

ABSTRACTS AND BOOK REVIEWS

Richard Boothby. *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. xv + 266 pp.

The importance of Richard Boothby's *Death and Desire* lies in its demonstration of the theoretical centrality of the death drive to Freudian psychoanalysis. Taking seriously the commonplace about Lacan's "return to Freud," Boothby's account makes a forceful case for the death drive--rather than the unconscious--as "the crowning discovery of psychoanalysis" (223). Perhaps it is not surprising that the most extensive vindication of the death drive's conceptual validity should come from a philosopher; for, as Boothby suggests, "The theory of the death drive was the highwater mark of Freud's speculative urge" (4).

Because the death drive is a theoretical construct amenable to only negative definition, it has often been dismissed as useless for therapeutic purposes (by clinicians), or taken to represent the limit of conceptualization as such (by theorists). *Death and Desire* moves beyond this epistemological impasse by putting the concept to work in the service of an argument about Lacan's revivication of psychoanalysis via his categories of real, symbolic, and imaginary. The conclusion reached is that "The concept of the death drive forms a kind of dynamic intersection between the three registers as it is at once the return of the real, the unbinding of the imaginary, and the agency of the symbolic" (224). So thorough is Boothby in his execution of this original argument that--although he qualifies the book's intent as "not to provide a comprehensive account of Lacan's work, but to traverse his thought obliquely along the lines

of a specific concept" (16)--*Death and Desire* is a far better introduction to Lacan than many of the recent works which claim that as their aim. Furthermore, unlike some of these recent "introductions" to Lacan, Boothby's account does not exhaust its exegetical energy on outlining the imaginary. Rather, Boothby spends half his time showing what a truly radical, indispensable concept the imaginary is, which is one of his book's strongest contributions. Indeed, by making the mirror stage (and its associates) interesting again, Boothby has accomplished no mean feat.

Focusing extensively on the complexities of Freud's theory of narcissism, Boothby forcefully shows how the aggressivity associated with the imaginary ego represents a projection outwards of the destructive instincts that are generated by the ego's self-constitution. The proleptic identification with an image of corporeal unity provides the subject with an initial organization of its instinctual chaos; but in so doing, imaginary alienation pits the ego against the real of subjective desire (Boothby keeps fairly clear the crucial distinction between subject and ego that gets lost in so many accounts). That is, the ego is aggressively defensive against what it has necessarily excluded in its constitutive Gestalt. Like the perceptual separation of figure from ground, the ego separates itself from the field of psychical forces that then threaten to overwhelm its closely patrolled boundaries.

To further this exposition of ego formation, Boothby develops the unconventional interpretive model of imaginary energetics (for which model he finds some support in Lacan), thereby aligning Freud's notion of libidinal energy with Lacan's register of the real. The energetic model allows him to make the rather surprising argument that the origin of the death drive lies in

imaginary alienation: "In Lacanian terms the death drive represents the return of the real excluded by the imaginary" (84). This gives new force to Lacan's diatribes against ego-psychology, for the ego is revealed to be its own worst enemy.

Now although Boothby's rethinking of the imaginary is conceptually productive, it does entail a number of costs, not least of which is the strategic problem of deferring any consideration of the symbolic to the middle of the book. The absence of an account of symbolization is felt particularly strongly in the book's discussion of trauma. Boothby is aware of this problem and tries to justify his exclusive attention to the relation between imaginary and real by suggesting that this serves "to frame more clearly the homology of the two Lacanian categories with the Freudian ego and id" (106).

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The impulse to make Freud and Lacan completely compatible drives Boothby's project, and the conviction that their theories can be shown to be isomorphic represents perhaps the most troubling of the book's theoretical assumptions: "nearly every major point of Lacan's conception can be referred to a text of Freud in which a similar view is proposed" (33).

In order to sustain the rhetorical viability of Lacan's "return to Freud" with respect to the death drive, the organic dimension of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* has to be converted into something else--hence the theoretical necessity of Boothby's energetic model. By eliminating Freud's biologism, the concept of death--which was perfectly literal in Freud (and partially so in Lacan, too)--is transformed into a metaphor: "What is subject to 'death' is not the biological organism but the imaginary ego" (84). Thus although Boothby accurately associates the death drive with the real, his argument tends increasingly to distance death by quotation marks, such that "death" comes to signify the active disintegration of the ego as a consequence of the forces it excluded in its imaginary self constitution. One problem with this metaphorization of death is that it vitiates the distinction between subject and ego, since in Boothby it is the ego--rather than the subject--which is threatened by the death drive.

