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WPR seeks to review books on Feminist Theory and Gender Theory likely to be of interest to philosophers, as well as books in Philosophy likely to be of interest to those working on Women and Gender. Both Feminist Theory and Philosophy are understood in a broad and non-partisan sense.

WPR is published three times a year. The Spring and Autumn issues are general issues. The third issue each year is a Special Issue, with a focus on articles in an area of Feminist Philosophy chosen by a team of Guest Editors.

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Material for WPR

- **Book Reviews** to Margaret Whitford
- **News** to Alison Stone, News Co-ordinator, 2B Cowper Road, Cambridge, CB1 3SN, UK (alison.l.stone@btinternet.com)
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WOMEN'S PHILOSOPHY REVIEW

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## EDITORIAL

There is a distinctly Australian feel to *Women's Philosophy Review*, issue no 19. First of all, the Editor is proud to present Susan James' interview with two visitors from Australia, Genevieve Lloyd and Moira Gatens, who write and develop their philosophies both singly and conjointly. The two Australians could be characterised as feminist Spinozists, as also could the interviewer who asks the visitors to the UK the obvious question: 'Why combine a passion for Spinoza with feminism?'

As the sympathetic, yet probing, interview moves on, it becomes clear why the philosophy of Spinoza should be so richly productive for feminist philosophers. It's a compelling read, and one that shows clearly the power of Spinoza to re-cast issues that emerge at the conjunction of ethics, politics and ontology.

One such issue involves the tragic history of the relation between indigenous and non-indigenous people in colonial Australia. Here we find reference to the British colonists' myth that they were discovering—and exiling their own unwanted citizens—to an 'empty land'. Lloyd and Gatens' Spinozistic approach foregrounds the question of citizenship. They share a concern to redress inequalities of power, but without relying on assumptions about universal, human rights. Instead, questions of history move centre stage, and questions of how to re-imagine the relationship between the polity and the citizen in ways that can pay attention to (racial and sexual) specificity.

Another aspect of the 'Australian' feel to *WPR* no 19 is Janice Richardson's review of *Going Australian: Reconfiguring Feminism and Philosophy*, a conference that took place in the UK in February 1998. This was an extraordinarily invigorating occasion for all those who attended the papers by the seventeen speakers from Australia, plus one from New Zealand. The letters, postcards and emails that are still reaching the organisers about this event six months later indicate that this might indeed have become 'part of the legendary history of feminist philosophy'—as one postcard from two UK delegates who were also attending the 1998 *International Association of Women Philosophers* in Boston so memorably put it.

What adds still more to the Australian character of *WPR* 19 is the fact that a number of the books reviewed in this issue are Australian.

These books are Penelope Deutscher's *Yielding Gender*, Jean Curthoys' *Feminist Amnesia*, Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman's *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, whilst Janice Richardson adds to the continuity of WPR 19 by exploring the 'Why Spinoza?' question further in her review of Genevieve Lloyd's *Guidebook to Spinoza and the Ethics*. Penelope Deutscher is also one of the reviewers in this issue, as is also another Australian, Rosalyn Diprose.

Of course, there are also important contributions to WPR 19 that do not reflect the Australian theme. Foremost amongst these is Jean Grimshaw's thoughtful and lively review essay on 'The Body in Feminist Theory and Philosophy'. Interestingly, a number of the issues that we meet in the Lloyd and Gatens' interview also re-surface here. In particular, there is a concern with how to re-imagine the body in ways that are non-dualist and that also recognise the specificities of sex.

A number of the other books reviewed in this issue—Haraway, Shildrick and the anthology of *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*—also pick up strongly on the theme of the body, whilst the collection of essays by Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*, addresses the question of race from the perspective of India and the 'third-world', but in ways that reveal continuities with Lloyd and Gatens' approach.

Other significant contributions to this issue include a review of the SWIP conference on *The Politics of Knowing* in April 1998, and a further conference report on a conference at the ICA in May 1998 which included Luce Irigaray amongst the speakers. Here again there are links with other themes in this issue. Thus, for example, Daphne Hampson was the main organiser of that conference on 'post-conventional religion'. Her recent book, *After Christianity*, is reviewed here by Grace Jantzen who chaired that event.

The Editor would like to thank all those whose contributions have made this issue possible, as well as those reviewers whose offerings have been held over until future issues because of pressures of space. We do, however, still need more reviewers and writers of features, as well as help with the production of the journal. We also **urgently** need more library subscriptions if the journal is to pay for the editorial help that is required if it is to survive. If you know a library that might be interested, please pass a copy of WPR on to the Librarian with your recommendation. The Editor will provide a complimentary copy of

WPR no 18 to any reader seriously interested in finding Bookshops and Libraries willing to take the journal. Please also try and interest friends and colleagues in subscribing to WPR direct or in joining the *Society for Women in Philosophy* (UK).

Finally, readers should not forget that the next issue of WPR (no 20) is the first of the Guest Edited issues. The theme is *Feminist Political Philosophy*, and Diemut Bubeck and Alex Klaushofer will be responsible for the content. This issue is available free of charge to WPR subscribers, but also only to those SWIP members who have paid the full UK rate. Other SWIP members who want to buy Special Issue at a reduced rate should contact the SWIP Treasurer and Secretary, Kimberly Hutchings (address on the inside cover of this issue).

The next general issue of WPR (no 21) will appear in Spring 1999 when the interview will be with the Italian feminist philosopher, Adriana Cavarero, and when the review essay will be Alessandra Tanesini writing on Feminist Philosophy of Language. I'm already looking forward to reading it ... so please help sign up those libraries, bookshops, colleagues and friends.

Christine Battersby  
University of Warwick

**Women/Philosophy—In Conversation**  
no 3 in a series of *WPR* Conversations

**THE POWER OF SPINOZA:  
FEMINIST CONJUNCTIONS**

Susan James Interviews  
**Genevieve Lloyd and Moira Gatens**

**Spinoza/Feminism and Other Relations**

SJ When one writes about past philosophers, the question of *how* to write about them is always present. You have each written independently about Spinoza, and you are now working together on a book which shows how his philosophy bears on a number of contemporary issues. You must have thought a lot about where commentary ends and appropriation begins.

GL The task we're engaged on is not just free association with Spinoza, a matter of exticating common ideas that we find usable. I think it is the kind of reading that can be grounded in an interpretation of how Spinoza's texts are put together, and I would certainly want that to be the case.

There is some appropriation insofar as what we are doing is reading the Spinozan texts through a lens which is guiding our choice of what to say, because we want to deal with contemporary issues—including issues about feminism—that require a reconceptualisation of the imaginary.

SJ How has it come about that you have each focused on what might initially seem the rather unpromising figure of Spinoza, as a way of developing your ideas about gender in philosophy?

GL I think I first became interested in the relation between Spinoza and the feminist questions partly because he offers an alternative to Cartesian ways of thinking about the body and its relation to the mind. That was certainly one thing that I was interested in.

But it's not the case that I had a pre-existing agenda of feminist questions that I took to Spinoza. My interest in Spinoza pre-dated wanting answers to those questions. I think my initial interest in Spinoza really arose quite accidentally.

I was educated in a predominantly analytic approach to philosophy, and at some stage in the 1970s I came to feel the lack of an education in history of philosophy. It was not that I hadn't studied the philosophical canon, but it had somehow always been taught in a completely ahistorical way that treated past philosophers as if they had answers—usually mistaken answers—to questions that were part of the agenda of contemporary professional philosophy. The idea was that one took our philosophical problems back to historical texts and extracted from them supposed answers to our contemporary questions. I came to think that this was a total distortion of the texts themselves. So I set out to re-educate myself in the history of philosophy from the seventeenth century, starting from Descartes. I was going to work my way through to the twentieth century, but I got stuck on Spinoza for many years.

SJ Why did Spinoza exert such a fascination?

GL I think—although at the time I only had these thoughts in a very incoherent form—it was largely because Spinoza spoke in an alternative voice, engaging with, and offering alternatives to, ways of thinking that I now see in retrospect as being the residue of Cartesianism in contemporary philosophy.

I found that when I read Spinoza, what it was saying to me was, 'Here is an alternative way of looking at these issues'. So the mind/body distinction became something entirely different. When Spinoza talked about the mind as the idea of the body, this offered a way of thinking which was radically different from mind/body opposition. So it wasn't that I brought a set of feminist questions to Spinoza, but rather that, through reading Spinoza, I became aware of what I thought were inadequacies in our prevailing thought patterns, which had in fact been thoroughly formed through Cartesian philosophy. Not necessarily through the

historical Descartes, but through ways in which that had filtered into the culture. The explicit formulation of a feminist agenda only came much later.

SJ So was it in a way accidental that it was Spinoza? For instance, could it have been Merleau-Ponty who played this role? Or was it important that it was someone a bit further back in the tradition?

GL I think it was important that it was someone historically closer to Descartes. But there is also a real fascination exerted by Spinoza's texts, even in the first reading when you don't understand them at all—and I must say they were initially quite incomprehensible to me. It's the kind of philosophy you can read and engage with without much comprehension because it just draws you in. There is a real magnetism that comes, I think, from the text itself, just from the quality of that mind, the kinds of issues it raises, its mode of philosophical thinking.

SJ Absolutely. There is something awe-inspiring about Spinoza isn't there? A sense that no one can quite do this justice, but that there is something wonderful to be found.

GL It would be very unfair to those texts to start in the other direction, as it were, to say, 'I have got a feminist agenda, I have got questions I want answered, I'll see what Spinoza has to say, and if I don't much like his answers then I'll go on to Merleau-Ponty.'

I think in my case it was a matter of following the texts and catching up with the movement of thought. What I appropriated from it later was much further down the track.

SJ So reading Spinoza helped you to articulate questions which later came to seem questions for feminists?

GL Reading him helped me to articulate what I had misgivings about in the Cartesian tradition. And that's no accident, because Spinoza was engaging with exactly that.

SJ Moira, how did you get interested in Spinoza?

MG I guess the 'Why Spinoza?' question is a very different story for me. As an undergraduate at the University of New South Wales I had a training in mainly analytic philosophy, with a few other things mixed in—such as a bit of Sartre and some feminist theory. In my honours year I worked on psychoanalytic theory. Then, as a PhD student, I went to the Department of General Philosophy at the University of Sydney, which was a continental, and political and, at that time, a Marxist-feminist Department. I saw Sydney as freedom, as a place where I could do whatever I wanted.

When I first started my PhD my aim was to write an entire thesis on hysteria. It would have gone—I was only twenty one!—from the ancient Greeks and the Egyptians, through to the present, to *anorexia nervosa* and so on. I guess maybe a bit of common sense prevailed at some point. But I was interested in the mind/body problem, and what interested me in the issue of hysteria as Freud articulated it, was, as he puts it, 'the mysterious leap' from the mind to the body. What is this mysterious leap?

So there I was, embarking on this huge project about hysteria, mind/body, and so on. Eventually I became dissatisfied with the way the mind/body problem was articulated by Freud and I saw, obviously, that this problem had a long genealogy in the history of philosophy. So I decided to go back—not to the beginning, but to Descartes.

At that point, I only had a fairly crude reading of Descartes. I re-read his works, and I read his *Passions of the Soul*. There's a common thread with Jenny in that I'm self-educated in the history of philosophy. I got virtually none as an undergraduate. Descartes, Spinoza and Hume are the three figures I used for one section of my PhD thesis. By then, the problem had branched out. It wasn't just the mind/body problem which interested me. I was interested in the mind/body problem, and its relation to the reason/passion split and the nature/culture split. I thought these were the three dualisms that really needed to be investigated. It was really that sort of arrogance and boldness of youth—that 'Oh

I can look at mind/body, reason/passion, culture/nature from the seventeenth century to the present.'

I suppose I was interested in Spinoza for reasons similar to Jenny's; he seemed an interesting counterpoint to Descartes. But I also think Spinoza is hilariously funny a lot of the time, so it was a pleasure—a real pleasure—to work on him. And because my interests also had a political dimension—which was not true of many of the commentators on Spinoza that I read—I studied his political treatises very carefully, along with the *Ethics*.

At that point—and I suppose in some way I still believe this, although I'm not sure if it would stand up to really thorough scrutiny—at that point, anyway, I was convinced that, of all the philosophers, Spinoza had managed to achieve a consistency and workability between his ontological, epistemological and political writings. This was of particular interest to me as a feminist, because in reading the history of philosophy I was so used to finding authors who would say 'all human beings are like this' or 'the mind has no sex' in their ontological or epistemological writings, but undercut such claims in their political work. As soon as you turned to their political work odd things would start happening and women would be excluded.

Women are excluded from political participation in Spinoza, too, but I think for different reasons than usually. Even then, before I'd read any Deleuze, I thought that Spinoza's notion of reason was an active emotion, so that there's not a clear reason/passion split in his thought. And the same with nature/culture. There was not a clear nature/culture split in Spinoza because, according to him, the human is not a kingdom within a kingdom, a power within a power. We *are* part of nature. So Spinoza seemed to me to stand out in the history of philosophy as somebody who allowed one to think problems in a new way. I remember the last bit of my thesis was called 'An Open Conclusion', and it was all about what you could do with Spinoza.

I have to be careful here not to give the impression that I have followed a smooth philosophical trajectory, because I haven't. At that time nobody was interested in Spinoza, and when my thesis was re-worked as a book and published by Polity they

explicitly said that they wanted me to get rid of all the material relating to Spinoza. I thought this material was the most interesting thing—or, rather, the most creative thing—in the original thesis; but the manuscript became *Feminism and Philosophy*, and Spinoza is not there. I had to wait quite a long time before going back to that work.

GL But I think the unities are very salient in Spinoza. Moira was talking about the unity between Spinoza's epistemology, ontology and politics. Although I initially focused almost exclusively on the *Ethics*—I found the political arguments rather harder to get to grips with and didn't know what to make of them until much later—I had a similar reaction to that work. In the *Ethics* you get a very strong unity developed between things that are usually treated as quite separate, such as reason, affect and imagination. Thinking about this unity helps me trace the trajectory of the feminist orientation of my thinking in relation to Spinoza.

When I wrote *The Man of Reason*, which came out in 1984, I was already quite fascinated by Spinoza, although in the book Spinoza is handled in one sentence. Looking back on it this was a bit puzzling—it didn't fit at all—but I think the explanation was that in *The Man of Reason* I was looking at the more negative points of the philosophical tradition, where reason had polarised from emotion. Spinoza already struck me, at that stage, as a moment in the philosophical tradition where polarisation didn't occur. So there was potential there, but it took me a very long time to get back to it to think it through.

This was a moment of the philosophical tradition where the polarisation between reason and other aspects—imagination, affect—was not expressed through the male/female distinction. This meant that if one wanted to break down an alignment or dichotomy between reason and its opposites, and thus between 'male' and 'female', here was a moment of the philosophical tradition that one could turn to see how Spinoza did it, how he avoided the dichotomy. There might be potential there for more constructive ways of thinking both the male/female distinction, and the reason/affect/imagination distinction.

That thought stayed with me, but was never really developed until quite recently. I see what I'm doing with Moira in our new book about Spinoza as a positive appropriation of the philosophical tradition rather than as a negative objection to it. The positive and negative approaches can both be seen as reflecting a feminist perspective on the history of philosophy, but they're very different in spirit. I'm now much more interested in the positive appropriations—in looking *to* sources in the philosophical tradition for ways of re-conceptualising issues that are under current debate, and for ways of opening up our imaginations to alternative ways of thinking, than I am in the more negative criticisms of past philosophers.

#### Restoring the Past

- SJ Restoring a past to feminist philosophy is important to us now, isn't it? Much of the work of the last few years has rejected parts or aspects of the philosophical tradition, and you, Jenny, were one of the people who initiated that terribly important phase. All that had to be gone through first, but now perhaps there are ways of reconnecting ourselves with the past?
- GL I don't think that, for me, it was ever really a matter of 'rejecting' the texts I discussed. But there was certainly a different emphasis in those early stages of feminist critique. I think if I were writing about Descartes now I would do it very differently.
- MG But you could only do that now because what needed to be said has been said, and we can now move on.
- SJ It's interesting how these shifts in feminism reflect and are reflected in shifts in the broader treatment of the history of philosophy. It's relatively easy to see now that feminist criticisms of the divide between reason and emotion, for example, were initially very much in line with phenomenological criticisms of rationalism, the subject/object distinction and so forth. In the same way, the more constructive approach to the tradition that you've been discussing

is reflected elsewhere, for instance in the work of historians and philosophers of science. So it seems that the changing approaches to the history of philosophy that we find in feminism are also part of a broader cultural movement.

- MG I think that's absolutely right. But I also think there's a personal or subjective dimension. At least for me. If this isn't too autobiographical, I remember that when I was reading more broadly in the history of modern philosophy I became at some periods really terribly depressed.

As Jenny said in her lecture 'No-One's Land: Australia and the Philosophical Imagination', it felt as though there was really no place for me here, no home for me.<sup>1</sup> One reads Hobbes or Rousseau or whatever, and in each text you keep getting the sense that your reading position as a woman is just very unpleasant. I suppose you can read just as a disembodied mind, but that is something I have never been very good at. So for me the critiques and the criticism—even though I probably wouldn't want to defend them all now—were necessary to make a home or base for myself.

Somehow I had to elbow in to the conversation so that I had a place, and once one has a place one can be more constructive. One of the things I like about the history of philosophy in general is that when you get to know a particular philosopher you do have conversations with them—with him. I needed to have a position before I could say 'Well yes, this is interesting and this is interesting, and I wonder what could be done with that.'

- GL I think the question of style is very important. I don't mean just the excellence of the thinking. The sheer quality of the thinking voice that you find in Spinoza survives all the awkwardness of the superficial structure of the *Ethics*. You confront a book with a tight, geometrical structure, but as you get into it you forget all that.

In fact, you realise that that's not what drives the structure of the book at all. It's the voice that somehow carries you on. I'm

always drawn into the movement of Spinoza's thought and I find it much easier to assert my own thinking voice in response.

MG You feel in a playful presence, don't you?

GL That's right. There's an enormous intellectual vitality and engaging presence.

MG Well, I think at the point that I became interested in Spinoza he was fairly unmarked. So you felt you had space there.

SJ You were free to interpret him?

MG Yes. This is the other side of the coin about Polity not wanting Spinoza in my book, *Feminism and Philosophy*. Nobody wanted Spinoza at that stage. He hadn't been worked over. This means you did not have to fight through all those secondary authorities, those voices telling you what he was saying. It was possible to engage directly with that text. This was a mind with which it was possible to engage, without relying on the voices of one's teachers telling one what questions it was addressing.

#### Mind/Body

SJ One of the things you have in common is an interest in Spinoza's mind/body distinction, or lack of one, and you each draw enormously rich strands of thought out of his claim that the mind and body are one thing, viewed in two irreducibly different ways. This is a type of position that has been explored by contemporary analytical philosophers, too: by Donald Davidson, for example, in his discussion of anomalous monism. I wonder how you think work done in this analytical tradition on the relation of mind and body relates to your own?

MG I think the thesis about the mind and body that Spinoza develops in the *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* is very different from those discussed in analytical philosophy. One reason is that when Spinoza

says that the mind is the idea of the body, the body is always already in a social context, and the context in which a body grows makes a real difference to the powers and capacities of the individual it becomes.

So for instance, when Spinoza says in the *Tractatus Politicus* that women are rightly excluded from the body politic because men are by nature superior to them, he goes on to say that if women had been equal to men and had shared political power with them, men could have made less use of their abilities. It seems to me that in Spinoza's work this element is always there.

There is also a strange sort of phenomenological element to Spinoza's thought. He says at one point in the *Ethics* that if someone can't imagine doing something, they will not be able to do that thing. This echoes Iris Marion Young's argument in her essay 'Throwing Like a Girl', where she says that if you don't believe you can jump this creek—if you can't imagine yourself doing it—you won't be able to do it. So I think there is already a really interesting social and political dimension to the mind-body thesis in Spinoza. This could be developed in the analytic tradition, but I've not seen it.

GL The social dimension of the individual mind, as Spinoza sees it, also brings in its history. The body bears traces of its own past which have a bearing on how it learns. Despite the common aspects of our experience, the particularity of individual histories in social contexts remains constitutive of human thought.

MG That's right. And because of the way he talks about 'affect', there's no possibility of solipsism.

GL Yes, for Spinoza it's part of the very definition of imagination that this is an awareness of the body as it is impinged upon by other bodies. I am aware of my body only in its relation to other bodies, and this is my only means of access to it. This shifts one's focus onto the social and the collective. That's the key to what's interesting about his treatment of freedom and responsibility. Freedom for him is not individualistic, but a quality of the collective.

MG Which is why so many of those French left intellectuals, such as Althusser, found him interesting. One can't be free alone. You've got to be free with others.

But isn't Spinoza drawing here on a Stoic tradition which is distinct from the Aristotelian and Platonic ones, and in which a particular conception of friendship is crucial to flourishing? And again, this is interesting given the *impasse* between liberalism and communitarianism, because Spinoza offers a model that's neither constructed around the lone individual, nor the suffocating, claustrophobic kind of communitarianism that I find in, say, Alasdair MacIntyre. There's a different way of thinking here about what it would mean to be a citizen, which isn't tied to liberal assumptions about rights. It's a notion that would make sense of the responsibility that we have to others and that they have to us, and of a freedom that is not there to be claimed but can only be created.

SJ Yes, for Spinoza freedom is a kind of security: security from the debilitating passion of sadness. A Stoic would argue that it's possible to secure oneself completely against sadness and thus slavery, and in this respect Spinoza isn't a Stoic because he recognises that we always remain vulnerable. To what extent do you think it's possible to create states in which all citizens are free, in his view? After all, he suggests at one point that rulers need to create a simulacrum of a free state by offering citizens sticks and carrots which will cause them to act as if they were free, even when the citizens themselves can't be relied to co-operate in the ways that actually make one free. And that seems to go against the democratic aspect of Spinoza, and indeed against democratic presuppositions which we tend to take for granted.

