

of belonging through laws and science, showing that in many instances the problem is not to be ascribed to blackness, or to anywhere in particular, but to the pseudo-scientific dispute of self-identification by the apparatus of the state. This is directly related to the question of how to conceptualise resistance to racialising surveillance. If surveillance is about slavery, escaping might be a good option. *Dark Matters* hints that we should ask ourselves whether we wish to constantly surrender our bodies as data, as if that was in fact an option. If surveillance is framed as anti-blackness, going back to black(ness) might be a decisive counter-surveillance trick, but, then, performing whiteness or trying to pass in terms of race and gender (to the extent this is inspired by the narratives of runaway slaves) could also be regarded as genuine revolutionary moves. After much travelling through the dark side of surveillance and its sufferings, Browne ends up somehow oddly celebrating the sharing of style tips to confuse artificial intelligence, along with some other accidental counter-performances and symbolic gestures of defiance in the face of the white gaze, without really questioning the limits and effectiveness of these confrontations.

In this context, what really stands out as a perplexing gap in the argumentation of *Dark Matters* is a deeper reflection on the relationship between surveillance and the Black Lives Matter movement. Triggered by the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012 by a Neighborhood Watch volunteer, Black Lives Matter is unquestionably rooted in a reaction against surveillance's violence, a visible answer to the barbarity of the gaze. Additionally, the movement has, since then, been regularly reignited by images of brutal anti-black racism, often obtained from police car and body cameras, as well as smartphone and CCTV footage, that incarnate a paradigmatic instance of complicated (non-exclusively dark, non-exclusively white) *sousveillance*. Thinking about surveillance from this standpoint could have made more explicit the tensions between the blackness of surveillance, on the one hand, and on the other, what the Dutch research and design studio Metahaven term 'black transparency': that is, the potentially disruptive uses of counter-information. Oscillating between the accidental disclosure of secrets and the systemic con-

cealing of information, black transparency is not a straightforward remedy, and certainly not the contrary of surveillance. It is rather a counter-weapon acknowledging that surveillance is an exercise of power, and a reminder that, because it is not blind, surveillance can never be subverted by simply being dodged, played around or reversed.

Gloria González Fuster

French philosophy today

Christopher Watkin, *French Philosophy Today: New Figures of the Human in Badiou, Meillassoux, Malabou, Serres and Latour* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). 272pp., £24.99 pb., 978 1 47441 473 9

Following an earlier study of 'post-theological thinking' in the work of Alain Badiou, Quentin Meillassoux and Jean-Luc Nancy (2011), Christopher Watkin's new book on several contemporary French philosophers considers the way in which they approach human beings. It explores both how they understand what is distinctively human, and how they present this distinctiveness in relation to broader forms of life, existence or being. The more open and inclusive their figure of the human, Watkin argues, the more successfully it evokes the peculiarly elusive and multi-faceted nature of its object.

Watkin structures his account of the five thinkers named in the subtitle of his book in terms of a broadly linear story of progress; one that begins with a relatively closed and thus relatively limited and exclusive figure of the human, and that culminates with a maximally open celebration of human actors as part of an all-inclusive relational field. The beginning and end points of this trajectory are marked by Badiou and Bruno Latour, respectively, with Meillassoux, Catherine Malabou and Michel Serres marking so many successive stages along the way.

Watkin rightly sees how Badiou's conception of truth-affirming subjects, despite the 'inhuman' austerity of his underlying ontology and the 'immortal' or 'super-human' inflection of the truths that

they seek to uphold, nevertheless relies on basic human capacities like the ability to think, to reason, to wager, to commit, etc. However universal the scope for affirmative thought might be, such abilities themselves serve to distinguish, for Badiou, a genuine human life from the ‘merely animal’ dimensions of our worldly existence. This ability to affirm a universal truth exemplifies what Watkin calls, throughout his study, a delimiting ‘host capacity’, possession of which serves to police the line between human and animal forms of life. Reliance on such a ‘gatekeeper capacity’ immediately raises the problem of what to make of human beings who, for whatever reason, have been dispossessed of it – for instance ‘neonates, the senile, those with severe mental disabilities’. What is the status of such figures who lack the capacity to affirm, in the purportedly universal affirmations of both Badiou and then Meillassoux?

The value of Latour’s ‘polyphonic and multi-modal’ approach, by contrast, is that it embraces a myriad diversity of human figures as an integral part of an all-encompassing relational network of other figures, without relying on a specific capacity, substance or story that might demarcate the hosts that carry it from those that do not or cannot. The reason why Latour figures effectively as the pinnacle of the field Watkin surveys is that he finds a way to acknowledge human capacities like language and thought simply as local instances of more properly universal phenomena of ‘translation and mediation’ which appear to apply to *all* modes of existence. Actors’ identities are then free to evolve without reference to any underlying or identifying essence, and in extremis to confront those tipping points where, as a result of changes in their capacities and relations to other actors, they might become truly other than themselves. As a result, the paradigmatic figure of self-assertive humanity, the modern subject championed by Descartes and the scientific revolution (to say nothing of Rousseau, Marx and subsequent political revolutions), is here ‘completely unmoored, dislocated, distributed, divided up’ (citing Latour). Of all those Watkin surveys, Latour’s figure of the human is thus the most open and varied, and ‘the least prone to dangerous exclusions’.

