

# THE LONG CONJUNCTURE

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*David Glover*

Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Durham NC and London, Duke University Press, 2015, 319pp; £16.99 paperback

James Epstein, *Scandal of Colonial Rule: Power and Subversion in the British Atlantic during the Age of Revolution*, New York and Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, 314pp; £21.99 paperback

Our history is destined in this chapter to go backwards and forwards in a very irresolute manner seemingly, and having conducted our story to tomorrow presently, we shall immediately again have occasion to step back to yesterday, so that the whole of the tale may get a hearing.

-*Vanity Fair* (1848)

'Intimacy' has become a busy term in contemporary cultural theory with few signs of agreement about its endlessly contestable meanings and usage. While some critics would still locate it primarily within the most highly personalised 'zones of familiarity and comfort', 'intimacy' frequently invokes what Lauren Berlant has concisely described as 'the modes of attachment that make persons public and collective and that make collective scenes intimate spaces.'<sup>1</sup> So, in Jürgen Habermas's classic account of the 'surreptitious hollowing out of the family's intimate sphere' by the predatory powers of states and businesses, a paradoxical condition of 'floodlit privacy' is all that remains.<sup>2</sup> Lisa Lowe's ambitious new book is a reminder of the deft footwork now required of anyone attempting to negotiate this tricky terrain. In *The Intimacies of Four Continents* she aligns herself with postcolonial scholars like Ann Laura Stoler, Antoinette Burton, or Nayan Shah who have each provided a distinctive take on how 'the "intimate" sphere of sexual, reproductive, or household relations' served as 'a site of empire'. But, in the next breath, Lowe firmly differentiates her project from theirs as one that aims rather to open up what she calls a "political economy" of intimacies' in which geographical distances are radically foreshortened by highlighting the close historical and conceptual relations between changing categories of labour and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century struggles for emancipation (pp17-18). From Lowe's perspective, our common-sense notions of 'intimacy' can no longer be said to ground the inner self-certainty of the modern individual or of liberal individualism more generally; instead, the limited cultural forms that interiority and domesticity characteristically take must ultimately be viewed as the obscured or unrecognised product – in the most literal sense – of the colony's specific

1. Lauren Berlant, 'Intimacy: A Special Issue,' in *Intimacy* ed. Lauren Berlant, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2000, pp1, 8.

2. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1989, pp155, 159.

work in sustaining, not to say constantly re-creating, the metropolis or imperial centre that once brought it into being. In her introductory remarks, Lowe turns to Foucault, characterising her study as ‘an unlikely or unsettling genealogy of modern liberalism’ that will pave the way for ‘a historical ontology of ourselves’, an analysis of the categories that continue to define who we are and allow us to reflect on what we might still become (p3). This formulation sits uneasily with the residues of a Marxist theory of ideology that sometimes informs the structure of her arguments, regardless of her critical observations on the shortcomings of the Western Marxist tradition.

On the one hand: slaves, sharecroppers, convicts, day workers, debt peonage, indentured labour; on the other: freedom, utilitarian discipline, free trade, and liberal governance. Rather than striving for a synoptic overview, Lowe engages with the problem-space of liberalism selectively, exploring the links between these twinned poles of hegemony and domination through a series of well-chosen case studies that not only revisit the colonial archive, but also extend that archive to include works of fiction and autobiography, as well as major political treatises and long-term changes in décor and fashion. In so doing she seeks to identify key episodes in the emergence of a post-abolitionist political and economic world-system, what one might call the long conjuncture defined by Britain’s unprecedented industrial presence and virtually indestructible sea power as older mercantilist economic ideologies were increasingly swept away by liberal notions of free trade. Her adroit use of case study materials allows Lowe constantly to switch perspectives on the liberal *démarche* and consequently her genealogy is less an inventory of mixed origins, and instead more a kaleidoscopic depiction of liberalism’s many-faceted political and cultural sites and practices and their role in implementing ‘colonial divisions of humanity’ (p6).

She begins in 1803 with an analysis of what she takes to be a vital British state document that set the scene for the replacement of plantation slavery by punitive regimes of indentured labour, producing long-range patterns of international migration with all the massive human disruption and suffering that predictably followed. Lowe then takes a step back into the pre-abolitionist world of the late 1780s to examine the problematic role played by autobiographies of former slaves in the campaigns against slavery. Although these texts appealed to their readers through such devices as sentimental interpellation or powerful portrayals of religious conversion, they were dominated by the individualistic assumptions of a literary genre that could only conceive of the struggle towards freedom in terms of the tribulations and triumphs of a singular first-person narrator, in which ‘the collective subject of colonial slavery’ was virtually forgotten. Lowe argues that this bias was particularly evident in the most influential of these autobiographies, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), whose author remained ‘forever haunted by his former status as property’, while seeking the solution to slavery in the expansion of free trade across the globe (pp69-70). Lowe

contrasts Equiano's writing with that of Ottobah Cugoano whose *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (1787) wove together the story of his own kidnapping and those of his 'miserable countrymen' with a forceful refutation of the arguments of slavery's defenders.

Yet in driving a wedge between Equiano and Cugoano, Lowe effectively ignores the evidence of their active political collaboration and makes the anti-slavery alliances less complex and highly charged than they actually were.<sup>3</sup> Her final example of liberalism's inbuilt tendency to slide into illiberal extremes and its repeated betrayal of its own *raison d'être* is a reading of John Stuart Mill's *Considerations of Representative Government* (1861) with its justification of the deployment of force against those peoples and races deemed 'unfit for liberty', echoed in his writings on the imposition of law and order during the East India Company's governance of India. This text is placed in apposition to the manifold ordinances brought in to regulate and correct the "backward" habits of the indigenous population in the newly inaugurated Crown Colony of Hong Kong in the early 1840s. The combination of "free trade" or "free circulation" with the "rule of law" had gradually begun to take the place of direct conquest and by the middle of the century was becoming the new and preferred 'hallmark of liberal reason' (p132). But it was never a softer form of power.

One of the more unexpected instances of the asymmetrical intimacies Lowe has in mind occurs in her third chapter when she sets the outrageously flamboyant figure of Becky Sharp from William Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair* in the context of the immense popularity enjoyed by Indian and Chinese chintz and calico designs and fabrics. A lucrative import to Britain's expanding domestic market, exchanged for human commodities in the hugely profitable trade in African slaves and Chinese labourers, and finally copied and then mass-produced by British manufacturers as the rise of the Lancashire cotton industry gathered steam, these textiles combined pitiless competition with a newly exoticised sense of homeliness, providing a nuanced reinterpretation of G.K. Chesterton's celebrated dictum that *Vanity Fair's* 'chief character is the world' (pp70-84; 88-93). Lowe offers this imperial commercial history in part-explanation of why Thackeray's exuberantly witty novel remained the favourite reading of the Trinidadian C.L.R. James throughout a lengthy but always intrepid career as a writer and political activist – though it seems no less likely that the sheer irreverence of the text, its almost wilful lack of respect for statuses or persons, mattered far more to him than this half-hidden cultural history. Certainly James himself was never able to identify the source of his inexhaustible fascination with the novel. This chapter shows the extraordinary range of Lowe's cultural references and the remarkable transcontinental reach of her arguments, yet her assessment of the current political situation, a perverse and profoundly recalcitrant present, is unremittingly bleak. As she notes in her closing remarks: 'it has become difficult to write or imagine alternative knowledges, or to act on behalf of alternative projects or ways of being' (p175).

3. See Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery and Other Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta, Penguin, New York 1999, pp185-198, p14.