Furthermore, the way in which Boothby's argument *does* integrate an account of the symbolic in relation to the death drive functions to cloud other previously established distinctions. Thus when Boothby provisionally concludes that "The death drive may be said to involve the emergence of the real in the disintegration of the imaginary--a disintegration that is effected by the symbolic" (136), Lacanian distinctions between imaginary, real, and symbolic kinds of death disappear. Lacan's insistence on the mortifying effects of the signifier--supported in his Rome Discourse by the classical wisdom which held that "the word is the death of the thing" implies a subjective alienation so radical that one may speak of a symbolic death. However, symbolic mortification is not identical with the literal death which leaves a hole in the real requiring symbolization (as Lacan argued in his seminars on *Hamlet*). And neither symbolic nor real deaths are entirely equivalent to imaginary disintegration, which is why Boothby is somewhat misleading in referring to "imaginary alienation" and the ego's "separation." For Lacan, alienation is a technical term denoting the subject's constitution in the symbolic Other (*A*), while separation refers to the subject's constitutive loss of an object (*a*). Although *Death and*

Desire liberally deploys the terms "alienation" and "separation," there is little mention of the Other or the object *a*. Correlative with these idiosyncratic emphases is the rarity with which *jouissance* is related to the death drive, despite the numerous other conceptual links made in the course of Boothby's argument. An additional problem in blurring distinctions between imaginary, symbolic, and real deaths is that, having made death into a figure for deconstruction, the link suggested by Lacan between the death drive and suicide is broken. Thus not only are distinctions elided at the cost of homologies and identifications, but connections and associations disappear too.

Boothby has taken advantage of his access to the whole Lacanian corpus, including unpublished seminars; and his familiarity with the Freudian and Lacanian canons is impressive. He quotes both Freud and Lacan extensively, lays out each part of his theoretical argument clearly, summarizes each step, repeats key points, and elaborates exhaustively the implications of every move he makes. This mastery of his material makes reading *Death and Desire* a pleasure; however, it also generates some of the problems. The costs attendant on the impulse to square Freud with Lacan are compounded by Boothby's desire to square both Freud and Lacan with themselves, thereby replacing discontinuous metapsychological speculations with the coherent grandeur of a Freud-Lacanian theoretical edifice. Thus Boothby finds a "profound continuity" between Freud's 1895 *Project* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), while quoting so indiscriminately from early and late seminars as to preclude any possibility of periodizing Lacan's teaching. This construction of a theoretical system centered on the death drive is alleged to "integrate Freud's most basic concepts in a new synthesis"; and Boothby immediately adds, "One of the main goals of the preceding chapters has been to demonstrate such an integration" (187). Goals of synthesis and integration are, of course, the goals of the ego; and if Boothby's emphasis on the ego is the source of the book's strengths, it is also, we must now admit, the source of its weaknesses. In this respect, *Death and Desire* itself operates analogously to the ego, for its exuberant alignments, integrations, and consolidations are accompanied by the kind of risks to which Boothby's own exposition alerts us. If the ego is vulnerable as a consequence of its constitutive divorcing of itself from instinctual life, then *Death and Desire* is vulnerable as a consequence of its divorcing itself from contemporary debates in psychoanalytic theory. Perhaps it is Boothby's relative unfamiliarity with secondary

material on Lacan that makes his account of the symbolic so conventional and his interpretation of the phallus so blithely mistaken--"Lacan's concept of the phallus implies the unending slippage of meaning that Derrida has called dissemination" (154). Indeed, the fraught concepts of sexuality and sexual difference are those upon which Boothby is perhaps weakest, as this unresolved non sequitur indicates: "Lacan is convinced that there is nothing biologically fixed or determined about gender identity, as the very existence of homosexuality suggests" (155).