Serres comes close to similar heights, with his

recognition that the difference between human and crystal, or mammal and mineral, is only ‘quantitative’ rather than ‘qualitative’ – but he still falls a little short of Latour insofar as his conception of humans as uniquely ‘undetermined’ or de-differentiated self-fashioning animals remains tied to this very uniqueness, and consequently to a ‘host narrative’ that restores a gatekeeper exclusivity to the figure it upholds. Although Meillassoux’s emphasis on contingency and possibility opens his conception of the human up a little more than Badiou’s, his reliance on rational thought and affirmation still positions him, on Watkin’s spectrum, much closer to Badiou than to Latour.



Malabou, finally, is the central and most thoroughly studied figure in this account, since her conception of plasticity stretches any notion of a host capacity past its limit, and replaces it by a ‘host substance’. Malabou’s determination to think mind and brain together allows her to evade the exclusive confines of mental operations like affirming or reasoning and to explore a biological field that disperses humanity in the midst of a much wider, more ecological frame of reference, but she nevertheless stops short of that leap into a fully ‘polyphonic’, fully

post-anthropocentric cosmos which Watkin associates with Latour.

Each of Watkin's readings is admirably clear and impressively thorough, and his decision to approach the field in terms of a single over-arching movement lends his book both a coherence and a momentum that distinguish it from the great majority of survey-style overviews. Needless to say, readers with different political and philosophical priorities may well see, in the overall movement from Badiou to Latour, something rather different than the broad opening and progression that Watkin applauds – but there isn't space for this argument here, and in any case politics isn't one of this book's central concerns. Two other questions, however, seem harder to avoid.

First of all, given Watkin's determination to avoid any reliance on a specifying host capacity or substance, combined with his determination to expand the frame of reference as far as possible, the question of what exactly still serves to demarcate a distinctively human figure seems hard to pin down. That is Watkin's point, of course, in his appeal to 'multiple, layered accounts of the human' over any 'single-aspect' identification. Nevertheless, in his recurring reference to the neonates or the severely senile, what seems to recur are indeed *figures* in the most literal sense, figures that we might recognise as human because, presumably, they appear to conform to a recognisably human shape. But this begs the question of why this should be so, and of where (or why) we should locate the points at which any figure per se might cease to *look* human, in order to appear as something else.

Second, the more thoroughly Watkin purges his human figures of their reliance on a host capacity such as reason or affirmative thought, the more his own appreciation of the humanity of senile or disabled figures seems tacitly to rely on a form of just such affirmation. Total elimination of every host capacity deprives these figures of any opportunity to affirm their *own* humanity, of course, as actors in their own right, and like some of Malabou's 'new wounded' they can appear here only as the objects of others' benevolent concern. But no matter how inclusive and diversified our categories of apparently human-shaped objects might become, doesn't their

affirmation as human still depend, as ever, on some actors' capacity first to recognise them as such, and then to do what is required, at the level of social organisation, to affirm and look after them? Watkin's book certainly helps us to escape the conventional limits of humanist affirmation, but to my mind its celebration of an effectively 'unlimited humanity' seems to rely on precisely the sort of affirmative thought it seeks to undermine.

Peter Hallward

Paper trails

Kate Eichhorn, *Adjusted Margin: Xerography, Art and Activism in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016). 216pp., £21.95 hb., 978 0 26203 396 1

The punning title of Kate Eichhorn's book refers to the 'somewhat audacious argument' at its core: that the xerographic (or dry photocopying) machine played an overlooked but decisive role in the formation of alternative artistic and political communities in North America during the late twentieth century. As Eichhorn notes, however, evoking the oversignified margin 'remains a somewhat perilous endeavour'; perhaps as a consequence, this thoroughly researched study of the emergence and decline of xerography tends towards a romantic celebration of the subcultural, alternative or peripheral.

The book begins by providing a succinct history of xerography's technological development from the late nineteenth century onwards; including unexpected details such as Edison's 'electric pen' of 1895, a motorised stencilling device that would eventually morph into the modern tattoo needle. Post-Fordist regimes of work hastened these machine advancements, and yet, as Eichhorn demonstrates, the burgeoning countercultural movements of the mid-twentieth century promptly abraded the administrative and bureaucratic world of white-collar office employment. The wildly successful North American copy shop Kinko's provides a neat framing device for Eichhorn's story, a grassroots business founded in 1970 that generated 'the space and equipment to