MG That's the sort of thing Yirmiyahu Yovel says in his two-volume study of Spinoza. You can never make the multitude wise, all you can do is get them to mimic reason by capturing their imaginations. But I would read that—and I don't think it's a gross indecency to Spinoza's text to read it this way—as saying, sure, that's the base-line. But once you have the appropriate

institutions, the checks and balances, in place, then it's possible in that context for at least some people to become free. This is a real possibility in those conditions, and no possibility at all under other conditions.

And if you take the view, as I do, that for Spinoza subjectivity is always a becoming, and the identity of an individual is always a process which is in turn very much affected by the context in which the individual becomes, then that sort of base-line political theory, even if it starts off from the operation of fear and hope, allows a possibility for the development of reason and freedom.

And if you also believe—I do, actually—that our greatest power lies in reason and understanding, then the *conatus* of the multitude should just push the state in that direction.

SJ So if we translate out of Spinoza-speak, we would be saying something like: 'We can create circumstances in which people see that it's in their best interests to extend the kind of supportive institutions that enable them to realise themselves better, both collectively and individually.'

MG Something like that. Yes. But the idea of the collective as a whole being absolutely free doesn't make sense. We're always becoming free, and the most we can attain is a degree of freedom.

### Rethinking Responsibility

GL This also gives a different way of thinking about what's involved in the exercise of state authority which is less hypocritical and moralistic than others, because it doesn't attribute moral responsibility to individuals. Individual acts are not free in a way that would warrant the imposition of state power interpreted as vengeance, or as rectification of a wrong done. When the state intervenes it is simply saying, 'This has to stop, and in order for it to stop we have to intervene.' It is not saying, 'You are the site of evil through your exercise of freedom, so you must be punished'. Rather, something has gone wrong and the collectivity must

intervene to re-route your energies in a more constructive way out of this black point.

I think there's something immensely valuable in such an approach, for instance in relation to children who kill. When things like this happen, it becomes manifest that something has gone wrong in the collectivity, which must be rectified. So responsibility is always a collective matter. It's not that the individual has not done wrong, but that the individual wrongdoing is in a way irrelevant. What is important is the collectivity setting itself to rights.

- SJ So that raises questions for the collectivity about its own causal history, doesn't it?
- GL Yes, the collectivity needs to reflect on why this problem has erupted here. What is wrong in the surrounding social practices and institutional structures, and how can they be addressed in order to avoid this sort of thing?
- SJ So what may be regarded as the particular failings or misdemeanours of women become the responsibility of the community, which has to look to its history to understand, and try to rectify them. And if we take Spinoza's determinism seriously, does that mean that the community's capacity to rectify its practices will be determined, and also limited, by its own causal history?
- GL I think that has to be accepted.
- MG Communities aren't hermetically sealed though. They're always in conversation with other communities, and the distance one gains through seeing one's own community through the eyes of another is really helpful.
- So, for example, we might say of another community that its practice of clitoridectomy is outrageous. (In fact I believe it is outrageous. I'm not saying it isn't.) But that community might say to us, 'Well, we think it's outrageous that you put your old people away in homes all by themselves, away from their grandchildren.'

This sort of engagement between different cultures is a two-way street, where you get a perspective on yourself and you have a perspective on them. The problem is, of course, that these relations are often not reciprocal.

For example, the relation between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Australia, which Jenny was talking about in 'No-One's Land', is one of domination and subordination. But, nevertheless, if one wants to learn, then the indigenous have a lot to teach the Australian people: about their imaginary, about their self-conception, and about the inaccuracies and distortions these contain. So it's true that there's an overall determinism. But part of what is determining is that one comes in contact with others who don't share the same beliefs and emotions, or the same 'guiding fictions', as Jenny called them in that lecture. Australia isn't *just* a free colony away from the oppressive class system of Britain. It's also a colony that stole the land which other people were living on.

- GL Determinism doesn't exclude reflection. And this is reflected within Spinoza's system where, no matter what happens, reflection on it is always possible.
- SJ And that in turn is made possible by the *conatus*, isn't it, which is always pushing ahead?
- MG Yes. To go back to the feminist issue, one of the things Spinoza offers is a way to open up debates about responsibility within feminism to broader debates. Again, this is something Jenny discussed in that lecture, when she showed that insights that have arisen from feminist appropriations of the history of philosophy may be very productive in thinking about the present relations of privileged whites to indigenous peoples.
- One can't always romantically want to be the 'Other's Other'—always the 'Other'. One has to admit that one has responsibilities, and that one is complicit in relations of domination and subordination where one may not be the subordinate party. I think feminist explorations of race have problematised the notion

of women as the oppressed, and cast doubt on those old 1970s moves that compared women to the colonised—and that tended to forget that at least half of the colonisers were women.

- GL Yes, another way I think it becomes relevant is that if you think through these issues of gender relations in a Spinozistic way, you are much less inclined to blame individual men for what is going on. Instead, you are more likely to try to identify bad social structures and institutions that can be collectively remedied, especially through collective understanding.

When things are going disastrously wrong, one will not try to insert the issue of blame, by saying, for example, 'That man's to blame.' Rather, one will shift attention to understanding the collective social practices that produce these situations. Now, that can sound trite, like a refusal to accept individual responsibility. But it's not a refusal to judge. On the contrary, it is an insistence on understanding—understanding the structures and the individual. Indeed, the possibility of change depends on getting a richer understanding of the structures that produce the bad situation.

### Changing Ourselves

- SJ Isn't there also in Spinoza a theory of self-reflection and self-improvement, which raises the question of what makes us capable of this?

- GL The individual's improvement depends—and there is another Stoic argument here—on rational friendship. That's what makes it possible for us to improve ourselves through individual reflection. None of us can do it on our own.

My capacity to rationally reflect on the negative, diminishing things in my life—and hence to become more free and more rational—depends on my membership of a bigger collectivity in which reason is flourishing. Being able to change things that we want to change in any given situation depends on having public spaces where the collective exercise of reasoning is going on.

One of the problems we are now facing is the erosion of those public spaces, especially of critical reflection on what's going on in society. So I think that there is a Spinozistic insight that can be used there, too. If you want societies which function well, where individuals are not constantly subjected to violence, intrusion, poverty and so on, you have to make sure that the processes of collective thinking are operating well. So public arenas such as universities, independent media, and so on, have to be kept healthy.

- SJ Moira, I wonder if this relates to some of the themes you discuss in Chapter 9 of your recent book, *Imaginary Bodies*, where you start by talking about consciousness-raising, which is a sort of semi-public forum, and then move on to talk about the need for judges to criticise the assumptions on the basis of which they reach judgments?

If we relate this back to what you were talking about earlier, are you saying that women ought to see themselves not just as victims, but as people with responsibilities who are involved in both these levels of collective self-examination?

- MG But I also think that a shift has to take place in the imaginary. Jenny mentioned the past and responsibility, and I think that reflection on the social imaginary shows that, in ways people may or may not be aware of, their imaginaries in relation to certain groups in society are very unreflective.

One thing I said in that book was about what it means to be a woman and a citizen. We have to face up to the fact that a lot of people who are thoroughly in favour of liberal democracy and equality for all, nevertheless hold two contradictory ideas. On the one hand, they believe that women are equal to men and are citizens. On the other hand, they believe that women are—and should be—under the natural authority of men. Now those two ideas can't sit together. Either women are free and equal citizens, or they're under the authority of men—their husbands, or whatever.

Women find themselves in a paradoxical position, and this comes out, for example, in the judgements concerning rape in marriage that I discuss. Of course women are free and equal and are equal citizens, but then again the husband is just using a bit of persuasion in ways that are thought to be O.K.

In the way we live at present everyone is seen as free and equal, but at the same time people have imaginaries and ideas about the relations between the sexes that place some people in subordinate positions. These imaginaries have become embodied in our ways of life and our institutions and are a great support to sexist and racist practices.

### Collective Imaginings

- SJ Can we take further this theme of the imaginary? In Moira's *Imaginary Bodies* we find a deliberately hybrid notion of the imaginary which draws from Spinoza and from the psychoanalytic tradition. How does this notion relate to Spinoza's idea of the imagination?
- GL Spinoza's account of imagination is central to the project of looking to his philosophy for resources to conceptualise freedom and responsibility. It takes very seriously that level at which all knowledge starts—that immediate awareness of what is happening to one's body. And it's only on the basis of that we get to the point of becoming rational. The level of imagination is never transcended in Spinoza. It's always there as the base of knowledge, even where knowledge becomes adequate.
- This is crucial in relation to what we can now appropriate from Spinoza. We can take the idea that there is always a layer of imagination which is to be taken very seriously. It's not a source of distortion and illusion which has to be shed and transcended in order to get on as fast as possible to the superior insights of reason which will be adequate where imagination is inadequate. Nor is the imagination just a feature of individuals. There is a layer of our collective imaginings that forms us. Not that we have no power in relation to it, but it's always there to be reckoned with. It

provides the impetus for the capacities we develop to think positively and engage with things around us.

And there is, I think, a sense of specificity; one understands oneself in a cultural setting in which structures of affective imagination are operating, not in a way that necessarily victimises us, but which we never really transcend. The rational way of life is the collective exercise of understanding of those prevailing images and fictions that govern the way in which our society is organised. We can come to be aware of them, and can come to replace them with better and more constructive fictions.

This is clear in Spinoza's *Ethics* and in the political writings, too. These images and fictions have an ontological part in the structure and forms of our existence. They are vital to our understanding both of what is positive, and what is negative, in our social practices. They are part of the collective imagination, and we have to find ways of identifying them—and to the extent that we can identify them, we have to find ways of becoming free of them. We can exert our power by coming up with more constructive fictions, which will themselves in turn become the precepts that shape social life. A future generation will need to reflect on *its* past, which is now our present freedom, or truth, and may find it in need of transformation.

- SJ This brings us to a further issue: the role of Spinoza's adequate ideas. How do you see them interlacing with the imaginary ideas you've just been talking about?
- GL Well, I see them not as an escape out of the lower levels of inadequate fictions. It's not that we will all be free because we are no longer imagining. That's not a realistic goal or, as far as Spinoza is concerned, a persuasive interpretation. I think the adequate ideas are the points of insight into how the collective imagination is operating. The adequate ideas are the inadequate ideas understood. So we become free insofar as we come to understand the organisation of the collective images which structure our social practices, and hence form our individual selves.

MG I'm not sure I entirely agree with that.

GL You don't?

MG I probably haven't thought about this carefully enough, but if one thinks about the collective or body politic, it just is impossible to form an adequate idea of it. The community, the nation, the body politic, the state or whatever that one is part of is just too complex for this to be possible. One can't form an adequate idea of it, and perhaps the closest one can get to the truth (with a small 't') is that this is necessarily an imaginative aspect of being a human being.

There is an imagination that is received, and which forms one, in relation to which one is fairly passive. Then there's an imagination that is much more active, and perhaps in that sense more adequate or rational, which would be the fiction Jenny was talking about earlier, the fiction that one gives to oneself, or that is negotiated with others.

So, again, to go back to the feminist context, it may well be the case that there has developed historically a masculine imaginary and a feminine imaginary, which of course aren't discrete—they interlock in all sorts of ways. And perhaps one of the tasks of men and women today who want to enjoy a hetero-sociability, rather than a homo-sociability which excludes women from the social sphere, is to imagine a different way of relating to each other, not based on the relations between husband and wife, not based on authority, but based on what Spinoza calls 'friendship'.

I'm not sure about the role of adequate ideas in all this—Spinoza does say that the best polity is one which functions as though it were one mind and one body. Now, one can think of laws and institutions as in a sense the embodied ideas of a body politic, but what could the mind of that body possibly be? How can one form an adequate idea of that body? It seems to me it's just too complex.

### Finding Better Fictions

SJ So do you think we need to somehow stand back from, and modify, Spinoza's distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas?

MG Not necessarily. But it may be that adequate ideas aren't so available in politics. Maybe his view is that politics, like religion, always has an imaginative dimension, and the best we can do is be aware of that and, if we are aiming for a democratic society and institutions, to negotiate an imaginary which is maximally inclusive and allows flourishing.

GL My feeling is that an adequate idea is an idea which has the inadequate idea of the imagination as its object. So gaining adequate ideas is gaining insight into the operations of the imagination.

For women *vis-à-vis* men, getting adequate ideas is gaining insight into the causes that are structuring bad practices. Now, there is another sense in which this might not give one a totally adequate idea of the operation of the imagination. But in my reading of Spinoza—which is not an uncontroversial one—to say that there is an adequate idea is not to say that there is a perfect idea, but to say that there is an idea of an idea. An adequate idea is a reflective idea which has as its object the unreflective operation of the imagination.

We see this in Part V of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza talks about mortality. The mind comes to see through the illusion of the belief in an afterlife. What it comes to see is that it that this is a fiction through which a truth is glimpsed. The belief in individual immortality is something that sustains individual life. It's not true, it's a fiction, and by the end of the *Ethics*, the mind comes to see that it's a fiction. So the adequacy of the idea there lies in seeing that the belief in individual immortality is a fiction, through which the mind attempts to grip something it can't fully grasp about its own status. It imaginatively reconstructs its continuing existence. So even in the mind's highest exercise of knowledge, it's still operating on imagination.

We see something similar when Spinoza talks about the intellectual love of God, which is the highest state of knowledge. There's never a point at which we get to the pure truth. Always, even the most sophisticated exercise of the mind—in which we present to ourselves what are supposed to be the deepest truths of our existence, and the deepest truths about God—is an exercise of the imagination that we can come to see as such. And that is the extent to which we are getting adequate ideas. Even in the *Ethics*, we find this model—that the life of freedom is the life in which it becomes possible to gain insight into the fictions that are current, and replace them with better fictions.

SJ We've been using the notions of imagination and fiction in various ways, in relation both to comparatively basic, situated kinds of understanding, and to rather abstract lines of reasoning like the one's you've just been describing, Jenny. Would you like to say more about how these hold together?

MG Well, Jenny might have a different response, but I see it as a way of talking about what we used to call ideology. Some postmodernist, poststructuralist thinkers argued that one could not talk about this any more, and I felt very dissatisfied with some of their accounts of what it is to know. For me, the notion of the imaginary allows one to think about how it is that individuals, and also groups and communities, understand themselves, without using the notion of ideology which always seemed to me stuck in a kind of idealism.

This takes us back to what we were talking about towards the beginning of this conversation: to the claim that imagination necessarily involves both mind and body—and a body that is already inserted into a context in which it has certain values and meanings. These may well be false but, if so, that is completely irrelevant, because it is through these meanings and values that a body becomes whatever it is. So for me, the notion of the imaginary embodies, specifies, historicises and contextualises the experience of individuals and groups. I guess the old notion of 'ideology' did that, too. But the imaginary does it without

separating out the material on the one hand and ideology on the other. The imaginary must be both.

Also, picking up what we were saying about the difference between inadequate and adequate ideas, I think Spinoza has a bizarre theory of truth which I don't claim to fully understand. What's interesting about the imagination for Spinoza is that it is inadequate knowledge; but inadequacy is not the same as falsity—at least not in the way that contemporary philosophers think about falsity. Inadequate knowledge is knowledge that is partial. There's always some truth there. (Again, this picks up certain elements of the notion of ideology.)

If we think about the imagination of collectives we can now see that inadequate knowledge is not false, but it also is not true. It is, however, really there—it has causes and effects. The other thing that is important here is that when one imagines—when one has inadequate knowledge—this isn't just a matter of something in your head, but is actually something to do with your body. So, for example, depression is a way of knowing something; joy is a way of knowing something.

These kinds of knowledge are thoroughly embodied. To know is not simply to have something happening in your brain. It is to exist in a different way than the way you existed before you knew that thing. For me, that is what is attractive about the imaginary. It is neither the poststructuralist, postmodernist notion of representation of reality. Nor is it the old, feminist notion of patriarchal ideology. I guess it is a sort of in-between term that is capable of bringing things to light that weren't brought to light before.

SJ: Yes. And in its seventeenth-century context, it obliterates the distinction between perceptions and acts of judgement about them.

MG That's exactly right. So in Spinoza the role of the will is not to stand by and say, 'I'll assent to that; oh no, I won't assent to that.' There's already an interpretation going on. And in that sense there are links with the whole psychoanalytic project which people like

Stuart Hampshire have picked up. And for feminist appropriations of Spinoza, I guess that's a convenient alliance.

GL Obviously there are some things we disagree about, such as what Spinoza is doing with the distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas, and what exactly he means by imagination. But I think we're going about it in a way that can yield a consistent reading of his texts, which might be some form of adequate knowledge, rather than just being a set of appropriations.

- 1 The interview took place at the conference *Going Australian: Reconfiguring Feminism & Philosophy* (February 1998). This included Genevieve Lloyd's lecture, 'No-One's Land: Australia and the Philosophical Imagination', referred to in the conversation.

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Warwick, February 1998

## THE BODY IN FEMINIST THEORY AND PHILOSOPHY

### A Review Essay by Jean Grimshaw

In recent years there has been an explosion of academic interest in the body. The journal *Body and Society* which commenced publication in 1995 is merely one indicator of this. Theoretical and philosophical interest in the body is, of course, itself not new; it has been a subtext to a great deal of nineteenth and twentieth-century theory and discourse. A history of theorisations of the body would need to include, for instance, nineteenth century Darwinian inspired theories of race or criminality; Charcot's displays of the body of the hysteric at the Salpêtrière; Freud's account of the body of the hysteric; and Wilhelm Reich's view of the constitutive role of the 'armouring' of the body in neurosis. Much contemporary discussion of the body, however, owes a debt to two influences, in particular.

The first of these debts is to the work of Michel Foucault: most notably to his 1975 book, *Discipline and Punish*, which offers an account of the formation of the body of the soldier through the minutiae of bodily disciplines and regimes, and of the increasing interest taken by the state in the bodies of its citizens (Foucault 1977). The bodies of the citizen and the soldier in Foucault's work, however, were paradigmatically male bodies.

The second important source of much recent work on the body has been feminist writing. Although feminist writing has drawn on the work of Foucault, it is quite wrong to over-stress the influence of Foucault. To see feminist writing on the body as solely inspired by Foucault is yet another of those 'genealogies' of feminist writing which see it as wholly derivative from or reactive to 'great' male writers.

Thus, already in 1949, in *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir wrote a great deal about the female body (Beauvoir 1977). But, she argued, the body is not a 'thing'; it is a 'situation'. In many ways Beauvoir anticipated more contemporary discussions of the body as 'text', of its discursive construction, of the ways in which there can be no 'natural' body. The ways in which women frequently experience their bodies (especially in their reproductive aspects) as a *problem* are deeply inflected

by cultural myths and images of woman and the feminine. In addition, Beauvoir offered illuminating and detailed descriptions of the ways in which girls and women learn the kinds of constraints and disciplines that frequently prevent them from engaging bodily with the world in the ways in which men and boys are encouraged to do.

It is, however, difficult to avoid the conclusion that despite her view of the body as 'situation', Beauvoir never escaped entirely from the kind of fear and dislike of the female body displayed by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*. In 1976, in one of the earliest discussions of sexism in the work of male philosophers, Margery Collins and Christine Pierce showed how Sartre, in apparent contradiction to his own view that existence precedes essence, seems to identify the female body as that which condemns woman to exemplifying the 'en-soi' or 'in itself': that which cannot achieve 'transcendence', and that which constantly reminds men of what they have to escape in order to achieve 'transcendence' themselves (Collins and Pierce 1976). The 'slimy' and viscous female body threatens to suck men back into the world of immanence. Some of Beauvoir's own descriptions of the female body seem to 'replay' Sartre's dislike and disgust. At times Beauvoir seems to regard the female body as a kind of intrinsic handicap to the female consciousness that wishes to achieve the transcendence that is appropriate to the 'pour-soi' or 'for-itself'.

### Second-Wave Feminism and 'Body Practices'

From the early days of second-wave feminism, many women involved with women's liberation were highly critical of the bodily disciplines and regimes to which women were subjected. The apparatuses of fashion and beauty and the constraints these impose came under fire; 1970s feminist critics, following Beauvoir, offered critiques of the ways in which little girls were discouraged from free or spontaneous physical activity and movement.

In the 1990s, in postmodern vein, feminist attitudes to beauty and fashion have shifted somewhat. The fashion and beauty industries are still the subject of ongoing feminist critique, but we have seen the near demise of regulatory norms (to which a Foucauldian analysis could well have been applied) of what women—and feminists—should or should

not wear. An increasing amount of feminist attention, however, has been devoted not so much to practices of fashion and ideals of cosmetically assisted beauty, but rather to ideals of body shape and slenderness, to analysis and critique of women's intensely ambivalent relationship to food, and to practices of dieting, exercise and fitness.

The work of Susan Bordo is very important here. In her influential collection of essays, *Unbearable Weight* (1993), she discusses issues such as the growing 'epidemic' of eating disorders in young women in many western countries. These are diagnosed as a kind of cultural pathology which is closely connected to the ideology of female slenderness and to the denial or disavowal of female appetite or hunger, and related to insistent dualisms in western philosophy. Bordo notes, as well, the escalation of practices of body modification: both through certain forms of exercise and through cosmetic surgery. Such practices fragment a woman's body into 'parts' to be worked on, and foster the illusion of the wholly 'plastic' body which can be entirely subjected to human will and control.

Bordo is concerned to resist the 'postmodern' line of thinking which simply stresses the 'ludic' or pleasurable aspects of body practices; a stress merely on pleasure or choice, she argues, cannot give any account of the suffering women undergo through trying to modify their bodies, nor can it account for the highly *normative* forms and ideals which underlie practices which may appear 'freely chosen'. When undergoing plastic surgery, for instance, the 'ideal' face, with smooth skin, small neat nose and chin, wide mouth and high cheekbones, is one which aims not only to appear young, but may aim to eliminate 'ethnic' traits in the interests of conforming to dominant white ideals of beauty.

