

## Editorial: Rhetoric of Praise

By Alice G. den Otter

Words of praise abound in *The Semiotic Review of Books*: “Excellent text,” “seamlessly produced,” “enriches and extends viewpoints,” “engaging, nuanced, and sophisticated,” “laudable enterprise.” These words are not particularly unusual; other periodicals use similar ones to express approval and commendation in their reviews of books, movies, and even sports events. Publishers and distributors employ praise words avidly in their promotional materials. Indeed, the advertising world in general relies heavily upon praise (“Best fund management group.” “Delightful inns and fine cuisine.” “Academic excellence in a spectacular environment”), frequently using the medium of testimony or third person narration to avoid the obvious bias of self-aggrandizement. Praise casts texts and performances in an elevated, positive light, persuading us that they exist in the realm of the Good and implying that we ought to appreciate, emulate, or at least buy access to those that receive the greatest and most consistent accolades.

Nevertheless, the words of praise with which I began cannot stand alone, nor do they in their original contexts. As French moralist Jean de la Bruyere (1963; orig. 1688) once noted, “a heap of epithets is poor praise: the praise lies in the facts, and in the way of telling them.” This is why reviews greatly exceed promotional materials in persuading us that certain works are worthy of being praised. Whereas the publisher’s commentary on the back cover of a case study might say “provocative and enlightening,” the reviewer’s similar words are accompanied by detailed discussion of the reasons, warrants, and evidence that support such a claim. Even potential drawbacks are considered and refuted. Praise, after all, is a judgement and partakes in the rhetorical quest to persuade others to make the same judgement.

Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (ca. 330 BC; 1909) places praise in the same category as its opposite blame since both are concerned with conditions of goodness in the present. Praise is the positive term, blame being spurred by the inability to praise due to a lack of evidence. We blame people who are not generous, considerate, or honest. We blame books that lack thorough research, insight, or relevance. But the qualities of reference remain those of praise, making praise the operative concept.

Aristotle calls the rhetoric of praise epideictic (ceremonial) rhetoric, and notes that it is one of the three basic types of persuasion (13-14). The other types are forensic (detective) rhetoric, which is used to persuade judges of guilt or innocence in the past, and deliberative (political) rhetoric, used to persuade decision-makers of advantage or harm in the future. We can see how closely the three are interwoven when we consider the following (unsubstantiated) claims. Epideictic: “*Huckleberry Finn* is a racially sensitive and perceptive novel.” Forensic: “*Huckleberry Finn* proves Samuel Clemens was not racist.” Deliberative: “*Huckleberry Finn* should be taught in the classroom.” Even though praise of present virtue, as depicted in the epideictic claim, might be used to support the defense of past innocence (forensic claim) or to recommend future promotion (deliberative claim), the three are clearly distinct in their emphases. When the focus is on the present, without an eye to litigation or utility, the epideictic thrust is predominant. Such is the case, I would suggest, with reviews of the ever present world of art, entertainment, and books. They may end with brief rec-

ommendations for the future, but the rhetoric of praise is by far the strongest force.

Praise persuades best through amplification (Aristotle 41), listing exemplary actions and then elaborating upon them with interpretations that show how even the smallest actions contribute to the overall grand and noble effect. For example, one might praise William Blake for his radical visionary imagination, mentioning all of his poems and paintings, and elaborating on particular epiphanies such as the moment in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* when a raging abyss imaginatively transforms into a moonlit river accompanied by harp music. The more details, the higher is the praise. In contrast, forensic rhetoric persuades through syllogistic reasoning, efficiently demonstrating proofs of initial premises with statistics, physical evidence, and selected data; and deliberative rhetoric persuades through logical illustration of potential outcomes based upon past or synthetic examples (Aristotle 41-42). Both forensic and deliberative rhetoric involve linear logic, which the amplification of epideictic rhetoric often transcends.

Although Aristotle considers all three rhetorical types equally important, the rhetoric of praise has historically been undervalued, perhaps because of its role in public ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, where embellishment and inflation are natural components. During the second century AD, a period known to rhetoricians as “the Second Sophistic,” epideictic was associated mainly with display and ornamental compositions, becoming the dominant form of public discourse when political speech and legal justice were suppressed through the tyranny of Roman emperors (Vickers 1988: 54-57). During the Renaissance, stylistic concerns continued to dominate, amplifying simple statements with witty flourishes to make praise or blame all the more memorable. Shakespeare, in one of his most famous sonnets, both exemplifies that tradition and mocks it when he praises a woman who lacks conventional artificiality:

My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips’ red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.  
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare. (Sonnet 130)

By the nineteenth century, epideictic rhetoric became fully associated with belles lettres, beautiful poetic writing that somehow lacked significance in the practical world (White 1997:22-23). Praise was useful for love and religion, but seemingly not for science and economy which required plain statements about the way things are.

In recent years rhetoricians have reclaimed the field of epideictic rhetoric, arguing that the view of praise as an expressive display without social consequence is inadequate and limiting. As Cynthia Sheard (1996:787-88) explains, “a dogmatic rhetoric of display serving primarily to allow speaker and audience to feel good about themselves” is static and reductive. Sheard perceives instead that praise is a necessary spur to the world of action and culture. The more a virtue is praised, the more it is confirmed and promoted within a particular community. Even if listeners do not imitate the exact vir-

tues of a hero, they nevertheless internalize an awareness that these heroic attributes are praiseworthy, thus ensuring that values of the status quo are respected and maintained. Sheard (1996: 790) concludes that “epideictic identifies and brings together the interests of individuals and communities,” not only to confirm the present but also to assist in envisioning the future.

Even Aristotle recognizes that the rhetoric of praise has an important social function: it rewards (and thus encourages) virtue, which Aristotle defines as “a faculty of providing and preserving ‘goods’; and a faculty of doing many and great benefits to all men in all cases” (36-37). Whatever or whoever does the greatest good to the greatest number of people is the most praiseworthy. Virtue, here, is distinctly active and socially enhancing. Simply being wealthy or beautiful is not enough unless these advantages enable active virtues such as generosity and kindness. Praise, says Aristotle, “is language which brings out the greatness of a virtue” (40), identifying the actions that display this greatness, and implying that the audience should imitate such actions.

Indeed, praise almost has a deliberative, future-oriented function, albeit the imperative “should” normally connected to deliberation remains implicit rather than explicit. This is what is most appealing about epideictic rhetoric: it does not preach overtly. Although the hidden message is that the good should continue, be repeated, purchased, or befriended, praise does not tell us what to do. It simply sets up the model, replete with justification based on cherished social values, and invites us to look and see for ourselves. Psycho-social forces of desire and competition, including peer pressure, do the rest. Praise thus contributes to the maintenance of virtue while allowing us to feel free to choose.

What is interesting, though, is that specific virtues and values change with time and culture. Rhetoricians have always recognized that. Even though Aristotle lists “Justice, Courage, Temperance, Magnificence, Magnanimity, Liberality, Gen-

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tleness, Prudence, Wisdom” as comprising the essence of Virtue, he notes that one must praise what is considered praiseworthy to each particular audience (39). When with the Athenians, praise the Wisdom of art; when with the Spartans, praise the Courage of war. While this relativity is sometimes mocked as being too performative, lacking fixed principles, one need only think of the difference between the interests of a young boy and a mature woman to see how necessary it can be to alter the values one praises when addressing different audiences. To praise Bart Simpson from “The Simpsons” television sitcom, for example, would require different emphases: Bart’s cool wit and risk-taking courage would be considered more praiseworthy by the boy than by the woman, who might nevertheless be induced to appreciate Bart’s imagination and sincerity. This is not to say that both sets of virtues aren’t present, but they are valued differently. Similarly, no academic speaking to academics would praise an author’s liberality in sending a manuscript to a vanity publisher or an author’s magnificent display of obscure vocabulary, since liberality and magnificence are not the primary virtues to which an academic aspires.

