

aveux de la chair ») que Foucault n'a pas eu le temps de réviser avant sa mort et qui demeure entre les mains du légataire principal des manuscrits, Daniel Defert. Entre-temps, tous ceux et celles qui s'intéressent à la pensée de Foucault ont maintenant un précieux texte à se mettre sous la dent sans devoir se déplacer dans l'hexagone.

Alain Beaulieu, Université Laurentienne

Infinitely Demanding

Simon Critchley

New York: Verso, 2007; 168 pages.

To say that *Infinitely Demanding* is not quite as difficult a read as the title suggests is not to criticise but rather to compliment Simon Critchley on the fluency with which he presents difficult thought. In his "Explanatory Note," Critchley says that the book is "the distillation into a single, continuous argument of much that I have been thinking and writing about for many years." (149) We do indeed find in abbreviated form many of the features familiar to readers of his work during the last fifteen years: Levinas, Lacan, Beckett, comedy, Laclau, hegemony and interstitial distance from the state are all there, as well as readings of Badiou, Løgstrup and Marx.

What is somewhat surprising is the complete absence of Derrida, who, like some purged former politburo member airbrushed out of old photos, is not just insufficiently represented: he is not even mentioned or footnoted once. Indeed with this volume Critchley seems keen to put as much distance between himself and his best known work, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (1992), as possible. However, there is no significant change of orientation and one can see a general strategy in the book, suggestive of a desire to reach out to a wider audience, of turning to make Derridean and Levinasian points by way of other philosophers. This can be seen, for example, in chapter two where Badiou and Løgstrup are discussed prior to readings of Lacan and Levinas. At times indeed Critchley seems to be rather pushing himself to make detours into new territory and I am far from convinced that the conclusions he draws from the discussion of Løgstrup could not equally well, or better, have been drawn from Levinas' work.

Critchley argues that philosophy does not begin, as has so often been said, in an experience of wonder but rather with a sense that something desired has not been achieved. He outlines various ways in which such a feeling is inherent in modernity, contending in particular that a sense of failure is inescapable in a self that is formed in the face of an ethical commitment it cannot finally fulfill. In his first chapter, Critchley engages in a deconstructive reading of Kant's *Faktum der Vernunft*, which suggests that rather than being autonomous, the self is shaped in relation to a demand with which it is confronted. This heteronomous subject and its ethical consequences are then further elaborated in readings of Badiou, Løgstrup and Levinas in the second chapter.

What I found particularly problematic in the architecture of the book was the suggestion, introduced at the end of the second chapter and pursued in the third, that the Levinasian ethical subject is in need of sublimation via recourse to Lacan. I think here Critchley takes the easy path of not responding to those critics of Levinas who see his work as labouring under a pathos of excessive responsibility, trying to skip the (admittedly exhausting) need to return to Levinas' text and point out simple misreadings (arguably in recent years no philosopher has suffered so persistently from serious misrepresentation). It seems clear that the Levinasian account of ethics precisely does not leave us, like Oscar Schindler at the end of *Schindler's List*, with a subject on its knees and crying over not having done more. Sublimation, or a process akin to it, is always already at work in Levinas' account of the subject and in many ways its persistence could be said to be the central target of his philosophy. In both of his major works, *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being* (1974), any relation to an other is found to be possible only on the basis of an infinite exposure to that other. Yet Levinas argues that such an "experience" can never be unmediated: as he says in the former work, the face is never manifested independently of the third, or in the latter, the saying is thematised in the said. The problem is that sublimation is all too common and we might argue that Levinas' much mocked pathos is the result of an attempt to open the encounter with the other and the possibility of an exposure to the unthematized ethical residue of saying that is obscured in the said.

The need for sublimation or not aside, it is in the inherently heteronomous and ethical nature of our selves that Critchley finds the solution to what he sees as the problematic motivational deficit at the heart

of liberal democracy. He argues that politics is action in a specific situation, the taking up of a distance from the state by actors who are never simply given but creatively brought into being. He tends in his final chapter to take his examples from “activist practice” and refers to Ya-Basta! and the WOMBLES although he never specifies why he chose these rather than other civil society groups or actors which could have similarly been invoked. Critchley himself wishes to adopt “anarchism” as the name for the politics of ethical responsibility that he sees as the consequence of heteronomous subjectivity. Yet, this is far from being a simple endorsement of “actually existing anarchism,” as he says, “anarchy should not seek to mirror the archic sovereignty that it undermines. That is, it should not seek to set itself up as the new hegemonic principle of political organisation, but remain the negation of totality and not the affirmation of a new totality.” (122) Such an anarchy is not so much anarchy generally understood as a valorisation of any pragmatic activist calling of the state to account. Indeed in his closing pages, Critchley stresses the essentially dissensual nature of democratic politics and uses a discussion of Graeber’s work to draw attention to the dangerously depoliticizing nature of the strong emphasis on consensus in much contemporary radical discourse.

It becomes clear as the book progresses that Critchley is particularly seeking to address those involved in radical politics today. This can be seen in some of his omissions, such as his formulation of politics as “a disturbance of the state” which arguably misses a step that needs to be taken first. (114) There is an important moment in the final pages of *Totality and Infinity* where Levinas speaks of the face relating to the third and aspiring to a State. While stressing the ethical experience of the face that challenges thematisation, Levinas is also insisting that there must be a moment of universalisation. In *Force of Law*, Derrida similarly stresses the need for both law *and* justice. In the face of corrupt elites and a neo-liberalism only too keen to let the state wither, in much of the world today (perhaps even in a U.S.A. where people can die for want of health insurance?), the affirmation of a state that aims at impartiality is undoubtedly the necessary precondition of any meaningful political activity. Critchley’s formulation of “interstitial distance from the state” would imply the necessity of the state but one has the feeling that Critchley’s attempt in the final chapter to ally himself with and intervene in contemporary radical politics prevents any explicit affirmation of the importance

of the state. Indeed, further exploration might suggest that 'the State' as a site is not always monolithic and that the "distance" Critchley values can, on occasion, be found *within* it.

The chief merit of *Infinitely Demanding*, apart from making Critchley's work of the last decade or so more readily approachable and available for undergraduate students, is this active engagement with new social movements that in the last decade have brought important new challenges to existing political practice. Critchley's formulation, in the final chapter, of what we might term a truly anarchic anarchism, together with his stress on the necessity of dissensus rather consensus makes this an important philosophical engagement which very subtly brings to bear high level theoretical insights on contemporary radical politics.

Mihail Dafydd Evans, University of the West of England, Bristol

Ethics at a Standstill: History and Subjectivity in Levinas and the Frankfurt School

Asher Horowitz

Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2008; xx + 404 pages.

Asher Horowitz describes this work as an attempt to place Levinas and the first generation of the Frankfurt School in "constellations," drawing out their affinities and highlighting where each may be able to supplement the shortcomings of the others. Given the modesty of this explicit purpose, one would be justified in wondering for whom this volume is intended; without an argumentative defence of each of the various positions presented, such a project could be compelling only to those already convinced by both Levinas' "ethics as first philosophy," and the socio-philosophical analyses of the Frankfurt School (or at least the major points of agreement between its members), positions between which there are deep tensions.

But no such argument is forthcoming on Horowitz's part. Despite his claims, *Ethics at a Standstill* is very much a contribution to what he might call a "left Levinasian" theoretical project. In a series of footnotes, he surveys the field of political engagements with Levinas and, with the exception of Enrique Dussel, finds them all too "liberal," which, for Horowitz, ultimately means: they do not call for the abolition of the