

BOOK REVIEWS

Mark Bracher. *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Mark Bracher's *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change* is founded on an extended series of confluences, principally: 1) audience with culture, 2) discourse with symptom, 3) identification with desire, and 4) analogy with metaphor. However, I would not like simply to dismiss these confluences, since Mr. Bracher tells his readers he does, in fact, mean to make them. For example, he admits that desire is not identification, yet "given this close interaction between desire and identification, I have decided to treat identification as a mode of desire" (22). Neither do I want to think Mr. Bracher's position can be whimsically cast off with a "well, it's close enough for government work." After all, his hopes for the book are quite high; he wants it to be helpful, useful, and valuable, "to help foster a better society, in which suffering and injustice are reduced and enjoyment and fulfillment are increased" (x).

Bracher's goal, in short, is to establish THE GOOD of cultural criticism.

But how is that to be done? I would say that Bracher must propose cultural criticism over and against any one thing which tries to set a condition on the good of cultural criticism by comparing the good of the one thing to the good of cultural criticism; Lacan said this about Kant's categorical imperative ("Kant with Sade").

Bracher defines the parameters of his project in terms that are only apparently different. THE DIFFICULTY: there has been "a betrayal of the public trust" fomented principally by humanities professors "who have variously ignored, denied or even celebrated

the inconsequential nature of their own critical activity, resting content with platitudes about liberal education." THE SOLUTION: encourage systematic reflection on and intervention in the psychological, social, and political effects that various texts and discourses might produce in those who receive and consume them" (1).

Professor Bracher's solution takes its specific form in a discussion against academic discourse whose only goal, he says, is the production of knowledge, not--mind you--the production of an S_1 to serve as the ground for a knowledge, S_2 . In this manner, Mr. Bracher is able to say there is such a thing as "the academic knowledge." "The Academic knowledge," then, is the some thing over and against which he hopes his readers will "further empower human beings" and (in light of which) his cultural criticism might curiously illuminate itself: "That is, I do not want myself or my readers to rest content with the satisfaction produced by the knowledge presented or made possible by this book. Rather, I want this knowledge to serve as a means for promoting large-scale psychological change" (57). In the absence of the object (of knowledge), Mr. Bracher would like to encounter a voice of conscience, "a psychological change" which, though fraught with significance, predates (at least logically) metaphor, invective, and verbal abuse (perhaps even his own).

This is "the point" (and I mean this literally in structural terms) of Bracher's cultural criticism: NO METAPHORS ALLOWED. NO Eggheads. NO Garlic Eaters. NO Poles. And finally, one might ask on behalf of Mr. Bracher, without Poles what use is there for Poland? In this manner--without metaphor (and subsequently no means of retaining the metonymy of desire)--Mr.

Bracher "can" obviate the problem of maintaining the universality of his "psychological change" in the promise which the evaporation of the symptom holds.

David Metzger
English Department
Old Dominion University

Eugène Lemoine-Luccioni. *Psychanalyse pour la Vie Quotidienne*. Bibliothèque des Analytica.
Paris: Navarin, 1987. 202 pp.

Che vuoi?

This text, masterful in the way it leads one along the different strands of a complex theoretical web, creatively weaves together the

94

analytic experience. Not only does it thereby demonstrate that at the "level at which analysis operates there is no region of man that is not implicated," as beautifully expressed by Lemoine, but it also manages to present knowledge in the form of a fiction that avoids any dogmatism.

As this work repeatedly points out, the discourse of the master, which is the exploitation of S_2 by S_1 , the master signifier, is a dogmatism that never allows the subject to come to light, to "spark" between the signifiers that represent him or her for another signifier. Lemoine's work moves in the opposite direction. Focussing on the element that enables the articulation of desire, namely the object *a*, she shows, impressively, how psychoanalysis is the practice of speech in which "*the analysand recovers the use of his own language. The analysand no longer speaks everyone's language, not that of this or that master He does not even speak the language of the analyst, which was never given to him to be listened to as analysand. He has to invent his own*" (47).

The difference between analysis, psychotherapy and psychodrama is described with remarkable clarity. Lemoine is never polemical about the importance of any one, preferring to emphasize that in "*analysis one takes into consideration the truth of the unconscious subject who is the guarantor of structure*" (118).

Lemoine lucidly illustrates how any statement made by the analysand is legitimate in analysis, since the analyst listens to the utterance, *énonciation*, of the unconscious subject. It is not a matter of comparing the analysand's declaration with a normative reality but rather a question of understanding to whom the analysand's statement is addressed. To try to give sense to the analysand's discourse results in "*causing the analytical process to stop. If the analyst does not respond, the analysand is confronted with a 'che vuoi?' and with his or her own fantasy*" (119). This literary work is supported by, indeed founded on, clinical cases and their vicissitudes, in their uniqueness facing the overwhelming "che vuoi?" for those who come to confront it.

