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#### ABSTRACTS AND BOOK REVIEWS

Teresa Brennan (ed). *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. London

and New York: Routledge, 1989.

Jane Gallop is right to insist on the *fait accompli* status of this conjunction: "It is no longer appropriate to think about the relationship between feminism and Lacan in the abstract". But for some reason, Brennan's coy title only hints at the silent third figure slipping "between" Feminism and Psychoanalysis: deconstruction, which mediates throughout as a third intimate to the coupling. Indeed, caveat emptor: at least a third of the contributors have payed only the merest of lip service to psychoanalytic theory, more attentive to the silent than to the stated partner. Of course, it's a sore point for those defending the integrity of the Freudian Field that Lacanian psychoanalysis tends to be read through, with or after poststructuralism in an anglophone (and also, this book implicitly suggests, in a feminist) context. But for those critically negotiating the relationship between psychoanalytic and deconstructive theory, this feminist field could be of particular interest precisely because it has long been taking an otherwise controversial relationship for granted. Elizabeth Wright: "...when feminism takes up psychoanalysis it also takes on post-modernism".

"Between", however, means what it says. We are not presented with essays which succeed in straddling different theories and their relationships with each other. You don't find here both deconstruction and psychoanalysis working together, so much as a strange hybrid bred for pragmatic purposes, and cultivated in the space between theories. Psychoanalytic and deconstructive accounts of sexual difference appear only insofar as the contributors relate

these to feminism, rather than insofar as they relate to the larger body of the theory they are drawn from, or to each other. Not suprisingly, sometimes this results in just plain bad theory, especially since of the contributors, only Joan Copjec is really adequate to the psychoanalytic, only Spivak to the deconstructive, and only Irigaray a successful, if contentious co-mingler. So a psychoanalytic audience picking over the papers will most certainly, yet again, be excruciated by the worst of common theoretical gaffes (the gaze, the real, the phallus in Lisa Jardine, Parveen Adams, Naomi Segal ...) and yet the exercise might also earn them a reputation for professional pedantry since it is made very clear that fidelity is not the aim. This has to be taken seriously, and the hybrids accepted on their own terms.

So -the question is raised about why and when we should privilege technical precision. Joan Copjec's "Cutting Up" is the most instructive in this context. While this is a serious and sophisticated engagement with Lacan which insists on an accurate interpretation of the real, it is more important that Copjec relates her rigour to the political concerns of the feminist project she is a part of, and how these might be better served. "It is out of a dedication to the very real cause of feminism that I have undertaken this preliminary analysis of the real as cause." So her complaint that "the real has been evicted from current discussions" is motivated not by fastidiousness but by a concern that this leads to an analysis of the subject as entirely the product of the social order, an account of woman as nothing but the realisation of male desires. Copjec turns to Lacan because he offers an account of the subject as woven, not from representation, but from the *failure* of representation, not from language but from what is cut off from language. Lacan, "allows us to think the construction of the subject without thereby being obliged to reduce her to the images social discourses construct of her".

Copjec's proposal that locating the kernel of nonsense or absence which holds the fantasy and the subject in place should be the aim of feminism and other political theory since it provides the link between the subject and social discourses, is bound to be controversial. However, only on such grounds can it be appropriate to hold out as Copjec does, for greater fidelity to Lacan. More than her counsel, it is her approach which is crucial for this book, emphasising a strategic compromise between pragmatism and pedantry which should guide critical response to certain other chapters. Such an approach might allow us to say, for example, that it is Margaret

136

Whitford's own project (a defence of Irigaray as "not a pre-Lacanian but a post-Lacanian, who is confronting the implications of Lacan's work while seeking to expose its patriarchal bias") which would be even better with more Lacan up her sleeve.

This makes it seem that the feminism field might be that most gruelling field of all where, feminism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction - one has to be able to do it all at once, to do it well. For all that the book demands of the reader that the three-way intersection be taken seriously on its own terms, none of the articles quite works from that intersection. The reader begins to feel something always missing, an elusive plenitude just out of reach. If Whitford only had more Lacan, if only Copjec had more discussion of feminism, if she hadn't based her discussion on a bad interpretation of Derrida .... Yet pursuing the whole could go too far: to describe Spivak's difficult and finely wrought piece as "unpsychoanalytic" would be accurate but irrelevant. So if Wright is correct that when feminism engages in psychoanalysis it inevitably does so with postmodernism, it's a tall order with a high likelihood of hybrids, and both Rachel Bowlby and Spivak refer to the kind of absurdist scenario in feminism where "sort-of-Derridas" are being defended against "sort-of-Lacans". This book plays out that scenario, and yet there is no doubt that it is an important collection: all of the contributors are unusually well-published and well-known. This is why Gallop takes the right tack in arguing against this kind of abstract musing: for however you feel about it, the interweaving of false faces, straw people, pragmatism and eclecticism has long been, not a proposal for a new discipline, but an established if heterogeneous field.

