

# PROMISCUOUS ATTACHMENTS

---

*Ben Highmore*

Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2020; 213pp, £18.00.

Early on in Jenny Diski's memoir of *The Sixties* she provides an audit of her reading, listening, and viewing from the time. She reads Hardy, Dostoevsky, Nabokov, Neruda, the Beats; she watches Hollywood and British B movies, and the New Waves of Godard, Antonioni, Pasolini and others; and she listens to Mingus and Monk, Dylan and Baez, the Stones, Animals and Kinks. This music, she writes, 'all either accompanied me from the beginning of the decade or had emerged by the middle of it and were essential: the rhythm inside my head, the beat of my heart, the tuning of my sentiments'.<sup>1</sup> Even if Diski's scene was not your scene, my guess is that you know exactly what she means: haven't we all had our sentiments tuned by music, by our enthusiasm for a novelist, a filmmaker, a painter, a poet? The sensual stuff of culture gets under our skin, draws us in, expands our world, fashions our consciousness, sets the tone and tempo of our responsiveness to the world around us.

1. Jenny Diski, *The Sixties*, London: Profile, 2010, p26. (Hereafter *The Sixties*).

The 'tuning of sentiments' is precisely the sort of phenomenal work that Rita Felski's *Hooked: Art and Attachment* is suggesting that humanities scholars could and should pay attention to. For Felski we get a sense of the sociality of literature, music, television and cinema when we see it as an experiential resource: 'stripped of the sediments of the novels I've read, the films and TV shows I've watched' she writes, 'I would be another person entirely. Fictional beings serve as alter egos, ideal types, negative exempla, moral guides, objects of desire, imaginary friends' (p92). It is this world of the vernacular humanities (to coin a phrase), where books are absorbed as bedtime reading, where music consoles you through a break-up, and where a favourite painting is a postcard stuck on your fridge door with a magnet, that Felski is keen to engage with. And it is this world that seems so far from the world of professional humanities scholarship as it is usually practiced.

Felski is one of the leading voices in 'post-critical' humanities. *Hooked* follows on from previous books (*The Uses of Literature* 2008 and *The Limits of Critique* 2015) where, following the lead of writers like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, she worried that the critical humanities' reliance on symptomatic reading, or deconstructive strategies, or ideology critique, or what was named more generally as 'the hermeneutics of suspicion', had become a new doxa used to flag *professional* humanities attributes. In *Hooked* she continues this concern by noticing, for instance the 'growing weariness with browbeating works into confessing their noxious motives' (p123) or sorting them 'into categories of the complicit or the resistant' (px), but here she is much more concerned

with proposing the vocabularies and protocols for an approach to cultural works that are open to their immediacy, to their ability to connect us to the world, and to their intimate sociality. The project, then, is to imagine a post-critical attention to art (broadly conceived) that can hang on to our first-person response to works (which might be visceral, indifferent, traumatic, melancholic, consoling, and so on), while ensuring that such attention isn't a flight from the social but a more capacious form of contact with it. The project is also concerned with the institutional reality of university teaching and research where departments of literature, of music, of the history of art exist with their specific disciplinary histories and knowledges that would be foolhardy to jettison. *Hooked* asks the questions: 'Can we find ways of talking about the world-disclosing force of art that do not sideline its social shaping? And how might this expanded repertoire reveal commonalities as well as differences between academic and lay audiences?' (p36).

Felski is a generous and lively writer and her proposals throughout *Hooked* are built out of a generative engagement with the work of others. Her approach, she claims, is in tune with the work of Bruno Latour and his colleague Antoine Hennion but is not itself a version of Actor-Network-Theory (rather than being ANT, it is, as she says, *ANTish*). For Felski ANT's capacities are particularly well-suited to an attention to aesthetics that neither wants to treat it as 'transcendental and timeless' nor as a cipher for something else (politics, say, or economics): 'Instead, it slows down judgement in order to describe more carefully what aesthetic experiences are like and how they are made' (p xi). ANT searches out connections in a way that is 'additive, not subtractive' (p6). But if academic luminaries such as Latour provide one set of resources, another comes from a place much closer to the vernacular humanities – from writers like Zadie Smith, Rebecca Solnit, and Geoff Dyer who practice what in another time might have been called Gonzo scholarship. This is a literature that forgoes notions of scholarly detachment while also performing a concentrated attention on works of art. Felski, for instance, makes much of Zadie Smith's 2012 *New Yorker* article 'Some Notes on Attunement: A Voyage around Joni Mitchell'.<sup>2</sup> In this article Smith describes how a lifelong low-level annoyance with the music of Joni Mitchell became transformed into an epiphany that produced a deep attachment to the sensorial and passionate landscape of Mitchell's music. Smith's essay pivots on the work of attunement: how it was that what was once received as noise suddenly became music, how indifference and annoyance morphed into love, and how she heard Mitchell's music, as if for the first time, in a way that suddenly 'got it'. And how this getting it was not 'an argument', not an intellectual decision, but a sensorial realignment of Smith in relation to Mitchell at a propitious place and time.