Nicole E. Didicher (2000:76) notes that the word “praise” is cognate with “price” – “what we praise is what we put a high price on, what we value, what is of use to us.” To a certain extent, this suggests that praise is as fickle as the stock market, something that disturbs idealistic notions of praise as a mark of excellence. Nevertheless, as Barbara Hernstein Smith (1983:11) insists, “all value is radically contingent, being neither an inherent property of objects nor an arbitrary projection of subjects but, rather, the product of the dynamics of an economic system.” We praise not only what has personal and intrinsic value, but more importantly, what has value in our society, among our colleagues, our families, and our friends. We consciously link to their values when we persuade them to appreciate what we hold dear, like setting a price based upon neighbouring commodities. As with market goods, we recognize that there is a hierarchy of values that fluctuates according to economic forces. And so, as Aristotle says, we grant the greatest praise to someone (or something) who is “the only one, or the first, or one of a few who has done something, or [one who] has done it in the highest degree” (41), leading to a premium upon novelty and greatness.

Book reviews clearly participate in such an economy, although the praise accorded a book does not necessarily match the price. Some books are worth buying and others are not, which may be why reviews have become so important to consumers. In the world of academia, of course, value exceeds monetary expenditure. Intellectuals are, in fact, interested in what Pierre Bourdieu (1991: 66) calls “symbolic capital,” the worth one accrues through education, class, and accomplishment. Some books increase our assets, giving our own arguments authority and credibility when we quote them; others do not. Praise clarifies which ones contain the greatest merit, not only identifying the details but also reminding us of the virtues that are the most worthy to be emulated. Thus it is that Originality, Perception, Logic, Clarity, and Relevance are ennobled in today’s information age, with even irrational fiction being blessed under the auspices of Originality and Emotional Realism.

Still, how does one praise in such a way that one isn’t just hawking wares and increasing one’s own symbolic capital? Religious thinkers have long pondered this question, convinced, as Karmen MacKendrick (2000: 20) reminds us, that praise “is an act of responsive delight, an act performed for love of love, justified where simple information is not.” I think we need to retain some of that delight when we praise, no matter how audience-specific and objective we attempt to be in our evaluations. Delight, after all, is where scholarship begins, sparking the curiosity and the satisfaction that

spur discovery. And it is through delight that we engage and teach our students. As poet William Wordsworth observed in 1800, “We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone. The Man of science, the Chemist and Mathematician [. . .] know and feel this” (1965: 455). Delight speaks to the human spirit in a way that reason does not. This is why Aristotle insists that any act of persuasion needs to appeal not only to logic (logos) but also to emotion (pathos) and credibility (ethos) (6-7). To praise effectively, we need to address the whole spectrum. Not only do we need to say, “this is good because it has the following examples of goodness.” We also need to add, “This is good because it’s delightful. Trust me, I spent time with it and enjoyed it immensely.”

This last point, about trust, concerns credibility. To be credible in praise, one needs to pay attention to the praise object (or person) without questions of guilt or utility. Praise is not praise when tossed about lightly, or when proffered as part of an exchange for favours: that is merely flattery. In religious circles, the full attention that praise requires verges on prayer (McKendrick 2000: 27). But in academic circles, such attention is more frequently considered respect or dedication. Roland Barthes notes in his book *Criticism and Truth* (1987: 92), that the very attention a critic devotes to a work is already affirmative, considering it as a serious work to be debated by scholars, no matter how many weaknesses are identified or denounced. In Barthes’ words, “the critic . . . is obliged to adopt a certain ‘tone,’ and this tone, when all’s said and done, can only be affirmative.” What the tone ultimately affirms is the work’s status as a worthy text, a writing that speaks to and into the reader’s world. This is not to say that the text has no flaws, but that it has passed the “taste test” since it has attracted and sustained the interest of the reviewer. As Martin Amis (2001: xiv) confesses, reviewers learn to “avoid the stuff [they] are unlikely to warm to.” Simply being reviewed, therefore, is a sign of praise.

Still, as Amis (2001: xv) points out, if delight and attention are the main criteria for praise, then “there is no means for distinguishing the excellent from the less excellent.” Anything can be praised if one focuses long enough upon it. Poets have been known to praise sand and thorns as eloquently as they praise roses. True, but the rhetoric of praise is not just an expression of personal enthrallment. Delight and attention are the beginning. But persuasion is the end. And for that to be accomplished, praise necessarily must convince another. To do so, praise requires proof: not testimony, but evidence which the audience can assess for themselves. Here is where the amplification of details mentioned earlier plays a significant role.

For the book reviewer, the proof of praise consists in quotation. As Amis (2001: xv) writes, “Quotation is the reviewer’s only hard evidence. Or semi-hard evidence. Without it, in any case, criticism is a shop-queue monologue.” According to Amis, the most convincing evidence consists in quotations that veer away from cliché, avoiding the overused words that have been voiced by so many others that they lack personality and credibility. Consequently, Amis writes, “When I dispraise, I am usually quoting clichés. When I praise, I am usually quoting the opposed qualities of freshness, energy, and reverberation of voice” (2001: xv). Here, then, is a distinction that can be useful in discerning the quality of praise. The greater the originality of the quotations, the greater the elevation. Naturally a certain amount of perceived originality depends upon the audience’s previous experience. Nevertheless, the flavour of the quotations certainly determines the flavour of the praise. The more striking the quotations, the more striking the praise.

Sometimes, of course, the quotations do not

appear striking until the praiser interprets them in a striking manner. This is a more complex level of praise that depends firmly upon interpretation. Simply designating a text as wonderful, followed by a list of quotations is not enough. To praise fully, one needs to draw out signifiers of greatness, no matter how subtle these might appear. Aristotle suggests that an action which might be disadvantageous when considering its future worth, for instance incurring death by rescuing one’s friend, might yet be praised as being selfless or noble. Or an action that might be considered a fault when examined forensically, such as stealing an important document, might yet be praised for its contribution toward a higher end (Aristotle 14). This ability to shift the perception of something not-good to something good, has occasionally aroused suspicion about the slipperiness of rhetoric. But sometimes one needs to be creative in turning what might at first not appear remarkable into something astonishing and apt. In this way, praise really is a semiotic art.

For example, Michel Serres’ book *The Troubadour of Knowledge*, begins its first chapter with a startling instance of praise. Born left-handed, Serres was forced by his teachers, by one anonymous and nasty teacher in particular, to write with his right hand, although his left hand continued to be dominant with forks and scissors. While this experience caused years of frustration and anger at the right-handed majority, Serres now declares his “heartfelt gratitude” to the schoolmaster. He praises the teacher, the tyrant, for forcing him to experience a wholeness that few of us have experienced: the completeness of being able to use both right and left sides of his body with equal grace and strength rather than leaving, as is customary, one side limply dragging while the other acts. “Do Schoolmasters realize,” he asks, “that the only ones they ever teach are the ones they have thwarted or forced to cross?” (1997:3).

Sometimes the most intriguing types of praise are those that take a little act and embellish it so that it appears a grand gesture. Our own mundane experiences become elevated in the process, making us appreciate afresh those things we take for granted. William Wordsworth in his poem of 1789 “Tinturn Abbey” thus praises the “little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and of love” which play no part in one’s egoistic self image and yet constitute the “best portion of a good man’s life” because they are rendered without thought of recompense or profit (1965: 108:4-6). Similarly, Barthes (1977: 135) praises an obscure passage in Goethe’s *Werther* “where suddenly appear a dish of green peas cooked in butter and a peeled orange separated into sections.” These seemingly trivial details take on semiotic grandeur when Barthes praises not only their “sumptuous appearance of a materiality” but also their welcome “distortion, a sudden gap wedged into the intellectual murmur.” The creativity and freshness of such praise are delightful enough to win our assent.

On a final note, I want to suggest that what differentiates a semiotic review from other reviews is precisely the rhetoric of praise. Unlike the forensic and deliberative thrusts of shorter appraisals, a semiotic review attends seriously and creatively to the praiseworthy significance of a text (or its disappointing lack), exploring not only the possibilities of its content, but also the virtues of the interpretive repertoire, the questions, the associations, the system of expectations constructed around that content. The heightened attention to signifying details marks appreciation and inspires delight. And through this rhetoric of praise the values of an interdisciplinary academic community are imagined, confirmed, and promoted.

