

INTERVENTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY
THOUGHT

To my family,
as well as to all of my friends and mentors who have cultivated
practices of intervention

INTERVENTIONS IN
CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT
History, Politics, Aesthetics

Gabriel Rockhill

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CRITIQUE OF EXEGETICAL REASON AND THE REINVENTION
OF CONTEMPORARY THEORY

Since one of the important theoretical questions in the modern age has been that of the role of philosophy in a world characterised by the perceived successes of the so-called natural and social sciences, it is perhaps not surprising that philosophic practice in a certain tradition has increasingly come to orbit around historical and hermeneutic issues. In the new institutional setting, this appears to be one of the only domains in which philosophy can maintain its disciplinary legitimacy and hold out against the apparent power and social authority of the other disciplines, particularly in a world in which the metaphysical realm is arguably less secure than in other conjunctures. To a certain extent, this could be seen as philosophy having been driven into an institutional corner in which its only valid activity has become its own self-interpretation, that is, the endless exploration of the very textual tradition that it has constructed in order to historically legitimate itself.

This has brought with it a series of grave risks that are – or should be – cause for great concern.²⁴ To begin with, even though so-called continental philosophy is quintessentially historical, it tends to use impoverished models of historical analysis and explanation, which is at times directly linked to a haughty refusal to engage with the human and social sciences. We are often told that there is a sequence of – more or less disincarnated – ideas that are channelled from the ancient Greeks down to the present, and that we can have special access to this chain of extraordinary thoughts by studying a very small group of philosophic works written by the canonised ‘great men’ of the so-called Western tradition. This disembodied dialogue across the centuries – in which one often assumes that a fixed set of eternal big questions is debated – unfolds according to a central narrative that allows us to understand the totality of ideas from the Greeks to the present by using a single overarching framework. Perhaps the most widespread script is that there has been a shift from theocentric philosophy (beginning with Greek polytheism and continuing through the monotheistic traditions of the Middle Ages) to subject-centred philosophy (starting with Descartes and continuing through Kant, Hegel and phenomenology), eventually leading to a turn toward alterity and otherness – or, why not, a return of the subject or a turn toward objects – in contemporary thought. This schematisation knows a seemingly infinite number of

variations, but the guiding principle remains the same: a single and often extraordinarily simple script permits us to understand all significant human thought in the West with a few very basic ideas.²⁵ It is true that in contemporary theory there is a widespread tendency to provide a two-dimensional account of history in which a dominant but incorrect way of thinking is either constantly challenged or ultimately overthrown by a superior mode of philosophising. This is the case, for instance, in the myriad histories in which the juggernaut of so-called Western metaphysics is curtailed or resisted by a repressed dimension of differential forces.²⁶ However, regardless of how these two dimensions are defined, this approach by no means significantly alters the core idea that the entire history of philosophy can be summed up in terms of a simple paradigm (which strikingly resembles fairytales of the perennial battle between the forces of good and evil). This leads to what I propose to call the contradiction of continental philosophy: a purportedly historical intellectual activity regularly relies on some of the most philosophically impoverished models of historiography, often without questioning them in the least (because they tend to operate as givens). The same is true, moreover, of the geographical models used for thinking the history of thought. It is generally assumed that philosophy is quintessentially a European phenomenon and that the history of properly philosophical thinking goes hand in hand with a history of Europe that stretches from the ancient Greeks to the present.²⁷ The rest of the world is implicitly or explicitly plunged into the abyss of non-thought, or at least non-philosophy.²⁸ Finally, the social models for structuring the supposed Western tradition of philosophy are embedded in a highly problematic hierarchical distinction between what Hegel called the 'heroes of thinking, of pure thinking' – that is, the great individuals who really philosophise, and who are most often white bourgeois western European males – and the unthinking or unphilosophical masses.²⁹

