

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Gender: Key Concepts in Philosophy

TINA CHANTER

New York: Continuum, 2006; 176 pages.

Tina Chanter's recent book, *Gender*, is part of Continuum's "Key Concepts in Philosophy" series, which has previously published volumes on *Epistemology*, *Ethics*, *Language*, *Law*, *Logic*, and *Mind*. The purpose of the series is to serve students as introductory volumes on "core ideas and subjects" in philosophy. Although not the most introductory of introductions, supplemented by primary sources and screenings of the films she discusses, Chanter's book would serve as an excellent textbook for feminist philosophy courses, particularly for instructors with a continental slant: rather than dividing chapters into streams of feminist thought such as liberal and radical feminism, as is typical of most introductory books on feminist philosophy, Chanter provides chapters on Foucauldian, psychoanalytic, poststructuralist, and Deleuzian feminisms, and also includes extensive discussions of prominent continental feminists such as Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, Moira Gatens, and Rosi Braidotti.

While *Gender* also includes chapters specifically devoted to Marxist and postcolonial feminisms, one of the merits of Chanter's book is that issues of race, ethnicity, and class are discussed throughout the book and in every chapter, rather than remaining contained in these particular chapters. This is indicative of Chanter's argument that considerations of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class cannot simply be "added on" to questions of gender, as supplementary chapters for instance. Instead, Chanter advocates an intersectional approach which is also "resolutely historical," or which "refuses to treat the 'categories' of race, class, gender, and sexuality as if they were transparent or self-evident" (154). Chanter's book provides both strong arguments for and an example of such an approach to feminist theory. As an introduction to feminist theory, Chanter's discussions of race and ethnicity as these intersect with gender and sexuality are also more inclusive of global feminist perspectives than many introductory texts in feminist philosophy, which tend to focus primarily or exclusively on the experience of black women in the United States when exploring race and ethnicity.

Chanter begins *Gender* by noting that, following declarations of the death of God and the end of metaphysics, "It was only a matter of time" before the end of gender would also be announced. As Chanter observes, "These are interesting and difficult times for gender theorists." While in simpler times feminists made use of an apparently straight-

forward sex/gender distinction, today it has become clear that this is yet another binary opposition which calls for deconstruction. Exploring the challenges which intersexed and transgendered identities pose to the sex/gender dualism helps Chanter to complexify the discussion of sex and gender, and not only to show that there is no sex, but only gender, as some feminists have argued. The experiences of intersexed individuals who identify with the sex which they were prior to early surgical interventions, but which they have not been socialized to be, problematizes the strong social constructivist claim, while the case of transsexuality, in which individuals identify with a sex/gender which they *neither* possess "naturally" *nor* have been socialized to be, challenges both biological determinist and social constructivist arguments, suggesting to Chanter that, beyond the standard dualisms of sex/gender and nature/nurture, there may be a "third factor." This is a novel and exciting way of introducing feminist philosophy, one that begins with rather than marginalizes the transgendered and the intersexed and the problems which they pose to our deeply-entrenched notions of sex and gender, rather than beginning with the sex/gender distinction and with "woman" (as if this were another transparent and self-evident category).

In addition to the chapters that have already been mentioned, Chanter also has a chapter devoted to "Formative Moments and Concepts," and another to "Feminist Epistemology." It is in "Formative Moments and Concepts" that the reader will find discussions of classical feminist theorists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, and Simone de Beauvoir, among others. It is also in this chapter that Chanter explores the implicitly white, heterosexual, and middle-class nature of traditional feminism, and the sexism of much traditional postcolonial theory. Chanter takes up the latter subject via a feminist response to the postcolonial philosophy of Frantz Fanon. Finally, in this chapter Chanter formulates her argument that analyses of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality should not only be synchronic but also diachronic, or should account for the "messiness of history."

Chanter's chapter on feminist epistemology takes up two kinds of examples of feminist arguments regarding the gendering of knowledge: feminist ethics of care and feminist philosophies of science. In this chapter we find stimulating discussions of authors such as Gilligan, Harding, and Haraway.

Gender is an eloquent, articulate, and sophisticated discussion of diverse aspects of the history of feminist theory and of current feminist theory. Chanter grounds her theoretical analyses in applied feminist concerns such as rape, anorexia, and sati, and also offers compelling interpretations of cultural works, and particularly of films, to illustrate her arguments. Although presented in the format of an introduction to

feminist philosophy, *Gender* is sufficiently complex and original to be stimulating reading not only to students new to the field, but also to scholars of continental and feminist philosophy.

CHLOË TAYLOR, *McGill University*

The Impossible Mourning of Jacques Derrida

SEAN GASTON

New York: Continuum, 2006; 152 pages.

Comprised of three chapters ("The Precedant," "Histories—Décalages," and "The Gap Moves"), each representing roughly a month of daily diary entries (October 12 through December 17), *The Impossible Mourning of Jacques Derrida* was chronicled during the first two months following Derrida's death in 2004. The book is a series of meditations that both directly and indirectly consider Derrida and his work, including personal stories of Gaston's life during this time of bereavement. The entries, which vary in length from five pages to a sentence or two, are at times intensely personal, autobiographical, and moving. At other times they are more formal and academic. Often they are a combination of both, where distinctions are not readily evident.

The character of this book is such that it probably will not be read by most at length but in small increments. Its fragmentary structure and short, often chaotic, bursts of thought make it a good daily devotional. Potential readers should not expect much in the way of a sustained interrogation of a given subject. More generally, *The Impossible Mourning of Jacques Derrida* is in style and content the kind of book readers will expect from an author who faithfully and fully embraces the gleeful play of deconstruction. Yet as much as this is a playful, even cavalier text, it is also somber and sorrowful.

In the end, this book stands out as an oddity among philosophical texts. Gaston offers little more than a snapshot of Derrida and his work, his relation to Hegel, Husserl, and others. While there are a number of important insights offered there is almost no critical dialogue. Moreover, readers should expect only a brief survey and introduction to deconstructive thought found between the lines. Even so, one need not be familiar with Derrida or deconstruction to appreciate this book. As a response to the loss of Derrida it is both a mourning and a realization that such is impossible. It is an attempt to fill the gap left by Derrida's passing and it is the realization that such a filling is impossible. Gaston returns again and again to the gap left by the passing of Derrida and the

gaps that we find throughout Derrida's work. Gaston asks how it is that we might mourn the one who so zealously forewarned of its dangers. Derrida is clear that we cannot avoid mourning, for it is thrust upon us, whoever we are, and yet we are told of its simultaneous impossibility.

Gaston offers readers a unique work that, while representative of a kind of mourning—a prolonged aching—offers a tribute that is careful not to "monu-memorialize" Derrida. How one should mourn is not answered by Gaston. In fact, the matter of mourning seems to get significant attention as a topic only in the last part of the book, leaving the rest of the text as an act of mourning itself. Some readers will no doubt be disappointed that many important questions are raised but receive only passing glances, e.g., the problem of history, the philosophy of literature, and so on. In such ways this book acts more like an anecdotal philosophy text, which is interesting because of its personal character more so than its depth of philosophical insight. Even so, this is a pleasure to read because of its existential honesty and its frustrating gaps.

JASON C. ROBINSON, *University of Guelph*

The Things Themselves: Phenomenology and the Return to the Everyday

H. PETER STEEVES

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006; 245 + xvii pages.

In this new volume in SUNY's Contemporary Continental Philosophy series, H. Peter Steeves aims to renew the philosophical revolution that was inaugurated by Husserl's phenomenological account of intentionality, a revolution that purports to replace the detachment that has traditionally characterized philosophy with a robust, concrete reengagement with the world capable of disclosing the structures of experience. The underlying contention is that the radical edge of this project has grown dull through idealist misinterpretation and internal theoretical disputes among later generations of phenomenologists. Thus, like many others over the years, Steeves aspires to "do" phenomenology rather than just produce textual commentary about it. As his title suggests, Steeves takes this up in terms of the dictum that ostensibly guided Husserlian phenomenology: to return "to the things themselves." By returning to "the specifics of everyday existence" (xvii), his goal is to "make one small step within [the Husserlian] tradition, hinting at a possible direction for a phenomenology that takes seriously a return to the things themselves" (xiii).