The goal of theoretical integration is also attributed to Lacan vis-à-vis philosophy as the final chapter, "Metapsychology in the Perspective of Metaphysics," elaborates: "One of the most significant aspects of Lacan's revitalization of psychoanalysis consists in the way he reintegrates it with philosophical reflection" (187). This chapter, the most tentative and qualified in the book, is also the one in which Boothby's professional affiliation shows most clearly; for unlike accounts of psychoanalysis by philosophers such as Ricoeur, Hyppolite, or even Derrida, Boothby's argument does not translate psychoanalysis into philosophical models until the very end--and

then only very hesitantly. Although any notion of a *linguistic* unconscious disappears from this overtly philosophical chapter, Boothby is particularly good at marking the limits of Lacan's tiresomely overemphasized Hegelianism. Finally, although *Death and Desire* serves traditionally Freudian concepts--sublimation, anxiety, the superego, the oedipal and castration complexes--better than Lacanian ones, the way in which Boothby uses Freud and Lacan to rethink each other will un-doubtedly provoke further thought.

Tim Dean
Johns Hopkins University

James Mellard. *Using Lacan/Reading Fiction*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991.

In *Using Lacan/Reading Fiction*, Mellard provides what some might call a "close reading" of *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Beast in the Jungle*, and *To The Lighthouse*. These readings, Mellard tells us, "assume a Lacanian epistemology instead of arguing for it or setting it out in detail." For example, in chapter one, on the *Scarlet Letter*, Mellard finds that Hawthorne's language reveals in the creation of Hester

Prynne some of the problems any subject encounters in the interrelations of the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. A Lacanian perspective is also used to solve a persistent critical problem in *The Beast in the Jungle* insofar as such analysis shows very clearly that Marcher is constantly repeating the structures of the mirror stage (Mellard's chapter two). And, in the middle section of *To The Lighthouse*, Mellard claims to see the Real "operating" (his chapter three).

It is no surprise that Mellard should think his Lacanian reading to be "allegorical, algorithmic," if not merely such, since Mellard never takes into account what very precisely precludes allegorization, personification, or hypostatization on Lacan's part--namely, *jouissance* insofar as the symptom puts it in the place of THE NOW. For Mellard, the "there is" is "what makes sense," "what has meaning." Mellard's "use" of Lacan, then, is to make the unconscious go away --to resist that which resists interpretation. Like Foucault, he acts as if language were weightless, only projected on the axes of substitution. Yet, without metonymy, without a residual ground to metaphor, the signifier is unmarried, untransformed, undifferentiated from the infinite ciphering of the unconscious: one, one, one, one, one, one.

Thus, Mellard's insistence on allegory, on algorithm, and on the *use* of Lacan, puts him in the same camp as those who wish to deduce the creation of a work from its sources--only Mellard finds the sources of the work in his own reading. He fails to distinguish between invention and creation and therefore cannot come to terms with Lacan's notion of the symptom nor understand how literature itself is a symptom; literary characters (such as Dimmesdale) simply have symptoms, for Mellard. In other words, Mellard "himself" wishes to be the father of the artist. In Mellard's defense, one might say that "even though the symptom opposes meaning, there is a *jouissance* of meaning, where literature makes use of the imaginary, where fiction has a hold on truth and artists are the sons and daughters of the works they create." And such a statement may be acted out in Mellard's text, but it is certainly not something of which he is aware.

David Metzger
Montana State University

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Jacques Lacan, Jonathan Scott Lee (Boston: Twayne, 1990).

Lee's book, a volume in Twayne's "World Authors Series," aims at a relatively comprehensive account of Lacan's *oeuvre*, at an introductory level. Its seven chapters present the following topics. First is a short but strong account of the biographical and social background, gleaned largely from Roudinesco, and partly from Turkle, but useful for those who are coming to the material for the first time. Second, there is a description of Lacan's early work--the thesis on paranoia and the two important pieces on the family which Lacan contributed to the *Encyclopédie française* under the commission of Henri Wallon. The first of these commissioned pieces Lee reads nicely stressing Lacan's claim that "family *psychology*" fails to think through the nature of the family as an *institution*, and thus a structure: already we see the sharp one between the psychoanalytic and psychological approaches. Lee notes (A) Lacan's early refusal of the usual understanding of "instinct," and his insistence upon conceiving of the human order as "subversive of all instinct," in Lacan's phrase, and (B) Lacan's early repudiation of developmental psychology, in his exploration of the notion of "the imago," a term that initiates his thinking about the imaginary order. The second article distinguishes psychotic and neurotic complexes (picking up the thesis on paranoia) by tracing the relation between (A) the emergence of sexuality and (B) the *constitution* of reality: we are thus squarely situated in the problem of the Oedipal structure, well beyond the adaptational agenda of ego-psychology. This chapter also provides a brief but careful, lucid, and textually grounded exegesis of the first two pieces in the English edition of Lacan's *Ecrits*, those on the mirror stage and aggressiveness. I emphasise this chapter because it is one of the high points of the book.

