

Socialists will find that some parts of the argument are underdeveloped: in particular, work-place democracy, socialization of property, the abolition of money, and the specifics of how a non-market economy will work. But Gomberg is fully aware that a more comprehensive treatment is necessary and does note its importance, so the absence of the above-mentioned issues does not mar the main argument. Gomberg's book would be improved if they were included, but it would also be twice as long. The division of labor is an important topic for socialists, and overcoming the division between skilled and unskilled labor is a problem that needs to be addressed when constructing arguments for socialism. Gomberg's book is a nice complement to the work that has been done on socialist models. But, his discussion of the division of unpaid domestic labor and paid workplace labor is insufficient. A more detailed treatment of how society can address the sharing of domestic and workplace labor is needed.

Gomberg has produced a book with few flaws. It has obviously been through several revisions and its argument is quite clear. His review of the effects of racial and economic inequalities and the sociological and anthropological theories about social organization, inequality, and racism is detailed, allowing this book to be used in classes on political theory, theories of socialism, and race studies. But the book is mainly in dialog with Anglo-American political theory, making it a comfortable fit in courses on Rawls and contemporary political philosophy. Gomberg does advance a novel and thorough theory about labor sharing, so those well acquainted with political theory will find the book an interesting addition to the field.

JUSTIN P. HOLT

*Gallatin School of Individualized Study*  
New York University  
715 Broadway, 4th Floor  
New York NY 10003  
jh129@nyu.edu

*The Abyss of Representation: Marxism and the Postmodern Sublime*, by George Hartley. Durham, North Carolina/London: Duke University Press, 2003. \$69.95; paper, \$22.95. Pp. 338.

In this complex and nuanced book, George Hartley addresses the issue of representation through the lens of contemporary Marxism and post-structuralism. The primary question driving the book concerns the limits of representation itself. Its focus is on theorizing the instances in which a

gap opens up between a concept and its actual incarnation, making it impossible for us, as subjects, to properly represent an object. Hartley argues that rather than preventing us from gaining knowledge, this abyss actually plays a productive role by creating a space for the emergence of subjectivity itself. These limits are in fact “the very ground of the subject” (4). As he tries to show, this is not only of theoretical significance but actually has important political and social implications, since it allows for the possibility of undermining the hegemonic position of 21st-century capitalism.

This political dimension, while introduced early on and remaining at the heart of the book, is not immediately elaborated upon. After initially asserting that “there is no beyond of representation” (*ibid.*), that ultimately all experience of subjectivity is dependent on the illusion of this beyond created through representation itself, the author proceeds to examine the ways in which various thinkers in the continental philosophical tradition have addressed this question. Hartley’s overview, divided roughly into chapters dedicated to Kant, Hegel, Marx, Jameson, and Spivak, constitutes the substantial portion of the book. As he sums up in the first chapter, the aim is “to position these figures into a particular constellation that might be of some use in the attempt to move Marxism into the culturally complex network of global relations in the twenty-first century” (21). The result is a narrative that is not quite a conceptual history of representation, but one that gradually proceeds to show how modern political discourse is informed by the same engagement with this described abyss as is the relationship between representation and subjectivity.

As Hartley argues, the limits of representation expose the existence of negativity and fissure at the heart of the social body. Invoking the work of Laclau and Mouffe, he writes that “Society” is in fact an “ideological illusion” (262), resting on a precarious antagonism that both makes the present order possible and simultaneously prevents the full achievement of its own projected identity. In today’s age of global capitalist hegemony, the idea of the Nation existing as a unified body maintains itself by “expelling to the margins or the outside its other, its excluded element that figures as the embodiment of the radical negativity at the core of the social substance” (15). This excluded Other translates, on the political level, to that abyss in relation to which the idea of the Nation is put forth as a unified entity.

For Hartley, this excluded element — what he refers to as the “symptom of the nation” — is also the very possibility through which resistance to hegemony may come. If the symptom happens to be created as a way to cover up the rifts within that particular society, he reasons, “once this symptom has been recognized as the true ground of that society, that symptom dissolves — and yet so does the society that depended on its exclusion” (273). In the concluding chapter Hartley elaborates on one such example, namely the

Chicano as the self-articulated Other of Anglo-America. In this case the symptom has claimed an identity for itself, making it possible for us to identify with it, and so challenge the dominant discourse.

While this proposition is intriguing in its description of how the "racist construct of the Mexican in the American imaginary" (275) is actually the source of a dialectical tension through which the construct of the nation may be undermined, it unfortunately does not address the process by which new modes of cultural and social expression are commodified and subsumed in the age of late capitalism. In other words, while the symptom itself can never be integrated into the Nation, it is not clear whether Hartley believes its own image could be turned into a commodity and in this manner de-radicalized. If so, this would cast doubt on the ability of a discursive shift to alone produce a significant social transformation.

While the conclusions drawn in the final chapter would have benefited from such a standard concern of Marxist social analysis, as a whole the discussion of the limits of representation and their relation to contemporary political thought is engrossing. The theoretical landscape that Hartley surveys shows his ability at creative reinterpretation in order to highlight the abyss of representation hidden in the midst of important thinkers' ideas. His reading of Marx deserves specific mention, for it is here that Hartley critiques Althusser's theory of structural causality, and thus reinforces his own argument for the primacy of a subject and against Althusserian interpellation.

Hartley argues that in rejecting the Hegelian strand in Marx's thought, Althusser overlooked the dialectical importance of the general equivalent as the excluded object that is necessary for the presentation of value itself. In *Capital*, the social structure of value is only presented by excluding a particular commodity and having it function "as the equivalent use-value, but never as its own value" (113). Since as it turns out "this structural causality can only operate because of the exceptional One, the commodity excluded from the structure of values" (123), Hartley effectively shows that an Althusserian theory of interpellation also rests on an excluded element that acts as its condition of possibility. This move back toward a more explicitly dialectical, Žižekian reading provides a welcome and intriguing alternative to structural Marxism, which aimed to exclude the very issue of representation.

The drawbacks of the book — such as its occasional over-reliance on post-structuralist allusions to the nature of global capitalism — are balanced by the author's determined attempt to theorize "an other outside that system" (271). While this effort is not entirely successful, as the bulk of the political argument is ultimately relegated to the final chapter and leaves one

desiring more closure, the overall result is a compelling theory of representation that contains the intellectual breadth and philosophical subtlety to be a worthwhile read.

RAFAEL KHACHATURIAN

*4676 Bedford Avenue  
Brooklyn, New York 11235  
RafKha86@gmail.com*