

poetry might achieve by way of cultural and political transformation seemed urgent and limitless, but the sustaining epistemological investments in Pound's and Olson's projects (with Alfred North Whitehead in the background) and ontological investments in Martin Heidegger's philosophy and claims for poetry, pervasive in both the prose and poetry of the *Intelligencer*, were disappointed. So too was trust in the British polity, with early signs of disillusion clear in Prynne's sardonically titled 1971 collection *Brass*.

As Prynne came to displace Olson's Gloucester and Heidegger's Earth from the center of his universe, significantly invoking Paul Celan as the contrary spirit of *Brass*, Latter is also determined to dislodge Prynne and Cambridge from the center of his history. Latter's signal move is to bring his discussion to a close with MacSweeney, a Newcastle poet and a newspaper journalist whose violent and obscene but lyrically intense poetry of the late 1970s focused on "the processes of the damaged life-world" at a time that the Thatcherite revolution was felt to close off any renewal, especially in the industrial North. The trauma of the destruction of the postwar social democratic settlement continues to resonate through British poetry, apt to issue "news-items" of great vehemence even whilst destitute of hope, and to resort through gritted teeth to lyrics of sexual love and even domesticity as haven in a heartless world. Meanwhile "principles of trust, risk and fraternity" have proved distressingly vulnerable to spasms of outrage now first reactions are broadcast instantly, unamenable to private exchange, negotiated understanding, or second thoughts. A fleeting thought or feeling can damn a listserv poster with no right of appeal. To read the *Intelligencer* is to be struck by the negotiations of thinking, the focused exchanges it enabled, by comparison with present-day self-censorship and the poverty of connection in a culture that endlessly proclaims its connectedness and commitments to "community." The *Intelligencer* may have been short-lived and succumbed to fractures in poetic principle (surprisingly for an *English* intelligencer, not obviously legible along class or geographical lines), but its most recent electronic equivalent was dead at birth, participants mute after the obloquy swirling about its predecessor.

Alex Latter's study is exemplary in its management of a problematic material archive, in the precision of its historical narrative, and in the intelligence of its organization and analysis. It will be valuable methodologically to scholars of coterie journals and poetic communities who may have no particular interest in the poetic moment it addresses, as well as important to students of Prynne and of twentieth-century and contemporary British poetry.

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Marcus Boon, Eric Cazdyn, and Timothy Morton. *Nothing: Three Inquiries in Buddhism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015. 296 pp.

R. JOHN WILLIAMS

It is long past time someone mounted a rigorous response to Slavoj Žižek's critique of Buddhism's role in the totalizing realms of global capitalism. *Nothing: Three Inquiries in Buddhism* by Marcus Boon, Eric Cazdyn, and Timothy Morton is ostensibly that response—"ostensibly" because, for better or for worse, what this book giveth, this book also taketh away. For every stab the authors take at Žižek's caricature of Buddhist praxis as the spiritualist ethos of neoliberalism, they also concede, however grudgingly,

some overarching point in his argument. The effect is often unsettling, if not confusing, but not without merit. The explicit goal of the volume is to articulate a network of unacknowledged “connections between Buddhism and critical theory,” often by suggesting that even the loudest anti-Buddhist voices in critical theory are unwittingly reproducing some deeper form of Buddhist philosophy. In Morton’s section of the book, for instance, Žižek is characterized as being a “closeted Buddhist,” furiously repressing the spectre of Jacques Lacan’s more sensitive crypto-Buddhism while simultaneously embracing the retrograde prejudices of G. W. F. Hegel’s “Buddhaphobia.”

But if the authors of *Nothing* find Buddhism working behind the scenes in ways many would not have expected, they show little interest in the everyday practices of the more than 300 million people who are avowedly Buddhist. Funeral rites, reincarnation, shrine offerings, pilgrimages, guru devotion, astrology, and a host of other ceremonial practices are almost entirely ignored in favor of what they call the “radical core” of Buddhism—that practice which has become, in the West, the most favored of Buddhist *techné*: meditation. Still, the point that mindfulness and meditation need not be understood *only* as tools for banal work-life seminars, management therapy, and consumerist quiescence is worth making, and they are quite convincing in arguing that Buddhism (or at least the “Buddhism” these authors are committed to) evidences secret affinities with critical theory (or at least the non-Frankfurt school “critical theory” these authors are committed to). Such affinities are offered here as good news, but we are left wondering how the authors might respond to research suggesting that lifelong practitioners of Buddhist meditation may be the least likely to demonstrate the qualities such practices supposedly cultivate.¹

The underlying, proselytic goal of *Nothing* is the desire to have readers view Buddhist meditation as less of a psychotherapeutic mode of release, and more as a rigorous site of inner paradox, strange loops, and cybernetic ontologies. That paradoxes, strange loops, and cybernetic ontologies are already essential to the infrastructures of global capitalism indicates how much deeper one might go in exploring these questions, but *Nothing* is an admirable beginning.

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1. See Jay L. Garfield et al., “Ego, Egoism, and the Impact of Religion on Ethical Experience: What a Paradoxical Consequence of Buddhist Culture Tells Us about Moral Psychology,” *Journal of Ethics* 19 (Dec. 2015): 293–304.

Judith Butler. *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015. 248 pp.

HANA WORTHEN

Elaborating Hannah Arendt’s notion of the political, rethinking its investment in the public to the detriment of the private and the consequent privileging of a political subject constituted by speech, Judith Butler’s *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* turns to the corporeal materiality of resistant subjectivity, of the body, and of assembled bodies. Under the conditions of neoliberal rationality, how do embodiments of plural, popular will come into being? How do they manifest themselves