Issues concerning body practices have been explored in the work of a number of other feminist philosophers. Sandra Bartky (1990), for instance, has used the work of Foucault to offer an analysis of the contemporary apparatuses of fashion and beauty that in many ways harks back to the critiques of the 1970s. The power of the 'imperatives' of the fashion-beauty complex, she argues, lies precisely in their 'facelessness'. No-one *orders* women to wear mascara or high heels, or to try to become thin. The ways in which these imperatives circulate makes these demands seem all the more insidious, since it is so easy to see them simply as freely chosen or merely self-imposed, and the 'sanctions' attached to

transgressing them are not imposed by any clear authority. But women constantly survey, monitor and police themselves, in the interest of achieving 'standards' of beauty and self-presentation to which they can never measure up, and which conform to oppressive ideals of heterosexual attractiveness.

Iris Young (1990) has also developed innovative ways of thinking about women's bodies. In one chapter, 'Throwing Like a Girl', she deploys Beauvoir's distinction between immanence and transcendence, and adapts aspects of Merleau-Ponty's account of human embodiment. She uses these to analyse the ways in which women may be constrained by norms of 'feminine' movement and by inhibitions derived from a sense of their bodies not just as subjects of action, but as objects of the 'gaze' of others. Such norms and inhibitions block unselfconscious full bodily engagement with tasks and activities on the part of women. In other chapters of this 1990 book Young writes about women's experiences of their breasts and about clothes. Unlike Bartky, Young asks how we might develop ways of understanding the pleasure clothes can afford us which do not conform to the imperatives of the fashion industry or to norms of heterosexual attractiveness.

### Women's Reproductive Bodies

Two of the earliest demands of the women's liberation movement were that abortion be freely available and that women should not shoulder the whole burden of childcare unsupported. In the 1970s, however, childbirth and maternity were not as high on the feminist agenda as they have since become. Here again the 1970s feminists followed Beauvoir whose view of maternity was complex and ambivalent; she certainly did not deny the potential pleasures of childbirth and maternity, but at times she seemed to see the female reproductive body as a handicap and a burden, making woman a 'prey to the species'. Famously, in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1979) Shulamith Firestone diagnosed women's reproductive role as the root cause of their oppression, and recommended the replacement of female pregnancy and birth by 'artificial' means.

Firestone's account reads strangely now in the light of the large number of feminist critiques of what have become known as 'reproductive technologies'. (See, for instance, Corea 1988; Spallone 1989;

Stabile 1994.) Feminist concern has focused in particular on 'high-tech' conceptive technologies and infertility treatments such as *in vitro* fertilisation. Indeed, a number of feminist writers have argued that IVF is a patriarchally controlled procedure which is part and parcel of an ongoing male drive to control reproduction and maternity, and that it requires women to submit to the view that unless they are mothers they are nothing.

Another focus of feminist concern has been the increased use of scanning procedures during pregnancy, made possible by the use of ultra-sound and by procedures such as amniocentesis. Identifying the sex of the child before birth has enabled the abortion of foetuses just because they are female; new techniques of foetal intervention, including 'gene therapy', also raise the prospect of the eugenic search for the 'perfect' baby. The extent to which feminists should or can simply 'resist' reproductive technologies, however, remains a contentious area of debate.

Women's reproductive bodies, however, have also been the focus of other kinds of analyses. In a powerful analysis of the kinds of discourse found in gynaecological textbooks, Emily Martin notes the dominance of mechanical or industrial metaphors for the birthing process which reduce the birthing woman to passivity in the face of male medical expertise, and conceptions of menstruation and menopause which seem to see the whole purpose of female life as reproduction (Martin 1987).

Since the time of Beauvoir, then, there has been an ongoing feminist awareness of and concern with a wide range of issues concerning ideals and images of the female body, disciplines of the body to which women are subjected and in which they engage, and the discourses and practices to which the female reproductive body has been subjected. In recent years, however, a great deal of feminist theory and philosophy has more explicitly addressed a range of fundamental philosophical questions about 'thinking' the body in general, and sexual difference in particular.

### The Sex-Gender Distinction

Famously, Beauvoir wrote that one is not born a woman, one becomes

one. Indeed, her analysis of the social construction of femininity and of myths and images of the feminine was a powerful influence on the emergence of feminist analyses of gender. As I have already noted, Beauvoir argues that the body is a 'situation' rather than a 'thing'. However, there are also aspects of her writing which can be read as legitimating a view that the body (especially the female reproductive body) is a biological 'given'.

From the 1970s onwards, much feminist theory was anchored in the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'. 'Sex' was seen as 'biological', something that was given in nature, whilst gender, on the other hand, was seen as cultural. This distinction was of crucial importance in allowing a wedge to be driven into theories of 'woman's nature' which were biologically determinist. More recently, however, the sex-gender distinction has been seen as problematic, for two main and related reasons.

First, it has been argued that 'sex' is itself gendered. The assumption that there are only two sexes and the insistent quest for sexual difference which is premised on a sharp sexual binarism are represented as products of a gendered and heterosexist ideology. Second, it has been argued that the body itself cannot be seen as given, as brute nature, a mere *tabula rasa* which is prior to culture. Rather, the body is itself the subject of constant social inscription; it is discursively constructed and 'written' on by innumerable forms of social discipline, such that there is no possibility of a sharp distinction between 'nature' and 'culture'.

### The 'Imaginary' Body

Human bodies, whether male or female, figure in human culture through processes of representation. 'The body' as it figures in discourse can be seen as an 'imaginary' body; a body constructed and read through various forms of social representation and imagination. The concept of the 'imaginary body' is discussed by Moira Gatens (1996). Gatens notes the ways in which the 'human' body has often been seen as male, and the female body has been seen as unrepresentable. She discusses the connections between the masculine imaginary body and notions of 'the body politic'; 'imaginary bodies' have real social effects, and the connection between the masculinism of images of the body and the exclusion, marginalisation and oppression of women in politics, ethics and law is not an

accidental one. The sex-gender distinction in itself may be premised on a notion of the body which implicitly sees that body as a male one.

To be critical of a sharp sex-gender distinction and to argue, as Gatens does, that it ignores the specificities of female embodied experience, is not to lapse back into a biological essentialism. Rather, it is to recognise the importance of the fact that female bodies have been historically constructed and experienced in different ways, inflected of course not merely by gender, but by such things as age, race, and class.

Conceptions of the 'imaginary body' have been usefully deployed in other feminist orientated analyses of discourse about the body. Catherine Waldby (1996), for instance, discusses aspects of the dominant discourse surrounding AIDS. She argues that much AIDS discourse projects 'imaginary anatomies' of the body; in particular the contrast between the 'leaky' body (ascribed primarily to gays and to some women) and the bodies of white male heterosexuals which are constructed as ideally 'impermeable' in their defences against infection by others. She notes too that a great deal of biomedical discourse about the processes by which the body attempts to 'fight' the HIV virus is conceptualised in terms of 'heroic' masculinised cells attempting to ward off the devious and feminised invader.

### Gender as Performance

One of the most influential theorists of the body has been Judith Butler. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler noted that we commonly think of gender performance as something which flows from an inner 'gender identity'. Butler argued, rather, that the constant repetition of gender performances, their iterability, creates an illusion of an 'inner substance' or of a 'core' gender identity. But this is merely a shadow cast by outward performance.

'Doing gender' and being caught up in sexual dimorphism are, according to Butler, essential to the constitution of an intelligible subjectivity within a normative heterosexist framework. Without a clear assignment of sex, most of the dominant social narratives of our lives seem impossible to tell. Despite the fact that scientists currently have difficulty in spelling out any exhaustive or exclusive set of criteria for sexual difference, the medical and legal framework of our lives requires

that a clear assignation of sex be made in all cases. There is strong medical pressure for surgical intervention, for instance in the case of children born with 'ambiguous' genitalia.

Since we live within a heterosexual cultural framework, none of us can exist 'outside' gender; 'performing gender' is not something that we decide to do as we might decide to act a part in a play. But, Butler argued, the constant repetition of gender performance breeds a kind of potential 'excess' through the instability of meaning that is a constitutive feature of the iterability of performances. And repetition, through the ways in which it can, for instance, turn into parody, may give rise to the possibility of the destabilisation of gender. What seemed to be 'natural'—a set of performances flowing from an inner core—comes to reveal its roots in performance and artifice.

Butler regarded phenomena such as drag as particularly interesting. In everyday life, it is often thought that drag stands to everyday gender as the artificial to the real. But Butler argued that what drag in fact exposes is the 'artificiality' of that which we normally take to be real. So phenomena like drag can destabilise gender and denaturalise it, and for that reason they are at the cutting edge of projects of subverting gender, deconstructing the binary systems within which we live, and generating new possibilities by the parodic repetition of old and stereotypical themes.

The extent to which parodic activities such as drag can subvert ideas of 'natural' gender is controversial. In so far as we may think of the body as a 'text' on which meanings are 'written' in the form of performances, then it is also important to note that these meanings may be context-dependent; the meaning that a drag performance has for one audience may differ from that which it has for another. Drag may well be seen as parody; but whether this parody acts to *destabilise* ideas of gender or simply to reinforce notions such as that of a 'real woman' may be highly contextual.

Since the publication of *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler herself has recognised both the need to explore the 'interiority' of gender and the reasons why it cannot be understood simply as 'performance', as well as the difficulties in supposing that drag always and in all contexts has the potentiality to subvert gender norms. (See Butler 1997; and the interview with Butler (1998) in the last issue of *Women's Philosophy Review*.)

Butler's view of the significance of performative forms of gender subversion has been played out in the movement known as 'queer'. 'Queer' aims for a kind of body politics in which genders and gender performance can no longer be aligned in ways that are intelligible according to old sexual binarisms. One can 'be' any gender that one wants, given sufficient energy and innovation with forms of dress and bodily demeanour and practices of body inscription or body modification. (See, for instance, Bornstein 1995).

There are important questions about the limitations of the kind of 'body politics' theorised and practised by 'queer'. Subversive or transgressive though it may be in some ways, questions have been raised about the extent to which it is possible to see the body as an infinitely 'plastic' site for modification or creation, and the extent to which this recapitulates rather than subverts contemporary consumerist modes of body practice. In addition, there are many forms of material exploitation, inequality and oppression which it is not easy to see that 'queer' body politics can address.

### The Materiality of the Body

One way of summing up some of these worries has been to ask whether 'queer' ignores the materiality of the body. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993) Butler noted that she had frequently been accosted in discussion at conferences by people asking, 'But what about the body?'. Her response can be summarised as follows; it is to ask within what kind of discourse we find the figure or trope of bodies that have a pre-discursive material existence. Questions about the body seem here to be reduced to questions about discourse. But, it might be replied, is there not some kind of resistant 'materiality' about bodies and bodily processes that cannot be reduced to discourse or to processes of signification? Is there not a materiality that may intervene or irrupt and that is certainly not infinitely plastic? Can theories which stress the discursive or historical construction of the body allow for the recognition of its materiality, and of the corporeality which is involved in sexed and gendered identities?

In a forthcoming paper, Tamsin Wilton (1998) argues that whilst the body can never be posited as prior to signification, there is a problem with theories which have seemed to try to displace it altogether. On

the one hand, there is indeed a need to resist theories of the body which are biologically deterministic. On the other hand, however, it is also problematic to suggest that there are no differences between 'queer' and non-queer bodies, or to represent gender as a matter of display, performance, narrative or career which need involve no reference to the materiality of the body. Such theories fail to recognise problems with ideas of the infinite plasticity of the body.

Given that the oppression of women, 'queers' and people of colour involves the discursive constitution of bodies, it is understandable that talk of bodies has sometimes been greeted with suspicion. But certain sorts of social constructionism cannot make much sense of oppositional body practices, nor of such things as the strong need felt in the case of gender changes for the physical alteration of bodies. Wilton argues that the interventions of feminism and 'queer' which have sought to counter the hegemony of heteropolarity need grounding in an oppositional theory of the body. Such a theory, she suggests, should conceive of the body not so much as an object located in space, which is easily amenable to control or manipulation, but rather as an event situated in time.

According to Wilton, being male or female is an embodied, time-situated social process which involves a lifetime of interactions at the interface of the body and the social. Bodily events and worries about the body are immensely significant for gender identity and sexual identity, and bodies are chronically changeable and subject to time and to processes that are frequently beyond our control. Gender is a process rather than a property of bodies, in which the 'conversation' between the body and the social is continually recreated. This 'conversation' is one in which neither the material nor the social can be seen as having any kind of ontological priority. The body is a situation, an ongoing event, whose meanings are always socially constituted, yet whose processes can irrupt in ways that may fracture the meanings by which they are themselves constituted and compel rearticulations and re-imaginings.

### **The Body, Sexuality and Subjectivity**

Elizabeth Grosz (1994) has noted how often in the history of philosophy the body has been theorised in terms of an insistent dualism of the physical and the mental, and subjectivity has been conceived of as the

combination of, or cohesion of, elements seen as either mental or physical. The sex-gender distinction itself relies on this kind of dualism. Indeed, Grosz finds a subordination of body to mind—and of sex to gender—also present in much feminist writing (p. viii). Because of the ways in which women have frequently been constituted as 'body' or 'nature' in western philosophy, and because of the kinds of biological reductionism that have characterised (and continue to characterise) many patriarchal conceptions of woman, the unease which many feminists have felt in talking about the body, or about women's bodies, is perhaps understandable.

Grosz suggests, however, that it might be possible to displace the centrality of mind or the psyche from theorising subjectivity through a reconfiguring of the ways in which we think about the body. Subjectivity might be thought through the primacy of corporeality, not in a reductionist way which claims that the categories of interiority such as agency, consciousness or reflection are useless or can simply be transcribed, but in a way which recognises the centrality of the 'surface' of the body to the constitution of subjectivities. This is a non-reductionist form of materialism. Its advantages are that it allows us, in a way that dualist models do not, to rethink questions about the sexed specificity of bodies, about sexual difference, and about sexuality itself. Grosz suggests that a full recognition of the corporeality of the subject will not so readily succumb to the neutralisation or neutering of its sexed specificities which has occurred to women as a consequence of women's submersion under male definitions.

The specificities of sexed bodies, however, should not be seen in terms of two absolutely distinct types of entities, men and women. According to Grosz, the categories of 'male' and 'female' are mobile and unbounded, and yet also irreducible in that there will always be a sense in which the experience of embodied femaleness will be alien to men (including the male-to-female transsexual). She maps 'the framework or terrain of sexual difference' not in terms of 'the concept of a continuum', but in terms of

the simultaneous recognition and effacement of the spacings, the intervals, the irreducible if unspecifiable positioning, the fissures and ruptures, that bind each 'thing' to every other. ... Bodies themselves, in their

materialities, are never self-present, given things, immediate, certain self-evidences because embodiment, corporeality, insist on alterity ... (p. 209).

This 'alterity' of the body involves an embodied psyche that is established relationally, traced by 'race, sex, sexualities, ethnic and cultural specificities'.

In the past, some forms of feminism have at times either underplayed the importance of embodied sexual difference, or tried to think it in ways which brought with them the danger of recapitulating patriarchal views of sexual difference. The question with which many feminist writers are now engaging is how to think the body, sexuality and sexual difference differently, beyond the dualistic confines of a great deal of traditional philosophical thinking and of some feminist thinking as well. The project is a new one, and it has no one clear kind of direction. Grosz, for instance, asks us to deploy the model of the Möbius strip to think about the ways in which body can be seen as an inflection of mind and vice versa, and the kinds of torsion by which one turns into or drifts into the other. But she also notes that a model is simply a heuristic device which enables us to highlight certain things and see less significance in others.

Other writers on the female body have also been concerned with bodily models and metaphors. Kristeva (1982), Young (1990) and Betterton (1996) are amongst those who have noted how women's bodies have often been seen as 'abject', as that which is messy, fluid, and which lacks clear boundaries. In her attempt to rethink the female experience of having breasts in a way that displaces the idea of the breast as object of the male gaze, Young (1990) deploys metaphors of fluidity. But, she writes:

As far as I am concerned, it is not at all a matter of making a claim about women's biology or bodies, for conceptualized in a radically different way, men's bodies are at least as fluid as women's. The point is that a metaphysics of self-identical objects has clear ties to the domination of nature in which the domination of women have been implicated because culture has projected onto us identification with the abject body. (Young 1990, pp. 192-3).

In this respect Young's project fits with that of Luce Irigaray (1985a, 1985b) who has been wrongly read at times as proposing a new ontological truth about women's bodies and about female sexuality. She should be read, rather, as proposing the strategic deployment of new metaphors, those of fluidity, for example, or those which refuse to subordinate the tactile to the scopic or visual, in order to think female sexuality and female embodied experience in different ways.

### Concluding Remarks

Much recent feminist literature has stressed the metaphors of fluidity. However, during the 1980s and 1990s the body which was most commonly coded for sexual attractiveness became the 'fit' body, lean, lightly muscled and well-toned. The more it seemed to become impossible to exert any control over the vagaries of the market, over pollution, even over what goes into the food that you eat, the more it seemed to become important to 'preserve' yourself by a rigorous programme of 'healthy' eating, exercise or skin care. This was in contrast to the notions of 'beauty' or 'attractiveness' prevalent during the 1960s and 1970s, and the regimes prescribed to achieve these, which bore little relation to notions of 'health' or 'fitness'.

The body has become increasingly visible in contemporary culture. Discourses of health, fitness and beauty, for instance, have not only proliferated, but now intersect in powerful new ways. Much as the anxieties of the Victorian ruling class about the seething and potentially unruly 'masses' in the new industrial towns were frequently displaced on to fears of and attempts to control working-class sexuality, perhaps late twentieth-century anxieties about the vagaries of global economic systems and the potential nightmares of environmental catastrophe have been accompanied by a retreat from a belief in the efficacy of politics and displaced on to new forms of cultural fetishisation of the body.

The trajectory of the life of Jane Fonda, one of the most important cultural icons of the new concern with the body in the 1980s, might stand as a parable for this cultural shift. Fonda's involvement with politics in the 1970s transmuted itself in the 1980s into a concern with the body. Hers was a huge success story, frequently recounted under the sign of 'feminism' and the 'empowering of women', in which Fonda's

body was itself the project and example, and in which political energy (including feminist energy) at times seems to have been displaced or replaced by the energy of the aerobically fit body.

The cultural emphasis on the body can also be seen as related to current crises and uncertainties in gender relations. An additional feature of popular discourse about the body since the 1980s is the way in which it has increasingly involved men. Care for the body is no longer primarily a female preserve, or that of the relatively few men who participate in specialised sporting activities. Fashion and cosmetic aids for men proliferate, and alongside this proliferation, the gender coding of bodies has in some respects become less absolute and more difficult to fathom. Male bodies are routinely shown in erotic or seductive poses which would formerly have been coded as feminine, and female eroticism itself (as in the case of Madonna) is often coded as assertive or aggressive in a way that might formerly have been seen as masculine. But this new 'androgyny', unlike that of the 1960s and 1970s, is chameleon-like and premised on artifice. The body, it is supposed, can be 'written on' in any way that one chooses. The denial in much academic writing of the 'naturalness' of the body and the stress on its discursive construction is played out not only in aspects of mainstream popular culture, but also in some of the more transgressive forms of sexual politics, notably in 'queer' theory and activism, which has aimed to deconstruct gender binarism and subvert gendered norms of dress and bodily presentation.

In a short paper it is only possible to gesture towards both the richness and the problems of contemporary feminist discussion of the body. I have signalled some of the themes and issues which seem to me to have emerged as particularly important in recent years. There are of course others. How, for instance, should we think about issues concerning technology and embodiment? (See, for example, Haraway 1991; Braidotti 1994; Stabile 1994.) Have feminist discussions of female embodiment paid sufficient attention to the ways in which female embodied experience is inflected by race and class? Have we thought enough about women's bodies in labour—not just reproductive labour, but the sort of labour which is performed in the places of work where most employees are female? Have we thought sufficiently about the embodied experiences of illness, ageing and mortality? In many ways, women share these latter experiences with men; yet these shared life events are also inflected

by gender.

In western philosophy women have often been identified with the body and nature, and men with culture and with reason and self-consciousness. Feminist philosophy has exposed and fractured these identifications. At times it has itself recapitulated some of the dichotomies on which they were founded. But its innovative and critical energies have also displaced these dichotomies and produced a range of insights, reflections and ways of trying to rethink the importance of female embodiedness which are a paradigm of the power of feminist philosophy both to effect intellectual transformations and to relate these to the embodied experiences of women's everyday lives.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Modest Witness@Second Millennium.FemaleMan.© Meets Oncomouse™: Feminism and Technoscience.*

Donna Haraway, Routledge 1996

h/b £45.00 0 415 91244 X, p/b £14.99 0 415 91245 8

Donna Haraway has always encouraged us to engage with science and technology from 'inside the belly of the beast'. She has always recognised our positioning within a technoscientific culture which renders highly problematic any attempt to set feminist values against technoscientific ones. Some early feminist writings flirted with the view that science and technology simply are masculine, needing correction by more life-enhancing female values. For Haraway, by contrast, 'the fiercely physical, semiotic world of techno-science ... is the real and imaginary field for *Modest Witness@Second Millennium* ... We are inside its material grammar: we both embody and contest its rules' (p. xiv).

We can draw attention to many of her themes by unpacking the book's title. The 'modest witness' at the beginning of the second millennium is very different from the 'modest witness' which the book begins by discussing. The earlier modest witness was the civil man (her example is Robert Boyle (1627–91), physicist and chemist) who devised the experimental method in science simply to show—to those who had the authority to count as legitimate witnesses—the workings of the object world. This modest witness was 'the legitimate and authorised ventriloquist for the object world ... endowed with the remarkable power to establish the facts' (p. 24).

The new modest witnesses at the beginning of the second millennium are signalled by Haraway as 'Femaleman' and 'Oncomouse'. 'Femaleman' is derived from the science fiction of Joanna Russ. This figure, far from being a universal female to oppose to the supposedly universal man which Boyle represented, is instead disruptive of these central gendered categories: 'a human, technological and organic (entity) with problematic selfhood boundaries' (p. 71). Femaleman is joined by 'Oncomouse' to mark the kind of positionality from which contemporary technoscience is to be interrogated. 'Oncomouse' was the first patented animal in the world: 'one of a varied line of transgenetic research mice'. Oncomouse reliably develops breast cancer, and is

marketed to aid research into its cure.