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## Animal Reproduction

Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal, Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

### By Verena Andermatt Conley

If animals are incapable of language, must one not be attentive to another communicative medium operative in nature's animal provocations? This question serves as a departure for Akira Mizuta Lippit's investigation into the relation between animals and humans in a densely argued book—197 pages and 87 pages of notes. The question is examined through various fields—philosophy, psychoanalysis, critical theory, literature and the technological media, especially, photography and cinema. The investigation follows mostly a historical evolution that traces relations between humans and animals in connection with the latter's progressive disappearance from the world. The book tracks the animal from its exclusion from traditional philosophy to its return. Under the impact of evolutionary

sciences and psychoanalysis, Lippit notes a shift from biological to technological metaphors and electric communicability, and to cinema seen as the "culmination and beginning of an evolutionary cycle: [where] the narrative of the disappearance of animals and that of the rise of the technical media intersect" (197).

The study is thus situated at the intersection of several contemporary theoretical debates, from the relation between animals and humans, the division between nature and culture, to that between nature and technology. In the first five chapters, Lippit gives the reader an overview of the figure of the animal in modern philosophy, from Descartes and Leibniz to Schopenhauer, Kant, Hegel and others. He traces the complication of this figure in Heidegger and Nietzsche before leading the reader to new ways of articulating it with Darwin's evolutionary schema, Bergson's temporality, with Freud and Breuer's interest in the animal in humans, especially where neurological transmission and electricity are concerned. With Freud and Breuer, the neat division that earlier philosophers tried to establish by excluding animals from the human arena is seriously threatened by new forms of subjectivity and consciousness that, by appealing to electricity and the science of information, put in question the very foundation of inherited, philosophical notions of being.

Lippit then works through some of these new forms of subjectivity, especially in the works of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Derrida's re-readings of Freud's *Wunderblock* as a technological metaphor and Deleuze and Guattari's pronouncements on "becoming-animal" blur the distinction between humans and animals at the very time, Lippit notes, that biological diversity is being reduced. With a detour through the literary animal in Lewis Carroll, Franz Kafka and Akutagawa Ryunosuke, Lippit arrives at his "speculative" concluding chapter on the relation between animals and technological media. In "Animetaphors: Photography, Cryptonymy and Film," borrowing from Freud and from Derrida's work on Freud and the animal, the author makes provocative remarks. After restating that the animal functions not only as an exemplary but as an originary metaphor of sorts, Lippit finds a transversality at work between animal and metaphor. The animal is metaphor, he declares chiasmatically, and metaphor is animal (165). Together they transport to language the vitality of another life, another expression, animal and metaphor, a metaphor made flesh, a living metaphor that is by definition not a metaphor, not even an antimetaphor, but an "animetaphor." The animetaphor may also be seen as the unconscious of language, of *logos* (165). Via a discussion of responsibility and morality by Adorno and Derrida respectively, Lippit asserts that "the animetaphor can be seen as a kind of *zoon*, inhabiting the edges of figurative language, making the absence of subjectivity" (170).

It is that very absence of subjectivity that enables him, by mobilizing Roland Barthes and André Bazin, to make the connection with the absence of the look in the photograph. Both animals and photographs project a look without subjectivity (173). In another tour-de-force the author associates animals and photography. They both share a crypt in which antitheses, animal and technology, are united without producing a sublation (183). Both disrupt the flow of figurative language. After photography, cinema can be seen as a cryptic topography in which animals and the reproductive media converge, forming a Deleuzian rhizome (184). As animals disappeared from the phenomenal world, they became increasingly the subjects of nineteenth- and twentieth-century reproductive media (185). Lippit argues how early cinematographers like Muybridge seemed to be "racing against the imminent disappearance of animals from the new

urban environment" (185). Distinct from the stillness of photography, cinema added the possibility of electric animation. Technology and the technological instruments and media served as virtual shelters for displaced animals. In this manner, technology and the cinema came to be a vast mausoleum for animal being. And so Lippit writes: "Cinema is like an animal, the likeness is a form of encryption. From animal to animation, figure to force, from poor ontology to pure energy, cinema may be the technological metaphor that configures mimetically, magnetically, the other world of the animal. Animal magnetism had moved from the hypnotist's eye to the camera eye, preserved in the emblematic lure of cinema" (197).

Lippit very deftly and adroitly brings together and recombines many different theories. The book reads as an excellent overview of the inscription of the animal in theoretical discourses. The downside is perhaps an overly summarizing effect. Yet, at the same time, Lippit's weave of seemingly incompatible theories informed by his broad knowledge of theoretical texts dealing with animals, lead in the last chapter to a provocative reading of the "animetaphor" through the site of yet another contemporary debate, that of cinema and animation. This excellent, comprehensive overview and stimulating discussion that is intensely rewarding in its final, speculative moments will be of interest to many readers interested in different fields of inquiry, be it philosophy, psychoanalysis, ecology, ethics, cinema, or media studies.

Verena Conley teaches in the Literature Program at Harvard University. She writes about feminism, ecology and technology.

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## Inevitable Transcendentalism

Henry Pietersma, *Phenomenological Epistemology*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2000.

### By Robert Burch

To those philosophers who have a commitment to phenomenology that derives principally from a reading of Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty, the title of this book, with its substantive emphasis on epistemology, will be a provocation. That epistemological issues are evident centrally in Husserl's phenomenology, no one is apt seriously to deny. But as Pietersma himself notes, both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty are "on record as having rejected epistemology" (viii). The story of this 'rejection' is by now familiar and widely taken for granted. However, since it stands in the background of Pietersma's study as a tale in need of some retelling, a brief reprise is in order.

In Heidegger's judgement, Husserl's phenomenology is too much determined by the problems of intentionality posed at the level of the consciousness/object relation, and so likewise remains too much bound by the general terms of Kantian transcendentalism in which the transcendental is assigned to subjectivity. Heidegger does consider Husserl's phenomenology to be ontological in its fundamental intent, but it is ontology, he believes, in the form of a transcendental philosophy that is essentially epistemology. It is epistemology in that it interprets the being of beings in terms of the objectivity of objects for transcendental subjectivity, and the truth of beings in terms of the evident certainty through which the subject guarantees its representations of objects. As being and truth are the same, the measure of being is thus epistemological. It is Heidegger's contention, however, that this interpretation of being as objectivity and of truth as the certainty of representation in the cognitive attitude of objectification is not ontologically radical

enough. He claims instead that intentionality is a founded mode of our being-in-the-world, and that the epistemological problem of securing the objectivity of objects is a derivative concern. Insofar as they are formulated at this 'founded' level taken unwittingly to be fundamental, traditional debates about realism versus idealism, as well as those over the issues of relativism, naturalism and psychologism, are ill-conceived. As Heidegger sees it, the transcendental is to be located in an understanding of being that is always already at work in all of our encounters with beings, and that as such precedes and makes possible all cognitive objectifications.

Merleau-Ponty too suggests that Husserl's phenomenology is not ontologically radical enough. Moreover, he too thinks that the issue at stake has to do principally with the role and meaning of intentionality and the place of the transcendental. As Merleau-Ponty characterizes it, Husserl's phenomenology is essentially a form of intellectualism according to which 'to be' is 'to be an object of consciousness', whereby objects of consciousness are constituted as such through meaning-giving acts as acts of objectification and conceptualization by the knowing subject. In this way, Merleau-Ponty regards Husserl's phenomenology as ontology in the form of a transcendental philosophy that is essentially epistemology. It is epistemology in the sense that it construes the being of beings in terms of consciousness' positing and grasping of objects, the task of Husserl's phenomenology being to present reflectively the transcendental structure of these epistemic relations taken to be original. It is Merleau-Ponty's contention, however, that meaning is not originally bestowed by consciousness in such objectifying and conceptualizing acts, but that it originates in and through a prereflective, preconceptual awareness by the embodied percipient in relation to perceived beings, this perceptual awareness taking place on the basis of the 'world' as an open-ended font of incarnate meaning always already in play. Yet, *pace* all reflective philosophy, Merleau-Ponty claims that the structure of this original perception is not strictly analogous to that of our conceptual thought and hence that it cannot be fully recaptured from a reflective, conceptual point of view. Merleau-Ponty locates the transcendental in embodied perception as a self-sufficient movement of transcendence. Thus our intentional relation to objects of conceptual knowledge is held to be founded on this primary level of perception, and our epistemic concerns about objective knowledge claims, to be a derivative concern.

