Wayne Bradshaw. *The Ego Made Manifest: Max Stirner, Egoism, and the Modern Manifesto.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2023. Pp. 210.

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Max Stirner is a curious figure in the history of philosophy, politics, and art, as a somewhat obscure nineteenth-century German philosopher who nevertheless has exercised a subterranean influence in each of these fields. Wayne Bradshaw's *The Ego Made Manifest: Max Stirner, Egoism, and the Modern Manifesto* (2023) is a welcome addition to a steadily growing literature that sheds much new light on this topic.[1] As Bradshaw relates, Stirner—real name Johann Caspar Schmidt—emerged out of the boisterous, iconoclastic milieu of the Young Hegelians in 1840s Berlin. Participants in their meetings included at one time or another Stirner, Bruno Bauer, Arnold Ruge, Friedrich Engels, and Karl Marx; Ludwig Feuerbach was the leading light of the group, for the most part from afar. Published in 1844, Stirner's *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (*The Ego and Its Own*) was written in reaction to this circle, especially Feuerbach. It pushes further the critique of religion developed by the Young Hegelians, attacking all alienated abstractions—the state, society, humanity, reason, morality, etc.—as an unwarranted imposition on the individual ego. In this vivid account of the tyranny of abstraction, products of the human imagination are transformed into external, fixed ideas that rule over us, with the prototypical example being the idea of God. In place of these so-called "spooks" haunting the mind, Stirner affirms a philosophy of egoism. He insists on the absolute autonomy of concrete individuals, who are free to adopt and discard ideas according to convenience, and entitled to use other people instrumentally for their own ends without restriction. The guiding principle is one of "expansive self-ownership" (7), according to Bradshaw.

Bradshaw considers the philosophical legacy of *The Ego and Its Own*. Stirner's argument is the object of an extensive rebuttal by Marx and Engels, which can be found in unabridged editions of *Die deutsche Ideologie* (*The German Ideology*) (written 1845–1846, published 1932). Otherwise, Stirner is rarely connected to the Young Hegelian background they all shared, with its roots in German idealism.

[1] Wayne Bradshaw, *The Ego Made Manifest: Max Stirner, Egoism, and the Modern Manifesto* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2023). All subsequent references to this title are given in-line.

He is more often cast as a precursor to Friedrich Nietzsche, known for his thoroughgoing interrogation of received moral values, coupled with an unusually expressive and arresting prose style. Stirner's wider influence is difficult to gauge, since it frequently goes unacknowledged where it does exist, but arguably there are affinities with twentieth-century thinkers from Jean-Paul Sartre to Ayn Rand. The principal features of Stirner's thought that recur in the work of later philosophers are his insistence on individual liberty, the rejection of morality, and a suggestion of elitism. All of this is covered ably and accessibly in *The Ego Made Manifest*. Bradshaw rightly dispenses with superficial interpretations of Stirnerian egoism that see it as straightforwardly solipsistic or nihilistic. Conversely, he gives proper consideration to more searching criticisms aimed at its conceptual limitations and internal contradictions. These include the problem of what, in the absence of any abstractions, a unique self can consist in: Must it devolve into the pure negativity of a perpetual insurrection against established ideals, with no positive content of its own? As Bradshaw puts it, "once separated from all external values the ego could only be represented as the negation of meaning" (66). Still, Stirner's critique of abstraction as such is judged to be his most significant contribution to philosophy.

As regards politics, Stirner's amoral individualism has been taken up by different factions across the political spectrum. He is considered a founding father of the anarchist tradition, located at its individualist extreme, where it intersects with libertarianism.[2] *The Ego Made Manifest* tells how he influenced mainstream anarchists like Emma Goldman, Benjamin Tucker, and Herbert Read, as well as providing a philosophical justification for the fringe illegalism of the Bonnot Gang's crime spree in France and Belgium in 1911–1912. It is noted that anarchists were selective in their application of Stirner's ideas, often simply ignoring those aspects of his thought that appeared to be incompatible with their own idealism. To this day, Stirnerian egoism is commonly identified as a form of anarchism. To his credit, Bradshaw recognizes that it was also part of the intellectual make-up of Italian fascism (albeit in a similarly adulterated state):

[2] Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (1992; London: Harper Perennial, 2008), 220–233.