The positionality of Femaleman and Oncomouse is in no way innocent. These two figures are themselves implicated within technoscience, the products of genetic technology. Haraway's use of these two figures makes it impossible to think of epistemological standpoints as homogeneous, natural or social locations that yield untainted experience, and in terms of which dominant discourses can be interrogated. Femaleman and Oncomouse make clear the artifactuality of our identity categories even as we inhabit and use them. From such complex positionality comes an alternative kind of 'witnessing'. This witnessing is marked by care and accountability, and by what Haraway calls—adopting a term from bell hooks—'yearning'. This 'yearning'—for justice and equity, for example—does not in any way require that these notions can be given the transcendent status that modernity assumed.

From such positions Haraway proceeds to interrogate contemporary biotechnology. As we have come to expect from her previous work, she offers us multifaceted excavations of the emergence of what counts as 'nature' for us. It takes in movements of multinational capital, deconstruction of dominant metaphors within scientific texts, and the weaving of biotechnological explanations into a dialectical relationship with the surrounding cultural artefacts. Throughout there is a refusal to reach any simple conclusions about the effects, beneficial or otherwise, of the discourses which are gaining her attention.

If we follow Haraway's account, we cannot simply reject genetic manipulation as 'unnatural' and, therefore, as bad. But we can question its safety; the inadequacy of the constituency which has debated its procedures; the powerful lobbying by companies to gain licences; the effects on the environment and ways of life throughout the agricultural world. Haraway helps us see that it would be absurd to look for a feminist doctrine on reproductive technologies. However, as feminists, we can recognise the role of visualising technologies in dissociating the foetus from the bodies of the affluent, while the inadequacy of health-care renders invisible the deaths of foetuses and babies in the cities of Brazil.

Throughout the book, Haraway quotes with approval Sandra Harding's insistence on 'strong objectivity' as a guide to our scientific practice. There is, however, a difference of more than style between the

two writers. Harding sees attention to marginal positions as providing feminists with resources primarily for critique: resources which will provide data that the dominant theories cannot adequately theorise, and from which their structuring assumptions and ideological frameworks become visible. For Haraway, by contrast, the complex and implicated positionality from which we work—laughing nervously over our categories as we employ them—is a resource for what she terms 'diffraction'. These are positions from which new ways of configuring the discourses will emerge.

What Haraway's texts always make clear to us is the contingency of frameworks of meaning in terms of which our scientific theories are constructed. But she claims that 'Reality is not compromised by the pervasiveness of narrative.' (p. 64) 'We are in a world of immeasurable results, a world that exceeds its representations and blasts syntax.' (p. xiv) This 'excessive' world that 'defies both denunciation and celebration' allows for the possibility of diffracted accounts from our non-innocent positions:

Both people and things have a nonreducible trickster quality that resists categories and projects of all kinds. Yearning is fed from the gaps in categories and from the quirky liveliness of signs (p. 128).

For Haraway, we cannot give up on biotechnology, a rich resource which we cannot approach 'only in scolding mode' (p. 105). The complexities here are captured in the paintings of Lynn Randolph with which the book is illustrated. One of them depicts a prettily pale Oncomouse, with visible mammary glands wearing a crown of thorns. She is enclosed in a box surrounded by peeping eyes reminiscent of the peep show. But these eyes come from faces of many colours, ambiguously gendered, for whom this mouse embodies fantasies of cures (salvation), but who are also trying to witness the world in other ways. In this arena there can be no dogma.

No review can do justice to the exhilaration of Haraway's text. Just make sure you read it.

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***Yielding Gender:  
Feminism, Deconstruction and the History of Philosophy***  
Penelope Deutscher, Routledge 1997

h/b £37.50 0 415 13944 9, p/b £11.95 0 415 13945 7

Would you say that gender instability works positively for women? I suspect that many of us would answer 'yes' to that question. This book will give us pause. As an analysis of constitutive instability *as textual effect* it is the best I have read. The extent to which this effect is shown to be recuperative is sobering.

Penelope Deutscher is doing important work in the history of philosophy and in the history of feminism as a philosophy. *Yielding Gender* is written in a clear and simple style which should be accessible to all readers, including undergraduates and non-specialists. Yet it treats complex issues of textuality, history, hermeneutics, contemporary theory, feminism and methodology. If I say that it is particularly strong in the last of these, I hope I will not discourage potential readers; my students seem to have a durable resistance to the fascinations of methodologies. This book should convince them otherwise. Deutscher's deployment and explanation of deconstruction as a methodology and as a philosophy is consistent and extremely productive.

Deutscher exemplifies and reinstates the crucial importance of deconstruction in its relation to feminism as an *intervention*. This establishes a sound basis upon which to build her analysis of those who have, in practice, assumed that pointing out contradiction is the same as dealing with its effects in the philosophical history of gender (and gender in philosophical history). Her criticisms of the deployment of deconstruction as a primarily negative strategy have the power and conviction of the inevitable. But Deutscher is a generous critic. In pointing out where other feminist readings fall short, she stresses the need to 'keep theory on the move'. She has a keen sense of how emergent ideas clarify, and so avoids seeming to say that earlier feminists were benighted, a rhetorical positioning which is so deleterious historically. As feminists read each other, we need to develop a strategic understanding comparable to Deutscher's of the potential textual effect of what we write about each other, of how this participates in constructing the feminist intertext.

Deutscher wears her considerable learning very lightly, so much so that it might be easy to take for granted her achievement in

consistently handling diachronic readings from St. Augustine to Judith Butler. With admirable clarity and brevity, she begins by outlining the current situation in terms of thinking gender, demonstrating how in the widespread enthusiasm for a 'post-gender' romanticism, Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick have become identified with positions opposite to those for which they argue. She goes on to summarise the reception and textual effects of deconstruction in Europe and the USA, especially in relation to feminism, despatching in what I found to be a most satisfying way some of the deadwood debates around Jacques Derrida. What might be seen as the first section of the book then concludes with feminist theory, especially that of Michèle Le Dœuff, Sarah Kofman and Luce Irigaray.

In what is, in effect, the second part of the book, Deutscher demonstrates in detail how interpretations of Rousseau, St. Augustine and Beauvoir have been limited in their efficacy as interventions in the phallogocentric tradition. Rather, they can have the textual effect of sustaining that very tradition. The quiet way in which Deutscher offers a means of understanding what have been, for many, extremely long-standing difficulties with Beauvoir leads me to recommend the book as an extended historical introduction to reading the latter's work. (I am tempted to say it is almost indispensable as such.)

The understated manner of this revisiting of Beauvoir actually leads me to the one reservation I have with *Yielding Gender*, and it is purely a matter of presentation. I would have liked more drama, less modesty and restraint, especially in the conclusion, and more of the wryness of her discussion of the 'Brundle-fly effect' which she offers in chapter 2. The 'Brundle fly' image is taken from David Cronenberg's science fiction film, *The Fly*, in which the hero (Seth Brundle) 'is accidentally synthesised with a household fly in a machine of his own invention' (p. 35). Deutscher uses this analogy to explain the theoretical foreshortening and the increasingly complacent receptions of Derrida's texts through Rodolphe Gasché, Richard Rorty and Paul de Man— which transmutations are then attacked by Jürgen Habermas.

Perhaps this is merely personal, but I think it is also a matter of clarity too, or of allowing due salience to the definitional points of the argumentational topography. I say this as much to encourage readers to persevere beyond a glance, as to make real criticism. To put it another

way, don't read the conclusion as a guide as to whether to read the book, because it really does underplay its achievements. Also don't expect the appositeness of the title to become apparent without thinking hard about it.

The point can be illustrated through Deutscher's discovery that in Augustine, 'the account of woman is related to a problem that might appear distinct—that of man's likeness to God' (p. 140). This is a wonderful insight which is then brilliantly tracked in terms of its implications for readings which focus only or even primarily on 'woman' or 'the feminine'. The same is true of her treatment of those textual complexities which may not be directly prescriptive about 'woman', but which can nevertheless produce the appearance of an extra-textual authority and/or origin. Such moments are too important to pass without some fanfare.

In comparison to *Yielding Gender*, many books in contemporary 'theory' are more like external commentaries: it is as if they were in the voice of a commentator at a racetrack, whose job is apart from and above the fray. This would imply that their authors might not have thoroughly absorbed the implications of what they are saying for their own textual practice. By contrast, Deutscher succeeds in combining disinterested analysis with commitment. For me this is a mark of excellence. At several points, I found myself in emphatic agreement, exclaiming 'at last'.

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### *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*

Nancy J. Holland (ed.), Penn-State University Press 1997

h/b £35.95 0 271 01634 5, p/b £15.50 0 271 01635 3

### *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman*

Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, Emily Zakin (eds), Routledge 1997

h/b £40.00 0 415 90916 3, p/b £12.99 0 415 90917 1

Many contributors to these two collections reflect on the passage of feminist theory from the politics of the 1970s to those of the 1990s. For most, this passage reflects a turn towards anti-essentialist feminism, and a loss of confidence in a stable referent, 'woman', as the subject and object of feminist politics. Many of the contributions in both works

acknowledge the significance of Derrida's 1978 work *Spurs*, as well as his 1982 interview with Christie McDonald, as crucial references in the development of a self-identifying anti-essentialist feminist politics over the past two decades.

In her essay in *Derrida and Feminism*, Jane Gallop writes of how 'Derrida's timely intervention called into question a certain essentializing of woman in seventies feminism'. She goes so far as to identify Derrida's work as possibly having enabled her own: 'Most of what I have to teach I might have learned from Derrida, whom I read for the first time in 1972' (p. 18).

Since some would go so far, perhaps it is not surprising that many feminists' relationship with Derrida has been ambivalent, concerned about being compromised by intense engagement with the work of a male theorist. Tellingly, as Elizabeth Grosz points out in *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*, this issue has not been troubling, or not to the same extent, in relation to many other figures, such as Michel Foucault (p. 78). According to some, Derrida crucially influenced a generation of feminist theory. According to others, Derrida's work has undermined the same generation and its interests. Both collections include essays which review this range of positions.

For the editors of the *Derrida and Feminism* volume, Derrida's contribution can be understood as having offered 'levers of intervention' for undermining phallogentrism, exposing its 'limits and margins'. That contribution also allows us to interrogate Derrida's debt to feminism, in addition to assessing feminism's debt to Derrida. Derrida's contribution to a destabilisation of phallogentrism does not prevent us from critically analysing the extent of his own 'participation in the structures of masculinity which perpetuate the sexual violence of philosophy' (pp. 2-3). A series of contributors to this volume read Derrida for what they take to be his blindspots. For example, Kelly Oliver explores Derrida's debt to the maternal, whilst Rawlinson emphasises the 'other who is not the same'.

However, none of the essays in *Derrida and Feminism* enacts the vicious triumphalism or open hostility which has characterised critics hostile to Derrida's work as they think to have caught him out in some unwittingly contradictory or incoherent position. The editors propose that weaknesses in Derrida's work might well be revealed by a feminist

reading. That said, Derrida is hardly a philosopher who attempts to conceal—or who refuses to interrogate—the 'ironies and impossibilities' of his own work. For all their diversity, sympathy with this political stance is reflected in all of the contributions of the two volumes. The resulting anthologies are more focused and productive than they might otherwise have been, suggesting that critical but patient readings give the most intelligent result, at least when it comes to discussing Derrida and feminism.

The editors of both volumes have also excluded substantial discussion of French women theorists usually understood as 'French feminist' and as 'deconstructive'. Certainly, it is peculiar to see two volumes appear concurrently on Derrida and feminism which contain no discussion of or contributions by Hélène Cixous; one mention only of Sarah Kofman (Kamuf); and only very occasional references to Luce Irigaray (with the exception of Armour's essay in *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*). This occurs because the organising focus of each collection is the engagement with Derrida by Anglo-American feminism, but certain exclusions are therefore questionable.

The inclusion of Meheron's essay on deconstruction and AIDS-related testimony in *Feminist Interpretations* drew attention to a missing section of essays which might have represented Derrida's crucial influence on many who have worked on AIDS; on mourning; on sexuality; and on performativity in queer theory; and on the intersection of gender and queer studies. Here, one thinks of Judith Butler (discussed only by Ewa Ziarek), Peggy Phelan, and particularly of Eve Sedgwick, not mentioned in either volume. One could question this imbalance given that the logic of both anthologies is to track the passage of deconstruction through two decades of shifts in (largely) American feminist theory. The important engagement of feminist postcolonialist theory with deconstruction is also under-represented in both collections.

These imbalances aside, for those whose interest is to reflect on the trajectory of Anglo-American feminism as it has engaged with deconstruction over more than twenty years, Holland's anthology, *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*, is the more useful. It reprints both the 'Choreographies' interview with Jacques Derrida, and Gayatri Spivak's extremely influential discussion of *Glas* and *Spurs* in her famous essay, 'Displacement and the Discourse of Woman', which provoked perhaps

ten years of debate on the different politics of engagement by men and women in the displacement of metaphysical subjectivity.

*Feminist Interpretations* also includes a strong essay by Armour on what has been another rich area of research and debate: feminist deconstructive work in religious studies. There are further essays by Olkowski, Peggy Kamuf and Peg Birmingham which examine aspects of Derrida's work which have had less attention from feminists. Thus, Olkowski considers Derrida's readings of Kant, whilst Birmingham engages with his debt to Husserl. This anthology also reproduces essays by major American philosophers (Cornell and Fraser) which respond to Derrida's 'Force of Law' paper, and which allow reflection on the necessary but unavowed 'violence' inherent in founding and justifying feminist politics. This issue is also overtly and painstakingly articulated in a new essay by Grosz in the same collection.

The issue for many contributors to both volumes is to analyse Derrida's work for its blindspots in relation to women, femininity and feminism. But if we interrogate the limits and 'constitutive inconsistencies', the 'questions and conditions' of Derrida's work, does not this suggest that feminism must be prepared to interrogate its own limits and 'constitutive inconsistencies' (Grosz's term) also? To think otherwise is to think that feminism is exempt from the problematics of 'reappropriation, "liberation", autonomy, mastery', 'metaphysical presuppositions', narratives of progress and of 'an ultimately thinkable telos, a truth of sexual difference and femininity' (Derrida in *Feminist Interpretations*, pp. 25–6). The faith in such an exemption is precisely what Derrida questions in his exchange with McDonald. And a so-called anti-essentialist feminism is usually one which rejects the myth that it is exempt from such problematics.

This self-naming anti-essentialist feminism knows its own founding limits perfectly well, but has difficulty making the leap from knowledge to belief. Feminism knows, and knows with a frequent and disturbing glibness, that it speaks, often, at the expense of the 'other woman'; that it has denied differences among women in the name of the politics of sexual difference; that it has occupied positions of power and not just been the victim, that its founding moment in the combat of patriarchy is the dependence on patriarchy; that one's very speaking position demonstrates that one is not simply 'excluded' from patriarchy;

that 'no position can encompass the entire field, and that to present a position, to provide a strategy, to make specific claims is always to exclude, to deny and to problematize other, competing positions' (Grosz in *Feminist Interpretations*, p. 74). Feminists are master subjects engaged in the politics of exclusion.

As Grosz points out, a realisation that feminism is not exempt from the blindspots it has wanted to locate in Derrida's work, allows us to refigure what feminism might have to gain from thinking a Derridean politics. According to many, Derrida's work has barely engaged with the political, and feminists are left to make applications of his work to 'political issues' where feasible. But it is Grosz's essay that overtly asks what a Derridean politics is, and argues clearly why such a politics matters still, and crucially, for feminism. Rather than feminism chastising Derrida for not offering the 'clear-cut position', 'certainties in political judgement', it is the feminist who desires unequivocalty who, argues Grosz, 'can afford to learn much from deconstruction' (*Feminist Interpretations*, p. 75). It is deconstruction that tells us that what we repudiate most is what is folded within at our heart.

It may be an intended irony that Grosz fits the question of feminism's ability to 'confront its own internal paradoxes, its inherent or constitutive inconsistencies' and its 'necessary if changeable limits' into a progressive narrative. Only this kind of political or theoretical commitment, she proposes, 'can be said to have come of age'. Such a feminism has 'finally reached the stage when it . . . is prepared to speak up against some of its own commitments' (*Feminist Interpretations*, pp. 73-4). One of the questions asked by many of the essayists is whether one has ever really read Derrida? But the question provoked by these anthologies, and particularly Grosz's essay, and the reprint of the 'Choreographies' interview, is whether one has ever really read feminism? Many feminists have affirmed sensitivity to cultural difference, race, sexuality, rejection of progress narratives. But, as Grosz writes, for a Derridean politics greater vigilance and the best intentions cannot produce a feminism or anti-racism free of an implication in phallogentrism and racism. And the essays in both anthologies allow us to ask to what extent feminism can come to terms with this?

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***Leaky Bodies and Boundaries:  
Feminism, Postmoderism and (Bio)ethics***  
Margrit Shildrick, Routledge 1997

h/b £45.00 0 415 14616 X, p/b £14.99 0 415 14617 8

What if, in the everyday course of events, the self is not in control of its (proper) body? What if the body is 'leaky' in two senses: 'leaky' in the sense of being subject to unpredictable extrusions which we might usually associate with the abject or with illness; and, 'leaky' in the sense of overrunning any border that might separate a body from mind and from another self? And what if this leakiness is not just a feature of material bodies, human or otherwise: what if leakiness is also a feature of conceptual bodies and bodies of knowledge?

That material, discursive and epistemological bodies are leaky is the hypothesis which directs Margrit Shildrick's exploration of ethics and sexual difference in *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries*. As Shildrick points out, leakiness of human bodies is usually associated with the feminine and has been the basis for discounting women (and other groups considered 'disabled' on the basis of their mode of embodiment) from the realm of rationality and responsible agency.

Further, Shildrick argues, denial of discursive leakiness is the basis for constructing concepts, categories and disciplines which exclude and denigrate difference. But if all bodies are leaky—and if categories always exceed themselves, spilling over into what they exclude—not only are the grounds for sexual and other kinds of discrimination put into question, but so are our usual models of moral agency and proper personhood as well as the ethics these models uphold.

By putting into question sexual discrimination and conventional ethics (particularly biomedical ethics) through the thesis that bodies overflow themselves, Shildrick points to an 'ethic in which differences are acknowledged, respected and allowed to flourish' (p. 6). Her questioning involves a critical appropriation of the work of a number of theorists: primarily Foucault, to argue that material bodies are discursive constructs; Derrida to argue for the fluidity of all discursive constructs; and, Irigaray to insist on the specificity of sexual difference. In between she critically engages thoughtfully with a range of feminist theorists and ethicists in building her case.

There are I think two features of Shildrick's analysis which mark it

out from others which may, on the surface, seem similar. The first is that the book is written in a highly accessible style, no small achievement given the complexity of the issues addressed and the notoriously difficult style of some of the theorists covered. The only quibble I have with the style is what seems to me an excessive use of the word 'postmodern' to describe the book's project: 'the postmodern approach', 'a postmodern ethic', 'postmodern theorists' and the like.

While this objection may just be based on personal taste, it is raised with the intent of defending the book's seriousness. 'Postmodern' is a word increasingly used by critics to dismiss critiques of humanism as 'relativist' (read 'amoral' or 'immoral') and as 'obscure' (read 'self-indulgent, meaningless prattle'). Shildrick's approach to ethics and sexual difference is neither immoral nor meaningless and if the potential reader is amongst those who think they are 'anti-postmodern', and would dismiss the book's value accordingly, she or he would be advised to put such prejudices aside.

There is another way Shildrick may be doing herself a disservice by using 'postmodern' to describe her work and that of the theorists she draws on. When 'postmodern' is used neutrally or positively, as it is by Shildrick—as shorthand to describe a range of positions on language, power, the body and subjectivity—it tends to efface differences between theorists (who would never describe themselves as such). There is the risk therefore that the uniqueness of Shildrick's own position is obscured through the labels she uses.

This brings me to the second feature that marks this book out from others in the field: its focus on biomedical ethics. It is the thoroughness and the manner in which Shildrick brings her thesis about leaky bodies to bear on biomedical ethics that signals its originality. Both normative medical ethics and features of health-care practice form the objects of her analyses. She demonstrates, for example, how the principle of autonomy, which forms the basis of conventional notions of moral agency, paradoxically operates in practice to ensure patient compliance in the health-care encounter. This principle also contains a sexual bias which works to silence women, in particular, on the matter of their own health and well being. More positively, Shildrick shows how the idea of leaky bodies suggests a different approach to health-care practice and to biomedical ethical issues: an approach which 'necessitates an ethic

of openness and responsibility towards difference' (p. 179), particularly differences in and between women.

Throughout both her critiques of medical discourse and practice, and the construction of her positive ethic, Shildrick targets specific medical ethical issues and medical models of the body and draws on empirical and historical studies from medical sociology. All this culminates in an informative and thought provoking analysis of the ethics of New Reproductive Technologies. NRT's are revealed to both contribute to the normalisation of femininity and, at the same time, to disrupt that normalisation by producing, at least potentially, new forms of subjectivity and expressions of autonomous female desire.

Shildrick's is not an ethic which is unduly sure of itself: there is no attempt to solve moral dilemmas by erecting new principles or moral norms which would decide once and for all what is good or bad for the other for whom one cares. Rather, the call to remain open to differences and to revise one's own concepts and values depending on the circumstances, introduces a level of insecurity into medical practice. Yet, what may be lost in terms of security for medical ethicists and practitioners is made up for in terms of a sensitivity to the complexities and realities of the health-care encounter. Through this sensitivity, as well as the book's accessible style, *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* makes a valuable and important contribution to the fields of biomedical and sexual ethics.

