

FIRST PANEL

1a) Matt Travers, University of Middlesex

The Transcendental Inexperience

In this paper I explore the political role of the aesthetic in relation to the philosophy of Ray Brassier with the aim of developing my previous critique of his work in the 'Invention of Experience'. My basic argument will be that political norms of 'the good' appear to be inextricably tied to an expanded notion of the aesthetic, and that Brassier's explicit commitments to an as yet unclear strain of post-Marxist politics pose difficulties for a 'transcendental realism', primarily in terms of i) understanding the social relation of the commodity-form, ii) affirming a positivist reversion of Nietzsche's aesthetic turn, and iii) maintaining a critique of experience which would sever the idea of communism from all its traditional content. Ultimately, I will contend that Brassier's political standpoint can be seen as the logical counterpoint of Adorno's own 'melancholy science', where both oppose a totalitarian vision of state capitalism with a romantic belief in an ideal outside; whether this is codified in terms of a future redemption with a speculative nature (Adorno) or as faith in the technological overcoming of capitalist man (Brassier). Like Adorno before him, there is little or no indication of how Brassier's critique of capitalism might combine with any modern political movements. And where Adorno once conceived of the 'autonomous artwork' as that which preserves a 'semblance of subjectivity' from the threat of real subsumption, now we are asked to place our trust in the divine inventions of science as that which might project us beyond it: into the fabled realm of Transcendental Inexperience.

1b) Stijn De Cauwer, University of Utrecht

The critical-utopian aspect of Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities*.

In his unfinished novel *The Man without Qualities*, Robert Musil presented a series of enigmatic utopian proposals. Lukács critiqued Musil of being an example of the ideology of modernism, with a negativity rejecting reality wholesale and an infinite exploration of abstract fantasies; a critique that has become paradigmatic for later criticisms.

Musil-scholars often attempt to resolve the complexities concerning the critical and utopian aspect of Musil's work by trying to seek a proper sequence or hierarchy in the different utopian proposals and by adhering great importance to guessing what the ending of the novel was going to be, which then would serve as the final and normative utopian proposal, surpassing all the other ones.

Next to the explorative-utopian aspect of the novel, which according to Musil had to serve as a vast experimental station to find new and better ways of being human, I would like to propose another utopian aspect of the novel, which is not concerned with finality but with the conditions of possibility. In this critical-utopian aspect of the novel, the critical and the utopian coincide. Musil's ideology critique should not be heard as a dismissal of ideologies or finding an "outside" from which they can be critiqued, like Mannheim's paradigm of the 'free-floating intellectual'. Instead, he wanted to establish a different relation to all

ideologies. Musil was of the opinion that the intellectual debates of his times were as if stuck in a rut, lacking the concepts to face the present, only capable of seeing the present as a period of decline. The inadequacy of the prevailing models made them turn towards the idealized fetishes of state, nation or race.

Musil's critique consists of problematizing the taken-for-granted categories the debates were stuck in, in order to break open a petrified figuration of reality so it could be modulated and readjusted. He wanted to open up a sense of possibility, an awareness that things could have been different and better. Musil wanted to place all ideologies on a flexible base, with scientific indeterminacy and the partial and provisional nature of knowledge as the model. Although sharing many features of Lukàcs' theory of reified consciousness, Musil proposed a completely different, open-ended form of dereification. Musil's critical-utopianism has to be seen as an immanent critique and not as a withdrawal, more akin to the tradition of Bloch and Jameson than Mannheim's paradigm.

SECOND PANEL

2a) Owen Holland, University of Sussex

Marx, Aeschylus and the Possibilities of Indeterminacy in Historical Materialism

This paper works towards a tentative specification of the status of the 'literary' in Karl Marx's thought. I begin with a close reading of one of Marx's own favourite poets, Aeschylus, in an attempt to discover whether Marx's dialectical cast of mind may well have been partly influenced by his readings in literature, as well as Hegel. Marx's appetite for literature was certainly voracious. The reading of *Prometheus Bound* which I offer opens out into a consideration of the problem of textual indeterminacy and the ways in which this problem might be homologous with those of political praxis, especially in light of Marx's fondness for making use of the dramatic stage as a metaphor for the historical process in his own writings. In mapping out a constellation in which Prometheus, Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* and the image of a tortured prisoner in Abu Ghraib figure as concrete instantiations of Marx's twofold vision of history, I attempt to arrest the aesthetic moment of Marx's thought. I end with a discussion which aims to reconstruct a Marxian approach to aesthetics and problematise it in two directions: firstly, to what extent can the notion of autotelic art be said to exist in a relationship of productive tension with instrumentality; secondly, what notion of the human subject can be taken to underpin the moment of aesthetic creativity?