According to this familiar story then, both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty reject epistemology on two levels. First, they both reject the kind of epistemological determination of ontology that attempts to understand how in the first place things come meaningfully to be for us in terms of how a knowing subject constitutes a world of objects as objects of conceptual knowledge. In this regard, they do have an epistemological interest, but it is an interest in showing that in principle all conceptual object-knowledge is derivative of a more fundamental access to and awareness of beings. Thus, second, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty also reject epistemology in the sense that they both eschew the traditional epistemological project of studying in general terms our right to the object-knowledge beliefs that we have. They both regard such issues of justification as being domain specific, dependent upon and relative to a prior delineation of a particular domain of ontologically homogenous objects about which particular kinds of object-knowledge beliefs are held. Yet as such these epistemological issues are not of general philosophical importance.

Such, then, is the background to Pietersma's study, whose purpose, he tells us, "is both historical and systematic" (vii). Historically, Pietersma offers clear and careful interpretations of the views of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty on the central epistemological issues of knowledge, truth, and evidence. Since he regards these three as "towering figures in the recent history of philosophy," he takes their views seriously, seeking to understand them sympathetically on their own terms. His interpretation of each figure constitutes a discrete chapter that together form the body of this study, with each one meant to stand on its own as "an exposition of each philosopher's doctrine for its own sake" (vii). His efforts in this regard have a twofold virtue. Although there is no lack of both general and specific commentary on the works of these three figures, Pietersma is right to claim that his study is original in focusing on their epistemological views and considering them "in an epistemologically responsible manner" (viii). Second, in the course of his interpretations, Pietersma sheds new light on a number of key themes (e.g., Husserl on intentionality, evidence and horizon, Heidegger on the place of correspondence and the status of universals in predication, Merleau-Ponty on the externality of being) in a way that takes us beyond the complacent stance assumed in the familiar story.

Since on Pietersma's reading Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty develop their epistemological views specifically in criticism of Husserl, there is a good deal of comparing and contrasting in his interpretations. However, in order to counter the familiar story, Pietersma emphasizes their affinities in order to highlight what, in relation to the general history of epistemology, he argues they have in common. To that end, he attempts to show how profoundly all three are indebted to Kant's transcendental epistemology, despite their criticisms of that position. He interprets all three as transcendental philosophers in the broad sense that all three understand the being of beings in terms of some transcendental 'framework' in and through which beings come to be for us in the first place, however they may then be explained.

At the same time, Pietersma weaves into his historical interpretations a systematic and critical analysis of central themes in traditional epistemology and metaphysics. In this regard, his systematic focus is the opposition between transcendentalism and realism as this relates to internalist and externalist accounts of knowledge. His guiding question is whether transcendentalism provides a more satisfactory answer to traditional epistemological issues of knowledge, truth and evidence than does realism. A brief review of some basics in epistemology will help to make this project clear.

An epistemological externalist takes a third person standpoint with respect to the problem of knowledge, attempting to appraise the truth-value of a belief as a relation between a belief-state (i.e., 'A believes that p') and the situation that makes the belief true, presuming to evaluate this relation (typically in causal or reliabilist terms) independently of the reasons the cognitive subject who holds the belief might give for holding it (9-10). An epistemological internalist rejects this externalist approach on the grounds that it begs the question by making illicit use of a presumed knowledge external to the relation of the belief-state/truth-making-situation in order then to evaluate that relation. Instead, the internalist demands that all knowledge claims be justified in terms of the cognitive experience and system of beliefs of the belief holder, and hence in terms of how the believing subject comes to hold the belief and things become accessible and known in the first place. To the externalist,

however, this approach seems *per absurdum* to make a belief held by the believer itself a part of the grounds that support the appraisal of its truth-value. This epistemological opposition is not directly resolvable on strictly epistemological terms, since it has its basis in fundamentally different conceptions of being and truth. Pietersma identifies these different conceptions as realist and transcendentalist.

The realist holds both that beings are what and how they are in themselves independently of the mind, and that we can know this independent being as such. Truth is defined accordingly as the conformity of our beliefs to the way things are in themselves (i.e., *adequatio intellectus ad rem*), our concepts being "born from insight into the nature of things" (14). It is this general conception of being and truth, moreover, that is presupposed by the radical skeptic as one who posits mind independent of being on the one hand and yet doubts that we can have genuine knowledge of such being whatsoever on the other. In contrast, the transcendentalist holds that the question of being is a question of how beings come to be for us in the first place within the bounds of possible experience. When approached in this way, the realist issue of the being and nature of beings 'in themselves' as mind independent entities is transformed into a question about the being and nature of beings 'in themselves' as this is announced and can be determined within the transcendental framework through which alone beings first come to be for us and hence are first accessible and known. To the transcendentalist, then, the philosophical determination of this transcendental framework is ontology. Likewise, then, the transcendentalist affirms that there is a transcendental truth to which everything that comes to be for us as an object of experience must conform and that precedes and makes possible all truth claims about beings. In this way, the transcendentalist forestalls radical skepticism by rejecting the conception of being upon which it is premised, and by showing that all questions about the truth and falsity of our claims about beings presuppose a transcendental context of truth in which beings are accessible and known in the first place.

It is in internalist, transcendentalist terms that Pietersma characterizes phenomenology epistemologically. To "adopt a phenomenological attitude," he says, is "to approach cognitive experience from within, i.e., from the first person perspective" (3), the task being to make explicit "the internal structure of cognitive experience" as a truth always already in place (8). Understood in this way, the phenomenological epistemologist takes a "transcendental approach" (12-13).

The body of this study is thus devoted to explicating how, respectively, Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty understand the transcendental framework, and the epistemological implications of their respective views. As Pietersma presents it, however, the fundamental debate is not over the transcendental perspective itself but over the "place of the transcendental," which each of them locate differently. In the case of Husserl, it is assigned to transcendental subjectivity and the subject's object constituting, meaning constituting acts. With Heidegger, it is the understanding of being that is the event of being itself as the access-giving framework different from all and any beings or properties of beings. For Merleau-Ponty, it is the sensory field of the embodied percipient, neither subject-being nor object-being, but encompassing and transcending both.

Not to minimize the importance of the differences in these different ways of situating the transcendental, Pietersma's three protagonists are united epistemologically in their rejection of



realism in favor of transcendentalism. “Realism for them is a curious blend of a metaphysical position and a subjectivist theory of knowledge” (169). The metaphysical position affirms in absolute terms that beings in their being are mind-independent, whereas the subjectivist theory of knowledge holds that we know this mind-independent being through our mental representations of it. Yet this “curious blend” seems to make skepticism inevitable, since in the end all that we would really know about beings in themselves would be our own ideas of them, ideas that in principle are defeasible. The transcendental alternative defeats skepticism by grounding empirical realism in a transcendental framework whose truth is indefeasible since it is presupposed by our access to and knowledge of any beings whatsoever in the first place. To the realist, however, this is a victory *trop bon marché*, for it implies not only that things in themselves are unknowable, but also and more significantly that the very search for a knowledge of them in themselves is a meaningless project.

All in all, Pietersma does a superlative job in bringing out the underlying epistemological themes in these three figures, and does so in a clear and straightforward style. He is thoroughly acquainted with the work of all three, as well as with the discussions and debates in contemporary analytic epistemology. He is also able to situate the epistemological issues he treats in a broader historical context. Consequently, this study should have wide appeal. If in the end it does not secure definitive answers to the issues it raises, its systematic purpose being secondary, it does establish clearly what is at stake and leaves us with important questions to ponder. By way of conclusion, I shall briefly note three of these.

First, Pietersma leaves the reader to consider whether or not realism does inevitably lead to skepticism. For it may well be that we *do* have cognitive access to beings in themselves, although in terms other than those of the subjectivist theory of knowledge. Were that the case, then the transcendental turn would not be needed, which might seem a felicitous prospect. For as Hegel somewhere remarks of the Kantian version of this turn, it “sends us to feed on husks and chaff.” But, then, as Hegel also makes clear, it would be incumbent on the would-be realist to show how such knowledge is possible, and it remains to be seen if that could be accomplished in terms other than transcendentalist.