Despite its impressive global sweep, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* is a surprisingly short book: just one hundred and seventy-five densely packed pages, with another eighty-six pages of detailed endnotes. This brevity puts considerable pressure on the case studies that Lowe has assembled. If ‘to think under the conjuncture is quite literally to submit to the problem induced and imposed by its case’, then Lowe sometimes seems to shy away from fully elaborating the concrete historical and political circumstances that would enable her to do so.<sup>4</sup> The most striking example of this weakness is Lowe’s account of the 1803 document referred to above which authorised a pilot scheme for testing the feasibility of a system of indentured labour in Britain’s slaveholding colonies, a scheme that targeted Chinese workers. As one might expect from Lowe’s earlier work, especially her book *Immigrant Acts* (1996), one of the strongest themes in *The Intimacies of Four Continents* is the entry of the Chinese emigrant into imperial modernity, a process of displacement that was vital in securing the formal legal preconditions enabling men and women to be considered ‘free’ of any ties that might prevent them from entering into binding agreements with potential employers.<sup>5</sup>

4. Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, trans. by Gregory Elliott, Verso, London and New York 1999, p18.

5. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian and American Cultural Politics*, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London 1996.

Lowe’s archival starting-point is headed ‘Secret Memorandum from the British Colonial Office to the Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company’, a document partially reproduced in a half-page photograph in the book’s first chapter (p22). The letter was written in the shadow of the slave revolution in Haiti (St Domingue) famously led by Toussaint L’Ouverture in 1791 and, despite Toussaint’s defeat by Napoleon’s forces in 1802, its author, John Sullivan, the Under-Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, concluded that it was imperative to devise a scheme that would prevent such a cataclysm from ever happening in the Caribbean again. By importing Chinese labourers into the British West Indies the plantation workforce would be split along ethnic lines, following the familiar imperial principle of divide and rule, dampening down republican fervour and bringing in a tough-minded labour regime that would step into the breach left by the ending of slavery. As Lowe convincingly argues, what breathed new life into these well-worn tactics was the ‘fantasy of a “free” yet racialized and coerced labour’ that pitted the figure of the Chinese coolie against that of the unruly “negro” slave (p24). The mission was entrusted to an agent with strong East Indian credentials named Kenneth Macqueen who was to manage the recruitment of Chinese workers and bring them to Trinidad. It is not too much to say that for Lowe the 1803 Memorandum and the ensuing voyage of the *Fortitude* (1806), the ship Macqueen commissioned in Calcutta, represent *the* formative moment in re-making the institution of slavery.

Putting aside the issue of whether the centrality Lowe gives to Sullivan’s letter is justified, her claim begs another important question: why was Trinidad chosen? Was it pure contingency – a mere historical accident? After all, in the early 1790s one can already find scattered references in the British periodical press to the idea of bringing in Chinese workers to replace African slaves in

the West Indies sugar plantations.<sup>6</sup> Or, was there something about this island that led British government officials to regard it as a strategic site where the probable consequences of an abolitionist victory might be moderated or even countered? In a wide-ranging conversation on C.L.R. James the late Stuart Hall highlighted Trinidad's social and cultural 'distinctiveness', drawing attention to its 'vigorous independent intellectual life' and the fact that 'it has always had migrations from the smaller islands.'<sup>7</sup> These movements can be traced back to the successive phases of colonization that Trinidad experienced, having formerly been controlled by Spain and France before being annexed by Britain. Indeed, in the 1780s, when the island still belonged to Spain, French and Creole patois were its most commonly spoken languages precisely because of migration from other parts of the Caribbean. At the cusp of the early nineteenth century what made Trinidad different – especially from a Colonial Office vantage-point – was not simply its affinities with continental Europe, but its *belatedness* as a British possession, for it first came into British hands in February 1797 during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and until March 1802, when the Peace of Amiens ratified its new colonial status, the island's future had remained uncertain. And there was also a belated quality in Trinidad's relationship to slavery. According to the 1784 Census the combined numbers of settlers and free men and women narrowly outnumbered those of slaves on the island and even by 1797, when the balance had been reversed, largely due to the impact of the British slave trade, Trinidad was 'not yet a typical slave colony', where the vast majority of its population would have consisted of African slaves.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the ethnic composition recorded in the Census was further complicated by the fact that those classed as either 'free' or 'settlers' included many people who were of both European and African descent. Compared to the political geography of Jamaica, Trinidad looked like a very unusual island: culturally close to France, but less susceptible to a major slave rebellion. Yet, despite Trinidad's underdeveloped slave economy, sugar had already become the island's most important cash crop *before* the British arrived – and sugar production was indelibly associated with the demand for slave labour.

For a better understanding of why Trinidad stood at the epicentre of British discussions as to whether slavery had any kind of future in this period, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* should be read in tandem with James Epstein's extremely impressive *Scandal of Colonial Rule: Power and Subversion in the British Atlantic during the Age of Revolution*. Narrower in scope than Lowe's book, but no less imaginative, Epstein's monograph is organised around the controversial London trial, and subsequent acquittal, of Thomas Picton, on the charge of having ordered the arrest and torture of a young free "mulatto" woman named Louisa Calderon while he was serving as Trinidad's military governor after it had been captured by the British. Calderon had stood accused of being an accomplice in the robbery of her lover and, as Epstein shows, prominent among the popular stories generated by Picton's trial was a Gothic narrative

6. B.W. Higman, 'The Chinese in Trinidad, 1806-1838,' *Caribbean Studies* 12:3, 1972, p22. Henceforth *Chinese in Trinidad*.

7. Stuart Hall (interviewed by Bill Schwarz), 'Breaking Bread with History: C.L.R. James and *The Black Jacobins*,' *History Workshop Journal* 46, Autumn 1998, pp17-18.

8. Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962*, Heinemann, London 1981, pp15-16.

in which Calderon was 'caught in a labyrinth of darkness' and wanton cruelty, imprisoned at the behest of an unfeeling tyrannical villain who was 'a displaced representative' of everything that 'Englishness was not' while she was now loyally identified as 'One of His Britannic Majesty's Subjects' (pp32-8). By asking what was at stake in such representations, Epstein examines the issues that Picton's trial brought into the limelight and those that it suppressed. Behind the lurid Gothic tropes was a wider struggle to secure the continuing survival of slavery in the face of the growing confidence in the abolitionist cause, with Trinidad regarded very much as a test case. At a local level, Picton was feared by practically everyone in Trinidad, but he could be relied upon to put the plantation owners' interests first, introducing a harsh new Slave Code in 1800. However, in 1801 the Colonial Office came under the sway of Lord Robert Hobart, by reputation the only convinced supporter of abolition in the British cabinet – a matter of some concern throughout the British Caribbean. In 1802 Hobart appointed the MP William Fullarton, a former colonel in the East India Company's army, as Trinidad's first commissioner, undermining Picton's virtual monopoly on power and leading directly to his prosecution at the Court of the King's Bench in February 1806 – at Fullarton's instigation. It is against this political background that John Sullivan's 1803 Secret Memorandum should be understood.

