carve out something of interest during their time on the 7:40 to Waterloo. 'Zigzagging' is a clever play on how to get round and make more interesting the straight and narrow, which here signifies both the rational architecture of Washington's Dupont Circle and a mode of sexual being. Finally, Keillor's autobiographical account of how he happened on some arresting images (glimpsed at first from the wonderful, ramshackle North London Line) soft-pedals the possibilities of the randomly got image, from which he expects not the revolutionary energy promised by the Surrealists but 'subjective re-imagination' or the fond memory of now extinguished political hopes.

The point being that in all such cases, meanings and values are made from the stuff that is there - from phone boxes, the built environment, the need to commute to work by train or car - whereas Fainstein's concern is with how the stuff gets there in the first place, how decisions are made about what to build and where to build it. To a certain extent, the difference between the two texts is the difference between culture and politics. To make a just city one gets entangled not just with official processes and procedures, but also with a sphere in which the end result is a decision (and thus victory, defeat, or compromise) and eventually such things as buildings, parks and squares, which can be re-imagined but not ignored. The endless remaking celebrated in *Restless Cities* is, by contrast, the making and remaking not of buildings but of meanings, working in the interstices of the modern city and its routines, where there is flexibility and play in the joints. It is, to call on de Certeau's distinction, a book about the tactics employed by 'users who are not [. . .] makers'.<sup>1</sup>

1. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Steven Rendall (trans), Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, p.xiii.

That said, *Restless Cities* has a political sting and bite absent from *The Just City*. While the latter faithfully records successive waves of urban political injustice, it's the former that soberly assays the damage. Maybe it's because it's an English book, drawing on the nation's rich heritage of morose complaint, to which Fainstein has no access (even Geoff Dyer's essay on his search for the perfect elevenses, replete with moments of ecstasy and rapture, is haunted by the knowledge that the moments will be followed by disappointment and routine). Maybe it's because Fainstein is, to all appearances, a woman of the centre-left; a book on the same topic by David Harvey or Neil Smith would have played these melodies in a different key. I suspect, however, the reason lies in questions of genre and conception. It's a matter, in the end, of how one registers the consequences of political defeat.

Fainstein draws up a careful balance sheet of each development project she evaluates: the creation of Battery Park City, the redevelopment of Times Square and the building of the new Yankee Stadium in the Bronx; the Docklands redevelopment, the redevelopment of Coin Street on the south bank of the Thames, and the 2012 Olympics in London; and the development of Bijlmermeer and Amsterdam South in Amsterdam. Balance sheets are possible because Fainstein has already, in the philosophical discussion that opens the book, split justice into three moments: democracy, equity and

diversity. The clever point of this dissection, worth the emphasis she gives it, is that 'just' planning and development demands more than the democratization of the planning process. If, for example, a community affected by proposed redevelopment is well-off or ethnically homogeneous, its democratically expressed preference may be to stay that way. A development outcome that helps poorer inhabitants of the city may depend on urban bureaucrats enforcing their will. Equity, democracy and diversity by no means move in lockstep, or even in the same direction.

But treating equity, democracy and diversity as three elements of a unitary 'justice' actually underplays the seriousness of the political issues at stake, insofar as it allows one to trade off benefits in one sphere (a more diverse population in the Docklands, with middle class residents) against costs in another (the destruction of the existing working-class community, largely excluded from the planning process). In fact, what Fainstein means by equity is really justice per se, and the fact that democratized arrangements don't necessarily deliver it is a reminder that democracy itself can foster ethnic homogeneity (anti-Semitism was fostered by European interwar democracy and hindered in the Empires) and often lead to grotesquely inequitable policies. By contrast, diversity isn't a political principle or value at all. The political value at stake is anti-racism and the struggle against ethnic prejudice. Diversity as such, from a political point of view is neither desirable nor undesirable (if a nation's ethnic homogeneity was not the result of prejudice, would we count it as unjust?). It's a cultural value: people, or at least some people, find cities with ethnically mixed populations more interesting, more enjoyable, more pleasurable.

In each case, battles are fought and a result eventually enforced. The urban goods at stake are, of course, fundamental: housing (overwhelmingly: in fact, it's mostly about housing), access to jobs, and public space. The results are tallied up: people near Times Square lose their homes, small businesses are squeezed out, but the public gets some tax revenues and a place to walk around in. But the result is also the city itself, as a built structure invested with symbolic force. The political loss entailed by Times Square or Yankee Stadium isn't just a calculable number of jobs or housing units: it's also the continuing presence of mammoth structures, cathedrals of capitalism, that remind those who scurry underneath them of who is really in charge. To say of the public space made possible by Battery City that it provides ordinary people with 'unobstructed views of the water in attractive surroundings' is to say nothing of the kinds of waterfront pleasure it might license and the kinds it makes impossible. To say of the Docklands that it became a more diverse community due to the influx of middle-class residents while causing no 'objective deterioration' to local council housing is to ignore the substitution of one form of community for another.

The legacy of every development project is not just a calculable number of jobs, housing units, tax dollars, and acres of public space - it's also a certain

kind of city, designed for certain kinds of activities. Some of those activities are catalogued in the present continuous verbs that title the chapters of *Restless Cities*. The tone in which each is discussed varies considerably. Iain Borden's discussion of 'Driving' describes in subtle and eloquent detail the kinds of urban sensation zapping around the city produces, without much critical interest in the extent to which cities are designed around the purchase and use of automobiles. When Rachel Bowlby rescues the commuter from the enormous condescension of literature, the discussion is sympathetic and in a fairly neutral key. Other chapters - Chris Petit's 'Bombing', Esther Leslie's 'Recycling', and Iain Sinclair's 'Sickening' make an explicit protest against the kind of city with which capitalist development leaves us.

Nor are the activities chosen for analysis in any way random. As is so often the case with paeans to the modern city, 'Working' is noticeably absent. In fact, the restlessness covered in the chapters tends to cluster around a category Sayeau discusses in his analysis of waiting, the idea of 'constrained' or 'compulsive' time developed in the work of Lefebvre. This is the time we spend not in work or play, but accomplishing all those tasks made compulsory by the very structure of urban life. We have to drive and commute, we have to wait, we have to shop, we make and receive phone calls, find places to live, and, as Geoff Dyer makes clear, fret incessantly over where we might eat or drink. That such activities loom so large in *Restless Cities* is tacit acknowledgement that our urban restlessness is less a matter of making and unmaking the city than of filling up prescribed gaps in space and time with various 'activities'.

*Restless Cities* is thus underwritten by a certain unstated, and perhaps unintentional melancholy. It faithfully and imaginatively records the many ways in which citizens make their urban lives interesting and enjoyable, and it carefully ferrets out the meanings secreted within even the most banal everyday acts. In so doing, however, it shines a bright light on what de Certeau has called 'the marginality of the majority'. Behind every silver lining it discovers - a thrilling drive, a beautiful potted plant, revolutionary street art, the perfect donut - one senses the storm clouds overhead. It's a picture of London where the point is less 'making and unmaking' than just making do.