Second, it would seem clear that on Pietersma’s account a phenomenological epistemology is inevitably a transcendentalist epistemology, and hence that a realist phenomenology is a contradiction in terms. I do not think that there is much doubt that this is the view of his three protagonists. However, it is a view that some phenomenologists would call into question (cf. e.g., T.D. Langan, *Being and Truth*). Moreover, it is a view that Pietersma himself seems in passing to suggest that there is a phenomenological approach in which externalist and internalist, transcendentalist and realist perspectives fit together in a complimentary way (7-8). But what that might look like, Pietersma does not say.

Third, there are readers who might question the leitmotif of Pietersma’s account on the grounds that transcendentalism is subjectivism. After all, there is a striking gulf between the forms of transcendentalism that would locate the transcendental in fixed and unchanging a priori structures of subjectivity, and those forms that would locate the transcendental in the historical occurrence of a finite interpretative framework, whether that framework is understood as the historical event of being’s truth or the *éclat de la chair*. For when

the philosopher crosses this gulf what comes into question is the very distinction upon which the transcendentalist perspective turns. In a working note (November 1960) to *Le visible et l’invisible*, Merleau-Ponty makes this point explicitly: “No absolute difference between philosophy or the transcendental and the empirical (it would be better to say, the ontological and the ontic).” But this claim puts into question fundamentally the distinction between philosophy and non-philosophy. But that in turn puts in jeopardy the task of discriminating truth from error.

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## Philosophizing Refuge

Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

By Samir Gandesha

The year 1991, according to historian Eric Hobsbawm, marks the end of the “short twentieth century.” It was in this year that, under the pressure of glasnost and perestroika - the opening and restructuring that had been initiated by Gorbachev - the Soviet Union imploded. What came to an end with the USSR was the relatively stable, bi-polar system of nation-states organized into two competing blocs, which has now given way to a very different international order. In the post-Cold War order, the center truly cannot hold; the sovereignty of the nation state is under siege from all quarters. It is undermined “from above” by multinational corporations and international organizations such as the WTO, whose sole purpose is to ensure the triumph of markets over states, and “from below” by the often violently rancorous demands for greater devolution of power at local and regional levels.

The end of the twentieth century forms the historical context for Agamben’s reflections in this tightly compressed, deceptively short book. It scarcely comes as a surprise, then, that while it draws upon a wide range of thinkers - ancient, medieval and modern - the one thinker whose presence is most strongly felt in this book is the German-Jewish political theorist, Hannah Arendt. Perhaps more than any other thinker, Arendt experienced directly and reflected upon the barbarism of twentieth century history. Aside from her work on totalitarianism, Arendt’s most influential contribution was her attempt to redefine the limits of the political via a systematic reading of Aristotle’s taxonomy of human associations. While the household economy or the *oikos* made *life* as such possible, only in the *polis* was a *good life* to be found. According to Arendt, history was to be read as a narrative of decline, of the progressive eclipse of the political by the social; the reduction of politics, which the Greeks had regarded as an end in itself, to a means for pursuing extra-political, that is socioeconomic, ends. Just as Heidegger sought to retrieve an apparently more “primordial” experience of Being buried in the sarcophagus of the “tradition” via the ontological difference, Arendt attempted to recover a lost ontology of the political by differentiating the

concept of life itself. It is the distinction between “mere” life, on the one hand, and the “good” life, on the other, that most deeply informs Agamben’s political theory.

In the Preface, Agamben claims that political theory, dominated by the holy trinity of nation-state-territory, is unable to confront the transformations that have “gradually emptied out its categories and concepts.” Agamben therefore seeks to develop political paradigms from “experiences and phenomena that usually are not considered political or that are considered only marginally so” (ix). He considers such disparate problems such as the ‘state of exception’ as the basis for normal legality, the concentration camp as nexus of indifference between public and private, the refugee as undermining the opposition between human being and citizen and the hypertrophy of language. In the process of redefining the limits of the political, Agamben seeks to develop, somewhat ambitiously, an understanding of the proper sphere of politics as one comprised by the “gesture” or pure means - means that have freed themselves from any relation to possible ends that they might realize.

Agamben takes up Foucault’s thesis according to which in the modern period all politics becomes “biopolitics,” that is, a politics geared to disciplining individual bodies and administering entire populations. Following Arendt, however, he argues that the very concept of “life” itself requires careful clarification. A central conceptual distinction informing Agamben’s work, therefore, is that between the *zoe* and *bios*. As alluded to above, these terms distinguish between, on the one hand, mere or naked life (the fact of living) and “form-of-life,” on the other. The latter “must become the guiding concept and the unitary center of a coming politics” (12). The distinction between “naked life” and “form-of-life” runs parallel to Heidegger’s ontological difference. Just as Dasein is that being for whom Being, itself, is a question, for Agamben “a life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself” (3). Agamben thus seeks to define “a life - human life - in which the single ways, acts and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all power” (3).

This distinction between naked life - the *brute* fact of living - and form-of-life is crucial precisely because, as an interpretation, it always already places happiness or the “good” at the center of the question of life. Sovereign political power rests on the conflation of naked life from form-of-life, for power is ultimately erected upon the authority to put its subjects to death. “The ultimate subject that needs to be at once turned into the exception and included in the city is always naked life” (6). If the deployment of a discourse of “naked life” refracted through medical-scientific institutions is the basis of political domination, then the concept of form-of-life becomes the basis for resistance to power, or at least *state* power. In other words, the reduction of politics to biopolitics enables the state to displace politics as resting, ultimately, on the question of the “life worth living,” to a technology of life.

The relation between *zoe* and *bios* is the central theme running through most of the essays collected here. For instance, in the chapter critiquing the discourse of human rights, Agamben argues that while erstwhile categories of political philosophy such as “Man,” “Rights of the Citizen” “sovereign people,” “worker,” etc. have withered, the refugee in our time represents the form and the limits of the “coming political community” (16). The tendency of states, particularly in the interwar period, to denaturalize their own citizens marks the beginning of the end of what Agamben calls “naïve” conceptions of

citizenship. What is notable in the international response to the resulting “refugee question” was that both nation-states and the organizations representing them were not only unable to provide a workable answer to the question but, moreover, were unwilling to face it squarely.

Following Arendt’s argument in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Agamben contends that the putatively universal rights of “Man” are tied, paradoxically, to the particularity of the modern nation-state. The refugee, therefore, falls through the gap between universal and particular. Hence “precisely the figure that should have embodied human rights more than any other - namely, the refugee - marked instead the radical crisis of the concept” (18). The concept of human rights breaks down precisely at the moment when what comes into view are those people who have been stripped of every mediation, every specific quality that would distinguish them from others, which is to say, of course, those who have nothing left but their naked humanity. The real crisis, therefore, lies at the ontological level, that is, with the concept of the “human” as such. The human, in the literal sense, is inconceivable within the legal framework of the nation-state. Human rights are simply the means by which “naked life” makes an *unassimilable* appearance within the nation-state. The nation-state is the political entity that grounds sovereignty in nativity or birth. Accordingly, human rights function as a kind of “vanishing presupposition”: rights are attributed to humans only in as much as they immediately, that is, at the moment of birth, become citizens. The figure of the refugee imposes itself between nativity and nationality; the human and the citizen. In the process the refugee brings the fictional nature of sovereignty to light and in the process contributes to its crisis.

If it is indeed true that a discourse of human rights founded upon the “human” as such is inconceivable in the juridical structure of the nation-state, then what is the juridical status of the “right of asylum”? One wonders, indeed, whether it is even necessary to point to the figure of the refugee to indicate the fiction of sovereignty. The fissure between *zoe* and *bios* had already been opened during the so-called “economic miracle” in Germany whereby the children of Turkish *Gästarbeiter* were precisely *not* granted citizenship “at the moment of birth.” These extremely restrictive citizenship laws have only just begun to change, though not of course without protest, in Schröder’s Germany. While citizenship based on blood rather than nativity no doubt constitutes a more insidious form of biopolitics, given both the provocatively original nature of Agamben’s argument and the historical importance of the German experience, this difference needs to be addressed.