In the face of these problems, and in a historical conjuncture where doing a certain type of philosophy still amounts primarily to examining the textual history of a particular philosophic tradition, the question of historical methodology should be at the forefront of theoretical debates. Indeed, the reinvention of contemporary theory – at least of this genre – requires a deep and expansive interrogation into its own historical methods (as well as their historical constitution).³⁰ It also necessitates a critical re-evaluation of its highly questionable cultural

geography and operative social hierarchies. This work cannot simply be done within the historically constituted discipline of philosophy. It entails breaking with some of the unquestioned givens of disciplined thought and engaging extensively and profoundly with other modes of inquiry. This can not only enrich and transform philosophical inquiry, but it can also help reconfigure some of the givens of these other domains of investigation. Ultimately, this requires deep social and institutional reconfigurations that radically overhaul the contemporary knowledge economy.³¹

A second major risk has to do with the hermeneutics of isolated, disembodied and canonised texts, and a third with the perpetuation of exegetical thinking. The theoretical assumption that reflection is quintessentially a heroic endeavour in which a few privileged individuals chart the historical course of human thought is inherently problematic, and it ignores the deeply social and collective aspects of thought processes as well as the material formation of archives and individual bodies of work (which ultimately demonstrate that the very distinction between text and context is untenable).³² It also creates a deep and almost insurmountable divide between the gods of thought, on the one hand, and philosophical acolytes on the other. Professional education in philosophy is almost exclusively oriented toward the latter, meaning that one is typically trained to be an interpreter, not a philosopher. In fact, attempting to cultivate the intellectual practice of a thinker, as opposed to a potential instructor of philosophy, is often perceived as deviant and presumptuous. Such acts are duly subdued or sidelined by an expansive system of naturalised institutional sanctions that serve to protect and preserve the intellectual division of labour.

The centre of gravity of so-called continental philosophy is exegetical thinking. The very practice of philosophising takes place within a framework of textolatry – to appropriate Vilém Flusser's felicitous neologistic reworking of idolatry – in which one reflects through the canonised words of the beatified saints.³³ Doing philosophy, in this regard, amounts to producing professional secondary, or even tertiary, literature aimed at providing an internal analysis of an elite pantheon of texts. There is, of course, a broad spectrum of possibility, including fidelity to original urtexts à la Pierre Menard, as well as readings that seek to undermine interpretive consensus and thereby transform commentary into original philosophy. In most cases, the *summum bonum* of such a practice is respectful originality: the interpreter introduces her or

his own thought through a close reading of one of the crowned princes of philosophy.³⁴ Indeed, the professionalisation of philosophic discourse makes it resemble crackerjack forms of ventriloquism, in which the speaker's dummy – which needs to appear to speak for itself – is in fact a mummy produced out of the preserved paper shreds of the past.³⁵

This can, in particular cases, perpetuate a specific form of intellectual imperialism insofar as it is almost exclusively the continental Europeans – and especially western Europeans – who are today recognised as the true originators of philosophic thought.³⁶ In fact, many forms of anglophone continental philosophy remain haunted by just such modes of Eurocentric theoretical colonisation, which is also intimately bound up with the perpetuation of class-based, racialised, patriarchal, ableist, urbanist and other hierarchies. For the masters of thought are, or at least appear to be – with a few important exceptions – white, bourgeois males from Europe.³⁷ There is thus a very specific intellectual and libidinal economy that is often at work in certain philosophic circles organised around European father figures.³⁸ According to a rarely questioned practical phallogocentrism and international division of labour, a handful of 'great men' from Europe are recognised as the only ones who can truly think, and they come to function – in certain communities – as the bearers of unquestionable philosophic realities.³⁹ This fosters, moreover, a unique form of authority epistemology, according to which a proposition is valid simply because a recognised authority stated it.⁴⁰ Argumentation, demonstration and the rigorous analysis of concrete particulars become secondary to faith in the father. The contemporary version of the scholastic expression *autos epha* – 'he said' meaning Aristotle, *the philosopher*, claimed it, therefore it is true – is 'my father figure said' or, more colloquially, 'my guy said'.⁴¹ This type of philosophy as hero worship, or continental scholasticism, places thought at the feet of supposed philosopher kings, thereby imposing infantilisation as the consensual order orchestrating the thought and work of the droves of interpreters.⁴² This theoretical *ancien régime* is often severely perpetuated, moreover, by the economy of the theory industry and the star system in their unrelenting search for a celebrity pool of bankable icons.