In chapters three and four we are introduced to the "Rome Discourse," in five to Lacan's readings of the *Symposium*, *Hamlet*, and *Antigone*, in six to the real, and finally, in chapter seven, to two of Lacan's later, difficult foci, the sexuation diagram in *Encore* and the question of the status of psychoanalysis as a science. In fact, these later chapters, in particular the account of the real, and the treatment of science, lean heavily on (and repeat somewhat) Lee's reading of the "Rome Discourse," thus treating less of the later material than they appear to do. But like his account of the "Mirror Stage" and "Aggressivity," Lee's reading of the "Rome Discourse" is admirably textual and exegetical. With so many vague, intuitive, psychologising, fashionable, polemical, and imprecise discussions

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of these basic texts now circulating, a reading that attends to the order of Lacan's argument, distinguishing five or six claims where readers have seen only one, must be applauded. No other reading has done the simple work of following the argument so closely in these early texts: "we can outline a series of five points," and "it is not just a question of the structure of the analytic situation; several philosophical questions can be distinguished on these two pages"--this kind of

gesture produces a useful guide for readers who are seeking access to the material itself, as well as providing background in the intellectual context upon which Lacan draws, and to which he responds. Lee helpfully cites, rather than simply referring to, the text--both Lacan's texts, and those of Kojève, Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, and Hegel. It is a pleasure, somehow at a moment when one sees people quickly scrambling for "the real" and the "object a," for the notion of masochism in Sade, or *jouissance* in femininity, to find someone demonstrating the subversive complexity of notions we thought we had digested and passed beyond--the image, demand, the question of what a perception is. And yet.

And yet the book virtually ends after a promising first seventy pages. Faced with such difficulties as Lacan's comments on *la chose* in "The Freudian Thing," and the graph of desire in the text on Schreber (still short of Lacan's work in the 1960s), the book wavers, repeats, turns back to familiar territory: the elaboration of particular details suddenly gives way to reliance on generalizations and repetition--"any word spoken gains its meaning only in relation to the other to whom it is addressed" (99); "the reference to Heidegger brings us back to the familiar theme of temporality," which means nothing more, evidently, than that "the events of a subject's life come to have meaning only through their relationship to a future point that is somehow essential and revelatory" (92). Under the ambitious heading "*jouissance* and the *objet petit a*" Lee writes, "In many respects the lecture simply repeats leading themes of the 1950s" (138). What the graph of desire, which is treated in five pages, "reveals is that identity is a matter of complex relations at all levels, the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real" (139). Eventually, the exegetical voice is largely usurped by another tone, one that is meant to be descriptive, but that shows a certain bewilderment as well: "Even the most casual reader will have been struck by Lacan's apparently confident use of quasi-algebraic formulations" (188); the later work, he says, "substitutes a complex web of analogy and wordplay as the key to a largely unelaborated argument" (134). What was analytic tends to become more general reporting--

"Lacan uses the paradoxes of set theory . . . the 'interior 8,' the Möbius strip, the Klein bottle," and Lacan's "concern with rupture leads to an ever-growing delight in multireferential and multi-lingual wordplay" (134). By page 135 Lee has entirely dropped, and will "not aim here or in the final chapter" for, "the relatively systematic analysis of particular texts offered in earlier chapters."

Lacan is still dauntingly difficult for everyone, and this shift in Lee's book is no surprise, nor would it be right to pretend that he is unaware, or unforthcoming, about the shift in the character of his account, once he has completed his reading of the "Rome Discourse." But one has to wonder how a reader who has obviously learned so much, and seen so clearly, can come to believe that Lacan would one day have become content to "substitute wordplay as the key to unelaborated argument" or to lapse into "ever-growing delight in the multireferential"--remarks which attribute to the text a confusion that is perhaps to be located elsewhere. We have seen this sort of remark about Hegel, Heidegger, and others: their early work is profoundly important, but their later work is mysticism. At these moments, Lee's admirable exposition begins to veer toward the kind of statements we have seen, in a far more virulent form, in Sherry Turkle's book, according to which Lacan was at best a poet, at worst a poseur and a charlatan (her word), and also in what Joan Copjec has called David Macey's "incredibly hasty book"--the one that pretends Lacan was a surrealist.