It is a perspective like this that might be described as phenomenological in a broadly social and cultural manner. What Felski is not interested in, though she recognises that her position flirts with this, is a narcissistic subjectivist

2. Zadie Smith, 'Some Notes on Attunement: A Voyage around Joni Mitchell', *The New Yorker*, December 17, 2012, pp30-35.

relationship to art. Zadie Smith's account of her 'conversion' is not narcissistic ('it's not, in the end, all about me') but it is singular, and it is through this singularity that the specificity of the social and historical is brought to bear on the phenomena of conversion. Smith's account of her changing attachment to Joni Mitchell is, I think, an example of what Felski means when she calls for a form of attention that is neither 'close-reading' nor 'distant-reading' but is a 'midlevel perspective' (p144). Midlevel describes a view that isn't lost within the thickets of textual density and can step outside the work and watch it have its effects and affects. It is 'sociological' but not in a grandiose way that might want to recruit works of art for large-scale explanatory schemas. If art offers 'a training in modes of paying attention' (p60) then the midlevel perspective wants to watch that paying attention in action, to see the attachments getting forged when works are actualised in everyday life. *Hooked* provides the vocabularies (attunement, attachment, alignment, allegiance, and so on) and the procedures (some forms of audience research, elaborated first-person responses, historical examples of artworks shaping consciousness, etc.) for the midlevel perspective.

*Hooked* is organised into four chapters, of which the first broadly covers the sort of Actor-Network-Theory approach that Felski is interested in, and how ANT's idea of a 'flat ontology' (what in another cultural moment might have been called the 'cultural continuum') is so liberating for doing things with art. The second chapter looks at how art can draw us towards it (or repel us, or not attract us one way or the other) and investigates accounts of how this happens (including Zadie Smith's conversion to Joni Mitchell). The third chapter re-examines the idea of 'identification', taking it away from the sort of psychoanalytically informed idea of mirroring, towards a more diverse set of ways of identifying (identifying with form, identifying across characters, conflicted identification, and so on). The final chapter looks at interpretation as a relational act, and how this might impact on the teaching that takes place in literature and other departments. The example of how the idea of the artwork as 'relatable' (a term which fills many academics with dread) might actually allow for an engagement that goes way beyond the narcissism that the term can imply, is particularly salient.

The limitations of *Hooked* might be glimpsed by turning back to Jenny Diski. During the decade she was reading Dostoevsky and Neruda, dancing to the Kinks and watching Anna Karina on the screen, she was also being hospitalised for depression, smoking marijuana and popping pills (both prescribed and not), getting involved in politics by attending anti-war demonstrations, and spending 'an inordinate amount of energy worrying about my hair and shortening my skirts' (*The Sixties*, p22). *Hooked* is primarily interested in cultural works. It doesn't have a partisan attachment to specific kinds of works (it doesn't promote James Joyce over Joyce Grenfell, for instance, or for that matter Britney Spears over Burning Spear) but it is interested in starting out from the work of literature, or film, or music, rather