Renata Volich
47 rue Bonaparte
Paris 75006

La Querelle des Diagnostics - Collection "cliniques". Paris: Navarin, 1986. 184 pp.

95

Resignifying the Cause

Many have been the times when psychoanalysis has been referred to as the tower of Babel, in which soliloquies take place at the expense of fruitful dialogue which could enrich the analytical field, and which could help it to yield elements to deal with the clinical practice overcoming its limitations. When all is said and done, after the sometimes acrimonious dispute around what is the most appropriate interpretation or the best guide to make a diagnosis, there is the fact that the patient, who should be the greatest beneficiary of the diagnostic instruments, may end up being overlooked.

The collectanea under the name "Cliniques", of which the book *La Querelle des Diagnostics* is the first, offers "a space for both clinical and epistemological confrontations not only concerning psychoanalysis but also psychology, psychiatry and clinical psychopathology" (179).

In his essay on *English Psychiatriy and the War*, Lacan demonstrates how English psychiatry in the 1940s was still engaged in adapting recalcitrant people in the army, something that was done apart from every effort involving primary and coercive adaptation. At that time, the schools of Lewin and Bion were interested in experimental researches in which the group's structure would run in opposite direction to that of individualism or collectivism, so abusive and destructive for the person. Lacan follows their work most attentively and underlines the importance of rescuing, even in an impasse, the vivid force of an intervention.

La Querelle des Diagnostics embraces a vast field ranging from the question of DSM III-R, and the risk of a rigid and objective diagnostic framework (that would mark a patient with a label for the rest of his life) to the matter of having different diagnostic systems according to the classification of mental diseases.

The article entitled "Diagnostics in Psychiatry, why do it?" illustrates that "in any case, the diagnostic or its absence is in reference to the approach used and the aim pursued. One of the dangers remains in the absence of a permanent conscience of the existing diversity and in the use by everyone of the same words covering different concepts" (80).

The way adopted by different clinicians has deep roots in their own professional journey and entails transference with those involved in it. However, by setting aside an idolatrous subservience that can be conducive to iatrogenicity, one should understand that it is out of differences that mental health professionals can escape the confinement that narcissism imposes.

96

The confrontation and acknowledgement of different domains in psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis, so profuse in this book, can give clinicians more resources to deal with the invaluable question so beautifully formulated by Macbeth:

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow:

Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
And, with some sweet, oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff,
Which weighs upon the heart?

Renata Volich
47 rue Bonaparte
Paris 75006
France

Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*.
Cambridge: MIT Press. Index. 188 pp. (0-262-24031-9) hb. \$25.00.

One of the most appealing and powerful aspects of Slavoj Zizek's rhetoric has been his continual use of illustrations from popular culture. Such a tactic catches us at our most vulnerable: in the place where we thought to have escaped from the pressures of serious familial and national concerns. Particularly in the dark warmth and seclusion of the cinema, we are disconcerted to have the exit doors brusquely thrown open. Any discomfort at this intrusive de-mystification is rapidly succeeded by an appetite for more knowledge, since the experience is not only salutary but also exciting. Extending the metaphor, one can say that, from those exit doors, it is the sunlight that glares in upon the darkness of the Real, even though it be more dazzling than that at the mouth of Plato's Cave, the Real remains impossible to conceptualize. "Impossible" is Lacan's term: the Real is called "impossible" because it cannot be brought within the scope of the Symbolic. Like the God of the medieval mystic, it can only be worded at the philosophical level by negations and indirections, the Real "of whom nought may be said." But, as Zizek's book shows, it can be revealed at the level of experience by its effects, for in those effects what is "impossible" proves itself real enough. Since through its resistance to direct description it distorts both the operations of the Symbolic and the objective realities the Symbolic appears to uphold, this distortion

97

has become both a figure for what is resisting direct description and a symptom of it. Zizek's book is an account of the strategies adopted by consumers ignoring and by critics detecting that resistance. He achieves two aims, for he both employs Lacan's thought and shows it at work. Indeed, the book might equally have been subtitled *An Introduction to Popular Culture through Jacques Lacan* which is evidence for its success; it is remarkable both as exegesis of Lacan and as critical explication of popular culture, in particular Alfred Hitchcock's films. But it has a still wider reach, for popular culture is nothing if not ideological: it encourages him to explore current political issues, such as the ecology crisis and the problem of defining democracy after the disappearance of Stalinism. One remembers that Zizek was a candidate for president of Slovenia.

