Imagining Bodies: Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Imagination
JAMES STEEVES
Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004; 220 pages.

James Steeves' book offers a review of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy that is valuable to newcomers while offering novel insights that will interest the advanced scholar. According to Steeves, the book sets out to "explore the role of the imagining body in the various kinds of imagination ... perception, aesthetics and fanciful" (6). Further, "Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the imagination will be applied to many different types of imagining and will be shown to provide a solution to many of the problems posed by philosophers concerning the imagination, including its relation to perception, the nature of the mental image, and the role of the imagination in psychopathology" (6). The real value of Steeves' book, however, is its ability to provide a thoroughgoing articulation of Merleau-Ponty's treatment of imagination in a way that illustrates a clear development in Merleau-Ponty's thought from his earlier works like Phenomenology of Perception (1945) to his later works such as Eye and Mind (1964).

Imagining Bodies includes an introduction and eight chapters. The introductory text introduces the recurring motif of the work: a discussion of the mime and the distinctively embodied expressiveness of the mime's art. This has the effect at times of suggesting that the issue at hand, that which is encapsulated in the term "embodiment," is no more than the expressiveness of gesture. Steeves' own verbiage occasionally pushes the reader into this superficial understanding of the mime motif. However, it is clear from the text as a whole that the book seeks to elucidate a greater issue, namely, embodiment as the precondition of experience and the centrality of the body in Merleau-Ponty's ontology.

Steeves' account of Merleau-Ponty's theory of the imagination unfolds cumulatively. The first chapter provides the groundwork for further discussion by illustrating how the early work of Merleau-Ponty suggests that perception is distributed throughout and saturates the whole of the body, rather than being contained within a single sense organ like the eye or ear. In this discussion we are introduced to one of the principal concepts of Imagining Bodies: the virtual body. Steeves tells us that "the virtual body is an imaginative ability to consider alternative uses of the body and to assume different perspectives from which to observe a situation. The original habits of the body can be extended and combined on the basis of an imaginative level of embodied experience" (22). In the
following chapters Steeves explains the role of the virtual body in the  
exercise of the imagination.  
In Chapter 2, "Perceptual Imagining," Steeves elaborates upon  
Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception as a wholly embodied function through  
which our sense data are incorporated into both the physical and  
cognitive behavior of the subject. The distinction between the physical  
and cognitive gradually dissipates as Steeves' analysis proceeds. This  
progressive dissipation is seen in the following four chapters. First, in  "Aesthetic Imagining," Steeves articulates a synthesis of Merleau-Ponty's  
analysis of perception (the cognitive act) with the subject's interaction  
and reaction (i.e., one's behavior understood in a broad sense) with  
works of art. This yields an analysis of aesthetics that is wholly effectual  
to the lived experience of the subject. This is elaborated upon in Chapter  
3, "Fanciful Imagining," to the extent that the activity of the imagining  
body comes to be understood as the sole existential influence upon  
the subject. It is responsible for her pathology, as is described in Chapter 4,  "Pathological Imagining," as well as her own self-understanding, as  
described in Chapter 5, "Self-Imagining."

In his concluding two chapters Steeves returns to the motif of the  
mime in order to introduce a novel analysis of the ontology of the self.  
Although it seems overdone at times, Steeves' motif of the mime serves  
as an exemplar of the ideas he seeks to elucidate.

DARRYL MURPHY, University of Guelph

Interrogating Ethics: Embodying the Good in Merleau-Ponty
JAMES HATLEY, JANICE MCLANE, CHRISTIAN DIEHM, Editors  
Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006; 386 pages.

Merleau-Ponty nowhere gives us an explicit ethics. Yet everywhere, from  
his studies of perception and the body through his investigations of the  
political, ontology, nature, and institutions, his philosophy grapples with  
the web of relationships through which we stand to one another as  
expressive and responsible agents. An implicit ethics haunts his work,  
and the essays in this volume seek to reveal it. But as James Hatley  
points out in his introductory essay, this will not be an "ethics as usual."  
If ethics is rooted in the webwork through which we become responsible to  
ethical imperatives then ethics cannot simply be the affirmation of an  
already or easily established good; instead it must be an inquiry into how  
our becoming responsible through this webwork complicates the very  
notion of the good.

The essays in the first part of the book take up this issue in especially  
insightful ways. Alia Al-Saji's study of the genesis of the ethical body in  
Merleau-Ponty combines careful readings of Eye and Mind, Signs, and  
The Visible and the Invisible with observations about painting, mirrors,  
and the mirror stage to show how we find the sense of our bodies  
visually completed in other bodies, and how this relation opens up ethical  
questions once it is given voice in expression. Bernhard Waldenfels'  
essay echoes this point by emphasizing how Merleau-Ponty's ethics must  
be based in a "logos of response" (98), that is, a logic in which ethical  
imperatives emerge only from the to and fro of responding to the world  
and one another. As Waldenfels observes, such an ethics leaves behind  
the is/ought distinction and shows how ethics must be sensitive to Imperatives  
that do not fit within current teleological, deontological, or  
utilitarian accounts. Diane Perpich's response to Waldenfels is illuminating,  
and it is apt for a book on this topic to build in such exchanges  
between thinkers. Mary Rawlinson's essay nicely complements these  
conclusions. She tries to make sense of Merleau-Ponty's apparent blind-  
ess to sexual difference from within his own philosophical framework,  
arriving at the important result that in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy ideas  
are radically contingent on the ways we produce perspectives on our  
world, through our bodily engagement with others, in practices such as  
literature and painting. She gives a powerful demonstration of this ethical  
framework through an insightful reading of Henry James's A Portrait of a  
Lady, showing how Isabel Archer's experience is what produces her  
perspective on the good, her idea of it. Even though an idea in this sense  
diverges from classical understandings of the idea of the good, Archer's  
idea, "that the paradigm of real evil is to render another no more than  
the means of satisfying one's own desires" (89), echoes one formulation of  
Kant's categorical imperative. What is key here is that the good that  
Archer arrives at is mediated not by an immediate universal but by our  
bodily and perspectival ways of finding a universal within the singular.  
Altogether, the essays in this part unsettle the idea of an abstract good,  
and direct our attention to the good's bodily and intersubjective birth.

The second and third parts contain essays showing how Merleau-  
Ponty's phenomenology of the body and language provide resources for  
a phenomenologically based ethics. These essays include Janice Mc  
Lane's study of the way that identifying oneself as a victim operates on  
bodily levels that erode agency, Carolin Woolson's analysis of the role of  
bodily memory in ethics, David Brubaker's tracing of a tension between  
Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, Glenn Mazis' discussion of divergences and  
affinities between Levinas' ethics of the face and Merleau-Ponty's ethics  
of the flesh, and Susan O'Shaughnessy's analysis of Merleau-Ponty and
Wittgenstein on the role of language in mediating conflicts (such as in interfaith discussions).

Attention to the body in the second and third parts is mostly inspired by Merleau-Ponty's posthumously published writing about what he calls flesh. (A notable exception is Jennifer Gosetti-Ferenczi's nuanced account of how the generation of gestural language calls us into relation with alterity; her account incorporates empirical studies of the spontaneous development of sign language in children and Kristeva's notion of poetic language.) The focus on flesh is not surprising, for flesh is a principle that exceeds individuals and marks our bodies as implicated in something beyond us. Flesh is thus a powerful resource for ethics. A reader of these essays, however, might be forgiven for thinking that the ethics of the flesh is all too friction-free, that an ethics of the flesh springs from something like an element of pre-personal harmony. According to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty confessed to having never recovered from a happy childhood. This has brewed into a nostrum about Merleau-Ponty as a happy philosopher hung up on connections rather than differences, birth rather than death, harmony rather than discord, and so on. In my view, this is misleading. Merleau-Ponty rightly observed that perception is inherently violent in imposing its own perspective on things, and was interested in how reason, ideas, and philosophy itself are (as Rawlinson emphasizes) fragile and contingent, arising only in rare moments, and who was concerned to trace the way in which history and institutions harbor discords that can undermine human happiness. An ethics of the flesh would not simply be an ethics of harmony but of a tension to which we find ourselves already responsive or obligated. The tension between harmony and discord surfaces in an exchange between Ted Toadvine and David Abrams, on Abrams' Merleau-Ponty inspired contribution to environmental ethics. Toadvine argues that Abrams' eco-phenomenology poses a radical gap between perception and reflection, and downplays reflection and language. According to Toadvine, Abrams does this in order to give an account of our perceptual and bodily attunement to nature as manifesting a "kinship" between us and nature, a kinship that thus neglects the gap between us and nature that is marked by the difference between perception and reflection. In response, Abram notes that the kinship he proposes includes the hunting and killing of other animals (to which Toadvine has ethical objections) and that Toadvine has given an altogether too harmonious and placid reading of Abrams' notion of "kinship" (284). What is at stake here are issues of harmony and discord. If a Merleau-Pontyan interrogation of ethics unsettles the idea of the good then it must be open to finding an unsettled and perhaps unsettling—even discordant—idea of the good. We cannot simply cleave to notions of an harmonious flesh that leads us back to a good that we find welcoming because in accord with our ethical intuitions. A Merleau-Pontyan ethics would be an ethics of hard work, an ethics of collectively accomplishing a good rather than an ethics of an ideal settled in advance. To develop such an ethics we would do well to see how the flesh invites itself to go wrong. This aspect of Merleau-Ponty's ethics, it seems to me, is unfortunately obscured by the particular approach to flesh that predominates in the second and third parts.

Interrogating Ethics concludes with a codicil. This contains an intriguing essay on the mouth, by David Wood, which traces how the very function and formation of the mouth, as regulating what is food or not, already marks our bodies and our ontology with a tension between facts and values, between is and ought. In other words, this primal opening of the body bodes a bodily ethics. The final essay, by Hugh Silverman, speaks about what it means to speak about a philosopher such as Merleau-Ponty, and shows how our discussion of him brings in various specters of other philosophers. Here, death shows itself in the discussion of ethics, embodiment, and responsiveness.

Overall, Interrogating Ethics is a rich and intriguing volume which opens an ethical dimension within Merleau-Ponty's thought. It contributes to Continental philosophy's exploration of an ethics beyond the usual since it emerges from and spreads into diverse areas of life, rather than being pursued as a topic and practice separate from the general run of life.

DAVID MORRIS, Trent University

The Sense of Space
DAVID MORRIS

The Sense of Space picks up Merleau-Ponty's investigation of spatiality from the Phenomenology of Perception and works out a rigorous philosophy where depth figures as the original ground of human existence. It is in depth that we primarily live, argues Morris. Not, however, the depth of scientific measures or the geometer's ruler, but a depth that is a dynamic crossing of body and world, a depth in which we are always already emotionally, expressively, and intersubjectively involved. Morris compellingly assumes the style of the Phenomenology, employing vivid experiential descriptions and scientific case studies while, like the later Merleau-Ponty, driving these phenomenological investigations to fruition
in a primordial ontology of chiasmic reversibility that precedes and grounds subjective experience.

Morris’s introduction, a philosophical work in its own right, lays out “The Problem of Depth.” Following the work of Merleau-Ponty and Ed Casey, Morris explains that depth is the primary dimension that affords us perceptual existence, placing us in contact with a world of voluminous things. Traditional accounts of space argue that we come to a sense of spatial depth by reconstructing a representation of the world latent in the intrinsic resemblances of sensory givens, or by inference to an intelligible order beyond sensation. Morris criticizes these views for presupposing an objective spatiality of objects by integrating them into our bodily space (say, the driving implements in a car) or by being drawn out of one’s bodily space (finding oneself thrown into a British car where all directions are reversed and nothing is where it should be when we reach for it).

Our experiences are of an exchange of body and world, not at some fixed point but as a dynamic threshold. Morris decisively points out the way in which we experience ourselves as a join between the extra-ordinary, unified sense of our own bodies and the ordinary space of things. Following Merleau-Ponty, our bodies are not in space but of space, constantly forming identities with objects by integrating them into our bodily space (say, perhaps, the driving implements in a car) or by being drawn out of one’s bodily space (finding oneself thrown into a British car where all directions are reversed and nothing is where it should be when we reach for it).