than the other cultural and social entanglements that Diski is enmeshed in. Does this matter? After all a study has got to begin somewhere, and why not hang on to these distinct parcels of activity that we call 'literature' or 'art', or 'film' and 'music', especially when so many jobs depend on defending humanities departments from the ravages of an avaricious state keen to make the humanities pay (both literally and metaphorically). We could say that Cultural Studies offers an alternative here in its ability to start from a conjunctural place where drugs, haircuts, pop music, mental health, politics, and fashion at least have a chance of being articulated together however dissonantly. Yet Cultural Studies, as a brand, has been pretty adamant in the past about where its energies lay, and it would be tricky to find many people promising a form of Cultural Studies where Dostoevsky, for instance, looms large. But it strikes me that if *Hooked* clarifies the concerns and possibilities for humanities departments eager to become more relevant to the vernacular humanities (the humanities practiced when we connect with our 'box sets' at night, or pop in our ear buds), then one of the challenges that Felski's book forecloses (and for very good institutional reasons) is how could the humanities be reimagined and reconfigured in the light of an ANTish approach. Is there a new humanities simmering away as a counter-point to what the book declares? Perhaps *Hooked* also allows us to glimpse this other humanities; one more flexible, less organised around types of art, one more sensitive to the amorphous infrastructures that link poetics and politics with the orchestration of feelings. Now is probably not the best time to float the idea of a new university department to your VC, but I wonder what a newly hatched 'Department for the Study of Material Imaginations' would make of *Hooked*. I think they'd like it.

**Ben Highmore** teaches cultural studies at the University of Sussex and is on the editorial board of *New Formations*.

# CONTRA ECOSOPHY

---

*Nicholas Pisanelli*

François Laruelle. *The Last Humanity: The New Ecological Science*, London, Bloomsbury, 2020, pp184, paperback £20.69.

In his account of the platform of deep ecology, Arne Naess stipulates that his philosophy of ecology or ‘ecosophy’ can only be said to be one among many, an ‘Ecosophy T’, which provides ‘the means for developing your own systems or guides, say, X, Y, or Z’.<sup>1</sup> Ecology provides the fertile ground for the growth of new philosophies, each tailored to provide a ‘total view which you feel at home with, ‘where you philosophically belong’ (p37). It has not been lost on those philosophers writing since Naess first cultivated his deep ecosophy that the immense ecological catastrophe of our present poses a dire threat to any such belonging, as, for example, in Bruno Latour’s recent writings on Gaia, Bernard Stiegler’s theory of the Neganthropocene, or in Félix Guattari’s own ecosophical thought.<sup>2</sup> What is needed, in other words, is more philosophy, this time better attuned to the fragile complexity of life on earth.

The new ecological science proposed by François Laruelle in *The Last Humanity* is a forceful and urgent interruption of this propagation of philosophy in the name of ecology. Laruelle continues his longstanding project of non-philosophy, a unique scientific practice that deprives philosophy of its sufficiency to determine the Real and thereby legislate its dominion over living things and other forms of thought. Rather than add another ecosophical variant to Naess’ ever-growing list, Laruelle provokes the antinomy between philosophy and ecology to bring about the ‘degrowth’ of philosophy itself (p9). The invaluable contribution of *The Last Humanity* to eco-critical thought is the discovery of a ‘little messianity’ (p25) within the collapse of ecology’s philosophical ground that would make it the science not of the world, but of the future.

Laruelle begins by situating *The Last Humanity* within the precarious conjuncture between the decline of philosophy and the rise of ecology. For Laruelle, ecology has emerged as philosophy’s new rival, capable of posing its own counter-universal consideration of the relation between living beings and their world. But in this transfer of power he identifies the persistence of what he calls the ‘world-form’ or ‘capital-world’ (p49), the philosophical image of the Real that englobes other kinds of knowledge and submits them to its own procedure. Philosophy, as the universal mediator of knowledge, is the capital-form of thought – it is not made for humans but for its own valorization through the auto-production of its sufficiency. The amphibology of Being and life that Laruelle identifies at the heart of our new ‘ecological age of philosophy’ (p137) serves as the means for the continuation and

1. Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (trans) David Rothenberg, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p37.

2. See Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, (trans) Catherine Porter, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2017, p13; Bernard Stiegler, *The Neganthropocene* (trans) Daniel Ross, London, Open Humanities Press, 2018, p38. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, (trans) Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, London, The Athlone Press, 2008, p28.

intensification of such domination:

Philosophy gives itself a subject and determines that subject by adding attributes, rational, linguistic, all transcendent: this means taking much from animals or depriving them of much. This accumulation of the capital of logos over man as their super degree and as measure is the foundation for all philosophical and higher racism (p120).