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### *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Spinoza and the Ethics*

Genevieve Lloyd, Routledge 1996

h/b £35.00 0 415 10781 4, p/b £6.99 0 415 10782 2

This is an excellent, short introduction to Spinoza's *Ethics*. The first chapter situates the *Ethics* with respect to Spinoza's other works, along with his life and times. In particular, it starts with a graphic account of the excommunication of Spinoza from the Amsterdam synagogue at the age of twenty-four. The book then concentrates upon exploring the *Ethics*. As a guidebook, it actually follows the text, with the aim of simplifying it, whilst still giving a flavour of the complexity of Spinoza's ideas. It is written with the aim of making this text less daunting to those

approaching it for the first time. I can attest to the fact that, in that aim, it certainly succeeds.

The first question that may strike readers is: what has this to do with feminism? Given that the terms 'sexual difference', 'woman' and 'feminism' do not appear in the index, why should this book be reviewed in *Women's Philosophy Review*? Is it simply a book for those readers, already interested in Spinoza, who want a guidebook whose author can be relied upon not to irritate by employing sexist prose? More broadly, should feminists be interested in Spinoza?

In a way, Lloyd may have created her own audience. Her earlier book on Spinoza, *Part of Nature: Self-Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics* (1994), does contain a chapter in which there is an attempt to think through sexual difference within a Spinozan framework. There may be renewed interest from other feminists, hooked by the use of Spinoza by Gilles Deleuze or by Moira Gatens, or interested in feminist ontology generally. Although there is insufficient space or scope in this short book to explore the feminist and political implications of Spinoza's *Ethics*, Lloyd does make the point that,

To read [Spinoza] is to glimpse unrealised possibilities of individual and collective self-consciousness—alternative ways of thinking about minds and bodies, of self and other, of personhood, agency and responsibility, of the relations between human beings and the rest of nature, between reason and the passions; of power, dominance and difference. (p. 23)

After the introduction, 'Spinoza in his Time and Ours', Lloyd starts to set out the framework of the *Ethics* in a discussion of 'God, Minds and Bodies'. Given the complexity of Spinoza's *Ethics*, this book is an ambitious attempt to explain it in a clear and comprehensible manner. There is sustained argument, for example, on Spinoza's argument for the existence of God. As with his other moves, this draws upon his correspondence to clarify arguments and to signal the way in which the system works and its relevance for future arguments.

Readers are likely to be familiar with Genevieve Lloyd's *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (1984; 2nd ed. 1993), in which Lloyd discusses the way in which reason, whilst appearing to be neutral within Western philosophy, is actually equated within the

philosophical imaginary with that which is male. Lloyd's interest in Spinoza is therefore understandable because, although he is classified as a rationalist, his view of reason is not predicated upon a split between the mind and body. As Lloyd points out, he challenges the ideals of reason. Within the Spinozan system, knowledge gained through the imagination is not lost but is built upon, thereby informing knowledge gained through reason.

Following closely the structure of the *Ethics*, Lloyd then moves 'From Bondage to Freedom', in a chapter which explores the paradoxical nature of freedom within Spinoza's work. This is likely to be the most familiar aspect of Spinoza for those coming to him through an engagement with Gilles Deleuze's *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (1968; trans. 1990). Here Lloyd outlines the central concept of *conatus*, the striving of an organism to thrive and persist in being, from which the ethics—rather than moral rules—are drawn.

The final two sections deal with, perhaps, the most complex part of the system: 'Intuitive knowledge and the Love of God' and 'The Way of Wisdom'. These titles of these chapters sound unnecessarily off-putting. As Lloyd makes clear, Spinoza's idea of God is very different from that of a transcendent power that dictates rules.

This short guidebook raises themes that are familiar to readers of Lloyd's previous work. These include not only the question of rationality, but also a discussion of duration and of death. At the end of the book, there is an interesting exploration of the final section of the *Ethics* which reminds me of the concerns raised at the end of Lloyd's *Being and Time: Selves and Narrators in Philosophy and Literature* (1993). This may be to read too much into what is effectively a 'nutshell guide' to the *Ethics*. The least that can be said is that this is a clear and concise introduction to an area which Lloyd herself has highlighted as potentially productive for feminist ontology.

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*After Christianity*

Daphne Hampson, London, SCM Press 1996

p/b £14.95 0 334 02640 7

Daphne Hampson is without doubt one of the foremost contemporary feminist theologians. In this book she builds on her previous work, especially *Theology and Feminism* (Blackwell 1990), to develop a feminist post-Christian theology and spirituality. While this is a book which is of particular interest to feminists working in areas of religion and theology, it should not be ignored by those whose focus is more secular, since a large part of its impetus derives from the urgency to reconceive the world in a non-reductionist way once we concede, as we must, that traditional Christianity must go. Too often that recognition has been the basis, for feminists, of an unreflective secularism which in its masculinist structures and reductionist foundations is perhaps as narrowing and oppressive a world view as the religion it replaces. Daphne Hampson is looking for an alternative.

The first part of the book rehearses many of the arguments of *Theology and Feminism*. Its main argument is that 'Christians are those who claim that there has been a particular revelation in history' in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth; that this 'entails ... that Christianity is a "historical" religion' in the sense that this revelation carries divine authority in a way quite beyond the weight of history in other aspects of culture, and that such a stance is both intellectually and morally perverse (p. 51). It is intellectually perverse because this notion of particular revelation is incompatible with a scientific understanding of the world. It is ethically untenable because it asserts heteronomy, God and the self known through revelation 'from outside' rather than, as feminists must claim, autonomously.

Part of Hampson's aim in these chapters is to refute the criticisms that have been directed against this argument by feminists and others since she first advanced this position. Especially contentious has been her essentialist definition of what it is to be a Christian. There have been many who have argued that one can legitimately claim the label if one stands (even rather loosely) within the Christian tradition, not necessarily accepting the notion of particularist revelation. Hampson will have none of this; but I doubt whether her critics will be convinced.

Either Hampson's account of what it means to be a Christian is

stipulative or it is descriptive. If it is descriptive, there are many counter-examples—many who label themselves Christians (and are so labelled by others) without accepting Hampson's account of revelation. On the other hand, if what she is engaging in is stipulative definition, then it must be said that this definition is, at the least, strongly contested. And one can only cringe at Hampson's assertion that she 'can think of no major feminist thinker who is a Christian' (p. 252): she has herself cited among others Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Janet Martin Soskice, and Sarah Coakley.

For my own part, it is the rest of the book which I find much more interesting. In chapters 4 and 5 Hampson gives a devastating account of how the paradigms of Christian theology reflect masculinist psychic structures and of the ways this has served to keep women 'in their place' as the 'Other' of the male norm. She is not the first to discuss these matters, of course, but she raises some significant new issues.

Particularly telling is her exposition of the presupposition of traditional Christianity that God is at a *distance* from humanity, a gap both ontological and moral (p. 142). Once this is presupposed, all manner of things follow: the need for special revelation, for example, and the enormous importance of Jesus Christ as incarnation of God and mediator between God and humanity. It also generates endless questions about how God could 'act in the world': whence arise all the old conundrums about miracles, prayer, human freedom, etc. which fill up standard textbooks in the philosophy of religion. But why make that assumption in the first place? What kind of a god would it be who would need to keep such a distance lest perchance it be—what? Contaminated? Less awesome? What structures of the male psyche does such a projection of the divine bespeak? Hampson here and in many other issues in these chapters puts her finger on what must be a sore point for standard (read 'male') Christian theology.

In the last two chapters of the book, Hampson takes the first steps into new territory: what sort of theism, what sort of spirituality can there be for a post-Christian feminist who, while no longer able to be Christian, nevertheless also finds reductionist secularism inadequate? Hampson draws heavily on the German philosopher and theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), especially (as she reads him) his '*conceptualization* of the self as having an immediate connectedness to that

which is more than the self. This Hampson, like Schleiermacher, 'wishes to name God' (p. 213).

Because of this immediate connectedness, a connectedness which in some sense opens out to the whole universe, Hampson finds plausible the sorts of experiences of special awareness found among the accounts collected by the Oxford Religious Experience Research Unit, or the sorts of 'miraculous' events of 'answers to prayer' which happen to people who 'live with this kind of openness' and therefore can 'know all manner of things': an example she gives is 'what platform number they need if they are not to miss a crucial connection at a railway station' (p. 227). She discusses some of the dimensions of this openness: attention, honesty, and orderliness. Through such practice, women can become authentically ourselves and be able to serve others in a life-enhancing way.

Here I sit with my head in my hands. While I think that Hampson is wishing to make a case that I too find of utmost importance, namely a conceptualisation (I would prefer 'construction') of the self and the world which is not rigidly confined to the reductionist structures of secular modernity, can this be it? I am alternately perplexed by and at odds with her presentation.

Although her book displays awareness of the work of contemporary French thought, especially that of Luce Irigaray, Hampson operates with a virtually unproblematized notion of the woman subject, a subject position which women can choose or 'come to conceive of ourselves' (p. 209). It is this self-chosen subject, then, which can learn to be open to the connection with that which is beyond.

Similarly, at least in these last two chapters, Hampson treats 'experience' as if it were empirically given, and indeed is a connection to (or perception of) some kind of reality: it is as though all the work on the discursive construction of experience had never been done. Again, she gives various, not obviously compossible, definitions or descriptions of God: God is the 'awareness itself' of connectedness (p. 232); 'that through which we can be present to another' by intuition (p. 234); that within the whole 'on which we can draw for healing' (p. 239); actualised in the world through our prayer (p. 244); 'a power for good' within the whole (p. 247); 'energy, light, power, love and healing' (p. 251); 'the fullness of our potentialities' (p. 250). 'We may understand God as that

which gives us illumination, which allows us to heal ourselves, and which passes between us and those whom we love. God is both that which connects me to the greater whole and that which enables me to be my true self' (p. 251).

Just listing these characterisations makes obvious what a great deal of work is left to be done on Hampson's ideas of 'the self', 'experience', and 'God'. Yet she is surely right in her contention that 'until the present, women have been denied the possibility of thinking out how they wish to conceptualize what "God" may be' (p. 257). To adopt unreflective secularism is as surely to leave that conceptualisation in patriarchal hands as to be conventionally Christian. Although Hampson's conclusions may be unsatisfactory, the task she sets is one which any feminist interested in religion must find compelling.

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*The Company She Keeps:  
An Ethnography of Girls' Friendship*

Valerie Hey, Open University Press 1997

h/b £40 0 335 19407 9, p/b £12.99 0 335 19406 0

*"Women have always been divided against each other."*

*"Women have always been in secret collusion."*

*Both of these axioms are true.'*

Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (Virago 1980, p. 189)

Valerie Hey has explored in this book a hidden terrain: the negotiations and transactions of girls' friendships. She de-naturalises the process to reveal the complex power struggles that are in play. The girls' desires for power and influence through friendship have to be reconciled with ethical rules. The central ethical premises of girls' friendships are reliability, reciprocity, commitment, confidentiality, trust and sharing. These values, however, often come under pressure when girls convert the wider loyalties of friendship into the exclusivity of best friendship, mimicking the heterosexual and exclusive relationship of post-puberty. This exclusivity tends to work against the grain of the ethical stance and exposes the girls to the dangers of being 'dumped', if and when there is a reallocation of 'best' friendship. The pain experienced by the 'dumped' girl in a friendship fall-out is revealed to be quite as intense as the pain

felt in sexualised relationships. Girls' divorces are emotionally messy.

The important move in this book was to examine specific female practices of girlhood friendship—previously untheorised, unseen and unresearched. What had been previously viewed as something on the margins of schooling is here understood as a significant feature of a gendered aspect of the sociology of education. One of Valerie Hey's first observations is that issuing and accepting or rejecting invitations is a key social practice. An early clue for her in interpreting the girls' practices was a literary one. Gilbert Osmond in Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady* was said to hold parties purely for the pleasure of excluding people. Valerie Hey reveals the highly ritualised nature of girls' exclusionary practices which include a glossary of pejorative terms ('snide', 'slag', 'show-off', 'boffin'). To be obviously clever (a 'boffin') was to run the risk of exclusion from girls' friendship groups; the price of staying within a friendship group was sometimes to give up on ambition.

Adrienne Rich has outlined the ways in which female friendships and women's choice of women as allies disintegrate under the pressure of 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Depressingly, Valerie Hey's work seems largely to confirm this. At puberty, the girls judge each other's looks and style by heterosexual yardsticks (as though they lose their own 'gaze' and adopt a male 'gaze'). Girls who sleep around, for example, are labelled 'sluts' by girls themselves as well as boys. They police each other's behaviour. It is deemed important to wear fashionable clothes, with the approved labels, and be attractive to boys. The girl who ignores or defies these rules is condemned by other girls as 'sad'. The girls who are popular with the boys, tend also to be popular with girls. The fashionableness, however, must never slip over into overtly sexually enticing clothes, otherwise the girl is condemned as a 'slag'.

Fashion, far from being innocent fun, represents a terrifying domain full of pitfalls for the unwary. Somehow the girls have to negotiate a middle way between the Scylla of 'sad' and the Charybdis of 'slag'. Any girl brave enough to resist altogether the fashion imperatives, and who retains a primary loyalty to female friends further runs the risk of being condemned as a 'lezzy' or a 'dyke'. The girls' overwhelming desire to belong to a group means that girls censor their own fashion style and behaviour to conform to appropriate forms of femininity. The feminism of (some) mothers and (some) teachers seems powerless to protect the

girls from these cultural pressures.

I found reading this book both instructive and depressing. The research is admirable. By investigating friendship dramas, by reviewing girls' talk, Valerie Hey has made transparent areas of girls' friendships which had previously seemed utterly opaque.

It was disturbing to find that girls' friendships, which I had blithely supposed might protect them from what Raymond Williams called the 'sheer power and pressure of dominant culture', were largely incapable of doing so. It is true that girls' friendships can sometimes provide a small site of resistance to the dominant culture, but only in limited ways. Valerie Hey, not surprisingly, ends this important book not with an assertion, but by raising some questions. She asks how to 'recognise girls' systems of connection without pathologising them'; how to 'disrupt their circuiting of difference (in terms of racism, classism and homophobia)', and how to 'reposition' that which is 'transgressive' in female friendships in ways that can provide modes of resistance to heterosexual culture. How indeed?

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### *Feminist Amnesia: The Wake of Women's Liberation*

Jean Curthoys, Routledge 1997

h/b £40.00 0 415 14806 5, p/b £12.99 0 415 14807 3

Jean Curthoys begins her book with a question which indicates clearly, and from the outset, her attitude regarding the status of both second-wave feminist and all broadly poststructuralist thinking: 'Why has the generation of student radicals of the 1960s and 1970s failed to produce any genuine intellectuals?' To begin on such a negative note is disappointing in a book which promises, as blurbs on the cover suggest, 'a penetrating, sure-footed and original' analysis of 'what is wrong, not just with feminist theory but with important elements of postmodern theorising generally'.

The quotations on the cover are written by Janet Radcliffe Richards and Mary Midgley respectively. Many feminist academics (myself included) feel there is a need to confront the factors influencing the resistance of many female philosophy students and the continued antagonism of older, analytically-entrenched, academics to take seriously

and engage with current trends in feminist philosophical thinking. Curthoys' book, if its press is to be believed, offers a rigorous account of the intellectual basis for such resistance and, moreover, the opportunity for feminist academics in the poststructuralist tradition to engage with the criticisms it elaborates. Sadly, this is not the case.

Any attempt to engage sympathetically with Curthoys' book is compromised from the outset by her tendentious definition of the kind of reasoning which would qualify a theorist as a 'genuine intellectual'. Furthermore, Curthoys' assertion that the majority of her colleagues represent 'intellectual mediocrity' and are invested in the pursuit of duping their students with 'conceptual muddles and basic ignorance' place those accused (again, myself included) in the position of having to adopt the logic and vocabulary of Curthoys' discourse if they are to attempt to defend themselves against her attack. This brand of intellectual bullying will be familiar to most, if not all, feminist academics who have had to fight to be credited with—and maintain a voice within—traditionally masculinist institutions.

The initial problem for any reader familiar with recent trends in feminist and Continental theory is in divining the precise target of Curthoys' general criticisms. Despite her repeated remonstrations concerning a perceived lack of clarity in these works, she continually lumps together structuralist, poststructuralist, postmodern and deconstructionist theorists as if they constituted a homogenous block. This lack of precision is particularly problematic in light of the fact that, whilst an entire chapter is devoted to the work of Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray's texts are dismissed as 'generally ... too obscure to interpret with confidence'.

Curthoys' text can be divided into three main areas. The first is an attack on feminist theory, based on the 'two sciences' analogy (see below); the second, a critique of Derridean deconstruction on the basis of its similarity with Hegelian idealism; the third, a self-congratulatory prescription as to what feminism should consist in. This last requires of the feminist academic a commitment to a humanist ethic at a communal level and a belief in the wisdom of rational autonomous thinking at the individual level. What feminism should be doing is pursuing 'an essentially human search for the good, both in solidarity with others so that we do become more fully human, and autonomously so that we

stop reinforcing the workings of power.'

The nub of this book lies, I suggest, in its analysis of Derridean deconstruction and the comparison between deconstruction and the speculative tradition of philosophy espoused by Hegel and critiqued by Marx, rather than in current feminist theory. Her knowledge of—and engagement with—current feminist literature and theory is poor, as is perhaps indicated by her acknowledgement that 'My major intellectual and personal debt is to my husband'.

Insofar as she does deal with feminism, Curthoys' overall method concerns the mapping of its failure in relation to a threefold schema of liberation theory, based on the principle of resistance to power. For Curthoys, this resistance must be grounded upon an ethic of *human* value (originating in the Christian ideal of love) and be informed by wisdom (of the Socratic variety). Feminist theories of difference, she believes, repress and/or abandon any such call to human worth by simply inverting the power relations between men and women without challenging the structural dynamic of that relation. She spends a whole chapter setting up an analogy of her methodology in the form of the 'two sciences thesis' which, whilst addressing the general point, hugely compromises its effectiveness by virtue of its engagement in an argument concerning the merits of early Darwinian versus Lamarckian theories on inherited genetic characteristics, which is far from having been resolved in the manner Curthoys supposes.

For Curthoys, the era of grand narratives formulated in classical (clear and distinct) style is clearly still with us. However, the narrative that Curthoys employs adopts rhetorical techniques that preclude fruitful discourse. Curthoys moves within a discourse of rationalistic emancipation in ways that suggest that any prolonged engagement with her arguments will be intentionally misread. I suspect there are those of us, however, who would prefer to move on, and as Foucault remarks: 'As to those for whom to work in the midst of uncertainty and apprehension is tantamount to failure, all I can say is that clearly we are not from the same planet.'

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***Feminism and the Politics of Difference***

Sneja Gunew & Anna Yeatman (eds), Wellington (NZ): Bridget Williams Books; Scranton PA (USA): Westview Press Inc., 1993

NZ 0 908912 59 5

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Working at the intersection of feminism, politics and multiculturalism, and within a post-structuralist problematic of difference, Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman pose the testing question: how can we deal with differences among women without losing the impetus that derives from feminism being a coherent movement for social change? The move from the liberal humanism of emancipation and identity politics, to a post-structuralist debate about the internal politics of voice and representation, is taken up by fourteen writers, all with very different agendas. The essayists include representatives from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, and the US. The writers work across many different disciplines, including sociology, politics, anthropology, English literature, film and gender studies. True to the indiscretion of difference, subject boundaries are never fixed. However, specificity and locatedness emerge as key themes in the debate.

In their excellent introduction, Gunew and Yeatman draw out the themes of race and ethnicity, appropriation, authenticity, and legitimacy. However this is not followed through in the structure of the book, and while some of the excitement of reading this volume comes from discovering the many links, cross-references and inter-related concerns between such diverse authors, some structured division of the book into parts would have made it more accessible. As it was, I enjoyed dipping into the contents, making new connections and discovering new themes on each reading—multicultural writing, reading and spectatorship, among others. It is a detail perhaps, but a more comprehensive index would have been useful in my journeying through this wide-ranging book; for instance, Homi Bhabha, Moira Gatens, Julia Kristeva, Meaghan Morris, Gayatri Spivak and Trinh T. Minh-ha are names that repeatedly crop up. Thus, Minh-ha is referenced in seven out of the fourteen bibliographies, but these are not adequately indexed.

Gunew starts the book off with definitions of multiculturalism, endorsing Bhabha's reading of cultural difference as involving that which is both incomplete and incommensurable. Bhabha haunts this

collection, even though his definitive book *The Location of Culture* was not published until 1994. His notion of hybridity supports the emphasis on local differences, and opens up the pervading question of coherence. Can we speak about 'feminism', 'Australian' or 'Aboriginal' without falling into the trap of universalisation, and if we reject 'identity' can we have agency and activism?

To my mind, the key essay is Yeatman's 'Voice and Representation in the Politics of Difference'; ironically it is the final contribution. Yeatman sets up difference as a borderline, allowing minority groups to 'stand outside looking in'. These groups are allocated a contradictory position that depends on mainstream universalist terms of critique: terms which themselves then prove to be partial and biased in the face of the particularity of voice and representation. Politics, Yeatman says, is the contestation of particularities, and it is in the processes and relationships of this disruptive, but ethical, politics that self-hood emerges.

This raises a question relating to advocacy and appropriation: who is permitted to speak on behalf of whom? This is a question taken up by Jackie Huggins, writer and recorder of Aboriginal histories; and in essays on agitational, deconstructive film production; on multicultural writing practices; and on the border as an excess that both joins and divides. All resist the rhetoric of assimilation which embraces and distances the otherness within the same, rather insisting on an ambivalent borderline positioning which is both dependent on and rejects the dominant discourse.

Politics as the productive disruption of oppositions is also the theme of a forward-looking essay by Vicki Kirby, whose work explores a corporeal politics through deconstruction. She engages with Haraway, but sees Haraway's 'hope' that feminist discourse might avoid oppositional thinking as just that—a hope. Kirby thus argues, like Yeatman, that self-legitimation is enabled by 'othering the other'. Kirby also uses Spivak as she considers what is involved in disrupting from within bipolar structures and 'negotiating enabling violations'. Midori Matsui, in a fascinating survey of Japanese boy-boy comics, echoes Kirby, but uses Lacan to put forward the idea that the play of a subversive imaginary, enabled by a displaced femininity, can dissolve historical, moral and discursive boundaries.