Agamben argues that the relation between the refugee and the human as such is even more problematic if we examine the history of camps. There exists a family resemblance between the internment camp, on the one side, and concentration and extermination camps, on the other. The logic leading from the former to the latter involves the progressive stripping away of the particular qualities of groups of people. Before Jews and Gypsies or Roma could be sent to extermination camps, they had to be stripped of even their second class citizenship and, in the process, they became *all-too human*; they became what Agamben calls *homo sacer*, sacred in the parlance of Roman Law, which is to say, doomed to death (22).

The question then becomes not simply how it was possible for certain people to carry out unspeakable acts on fellow “human beings,” but rather through what political and legal means were human beings stripped of all rights and privileges to the point that committing any and all manner of unspeakable acts against them would

no longer be considered a crime. The concentration camp is rooted in the Prussian legal doctrine of *Schutzhaft*, or “protective custody,” that authorized the prophylactic detainment of individuals who were thought to represent a threat to the state. The camp, therefore, is ultimately grounded in a temporary suspension of legality, or the “state of exception”; it is the space which results at the very moment that the temporary state of the exception becomes the *rule*. The camp is what is excluded from normal legality yet, at the same time, is included by virtue of this very exclusion.

In order for Adorno’s categorical imperative to become binding - that the Holocaust not repeat itself - the connection between nativity, on the one hand, and the holy trinity (nation-state-territory) it underwrites, on the other, must be undone. Suggestively, if not entirely convincingly given the current *de facto* state of war in the region, Agamben takes Jerusalem as a model for rethinking this relationship. One of the solutions that has been mooted as part of a larger Arab-Israeli peace settlement is that of a non-partisan Jerusalem as the capital of two different states. Agamben argues that such a condition of a- or extra-territoriality could form the basis for international relations. It might, therefore, be possible to imagine two political communities claiming the same region and in a condition of exodus from each other (the pertinence to the Canadian case is unmistakable). What this would involve is a notion of reciprocal extra-territorialities in which the guiding principle would no longer be *ius* (right) of the citizen but *refugium* (refuge) of the singular; a “being-in-exodus” of the citizen.

The biopolitical fault line between *zoe* and *bios* resurfaces again in a chapter that addresses the idea of “the People.” This term signifies two contradictory meanings: (1) an integrated body politic as a whole, as in, for example, the US Constitution’s language of “We the people”; and, (2) as a part of the body politic, a multiplicity of needful and excluded bodies. The ambivalence inherent in this concept, whose rhetorical power has dramatically increased in recent years, is an effect of the split between naked life and form-of-life. While historically there had always been a way of naming the semantic split, for example the Roman distinction between *plebs* and *populus*, with the French Revolution sovereignty comes to be rooted in a single entity. When sovereignty becomes so invested, the poor, the marginalized, the “wretched of the earth,” become an “intolerable scandal in every sense” (33). According to Agamben, just as the refugee cannot be contained within the juridical structure of the nation-state, so, too, must marginalized citizens be violently excluded: “Our time is nothing other than the methodical and implacable attempt to fill the split that divides the people by radically eliminating the people of the excluded” (33). The quintessential historical example of this is Nazism which attempted to heal the biopolitical rift by seeking to radically displace the people by the *Volk*.

While Agamben’s investigations into the modern state’s deployment of biopolitics is extremely insightful and indeed speaks to some of the most urgent political questions of the age - the increasing exclusion of the homeless by governments explicitly acting on behalf of the “people,” the states of emergency that are now routinely invoked during meetings of international leaders and organizations, the inordinate powers devolved onto the police, the nature of the integrated spectacle, etc. - a number of questions arise. First, given that this book speaks so directly to contemporary events, original publication information would help to contextualize each chapter. Second, while Agamben’s deployment of concepts is incisive and at times imaginative, there are far too many references and allusions to too

wide a range of thinkers in short chapters that are far too short. Hence, theoretical positions are simply evoked apparently to *legitimate* rather than to *ground* arguments. Third, Agamben is correct to root modern sovereignty in biopolitics, for instance, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes grounds it in the fear of violent death that pervades the “state of nature.” Yet, at the same time, precisely because it is grounded in the protection of “life,” such a conception of sovereignty allows for subjects to defend their own lives against *lawful* authority. They may, in other words, legitimately resist the death penalty. Finally, one wonders whether recent developments in reproductive technologies, cloning, genetic engineering, etc., namely *biotechnology*, do not ultimately render the opposition of *zoe* and *bios*, upon which Agamben’s reflections are premised, obsolete. For, if we agree with Heidegger that technology “worlds the world,” then “mere life” has to be understood as always already invested with “forms of life.” Life in itself, as that which can be differentiated from moral-political decisions regarding the “good” life, is simply no longer available. What really needs to be addressed, therefore, are not principally the disciplining, dividing and classifying practices that sovereignty brings to bear on naked life, but the very manufacture and commodification of life, as it were, from the ground up.

If Agamben seeks to locate the conditions for the possibility of the sovereignty of the modern state in biopolitics, then as an alternative he seeks to develop a somewhat enigmatic conception of politics as subversive of the opposition between means and ends. “A finality without means,” he tells us, “is just as alienating as a mediality that makes sense only with respect to an end” (116). This attempt to develop a conception of politics as means without end needs argumentation. Politics has always been constituted as a means to an end beyond it. For the ancients, it was placed in the service of the contemplative life; for the moderns, it was harnessed to what Hobbes called the “continuance of motion,” that is, of “mere life.” If politics is a means without end, if it is undertaken for its own sake, then it begs its own question. It becomes an empty tautology.

For Agamben, a politics of means without end is ultimately to be understood as the event through which language is grasped *as such*. This is a politics construed not as a logic of communicative rationality but rather as the *fact* of communicability. Ultimately, then, “What is in question in political experience is not a higher end but being-into-language itself as pure mediality, being-into-a-mean as an irreducible condition of human beings” (116). The necessary supplement to this contribution must, of course, remain the modern question of the nature of art and aesthetic experience. For art is precisely that phenomenon that cannot be conceived as an empty signifier for the communication of a pre-determined meaning; it is, rather, what enables language itself to appear. As Kant argued in his third *Critical*, the sphere of the beautiful is that of “purposefulness without purpose,” means without end. However, this volume is far too brief to enable Agamben to argue sufficiently for a conception of such a politics to come. All he can do is gesture in its direction - which seems, in fact, to be the whole point.

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## Peirce in France

G rard Deledalle, *Charles S. Peirce's Philosophy of Signs. Essays in Comparative Semiotics*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000.

By Geoffrey Sykes

For the past four decades G rard Deledalle has been the main exponent of American philosophy in France. Books such as *La philosophie am ricaine* and *  la recherche d'une m thode* have become widely known and circulated. Much of his exposition has been centred at l'Universit  de Perpignan, in southwestern France, in regular weekly seminars that ran for over 25 years until his retirement.

Commencing with his personal association with John Dewey, Deledalle's scholarship, including several publications on Peirce, would seem to run counter to post-war French interest in structural and Marxist semiotics, and philosophical traditions. Yet it is part of his professional achievement not only to represent pragmatism as a minority, mainly American influence, in France, but through its advocacy to help question and overcome stereotypical divisions between European and American thought. Through personal and professional contacts, he has introduced the work of James, Dewey and Peirce, and pragmatism generally, to thinkers such as Foucault, Deleuze and Lacan. Such introductions, and the consequent influence of pragmatism on post-structural French thinking, cannot be underestimated, and testify to Deledalle's role in modern French philosophy and semiotic theory.

The reason Deledalle might not be more widely known and read outside of France is simple: most of his books were written in French, and have remained untranslated. We are indebted to Susan Petrelli for the English version of the short, but elegant and penetrating, intellectual biography *Charles S. Peirce, 1839-1914: An intellectual biography*. Deledalle's other English contributions, to *Semiotica* and international meetings, such as IASS congresses (Deledalle: 1992), have remained dispersed and not always readily accessible.

The recent publication of an anthology of Deledalle's papers, *Charles S. Peirce's Philosophy of Signs*, provides a necessary and helpful catch-up and introduction for English readers of Deledalle's life-long work. Seventeen papers are included, previously published in whole or part between 1964-1999. This is "a collection of papers written over fifty years" (vii). Any problem of translation of the thirteen articles first published in French, and included in whole or part, has been overcome by the author, who has undertaken virtually all translations, including Latin, Greek and German quotations.