Attractive as that old slogan may be, it has never been clear exactly how it ought to be understood, and just how much stock, if any, should be put in it. But Steeves takes it up completely unproblematically. He consequently avoids dealing with a number of crucial questions that are implicitly broached by his investigations, for example, the question concerning the relationship between "world" and "things," that is, whether pursuing the latter really will bring us closer to the former. There is likewise no direct reckoning with questions concerning the meaning of "everydayness," nor with just what "structures of experience" are and how they relate to the "being of the world" (xiv).

This theoretical looseness is positively embraced by Steeves by way of locating his project as neither a work of strict phenomenological theory (too abstract) nor mere psychology (too naive), nor even somehow in between. Deliberately situating it "outside of standard academic discourse" (xvii), he presents the work as one of "applied phenomenology" and hence as a "truly philosophical and phenomenological project" (xiv).

While some such practical orientation is certainly commendable, in particular with regard to the task of renewing phenomenology, and especially (but not only) if it succeeds in gaining for phenomenology an accessibility beyond specialists, it is far from clear whether *The Things Themselves* can really advance either agenda. Steeves's claim, for example, that his approach does not sacrifice "rigor and exactitude" (xvii) is by and large untrue, and so it is hard to see how that which is rendered accessible is actually phenomenology. At any rate, the reader will be left wondering whether the populist tone is not simply an alibi for methodological laxity.

Nonetheless, the book—consisting in ten chapters spread over three sections—is an interesting and at times entertaining read. The first section, "The Animal as First Philosophy," takes up themes that are central to Steeves's work more broadly, namely, animality (see *Animal Others*, 1999) and community (see *Founding Community*, 1998). The aim here is to learn to recognize and rethink humanity within the larger framework of animality and the natural world. There are lively discussions here concerning, for example, animal language and logos, feral children and Bigfoot, as well as critical reflections on Levinas's view of animals. But as will be the case throughout the book, these discussions are liberally interlarded with anecdote and other narrative which, while often intriguing, leave the discussion short on substance.

The second section, "The Good, the True, and the Beautiful," takes up aesthetic and epistemological questions, aiming to show how such issues are mutually inseparable and thoroughly normative. Here we find an interesting critique of the quasi-pornography of ESPN exercise shows,

although like the earlier chapters this does not amount to much more than an introduction to the issues. Building off Merleau-Ponty's famous essay, Steeves then provides an analysis of Cézanne's work. This provides a refreshing dose of rigor, albeit ironically only by taking some distance from the ostensible return to the everyday. Finally, there is a discussion of feminist epistemology, in which Steeves traces out some of the important philosophical affinities between phenomenology and feminism. There are noteworthy and highly suggestive observations made in terms of scientificity and communitarianism, for example, but as before the discussion tends to be detracted from by a frustrating amount of digression.

The point of the third and final section, "Away From Home," is to question the meaning of home and travel. The first chapter looks at ethical considerations related to the possible colonization of Mars. Although a lot of flighty speculative science is dealt with here, it makes for an interesting extension of the concerns of the first section to an even larger holistic vision that goes beyond the notion of "life." The next two chapters deal with tourist experience—in Disneyland and Las Vegas—and are surely the best of the book. In David Wood's judicious phrase, they deal with the "hermeneutics of irreality." Although the discussion of various "rides" in the Disneyland chapter gets a bit tiresome, the overall analysis in terms of community is well done. Likewise, the interrogation of Las Vegas in terms of a broad notion of "risk" makes for a surprisingly salutary interpretation.

The tenth and last chapter is, as Steeves admits, something of an oddball. It is about Venezuela, where the author lived for a year as a Fulbright Fellow; in particular it concerns the rise to power of Hugo Chávez and the radical social changes involved therewith. A large chunk of the chapter is devoted to recent Venezuelan history (although a great deal more has happened there since the time the chapter was written), and the rest is a stylized, largely autobiographical account of Steeves's experience during this tumultuous period. The ostensible point is to question the nature of democracy and the ethical duties of philosophy, presumably in terms of "phenomenological communitarianism" and the idea of a practical, ethically-driven view of phenomenology. But nothing is said that addresses these themes very clearly or explicitly. Again, it all makes for a gripping read, but by the end the poetic fancifulness (possibly an attempt at "magical realism") reaches such a fever pitch that it is utterly mysterious just what is going on.

The upshot seems to be that without serious methodological reflection that enables us to go beyond the static analysis of intentional structures, the phenomenologist is left oscillating between being either a detached observer of irreality or a disoriented participant uncritically

swept up in the force of major historical events. To be sure, Steeves's book suggests a number of fruitful areas for the development of phenomenology. But as a return to the everyday the latter project will require, as it always has, no small amount of "theoretical" work, if we really want to see the revolution through.

BRYAN SMYTH, *Mount Allison University*

Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation: Out of This World

PETER HALLWARD

New York: Verso, 2006, 199 pages.

It is a rare event to encounter a book on Deleuze that does not privilege either the actual or the virtual sides of what he understands as real, but that rather attempts, despite the seeming paradoxes and contradictions of such a distinctively Deleuzian position, to develop it into a theoretically and practically consistent whole. Unfortunately, Peter Hallward's well-written and well-researched *Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* is not such an eventful book. Unlike those commentators who privilege the actual at the expense of the virtual and read Deleuze as a sort of "fleshy materialist" philosopher, Hallward opts for the opposite extreme. He maintains that "the actual ... is in reality ephemeral and illusory" and "[t]he virtual alone is real" (35), and that therefore Deleuze is more correctly read as a sort of spiritual, if not mystical, philosopher "out of this world." That Deleuzian commentators take such extreme positions might not only suggest that Deleuze failed to get his ontological message across loud and clear, but more important that they are perhaps less concerned with what Deleuze really meant and more with what they can do with him. While such practice is common, if not solicited in the context of Deleuzianism, it does become problematic when a commentator, such as Hallward, proposes a reading in order to reach the conclusion that when it comes to the world we live in, we cannot actually do that much with Deleuze. One is inclined to adopt a more traditional attitude: what *did* Deleuze really mean?

Although he deals with a variety of issues, Hallward's real concern in the book is with the relationship between actualization and counter-actualization. Hallward devotes the first two chapters to actualization, that is, the ontological movement of being from the virtual to the actual, and then spends the following four chapters developing the ways in which such movement can conceivably be reversed. From political practice to art to philosophy, counter-actualization entails progressively

higher degrees of disintegration of the actual. Thus, in political practice the actual is "suspended," in art almost "abandoned," and in philosophy totally "abandoned." While Hallward does not seem opposed to approaching art and philosophy in terms of actualization and counter-actualization, he is skeptical about such an approach when it comes to political practice. If we proceed along these lines, we are left with an empty and useless conception of political practice. Hallward gives two main reasons for this claim. First, given that it is only the virtual and not the actual that is creative, actualization must always proceed from the virtual to the actual, thus making counter-actualization, that is, the movement that originates within the actual, a meaningless notion. "Since it acknowledges only a unilateral relation between virtual and actual, there is no place in Deleuze's philosophy for any notion of change, time or history that is mediated by actuality.... Deleuze's work is essentially indifferent to the politics of this world" (162). Second, given that in actualization actual creatures are but effects of virtual creations, there is no real relation on the level of actual creatures alone, and therefore no real possibility of relational politics. "At bottom" all actual creatures are the same, i. e., different. "Deleuze writes a philosophy of (virtual) difference without (actual) others. He intuites a purely internal or self-differing difference, a difference that excludes any constitutive mediation between the differed. Such a philosophy precludes a distinctively relational conception of politics as a matter of course" (162). It is primarily for these two reasons that Hallward concludes that when it comes to political practice, Deleuze has really nothing to offer.