There are, of course, excellent examples that break with the colonisation of thought and the libidinal economy of authority epistemology.⁴³ Moreover, we should not unduly simplify the situation or essentialise thinkers based on what are sometimes superficial sociological clas-

sifications,⁴⁴ nor should we slip into a simplistic cultural geography according to which one inverts these categories by making Europe anathema and only recognising as valid those thinkers who are from a supposed outside.⁴⁵ The simple fact of writing on specific figures from a particular tradition does not, in itself, invalidate one's claims, just as the replacement of these thinkers by others – father figures by mother figures, for instance, or 'major' intellectuals by 'minor' ones, European theorists by non-European thinkers – does not necessarily alter the logic of practice at work.⁴⁶ Differences in form, when they are not combined with transformations in content and method, can produce false appearances of change according to the stereotyping logic of certain forms of identity politics, which concentrate more on an author's sociological categorisation than on what they actually say or how they say it. Moreover, it is not only that ideas cannot be invalidated due to their geographical provenance, but it is also important to recognise that references to intellectual work in continental Europe can actually function, in certain discourses and at particular times, as an appeal to a minority discourse resisting a mainstream consensus (as has certainly been the case in the relationship between much of 'continental' thought and the dominant institutions of Anglo-American philosophy during and after the Cold War).⁴⁷ In this book, it is true that the primary reference points remain some of the emerging or established philosophers of a particular tradition, and its author is fully cognisant of both the enormous critical power of this heritage and the persistent problems plaguing its historical constitution. As a series of interventions into an existing discursive field, what matters most for these writings is in many ways what is done with these figures. Far from blind embrace or dismissive rejection, far from hagiography or parricide (the inverted form of hagiography, in which the ideal saint of thought is the dead, eternalised saint), this book proposes a critique of exegetical reason by rigorously engaging with prominent philosophic positions precisely in order to develop a deep methodological intervention into contemporary theoretical practice, as well as propose an expansive and potentially innovative thematic analysis.⁴⁸ The metaphilosophical critique of continental scholasticism needs to mine this tradition and cull from it its major strengths, one of which is historico-hermeneutic rigour and precision. We need to move, however, from imprisonment to empowerment, from incarceration *within* the interstices of a socially constituted canon to an empowering historical elevation of thought

that carefully works through – in order to think *with* and potentially beyond – some of the most prominent intellectual projects of a certain philosophic tradition.

With the aim of contributing, then, to the ambitious goal of reinventing contemporary theory, the chapters in this volume seek to propose alternative tools for thinking history, for engaging with the writings of the supposed masters, and, ultimately, for doing philosophic work. They develop a heterodox account of the history of contemporary thought, as well as an alternative rendering of the historical relations between art and politics. In general, the book proposes a form of radical historicism in which all of our most cherished values, concepts and practices are recognised as being historical through and through. This means that philosophy itself, rather than being an eternal form or even a unified enterprise in the history of the so-called Western world, is a socio-historical practice. In fact, one could even say that philosophy *per se* does not exist precisely because there are only various theoretical practices that are labelled – in different socio-historical conjunctures – as philosophical. It is therefore of the utmost importance to develop an understanding of history that permits us to map the chronological, geographic and socio-cultural dimensions of these practices. This allows us to break with the binary logic of epoch and event, or continuity and discontinuity, while elaborating an alternative account of historical change in terms of metastatic transformations that are unequally distributed across these three dimensions. Such a logic or order of history invites us to think in terms of overlapping constellations of theoretical practice within an expansive socio-cultural field. This book thereby proposes to radically part ways with many of the now-standard schematisations of the history of philosophy as well as of contemporary theory, which include both the movement model of philosophic sequences (in which, for instance, existentialism is followed by structuralism, which is in turn displaced by post-structuralism, and then why not by event philosophy or object-oriented ontology) and the individual paradigm that purports to simply rely on the supposed singularity of the work of each thinker.⁴⁹