Our spatial relations take the form of this expanding and contracting spatial body-world threshold. Morris clearly presents the insight that in order for this threshold to exist there must already be crossed movement in it. The world is not some foreign manifold but a primal contact which “intimates its possibilities” to us, such that our nascent experience of space calls for its own exploration in the development of ever more stylized movements.

The first part of Morris’ book elaborates this “Moving Sense of the Body.” Morris criticizes scientific accounts that seek to explain the motion of solid, determinate bodies by virtue of general, pre-existent laws.

Quoting Bergson, Morris reveals that in such a world everything that will be already is. Time does not matter because its significance is fixed beforehand. In place of this, the author argues for an immanent causality, immanent not to already determinate bodies but to movements that give rise to determinacy. Causality is a “vital order” which establishes its own norms and logic; it is “a multiplicity of movements [which] form a moving structure that is the ongoing result of the very movements that are so structured” (56). Rather than being repeatable and reducible to component parts, self-organizing structures are their own index of intelligibility. In a captivating analogy to origami paper folding, Morris reflects about how causality operates by folds within movement itself. Movement comes to limit itself, folding itself into constraints. These folds are of a piece with the thing they fold, yet introduce differentiation within it. That is to say, in limiting and differentiating, these folds recast the possibilities of motion, allowing for ever more complex structures to articulate themselves. What is more, these structures call to be understood in their own time, within the meaning that arises from their reciprocal relation as a “becoming out of limit” (75).

Morris explains Merleau-Ponty’s schema corporel as our living the world through a unity of diversely stylized habits. Like the structures discussed above, walking occurs as a structuring of limits that cross body and world. When I get to the point of developing the ability to walk and a walking style, I might learn to walk from the hip or the knee, says Morris. Learning one of these styles, however, reconfigures the movements that made it possible in the first place, in effect folding the folds that allowed it, and thus making a return to that original state of possibility difficult or impossible. Morris remarks that the body is labile. Its living depths in the world are subject to change and development. Habits follow this logic of a temporal, open structure. Morris argues that our movement is doubly the synchronic movement of our body-world threshold and the diachronic movement of constraints which fold this threshold into new possibilities—a determinately structured relation with the world which nonetheless holds itself open. In movement the body grows, and in growth the body moves, Morris explains. Thus in habit we live our engagements to the world in a kind of ecstatic temporality. We do not relate to things in their mere presence, but we encounter them having already anticipated them as we have come to live them and move with them. These stylized habits in turn are never fully what they are until they cross into engagement with things and resonate with them. Habits are described, paradoxically, as engaged insensitivities to actual situations which form the basis of further sensitivities. An example is that it is only when my body is unconcernedly attuned to the sounds of the new French words, i.e., once it has formed an identity with those
sounds, that their meaning is possible for me. In forming this habit I "grow into" a whole new sphere of action, which recasts all of my other engagements with the world. Like the causal structures articulated above (what Merleau-Ponty calls "motivating relations"), our habits grow into a completion which crystallizes their meaningfulness at the same time as it crystallizes the meaningfulness of their objects. Alluding to motor experiments conducted by Lackner and others, which present subjects experiencing their limbs in impossible positions, Morris reveals that the body schema is not a fixed representation of the body, but is an open structure rising out of body-world movement itself. One intriguing avenue Morris takes up, which I do not have space to explicate fully, is the centrality of asymmetrical movement in development: the child must learn to disagree with itself via jointed movement and thus join with the world in new ways. His "The Topology of Expression" chapter explores the reversibility of the body and world, as they infiltrate each other in this movement.

In a world that we are always comported toward and whose nascent meanings call us out of ourselves, the cogito is tacit. Intelligibility is never given in advance or once and for all but emerges as sens out of non-sens, as expressive gesture which renders body-world movement intelligible. Like the folding cause, this structure is chiasmic: expression and expressed become differentiated from within. Essentially, they are not different, so their difference in expression can never be conclusively clear-cut or hypostatized. Morris expertly ties this discussion of expression to learning, taking up the debater's paradox in Plato's _Meno_. He invokes Merleau-Ponty's point that our spatial relation is always already meaningfully crossed and that we encounter a furtive, beckoning intelligibility in the world as it pulls on us to bring it to its completion. Such is the case in a child who, seeing a vaguely differentiated and odd color, improves upon her perception until the colors "snap into place" and become determinate. Much of the second half of Morris' book is devoted to showing not only how expression and learning are integral to our sense of space but that this space is from the start ethical. Morris demonstrates that we learn from others in a process of analysis-synthesis, by which we mimic their movements in stages until we can perform these movements as integrated wholes. The structure of intersubjectivity is one of intercorporality, wherein we are always in touch with the movements of others. Thrown into this world with others, we first experience the world as an indeterminate non-sens to be resolved in perception, habits, learning, and expression. Morris culminates phenomenology in a transcendence of the subject, in the pre-personal, intersubjective, "unreflective fund of experience" Merleau-Ponty cryptically writes of, and what for Bergson is the time before the subject. Morris argues that this other-relatedness is the ground of all of our freedom for Merleau-Ponty, and he makes a compelling comparison to anxiety in Heidegger. For Heidegger, the self's determinate relation to its world and things—which it takes to be the ground of its existence—often withdraws, suddenly holding us out into this pre-objective origin.

The final sections of Morris' book outline an ethics where imperatives do not issue from already formed subjects but reside in the open character of experience. We experience others as extra-ordinary depths, like ourselves and in our own space. There is no specular encounter where another's space clashes with my own; we are already within each other's space, always in touch with others. Morris lays out some elementary steps for this ethics in depth, in which we turn a face toward others. For Morris, our space is never something established prior to emotions or to our dealings with others but is always in the first place a space that matters, which calls on us, which we have always been crossed with yet always meet up with in new ways.

Morris' book is written in expressive yet technical prose. In his pages we encounter the musings of Hamlet and Ahab, the vivid descriptions of Neruda and Rilke, compelling anecdotes about climbing the staircases of our memory, Lackner's experiments about weightlessness in airplanes, and numerous other case studies. Morris' book rigorously challenges traditional accounts of spatiality, defends and elaborates the positions of MerleauPonty, Bergson, and others, while intimating several developments and comparisons coming out of this account. Every serious student of phenomenology should study this book. Its novel insights will also be of great interest to anyone studying perception, language, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, American pragmatism, ecological psychology, child psychology, and related fields. While his work is focused on Merleau-Ponty, and to a lesser extent Bergson, its insights regarding Aristotle, Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre, and Deleuze are indispensable. Morris' book is an invigorating alternative to scientific and traditional explanations of spatiality. His thesis binds together traditionally isolated questions, placing expression, emotion, and ethics in the very depths in which we dwell.

DON BEITH, McGill University
Desire and Distance: Introduction to a Phenomenology of Perception

RENAUD BARBARAS

Renaud Barbaras has emerged in recent years as a leading authority on the thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Although founded primarily on Barbaras' main work, De l'Être du phénomène: Sur l'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty, first published in 1991 (an English translation appeared in 2004), this reputation is also based on subsequent contributions, including Le tournant de l'expérience: Recherches sur la philosophie de Merleau-Ponty (1998), as well as his involvement in the edition and publication of course notes from some of Merleau-Ponty's Collège de France lectures in the late 1950s. It would be wrong, however, to link Barbaras too closely with Merleau-Ponty. While he now occupies the sort of authoritative position vis-à-vis Merleau-Ponty that was once (and, to some extent, still is) held by Claude Lefort, for example, there is something significantly different now. Whereas Lefort, a close living link to Merleau-Ponty, can be said to have elaborated—in highly original ways, to be sure—an extension of Merleau-Ponty's thought, Barbaras' approach to the Merleau-Pontyan œuvre is to situate it squarely in the past. Rather than taking it up as an open-ended work in progress, Barbaras aims for interpretive closure, in particular with regard to the unfinished manuscript of The Visible and the Invisible. Thus, contrary to the kid-gloved attitude that characterizes much specialist scholarship, with Barbaras there is no lament over Merleau-Ponty's untimely death, no defensive speculation about what might have been. Instead, Barbaras critically and forcefully engages with Merleau-Ponty's extant work as a source of definite contributions that are to be assessed on the basis of their philosophical merits alone.

Barbaras' basic question concerns perception as the originary mode of access to being, and in particular whether a phenomenology of perception can come to terms with itself in a sufficiently consistent and critical way as to provide a genuine philosophy of perception. While Barbaras is confident that the latter could only be attained through a phenomenological approach, his question is whether this is in fact possible (he does not think that Merleau-Ponty himself fully pulled this off). As an "introduction" to this ultimately ontological problem, Barbaras' aim in Desire and Distance is to rethink key phenomenological concepts in order to ascertain and assess the ontological implications of phenomenology's claim to offer philosophical access to reality at the primordial level.

This is, however, by no means an introductory "introduction." On the contrary, it is a highly technical work. Although Barbaras occasionally pauses to gather his thoughts, he develops his analyses very swiftly, and in a terse and severely humourless style that is not for the uninitiated. The work was originally published in Vrin's Problèmes et Controverses series (1999). That this translation appears in SUP's Cultural Memory in the Present series is a bit perplexing, its content being far removed from anything that could be deemed "cultural analysis" in even the most generous sense. (There is no introduction from either the series editor or the translator that might clarify its inclusion in this series.) Be that as it may, Desire and Distance is a pivotal work of an important contemporary thinker, and its availability in English should give a welcome boost to discussions of foundational phenomenological theory.

Barbaras begins with what Merleau-Ponty called "the basic fact of metaphysics," that "I am sure that there is being—on the condition that I do not seek another sort of being than being-for-me." Accepting that our access to transcendence necessarily passes through immanence commits one to a broadly phenomenological approach, the primary task of which is to reconcile "presence" and "thingness" [chôsité] in an account of the conditions of their primordial unity. The difficulty is to come to terms with the distance that is contained within perceptual experience, to overcome the dichotomies on which most philosophical accounts of perception founder. For Barbaras, this means getting clear about the ontological structure of "appearance" [l'apparence], i.e., the ontology of phenomenality as such. This means avoiding any confusion between appearance in this sense and "appearing" [l'apparaissant], whether in general or in the form of any particular "appearance" [l'apparition]. (One wishes that the translator had included a note flagging this terminology.) We need to respect the autonomy and originality of phenomenality, from which follows the methodological exigency to suspend the "spontaneous ontology" of the natural attitude, i.e., perform the epoché and phenomenological reduction. It is ultimately this exigency that implies a commitment to phenomenology. Pioneering this route, Husserl made the key discovery, namely, that of givenness by "adumbrations" [esquisses; Husserl's Abschattungen]. From mere "appearance" [l'apparence], this allows us to distinguish "manifestation" [l'apparition] as the adumbrated awareness through which things are directly given—yet never wholly, that is, always at a distance. For Barbaras, it is of the essence of perception that things are given through the flux of manifestation, and it is here that the constitutive ambiguity between immanence and transcendence that animates the basic problem is to be found.

The primary phenomenological task is not so much to grasp perception along these lines but to retool philosophy by thinking according
to [selon] perception. This is something that Husserl himself failed to do. He compromised his insight concerning adumbrational givenness by retaining a dualistic conceptual framework according to which "the appearance of worldly appearing" [l'apparaître de l'apparaissant mondain] refers phenomenality back to a sense of immanent lived experience—transcendental consciousness—that would be an Archimedean point outside of the essential distance and ambiguity of perception. This phenomenologically unwarranted "subjectivation" of appearance [l'apparaître] is tied to traditional objectivist assumptions concerning presence and the determinability of being. The root of the problem lies in Husserl's positivist bias, that is, his refusal to recognize the absence from manifestation of what is manifested through adumbration as itself a constitutive moment of phenomenality—in other words, his inability to conceive of absence as a positive mode of perceptual givenness. According to Barbaras, Husserl was thus unfaithful to the reduction in such a way that he falsified his insights, ultimately remaining, despite himself, within the natural attitude.