# OUTSIDE THE PSY-COMPLEX

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*James Penney*

Ian Parker, *Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Revolutions in Subjectivity*, London and New York, Routledge, 2011; 248pp, £20.99 paperback

I'm likely not the only one recently to have felt the need for a new kind of book about Lacan. Slavoj Žižek has continued to produce work worth reading, and his swing to the left over a decade ago has only made him more relevant. Indeed, his writing continues to yield surprising and subversive insights about pressing contemporary issues and wields powerful and essential weapons with which to wage war against dominant thinking's complacent neoliberal hypocrisies. Yet one doubts that Žižek spends much time (re-)reading Lacan anymore: the same points are barely recontextualized; the same lessons, however valuable and worth repeating, taught anew.

Clinical writing for its part has fared surprisingly well, immensely productive in regions where Lacanian approaches are firmly entrenched in therapeutic settings, and finding a new and curious readership within groups with a long track record of scepticism about Lacan. Clinically, the obstacle is largely socioeconomic in nature. From what I can tell from outside the discipline, Lacan's presence in Anglo-American psychology departments has yet to become even marginal. To a significant extent, however, the struggle to be waged on the clinical front is not against an indifferent or hostile public, but rather against the underfunded and badly managed public health care apparatuses, the cynical managerialism of private insurance companies, as well as the long and formidable tentacles of the insidious international pharmaceutical lobby.

With precious few exceptions in the world of English-language publishing, we find on the one hand the Lacan of cultural theory, heavily mediated, to effects both good and ill, by Žižek's massive influence and, on the other, the specialized clinical writings, either addressed to the Lacanian clinical audience itself or to potential allies in the wider analytic and therapeutic communities, the massive American one in particular. It's been quite a long while indeed since there has been a major new Lacanian voice, one that brings to bear an aspect of Lacan's work yet to be considered (many of the seminars await 'official' publication) or makes use of Lacan to intervene in arenas of thought yet to have encountered an authentic or radical version of Freudian psychoanalysis. There are so many possible avenues left for exploration and, as ever, the academic career prospects of anyone who dares to walk the path, especially in the wilderness of North America, remain discouragingly dim. This considerable challenge notwithstanding, the field is open for a new Lacan, one that remains faithful to the Lacanian project while charting

invigoratingly fresh terrain.

The bad news, I suppose, is that Ian Parker's new book makes only steps in this direction. The good news, then, is that there are indeed steps, and significant ones at that. *Lacanian Psychoanalysis* makes a major contribution to the long-overdue articulation of the clinical Lacan with radical politics. Through a distinctly politicized lens, the book effects a wide-ranging contextualization of Lacanian clinical work against its hegemonic competitors, carefully negotiating the difficult nexus between the micro-level work of the clinic and the wider ideological forces against which analysis since its inception has found itself pitted. The main strength of Parker's book is its careful extrication of the Lacanian clinic (and to a lesser extent, Lacanian theory) from its rivals, which Parker helpfully locates in what he calls the 'psy complex' (p15), a useful and powerful phrase designed to group together the medical specialism of psychiatry since its inception, psychological social science (presumably because it doesn't feature a clinical element, neuroscience isn't addressed), and the more recent and putatively politicized practice of psychotherapy.

Parker's overarching point is that while each of these practices ultimately functions to adapt the patient to the norms and dictates of late capitalist social relations, true psychoanalysis works to transform the space of the clinic into a sort of laboratory for the interrogation and elucidation of maladaptive desires. Psychoanalysis too, Parker rightly insists, is a product of both capitalism and a quite distinctly bourgeois social milieu; it therefore founds a practice that also reproduces existing class relations. To be sure, despite the efforts of the most enlightened state formations, true Freudian psychoanalysis has only very rarely reached below the middle classes. For Parker, the psy-complex is designed to work, even in its feminist and gay-friendly therapeutic incarnations, as 'the sensible unit of reflexive accountability in contemporary neoliberal capitalism' (p197). By contrast, psychoanalysis can clear a space for a 'revolution in subjectivity', that is to say 'a moment of separation from social relations' that might effect 'a renewed encounter with them' (p198). Unlike both its antecedents and outgrowths, psychoanalysis imagines the ideal end of the process not as integration, but rather as a decisive *break*, with society, at least to the extent that we define this society as the status quo of both class relations and hegemonic political and ethical thought.

This idea of the clinic as bearing a potentially contestatory relation to the social field is at once the most suggestive and problematic aspect of the argument Parker develops in *Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. To be sure, clinical practice would hardly be worthwhile from both Freudian and socialist points of view if it did not offer at least the possibility of thinking through desire's ineffable excess over society, in other words the social world's inevitable failure to live up to our political and sexual expectations. This is why the argument's coherence hinges on what Parker calls 'disjunctions' (p10) between the clinic's inside and outside, between the so-called private space occupied by patient

and analyst and the public world of socio-political struggle. In other words, the critical potential of psychoanalytic therapy - its capacity to produce forms of subjectivity in revolt - paradoxically depends on a separation of politics from the clinic. The clinic's uncanny externality to both politics and social relations is what differentiates psychoanalysis from the normalizing, disciplinary, and integrationist ethos of its better-known rivals in the psy-complex.

The logic no doubt carries an intuitive appeal. The problem as I see it, however, is that it fails to acknowledge that if the clinic is in some complicated or paradoxical sense external to society (Parker borrows Jacques-Alain Miller's term 'extimacy' to imply an alterity *within*), the same can be said of society itself. The idea that the clinic features a disjunctive relation to its outside makes a familiar sort of sense because it implicitly draws on deeply ingrained ideas about the public and the private, the individual and society, that centuries of liberal political thought have hard-wired into our brains. Moreover, many analysts' egos no doubt benefit from conceiving of their practice as partially sheltered from the social and political hurly-burly that can exacerbate patient suffering. The clinic becomes a powerful site indeed to the extent that we position it some way beyond the reach of the social world.

In my view, however, psychoanalysis effects a break with the liberalist tradition that upholds this distinction between public and private spaces. Imperfectly effected by Freud, this break is radicalized by Lacan. His concept of the real is not 'applicable' in some differentiated way to the clinic on the one hand and to social relations on the other: the real is the real *tout court*. To the extent that he or she can (fail to) encounter it, the subject does so as something other than the individual in its personhood confronting a hostile social world. The real corresponds instead to a dimension of non-relationality which squarely inserts the apparently intimate space of the clinic into a field of social relations already estranged from itself. The unconscious, structured by a transpersonal Other and therefore neither individual nor collective, punctures this field from within. This is why the concept of the unconscious simply doesn't 'compute' with respect to the conceptuality of liberalism. Quite clearly, this crucial estrangement from liberal thinking is something psychoanalysis shares with the Marxist tradition.

