



Publication details, information for authors and referees and full contents available at: <http://global-discourse.com/>

ISSN: 2043-7897

Suggested citation:

Edward, M. (2011) 'Review of "Marx Through Post-Structuralism: Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze" by Simon Choat', *Global Discourse* [Online], 2: 1, available from: <<http://global-discourse.com/contents>>.

All copyrights of this article are held by the author/s.

**Marx Through Post-Structuralism:  
Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze  
By Simon Choat**

*Review by Mark Edward<sup>1</sup>*

In Choat's *Marx Through Post-Structuralism* one key claim is that different post-structural thinkers are engaged in the endeavour to provide a genuinely new materialist philosophy. Focusing on post-structuralist thinkers Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, Choat strives to investigate the influence of Marx and their attempts to create a materialist philosophy. In the following review I concentrate on the issue of materialism and make the claim that the materialism of each thinker holds significant differences. In particular, I want to differentiate the materialism of Foucault from that of Deleuze.<sup>2</sup> Where the former remains tied to an anthropocentric form of materialism, the latter is able to formulate a non-anthropocentric materialism. The result is that any truly materialist philosophy is required to free itself from anthropocentrism if it is to avoid idealism.

Before I proceed to the main focus of my review a word of praise is required for the achievements of *Marx Through Post-Structuralism*. What Choat achieves is the first substantial analysis of the influence of Marx on four key Post-Structural thinkers – an impressive achievement when thinkers like Foucault play a game of using but not referencing Marx. In addition, *Marx Through Post-Structuralism* demonstrates that it is possible for political scholars to find points of convergence between Post-Structuralism and Marx, rather than viewing them as antagonistic and incompatible paradigms. The result is that we can move beyond the one-upmanship of Post-Structuralist critiques of Marxism, and vice versa. Finally, Choat offers nuanced, careful and productive readings of Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze that will enlighten both new and established readers of these thinkers.

For Choat to demonstrate and support his claim that Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze propose and practise a materialist philosophy it is necessary to provide a definition of idealism. To define idealism Choat uses Althusser's definition of idealism as 'a philosophy of Origins and Ends, relying once on an ontology – defined here as a conception of the essential nature of the world – and a teleology – referring all events to a pre-established destiny.'<sup>3</sup> Although idealism is a varied and

---

<sup>1</sup> Politics, Newcastle University.

<sup>2</sup> My review will neglect to provide much comments or analysis about Lyotard and Derrida for the reason I am less familiar with their work than that of Foucault and Deleuze.

<sup>3</sup> Simon Choat, *Marx Through Post-Structuralism* p2

well-established philosophical position, Choat's deployment of an Althusserian definition serves the purpose of the book's claim that Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze are materialists. It is therefore adequate for Choat to omit a substantial discussion of how different philosophers define idealism. Furthermore, Choat outlines three specific criteria for a new materialism that escapes the idealist-materialist dichotomy. First, philosophy intervenes in political struggles and is not only a reflection on truth. Second, materialism recognises the contingency, complexity, and importance of history, without identifying a final point in history. Third, the subject is decentred and the sovereignty of consciousness is dethroned.<sup>4</sup> In addition to Choat's three criteria I would add another criterion: materialist philosophy cannot be anthropocentric. My additional criterion might sound similar to Choat's third criteria. However, there is a significant difference between humanism and anthropocentrism. In humanism there is the belief of a natural and secular subject made possible from our conscious being. In the case of anthropocentrism there always requires the presence of humans and the human-world relation is examined.

The French Philosopher Quentin Meillassoux has coined a term that will become significant for determining a philosophical position. For Meillassoux, the term correlationism denotes a common trend in philosophy since Kant, which focuses on examining and understanding the human-world relation (or correlation). As Meillassoux writes, 'correlationism consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realm of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another<sup>5</sup> and since Kant the problem of philosophy has moved from trying to think substance and consisted in trying to think the correlation.'<sup>6</sup> The task of philosophy has then been a type of gamesmanship, where each philosopher is attempting to think the most original correlate. For example, the subject-object correlation, the noetico-noematic correlation, or the language-referent correlation.<sup>7</sup> Graham Harman has noted that the problem with correlationism is that 'the correlationist holds that we cannot think of humans without the world, nor world without humans, but only of a primal correlation or rapport between the two.'<sup>8</sup> The result is that certain relations are excluded from thought in favour of thinking about the human-world relation. In other words, correlationism is a form of anthropocentrism that always requires the presence of humans. Other relations are of less interest. I now want to demonstrate how the materialism of Foucault is correlationist and the materialism of Deleuze avoids the charge of correlationism.