Barbaras thus aims to redeem Husserl's basic insights and provide a phenomenologically consistent eidetic of perception. Fundamental to this is a rethinking of the natural attitude and hence of the reduction, and this is of particular interest. Key here is the notion of "nothingness" [le néant]. Barbaras' contention is that what underlies the naïveté of Husserlian positivism is a reversal of the ontological priority of being and nothingness, that is, the supposition that nothing can precede something. What needs to be initially bracketed out is not the thesis of worldly existence but that of a preliminary [préalable] nothingness. Rather than moving from a suspension of existence to transcendental subjectivity, the reduction properly leads from the negation of nothingness to phenomenality itself, without any interposed objectivity. This fulfills the true motive of the reduction, which is not to place in abeyance the existence of the world but to overcome the misleading pre-comprehension that obstructs the correct apprehension of that existence.

Rather than transcendental consciousness, then, the apodictic residue of this approach is the certainty of an originary "there is" [il y a] which discloses "the structure of belonging [appartenance] that is constitutive of appearance [l'apparaître]." It is as "belonging" that Barbaras characterizes the "originary and perfectly singular mode of solidarity" that is the mutual implication of world, horizon, and subject—the what, how, and to whom of appearance. The claim that this solidarity yields the essence of appearance is meant to turn Husserl on his head by dispossessing consciousness of its priority: rather than the world being conditioned a priori by consciousness, it is now seen as the latter's a priori condition. There is thus no horizon of adequate deter-

mination. Rather, appearance implies the presence of the unrepresentable: all manifestation is "co-manifestation" of the world, of its inexhaustible absence, such that obscurity is spread across all experience. The structure of appearance thus breaks the laws of formal ontology, which hold only for appearing. In particular, the horizontality of the infinite flow of adumbrational givenness defies the principle of identity. This also applies to the subject. While subjectivity is an integral part of the structure of appearance, it is nonetheless ontologically dependent on the logic of appearance.

Barbaras thus provides a pointed and largely compelling critique and reinterpretation of transcendental phenomenology, a view informed and inspired primarily by the thought of Jan Patocka. Some may feel that the "standard" view of Husserl that Barbaras targets is a caricature. But the nature of his position, which aims to radicalize phenomenology or to out-Husserl Husserl, can effectively dodge that sort of objection. The deeper problem has to do with Barbaras' embrace of the infinite flow of adumbration as ontologically constitutive rather than, with Husserl, as an epistemologically regulative idea in the Kantian sense. While he rejects the intuitive basis of phenomenology, inasmuch as intuition is eventually intertwined with the non-intuitive, Barbaras does not call into question the primacy of givenness. He thus argues for the givenness of the impossibility of something's being exhaustively given: "The fact that the object cannot be given to me itself from the moment that, as an object in the world, it envelops the infinite is itself given to me" (76). This is a crucial plank in his effort to go beyond Husserl. Phenomenologically, however, it is highly dubious, and in any case does not seem to follow from the originary « il y a » as Barbaras described it. It is not that the latter is inconsistent with infiniteness per se. Rather, the problem is that Barbaras ties infiniteness to a notion of "the world" that presupposes that a single world—Husserl's die eine Welt—actually obtains. But this shows that Barbaras is insufficiently radical. Although he sets aside assumptions about its knowability, he does not recognize that the correct apprehension of the existence of the world will be rooted in the possibility that that singularity does not obtain, and that if it is given at all then it is as a practical imperative to realize. In effect, Barbaras pushes to the limit the standpoint of what Fink called the "non-participant spectator," and his claim about the givenness of the infinite is merely a speculative way to redeem phenomenology as a project of strictly theoretical reason.

In the last two chapters, Barbaras works back from this account of phenomenality to consider in more detail the question of the perceptual subject, approaching this as that which makes possible the presence of the unrepresentability of the world. Here he is critical of Merleau-Ponty, the
shortcomings of whose work can be traced back to his beginning with embodiment rather than interrogating the latter's inscription in the world on the basis of the horizontal structure of appearance and the negativity or non-coincidence that this implies. It is thus not corporeality as such that is basic but its "constitutive motility," living movement as "the realized identity between being and appearance" (92). Here Barbaras appeals to the likes of Kurt Goldstein and Viktor Von Weizsäcker, although this seems to be at odds with the specific phenomenological rigor that he has tried to establish. At any rate, readers of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's *The Primacy of Movement* will find Barbaras' discussion agreeable, if very cursory.

For Barbaras, the ultimate sense of perceptual subjectivity as living movement is cashed out as desire, "an originary incompleteness" understood in terms of "the movement of life itself," that is, the dimension of life transcendentally prior to the distinction between transitive and intransitive living. This is life as "the constitutive arch-facticity [*archifacticité*] of the transcendentual, the mutual envelopment of the world and its condition of phenomenalization" (114). Barbaras argues that it is as desire alone, understood as desire for the world, that the sense of being of the perceptual subject can account for the double dimensionality of manifestation, i.e., the solidarity of presence and absence: "To say that perception is desire is to say that every being appears only as the manifestation [*manifestation*] of an ultimate appearing that itself never appears" (125).

This is certainly interesting, and it would have far-reaching epistemological and ontological consequences, but it is simply an attempt to work out the conditions of possibility of the account of appearance developed in the first part of the book. It stands or falls with that account which, as noted, is not unproblematic. There is a naivete there which gets reflected in the story of desire. For it is unclear whether the constitutive incompleteness of desire points to the world or just to a particular lifeworld [*Lebenswelt*], what Husserl called a "homeworld" [*Heimwelt*]. Contrary to the publisher's blurb, there is no discussion of lifeworld in the text. It may be, as Barbaras suggested at the end of *De l'âtre du phénomène*, that the lifeworld is all there is. Yet surely what is given is a concrete multiplicity of lifeworlds. This makes it hard to see how disinterested philosophical insight could emerge on a phenomenological basis. For to treat the lifeworld as a singular universal would presuppose some kind of biological monism; yet in the absence of a universal frame of reference, description is left to choose among so many socio-historical regimes of visibility.

Barbaras' insistence on the givenness of the infinite's non-givenness is meant to avoid this predicament. But as he seems to recognize in his Afterword, which is a welcome addition to the English translation, this may not actually provide a phenomenological solution. Here, still with Patocka in mind, he presses the possibility that the ultimate realization of phenomenology would take the form paradoxically of a cosmology, or a "cosmobiology," as if "we abandoned phenomenology at the very moment in which we succeeded in establishing its possibility" (150). To his credit, Barbaras ends on an incisive and stimulating note of self-interrogation. But it may well be that the prospect of running aground in this way stems less from phenomenology per se and more from the "non-participant" approach that Barbaras has adopted. For the sake of the project, then, the range of questions that we need to ask should thus be expanded: Can a phenomenology of life culminate in disinterested theoretical judgments? Does "perceptual faith" not confer an indelible normative horizon? Does phenomenology not show us that the realization of philosophy is, at the end of the day, a matter of practical reason?

BRYAN SMYTH, McGill University

**On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy**

**JACQUES DERRIDA**


The English translation of Derrida's *Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* (2000) is a welcome revitalization of a subject that evoked much interdisciplinary attention two to three decades ago. In a text that tempts us back to the body, but with a difference, Derrida offers a characteristically tentative yet searching engagement with the works of his friend and philosophical ally, Jean-Luc Nancy. It is one of Derrida's most ambitious and demanding texts perhaps since *The Politics of Friendship* (1997), for he not only traces the thematic surfacing of touch in Nancy's writings but also regards the esteemed thinker in relation to a history of philosophy of touch, from Plato and Aristotle to theologian Jean-Louis Chrétien. The implicit and explicit dialogues between philosophers who have addressed touch inform Derrida's celebration of Nancy's works such as *A Finite Thinking, The Experience of Freedom, Being Singular Plural, L'intrus, The Experience of Freedom*, and *Corpus*. Following Derrida's foreword, three sections of chapters loosely structure the readings: "This is—of the other," "Tangents/Exemplary Stories of the Flesh," and "Punctuations: 'And You.'" Each section follows the haptic in various thinkers while
illuminating Nancy's inventions, most notably "there is no the sense of touch," "a finite thinking," "sense is touching," "ex-cription," "spacing," "being singular plural," and "to self-touch you." In addressing such concepts and phrases unique to Nancy's work, Derrida presents a rigorous, tangential, anecdotal, and often intimate tribute. Although the text delightfully meanders and far exceeds Derrida's humble aim to provide an "introduction" to Nancy, it never loses touch with its promise to clarify how the latter shares and parts ways with his intellectual peers, opening new avenues of thought.

Part I consists of six chapters containing Derrida's exploration of the metaphysics of touch—primarily in Aristotle, the Gospels, St. Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Berkeley, Freud, Heidegger, and Levinas. All the while Derrida turns and returns to Nancy's works in an attempt first to examine his direct and indirect responses and challenges to somewhat ossified concepts, and also to seek out anticipations of touch in writings by Nancy which do not directly use the word but conceptually approach it. This section is challenging for it is poetic, suggestive, and contains extant reflections on the untranslatability of the reflexivity and connotations of the other found in French phrases such as se toucher. There is a feeling of excess, of multidimensional paths introduced in preparation for the central and final parts of the book. It is crucial to enjoy the pleasure of immersion in ideas without attempting to grasp too firmly all that is raised in Part I, because later chapters resonate with and clarify what is introduced here. In short, the reader is strongly advised to exercise her "negative capability" in order to enjoy the academic but also literary experience of a philosophical inquiry that contains motifs, images, and anecdotes, and gathers meaning retrospectively. Certainly the book will bear several readings from different, though converging, vantage points (epistemological, ethical, theological, etymological), and with due attention to the voluminous notes. Primarily, the following question is raised: If the soul or psyche, Aristotle's animating principle, is understood in terms of its distinction from the material body (in the metaphysical body-soul duality), why is it that we can speak of touch in the realm of the intangible, such as emotion, in terms of the figure of "the heart"? This question gives rise to the touchability of the intangible, and the untouchability of touch, aporias that inform the entire book and draw us to Nancy's suggestion that the psyche or soul and body are not easy to differentiate, and that touch does not emerge as a single sense but seems to absorb the other senses as well. We can, for example, experience the touch of the gaze. (Hence, Nancy writes, "there is no the sense of touch."). The foundations of metaphysics are quickly exposed as faulty assumptions. It is true that much—perhaps too much—is addressed in Part I, but if one thread is to be identified in these six opening chapters it is Nancy's problematization of the immediacy of touch: for Nancy, self-contact, an experience that in metaphysics gives us access to self-knowledge, means contact not only with self but also with the other: "And in doing this, his 'intervention' touches and tampers with the philosophical gigantomacy surrounding intuition and intuitionism—no less" (119). In other words, there is no pure sense of touch, no pure access to self through touch.