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Dianne Hunter (ed.), *Seduction and Theory: Readings of Gender, Representation, and Rhetoric*, University of Chicago Press, 1989, 250pp.

The seduction scene in its many variants is at the heart of the psychoanalytic enterprise according to this challenging collection of twelve essays. Divided into four sections dealing respectively with: the politics of the gaze; the seduction scenario as the foundation of psychoanalysis; the seduction of the reader in literary texts; and the on-again off-again romance between philosophy and

137

consistent 'other' of culturally produced female subjectivity, that is, she functions as the male phantasm of the female seductress, and claims that Hawthorne's text operates as fictional translation of the spectacle set up by the New England witchcraft trials. In text and history these stereotypes, structured according to the economy of the male gaze, serve to control the 'deviant' female.

In the final section Susan Bernstein compares the narratives on Lacan produced by Stuart Schneidermann and Jane Gallop as a family feud between the son who is destined to inherit the father's mantle of authority and the rebellious daughter who wishes both to seduce the father and be the father, "the daughter can accede to these positions of power through imitation and play, metonymic activities; while the son aims to replace the father, a metaphoric substitution" (p.209).

Andrew Ross charts the seduction of two European theorists, Baudrillard and Umberto Eco, by an America which they each construct in terms of their own desires. Eco discovers the hyperreal, the simulacra, of which ideology is "an effect staged for profit and consumption", but which is, whether we like it or not, the inheritor and preserver of Europe, albeit in debased form in the same way that Rome supposedly preserved some of the effects of classical Greece. Baudrillard on the other hand traces the apparent disappearance of Europe in America, culminating in the 'nonmeaning' of the American desert. This, according to Ross, is the mark of the alien (or deliberately a-political) theorist who reveals total ignorance of the politics of stripmining or American Indian land-rights which have clearly (for those who wish to see) marked this terrain with meaning.

Completing the collection, Carolyn Burke's essay on Irigaray gathers together the various concerns with mimicry and masquerade as female strategies for survival in the imbalance of the traditional seduction scenario. In her analysis, Irigaray takes the textual initiative in the discourses of seduction. Irigaray's project in effect systematically redefines the discourses of seduction by means of a series of dialogues with a range of seminal male philosophers.

Burke distinguishes usefully between 'masquerade' as the traditional capitulation (albeit a knowing one) to male desire and 'mimicry' as the deliberate deconstruction of this feminine. However, in a slightly confusing footnote referring to the work of Stephen Heath, Burke defines the

second as more passive than the first. This runs counter to the concept of 'colonial mimicry' as another strategy for survival in the different discursive domain of

140

imperialism produced by a theorist like Homi Bhabha and it would be very interesting to see these concepts developed further.

Analysing in detail Irigaray's various strategies in individual texts, Burke usefully undermines the prevailing notion in some quarters of Irigaray as an essentialist who has privileged the return to an unproblematic female body. Rather, her 'performative' writing and development of an amorous/erotic discourse is the basis for an ethics of "difference and undecidability" in which exchange becomes circular and sight is no longer the privileged sense.

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Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen. *The Freudian Subject*. Catherine Porter trans. Foreword by François Roustang. Stanford: Stanford University

Press, 1988. xxi, 278 pp.

In a largely philosophical thesis that proceeds by close analysis of Freud's writings and draws upon the work of Philippe LacoueLabarthe and René Girard, Borch-Jacobsen's major move is to introduce a notion of mimesis as the lynch-pin of a number of conceptual "revisions" that the author argues have to be made to psychoanalytic theory. The key areas for these revisions are: i) Freud's account of the mechanisms of formations of the unconscious (dreams, symptoms, fantasies, etc.); ii) the structure of the ego in Freud's work of the 1910s on narcissism; iii) the issue of identification in Freud's later work in general, and the nature of the social bond/band central to *Group Psychology*. The argument proceeds by criticizing those aspects of Freud's work that either explicitly appeal to or tacitly imply a subject of the unconscious that is no different from the traditional philosophical concept of the subject of consciousness. The author then bases an alternative account of the constitution, construction or coming into being of the subject both by reinterpreting clinical material in Freud cases, dreams, symptoms, etc. - and by arguing that there are certain important impasses in Freud's theorization for which his own proposals are more satisfactory. There are, then, two dimensions to the author's thesis: an account of subjectivity in terms of mimesis and a critique of Freud.

