Satan is Boring

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REVIEWS

Red carnation

Peter Hallward and Knox Peden, eds, *Concept and Form*, Volume 1: *Key Texts from the 'Cahiers pour l'analyse'*, Verso, London and New York, 2012. 272 pp., £16.99 pb., 978 1 84467 872 3.

Peter Hallward and Knox Peden, eds, *Concept and Form*, Volume 2: *Interviews and Essays on the 'Cahiers pour l'analyse'*, Verso, London and New York, 2012. 302 pp., £16.99 pb., 978 1 84467 873 0.

Concept and Form consists of two printed volumes – one with selected texts from the *Cahiers pour l'analyse* in English translation, the other containing interviews and essays on the journal – along with a website (http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk) including the full text of every *Cahiers* article in French (some accompanied by a translation), unabbreviated versions of the interviews, short biographies of the authors who contributed to the *Cahiers*, and substantive entries on the crucial concepts used. Hallward and Peden provide us with an almost exhaustive overview of the contents and history of the journal, and succeed in disentangling one of the major nodal points of the pre-history of contemporary continental philosophy.
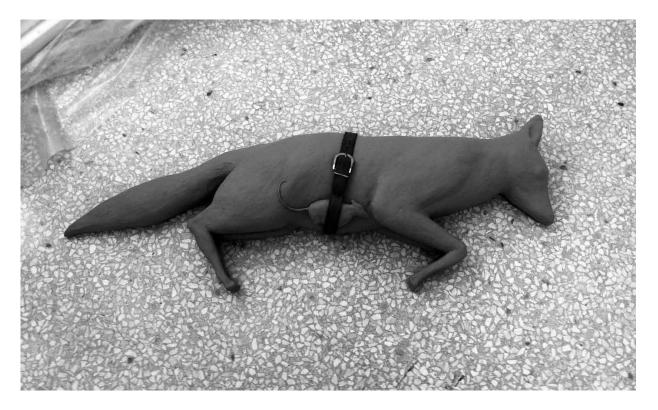
Scanning the table of contents of the ten issues of *Cahiers pour l'analyse* that appeared between 1966 and 1969, the first surprise is the sheer variety of authors it included and the even greater variety of topics. Established authors (Louis Althusser, Georges Canguilhem, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, among others) and master figures from the history of Western philosophy (Plato, Machiavelli, Descartes, Hume) are printed next to young and as yet unknown students from the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* (Jacques-Alain Miller, Jean-Claude Milner, François Regnault and Alain Badiou, to name but a few). Moreover, traditional divides between the concerns of Anglo-Saxon and French philosophy are ignored by contributions that treat questions spanning psychoanalysis, mathematics and logic, and political philosophy. Just as the journal aimed at bringing together different strands of thought (both historically and thematically), the articles themselves, more often than not written in a very dense prose, reinforce this by, for example, discussing Lacanian psychoanalysis alongside Frege. In brief, *Cahiers pour l'analyse* brings to mind one of the mechanisms at work in dream formation: condensation. Such an attempt at thinking together seemingly heterogeneous thoughts did not, however, happen randomly, but was the consequence of an ambitious theoretical project.

The opening sentence of the foreword to the journal's first issue states that the *Cahiers* 'aim to present new and previously published texts dealing with logic, linguistics, psychoanalysis, and all the sciences of analysis, in order to help constitute a theory of discourse.' As is apparent from several other texts, by 'all the sciences of analysis' is meant a psychoanalytically inspired structuralism, which has at least two important characteristics. First, the ambition to constitute a theory of discourse needs to be understood as opposed to the structuralism developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Where the latter considered structures as existing independent from human experience, the *Cahiers*' editorial board wanted to think structure *with* subjectivity. The subjectivity at stake here is not the Sartrean individual 'doomed to be free', but a point included in the structure. Such a point, however, is not just one element, like all the other elements defined by its position with regard to the other positions distributed by a structure, but a mark which indicates that something got excluded, or, more technically, an element that does not only differ from all the other elements but differs from itself. This means, first, that the subject is ultimately nothing but a lack of any positivity or substantiality, and, second, helps to explain the imaginary distance a supposedly free consciousness entertains towards the determining structure. For the point at which one 'enters' the structure coincides necessarily with an exclusion or repression, which opens up the space for an imaginary (and ideological) failure to acknowledge that one is first and foremost the subject of a pre-existing structure. In short, 'the sciences of analysis' do not include the subject because of their psychoanalytical inspiration, psychoanalysis being a praxis that obviously pays attention to the particularities of human subjectivity, but because psychoanalysis considers the human subject to be determined by an unconscious structure – *der andere Schauplatz*, as Freud put it – and locates this subject, distinct from the conscious ego, within the determining operations

of the structure. This obviously leads to the difficult issue that any Lacanian needs to address: the subject is both subjected to the unconscious determination of a structure *and* that element both inside and exterior to the structure that has the capacity to transform it. This cannot but remind us of the older psychoanalytical insight that it only makes sense to refer to the subject's freedom as a paradoxical freedom to subjectify its objective determination. The *Cahiers pour l'analyse* do not directly address this problem, as the main focus is on one side of the problem – a structure that includes its subject – to the detriment of the other, that is, a subject that would not only be able to assume its determination by structure, but also to change it. This is effectively confirmed by the way different interlocutors, at the time directly or indirectly related to the *Cahiers* project, react to Peter Hallward's repeated questions, in the second volume of *Concept and Form*, about how the will, militant engagement and a committed practice to change the world got theorized: they sidestep it.

This choice (if it is one) to focus upon the problem of how to theorize a structure that includes its subject, rather than upon how a subject might change it, can be related to the origin of the journal. Most of the members of the editorial board participated first in another journal: the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* started in 1964. Both journals shared the idea that a theoretical formation is required to overcome the ideological distortions known as humanism and personal experience, yet *Cahiers pour l'analyse* widened its scope in order to seek to construe a general theory of discourse (and its relations to regional theories of ideology, of art, etc.). In this sense *Cahiers pour l'analyse* was less directly political, instead pursuing questions of formalization, considered as essential to any non-ideological science. Significantly, many of the articles that made up the *Cahiers* not only contributed to the theory of discourse, which was supposed to eventually show the subject's place of non-coincidence with itself and to open up the possibility of acting *upon* the structure, but were also guided by the idea that it would be a mistake to take this sort of analysis as a mere theoretical exercise, as the most formal approach to any structure entails precisely the most practical thing that needs to be done, namely to locate the subject within it. Put differently, if the *political* aim of the *Cahiers* did not consist in connecting abstract and universal structure to concrete and particular experience, but in situating the latter within the former, each article contributed to this operation.

This second characteristic of the work published in the *Cahiers*, the attempt at formalization, is closely related to the first. If structure needs to be thought as structure including its subject, the only way to discern this subject is through a formalized approach to structure, i.e. to pay attention exclusively to its elements and their relations of interdependence. In Miller's famous article 'Suture' this is named the logic of the signifier. Developing a logic of the signifier implies, first and foremost, sticking to the superficial

plane on which the signifiers operate and resisting the temptation of any (depth) psychology. Like the psychoanalyst who discerns in stories and associations the meaningless concatenation of signifiers – and tries to shift the analysand from the search for signification to experiencing determination by the meaningless signifier – the *Cahiers* theoretician tries to shed light on the action of the structure in its effects. In this respect Miller's use of Frege is not so surprising as it might seem, in so far as the latter is similarly interested in explaining what a number is, without having recourse to psychology or to the experience that people can count objects. Frege's definitions of numbers remain on a purely formal level, starting with zero as the object that belongs to the concept 'not identical with itself'. As there is only one such object (zero), one is the number that belongs to the concept 'identical with zero', and two is the number that belongs to the concept 'identical with one or zero', etc.

This elegant solution to what Frege called a scandalous situation – that mathematicians were confused about one of their most important objects: number – has the striking quality that it is based on the illogical concept 'not identical with itself' and that its number, zero, is implied in each definition of any other natural number. This allows Miller to propose the notion of suture as a name for the weak point in any structure, pointing out that exclusion was always needed in order to make the structure operational. Like the logic of the number, which begins by introducing an illogical concept, the logic of the signifier is fundamentally marked by a blank or a void (zero) that both indicates and covers up an inevitable exclusion. Proving the existence of such a point can be considered as discovering the possibility of 'analysis' – that is, as Yves Duroux puts it in one of the interviews, 'to seek out the point by which the imaginary element of the structure can be made to topple over (*basculer*)'. It is in this light that, in the interview with Duroux and Étienne Balibar included here, the former states: 'The role of logic was something peculiar to Lacan. It came from him. It didn't come from us, contrary to what people say, people who say that we "logicized psychoanalysis", etc.' Duroux refers here to the widespread opinion that the effect of Jacques-Alain Miller & co. on Lacan's teaching consisted in introducing a logical approach to psychoanalytical notions such as the subject, the unconscious and phantasm, neglecting the more concrete particularities of the analytical experience. Duroux is right to correct this misconception, although it is difficult to imagine that Lacan's exchange with Althusser's students (which coincided with the change of venue of his weekly seminar from the Sainte-Anne hospital to the École Normale Supérieure) had no effect on the orientation of his later teaching. If one looks at his seminars from the period 1964–1968, one can scarcely overlook the important place that logical issues occupy within them, and, indeed, one may even be tempted to consider this logical approach as mediating between the earlier structuralist method and the later mathematical, topological excursions. Although Tracy McNulty is right, then, in an illuminating discussion of the debate between Jean-Claude Milner and Serge Leclaire, to point out, *contra* Milner, how mathematics, and topology in particular, are already present in Lacan's work from the 1950s, one should also note that the use made of it, and the hopes placed upon it – to invent mathemes which allow for integral transmission – as well as the main problem motivating it – to formalize that which seemingly resists formalization, *jouissance* – becomes only evident in the later work. In this context, an interesting suggestion can be found in Patrice Maniglier's contribution to *Concept and Form*'s second volume, in which he suggests that Miller's turn to logic in order to go beyond the 'weak' subjectless structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, may have caused, or at least have enhanced, a blindness to those aspects of his theory that are useful for exactly the kind of theory the *Cahiers* wanted to develop. Maniglier highlights, in this regard, Lévi-Strauss' reference, in his seminal article on 'The Structural Study of Myth', to the Freudian conception of trauma as involving *two* times. Trauma is not a terrible accident that has happened, but an imbalance at the level of one myth that implies the creation of a second one. The crucial point here is that the structuralist reading of a (neurotic) myth cannot consist in a mere identifying of the places and their differential relations pertaining to a structure, but necessarily implies taking into account the generation of a variant. Lacan used this idea in his early text on the case of the 'Rat-Man', which allowed him to consider the subject, not as occupying one of the positions within a myth, but rather the space in between one myth and one of its variants, which are part of an open-ended process of transformation. Whether one agrees with Maniglier's critique of Miller and Milner or not in this respect, it is clear that Maniglier's 'rehabilitation of Lévi-Strauss' is indeed 'striking' (as Duroux puts in his interview with Peter Hallward) and deserves a more thorough discussion than is possible here.