The main problem with Hallward's interpretation of Deleuze is that it insists on the clear-cut ontological gap between the virtual and the actual. Since "the virtual alone is real" and "the actual is illusory," the main mistake to avoid here is again the assumption that the virtual and the actual enjoy equal powers of determination, that creating and the creature reinforce one another in some sort of mutual co-implication" (79). Hallward's main mistake is to think this a mistake. Ontologically speaking, it does not make sense to speak of either the virtual or the actual on their own. The virtual and the actual are two sides of one and the same real, and while it makes sense to say that one of these sides is creative whereas the other is not, it does not make sense to speak of the real in either of these terms to the exclusion of the other. Neither the virtual (creativity) nor the actual (creature) on its own is real. The virtual and the actual together are what is real. The virtual does not sustain the actual, and the actual does not sustain the virtual. Instead, the virtual and the actual together sustain the real, and it is within the real that we speak of the reciprocal interplay between the two. Take away one of these sides and the real is no more. It is his mistake to insist on the clear

cut ontological gap between these two sides that leads Hallward to dismiss a Deleuzian conception of politics along the two above-mentioned lines. But if we interpret the virtual and the actual as I suggest here, the two problems Hallward associates with Deleuzian politics disappear.

First, if the real is both the virtual and the actual, counter-actualization just means exercising that side of the real that is creative (the virtual) in order to change it. The (actual) creature places a limit to the degree of (virtual) creativity that is available to its reality. Human beings, for instance, cannot fly, but they can change their social and political circumstances. Hallward complains that counter-actualization is meaningless, since no possibility of change can originate within the actual realm alone. But this complaint would only make sense if we could speak of the actual realm on its own. But we cannot. The actual and the virtual together comprise the real, and it is within the realm of the real that every possibility of change originates, along with everything else. Second, Hallward complains that there is no relational politics since there is no difference on the level of actual terms alone. The same logic applies here. There are no actual terms on their own. Every actual term is already some real term, and it is not only within but also between real terms that we speak of difference. The difference between real terms has to do with the ratio between the virtual and the actual sides of their respective realities. Some realities are more creative (virtual) and some more creatural (actual) in proportion to "what they can do." Deleuze uses Spinoza to understand the difference between these two realities in terms of affectivity, and he uses Nietzsche to call those realities that are maximally creative "good," and those that are maximally creatural "bad." Deleuze's evaluation of any social and political situation always has to do with how much it stifles or how much it encourages the virtual (creative) side of human reality.

Hallward's critique of Deleuze is certainly based on a thorough familiarity with his work. Unfortunately, it does adopt a highly one-sided, dare I say Badiouian, perspective on it.

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Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism

JANET AFARY and KEVIN B. ANDERSON

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005; 312 pages.

The bar for being recognized as an expert on Islam has never been set particularly high. When that is combined with writing about a not oft-visited country, the consequences can be particularly disastrous. As Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson show in *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, in the case of the French philosopher this combination led to horribly inaccurate predictions about the outcome of the Iranian revolution and the nature of political Islam, as well as the decline of the thinker in the eyes of the French intelligentsia.

Afary and Anderson provide an historical introduction to Foucault's intervention in Iran, putting in context the little known details preceding the Islamic revolution, which appeared to many Western observers almost *ex nihilo*. In 1978–79, a series of mostly urban protests broke out against the government of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. Viewed by his own people as a brutal dictator and an anti-Islamic Western puppet, Pahlavi had been installed in power by a CIA-backed coup that overthrew the nationalist government of Mohammad Mossadegh. Upset about the confiscation of British petroleum interests in Iran, the British successfully appealed to the American government for its help in installing a more pliant government in Tehran. As the revolution began to spread, Foucault went to Iran as a special correspondent for the Italian daily *Courriere della sera*, and later for the French *Nouvel Observateur*, first in November 1978 and then again in 1979. These articles, by-lined Tehran but actually written after Foucault's return to Europe, describe the role of religion in creating what Foucault labels a new "political spirituality" that would alter the "global strategic equilibrium."

Combining a detailed commentary on Foucault's intervention in Iran, alongside the first English translation of Foucault's articles—which have long been available in French and in Persian—as well as those of some of his critics (including Simone de Beauvoir and the French scholar of Islam Maxime Rodinson), Afary, a scholar of Iranian history, and Anderson, a sociologist of left-wing movements, show that contrary to any assumption that Foucault's well-documented hostility to grand narratives and utopianism might make him suspicious of the Islamic revolution, he was willing to suspend his disbelief, at least in part, because of his other interests. In particular, they stress that his interests in the power of traditional narratives (in this case, combined with modern technology) to fight modernity led him to find hope both in the narratives of the well-established Shiite rituals that surround Muharram and in the cult of

martyrdom that increased in size during and following the revolution. Afary and Anderson argue, very persuasively I believe, that Foucault succumbed to the same sort of Orientalist beliefs that are to be found in Nietzsche and Heidegger. One of my few complaints about this book is that it could have benefited from a greater discussion of the Western Orientalist tradition—particularly in France—that is so well documented in Edward Said's body of work. It is very possible to argue that Foucault's own reading of Eastern traditions is highly influenced by the school of French Middle Eastern studies that Said analyzes.

After the discussion of Foucault's support for the Revolution, and the contents of his articles, the authors identify two particular themes for discussion, both of which turn on the question of gender as it has been understood in the West for the past generation. In the two chapters on women's rights in Iran, Afary and Anderson show how secular intellectuals and feminists were co-opted by the radical clerics associated with Ayatollah Khomeini, and discuss in great detail the reposts to Foucault written by Atoussa H., an Iranian feminist whose article attacking Foucault was published pseudonymously, and Maxime Rodinson, a French professor of Islamic Studies. They detail Foucault's problematic relationship with feminism and compare it with the disastrous effects the revolution had on the rights of women in Iran.

In the last chapter, Afary and Anderson close with a discussion of male sexuality. The authors argue that Foucault's understanding of homosexuality in the Muslim world was tainted by his inability to see forms of power capable of operating on the body other than those found in the Western sciences of sexuality, which he had analyzed in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Moreover, they argue that in the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault, by looking to the Greco-Roman world, was trying to find an equivalent for the ethics of love he believed to exist in contemporary Muslim countries. For that reason he was blind to the dangers the Iranian revolution posed to sexual minorities. They write: "Up to a point, Foucault was correct in his observations that Muslim societies have remained somewhat flexible on same-sex relations. But such a limited form of acceptance, which involves total closeting, is not the same as the recognition sought by the modern gay and lesbian rights movement" (139).

Foucault never responded to his critics, with the exception of two dismissive letters (both reprinted in the anthology), one to Atoussa H., and another to the intellectuals Claudie and Jacques Broyelle, who had criticized Foucault in the pages of *Le Matin*. In fact, after a somewhat critical open letter to Iranian Prime Minister Medi Bazargan, Foucault remained quiet on the subject for the five years that remained of his life.

Ultimately, the two authors have done a huge service to the intellectual world. Not only have they collected and translated previously unavailable documents concerning Foucault's involvement in Iran, they have provided a useful discussion of the themes, dominant in Foucault's work, that rise to prominence in his discussion of the revolution. More important, they have showed the danger not of intellectuals commenting on politics but of poorly thought out, sloppy, and ill-informed Orientalism. This alone makes their book a timely intervention.

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Music and Philosophy

GABRIEL MARCEL

Trans. Stephen Maddux and Robert E. Wood

Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005; 147 pages.