John Sullivan is a rather shadowy figure in Lowe's study, leaving the impression that he was something of a faceless bureaucrat. But in fact, as Epstein makes clear, nothing could be further from the truth. Born into an old, but not especially prosperous Protestant family in Cork, Sullivan went out to Madras at the age of sixteen where he was taken on by the East India Company and made a considerable private fortune, mainly through supplying grain to the army. He returned to England in his mid-thirties a very wealthy man and determinedly built a solid second career in politics in which his experience in India was among his greatest assets. William Pitt's description of Sullivan as a 'nabob of good fortune' publicly positioned Sullivan among the more dramatic examples of new and rapidly acquired money in the second half of the eighteenth century – a far cry from the satirical portrait of the 'nabob' as a solitary, self-indulgent dandy in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.<sup>9</sup> Sullivan consolidated his rising status by acquiring a country estate and marrying into the Hobart family. So, when the future Lord Hobart became governor of Madras in 1793 he could rely on his brother-in-law's advice and support. Sullivan occupied several central positions in government and spent seventeen years as a commissioner on the Board of Control for Indian Affairs, including a period when Hobart was its President. These were crucial years in the transfer of the East India Company's powers to the state. Who better to oversee a provisional scheme to bring Chinese workers to the Caribbean, a scheme that might satisfy supporters of abolition like Hobart and meet the rising local demand for labour – not to mention stemming the flow of African slaves being brought into Trinidad in the early nineteenth century, some 4,332 in 1802 alone?<sup>10</sup>

9. See Nigel Chancellor, 'John Sullivan (1789-1839)', [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com) (accessed 24 September 2015).

10. Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810*, Macmillan, London, 1975, pp332-3; 338-40.

But there was no shortage of experiments on offer and it is misleading to equate the notion of a 'Trinidad experiment' with the voyage of a single ship carrying indentured Chinese labourers to Trinidad. As E.L. Joseph, one of the earliest of Trinidad's historians, wrote in 1838, 'Trinidad has often been called a colony of experiment, on account of a number of experiments tried here by different administrations' – though his use of words like 'ridiculous', 'injurious', and 'silliness' conjure up a vision of Swift's island of Laputa rather than the sobering discourses of political arithmetic.<sup>11</sup> Epstein provides an admirably comprehensive and judicious view of this political moment in which Trinidad served as a blank canvas upon which all manner of iconoclastic scenarios might be inscribed. He concludes that, around 1802, the island 'came to represent an experimental space for reimagining colonization in the West Indies' and, among the variety of improving schemes that were floated, he lists: the establishment of a cadre of yeoman farmers, traders, and engineers who would make extensive use of the new steam technology; a settlement of five hundred Scottish Highland families, particularly drawing in ex-soldiers from disbanded Scottish regiments as a counterweight to the largely Spanish and French ethnicities that made up the bulk of Trinidad's population; and a plan by which offenders from the metropolis might be rehabilitated through being shipped out to the Caribbean, the brainchild of the magistrate and political economist Patrick Colquhoun (pp189-205). These are just fragments from a large field of experimental proposals that came within the purview of the Colonial Office during this brief but turbulent period.

11. E.L. Joseph, *History of Trinidad*, A.K. Newman & Co., London 1838, pp230-1.

In July 1802 the Colonial Office received a detailed paper innocuously entitled 'Suggestions with Respect to the Population and Settlement of Land in Trinidad' by Captain William Layman, a Royal Naval officer who then enjoyed the patronage of Lord Nelson. Layman, following Adam Smith's argument that slaves were the most expensive type of labour, made a forceful economic case for importing Chinese workers and for introducing a new range of crops into the island from the East Indies, ideas he developed further in supplementary documents and additional correspondence. When he learned that Hobart and Sullivan had decided to proceed with what he understandably felt to be a derivative, yet ill-conceived plan of their own, Layman was outraged. But, given the East India Company background of these officials, it is hardly surprising that they thought it wiser to draw on the well-established network of connections that this organisation provided. In practice, however, the scheme proved far more difficult to implement than they had foreseen. Afraid of the corrupting influence of foreigners, the relatively recently installed Manchu dynasty was implacably hostile to emigration and the bulk of the Chinese men that Macqueen was able to enlist came from the border zone of Macao (a total of 147, via a Portuguese intermediary) with the remainder coming from Penang and Calcutta (some fifty-nine, all but six of whom signed on in Calcutta). These figures contrasted starkly with those in the Colonial Office archive that suggest an official target of 500 Chinese. But, as Epstein points

out, this kind of wishful thinking was characteristic of all ‘such schemes for recruiting free labour to the West Indies’ in which ‘fantasy played a serious role’ (p214). These fantasies were of course gendered. Lowe emphasises the energizing contribution made by a ‘fantasy of Chinese family civility’ to the dream of a new stable labouring community in the colonies (pp32-4). Yet this idealised Chinese female turned out to be the most elusive figure in the entire imaginary design. Macqueen was unable to find a single Chinese woman to embark for Trinidad and this led to more discussion as to how this lack might be remedied in the future. One professed solution, the claim that Chinese girls could readily be purchased from their parents, brutally exposed the contradictions underpinning the “enlightened” belief that indenture was a humane alternative to slavery for it would have made ‘the denial of freedom to Chinese women’ a necessary condition for securing ‘a system of free [male] labour’ (Epstein, pp217-9). In more senses than one, “free” labour has always been a precarious category.

In any event, this particular experiment was a resounding failure. Although the men began their life as plantation workers, by the end of March 1807 most had found other forms of employment and only twenty-four remained in their original occupations. But worse was to follow. When the *Fortitude* left the island three months later it departed with sixty-one of the Chinese aboard, men who had exercised their option of a return passage to India or China. According to one calculation, at the end of 1808 only twenty-two of the original group remained (*Chinese in Trinidad*, p33). In reality, the departure of the *Fortitude* indicated neither the beginning nor the end of indentured labour, though it did mark a significant pause in its forward march. In Europe indenture had long been at the heart of the binding formal relationship between master and apprentice and the abortive attempt to follow the ending of slavery with an automatic unpaid six year “apprenticeship” was in essence a kind of forced indentured labour – “point de six ans” was the slogan chanted by Trinidad’s emancipated slaves on August 1, 1834. The true legacy of Sullivan’s memo was only apparent as abolition became absolutely unavoidable in the 1830s and the infrastructure of brokers and contractors set in place by the East India Company was rapidly mobilised to create an immense new supply system of migrant labour. It is this intensely regional specialization that explains why Indian labourers accounted for eighty-five per cent of indentured immigration across the British Empire between 1834 and 1920, while the Chinese contributed just six per cent.<sup>12</sup>

Epstein plausibly argues that notions of freedom and labour were constantly being readjusted and reframed in what he calls ‘an altered discursive and practical field’ throughout the nineteenth century, nowhere more so than in the colonies. And, like Lowe, he suggests that the most productive approach to their ‘unevenness’ within liberalism is via a Foucauldian genealogy (p220). These two studies focus on closely related issues: changes in the modes of colonial discipline; popular struggles around abolition, before *and* after the

12. David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York 1995. For a critical discussion of Northrup’s figures, see Adam M. McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders*, Columbia University Press, New York 2008, Ch.2.



end of slavery; the relations between the local and the global; and the ways in which justice and violence in metropolitan and colonial legal codes bled into each other – issues that turn on the complex historical evolution of liberal governance. For, as Foucault always insisted, his approach to genealogy necessarily involved a ‘history of problems ... why such a kind of problem, why a certain way of problematizing appears at a given point in time.’<sup>13</sup>

If Lowe’s book strives for the broadest comparative insights into the links between liberalism, imperialism, and forced labour, Epstein’s fine-grained analysis of the cultural and political reverberations emanating from a series of events in a single setting provides a more detailed sense of how racial and gendered conflicts were played out in the early phases of the long conjuncture of abolition – with excellent chapters on Trinidad’s radical underworld in Port of Spain and on what the records of the suppression of an alleged slave conspiracy reveal about the machinations of colonial rule. Lowe and Epstein hail from very different specialist backgrounds, but they each write at the intersection of several disciplines, though under distinct interdisciplinary flags of convenience: ‘global humanities’ (for the former) and ‘critical perspectives on empire’ (for the latter). What is urgently needed is an extended dialogue between them.