Hermeneutically, this project resists both the philosophical habitus that encourages us to identify the origin of thought with the mind of an individual philosopher – and to unduly rely on the constructed limits of his or her corpus as the limits of thought – and the reductive determinism that seeks to establish a single social determinant behind the work of a particular individual or group of thinkers. This has not only

required an extensive engagement with other disciplines, but it has also necessitated working through the historical constitution of these fields in order to try and come to terms with some of their structural limitations. This has been important because in turning its back on authority epistemology, this book takes the writings of prominent philosophic figures as propositions within a vast cultural field that invite exploration rather than obsequious acquiescence. This means that philosophic hermeneutics is not simply a matter of participating in the institutionalised ritual of the internal analysis of canonised texts. Rather than taking philosophers at their word, this book invites us to diligently work through their writings by directly engaging with their objects of analysis in order to test claims, question deep-seated assumptions, advance counter-propositions, and elaborate alternative cartographies of the material in question. In the place of exegetical thinking, it advocates cultural theoretical engagements that call into question disciplined thought.

Although labels can often be problematic, this attempt to reinvent philosophic practice is not unrelated to what I have begun calling, through the insightful instigation of my friend and colleague Pierre-Antoine Chardel, *sociophilosophie*.⁵⁰ In addition to directly engaging with the analysis of socio-cultural phenomena *in concreto*, *sociophilosophie* attempts to rethink philosophy's relationship to the larger social, political, economic and cultural world. More specifically, one of the central methodological propositions of this book is that it is necessary to undertake a metaphilosophical critique aimed at reconfiguring the intellectual givens of theoretical practice. Rather than proposing another interpretation, in the sense of a move within a well-orchestrated game, it attempts to raise questions about the very nature of the game that is being played and its larger cultural and political relevance. This form of critique is by no means a purely intellectual endeavour that consists in proposing a philosophical analysis of philosophy, nor is it an attempt to unveil the theoretical presuppositions or individual leaps of faith operative in particular philosophies. It does not play the philosophic game against itself, so to speak, nor does it rely on the time-tested strategy of philosophic succession through the criticisms of the theoretical assumptions of one's predecessors. Instead, it seeks to change registers by scrutinising philosophy as a specific – and variable – type of intellectual social practice and examining the givens inherent within it. These elements, which go without saying for practising philosophers, are generally beyond the purview of philo-

sophical analysis for one of two reasons: they either remain so implicit to the very act of philosophy that they are not recognisable as objects of inquiry, or they present themselves as so banally self-evident that they require no philosophical reflection or investigation. Unknown or too well known, the metaphilosophy of philosophic practice can hardly interest philosophers qua philosophers.⁵¹ And this is with good reason: it can endanger faith in the philosophic game by raising troublesome questions regarding what it is that we do when we philosophise, and why, therefore, we do it.

RETHINKING THE HISTORICAL RELATION BETWEEN ART AND POLITICS

This is a collection of autonomous essays that does not claim to provide a historical survey of contemporary thought, nor does it purport to construct a single argument that develops sequentially through the course of the book. Each chapter is a specific intervention into a particular field, and some of the analyses are certainly more interventionist than others. The authors engaged with are not supposed to be representatives of particular schools of thought or movements. They have been chosen due to the major contributions that they have made to certain thematic debates, and in a number of cases they are thinkers with whom I had the opportunity to work directly (Derrida, Badiou, Rancière). Other philosophers could have taken their place or been added to the list, but circumstantial factors and structural coherence played an important role in circumscribing this project. This is in part because the analyses that follow are methodologically and thematically driven. They all seek to raise – from different vantage points – systemic questions regarding philosophical methodology and what it is that we do when we purport to engage in contemporary theory. These methodological preoccupations orbit, moreover, around three primary topics, which have been central to my research over the last fifteen or so years: history, politics and aesthetics. Although individual essays tend to focus on one of these issues, they all contribute in various ways to the overall project of developing alternative models for thinking the historical relationship between political forces and aesthetic practice. They are thereby preoccupied with one of the fundamental themes of critical theory in the broad sense of the term: what – if any – is the relationship between art and politics, and how can we make sense of their historical devel-