Living beings are distributed and embedded in the world-form according to the strictures of philosophical predication, which in each instance assert the priority of humanity by placing them first or last in the continuum of life. Ecology merely attenuates the degree of estrangement that results from this hierarchical allotment of Being while remaining essentially constricted by the 'straitjacket of ontology' (p3) and the world-form. Laruelle's task in *The Last Humanity* is thus to think the equality of man, animal, and plants (the MAP system) by placing humanity 'before-the-first' or 'after-the-last' (p2), that is, outside the order of philosophical priority that finds all in other living things the deficient image of man. Humanity must be understood as an 'in-the-last-humanity' (p1) that follows unilaterally from the Real itself, whose only minimal difference from other living things is their ability to undermine and under-determine every philosophical decision as to the proper order of life, the world, and the Real (p33).

To intercept the transmission of this philo-capitalist structure of thought, Laruelle invents an 'eco-fiction' (p1) oriented toward the degrowth of philosophy as such. Those new to non-philosophy will face the immediate hurdle posed by the dialogic mode of this fictive practice, as eco-fiction bears little resemblance either to literary representation or philosophical discourse as commonly conceived. Fiction is for Laruelle a practice of under-determination, a way of conjugating ecology and philosophy without positing any unity between them. It lacks the procession of proper names, axioms, and concepts that would fashion it into another link in the long dialogic chains of philosophy, since, from the point of view of non-philosophy, these are the means by which philosophy secures its consensus. For this reason, *The Last Humanity* does not cite or position its ideas in any explicit dialogue with scientific ecology, environmental studies, or ecosophy. Eco-fiction instead puts its own specific operations into play (idempotence, vectorialisation, cloning) to produce a dissensus that treats ecology and philosophy as a kind of raw material for thought stripped of any transcendence. Behind the seeming monologism of philosophy's degrowth is perhaps Laruelle's most radical gesture, for *The Last Humanity*, he writes, is a 'prolegomena for any ecology that can present itself as a future' (p20). Eco-fiction prepares for nothing less than the founding of a new ecological discipline, this time untethered from the world-form and indexed to the universe itself, where man experiences the collapse of his 'metaphysical nature as a living thing and therefore of his

hegemonic function within nature' (p108).

This change in the very terrain of thought occurs by way of the non-philosophical uptake of quantum mechanics. While Kant's *Prolegomena* undoubtedly provides much of the key material for eco-fiction, particularly the structure of the antinomy of reason,<sup>3</sup> *The Last Humanity* is also closely modelled upon Erwin Schrödinger's *What is Life?*, in which Schrödinger brings quantum physics to bear upon the biological conception of life.<sup>4</sup> Laruelle's use of quantum mechanics is similarly intended to bring about real effects upon the philosophical knowledge of life; as he puts it, 'It is no longer a matter of creating a metaphysics of life, either materialist or theological, but a theory of the knowledge of life by itself' (p34). To be sure, Laruelle is wary of the overeager appropriation of science for philosophy's own ends, and in no way seeks to propose an update to philosophical procedure so that it might better account for quantum indeterminacy. His use of certain quantum principles is intended to construct 'supercollider' (p22) between philosophy and ecology that operates on thought without any return to the Real. It works by isolating each element of the MAP system (man, animals, and plants) as a non-commutative variable in a quantum matrix to produce an aleatory subject prior to the priority of the 'hierarchy of images' (p32) that runs through the philosophical knowledge of life, descending from God to the subject to the deficiencies of plants and animals. Having prepared and reduced its philosophical material in this matrix, eco-fiction ejects its own 'generic clone' (p4) out into universe, a 'non-biological but conceptual' (p3-4) figure subtracted from representation who 'hold[s] the promise of an ecologic life that opens and breaks the antinomy that enclosed it' (p125). Eco-fiction, in short, produces clones in the universe rather than beings in the world. They bring to ecology the messianic promise to dismantle the biocentric image of thought implicit in the philosophical knowledge of life, be it in Naess' ecosophy or Schrödinger's quantum theory of biology, so-as-to inhibit the violence it metes out on man, animals, and plants alike.