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13. Michel Foucault, ‘What Our Present Is’ (1981) trans. Lysa Hochroth, in Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2007, p141.

# HIGHER FREQUENCY

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*Sarah L. Webb*

Ian Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism & Wrecked the Middle Class*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2014, 304pp; £11.99 paperback.

While many political journalists, scholars, and critics acknowledge and condemn racial dog whistling, Ian Haney López argues that they underestimate the full impact dog whistling has on American politics and society. In *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism & Wrecked the Middle Class*, López illustrates how politicians use coded racial appeals to influence social discourse, win elections, suppress liberalism, weaken the middle class, push their own agendas, and serve the interests of wealthy Americans.

López's book is one of several published within the last two years that weave historical insight with contemporary social and political analysis to reveal the often insidious ways that the legacy of racism and inequality continues to be recycled in American politics. But where McCutcheon and Mark (*Dog Whistles Walk-backs and Washington Handshakes: Decoding the Jargon, Slang and Bluster in American Political Speech*, 2014) provide the lexicon and 'decode' race-tinged political language, López harshly critiques dog whistling within the specific context of the 'colourblind' or 'post-racial' America increasingly touted since Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign and election. With *Dog Whistle Politics*, López carves a niche amid this recent scholarship by honing in specifically on how this rhetoric, as used by highly influential political leaders since the Civil Rights era, further inculcates racial bias and division. López structures his argument with nine alternating chapters – five narrative accounts of how major U.S. political figures advanced the use of racial dog whistling and four expository chapters that unpack the idea and practice of racism in America – and a conclusion wherein he proposes targeted solutions to political, racial dog whistling.

López begins his narrative thread in the 1960s with George Wallace and Barry Goldwater, noting that Wallace turned whole heartedly to dog whistle politics as a way to win votes. After realizing that racial resentment resonated with whites around the country, not just Southerners, and recognizing that explicitly racist language was not the way to present that resentment, Wallace coded his racial hatred in euphemisms that still carried the racial tenor he intended. Following Wallace's example, Goldwater strategically used coded race rhetoric to sway white Southern Democrats to vote Republican for the first time ever, ultimately helping to turn the GOP into 'the White Man's Party' (p18). López ends chapter one with Richard Nixon who, with the help

of zealous and astute political strategists, developed the practices of Wallace and Goldwater into the fully formed 'Southern Strategy.'

The next point in López's timeline is Ronald Reagan, who progressed conservative politics that serve interests of the wealthy from the fringe in the 60s, to a mainstream aspect of 1980s politics and policy. Reagan exemplified how dog whistling weakened the middle class by convincing white middle-class voters that 'big government', defined by closely associating government initiatives with blacks and other people of color, was their biggest threat rather than concentrated wealth. In chapter five, López continues his chronological narrative with political actors George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, but primarily focuses on one of the most significant instances of dog whistling in the 1988 Bush campaign: The Willie Horton commercial. The Horton commercial, as López argues, was so effective in appealing to white fear of the archetypal black male criminal, particularly the trope of black men raping white women, that Bush gained 12 percent of Dukakis' supporters, ultimately leading to Bush's victory.

López presents a bipartisan critique as demonstrated in the fifth chapter where he explains how Democrats also learned to pick up the dog whistle. Particularly, he suggests that Clinton's popularity among middle-class whites resulted from distancing himself, rhetorically, from the black community. As a candidate, Clinton promoted himself as a 'New Democrat', 'resistant to black concerns, tough on crime, and hostile to welfare' (p108). Beyond political pandering, however, Clinton followed through on his campaign platform with signal policies that disproportionately hurt African-Americans by leading to such outcomes as the spike in mass incarceration rates. While this critique of Clinton's campaign and subsequent policies is one instance that saves the book from scapegoating Republicans as the lone perpetrators of racial animus and inequality, the book would have more fully achieved its purpose with extended criticism of the rhetorical moves made by white Democrats.

López returns to Republican rhetoric with an analysis of George W. Bush's dog whistling about peoples from Latin America and the Middle East. Bush exemplifies how dog whistling can be used not just to win votes for elections, but also to garner widespread support for war and other government action once a candidate is already in office. In analyzing Bush's particular language, López notes that 'Bush was careful to cabin his remarks in terms of extremists and "a perverted vision of Islam," but the global terms in which he framed his analysis belied such fine distinctions. Bush transmuted our attackers from particular individuals and small factions of extremists into a whole civilization bent on our deaths and on the destruction of our way of life' (p119). Bush's speeches after 9/11 are good examples of how dog whistling works: what politicians explicitly and directly say is usually politically correct, but what they *imply* through euphemisms, ideographs, equations, and connotations usually encourages racism, islamophobia, or xenophobia. Politicians typically

point to their explicit statements to defend themselves against accusations of perpetuating such ideas.

The next movement in López's narrative includes the Tea Party and Mitt Romney. López discusses how during the Obama era, dog whistle politics greatly increased and pushed the general political field farther right. López suggests that Obama's race plays a large role in this uptick in coded race rhetoric and conservatism. Two chapters later, López talks about Obama's positioning relative to dog whistling. As López explains, Obama's 'post-racial strategy,' while adhering to previous Democratic strategies of avoiding the race conversation, is generally inadequate and often counterproductive. Although he rightly accounts for how Obama's race positions him differently in the rhetorical situation, López charges that the 'post-racial' approach is problematic because it leads to more conservative tendencies among Democrats and ultimately 'helps to legitimate the substance of dog whistle complaints because it promotes understandings of race and racism that obscure discrimination against nonwhites and magnify the ostensible mistreatment of whites' (p77).

The political profiles ultimately make up the greatest portion of *Dog Whistle Politics*, demonstrating that dog whistling, the coded rhetoric of strategic racism, has crystallized as a foundational political strategy for winning broad support among white Americans. López's criticism of well-meaning liberals like Obama who try to appeal to colorblind or post-racial ideals is extremely useful in a climate that singles out conservative strategies for their problematic handling of race. This sort of critique is necessary if López's larger project of countering and ending the use of dog whistles in politics is to have any chance.

The analysis of politicians' dog whistling is punctuated with an assessment of the concept of racism, how it functions in American society more broadly, and its correlation to dog whistle politics. First, López explains that although three different conceptions of racism constitute current discourse – hate, structural racism, and implicit bias – none prove adequate for understanding racism as used by dog whistling politicians. Instead, he locates dog whistle racism under the heading of *strategic racism* – 'purposeful efforts to use racial animus as leverage to gain material wealth, political power, or heightened social standing' (p46). He proceeds next to disrupt the rhetoric of colour-blindness, arguing that it legitimates, rather than undermines, dog whistle racism by obscuring the social structures that disadvantage people of color. Indeed, López traces the term's history from its original use to stop states from using 'race to humiliate and exclude', to its quickly coopted use by the Right to prevent the government from employing 'race to remedy centuries of racism' (p81). Because he defines dog whistling as strategic racism, López exposes the tactics of dog whistling politicians. After being challenged for racially coded rhetoric, dog whistlers use the absence of overt racial signifiers as a defense, accusing their accusers of racism, or more likely race baiting. To fortify their defense, López continues, they employ token minorities to protect their ethos.

