Books Reviewed

Metaphysics: Concept and Problems
Theodor W. Adorno

The works of Theodor Adorno have had a mixed reception in academic circles in Britain. His analysis of the ‘culture industry’ is often dismissed as both productivist and elitist and therefore irrelevant to the study of contemporary forms of cultural experience. This is in contrast to a largely ‘positive’ evaluation of his anti-foundationalist stance on the constitution of knowledge and a renewed interest in his work on aesthetics.

This volume of lectures brings together Adorno’s thoughts on metaphysics and culture in post-war Germany. Adorno regularly developed lecture courses in the 1960s to think through work in progress. These lectures provide the thought processes that contributed to the final section of Negative Dialectis, to many his finest work. As such they provide a valuable insight into the creative thought processes of this most famous of dialectical thinkers. They do more than this though. They also demonstrate the moral and intellectual dilemma that Adorno found himself in a post-Auschwitz world in which a ‘resurrected culture’, which importantly includes philosophical speculation, ‘was rehashing its traditional values of truth, beauty and goodness as if nothing had happened’ (p. 119). In part these lectures meditate on the meaning of Adorno’s famous claim that after Auschwitz it was impossible to write poetry.

The lectures begin, somewhat dauntingly, with questioning the nature and meaning of metaphysics in culture. Adorno takes the unusual stance that it was Aristotle, and not Plato, who was the first true metaphysician. For those of us who know of Plato’s simile of the cave in which he discounts the empirical world in favour of the ‘forms’, the metaphysically real, this comes as a surprise. But Adorno’s point is that Plato divides these two realms in such a way that there is no meeting place, no mediation between them. Whereas Aristotle poses the question ‘of how one is to conceive the mediation between the world of ideas and the world of sensible objects’ (p. 33). Aristotle thus becomes the first theorist to take seriously the relation between the empirical world and the world of ideas. Adorno’s underlying interest in Aristotle is, however, guided by problems in his own thought. If philosophical thought is also social thought and if it is embedded in the transitory and the historical, then how can it develop categories that are universal? For Adorno the universal is also necessarily the ideological, yet he does not wish to throw the baby out with the bath water. Rather he argues that thought ‘is able constantly to think beyond itself and its limits, to think through the walls of its glasshouse. And this thinking beyond itself, into openness – that, precisely, is metaphysics’ (p. 68). How, then is one to think of the metaphysical in the world today without falling prey to ideology?

Adorno recounts a recurring dream in which he feels he is no longer alive but merely the ‘emanation of a wish of some victim of Auschwitz’ (p. 110). To merely exist ‘one is taking away that possibility from someone else, to whom life has been denied; that one is stealing that person’s life … And if one does live on, one has, in a sense, been statistically lucky at the expense of those who have fallen victim to the mechanism of annihilation and, one must fear, will still fall victim to it’ (p. 113).

Adorno poses the dilemma of a survivor, but also, to extrapolate, of the ‘haves’ rather than the ‘have-nots’. The realm of culture becomes a realm of forgetting. He recounts an experience he had
as a child as he watches a dogcatcher’s van drive past, ‘one knew what was the most important thing of all, that was what really mattered, the zone of the carcass and the knacker’ (p. 117).

Which brings me to Adorno’s statement on the writing of poetry. It goes hand in hand with the imperative to write poetry whilst there is still suffering as an ‘objective form of that awareness’ (p. 110). To write or not to write is not a question of either/or. For Adorno the antimony lies in the nature of the world and not his thought. This translation is excellent and the footnotes provided by Rolf Tiedemann are exemplary.

University of Sussex

Michael Bull

Paul Virilio: From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond
John Armitage (ed.)

Apart from notable exceptions such as Deleuze and Guattari’s Nomadology (1986) and Kroker’s The Possessed Individual (1992), the work of Paul Virilio has been under-explored in social theory. As such, this collection is a welcome contribution to the study of the French ‘philosopher of speed’. Armitage’s introductory chapter shows how Virilio’s ‘dromology’ relates to the Second World War and in particular the understanding of war as speed. For Virilio, the equation of war and speed illuminates not only the total violence which characterises late-modern war, but also the tyranny that occupies the heart of modern progress.

Following his early idealisation of architecture as a space which could be adapted to allow greater freedom, Leach allows one to see how Virilio’s later work has concentrated on the negative effects of post-modern geography. Similarly, McQuire’s contribution to the collection shows how Virilio’s notion of the city as a mobile construction is related to the thesis that high speed has led to the disappearance of any collective vision of social reality. For McQuire, this idea suggests that the city as social space collapses into the screen, the pure surface which acts as a plane for highly individuated forms of communication. McQuire illuminates Virilio’s own contribution to the collection by showing how the theory of the end of social space is related to the concept of light-speed. Virilio argues that due to the invention of new forms of communication which approach the speed of light (such as live television transmissions), geographical space has collapsed and been replaced by the non-space of the visual display.