blessing to the forces which *make* this universe' (*One-Dimensional Man*, p. 175).

20. Alcott, 'Philosophy's Civil Wars'.
21. There are some good arguments in favour of abandoning the expression 'continental philosophy', with all of its Eurocentric connotations (see, for instance, Maldonado-Torres, 'Post-Continental Philosophy'). It is nevertheless important to recognise that it operates as a social signifier within a larger force field, and that much of mainstream anglophone philosophy would welcome its disappearance or dissolution through internal critique, thereby allowing it to colonise the small remaining place that it precariously preserves within certain institutions. In this sense, thinkers like Amy Allen (in personal conversation) have made the equally significant argument that it can be necessary, in certain instances, to maintain the expression 'continental philosophy' as a – perhaps poorly named – place-holder for alternative spaces of thinking.
22. 'Today', as Alcott poignantly asserted in 'Philosophy's Civil Wars', 'philosophy in the flesh has its back against the neo-liberal wall by those forces who want to know what value we add to higher education.'
23. These alternative practices need not necessarily be limited, of course, to ones inscribed within the historical and hermeneutic orientations of so-called continental philosophy.
24. The emergence of what is called analytic philosophy around the turn of the twentieth century surely cannot be separated from the ambition to modify the legitimate realm of philosophic activity, in part by at least partially calling into question this historical and hermeneutic orientation in the name of an examination of logically true statements in the present (which is largely modelled on certain scientific practices). This is not to suggest that we can thereby rely on a simplistic opposition between two different traditions (some philosophers trained in the 'analytic' tradition do the history of philosophy, and many of those trained in 'continental' philosophy engage with 'analytic' work), but rather that we need to be attentive to deep shifts in theoretical practice. It is also not to imply that the investment in identifying logically true statements in the present is purely laudable. The metaphilosophy of this practice is in dire need of a critical investigation that is as expansive and deep as it is structural and political. Although it is unfortunate that he does not seriously engage with the work of Frances Stonor Saunders and others on the minute details of the cultural Cold War, John McCumber has nevertheless made an important preliminary contribution to this project by foregrounding some of the links between the institutional domination of analytic philosophy, which began in the US in the early 1950s, and the post-war conservative hegemony summed up under the label 'McCarthyism'. 'The McCarthy

era', he writes, 'imposed an important restriction on just what kind of goal philosophers can pursue. It limited them to the pursuit of true sentences (or propositions, or statements)' (*Time in the Ditch*, p. xix). Moreover, he adds that 'there is also evidence suggesting that American philosophy largely remains, even today, what Joe McCarthy's academic henchmen would have wanted it to be' (p. xvii).