Within this frame, at any rate, one can note that Lacan did use Lévi-Strauss' formula at least a second time (at the end of his May 1961 lessons on a Paul Claudel theatre trilogy), and allow oneself the speculation that he perhaps did not return to it because of the influence the *Cahiers*' program had on him.

At this point the reader may have the impression that the *Cahiers* consisted mainly of texts critiquing a structuralism that does not take into account the *subject* of an unconscious structure. As mentioned before, however, the scope of the journal was much broader and involved, alongside other critiques of Lévi-Straussian structuralism (concerning its humanism and its naturalism, as in the debate with Derrida in issues 4 and 8) and articles on psychoanalytic theory, a focus on epistemological questions (Canguilhem and Foucault), the history of science, politics and the problem of formalization. The crystal-clear introduction by Hallward to the first volume provides a detailed yet exciting account of all the issues that motivated the creation of the *Cahiers*. Moreover, as the book version of *Concept and Form* cannot include all the texts the journal published, not even all those one might consider to be crucial (some of which have already been published in English elsewhere), the outstanding chapters in Volume 2 by Knox Peden (on Foucault and Lacan) and Edward Baring (on Lévi-Strauss and Derrida) deliver crucial insights into the theoretical aims and positions of some of the original articles that could not be included in Volume 1.

Devoting two books to this short-lived journal is to be welcomed as a much-needed contribution to the history of ideas, yet it also provokes the question of what happened to the programmatic idea that initiated and guided each issue of the *Cahiers pour l'analyse*. This question is partially answered by the presence of Slavoj Žižek among the contributors to Volume 2, and by Adrian Johnston's polemical reconsideration of Lacanian psychoanalysis as a materialism and its possible relation to contemporary neuroscience. The other part of the answer, however, concerns the work of Alain Badiou, whose work is evidently considered by the editors as the continuation of the *Cahiers* in the present. Tellingly, Volume 2 ends with an interview with Badiou, and Volume 1 includes both of his two *Cahiers* articles. There is certainly a logic to this last editorial choice, in so far as Badiou's contributions are replies to Miller's two central texts, 'Suture' and 'Action of the Structure', also included in Volume 1, and discussed in almost every contribution to the second volume. As Hallward shows in his own essay

in Volume 2, Badiou's contributions to the *Cahiers* articulate a theoretical disagreement with Miller, which can be referred back to what distinguishes Althusser from Lacan. In retrospect, however – that is, after the event of May '68 – these discussions enabled Badiou to think Althusser with and not as opposed to Lacan concerning the problem of science and subjectivity, whereas Miller chose to leave the *Cahiers*' project behind, concentrating on more specifically psychoanalytic issues. This causes Badiou himself to conclude that he is actually the only one who remained faithful to the Lacano-Maoist orientation of the journal. Leaving aside the question of what it may mean to be the sole and single 'embodiment of a tendency', as Badiou suggests, it is clear that the editors largely endorse Badiou in this self-situating, and in his self-differentiation from the others (renegades, reactionaries, etc.), by the place that is given to his interview in Volume 2 and to his *Cahiers* texts, at the end of Volume 1, followed only by two 'odd' texts on Cartesian politics (François Regnault) and on the notorious Molyneux problem (Alain Grosrichard). Supposing that this is a partisan choice on the part of the editors, there are definitely a number of reasons in favour of it, but also questions that this narrative provokes. To what extent is Badiou rather a Sartrean – Rancière's opinion – than a Lacanian? And if Badiou continues the Lacan in 'Lacano-Maoism', shouldn't one have included the text by Jacques Brunschwig on the particular proposition in Aristotle, published in issue 10? This text had a demonstrable effect on Lacan's reorganization of the Aristotelian square of opposition, resulting in the differentiation between a particular exception simply opposed to universality and the not-all characteristic of a non-universalizable singularity. Including this would have allowed for a more contemporary discussion of the positions of the late Lacan, Miller and Badiou regarding the subject as in- and ex-clusion within the universe of discourse *and* Lacan's object a, his 'sole invention' as he put it in his 1973–74 Seminar.

The last word may not be given to, but simply taken by Miller, who in the slipstream of a vehement discussion with Badiou on the latter's depiction of the former as a 'renegade' in the second volume here, has announced his plan to publish a new, eleventh issue of *Cahiers pour l'analyse* in 2014, with solicited contributions by Alain Grosrichard, Jean-Claude Milner and François Regnault. This, however, should hardly make anyone postpone taking delight in *Concept and Form*.

Dominiek Hoens

On your bike

With the advent of the global financial crisis in 2008, we would perhaps have imagined that the entire panoply of boosterish rhetoric that subtended it – from aspirational market-oriented self-help guides to outdated theories of rational economic agents – would have vanished overnight, condemned to languish in pools of Marxist tears (of laughter). Of course, while the market may have crashed, the general worry – 'what next?' – was left hanging, leaving the response – despite the Arab Spring, despite Occupy, despite mass opposition in the form of global riots and protests – primarily up to an increasingly vicious ruling class to decide. But Sloterdijk – with his whirlwind approach to the history of ideas primarily seen through the prism of complicated relations to Heidegger, Nietzsche and a oft-repeated desire not to be seen as the new Oswald Spengler – has much bigger things on his mind. His thesis in these two recently translated tomes is that no religions exist, only 'misunderstood spiritual regimens', that any and all revolutionary responses to the world are doomed to catastrophe because they attempt that which is impossible, and that the only hope lies in understanding that the human sphere consists of three 'immune systems': the 'biological', the 'socio-immunological' (legal, military solutions), and the 'symbolic or psycho-immunological' (mental armour). According to Sloterdijk, what human beings do across these different spheres is, above all, *practise*, in order to 'optimize their cosmic and immunological status in the face of vague risks of living and acute certainties of death'; a kind of spiritual self-calming across the ages in different formats and with different names, but essentially the same kinds of rituals to which the mystificatory term 'religion' has usually been applied.

Sloterdijk's earlier interventions into debates around eugenics and more recently the welfare state (where Sloterdijk called for tax to be abolished in the name of gifts from the rich) saw him much criticized by Habermas and others (see Andrew Fisher's account in *RP* 99), and he is clear that he is not now as interested in what gene therapy and other cutting-edge techniques might permit humanity to do to

itself, but rather wants to trace the history of earlier forms of activity relating to self-transformation. Sloterdijk refers to his approach and method, here and previously, as 'anthropotechnics', a way of understanding what the 'practising animal' does when it does something to itself, and sometimes when it lets something be done to it. (There's an interesting excursus regarding anaesthetic in *You Must Change Your Life* which highlights the historical significance of this technique, described as a 'revolution'.) Sloterdijk is at his most insightful when performing a series of short readings of those earlier thinkers who tackled the question of practice and related concepts such as habit, exercise, repetition – among whom Rilke (after whose poem 'Archaic Torso of Apollo' the larger book is named), Nietzsche, Unthan (an armless violin virtuoso after whom Sloterdijk names a branch of thought, in explicit opposition to the culture of political correctness as 'cripple anthropology'), Kafka, Cioran, Wittgenstein, Bourdieu – seeing in this literary–philosophical–poetic–sociological lineage a host of useful precursors to his own project. From Rilke he takes the idea of the metanoetic imperative – that you must change your life (and Sloterdijk is keen to make clear his anti-Marxist credentials by asserting that the emphasis is on 'your' and not on 'life': the point is not to change 'it' but 'you'); from Nietzsche the discovery of ascetic cultures as the key insight for anthropotechnics; from Unthan the idea of an anthropology of defiance tied to virtuosity and the will; from Kafka a 'negative theory of training'; from Cioran the practice of rejecting every goal-directed way of practising; and from Wittgenstein the concept of culture as a 'monastic rule', and the idea of 'secession', a term in heavy use in the two books, by which Sloterdijk means a series of ways of turning away from or distancing oneself from life. Bourdieu's descriptions of habit, though criticized for their sociological framework, are also evidence for Sloterdijk of the attention paid to questions of practice and repetition in twentieth-century thought. L. Ron Hubbard's scientology gets an amusing discussion as one side of the twentieth-century tendency towards the 'explosion of informal mysticism' (the

other being the resurrection and domination of athleticism and the Olympics). You might be wondering if women have anything to do with theorizing practice, or indeed, heaven forfend, *actually* practising, at any point in human history. Sloterdijk is not likely to help you out here. Simone Weil and Hannah Arendt get brief mentions, and there's a short passage on European witch-hunts and midwifery. You get the feeling that all this distance, trainers and asceticism is just not something women ought to engage in, and as for children, well, the pram in the conceptual hallway would just be in the way of the 'special zone of theory', the aim of 'secession' whereby one can stand on the shore and step out of life in order to look at it dispassionately.