"Philosophical thought can no longer, without being in danger of losing all its effectiveness, be dissociated from a reflection on the work of art," Gabriel Marcel insists, and the works he reflects on are most frequently musical ones (135). As Robert E. Wood explains in his introduction to these collected essays, the analogy that Marcel himself develops to explain the primacy and centrality of music to his thinking is a geographical one: his philosophy is the continent, his plays are the off-shore islands, and music is the sea out of which they both emerge. Maddux and Wood's aim in making these essays available to English-speaking readers is to correct critical inattention within the philosophical community to the inextricability of music and philosophy in Marcel's thought. In doing so, they also hope to draw philosophical attention to the ways in which music can both model and contribute to a richer awareness of the world in which we find ourselves. Marcel contends that music provides this basis through the sense of connectedness that one can get from participation in community. Indeed, participation is the very thing that, for him, characterizes our human project, a more social and ethically engaged existentialism than the caricature that comes down to us through popularizations of Jean-Paul Sartre's thinking.

The essays contained in this volume were written over a span of forty-five years, from 1920 to 1965, and they clearly reflect Marcel's engagement with the phenomenology and existentialism that dominated European philosophy between the interwar and post-World War II eras. Wood notes that Marcel's philosophical reading of Roman Catholicism, rendering his faith into a more accessible philosophical discourse, bears a

resemblance to Martin Buber's translation of Hassidic Judaism into philosophy. This resemblance is indeed there—Marcel's theorizing of the communion that music makes possible, for instance, depends on a non-objectivizing relation to the Other that, in Buber, is presented as the "I-Thou" relation—but one can also draw fruitful parallels to contributions by Heidegger and Sartre. These associations establish Marcel as a significant figure in European philosophical circles of the mid-twentieth century and speak to the necessity of this long overdue collection of essays. Here, in Marcel's writings, we find elucidation of three influential insights of this period: the deep appreciation of the subjectivity of the Other that preoccupied Buber and Levinas, the metaphysical power of art which is the topic of Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art," and the commitment to theorizing from concrete, everyday experiences which Sartre celebrated as the great virtue of existentialism.

In the book's first essay, "Music in My Life and My Work," (chronologically his latest, written in 1965), Marcel takes up this existentialist methodology most explicitly and develops his philosophical insights out of autobiography. He understands philosophy as a search for transcendence, for spiritual knowledge, and recalls his early experience of spirituality as constituted through music. This essay is not an elaboration of a general theory of music, but an account of how musical experience developed his philosophical thought, and his careful attention here to the personal experience of "becoming" most clearly shows Marcel as an existentialist thinker, albeit one who, like most placed in that category, rejects the label. "[I]t was with music as a starting point," he tells us, "that I was led to reflect on Being or to affirm Being" (46). Later in the book, in a 1943 essay titled "Music According to Saint Augustine," Marcel asserts that only in phenomenology can we develop a philosophy of musical experience, and in 1927's "Music Understood and Music Experienced" he claims that the essence of a musical structure "is not even essence except insofar as it is capable of being experienced" (101), recalling Sartre's classic existentialist dictum that existence precedes essence.

Marcel's thesis concerning the metaphysical power of art is discussed in a number of these essays, but it is most intriguingly presented in his cryptic comment that "[a]uthority is the distinguishing mark of a work of art" (71). The French word "autorité" has its etymological root in the Latin "auctor," which implies that the work of art possesses and is distinguished by the capacity to be an originary or founding event. Understood in this way, Marcel's 1920 notion of the work of art resembles Heidegger's thesis that artworks found worlds, a correspondence that is emphasized elsewhere by Marcel's more specific discussion of music and musical universes. "[T]o help live; to help bring

things to life: such is the sacred function of ... music," Marcel declares (79). Indeed Marcel thinks that the value of a musical idea can, as a rule of thumb, be gauged by the ability it has to reveal new facets of itself over time; the idea which is immediately fully obvious is, he says, rarely the most valuable. Clarifying, or perhaps correcting, Heidegger's contention that language is the house of Being, Marcel argues in a 1940 essay that music goes beyond even poetry: a poem only imperfectly survives translation, if at all, whereas music can be "an interpreter between peoples" (105). It also carries with it a need to be performed, to be "begun again" or reinterpreted in each new performance, such that it is at the same time transcending its performer and depending on him or her to bring out its fullest existence (107).

In opening up a space for interpersonal communion, music reveals itself as a ground not just for metaphysics and epistemology but for value theory also. Through their music, musicians create worlds into which they invite and initiate their audiences, Marcel claims. In this mystery of music we encounter the mystery of presence, which Marcel describes in 1940 as "the sudden emergence" of a form capable of creating and announcing itself (112–3). This suggests to Marcel that perhaps there is no real difference between presence and freedom, a convergence that is particularly acute in improvisation where we see the notion of "liberty" taking on its most authentic meaning. This is so precisely because the practice of musical improvisation constructs a radically open space where possibilities are offered, considered, and contested on a greater scale than one typically finds in, say, public discourse. The "being transported" which Marcel identifies in music-making is a profoundly ethical moment in which he relates to the other as Thou, not a perception of the other as object, but a deep appreciation of the other's subjectivity.

Marcel's attention to musical improvisation makes this collection relevant to audiences beyond the one the translators envision. No doubt English-speaking readers of existentialism will find these essays useful in illuminating Marcel's contributions, but I think theorists of musical improvisation will also derive great value from his work. Improvisation theory is an emerging interdisciplinary discourse drawing on scholarship in musicology, cultural studies, and philosophy, and these essays could augment work currently being done on the community-building functions of improvised music. In particular, Marcel's account of his personal experience of improvising provides a perspective that brings together philosophical analysis and a musician's phenomenology. Improvisation theory's attention to interconnections of aesthetics, ethics, and politics profits from descriptions of holism and solidarity in music of the kind Marcel presents when he writes about his improvisations as not really

coming from him and not really coming from outside him, but existing instead in a space where the distinction between inside and outside loses meaning. For those who believe, as I do, that the "rigor" of studying value theory components in isolation from each other is a false one, believing instead that a critical analysis is better conducted when the links between ethics, politics, and aesthetics are foregrounded, this book offers a great deal of food for thought.

TRACEY NICHOLLS, *Lewis University*

H. C. for life, That Is to Say ...

JACQUES DERRIDA

Trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006; 173 pages.

Jacques Derrida situates his tribute to Hélène Cixous, *H. C. for life, That is to Say...*, within the literary tradition of the palinode—and indeed this text is best read as a work that resonates and performs like a poem. When read through this form, a poem in all its musicality (ode, "song") defined by retraction and repetition (palin, "again"), Derrida's autobiographical anecdotes, philosophical close-readings, and more general assertions about the monumental importance of Cixous's project have an apparent, thematizable structure—a beautiful but also necessary attribute, for this piece has no chapters, no subtitles, no explicit divisions. The palinodic structure is thematizable because of its double movement: contained in recantation is a withdrawal aligned with death, and the grace of another beginning, for what was said can be miraculously replaced with other words, another direction, new life. Such a meaningful structure is continuous with Derrida's premise in a work that takes its place as yet another rich conversation with his close friend of over three decades: an exploration of the differences between the two thinkers's conceptions of death (and life). While previous conversations can be overheard in works such as *Voiles* (1998) and *Rêve, je te dis* (2003), this piece is an important contribution to scholarship on Cixous's literary achievements. Derrida attends in particular to *Le Prénom de Dieu* (1967), the novel to which he had originally planned to limit his address, in addition to *Les Commencements* (1970), *Anankè* (1979), *Jours de l'an* (1990), and *OR, les lettres de mon père* (1997), while he also makes reference to *La Baleine de Jonas* (1970), *Le Troisième Corps* (1970), *La* (1979), *Illa* (1980), *Mémoires d'aveugle : L'autoportrait et autres ruines* (1990), *L'Ange au secret* (1991), *Beethoven à jamais ou l'existence de*

Dieu (1993), the play *L'Histoire* (1994), *La Fiancée juive—de la tentation* (1995), and *Messie* (1996). Derrida does of course refer to various theoretical works, including Cixous's dissertation, *L'Exil de James Joyce ou l'art de remplacement* (1968) and *Entre L'écriture* (1986), but the emphasis is on her remarkable contributions to the literary arts.