The specificity of the multiple identity is the concern of Wendy Larner who traces the changing patterns of sexuality, culture, race and ethnicity in New Zealand. She reads the increasingly complex and chaotic relationships between traditional identities as a response to globalisation and the consequent changes in patterns of immigration and employment. She suggests post-structuralism as a way of theorising shifting identities in relation to historical conditions. Roxana Ng, writing as 'a woman of colour', is similarly concerned with the complex identities of 'lived experience' but uses a Marxist perspective to resist the sharing/caring model of multiculturalism, and to endorse the Canadian move to policies on race-relations.

The intersection of feminism and post-structuralism which is at the heart of this volume comes out most strongly in the idea of reading and writing as active and performative. This is an idea put most eloquently by writer and film-maker, Trinh T. Minh-ha, who draws on Chinese culture to discuss language as a code of resistance. She uses 'red' as an example of an inexhaustible and excessive symbolism that exceeds the totalising discourses which purport to speak for, on behalf of, or in the name of people. The politics of voice remains an open debate, and so it should, for closure would paralyse the productive dynamic between feminisms and multicultural writing.

Though this volume was published in 1993, and for the most part engages with post-structuralism, it still has a bearing on current debate, not least because so many of the essays point to the importance of located, material relations in the product and process of representation. This volume will, therefore, be of interest to anyone engaging with the subsequent work on relationality and corporeality that is now emerging from the Australian context.

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***Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism***

Uma Narayan, Routledge 1997

h/b £40.00 0 415 91418 3, p/b £12.99 0 415 91419 1

The title of this excellent collection of essays by Uma Narayan is deceptive, for rather than giving us yet another celebration of the indeterminacy of dislocation, Narayan's work encourages an appreciation of

the specific complexities of locatedness. Narayan combines some of the most interesting insights from recent work by postcolonial and diasporic feminists on women and national, religious and community identities, with reflections on her own experiences as a feminist philosopher of Indian origin based in the USA. Her project is really less about *dislocation* than about *relocating* concepts of culture, identity and tradition—too often evoked as static and homogeneous—into the complex, messy, history- and politics-saturated spaces from which they emerge and in which they are repeatedly reworked.

The opening essay, 'Contesting Cultures', takes on the familiar accusation of Westernisation levelled at Third World feminists by problematising concepts of Westernisation and 'indigenous' culture or tradition as two discrete and mutually exclusive poles of a binary. Narayan argues for the need to expose the ongoing change and contestation that is covered over by notions of tradition as static continuity, and uses the example of India to demonstrate both the specific political stakes behind such models of tradition, and the 'indigenous' sources of resistance and change that are ignored by such claims.

Narayan also makes the important point that feminists cannot simply dismiss the idea of 'Nation' and 'nationalism' as 'patriarchal constructs' (p. 37). Rather, they ought to insist on taking their own place within this field of contestation over definitions of national identities and take on the dangerous, but necessary task of offering alternative, feminist approaches to questions of identity. Narayan effectively uses personal experience in this essay both to reflect on the connections between mother-daughter relations and women's relationship to their 'mother-culture', and also to discuss the problematic but also compelling nature of both sets of relationships.

My one criticism of this essay is that Narayan could have made more of this connection, by focusing more sharply on the ways in which discursive constructs of 'Woman' and women's activities are so often called upon to bear the symbolic and strategic weight of preserving the 'purity' of tradition, culture and identity. The ways in which real and imagined 'mothers' are called upon to stand in for, and safeguard, the 'mother-culture' is an important part of the context within which the resistance and contestations of feminist 'daughters' are seen as so potentially threatening to national or community identities.

In the next essay Narayan turns her attention to the ways in which 'colonialist representations' of 'Third World' traditions (p. 43) tend to position women in a state of 'timeless victimhood', in 'places without history' (p. 48). Western feminists have also contributed to these kinds of representations, in which the complexities of historical, economic, and local and national political factors are covered over by totalising evocations of 'Culture' or 'Tradition'. Narayan develops her argument by contrasting Mary Daly's now-infamous discussion of *sati* (widow-burning) in *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) with more recent Indian feminist writing and activism on the same issue. Narayan does an excellent job of dismantling Daly's representation of Indian women and of synthesizing Indian feminist scholarship on *sati*; nevertheless, I would have liked to see her take on a more recent and less 'easy' target than Daly, whose gross over-simplifications and reliance on Katherine Mayo's *apologia* for British colonialism, *Mother India* (1927), have already been discredited by Audre Lorde, Joanna Liddle and Shinn Rai, and others.

With the essay 'Cross-Cultural Connections, Border-Crossings and "Death by Culture"', Narayan is on much more original ground as she brings together what is so often represented in the West as the 'exotic' practice of dowry murders in India with the more familiar phenomenon of domestic violence as known in the West. In considering why there is so much resistance, even among white Western feminists, to seeing the connections between these two practices, Narayan raises important issues about what kinds of information crosses borders, what particular contexts effect its production and reception, and what problems occur when what we get to know about the 'other' is decontextualised.

In this essay Narayan introduces the tremendously evocative concept of 'death by culture' and explores the ways in which mainstream Western feminisms can collude with tendencies to see this as a particular characteristic of Third World women. While domestic violence in the West is given what Lata Mani calls the 'privilege of complexity' in terms of its sources, contributing factors and social, economic, political and historical contexts, Western representations of dowry murder are often decontextualised, elided with other 'exotic' practices such as *sati*, and reduced to an alien product of a static, monolithic and all-consuming Culture of which Third World women are simply victims.

Narayan makes what should be an obvious point—that different contexts will affect both the ways in which specific issues are framed and the kinds of resistance strategies that are adopted. But rather than stay at the level of a generalized discussion of 'Difference', Narayan does what remains so rare in feminist literature about cross-cultural issues; she goes on to give details of how and why the violence issue has been framed differently by Indian and US women's movements, to consider the specifics of historically constituted cultural norms and options, economic and social conditions, and provisions in these two different settings, and how these impact on the political choices and strategies available to the different women's movements. Breaking down the impenetrable façade of an exoticised 'death by culture', Narayan is able to make connections between different women while respecting those differences in all their complexity.

The two final essays look at the roles of 'Emissary', 'Mirror' and 'Authentic Insider' that Third World subjects in the West are called upon to occupy, including by Western feminists. Narayan also looks at the multiple mediations of 'Indian Food' in colonial, postcolonial and diasporic contexts. Here Narayan's theoretical approach to the complexities of identity is 'incorporated' and materialised through examining eating practices.

Narayan's book should provoke a lot of necessary thought among white Western feminist readers about the work that 'we' still need to do to bring those complexities into our theoretical models and approaches. Her always accessible style also makes this an excellent vehicle for introducing students to the contributions that postcolonial and diasporic feminisms are making to feminist theory.

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**Jeanne Hyvrard: *Theorist of the Modern World***

Jennifer Waelti-Walters, Edinburgh University Press 1996

h/b £40.00 0 7486 0831 1, p/b £13.95 0 7486 0818 4

Unlike the better known exponents of *écriture féminine*, Jeanne Hyvrard is currently given little attention in the academic world. Although Jennifer Waelti-Walters is right to suggest that Hyvrard is more appreciated in Canada, the United States and Britain than in France, Anglo-American critics still tend to privilege the trinity of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray

and Julia Kristeva in discussions of contemporary French feminist thought. Jennifer Waelti-Walters's book sets out to redress this critical imbalance, not only by situating Hyvrard in relation to other theorists, but also by simultaneously emphasising and explaining the originality of her texts.

What is most striking about Hyvrard's writings is the way in which they are rooted in the contemporary science of chaos theory. According to Waelti-Walters,

all [Hyvrard's] books are recursive. They fall into the two categories described by chaos theory: big complicated systems with an underlying order or, the reverse, simple systems producing complex behaviour. And she is certainly 'looking for the whole' (pp. 42-3).

From the concept of chaos Hyvrard develops what she interchangeably calls 'round thought', 'fusional thought' or 'woman-thought'. This 'round thought' is the antithesis of patriarchy (or logarchy) since it defies control. Round thought is holistic, constantly connecting and re-adjusting; separational thought (that of logarchy) is taxonomical, assessing everything in terms of its place in a system of knowledge rather than within a ever-shifting network of relations. Ironically, the link between Hyvrard's explicitly theoretical texts such as *La Pensée corps* (1989) [*Body-thought*] and the more poetic 'literary' narratives is explained by Waelti-Walters as 'intellectual justification' (p. 157). Surely Waelti-Walter's own description of Hyvrard's philosophy would suggest that they should not be separated in this way?

Interesting criticisms are made of the limitations of Hyvrard's feminism. In particular, Waelti-Walters problematises the absolutely heterosexual system in which Hyvrard's theories are based. Female narrators are always supported by a male lover, causing Waelti-Walters to propose the rather unconvincing explanation that this is some kind of French cultural effect (p. 133). Drawing on the notion of pre-Creation chaos, Hyvrard promotes heterosexual intercourse as the re-embodiment of the fusion which preceded the separation of biblical Creation. Whilst such a theory connects women to the past and to the future through genealogy and procreation, there does seem to be no place for same-sex relationships in Hyvrard's universe.

This absence of positive female/female relationships is mirrored

in the lack of any notion of a supportive network of women in her texts. The mother is a figure who is both hated and loved, capable of producing both an empowering female genealogy (which represents Hyvrard's feminist vision) and a negative cannibalising system (which allows logarchy to be perpetuated). In her final chapter, Waelti-Walters attempts to answer her criticisms of Hyvrard with an Oedipal reading based on Hyvrard's own comments on *La Jeune morte en robe de dentelle* (1989) [*The Dead Girl in a Lace Dress*]. However, such an interpretation does not come very close to providing a satisfactory explanation, as Waelti-Walters herself implicitly admits.

Waelti-Walters has given us an extremely readable book which carefully attempts to unpack the dense (and often difficult) body of writings by Jeanne Hyvrard. The accessibility of Waelti-Walters' style will undoubtedly maintain the interest of even the most traditional reader. There are, however, a number of repetitions between chapters which suggest that the study may have been based on a collection of conference papers. The most notable example is the female partner of the explorer, Ferdinand de Magellan, who stayed at home in her Spanish kitchen while Magellan pursued his vision of a spherical world. This scene from *Canal de la Toussaint* (1986) is recounted by Waelti-Walters no less than four times, and on each occasion a similar point is made. It does seem surprising that, from a corpus of thirteen 'major works' by Jeanne Hyvrard, as well as numerous articles, oral presentations and unpublished manuscripts, Waelti-Walters did not draw on a wider range of textual examples.

On the other hand, the author does quote quite extensively from Hyvrard's writing (in translation) and includes substantial extracts from *La Pensée corps* and unpublished works in the three appendices in the volume. This study was accompanied by the simultaneous publication by Edinburgh University Press of the translations of two of Hyvrard's texts: *La Jeune morte en robe de dentelle* [*The Dead Girl in a Lace Dress*] and *La Menstritude* (1977) [*Waterweed in the Wash-houses*]. Together, these publications will allow Jeanne Hyvrard to make a more significant impact on women's studies in the English-speaking world.

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***Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir***

Karen Vintges (trans.) Anne Lavelle, Indiana University Press 1996  
h/b £33.50 0 253 33059 9, p/b £16.50 0 253 21070 4

Originally published in Dutch in 1992, Vintges' book breaks new ground in its approach to Beauvoir, offering easily the most sustained examination of her work as philosophy that I have yet encountered. Of course, Beauvoir herself repeatedly insisted that Sartre was the philosopher, she the 'mere' writer, but Vintges systematically challenges her self-characterisation as literary writer, maintaining that her entire *oeuvre* has an original philosophical content—it elaborates an existentialist ethics. Vintges goes well beyond the rather narrow focus on *The Second Sex* (1949) that remains common in studies of Beauvoir as philosopher. At the same time, she does not simply restore Beauvoir to her position within the philosophical canon, but shows how her contribution to philosophy exceeds and expands the boundaries of the discipline.

Vintges begins by returning to the *The Second Sex* itself, insightfully claiming that it should be read philosophically, as a phenomenological elucidation of woman's total experience and situation—not as a sociological analysis *manqué*. Within this study of *The Second Sex*, Vintges intervenes into the well-known feminist debate over whether the work employs a philosophical framework that prioritises a masculine-defined concept of transcendence. She contends that, although Sartre does define freedom and transcendence in opposition to the un-free, immanent female body, the same cannot be said of Beauvoir. According to Vintges, Beauvoir believes that the peculiarities of female physiology have made it possible for men to make women into the 'Other'; but she denies that female physiology necessarily precludes feminine transcendence. However, it is evident that for Beauvoir it is relatively difficult to realise one's freedom if one has a female body, and we may wonder whether this indicates that her concept of transcendence is still defined in antithesis to female corporeality in some residual way.

Although Vintges' re-examination of *The Second Sex* is illuminating, the really exciting part of her book is the succeeding study of Beauvoir's ethical writings, novels and autobiographical works. According to Vintges, Beauvoir began to outline her original ethical philosophy explicitly in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947). She argued there that one should

acknowledge and will one's own freedom, and that in so doing, one commits oneself to willing freedom as such, and so the freedom of others. She thus upheld the possibility of inter-human contact and solidarity, not simply conflict and antagonism as did Sartre.

According to Vintges, however, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* Beauvoir also attempted to formulate positive rules by which one can arrive at particular moral decisions. This was an enterprise that Beauvoir subsequently abandoned. Instead, she came to embrace the view that moral decisions can be made only in the absence of such general, positive, rules: as Vintges puts it, 'Positive normative propositions should present themselves as contingent choices, or rather as concrete, elaborated arts of living' (p. 164). Vintges takes this term 'art of living' from Beauvoir's novel *The Mandarins* (1954), and uses it to refer to the 'continual creative process' (p. 82) of individual ethical deliberation.

The rest of Vintges' book explores, firstly, how Beauvoir displayed individuals' various 'arts of living' in her later novels, starting with *The Mandarins*. Secondly, (drawing on Foucault's late work) Vintges studies how Beauvoir developed her *own* art of living, specifically by attempting to constitute a stable self-identity as an intellectual woman through her autobiographies and other techniques of life-style organisation. By constituting this self-identity, she hoped also to assist others to realise their freedom in their own particular ways.

Although Vintges is generally sympathetic to Beauvoir's ethical approach, she does criticise Beauvoir for underestimating the unconscious dimension of human life. Fascinatingly, Vintges argues that this underestimation vitiated Beauvoir's personal art of living by enabling her to re-live unconsciously her relation to her father within her relation to Sartre, remaining caught in what Vintges terms a 'youth trauma'.

The book's later chapters, which deal with Beauvoir's personal art of living, seem to lose their way somewhat, tending to become lost in the detail of her life. Yet the central point is that, insofar as her entire life and work elaborate the nature of ethics as the individual art of living, they prove philosophical in a broad sense that, as Vintges remarks, by-passes the 'strict boundaries of academic philosophy' (p. 137).

By enabling us to re-approach Beauvoir's work in these terms, Vintges makes a decisive contribution to the enterprise of showing that Beauvoir was a philosopher in her own right, not merely the disciple of

Sartre. She also shows how Beauvoir widened the scope of philosophy with her conception of ethics as art of living. In reading the book, I sometimes wished that Vintges' analyses of Beauvoir's arguments and concepts had been developed at greater length; but this is a minor point. The book is essential reading for those interested in Beauvoir and in existentialism generally.

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### ***Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault***

Susan J. Hekman (ed.), Pennsylvania State University Press 1996  
h/b £40.50 0 271 01584 5, p/b £15.95 0 271 01585 3

This volume has a double focus: it seeks to examine the 'transformative potential of Foucault's approach' (p. 4) for feminist philosophy, whilst remaining alert to the lack of attention paid to women and gender in Foucault's own work. As Hekman's introduction emphasises, this double focus crystallises around the question of whether a feminist politics remains possible in the light of Foucault's critique of the stable, humanist subject, given that emancipatory feminism seems to presuppose some such subject—'woman'—who requires liberating. For Hekman, Foucault is thus particularly useful for contemporary feminisms seeking to address the diversities of race, class and age which problematise any unitary conception of 'woman'.

Hekman's introduction also foregrounds both Foucault's relation to epistemology and his role in 'deconstructing' or 'destabilising' the modern subject. As several of the subsequent pieces reveal, however, this focus can lead critics to underestimate the status and force of Foucault's critique of the subject, as well as to overlook his conception of power as productive and to simplify Foucault's relation to the Enlightenment.

The opening essays, by Nancy Fraser and Nancy Hartsock, are symptomatic in this respect (although it should be noted that both essays have been published previously, in 1985 and 1989/90 respectively, and do not necessarily represent their authors' most recent positions). Fraser sets out to nuance Habermas' critique of Foucault by positioning the latter as rejecting humanism, rather than as rejecting modernity *per se*. However, her account reduces the notion of disciplinary power to a merely oppressive and coercive force which is portrayed as a 'bad thing' (p. 24).

Thus Foucault's critique of the production of the transcendental subject is reduced by Fraser to the problematisation of a merely 'utilitarian' fabrication of wholly manipulable 'Man'. Fraser proceeds to argue that Foucault either leaves autonomy untouched as an ideal, or presumes that 'the conception of freedom as autonomy is a formula for domination *tout court*' (p. 30). The former assessment overlooks the role of disciplinary power in producing the modern ideal of autonomy; the latter again elides Foucault's critique of humanism with his more complex relation to the Enlightenment generally. Far from simply rejecting autonomy, Foucault demands that we explore alternative modes of producing autonomous selves, whose 'freedoms' would always involve new dangers and constraints.

Hartsock's essay explicitly presents Foucault as a postmodernist reacting against the Enlightenment, and misrepresents his position when she claims that his rejection of foundationalist, neutral models of knowledge amounts to a rejection of the very possibility of knowledge (p. 44). This account completely overlooks Foucault's persistent focus on knowledge not as impossible, but as made possible only via productions that are always inflected by power. Indeed, Foucault's position seriously undermines Hartsock's own epistemological privileging of the 'primary lived experience' of the oppressed as producing a 'deeper', 'more comprehensive' knowledge of reality (pp. 46, 49).

Several other essays in the volume are marked by similar problems. Thus although Monique Deveaux engages critically with a range of feminist readings of Foucault (including Fraser's and Hartsock's), nonetheless, her appeal to a model of empowerment relying on notions of inner experience, consciousness and choice would be problematised by a subtler understanding of Foucault's account of power. Amy Allen explicitly limits herself to an examination of Foucault's use for analysing structures of domination, but maintains a split between 'surface' and 'deep' [explanatory] structures that is antithetical to Foucault's analysis of 'truth' as constituted by webs and networks of power/knowledge.

However, one of the volume's strengths is that several other essays provide the basis both for a critique of the above readings of Foucault, and for more productive—though never uncritical—engagements with his work. Terry Adajem, for example, emphasises that Foucault does not simply oppose modern liberalism, but seeks 'to reveal

the ways in which its own constellation of freedom is *also* a construction of power ... suffused with disciplines' (p. 292). Aladjem argues that resistance is possible from within the networks of power that constitute subjects. As such, she indicates a position that is explored more thoroughly by both Jana Sawicki and Moya Lloyd.

Sawicki argues that Foucault's critique of the humanist, foundational subject shifts the focus away from the epistemological project of grounding political theories, and towards an analysis of the costs of producing certain normalising forms of subjectivity and knowledge. However, both Sawicki and Lloyd position Foucault not as simply abandoning knowledge, autonomy, agency or freedom, but as continuing a Kantian critical tradition of interrogating the limits of their possibility in the present.

Moreover, both Sawicki and Lloyd offer a more convincing account of Foucault's conception of power, reflected in Lloyd's insistence that Foucault does not position subjects as 'merely the passive ciphers of power' (p. 247) but instead sees 'technologies of the self acting alongside technologies of domination' (p. 250). Both authors draw on Judith Butler together with Foucault's later work on technologies of the self to explore a politics permitting both resistance to particular normative discourses, and alternative modes of (non-unitary) self-constitution and (non-essentialist) engendering. For Lloyd, Foucault's 'aesthetics of existence' and the practices of self-fashioning are radical precisely because they are allied to the activity of critique so as to 'produce sites of contestation over the meanings and contours of identity, and over the ways in which certain practices are mobilized' (p. 250).

Given the importance of Judith Butler's work to feminist receptions of Foucault, as testified by this volume, it is appropriate that an essay by her is included here. Having outlined Foucault's inversion of the relation between sex and sexuality, Butler proceeds to perform an inversion of her own. She radically questions Foucault's claim that modern productive and disciplinary power—in the form of bio-power—emerges only in a post-epidemic age. Via a powerful critique of the construction of the homosexual body as deathly in the context of AIDS, Butler argues that power is still working to regulate death, with disastrous consequences for particular types of bodies: 'modern power "administers" life in part through the silent withdrawal of its resources ...

this dissimulated killing silently proceeds' (pp. 73–4).

Other interesting contributions include E. L. McCallum's piece, which argues that Foucault's work productively problematises the political efficacy of the (binary) category of gender, and Honi Fern Haber's examination of the subversive potential of body aesthetics, and of the muscled female body in particular. However, one of the most thought-provoking essays in the volume is Linda Alcoff's discussion of 'The Politics of Pedophilia'.

Alcoff compellingly critiques Foucault's own position on this matter, and goes on to use a Foucauldian model of power to develop an insightful account of paedophilia based on the recognition that any adult-child relationship is inherently marked by 'unequal, nonreciprocal relations of power and desire' (p. 118). On this basis, Alcoff argues for a prohibition of adult-child sex in ways that also allow her to problematise the notion of consent and to develop a non-repressive view of children's own sexual behaviours (her essay is also a useful counterargument to Jon Simons' troubling piece on mothering later in the volume, which seeks precisely to 'replace the unequal power-relations between mother and child with 'mothering' understood as mutual care given in friendship between equal adults).