Much of *You Must Change Your Life* is given over to a grand synthetic conceptual history of the practical aspects of various 'religions', Eastern and Western, and the concept of the teacher, or rather, trainer, that features as part of these practices. Sloterdijk's main argument here concerns the idea of 'vertical tension' – an image he plays with throughout with reference to acrobats and tightrope walkers, perhaps moving from the idea of a human zoo to that of a human circus. Against images of equality, Sloterdijk, like other conservative thinkers throughout history, such as Edmund Burke, is keen to stress the inevitability and necessity (as he sees it) of hierarchies and asymmetries. He writes of the tendencies in cultural life to form 'internal multi-storey structures', as opposed to the analysis that depicts a 'heavy-handed' 'matrix of power and subjugation' that Sloterdijk sees in the work of Foucault and his followers.

In a bid to shore up this idea of a kind of permanent and productive hierarchy in all cultural realms, as well as in the physical and psychic order, Sloterdijk describes the possibility that 'the inequality between humans might be due to their asceticisms, their different stances towards the challenges of the practising life'. In this way he avoids any kind of natural division, but this idea of unequal practices – an idea he claims 'has never been formulated in the history of investigations into the ultimate causes of difference between humans' – does not seem to get us much further as an explanation or as a solution to humanity's problems: where do these 'different stances' come from? How possible is it for people to develop different ways of 'practising life' if the burdens placed upon them by financial need require them to spend most of their time working, say, or taking care of others? If Sloterdijk comes across as defending the kind of life that we might associate with an elite, educated class who have time for contemplation and self-improvement, this appears to be no accident given that he wants to celebrate the 'third option' between 'death and the common lot', as he puts it at the end of *The Art of Philosophy*, that serves as a companion piece to the longer work.

At the heart of Sloterdijk's philosophical self-help project is an unexamined set of assumptions about the kind of 'self' who can carry out such 'operations' on their own lives. Apart from the material constraints identified above, the question remains of the quality of this 'self' that can split oneself into two, take a step back, and then get to work on beginning new practices; a 'self' that remains remarkably under-historicized. While we may imagine that it is possible to give up bad habits, and take up new better ones, it's not clear that we need to understand the entire history of anthropotechnics in order to do so, and Sloterdijk is of course wary of filling out any detailed conceptual prescriptions to lead people out of 'dullness, dejection and obsession' (seemingly a lot worse for Sloterdijk than exploitation, dispossession and war). But aren't we surrounded by people telling us to 'help ourselves'? Never, you might think, have the ideological and hypocritical dimensions of the rhetoric of 'hard-working families', 'shirkers', 'the workshy', and so on, been more blatant and more contestable, for all their ubiquity. Sloterdijk's diagnosis and solution, for all his intricate, sweeping style and historical breadth, will, be familiar to anyone who has had to suffer the blunt moral imperatives of Thatcherism over the past thirty years: pull your socks up.

Nina Power

Satan is boring

These two books would seem, at first sight, to make a good match for a two-in-one review. After all, what is spam if not a vile form of media? With the recent overwhelming evidence of wrongdoing in digital surveillance on an unprecedented scale, concerns about how new mediation technologies are being placed in the service of powerful global agents are finally reaching the mainstream. Research into the evils of media, into the nature of these technologies and their impact on global society, is, today, becoming all the more urgent. However, unfortunately, the match between these two books is only apparent. For while Fuller and Goffey's title *Evil Media* seems to signal a critique of new mediation technologies, the authors' notions of 'evil' and (to a lesser degree) 'media' are significantly detached from the common meaning of these words. The book is thus peripheral at best to a project of understanding the dangers of digital mediation today. Take for instance the following fragment from a discussion on data mining:

> Civil libertarians only get half the story right in their well-meant concern with the vast extension in scope of data gathering and mining. From some points of view, the growing volume of personal data available does indeed look likely to threaten a totalitarian encroachment on basic human rights. But it should also be considered as an important element in optimizing the functioning of market processes.

It is clear that the focus here is not exactly upon issues concerning the erosion of privacy, anonymity or freedom of speech. It is unsettling, then, to say the least, that 'optimizing the functioning of market processes' is considered an objective worth risking 'a totalitarian encroachment on basic human rights'. But if the meaning of 'evil' is here somehow transformed, how has it been transformed, and into what?

In the opening pages of the book, the notion of 'evil media' is introduced via a discussion of Google's famous 'Don't be evil' motto. The slogan, it is suggested, advances an operating principle of Western ideology: a unilateral discourse anchored in an ethics geared towards the fighting of 'evil' that serves to legitimize the incessant adventures of Western imperialism:

> It is an injunction that thus displays … the fundamentalist propensities of contemporary forms of imperialism for which the incontestability of transcendent values offers a clever ruse for alliance building, chest beating, and even technological development. The subject of the Manichaean puppetry of Hollywood, of military–industrial–corporate governance, the tracking down and rooting out of evil, and the orchestration of support for geopolitical strategies of domination aligned with the 'good' adopts a rhetoric that is generally as excessive in its intensity as the malice against which it purports to mobilize.

It follows that the real 'evil' here does not consist in the narrated 'evils' sold to us through the screen, but in the manipulative deployment of discourses based on merely self-serving 'ethics'.

This is an argument that has been more fully realized by Alain Badiou in his book *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil:* 'the theme of ethics and of human rights is compatible with the self-satisfied egoism of the affluent West, with advertising, and with service rendered to the powers that be.' Badiou here explores the ideological underpinnings of this 'theme of ethics', and identifies the central motor of such a model: 'good is what intervenes visibly against an Evil that is identifiable a priori.' The pitfall of this Evil-centric ethics is quite simple: it results in a mankind that becomes ethically sterile. Because, in Western ethics, 'Evil is that from which Good is derived, not the other way around', the results are disastrous. As Badiou puts it: 'if the ethical "consensus" is founded on the recognition of Evil, it follows that every effort to unite people around a positive idea of the Good … becomes in fact the real source of evil itself…. Every collective will to the Good creates Evil.' In their objection to Google's motto, Fuller and Goffey effectively align themselves with Badiou's critique of such currently dominant conceptions.

It should be said that *Evil Media*'s convoluted writing style, characterized by phrases consisting of numerous clauses, one after the other, makes the book more than a little hard to read. Concepts are

elaborated and expanded through clauses inside clauses inside sentences, with the consequence that one is often lost in the wilderness of their writing. As such, establishing some conceptual ground for *Evil Media*'s core claims is the only means by which one may attempt to reconstruct (or deconstruct) Fuller and Goffey's ultimate argument and understand its strengths and weaknesses. This conceptual ground is Badiou's counterintuitive and contrarian critique of a currently hegemonic model of ethics in which what is really 'evil' is actually the compulsion to fight a predefined 'evil', because it is a compulsion that negates the potential for multiplicity in the *good.*

In Fuller and Goffey's own exposition, however, several conflicting statements about how best to understand the term 'evil' are made. Starting from the position that an Evil-centric ethics, in the style of Google, advances imperialistic power, the authors argue, first, that media configuration itself (and not just its content) is aligned with said imperial and Evil-centric ethics. Therefore, such configurations are where 'evil' resides. As they put it:

> the material construction of media ecologies themselves plays a critical role in disseminating the very feelings of dread, fear, and foreboding that give rise to preemptive judgments in the first place.... Mediation facilitates and amplifies the creation of troubling, ambiguous social processes, fragile networks of susceptible activity, opaque zones of nonknowledge – the evils of media.

These media configurations thus only apparently render media transparent, because they are actually opaque. 'Evil' is analogous to opacity: 'the phrase "evil media" makes this troubling but often unacknowledged opacity palpable.' This is Fuller and Goffey's second point, yet, arguably, the new category of 'opacity' in fact marks a realignment *with* Evil-centric ethics, fundamentally contradicting the first claim concerning its intrinsically imperialist form. Third, Fuller and Goffey argue that, regardless of their previous elaborations, 'evil' will actually be used by the authors 'as a convulsive response to the more pervasively onto-theological climate of global culture' – that the term is to be employed ironically, too. Finally, the authors arrive at the assertion that the term 'can' be used in any way their whims require, since '[a]lready we can sense the chaotic heterogeneity of the uses to which the term "evil" can be put.' In other words, 'evil' ultimately loses all specific value as a linguistic sign.

After their initial gambit of identifying established notions of 'evil' with imperialistic monoculture,

therefore, the authors gradually shift their definition of 'evil', moving towards the one they will actually use throughout most of the book: that is, 'evil' as a codeword for 'opaque', and later on for 'grey'. Yet, equating 'opacity' with 'evil' is a stretch, while shifting the meaning of 'evil', once again, so as to signify 'greyness' requires a major suspension of disbelief, especially since the term 'greyness' is really introduced in *Evil Media* to refer to the boring or the bland in mediation practices. Some practices and mechanisms described in the book are thereby incorporated by the authors into the realm of 'evil' merely by virtue of being *boring* to the perception of humans as they live their everyday lives. The authors perform a moral valuation of 'greyness' as 'a space of activity that is ethically ambiguous'. But the argument that such ethical ambiguity is therefore *evil* defies any definition of ambiguity as the presence of an undecidability. In doing so, the authors turn around the meaning of 'evil' far too many times, diluting any clear concept of 'evil media' and thus rendering the very meaning of their own book thoroughly ambiguous. Read as a whole, the term 'evil media' in Fuller and Goffey's book is used, 'simultaneously', to refer to practices and discourses that advance the ethics of empire (that is, *evil* practices and discourses), practices that conflict with said ethics (which we therefore identify as *good*), and undecideable (or grey) practices and discourses. At one point the authors declare that 'such a term is not to be invoked with impunity'. Yet it is not their invocation of the term 'evil' that constitutes a problem, but its unnecessary overuse and final twisting into meaninglessness.