The related effect of the collapse of space is the end of movement, or what Virilio calls inertia. With regard to this, Gane’s essay compares Virilio’s idea of virtualisation and Baudrillard’s theory of simulation. He points out that the difference between Virilio and Baudrillard is that the former attempts to save the category of social reality, while the latter collapses the distinction between reality and simulation. Against Baudrillard’s notion of hyper-reality, Virilio is able to maintain a concept of the phenomenological body by asserting a theory of technological stratification. Those located at the centre of the technocratic society have access to the high-speed virtual sphere, while those on the periphery are confined to the province of low-speed actuality, the domain where the phenomenological relation still forms an effective bond.

For Kellner this insistence on the preservation of corporeal integrity neglects the democratic potential offered by new technological forms. Similarly, Cubitt claims that Virilio’s binary construction (subject/object) overlooks the fact that technology mediates between subjects and advances the construction of the communicative body. Cubitt views communication technology...
as an emancipatory form which suggests the end of monadic subjectivity. Zurbrugg’s chapter, which debates the merits of Stelarc’s technological experimentation, allows one to consider Cubitt’s position from a different perspective. According to Zurbrugg, one may see Stelarc as a *techno-versucher*, whose work with machines advances new forms of human/non-human interaction, or agree with Virilio and consider his philosophy as characteristic of the Nietzschean hubris which increasingly dominates the high-speed sector of late-modern capital.

Against authors like Derrida, whose relation to Virilio is explored by Crogan’s excellent contribution, Virilio is suspicious of the emancipatory effects suggested by new techno/textual augmentation. His theory of the technological colonisation of the body argues that the virtual benefits of the machinic add-on obscure the actual subordination of human concerns to technological progress. This point, which is central to Armitage’s interview with Virilio, is also considered by Conley and Der Derian. While Conley stands against cyber-feminism by arguing that there is little room to re-think identity through technology, Der Derian maintains that we must save critical thought and steer clear of an unthinking celebration of technological development.

*Staffordshire University*  
MARK FEATHERSTONE

**In Search of Politics**  
**Zygmunt Bauman**  

Bauman’s persistant theme, summarised in the phrase ‘individuals have become monads’, is that of the loss of community and sense of collective agency through the effects of individualisation and consumerism, which isolate rather than emancipate persons. He therefore adds to an extensive and developing critical tradition in sociology recently developed by writers such as Berger, Habermas, Lasch and Bellah. Bauman contributes to this tradition the location of current private dissatisfactions and impoverishment of the social sphere (in a particular view of the tensions between modernity and postmodernity), together with the emergence of chronic insecurity, that emphasises the changing role of intellectuals.

Contemporary Western culture, Bauman argues, confronts a tension between the twin beliefs, first, that human freedom is real and legitimate and, secondly, that the world is beyond human control. Consequently, increasing personal freedom develops together with an increasing sense of personal insecurity. Politics, which could be a collective forum, is the preserve of professionals immunised from the privatised concerns of individuals. Consequently, popular movements of political solidarity arise around shared fears and enmities, of which, according to Bauman, the current paedophile-related panic is typical.

Modernity’s promise to maximise human freedom by extending control over the natural world has been undermined both by the impermanence of the indicators of self-identity (family, work, nation) and by the global expansion of capital. This latter transcends national-based political structures, which, through their endorsement of strategies of privatisation and deregulation, declare their irrelevance. Power lies in the capacity to create insecurity for others; a sense of ‘crisis’ is normal. This is the new form of control – overt, repressive control is largely reserved for ‘failed consumers’ whose existence warns consumers of the uncertainties of life. The creation of transnational political structures to parallel economic globalisation weakens the significance of national indicators of personal identity whilst further removing the political
process from personal concerns. Popular culture reacts by identifying those areas that individuals feel can be controlled (such as body shape) whilst creating demonised representatives of uncontrollable forces (such as criminals or immigrants).

Whereas true social autonomy would recognise the human origins of institutions, political decisions are presented as inevitabilities brought about by forces outside human control (for example, the market). The apparently uncontrolled nature of inevitable change means that individuals are deprived of the certainties of both tradition and progress. However, according to Bauman, critical reflection, on which human autonomy depends, must deny that there are any certain foundations for either social order or personal identity. Therefore, those who traditionally engaged in critical reflection — the intellectuals — cannot reconcile their diversity of personal interests and have become just another competing status group.

Bauman looks to republicanism, representing persons as citizens, to provide an effective response to these new times. But participation in public affairs depends upon security. Hence the latter part of this book is a qualified defence of a ‘basic minimum income strategy’. This seems to be a very narrow issue on which to focus the preceding sweeping discussion of the interaction between personal concerns and global problems. Bauman admits that this strategy would be no more than a start, and that it may have self-refuting consequences if appropriate ideological and institutional supports were absent. Nevertheless, this is the one extensive consideration of a particular issue within a discussion that, however invigorating, relies on sweeping generalisations with barely a nod to empirical support other than quotes from sympathetic writers. Even with Bauman’s caveats, it sidesteps the issues raised at the outset concerning the isolation of consuming individuals and the absence of public discourse.