López explains that dog whistling works because counter to the prevailing narrative that most whites vote against their interests, whites have a historical investment in maintaining white supremacy. For many whites, racism operates at the level of commonsense, shaped and sustained by our social, physical and cognitive worlds. So the rhetoric of wealth redistribution resulting in non-whites receiving an unmerited share of dwindling or limited resources (such as space, facilities, jobs, etc.) resonates. Dog whistle racism, in the context of this racial history, merely sounds like well-established truths. As an example, López cites a study by Tali Mendelberg which shows that when race is explicit in political speech, whites are significantly less likely to respond favourably to that candidate. However, López cautions that it is extremely difficult to get most whites to perceive the racial content of dog whistle politics. Hence, he ends with strategies for counteracting, and ultimately ending, such pervasive use of dog whistle racism.

Primarily, López insists that ending dog whistle racism requires abandoning colour-blind and post-racial discourse and its silence on race. Instead liberal politicians, civil rights organisations, progressive foundations and unions, and individual citizens must actively centre race in the political and social discourse. While the entire volume is well-executed and useful for exposing the puppet strings of modern racism, López saves his most resonant rhetorical work for this last chapter in which he establishes the urgency of the issue and gives a clear call to action. *Dog Whistle Politics* is useful to a range of readers because it offers material for understanding, reflecting on, and acting against racial dog whistling.

However, even with all the strengths of the book, López weakens his overall project by toying with a dog whistle himself. A phrase like ‘the middle class’ happens to be one of the racially coded terms of which López warns readers to be critical. Though he doesn’t explicitly state his purpose as such, it is evident that López is writing primarily to white middle-class readers, using the framework of economics to get them to care about racial dog whistling. It seems that López understands the slim probability that whites would care to learn about, much less feel motivated to end, racial dog whistling in politics. Therefore, his argument is essentially that the urgency of addressing racist dog whistling lies in the fact that it ultimately hurts the economic prosperity of most everyday white Americans.

López’s narrative largely speaks – as dog whistling narratives have always spoken – directly to whites about how they can best protect their assets. Yet, where most of the politicians in his analysis have argued that the best way to achieve this security is by supporting conservative politics, López argues that middle-class whites need to move toward liberalism. It is possible to view López’s approach to this issue as strategic and necessary, and therefore good, since ending dog whistling requires effort from a significant number of whites, especially because they are the main audience for it. With laudable political aims, astute and articulate analyses, and an extended call to action, this book

does important work among similar projects dealing with race, culture, and politics. Readers, though, should still be cognizant of how the book might participate in fortifying the centrality of whiteness in America.

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# MODERNIST PHILOSOPHY?

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*Richard Eldridge*

Ben Ware, *Dialectic of the Ladder: Wittgenstein, the 'Tractatus' and Modernism*, London, Bloomsbury, 2015, xiv + 212pp.; £65.00 hardcover.

From Mallarmé to Pound and Eliot, from Joyce to Woolf and Kafka, modernist writers have characteristically offered shocks of newness and difficulty that aim at reversals and transfigurations of attention and commitment. Purity is the byword all at once for the process of transfiguration, the language through which it is achieved, and the stance that results. Chatter, dullness, complacency, and the bourgeois are the enemies. Intensity is all.

In contrast, twentieth- and now twenty-first-century philosophy is on the whole strongly resistant to modernism. It is cool, technical, analytic, academic, and neutral in its dominant forms of expression. Philosophical writers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Benjamin, and Heidegger who do indulge in modernist tropes remain just for this reason on the margins of mainstream science-oriented philosophy. Professional philosophers in the analytic tradition more or less write to anyone and from nowhere. Instead of transfiguration, they seek to make incremental contributions to bodies of argument that address eternal problems that are taken to have eternal answers, at least in principle.

How odd it is then that Ludwig Wittgenstein, a central figure in the development of analytic philosophy from roughly 1919 until his death in 1951, in his epochal 1921 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (English translation 1922), produced what Ben Ware aptly describes as 'a work which is modernist through and through: difficult, formalistically pure, perfectionist, heroic, resistant to any kind of instrumental appropriation' (p25) and marked by 'an aesthetic of compression and concentration' (pxii). Given dominant professional formations, this fact has by and large had to be and has been repressed within academic philosophy, as instead the book has been mined for its doctrines concerning such things as the nature of the proposition, logical truth, and the nature of the logical connectives. To take Wittgenstein's modernist style of writing as essential to the book's aims and achievement would entail admitting that an important piece of philosophy in fact has a historically distinctive style, point, and contextual situation. Hence Ware rightly sees his reading as 'blasting the *Tractatus* out of its traditional genre' (pxiv) of treatise in philosophical logic.

Ware develops his argument contrasting the standard reading of the *Tractatus* as somehow showing ineffable truths without strictly stating them—the philosopher Frank Ramsey famously remarked mordantly that Wittgenstein was trying to whistle what he officially denied could be said—with the austere or anti-metaphysical reading that has been developed in the past decade and

a half by Cora Diamond and James Conant. According to this latter reading, we should reject ineffabilist metaphysics and throw away *all* the propositions of the *Tractatus*, except perhaps its outermost frame. As Diamond puts it, we should not ‘chicken out’ in taking seriously its claim that its propositions are nonsense. By going through the process of succumbing to the temptation to ineffabilist metaphysics and then overcoming that temptation, we are brought to see that there is, in the end, no possibility of metaphysics. Ordinary language is in order just as it is, and we should abandon any attempt to claim authority over its meanings from a standpoint of cosmic exile.

Ware largely endorses this austere reading. He sees the *Tractatus* as ‘a means of interpretation, ... a therapeutic tool, ...[and] an immanent critique’ (p125) rather than as trafficking in ineffabilist metaphysics. Its therapy undertakes to ‘break the spell of the ideal ...through an acknowledgment and acceptance of the words which we already possess’ (p124). He adds, however, the further thought, developed out of Stanley Cavell’s reading of Wittgenstein, that this therapy also seeks to bring us to acknowledge our standing but unsatisfiable urge to transcend the limits of language (p107). By following through the *Tractatus*’s building of a ladder to a metaphysical standpoint outside ordinary language but then throwing it away, we are to see that Wittgenstein both succumbed to and then overcame a drive toward metaphysics, and by identifying with him we are to see ourselves, our unappeasable metaphysical urge, and our world anew.

Once this urge and its unsatisfiability have been acknowledged, one is then to accept ordinary language as it stands while avoiding metaphysics and what Wittgenstein called in a famous letter to von Ficker ‘just *gassing*.’ But what makes gassing just gassing or makes it, unlike ordinary language, a vain attempt to say what cannot be said? From the standpoint of the *Tractatus* it must be that it violates the conditions of what can be said that are established *by* its metaphysics of simple objects and their logical forms or possibilities of combination. Hence in the end, contra Diamond, Conant, and Ware, the ineffabilist metaphysical reading cannot really disappear. Even on the austere reading, its claims are fundamental to the cognitive and ethical stances that the *Tractatus* puts forward as exemplary.

By situating the *Tractatus* within a modernist cultural and artistic context, Ware does, however, also go beyond the austere reading and its paradoxes. In their epochal *The Literary Absolute*, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy argued that at the heart of Kant’s empirical realism about ordinary objects and rejection of any rationalist metaphysics of supersensibles (including a supersensible subject) lies a paradox of the presentation of the human subject. An active, free human subject is everywhere presupposed in Kant’s account of experience, yet it is (as in the *Tractatus*) nowhere to be found as an ordinary object within experience. Hence the human subject is ‘a subject without *mathesis*’ or intuitive presentation ‘even of itself’, a situation in which ‘the question of its unity, and thus of its very “being subject,” is brought to



a pitch of high tension.<sup>1</sup> One way in which the question of the being of the subject was then taken up after Kant, according to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, is through the energetic, markedly literary deployment of energies of composition, often involving deliberate paradoxes, epigrams, aphorisms, and swerings among fragments that both gesture toward metaphysical claims and yet continuously evade them. Readers of works in the rhetorical mode of the literary absolute often finding themselves identifying intensely with an implied author figure and its energies while also avoiding systematicity.