Something similar happens with the term 'media', although the argumentation in this case is substantially more consistent: 'Media, in the very broad sense that can be given to the term via science and technology studies, management theory, or even speculative philosophy, are irreducible elements in the composition and configuration of affect.' In *Evil Media*, then, the notion of 'media' is not contradictory in the way that Fuller and Goffey's notion of 'evil' ultimately is, but it is perhaps excessively broad. Consequently, topics usually foreign to the field of Media Studies, such as pharmacology or the techniques of pick-up artists, are examined with debatable degrees of usefulness. Media itself is present in the book only vicariously: its existence and agency are deduced through the examination of the traces it leaves 'in the composition and configuration of affect'. Instead, the book deals with

'systems, techniques and strategies', or *stratagems*, agglomerated somewhat freely around major fields of attraction identified by the authors as 'Intelligence' (in the military sense), 'Togetherness', 'Algorithms', 'Structures', 'Technicalities', 'Productivity' (corporate management) and 'Excellence'.

The book is most satisfying when the authors do what they do best: examining in detail the performativity of networks, software and digital technologies in general, as a set of entities that interact not only with and on humans, but also with and on other technological systems. As a contribution to the field of Software Studies, the chapters on Algorithms, Structures and Technicalities demonstrate considerable understanding and insight from a philosophical perspective. Fuller and Goffey's exploration of algorithmic greyness, and the techniques and practices through which computational machines communicate among themselves and with humans – a set with enormous social and political consequences globally – clearly touch upon some of the most important intellectual issues of today. As Kittler put it: 'Codes – by name and by matter – are what determine us today, and what we must articulate if only to avoid disappearing under them completely.' It is quite unfortunate, then, that the phrase 'evil media' confuses to the degree that it does, making it easy to miss what is of value in this book. Perhaps something along the lines of *Computational Stratagems* would have been a better, rather less distracting, title.

By contrast, Finn Brunton's *Spam: A Shadow History of the Internet* fully delivers on the promises of its title, tracing the evolution of the practices of spam since the early days of ARPANET. These practices, the author shows, exploit and threaten the technical and social characteristics of the medium they take place in. As spammers fight back (always in the name of endangered profit) through different techniques, codes and devices, they consequently adapt and upgrade their methods and internal structures. This leads to further moves and counter-moves in an endless 'technological drama' – an expression Brunton borrows from Bryan Pfaffenberger – entailing a conflict around the evolution of tools and practices. Brunton's detailed tracing of this drama reveals spam to be a key force in shaping the web since its beginnings. The history of the Internet presented from such a perspective is both insightful and amusing, like (if you can excuse the analogy) attempting a history of Batman's technology and psyche by following the Joker.

As Internet users, we know spam is multiple, mutating, diverse. Brunton proposes to understand the history of spam through a periodization consisting in three distinct structural transformations, each fundamentally different in terms of business models and technologies deployed. This allows us to see through the wilderness of spam accumulated in our memories, understanding the different political economies and techno-social assemblages that have intervened in the becoming of practically all instances of encounter with spam through our networked lives. Similarly, Brunton proposes a definition of spam that encompasses emails offering penis enlargement pills, improbable financial scams, or web bots designed to spam Google search results by creating thousands of fake blog posts. Spamming is 'the project of leveraging information technology to exploit existing gatherings of attention'. The book examines in depth several of the practices that fit this definition, like usenet spam, 'nigerian 419' type scams, search spam, splogging, content farms, social spam, botnets, and so on. However, Brunton's definition seems to be robust enough to accommodate plenty more exploitative practices than the book directly addresses. Practices that exploit legal and social codes as well as computer codes, such as Wikipedia astroturfing, or most of the Free-to-Play gaming industry, could well fit Brunton's definition, constituting hidden or more socially acceptable spam, or in some cases the heralds of future spam forms. *Spam* is an insightful, original, thoroughly researched, surprisingly human, and well-written book that provides a peek into the back alleys of the web; a peek of value to the field of Media Studies and, more generally, to those interested in understanding not only the Internet, but the pitfalls of building communities based in technology

Nicolás Mendoza

Ready-to-foot

In the City of Bikes is a fascinating, inspiring and sometimes maddening double-barrelled assault on what is, typically, invisible to the urban observer, or at most the source of anecdotal musings: the predominance, or at least the prominence, of the bicycle as a mode of transport in a very unusual city. For many of us living in the UK or the USA, the bike sits mainly in the garage or basement, and the awareness of its importance in places like Amsterdam, Copenhagen, or even Portland, Oregon, is the source of some bemusement. And yet there is a reason for such prominence, and it was inevitable that, as urban bicycle infrastructure comes, more and more, to be regarded as a cost-effective alternative to expensive mass-transit expansions (the Bloombergian approach, in New York), or as a way of luring 'creative class' types into the city (Rahm Emanuel's approach in Chicago), people want to know (necessarily, given the task) how the establishment of such a presence has been carried out successfully.

I say 'double-barrelled' because Pete Jordan's book, like so many nowadays, seeks to meld two very different genres: memoir and social history. In Jordan's case, this melding is perfectly appropriate, because his personal *raison d'être* is tied to the bike, and the city he writes about, Amsterdam, is his city not because he was born there, but because he moved there – precisely in order to live in a city where the bicycle was so prominent. Indeed, he was first prompted to relocate from Portland when he was staggered to see, in a photograph that he happened upon by chance, the sheer mass of bikes on a street in Amsterdam.

First, then, the memoir. Jordan can perhaps be taken as representative of a 'millennial' generation – so different from the post-hippie yuppies of the 1970s – in that he has apparently little concern for upward mobility; indeed his previous book, *Dishwasher: One Man's Quest to Wash Dishes in all Fifty States*, is representative, I think, of a certain trend among a significant portion of young people today. What used to be stigmatizing signs of downward mobility, even for the post-'68 crowd, are now marks of authenticity, of the life well lived. But before we dismiss Jordan as just another poseur among the hipster legions, we should reflect on the significance of his turn: he can work as a janitor in a concrete plant, ride a bike and live in town, note approvingly his wife's decision to take over a down-at-heel bike shop, and his choices are never reflected upon as being particularly noteworthy or unusual. Unlike many members of previous generations, he does not broadcast or moralize about his political work or social *engagement*. In his memoir he's merely living it: if opting out of consumerism, and living a humble but generous life is the kind of choice needed to 'change the world', Jordan shows that he doesn't at all consider his choice remarkable. Now, it is true, of course, that he has published a book, a memoir, and maybe it would thus be better to remain silent! Yet we can be certain that there are plenty of others, non-writers, settling in cities that a few years ago would have been seen as utterly unworthy of interest (Buffalo? Cleveland? Detroit?).

Jordan's memoir turns around the bike: it's at the centre of his social awareness, his love life, his fatherhood, his citizenship in Amsterdam. But it doesn't stop there – his commitment to the bike is also an *awareness* of the bike, something he makes clear is not a given, not even in Amsterdam. Perhaps the crucial moment occurs when he attends a party and is asked why he moved to Amsterdam. His answer: he 'spontaneously counted 927 cyclists in just 20 minutes' cycling under the Rijksmuseum. The following exchange takes place:

> 'Oh?' Said the aunt of our host [an Amsterdam native] when it was her turn to hear my explanation. 'Is that a lot or something?'
> *'A lot?* I said. That's massive!'
> The aunt looked puzzled. 'You left America to live here because of that?'
> 'Yeah' I said. What could be a more obvious reason?
> The woman shook her head, then muttered, 'I don't understand.'
> She wasn't alone … To the Dutch, the bike is so everyday, so normal, so deeply ingrained that trying to explain its remarkableness to a Hollander proved pointless.

To an Amsterdamer, then, the bike is *transparent* – one pays no more attention to it than to one's shoes. Less, even; Jordan recounts seeing many fashionably-dressed people of both genders riding hopelessly broken-down bikes. And Jordan concedes that if a foreigner were to confess that he had moved to the USA because of all the cars 'I would think he was nuts'.

Yet one could argue that the bike is even *more* transparent than the car – since there may indeed

be any number of foreigners who go to the USA for the cars. Not for the freeways or traffic jams, but for what those cars represent: wealth, of course, and status – perhaps the status those people are unable to attain back home, since, precisely, they can't afford cars there. Maybe all Americans, immigrants at heart, cherish their cars for that reason. Jordan mentions the difficulty Amsterdamers face in getting people from, say, Morocco, to ride: people from that country, and many others, find it demeaning and embarrassing to ride, a sure sign that one cannot afford a car.