Bauman’s thesis is accessible, persuasive and vividly presented. It is dominated by rhetoric and extended metaphor rather than argument and evidence, but it flows with ideas and passion. This is consistent with Bauman’s apparent aim of evoking, or even provoking, the reader to respond. Thus, it reads like a manifesto even though its practical recommendations are few. This book could be utilised as a research programme for sociology (for instance, for identifying the extent and social location of experiences and attitudes that Bauman presents as typical). This may be to trivialise Bauman’s goals, for he wishes to engage in a public debate. However, despite the frequency with which Bauman asserts that ‘we’ know or experience this or that — which sits awkwardly with his depiction of contemporary selves as privatised — it seems possible that he has universalised the peculiar concerns of liberal, Western professional intellectuals.

**University of Aberdeen**

**CHRISt WRIGHT**

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**Picture windows: How the Suburbs Happened**

**Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen**


It is not sufficient to take a look through the picture window (a typical feature of 1950s suburban houses) and see only the bored housewife, the anonymous commuter or the Joneses to keep up with. Rather, as Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen show in *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened*, this look should be far more wide-ranging. It could, for instance, study suburbia’s complex past and present.
Drawing on a mixture of sociology, economics, politics, cultural studies and urban planning, combined with both a diversity of archival resources and personal interviews, the authors try to undo the stereotype of the suburb as a fixed and timeless ‘no-place dominated by a culture of conformity and consumption’ (p. xv). They relate both the development of and the lives in the suburbs of Long Island with broader American issues. *Picture Windows* is chronologically structured, from Hearst’s turn-of-the-century Gold Coast to contemporary decentralised technoburbs, with an emphasis on three reoccurring and interconnected issues or themes.

The first major theme focuses on the ongoing conflict between the private and the public as concepts that are tightly intertwined with contrasting ideas about American democracy. American housing debates have traditionally been embedded within discourses that present housing either as a civic right that should be protected by governmental (financial and regulatory) intervention or as an issue for free private enterprise that should not have to compete with public funding. Baxandall and Ewen clearly show how these two discourses have continuously shaped, yet have also been challenged by, mass-scale housing discussions. These discussions ran from the New Deal (in which publicly funded housing was seen as a key factor for economic and social recovery) through Senator McCarthy’s prejudiced committee directed against ‘communist’ public housing to the current unwillingness to build affordable homes for new immigrants. It is the still dominant free-market ideology that, as the authors suggest, set off post-war suburban building but also helps silence the idea of housing as an issue of democracy.

The second theme of *Picture Windows* concerns the relation between aesthetic and socio-political ideas and developments. In the book, this topic mainly surfaces at moments of suburban history when architects, urban theorists and planners become involved in discussions on mass-scale housing. However, this theme becomes much stronger when it is related to innovations in technology, construction and marketing, the need for cheap housing and private investments. It explains how, in the 1940s, the possibility of mass-produced prefabricated single dwellings, with their built-in consumer goods, not only became the standard for the suburbs but also for the ‘new middle-class style of life’ (p. 133).

The ‘dream of inclusive democracy and prosperity’ (p. xxii) is the last significant theme of the book. Good housing is here taken as a sign of social equality and integration. This is lucidly illustrated when the authors draw upon the relationship between the rise of the suburbs and the reconfiguration of class distinctions, for example in terms of home ownership. The continuing struggles against the racial and ethnic homogeneity of many suburbs is also rightly stressed in the book. Perhaps more importantly, Baxandall and Ewen suggest that such changing positions have had lasting consequences for American society and its citizens.

By cleverly intertwining the above themes with a historical perspective and counter-intuitive accounts of suburbanites, about how their dynamic communities are lived and constructed, *Picture Windows* convinces in its plea to understand suburbia in plural rather than in singular terms. However, contrary to the authors’ claim, this is by no means the first study showing the dynamics of multi-layered suburbia. They prefer to tell the suburban story in a narrative, informative form bereft of references to or discussion of this previous work. These exclusions mean that aspects of suburban development here remain unexplained or underdetermined. Similarly, crucial concepts like citizenship and community are used within rather fixed definitions, whereas the book suggests that housing issues can challenge such categories. They really deserve a more critical analysis, especially since the authors do not otherwise shy away from the complexity of suburbia.

That said, the strength of *Picture Windows* is in its multidisciplinary approach which enables mass-scale housing to be linked with American history in a way that foregrounds the need to mutually conceptualise changes in society and suburbia. As such Baxandall and Ewen have written
an extremely readable book that is of interest to various fields both within and outside of sociology.

Brunel University

Popular Music and Youth Culture: Music, Identity and Place

Andy Bennett


This is an interesting book and a welcome addition to the sociology of popular music. In the past the topic has suffered from a lack of mainstream sociological texts, and this book is to be applauded for adding to this growing area.

Bennett’s aims are simple ‘I … view the local as a contested rather than a fixed space – the cultural significance I attach to music being its role in the construction of particular narratives of the local’ (p. 2). However, the first thing that strikes you about this two-part text is that it has been turned into a book from a doctoral thesis. There are always problems in doing this, not least that the focus is always narrow and designed to meet a specified goal, and this text is no exception.