The *Tractatus* evidently maps straightforwardly onto this rhetoric of the literary absolute, and Ware moves effectively beyond taking the *Tractatus* as ‘just philosophy,’ no matter whether ineffabilist or austere, by seeing it as a text that is fully literary or poetic as well as philosophical. He does this not by drawing on Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, but instead by turning to the work of Kierkegaard, a figure whom Wittgenstein admired. Kierkegaard aims via the indirect communications of the pseudonymous writings to ‘deceive [one] into truth’ (p58, quoting Kierkegaard’s *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*). The truth in question is religious or ethical, where the ethical (unlike in Hegel) is ‘a pervasive dimension of life’ (p70, citing Piergiorgio Donatelli), not either a circumscribed subfield of an academic *Fach* or a matter of business as usual. The cultivation of honesty, intensity, and purity everywhere in life cuts against the grain of a hollowed out social world.

One might then wonder exactly how this cultivation is to be practiced and expressed. An effort to take up such a stance in an exemplary way can strike one as a piece of heroism in an age of transcendental homelessness and kitsch or as an expression of anxiety and of a fear of non-existence, or both. (Both are distinctly masculinist enterprises stylistically, though they may be taken up by either women or men.) In any case, the enterprise of the cultivation of heroically honest, intense, and pure subjectivity, without gassing, seems to be caught in what Ware aptly describes as a ‘high modernist impasse,’ where ‘an implicit critique of a social world increasingly characterized by the degradation and commodification of words’ is coupled with an asocial plea to ‘individual readers’ to share in and then to renounce its temptations to metaphysics (p71). While there is not quite a contradiction here, it is difficult to see exactly how within ordinary social life the transcendence of social life is to be achieved and expressed productively, at least as long as the mode of transcendence is primarily structured by renunciation and what Ware calls ‘a poetics of discarding’ (p66). If all efforts at transcendent thought are discarded as nonsense, is anything left except silence and acquiescence in business as usual?

If there is a way beyond this impasse, it must involve, Ware suggests, what Wittgenstein undertook in his later writing: a shift toward a more social mode of philosophical thinking and toward ‘a change in our (social) mode of life’ (p72). Since ‘hope begins where anxiety leaves off’ (p137), and since the pursuit of radical intensity is motivated by anxiety, such a shift might entail a more

1. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester, SUNY Press, Albany 1988, p31.

moderated intensity of resistance. In a move that seems oddly to echo both Adorno and Rorty, Ware concludes with the thought that ‘the true inheritors of modernism’ (p141) would take up ‘an ethico-political commitment to new theoretical conversations about the nature of truth and the meaning of the good life’ (p140).

It is, I think, not fully clear what these suggestions about a way beyond a modernist impasse amount to. Once one has a perception of the fallen, hyper-conventionalised, inauthentic character of one’s social world, coupled with a sense of the unavailability of any metaphysical standpoint from outside that world from which we might see how to live otherwise, then one remains caught within the terms of the modernist impasse. (Walter Benjamin, an undercurrent hero of Ware’s book, remained thus caught.) And it is hard to see how to avoid either a perception of the fallenness of the social or a suspicion of metaphysics. But this just means that we remain much more within the agons of modernism that Ware so originally and powerfully traces here, rather than beyond them and within some distinctly postmodern form of life and thought. Late moderns are we still.

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# TASTE AFTER BOURDIEU

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*Ben Highmore*

Antoine Hennion, *The Passion for Music: A Sociology of Mediation*, translated by Margaret Rigaud and Peter Collier, Farnham, Ashgate, 2015, 339pp, £75 hardback

David Wright, *Understanding Cultural Taste: Sensation, Skill and Sensibility*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 188pp, £60 hardback

A few years ago I undertook an audit of the theoretical resources that a Cultural Studies programme I was reviewing was offering their undergraduates. The programme was taught across various disciplines including media and communication, sociology, geography and anthropology. One name was inescapable – Pierre Bourdieu – and one conceptual phrase was ubiquitous – cultural capital. By the time they had finished their degree, students seemed persuaded (if the evidence of their dissertations was anything to go by) of one uncontroversial fact, namely that our relations to cultural materials, be they food and drink or television and music, are determined and explained by the forms of cultural capital that are attached to them and by our access to such capital.

The students were being taught aspects of Bourdieu's 1979 book *La Distinction, Critique sociale du jugement*, which was a theoretical analysis, based on an extensive survey (using questionnaires) of French tastes undertaken in the 1960s. The book showed a world (or a country, at least) where your liking for Bach's '*The Well-Tempered Clavier*' indicated your access to 'legitimate' culture and your social prospects. Bourdieu was relatively uninterested in how *much* you liked Bach or in thinking about your relative attachment to this piece of music; his main interest was the fact that you *preferred* Bach to Strauss' 'Blue Danube', or to the songs of Petula Clark. He was also interested in the different semantic frameworks that social groups were able to bring to cultural objects, and in one famous example showed how a photograph of the hands of an elderly woman solicited very different responses across a hierarchy of social classes: for the 'most culturally deprived' the responses were aimed at the specific content of the image, at the gnarled hands and the labour that they must have undertaken; for those with the most cultural assets the responses were more abstract and more liable to treat the photograph as an image that can work symbolically and have autonomous aesthetic qualities (the arrangement of the hands, the chiaroscuro of the photograph).

When this book was translated into English in 1984 as *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* it arrived as a valuable weapon of class struggle.

It was wielded as a device for puncturing the sureties of those who felt that a certain form of 'high' or 'legitimate' culture was somehow naturally superior to the culture most readily available to the majority. Cultural capital analysis could reveal that, in some crucial ways, knowledge about opera or impressionist painting could operate in a similar way as golf: it gave a certain class or class fraction a set of shared referents, access to a social milieu, and a way of asserting the value of their leisure. It also gave students of media, film and cultural studies a handy way of responding to those that thought that their time would be better spent studying the classics.

More than thirty years on, Bourdieu's book is no longer an intervention. Now it is where the discussion of taste starts from. It is part of a common sense. It is the foundation of our understanding of the way taste and class are articulated, and this is hardly news to either opera lovers or horror film fans. Thirty years on, Bourdieu's intervention in taste culture looks as if an understanding of 'good taste' as some sort of moral value was swapped for understanding taste as a functional element of social reproduction. In the act of dethroning legitimate culture and the class that it underwrote, Bourdieu deployed an administrative rationality that treated culture as an instrument of an already-organised class society. Thirty years on from the English-language publication of *Distinction* the study of taste looks like it is at something of a crossroads: should it return to notions of aesthetic value so as to recoup something that was lost; or should it somehow 'go beyond' Bourdieu to find a more dynamic testimony to the social in the business of taste? There is also a third option which seems increasingly popular, which is simply to retrench the study of taste in the work of Bourdieu. You can see why this might be an option: Bourdieu is so associated with social stratification and social explanation that there is a real anxiety that by letting go of Bourdieu, you will also let go of class and social explanation, as if Bourdieu is the only possible route to class experience. You can see this nexus of choices (and some of the anxiety the choice produces) at work in the first book of this review, David Wright's *Understanding Cultural Taste: Sensation, Skill and Sensibility*.

