

BOOKNOTES

Matt fytche, *The Foundation of the Unconscious: Freud, Schelling and the Birth of the Modern Psyche*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, 310pp; £60 hardback

Matt fytche's thoughtful and intricate historiography of the unconscious puts textual and biographical detail alongside a compelling sense of broader questions of political subjectivity in the post-Enlightenment period. The premise of *The Foundation of the Unconscious* is, on the surface, straightforward: a genealogy of the idea of the unconscious from its germination in Friedrich Schelling's idealist philosophy to the expression of its early nineteenth-century origins in Freud and a number of other twentieth-century analysts, and the political baggage that comes with it. In this way, fytche's study makes an interesting companion to historiographical accounts of other psychoanalytic ideas, like Nicholas Royle's 2003 study *The Uncanny* (Manchester University Press). The result is a psychoanalysis that is recognizably Romantic rather than archetypically modernist: fytche makes a powerful case for a Freud rooted in the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling and the poets and anthropologists who constituted his context.

The first two parts of fytche's book make heavy going for readers unfamiliar with the terminologically dense and obdurately abstract writing of Fichte and Schelling, though the meticulous readings of their work on offer pays dividends. The 'I' in Fichte and the unconscious in Schelling offer a rebuttal, in fytche's reading, to eighteenth-century notions of mechanistic and deterministic structures underlying the natural world and thus circumscribing the possibilities for human autonomy and freedom. Schelling, conversely, begins to attribute the dimension of unconsciousness to 'all points of ontological reference', consigning 'the whole city of life to the abyss' (p135). This manoeuvre, however, is not a punishment or fall but rather the foundation and imperative for human freedom. fytche goes on to read the connected interests of natural philosophy, ontology and psychology through particularly illuminating examinations of the work of relatively little known figures like polymath C.G. Carus and naturalist G.H. Schubert.

The final third of the book and conclusion draw out the implications of the earlier discussions of Fichte and Schelling as regards the implications of their Romanticism in psychoanalytic writing proper. fytche offers more than merely an account of Romantic influence on Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, exploring instead the ways in which psychoanalysis can be set in a wider frame of the problems of post-idealist political philosophy in the 1800s. It is, in this regard, inevitably political, with the Freudian conception of the psyche offering, on the one hand, a more 'unbounded and natural instinct against which civilized independence must be defended' (p258) and, on the other, a determining law completing the rational account of human behavior and thus buttressing a rationalistic image of the ego. fytche displays, in other words, the ways in which debates about the concept of an unconscious are both foundational in and critical of the liberal subject of European modernity.

In stressing this ambivalence, fytche problematizes attitudes in critical theory that treat the concept of the unconscious as the mysterious harbinger of revolutionary forces and resistant to

the norms of bourgeois society. If only in a muted way, ffytche's meticulous historicization of the political and philosophical forces shaping Schelling's conception of the unconscious offers a counterpoint to, and critique of, Slavoj Žižek's vision of Schelling's unconscious in which it emerges 'in a brief flash'; a view that ffytche feels necessarily 'forecloses any attempt to give the unconscious itself a history' (p4). For this reason, ffytche's study will be useful to researchers and postgraduates engaged in contemporary theoretical speculations about the relationship between concepts of subjectivity, political life and the legacy of the Enlightenment. It should also be of great value to writers interested in the relationship of psychoanalysis and aesthetics in both modernist studies and Romanticism, opening the door to a vision of modernism inflected by not just psychoanalysis but its Romantic precursors, as well as perhaps promising new engagements of Romantic twentieth-century psychoanalysts (C.G. Jung; Donald Winnicott) with the philosophical and cultural artifacts of the early nineteenth century.

Benjamin Poore

Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation*, London, Sage, 2012, 240pp; £26.99 paperback, £85 cloth

Lisa Blackman's latest book *Immaterial Bodies* draws from the rich literature that has formed around body and affect studies (Blackman is the current editor of *Body and Society*). It well describes how, following the turn to affect, we have witnessed the near dissolution of the subject. However, Blackman makes the case that even if the body is no longer an image or self-contained entity, subjectivity has not gone away. So what has it become? Lining up her influences from Frank's early sociology of the body to Featherstone and Turner's co-editing of *Body and Society* in the mid 1990s, Blackman sets about deftly answering this question by re-entering into the current turn to affect, and almost synonymous revival of nineteenth-century crowd theory, from a unique position. That is to say, although often recast as a biomediation or assemblage, there is still a requirement, Blackman argues, to attend to this immaterial corporality and locate the subject of affect.

The risks associated with introducing a theory of subjectivity to affect studies are fully grasped by Blackman. There is always the problem of undoing all the positive work done to wrestle back the human experience of the world from the relations of interiority found in cognitive psychology and phenomenological studies. But this is not an attempt to psychologize affect (p24). Instead Blackman looks to decouple psychological processes from the self-contained subject. The study of the transmission of material affect must, as Blackman points out, account for the immateriality of what is transmitted. This post-psychological study of affect does not therefore, like many other recent accounts, move to the popular centre ground of current cognitive neuroscience to find its concepts. Blackman does something really interesting here. Rather than seeking to confirm the subject of affect through spurious references to pop science, *Immaterial Bodies* moves the inquiry to the margins of science, uncovering fascinating material on crowds, voice hearing, suggestibility, mental touch, rhythm and the double brain. Highlights include references to the work of Sidis (a student of James) on suggestion, Tuke's understanding of how the psychic becomes somatic and the application of Gibbs mimetic communication to nineteenth-century ideas about telepathy, hypnosis, delusions and hallucinations.

Blackman's dialogue with neuroscience treads carefully, avoiding positivism, and a social theory that defines itself as an inside set against an outside, all the while taking seriously the conceptual traffic between science and the humanities. Indeed, amid much neurospeculation Blackman's book is a significant and refreshing conversation at the margins, which unpicks what it calls the neurophysiological body. Essential reading.

Tony D. Sampson