Yet this is not a major criticism as the first three chapters, which make up Part I, do provide the reader with a breathtaking overview at break-neck speed of theories regarding youth culture and popular music study over the last fifty years. For example, Chapter 1 deals with aspects of style and young people that predate the fascination with the period after the Second World War. This differentiates youth and subcultures but says little about music per se. The chapter, like the whole of Part I, appears to be trying to cover too much: lifestyles, resistance, critique of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, subcultures, race.

Chapter 2, for example, is an attempt to ‘critically assess some of the theoretical approaches … in the related fields of sociology, cultural and media studies’ (p. 35). In it we move swiftly from Adorno and Benjamin to the contested nature of popular music to audience reception to subcultures. This is the difficulty in turning a thesis into a book, we seem to flirt with many avenues of thought, yet ‘critique’ none in any depth. It is only in Chapter 3, ‘The Significance of Locality’, that we get to the focus of the book.

Part I provides students with a compact history, but in doing so it poses more questions than it answers. Perhaps focusing on one or two theories/perspectives as they relate to space/place and locality (the theme of the book) would have helped. The real interest lies in the case studies.

Once we begin Part II the book becomes a real feast of detail. Bennett deals with four different musical styles and forms of locality in separate chapters: dance, bhangra, rap and tribute bands. What would have been helpful here would be a restatement of the themes for analysis, as we tend to get lost in the detail of the cases.

One particularly useful theory foregrounded is the tribe metaphor. This was particularly useful for understanding the communitarian process of an eclectic dance music scene, where differentiated followers of subgenres all come together with traditional, historical and chart-based music to form ‘identities without boundaries’. This idea that individuals appropriate parts of all genres to construct their identities is a timely one. A few more quotes from the ethnographic study would have complimented this approach and illustrated the different individual perspectives. The chapter on bhangra was at its best in describing the way Asian youth splits into ‘communities within communities’ (p. 118). Illustrating how the local is always global, Bennett states such
separations are based on cultural as well as religious grounds (p. 120). The remaining two chapters on rap and tribute bands/venues deal with other aspects of the local. And this is where the reader can feel slightly deflated.

Each of the case study chapters deal in great depth with issues of locality in relation to the separate pieces of research, and for that alone they are worth the read. However, Bennett does not then bring these separate analyses together to show us the threads that permeate throughout this idea of music, locality and identity. For example, we do not find out how the ‘familial’ atmosphere constructed by the tribute band in its venues is replicated or at least differs from that in the Asian bhangra events.

To be a useful teaching aid this book needs a chapter drawing out the themes and constructing a way of viewing the local in this age of global cultural resources. Bennett hints at these in all the case studies, but they need to be made explicit for students. It is not until the conclusion that we see use of the global as a form of possible explanation for the events delineated in the case studies, by which time we have run out of text.

It is an openly written text and, the above reservations aside, taken individually, different chapters will be useful as resources for students wanting a telescoped history of music or in-depth case studies of the four different genres. For this alone, I feel this book will be of use to students trying to understand what is at present a poorly defined area of study.

University of Leicester

GRANT COATES

Citizenship and Migration: Globalisation and the politics of belonging

Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson


Stephen Castles is one of the foremost authorities on international migration and has sketched out most of the themes elaborated in this co-authored book in his earlier work, in particular The Age of Migration, with Mark Miller (1998) and Ethnicity and Globalisation (2000). The latter contains an important programmatic statement of Castles’s views, in a chapter entitled ‘Citizenship and the Other in the Age of Migration’. This joint publication reflects a balanced division of labour with Alastair Davidson and deals with an impressively broad range of themes. In Chapter 1 the authors note the contradiction between the nation-state and nationality as guarantors of effective citizenship and the onward rush of globalisation in generating new forms of emergent global citizenship. Castles and Davidson firmly align themselves to the cause of post-national citizenship. As they argue, ‘citizenship should be a political community without any claim to common cultural identity’ (p. 25). The remainder of the book is an attempt to chart what the emergent forms of global citizenship might entail.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on citizenship, while Chapter 3 outlines the principal tendencies in international migration in the post-war period, including the formation of socially excluded ethnic minorities in the countries of reception. The powerful conclusion of this chapter goes to the heart of the matter when the authors ask, ‘How can the Other become a citizen when subjected to a whole gamut of exclusionary practices?’ (p. 83). The nation-state and citizenship have been predicated upon a concept of inclusion within the national community that excludes
the Other (both internally and at its borders). Given that ethnic minorities are now ‘here for good’ how are they to be incorporated as citizens with equal rights?

Chapters 4 and 5 develop this theme by outlining the divergent norms governing citizenship and naturalisation in the core states of Europe and North America. A situation of complex civic stratification is outlined by the authors, with differential modes of inclusion and exclusion operating in different states and within particular regional blocs, such as the European Union (EU). As the authors point out, European citizenship and the emergence of a European public space are the ‘other side’ of the exclusion of the extra-communitari, the asylum seekers and ‘illegals’. Equally, for settled ethnic minorities, the acquisition of civic, social and political rights is no guarantee of full equality as citizens. Continuing discrimination impedes full citizenship.