Let me not call for more precision without offering a few substantive remarks in closing. First: *jouissance* and fantasy are not at the same level as pleasure and desire. "The subject's fading is tied directly to 'the pleasure proper to desire'," Lee says. Thus, "that toward which pleasure tends is quite simply the subject's fading losing oneself in a sporting event, or reaching sexual orgasm" (147). One must keep a clear distinction between pleasure and *jouissance*, and between desire and fantasy--distinctions which are lost here. The understanding of fantasy and the subject's fading, which are in question at this point (Lee's text is "*Kant avec Sade*"), shows us that the fantasy is a protection against the real. The fantasy, in which we find the subject's relation to the *objet petit a* [the relation given in the formula for fantasy ($s < > a$), is a locus of suffering. It is not pleasure. It is not what is commonly meant by "an imaginary fantasy object," in Lee's phrase (145); nor is *jouissance* "ultimate sexual enjoyment or bliss" (141). It is rather a question of primary masochism--not the so-called "masochistic tendencies" which we can distinguish from "normal" sexuality, but rather

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primary masochism, that is, the essentially traumatic character of human sexuality. Thus the subject's fading in relation to the *objet petit a* is to be understood *not as pleasure* (losing oneself in a good ball game), but as *jouissance*, that constitutive suffering by which the subject avoids an encounter with the real. When Lacan says the subject's fading guarantees "the pleasure proper to desire," then, it means, not that *jouissance* is like the pleasure of orgasm, or that fantasy is a sort of desire, but that the *pleasure of desire* is at a radically different level from the *jouissance taken in fantasy*. The former is instituted in its apparently pleasing character only on the foundation of the latter, which we must conceive in its connection with masochism. This is why Lacan says all the drives are death drives. In fact, Lee's argument here is further damaged in that he takes over Catherine Clement's account of the "sigla" [$< >$] which indicates the relation between subject and object, claiming that it combines "the mathematical symbols for 'greater than' and 'less than,'" (143) (written $< \text{and} >$), whereas in fact Lacan comments in great detail in *The Four Fundamental Concepts* on this mark, saying that it concerns the notions of juncture and disjuncture (written $\blacktriangleleft \setminus$ and $\setminus \blacktriangleright$), taken from set theory and the problem of "adding" and "joining" that characterizes the relation between the subject and the Other. The exposition of this point will be found in the discussion of 'Alienation and Separation,' in *Seminar XI* (French 166-69, English 182-86).

Second point, structure and subject. A fundamental problem with the book is its account of the relation between the subject and language. Lee shows in his reading of the "Rome Discourse" that the "individual," upon entering into the symbolic order, loses his or her (mythically original) plenitude, and comes to be a being of lack, dependent upon speech and the other's response. This correct account, which is shared by most readers of Lacan, nevertheless allows us to think in terms of (to use non-Lacanian terms) the individual and the culture with its codes. For Lacan, however, the intrusion of the signifier upon the living being is the constitution of the unconscious. For Lee, it is hardly a question of the unconscious at all, but of how we deal with the limit to our narcissism that is posed by the existence of social norms and other persons (Hegel's account of the master-slave relation, which needs no unconscious, dominates here). Thus, according to Lee, it is a question of "the analysand's coming to *realize* the division within him," [emphasis mine] so that what "Lacan suggests is fundamentally reflected in Hegel's notion of the 'unity' of universal and particular in the same

subject" (74). In other words, it is a question here of how we come to learn (consciously) the rules of culture, accepting its dissatisfactions. There are only two terms here--the speaker and the language game, Saussure's *parole* and *langue*, Levi-Strauss's individual and the laws of the symbol within which the individual takes on significance--two terms which require no unconscious which repeat the traditional philosophical problem of freedom and determinism, and which allow us to speak of the Hegelian unity of subject and structure that constitutes the individual. And this means entry into the codes is conscious, learned, and manipulable: "once 'introduced' to this primary language of desire, the analysand is *in a position to begin to exploit the special resources of this language*" (75, emphasis mine). The problem here is that the word "*subject*" is regularly used to indicate the person, "the child [who] learns to speak properly," who learns how to operate in the symbolic system (free within the limits of this determination), so that Lacan is said to describe "an entry into the background language making civilized behavior possible." Lee adds that "for Lacan, successful negotiation of Oedipal conflicts is quite literally a matter of learning to speak properly" (64), whereas Lacan's focus gives us, not so much the kinds of language games we find in Wittgenstein, but an *unconscious subject*, for whom the relation between the imaginary and the symbolic is always one of "misapprehension"--in all senses of the word (the paranoid theory of knowledge). The word "subject," in short, does not name the person who comes to relinquish the excessive expectations of his imaginary ego, learning to speak and tolerate the discontents of existence, but the *unconscious subject* that is produced as an unavailable but constitutive part of the divided being which we can say is "subjected to" language. For Lacan's refusal of the Hegelianism of the particular and universal, which he elaborates precisely in regard to the unconscious, see *Seminar XI* (French 201, English 221).