Derrida's lecture shows how seemingly solid origins or beginnings liquefy upon recollective contact. Beginnings multiply, replace each other, until a beginning becomes structural only, with no substantial content as "the" beginning. Derrida names these withdrawing reassertions (palindomic) "rebeginnings"; his text characteristically defers definition, prefers opening gestures to closing ones. Such fluid movement of assertion and retraction delivers the rhythm of this piece—a performative tribute to the life in Cixous's work. Certainly, Laurent Milesi's translation is in itself a rebeginning. The piece was originally the inaugural lecture for a Cixous conference at Cerisy-la-Salle in 1998, then published in *Hélène Cixous: Croisées d'une oeuvre*, and finally translated into English in 2004, a project that bears the interruptive force of Derrida's passing on October 8 of that year. In his moving "Translator's Preface," Milesi reflects on the experience of this loss, and how it shadows not only the work of translation but also the way in which we perceive Derrida's assertions about his relationship with death. Yet his lecture is full of life: the tangential reflections of Derrida's address, especially his anecdotal reaching for the origins of his friendship with Cixous, are open and intimate. Just as Derrida touches upon the inception of their friendship, a postcard received from Cixous followed by a face-to-face meeting, this beginning dissolves as such into yet another origin—one of which Derrida was unaware until many years later when Cixous told him of the event. Seven years before the postcard was sent, she sat behind him during his address at Cerisy on the topic of death, and the proximity of the two thinkers would have been recognized only by those in the audience, perhaps one man in particular:

Maurice de Gandillac ... could claim to have seen us together, virtually, to have caught us in his field of vision and seen us both coming, facing him, whereas we did not know each other and had never seen or heard each other face-to-face yet. I am sure [his] mind was elsewhere; he was probably thinking of something else and he missed that (6).

This pre-originary encounter, then—the "true" beginning of the relation—dissolves just as it is reached. Only retrospectively does this event gather meaning; they are within the same "frame," Cixous and Derrida, even before they willfully connect. Derrida also reflects upon other co-

incidental resonances between them—and the delight he takes in these gifts is palpable—such as the co-incidence of their parents's names. While Cixous the author is "the daughter of the dead-fathers" (her father George having died from tuberculosis when she was eleven years old) and aligns herself, her ambiguous "I," on the side of her living mother, Derrida's father was Haïm Aimé, meaning "Life loved," and his mother was named Georgette, thereby forming "a perfect chiasmus" (57). Such improbabilities—of their first meeting, of the mirroring of their parents's names that reflect their respective identifications with the sides of life and death—mark for Derrida the possibility and the truth of their intersecting lives:

I always ask myself how we managed to meet, to read and write each other. Unless, turning this encounter between two people as different as we were into such an improbable, unpredictable, and unbelievable chance, this difference in rhythm might be the veritable essence of this encounter (64).

This is a beautiful account of a relation that precedes and exceeds intention or will, and speaks to Derrida's later approach towards what he calls "the letting/making come" of Cixous's performative poetics (67).

One of the central, implicit concerns of this book is the inadequacy of current approaches to Cixous's literary endeavors. Less than a decade ago, Mireille Calle-Grueber drew attention to the relative absence of scholarly works Cixous's fiction (*Rootprints*, 1999); here Derrida demonstrates, suggests, and questions what worthy readings might resemble. Repeatedly pointing out the limitations of the time given him (assertions that resonate with his reflections on death), Derrida includes several analyses or, as he calls them, "experiments" of excerpts while also asserting infinite possibilities for future studies (on telephones, animals, and punctuation in Cixous's literature, for a start). Extending from his interpretations are seemingly endless possibilities for readings of Cixous; certainly, according to Derrida, the majority of the work on her fiction has yet to be accomplished. True readings, Derrida implies, begin at the border of the untranslatable, just as true belief is an "impossible faith in the impossible" (4) and "the only true questions are the impossible ones" (27). He writes of the process of translation not only conventionally, taking note for example of untranslatable puns, homonyms, or expressions in French, but also accounts for the process of reading in general as an act of translation; it is as if the poetic event is undergone only through the experience of near-unreadability. Derrida reads such poetic events with a particular appreciation of specific novels, such as *OR*. Much literary (and thematic) significance is given to the sentence, "Je vis des

letters," because of the homonymy present here, the untranslatable collapse of "I saw letters" and "I live by letters/literature" (see Milesi and Herbrechter's note 65). Derrida sees in this sentence Cixous's performative pronunciation of life, vision, and velocity; the words say and "do" simultaneously. He also reads her use in the novel of the word "salut," with its double implication of an address or call and salvation. Most powerful and pertinent to the book as a whole, however, is Derrida's analysis of the word "might" (*puisse*), and the role in general of the subjunctive in Cixous's poetics. Might is the conflation of powerlessness and strength, impossibility and possibility, passivity and willfulness:

[I]n actuality, the *en puissance* here no longer designating the virtuality, the potentiality, a *dynamis* that one could traditionally continue to oppose to *energeia*. No, what arrives according to his mighty power of the 'might,' of the 'would that it, he, or she might,' really actually arrives, in real life. It is life for life. This grammatical alchemy makes the might power of the letter work and grants might not from power, having or being, but from the wish of the *puisse*, this wish that is an order, an 'I order (*jubeo*).' That this might come about, therefore from the jussory, the jussive, as the speech act theorists would say, the *jouissif*, as I would say, of an order or plea that enjoys [*jouissent*] and jubilates already feverishly from the arrival that is thus commanded, of a 'might' [*puisse*] ('would that you might live,' 'that this might happen/arrive,' 'would that you might hear me, 'would that you might write,' 'would that I might receive the order to live,' would that the letter might arrive, and so on, always imminently, on the spot, in a moment [*sur l'heure et tout a l'heure*]) (70–1).

Derrida thinks through the uniqueness of Cixous's grammar; he demonstrates the necessity of reading slowly—following his own dynamics, *adagio and lento*, asserted at the beginning of the lecture—because her writing moves so quickly, defying Chronos, with homonyms, seemingly simple proclamations, declarations of wishes, longings that simultaneously call the world into being like magic. This magical dimension is not at odds with reason, skill, the technical according to Derrida, and he explores the limits of conventional notions of the magical in order to heighten an appreciation of Cixous's project, its possibilities. Despite the vitality and innovation of her language, death remains very real; Cixous's father did in fact die, and any amount of verbal summoning cannot bring him back. Yet Derrida insists that hers is not a naive denial of the fact of death; she knows death well, "better than anybody," but does not

believe in it. Indeed, her father "is saved, saved from death ... only by saving his uniqueness through substitution" (25), through regenerative saying. Derrida leaves readers with an aporia: the difficulty he undergoes in his attempt to believe Cixous is paradoxically necessary for belief to be a meaningful event. To believe her, he must come to the limit of his ability to believe. Is this aporia a truth or an evasion? It is difficult to decide.