Mimesis is viewed as constitutive of, not constituted by, the subject. It constitutes the subject in such a way that the subject finds his or her identity through *identification, mimesis*, with another.

141

As the author writes, "The so-called subject of desire has no identity of its own prior to the identification that brings it, blindly, to occupy the place of otherness, the place of the other (who is thus not an other): an original alienation (which is thus not an alienation); and an original lure (which is thus not a lure, either)" (p. 48). However, mimesis renders problematic the notion of the identity of the subject since this is never self-identity but always the identity of oneself *qua* another.

It is regarded as an implication of this view that the following Freudian claims have to be revised: i) that desire has a connection with an object, because what triggers desire is mimetic assimilation or "identification with a model of desire" (p. 28); ii) that there is a *subject* of desire, because the notion of a subject implies self-identity through the various manifestations or attributes of the self; and iii) that fantasy is the enactment, *mise en scène*, of desire, because this implies that there is a subject for whom fantasy is represented as a spectacle (p. 26). Indeed, according to Borch-Jacobsen, mimesis is so powerful a concept as to be able to be seen as underlying even such central concepts of psychoanalysis as the pleasure principle and sexuality.

The critique of Freud's own views is pursued on two fronts, one "external" and one "internal". The "external" critique is based upon a number of philosophical considerations on subjectivity. It is claimed that Freud's position, notably in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, concerning unconscious thoughts, *Gedanken*, and ideas or representations, *Vorstellungen*, implies an unconscious subject that (i) is a substantive subject and that (ii) in all essential respects is the same as, or is modelled on, the subject of consciousness. If true, either of these claims, which are actually independent of one another, would of course be devastating for Freudian theory. The first would reveal a thoroughly discredited conception of subjectivity at the heart of the theory, while the second would give the lie to any claim about conceptual novelty in psychoanalysis. It is somewhat surprising, then, to find that the two arguments supporting these claims are very swift indeed. It is argued, first, that the fact that unconscious desire is *represented* in the conscious "alone suffices to make the unconscious substantive" (p. 5), and, second, that "the term 'subject', *subjectum*, designates what remains identical with itself beneath its various attributes" (p. 7). Neither argument is very compelling. The first, if valid, would prove too much, since by the same reasoning it can be argued that consciousness is substantive. But it is of course just as problematic to talk of a substantive con-

142

sciousness as of a substantive unconscious. Either representation talk is neutral as to the existence of a subject, in which case it is harmless, or it does indeed have dubious metaphysical implications, in which case there is no special problem for the unconscious. In any case, as Hume was the first to see, from the fact that there are representations, it does not *immediately* follow that there is a subject or, *a fortiori*, that this subject is a substance.

The second argument - which is presumably directed at Lacan rather than Freud, who never used the term - is even less compelling, since the etymology of the *term* commands no metaphysical view. Indeed, it simply highlights the point that Lacan used this term in spite of, rather than because of, its classical metaphysical implications.

The other front on which the critique is pursued builds on a close, though as I shall indicate - not always careful, reading of Freud's writings on the ego. While for any student of Freud this is the most interesting part of the book, the treatment of the material is often less than persuasive. For example, Freud is attributed with the claim that the "dream capitalist is always an infantile wish which has been repressed because it is sexual", whereas one of the more striking remarks in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, in a passage that the author footnotes, claims precisely that it is "an open question" whether sexual factors invariably contribute to the dream-work (SE 5, 606). This would perhaps be no more than a quibble if it were not for the fact that the method in action is one of close reading - but what sort of a reading is it that makes of an author's "open question" an unqualified generalization?