Third: the question of history--a terribly difficult topic. Given these two registers, that of the narcissistic person, and that of culture and other persons, one will be able to think that this person may enter into the codes of behavior in an alienating fashion, but eventually come to adapt, in accordance with the oracular imperative: know thyself. The analyst's task, on this view will be to help the analysand not to construct himself or herself in the alienated form of an ego; the analyst will keep the client from such self-objectification--from producing what Eliot calls "a face to meet the other faces that we meet." Lee writes: "How the analyst replies to

the analysand will determine whether the analysand is caught as an object in the symbolic, or emerges as a fully fledged human subject, assuming his status as *the hero of a narration*" (79). And later: "*The truth of the human subject . . . is eventually captured in the discourse as narrated*" (90). I can now complete an earlier quotation: "the analysand is now in a position *to exploit the special resources of this language in the telling of his history*" (75). In fact, however, when Lacan speaks of the "hero of the narration," it is only to expose the illusory character of this heroism, and to stress in its place that never-to-be-outstripped (*unüberholbare*) discontinuity between this person who constructs a narrative (a principal model for current theories of history), and that *in the discourse*, that irrevocable and non-appropriable alterity, which is the truth of the subject, unassimilable, unspeakable and real. As Lacan says, the unconscious is disturbing for all psychology, precisely "insofar as this domain reveals the *reality of the discourse in its autonomy*" (*Ecrits*, 50). We could push this thesis about history, to suggest that history itself is not

the work of conscious subjects, but of a discourse which can never be reduced to the intentions of its purported authors. When it is a question of psychoanalysis, "its operations are those of history," Lacan says, but precisely "insofar as history constitutes the emergence of truth in the real" (*Ecrits*, 49). It is not a question of the person's giving a *satisfactory* narrative of his or her life, such that alien elements are integrated, but rather of an "objective that can be satisfied only in the intersubjective *continuity of the discourse in which* the subject's history is constituted" (*Ecrits*, 49). This is already clear by 1955, when Lacan, speaking of the relation between the imaginary and the symbolic, writes:

it is just when the world of the dreamer is plunged into the greatest imaginary chaos that discourse enters into play, discourse as such, independently of its meaning, since it is a senseless discourse. It then seems that the subject decomposes and disappears. In the dream there's the recognition of the fundamentally acephalic character of the subject.
[Seminar II, 170]

This will "enable us," Lacan adds, to "understand how we should conceive of the death instinct." This radical, unsurpassable gap between the one who narrates and the discourse itself is the trauma of the signifier upon the organism: "Freud's discovery was that of the field of effects in the nature of man of his relations to the symbolic order" (*Ecrits*, 64). To suggest that man can put himself (the masculine is intended here) back at the center, as the

hero of his narrative, as the one who, in spite of all cultural determinations, can assume a degree of autonomy and self-possession, is to risk Lacan's reproach: "Let it be known, therefore, since he also prides himself on braving the reproach of anthropomorphism, that it is this last term that I would employ in saying he makes his own being the measure of all things" (*Ecrits*, 64).

A word on performatives. It should be clear that in this tendency to read Lacan as dealing with a person and a symbolic system, what is neglected is the real. Lee writes quite extensively about the real, but a certain slippage should be noted. Acts of speech, he says, carry a demand for recognition, and although we might believe that these demands are simply ours, the very structure of speech, as intersubjective, reveals the extent to which we are always already dependent upon others. This is entirely correct, and in a certain sense one can therefore say that a demand--any utterance--is not simply a *statement* expressing intentions, but also an *act*, and even a "speech act," since it wants to have effects. Lee says this "not only makes demand an essentially intersubjective phenomenon, it also highlights the performative power of language to effect changes" (75). Within limits, this account is quite correct, and Lacan's graph of desire shows where we might locate the trajectory of such "acts." The problem is that, again, a certain Hegel--the Hegel of the (conscious) struggle between two (only two, no Other)--dominates here. Like the notion of labor, which is also an "act" that transforms the world, speech is taken--I now finish Lee's sentence--to show "the power of language to effect changes *in the world outside the speaker*." The "performative" speech act is thus the act of a subject who works his will upon the world outside, at the same time depending upon the other's reply. Like labor, speech produces--we now introduce the term--the real. In Lee's words, "Demand introduces 'the effect of a signifier' into the real." Thus we see that "human languages . . . are essentially performative" (75). We have here a description which, by focusing on the acts of subjects (persons) in an I-Thou relation, effectively brackets out the problem of the Other (not another subject), and reduces the question of the real to that reality upon which the slave's labor works its performance. All of which we

