# Abstracts and Book Reviews

Kaja Silverman. *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

Indicative of a change in psychoanalytic film theory, Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror* highlights the inadequacies of previous uses of Lacan in cinema studies. While these previous film theories (e.g., Metz's, Dayan's) focus on the visual track discounting or ignoring the acoustic aspect of cinema, Silverman adds the voice; the voice, in terms of both the sound track and the voice of the author. By including the acoustic aspect, Silverman can study how classical Hollywood Cinema "extracts speech from women" instead of "woman as spectacle."

In spite of her strong criticism of previous uses of psychoanalysis, Silverman adopts many of the confusions about Lacan's teachings from the film theories she criticizes. Chief among these confusions, the gaze functions as the spectator's or filmmaker's seeing, while the Lacanian Real order becomes confused with a common sense notion of the real as reality. For Silverman, the "absent reality" functions with "the ontological relation of image to object;" this equation of reality with an ontological object places the real within a phenomenological Bazinian film theory rather than within a psychoanalytic film theory. So, when Silverman writes on "film theory's reliance upon psychoanalysis to account for the absence of the object," she confuses the absent object (Imaginary) and *Das Ding* (an absence in, not of, reality). Her inclusion of "a loved blanket" among the initiators of the *objet a* suggests another confusion around the notions of reality and lack: the confusion between object relations theories's and Lacan's teachings. The



blanket, unlike the dynamics of breast, feces, voice, gaze, Imaginary phallus, or void which initiate the *objet a* , has meaning as an object; on the other hand, these dynamics create Real affect only as marks of loss.

This confusion of the Imaginary reality with the Real leads to a merger of the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary orders; film theory's "preoccupation with lack" as "a preoccupation with male subjectivity" only functions when we understand the lack only on an Imaginary level and the formation of male (or female) subjectivity as a function only of Imaginary processes; these confusions are shared by the film theories she criticizes. She is correct in the focus of her criticism, but takes the previous film theories's use of psychoanalysis as given rather than as a point of contention. New readings of Lacan suggest a different reading of psychoanalysis.

The last and strongest chapter in *The Acoustic Mirror* on the voice of the author, arose, according to Silverman's introduction, from the lessons she learned in writing the preceding chapters. In that sense, it represents not only a conclusion to the book, but also a suggestion of further research. She argues that we need to re-think authorship as effects of texts rather than as non-existent (as in Barthes's "Death of the Author") or autonomously existing biographies. The films we watch determine how we read the author's role and position: the film text creates an "authorial fantasm."

This final chapter offers a way to study anomalous films (e.g., Liliana Cavani's) and it uses psychoanalysis to examine how film texts construct authors. For example, Silverman explains how the author can function according to "primary identification" (e.g., author as

narrator) or secondary identification (author as fictional character). For this distinction one can explain the disruption of the authorial voice in specific avant-garde films.

The last chapter also suffers from confusions between psychoanalytic definitions and common-sense definitions; the distinction between authorial subjectivity and authorial desire fails to account for the psychoanalytic definition of "desire." By building her “own authorial voice" around the "metamorphosis" of "the image of a lacking or impaired male subjectivity" taken from Cavani’s films, Silverman focuses only on Imaginary order processes of vision. Silverman’s book points to both the potential advantages of using psychoanalysis in cinema studies and to the previous problems in that combination. Her



poignant theoretical insights and enlightening readings of individual films and avant-garde filmmakers would benefit from the new readings of Lacan’s teachings.

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Edith Seifert, *Was will das Weib? Zu Begehren and Lust bei Freud und Lacan*.
Weinheim and Berlin: Quadriga, 1987. pp. 204.

The title means "What do Women Want? On Desire and Pleasure in Freud and Lacan." Edith Seifert’s general purpose is to present Lacan’s theories of feminine sexuality to a German public which has misunderstood the little it knows (particularly regarding the "non-existence of Woman"), and has been influenced much more by Luce lrigaray’s hostile treatment/adaptation of Lacan’s ideas. Seifert attempts to answer Freud’s famous question by rereading his *Totem and Taboo* in the light of Lacan’s Seminar on Poe’s *Purloined Letter*. Chapter 1 ("Parricide and Femininity") presents Totem and Taboo not as a serious ethnological or anthropological treatise, but as a fiction, or psychoanalytic document on the nature of the sexual difference. In particular, Seifert wishes to examine the possibility of a feminine superego less labile than Freud’s and less cruel than Melanie Klein’s. She introjects the concept of the Name-of-the-Father into Freud’s scheme, and draws out implications for the mother’s desire and *Totem and Taboo*’s value as a *matrilinear* myth of origin.