For Amsterdamers, then, the bike is an object even stranger than a car: it confers nothing, it calls no attention to itself, it's the zero-degree of transport. Its invisibility is inseparable from its – unrecognized – appeal. The bike for the Amsterdamer is that impossible self-consuming consumable artefact, one that is possessed but that refuses all possession, all fetishization. But is such a thing really possible? It certainly isn't for Jordan. For him, clearly, the bike is glamorous in an anti-glamorous way: it signifies the refusal of the car and consumerist lifestyle. It's supremely visible: anti-status as status. The spectre of bike snobbery rears its head, but I think one could argue that for Jordan at least the bad faith of the snob is superseded by a genuine utopianism, a desire to live *now* in a more progressive, egalitarian and energy-conscious society. The bike becomes a metonym of that. Since such a society does not exist, he in a sense has to create it: he has spontaneously to turn Amsterdam into that utopian space – the space of the awareness of bikes – to which the Amsterdamers themselves remain oblivious. He rides in Amsterdam, but in another city, a city of his own imagination – one that will exist some day only if he is joined in imagination by many others.

Or, almost in his imagination. Because the other side of Jordan's book is a painstaking, fanatically well documented history of cycling in Amsterdam. We are taken through the early years, the years of the 1920s and 1930s where the cyclist literally ruled the road, and recognized the law only when he or she wanted to (a characteristic that still prevails, to some extent). The 1940s were the war years, a time when Nazi tyranny showed itself not only in mass murder but in the confiscation – theft – of hundreds of thousands of bicycles. In the last days of the occupation, the starving populace tried to ride out to the country to find food using the remaining bicycles, which, for the most part, had long since lost their tyres. The bicycle in this case, in its decrepitude

and absence, becomes a powerful metonym for the massive suffering of the Dutch populace (as well as a direct cause: the absence or unusability of bicycles added not a little to the breakdown of transport, and thus of the circulation of goods and services, in the Netherlands). After the war, the bicycle and tyre dearth was replaced by a fevered prosperity: the resurgence of the bicycle, at least up to around 1955. After the war, production, consumption and plenty rather than starvation ruled, with the eventual result of a kind of traffic arteriosclerosis in which road casualties mounted and the car, like the bike before (and after) it, gained a kind of transparency: why would anyone want to get around except in a car? Of course you have to have one … so what? Yet the streets in the compact Dutch cities were rapidly becoming impassable, the air unbreathable.

The next phase of Amsterdam transportation history is one of the most unusual of any modern city. Jordan recounts it in obsessive detail. A group of anarchists, the Provos, influenced by the French Situationists and their critique of traffic and the car, proposed as a solution a return to the bicycle – but to a *free* bicycle. This was a new stage in the transparency of the bike. Indeed one of the Provo leaders put it succinctly: 'A bike is just about nothing – that's why it's so good!' Old bikes were to be painted white, and left around town for anyone to use. As more and more White Bikes appeared, everyone would enjoy the convenience of transport as ubiquitous and invisible, and as free, as the air. The car would disappear, in a kind of anarchist end-of-history resurgence of the convivial city.

That was the theory, anyway. Much mythology about the White Bikes was generated, throughout the world, in the mass media (even *Life* magazine), but, as Jordan argues, only a handful of White Bikes were ever made available, and those quickly disappeared, victims of theft or vandalism. Despite all the stories, all the memories of riding and seeing White Bikes, very few were ever distributed, and the few that were disappeared in a few days. But in this case myth was stronger than reality. It was the bikes that weren't seen, that really were invisible, that carried the day. The first White Bike protests were in 1965, but it wasn't until the early 1980s that enough anarchists were on the town council and in official city positions that the bike really came back in Amsterdam. The White Bike started it: not its presence, but its absence, the rumour, the awareness that there was something else, some other way of being and moving in the city. Why not perfect, invisible,

silent, effortless, moneyless transport? Why not the White Bike of the mind?

Nowadays one could argue that the White Bike is reincarnated in bike-share systems worldwide (in London, the so-called 'Boris bikes'), which do in many cases serve as a transport alternative. With their backing by banks and ad agencies they may be all too real and visible. Yet the White Bike as myth continues to inspire, precisely because of its promise rather than its reality. Strangely, one could argue that a version of the White Bike has always existed in Amsterdam, through bike theft. This might sound strange, but consider: the average Amsterdamer loses at least a bike a year to theft. One cannot really keep and ride a nice bike. Many people, when their bike is gone, simply go to a well-known spot in Amsterdam and buy another – stolen – bike. (Jordan devotes an entire chapter to this phenomenon.) One is always riding a clunker, which is not so much possessed as used, until a thief takes it and a new one is obtained – perhaps from the same thief. Thieves are paid to keep junk bikes in circulation, in other words; those bikes are just there, and one pays, say, $30 a year to ride. Not completely free, but damned cheap. It's not so far from bike share, really, with the difference that the system is kept running by heroin addicts rather than Barclays or Citibank. An anarchist bike share? And there are no advertisements for heroin on the bikes. No one in Amsterdam seems bothered by the moral or political implications of this – since, after all, by common accord, the bike is invisible. It would be insane to actually like one's bike, think it 'cool' – or even notice it.

Up to a point, at least, and this is my only criticism of Jordan's book. He tends to neglect exactly how Amsterdam managed to save itself from the car. We see the anarchists, the activists, to be sure; we even learn their names. But the difficult task of going from bike activism to the planning and implementation of the vast urban bike infrastructure of Amsterdam is glossed over. When Jordan finally gets to the 1980s and the development of that infrastructure, all we learn is that 'the attitude [among city managers] changed'. Using passive constructions, Jordan seems to imply that the infrastructure changes – the bike lanes, the traffic calming and rerouting – just happened naturally, as if by themselves, thanks to the addition of anarchists to the city council. Yet those changes were the result of brilliant and hard work by engineers teamed with those anarchists, and the technology of this infrastructure is so complex and ingenious that planners from around the world come to Amsterdam to learn how it is done. This is really the story that needs to be told, alongside that of the activists: the rethinking of the city, of the very nature of urban life within it, and, along with and contributing to that, the technical changes that make urban transformation possible.

Jordan's omission is important as well because it occludes the moment in which the bike loses its invisibility. Bike infrastructure planning presupposes the material presence of the bike and its rider: the speed, handling characteristics, visibility and vulnerability of the bike. Nothing could be less transparent. If the majority of Amsterdamers choose not to see the bike, for a few – the planners, the architects, the engineers – the bike is an overriding concern, overwhelming in its visibility. Perhaps even more so than it is for Jordan himself.

The bike as object wavers in a strange space, then, suspended above its visibility as utopian anti-consumerist consumable, a technical means of urban conveyance, and completely transparent and taken-for-granted mode of transport. One cannot help but think that the future will benefit if the first two modes of being (so to speak) win out over the third. But invisibility may be a strong suit of bikes as well, since their adoption as a kind of immanent prosthetic appurtenance assures their long-term survival on city streets – as eminently useful vehicles. Perhaps that unreflected-upon utility can justify their concomitant status as ubiquitous, invisible (to Amsterdamers, anyway) trash, rusting in conspicuous places, or slumbering at the bottom of canals, from which they are occasionally hauled, dripping, momentarily catching the attention of passers-by.

Allan Stoekl

Between the lines

Some forty years after his death, the allure of Picasso never seems to wane. The great Spanish painter still pulls them in. Whether on canvas or paper, in plaster or bronze, in melancholy blue or luscious azure, in jagged lines or erotic curves, Picasso continues to inspire and provoke, continues to enthral and appal like nobody else. And anybody who writes about art feels obliged, even compelled, to spill ink one day on a dead maestro who never lets up.

Tim Clark, the British-born Marxist art historian, one-time Situ fellow-traveller and now Emeritus Prof at UC Berkeley, is the latest in a long line of critics who enters the Picasso fray, even if he's self-conscious of the minefield he's about to dash across. He comes equipped with enough aesthetic savvy and political experience not to blow himself up en route. Already a renowned authority on Manet and on Courbet (*The Image of the People* and *Absolute Bourgeois*), on Poussin (*The Sight of Death*), on abstract expressionism (*Farewell to an Idea*), and, most recently, on Lowry – Clark and Anne Wagner (colleague and wife) recently penned a book-length paean to the artist's overlooked achievements – Clark's credentials for the job are impeccable. What binds all these painters together is a fascination that animates and binds together Clark's own œuvre: *modernity*, modern life, its paintings and painters, its everyday heroism and political ambivalences, its tangled loyalties and tormented freedoms. Clark's book on Manet, *The Painting of Modern Life*, had impressionism, Baudelaire and Guy Debord dialogue on the 'spectacle' of Haussmann's boulevards, on Second Empire Paris, where, in Debord's words, 'capital accumulated to such a degree that it became an image'. A decade earlier, using Courbet's eyes, Clark had scrutinized class and revolt in pre-Second Empire, in the run-up to the June Days of 1848. For Clark, as for Hegel, modernism seems to progress with its worst foot forward, through its darker side, always looking the negative in the face, yet somehow living with it.

Still, Clark believes that it is Nietzsche who is Picasso's man. 'Is not Picasso Nietzsche's painter? Is not his the most unmoral picture of existence ever pursued through a life? I think so.' As such, Picasso's truth isn't upper-case T, singular: it is multiple and leaps beyond good and evil, fucking by day and sleeping soundly at night, untroubled by restless pangs of conscience. None of which means Picasso's art wallows in relativity, that it lacks precision, that it affirms an unknowable world. On the contrary, 'exactitude' was one of Picasso's favourite words, and it is, says Clark, 'a transitive notion'. The world *appears* in a painting, and Picasso's problem is to decide which mode of representation 'gets closer to the way things *are*'.