In Part II, a section of five chapters playfully called "Tangents," Derrida zeroes in on deconstructing intuitionism through detailed readings, most notably of Felix Ravaisson, Maine de Biran, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Didier Franck, and Jean-Louis Chrétien—an excellent resource on these thinkers, thanks to Derrida's practice of reading generously. Of Husserl, for example, Derrida writes: "Now, it is better to remain very close to the letter of the text before we ask the questions seemingly raised by the reasons or the arguments..." (174). This practice of close, appreciative reading is consistent throughout the entire book, though the tangents on Husserl and Merleau-Ponty are the most enlightening of all five, demonstrations of Derrida's acrobatic ability to read Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Nancy through each other while recognizing their unique achievements. After teasing out contradictions in Husserl's assertion of direct access to self through self-touch, Derrida clarifies Husserl's "rigor" by examining Merleau-Ponty. In Signs, Merleau-Ponty claims to interpret Husserl while asserting that the subject has direct access to the other through an act of substitution: my sense of self is gained through a reflexive self-touching, of the right hand with the left, for example; the other is directly accessed when my right hand is simply replaced by the hand of another, in a handshake. Derrida returns to Husserl's assertion that the other can never be directly accessed in order to show Merleau-Ponty's misreading of Ideas II. It becomes clear that Nancy's attention to the reflexivity of touch shows a dialogue with Husserl and Merleau-Ponty; we also come to see his remarkable difference from both in his insistence on an in-consistent, non-co-incidental self, a kind of spacing between the double touching-and-touched in the reflexive se toucher. Derrida's examination of all three thinkers, including Nancy's departure from the two phenomenologists, shows how intuitionism may lead to ignorance of what is beyond appropriation in the other; Nancy's approach protects that which exceeds substitution. Derrida's familiar lexicon surfaces at this point in a beautiful passage that speaks to intuitionism and the ethical implications of Nancy's challenge to it: "I ask whether there is any pure, immediate experience of the purely proper body, the body proper that is living, purely living. Or if, on the contrary, this experience is at least not already haunted, but constitutively haunted, by some hetero-affection related to spacing and then
to visible spatiality—where an intruder may come through, a host, wished or unwished for, a spare and auxiliary other, or a parasite to be rejected, a pharmakon that already having at its disposal a dwelling in this place inhabits one’s heart of hearts as a ghost” (179–80). The text is most satisfying at points like this, where Derrida brings his own language (“hauntings,” “pharmakon,” “I ask whether there is any pure...”) to bear upon the language of Nancy (“spacing,” “one’s heart of hearts”), to produce writing that is simultaneously precise and suggestive.

The final section of the book, Part III, is comprised of two chapters and a postscript, and claims to be “starting over again” in its pursuit of all that differentiates Nancy from other thinkers of touch (277). The need to “start over” is a recurring theme in the book; it is a reflection perhaps of a desire to defer a point of completion, a need to eschew any claim to full knowledge or understanding that conventional conclusions or endings try to accomplish. Maybe to be true to Derrida’s sensibilities it would be best to approach this book as a series of openings, without claims to definitive readings of his friend’s work. At the same time, at the points where Derrida starts over again, he is at his clearest, and so these beginnings provide relief and orientation. The final chapters return to question what Nancy has to offer beyond a repetition of thinkers before him. Nancy’s phrase, “the self-touching you” is celebrated as an invention that dislocates self-presence by introducing the other, “you” into this experience. The other/“you” extends beyond another human being and into the realm of technology, or “ecotechnics,” a line of thought that separates Nancy from previous thought about the body: Nancy’s attention to the other that disrupts presence-to-self (and challenges metaphysics and Christian theology), his examination of the disruption of the body’s consistency through the ever-present possibility of operations, prosthetics, and transplants, his examination of life/death’s contingency upon the technical circumstances of medical science. The other is in this case technology, something so foreign yet so pertinent to the body/self’s survival or continued life. At this point, Derrida quotes at length from L’intrus, where Nancy reflects upon his own experience of a heart transplant. The final chapters of the book are appropriately intimate, peppered with anecdotes about Nancy, and close with some thought about “the virtualization” of touch through various technological innovations as the continued complication of the human’s relation to the body.

It is difficult to find fault with a thinker who is careful to read with such sensitivity and generosity. That said, the absence of any particular attention to Luce Irigaray, save a few appearances in the notes, may not be an oversight, but it is a disappointment, especially in the section devoted to “Writing the Body” in Nancy’s Corpus (285). Since contemporary French philosophy is of special interest to this study, the absence of an examination of Nancy’s correspondence with Irigaray and, for that matter, Cixous, might be read as negligent. On a more generous note, it would be appropriate to acknowledge that one of Derrida’s gifts to his readers is a body of work that unquestionably sets thought in motion, while leaving plenty of room for work to come. Quite moving are Derrida’s expressions of hesitation, and while they might be read as conventional, his humility comes across as genuine. In approaching the end of the book, in a proclamation of his sense of his own limitations, Derrida asks us to eschew what he has written: “I’m now sincerely asking that this book be forgotten or effaced, and I’m asking this as I wouldn’t have done—with as much sincerity—for any of my other books. Wipe it all away...” (301). Derrida, the faithful and close reader, shares his writings only on the condition that his readers do not resort to the mistake of substitution; just as touching necessarily touches upon a limit that marks an inaccessible beyond, Nancy’s works will always exceed the minds, no matter how great, that attempt to think them.

ALEXIA HANNIS, European Graduate School

The Cultural Politics of Emotion
SARA AHMED
New York: Routledge, 2004; 224 pages.

Sara Ahmed argues that emotions are social, cultural, and political rather than personal or primarily internal phenomena. According to Ahmed, the everyday understanding of emotions takes an inside-out approach: emotions are interior, subjective, and psychological. They are my emotions. I may exteriorize emotions by acting on them or expressing them. You may then respond to them, showing the movement of emotions to be from the inside out. A less common theory of emotions, held by certain sociologists and anthropologists, is that emotions are social and cultural practices. This theory takes an outside-in approach in studying phenomena such as group and crowd psychology. In the latter case a psychological model continues to be employed, wherein the crowd is psychologized as an individual who "has" emotions prior to any member of the crowd, but the direction in which emotion is thought to move has been reversed: the emotions of the group are internalized by me, moving from the outside in.

Ahmed’s approach is closer to the outside-in theory but is also distinct from it in that she problematizes the distinction between an outside and
an inside that pre-exist emotions. On the contrary, she argues that it is emotions that create the inside/outside distinction and that define the other as outside and create a sense of interiority. Emotions do indeed move—the etymology of emotion (*emovere*) already implies this—but they do not simply move between us or into and out of us but circulate in unpredictable ways. Moreover, emotions also stick: emotions can fix us, attach to us or attach us, prevent us from moving or being moved. One of Ahmed’s questions is, What sticks? She is thus concerned to analyze the stickiness of emotions and not just their mobility. For instance, following Wendy Brown, Ahmed discusses feminists who are stuck by their attachments to feelings of victimization. In this case, self-pity has stuck to them and they are attached to this self-pity to such an extent that it becomes an apparently permanent, immobile identity, preventing them from “moving on” or from achieving political mobility.

One useful formulation of Ahmed’s position on the sociality of emotions occurs when she writes of the “importance of understanding emotions not as psychological dispositions, but as investments in social norms” (56). For instance, when we feel shame, this has to do with our investment in a norm of the ideal subject and our own failure to achieve this norm. Similarly, hate in the form of racism is a hatred of non-whites because they do not live up to a white ideal or norms of whiteness. Similar arguments are made in each chapter for each emotion.

Ahmed’s book is divided into chapters that consider specific emotions, and it is important to note that the emotions she chooses to discuss are primarily negative. The one apparent exception is the chapter on love, however in this chapter it is an almost entirely negative view of love that is described. The emotions Ahmed discusses in the first chapters are pain, hate, fear, disgust, shame, and love. In the final chapters, Ahmed discusses “queer feelings” and “feminist attachments,” but again these are primarily negative, such as queer melancholia, mourning, shame, feminist anger, and feminist attachment to anger and self-pity. The discussion of emotions is thus a dark one, even if Ahmed tacks on some discussion of wonder and hope, and a few begrudging sentences acknowledge that love can also be a good thing, even if she does not explore it as such.

It is also important to note that Ahmed’s main examples are self-evidently social or public phenomena and events rather than more apparently private experiences. For instance, Ahmed discusses pain and shame by way of the case of indigenous Australian children being stolen from their parents to be raised and assimilated by white Australians. Hate and fear are discussed in terms of racism, and disgust is explored in terms of post-9/11 claims that terrorism is “disgusting.” Because Ahmed’s primary objective in this book is to argue that emotions are social and political, she might have made a more compelling case if her examples had not already been self-evidently political. If apparently private emotions can be shown to be political she would have a stronger case for the claim that all emotions are.

Some of the examples Ahmed uses are also not very convincing cases of the emotions in question. Often they are more obviously examples of the *word* for a particular emotion being used, rather than of that emotion actually being felt. Love, for instance, is discussed primarily through the example of white supremacist websites that claim that far from spreading hate (of non-whites), white supremacists are spreading love (for Aryans). We might not think this is the most convincing case of “love.” Obviously Ahmed can present love darkly when Aryan self-love is the example chosen, and again this makes it easier to argue that love is political than, say, that of a boy’s love for his kitten.

The example Ahmed uses to discuss shame is similarly unconvincing. Her example is the manner in which certain white Australians use the word shame to describe how they feel about the “stolen generation” of indigenous children. However, Ahmed argues that these Australians simply want the prime minister to say “we are ashamed” so that they can feel proud of this confession and go back to being self-congratulatory. It is not clear that any genuine shame is felt in this example. It is also worth noting that this is an example of claiming to be ashamed of something that one has done rather than of what one is, and Ahmed moves between an understanding of shame as being about wrongdoing and the more standard definition of shame as having to do with wrongdoing.

Likewise, the example for disgust that Ahmed discusses seems to be an instance of the word being used rather than the emotion being felt. The example is the statement “That’s disgusting!” which was so often heard in response to the 9/11 attacks. This may not be a convincing example of visceral disgust (rather than moral disgust), as Ahmed wants it to be. Ahmed claims that because we are viscerally disgusted by terrorists we want to eject or expel (vomit) all Middle Easterners from Western countries (and from our neighborhoods, the subway train we are on, etc.). However, it seems that if one moves away from someone who appears to be Middle Eastern on a subway car, this is not because of a nauseated feeling of disgust, a visceral desire to vomit, but out of (paranoid) fear and perhaps hate as well. The case of emotion Ahmed discusses seems once more to be misdiagnosed. The discussion of terrorism would have fit into the fear or hate chapters better than the disgust chapter, even if claims of (moral) disgust are frequently made. It seems that the constant replaying of 9/11 video footage shows visceral
fascination rather than visceral repulsion or a desire to eject (vomit) terrorists from our society.

There are similar problems with other chapters, and often Ahmed seems to multiply examples in order to analyze them in ways that are obvious to anyone not on the far right wing, and in ways that do not further her argument about emotions, but are simply opportunities for Ahmed to respond to various statements that racist groups, George W. Bush, and the American media have made. One must therefore plod through counter-arguments that one is presumably well familiar with and convinced by (such as why Bush was wrong to say “you are either with us or against us”) in order to get to the passages that further the argument of the book.

Finally, there is little that is original in Ahmed’s book, with the exception of the introduction and her chapter on love. In the latter chapter Ahmed problematizes the psychoanalytic distinction between narcissistic love and anaclitic love (love for another), showing that anaclitic love is in fact narcissistic and, more in passing, that the reverse is also true. While Ahmed collapses the narcissistic-anaclitic distinction with respect to erotic and maternal love, she soon moves on to the more overtly political kind of example with which her book is primarily concerned, critiquing what she calls multicultural love. Multicultural love, according to Ahmed, is problematic because it is conditional on ethnic minorities loving the nation in which they live in return, and this entails expectations that minorities should integrate into and share the dominant values of that nation. Although sympathetic to her critique, it is worth noting that Ahmed simply presupposes a notion of love as ideally unconditional (although other theorists of love have undermined this assumption), for the conditional status of multicultural love is presented as a self-evident flaw.

While this chapter on love, or anti-love, is interestingly different from the standard éloges to the emotion with which we are familiar, in the remaining chapters Ahmed merely assimilates theories of emotion from various authors, and her contribution is to apply these theories to her examples. Unfortunately, as noted, these examples are not always convincing and much of the discussion is beside the point. The argument about the sociality of emotion is itself not new. More original recent explorations of the topic include Teresa Brennan’s The Transmission of Affect and Daniel Gross’s The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle’s Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science, both of which also explore emotions as psychosocial phenomena.