2b) Matthew Charles, University of Middlesex

Utopia and its Discontents: Dreams of Catastrophe and the End of "the End of History"

The recuperation of utopianism in the anglophone world over the last three decades is historically premised upon, on the one hand, the assimilation of Ernst Bloch's theory of the

“Utopian impulse” via the first English translations of his major Utopian works during this period and, on the other, the rejection of any naturalisation of capitalism’s “reality principle” through a resistance to the closure or totality contained in the “end of history” thesis. Consequently, contemporary utopianism ends up legitimating itself in relation to the contested value of the “pleasure principle”, its discontent or uneasiness a symptom of repressed Utopian desire for a better, or at least different, world.

But this uneasiness over the “end of history” imposes a critical self-limitation upon contemporary utopian theory, which as a result jettisons the concept of history which is required for the genuine critical purchase it espouses. It is therefore necessary to distinguish the empirically conceived “end of history” from a metaphysical concept of the historical Absolute, or the unconditioned totality of history. Here, in contrast to the recuperation of a Bloch, the continuing importance of Walter Benjamin’s theory of the dialectical image and the speculative concept of historical experience which underlies it becomes apparent. The intrusion of the historical Absolute is coded throughout Benjamin’s thought as the eruptive and mortuary figure of catastrophe, which stands as the dialectical counterpart to the utopian wish images of the collective dream. Indeed, the motto under which the *Arcades Project* was to be constructed derives from Adorno: “Each epoch dreams of itself as annihilated by catastrophe”.

Analogous to the structure of Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontents*, it is necessary to recognise in the discontents of utopianism not only the working of a pleasure-principle frustrated by the demands of the capitalist reality-principle, but also that of a destructive death-drive. Understood as the dialectical counterpart to the wish image, the figure of catastrophe loses the conservative and reactionary significance it possesses in Freud, and assumes an existential-hermeneutical significance in its relation to the historical Absolute. The absence of such this philosophical recognition from much contemporary discourse, however, exposes how the place of the *future* in contemporary utopian theory cannot be properly grasped as a *historical problem*, and therefore ends up rehearsing the “realism” of liberal capitalism against which it is opposes itself.

THIRD PANEL

3a) Victoria Browne, University of Liverpool

‘History for the Future’: Feminism and the Untimely

Feminist history is inherently transformative, positing the past as ‘unfinished’ and open to different possible presents and futures. In this sense, feminism has a ‘retroactive’ rather than ‘retrospective’ approach to history. However, this model ascribes a fundamental privilege to problems and paradigms of the present, rooted in the perspective of the historian. Within recent feminist theory, this historiographical centralization of the present has been called into question.

A key voice in this debate is Elizabeth Grosz, who challenges feminism to abandon conventional models of history and temporality, and to ‘write history from the

point of the view of the future'. For Grosz, this means adopting an openness to futurity, such that the future is conceived as indeterminable: unconstrained by the 'chains of determinism', or by projections and expectations based on experiences past and present. This transformed conception of history and temporality would entail a 'becoming-art' of politics, as more experimental and creative forms of practice replace the traditional model of political action grounded in planning, prediction and 'step-by-step directed change'.

There is a lot at stake in the turn towards a 'becoming-art' of politics predicated upon the radical unknowability of the future. At a time when the relevance, history and force of feminism is being debated or declared obsolete, there may arguably be more urgency to illustrate the viability of feminist futures, as opposed to their radical indeterminacy.

To think through the ethical and political implications of Grosz's 'history for the future', I will consider her work in conjunction with the work of Christine Battersby. Both philosophers draw on a variety of thinkers to construct a philosophy of history premised upon a metaphysics of 'becoming' and the 'untimely'. However, I will argue that Grosz's commitment to the Bergsonian/Deleuzian concept of the 'virtual' – the realm of potentialities which exceed the actualities of the past and present - makes it difficult to transpose her *philosophy* of the future into a *history* for the future, as it elides the question of the historian's position and activity in the present. Moreover, her privileging of virtuality, 'creation' and the 'new' leaves behind the forgotten *actualized* others and events of history. In contrast, I will show that Battersby's conception of history and the untimely – drawing on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Arendt - enables a more practical approach towards a feminist 'history for the future'.

