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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 than consensus makes this an important philosophical engagement which very subtly brings to bear high level theoretical insights on contemporary radical politics.

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

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
While relying on much of the relevant literature in his explications of Levinas, his readings of the Frankfurt School are occasionally idiosyncratic and always designed to render them compatible with his broadly Levinasian orientation. Through this approach, Horowitz’s real goal becomes apparent: to take Levinas beyond the “impasse of liberalism.”

The work is structured as a “back and forth” between Levinas and successive members of the Frankfurt School. Horowitz begins with an explication of Levinas’ philosophy with a view to highlighting precisely the “amphibology” of ethics and politics—the manner in which Absolute Responsibility for the Absolute Other necessitates the “saming” of other Others in the demand for justice—that leads to Levinas’ liberal “standstill.” Horowitz’s response is to approach the question of History, which, for the Levinas of Totality and Infinity, is always a violent totalisation of singular subjects, by way of a fascinating Levinasian reading of Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History,” which allows him to connect Levinas’ concept of eschatological judgment with Adorno’s concept of “natural history” as the allegorical expression of a contingent, particular, and transient situation. The strategy, from here onward, is to demonstrate that one can analyze the apparently ahistorical Levinasian “Same” in terms of its natural-historical configurations, the point being that if the “Same”—the totality opposed to the ethical subject—has a history (that is to say, if “History” has a history), one can mount a more nuanced social critique of such configurations than Levinas was able to do himself.

If such is the plan, the task for Horowitz is to convince his readers that the “dialectic of natural history” presented, for instance, in the Dialectic of Enlightenment and One-Dimensional Man, as the entrenchment of modes of “identity thinking” which impoverish the experiential capacities and cognitive resources of the historical subject, can be consistently construed as the dynamic relation of the Levinasian ethical subject to the “Same.” Natural history is supposed to be an account of the evaporation of opportunities for “transcendence,” that is, for recovering the sense of an originary, and absolutely responsible, ethical subjectivity.

Adorno’s negative dialectics, with his insistence upon practising philosophy “from the standpoint of redemption,” that is, practising philosophy as unrelenting immanent critique that does not spare its own normative underpinnings, seems to Horowitz a promising model for a critical relation of ethical subjectivity to the totality it transcends. And,
insofar as the ethical subject is supposed not to be a (totalising) subject of knowledge, Adorno’s method of passing critical judgment upon the totality of social relations and, more importantly, upon the general “identity thinking” which underlies them, without thereby asserting any positive, fixed critical position does appear initially plausible.

Horowitz nevertheless takes issue with Adorno’s attempt at thinking beyond “idealists” subjectivity in terms of mimesis, of the relation between a proto-subjectivity and pseudo-objects not yet clearly distinguished from it; he claims that mimesis does not maintain a relationship with the Other in its absolute Otherness. At this point, Horowitz explicates Levinas’ points of departure from Husserl and Heidegger to arrive at a conception of a radically material, sensible subject. For this subject, sensibility is not a mode of information, but rather a precognitive affectivity by which one is affected by an Other who remains absolute.

In the final chapter of the book, Horowitz attempts to rethink the possibilities of relating ethical subjectivity to the Same. Following Marcuse, he discusses the Freudian thesis according to which the process of civilisation is the result of the conflict between the Reality Principle and the Pleasure Principle, where the (relative) victory of the Reality Principle, in response to a situation of scarcity, results in the law of repression. But, according to Marcuse, Freud hypostatises a particular natural-historic configuration of scarcity, namely, the domination of the many by the few, and thus mistakes a situation of “surplus-repression” for “basic repression.” The point is that—according to Levinas—ethical subjects may engage in erotic and, more importantly, fecund relations with others: relations (familial and sexual being the most prominent models) which may, in rejecting the natural-historic arrangement of the Same, reconfigure it in such a way as to eliminate surplus-repression.

To restate, I think that while the main line of Horowitz’s argument could perhaps be compelling to certain “Left Levinasians,” his approach lacks a great deal of force. In particular, while Horowitz is evidently correct about the possibility of a fruitful dialogue between the traditions of phenomenology and critical theory, the approach here remains too external, on two levels.