> Once again, Stirner's greatest insight, that ideas must continually be challenged by the individual who conceives of them, was the first aspect of his thought to be cast aside. […] Whereas anarchists had used egoism to break free of moral constraints, the forebears of Italian fascism used Stirner's ideas […] to take personal ownership of a movement's beliefs and dominate the will of the crowd. (109)

There is, moreover, a residual appeal to elements of the contemporary far-right, with Engels' pencil drawing of Stirner and the language of "spooks" recently resurfacing in memes on online platforms associated with the alt-right.[3] Besides these links to left and right, *The Ego and Its Own* has inspired more heterodox political actors, among them Stirner's first biographer John Henry Mackay, who advocated for the decriminalization of paedophilia under the banner of the late nineteenth-century free-love movement. Bracketing such outliers in his overview, Bradshaw argues that anarchist and fascist adaptations of Stirnerian egoism variously distort it by admitting alienated abstractions like "liberty," "the common good" and "the nation." To a certain extent, this allows Bradshaw to sidestep the question of the true political character of the underlying philosophy. His account of the various factions involved is nevertheless well-informed and generally judicious.

The main focus of the book under review is Stirner's relationship to art, specifically the posthumous resurgence of interest in his ideas among artists and intellectuals in Europe and the United States from the 1880s until World War 1. In the twenty-first century, a small but significant body of scholarly work has been produced concerning his influence on modernism and the avant-garde. In *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (2001) and *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (2007), Allan Antliff includes Stirner in the pantheon of anarchist thinkers whose

[3] For contemporaneous references to this phenomenon in other media, see Matt Goerzen, "Notes Toward the Memes of Production", *Texte zur Kunst* 106 (June 2017), https://www.textezurkunst.de/en/106/notes-toward-memes-production/; and Ed Pitt, "Inside the Leftypol Community", *Farrago Magazine* (11 May 2017), https://farragomagazine.com/article/farrago/2017-05-11-inside-the-leftypol-community/.

ideas he says helped shape the worldviews of key modernists and avant-gardists.[4] In *Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada: Art and Criticism, 1914–1924* (2010), Teresa Papanikolas makes a compelling case for recovering Stirner's central role in the intellectual formation of the Dada movement in Paris.[5] In *Autarchies: The Invention of Selfishness* (2017), David Ashford traces the evolution of this anarcho-individualist tendency within Anglo-American modernism up to Rand, further connecting it to the then nascent ideology of neoliberalism.[6] These pathbreaking interventions are duly referenced and acknowledged in *The Ego Made Manifest*. Bradshaw has made a thorough survey of the existing literature and cites a number of other relevant titles.

The Ego Made Manifest sets out to supplement the existing literature by focusing in particular on the development of the literary manifesto between 1880 and 1914. It actually achieves much more than this, in that it provides us with the most complete reconstruction to date of the early reception history of *The Ego and Its Own*. Bradshaw's careful scholarship generates a richly detailed, well-referenced account, covering the immediate reaction to the book among Stirner's peers, as well as its subsequent dissemination in a range of locations: Germany, France, Italy, the United States, and England. This international scope is enabled by Bradshaw's multilingualism; German, French, and Italian translations are often his own. The book stretches its stated timeframe profitably, reconstructing in some detail the debates of the 1840s and extending strands of the narrative up to the 1950s and 1960s. Bradshaw generally tries to avoid going over old ground, for example only briefly summarizing the Stirnerian credentials of Paris Dada, demonstrated at length by Papanikolas. Admittedly, he does revisit Wyndham Lewis and *Blast*, as well as Dora Marsden and *The New Freewoman*/*The Egoist*, both already analysed by Ashford. Still, a great deal of original research is incorporated into this synthesis of evidence from multiple sources across Europe and the United States. Building on the existing literature and superseding it in

[4] Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Allan Antliff, *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007).

[5] Teresa Papanikolas, *Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada: Art and Criticism, 1914–1924* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

[6] David Ashford, *Autarchies: The Invention of Selfishness* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

many respects, *The Ego Made Manifest* surely establishes beyond doubt the salience of Stirner's ideas for modernism and the avant-garde.