Chapter 2 ("Drives, Pleasure and Desire") confronts Freud’s drive theory with its reconceptualization by Lacan, particularly in reference to pleasure and desire as processes in the genesis of the subject and sexuality, activity and passivity as "make-do" concepts for a deficient representation of the sexes, etc. Chapter 3 ("The Signifier and lts Classification") is an exemplary presentation of Lacan’s theory of the signifier that makes clear the indebtedness to Saussure and Jakobson, while showing that Lacan’s inversions and innovations serve *psychoanalytic*, not linguistic ends. Rejecting the charge that Lacan’s theory of the signifer is a "masculine" one, Seifert states her conviction that any new definition of the feminine "can only be approached via the singularity of psychoanalytic discourse" (p. 110).

Chapter 4 ( "The Ascription of Woman—Woman's Desire and *Jouissance*") applies these theoretical arguments about signification to a reading of the Poe Seminar, in order to make explicit the incompatible differences in male and female sexuality, and why female *jouissance* is mysterious and ineffable. These conclusions are constantly projected back to *Totem and Taboo* to show how the same problematic and its solution is faintly adumbrated in Freud's theory of one libido and letters as dream signs. Seifert answers Freud's question "What do women want?" by responding: "To belong! To win (back) the characteristic of their forming part of a class" (p.147).

Chapter 5 ("Woman Exists! Luce Irigaray's Rescue Attempt of Woman") is a merciless scrutiny of Irigaray's theoretical assumptions as most recently set forth in *L'Ethique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris, 1984). Rather than the "no place" of Woman or the inexpressibility and unrepresentability of feminine jouissance, says Seifert, Irigaray wants to represent her and make positive statements without aporia. She rejects Lacan's distinction between the Symbolic and the Imaginary, thus placing herself, for Seifert, in the domain of psychology. She fashions a biological place for woman based on her excretion of mucuous fluids, which is then rendered Imaginary; while her removal of repression would supposedly reassert "feminine" love and a Utopia or "Third Age of the West" without hate or rivalry. Astoundingly, in view of what Seifert aptly calls Lacan's "phallologo*de*centrism" (p. 186), Irigaray believes in the One and can claim, although she builds on many of Lacan's observations about feminine sexuality, that "psychoanalysis lacks the postulates with which to grasp feminine reality" (p. 177).

Edith Seifert has attended the Lacan-oriented Sigmund Freud School in W. Berlin since 1980, and presents Freud's texts—as now seems increasingly unavoidable—through a Lacanian lens. This book is to be highly recommended for its clarity and refusal to be stampeded by German feminist attitudes to an ill-grasped Lacanian theory. It offers a good measure of Lacan's current German reception.

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Julia Kristeva. *In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*.
trans. Arthur Goldhammer, intro. Otto Kernberg. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.



In the introduction to Kristeva's short collection of essays (61 pages), Kernberg argues that Kristeva's latest work represents a "disengagement from her theoretical background" and an effort to distance herself from the teachings of Lacan; Kristeva, on the other hand, defends psychoanalytic practice in general and disagrees explicitly with Lacan only once when she argues that Catholics are not "unanalyzable."

Her essays, revised from a series of lectures given to Catholic school children, only make sense in this context of advertising psychoanalysis to Catholics. Unfortunately, the essays attempt to function as both a theoretical discussion for adults familiar with psychoanalysis and Kristeva's previous work on, for example, the "semiotic" and as an introduction to the analytic experience for school children; neither attempt works successfully. She has explained the dyn-

amics of religious faith and other possible relations between the "impossible" and the "plausible" in a more concise and sophisticated manner previously, and, if we are to take these essays seriously, then Kristeva's statement, "I am not a believer . . ." and her gentle reminder that Christian love operates according to a "paternal myth" does not go far enough in explaining the problems of Catholic love; Catholic love has led to the Crusades and many other un-loving holocausts. Kristeva never mentions how Catholic love effaces its hate for others and otherness. She wants instead to prod the Catholic audience into accepting psychoanalysis without alienating them.

Because the essays fall between an analytic criticism of faith and an analogy between the Catholic credo and psychoanalysis, they stress similarities and differences rather than focus on an exploration of how analysis might disrupt faith and make analysis of Catholics possible. But, suggesting this direction of exploration, Kristeva does explain that we are not one (with God), but always divided (biological/talking; unconscious/conscious); we can infer from this that analysis unbinds the analysand from faith in God. For Kristeva, psychoanalysis renounces faith with "clear understanding;" it does not create a new "positive knowledge," but rather a "strictly personal knowing;" it does not favor atheism because it demands the acceptance of an Other. Analysis helps us appreciate that "as spoken subjects we become the object of our desires and hatreds" and helps make the "Other less Hellish." Does analysis take the threat of Hell out of the Christian God?