can link to the earlier remarks about coming to stand again at the center of one's history: "what Lacan terms true speech," Lee writes, "is the *realization* in this subjective self-narrative of his essential being-toward-death." This accomplishment, this act, "is the full realization--that is, the full 'making real' in his self-narration--of the fact that he is mortal" (92). The

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conception of speech as performative thus links up here with a conception of the real as a sort of concrete reality which, like the productions of those who work, makes the world in its image. For Lacan, however, the real does not have this concrete, material form, but is rather that which is missing--let me stress this point--both from the subject's (the person's) actions, *and* from the structure, the symbolic codes, which are the two dimensions that Saussure and Hegel and Lévi-Strauss provide for many readers like Lee. Instead of saying "that human languages," as Lee puts it, "are essentially performative" (75), then, we would do better to say that human language is distinct from signs in the animal world, not because they work, but because they "mal-function" --and this is why they have bearing on the real.

Mortality is not something we can get our hands on. Lee writes that "the fully analysed analysand is most comparable to Hegel's slave, who has authentically assumed his being-toward death" (96). "Analysis," he says, "liberates the subject from the alienation resulting from the unconscious play of desire, by bringing to the level of *conscious realization* the effects of desire." On this very page, however, Lee also cites Lacan, who speaks clearly of that other real, the one that neither the subjective individual, nor the symbolic grid, can master. And its name is death, with all the temporal difficulties that attend its meaning:

So when we wish to attain *in the subject* what was *before the serial articulations of speech*, and what is *primordial to the birth of symbols*, we find it in death, from which his existence takes on all the meaning it has.

What is this thing "in the subject" here, more in you than you, and marked by that strange temporality of the "first cause" that makes it, like the gods, *before* the very birth of speech, *primordial* even to the symbol, unspeakable, unsymbolizable, but that from which "existence takes on all the meaning it has"? Lacan adds a sentence: "This mortal meaning reveals *a center exterior to language*," not symbolic, not personal, but that which, at the traumatic origin, "is more than a metaphor," though it has everything to do with the primary metaphorization by which the human being is *capable* of death, and *obliged* to speak, without knowing the hour of mortal time, or what to say in the face of it.

Jonathan Scott Lee has written the beginning of a very fine book: we wait in anticipation of what will follow when the moment is, as

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Hamlet says, the "ready" one.

Charles Shepherdson
University of Missouri-Columbia

Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Jacques Lacan: The Absolute Master*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

You can judge a book by its "colors," it would seem: this, at any rate, is what Borch-Jacobsen has done with Lacan's work, as well as what he would have us do with his.

Thus, after a long quotation from Lacan, we read "One almost feels like applauding--and why not, since everything shows we are at the theater" (79). And elsewhere, he plays the "convinced" reader who protests too much: "And really, how could it be otherwise" (138)--a gesture that seems intended to undermine whichever of Lacan's claims has just been presented, by colorful gesture rather than by argument, as, for example, "we understand why Lacanian analysis is a long (very long) speech" (139). Yes, we understand. Or the tactical juxtaposition of a derogatory adjective with what would otherwise pass for an analysis: "we must ask what this abrupt reintroduction of the subject can mean" (187)--as if to say, with one side of the mouth, "let us follow the argument here," while a stage whisper from the other side says "who could really believe this?"

A great number of important connections are "touched upon," in a breathless rush that is almost entertaining, were it not in the end frustrating in its refusal to say as much as it wishes to appear to say. We are given this, for instance, in a single paragraph: "Obviously, Lacan's whole complex reformulation of the Oedipal complex ultimately rests on the rigid 'dualist ontology' of Kojève," and then, "As for the recourse to the Lévi-Straussian theory . . . it only dresses up that profound ontological appeal by furnishing it with a sort of 'scientific' guarantee" (225).