This is not to say that the strength of the case is the same for each location. The chapter on pre-World War 1 France is perhaps less compelling than those covering Italy and England during the same period. As Bradshaw concedes, Maurice Barrès and Stéphane Mallarmé were not directly influenced by Stirner, only being made aware of the similarity between his ideas and their own once they had developed them independently. Nevertheless, Bradshaw reveals how Stirnerian egoism circulated in Parisian artistic and intellectual circles at the time, including among the Symbolist poets who followed Mallarmé, in turn setting the scene for the emergence of the Dadaists after World War 1. It is a shame that the latter falls outside the scope of his study, given their crucial contributions to the development of the avant-garde manifesto. By comparison, the Italian case is stronger. In addition to the key figure of Gabrielle D'Annunzio and a less direct link to Benito Mussolini, Bradshaw is especially convincing on Stirner's importance for the Futurist Filippo Tomasso Marinetti. This section of the book contains one of the more sustained readings of a manifesto in Stirnerian terms, Marinetti's *Fondation et manifeste du Futurisme* (*The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism*) (1909). The next chapter on the so-called "transatlantic shift" takes in Stirner's reception in anarchist and libertarian publications in the United States, in connection with developments in England; Marsden championing his philosophical legacy in her radical feminist journal *The New Freewoman*, and even changing its name to *The Egoist*, is the most significant of these. This paves the way for discussions of Imagism and Vorticism. Bradshaw conveys effectively the centrality of Stirnerian egoism to Lewis, as evidenced by his play *The Enemy of the Stars* (1914/1932) and the *Blast* manifestos (1914–1915). Overall, *The Ego Made Manifest* makes a persuasive case that Stirner's role in shaping modernism and the avant-garde before World War 1 has been insufficiently recognized.

That said, Bradshaw's conclusions about the "modern manifesto"—the third component of his subtitle, together with "Max Stirner" and "egoism"—could be more developed, notwithstanding his engagement with notable examples of the form by Marinetti and Lewis. He touches on a number of manifestos, artist statements, editorial prefaces, and similar documents, typically as part of a higher-level assessment of Stirner's prominence in a given cultural milieu. These analyses

tend to focus on the content of the manifesto at the expense of its form, mostly identifying themes in common with Stirner and language that recalls *The Ego and Its Own*. This is perhaps understandable in light of his overriding objective to demonstrate the extent of Stirner's influence on modernism and the avant-garde, but the result is that there is greater emphasis on intellectual history than literary analysis in *The Ego Made Manifest*. Bradshaw has little to say about the characteristic formal markers of the avant-garde manifesto—from the near-ubiquitous imperative mood to the predilection for exclamations, numbered lists, and experimental typography—and how these features may relate to Stirnerian egoism. Neither does he engage with any contemporary theorizing about the manifesto form, from Mary Ann Caws' introduction to her landmark anthology *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (2001) onwards.[7] The book under review could have benefitted from further reflection on these aspects of its topic, ideally on a similar level to the admirably thorough treatment of the other components of the subtitle.

Bradshaw does advance the argument that the manifesto form as a whole is inherently Stirnerian, in the sense that it facilitates—on the part of the manifesto-writer in each instance—the "expansive self-ownership" of whatever principles or program it is ostensibly promoting. To quote him directly: "Stirner helps us understand that we as readers frequently misunderstand manifestos because we misunderstand their purpose, which is ownership as an end in itself" (102). He makes much of the fact that manifestos are typically the work of a single author, despite their conventional use of the first-person plural pronoun *we*. The suggestion is that the form itself enables individuals to appropriate the collective energy of a movement and bend it to their will in Stirnerian fashion. This tension between individual and collective is central to Bradhsaw's interpretation of the avant-garde manifesto:

> Conscious of Stirner's work, a generation of avant-garde authors used the manifesto as a way of seizing control of abstract ideals, both as a way of liberating their own art and taking ownership of the work of others. When placed within the context of Stirner's thought, manifestos represent a self-

[7] Mary Ann Caws, "The Poetics of the Manifesto: Nowness and Newness", in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), edited by Mary Ann Caws, xix–xxxi.