3b) Paddy McQueen, Queen's University, Belfast

Beyond Recognition: Reflections on Honneth, Identity and the Future of Feminism

This paper argues that Axel Honneth's highly influential theory of recognition is an inappropriate model for theorising and enacting feminist emancipatory struggles. Two principal reasons are explored here. Firstly, his inattention to issues of power means that he is blind to certain forms of dominance and oppression. This prevents the concept of recognition providing a radical critique of the status quo. Adapting Butler's theory of gender performativity, the paper claims that positive recognition of gender fails to acknowledge the ways in which gender is enacted within a coercive framework of enforced norms that always produce exclusion. As a result, Honneth can neither provide satisfactory critical analysis of the discursive and material conditions within which recognition takes place, nor address how the subject is constructed through relations of power (and thus how these relations of

power can be reworked). Butler's theory suggests that recognition of gender will only function to reproduce, rather than radically transform, the norms through which gender oppression is generated and maintained.

Secondly, his concept of self-realisation, defined as integrity of the self, is shown to be incompatible with contemporary feminist visions of identity. Haraway's Cyborg, Braidotti's Nomad, and Lloyd's Subject-in-Process all represent figurations of the self which move us beyond the traditional, phallogocentric concept of the unified, autonomous individual. Honneth's concept of integrity relies upon a narrative of the self which celebrates wholeness and linear development. This dangerous, normalising fiction is a central feature of the existing gender system. Consequently, efforts to resist and ultimately eliminate gender oppression must reject precisely this notion of the self in favour of alternative narratives of identity, which emphasise multiplicity and fluidity. The paper concludes by revealing how the tensions between recognition and the contemporary feminist perspectives advanced here are embodied within Fraser's theory of recognition. Her attempt to formulate a coherent theory of recognition whilst retaining the insights of deconstructive feminism produces an inescapable tension in her work. This suggests the two approaches are ultimately incompatible. Consequently, in establishing a viable future for feminist theory and activism, we not only need to move beyond Honneth's particular model, but recognition more generally.

FOURTH PANEL

4a) Natalia Baeza, University of Notre Dame, Indiana

Negative Dialectics as Immanent Critique

Adorno's negative dialectics is a conception of philosophical reflection deeply indebted to Hegel's philosophy, but also importantly different from the Hegelian account. This paper discusses the relationship between Adorno's and Hegel's views of dialectics with the aim of clarifying the nature and structure of negative dialectics. The focus of my discussion is the idea, inherited by Adorno from Hegel, that philosophical reflection should proceed as immanent critique. This means that it must begin by considering a particular object of reflection and, without imposing any extraneous considerations on it, it must develop the assumptions and resources of the position itself so that they alone lead to contradiction. Moreover, the contradiction must be *determinate* rather than merely abstract: dialectical contradiction is not a merely formal-logical contradiction, from which anything at all would follow, but is rather a contradiction immediately attached to a specific interpretation, which interpretation constitutes a new position of thought (a new object of reflection) that can then be submitted to the same treatment: a contradiction is developed within it, and a new position is thereby

attained. The problem that interests me in this paper is whether negative dialectics can proceed by way of immanent critique, as Adorno claims that it does. Addressing this question requires, first, a clarification of the method of immanent critique and of its philosophical presuppositions. Since the notion of dialectics as carried forward through immanent critique has its roots in Hegel, a good point of departure is first to analyze its structure in Hegel's philosophy. Such an analysis is the concern of section 1. I conclude that, in Hegel, immanent critique presupposes a specific conception of determinate negation, which in turn presupposes the Hegelian teleology of reason. In section 2, I discuss Adorno's appropriation of Hegel's conception of immanent critique. Because Adorno rejects the Hegelian teleology of reason, he is committed to rejecting the Hegelian conception of determinate negation, and therefore also the Hegelian account of immanent critique. Still, negative dialectics is supposed to proceed through immanent critique. We are left with the following quandary: Either (1) negative dialectics proceeds through some alternative conception of determinate negation and immanent critique, or (2) Adorno illegitimately appropriated the Hegelian idea of immanent critique without realizing that his rejection of the Hegelian teleology made such importation problematic. I conclude with some suggestions in support of (1).