The papers are not ordered chronologically, but organized into four distinct, thematic parts: Semiotic as Philosophy, Semeiotic as Semiotics, Comparative Semiotics and Comparative Metaphysics. The largest part is Comparative Semiotics, which uses the exegetical strategy of comparing Peirce, indirectly or in terms of his direct reception, with a number of prominent philosophers such as Wittgenstein, De Saussure, Jakobson, and Morris.

A leading question can immediately, if somewhat rhetorically, be asked: what are we to make of this publication? By this, I mean, is it fundamentally a re-issue, of retrospective worth and interest for a history of ideas, or an anthology of one scholar's lifetime work? Does this retrospective publication and translation add any-

thing to the field of contemporary Peircean studies? My response to the last question is affirmative: there appear to be several distinct approaches present in the book, towards pragmatism, semiotics, philosophy, metaphysics, and biography, all of which deserve ongoing attention by Peircean scholars. What is distinct in its content might be explained in part by the book's inter-cultural origins. The French context suggests a dialectic with other semiotic and philosophical traditions, which led, at least indirectly, to a focus on pragmatic themes that remain as pertinent as ever.

The sectional presentation and introduction of the book implies that the selection of papers in this anthology is not merely one of editorial or bibliographical convenience. Rather, it is an aspect of an argument and a contemporary approach to Peirce that seeks a response by a wider, international audience.

The Introduction states clearly that Peirce's semiotic should be approached in terms of the philosophical questions it addressed: that the philosophical hue of Peirce's writings distinguishes them from the ethnology of Levi-Strauss, and the linguistics of Jakobson or De Saussure. The introduction stresses another distinctive theme - that Peircean exegesis should be mindful of the context of the writing and publication of his seminal work. Deledalle alludes to dates and periods of Peirce's life - 1867, 1878, 1906 - that were elaborated in *Charles S. Peirce, 1839-1914* (1990). There is a correspondence of audience, circumstance, chronology and ideas that can be overlooked by overly philosophical readings. Peirce may be polyglot, even a genius, but he cannot mean all things to all readers: it is more likely that he only ever meant a few things to a few people at any one time.

Peirce did not write systematic large-scale accounts of his schemes, in which a consistency of terminology would be ensured. As a result, he probably often contradicted his own "ethics of terminology," transforming, eliding and substituting key words of his semiotic theory. Throughout his book, Deledalle responds to changing nuances in the meaning of terms such as "sign," "representamen," "semiosis," and "icon," and invites us to re-read Peirce accordingly.

The argument about contextualized exegesis suggests parallels between this anthology and Peirce's own writings. Deledalle writes in a concise, notational and nuanced conceptual style that is flexibly adapted, in individual papers, to various audiences and circumstances. Any approach to the assemblage of writings selected from thirty years' output needs to be qualified by a sense of the author's own "different periods and in different contexts" (viii). Thus, the paper on Lady Welby is from a collection in a book dedicated to Peirce's correspondence with that English linguist: a response to a colleague, Jerzy Pelc, is previously unpublished.

The Conclusion of the book involves a close study of Peirce's "Contributions to *The Nation*" journal. This involves close analysis of key terms such as "sign" and "phanoscopy," as they are introduced and discussed by Peirce in that publication. Critical articles by Peirce on fellow philosophers such as Dewey and James are seen to qualify generalized, retrospective claims about what these thinkers had in common. Once again, the stress is on a contextualized exegesis that reaches beyond the pages of philosophy. What other approach would suit a thinker who arguably gave some currency to the term, "pragmatism"?

In a further similarity, whether intended or not, Deledalle's peripatetic and notational style seems to resemble the concise, conceptualized form of Peirce's prose since both share a sense of

interdisciplinary intellectual inquiry, distributed across a miscellany of publications. The result can be enjoyable and exploratory for the reader, sharing the subtleties and shifts of argument across different circumstances and times.

There is arguably one more similarity between Deledalle and Peirce, and that is in content. Behind a miscellany of publications and concise elliptical style there is a controlling, motivating and coherent "philosophy of signs." The Introduction hints at one main theme that will provide a thread of coherence through its various papers. That theme is the pragmatic nature of semiosis: of the fallible, experiential process of sign acts and sign making that is the subject matter for any semiotic analysis and theory. It is a theme or premise that will be echoed again and again in the papers that follow.

The first two essays overlap in their presentations of Peirce's triadic semiotics as "Peirce's New Philosophical Paradigms." They aim to set forth the philosophical context and "paradigms" that question and inform Peirce's development of a semiotic, and in particular trace the transformation of Peirce's work between "New List of Categories" (1866/67) and "The List of Categories: A Second Essay" (1894), in terms of a response to philosophical problems; in particular, the debate between nominalism and realism that characterized the differences between English and European philosophy up to the twentieth century. Deledalle sees the crucial role of phenomenology or "phaneroscopy" in developing mature categories (9), and in providing a philosophical basis for Peirce's pragmatic semiotic.

As demonstrated in *Charles S. Peirce, 1839-1914*, and argued in the Introduction of this book, Deledalle has an acute historical sense. The first paper, "Peirce's New Philosophical Paradigms," stresses the significance of 1885-1887 as a delineator of the development of Peirce's mature thought. The paper repeats the seminal role of one paper, "On a Logic of Algebra" (1885), in anticipating the mature categories of Firstness and Secondness (8-9). The 1885 paper responded to mathematical epistemology, or a philosophy of mathematics, and revised icon and index sign types from the "New List" (1867). The article, inspired by De Morgan's theory of a logic of relatives, began a decade-long inquiry into diagrammatic signs and reasoning, which explained abstract and intuitive thought within a representamen/sign act/interpretant relationship. Analysis of the iconic nature of mathematical expressions helped resolve the dualism of realism and nominalism that had pervaded his work up until 1885. "We are beyond nominalism and realism. The mind is in the world and in continuity with it. The law is a natural as well as logical process." The law is also, we might add, as Deledalle does in later papers, "geo-social" (43), produced by and in public and communal testing (51).

Henceforth, the representamen of sign acts could be located in complex graphic form in the artefacts of mathematics and culture: the mind can be studied in the world of dynamic rich signs. The development of indexicality into Secondness is central to Peirce's work, which can be seen as a whole as a speculation on the sign/object relationship. Peirce, in terms of Deledalle's interpretation, invites a specific semiotic explanation of action and "behavior," something omitted from many semiotic and pragmatic theories.

These early papers convincingly argue that "Peirce's semeiotic is a branch of philosophy" (xiii), that what is distinct about his theory of signs can be described in terms of the philosophical questions, of ontology, epistemology, ethics, metaphysics and language, that it addresses and seeks to resolve. The title of the book thus

remains convincing: Peirce's semeiotic truly is a *Philosophy of Signs*.

Paper three, "Peirce's First Pragmatic Papers, 1877-1878" (23-33), is a brief yet tantalizing study in intellectual biography. As is suitable from the author's culture, it focuses on an aspect of the "French connection" in Peirce's life. Peirce travelled to France, spoke French fluently and wrote in it often. In 1904 he was given the great honour of election as foreign associate to the French academy of science.

This paper compares French and English versions of well-known and seminal papers, "How To Make Our Ideas Clear" and "The Fixation of Belief" (both published in *Revue Philosophique*, 1878-79). It demonstrates subtle inflections and differences of meaning that resulted from changes in language and audience. It also outlines the possible historical influence of French politics, including the Paris Commune and libertarian thought, on the social philosophy of "The Fixation of Habit."

The result is no arcane or dry hermeneutic, but something representative of a type of intellectual biography that integrates very particular circumstances and events of a subject's professional and personal life, with the content of their ideas. Such an approach makes a lot of sense for a pragmatist who argued ideas need to be assessed in terms of their outcome or communication in sign acts. As detailed as it is, what is frustrating about the paper remains its strength: its specialism and concision. How many other digressive narrative sequences, involving Peirce's work at Johns Hopkins, with the Metaphysical Club, in travels to Europe, in the Coastal Survey or while at Arisbe, await further analysis?

A sense of concision and brevity is shared with other papers, and it is not really a judgement on the anthology to note as much: within and between papers many different themes and points are made, seemingly in passing. These cannot all be taken up with the constraints or purposes of the present volume, yet we are tempted on occasions to want more development.