The Real is the core of the book, determining its three parts. 1. a look at the split between the Real and reality; 2. an examination of Hitchcock's films; and 3. an analysis of the irruption of the Real within "every ideological edifice" (p. ix). What is common is the mismatch between Symbolic interpretation and the ground of the Real. Part I provides the first of many examples of

Zizek's agility in moving from one discipline to another. Beginning in philosophy, appropriately with Zeno's paradoxes--the Ur-example of the failure of definition to capture the infinity of existence--he cites from Jean-Claude Milner the unnoticed fact that each paradox has a noble model in mythic literature, a hallowed part of the Symbolic becoming satirized in the philosophical fable. Where in Homer, "as in a dream", Achilles "did not succeed that day in attaining Hector"¹ as he pursued him on the battlefield, so, in profound mockery, in the story of 'Achilles and the Tortoise', Achilles does not succeed in attaining the Tortoise; the reason centers on the impossibility of finally wording the continuum through which all races are run, whatever the desire, whatever the goal.

Having shown the impossibility of capturing the Real in numberwords, Zizek then discusses the impossibility of its being worded in desire. He supplies an illustration from contemporary science fiction, a short story by Robert Sheckley, to reveal how one's desire takes the form of desire for the unattainable. After a global nuclear disaster, a survivor pays out his remaining treasure in order to be imaginarily transported into reliving a mundane year of his pre-nuclear family life. Zizek reads this as a fable about the Lacanian object a: on returning to his post-nuclear life, the survivor recognizes the circularity of his pursuit, the ineffable promise of the Symbolic, never to be fulfilled, but without the lure of which it

could not function. The real of our desire is hidden behind common everyday reality, emerging only unexpectedly and unrecognizably, as in the printed text of *Looking Awry*, where we are told that we "must take into account" (sic) that "it is precisely and only in dreams that we encounter the real of our desire" (p. 17), performatively proving that the "account" has to go beyond the dream.

In Part I, Zizek also analyses the two main types of detective stories, the "logic-and-deductive" form and the "hard-boiled private eye" one. The first is characterized as going from the "lawless sequence" to the "lawful sequence", with normality re-established by the detective(-psychoanalyst) through his re-reading of the murderer's false narrative, discovering the truth *in the very mode of its false telling*. The second is seen as revealing the detective, not as detached spectator, but as drawn into the false narrative, involved with the disturbing events he himself relates, the solution all the more reassuring because of our imaginary involvement with him. In all such narratives the disturbance of the Real is brought back within the scope of the Symbolic.

In his book *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Zizek used Hitchcock's films to reveal the nature of the "Macguffin", the little bit of the Real that destabilizes the "homeostatic" balance of the Symbolic and gives the impetus to the story, which ends only when the balance has been restored. In *Looking Awry* he discerns another mode, how people are drawn into something by having to pretend to be it, for in social-symbolic reality "things ultimately *are* precisely what they pretend to be" (p. 74). The theme of transference of guilt often appears in Hitchcock's films, an outstanding example being *Strangers on a Train*, in which one protagonist seeks to transfer to another the guilt of a murder. The frightening thing, a "Real Thing", is the emergence of this unwanted Real guilt within the Symbolic, with the Other (police) in pursuit of the would-be innocent victim. Further modes in which the balance is disturbed concern the Real impossibility of the sexual relationship (*The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *The Rear Window*), the threat of the maternal superego (*North by Northwest*, *The Birds*), and the clash between the empirical and the fantasy woman (*Vertigo*, *The Lady Vanishes*).

In part III, Zizek first explores the relation of Real, Imaginary and Symbolic, relating them to the circulation of lack, the object-cause of desire--the absence that the object *a* is supposed to fill. The Symbolic makes its impossible demand upon the Real, producing the object *a* and ignoring the contradictions that arise therefrom; the Real invades the Imaginary, inducing terrifying hallucinatory

99

objectifications of itself; the interrelation of Imaginary and Symbolic is tied to the lack in the Other. Zizek typifies each of these relations round the Lacanian triangle with examples from popular fictions. Within the triangle, emanating from the Real, is *jouissance*, threatening to "swallow us all", as he illustrates with an allusion to Patricia Highsmith's short story "The Pond" (p. 133).

The book concludes with a timely consideration of the problems of democracy. Zizek subverts the Enlightenment's idealization of voting subjects who are to be legally accepted as equal citizens "without regard for race, sex, religion; etc." (p. 163), arguing that their concrete social ties cannot be set aside. Maintaining the liberal stance by endeavoring to separate the public and the private cannot be done, for commitment to the superego of the public duty involves a secret obscene enjoyment, one that, as Lacan has shown, Sade bears witness to against Kant. There is an inevitable "leftover" from the liberal calculation of formal equality, an equality that must be recognized as a "symbolic fiction". Here his view accords with that of Cornelius Castoriadis, in that what is required is a Symbolic maintained imaginarily--"I know very well" (that the democratic form is stained by pathological imbalance), "but all the same" (I will act as if democracy were possible). The cultural critic, the philosopher, the psychoanalyst, the sociologist, and the consumer of popular culture alike will be provoked by this juxtaposing of a difficult thinker with a deceptively simple field.

Elizabeth Wright
Girton College
Cambridge

Notes

1. Homer, *The Iliad*, XXII, 199-201.