Because of its strange supplementarity to society and politics, Parker advances, Lacanian clinic work can give rise to his subtitled revolutions in subjectivity. Yet it could just as easily be argued that instead of making visible a radical political perspective, the premise of the clinic's alterity vis-à-vis social relations in fact threatens to render clinical space *apolitical*. This in fact has been the most constant refrain in 'hard'-left Marxist critiques of psychoanalysis, more precisely that its emphasis on an apparently personalist notion of subjectivity and its provenance from a decidedly bourgeois social milieu render it incapable of questioning the class relations on which its practice has overwhelmingly tended to depend. This difficulty in the book's discussion leads to a contradiction. On the one hand, the extra-social clinic



can be a privileged space for nonconformist subjectivities which effect political contestation in the wider world. On the other hand, however, *Lacanian Psychoanalysis* is chock full of warnings against this same privileging gesture; against the way in which too much psychoanalytic theory draws on idealizations of the transformative power of clinical work, as well as misunderstandings and misapplications of the clinical concepts and phenomena invoked in psychoanalytically inspired varieties of social critique. The main exception to the rule for Parker is Žižek's work.

Parker warns for instance against applying the transference concept to social phenomena outside the clinic, insisting that it cannot be abstracted from the analytic situation that catalyzes or isolates it. Moreover, such applications by non-analysts draw on merely imaginative constructions of what actually takes place in the clinic (pp171-73). I should confess that I have a vested interest in this aspect of Parker's argument because my recent book makes such an attempt, more precisely to translate the transference concept into a method of politicized cultural analysis.<sup>1</sup> More significantly, however, Parker is surely obliged to respond on this point to the founder of psychoanalysis himself. In his 'Autobiographical Study' of 1925, Freud writes that 'it must not be supposed that transference is created by analysis and does not occur apart from it' (p26).<sup>2</sup> Quite clearly, Freud was willing to entertain mobilizations of the transference concept beyond the clinic's walls, the same mobilizations that in Parker's view do an injustice to both clinical work and socialist analysis.

Parker is surely justified when he protests that too much psychoanalytic social and political thought idealizes the clinic as 'a pre-existing taken-for-granted grid of knowledge' (p172). At the same time, however, the argument also risks *mystifying* clinical space as an esoteric or sacrosanct arena in which occur strange phenomena intelligible only to initiates in possession of occult knowledge. The clinic is not outside social space, nor does it form its estimate supplement. Rather, clinical work is fully inscribed in social space. Though it reaches everywhere, leaving no arena untouched, it also contains its own negative 'outside', its own unknowable internal alterity. The advantage of the clinic is that it foregrounds this alterity. It gives clues which can uncover the symptoms, inhibitions, and anxieties that protect us from its destabilising agency in ordinary life, and that cause us to knock on an analyst's door in the hope of obtaining relief.

Despite this difficulty in its underlying argument, *Lacanian Psychoanalysis* provides an invaluable service to those innumerable readers with experience of, or interest in, contemporary therapy, and who want to learn more about the ways in which Lacanian practice differs from its better-known and ideologically problematic rivals. Though it hardly settles the extraordinarily complex problem of how clinical concepts can become operative in non-clinical settings, Parker's book is now an obligatory reference for anyone who sets out to address it.

1. James Penney, *The Structures of Love: Art and Politics beyond the Transference*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2012.

2. Sigmund Freud, 'An Autobiographical Study', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 20, London, Hogarth Press, 1953-74, p42.

# HUMAN THING

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*Teresa Heffernan*

Dominic Pettman, *Human Error: Species-Being and Media Machines*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011; 336 pp, £18.50 (US\$25.00) paperback;

Susan McHugh, *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011; 296 pp, £18.50 (US\$25.00) paperback

Dominic Pettman's *Human Error: Species-Being and Media Machines* and Susan McHugh's *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines* are two recent titles in Cary Wolfe's series *Posthumanities*; published by University of Minnesota Press, this series grapples with the rapidly changing sense of what it means to be human in this new century. Pettman's book is a pleasure to read. It is insightful, passionate, theoretically sophisticated, but also provocatively playful. As he ranges across impressively diverse terrain - including amongst others the band Acrogramme, answering machines, and humans sounding like animals in distress; Agamben's theory of the anthro-machine; Werner Herzog on Timothy Treadwell and grizzly bears on video; Haraway and her dog; Soderbergh's *The Girlfriend Experience* and Stiegler on re-focusing the libido; Marcuse on the problem of 'shrink-wrapped genitals' and the possibilities of a libidinal ecology; Ikkwān al-Safa and the case of animals versus Adamites; Nine Inch Nails and zoophilia; Derrida and his cat; Marx and species-being; Arendt and art; Bloom on Shakespeare; J.A. Baker on peregrines as a model of 'impersonal' as opposed to anthropomorphic intimacy with animals; the execution of Topsy the elephant for murder - he keeps the question of humans and their relationships to animals and machines front and centre.

Displacing God, man, at least since the Renaissance, has understood himself as at the centre of the universe and has revelled in his own uniqueness, but Pettman suggests it is time to give up on this version of the human and this inhospitable and overly cocky attitude as it has put the planet in peril. It may be that that ephemeral, hard to describe 'thing' that we keep insisting is at the essence of the human - separating us from both robot and beast - is a bit like the emperor with no clothes. In other words, Pettman argues, we cannot keep trumpeting our own uniqueness in the face of all the evidence that keeps telling us we are completely embedded and intertwined in the animal-machine continuum. What is wrong with the human's superior sense of themselves ... well, Pettman argues, this view winds up feeding a smug ignorance that makes humans closed to the world around them, forgetful of their need for 'natural or cultural technics' which produce the human, and oblivious to the damage they wreak. But it is the intelligent and attentive

readings of both pop culture and theory, which I cannot do justice to in this review, that give weight to this argument. To start, Pettman considers the popular BBC series *Planet Earth*, one of the most expensive and sophisticated nature documentaries ever made, which showcases the diversity of life on the planet and which he describes as: 'like the portrait a family commissions when it knows that one of its members has a terminal illness. In this case, however, the family is facing extinction due to the reckless behaviour of its formerly most promising child' (pp1-2). His focus, however, is this melancholic series' cynical commercial sponsors – Dow Chemical and Cisco Systems - that sell their audience on the idea of our uniqueness, hoping, we, seduced by this sentimental flattery, will fail to notice their toxic legacy. This arrogant faith in the 'human element', he suggests, keeps us blind not only to the demise of the planet, but to the nightmarish world the advertisers are selling us: 'a place where body language is business language' (p4) in the words of Cisco Systems. In another chapter, he considers NASA's 1977 Golden Voyage Record - sounds and images sent out into space that represent our planet. But, as Pettman sees it, this message assumes not only an alien population hooked on vinyl, but an anthropomorphic view of the planet that counts on any possible aliens out there recognizing the human as a distinct category - as 'essentially' different from machines and animals.