This volume is highly recommended, then, both for the range of views represented, and, in particular, for the essays by Alcoff, Butler, Sawicki and Lloyd. These four essays not only delineate with great clarity how, 'in forcing us to rethink the subject', Foucault 'also forces us to rethink the political' (p. 259), they also convey the exciting potential of Foucault's transgressive and transformative thought for feminism.

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**CALL FOR PAPERS FOR A SPECIAL ISSUE OF  
WOMEN'S PHILOSOPHY REVIEW**

and Review Essay by Penny Florence and Nicola Foster of  
*Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*

Peggy Zeglin Brand and Carolyn Korsmeyer (eds)

Pennsylvania State University 1995

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What follows is a hybrid essay. Its aim is to combine a call for papers for a special issue of the *Women's Philosophy Review* (no 26, year 2000) on 'Aesthetics' with a review of a book whose reception so far is highly relevant to our proposed special edition. You as a reader are asked to adopt a variety of self-positionings: as inquirer into contemporary philosophy in general, and into aesthetics in particular, as potential reader of the book under discussion, and as potential contributor to *WPR*.

Briefly, *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics* has had little attention since its publication in 1995. Yet by all current measures, it should have had. It is serious, informed, scholarly and intelligently edited. It contains well-argued contributions by most of the important writers on aesthetics from feminist or gender-aware perspectives, and it also tries to expand that small field by including new writers and those active in related areas. It even has an introduction by a prominent and respected figure in the field overall, Arthur C. Danto, who in his *Foreword* rightly introduces the book as 'a pioneering work' (p. xvi).

What Danto says is as true whether the book is read in the context of aesthetics as it is of feminism. And therein lies a strong indicator of the problem. Feminists have written a great deal over the last twenty to thirty years about what they regard as broadly aesthetic concerns. They have also challenged philosophy. But the nature of the task in literary, art and cultural theory has been very different from that in aesthetics. Not only is there the problem of recognition that all interdisciplinary innovators face, so that philosophers have been either reluctant or unable to see the relevance of issues formulated in what may appear to be looser terms. But there is also the rejection among many feminists of what may be a mistaken view of aesthetics or 'the aesthetic'. The effect on both sides has been to occlude important questions.

This is particularly serious if the argument put forward in the concluding essay of *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics* by Hilde Hein is correct. In 'The Role of Feminist Aesthetics in Feminist Theory' Hein argues that 'feminist theory is at present hindered by the lack of an adequate aesthetic theory' (p. 449). Hein is more concerned with the danger of feminists' rejection of aesthetics altogether than with the prospects of living with a plurality and possible incompatibility of several aesthetic approaches. She concludes her essay with a missionary and visionary call:

It is possible to opt for pluralism without abandoning either rationality or idealism and certainly without giving in to despair ... feminist theory is radically innovative in its philosophical approach and ... aesthetics is at its centre (p. 460).

Whether or not Hein's zeal is fully supported philosophically, it certainly opens on to new ways of synthesising currents within feminism with gendered understandings of aesthetics right at the centre. This is one of the kinds of risk we hope to take in the special issue of *WPR* on Aesthetics.

What might an 'aesthetics of difference' look like? Speaking personally for a moment, it was noteworthy that when I (Penny Florence) organised a conference on this two years ago, very few contributors actually dealt with aesthetics. When I expressed disappointment about this, most people at the conference disagreed with me. Their definition of aesthetics was much more inclusive than was mine. For me the central issues are: subjectivity; some attempt to gender and locate universals; contradiction; the specificity of the art object or construct; the interface/s between philosophical aesthetics and other related discourses.

Let us take a further example of central importance from *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*. Much of philosophical aesthetics is based on the assumption that the aesthetic is universal because somehow 'we are all wired in the same way' or, put differently, that we share a 'common human nature'. Korsmeyer's essay 'Gendered Concepts and Hume's Standard of Taste' begins by showing that 'common human nature' in Hume is based on philosophical concepts which are neither neutral nor universal, but are 'heavily inflected by models of ideal masculinity that

inform discussions of human nature' (p. 49). While theoretically there is nothing that rules out men or women from participating as critics in the standard of taste, Hume's tangled concept of human nature, on which his entire edifice of the standard of taste depends, cannot support gender difference unproblematically.

But Korsmeyer does not stop there. She seeks to rework the tradition of aesthetics, rather than to dismiss it altogether. The standard of taste, she argues,

cannot be dismissed as a masculinist artefact. Nor ... is it easily patched up. ... For if concepts like taste are gendered, they are also the operational tools that drive philosophising; as such they have to be repaired while in use as we explore how many of the presuppositions of universality we wish to discard or retain, and what is gained and sacrificed along the way (p. 63).

This may seem modest in comparison to the more polemical ideals feminism has often espoused, such as those of radical opposition. We would not wish to dismiss them either, not at all. Nor do we think reformism is necessarily less radical in its effects. It is a matter both of the historical moment and the job in hand. Has that form of polemical work largely been done, or is it useful for particular purposes? It is certainly becoming increasingly clear how opposition remains trapped in the terms and parameters of that which is opposed.

Korsmeyer's essay aims to point 'beyond' mere critique, although this 'beyond' is left undeveloped and full of difficulties. The special edition of *WPR* we propose, and the contributions we are seeking, will aim to push into that territory 'beyond'. It could be that one of our readers has discovered some anomaly or evidence concerning a very specific point. We would welcome a short piece of approximately 2000 words about that detail. Details can be highly revealing. Or you may have a much broader idea that would require up to 5000 words to elaborate. Because of the nature of the task as we see it, to begin delineating new areas, your contribution may be speculative and interrogative. We are as interested in raising good questions as proposing answers.

For, until recently, very little indeed was published which sought to introduce feminist perspectives into the philosophical sub-discipline of aesthetics. As Korsmeyer and her co-editor, Peggy Zeglin Brand,

point out in their 'Introduction: Aesthetics and Its Traditions', the major American publication on aesthetics, the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 'did not have any feminist presence whatsoever until 1990 with the publication of a special issue that became the basis for this collection [*Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*]' (p. 2). And yet, this is a second publication edited jointly by Korsmeyer on the topic. *Hypatia*, the American journal of feminist philosophy published a Special Issue on aesthetics, also in 1990, which was followed in 1993 by the publication of—a somewhat shorter and with a slightly different focus—edited collection by Korsmeyer and Hilde Hein, titled *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, (Indiana UP 1993).

This seems quite astonishing from the point of view of feminist scholarship in arts disciplines such as literature; literary criticism and theory; art history and theory; and film studies where feminist publications have already gained respectability (with all the problems that *that* brings). Within the wider discipline of philosophy, especially political philosophy and ethics, feminist scholarship has also been developing, though at a different rate. Moving into mainstream debate puts the situation in those disciplines or areas into another time and place than in philosophical aesthetics. This in itself is important because it may seem that some issues have been resolved simply because they now have a history in other discourses.

If it seems surprising that there is no strong feminist presence in the philosophical sub-discipline of aesthetics, we have to ask why in particular the broader work done in 'the arts' has had so little impact—as well as why in particular the same is true of the body of feminist philosophical scholarship, especially in the areas of political philosophy and ethics. In other words, there are issues to be examined from within and without philosophy itself.

*Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics* is, then, a 'pioneering work', not because it offers a collection of feminist essays on aesthetic issues—there is no shortage of such collections, many of which are excellent—but because of the ways it aims to open up the sub-discipline of aesthetics to both new and already existing feminist discourse and scholarship in aesthetics. The book is substantial: a collection of some twenty essays, divided into five Parts, each with its own introduction and bibliography, and spanning nearly five hundred pages in all. It is well

structured and well introduced, to help those who are not necessarily familiar with philosophical aesthetics.

This volume does, then, deserve to become an integral part of the reading lists of most courses in aesthetics. Whether it does remains to be seen. Brand and Korsmeyer have some ideas on why it may not, and they connect closely with our contention above, where we point to the frequent mutual incomprehension that exists between feminists working outwards from philosophical and wider arts traditions.

Rejection of the aesthetic is actually quite a mainstream position. Art criticism in general, and materialist criticism in particular, is facing the difficulties inherent in this splitting off of 'the aesthetic'. At its most basic, a rejection of aesthetics as such throws into question the whole category of art as such. It leaves the value of works of art only or largely in their capacity for being important historical records. But the argument is also often that there are works of art that can lead to social and political change. How do they do this? How are they different from tracts and propaganda? Tracing their impact only explains little, and only at a secondary level.

It could be argued that the investigations of Part Three of this book, 'Feminist Art and the Refusal of Aesthetic Value', which examine the strategies women artists have been using to prevent their work from becoming 'merely aesthetic', actually rely and draw upon a notion of the aesthetic. For example, Elizabeth Ann Dobie shows how Nancy Spero's work juxtaposes images alluding to one context, accompanied by texts and quotations (usually by men about women) taken from another context entirely (often incomplete and difficult to read), in a way which blocks a linear time movement.

But what effect would such a strategy have were it not drawing on an anti-aesthetic? Hostility either to aesthetics or to any understandings of the notion of 'the aesthetic', even if pluralised, can be revelatory. It does not abolish that on which it draws. Or would you argue to the contrary?

Christine Battersby takes understanding such hostility to the aesthetic further. She argues that it has its origin in Kant's articulation of aesthetic judgement as disinterested. In her contribution to Part One of the collection, 'Stages on Kant's Way: Aesthetics, Morality, and the Gendered Sublime', she shows how Kant's articulation of aesthetic

judgement has been developed in philosophical aesthetics into the study of disinterested, contemplative and detached aesthetic. Works of art that exemplified it, and others that sought to block it, accompanied the development of philosophical aesthetics. Most so-called 'important' avant-garde and contemporary works belong to the latter category.

Theoretically, such moves had their basis in Marxist and psychoanalytical theory, and significantly also, we would add, in post-colonial thought. Marxists sought to block the possibility of works of art (including the image/representation) becoming just one more object for appropriation, one more commodity (though it has to be said that not all were equally implacable in their opposition to, or denial of, aesthetics). Psychoanalytic theory (to take just one example) offered a theory of the uncanny which blocked the image/representation from becoming merely 'aesthetic'. What do these various blocking strategies signify? Through your contributions, we would hope to follow up these important and productive lines of inquiry.

For many feminists the notion of 'disinterested' aesthetics is problematic, not least because it emphasises a subject/object relationship between viewer/reader and the image/representation. In patriarchal society this relationship becomes gendered: the former is male, or must adopt a male viewpoint, while the object is a female image or a feminised image/representation.

Mere rejection of the tradition of aesthetics simply reinforces the exclusion of feminists from aesthetics. Much more interesting, we believe, is the possibility that the displacement of aesthetics among radical thinkers on the arts over the past thirty years or so connects with gender in fundamental ways. The 'feminine' shares many supposed attributes with the 'aesthetic', and indeed their histories are closely intertwined.

To clarify this, we can take a brief look at the relatively short history of Aesthetics as a separate and almost autonomous sub-discipline. Prior to the mid-eighteenth century discussions on art and beauty went under the title of 'philosophy of art' and were treated as an integral part of philosophy. Such discussions were generally linked to epistemological and ontological concerns and were seen to be directly connected with political, social, moral and ethical discussions.

Thus, it was only from the mid-eighteenth century that aesthetics

began to be seen as a separate aspect and a sub-discipline of philosophy, cut off from most other philosophical concerns. As Brand and Korsmeyer articulate it,

what began in the eighteenth century as an explicit defence of taste grounded on an understanding of common human nature was retained in the tradition in the form of this neutral figure, whose historical time, place, social class, gender, nationality, or individual traits were held to be irrelevant to the experience of aesthetic quality (p. 118).

However, this shift is particularly noticeable in the analytical tradition as practised in the anglophone world. Outside the English-speaking world, the picture is much more complicated, as many European philosophers continue writing on aesthetic issues as part of their larger philosophical concerns.

The establishment of aesthetics as a sub-discipline of philosophy, confined to areas of inquiry limited to a well established set of questions, without the possibility of asking after the conditions of their possibilities or their foundations, meant that feminists were limited to the terms of references already established. For example, Brand and Korsmeyer offer the following quotation from Kennick as a definition of aesthetics:

By 'traditional aesthetics' I mean that familiar philosophical discipline which concerns itself with trying to answer such questions as the following: What is Art? What is Beauty? What is the Aesthetic Experience? What is the Creative Act? What are the criteria of Aesthetic Judgement and Taste? What is the function of Criticism? (p. 9)

Since all the above questions presuppose an abstract and 'universal' experience with regard to art, the introduction of gender into any of the above questions would be seen as the introduction of empirical data which properly belongs to the disciplines of sociology or politics, but not to aesthetics. Is received aesthetics really free of such data? Or, we would want to ask, is there a way of re-framing the questions to remove this kind of impasse? We invite contributions that dare to try to do this, which is implicit in Brand and Korsmeyer's collection.

This is in the sense that while their book aims to introduce

feminist perspectives into the established contemporary analytical tradition of aesthetics, its structure invites a questioning of the foundations of analytical aesthetics as such. It was of course these aesthetic theories which led to the formation of contemporary philosophical aesthetics.

Battersby's essay in Part I shows that the difficulty of the Kantian sublime for women is not merely a problem of aesthetics. She argues that 'one of the primary ways to transform the present lies in the possibility of a radical encounter with the past ... . Opening ourselves up to th[e] impossible past also transforms the way we perceive women speaking/writing/creating now' (p. 105). Joanne Waugh's essay 'Analytical Aesthetics and Feminist Aesthetics: Neither/Not?' (Part 5) also urges 'conquering and reclaiming, appropriating and formulating, forgetting and subverting' the tradition, as a continuous project for an altogether new future (p. 413). Would you take this line?

Or would you wish to start from a position outside analytical aesthetics such as that adopted by Rita Felski in her essay 'Why Feminism Doesn't Need an Aesthetic (And Why It Can't Ignore Aesthetics)?' Felski seeks to demonstrate that the distinction between aesthetics and politics is more complex than is suggested by the tradition of analytical aesthetics. Equally she argues,

the desired reconciliation of art and politics implicit in the category of feminist aesthetics fails to recognise the messy contradictions and tension, as well as crucial interconnections, between these two terms. Such a category ... tends either to collapse the aesthetic into an epiphenomenal reflection of a pre-existing politics, or to overestimate the political implications of an aesthetics of stylistic experimentation (p. 443).

Felski seeks a more diversified model of the relationship between politics and aesthetics.

We hope we have made it clear that *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics* is an excellent book. It is, furthermore, evidence of an important development we wish to help to advance. However, while what we are looking for in contributions to our special issue overlaps with much of Brand and Korsmeyer's book, it does not exactly match it. The aim of Part 5 of the 1995 anthology comes closest. 'Feminism and Aesthetics: Directions for the Future' offers a selection of essays which question the

very foundation and future of philosophical aesthetics. It focuses on the future viability of the tradition of analytic aesthetics. We would hope for essays, notes or short interrogations which try to begin to show what it might mean to reformulate aesthetics. We do so in the belief that in some form aesthetics is indispensable. But we would be equally pleased to receive your arguments to the contrary.

We welcome pieces of any length up to 5000 words, based in any discourse, but all referencing philosophical aesthetics explicitly in some way. We also wish to include short statements of about 300 words from practising artists about what aesthetics means to them.

Time is short now. We will need your completed contribution by January 1999, so contact one of us immediately if you have an idea to discuss or put forward.

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## BOOKS RECEIVED

Please contact Margaret Whitford, Books Review Editor, promptly at the address given on the inside cover if you are interested in reviewing one of the following books.

- Bar On, Bat-Ami and Ann Ferguson (eds), *Daring to Be Good: Essays in Feminist Ethico-Politics*  
Routledge 1998, 0 415 91554 6, 0 415 91555 4
- Digby, Tom (ed.), *Men Doing Feminism*  
Routledge 1998, 0 415 91625 9, 0 415 91626 7
- Dines, Gail, Robert Jensen and Ann Russo, *Pornography: The Production and Consumption of Inequality*  
Routledge 1998, 0 415 91812 X, 0 415 91813 8
- Fleming, Cynthia Griggs, *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson*, Rowman and Littlefield 1998, 0 847 68971 9
- Frost, Christopher and Rebecca Bell-Metereau, *Simone Weil*  
Sage 1998, 0 803 97862 6, 0 803 97863 4
- Jackson, Stevi and Jackie Jones (eds), *Contemporary Feminist Theories*, Edinburgh University Press, 0 748 61141 X, 0 748 60689 0
- Kemp, Sandra and Judith Squires (eds), *Feminism*  
Oxford University Press 1997, 0 192 89270 3
- Lublin, Nancy, *Pandora's Box: Feminism Confronts Reproductive Technology*, Rowman and Littlefield 1998, 0 847 68636 1, 0 847 68637 X
- Mintz, Beth and Esther D. Rothblum (eds), *Lesbians in Academia: Degrees of Freedom*, Routledge 1998, 0 415 91701 8, 0 415 91702 6
- Seu, I. Bruna and M. Colleen Heenan (eds), *Feminism and Psychotherapy: Reflections on Contemporary Theories and Practices*  
Sage 1998, 0 761 95190 3, 0 761 95191 1

- Tong, Rosemarie Putnam, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, 2nd ed.  
Westview Press 1998, 0 813 33332 6, 0 813 33295 8
- Weiss, Penny A., *Conversations with Feminism: Political Theory and Practice*,  
Rowman and Littlefield 1998, 0 847 68811 9, 0 847 68812 7
- Willett, Cynthia, *Maternal Ethics, and other Slave Moralities*, Routledge 1998,  
0 415 91209 1, 0 415 91210 5
- Wilson, Elizabeth A., *Neural Geographies: Feminism and the Microstructure of Cognition*, Routledge 1998, 0 415 91599 6, 0 415 91600 3

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

### **Report on *Going Australian: Reconfiguring Feminism and Philosophy***

*University of Warwick, February 1998*

This was the most enjoyable—and useful—conference I have ever attended. It was an imaginative and important achievement to bring together voices which have (or will have) a major impact upon philosophy. I was impressed, not only by the quality of papers, but also by the amount of detailed preparation that went into the conference. This clearly paid off, creating a friendly and easy-going atmosphere conducive to the exchange of ideas.

The conference opened with a public lecture by **Genevieve Lloyd** (New South Wales), 'No-one's Land: Australia and the Philosophical Imagination'. This was introduced by Christine Battersby (Warwick) who welcomed the speakers—seventeen Australians and one New Zealander. It was an appropriate start to this exciting conference. As Battersby pointed out, the task of thinking about women within philosophy has not been limited to an illustration of the negative gender bias within influential texts, but has transformed philosophical debate. Genevieve Lloyd's work is part of this ongoing transformation.

Battersby went on to discuss Australian feminist theory which had prompted this, the first conference to bring together Australian philosophers in Europe. Australian feminist philosophy cannot be described as a monolithic entity but takes many forms, with overlaps and points of tension, which constitute an emergent tradition. In considering these emergent patterns, it is important not to set up the opposition so rigidly that the complexity of some theorists is lost (a point that was echoed during Clare Colebrook's interesting paper the next day). Nevertheless, it is possible to discern trends. Battersby argued that 'American' feminism has tended towards a view of the self that is either: 1) an unproblematic unity (holding universal rights which protect the integrity of the self) or 2) constructed by discourse, under the loose label of 'postmodern' feminism. Many Australian feminists adopt a different approach. This involves a rejection of a straight forward self/other split in which the self is defined by what it is not. In this rethinking of ontology, there are interesting links between the work of Australian feminists and that of

their hosts at this conference, in particular the work of Battersby herself, whose new book, *The Phenomenal Woman*, was launched at the conference.

After expressing concern as to whether they would be able to 'collectively enact' the identity expected by their hosts, Lloyd gave an interesting paper that raised a number of themes which, as it transpired, were picked up in the course of the weekend. She situated Australian feminism by considering the meaning of the 'philosophical imaginary'—drawing upon the work of Michèle Le Dœuff, whom she cited as an important influence on Australian feminism generally. Lloyd illustrated the way in which the sexual imaginary of a culture can become apparent by an analysis of its philosophical texts. Further, she argued, this can open a space in which the speaking position of the silent, yet present, 'other' can be highlighted to show the exclusions within the text. This involves using the fact that women have been both inside and outside philosophy: 'inside' by virtue of being discussed, yet 'outside' the production of the canon.

This point resonated with a question later to be discussed in Penelope Deutscher's paper. Deutscher made the point that women's work within philosophy tends to have been classified as simply an exposition of the work of a great man. This is a trap for the woman, whose *original* work is then criticised for differing from the master's voice and, therefore, for being an inaccurate commentary!

Whilst Lloyd's concern with imagery and speaking positions within texts can sound abstract, her argument was that this does resonate with the concrete experience of being an honorary male philosopher. She explained that the multiple nature of her own position, not only as a woman but also as white, was most evident to her when considering questions of race. Lloyd situated the Australian imaginary by outlining two fictions: that of *terra nullius*, the legal myth that Australia was no-one's land; and that of the aborigines as a doomed and primitive race.

These were themes that were of concern to many speakers within the conference. They were discussed broadly, not only in terms of the relationship between philosophy and culture, but also in the context of issues of race and feminism, at the level of both theory and practice—along with the relationship between these—illustrated from Australian (and New Zealand) perspectives. Lloyd argued that, whilst it is important

to claim a place for a feminist philosophy which can disrupt the malestream, taking responsibility for a speaking position as a white professor has meant that she does *not* view herself as marginal with respect to race. Paradoxically, she was using this aspect of feminist theory to recognise potential gaps within the white feminist philosophical imaginary. The point that white feminists have marginalised black feminist issues, in the same way as men have marginalised women's perspectives, has been well publicised by black feminists. Nevertheless, it is useful to restate this point.