The oft-cited difficulty of Laruelle's work, though all too often a symptom arising in the face of non-philosophy's autonomy from philosophical procedure, is undoubtedly enhanced in *The Last Humanity* as a result of these quantum operations. Laruelle straightaway positions his reader within the workings of the supercollider without preparing them with a summary of non-philosophy or an explanation of the quantum mechanisms it puts into play. The reason for this approach is twofold. First, Laruelle's conjugation of non-philosophy with quantum physics takes place in the most recent period of his thought of which *The Last Humanity* is a part (Philosophie V), and the two key texts in which he expounds upon the significance of the quantum and the generic, *Introduction aux sciences génériques* and *Philosophie non-standard*, have yet to be translated into English. Second, it is to insist that eco-fiction's degrowth of philosophy is not an austerity in thought mirroring the capitalist ruination of the planet, but a 'positive structure' (p109) of knowledge oriented

3. See Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (trans Gary Hatfield), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p99.

4. See Erwin Schrödinger, *What is Life?*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p34.

toward the creation of a new ethics between man, animals, and plants. The felt disadvantage of the reader is, in part, the effect of their immanent position within a quantum modelling of thought that begins with an aleatory, rather than human, ethical subject. The considerable effort required to navigate Laruelle's eco-fiction is ultimately worthwhile once one becomes attuned to its distinctive point of view upon the collapse of philosophy and its world, as it allows us to think anew our equality with all other living things prior to the decisions and images intrinsic to the 'representative reason of philosophy' (p144).

Yet, for all its inventiveness, *The Last Humanity* does represent something of a lost opportunity. As translator Anthony Paul Smith and long-time practitioners of non-philosophy Katerina Kolozova and John Ó Maoilearca have noted elsewhere, Laruelle does indeed omit any account of ecology's own scientific methods and findings, and thereby opts out of a more meaningful encounter between ecology and non-philosophy.<sup>5</sup> Throughout *The Last Humanity* ecology appears only its 'quibbling mediocrity' (p2), or as a form of 'political chattering' (p2) and 'media-friendly vulgarity' (p5). This omission is made all the more glaring because it comes from a thought so uniquely capable of conjugating itself with different kinds of scientific knowledge while avoiding either a belligerent scientism or ecosophical fusion. Smith's own work, especially *A Non-Philosophical Theory of Nature*, offers a more substantive engagement with the science and history of ecology itself through the notions of ecosystem, niche, and biosphere.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, this missed encounter remains instructive because it demonstrates once more that *The Last Humanity* is not non-philosophy's final word on ecology, but the prolegomena for a new science of ecology that is at once futural and universal. While the absence of more direct considerations of ecological science may decrease the text's immediate utility to some scholars, Laruelle's use of philosophy and ecology as contingent material prompts us to challenge the more fundamental concepts by which we understand the malediction of our world and our obligation to the living things that suffer it with us.

5. See Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca, Katerina Kolozova, Anthony Paul Smith and John Ó Maoilearca, 'Thinking Alongside *The Last Humanity*:' Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca in Conversation with Katerina Kolozova, Anthony Paul Smith and John Ó Maoilearca', *Oraxiom: A Journal of Non-Philosophy*, 1, 1, 2020, pp170-180.

6. Anthony Paul Smith, *A Non-Philosophical Theory of Nature: Ecologies of Thought*. London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

**Nick Pisanelli** is a PhD Candidate in the English Department at Brown University.

## CRÉPUSCULE WITH R.A. JUDY

---

*Michael E. Sawyer*

R.A. Judy, *Sentient Flesh: Thinking in Disorder, Poiēsis in Black*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2020, pp597, \$34.95 (paperback)

In the spirit of what R.A. Judy calls ‘thinking in disorder’, it seems apropos for a review of *Sentient Flesh: Thinking in Disorder, Poiēsis in Black* to perform a similarly unruly approach by, in this case, starting at the end. The title of this review, ‘Crépuscule with R.A. Judy’ is a reflection, most obviously on the last line of the text that reads, ‘[i]t is a time of drinking and thinking in disorder’ (p457), but also an acknowledgment of a figure I believe sets the tone for the text, Thelonious Monk.

As a practical matter, the intellectual constellation that serves as the background, context, and ultimately the resting place for R.A. Judy’s *Sentient Flesh* includes (but is not limited to), Hortense Spillers, Fred Moten, W.E.B. Du Bois, Kant, Sylvia Wynter, and Nahum Chandler. I say, ‘not limited to’ because the depth and breadth of Judy’s interrogation of the terms and conditions of ‘...the meaning of being black’ (p257) is voluminous and covers whatever waterfront you happen to be on of both the western philosophical and Black radical traditions. That being said, the Monk reference requires further articulation to explicate the manner in which, more than any of the other apparent interlocutors here, it is his music that sets the mood for this text.