Pettman's critique of human exceptionalism - he hints - is the product of an 'embittered idealist', and at times he may overstate his case. The problematic grouping of the 'human' in the title of the book, for instance, does not account for other cultures or ancient civilizations that imagine relationships with other species and or the inanimate world in less rigid ways that do not necessarily participate in this 'error'. I am not so sure the argument that '*every* animal, indeed *every* machine, is exceptional in its own way' (p199), while technically true, offers much or translates practically. In other words, I am not sure the uniqueness of every fridge would be on my mind if I were running out of a burning building; I am after all more likely to save children, lovers, pets, computers and roughly in that order. I also think the urge to embrace our machines may play into the very corporate logic that Pettman is critical of, given the rapidly expanding market for ipods, smartphones, computers, and robots that increasingly mimic human behaviour, feeding our narcissism; and while these inanimate objects are proliferating, other species are disappearing. And finally, if humanity's inflated ego that has disavowed its animal and machine aspects has done a lot of damage, it may be that that arrogance is necessary to some degree. I can acknowledge, for instance, that my computer is writing me and rewiring my brain, but to finish this book review, say, I also have to presume some mastery over the machine. Yet, Pettman's lively writing that warns of 'animals [that] splat against the glass ceiling' (p135) in human-centric narratives which attempt to include animals in models of a global eco-political community, serves to disturb rather than reinforce the arrogance and smugness he identifies as our 'human error'.

His book is over-the-top in all the best ways.

Susan McHugh's *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines* also runs over lots of interesting and diverse territory. There is a chapter on seeing-eye dogs and blind detectives in popular novels and TV, which focuses on the ways in which these representations of human-animal working units dovetail with the rise of disability rights and questions of public access even as the almost exclusive casting of blind white males and German shepherd guides suggest other limits. There is another chapter on the entry of women into professional equine riding, an analysis of *National Velvet* as both a novel and film, and the simultaneous representation of girl-horse relations as increasingly sexualized and infantilized in popular culture. One of the most interesting chapters is on queer pet owners, animal breeding, the 'gay sheep' controversies, and the de-sexing of contemporary pets. Focusing on J.R. Ackerley's dog memoir *My Dog Tulip* (1956), this chapter considers the intersections and entanglements of the policing of both human and animal sexuality. In McHugh's words: "Telling the story of how a pedigreed beauty elects to breed mongrels, Ackerley quietly argues that mongrel outlaws, otherwise incomprehensible in relation to the regulation of sexuality through identity, bring gay men and canine bitches together in a queer counterpublic" (p152). Another chapter 'The Fictions and Futures of Farm Animals' focuses on stories of pig uprisings - from Orwell's *Animal Farm* to Noonan's *Babe*, to Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* - the history of meat production, and the recent turn to genetically modified farm animals that increasingly foreground the permeability of borders between human and animal. Intertwined with these fictional works that all feature pigs, this penultimate chapter considers the various types of animal life and animal products that are used in the production of supposedly 'animal friendly' meat grown in laboratories and also the creation of patented genetically modified animals like the Enviropig™. The inclusion of Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr's *Victimless Utopias*, an artistic project that exposes the ethical dilemmas of these 'new beings', raises a host of provocative questions that disturb the view of these creatures as nothing more than commodities. McHugh's concluding chapter 'Toward a Narrative Ethology' suggests the importance of animal stories that encourage 'learning from animals ethically' while breaking down hierarchical and dualistic thinking.

But the strength of this book that seeks to tie so many disparate elements together also proves one of its weaknesses, as sustained analysis, at times, is side-lined and positions are assumed or stated rather than argued or contextualized. So, for instance, the book opens with a claim about proposing an 'alternative theory' of the novel that argues that this genre offers 'experiments with multiple perspectives and processes that support models centered on agency rather than subjectivity, reflecting as well as influencing on-going social changes' (p1). But this rather vague claim is never developed in terms of the existing theories of the novel from Bakhtin to Said to Armstrong, to name a few, and so this 'alternative theory' is given

no context. Surely these critics of the English novel, for instance, also discuss 'multiple perspectives', 'agency', and the novel as simultaneously representing and shaping culture? An equally vague premise of this book is that 'the twentieth century marks major turning points not only for scientific ethology but also for literary and visual media forms' (p216). I am left assuming that these new 'forms' refer to popular culture as there is nothing on cubism or stream of consciousness, for instance, nor any of the other many experimental artistic and literary forms that exploded onto the scene in the early part of the century. The writing is frustratingly obtuse and clunky, in sections, and I came away unconvinced by the rather grand (and, ironically, anthropomorphic) declaration that 'the futures of all species life is at stake in narrative form' (p3). Is this not the blind spot of literary and cultural critics who do not take account of evolutionary biologists' view of the human as, in Katherine Hayles's words, an 'eye blink in the history of life'? I remained mystified by a concluding statement that one of the main questions addressed in the book is: 'What are the visual and narrative processes by which animals engage with their own representations?' (p170). What could this possibly mean, I was left pondering. In a book that is interested in shifting 'the representation away from human subjectivity', the problematic categories of 'animal' as distinct from 'human' were employed throughout and left mostly unquestioned, serving to solidify rather than undo the autobiography of the human (as in Derrida's 'The Animal Therefore I Am'); in other words, doesn't this binary arise from the very process of humans narrating animals as a separate and distinct group? Finally, I felt that there were so many straw men set up in this work that it was impossible to get a sense of where it was situating itself in terms of other works in the field. For example, McHugh writes: 'Traditional notions that aesthetic forms follow from scientific thinking about animals, along with more reactionary views, for instance, that the novel gives form only ever to human subjectivity, become unsettled by this sense of embodiment as interconnecting species and social agency, effecting changes across literature, science, and indeed life itself' (p4). But, in trying to unpack this sentence, I was left wondering whose 'traditional notions' and/or 'reactionary views'? Which 'scientific thinking' about animals? And which changes are effected? These non-specific but large claims left me quite frustrated as a reader. I do think, however, that the way that animals get represented in popular culture and/or artistic works has a powerful impact on how humans treat and think about animals - a point that the book admirably demonstrates in its focus on the last hundred years of animal narratives, which expose animal agency, and much of the material that McHugh mines is unquestionably rich.