4b) George Hoare, Nuffield College, Oxford

The Missing "Commodity Form"? A Comparison of the Critiques of Consumerism in Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* and the British "Early" New Left

In this paper, I examine the critique of "consumerism" found in the British "Early" New Left (1957-62) in the context of the analysis of consumer capitalism found in Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (2002 [1964]). I argue that the work of Stuart Hall (1957, 1960), Edward Thompson (1959, 1960a, b), Richard Hoggart (1957, 1958), and, more complexly, Raymond Williams (1958a, b, 1961), in the movement known as the British Early New Left centres around a weakly defined notion of "the profit motive" rooted in the tradition of ethical criticism in British socialist thought (Anderson, 1968), rather than the conceptual starting point of the *commodity* as found in the tradition of Western Marxism influenced by Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1970 [1923]), and accessed in the paper mainly through a consideration of *One Dimensional Man*. As a consequence, we can discern a set of systematic contrasts between the analyses of Marcuse (2002 [1964]) and Thompson (1960a)—particularly in their differing understandings of the idea of *contradiction* and the effect of consumerism on the development of *individuality*. I take the former to be particularly important, contending that the British Early New Left represents a struggle towards a critique based in an "image

of society” as an expressive unity or, in Williams’ phrase, “a whole way of life”, but *without the notion of totality* (Anderson, 1968). I conclude by observing that the British Early New Left’s concern with cultural subordination and cultural politics (Hoggart, 1957; Williams, 1958a, 1961) opens up a very different political perspective from that commonly associated with much of “critical theory”, around the possibility and desirability of a “common culture”.

4c) Kamilla Pawlikovska, University of Kent

‘Seeking the Extreme: Ecstatic Reading of Science Fiction and its Sociological Interpretations’

Only the perverse fantasy can still save us.
(Goethe)

In 1922 William Ogburn observed that culture in modern societies does not follow the rapid technological progress. His concept of cultural lag was later developed by Alvin Toffler who in his *The Future Shock* observed that theorists of social change generally focus on the directions of change and underestimate the importance of the *rate* of change. Toffler claimed that ‘any attempt to define the ‘content’ of change must include the consequences of pace itself as part of that content’ (Toffler 1984; 3). Both uncontrollable technological development and rapid change constitute two main themes of dystopian fiction. In my paper I will use sociological theories to argue that these themes do not possess a didactic function any longer but instead they help the reader to ‘exist in the extreme’, to ‘become ecstatic’ (that is, ‘to be outside the self’). My interpretations of ‘technological determinism’ will be informed by my readings of John Dewey, Thorstein Veblen and Clarence Ayres; rapid change will be analyzed with reference to Toffler and Daniel Bell. I will support my argument with examples from science fiction novels of Philip K. Dick, Evgenii Zamyatin, and Angela Carter.

I will structure my analysis along the three criteria. Initially, I will examine the language which is used to describe technological progress and social change focusing on how its particular use creates particular connotations. For example, I will identify the instances of what Raymond Williams calls ‘technological sublime’ in Zamyatin’s novel *We* and demonstrate how it is connected to Ayres’s views on technology. Further, I will examine the notion of time and space. For example, in Carter’s novels the narrative contexts change swiftly and imperceptibly from realist settings (e.g. contemporary London) through apocalyptic New York overcome by racial civil wars to a futurist underground city of Beulah hidden in the desert. Landscapes and horizons which typically represent freedom, in Carter’s work conceal the threat of unconstrained violence and anarchy; similarly, rooms and

houses do not provide shelters, instead, they are symbolically contaminated (soiled, invaded by insects and parasites) or, on the contrary, they are septic clean and resemble operational theatres. By structuring the narrative along the rapid shifts and subverting the received cultural expectations Carter disrupts cognitive patterns in a similar way that rapid changes do. Finally, I will examine the relationship of the body and technology. I will focus on the attempts to reduce and control individuals through science and technology by subjecting them to constant surveillance (in Zamyatin's *We* citizens are observed even by their own TV sets) or incorporating human bodies as part of the machine (e.g. mutated humans, 'precogs' used to prevent crime in Dick's *Minority Report*).