Chapter 6 outlines the construction of ethnic identities, with a stress on the multiple and transnational nature of political and social networks amongst ethnic minorities.

The remainder of the book is an elaboration on these themes. Regional blocs, such as the EU, are again singled out for the potential they offer for a post-national model of citizenship. In a concluding chapter entitled ‘Social Capital and the New Civics’, the authors argue for a regional form of citizenship based upon tolerance, mildness and trust in our relations with the Other. The universality of human rights and global citizenship are counterposed to the chaos unleashed by contemporary economic globalisation, particularly in the least developed regions of the globe.

The issues raised by the book are undoubtedly of great significance. Unfortunately, the breadth of coverage means that some areas are treated in an overly schematic manner. There is also an unnecessary repetition of material that is widely available elsewhere, while more recent debates around multiculturalism barely receive a mention. There is no reference, for example, to Charles Taylor’s seminal discussion of multiculturalism and recognition, which is precisely set within the framework of international migration and the emergence of diasporic groups with powerful homeland attachments. The authors’ recourse to the concept of social capital and the virtues of social solidarity is also problematic given the theory’s doubtful pedigree in management discourse and practice. These issues aside, this book is to be recommended to the general reader interested in the implications of international migration for citizenship. To scholars active in the field it provides a useful summary of the key debates and a solid basis for future research.

Oxford Brookes University

DAVID GRIFFITHS

The Consumer Society Reader

Martyn J. Lee (ed.)


Fifteen years ago, sociological studies of consumption and consumer cultures were comparatively thin on the ground. Now, the density of published material makes Martyn Lee’s reader of ‘contemporary and classic literature’ an invaluable route guide and travelling companion to the field. Lee has selected twenty-eight key readings from twenty-six authors (Karl Marx and Jean Baudrillard share the honour of featuring twice). Each appears with an impressively brief editorial abstract. They tend to comprise unexpurgated essay – or article – length extracts. Lee’s introduction to the whole volume is primarily devoted to linking together summaries of each reading into an identifiable intellectual narrative.
The readings are divided into two parts: ‘Theoretical and conceptual foundations’ and ‘The character of consumer society’. The former is pretty much self-explanatory, but Lee has shaped the section through focusing on the interrelations between both economy and culture and production and consumption. Readings on desire, sexuality and gender are notably absent. With apologies for a list-like summary, the selections concentrate on: questions of commodification and value (Marx on use value and exchange value and Baudrillard on sign-value); the introduction of cultural processes into analyses of consumption (with Campbell critiquing economists’ accounts, Veblen on status and the leisure class, Douglas and Isherwood on consumption and symbolic communication, Bourdieu on distinction and cultural capital, and Featherstone on cultural intermediaries); and relations between production and consumption (Miller on commodity biographies and consumption as recontextualisation, Hebdige on the cultural biographies of Italian scooters, and de Certeau on spatial strategies and tactics).

The second section of readings follows through these concerns, adds a few others – for example on urban space, and on transitions between capitalist regimes of accumulation – and is organised into a roughly chronological order by subject matter. To resort to a list again, the readings here are principally focused on: the historical contextualisation of consumer cultures (including Slater’s retrospective excavation of the birth of consumer society, Aglietta on Fordism, and Harvey on theorising post-Fordism); the production of consumption through the ideological operations of advertising and marketing (Ewen on advertising agencies in the United States in the 1920s, Galbraith on the social production of needs and wants, Packard on ideologies of growth as good, Baudrillard on brands, Haug on packaging, Leiss et al. on historical trends in Canadian adverts, and Wernick on the general promotional quality of consumer society); the attractions and positive possibilities of consumption (Cross on consumer culture in the 1930s Depression, Mort on shifting progressive politics away from anti-consumerism, Fiske on ‘semiotic democracy’); and consequent worries about over-romanticising consumption (from Clarke and McGuigan in particular, and also apparent in Zukin’s reflections on the social transformations wrought by changes in US retailing and urban public space).

This summary should have already conveyed what a valuable student resource this volume is. Through a focus on classic papers rather than themes or disciplinary approaches, it complements other single-authored reviews and edited collections. My review copy has certainly disappeared from my office with alarming regularity since I received it a month ago. It would be unfair to be too critical of the predictability of the readings collected here – after all, their known importance is, I suspect, precisely why I have had such trouble keeping possession of my copy – or too demanding about omissions – as Lee himself states in his preface, no anthology can cover everything. However, I do think two points of criticism might be made. First, the volume is somewhat under-edited. Lee’s chapter summaries are wonderfully short, but the introduction sticks too close to the readings for my taste; there are no further readings suggested, something that would have been invaluable in letting students explore examples of these readings’ empirical application and development; and no glossary of key terms is provided. The production quality is adequate, but minimal – no illustrations, then, not even for readings that used them to great effect in their original form (for example, Hebdige’s scooters).