**Copula: Sexual Technologies, Reproductive Powers**
ROBYN FERRELL
Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006; 175 pages.

What happens to the discourse of philosophy when it is produced by embodied, sexuate, reproductive subjects? This is one of the questions posed in Robyn Ferrell’s wide-ranging book while engaging with theorists such as Marx, Beauvoir, Heidegger, Irigaray, Butler, and Lévi-Strauss on topics including reproductive technology, the labor of parenting, the temporality of feminist politics, phallic signification, kinship patterns, and masochist pleasure. Rather than building a single argument in linear fashion from chapter to chapter, the book explores the myriad relations between reproduction, technology, and feminism in different ways, drawing on a range of disciplinary resources. Common themes, such as the significance of embodiment for feminist theory and politics, and basic philosophical concepts, such as genre and copula, are developed in different ways throughout the book. One of my aims in this review will be to gather these themes and concepts together, exploring their multifaceted significance in Ferrell’s work.

Ferrell’s analysis of the copula first arises in the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis. For Lacan, the phallus is the copula which joins subject to object, producing both linguistic relation and sexual relation. Since the same signifier distinguishes those who have the phallus from those who lack it, there is only one libido and one logic of distinction/connection for Lacan. Accordingly, “The sexual relation is one the male subject has with himself, via the object of woman, and it never touches the other” (95). What would it take to imagine the copula of sexual, logical, and ontological connection/distinction in a way that does not always already belong to the masculine? Ferrell addresses this question in what I take to be the conceptual heart of this book, “The Figure of the Copula” (Chapter 7). In its most general sense, a copula “expresses the making of identity in relation” (109). For example, in the sentence “The cat is grey,” the copula “is” connects cat to grey, subject to predicate. This connection does not collapse the distinction between two terms but maintains them in relation to one another. Etymologically and conceptually, the term copula is related to copulation (sexual union) and copulative (which can refer to either grammatical connection or sexual union). But while Lacan’s phallic copula already belongs (if only in phantasy) to one of the terms it is meant to join together, there is no sense in our grammatical example that the “is” belongs more properly to the cat or to grey. The verb “to be” is not something, and it cannot be annexed to one side or the other of the sentence. Rather, it marks the hinge, or what I would call the point of indifference, between distinction

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and connection. The copula makes two potentially unrelated terms into a couple without supressing one or the other.

The interrelation between logical, ontological, and sexual aspects of the copula open up fascinating possibilities for feminist theoretical inquiry, although the implications are not confined to theory. Ferrell traces the logic of the copula through her analysis of technology, including reproductive technology. Beginning with the claim that "[t]he copula is kin to technology" (159), she follows through the possibilities, but also the dangers, of technological thinking. For Ferrell, technology is "not merely a name for machine-based action, but any arrangement of resources that allows for the production of a desired end" (38). In this sense, even feminism could be understood as a technology for producing gender equity, for "reproducing (feminist) subjects" (43), or even for producing "gender" as a concept and area of inquiry. Drawing on Heidegger's philosophical etymology of the word, we could say that a technology is the art or skill (techne) of bringing something forth (tiktein, to give birth). Technology reproduces something that would not otherwise come into being automatically or "naturally." The process of reproduction, however, would not function without a certain degree of automatism. Whether we consider technological, literary, political, or physical reproduction, there is both an element of willed intervention (an "arrangement of resources") and an element of unwilled contingency, a proliferation or spawning by which that which is made also makes and remakes itself: the fetus grows in its mother, the political movement takes on a life of its own, a new genre of feminist sci-fi emerges, mobile phones become a basic necessity, and so forth. This self-proliferation is both the strength and danger of technology, and Ferrell suggests that the technology of feminism is no different from other technologies in its ambivalence.

But what is the danger of feminism? What is its product or "desired end"? Ferrell calls feminism a technology in the sense that its "conceptions—equality for women, for example—have become material events" (159), becoming "real" in the form of universal suffrage, equal opportunity legislation, laws against domestic and sexual abuse, and so forth. But the very language of equal rights with which feminism has by and large developed its technological apparatus can take on a life of its own, working sometimes for and sometimes against feminist interests. Fetal rights and fathers' rights compete with women's rights like commodities in the marketplace; women's rights are pitted against black rights, religious rights, or the right to traditional cultural values, leaving some women torn between seemingly incompatible aspects of themselves. In relation to reproductive technology in particular, the same techniques that give women greater control over their own reproductive power, such as IVF technology, can also be used to commodify or diminish this power. Part of Ferrell's lesson in this book is that every technology, including feminist political technologies, have both their danger and their saving power. If we join this claim to Ferrell's analysis of capitalism throughout the book, then the implication is that many small-scale, locally based feminist techniques could work better for women than a single transnational feminist monopoly. The organization of the book itself, with its numerous approaches to specific but related issues, already gives us a concrete example of how this technique could take shape.

In addition to the logic of the copula and the ambivalence of reproductive technologies, Ferrell explores the concept of genre for feminist philosophy. Genre is both generative and generic; as such, it refers to the "reproduction of order" (160). In literature, genre refers to a group of texts that are "the same, but different" (160), sharing for example a common pattern, structure, or theme but telling a different story. Each new text reproduced within a genre brings forth "a future recognizable to the past and continuous with the present, while novel enough not to seem to be mere repetition, as a 'done'" (160). Likewise, sexuate genre (or gender) brings forth women who are the same but different from other women, and men who are the same but different from other men. But what precisely is "the same" that makes a woman identifiable as such without reducing her to merely a particular instance of her more general and generic gender? Does gender make the woman, or do women (in particular, feminist women) make gender, i.e., as a concept with which to analyze and dismantle patriarchal power? Furthermore, what is the relation between discourse and subjectivity, such that it makes sense to speak of both texts and embodied subjects in relation to genre?

While I cannot respond to these questions at length here, I will draw on Ferrell's final chapter, "The Technology of Gender," for my closing remarks. A literary genre does not exist apart from the texts that constitute it; and even if a key feature of genre is its capacity to reproduce texts which recognizably belong to itself, its other key feature (that the texts not be exact duplicates, that they tell their stories differently) opens the genre to transformations from within. For example, Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time belongs to the genre of science fiction and plays with the boundaries of this genre, transforming it from within. Does the feminist do something similar with the feminine gender? This sort of transformation from within—women changing the meaning of "woman"—is central to feminist labor, and it is most effective when reproduced across the generations, both the same and different, in as many different contexts as possible.
But the reproducibility of genre is not innocent, and it does not always generate positive changes which expand and diversify possibilities for women. Part of the ambivalence of genre—and perhaps also of gender—is its exposure to commodification. If you liked *The Matrix* you will love (or you will at least pay money to see) *Matrix 2, Matrix 3*, etc. If your mother was a feminist, why not try *Girl Power*? It comes with three collectable stickers and a do-it-yourself jewellery kit! Precisely because genre reproduces the same differently, it is capable of generating a sense of novelty while reinforcing or even restricting conventional generic boundaries. Linked with the replicative power of modern technology and the voracious appetite of contemporary capitalism, the power of genre poses formidable challenges for anyone who desires radical social change. Ferrell's development of this concept in relation to feminist issues helps to clarify the task of contemporary feminism, which both inherits a legacy from first- and second-wave feminists and also faces different challenges—but also new possibilities—in an increasingly technological age.

LISA GUENTHER, University of Auckland

**Experiencing the Postmetaphysical Self: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction**

FIONOLA MEREDITH


In this stimulating and well written book, Meredith proposes an antifoundational and hermeneutic/deconstructive approach which she believes escapes the pitfalls of deconstruction while assuming the best of hermeneutics. Following the poststructural erasure of the subject, the consequences for notions of experience, selfhood, and self-presence have been sizeable and, she argues, largely misappropriated. In response, Meredith reappraises the experiential in such a way that while she acknowledges there may no longer be a sovereign subject, she believes we may still meaningfully engage a notion of partial self-presence. To that end, she examines Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Althusser, Ricoeur, Gadamer, and others, so as first to diagnose what she views as “the ultra-negativity of post-structuralist thought” (2), and then to reposition what she determines to be salvageable from both sides of this less than clear philosophical divide.

Meredith argues that post-Saussurean/structuralist thinking, which she identifies chiefly with Derrida’s deconstruction, has reduced the notion of experience to something sterile and static. Moreover, the deconstructed and decentred self, we are told, unnecessarily vanishes into radical alterity without hope of recovery. What is needed, according to Meredith, is a revaluation of the categories of experience, self-presence, and subjectivity which, if we are to relocate a meaningful sense of self, necessitates the dislodging of many persistent assumptions coming out of deconstruction. In the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur, Meredith believes she has found more promising ways of conceiving of the postmetaphysical self which, while privileging language and the loss of the singular subjective self, do not dissolve the self completely and irretrievably.

In the first chapter, “Difference and Undecidability: Post-Saussurean Thought,” Meredith describes some of the basic elements of Derrida and Lacan, including some major criticisms, so as to prepare the way for her later proposal that goes beyond both and, to a lesser degree, beyond hermeneutics. Surprisingly, Meredith argues that both Derrida and Lacan are closer to the essentialism they so vehemently reject than either recognizes. While this is a little difficult to accept, her arguments are interesting, if perhaps a bit hasty.

In the second chapter, “Woman as Text: The Influence of Post-Structuralism on Feminist Theory,” Meredith argues that poststructuralism has partially influenced feminism for the better, although she places more emphasis on its impact for the worst. Ultimately, for Meredith, feminism and poststructuralism are fundamentally incompatible. To help substantiate her claim, she examines Kristeva’s theories of female subjectivity.

In Chapter 3, “The Post-Structuralist Erasure of Experience,” Meredith further examines poststructuralist arguments and their failings, and elaborates on why a partial rejection of poststructuralism does not necessitate our acceptance of the metaphysics of presence. After exploring some of the major features of poststructuralist thought, Meredith argues for a notion of “direct, lived experience ‘as something to be lived through’” (81) and, thereby, upholds a sense of self and world distinct from that of deconstruction. She envisions her position as somewhere between metaphysical objectivism and the pessimistic relativism evident in the “post-structuralist’s high-handed attempt to suck lived experience into the vortex of the Text” (86).

In the fourth chapter, “Frameworks for Experience,” Meredith examines the phenomenological hermeneutics of Ricoeur and Gadamer, and describes ways of overcoming some of the more obvious failures of Derrida, Lacan, and the like, through an “interpenetration” of deconstruction and hermeneutics. Here she develops her notion of experience “in all its contingency and uncertainty, identifying it as the continual weaving of
the cord which connects consciousness (in the form of beliefs, values, feelings, intuitions, desires and so on) to a world which always exceeds our capacity to understand it" (111).

Chapter 5, “It’s me here”: Writing the Singular Self, Writing the Post-deconstructive Female Self,” finds Meredith arguing for a notion of female subjectivity that has as its center “women’s symbolically mediated lived experience” (79). She examines what it means to “write the self” using her deconstructive/hermeneutic model of the experiential, which is meant to avoid the mistaken notion of self as radical origin as well as the extremes of a strictly poststructuralist analysis. This final chapter returns to feminist theory, as she argues further for an “approach that recognizes the equiprimordiality of singularity and alterity in our embodied existence” (170).

This is a very readable and enjoyable work. Given the number and complexity of issues discussed one would expect only a brief survey, but Meredith accomplishes more. There are times when her arguments fall short of solid conclusions, and her style of referencing is sometimes a bit forced (perhaps because of the excessive number of block quotes), but these are not overwhelming issues. This is a fair treatment, and she tries hard to avoid misrepresenting either side. It is curious, however, that Meredith chose to characterize Derrida and the larger deconstructive attitude as she has. Throughout the text she builds the case for a view of deconstruction (and poststructuralism generally) as a way of thinking that rejects the possibility of meaning and understanding (114). Yet on the last page of her conclusion she offers an all too brief account of Derrida’s later position that is said to lack the ardent relativism of his earlier work—the very relativism she argues against in order to bolster the persuasive force of her own project. This suspicious maneuver notwithstanding, Meredith’s antifoundational revaluation of the postmetaphysical self presents readers with a number of interesting and challenging ways of thinking somewhere between hermeneutics and deconstruction.