While the first example is symptomatic, the second example is more important in its own right. The author writes, "Unconscious thought is always conceived as visual thought" (p. 244, n. 10). If this is so, why then does Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* discuss "the means of representation" and "considerations of representability" which, as factors specific to dreams, are concerned precisely with the issue of the ways in which the dream-work deals with the problem of visualizing such non-visual latent thoughts as logical connectives? As it turns out, the claim that unconscious thought is always visual is tendentiously attributed to Freud, for in quoting Freud's remark that "one and only one of these logical relations is very highly favoured by the mechanism of dreamformations; namely the relation of similarity, consonance or approximation - the relation of 'just as'" (p. 21), Borch-Jacobsen construes Freud as claiming that the logic of dreams is a logic of similarity and

143

that the dream-work is "exclusively preoccupied with the relation of likeness". This point is crucial for it is used as evidence for a tension within Freud's work, which thus allows the author to replace the claim that the dream-work is the *translation* of latent into manifest content with his own view that the dream-work's preoccupation with resemblance to the exclusion of all other logical relations indicates a more fundamental affinity between desire and resemblance than Freud can allow - an affinity that reveals the essentially *mimetic* function of desire.

In attributing to Freud the view that unconscious thought is visual, Borch-Jacobsen disregards the fact that the phenomenon Freud is discussing is the difficulty of representing visually the *nonvisual* logical connectives of the dream thoughts.

As the author says, his central concern is with Freud's writings on the ego, but one is at a loss to explain the absence of any genuine engagement with Lacan's work - which is not to say that Lacan's name is absent; in fact the brief asides in which he is mentioned and the dismissive remarks in which he is alluded to make him the absent Other of this Freudian subject.

Still, it is to the author's credit that he does not gloss over the important and difficult philosophical issues arising from Freud's writings; while his treatment of these problems is not always convincing, Borch-Jacobsen shows how deep they go.

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Slavoj Zizek. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London and New York, 1989.

Slavoj Zizek, a researcher at the Institute for Sociology in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, is a much appreciated author and speaker and his work is already known to many in the Freudian Field; this recent text should bring him to the attention of an even wider audience. He himself states that the aim of his book is threefold: "To serve as an introduction to some of the fundamental concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis. . . , to accomplish a kind of 'return to Hegel' . . . [and] to contribute to the theory of ideology" (p. 7). Zizek's aims are present in various combinations in elaboration of his specific arguments. However, the overarching objective of Zizek's book is an analysis of the "object" as one of the most controversial in contemporary psychoanalysis. For instance, Zizek shows how the

144

theoretical debate and confusion surrounding Lacan's seeming valorization of the phallus distracts from an encounter with the sublime object, "the impassive, imaginary objectification of the Real" (p. 185).

In chapter five, "Which Subject of the Real?" (which also entails "Which Object?"), Zizek provides an exposition of the three types of Lacanian object while providing a stunning study of the real. The evolution of Lacan's own thinking between the 1950s and 1970s has contributed to the misunderstandings about the real. Zizek clarifies the terms and makes possible a conceptual link between the real and the pivotal object(s). The formulation of the "real as impossible" maps onto "*objet a* as cause" in such a way as to concentrate the three types of divergent aspects of the Freudian field to explicate several concepts central to Lacan's work. By concentrating particularly on Lacan's later views on, for instance, the real, *objet a*, fantasy, and the *symptom/sinthome*, Zizek has both clarified and changed the terms of debate in contemporary discussions of Lacan's contribution to psychoanalysis. Moreover, in re-emphasizing Lacan's break with "post-structuralism," Zizek pays rigorous attention to psychoanalysis's articulation with the social, thus making his work essential to anyone working on Freud and Lacan: literary and film theorists, political-economists, and, most importantly and unexpectedly, clinicians.

The title of Zizek's book itself contains many different threads. "The sublime" evokes the primary and secondary literatures on the sublime, particularly Kant, and Zizek's careful discussions of Kant allow him at once to engage with Lacan, "save Hegel," and consider the status and function of "the object" in psychoanalysis. The object of psychoanalysis becomes "the sublime object", which acts as a sort of inaccessible and forever shifting limit. Zizek's discussion of the sublime object of psychoanalysis elicits the idea of the object as commodity, returning psychoanalysis to the realm of "ideology" and through the work of Marx, Althusser, and Hitchcock to the field of social, cultural studies, Lacanian (and Hitchcockian) objects (pp. 182ff) corresponding to the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real. These correspondences, as well as the careful differentiation of three types of object, give rise to the valuable conclusion that

the Real itself, in its positivity, is nothing but an embodiment of a certain void, lack, radical negativity.. That is why the real object is a sublime object in a strict Lacanian sense - an object which is just an embodiment of the lack in the other, in the

145

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148