Secondly, at numerous points in the volume the quixotic character of any search for the theory of the consumer society is suggested. And yet noting that problem is as far as this reader goes. It stays, for me at least, too close to the generality, singularity and territoriality of its title, and conveys too little of how consumer studies in the last decade have moved beyond the consumer society imaginary. The focus is on, then, a singular consumer society, implicitly located in North America and Europe (no readings explicitly mention anywhere else). The global geographies of modern consumption, and the many different possible conceptual approaches to these, may be
signalled as central questions by Lee in his introduction, but they then disappear completely. Not only that, but one also gets little sense of how, to plagiarise John Urry, the sociology of consumption might be moved beyond not just a singular consumer society but also the imaginary of societies per se through parallel work on global flows of commodities and local spaces of consumption. This reader does not fashion new agendas or indeed seek to highlight those emerging in consumption studies over the last decade. Its quality, and its usefulness to students, stems from its lucid and unfussy presentation of a set of readings that are likely to be launch pads for most social scientific courses on consumption.

Royal Holloway, University of London

PHILIP CRANG

Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin de Siècle
Kate More and Stephen Whittle (eds.)

Reclaiming Genders exemplifies a growing trend towards transsexual-authored analyses of transsexualism. As such, this text is of notable value to transgender, sexuality and gender studies. While most books in this area emanate from the United States, Reclaiming Genders focuses specifically on transsexual issues within the United Kingdom. The aim of the book is to analyse three central issues concerning contemporary transsexuality: the processes by which individuals become transsexual, how these processes in turn influence transsexual politics within gender theory and civil rights movements, and how transsexualism might inform future understandings of gender and sexuality.

Part I includes four chapters on Female-to-Male (FTM) transsexuality. Given the general paucity of FTM studies the editors are clearly attempting to rectify the hitherto general invisibility of FTM transsexuals. As a co-founding member of Press For Change, Whittle is keen to reveal the issues and contradictions inherent in the British legal system as it currently struggles to incorporate transsexuality within sex-discrimination legislation without addressing key gender issues on which the law is founded. Cromwell’s chapter on historical accounts of FTM transsexualism draws from his recent book Transmen and FTMs (1999). The aim of the chapter is to render visible the mechanisms by which FTM individuals have been made invisible through incorporation into lesbian history. Stryker’s biography of Louis Sullivan continues the focus on FTM transsexuality. Given the ostensible focus on British transsexualism, we must assume that Sullivan’s inclusion here (he was born in Milwaukee and moved to San Francisco) reiterates the paucity of FTM narratives. One of the founders of FTM transsexual activism in the United States, Sullivan’s detailed autobiography of his transition to being a gay male particularly challenges conceptions of the interrelationship between gender (identification) and sexuality (desire). Prosser’s chapter explores transsexual narrative as literal and metaphoric travelogues that both propel and facilitate the notion of transsexualism as a journey of coming-into-being through narrative. Prosser delves much more deeply into the processes of transsexual narrative in Second Skins (1999).

Part II moves towards a politics of transsexualism, focusing on several thorny issues within transgender theory, including visibility, HIV activism, inclusion and exclusion. Green details the dilemma of a community whose ‘success’ is defined in terms of its ability to render itself invisible.
This invisibility operates in direct opposition to the demands of civil rights politics that advocates utmost visibility. More, Laframboise and Brady examine some of the issues they each faced through their work with HIV and transsexualism. Each author discusses the initial silence and then resistance each faced in attempting to address the issues of rape, safe sex and HIV infection within transsexual communities within Britain and Canada. More’s experience of British rape crisis centres’ exclusion of transsexuals, while deeply disappointing, is unsurprising. Kaveney’s chapter argues for an inclusive politics, pointing out the greater political gains produced through this strategy. Greaney’s both poignant and depressing account of exclusion from postgraduate studies serves to reinforce the point that heteronormative psycho-medical accounts of transsexuality are not exclusive to psychiatric offices.

Part III provides a varied analysis of future trends within transsexual studies. Rubin’s chapter revisits the tendency within sociological studies of transsexualism to erase transsexual subjectivity by focusing on gender from either entirely essentialist or social constructionist perspectives. Like Prosser, Rubin calls for the ‘specificity of transgender work’ to inform sociological enquiry. Despite her previous arguments in Transgender Nation (1994), Mackenzie provides a wholly positive account of transsexualism whereby transsexualism performs ‘discourse interruptus’ to create change. Morgan’s chapter plays on Freud’s analysis of femininity to suggest that transsexualism represents resistance to the requirements of gender identification, just as feminists argue lesbianism resists patriarchy. More’s two final chapters examine the limitations of transgender theory for transsexual subjectivity.