25. One of the significant pitfalls and limitations of certain forms of postcolonial and decolonial theory is precisely its tendency to maintain similar simplistic narratives regarding the history of 'the West'.
26. The very idea of Western metaphysics is perhaps the metaphysical notion par excellence since it is coterminous with the superstition that an eerie but omnipresent spectre is haunting the entire history of a particular 'culture'.
27. This tradition was invented in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and was then projected back on to history as if it were a natural given, as I have argued in some detail in *Logique de l'histoire*. 'The great majority of early modern historians of philosophy', Peter K. J. Park adeptly writes, 'were in agreement that philosophy began in the Orient. It was in the late eighteenth century that historians of philosophy began to claim a Greek beginning for philosophy' (*Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, p. 2). Robert Bernasconi has powerfully and incisively made the same argument in a number of articles, and Park draws explicitly on his work (see, in particular, 'Philosophy's Paradoxical Parochialism: The Reinvention of Philosophy as Greek'). On the category of 'the West' and the construction of origin narratives in order to lay claim to certain civilisational commodities (democracy, philosophy, human rights, humanism, freedom, and so forth), see also David Graeber's essay 'There Never Was a West: or, Democracy Emerges from the Spaces in Between', in *Possibilities*.
28. Park cogently notes that 'the development of the modern discipline of philosophy and the exclusion of non-European philosophies from the history of philosophy are related phenomena' (*Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, p. 5).
29. Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, p. 62. The entire quotation reads as follows: 'The history of philosophy deals with Ideas in the form of *thinking*. It presents conscious thinking, puts before us the heroes of thinking, of pure thinking, for our consideration in their achievements. The achievement is the more excellent the less the particular character of its author has imposed its seal on it. It is in philosophy that the particular (i.e. the particular or private activity of the philosopher) disappears, and all that remains is the field of pure thought' (pp. 62–3). The suspicious and paradoxical nature of this type of attempt to disembodify the

history of philosophy, when the latter is in fact the history of very specific bodies thinking and bodies of thought, must not be lost on us.

30. 'For a philosopher', as Cornelius Castoriadis rightly pointed out, 'there *must* be a critical history of philosophy. If this history is not critical, he is not a philosopher; he is only a historian, an interpreter or a hermeneutician [...] Philosophy is a reflective activity that deploys itself at once freely and under the constraint of its own past. Philosophy is not cumulative – but it is profoundly historical' (*Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, pp. 17–18, translation slightly modified).
31. On this point, see Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, pp. 119–228.
32. In addition to *Logique de l'histoire*, where I make this argument in detail, see Nkrumah's trenchant criticisms of the museumification of canonical philosophic texts in the Western tradition, which is due to an 'academic treatment' that is 'the result of an attitude to philosophical systems as though there was nothing to them but statements standing in logical relation to one another' (*Consciencism*, p. 3).
33. See Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, p. 12.
34. Louis Pinto has provided insightful analyses of this and other related phenomena in *Les Philosophes entre le lycée et l'avant-garde* and *La Vocation et le métier de philosophe*.
35. Friedrich Nietzsche put his finger on a crucial aspect of this problem in his radical critique of professional philosophers' shortage of historical sense: 'You ask me about the idiosyncrasies of philosophers? ... There is their lack of historical sense [*ihr Mangel an historischem Sinn*], their hatred of even the idea of becoming, their Egyptianism. They think they are doing a thing *honour* when they dehistoricise it, *sub specie aeterni* – when they make a mummy of it. All that philosophers have handled for millennia has been conceptual mummies; nothing actual has escaped from their hands alive. They kill, they stuff, when they worship, these conceptual idolaters – they become a mortal danger to everything when they worship' (*Twilight of the Idols*, p. 35).
36. Gayatri Spivak poignantly and provocatively raised the crucial question of the relationship between Western intellectual production and Western economic interest in her canonical essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'
37. This is surely one of the factors contributing to what Alcoff has aptly described as philosophy's demographic challenge: 'The world of philosophy today is, how shall I put it, "demographically challenged". In the United States, the discipline is less than 25% female (and women comprise less than 17% of full-time faculty, according to a recent study). African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and US-born Latinos are rarities.' She attributes this to the West's 'universalist concepts': 'those who think themselves ahead of the historical curve have no need to worry