The theme of belief brings Derrida to an insightful discussion of Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, in which he reaches across the limits of the psychoanalyst's exposition on "the omnipotence of thought" and into the beyond that opens with Cixous's "letters of omnipotence." According to Derrida, Freud (called with affection and resistance by Cixous, "Uncle Freud") misunderstands the poetic dimension of art, art that makes-lets things happen. In his "evolutionist" theory where Freud draws parallels between the advancement of humankind and the psychic development of the child into maturity, animism is accorded with narcissism, religion with object choice and attachment, and science with the relinquishment of latter two ways of being, granting freedom from the narcissistic fantasy of omnipotence through an acceptance of death. Derrida writes that Freud neglects to explain why, if he accords art with animism, narcissism, the omnipotence of thought, art has survived despite the progression through these stages; the psychoanalyst limits himself to thinking through representational art (where art exists "as if" it depicts something external or real in the world). Derrida insightfully points out that it is an odd failure, for "the poetic dimension of art—is ... in the order of psychoanalysis ... where performative power [*is*] ... at once rational, technical and magical. The effect, both affective and effective ... is always magical in appearance" (112). Similar to the operations of language in psychoanalysis, Cixous's poetics, her magic, does not exclude the technical and scientific dimensions of composition and thought. Such omnipotence of thought need not be disdained with the label of narcissism, according to Derrida. Instead her writing "experiments" the pre-originary force traced by Freud, referred to as "animatism" or *Belebheit*; this is a force for life that precedes any cultural determination, and thus escapes the evolutionary logic set up by Freud. Cixous' *Belebheit* is indeed narcissistic, according to Derrida, but he draws a useful and important distinction between "petty narcissism" that is blind to the other and a prior, essential narcissism in which "life lets itself be lived and outlived," for "the mightier narcissism is, the more it loves the other" (115). In other words, art's narcissism is to be celebrated as integral to its engagement of or openness to the other. The acknowledgment of death, the stage that marks in Freud psychic and collective maturity, is likewise problematized. Here, Derrida examines the denial implicit to

acknowledgment (of death, for example); acceptance can be a form of avoidance. This analysis gives rise to a rich analysis of passages from Cixous's *Anankè* in which a reader can see how Cixous's poetics challenge Freud's claims by exposing the way in which denial of death contains its affirmation, while explicit acknowledgment of it may signal a veritable blindness to its reality.

The next-to-last rebeginning is the most straightforward movement of Derrida's text, at which point he passionately expounds upon Cixous's valuable works and with what they (and she), despite obvious international fame, must contend in order to become fully appreciated and disseminated. He even confesses to his own reaction of confusion, awe, and fear when he read Cixous's draft of the yet-unnamed *Le Prenom de Dieu*, three and a half decades before: "What on earth is happening here?; What am I going to do with this?"; "What on earth is this type, this new type of raving and sublime autobiography?" (147). He feared that the novel would not be accepted by the world; it was that revolutionary to the revolutionary philosopher. Such intimate descriptions of self-doubt are demonstrative of what Derrida characterizes as true reading: if we are shaken we are open—and how else is there to practice reading? If anything this work affirms reading and writing as serious activities with much at stake. Cixous herself, according to Derrida, is in a precarious position. He elaborates upon four "traps or tests" faced by Cixous, namely, "the armed force of misogyny or of phallogocentrism," (136), internal resistances to the scope of her work, manifested in scholarly works that ghettoize her "among the great-French-women-theorists-of-the feminine" (140). Acknowledging Cixous's feminism, Derrida points out that she exceeds the reductive weight of categorization that hides behind an appearance of celebration or support in the academy. The third test is subtle and internal to Cixous's life-work—for he warns against the avoidance that is implicit to recognition. In other words, on one level affirmation can result in a kind of evasion rather than a full affirmation that contains or is open to negation. Finally, Derrida writes that Cixous will face the test of the tension between the resistance to and necessity of a metalanguage; surely as a totalizing force it may threaten to absorb singularities but it is required "to get the truth out of the well. The truth of the essence, what one says and when one says it/that is [c'est], is only an agency in the differential of the intensities of power" (143). This is a tantalizing gesture towards examining the problem of totality and singularity that might interest scholars who are evaluating poststructuralism. On the whole, then, the text's value is in its powerful assertion that it is time to begin again to read Cixous. If Derrida is not entirely convinced, and cannot take Cixous's side, he shows an unquestionable conviction in the greatness of her literature: how many

other writers can claim that Derrida began a sentence about them with, "I know no other writer who ..."? One of Derrida's greatest tributes is his assertion that he and Cixous are so very different. He writes with such authority—by virtue of his humility and open self-doubt, and exploration of his own limits—that hopefully readers will believe him, and recognize that anyone who argues that Cixous is at all "derivative" of Derrida is simply exposing an ignorance or misreading of her work. At the very least, readers can take from Derrida's reflections a very few simple statements carried so gracefully by the palinode that structures them: "it is always necessary to begin again with her" (78); "read and reread everything yourselves, that is a job for life..." (94).

ALEXIA HANNIS, *European Graduate School*

Žižek !

ASTRA TAYLOR

Zeitgeist Video, 2005; 71 minutes.

Si les départements de cinéma s'intéressent depuis longtemps à l'analyse politique, ceux de science sociale se soucient encore peu du cinéma. Pourtant, plusieurs penseurs ont commencé à relier ces disciplines et Slavoj Žižek, philosophe à l'Institut des sciences sociales de l'Université de Ljubljana (Slovénie), devenu un incontournable des *cultural studies* aux États-Unis, en a fait une des particularités de sa pensée. La situation est devenue paradoxale au point où Slavoj Žižek—qui tente une réinterprétation politique de Jacques Lacan—est plus connu et étudié dans les départements de communication que dans ceux de science politique. C'est que tous ses livres sont remplis de référence au cinéma, du plus petit exemple pris dans le détour d'une argumentation logique, à l'analyse cinématographique rigoureuse d'une scène ou d'une image : le cinéma parfois appuie le propos sociologique, d'autres fois c'est la situation sociale qui porte le discours esthétique. Cette posture académique—entre la science sociale et le cinéma—est propice au traitement cinématographique de la pensée d'un auteur et le documentaire *Žižek !* d'Astra Taylor—dont c'est le premier film—permet de joindre les deux lignes que sont l'étude cinématographique de la pensée politique et l'étude politique du cinéma. Si le documentaire dévoile un Slavoj Žižek intéressé par le cinéma, ce que ces livres présentaient déjà, il permet en outre d'avoir un regard cinématographique sur Žižek.

Le documentaire de Taylor se veut une présentation de la pensée de Slavoj Žižek. En le suivant dans ses conférences, on fait le tour de sa

biographie : visite de son Université (l'occasion de parler de son passé de dissident dans l'Ex-Yougoslavie), rencontre avec son editrice chez Verso (l'occasion de parler de ses nombreuses publications souvent traduites en plusieurs langues). Avec ses conférences, la star académique—dont on dit qu'il donne plus d'une centaine par année—déplace les foules (jusqu'au-delà de 1000 personnes). Maintenu par les médias, sa popularité croît sans cesse. Aujourd'hui, Žižek signe des autographes et participe même à des documentaires. Mais le film permet en outre de découvrir ses principales idées—le rôle de l'idéologie, de la croyance et de l'illusion, le mouvement politique et psychologique de la consommation, l'ironie et le cynisme dans la pensée—, le tout, sous forme de citations disséminées. Disparates et sans lien entre elles, ces citations sont à l'image des textes žižekiens, excentriques à souhait. Elles donnent aussi une idée assez juste des thèmes réguliers que Žižek colporte de livre en livre, chaque fois l'occasion pour lui de (se) répéter. Cela été mieux dit ailleurs, il vaut mieux citer :

Son processus même d'écriture par copier-coller, allers-retours, réutilisations constantes de matériaux déjà présents dans des travaux, des livres, des interventions précédentes, ressortit aussi à une écriture de la reprise. Le sentiment de déjà-vu ressenti parfois à la lecture de cette œuvre en spirale ne tient pas à l'incurie de ses éditeurs mais au mouvement même de l'écriture qui a pour but, à chaque fois, de reconfigurer par l'agencement de son énonciation même la situation de sa réception : performativité rétroactive de la communication ou de la dialectique hégélienne. (François Théron, « Slavoj Žižek. Un philosophe inclassable », dans *Le Nouvel Observateur*, hors-série n° 57, décembre 2004/janvier 2005, 50.)