Foucault is sometimes regarded as embodying a new materialist philosophy and *Discipline and Punish* is often cited as an exemplary example of Foucauldian materialism. Indeed, it is in *Discipline and Punish* where we see Foucault put into

---

4 Simon Choat, *Marx Through Post-Structuralism* p172

5 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* translated by Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008) p5

6 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* p6

7 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* p6

8 Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2009) p122

practice his notion of power being productive. However, what is evident is that in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault's analysis is anthropocentric, despite its anti-humanist credentials. In a recent conference paper the philosopher Graham Harman has explained his reasons for rejecting the materialism of Foucault:

In this positive sense of the term, materialism refers to a standpoint that breaks down the tired dualism of subject and object, allowing these two poles to interpenetrate and mutually constitute one another. Michel Foucault (see especially Foucault 1977) is usually regarded as one of the heroes of this brand of materialism. Yet Foucault is not among my own intellectual heroes, precisely because "human subject" and "world" remain the two dominant poles of his universe, even if they are now glued together than left in lonely Cartesian solitude. A truly multipolar cosmos requires that the human being be treated as just one kind of entity among trillions of others, not as a full half of a dual monarchy: a mere Habdburg Metaphysics.<sup>9</sup>

I have included this lengthy quote from Harman as his criticism of Foucault suggests that we require a materialism that is capable of avoiding correlationism. In other words, a materialism that does not only concentrate on examining the relationship between human and world.

It is possible to make the claim that a Deleuzian ontology provides the potential to construct a non-anthropocentric and non-correlationist materialism. Deleuze has made it clear that his interest in metaphysics and his quest was intended to produce a metaphysics or an ontology, stating that 'I've (i.e. Deleuze) never been worried about going beyond metaphysics or any death of philosophy', adding that 'I feel myself to be a pure metaphysician... Bergson says that modern science hasn't found its metaphysics, the metaphysic it would need. It is this metaphysics that interests me.'<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Deleuzian concepts embody a non-anthropocentric ontology and their application could apply to both human and non-human environments. For example, we could use concepts like becoming, virtual, singularity, strata, rhizome, intensive and others to describe environments that would not necessarily need the presence of humans. Protevi and Bonta have even put forward the claim that Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* is post-post-structuralist. Their point is they feel the need to not situate *A Thousand Plateaus* alongside the works of Derrida and Foucault.<sup>11</sup>

The point I am trying to express in my review might seem pedantic and not worth labouring. Indeed, Choat does acknowledge there are significant differences between Post-Structuralist thinkers. However, what has concerned me is that materialist philosophy needs to concern itself with relations between non-human actors and not only the human-world relation. As Harman has stated, we need a 'non-

---

9 Graham Harman, "I am Also of the Opinion that Materialism Must be Destroyed"

10 Cited in Mark Bonta & John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004) p12

11 Bonta and Protevi would rather *A Thousand Plateaus* is see a unique geophilosophy blueprint as important as Descartes or Kant. See Mark Bonta & John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy* p39

Kantian world where the relation between prisons and human subjects is of no higher status than that between the various bricks in a prison, or between prisons rats and the cosmic rats annihilating protons in their brains.<sup>12</sup> It is doubtful whether a Foucauldian materialism provides a non-Kantian world, but a Deleuzian materialism might have the capacity to offer a line of flight from correlationism.<sup>13</sup>

---

12 Graham Harman, “I am Also of the Opinion that Materialism Must be Destroyed”

13 There are other possible escape routes from correlationism in the work of Alfred Whitehead, Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, Levi Bryant, Steven Shaviro and Ian Bogost.