Reading *Sentient Flesh* is reminiscent of a moment in Charlotte Zwerin’s 1988 documentary ‘Thelonious Monk: Straight No Chaser’ when the footage depicts saxophonists Charlie Rouse, Phil Woods, and Johnny Griffin, struggling to make their way through the asymmetric complexity of the head of the tune ‘Osk-T’. In the film, Rouse is explaining the intro to Woods and Griffin, the latter who admits to being completely confused, finally sees the light when Ray Copeland weighs in from the trumpet section. Copeland explains that the entire introduction revolves around itself for a predetermined number of times repeating an internal figure that has served as the point of confusion for Griffin who relievedly proclaims ‘ahhh...slowly but surely!’

I take R.A. Judy’s text to present the same level of complexity to scholars who, like Johnny ‘The Little Giant’ Griffin, are deeply immersed in the discipline but can still be flummoxed by the serpentine ‘language’ of Monk. As with any difficult yet somehow familiar piece of art, a complex musical figure, or in this case a philosophical argument, it is often the case that something that approaches understanding requires that an outsider locate a graspable element that will serve as a handhold or key to unravelling the problem. In this case, I would propose that R.A. Judy’s assertion by way of Nietzsche that

'[i]t has been suggested that the study of etymology may throw light on the history of moral concepts' (p284) is just such a useful thing.

This notion is central to the point of entry Judy explores for the text, the succinct statement by Thomas Windham from the Works Progress Administration Federal Writer's Project that reads, 'I think we should have our liberty cause us ain't hogs or horses – us is human flesh.' (p1) If one did not take the author at his word in his opening 'Notes on Translation & Transliteration', and the Preface entitled 'Preliminary Signposts' where it is made clear that the mysteries of language will serve as the vehicle to traverse this rocky, uncharted, and perilous argument, the detailed hermeneutics pursued in service of running down to ground the philosophical import of Windham's seventeen-word statement should. What is important about the exegesis of Windham's declaration is that it makes good on an explicit goal of Judy's text and makes what I understand to also be an important disciplinary intervention.

The explicit goal is that, in keeping with the first lines of the preface, '*Sentient Flesh*...exhibits what it exposit, and so is a working of *poiēsis*, a thinking-in-disorder, the enactment of which is called *para-semiosis*.' (p xiii) What this means is that for Judy, Windham, who he emphasises 'belong[s] to the class of chattel property, along with hogs and horses' (p2) is unreservedly placed in conversation with John Locke. This is the same John Locke who endeavored to define the distinction between human and animal while necessarily categorising the enslaved Negro as the latter. Judy's juxtaposition of the enslaved Windham's thinking with that of the Enlightenment philosopher Locke disorders the order that white supremacy has gone to such lengths to establish and stabilise.

The disciplinary intervention here is inseparable from the privileging of previously silenced voices exemplified by the centering of Windham. This is what I view as a critical intervention by Judy into what, from the perspective of Black Radical Thought, it means to philosophise and beyond that what utterances can be understood to be philosophical. For Judy, the taxonomy presented by Windham is as rich, or perhaps richer, with philosophical import than Locke's *The Two Treatises of Government*. Therefore, what I understand as the philosophical system at work in this text is opening new horizons in what *Africana Philosophy* employs as its archive exemplified by this list in the text of disciplines that will be engaged:

...literary genre – short stories, novels, poetry – literary theory and philology; structuralism and semiotics; anthropology and ethnography; foundations of mathematics and number theory; philosophy, from classical Greek to twentieth-century phenomenology and existentialism, and the history of ideas; Arabic philosophy and scholasticism; music – spirituals, 'folk music,' blues and jazz – and ethnomusicology; political economy and legislative history. (p xii)