Much of this text appears in earlier versions as journal articles in genderfuck and Radical Deviance, the latter co-edited by Diane Morgan and Kate More. Some chapters (‘Talking Transgender Politics’) read as more polemical than others – most likely the result of a political aim to appeal to both the academy and a wider general audience. Transsexualism has become the trope de choix for transgender theory, which claims transsexualism as the very embodiment of subversion and transgression. These claims are countered by equally fervent feminist claims that transsexualism is a psycho-medical product conforming to conservative, conventional gender categories. Sociology is well placed theoretically to evaluate this current quagmire of ‘authenticity’ and ‘conformity’ debates within queer and feminist studies. Reclaiming Genders provides a much needed focus on these gender identity issues as they are analysed within the British context.

The Queen’s University of Belfast

Whose Europe? The Turn Towards Democracy
Dennis Smith and Sue Wright (eds.)

Theories of European Integration
Ben Rosamond

How can social scientists, and especially sociologists, understand the general patterns of social change in Europe? How can we make sense of the very dramatic, and possibly unprecedented, forms of transnational integration we are experiencing in Europe? Are these forms of system-level
integration connected with the collapse of traditional, well-understood and valued mechanisms which allow relations between social actors (collective and individual) to continue and social solidarity to survive? These questions are geographically or regionally specific versions of what must be the really heavy-duty concerns of a sociology in the current epoch of globalisation. They concern the relationship between social disintegration — decreasing ‘democracy’, collapsing ‘citizenship’, both of them empirically researchable, for example with respect to ethnic conflict, social exclusion and crime — and system integration.

‘Ever closer union’ has been the guiding motto of the European Union (EU) since its beginning. It is its key project and one which as been given a new twist with the next phase of its development which will be to incorporate Central and East European countries. The first set of stages, through political and economic collaboration, is clearly visible as a classic form of integration at the system level. A constitutional political apparatus — Parliament, Commission, Council of Ministers; a Court of Human Rights enforcing norms of fundamental human rights (and democracy); a European Social Charter encoding workers’ basic social claims; a Single European Market encoding commercial commonality — all of these harmonise the regulation of capital and labour markets, the fundamentals of social protection (or rather their restructuring and restriction) and, not least, the integration of women into education, employment and politics. These comprise a deliberate, socially steered form of system integration as Therborn, among others, has noted. It is intended to fuse and converge what had previously been plural, variable and potentially incompatible and even confrontational institutional relations within and between nation states inside geographic Europe. The second stage will be the extension of these supranational, normative institutions to the ex-communist nations of Central and Eastern Europe.

This contrast between a forceful and fateful system-level integration and the brute reality of lived social exclusion, enfeebled electoral democracy and unequal citizenship rights, is the context for most sociology now which is ‘about’ Europe. Both the books under review deal obliquely with these issues, or at least approach them in rather crab-like ways, Smith and Wright from genuinely sociological directions and concerned with the communicational basis of democracy in these circumstances, Rosamond from a much more limited perspective concerned with one branch of political science ‘theory’.

Smith and Wright’s edited collection is concerned, variously, with the institutional and cultural basis for democracy in the ‘new’ western Europe. It looks at the significances of language, social identity and cultural diversity in the context of a fast-changing operational European ‘democracy’ and ‘community’. Many of the chapters are useful, pointed, precise and locally detailed contributions to the overall debate on these issues. The book is divided into three sections on ‘barriers’, ‘bridges’ and ‘processes’. The first looks at communication and power and has particularly interesting contributions on the role of language in European political change (especially by Wright), an area still unjustifiably marginalised by sociology. The second section contains very useful summaries of general approaches to post-national polities (Axford and Huggins) and of cosmopolitan citizenship (Jary) put into the European frame. And the third section, perhaps the least coherent, contributes to the developing use of Norbert Elias’s ‘civilizing process’ approach, which we have seen in several other general accounts of European social change lately. A wide range of contributors from across Europe, including the south and east, and from politics as well as sociology, give the twelve papers much more overall thematic interest than is usual in collections with such a protean general remit, and provide very useful and often (and to me at least) provoking references. The book is a rich resource for those who want to connect the system and social levels of ‘Europeanisation’, and who are searching for material to support their attempts to connect theoretical accounts of changing democracy, the place of civil society and the role of national and post-national states, with examples and case studies of actually existing ‘Europeanism’.
Theories of European Integration is, as the title suggests, about theory and, more precisely, the variety of theoretical positions in political science and international relations concerning ‘neofunctionalism’ and ‘intergovernmentalism’. This is pretty specialised stuff and, really, of most interest to those concerned with the general functions and operations of ‘theory’, self-consciously understood, in the social science disciplines, and specifically, to students, of how something called ‘EU studies’ is being constructed as an intellectually coherent project within an academic politics discourse. In fact, Rosamond explicitly distinguishes (p. xi) his own approach from those ‘normative’ theories which would focus on issues of citizenship, democracy and ethics in relation to the EU project. For Rosamond ‘integration theory’ is the theoretical thinking wing of the ‘EU studies’ movement. It is concerned with speculation and reflection on issues of the relationship between states, economies and polities, and the likely consequences of supra-nationalism on nation states in the European context. Much of the book is a map of the theory landscape for political scientists focusing on Europe, together with general observations on how theory discursively operates to structure and ‘intellectualise’ perceptions, and functions. This seems curiously old-fashioned for sociology, which, after all, has been enjoying the realism/social constructionism battles for a long time now. It is unfair to criticise a book for failing to achieve something it is not concerned with, but there is a strong sense here that the ‘European integration’ in the title of Rosamond’s book has actually become recreated as a set of intellectual issues which are neither explicated in a formal theory, in the strict sense, nor given a concrete social reference or reality. Instead European integration is seen as a definitional curiosity, the meaning and content of which is intriguing in its disciplinary, discursive variety. The slightly anachronistic feel of this book is given added weight by the author’s deliberate use of a ‘sociology of knowledge’ approach to locate theories within their supposed interest groups in a simple functionalist way.