# STRANGE ECOLOGY

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Noel Castree

Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2010; 160pp, £29.95 hardcover

Now and again a book is written that messes with your head. Timothy Morton, Professor of Literature and Environment at the University of California (Davis), has fast made a name for himself as an out-of-the-box thinker.<sup>1</sup> His *Ecology without nature* (2007) challenged readers to forget 'nature' - not, you understand, in the name of a brave new biotechnologised world in which capital entirely swallows-up the natural, but for another cause. The book attracted attention well beyond Morton's disciplinary home-base. In this 'prequel', as he styles it, Morton once again plays the role of 'the irritating Columbo-style guy at the back of the room ... who asks the unanswerable question[s]' (p115). Is he irritating, revelatory, or something else? It depends on where the reader is coming from, needless to say. Morton here writes for 'people who aren't members of the in-crowd of specialists familiar with the language of theory' because, he continues, '[h]umanities scholars have some very good and important ideas, if only they would let others read them' (p13). Though the dust jacket refers to 'disciplines ranging from critical theory to Romanticism to cultural geography' (are any of these 'disciplines'? ... no matter), the contents suggest a broader intended readership, including earth, biomedical, environmental, engineering and life scientists.

Stylistically, Morton is not as successful as he might wish. Though very beautifully written indeed, his monograph is likely to be too linguistically elusive and allusive for readers not already *au fait* with the sort of 'theory' he wants to put to work for the benefit of non-specialists.<sup>2</sup> Style aside, some of the ideas are slippery - even if articulated in plain English they'd leave you scratching your head. But, as a sometime-member of the 'in-crowd' to which Morton refers, I found *The ecological thought* a compulsive read. It set my pulse racing and it fired my neural networks. Even so, I'm not entirely sure it's as original a contribution as it purports to be. It also suffers problems typical of plenary arguments. Before I explain why, let me précis his remarkable monograph.

I begin with the book's title and conceptual centre-piece. 'The ecological thought', Morton writes 'is the thinking of interconnectedness in the fullest and deepest sense' (p7). It implicates not only science, but also art, literature, music, poetry, social science, and more - it is totalising in its reach and implications. Accordingly, Morton explores it with reference to everything from Milton's *Paradise Lost* to *The origin of species* to Georg Cantor's set theory to Philip K. Dick's *Do androids dream of electric sheep?* to Disney-Pixar's *WALL·E*. 'The ecological thought', he continues, 'is about warmth and strangeness,

1. Morton's personal webpage at UCD contains links to his several blogs and to various audio and audio-visual recordings in which he shares his ideas. For those who don't already know his work, his webpage contains a short video in which he summarises *The ecological thought*.

2. This said, it's all relative. Compared to the recent work of another literary theorist covering similar terrain to Morton (Cary Wolfe, 2010), *The ecological thought* is a model of accessibility for novice readers!

infinity and proximity, tantalising “thereness” and head-popping, wordless openness’ (p12). At base, it is less a collection of thoughts or a single meta-thought and more a *way of thinking*. One might imagine ‘the ecological thought’ to be an earth-bound equivalent of fictional astronaut David Bowman’s mind-blowing experience of the universe at the end of Stanley Kubrick’s film *2001: A space odyssey* (1968).

Morton elaborates ‘the ecological thought’ with reference to two concepts designed to challenge conventional ways of thinking. The first is ‘the mesh’ (explored in chapter 1, ‘Thinking big’), which denotes an ontology that stresses ‘infinite connections and infinitesimal differences ... we can’t ... specify anything as irrelevant ... there is no background and therefore no foreground’ (p30). The mesh is not organised like a network, and nor is it structured like a web. It is fluid, excessive, and multi-dimensional, organic and inorganic, everywhere and nowhere in particular. If it’s a ‘totality’ then it’s not in any of the available Marxian senses of the word. Accordingly ‘If we think the ecological thought, two things happen. Our perspectives become very vast ... At the same time, our view becomes very profound. If everything is interconnected to everything, what exactly are the things that are connected? ... [W]e can’t predict or anticipate’ (p38). This brings us to Morton’s second key concept, the ‘strange stranger’. It describes all phenomena in the mesh - *including* those we think we already know extremely well. ‘This stranger isn’t just strange’, Morton writes, ‘[s]he or he or it - can we tell? how? - is strangely strange. Their strangeness is itself strange. We can never absolutely figure them out’ (p41). Our habit - ‘our’ here means the West, though Morton never quite says so - is to routinely domesticate strange strangers: in our desire to understand, use or control them we lose all sense of their strangeness. In light of this, Morton valorises ‘uncertainty’ - the never-quite-knowing something, the ability to let strangers be strange. Despite our best efforts, he argues with reference to Freud’s notion of the uncanny, we occasionally glimpse true strangeness in our daily lives (only to pass over it quickly as an anomaly rather than a revelation).

Morton’s ecological thought is both critical and affirmative. He identifies several ways in which ‘non-ecological thought’ is writ-large in the modern world. I list them in no particular order because nor does Morton. First, there’s the idea of Nature, and its bed-fellow ‘the environment’. For Morton, these pervasive concepts invite us to imagine the world as something outside us possessed of a definite identity, structure, integrity or logic. They cleave the mesh epistemologically and, he argues (as he did in *Ecology without nature*), they need retiring from our discourse for good. Second, there’s indifference - the sort that consumers display each time they buy a commodity whose manufacture implicates and affects so many and so much. For Morton, climate change deniers are similarly indifferent because they equate ‘no climate change happening here’ with ‘don’t worry about the climate, period’. Third, there’s the antithesis of indifference: namely, the sort of ecological care and concern shown



by environmental philosophers and practising environmentalists. Proponents of deep ecology are criticised for their super-organicism, ecocentrism and occasional misanthropy; Morton also takes issue with the rhetoric of eco-activists, which is (he believes) ‘too strongly affirmative, extroverted and masculine ... [too] sunny, straightforward, ableist, holistic, hearty and “healthy”’ (p16). Fourth, and relatedly, there’s a certain aestheticisation of what we (wrongly) call ‘nature’ that’s all about sublimity, awesomeness and power. For Morton it renders us mute and incapacitates truly ethical action within the mesh-world. Finally, Morton distances his own position from that of certain ‘post-humanists’, the sort who write books as challenging as *The ecological thought* (he names no names but one can hazard an educated guess). Despite their best efforts, he maintains, these seeming iconoclasts render the strange far too familiar, and they also risk being too *post* the human (even as they rightly complicate our sense of what this term signifies).

In what does Morton’s ‘positive’ argument consist? First, he commends ‘intimacy’: not the act of becoming intimate with things (since we already *are* up-close-and-personal, constantly and ineluctably), but the *proper recognition* of the fact of intimacy. Intimacy is not only about closeness: it scales up and down, and it points in every direction at once. Second, Morton commends ‘negativity’. In chapter 2 (evocatively titled ‘Dark Thoughts’), he argues that strange strangeness will often be unpleasant, repulsive, even dangerous. We should not replace Nature with ‘post-Natural’ sensibilities that simply repeat the old habits of seeing the world as beautiful, awe-inspiring or in need of more ‘sustainable management’ plans. Third, he commends a form of ‘forward thinking’ that’s resolutely anti-capitalist. Worrying about an apocalypse, as some environmentalists do, is what allows capitalism ‘to keep reproducing and reinventing itself’ (p125). This is an arresting thought. If we do nothing while waiting for the fateful day, Morton argues, then we sustain ‘The boring, rapacious reality we have constructed, with its familiar, furious, yet ultimately static whirl’ (p3). Politically and ethically, we can do better than set our compasses towards either a ‘bright green’ future (capitalism’s next Kondratieff) or an avenging (yet cleansing) Nature (Lovelock’s Gaia). ‘The ecological society to come’, Morton writes, ‘will be much more pleasurable, far more sociable, and ever so much more reasonable than we can imagine’ (p19).