What R.A. Judy presents here as the methods he employs internal to what I am proposing makes up his philosophical system, one will note that he studiously avoids any specific reference to Black/Africana Political Theory, Black/Africana Political Philosophy, etc. which implies to me that this formation resolves itself as in and of itself a particular form of Black Radical Thought that is unique in form and content. The unique 'form' of Judy's text (what I view as an essential element of his thinking), in my reading, further establishes that it is Monk who serves as the/a? guiding force here. The text asserts '[t]he form it traces in chaos is arranged into two parts called 'Sets'.' (p xiii) The 'melody' that mirrors the complexity of the guiding riff In Monk's 'Oska-t' that was the source of Johnny Griffin's confusion goes a little something like this:

*Sentient Flesh...*is an interrogation of the relationship between the terms *Negro*, *poiēsis*, and *humanism*. The focus of that attention is the indicial force of the normative. (p9)

Armed with that understanding, the 1<sup>st</sup> Set features two distinct sections that have, as the point of focus, what I am called the 'guiding riff' above. The first section is a comprehensive deconstruction of Du Bois's employment of *Lohengrin* in *The Souls of Black Folk* chapter entitled 'On the Coming of John', and the second, called 'Sentient Flesh', teases apart the difficulty in transcribing for consumption(?), study(?), or something in that vein the cultural production of Black bodies while simultaneously transcribing that which is established as beyond transcription.

Internal to the 1<sup>st</sup> Set's exegesis of 'On the Coming of John' is Judy's preoccupation with the asymptotes of a hyperbola that, following Du Bois, allow thinking about the unthinkable or 'measuring the unmeasurable.' (p95) This, Judy posits, relates itself to the notion of the Negro because '[i]n this respect, the Negro cannot be counted' (p114) meaning that in sociological terms there is no one-to-one correspondence/bijection (p114) between that notion and a discernible sign. All of this about asymptotes, mimesis, analogy, etc. makes me wonder if in substance Judy exposes the *end* of these concepts with respect to the manner in which the *Negro* enters a self-authorising system of Black Thought. What I mean by this is that the *Negro* as a juridical distinction and the Negro as an ethnographic designator (p xiv), when subjected to this form of comprehensive analysis from the perspective of disordering western epistemologies, is not 'like' anything and in that dissimilitude, in a form of elegant simplicity just 'Is'. Stridently so.

This would seem to situate a new form of cognition that is an expansion of the Du Boisian examination of self-consciousness, 'true' or otherwise. Confusingly Judy dives into this already complex discourse writing:

Du Bois's calling Negro double consciousness a 'second sight' underscores that semiosis is the articulation of a dynamic community of interpreters.

What's more, it is the community's *becoming-in-the-ordering-of-consciousness*. That is what the *Negro* indexes if it indexes anything at all. (p258)

I say this is confusing for several reasons not the least of which being Judy, later, requires a 'return for a moment...to our earlier construal of Du Bois's calling Negro double consciousness a 'second sight'. (p315) Judy seems to be disordering Du Bois's formulation that runs *second-sight*, then *double consciousness*, and finally *two-ness* by seeming to insist, perhaps contra-Du Bois, that double consciousness is the necessary pre-condition for second sight or, perhaps even more provocatively, they are either simultaneous or the same thing. Further, Judy appears to abandon *twoness* perhaps situating the unresolvable conflict that Du Bois insists upon within the Dark Body between Negro and American as resolved through para-semiosis. Para-semiosis as 'denoti[ng] the dynamic difficulties operating in multiple multiplicities of semiosis that converge without synthesis' (p391).

This is very confusing, positively so, and it is just one of many challenges that R.A. Judy's text presents to readers. I say 'readers' here because this text is nothing if not a call for communal forms of thinking. This, retuning to the beginning of the text but not the beginning of this review, is rich with the import of Windham's focus on the 'us' of this form of Black Existentialism in contradistinction to the 'I' of the Cartesian Cogito. Make no mistake about it, this is a difficult text that will not yield to surface readings but requires a reading practice that will involve collective attempts to deal with its erudition. R.A. Judy has presented us with an opening to consider and reconsider what it means to be Black in this world and I hope it is a challenge that is taken up and serves to enrich the archive of Black Radical Thought. It is indeed a time for 'drinking and thinking in disorder' with this text as a constant and dynamically mysterious yet trusted companion.

**Michael E. Sawyer**, Ph.D. Associate Professor of African-American Literature, and Critical & Cultural Studies in the Department of English at the University of Pittsburgh