A corollary of this: the importance of not appropriating the position of 'other' (in a repetition of the masculinist move of positioning women simply as 'other') was well made. This is underscored by recognising that some contemporary male philosophers have moved beyond positioning woman as 'other' and have attempted to appropriate this space.

The importance of resisting any move to homogenize different types of 'otherness' was brought out in Rachel Jones' opening remarks to the paper by Clare Colebrook (Monash, Victoria) which started the Saturday plenary sessions. Jones traced the origin of the idea for the conference. Again, a fascinating parallel was drawn between a model that can be used to think of the self as emergent and the terms in which an emergent tradition, such as Australian feminism, can be understood. The emergence of Australian feminism—as different voices—was linked with the way in which the self can be thought of as emerging through relations with others (rather than as a pre-existent, already formed self).

Colebrook's 'What is Australian Feminism?' compared Australian and American feminisms. The Americans, mainly Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell, were characterised as concerned primarily with language. This seems more appropriate in terms of Butler's work (in which it is the repetition of the performance that aims to destabilize and which she discusses in terms of poststructuralism) than with the open possibilities implicit within Cornell's concept of the imaginary domain. However, the general theme that Australian feminism was much more than an amalgam of Anglo-American and French feminism was well made. In support, Colebrook cited the important work of Elizabeth Grosz, with her emphasis upon corporeal feminism and critique of essentialism, along with the work of Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd.

Following this was a paper by **Penelope Deutscher** (Australian National University). As mentioned earlier, her paper on contemporary French women philosophers raised questions about *how* women's theoretical work becomes marginalised and defined as outside philosophy. This primary focus was on Barbara Cassin and Nicole Lotaux, whom Deutscher argues are not widely read, possibly because their work is not easily fitted within the heading 'difference feminism'. This was a detailed excerpt from work in progress, which will make interesting reading.

The session then continued with **Zoë Sofoulis** (Western Sydney) on 'Container Technologies'. Sofoulis produced a number of images which lingered after the paper. One example is the thought that containers actively work by holding things (and which should therefore count as active in the way in which we think of machines as active). Although any image of the female body as a container is problematic within, for example, arguments around abortion, she did challenge the way in which the terms are used. She is a witty and engaging speaker and the fact that she had broken her leg upon arrival in London did not mar this ability.

**Linnell Secomb** (Western Sydney) gave a paper on 'Fractured Community' which examined the problems which arise when situating issues of race and feminism within the legal context of Australia. She focused upon this to engage with the contemporary debate around the meaning of 'community'. It is an indication of the clarity of her work that there were no easy answers to the practical questions that present themselves with regard to conflicts between native Australians and the (white) settlers. As such it provided a useful point of departure for discussion.

There was an interesting Foucauldian move in which she argued that, in expressing our concern for a lost community, we are actually creating one. In other words, a parallel was drawn between the argument that our sexuality is constructed by the way in which we are compelled to talk about it, and the construction of community through the protestations that it no longer exists. Had there been more time, it would have been useful to explore this further to bring out the subtle aspects of power involved in this move. As it was, the paper was already packed with a useful analysis of the body politic through Hobbes' atomistic

individuals to Pateman's critique of the sexual contract, as well as a sustained engagement with Benhabib's view of an embedded and embodied community.

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the minority discourse (that cannot be understood by the majority) was used to undermine the Habermasian approach of Benhabib. This was situated in the Australian context of native land rights in which it is argued that the 'settlers' simply understand native land rights as an aim to gain real estate. She argued that both community and law were 'fractured'; that assimilation of oppressed groups into citizenship was a myth.

There was a brave attempt to suggest a way forward which recognised difference by acknowledging, for example, the two different conflicting laws of the native Australians and the 'settlers'. The aim was to replace Benhabib's model with one that recognised 'fracture and rupture'. This clear exposition raises a number of problems, such as the issue of conflict of laws, the extent to which different groups can really remain separate from each other, and conversely the extent to which they can be viewed as homogenous within the group itself. (On a practical level, this raises questions about, for example, clitorrectomy in which there are conflicts between the sexes within racial minority groups.)

**Moira Gatens** (Sydney) completed the day with her keynote paper which was an attempt to sum up 'where we are now'. This was done by looking back at the last thirty years of feminist theory—rather than by giving a more in-depth analysis of her own original use of Spinoza and Deleuze. The paper was divided into five sections: introduction, early modern political theory, sexual contract, feminist moral philosophy and sexual sociability. Its focus was upon the central question about sociability: how we are to live together.

Gatens argued that what can be characterised as a loss of unity within the feminist movement, within the last thirty years, can also be viewed as a strength—in that it illustrates different ways of opening up an inclusive sociability. What was important was not the aim of producing a dogmatic definition of feminist philosophy (Australian or otherwise), but to account for what it can do. (In this she overlapped with a point made by a number of speakers, particularly Rosalyn Diprose, who concluded the conference.) In the final section, Gatens posed the question: why is feminism portrayed by the media as anti-social when it

is an open social movement? In so doing, she attempted an engagement with the 'social' imaginary or the imaginary of some men.

The Sunday started with parallel sessions. It was viewed as important by the conference organisers that there should be diverse feminist voices, which should include women at various stages of their academic careers rather than only established writers. This worked well, with some of the most interesting papers coming within the parallel sessions I attended. The first parallel session involved three venues. In the first **Nicki Sullivan** (Macquarie, Sydney) gave a paper entitled on subjectivity and tattooing. This was accompanied by **Sarah Ahmed's** (Lancaster, UK) 'Bodies with Skins'. The second session involved papers on feminist epistemology by **Kirsten Campbell** (Macquarie) and on Klossowski, money and capitalism by **Melinda Cooper** (Paris VIII).

I attended the third parallel session which included the only New Zealander, **Betsan Martin** (University of Auckland). Her paper, 'Imagining Difference with Rosalyn Diprose: Ethics and Embodiment for Cultural Difference'—a brave and apt title given that Diprose was in the audience—started with a wonderful greeting taken from the Maori tradition. The greeting situated the speaker on the other's land by thanking the hosts for particular acts of hospitality. It is the Maori emphasis upon hospitality, and the abuse and forfeiting of that hospitality, which was the central theme of the paper. There was a link between Lloyd's earlier emphasis on the situation of the speaker and the way in which the greeting itself situated the speaker on another's land.

Lloyd had discussed the philosophical imaginary of Australia, with the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. Martin drew parallels between this and the settlement in New Zealand. The imaginary differs, in that the Maori were signatories with the British crown to the Treaty of Waitangi. Nevertheless both were exploitative and, at a time when both the Aboriginal and Maori people are attempting to 'seek redress for their stolen lands and language', this was an attempt to think through the relationship between feminist theory and race.

The accompanying paper by **Ros Mills** (Southern Cross, New South Wales) used a psychoanalytic framework in order to discuss the case of three white women who had killed a white, middle-aged man who was a stranger to them. A useful point that was made was the need

to focus upon legal procedure—i.e. on what really happens—rather than simply a 'black letter' analysis of legal cases and legislation.

In the next plenary session **Robyn Ferrell** (Macquarie) continued this psychoanalytic theme. Her paper, 'Copula: Feminism and the Sexual Relation', discussed 'the sexual relation' by starting with the question: how can the sexual relation be violent? She argued that there is an underlying ambivalence between the concept of relation—whether logical, grammatical, sociological or sexual—and she attempted to draw these together by the use of the image of the copula. This was an interesting and well delivered paper, which covered much ground from a psychoanalytic perspective.

The next parallel sessions were **Kim Little** (Monash) on the gender/sexuality distinction in feminist and queer theory and **Catherine Hunt** (Macquarie) on 'Writing Cyborgs'. This ran in parallel with two papers on art which I attended. The first paper by **Pip Cummings** (Macquarie) focused upon the work of psychoanalyst and artist, Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger. This was clearly a very well researched and intricate paper and the illustrations of the work were very useful. There was a similarity between Lichtenberg Ettinger's work and that of Irigaray, with its reworking of the Lacanian structure, although Irigaray's reworking appears more radical.

The second paper was by **Barbara Bolt** (Murdoch, Western Australia). Entitled 'Shedding Light for the Matter', it was accompanied by slides of her own, stunning paintings. Bolt works in conditions in which the pace of the art work is dictated by the material conditions: the painting has to be completed before the materials are destroyed by the heat of the sun. Bolt argued convincingly that, despite the problematisation of questions of truth and knowledge, there has been no attempt to uncouple the metaphorical link between light and knowledge. Drawing from her experience of living in Kalgoorlie, where the sun blinds by its glare (in contrast to being 'enlightening'), she aimed to think beyond this metaphor. Fascinatingly, this involved the recognition of the materiality of vision itself, hence the title 'shedding light for the matter'.

The final plenary paper of the conference by **Rosalyn Diprose** (New South Wales) was simply entitled 'What is (Feminist) Philosophy?'. She is an amusing speaker, well able to hold her audience. She started by citing a criticism of herself and Grosz in a recent book by Jean Curthoys

[reviewed elsewhere in *WPR* 19, ed.] which had classified their work as 'postmodern' feminism and had singled them out for attack, along with the work of Irigaray and Kristeva (but, curiously, not Lloyd or Gatens). Curthoys made presumptions about the autonomy of science and had characterised feminism as a desire for power. These were easy criticisms for Diprose to knock down. However, it was relevant because they opened up a line of discussion about the underpinning assumptions of her critic.

Rather than viewing theory as an autonomous enterprise, Diprose drew upon Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* to think about the concept of a concept. In other words, Diprose wanted to think about a model that rejected the idea that of a concept as merely representation of the external world. Instead Deleuze and Guattari argue that a concept should allow people to think differently. Diprose argued that images such as that of Irigaray's 'two lips' opened new ways of thinking specifically about sexual difference. Similarly, she cited Lloyd's *The Man of Reason* as an analysis of sexual difference within the philosophical imaginary which argues that ideas of reason are based upon the exclusion of women.

Whilst Lloyd's book traces this historically, the implication picked up by Diprose was that the effects of this are still relevant today. Continuing with the examination of ideas, Diprose drew upon Levinas to discuss ideas themselves, not as objects of representation, but as affective. In other words, that one lives from ideas rather than consuming and regurgitating them—as in her critic's model. Rather than necessarily being drawn from Levinas, this approach strikes me as more in keeping with Gatens' work, which Diprose went on to discuss.

Battersby then concluded the conference by drawing together the themes which had emerged out the 'patterns of interaction' over the weekend. Hopefully, this important conference—and the book which should come out of it—will increase interest in Australian feminist philosophy.

Janice Richardson  
Staffordshire University

### Report on *The Politics Of Knowing: Society for Women in Philosophy Conference*

University of London, April 1998

This conference played an important role in raising the pertinent issues and demonstrating the high quality of current philosophical contributions in the area of Feminist Epistemology. The specific theme of the conference made for a rigorous and intense discussion of many aspects of the field. The three speakers, though concerned with their particular interests, presented their claims in such a way as to allow for connections to be made between them throughout the day. For me, this open quality of the presentations offered a valuable developing picture of the pressing concerns for feminists regarding theories of knowledge.

Alison Assiter began the day with a paper which examined the question of epistemology and value. This paper helpfully described problems and themes which participants could refer to throughout the conference. Feminist epistemologists have made significant responses to the recognition that in the case of knowledge, theory is underdetermined by the data. In other words, traditional epistemology often implies that it is 'obvious' when something counts as knowledge, but it is not difficult to come up with examples which challenge this; the speaker's example of one person's account of a committee meeting was particularly effective.

Dissatisfied with relativistic responses to the question, which simply give up on theory, the speaker suggested that there is another way to 'fill the gap' and at the same time deal with two significant worries: how we are to engage with those in other epistemic communities, and how we are to judge between such communities. This can be effected by invoking an integrated theory of emancipatory values. The discussion allowed the speaker to indicate carefully how this differs from classical liberalism.

After lunch Alessandra Tanesini gave a paper which focused upon the challenge of presenting a socialization of epistemology which does not commit the naturalistic fallacy. Despite warning the audience that she was jet-lagged, the speaker gave an energetic performance which outlined and rejected attempts to socialise epistemology by reliabilists, feminist standpoint theorists and Michel Foucault. Each mistakenly assumes that I can find out what I am entitled to know by finding out what society tells me I am entitled to know. A better socialization of

epistemology can be effected by recognizing that knowledge is or appears to be normative, and by avoiding a certain Foucauldian regularism which makes one disposed to committing the naturalistic fallacy.

The discussion saw attempts to draw attention to the activism of standpoint theory and also allowed the speaker to emphasize that socialization of epistemology is often motivated by a conviction that not all knowledge items can be treated in the same way, and yet by invoking naturalism, epistemologists risk a new form of reduction.

The third paper was given by **Helen Longino**, whose views had been referred to throughout the day. It constituted a response to recent criticisms of the project of epistemological socialism, which seem to urge that we must all be epistemological individualists after all. The speaker sought to describe epistemological socialism as a kind of contextualism which both avoids subjectivism and accepts individual epistemic agency.

Longino began by outlining a rich description of the role played by context in justification which assists feminist arguments about the conditioned nature of subjectivity, and so allows feminist epistemologists to avoid subjectivism. Epistemological individualists share the view that I can validate my own knowledge, and the rich description of context also serves to make this argument untenable. The crucial claim made by epistemological socialism is not a denial that subjects have a relation to knowledge content, as epistemological individualists like Louise Antony would have it, but rather a denial that the relation of subjects to knowledge is passive, insisting rather that the social context of knowers is relevant to their status as knowers and to the content of their knowledge. The discussion allowed the speaker to apply the principles of the theory to particular examples, which clarified the notions and made the argument even more convincing.

On the whole, I felt that this was a most successful conference, and would like to express my gratitude to the speakers, respondents, and all other participants for making the day so enjoyable and enlightening. The length of time (an hour in the case of each paper) given to discussion at the end of papers was much appreciated and appeared to be fruitful for all participants.

Thanks are due to the *School of Advanced Study Philosophy Programme* for supporting this event, and to Miranda Fricker for organizing the conference and ensuring that it ran particularly smoothly.

Joanna Kerr  
*University of Edinburgh*

### **Report on *Post-Conventional Religion: Feminism, Ethics and Spirituality***

*ICA, London, May 1998*

This was a conference with a broad remit: to open a space for women in our society who have moved away from conventional religion and towards an idea of post-conventional religion, a religion that is compatible with their feminism. But, as the title reflected, the predominant theme of the conference was the move from religion to spirituality, a peculiarly feminist spirituality. Here feminism was glossed as a demand that self-identity is rethought in relational terms, as a relationality which dissolves the rigid 'masculinist' boundaries of self/society, body/mind or being/acting, in order to open up to spirituality and, consequentially, to an ethical way of living.

Although questions of spirituality were debated in academic terms as involving a feminist and philosophical move away from a masculinist theological position, what came through strongly was the practical need for an attentive 'female' sensibility as a means of coping with the pace of modern life. However, the way forward was too often conflated with a self-help guide to spirituality, the value of the quiet contemplative moment, yoga and meditation, and 'letting be'. It was surprising, and disappointing, that such a strong panel of professional academics did not produce a more rigorous debate, especially as the audience at the ICA proved to be keenly interested, questioning and well informed. Nevertheless, the conference provided a welcome, and much valued forum, getting together women from many disciplines and backgrounds. It therefore achieved its aim, and provoked a lively thoughtful debate, and for that we must thank Daphne Hampson and her impeccable organisation.

**Daphne Hampson** (University of St Andrews), post-Christian theologian, opened the conference, arguing that if we understand the self

differently we need to see God differently. The shift from the idea of the masculinist self-sufficient and 'complete' self, and the corresponding all-powerful Christian God, to the autonomous feminist and spiritual self that is 'centred in relation' demands a move from dogmatic religion to a religion that equates God with spirituality.

Hampson promotes a peculiarly humanist and ethical spirituality, a force which holds onto themes found within the more contemplative Christian tradition, and she is at ease using the familiar vocabulary of that tradition, talking about healing, prayer and, indeed, God as ways of thinking about 'an other dimension of reality', a dimension understood through the relational ways of thinking she finds in feminist theory. This is not unproblematic; feminism is, as it were, a broad church and some references to the specific feminist texts she is drawing on would have been useful; Luce Irigaray is perhaps the assumed resource.

Rejecting Christianity as a 'vehicle' of human religious sensibility which is no longer believable or moral, she went on to explore that sensibility within a more equitable and ethical feminist paradigm. But first she asks the key question in any idea of post-conventional religion: 'why be a spiritual person?' Here Hampson stays with the theological equation of God with goodness, a God evidenced in human endurance and sensibility; in renewal and recreation even in the face of suffering; and in that other dimension sensed in everyday encounters of love, healing and prayer. She claims that attentiveness, honesty and integrity enable the spirit to flourish, and that we need to make time and space in our lives for the renewal of the self and for cultivating relational ways of thinking so that we might be 'centred in relation', and in God.

Hampson is an inspirational, forceful and assured speaker, committed to the idea of a post-Christian spirituality. Many in the audience shared her sentiment. There was however some concern from the floor about her use of the word 'God' and about the way she rejects, rather than reworks, models of women in biblical myths.

As a sociologist **Eileen Barker** (LSE, London) supported the idea of a changing image of God by discussing how social changes correspond to changes in conceptual boundaries—the impact of feminism being one example. Sadly, Barker did not talk about her research into new religious movements, many of which would surely come under the epithet 'post-conventional'. Instead, she gave an overview of different

sociological models to make the point that conventions are necessary but arbitrary.

The post-conventional, Barker argued, is continuous with the conventional, and the current move from religion to spirituality is a move which reflects social changes characterised by a concern with self-responsibility, relations and the experiential. Apparently, authoritarianism and revelation have been superseded by pluralism and experience; religion by spirituality, and the fixed idea of God with a more fluid, pluralistic image. The title of Barker's paper, 'How Can We?', provocatively posed a number of questions—we? can we? how?—which opened a short debate on strategies of change and the power of the individuals to choose. Barker, it seems, sets great store by education as an impetus to change. Perhaps feminism is one way forward.

An active spirituality was very much the focus of the paper from **Philippa Berry** (Kings College, Cambridge) which set out to re-evaluate non-intellectual ways of knowing as a bodily, experiential and experiential sensibility. Using an eclectic plethora of references—including Lacan, Kristeva, Susan Griffin, Cavareto, Haraway, Deleuze and Guattari—she used 'feminist' theory to rethink bodily identity as an open system of matter-energy; a system which challenges binaries such as the organic/inorganic, animal/human and matter/spirit. Berry wanted us to rethink matter, on a quantum or dynamic model, as movement or energy. Known through the senses rather than the intellect, this energy was cited as *chi*, life-force, the 'intelligence of matter' and as (embodied) spirituality.

This 'lightness of being'—the fluid, the dynamic and the formless—then demands a relocation of ethics from the intellect to attentiveness. Here Berry made a rather worrying conflation of feminism, spirituality and the practises of Buddhism and Taoism. She went on to advocate a mindful, attentive and ethical mode of living, and a pace and value of life which is respectful of bodily time and need; a change witnessed perhaps in anti-careerism, anti-consumerism and above all in having control, instead of being controlled. She looked to yoga, massage and Eastern medicine as support for such a mode of living.

The questions from the floor were pertinent. In particular, it was asked whether Berry's take on these issues is gender specific. It seems it is not, although Berry finds in feminist theory a welcome move away

from over-developed intellectualism. However, I am still left wondering why she needs to move from understanding the body in terms of a material fluidity to spirituality.

The highlight of the conference was the paper from the French feminist philosopher **Luce Irigaray** (CRNS Paris), 'The Breath of Women'. Reading in French, with a translation given after each short section, she explained breath as a spiritual life-force, with the breath of women as the first and last gesture of life and as the most radical need. Irigaray goes back to an image of the annunciation, finding there a space for the spiritual in the idea of a virginal breath, free of appropriation and consumption. Such a 'breath of women' is cultivated through an ethic of compassion and of sharing; just as the woman shares her breath, her oxygen and nourishment with the foetus, so the spiritual master shares the spiritual path.

Here a strong and not unproblematic affinity was once again drawn between feminist and Eastern ideas of spirituality, especially the practice of yoga. The motif of maternity was further fleshed out as the transmission of both a physical and a 'meta-life', with the mother giving autonomy to the infant through the sharing of blood, body and milk. Women's capacity to mother assures the spontaneous and instinctual conservation of breath. But Irigaray gave this reciprocal relationship a further and surprising twist by mapping it onto the idea of woman as heterosexual lover, using an Eastern model of love to extend the spiritual into the carnal.

Irigaray maintains there is a difference between the subjectivities of woman and man. Women's special 'vitality of soul' provides a spiritual resource which man has deprived himself of in the reduction of sex to reproduction, commerce and technology. Indeed Irigaray proposed that the role of woman as lover was higher and more inclusive than her role as mother because her energy then flowed through the carnal relation and was not just taken up in engendering. Sexual difference, says Irigaray, is opening up a transcendental sensible horizon between people through the cultivation of breath and spirit.

Perhaps the main concern of the many questions was the idealistic responsibility put on women to 'conserve breath' and engender equitable sharing relationships. Irigaray replied that she has great faith in women awakening to their radical possibilities. Other delegates questioned her

focus on the heterosexual relationship, and her conception of the mother/child relation; the reply on both counts was that what is important is the quality of the relationship, that it is a sharing one that gives to both. Perhaps we should remember that this paper was only a short reading: her new book *To be Two (Être Deux)* will surely involve a more extended discussion of a sensible relationality.

The idea of relationality came up again in the plenary session, adeptly chaired by **Grace Jantzen** (University of Manchester) who gave a magnificent summary of the conference, situating the ensuing discussion around four themes: self-identity, boundaries, spirituality and the notion of attentiveness, and the dissolution of binaries. Irigaray sees the problem of relationality as the paradox of spirituality: that it is at once both singular and relational, a relation between one and the other that neither restricts nor exploits. And so the conference came back to where it began, with the question of feminism, ethics and spirituality. The space of the post-conventional remains open.

*Judy Purdom*  
*University of Warwick*

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