JASON C. ROBINSON, University of Guelph

Sartre

DAVID DRAKE

David Drake has written what is possibly the shortest English-language biography of Sartre, his book clocking in at slightly over 140 pages of actual text. Drake is certainly well qualified to write this biography. Before returning to teach in England he was involved in radical politics in France. He worked for the left-wing, alternative wire service, Agence de Presse Libération—a wire service directed, if in name only, by Sartre himself. Published in 2005 and timed to coincide with the one hundredth anniversary of Sartre’s birth, Drake’s biography is one of the most recent editions to Haus’ line of biographies of culturally important thinkers and writers, “Life and Times.” The book tells the story of Sartre’s life in a very English way, clear of the psychological profiles one would find in French biography, and would be worth recommending alone for the introduction it provides students to Sartre’s life and work and the background historical details Drake provides. Like all the books in the “Life and Times” series, the text is interspersed with short boxed descriptions of relevant events and biographies of key players in Sartre’s life, for instance Albert Camus and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

The concern with a biography of this kind is always that in trying to meet the demands of commercial publishing, issues of philosophical concern will be obscured. Drake, while avoiding the worst excesses of this, is not completely successful. Drake was a professor of translation in England and is a lifelong student of the history of radical politics. As a consequence, the book is unfortunately divided into two distinct sections. In the first, concerning the period prior to about 1950, Sartre is treated as a writer. His philosophy, while discussed, is not given the detailed treatment that would be necessary in a work of philosophy, or a philosophical biography—the exception being an unusually good discussion of Sartre’s phenomenological work from the 1930s, though Drake’s description of the phenomenological exercise seems to miss the importance of the first-person perspective. In the second section, Sartre is treated as a political militant. While here again Sartre’s work is discussed, the sort of detailed exegesis of the relationship between Sartre’s changing philosophical and political stances is mostly, but not entirely, absent from the book.

The other concern, beyond some questionable copyediting (for example, Sartre was not paid the absurd amount of $25,000,000 for his Freud film script, but $25,000, or about $170,000 in today’s dollars), is Drake’s tendency to reduce complex issues to simple ones. While this is not necessarily deleterious to a pedagogical enterprise, the author should be careful not to obscure details. For instance, Drake’s description of the falling out between Merleau-Ponty and Sartre ignores the salient details of their dispute, leaving the reader to underestimate its philosophical undertones. He ignores similar issues in the development of Sartre’s later Marxism, failing to understand that Sartre’s frequent references to the French Revolution in the Critique of Dialectical Reason
show how Sartre has subtly changed Marxist class theory. Similarly, in his discussion of Sartre's often controversial political engagements, Drake tends to minimize Sartre's failures and miscalculations. For example, he does not mention that it later came to light that the RDR, an organization involving Sartre, as well as many others, had been used by the CIA, which had funneled money to it through American trade unions in a bid to undermine the CPF.

That said, Drake's book deserves to be recommended as a useful teaching tool as well as a very readable quick guide to the life of the French iconoclast Jean-Paul Sartre. Of all the guides to Sartre's life published in 2005 to commemorate the centenary of the philosopher's birth (I can count at least a dozen biographies and biographical essays published in English and French), this is undoubtedly the clearest. That alone would make reading it worthwhile.

KEVIN GRAY, Université Laval

Existentialist Thinkers and Ethics
CHRISTINE DAIGLE, Editor

Composed of eight papers on different existentialist thinkers, the texts that make up Existentialist Thinkers and Ethics attempt to show the nature of the ethical thinking that is central to existentialism while opposing relativism, which all of these authors seem to think haunts the existentialist project. In many ways, Christine Daigle makes the question of finding an ethical base for existentialism more challenging by choosing to define existentialism as an evolution of nineteenth-century Existenzphilosophie that became disenchanted with rationality and chose to emphasize the centrality of human existence to philosophy. As with any collection of papers, some of the texts in this volume are stronger than others. The essays appear in roughly chronological order in the book, starting with Kierkegaard and ending with Merleau-Ponty. (There is, curiously enough, no mention of Gabriel Marcel, beyond a reference to him in Daigle's introduction as the philosopher who coined the term existentialism.)

Of the stronger papers, Dominic Desroches begins the book with a reading of Søren Kierkegaard, attempting to show how Kierkegaard's teleological suspension of the ethical can be seen as a rebellion against the linguistic realm that constitutes traditional ethics. Putting Kierkegaard's thought in opposition to Hegel, Desroches first argues that the former stands opposed to the latter's dialectical thought, even if Kierkegaard's own thought is in some way dialectical. He then shows, in a linguistic and Husserlian reading of the teleological suspension of the ethical, that God's testing of Abraham and Job must be a transcendent activity, one that bypasses any possible Kantian ethics.

In another strong paper, Todd Lavin tries to show that Heidegger, in spite of the obvious spectre haunting his thought, still has a number of things to offer the contemporary ethical and political philosopher. Lavin's thesis is that "only in and through collective social action can Dasein win its own self" (53); the ethical, in other words, appears only through the concretely social. To prove his point, Lavin tries to show that it is necessary to reread Being and Time to avoid what he terms the "reification of the They" (54)—Heidegger's choice to understand social relations on a more abstract level. In order to do this, Lavin makes the curious choice to turn to the work of the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. I say that this is a curious choice as a more mainstream, and in many ways more detailed, attempt to reconcile Marxism and existentialism is given by Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse might have been a better choice, as he actually studied with Heidegger and wrote extensively on the question. Lavin's only mention of Marcuse comes when he briefly cites Marcuse's famous line that capitalism renders the masses inert by offering them an antenna on every house, a transistor radio on the beach, and a jukebox in every car or restaurant (57). Engaging with Sartre's later Marxist writings would have been beneficial for Lavin's text and would have better situated Lavin's essay in the volume as a whole.

In his interesting exegetical contribution, Stephen Schulman takes the difficult and unusual path of trying to show that Heidegger's student, Hannah Arendt, belongs both to the existentialist and ethicist camps. He does this by first stressing, contrary to the standard analysis, that Arendt did have a normative ethical theory, one that is in many ways existentialist, if by an existentialist ethics we understand an ethics without rules. In a similar vein, Philip Knee gives a unique reading of Camus' thought. Knee shows the similarities between Camus' thought and that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, arguing that what separates Camus from Sartre, and makes him closer to Rousseau, is his emphasis on measure and his rejection of excessive rationalism in ethics, a strain of thought Knee finds in L'homme révolté.

In Daigle's essay on de Beauvoir and Sartre, she argues that de Beauvoir's philosophy was the more developed of the two. While it is generally conceded that de Beauvoir was the better memoirist, and that some of Sartre's writing was rewritten or substantially reworked by his partner, the contention that de Beauvoir's ethics was the more developed of the two rests on a number of assumptions that required a non-
standard reading of the existentialist corpus: first, the importance of an emphasis on the body, and second, the de-emphasizing of the political. This second point is particularly problematic. Daigle contributes a closing text to the volume wherein she argues that by examining the ethical pretensions of existentialism we arrive at the political aims of the movement. Similarly, the essay by Kym Maclaren tackles the thought of Merleau-Ponty and argues, following the first of Daigle’s assumptions, for the importance of the body and that a study of embodiment would give rise to an ethics. This ethic is a kind of virtue ethics, but one that sees embodiment as yielding a genuine existentialist commitment to others.

The essays on Friedrich Nietzsche and on Jean-Paul Sartre are not particularly strong. In his essay, David W. Goldberg attempts to show that there is a Nietzschen solution to the problem of relativism, and that we can dismiss once and for all the accusation of moral relativism levelled against the existentialist. This problem, however, has been shown repeatedly to be little more than an *ad hominem* attack levelled against the existentialists by their adversaries. While other parts of Goldberg’s discussion are interesting, a section rebutting Nietzsche’s supposed antisemitism (again, something already well addressed in the literature) takes up far too much of the text.

The weakest essay in the volume is Glenn Braddock’s contribution, wherein he addresses what he describes as a contradiction between Sartre’s pronounced atheism and the statement in *L’existentialisme est un humanisme* wherein Sartre says that “even if God did exist, that would change nothing” (91). Braddock’s attempt to show that these two positions are contradictory is unconvincing; Sartre never intended for *L’existentialisme est un humanisme* to be his final word on anything, let alone on the question of religion.

Unfortunately, the book is marred by poor editing. The book undoubtedly presents a challenge as some of the essays were translated from French, in most cases by graduate students. Philosophers are best suited to translate works of philosophy, of course, provided that professional editors supervise the translation. This second task seems to have been wholly ignored by McGill-Queen’s University Press. The book is replete with badly turned phrases, grammatical mistakes, and books cited with oscillating titles (for instance, *Existentialism is a Humanism* is sometimes referred to as *The Humanism of Existentialism*).

Overall, this book provides an original and valuable, if uneven, contribution to the field.

KEVIN GRAY, Université Laval

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**Vico’s Uncanny Humanism: Reading the ‘New Science’ Between Modern and Postmodern**

SANDRA RUDNICK LUFT


Giambattista Vico claimed that he struggled for twenty years to grasp the “master key” of his *New Science*. In *Vico’s Uncanny Humanism*, Sandra Rudnick Luft uses this claim as her own “master key” to understanding Vico’s mature work—an understanding that Luft claims was a twenty-year struggle for her as well (xvii). Unlike traditional readings of Vico which situate him within the humanist tradition and which read the *New Science* in line with Vico’s earlier works, Luft argues that Vico’s discovery took twenty years precisely because it was too strange to cohere with the humanist tradition or indeed with Vico’s own earlier writings. Furthermore, Luft argues, contemporary readers’ continued immersion in the humanist tradition prevents their noticing the radical strangeness of the *New Science*. Luft circumvents this difficulty by reading the *New Science* alchemically, that is, in a manner that ignores “the search for historical and eidetic influences or relationships and engage[s] texts interactively, hermeneutically, fragmentarily, as one holds conversations with strangers only to discover shared insights” (ix). This reading permits Luft to explore affinities between Vico and rabbinic and postmodern texts, something that she does with great profit.

Luft shows that reading Vico’s *verum-factum* principle in light of the rabbinic tradition transforms it from the “maker’s knowledge” epistemological conceit that occurs in Bacon into the ontological claim that words are inseparable from deeds and things, and hence that language itself is originary. In what is probably the best and most engaging section of the book (“The Originary as Language” in Chapter 2), Luft explores Vico’s use of the Hebrew term *davar*, a word that has usually been translated as *logos* but which in the original Hebrew denotes not only “word” but “deed” and “thing” (79). In the rabbinic tradition, Luft argues, there is no distinction between God’s speaking the world and God’s creation of it. Likewise, for Vico’s first men, language is radically originary; the first human language literally created the human world. Thus, the human understanding of the world is grounded not in a homology between thought and reality but in their identity. Vico’s *verum-factum*, then, is hermeneutic and ontological rather than epistemological, and does not rest on human subjecthood. Thus, on Luft’s view, Vico’s *New Science* is not a part of the Cartesian tradition but a reaction to it as radical as that of the postmoderns.

The particular postmodern figures whom Luft finds most resonant with the mature Vico are Nietzsche and Heidegger. “Only Vico and
Nietzsche [she writes] attribute divine agency to an ontologically creative language” (198). Only Vico and Nietzsche therefore understand the strangeness of the existential situation of the first humans. For the first humans, it was in a sense the absence and not the presence of a world that both enabled and obliged them to speak, and in so doing to create the historical world. While Heidegger’s approach is less originary and anthropocentric than this, Luft observes that the praxic, poietic being of the first humans was the being not of subjects but of “wholly embodied, historically situated beings-in-the-world” (199), that is, of human beings understood not as Cartesian subjects but as Dasein. The possibility and indeterminacy that induced them to speak a new world into being is just Heidegger’s Lichtung or “clearing,” the existential space in which the unconcealment of being takes place.