First, the shortcomings perceived in Levinas are not immanent failures, but rather failures to live up to Horowitz’s unquestioned, though perhaps somewhat tendentious convictions, e.g., that “Ethics, if it is ethics, does something to the public sphere; it makes the State wither away.”
That this is not an intrinsically Levinasian position is further evidenced by Simon Critchley’s recent political appropriation of Levinas in *Infinitely Demanding*, wherein Levinas provides an account of ethical *motivation* for anarchist politics in a world where the State structure is here to stay. To make any sort of claim regarding the relation between “ethics” and “the State” would require premises regarding the reducibility or irreducibility of the “political” as such, which are unfortunately not provided.

Second, the shortcomings perceived in the Frankfurt School—and especially Adorno—are by no means immanent, but rather only seem shortcomings from a Levinasian perspective. For example, whether or not there is some sort of “latent idealism” in Adorno’s presentation of the mimetic relation, its presence is not in and of itself a weighty objection; arguably, from Adorno’s perspective, one would need the added premise that the mimetic relation also masks a more fundamental mode of subjectivity. It would have to be shown that he “got it wrong,” and not merely that he failed to live up to an externally predetermined conclusion. While Levinas may claim to present just such a fundamental mode of subjectivity, Horowitz does no work to convince us that he is correct. Indeed, it would seem that, from Adorno’s perspective, the phenomenological presentation of ethical subjectivity could be nothing other than an ideology designed to create subjects passive in the face of a dominating Other, that is, Levinasians are self-consciously complicit in their own domination.

Clearly, most of my reservations regarding *Ethics at a Standstill* stem from disappointment at the lack of any attempt to make it seem “right,” and thus are not substantive criticisms in themselves. Nevertheless, it is just this lack of argumentative force that leaves Horowitz’s conclusions so dubious; in particular, the notion of transformative fecund relations as potentially emancipatory presents a certain dilemma. For, if we are *not* the ethical subjects that Levinas describes, if indeed we are primordially interpretive or pragmatic or what-have-you, then the normative claim that we *ought* to inculcate this radically different form of subjectivity—itself the supposed wellspring of all obligation and normativity—is radically unfounded. Horowitz runs up against the same objections that Habermas levelled at Adorno. If, on the other hand, we *are* ethical subjects, Horowitz’s conclusions are false: there is quite clearly nothing emancipatory about merely being so.
It seems that Horowitz is not simply suggesting that radical State-withering consequences follow from mere “ethical subjectivity.” Rather, at times he appears (perhaps unintentionally) to be exhorting us to a vague transformation of our subjective relations, as if we simply hadn’t realised that escape from domination would require us to treat each other better. Maybe we have forgotten, but this is certainly a round-about way of reminding us.

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*A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*

Manuel DeLanda

New York: Continuum, 2006; 142 pages.

Manuel DeLanda wrote *A New Philosophy of Society* in a style which, by his own admission in the introduction to his *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, bridges the gap between Continental and Anglo-American philosophy. His aim is to introduce “a novel approach to social ontology” (1) in order to provide “sociologists and other social scientists” (8) with an insight into “what kind of entities we can legitimately commit ourselves to assert exist.” (1) He calls such entities “the actors of [his] earlier historical narratives” (6), namely, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (1991), *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History* (1997) and *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (2002). DeLanda had already undertaken a reconstruction of Deleuze’s ontology in *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*. In this new book, which is in a sense a continuation of the former project, DeLanda elucidates the concept of assemblage and other related concepts as they were used by Deleuze in *A Thousand Plateaus* and in other texts. By introducing this reworked segment of Deleuzian ontology, DeLanda wishes to alter rather than preserve the ontological foundations on which sociologists are to base their works.

As a means of deploying Deleuze’s “theory of assemblage” in a more productive manner, DeLanda proposes a “neo-assemblage” theory, sometimes derided as “assemblage-theory 2.0” by “orthodox” Deleuzians. (4) This new framework can accommodate both reductionist