*The ecological thought* makes you *think* (indeed, each of its three chapters has the t-word in the title). Morton sticks to the conventions of scholarly writing but his aim is to express unconventional thoughts. This work is avowedly cerebral, but - sensing the hands of ‘practically minded’ commentators on his neck - Morton provides a defence: ‘I’ve been accused of not wanting to help Katrina victims because I’m so busy theorizing with my head in the clouds ... “Your ideas are all very well for a lazy Sunday afternoon, but out here in the real world, what are we actually going to do?” Yet one thing we must do is precisely break down the distinction between Sunday afternoon and every other day, and in the direction of putting a bit of Sunday afternoon



into Monday morning, rather than making Sunday a workday' (pp117-118). Morton's point is that we can't act without thinking, and if our thinking is 'damaged' (a phrase he uses on page 3) then so too will be our practices. Like all good philosophers, Morton's real concerns are concrete, everyday and empirical.

Why take the detour now? 'The ecological crisis we face', Morton states on the first page, 'is so obvious that it becomes easy - for some strangely or frighteningly easy - to join the dots and see that everything is interconnected'. Yet this crisis - which Morton refers to repeatedly through his monograph - has not yet made the mesh and strange strangers significantly more apparent to us. We're still trapped in the past: 'since we have been addicted to Nature for so long, giving up will be painful. Giving up a fantasy is harder than giving up a reality' (p95). Even so, Morton metaphorizes the ecological thought to a virus. It will eventually spread and multiply, he insists, unless we stymie it by reaching for the old vaccines and antidotes (Nature, indifference, environmentalism ...). We should not seek a cure, Morton argues, because the ecological thought is a virus that, by *changing* us, will make us *less* damaged not *more*. A Copernican Revolution thus awaits us, one that further decentres humanity.

This book makes particular demands upon readers. 'Normal' reading practices won't do. Have I had, can I have, and will I (ever) have 'the ecological thought'? This is a question I asked myself as I tried to make sense of Morton's argument. I still don't know the answer after reading the book twice. Morton - like all grand philosophers - casts himself as a seer. Inspired by a smallish band of perspicuous others (Milton, Darwin, Emmanuel Levinas ...), he presents us with both a plenary critique of the present and an encompassing alternative. The latter, he argues, is immanent in the former and yet lies unseen.

Inevitably, an argument as sweeping and radical as Morton's begs some large questions. First, though *The ecological thought* is intended to be a work of 'applied philosophy' - it's abstract for the sake of the concrete - Morton's argument proceeds by way of some questionable 'empirical' moves. His treatment of environmentalism and environmentalists is a case in point: apparently, the green movement is - at base - held in the grip of 'anti-ecological' thinking. Where, then, does the germ of 'the ecological thought' lie? How might it be fertilised? Don't look to capitalists or even ethically minded consumers, so who might make Morton's argument flesh (perhaps a cadre of book-wielding, tenured academics?!). Second, and relatedly, for all his talk of ecological crisis, Morton does little more than gesture to its ability to unsettle existing habits of thought and practice. On the one side, he appears to link the 'force' (his word) of the ecological thought to the perceived ecological crisis looming; but on the other hand, he downplays the crisis idea ('What if it's not a huge catastrophe worthy of a Spielberg movie but a real drag, one that goes on for centuries?'(p118)). Morton's equivocation led me to regard his argument as ultimately utopian (don't get me wrong here: utopias are

good to think with, but best if there's a fighting chance of achieving them). His analysis lacks a sense that the ecological thought virus might not only have some specifiable hosts who hasten its spread, but some event that might sets the hosts off running in the first place. Morton's book discusses some deadly serious issues - but it feels politically and ethically free-floating, one man's thought-experiment conducted in a mostly unthinking world.

Thirdly, we might ask: is Morton guilty of one of those performative contradictions that so often attends truly radical thinking? He is very certain about what 'non-ecological' thinking looks like and about the various parties (most of us, it seems) who propagate it. But the ecological thought is all about uncertainty and strange strangeness. Is Morton using ecological thought to think about non-ecological thought? If so, he's giving it a poor advertisement. I can think of all sorts of reasons to criticise many elements of the current green movement and the omnivorous capitalism those elements oppose (where they're not being neo-Malthusian). But I can't see how these reasons would lead me to prefer uncertainty, strange strangers, and the mesh as my existential alternatives. How to cross the divide between Morton's non-ecological and ecological thinking when there's seemingly no bridge to span it?

Let me conclude by returning the issue of this book's readership. Despite weaving insightful discussions of Darwinian theory and fractal curves together with acute analyses of poems, movies and other creative works, *The ecological thought* only connects C.P. Snow's famous 'two cultures' by writing in a way that would baffle the average reader outside the humanities. So much for demonstrating the wider value of humanistic scholarship! What, though, of the cognoscenti who Morton is not expressly writing for in this monograph? As I said at the outset, these readers will be drawn to this book, and are likely to form the majority of its readers. What else are they (we) reading, apart from Morton? I'm hardly alone in having studied - with enormous interest - Latour's *Politics of nature* (2004), Haraway's *When species meet* (2008), and Ingold's newest book *Being alive* (2011). What does Morton's work add to this remarkable trio of studies and others that share their broad sensibility? Apart from some astute observations, alluring formulations and the occasional good joke ('What a fine mesh we've gotten ourselves into' [p61] was my favourite), I'd have to say 'not a great deal'. I also confess some surprise that Morton apparently ignores these studies. Morton's swift dismissal of 'post-humanist' writing creates a false sense of the difference between his own work and that of intellectual bed-fellows he's kicking into the long grass by dint of omission.<sup>3</sup> I presume his is a 'post-humanist post-humanism', to quote one of Morton's literary theoretical peers, Cary Wolfe.

Perhaps if I were more capable of the ecological thought I might detect greater novelty in the pages of Morton's book. As it is, I regard it as a rich, learned and highly stimulating addition to the growing literature which aims to think beyond 'nature'.

3. Talking of missing links, Morton (p101) repeats the Fredric Jameson (or was it Slavoj Zizek?) line that 'it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism' - but without attribution.