As an appeal to Catholic school children not to reject psychoanalysis as a nihilistic secularizing practice, Kristeva's book would im-



prove by excluding Kernberg's polemic and by explicitly gearing the publication of these essays toward a specific audience: Catholic school children. For the rest of us, the essays are almost embarrassing to read, not because they are ill conceived or poorly wrought, but because they were not intended for us to read. Kristeva's effort at popularizing psychoanalysis does not reach its audience.

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McGrath, William J., *Freud's Discovery of Psychoanalysis: The Politics of Hysteria*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.
Rudnytsky, Peter L., *Freud and Oedipus*. New York; Columbia University Press, 1987.

Both McGrath and Rudnytsky attempt to show how Freud's historical and personal situation led to his scientific discoveries; they argue that these biographical determinants do not invalidate psychoanalysis, but neither book addresses how Freud's discoveries function outside Freud's particular context, for example in Lacan's work.

McGrath focuses on the political situation in Freud's Europe emphasizing the Badeni crisis, the constant tension between Catholic institutions and Jews, and the tension between decadent southern culture and restrained northern culture. He uses evidence from dreams to show

how, for example, Lecher's famous twelve hour speech in front of the hostile and conservative parliament played an important role in Freud's thinking; he also argues effectively that "Freud was dreaming about his own psychoanalytic technique." Even architectural forms played a role in shaping Freud's theories. McGrath sees psychoanalysis as a corollary to the freedom from political despotism Freud wished for.

Rudnytsky traces the figure of Oedipus through Freud's writing and analyzes Freud's intellectual and personal situation, with its "complicated genealogical position" and tangled-up family sequence, according to the Oedipus myth. He also examines how that myth impinges on Freud's intellectual context in the work, and in the parallel family situations, of Schiller, Hölderlin, Kleist, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. It is Nietzsche who "most clearly anticipates Freud in the



attention he gives to the centrality of incest in the Oedipus myth." In reference to Nietzsche, Rudnytsky appends an essay arguing against the positions of Deleuze and Guattari, Girard, and Sandor Goodhart.

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Malcolm Bowie. *Freud, Proust, and Lacan: theory as fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

In *Freud, Proust, and Lacan: theory us fiction*, Malcolm Bowie asks what theorists desire when they theorize about desire? To answer what Lacan desires, Bowie attempts to read "against" Lacan's theory. First, Bowie explains how Lacan "disinters" Freud from "banalising glosses and corrects Freud from within." That returning to Freud works according to Lacan's stylistic strategies, but Lacan's style can only be fully appreciated in the context of his theory. For Bowie, that theory, revolves around linguistic concepts especially the "synchronic analysis of complex signifying systems" and the "unconscious as a signifying chain." His analysis goes on to catalogue significant word-play and ties that to that linguistical oriented theory. He points out how this emphasis enables psychoanalysis to avoid benign "speculation." But, he never suggests that Lacan's theory may go beyond these linguistic formulations to include graphemes and mathemes.

Bowie's style, marked by the caution of the Cambridge University Press books, explicitly attempts to avoid the "pre-emptive power" of Lacan's teachings; instead, by establishing the "grain" of Lacan's teachings (a grain he reads against) Bowie inadvertently accepts a particular version of Lacan's teachings—a version popularized in the 1970's and a version which works as the complement for deconstructive "solutions." For example, Bowie identifies Lacan's "disappointing use of allegory" as imposing a meta-language, and he suggests post-structuralism avoids these problems of meta-language; in fact, he falls into the trap identified by Slavoj Zizek, in "Why Lacan Is Not A Poststructuralist," of equating post-structuralist stylistic avoidances with

the successful subversion of any meta-language; instead, as Zizek explains, these evasions have a very didactic meta-language centering the argument (*NFF*, no. 2).



For Bowie, Lacan also supposedly offers a "solve-all formula" to the tension between theory and fiction: "la verité y révèle son ordonnance de fiction" (truth here reveals its fictive arrangement); he finds this too simple, but the arrangement of fiction is no simple matter.

Bowie's book documents, clearly and carefully, the reception of Lacan during the 1970's and early 1980's.

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Peter Dews. *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*. (New York: Verso, 1987).