J'emploie le mot « personnage » pour désigner le Slavoj Žižek qu'on nous présente. C'est que, dans ce documentaire, il agit comme tel. Ou mieux, inversement, il tente de se soustraire à l'image publique qu'on lui prête : Slavoj Žižek est devenu un personnage médiatique qui vit à travers les conférences et, maintenant, à travers le cinéma. L'intelligence du documentaire *Žižek !* est de présenter le phénomène tout en y participant. Ce sont les médias qui entretiennent la popularité de Žižek, pas sa renommée académique ni la profondeur de sa pensée. C'est parce qu'on parle plus de lui que de sa pensée que Žižek s'est forgé une réputation. Sa pensée est souvent diffusée sans être analysée ni même simplement comprise. Žižek possède, selon ses propres mots, un aspect *clownish*, il dira même que les médias « *making [him] popular is a resistance against taking [him] serious* » [*sic*]. Mais la popularité

médiatique a des conséquences dans le domaine de la pensée. Žižek est rejeté par le milieu académique. Même son editrice—dit-il dans le film—rejette certains de ses manuscrits sous prétextes qu'on n'y trouve pas de *jokes*.

Cette situation est intéressante sur plusieurs points, car elle dévoile le lien ténu entre la pensée et sa médiation, entre la communauté scientifique et la circulation du discours, entre l'intellectuel et son public. Le cas de Žižek—où le medium prend toute la place du message—nous enseigne que l'un et l'autre ne se distinguent pas. Une idée n'est pas dissociable de sa diffusion, l'université de la société où elle se trouve, l'écrivain de son lecteur. Les sciences sociales ont beaucoup à apprendre dans ce domaine. Rongé par le doute sur sa propre pensée et désirent survivre intellectuellement, Žižek peut bien vouloir abandonner l'image qu'il projette (son personnage), il n'en a pas le pouvoir. Le pathétisme de son « suicide » médiatique commis à la fin du film n'y changera rien. Žižek en effet y « joue » sa propre mort, couché par terre, il veut nous convaincre qu'il a sauté du haut d'un escalier en colimaçon, comme pour dire que la fin de la vie médiatique coïncidait avec la fin de la vie (et avec la fin du film). L'arrêt du film (avec le générique) devrait correspondre à la fin de la transmission. Ce serait aussi comprendre la fin du documentaire comme la naissance de quelque chose—le générique comme genèse : à partir de la fin du film, le spectateur s'intéressera au *vrai* Žižek, comprendra *vraiment* sa pensée, achètera ses livres, ira voir ses conférences. (Peut-être le rencontrera-t-il et obtiendra-t-il de lui un autographe ?) Le *suicide* serait donc bien une naissance, mais ce qui en découle, c'est le retour du *même*. Cette fin d'un média, c'est simplement le début d'un autre. Et dans le cas particulier de la philosophie de Žižek (on pourrait étendre la chose à toute philosophie dite « populaire »), le médium prend toute la place du message, il l'alimente et l'enrichit sans cesse.

Que Žižek essaie de fuir les médias par un suicide filmé montre bien que sans la caméra, il ne serait rien, on ne parlerait pas de lui, et cette recension n'aurait pas été écrite. Žižek est la victime de ce qui le nourrit. Et vouloir mettre fin à cette situation en filmant l'absence de médiation montre bien le *double bind* dont Žižek est le producteur/produit. Filmer l'opposition à l'image, c'est bien tenter de se suicider en espérant que quelque chose en naisse, c'est utiliser un média en espérant qu'il puisse se développer contre lui-même. Et cette vaine entreprise a été bien expliquée ailleurs, dans le domaine des archives. Contre Bataille qui propose la destruction des archives, le philosophe Boris Groys répond que cette destruction en tant qu'événement devra, pour valoir quelque chose, être elle-même archivée. L'archive n'est pas négligeable, bien au

contraire : en tant que médium/message, elle possède comme le cinéma sa vie propre, et cette vie, dans son élan, ne peut que s'accroître.

Pour faire un parallèle avec le cinéma—un peu à la manière de Žižek—, disons que cette vie propre du média est un thème fort des films sortis pendant les années quatre-vingt-dix. Dans une des dernières scènes de *Natural Born Killers* d'Oliver Stone (1994), un dialogue révèle le sens du film. Le couple de tueurs en série qui était connu pour ne tuer qu'en présence de témoins s'échappe d'une prison avec l'aide d'un journaliste devenu pour l'occasion caméraman pour la télévision. La scène finale est particulièrement intéressante : on propose de tuer le journaliste. L'argument du journaliste pour rester en vie est celui-ci : les deux tueurs oseraient-ils perdre leur seul témoin ? L'action bascule, la réponse est sans appel : la caméra que porte le journaliste est déjà le témoin de la scène. Tout le film prend un nouveau sens, c'est alors seulement que le spectateur se rend compte que le personnage principal de toute cette histoire était la caméra qui la filmait. La scène finale de *Žižek* ! est similaire : prétendument mort Žižek se lève et quitte la pièce où il se serait « suicidé », seule la caméra reste. S'il faut penser le sujet du film—dans son sens philosophique—alors celui-ci ne peut être que cette caméra qui reste, car lorsqu'elle cesse de tourner, c'est bien la pensée de Žižek qui s'arrête.

Que reste-t-il derrière le semblant ? Que reste-t-il de la pensée, si elle est représentation sans modèle ? C'est une question que pose Žižek dans le film, et c'est certainement une question que l'on se pose sur la pensée de Žižek après avoir vu le documentaire. « *It's all fake* », nous apprend le maître de soirée du cabaret Silencio pour présenter sur scène une chanteuse dans *Mulholland Dr.* de David Lynch (2001). L'interprétation espagnole de la chanson *Crying* de Roy Orbison fait fondre en larmes les spectateurs. D'un coup, la chanteuse s'évanouit sur la scène ; la voix, néanmoins, demeure. Cette voix qu'on croyait sienne continue, seule, sans son support. Pourtant on y avait cru, on la croyait vraie cette représentation, tout comme le public du Silencio. Cette scène est souvent invoquée par Žižek dans ses livres ; on peut aisément la retourner contre lui. Une fois évanoui, une fois disparu de la scène (ici, de l'écran), le penseur doit laisser la place qu'il occupait à sa voix. Mais une fois que l'illusion se révèle illusion, que le simulacre se montre tel qu'il « est », l'émotion et la pensée peuvent-elles demeurer ? C'était faux, c'était une illusion, on aurait dû le savoir : depuis le début on nous en a averti. S'il n'y a rien à dire sur Žižek ou sur sa pensée derrière l'image populaire qu'elle a, pourquoi en parle-t-on autant ?

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Feminist Interpretations of Merleau-Ponty

DOROTHEA OLKOWSKI and GAIL WEISS, Editors

University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006; 290 pages.

The feminine body has remained a consistent focus of feminist philosophy. Certainly, feminist philosophers have disagreed about the ontological and material status of this body and the implications of its difference, but feminist philosophy would make little sense without it.

Such rapt attention to the question of embodiment is almost unheard of in the traditional (read: androcentric) Western philosophical canon—except, of course, in the case of Merleau-Ponty. For Merleau-Ponty, foundational philosophical questions such as being, consciousness, freedom, and language are inseparable from a theory of embodiment, whose elaboration he made his life work. Yet despite this major contribution to a theory of the body, Merleau-Ponty remained (as earlier feminist commentary on his oeuvre has pointed out) largely inattentive to the sexed difference of bodies. This is why Merleau-Ponty makes for such an intriguing bedfellow for feminism: here is the body-positive guy who whispers all the right sweet nothings in your ear, but is still incapable of finding your clitoris.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, feminist embraces of Merleau-Ponty have until recently remained few and furtive, despite notable Merleau-Ponty-inspired work by thinkers such as Iris Marion Young, Gail Weiss, Dorothea Olkowski, and Vicki Kirby, who laid the groundwork for this collection. This hesitance was undoubtedly fuelled by the widespread influence of Luce Irigaray's critical essay in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (trans. 1993) on Merleau-Ponty's concept of chiasm, where she claims that Merleau-Ponty usurps maternal embodiment and erases sexual difference. A renewed interest in materialism and phenomenology, however, has set the stage for this new collection of twelve essays (some previously published) by mostly well-established feminist philosophers. After the long, largely fleshless years of feminist discursive post-structuralism, the time seems to be ripe for revitalized attention to questions of embodiment and sexual difference. Merleau-Ponty, despite his androcentric oversights, proves a remarkably fecund source for breathing new life into these debates.