The tone of the entire book runs this way: it asks us to find it clever, but it proves increasingly annoying--until the end, at which point even the cleverness disappears, to be replaced by opinion, as though the reader were now sufficiently impressed to need no demonstrations at all, but could simply be told what to think: "trying to do anything with the Lacanian mathemes would be as silly as trying to make a surrealist 'bachelor-machine' work" (162-3); or "Lacan was the last to believe in his fictions, and his

project was actually completely different [and] perfectly cynical . . . to use science for magic's ends" (163). As though the tone of Lacan's writing annoyed Borch-Jacobsen, who could not but be annoying in turn, in a kind of aggressive and jealous identification.

One might be tempted to wish that the book were less breathless and flashy, since Borch-Jacobsen seems to have read enough, and understood enough, to write a genuinely useful book; but he is clearly too angry and impatient to have written a different book than this. And when one looks past the colorful surface, to consider more closely what appears to be a wide degree of reading, even the reference to thinkers other than Lacan proves disappointing. One example. What is ultimately at stake for the author is evidently that Lacan's theory loses touch with "reality," replacing "actual experience" with images and language: "why, after all," he complains, "should true life always be elsewhere" (70); and "theorized or reflected affect, as everyone knows, is no longer lived affect" (59). Thus, "the world Lacan describes as strictly 'human' is the most inhuman of possible worlds" (59). The author is thus led to advocate, against Lacan, a return to affect (understood as pre-imaginary and prelinguistic). "The Lacanian ego is the ego as it theorizes itself, never as it feels 'itself' or experiences 'itself'" (57). One might ask whether the fact that Lacan provides a theory of the imaginary also means that the individual person actually

experiences that theory, in place of life--as though the planets circulate because they have read Newton. But let us turn to our example, the learning that the book wears so lightly

Borch-Jacobsen frequently cites Heidegger as a source capable of denouncing those "specular" and "theoretical" aspects of Lacan's work that appear to be most complicit with "meta-physics"--its denial of the body, its refusal of affect, its linguistic constructions that lose track of "reality." Lacan's supposed privileging of the visual at the expense of what Borch-Jacobsen calls "feeling" or "experience" should thus be subjected to the same critique which Heidegger makes of Plato's "vision of essences" (60-63). And yet, as Heidegger himself suggests, only a being that speaks can have affect, not the "pain and pleasure" of natural life, not "sensation," not "perception," but *Stimmung*, in particular the "affects" (guilt, anxiety, boredom) which disclose Dasein's being-toward-death, precisely by way of Dasein's primordial relation to the other through speech. "*Stimme*-" suggesting both mood and voice, thus indicates the original link between language and affect in Heidegger. We

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must make a "distinction between state-of-mind and the reflective apprehending of something 'within,'" Heidegger writes, adding that "having a mood is not related to the psychological in the first instance, and is not an inner condition" such as the "psychology of moods" understands it.¹ Phenomenology in fact suggests the naivete of the "natural attitude" that gives the notions of "perception" and "sensation" a "pre-discursive" status. In short, according to Heidegger, affect cannot be understood as a pre-discursive "feeling" that might show us the "reality" of the subject prior to imaginary or symbolic influence.

Thus, Borch-Jacobsen objects that Lacan gives us "a subject of *representation* (and not of an immediate certitude--that of affect, for example)" (189), and draws on Heidegger for this argument; yet if one turns to *Being and Time*, Heidegger is explicit: "State-of-mind," he writes, "is characterized equiprimordially by *discourse*" (Heidegger's italics). As Heidegger points out else-where, what are "well-known ontically under the terms 'affects' and 'feelings' . . . have always been under consideration in philosophy." But we should not confuse the philosophical consideration with the recent "framework of 'psychology'" On the contrary: "Aristotle investigates the *pathe* [affects] in the second book of his *Rhetoric*" (138). The truth always speaks, as Lacan might say: Borch-Jacobsen gives us a plea on behalf of affect and "reality"--a plea whose colors are those of rhetoric.

Charles Shepherdson
University of Missouri-Columbia

Notes

1. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 134. Pagination follows that of the seventh (and subsequent) German editions, *Sein und Zeit* (Tubingen: Neomarius Verlag, 1953). References will appear henceforth in the text.

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