Reading the New Science “between” these rabbinic and postmodern texts, Luft argues, reveals that the “master key” Vico discovered is the uncannily poetic-poietic nature of the first humans. For the mature Vico, then, the historical world is an artwork and must be understood hermeneutically rather than epistemologically. In the very act of understanding the world Vico’s poetic first men created it, and created themselves as human beings thereby. Luft’s alchemical approach not only helps the reader to think outside of Cartesian subjecthood, and thereby to encounter the profound strangeness of Vico’s twenty-year discovery; it also affords Luft the opportunity to engage in a wide-ranging consideration of figures and positions ranging from Philo, Cusa, Epicurus and the Stoics through to Marx, Gadamer, and Derrida. Her project is further undergirded by a thorough overview of contemporary Vico scholarship.

While much of this material is useful, and occasionally even revelatory, Luft’s book is too short to accommodate comfortably all the texts and figures that she engages. Indeed, she notes in the preface that space considerations prevent her from including her entire survey of Vico scholarship. She thus directs readers to her website for the portion of the survey excluded from the book. Even with this apparatus, half of her book reads like a literature review in a dissertation rather than as part of a monograph from a senior scholar. This literature review portion is too dense, and reading it is often tedious. When working through it, it is especially infelicitous that there is no bibliography. Thus, the reader is forced to chase the book’s many references back through series of Ibids to their sources. According to Luft, the bibliography—like the rest of the literature review—was excluded from the publication for reasons of length. She therefore posts an annotated bibliography for the book on her website. The decision to exclude a bibliography from a book for which one is so obviously necessary reflects poor editorial judgment.

Indeed the editors’ cavalier attitude toward the book is further evident in the overall structure of the work. It is apparent that the book was cobbled together from a number of articles Luft has published over the years. While there is no problem with this in principle, in many places the seams between the articles are still showing. The same passages are repeated over and over throughout the book, evidently owing to their having appeared in a number of the articles in which the book originated. Indeed, the patchwork nature of the work is sometimes even apparent in changes in the author’s idiom. Most noticeably, Luft throughout uses gender-exclusive language, with repeated references to the “first men” and with “he/him” as the default pronoun. However, one ten-page portion of the third chapter consciously adopts gender-inclusive language, evidently because this was the idiom of that particular article. One of the further effects of Luft’s having cobbled articles together with little revision is that where Luft has something new to say in the text—that is, newer than the article that that portion of the text reproduces—she embeds it in long, cumbersome footnotes rather than working it into the text proper. While Continental philosophers are perhaps more than anyone sympathetic to the hors de la texte, Luft often has way too much hors and not enough text. This makes reading difficult, especially given the absence of a bibliography. Proper editorial supervision would have forced a major revision in the whole text, either recasting the book as an article collection or forcing a substantial rewrite to turn it into a real monograph (not an article collection posing as a monograph). With the right edit this could have been a great and important book; as it stands, it is a deeply flawed book with some great and important ideas. Particularly in light of Luft’s twenty-year struggle to produce this book, Cornell’s editorial indifference is a profound disservice both to her and to her readers.

SHANNON DEA, University of Western Ontario

The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin, and Derrida
MATTHIAS FRITSCH

Matthias Fritsch has written a dense and provocative book that should prompt a renewed discussion of the Marxian past and the political future of Continental philosophy. Navigating the fragile bark of emancipatory politics into a non-utopian but still better future, argues Fritsch, requires
steering between Scylla and Charybdis. To the left is the danger that the memory of past suffering and injustice would be subsumed in the promise of a future liberation. To the right is the threat of losing any such promise in the memory of history’s victims. Without actually taking it upon himself to chart a course for us, Fritsch seeks to temper the navigational advice of the three personages named in his subtitle: Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, and Jacques Derrida. Unalloyed with the others, each of these pilots fails us, Fritsch maintains, but if their directives and injunctions are judiciously mixed, a real alternative to our present, disastrous course emerges.

Chapters 1 and 2 present Benjamin and Derrida, respectively, as critical heirs to Marx’s emancipatory project, with an emphasis upon the critical. Central to Fritsch’s argument is the claim, characteristic of critical theory, that Marx attempted “to speculate on capitalism, and in particular on the technology it brings about,” thereby re-enclosing himself in the profit-seeking logic of capital that he sought to overcome (33). According to Fritsch’s version of this critique, “Marx views the final materialization of his promise for the classless society as following the very same logic that brought about the suffering, such that the promise would in some sense justify the suffering and surpass a mournful memory of those victims” (15). Essentially, Marx is too teleological in that the end of communism justifies not only all manner of revolutionary excesses but also the very evils of capitalism itself, which must be undergone in order to prepare the way for its own overthrow. I will return below to the warrant for this reading of Marx. Suffice it to say that in Chapter 1 Fritsch is interested to locate this criticism in Benjamin’s own reading of Marx, and to show how Benjamin in turn avoids repeating Marx’s error. Benjamin, “despite his affirmation of Marx’s secular classless society, and his use of theological categories,” articulates a theory of political action that is radically anti-teleological (47). Political action, for Benjamin, is not motivated or justified by its goals but by an imperative to redeem the promises latent in past failures. Revolution embodies messianic time, in which every moment is shot through with promise, which we have an absolute duty to seize.

The trouble with Benjamin’s revision of Marxism, according to Fritsch, is that he lacks a concept of temporality that would tie a disenchanted and liberated future to the memories of past injustices. In jettisoning teleology, Benjamin also jettisons any non-accidental connection between the memorial imperative to act and the future promised in that act. Therefore, in Chapter 2 Fritsch turns to Derrida to supplement Benjamin. In Derrida’s “notion of differential iterability,” Fritsch locates “an account of historicity” that establishes “as a conceptual (not merely political or psychological) necessity, the relation between Benjamin’s ‘disenchanted’ future and memory” (69). Ironically perhaps, this linkage is secured by emptying Marx’s promise of any content, showing that a radical futurity (“il faut l’avenir”) inhabits every experience and event, giving rise both to a projection of a horizonal regulative ideal and to the impossibility of that ideal ever being fulfilled. Fritsch has a wonderful facility with Derrida, and appreciates the fact that “any deconstructive reading ... must borrow its resources from its object, demonstrating the efficacy of these structures anew with each reading” (75). Therefore, he situates his Derridean supplement within Derrida’s own reading of Marx, which has as its task “to show how Marx’s promise in particular ... led to totalitarianism while also containing the elements that destructure and exceed all totalitarianism” (78). The reader’s reaction to this chapter, therefore, will likely follow upon the reader’s opinion of Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*.

With Chapter 3, Fritsch moves into fresh territory. In order to amalgamate Benjamin’s account of political action with Derrida’s account of temporality, he must remove the mediation of Marx and allow Benjamin and Derrida to address one another. This encounter takes place over the question of violence or power (*Gewalt*). Benjamin’s opposition to historical teleology also implies a rejection of “teleological concepts of action and power,” a refusal to justify either action or power instrumentally (103). Rather than embracing a Kantian morality of action, which seeks to avoid violence by taking refuge in actions that are ends in themselves, Benjamin calls for “a politics of pure means” (106). For Benjamin, the telling example is the general strike, a work stoppage without conditions, and hence without a goal. According to Fritsch, “The relationship between the strike and its outcome ... is an ‘enactment’ that suspends the projection of goals and interrupts the positing of ends, thereby revealing ends as posited” (133). The question is whether such an interruption can itself become permanent, in the sense of a permanent revolution, or whether any act of “breaking through” must fall back into the economy of means-end violence. Fritsch, siding with Derrida, argues that “[t]he oppressed, both in the past and in the present, are, in some sense, a part of the system of power and violence,” and that, therefore, “[a]s participants in this system, and as contestants of its dominant interpretation of itself, the oppressed cannot claim ‘pure violence’ (the non-violence of refraining from positing law) for themselves” (150). There is no way to engage in politics with a good conscience, even as it remains necessary to engage in politics, and to receive the messianic call of the dead.

The final chapter works to trace, if not unbind, this knot: “The call to responsibility in relation to a ‘tradition of the oppressed’ is not to be opposed to the history of violence in a binary fashion, but must precisely be seen as produced and carried along by this tradition, as if in spite of
This quasi-transcendental claim and the consequent negation of a good conscience" are just as productive cognition of and without gratitude, surpasses that tradition, Fritsch argues that these two thinkers need one another. Derrida insists upon an originary guilt" as to the origin of the messianic claim—whether it derives from any determinate responsibility to determinate victims of empirical history. This quasi-transcendental claim lacks the normative teeth required for political action, however, and Fritsch suggests that Benjamin's "ambiguity" as to the origin of the messianic claim—whether it derives from historicity as such or from our particular history—is "a necessary, or at least a productive ambiguity" (187). At the same time, Derrida's "recognition of absolute loss, the deferral of justice to a future to come, and the consequent negation of a good conscience" are just as productive and necessary for Benjamin, for they guard against the collapse of his emancipatory project.

It is gratifying to read such a careful and sensitive discussion of the inseparability of Derrida's textual practices from at least some strands of the Marxian political project. Fritsch is obviously sympathetic to both Benjamin and Derrida and wants to examine each of their projects in the best light. Thus, for example, he does not rest content with Derrida's at times harsh reading of Benjamin but insists upon "a much more generous reading" in order to bring out the depth of the connection between the two thinkers (105). The strengths of Fritsch's book stem from this generosity, for one can see that Derrida, like Benjamin, is unwilling to wait for some mythical right moment to enact the interruption of the law. Just as Benjamin's writings enact the montage that they valorize, Derrida's deconstructions evince no separation of theory from practice.

Because of these strengths, I am puzzled by what seems to me the one glaring weakness of Fritsch's book. It seems that Fritsch is exceedingly unjust to Marx, and that he recognizes this fact, and repeatedly attempts to apologize for it, but without being able to undo it. The example that goes straight to the heart of the matter appears right at the start of the book. Even before he lays out his critical interpretation of Marx, Fritsch cautions the reader: "The reading of Marx advanced here is a reading that is willing to emphasize teleological tendencies and economic determinism but does not, on the whole, seek out other tendencies—with the exception of uncovering the extent to which Marx was concerned with a memory of injustice. This reading does not claim to be the only possible one. Different texts as well as different layers of Marx's writings might, with good justification, be mobilized. Nonetheless, the reading presented is a legitimate one, especially if one keeps in mind its purpose in the present context" (14). In other words, Fritsch defends himself by arguing that his act of reading, despite its apparent injustice, is lawful, and this lawfulness is evident in light of his purposes. I cannot see this as anything other than the sort of teleological justification that is criticized again and again throughout the book, yet here it is offered up as an apology for Fritsch's own reading of Marx. This act and its legitimation, it seems to me, reverberate throughout the text, like a tell-tale heart. Let us linger for a moment on the ways in which Marx, from beyond the grave, makes himself heard in Fritsch's text.

Fritsch knows that "Marx's philosophy of history is by no means devoid of performative elements," which might be taken to upset the teleological, determinist reading that Fritsch professes; he reassures us, however, that "Derrida ... underlines this performativity as much as possible" (16). Derrida shall be offered up as a witness, it seems, to the legitimacy of Fritsch's reading. If Derrida underlines Marx's performativity "as much as possible," and Fritsch's reading relies upon Derrida's, then Fritsch is suitably insulated from any perturbations caused by that performativity. Yet Fritsch himself seems to confess that it is possible to undermine Marx's performativity even more than Derrida does. Fritsch cites Marx's famous injunction from the *Eighteenth Brumaire*—that "the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead"—as evidence that, "instead of placing his hope in memory, [Marx] opposes that latter to the future" (93). But then Fritsch introduces into an endnote the following consideration: "It is perhaps significant—and in the Marx book, Derrida does not seem to be aware of this—that this call is itself inherited, an unacknowledged quotation from the Bible whereby Marx slips into the role of Jesus" (212 n. 61). I can only second Fritsch's intuition that this "is perhaps significant," and wonder why attention to this performative element does not trouble Derrida's reading of Marx. After all, if Marx's call to let the dead bury their dead is itself a citation, an active involvement with the dead, it would seem there is something more complicated going on in Marx's text than a celebration of unencumbered futurity.