- about the limitations of anything as quotidian as gender or ethnicity' ('Philosophy's Civil Wars'). Also see her essay 'A Call for Climate Change for Women in Philosophy'. See also Annika Thiem's extremely insightful call for institutional transformation in 'Queering Philosophy: How Can Queer Theory Inform and Transform the Practice of Philosophy?'
38. This libidinal economy is the site of a form of cultural coloniality that perpetuates itself – as Aníbal Quijano has poignantly argued in a different context – through the seduction of Europeanisation rather than via repression. In his incisive essay 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', he discusses the history of colonialism and underscores the moment when 'European culture was made seductive': 'beyond repression, the main instrument of all power is its seduction. Cultural Europeanisation was transformed into an aspiration [...] European culture became a universal cultural model' (Mignolo and Escobar (eds), *Globalisation and the Decolonial Option*, p. 23).
 39. Parting ways with this institutionally inscribed cultural division of labour requires the cultivation of heterodox intellectual practices that cut across, and even leap beyond, the well-trodden paths within extant archives. Avram Alpert's important work is a case in point insofar as he seeks to redraw the established map of cultural and intellectual relations by providing prismatic readings of modern themes – such as the self in a global setting – that are refracted across modern European thought, American Transcendentalism, the black radical tradition and Zen Buddhism (see his dissertation 'Practices of the Global Self', part of which is currently being reworked into a book project entitled *Unbearable Identities: Essaying the Globe from Montaigne to Suzuki*).
 40. This ideal-typical orientation knows a vast series of variations. For instance, Ian Hacking has identified a parallel but slightly different 'pen-friend approach to the history of philosophy': 'A few heroes are singled out as pen-pals across the seas of time, whose words are to be read like the work of brilliant but underprivileged children in a refugee camp, deeply instructive but in need of firm correction' ('Five Parables', in Rorty, Schneewind and Skinner (eds), *Philosophy in History*, p. 103).
 41. In relation to this highly problematic epistemology, it might be said that contemporary philosophy, in order to renew itself, needs to undertake an anti-scholastic revolution, parallel in certain ways to what took place in the seventeenth century in the writings of figures such as Sanches, Descartes and Hobbes. The last summed up one of the shared concerns of these and other authors at the time in the following terms: 'to forsake his own natural judgment and be guided by general sentences read in authors [...] is a sign of folly, and generally scorned by the name of pedantry' (*Leviathan*, p. 27).

42. The battle of interpreters in many ways becomes a struggle over the relative status of the philosopher kings in which the elevation of one's *maestro* brings with it *osmosis legitimation*: the commentator, via mystical transfer, is ranked according to the ranking of masters.
43. Although I do not engage directly with their work in this book, the writings of the following figures all attest to a robust and diverse tradition of anglophone philosophy that works through but is by no means subservient to the 'recognised European masters': Seyla Benhabib, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Stanley Cavell, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Angela Davis, Nancy Fraser, Stuart Hall, Frederic Jameson, Richard Rorty, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Charles Taylor, Cornel West.
44. Although he runs the risk of flattening the enormous discrepancies between different types of privilege, or even masking certain positions of privilege altogether, Gilles Deleuze nonetheless raises a very important point when he claims: 'The difference between minorities and majorities isn't their size. A minority may be bigger than a majority. What defines the majority is a model you have to conform to: the average European adult male city-dweller, for example ... A minority, on the other hand, has no model, it's a becoming, a process. One might say the majority is nobody. Everybody's caught, one way or another, in a minority becoming that would lead them into unknown paths if they opted to follow it through' (*Negotiations*, p. 173).
45. The decolonisation of theoretical practice requires the development of a complex cultural topography based on a multidimensional conceptualisation of space. Rather than reducing the latter to a single, abstract background space or delimiting the world in terms of monolithic geographic blocs, the task of this radical geography is to denaturalise space and chart a multiplicity of different and overlapping spaces while being attentive to the stratifications and distributions operative within each of these heuristically delimited fields. This requires developing tools for a multivariate mapping that uses a multiplicity of factors to situate elements in spaces. Although this approach seeks to part ways with many of the now-standard but schematic geographic oppositions – the West and the rest, the North and the South, the core and the periphery, the First and the Third World, and so on – it should be emphasised that it does not in the least take the wind out of the sails of the critique of Eurocentrism. It simply identifies different levels of intervention by criticising what is heuristically labelled Eurocentrism while simultaneously recognising that Europe has no centre properly speaking, but is instead the site of striated, overlapping and contested spaces. The critique of Eurocentrism is thus recognised as a twin project to that of deconstructing the very idea that Europe has a centre. The latter does not exist *in itself* as a given reality but is rather a complex,