A good number of essays in the collection suggest that the time may also be ripe for a nuanced reconsideration of Irigaray's criticisms of Merleau-Ponty. Judith Butler's essay "Sexual Difference as a Question of Ethics" challenges Irigaray's keystone critique most directly. Butler in fact reveals a primary and necessary complicity between Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty, as she argues that Irigaray's criticism "enacts the theory of flesh that it also interrogates" (108). Butler presents a crucial departure

from Irigaray's ethical question ("How to treat the Other well?") and rather asks: "How to treat the Other well, when the Other is never fully Other?" (116). Her refutations of the criticisms against Merleau-Ponty's supposed solipsism and reduction of the other to the same are astute and convincing. Perhaps the only jarring thing about the essay is its perpetual return to the question of language in a way that seems dismissive of the body's materiality. However, this could be explained by the fact that the essay was written in 1990, when discourse and language certainly outweighed fleshy materiality as the focus of feminist investigations into embodiment.

In a similar vein, Vicki Kirby's "Culpability and the Double-Cross: Irigaray with Merleau-Ponty" reads Irigaray as being guilty of the same things that she criticizes in Merleau-Ponty (here, a "desire for self-presence"). Kirby also addresses the question of language. But most scintillating is Kirby's sophisticated and nuanced reading of Merleau-Ponty's chiasm and the flesh. Here, in the most significant departure from Irigaray's position, Kirby locates the feminine and the maternal-gestational *within* Merleau-Ponty's theory of the flesh. She thus crucially finds room within this (never symmetrical) intertwining for difference. For those feminist theorists looking for a way to accommodate both the difference of feminine bodies and the interconnection of all bodies, Kirby's essay is the jewel in the crown.

Other essays remain more loyal to the Irigarayan position. In her essay "From the Body Proper to the Flesh," Beata Stawarska purports that her critical reading of intersubjectivity in Merleau-Ponty in fact "completes" Irigaray's critique. Yet the aforementioned essay by Butler convincingly refutes many of the criticisms Stawarska puts forward. Similarly, co-editor Olkowski's essay "'Only Nature is Mother to the Child'" provides an interesting criticism of Merleau-Ponty's elision of the maternal that inaugurates intersubjectivity. Again, however, this essay seems less convincing in light of Kirby's strong arguments to the contrary. Olkowski's piece would also be strengthened with more attention to the actual phenomenology of gestation-as-intersubjectivity. Nonetheless, both Stawarska and Olkowski's essays add promising angles to debates on the nature of sexually different bodies.

But Merleau-Ponty certainly has much to contribute to feminist debates beyond the (albeit crucial) issue of ontological sexual difference that Irigaray brings to the fore. Readers will be happy to see this collection pursue additional questions that sustain feminist philosophy's broader political, ethical, and cultural relevance. An astute introduction to addressing these broader concerns is the first essay in the collection, Sonia Kruks's "Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of Difference in Feminism." Here, Kruks uses Merleau-Ponty's thought to map the potentiality

of a shared affective and embodied ground among women. Yet, as Kruks stresses, the body is only *potentially* (and never *necessarily*) a path to commonality. This analysis provides a convincing answer to the question of how the illusory group "women" can find a ground for unified feminism across difference, but one that also side-steps the regressively fracturing "epistemology of provenance" (26) prominent in group-based identity politics. In her criticism of politically debilitating "group solipsism" (27), Kruks breaks new ground for thought on anti-oppression politics and activism more generally.

Next, Helen Fielding's innovative essay "White Logic and the Constancy of Color" locates a significant political and ethical dimension in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of color perception. Fielding deploys this to tackle the questions of racism and "skin color." She provides an excellent analysis here of the "paradox of phenomenal perception" as acting both as a filter that will "color" what we see, but also as that which can open us up to the possibility of otherness. Fielding's essay also makes an important contribution to visual culture studies. Such a contribution is also offered by Jorella Andrews's essay "Vision, Violence and the Other: A Merleau-Pontian Ethics." Here Andrews defends perception against postphenomenological anti-ocularist positions that equate the "gaze" with the objectification of women. She points out that for Merleau-Ponty, vision does not fix things, but is rather always open to a perceptual future. Importantly, however, Andrews also examines Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception in light of increasingly non-reciprocal acts of contemporary visual consumption. Like Kruks, Andrews locates the possibility, but not the inevitability, of community through embodied existence.

Laura Doyle's "Bodies Inside/Out" is another strong contribution to a politics that extends beyond feminist concerns of sexual difference, as she uses Merleau-Ponty's concept of chiasm to develop a theory of the body's potentiality for resistance. With this essay Doyle also continues Merleau-Ponty's project of developing a phenomenology of lived embodiment, as she explores the vulnerability and possibilities of the body's interior spaces, particularly in contexts of violence and domination. Co-editor Gail Weiss's own essay, "Urban Flesh" should be included in this category of essays, as she expands feminism's core concerns to the promising question of urban embodiment and violence. Unfortunately, despite some of the individual morsels of keen insight it offers, Weiss's piece suffers from an overall lack of focus, and a dilution of analysis through inclusion of too many disparate interlocutors (Irigaray, Arendt, Casey, Iris Marion Young, in addition to Merleau-Ponty).

Ann V. Murphy's essay on "Language in the Flesh" is a sort of middle ground between those essays that take up the Irigarayan question of

sexual difference and those that expand the territory of feminist criticism. Here, Murphy too asks whether Merleau-Ponty's philosophy can accommodate radical alterity, but brings Levinas' critique of Merleau-Ponty into the Merleau-Ponty/Irigaray discussion. This contribution indeed displays a relevance beyond the borders of feminist philosophy, but it seems to offer less in terms of new insights into these debates.

The essays in this collection are for the most part strong, fresh and convincing; weaknesses in a few of them have already been noted. To these criticisms we might add aspects of Johanna Oksala's essay on "Female Freedom" that suggests a rather radically poststructuralist reading of Merleau-Ponty. In many ways this essay is exciting, as it situates feminist Merleau-Ponty scholarship in a decidedly contemporary theoretical context. Strangely, however, despite the essay's argument for the radical openness of the lived body, Oksala ends the essay by coming back to a body that does not "do" (and is therefore insufficient for) politics. In this off-handed move, Oksala unexpectedly veers too far away from the core of Merleau-Ponty's teachings, which would never posit any sort of acting subjectivity that was not ultimately embodied. Finally, the only sore thumb of the lot is David Brubaker's essay in defense of Carol Gilligan's ethics of care. Not only does this essay seem out of sync with the others in its (somewhat ironically) distanced and disembedded tone, but also in its goal of locating a "universal moralist principle." While gendered experience is certainly relevant to this quest, the quest itself is framed in rather objective and disembodied terms, and seems to lack the sense of ethical and political urgency shared by the other essays. Moreover, Brubaker's reading of Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh is at times too literal, while his use of figure perception relies too heavily on analogy. As a result, an appreciation of the nuanced concept of materiality that Merleau-Ponty develops seems missing.

But in spite of these few miscalculated gasps, the collection as a whole is a breath of fresh air into Merleau-Pontian and feminist scholarship alike, and certainly has much to offer theorists dedicated to rethinking embodiment in terms of generativity, fecundity, and openness to difference.

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