Most of the contributors to the Smith and Wright collection are concerned, in one way or another, to theorise the meaning and practice of democracy in a changing Europe. Rosamond makes the theorising – of what European integration might refer to – itself the focus. These are very different ways of studying something that both books hold to be the issue – the consequences of increasing European integration within a globalised world. For most sociologists who wish to connect general approaches to and theories of social change in Europe with ongoing, concrete and policy-driven events and processes, the Smith and Wright edited volume will be a useful addition to the slowly increasing body of work (in English) becoming available. Its bibliographies, especially, will provide useful signposting for further specialist and generalist teaching.

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Meetings, Manners and Civilization: The Development of Modern Meeting Behaviour

Wilbert Van Vree


For anybody looking for a sign of intellectual intent in Wilbert Van Vree’s title then the key work is ‘Civilization’, since this is a book that owes a huge debt of gratitude to Norbert Elias’s The Civilizing Process. Indeed Van Vree’s work appears here in English having been translated from the original Dutch with the financial help of the Norbert Elias Foundation. Van Vree himself writes
out of the Amsterdam school of sociology that, over the last thirty years and under the leadership of John Gouldsblom, has produced a great deal of varied and wide-ranging work in the style of Elias’s original project. Much of this work has tried to balance what Gouldsblom has called the ‘hodiecentric’ nature of sociological enquiry, a preoccupation with present day societies. Van Vree’s project, then, ranges across a period of some six hundred years as he tries to write a pre-history of the modes of interaction and behaviour that have come to organise Western European and American society.

Van Vree’s more specific contention is in many ways a supplement to Elias’s work. Whereas Elias used table manners as a way of charting the civilising process, Van Vree turns to the stylisation of meeting behaviour which has, he claims, replaced the stylisation of eating behaviour during a period of state formation and the pacification of societies within increasingly larger areas during the last millennium, and particularly since the eighteenth century. During this period more and more people developed mutually dependent relationships and ‘an increased number of problems needed to be solved through talking and decision making in meetings’ that themselves demanded ‘an ever increasing precise, more equal and more embracing regulation of impulses and short-lived affects’ (p. 9). In effect, Van Vree is asking his readers to think about the connection between international diplomacy and local trade-union meetings, between parliamentary procedure and workplace decision making. For Van Vree it is the very structure — the meeting — that frames these different kinds of behaviour, rather than what happens in and as a result of them, that is the more worthy of his sociological attention.

He sets about charting this ‘meetingization’ of society by examining the lexicographical roots of the word ‘meeting’ in English, German, French and Dutch. He demonstrates how many of the meanings associated with the word — ‘a scuffle, sexual intercourse, to fight, to copulate’ (p. 15) — gradually fell by the wayside in a process of linguistic consolidation that saw the discursive and negotiative connotations of the word take precedence. He examines the rise of the court in Western Europe and the formalisation of meeting behaviour that began to be satirised in works like Erasmus’s Senatulus and then goes on to examine the relationships between Protestant meeting behaviour and the rise of industrial society, particularly in Holland and Britain. Finally he charts the professionalisation and ‘parliamentarization’ of meeting behaviour that has affected all aspects of formal and informal life since the nineteenth century and the corresponding advice for succeeding in this kind of culture provided in manuals and handbooks.

Van Vree’s book is never less than impressive in the way that it covers so much historical material in a convincing manner. And yet paradoxically the book’s central weakness is its limited field of vision. Elias’s works stand not so much as a point of reference for Van Vree, but as a religious document that limits his thinking. There are clearly important links — and possible points of contention — with Foucault’s work on discipline and bodily regulation in this book and yet Van Vree ignores them completely. Given the perfect opportunity in the form of Jeremy Bentham’s book on parliamentary regulations, he fails to take up the baton. In terms of gender and sexuality the book is even less help. While Van Vree points out the ‘monopolization of official meetings by men and the long exclusion of women from these meetings’ he surely gets it the wrong way round when he suggests that such monopolisation and exclusion ‘may help to explain the historical and still-existing gender gap’ (p. 257). Neither does he take up the implications for male–male relationships of just why men would seek, across such a broad historical period, to exclude women. As an overview, then, of how and why meetings have become so important Van Vree’s book is invaluable; as an engagement with wider critical discourses it remains a missed opportunity.