It seems that the generosity that Fritsch extends to Benjamin and Derrida is not, for whatever reason, extended also to Marx. For if the nearness of Benjamin to Derrida could only be acknowledged on the condition of a new reading of Benjamin, one that went beyond Derrida's own reading, then perhaps the same is true of the nearness of Marx to Derrida. But, as much as Fritsch hints at the need for such a new and "much more generous" reading, he nonetheless allows Derrida's own
conception emerged, among other things, the idea of "teleology" and the utopianism of Marx's invocation of a poetry "from the future." Are Marx and Benjamin so opposed as Fritsch would have it?

I think a similar question can be asked about Marx and Benjamin. Fritsch makes much of what he calls "Benjamin's explicit critique of Marx," but, like the messiah, this is much announced but never arrives, so far as I could see. Fritsch seems to locate this explicit critique in a passage from Benjamin's notes to the "Theses on the Concept of History." The text he cites reads: "With Marx, the structure of the basic thought presents itself as follows: In the course of historical development, humanity arrives at the classless society through a series of class struggles. But the classless society is not to be conceived as the endpoint [Endpunkt] of an historical development. From this erroneous [irrigen] conception emerged, among other things, the idea held by his epigones of a 'revolutionary situation' which, as is well known, never wanted to come" (34). I have two reservations. First, to say that "the classless society is not to be conceived as an endpoint" is not to say that Marx's texts conceive of the classless society as an endpoint. The text cited is rather ambiguous regarding this attribution, an attribution that is even more elusive in the other texts cited by Fritsch, wherein Benjamin directs his criticism solely at Kantian Marxists and Social Democrats. Moreover, even if Benjamin did so read Marx's texts, that is no reason for us to do so. Once again we are confronted by the need for and simultaneous lack of a new approach to Marx's own texts. One of the major differences Fritsch alleges between Marx and Benjamin is over technological progress: Marx shares the nineteenth century's "widespread enthusiasm for technology" and "speculates" on the return it will bring after the revolution. Benjamin is disillusioned in this regard, eschewing both the teleology and the utopianism of technology. But Fritsch never discusses those texts—"The Author as Producer" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" leap to mind—wherein Benjamin seems to evince his own peculiar brand of "enthusiasm for technological progress and the process of modernization" (33). Fritsch recognizes that Benjamin's texts are complex and difficult, and argues, on that basis, for distancing Benjamin from Marx. But that consideration ought to cut both ways. Are Marx and Benjamin really as distant as Fritsch would have it?

What is at stake here is not, I hope, my own personal sympathy for Marx. As Fritsch writes, "The past we inherit—and this is certainly true of the history of Marxism and of Marx's text—is saturated with latent promises that arise from missed chances, lost struggles, and failed revolutions" (41). I think the absence of a renewed encounter with Marx is such a missed chance in Fritsch's own inheritance. That absence cannot be justified by the immense value of Fritsch's encounter with Benjamin and Derrida. That absence can only be remembered and recognized for the loss that it is. That loss, too, is saturated with promises.

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Derrida, un Égyptien. Le problème de la pyramide juive

PETER SLOTERDIJK

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Le deuxième auteur dont fait mention Sloterdijk est Sigmund Freud. Plus précisément, celui de l’Homme Moïse et la religion monothéiste, son dernier livre: un Freud tourné par son œuvre qu’il questionne à nouveau. Dans cette suite de trois essais, Freud soutient que Moïse aurait été un Égyptien adorateur du Dieu solaire; voyant le peu de succès de cette religion en Égypte, il l’aurait introduite chez le peuple hérétaire en esclavage. Dans ce livre, Freud semble abandonner certains de ses
concepts les plus chers, comme celui de l’inconscient, au profit de nouveaux, dont celui d’Entstellung (déplacement). Freud introduit et perfore ce Entstellung en réinterprétant le mythe de l’Exode; Sloterdijk y voit pour sa part la prémonition de la différence. Cette réinterprétation de Freud fait de l’Exode la réalisation de l’égyptianisme le plus radical par des moyens juifs. Ce qui compte désormais n’est plus l’origine (comme l’était l’inconscient), mais la perspective de la Terre promise. Le notion de déplacement permet à Sloterdijk de faire intervenir un troisième auteur, Thomas Mann, qui reprend à sa manière la subversion de Freud avec sa tétralogie Joseph et ses frères en établissant la charnière entre le départ d’Egypte du peuple hébreu et le retour en Égypte de Joseph ou encore, pour Sloterdijk suivant Freud, le retour d’un Égyptien parmi les siens, mais avec ceci de particulier qu’il a conservé la religion solaire originelle ce qui lui donnerait une supériorité herméneutique dans l’interprétation des rêves. À l’image du Joseph de Thomas Mann qui obtient le succès en saccant lire les rêves des Égyptiens, Freud le fait à sa manière avec les rêves de la bourgeoisie viennoise; Derrida, en quelque sorte, représente une nouvelle vague de la réinterprétation des rêves qui, en allant au-delà des modèles de la psychanalyse et de l’herméneutique messianique, montre comment «la mort rêve en nous, ou, en d’autres termes: comment l’Égypte travaille en nous» (36).

Les concepts de vie et de mort sont approfondis dans la quatrième rencontre avec l’analyse des civilisations de Franz Borkenau. La philosophie de cet historien de l’art peu connu se base sur les positions des différentes civilisations face au phénomène de la mort. Si les Égyptiens ont une obsession pour l’immortalité, l’Antiquité, avec les Grecs, les Juifs et les Romains, accepte pour sa part la mort, ce qui se traduit pas le déploiement de l’énergie dans la polis ou la communio empirique; l’être chrétienne en Europe de l’Ouest en sera sa réaction, entraînant un nouveau ressac, les Temps modernes. Sloterdijk s’intéresse ici à l’impossibilité d’un évolutionnisme dans notre perception de la mort; perception qu’il voit justement en action dans la philosophie de Derrida. En effet, Derrida lui-même était persuadé qu’on l’oublierait à sa mort, et en même temps que la mémoire culturelle allait garder quelque chose de lui. Les deux positions sont, dans le cas de Derrida, possibles et nécessaires selon son principe de non-identité. Un positionnement unique est intenable, non comme indécidable, mais dans l’oscillation entre les pôles de l’antinomie de la mort (philosophiquement, le choix entre métaphysique et non-métaphysique).

En tant que cinquième auteur, Régis Debray permet à Sloterdijk un retour sur le concept d’Entstellung, le considérant désormais comme moyen de transport. En posant la question du déplacement de Dieu, Debray permet de questionner l’Entstellung non plus comme un effet de l’écrit, mais le résultat du lien entre le texte et le transport. Lorsque advient le moment de l’exode, tout est réévalué en fonction du poids: le léger parchemin prend vite la place des anciens dieux égyptiens de pierre. Le Dieu éternel est désormais soumis à l’éphémère du papier, reste à savoir, pour Sloterdijk, si les pyramides—machines immortilisantes—peuvent être transportables.

Le spectre de Hegel semblait promener derrière chacune des rencontres précédentes. Dans la sixième, Sloterdijk montre que c’est Derrida qui se tient derrière Hegel et l’observe. Cette observation est une séance de psychanalyse où Derrida note et analyse tous les lapsus du maître qui professe, une séance de psychanalyse où, dira Sloterdijk, le dernier pharon de la métaphysique est analysé par son dernier Joseph. Derrida a, dans les Marges de la philosophie (1972), critiqué la sémiole de Hegel d’inspiration platonicienne dans laquelle la face intellectuelle du signe est semblable à une âme qui est «déposée» dans un corps. La pyramide, dit Hegel, c’est le signe entre tous les signes, et la sémiole, c’est la science générale des pyramides. L’image de la pyramide importe car elle constitue l’image primitive des matières encombrantes et peu maniables qui n’ont pu être emportées lors du retour de l’esprit à soi (62)». Elle rappelle, en l’exagérant, l’image du livre imprimé et de ses caractères que même l’Esprit doit s’encombrer lors de son exode circulaire qui se veut allegement. Or, lorsque Hegel doit parler de l’intelligence, il la compare à un puits (menant verticalement vers la profondeur) et au fond duquel sont inconsciemment conservées images et voix de la vie antérieure. Pour déconstruire la pyramide, donc, il faut la dé-décaler (ent-entstellen), pour qu’elle redevienne puits; ces puits devraient soulever de sol-même, ou encore un rappel de sa propre survie jusques ici et jusqu’à maintenant.

Ce n’est pas le puits, mais la chambre funéraire qui intéressera Sloterdijk dans la septième et dernière rencontre avec Boris Groys. Ce philosophe s’est intéressé à la question de la pyramide—moins à sa transportabilité qu’à certains de ses lieux comme la chambre funéraire. Peut-on déplacer, demande-t-il, cette chambre et la réinstaller dans un autre lieu? Dans nos sociétés, Groys assimile les chambres funéraires à nos musées «dans la mesure où les musées ne sont que des lieux hétérotopiques au cœur du ‘monde de la vie’ moderne, sur lesquels des objets choisis, comme des momies modernes, sont mortifiés, défonctionnalisés, ravis à l’usage profane et proposés à l’observation recueillie (71).» Mais les modernes, selon Groys, n’ont pas besoin d’herméneute de rêve, ils n’ont besoin que de collectionneurs. On comprend mieux là, selon Sloterdijk, la philosophie après Derrida, en particulier chez les jeunes derriéris: de la grammaïologie on passe à la muséologie (ou théorie des archives).
La lecture sloterdijkienne de Derrida est intéressante, autant dans le fond que dans la forme. Elle est faite elle-même d'un entrelacs de lectures, Sloterdijk qui lit Derrida, qui lit Hegel, etc.; une forme de commentaire du commentaire qui n'est pas étranger à la philosophie derridienne. Sloterdijk ne contextualise pas Derrida grâce à sept différents auteurs, tel qu'il le présente; il ne tente pas non plus de comprendre sept auteurs grâce à Derrida. Non. Chaque rencontre se répète dans une autre—Luhmann qui permet de comprendre Freud, qui permet de comprendre Thomas Mann, et ainsi de suite; chaque lecture renvoie une autre doit le faire, formant une texture propre à ce que Derrida a pu nous apporter avec sa pensée. En ce sens, l'objectif de penser Derrida en pensant à Derrida est réussi: le problème de la pyramide juive est bien celui de l'écriture. Mais que signifie encore écrire pour survivre?

S'il m'est possible de faire cette critique, je dirais que Sloterdijk s'attarde trop à la «momie»—corps pyramidale—et laisse de côté la terre promise que fut l'Amérique pour Derrida—nouveau désert égyptien (pour continuer dans la métaphore). Le choix de l'Amérique comme terre d'accueil par Derrida n'est pas anodin, et qualifier l'Amérique de «Palais de cristal» comme le fait Sloterdijk dans ses livres ne suffit peut-être plus pour comprendre la dynamique à l'œuvre entre Derrida et l'Amérique: la survivance, ici, devient géographie. Des nations, des peuples exprimer ici le désir de perdurer, il faut bien prendre en compte ces espoirs et ces rêves américains. Si l'Europe a besoin de collectionneurs, l'Amérique réclame encore ses prophètes et Derrida a été en cela très sémitique: devenir impersonnel en qui résonne la voix des sans-voix. Cela reste penser: non seulement Derrida qui parle, mais qui prête sa parole à l'non-voix des exilés.

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