Wright's book is full of insights that encourage us to rethink our loyalty (if it is loyalty that we have) to Bourdieu's cultural capital analysis. He points out, for instance, that the sort of algorithms that chase us around the internet, trying to predict what we might be waiting to purchase, or trying to persuade us to want things we had never considered, are informed by the same sort of socio-cultural reckonings as exist in cultural capital analysis. Such algorithms note our buying preferences, our cultural allegiances, our geographical locations, and any other data it can harvest, to fit us into categories that look very similar to the cultural categories that a Bourdieu-inspired analysis can offer. Capitalism, of course, is uninhibited in terms of what it can use to turn a profit, so there is no reason to look too askance when we see it mobilising work associated with leftist critique. Of more moment, though, is the complicity that might exist between a socio-economic system (capitalism) that is keen to

instrumentalise culture and a form of sociology that sees culture as instrumental for the function of social reproduction. Given these coordinates anything that could refuse the instrumental strains of culture and the instrumentalist attention to culture might seem particularly worthwhile. Wright also notes how cultural capital analysis often generates the sort of 'ideal' class subject, who only exists as a theoretical fiction in the world, but who figures centrally in the analysis of that world. It is an odd case of affairs when sociology is more readily able to invent a subject-without-contradiction who subscribes to all the cultural itineraries that such a subject should subscribe to, but ignores the messy subject-in-contradiction that names the vast majority of us.

The danger to be avoided in reviewing is to criticise a book for not doing something that it never set out to attempt in the first place. In Wright's book, however, the main weakness concerns the book's difficulty in delivering the promise of its subtitle. It is, I think, primarily a structural issue and suggests that there is an excellent book here struggling to get out, and which is somehow hemmed-in by the way that the chapters are organised. Wright has set himself an ambitious and important task: namely to get back to the etymological sense of 'taste' as connected to social experience (as in the sense of 'getting a taste' for something). In this he seems to want to champion a more phenomenological sense of taste as it is embodied in 'sensation, skill and sensibility'. There is an important argument here and a great deal that is worth pursuing: 'skill', for instance, connects taste with practices of habit and the body; 'sensibility' relates taste to older ideas about manners and the passions, but also to thinking about taste in relation to feelings and affects; 'sensation' connects taste to the empirical world of the senses, of taste as a literal sense that stands as a metonym for sight, hearing, touch, and smell (as well as other virtual and remote senses solicited by on and offline media, and more 'internal' senses such as proprioception, which constitutes an important sense in our mobile and vertiginous world). Yet if these are the threads of an argument, the themes of the chapters mean that they never get satisfactorily woven together. The chapter themes ('Theorizing Taste', 'Measuring Taste', 'Governing Tastes', 'Globalizing Tastes', 'Producing Tastes', and 'Digitalising Tastes') allow for a good deal of ground to be covered, but each chapter pursues specific issues in a way that doesn't encourage sustained reflection. By the end the reader is left without any synthesised idea of what it might mean to pursue cultural tastes *as* sensation, skill and sensibility as a particular mode of enquiry. But it is testimony to the scope and scale of the project that this reader is still intrigued by such a possibility and would gladly read more. Perhaps there will be a second volume.

Antoine Hennion is amongst the authors whom Wright points to as offering a sociological alternative to the dominant presence of Bourdieu. Hennion is a French sociologist whose career offers a sustained antidote to Bourdieu's baroque theoretical architecture. While Bourdieu underwrote his work with the large-scale survey, Hennion often uses microscopic ethnographic materials

to point to feelings and actions that are sometimes only registered as a pause, or as something that can't be positively expressed. While Bourdieu took social class as his subject and then examined how taste was articulated within and across these classes, Hennion's subject (amateur rock climbers, music lovers, wine tasters) are social groups who primarily exist as taste groups (taste defines them in some essential way, and in advance of analysis). Indeed while reading cultural capital analyses you sometimes wonder whether people's preferences always matter in quite the way they are made to (most of my TV watching preferences are determined by my desire to 'veg-out' in the evening); with Hennion the kind of attention being given, and the extent of an attachment to a cultural form, is always at the forefront of the enquiry. While Bourdieu's primary resources are social theory (primarily his own complex orchestrations of terms), Hennion's resources (to judge from *The Passion for Music: A Sociology of Mediation*) are often from the humanities. Given that Hennion is routinely cited as offering an important contribution to the sociology of taste it is surprising that this is the first of his books to be translated into English (it was originally published in French in 1993).

The first half of *The Passion for Music* provides an intricate discussion of mediation, critical theory and various forms of cultural history (primarily art history). As Hennion roams across the work of writers such as Durkheim, Adorno, Panofsky, and so on, he builds up a critical sensitivity towards how sociology could address mediation, but hits 'pay dirt' in art historians such as Michael Baxandall and Svetlana Alpers. Both Baxandall and Alpers are historians who spend considerable effort attempting to recover the contemporary viewing conditions for the work of artists such as Vermeer or Fra Angelico. To do this requires recovering the active mediators involved in creating such work. Thus for such historians the sociality of the work does not reside 'in' the painting, nor in the intentions of the artists, nor in the viewer. Indeed it is both scattered across a number of agents (mediators) as well as condensed into specific moments of viewing (including the viewing required to paint). Such agents include clients (not, it should be noted, patrons), artists, the gestures of models, architects, theologians, painting techniques, technologies of paint, materials, institutions, and so on (there is a real sense that the investigation of mediations are limitless). The 'eye' that sees the painting, and the 'eye' that paints the painting is *always* a social eye, and that social eye is social because of the endless mediations without which there is no experience and nothing to see.

The second half of Hennion's book is concerned with music, often with Bach, but it is concerned primarily with mediations of music; with the ear that hears and the many mediations without which there is no ear, and nothing to hear. To attend to Bach, then, from the perspective of mediation (and by this time in the book there is nothing outside of mediation, nothing that is material, that is worth talking about, or that is worthy of our love) means that there is no 'real Bach' to recover. This doesn't mean, though, that the fierce

debates about how to perform Bach, about what musical instruments are most appropriate, are not a material form of mediation for the appreciation and practice of Bach. Hennion shows us precisely how such controversies are the active agents for our encounter with the music. While this is the most systematic part of the book it is followed by a number of short chapters that include an analysis of a form of music tuition as well as an auto-ethnography of a rock concert.

For Hennion taste is always an active, social process and is never reified as a symbolic asset. Taste is always the activity of tasting; the music lover chooses a recording and prepares themselves for listening; the wine taster takes a moment, pauses to attend to the wine; the rock climber orients themselves to the affordances of the rope. Taste is, for Hennion, a self-reflexive process of engaging with the sensorial world. Taste doesn't work to reaffirm a pre-ordained social role, but that doesn't mean that it isn't profoundly social. Indeed, for Hennion, it is social precisely because it always requires a subject engaging with a complex social, sensual, and material world.

In the end a sociology of mediation, as performed by Hennion, manages to escape the reductions of Bourdieu by insisting on a grammar of encounters. This is no bad thing, but it is a starting point rather than an end point. It is a theory much more attuned to the way that we cast our attachments on, and into, the world and to the way the world gets its hooks in us. But where we cast our attachments is crucial, as is the kind of culture that gets its hooks in us. If the study of taste wants to go beyond Bourdieu, while maintaining an engagement with class and social hierarchy then it will need to embrace the work of writers who are more attuned to the social dreams and feeling that culture promises. What the study of taste also requires are writers (such as Lauren Berlant) who can recognise how the materials of cultural genres (and the feelings, moods, desires that they put into circulation) are also active in entangling us with the social (and tripping us up), in constituting our class worlds, and modulating our experience as gendered and raced bodies in the world. Taste is never simply preference (that is called shopping): taste is our experience of the endless becoming of our social being.