If Picasso's truth answers to revalued Nietzschean values, then the truth *of* Picasso isn't found, for Clark, in biographical trivia: it's in his art, looking closely at his art, feeling his art. The truth of Picasso, in short, is sensual and acoustic, unplugged from the canned noise of biography. The truth of Picasso lies in what he painted, in what he created, not in how he lived. Clark has zero tolerance for the 'cult of personality', for fawning, ass-licking adulators and/or Picasso-was-a-bastard detractors. John Richardson isn't named in person – nobody's named in person – but we sense he's in Clark's mind when he scorns celebrity bios, with 'all the determination to say nothing, or nothing in particular, about the structure and substance of the work Picasso devoted his life to'. Thus Clark seeks to get right *into* the art, into the frame, into the atomic form and structuring of the paint. And we can see the art for ourselves, in this lavishly illustrated and elegantly mechanically reproduced book, full of vivid colour plates. Clark's truth about Picasso gets particularly deep into four paintings: *The Guitar and Mandolin on a Table* (1924), *The Three Dancers* (1925), *The Painter and His Model* (1927) and *Guernica* (1937). In these canvases, we journey into, through and eventually beyond Cubism, move within touching distance of Picasso's objects, mingle in his interiors, open his creaky shutters, venture out onto sun-drenched balconies. Picasso's is a dialectical world of allegory, of things not quite being what they seem. Ambivalence prevails: his canvases are full of scary monsters and radiant monuments, of demonic death and joyous life, of hard-edged mutilations (portraits of first wife Olga and mistress Dora) and voluptuous flows of erotic energy (those of Marie-Thérèse Walter, the real love of Picasso's life). Sometimes we get to hear from Clark the graphic detail of how Picasso layers on paint; occasionally, we get to watch it dry.

Clark's horizon is a lot narrower than usual takes on Cubism. Clark reckons Cubism hinged, and could only hinge, on a certain sense of space, on an essentially private and introverted kind of space – 'room-space' – a behind-closed-doors affair that prevailed between 1905 and 1915. This wasn't so much revolutionary art as 'Bohemia's last hurrah'; it was 'a style', Clark says, 'directed to a present understood primarily in relation to a past: it is a modest, decent, and touching appraisal of one moment in history, as opposed to a whirling glimpse into a world-historical present-becoming-future.' Clark thinks that Picasso's greatest art came from his struggle to shrug off the confinement. It's in doors ajar, in windows accidentally left open, where the escape routes apparently lay. That's where Clark's chosen paintings come into their own. They mark the beginning, climax and supersession of Cubism, an interregnum and interstice, a bidding it adieu; not because each canvas brings the outside inside the frame, but because each canvas broke free into the outside. The crowning glory of Picasso's outside was, of course, his 1937 mural *Guernica*, commemorating the Luffwaffe's flattening (under Franco's orders) of the ancient Basque town. 'Guernica was inaugural', Clark says. 'It ushered in the last century's, and our century's, War on Terror – terror largely administered by the state – in which tens of millions would die.'

The sheer 'gigantism' of Guernica was new uncharted terrain for Picasso. When commissioned by the Spanish Republican government, Picasso had doubts he could pull it off. Yet, 'through astonishing feats of concentration', he did, in five intense weeks, in an empty, dingy Parisian warehouse. 'Privacy had been torn apart', says Clark; 'the room, in the chaos, must give way to the street.' Bombs rain down on the earth, at ground level; Picasso's monsters are the monsters that lie within us. One of the fascinating things about Clark's chapter on *Guernica* is the chance to see Dora Maar's series of photographs, 'Guernica in progress, May–June 1937.' We can glimpse the bare canvas hanging on the wall, the pencil doodlings, the revisions and additions. We can follow the initial sketches right through to the final, colossal black, white and grey oil depiction of mayhem and massacre, of grieving women and dead babies, of flaming houses and shredded clothing, of fists and dismembered bodies, of maimed animals and blackened skies. We can even see Picasso at work, action painter, a crouching tiger in the corner of his canvas, torso blurred through rapid arm movement. His paint pots are there, his stepladder; old rags and brushes litter a barren floor. We're reminded, in case we forgot, that this masterpiece was painted by somebody who lived.

One of the disappointing things about the chapter is, however, Clark's own analysis and commentary. It might be that he's conscious of the fact that the subject matter is so well worn. It may be that he's struggling to add his own colour, his own gloss, to Picasso's black and white. But in thinking about *Guernica* formally, with a purely aesthetic focus, what transpires is a discussion oddly remote and abstract. Clark says that *Guernica* is nothing if feeling is absent; the logic could be applied to Clark's own words, even to his whole book. Indeed, Clark's problem is our problem: his writing problem, a self-indulgent style always several steps removed from any recognizable human reality. The conceit is astonishing. Clark really loves to hear himself write, loves to bring himself into the canvas: 'I dare say...'; 'it seems to me...'; 'I think...'; 'I feel...'; 'I believe...'; 'I take it that...'. He's everywhere between the lines. He won't keep quiet, won't let his *je* become *un autre*. Invariably, it's too much opinion, too much too much. We might wonder what's the point, anyway, of describing in such detail paintings we can look at for ourselves. Often the reader craves some dirt on Picasso, one of those juicy bio tidbits Clark disdains, anything to help us see a human stain. Clark is all brains; worlds removed from Picasso's workshop brawn.

Meanwhile, Clark seems to want to close the shutters and lock the doors on bodies in Picasso's frame. Sex is strictly private, not public. Picasso knew how shapes could more adequately capture sexual love than any word. And he wasn't prudish about these shapes. His windows always formed openings, wide open not only to the sea and sky, but also to the whole wide world; through them bodies spill out well beyond the confines of Clark's room-space. Sexual love is 'the highest standpoint humans can reach', Freud said in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 'the prototype of all happiness.' That's why to take a Cubist room as a mere parlour is to miss the point about the dramatic power of Picasso's small space: it's an inwardness that gives a brutal and tender self-image to us all, an exteriorization of the self in pictorial form. Clark deals with plenty of Picasso's objects, but he doesn't get his subjectivity: in saying too much he gives us less of the art that really is *there*.

One thing *Picasso and Truth* actually does shut up about is history and politics. This is a strange position for somebody so steeped in history and politics as Clark. Part of the issue here is doubtless his quest to say something new about Picasso; to

locate Cubism as a 'moment' in history is somehow old hat. (Compare John Berger's 1969 *The Moment of Cubism*.) But in putting Cubism and Picasso in solitary confinement, rather than positioning both within broader history, within sweeping inventions and innovations in technology, science and culture, we're left with Clark's own peculiar version of the cult of personality, with a voluntarism of the individual genius developing his art. It's borne out with the choice of Nietzsche as the story's cult hero. Yet a Nietzschean Picasso results in a misrepresentation of both. In recent times, Clark has admitted that he now listens to history played in a tragic key. (See his 'For Left with No Future', and Alberto Toscano's trenchant critique of its conflation of tragedy and pessimism in *RP* 180.) He roots for a Sex Pistols-like pessimism, for a 'No Future for You and Me', for a cynicism not too far removed from Johnny Rotten's other punk refrain: 'What's the point?' Clark's point, it seems, is to affirm actual history as tragedy and alternative history as farce. He wants no utopian company, preferring to be miserable inside his own room-space, inside his own head-space. There, in lamp-lit gloom, he swaps *The Coming Insurrection* for *The Experience of Defeat*.

All this seems a long way from Nietzsche's optimism, from his Yes to life, even in the ruins, especially in the ruins, where we can still enjoy our lunch. To see a painting like *Guernica* only as agony, as devastation, as the negation of life, loses any dialectical grasp the Left should have on life: that humans can't go on – and yet, we go on, and the revolution goes on... *Guernica* is nothing less than the cry 'I will survive', that the Death Instinct is always counteracted by Eros, by our higher will. 'I'm no pessimist', Picasso urged in 1935. 'Everything I do connected with life gives me intense pleasure.' He also became a card-carrying Communist, which Clark fails to mention; it was later on, in 1944, beyond *Picasso and Truth*'s remit. But as Picasso himself confessed: 'My membership of the Communist Party is the logical consequence of my whole work.' 'Yes', he says, 'I am aware of having always struggled by means of my painting, like a genuine revolutionary. But I have come to understand, now, that I must fight not only through art ... And so, I have come to the Communist Party without the least hesitation, since in reality I was with it all along.' *Picasso and Truth* marks Clark's retreat into an art for art's sake, his farewell to an ideal. It is to idle at the museum rather than to embrace dangerous life with art.

Andy Merrifield

Gemeinspruch

One element of the reforms of English higher education that has received less attention than others is the overhaul of teaching training. Whilst the Conservative's flagship Free Schools are, like independent schools, at liberty to employ unqualified teachers, changes made last year to the model funding agreement of Academy schools (directly funded by central government, typically supported by external sponsorship, and independent of local government control) and to the conditions of recruitment for comprehensives have now granted the same entitlement to schools across the sector. The Department for Education has simultaneously introduced a school-centred teacher training scheme, shifting around a quarter of current funding for training away from universities to an expanding network of teaching schools (of which over half are Academies).

These changes are intended to impact upon not only the economics of secondary and higher education (as increased competition between schools and universities over recruitment leads to the closure of education departments in HE) but also how teaching is taught and the kind of academic research that informs it. For Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, this comprises part of a sustained attack on what – borrowing from the neoconservatism of the US Culture Wars – he calls The Blob: 'the network of educational gurus in and around our universities who ... drew gifted young teachers away from their vocation and instead directed them towards ideologically driven theory'. In returning to an apprenticeship model the government seeks to reverse the professionalization of teaching, expressed in recommendations from 1884 'that what English Schoolmasters now stand in need of is *theory*; and further that the universities have special advantages for meeting this need'. It is this hostility towards theory that has led it to champion both school-based practical training and 'evidence-based research' in educational studies.