# PINK PATCHES

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*Chiara Certomà*

George McKay, *Radical Gardening. Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the garden*, London, Frances Lincoln, 2011; 224pp, £ 12.99 paperback

If you have ever looked at gardening as a mere leisure and relaxation activity, and at gardens as places far from ordinary troubles and political struggles, *Radical Gardening. Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the garden* by George McKay is the right book to challenge those ideas. Just forget about the description of the aesthetic pleasantness of multicoloured flower beds and the moral virtues plant care adds to daily people's life; do not expect any history of the progressive erasure of wilderness from modern cities, or about the art of creating a greener urban landscape. Far from these common interpretations of gardening, McKay proposes an altogether different perspective by exploring the political relevance of gardens and gardening in cities. He tells us a captivating story about the subversive, innovative and creative character of gardening and the role of gardens in western history, with particular focus on Britain and the United States. Specifically, the author offers readers a description of the public politics of gardening as developed, managed and transformed by grassroots movements.

The author spells out three intertwined plots in the book; the first provides a story of how green space has been progressively appropriated by people (through claiming, planning and planting) so as to become part of the public imaginary; the second follows the evolution of gardening rhetoric in political propaganda and in the constitution of social mentality; the last plot tell us about the connection between gardens, plants, flowers, gardening, and political ideologies. A further plot, in my opinion, emerges from the narrative; namely the constant shifting between gardens (and lands, terrains, parks, allotments, and so on) as *ad hoc* spaces for political expression, and gardens as the object of political claims. These two statuses of gardens (i.e. means and objects) are often not clearly distinguishable (some gardens, such as community gardens, are at the same time, places for the manifestation of people's political will and objects of their political claims). Nevertheless, it is evident that throughout history, gardens constituted a materialisation of political and social ideologies (this is the case with organicism, fascism, anarchism and so on), and the *loci* where a number of political issues 'condensed' (such as genetic modification issues, food policy, capitalist systems, multiculturalism and so on).

McKay's book intentionally focuses on the last two centuries but leaves aside certain types of gardens that represent the institutional point of view (such as the imperial garden, the public park celebrating the social

order and governmental values, the landscape plans fuelled by states or private investors). The book moves from the first uses of public gardens as locations for subversive events and critical engagement at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and leads us to discover the way in which gardens, and urban green spaces in general, have been appropriated by the people *through* gardening; and how gardening entered the contemporary dialogic of the urban future and the 'extreme space in the contestation of cityscape' (p194). Ironically, even if public green spaces have frequently been provided by local authorities as a means to prevent revolutions, from the Victorian age onward, they rapidly evolved into venues for working class demonstrations and nurseries for social movements (Hyde Park is an example of this). As a consequence, public urban green spaces evolve into a space available for political activism, and 'function as a special zone for the common articulation of social change, social experimentation, the critical rejection of some aspects of society, and even the confrontation with authority' (p12). In the same years, the Garden City movement emerged. It proposed a socio-horticultural experiment comprising a low-density housing model for the working class; this was planned by local authorities to instil moral virtue (such as cooperation, solidarity and inclusion) in people's minds through the presence of a broad variety of plants, flowers, and gardens planted in the place they live in. The innovative character of the Garden City movement resides in the interest of urban inhabitants for issues and activities that traditionally are associated with the countryside. This brings readers to consider the birth and the evolution of the organic movement that emerged as a localised counter-narrative opposing the growing impact of chemical agriculture in the early 20th century. From biodynamics, to permaculture, to backyard gardening and today's organic agriculture, the practitioners of non-industrial and small scale agriculture saw their work as an 'extension and enhancement of political struggle' (p49). In the first half of the twentieth century the politically ambivalent character of gardening became evident; the appropriation of the radical gardening approach by the European totalitarian regimes clearly demonstrated that gardening *per se*, far from being a liberating and progressive activity, might turn out to be a repressive and regressive expression of the extreme right. Under Nazi and fascist regimes gardening was instrumentally revitalised to grow blood and soil ideologies. Actually, I would be more inclined to consider gardening under totalitarian regimes as an expression of mainstream, rather than contestative politics; indeed, despite the fact that at the very beginning European fascist regimes arose with revolutionary intents, they rapidly turned into mainstream ideologies and made the garden a social metaphor in support of racist, xenophobic, nationalist and ethnicist claims.

By following the stream of history, McKay analyses the polemic landscape set up after World War II in the form of war memorials and peace gardens. Military gardens were created worldwide as memorialisations of the war event with art, symbols and memories placed in the public space of gardens. Even in

this case, gardens might be seen as a manifestation of power's need to justify, commemorate and remember the sacrifice of such an impressive number of people. Peace gardens stand in opposition to memorial gardens; they remind us that 'In that act of the refusal to kill lies a fundamental rejection of the authority of the state and (often) an inevitable and deeply uncomfortable confrontation with the values of majority society' (p100). Thus, the birth of the peace movement saw the rise of the municipal peace garden that broke the linkage between garden (particularly horticulture) and war.

In the following chapter, McKay describes the evolution of the horti-counterculture, that is, the new interpretation of the garden as liberatory space and as a space for environmental consciousness to grow. This appears to me as the very object of the entire book. The chapter moves from the semiotic of plants in the flower children's culture, and by extensively describing the universe of subcultures from the 60s onward, comes to communal living (particularly eco-villages). Their most relevant legacy consists in the use of gardens as space for micro-politics, and gardening to raise public awareness about social and environmental concerns. This is the reason why a number of counterculture experiences still have a significant role in present day alternative society (such as the associations *Diggers and Dreamers*, *Worldwide Organic Farming*, *Ecovillages Network*, etc.). Often, this alternative has been made possible by land-grabbing initiatives that provided the space for concerts, festivals, and meetings aimed at criticising private property and individualism. Nonetheless, beside the liberation of habits (new clothing, new music, new images of sex), gardens had a liberatory function even in the case of prison gardens, gendered gardens, or gardens for disabled or for impoverished people.

In the last chapter (the most interesting in my opinion) the argumentation turns toward the social side of radical gardening, and its relation to the construction and reconstruction of urban communities. Radical gardening, in these cases, represents the more marginal and sometimes audacious use of public land scraped at the city peripheries and the marginal space of societal imagination.

Allotments are the oldest of the contemporary alternative gardening experiments. Allotments are zones in cities claimed by the citizens and provided by local administrations for people to cultivate vegetable and flowers. They were instituted as gardens for feeding people in the period of war shortage, and have become today recreational gardens associated with environmental and anti-capitalist stances: 'The revival of allotment culture since the 1970s speaks of the rise in eco-consciousness, a desire for social community, a non-commercial and non-genetically modified space, the bodily pleasure of physical work, and quite possibly the pragmatic fact that newly-constructed domestic accommodation is generally built in greater density, therefore private gardens are reduced in size or availability' (p162). A second example is provided by the experience of community gardens, which are

characterised by a specific accusatory rationale: people create them because local governments do not. Community garden sustainers affirm gardens to be able to reduce crime, increase social cohesion and clean environments, and produce a relevant change in community confidence and cohesion. The last form of polemic landscape *Radical Gardening* tells us about is Guerrilla Gardening. It sprang from micro-politics, making 'garden activism in the form of overnight transformation of a neglected park or the sprinkling of seeds on waste ground for a subsequent seasonal surprise, without permission' (p184). It is not a protest but a creative celebration that operates in the interstitiality of urban spaces; and, as McKay affirms, it is intended as a corrective to the 'parochial or suburban or landed version of garden understanding' (p195).