# PLAGUED BY THE SELF

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*Joseph Darlington*

Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Lacan: In Spite of Everything*, trans. Gregory Elliott, London, Verso, 2014.

As anyone who has attempted to teach Lacan's work will recognise, there are perhaps as many different Lacans as there are readers of Lacan. The tendency of his concepts to be at once so evocative and yet ultimately evasive makes him a perfect tool for the literary critic, but perhaps not so useful for the medical practitioner. Élisabeth Roudinesco, head of research in history at University of Paris VII and author of three books on the renowned neo-Freudian, would probably reject such an assessment of the situation. Her new work seeks to defend Lacan's reputation as a mental health professional even as she reveals some of the more intimate details of his occasional small madnesses. *Lacan: In Spite of Everything* (2014) provides a compelling and insightful, if occasionally frustrating, reading experience. Food for thought which, unusually for anything Lacan-related, is also eminently readable.

Roudinesco's previous works on Lacan, translated as *Jacques Lacan & Co.: a history of psychoanalysis in France, 1925–1985* (1990) and *Jacques Lacan* (1999), approach the man respectively as an influential figure in the history of psychoanalysis and then as a great individual thinker in his own right. Now, in *Lacan: In Spite of Everything* (2014), Roudinesco returns to Lacan in light of his conflicted legacy and, in setting herself up to correct some flawed interpretations, reveals a range of unexpected and eccentric biographical details in the process. Much like some of Plato's treatment of Socrates, Roudinesco's compelling depiction of Lacan's character emotionally connects the reader to his intellectual propositions as they are expounded. The subject (with a barred S) crouches at the centre of the text daring you to try and know more about him. Yet, all along, we are also reminded of a Lacan who 'embodied the ideals of an institutional psychotherapy and a humanist psychiatry today in disarray' (p152), who was 'the only psychological thinker to consider the legacy of Auschwitz in Freudian fashion' (p7), and whose own reading of Freud was not clinical, but 'deployed as a new humanism promoting individual liberties and an exploration of the irrational side of human nature' (p9). In spite of everything, Lacan remained a 'doctor of the sick' (p152), and we are clearly to respect this. Although this respect does end up making some of his unusual personal habits all the more juicy as gossip.

As Roudinesco writes, 'Lacan felt sorry for fathers and hated mothers and families, while himself being an actor in the intra-familial humiliations he denounced' (p37); leaving his pregnant wife for his pregnant mistress, among



other tabloid-friendly *affaires de cœur*. Yet it is Thanatos rather than Eros who we are most often to see haunting his decisions. He seems at once driven and paralysed by a fear of death and a fear of finality. Terrified of naming, his published letters are titled writings [*Écrits*], his seminars *The Seminar*, and his television appearance *Television*. He would 'sleep fewer than five hours a night [and] drive his car without observing basic safety rules' (p97) to maximise his work-time. At work, his analytic sessions got shorter and shorter until 'certain people were doing ten a day, one minute every half-hour' (p114). When we read that, in 1953, he wanted to 'persuade the Pope' (p106) of his theories, the old stereotypes of the patient running the asylum start to come to mind in some of their more clichéd forms. Yet, as with any good psychoanalytical case study, it is the method behind the madness which provokes the most interest and moves us beyond the banal task of checking-off symptoms towards a systematic and nuanced appreciation of the condition in which we find ourselves.

The linguistic component of Lacan's theory 'the signifying chain: a subject is represented by a signifier for another signifier' (p66) – is translated into Roudinesco's core organising metaphor: the 'Plague'. With touches of Artaud and Camus as inter-texts, the Lacanian plague is a mess of 'crazy words, bizarre words' (p52) which overtake expression, overtake the subject and, eventually, overtake reality itself and make 'the Real' unbearable. It is the plague which overcomes Lacan himself as he tries to express his ideas only to lose himself in endless lists and wordplay. The same tendency is found in the literary masters, 'Rabelais or Joyce [for whom] the neologism can turn into a delirious creation if an author resorts to it to rethink the whole of a doctrinal system' (p113). Language shifts and transforms things into their opposites, forcing us to withdraw further and further from the recognisable and the everyday. Language becomes a compulsion, 'narrative transformed into sexual exhibitionism' (p102), and, behind all this, the internet appears over the horizon promising to secure the plague of libidinal language its worldwide domination.

As negative as the term 'plague' may appear, however, there is an ambiguity within it which only becomes truly clear when Roudinesco hints at the forces against which she is writing. The origin from which Lacan draws the term is a (seemingly invented) comment made by Freud to Jung as they arrived for the first time in America: 'They don't realise we're bringing them the plague' (p104). Such a plague, it is implied, has mutated following this initial outbreak on the new continent. Where Lacan, following Freud, 'rejected the idea of describing symptoms separately from the subjective lived experience of insanity' (p25) the explosion of the therapy movement in America brings with it an amoral foregrounding of the reality principle, ubiquitous pharmacology and the integration of psychiatric facilities with the prison system. Such 'security-minded and biological-behavioural descriptions... have invaded psychiatric discourse' (p25), in the form of the *DSM*, and 'psychopaths' are incarcerated for life for having fallen afoul of a checklist. This mutant strain of

the plague, crossbred with a militarised State and financial capital, places the darkness of the Lacanian vision in context. The ever-shifting, paradoxical life of the Lacanian subject is infinitely preferable to the anaesthetised productive worker synonymous with *DSM* definitions of health.

Overall, for all its positives and negatives, Roudinesco's description of the psychoanalytical plague unleashed by Freud and so much developed by Lacan owes less to Artaud and Camus than Borges. In particular, the short story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' which features a fictional encyclopaedia about an invented world so intellectually fascinating that it overtakes the world's thoughts and the world is, in turn, made into that which is described in the fictional accounts. Roudinesco's description of psychoanalytical humanism seems to invite this reading: 'this discipline is not a science, but rather a rational statement whose background is great myths constantly reinterpreted in accordance with the history of the world' (p131). The book's very title (*envers et contre tout*, in the original French) is taken from Lacan's own study of Antigone; a mythical figure Roudinesco mines for parallels with the master himself. To understand myths, psychoanalysis must itself become a myth and Lacan along with it. Which is not to say that there is no truth in myths, although neither is it to say that all myths are true. Such categories, for Lacan, are always already beyond our grasp, the first casualties of the plague of signification.

Such a plague of myths returns us to the initial statements of this review concerning the unwavering readability of this book. Gregory Elliott's translation does great justice both to Roudinesco's readability and those precise translators of Lacan who come before him. Foreign terms appear when appropriate, never over-protruding, and the tendency of other Lacanian translators toward over-capitalisation is thankfully downplayed. The material is arranged thematically, rather than chronologically, making for a lean and focused narrative. Neither are explanations overburdened, leaving satisfying spaces in the text for the reader to ruminate for themselves. In many ways Roudinesco's historical method presents a viable, if controversial approach to Lacanian matters; a refreshingly empirical alternative to the occasionally verbose and rambling style of pure theorists such as Žižek. By setting up Lacan as a myth, Roudinesco not only captures the reader's imagination but, as a skilled plague-bringer, infects you with the enthusiasm, urgency and sincerity of the thinker's work in her telling. This is exactly the mix of history and critical theory which is needed in the twenty-first century to start making our critical theorists relevant and vital again.

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