In the last decade, there has been a substantial shift in French political philosophy and critical thought, from Nietzschean amorality to Kantian ethics, from a valorization of disruptive desire to a prizing of rational dialogue. This shift is evident not only in the works of younger philosophers —such as Guy Lardreau, who has argued that, in Peter Dews's words, "a right to difference can only be upheld by universal principles" (218)—but in the works of more established writers as well. Shortly before his death, Michel Foucault spoke forcefully about the "obligation" of "speaking the truth . . . in its complexity" (quoted in Dews 219). Similarly, in recent work, Jean-Francois Lyotard has ceased to claim that a concern with truth is authoritarian and imperialist, asserting instead that it is precisely the suppresion of any dialogue striving for truth which is oppressive. This shift, Dews maintains, sounded "the death-knell of post-structuralism" some time ago (219).

In this volume, Dews, Lecturer in European Thought and Literature at Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology, undertakes to explicate and criticize the work of four major post-structuralists, seeking reasons for the dissolution of post-structural thought in the impasses reached by their theories. Specifically, Dews brings the analytical tools of Frankfurt School Critical Theory to bear on the writings of Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan. Overall, Dews's analyses are helpful and convincing.

Dews's treatment of Lacan is by far the most appreciative and least critical. As Dews emphasizes, Lacan alone does not lose sight of truth or disparage its pursuit. He neither abolishes the subject, nor offers a



mere philosophy of consciousness. Finally, while he does not present a political program, he does not construct a theory which would undermine the possibility of such a program, or of rational political action. In effect, for Dews, Lacan was always to some extent a *post*-post-

structuralist. This is not to say that Dews Ends nothing to criticize in Lacan—he does, but his criticisms are presented in the context of an admiration which places Lacan well above his contemporaries.

Dews's interpretation of Lacan focusses upon Lacan's incorporation of Hegel into psychoanalysis. Much of Dews's analysis is both novel and convincing. Seeing Lacan, so to speak, through an Hegelian lens, allows Dews to isolate and reconstrue aspects of Lacan's work which other commentators have missed. However, there are two serious problems with Dews's approach here. The first is that Lacan's *philosophical* influences are far broader than this Hegelian emphasis allows, encompassing aspects of the Analytic tradition, Phenomenology, and Marxism, as well as German Idealism. The second, and more important problem is that Lacan was not a philosopher, but a *clinician*. Treating Lacan primarily as a philosopher almost inevitably leads to serious misunderstandings of his work.

Unfortunately, there are many such misunderstandings in Dews's treatment of Lacan. For example, Dews claims that, at least sometimes, "the signifier need not be linguistic, but can be any form of human action or self expression" (78), thus turning Lacan's linguistic focus into a generalized semiotics, which Lacan explicitly denied. For Lacan, the focus of analysis is on the speech of the analysand and on what the linguistic signifier says contrary to the conscious intention of the subject—on what "*ça veut dire*" when "*ça parle*," rather than what the subject consciously "*veut dire*" (see Lacan 1966, pp. 330-1, 413, 437, and elsewhere). A related misunderstanding occurs in Dews's discussion of the full word and the empty word. Dews understands the relation between the latter and the former as "a transition . . . in which the subject progressively abandons the imaginary autonomy of the ego, in order to accept its true location in the domain of intersubjectivity" (67). This might be correct, at one level—though I am not really sure what it means. But, in any event, Dews misses the primary significance of these terms. Drawn from Freud's *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unhewussten*, where they appear as *Worte voll und leer*, these terms refer to words, signifiers, which involve what Lacan elsewhere called a "constitutive ambiguity"—an ambiguity which, again, expresses something beyond the conscious intent of the speaker



(Lacan 1966, p. 83). Freud's example is "*mit Eifersucht*"/"*mit Eifer sucht*," phonetically identical sequences which mean respectively "with jealousy" and "with eagerness seeks" (Freud 1940, pp. 34ff.). Thus, an analysand can consciously intend to say that he/she is jealous and, at once, counter-intentionally and through the very same signifiers, indicate ("intersubjectively," Dews would say) that he/she has eagerly sought that situation which inspires the jealousy.

There are several further examples of misconstrual of this sort—one of which, surrounding the function of the bar in signification, leads to Dews's final criticism of Lacan and his final, qualified, preference for Habermas. However, despite these misunderstandings—which are really no more numerous than those in most other treatments of the topic—Dews's discussion of Lacan is engaging and informative, as is the book as a whole. Despite its flaws, it should be of considerable interest to many who are studying Lacan or seeking a scholarly and critical treatment of Lacan in relation to post-structuralism for use in the classroom.

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