> appointed leader's effort to take ownership and control of a movement's values and ideals. […] Egoism requires the seizing of personal control over abstractions and the manifesto, by its nature, transforms abstract ideals into personal property. (12)

This observation is insightful as far as it goes, but it ought not to crowd out a more granular consideration of the formal dimension, as noted above. There is also the potential for it be applied somewhat reductively. The same mechanism is said to be at work in manifestos by Marinetti and Lewis as in Marx's and Engels's *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (*The Communist Manifesto*) (1848). The latter is the sole manifesto not produced by an artist to be covered substantively in *The Ego Made Manifest*. Bradshaw understands it in equivalent terms to his other examples, as an assertion of ownership and control over the ideology of communism. He neglects to engage much beyond that with any of the arguments advanced by this seminal text.

In general, *The Ego Made Manifest* is on firmer ground discussing art and literature than it is dealing with Marx and Marxism. Bradshaw chooses to interpret Marx's repeated attempts to refute *The Ego and Its Own* symptomatically, as evidence of an anxious preoccupation or obsession on his part. This is supposed to have involved him taking over Stirner's critique of abstraction without proper acknowledgement, but the claim elides important differences between the two philosophers. In fact, Marx's critique of abstraction is much more complex. He seeks to expose the fundamental distortion of reality entailed by a socioeconomic system predicated on abstractions such as value, while insisting on their material basis as socially necessary forms of appearance. The richness of this interpretation is confirmed by the subsequent development of theories of "real abstraction" within the Marxist tradition.[8] By contrast, Stirner points to the illusory quality of abstractions and refutes them on that basis—as it were, abstractly—as mere fictions or simple falsehoods. Similarly, Bradshaw reads Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach ("The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various

[8] For outstanding example of this line of thought, see Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (1970), trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2020).

ways; the point is to change it")[9] as straightforwardly Stirnerian in spirit: "With a singular statement, Marx allowed for the possibility that superior individual minds—such as his own—could exert their will on the course of history." (39–40) But Marx is more likely envisaging the collective agency of a class than some elite caste of ideologists here. Indeed, *The Communist Manifesto* addresses the role played by such individuals in the revolutionary process, saying only that some members of the bourgeois intelligentsia might ally themselves with the rising proletariat. It is clear enough that they would be hanging off its coat-tails, not leading it by the nose.[10] That Marx sought through this manifesto to influence the direction of the class struggle in line with the principles of historical materialism is hardly controversial, but that does not make him a secret Stirnerian.

These criticisms aside, *The Ego Made Manifest* is a timely book that makes a valuable contribution to a developing area of study. It is engagingly written and full of clear expositions, interesting details, and illuminating reflections, which ought to give it a broader appeal beyond specialist circles. It marshals a wealth of evidence to demonstrate Stirner's influence on modernism and the avant-garde, filling a gap in the existing literature by covering the period before World War 1. The very success of this endeavour prompts a further question. Is it not now time for scholarship to move beyond the stage of verifying the extent of that influence, in order to start evaluating whether it was on the whole positive or negative for modernism and the avant-garde? Too often, Bradshaw's defence of Stirnerian egoism against the various misinterpretations it has suffered stops there, implying that there might be nothing problematic about it, if only it had been rendered faithfully. If the underlying philosophy is subjected to more sustained critical scrutiny, that might help us to draw out the political and aesthetic implications for modernism and the avant-garde. Are Stirner's conceptual limitations and internal contradictions not transmitted to the movements concerned? The fact that his ideas appealed to anarchists and fascists alike may have some bearing on the ambivalent politics of modernism and the avant-garde, which also combined progressive and

[9] Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845/1888), trans. S Ryazankaya, in Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, edited by David McLellan (1977; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 173.

[10] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), trans. Samuel Moore (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 16–17.

reactionary elements. Bradshaw's insight about the pure negativity implied by the notion of a unique self free from all abstractions could be explored more fully in connection with the overtly destructive character of the aesthetics devised by Futurists, Vorticists, and Dadaists. These are just a few of the possible routes open to future research, which is bound to build on the foundation established by *The Ego Made Manifest*.