While accounting for the challenges and the results obtained by contemporary radical gardening, the book reminds us of some of the most striking post-modern issues, such as the emergence of subaltern and antagonistic political theories, the new urban grassroots movements, the link between space and politics, the fragmentation of the individual self and the reconstruction of an innovative collective identity, the overcoming of a discourse-based political activity. I see this last point as particularly relevant as it builds upon the post-modern material politics theory that interprets the political domain as produced by the gathering of humans and non-humans around a contested issue.

McKay compels us to confront the exciting novelties – as well as some of the uncomfortable consequences – arising from the vibrant political approach pushed forward by radical gardeners. In doing so, he brings us onto the variegated, dynamic and engaging lands where collective history takes form: the public space of gardens, allotments, flowers beds, wastelands and single spots of land. As a well-written romance, *Radical Gardening* is a book that readers will find difficult to stop reading and that will forever change their perception of urban public green spaces.

## BOOKNOTES

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David Landy, *Jewish Identity and Palestinian Rights: Diaspora Jewish Opposition to Israel*, London, Zed Books, 2011; 250pp, £19.99 (US \$34.95) paperback

'Our mission was simple. Above all it was to show that Jews could try to build bridges rather than walls, come with an olive branch and not with a bulldozer to destroy olive trees' (Neslen cited in Landy, p1). Thus opens David Landy's timely and astute book, at the centre of which are, what he terms, 'Jewish Israel-critical' movements in North America, Australia and Europe. He examines the roots, structures and strategies of these movements and interrogates the roles they play in contemporary Jewish communities and Jewish identity formation.

Considered in the context of well-rehearsed accusations of 'self-hatred', directed at Jews who are critical of Israel, Landy identifies activism as 'self-liberation, finding a voice to speak up (as a Jew) for values like human rights and justice' (p7). Israel-critical activism is construed as a possibility for members to create an alternative Jewish identity, which dissociates Jewishness from Zionism and challenges Israel's position as speaking for *all* Jews, and committing crimes against humanity in the name of *all* Jews. Landy stresses the ideological rather than territorial aspect of this identity, since many Jews feel at home in the diaspora, and describes this new identity as 'diasporist': 'A diasporist identity, then, is a Jewish sense of self, forwarded by Jews in the diaspora and often constructed against hegemonic Zionism' (p41). The effectiveness of Jewish activism is not only evaluated on a personal level but equally on a collective one, for example through the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) strategy and its adoption, or denunciation, within Jewish circles.

Landy's debate is always anchored in identity formation, concentrating on the impact of activism and opposition to Israel on Jewish identity. He offers crucial insights into contemporary Jewish dissent from unconditional Israeli support, which makes his book invaluable for anyone interested in Jewish activism and Jewish diaspora identity. As promised in his title, Landy's study also focuses on the tension between Jewish identity and Palestinian rights and the unequal and problematic power relationship that exists between Jewish activists and their Palestinian 'subjects'. The author shows how the criticism levelled at human rights discourse, i.e. relocating the Palestinians to the periphery as passive objects of outside interference, is reproduced in 'alternative' tourism in Palestine.

If one had to find one minor flaw with this otherwise excellent and nuanced work, it would be the peripheral position of the Palestinians in Chapter 6, which is dedicated to the relationship between the Jewish activists and the

Palestinians, but puts the Jewish activists centre-stage. However, this absence could be explained through the lack of interaction that Landy observes between those two groups, which leads him to conclude that the 'object of activism is not Palestinians as such; it is a political solution for Israel/Palestine based on some measure of justice for Palestinians' (p181). Although this conclusion in some respects reaffirms the marginality of the Palestinians within Western discourses, nevertheless, Landy sees Jewish activism as contributing to the Palestinian struggle for justice and liberation.

*Isabelle Hesse*

Lars T. Lih, *Lenin*, London, Reaktion Books Ltd, 2011; 235pp, £10.95 paperback

Vladimir Ilich Lenin - 'a posthumous creation' (p7), a name by which the man himself never went. So how does the life of Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov the man inform the works of the writer N.Lenin? This question marks the opening of Lars T. Lih's new critical and biographical study. Prior to declassification of Soviet archives, studies of Lenin lacked the necessary details for a 'warts and all' treatment, yet since then, Lih writes, studies 'often seem to be based on a methodology of "nothing but warts"' (p13). Rather than mimic the likes of *Lenin's Mistress* - Micheal Pearson's 2002 work aimed at uncovering Lenin's 'darker, sexual side' (p216) through a possible relationship with French communist Inessa Armand - Lih instead treats Lenin's life as a valuable source of clarification in the consideration of his contested ideas.

The work builds around Lenin's 'Heroic Scenario'; a term coined by Lih to emphasise Lenin's simultaneously romantic yet pragmatic analysis of Russia's material conditions as a means to proletarian revolution. The three central ideas that Lih builds through the text are the *vozhd*, the *narod*, and the *vlast*. 'The normal translations - *vozhd* = leader, *narod* = people, *vlast* = power - are not inaccurate', according to Lih, yet 'they bleach the emotional colour out of Lenin's rhetoric' (p193). As the book follows Lenin's personal history and the context surrounding it, these concepts are so skilfully interwoven as to be almost imperceptible. The effortless transition between biography, history, and political theory make a compelling case for Lih's reading of this oft-quoted yet elusive figure.

In some respects, however, Lih does leave the reader hungry for certain biographical details. For example, Lenin's power-politics within the party is alluded to yet examples remain thin on the ground. However, Lih's allusion to the '55 volumes of the fifth edition of the works of V.I. Lenin' (p7) within the opening sentence, along with numerous references to recommended further reading elsewhere, act as a constant reminder that this is a consciously critical and theoretical text - not your standard biographical fare. In this way, *Lenin* is a book that opens the subject and encourages further reading



whilst successfully posing challenges to the 'standard textbook interpretation' recognisable to fellow Lenin scholars. The personal details that do remain, however, are powerfully evocative; including a note on Lenin's constant laughter that Bertrand Russell reportedly found 'rather grim' (p212). What Lih accomplishes in this text is a clear and concise description of the 'situation' within Russia and the 'heroic scenario' through which Lenin both comprehended it and moved to revolutionise it. It is this neat balance of diverse scope and potent theorising that recommends this book to historians and political scientists alike, whilst providing enough material and contentions for both an uninitiated and an informed readership.

*Joe Darlington*