The inauguration of Routledge's Theorizing Education Series is a satisfying counterblast to this retrogression. It aims to bring together work on the role of theory in educational research and practice

alongside a distinctive focus on 'articulating what explicitly educational function the work of particular forms of theorizing supports'. These aims are differentiated in its inaugural publication as 'the theory question in education' and 'the education question in theory', with the latter clarified by the series editors as addressing 'whether education research *necessarily* has to rely on theoretical input from (other) disciplines or whether there are, or ought to be, distinctively *educational* forms of theory and theorizing', and thus whether education is merely an applied field of study like business studies or an academic discipline in its own right.

The trandisciplinarity at stake in this question deserves further consideration, but it is first worth noting how it reflects a current anxiety within anglophone education studies, provoked perhaps most notably by the dispute between Paul Q. Hirst and Wilfred Carr in which Carr insisted that 'education theory' is the empty name given to futile attempts to ground educational practices in external 'authorities' (Plato, Rousseau, Kant...). It is not merely in the discourse of policymakers, then, but from within the discipline itself that theory has acquired something of a bad reputation over the last decade. It is tempting to ascribe this impatience towards theory to confusion over distinct areas of enquiry, comparable to an artist responding to a talk on aesthetics by demanding: 'But how does this help me work better?' But at the heart of this antagonism in fact lies not so much the paucity of theory itself as the limitations of practice.

Something of this suspicion towards theorizing nonetheless lingers across the essays collected in the opening section of the book on 'The Contextual Presence of Theory', which are concerned with uncovering the implicit theoretical bases of educational practices. Thomas S. Popketiz reveals how contemporary practices relating to students as 'adolescents', the learning 'community' and 'problem-solving' pedagogies can be traced back to theories expressing Protestant anxiety over urbanization and mass schooling, which are psychologized in American Progressivism and taken up into the mainstream via Dewey's pragmatism. Similarly, Daniel Tröhler historicizes current educational practices in relation to the emergence of Protestantism, such that education becomes a core element of social life following the introduction of the modern notion of childhood in Rousseau and Basedow, with the goal of producing future citizens as a 'safeguard [of] the modern world against possible dangers of modernity'.

Although this kind of historicizing is useful, it becomes critical only to the extent it is possible to theorize the exact nature of the relationship between 'theory' and 'practice' in terms of social divisions, otherwise one is merely suspicious of theorizing per se (and of its propensity to 'generalize' or 'universalize'). This is Carr's position and something comparable seems to resonate in the force of the 'alleged' in Tröhler's claim regarding 'the *alleged* necessity to formulate an educational theory as intellectual legitimation and as instruction for educational practices'. However, this is complicated by the explicit refusal to distinguish between theory and ideology in its materialist sense (as the ideology of a ruling class), in the same way Gove talks of the 'ideologically driven theory' of The Blob. Here, some of the lessons of Althusser's critique of the conspiratorial consequences of a negative theory of ideology as false consciousness remain unheeded (as if a secret group of elites know the truth and somehow deceive us). When Popketiz argues that 'theories are material, but not in the Marxist sense', he does so on the basis that they 'don't just stand there to push thought and ideas but are "actors" in the everyday world'. On the one hand, this resembles Althusser's (Marxist) re-materializing of ideology in terms of apparatuses, but, on the other, refusing to distinguish such actors in relation to a ruling class ideology (as Althusser continues to do) leaves us with an idealist and even theological injunction against the sins of knowledge. Similarly, Tomasz Szkudlarek's ontologizing of the function of theoretical *excess* as making the 'ontological fault, or incompleteness' of reality 'invisible', is only necessary because it proceeds from a uniquely idealist problem: how could it possibly be that educational mechanisms are already in operation before their theories are formulated?

This is surprising given that the most legitimate recourse to theory within anglophone education studies is that of French sociology: certainly Foucault, preferably Bourdieu. This follows from the transdisciplinary nature of its formation in the English-speaking world, which leaves it without a credible canon of its own, and also because the philosophical underpinnings of the discipline in Germany are problematically over-identified with the process of *Bildung*. In this, current educational theory mirrors one aspect of the development of contemporary theory more generally: either French poststructuralism or an updated idealism, omitting Marxist *philosophizing*. What renders this situation more acute in education studies, however, is a specific

misunderstanding of German critical theory as either implicitly equated with its later Habermasian development or nominalistically misidentified with 'critical pedagogy' in general.

Robin Usher and Anna Anderson claim, for example, that 'critical theory and its educational cognate critical pedagogy have probably been most influential in educational circles' but that the limitations of critical theory necessitate a Foucauldian practice of genealogical critique. These limitations are equated with 'a particular kind of ["totalizing and excluding"] rationality, which in its own way is equally oppressive' because its 'universalizing thrust' does not submit their own position to critical scrutiny and entails 'a will to know which is also a will to govern'. This description of the 'emancipatory project'

of critical theory is caricatured enough to be a better description of that which the Frankfurt School originally criticized – and it is telling that this chapter contains not a single reference to any such theorist – but it also ignores the influence of Nietzschean genealogy on the same critical theorists (and the basis of their difference from later generations). To claim that Foucauldian genealogy advances beyond critical theory because it shows how 'theories are the contingent turns of history rather than the outcome of rationally inevitable trends' or because its notion of critique problematizes 'the assumptions, familiar notions, unexamined ways of thinking on which the practices we accept rest' and so 'shows the fragility and contingency of the present in relation to the past' rather than making a 'telos or totalizing goal' fails to distinguish Foucauldian genealogy from Frankfurt Critical Theory and reveals little familiarity with *Negative Dialectics* or the *Arcades Project*.

The generality of these claims would be less troubling if they weren't echoed elsewhere in the book,

such as when Popkewitz distinguishes his critical theory from 'Frankfurt critical theory' on the basis that he seeks to 'denaturalize what is taken-for-granted, and to make fragile the causalities of the present', or when Tröhler decries, with a little more justice, the 'neo-Marxists clustered around the notion of "critical education" … who derived their theoretical assumptions from their study of the advocates of "critical theory" … and who via the method of critique of ideology (that was assigned only to the others) for self-determination of every individual'. Against this, I would suggest that the philosophical relationship between 'critical pedagogy' and 'critical theory' is often assumed rather than examined, and that within some proponents of 'critical pedagogy' today – but even in Freire's work, for example – there resides a Marxist sociology with a Hegelian epistemology. Consequently, although I am sympathetic to Norm Friesan's demand to radicalize and socialize the educational vocabulary of *Bildung* beyond its individualist framework and Johannes Bellmann's attempt to 'develop a social-theoretical approach to education as a distinct alternative to long-prevailing individualistic approaches', I would argue that it is the materialist philosophy encoded within critical theory, rather than Hegelian idealism, which still provides the best resource for philosophizing the non-philosophical contents of mass education today.

The need for such a historical materialist approach emerges in Alexander M. Sidorkin's usefully provocative essay 'On the Theoretical Limits of Education', which concerns not the apparent impoverishment of theory (which is only impoverished from the idealist standpoint of an insufficiency to either ground its claims or adequately conceptualize the real) but the enfeeblement of practice. Shifting the notion of 'theoretical limits' from the natural sciences to the context of education, Sidorkin applies the question of 'how much can we push a certain thing; how much can we change it without destroying or turning it into something completely different or no longer useful' to reforms of schooling. If the furthest limits of education concern human bioeconomics (limits on the ability for learning as a species and on the varying time and motivation to learn within a single lifespan), the near limits of education are those connected with the comparatively recent 'institution of mass compulsory schooling'.

When Sidorkin analyses these limits in terms of institutional arrangements of the labour of learning, his point is not to belittle mass education but to emphasize its difference from older (and often

coexisting) institutions of elite schooling. A failure to recognize this difference, especially by policymakers who only have experience of the latter, perpetuates the 'persistent myth that mass schooling can be refashioned into elite schooling' and consequently the constant disappointment of those seeking to reform mass education in this way. I hold reservations about Sidorkin's specific solutions to this problem, but the conclusion he draws is one that returns to the importance of continuing to theorize mass education against the impatience of frustrated educationalists: 'we do not know what education is' and without this understanding, 'our analysis of practices and our recommendations will remain imprecise and ineffective'.

The absence of critical theory from this collection is significant because it elides a perspective from which to consider the broader impasses of theory in education and therefore address the anxiety over transdisciplinarity at the centre of these debates. The question of theory's own insufficiency is *the* question of critical theory as conceived by the philosophers associated with the first generation of the Frankfurt School in the 1930s. The realization that this question cannot be addressed without simultaneously reflecting upon the historical and material conditions which constrain the academic disciplinarity and the idealism of traditional philosophy is what marks their theorizing as critical in a transdisciplinary sense, taking us beyond Hirst's analytical philosophy and Carr's pragmatism. This transdisciplinary theorizing anticipates and exceeds the notion of transdisciplinarity first coined in the context of a workshop on 'Teaching and Research Problems in Universities' by Jean Piaget in the 1970s.

Transdisciplinary theorizing of education is required if we are to confront both the 'theory question in education' and the 'education question in theory'. An understanding of the expansion of the economy into all aspects of social relations, including the increasing commodification of education, is not possible without concepts and theories imported from a critique of political economy. As Lisbeth Lundahl argues, this includes both hidden and more direct forms of privatization: the introduction of Free Schools in Sweden (lauded by the Conservatives and tacitly accepted in Labour's recent announcements) enforced a market on the *whole* system, including a state sector that now had to compete for students, teachers and resources. Simultaneously, existing theory, including the critical kind, must address the increasing pedagogization of society under the most recent developments of late capitalism: Angela

Merkel, Bellmann reports, 'wants to turn Germany into a *Bildungs*republik'. This concerns not just schools, colleges and universities but other areas of the state as well as corporations, charities, cultural and artistic institutions, as 'lifelong' and 'flexible' models of learning change how we work and the nature of the services and goods we consume. Szkudlarek is right to draw attention to Foucault's anticipation of this.