historically variable entity that forcefully persists *for itself* (or rather *for some*) and *for others*. The critique of Eurocentrism is thus simultaneously the critique of the centre of Europe, of centre-Europeanism. Finally, it is important to note that geographic synecdoche is an important rhetorical strategy in this dual endeavour, for it allows us to speak of certain entities – like Europe – while fully recognising that the part is being taken for the whole, that is, that this is a heuristic construction.

46. Maldonado-Torres has foregrounded this problem in the case of displacing the continent of reference from Europe to elsewhere: ‘continentality may thus change its referent (Africa, America, Asia, Australia, or Latin America), but not necessarily its logic’ (*Post-Continental Philosophy*, p. 2).
47. Drawing on the important historical and political work of John McCumber, Maldonado-Torres has argued that continental philosophy in post-war America developed in part as a critical political and epistemological response to the conformism and consensualism of analytic philosophy, which was the preferred bedfellow of McCarthyism and conservative politics more generally (see ‘Toward a Critique of Continental Reason’, in Gordon and Gordon (eds), *Not Only the Master’s Tools*, pp. 54–5).
48. This has nothing whatsoever to do with the theoretical bulimia that consists in ingesting work – often the latest trend of best-sellers – as quickly as possible in order to deliver it back to the public with the same rapidity in the form of an endless spate of theoretical purée.
49. The work of figures from an array of different fields has proven extremely helpful in parting ways with the standard philosophical schematisations of recent history. See, for instance, the writings of Anna Boschetti, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Cressole, François Cusset, François Dosse, Jean-Louis Fabiani, Niilo Kauppi, Michèle Lamont, Albert William Levi, Pascal Ory, Louis Pinto and Jean-François Sirinelli.
50. See, for instance, his lecture at the École Normale Supérieure on 14 November 2013 entitled ‘Socio-philosophie de la technique et de l’internet’. We are currently working on a book project together, tentatively entitled *Pour une sociophilosophie du monde actuel*.
51. Metaphilosophy is simultaneously among (*μετά*) and after or beyond (*μετά*) philosophy as such, for it is at once immanent to philosophic practice and generally beyond the scope of philosophers. This is not unrelated to what Pierre Bourdieu called ‘philosophical doxa’, which he defines as ‘everything that goes without saying, and in particular the systems of classification determining what is judged interesting or uninteresting, the things that no one thinks worthy of being mentioned, because there is no demand’ (*Sociology in Question*, p. 51). Also see the definition that he provides in *Pascalian Meditations*: ‘a set of fundamental beliefs which

does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma' (p. 15). Although this is not the place to detail the differences between these two notions, let us signal one important discrepancy: where Bourdieu celebrates ordinary language philosophers as 'irreplaceable allies' in his sociological critique of philosophy (*Pascalian Meditations*, p. 31, translation slightly modified), I would argue that it is crucially important in our conjuncture to undertake a deep and expansive critique of the metaphilosophies operative in different philosophic practices. For that matter, we must equally bring critical attention to bear on phenomena such as metasociology and metahistory, even when we draw on and develop the work of researchers in these fields.

52. In this regard, the concerns of this book strongly resonate with the arguments I advanced in *Radical History and the Politics of Art*.
53. This argument is developed in the second section of *Logique de l'histoire*, which is the context in which this text takes on its full meaning, and in which it was originally published.
54. This is particularly apparent in the problematic position that he takes in 'Penser entre les disciplines: Une Esthétique de la connaissance'.
55. *The Castoriadis Reader*, p. 362 (translation slightly modified).