In this regard, the current antagonism towards theory within Education Studies reflects a set of broader external and internal historical conditions (massification and commodification) reminiscent of those that generated the formation of Cultural Studies as the most fertile field of transdisciplinary theorizing in the twentieth century anglophone academy. There is, therefore, a double provocation arising from this book: not just 'to theorize education' but to 'pedagogize theory', since today it is pedagogy that most stands in need of a critical standpoint of its own.

Matthew Charles

Speculation against speculation

Speculation has a bad reputation. It did so in the nineteenth century, when populists berated financial speculation for its parasitic relation to the hard work and 'real labour' of farmers; it did so in the mid-twentieth century, when John Maynard Keynes sought to expel the 'animal spirits' of speculative gambling from the international financial system; and it does so now, when speculative investment in and complex repackaging of household debt and mortgages has triggered one of the worst financial crises since the Great Depression. But however berated, criticized, repressed and outlawed speculation has been over time, it undeniably defines our zeitgeist. It underpins both the credit crisis that has shaped economic fortunes for nearly a decade, and the security apparatus that has developed in the name of fighting terrorism, seeking to pre-empt and anticipate threat at the earliest possible stage. Speculation seems undeniably and irrevocably tied to a neoliberal attitude and the excessive 'capitalization of almost everything', as Andrew

Leyshon and Nigel Thrift put it, that defines the contemporary juncture.

Now, however, in the midst of a chorus of critique directed against speculative finance and speculative security, a group offers a manifesto that seeks to rescue the affirmative and creative qualities of speculation. Writing under the name of the Uncertain Commons, this collective excavates the multiple politically promising meanings of speculation, its vital values of 'expectation, conjecture and anticipation', its 'dormant energies' of contestation, play and immanence. 'To speculative affirmatively', they write, 'is to produce futures while refusing to foreclose potentialities, to hold on to the spectrum of possibilities while remaining open to multiple futures whose context of actualization can never be fully anticipated … In this sense, affirmative speculation affords modes of living that creatively engage *uncertainty*'. In short, the Uncertain Commons seeks to carve out ways that engage the uncertain future creatively and democratically, without lapsing into the commodification and colonization of futurities that speculation all too often produces. As Susan Bibler Coutin has written perceptively in a slightly different context, 'when risk is rendered catastrophic yet incalculable, oppositional discourses and tactics, like security discourses themselves, must enter the unknown, not to minimize the unknown through knowledge, but rather to use its temporal rift to redefine the security project itself.'

There are many reasons to welcome the agenda of this book. One of the most important is that *critiquing* speculation has historically been quick to veer towards a particular vein of conservatism. It may be an uncomfortable truth for radical philosophers and critics of neoliberalism alike, but criticizing speculation's ephemeral qualities and anti-foundational commodifications has all too often led to an interpellation of problematic socio-political foundations. The nineteenth-century populists who likened futures trading to the work of the devil often sought to inscribe white Christian nationhood as the core American value (frequently aligned with anti-Semitism); the post-World War II Bretton Woods financial world order was founded upon its own model of the nuclear family and the male breadwinner; and current critiques of derivatives as speculative excess tend explicitly or implicitly to appeal to a mythical 'real' economy in need of rescue. The historical conundrum of critiquing speculation is that conservatism and the appeal to fundamentals loom large when condemning speculation's fleeting, uprooting, abstract and anti-foundational qualities.

Seeking to move past this conundrum, *Speculate This!* distinguishes between 'firmative' and 'affirmative' speculation. Firmative speculation is based on predictive, calculative rationalities that colonize the future and close down its multiple potentialities. It works through expert knowledge and the classification, enumeration and probabilistic calculation of risks, producing firmaments or foundations as 'the probabilistic itself becomes a new form of certainty'. In this manner, firmative speculation '*produces* potentialities and then *exploits* and thus *forecloses* them'. Chapter 2 of the Manifesto analyses the various guises and manifestations of firmative speculation through its four functions: calculation, communication, socialization and globalization. It is compellingly broad in historical scope – starting with the English Gambling Act of 1774 – and rich in examples. It discusses the legal sanctioning, moral problematization, globalizing networks and normalizing social effects of firmative speculation across a broad spectrum of security and financial settings. This at once synthesizes a large interdisciplinary set of literatures, fuses it with current examples, and adds its own distinctive voice to what we know about speculation as a modern practice of approaching the uncertain future. For example, while it approaches firmative speculation as a calculative and expert practice, this chapter is careful not thereby to render it inherently dull or disembodied. One of the strongest sections of the chapter analyses the vibrant visualizations of speculation, and the way in which digital media and real-time data-streaming play a role in 'render[ing] probability palpable': 'A firmative speculation … relies on sensory and affective responses for the formation of consensus on selective solutions for a better collective future.' Likewise, in its discussion of what all too often ends up being a self-fulfilling prophecy of pre-emptive intervention and speculative security, Uncertain Commons reflect upon the melancholic drive inherent in this. Fear does not suffice when everyday life is confronted with the spiralling logic of producing the very thing security seeks to contain or expel, such as deadly viruses or hacker attacks. Ultimately, firmative speculation as an approach to the uncertain future entails the 'hubris of risk calculation'; it 'activates the distinctive future-perfect temporality of the catastrophic imagination: thinking of *what we will have done* by the time the next catastrophe hits'.

In contrast to the commercializing logic and self-fulfilling properties of firmative speculation, *Speculate This!* offers its notion of *affirmative*

speculation. Affirmative speculation is the admittedly paradoxical endeavour to rescue and revalue a speculative attitude to the world – an attitude of wonder, of open-endedness, or radical uncertainty. Affirmative speculation, then, thrives 'in the vicinity of the unthinkable', but, unlike firmative speculation, it 'remains responsive to difference' and refuses to foreclose potentiality. Affirmative speculation '*sabotages* the exploitation of potentialities, *produces* the common, and *opens* up innumerable possibilities'. Chapter 3 grapples with the notion of affirmative speculation, and how it might look in practice. Ranging from the prototype to the revolution without agenda, from the Ricardo Dominguez Transborder Immigrant Tool to the film *Into Eternity* (2010), from the hacker collective Anonymous to practices of piracy, the authors seek to give body and meaning to their call to 'speculate *otherwise*'. Thinking speculation otherwise entails carving out spaces of becoming, engaging in 'creative sabotage' of firmative speculation and fostering 'social relations not mediated by markets'. At moments in this chapter, the reader is drawn into the speculative, experimental nature of defining affirmative speculation itself. The Uncertain Commons render explicit their own disagreements over how affirmative speculation might look or work, and invite the reader to help adjudicate. Not all of the examples offered in this chapter are, however, equally convincing. It is the book's strength *and* weakness that it gives meaning to affirmative speculation through manifold examples. Critiquing the way speculation colonizes the future is important, as is gesturing towards radical undecideability and the future's profound open-endedness. But thinking creatively of how such politico-philosophical agendas might look in practice is a challenge not many have yet dared take up. In the face of this momentous task, clearly no concrete example could ever suffice. Still, the examples offered here tend to favour the digitally savvy and largely steer away from the conventional places where we might think to locate politics. Though as a political scientist I have often tried to work with a broad notion of politics – seeking surprising political significations and practices of 'making strange' in the arts or literature, for example – the Uncertain Commons' steering away from the contours of existing political debate seems to leave a gap in their otherwise rich exploration of examples.

It is clear that a boundary between firmative and affirmative speculation could never be fully drawn. For example, the prototypes of affirmative speculation could, in their own development, be incorporated into schemes of firmative speculation and investment. Some examples of firmative speculation, could – in expected ways – offer anchors of critique along affirmative lines, as in for example the controversy over the pre-emptive arrest of the Lackawanna Six. The boundary is mutable, and the Commons is keen to steer away from clear notions of 'bad' and 'good' speculation. On balance, though, perhaps *Speculate This!* underestimates the extent to which firmative speculation *itself* deploys notions of uncertainty, potentiality and possibility as a basis for security action and its drive to commodification. As Louise Amoore has shown, for example, the security apparatus of the war on terror has to an important extent moved *beyond* probability and is better understood as a politics of possibility which exceeds risk calculation to act on admittedly unknown and possible futures. The deployment of intuition and the reading of 'scattered signs' that this book's authors offer as properties of affirmative speculation are already the method of security data algorithmics and the production of suspicion in advanced passenger screening programs. Similarly, financial speculation may not be about prediction at all, but about the production of *multiple* possible futures that are rendered liquid in the present, as Melinda Cooper, for one, has argued. Though Uncertain Commons are certainly aware of the movement 'beyond risk' – discussing how, at the beginning of the twentieth century 'probabilistic bets on the future appear increasingly *infirm*' – it largely places firmative speculation in the domain of calculative risk and probability. It does not explicitly reflect on security's move *beyond* probability, nor does it engage the difference between pre-emption and prediction (for they are vitally different, as I have argued elsewhere). Within a politics of possibility, the infirmity of probability calculus can no longer be seized upon for critique, because it has already fully been appropriated towards security action and commodification.

Speculate This! offers a much-needed avenue for the politically urgent critique of speculation that avoids the trap of conservatism. It is erudite and rich in examples. It is a collective voice – and even if that at times produces weaknesses in the text, it works to draw the reader into the political experiment of affirmative speculation. Now, it is up to the readers as potential collective to seize, expand, engage and develop this promise of alternative political futurity.

Marieke de Goede