Part Two is "devoted to Peirce's theory of signs" (35). It takes up themes introduced in the first part directly. The organization of the First and Second section is thus very clear: having clarified the philosophical background, the focus is on distinct features of semiotic theory. "Sign: Semiosis and Representamen" and "Sign: the Concept and its Use" focus immediately on themes that Deledalle regards as central to a pragmatic understanding of Peirce. A sign has two aspects or "acceptations": the sign object (representamen) and the sign action (semiosis) (37). These two aspects function with an effect that is conceived as the interpretant, third acceptance of the sign.

Focus on these key terms allows Deledalle to expound the general features and terminology of Peirce's semiotic. A representamen is the sign object: it can function as a symbol (a general sign acting in a repertory of signs), an index, or icon (likeness to objects); yet its function as a sign can only be analyzed in the process of semiosis through a relational act that produces an interpretant effect (38-39). Through semiosis natural or dynamical objects are transformed into immediate objects: the potential of transforming any object or stimulus to become part of semiosis, to change from dynamic to immediate object, led Peirce to argue the whole universe "is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs" (5.448).

Deledalle notes the semiosis of Peirce's own ideas, which results in a kind of "terminological laxity" (42) in the progressive development of a key term like representamen. This term seems to change from a Kantian mental image or

idea, to an aspect of the process of semiosis, of the mind in the world and thought in action. In the latter it is a "written, gestural or spoken sign" (43) participating in a continuous, temporal discourse of a community (51). Deledalle traces a move from mentalist to sociological concepts of truth and epistemology. Peirce sees a "regressus ad infinitum" in the interplay of sign act, object and interpretant that is discursive and communicative in effect. Peirce moves from singular acts of indexicality to a composite discursive account of truth and mind. The result provides, in a semiotic model, a theory of mind and cognition that "all thought is in signs" outside of mental signs (43).

There is a fascinating sub-section here on "Semiosis and Time" (50-53) suggesting temporality as a factor essential to a pragmatic account of semiosis. Temporality involves more than chronology, but was conceived by Peirce, we know, in terms of synechism or continuity, as well as the discontinuity of Seconds. Deledalle stresses that the "continuous temporal process" involved in any semiosis-structural analysis of representamen divorced from the nuanced "existential" or "instantiated" context of spatial temporal relations, seems almost impossible in Peircean terms. The temporal process can be understood in infinitesimal intervals of particular movement, or in long discursive tropes of an expanded community. Once again, it is the concision of this section that brings forth its own critique: the topic it introduces is important enough to beg expansion. Gilles Deleuze (1986: 1-11) has argued against the synchronous nature of structural semiotics, and that any contemporary revisionist theory needs to be diachronic, and focus on the moving image conceived in a temporal sequence. A comparative study of Deleuze and Peirce could help elaborate the topic of temporality and semiosis.

In "Sign: The Concept and Its Use," Deledalle provides close exegesis of the term representamen, thus further illustrating the aim of providing a contextualized study of Peirce's thought. Through Deledalle's focus on the etymological shifts of the term, we can see how Peirce expounds, within a semiotic frame, notions of indexicality, context and action that remain crucial to behavioral semiotics.

Part Three is the longest section of the book. It comprises eight papers, commencing with an occasional reply to a fellow semiotician, Jerzy Pelc, that was previously unpublished. This is followed by an exegesis of Peirce in terms of his reading of Greek philosophy. "Semiotic and Significs" discusses Peirce's mature correspondence with the English linguist Lady Welby, and essays on De Saussure, Morris, Jakobson and Wittgenstein follow. An unusual inclusion addresses the semiotic potential of Marshall McLuhan's writing on mass media, and seeks to commence what is claimed as a semiotic of media.

The papers of Part Three have a valuable goal: to approach the comprehensive and divergent writings of Peirce in terms of their reception by or comparison with that of other philosophers. It is an innovative and useful approach in which themes of the preceding Parts are dispersed, repeated and elaborated. The paper on De Saussure seems entirely satisfying and helpful, with a detailed focused approach to a question that is often put: how similar or different are "the a priori conditions" of Peirce's and De Saussure's thinking? (100) Can Peirce's Representamen be equated with De Saussure's signifier? Detailed comparisons are presented in tabulated lists. In conclusion, the social basis of sign theory is acknowledged: nevertheless, Deledalle sees a psychologism in De Saussure that can be contrasted with Peirce's anti-psychologist

behaviorism. The triadic dynamic of Peirce's schema cannot be reduced to De Saussure's mentalist-based dyadic model. The paper ends with a useful, diagrammatic attempt to map De Saussure within a more inclusive and comprehensive Peircean schema.

The controversial topic of the use of Peirce by Charles Morris, and comparison of his behaviorism and the semiotic behaviorism of Peirce, are directly addressed in "Peirce and Morris." The differentiation of physiology and natural signs, and human signs and language, has been an issue in all branches of modern semiotics. Inquiry into corporeal and facial signs and gestures has been too readily classified as physiological, rather than classified according to a suitable repertoire or theory of sign types. Can one suggest that a comparison of the behaviorism of Morris, and his mentor Peirce, might provide more illumination about the boundary of natural and social signs, and corporeal behavior generally, than the current fashion for biosemiotics?

Critical analysis of Jakobson's appropriation of Peirce follows the discussion of Morris, and then comparison between analytic themes of Wittgenstein, Frege and Peirce. Once again, the strategy of employing such critical comparative readings seems successful, and limited only by their length. One always wants more, much more, principally because such comparison is a useful, indeed necessary way to expound Peirce in the context of a history of ideas. Can one truly specialize in Peirce without regard for his place in the crowded and competing fields of modern philosophy and semiotics? Undoubtedly such comparative study will need to be based on a coherent reading of Peirce, something that Deledalle provides in Part Two.

Individual points, such as involved in discussions of Frege and McLuhan, cannot pre-occupy this one review. What can be argued is an overall impression of Part Three as an elaboration of themes implicit in previous Parts: that Peirce's work, in terms of traditional philosophies and of major philosophers of the twentieth century, retains distinctive pragmatic themes, of sign acts embodied in triadic sign functions and semiosis generally.

The last Section has the intriguing title, "Comparative Metaphysics." Deledalle reminds us that Peirce, in his middle age, inquired about larger truth claims of transcendental, theological and ideological perspectives that could parallel or co-exist with pragmatic analysis. What are we to make of the extensive cosmological writings of Peirce, and of his references to Christian and mystical theology? What are the implications of a temporal understanding of semiosis, of how signs "evolve," for any epochful or determinist account of historical and natural evolution? (164) What are we to make today of Peirce's notions of creative and evolutionary love? Deledalle (1990: 44-45) has elsewhere argued that by 1887 Peirce had "walked free" from the cave of Platonism: that paradoxically, despite social isolation, poverty and professional failure, he increasingly saw "the sun set free." In Part Four, Deledalle interprets Peirce's cosmology and metaphysics without retreating from his previous argument about Peirce's anti-Platonism and anti-idealism. The comparison of Peirce's triadic categories, and the Christian trinity (170-180) should be regarded in this inquiring context: to investigate appropriate non-realist general philosophies that ground pragmatism in some generalized narrative of time and existence. Peirce analyzed semiosis in a micro "geo-social" context: he illuminates context in a semiotic framework. Yet his work lacks and even opposes grand sociological or cultural narratives. For instance, he opposed Hegelian historiography. Peirce himself adopted gospel and Christian ref-



erences to hypothesize a general “metaphysical” philosophy. It seems reasonable someone like Deledalle should do the same.

On arriving at the end of the middle-sized, 199-page volume, one can readily ask supplementary questions in terms of the author’s wider writing, and from questions that the anthologized papers raise. Philosophically, what was the influence of thinkers like Locke, Hume, Hamilton, Darwin, to name only a few, on Peirce, especially in his early years, in addition to the influence of Greek thought and Kant, so well identified in this volume? Esposito (1999) has done so much to foreground such inquiry, that to complete it would require a book several times as long as Deledalle’s. Semiotically, how well can the sub-type of index be identified with the sign-act? Comparatively, how useful is any approach, critical or otherwise, to McLuhan as a point of departure to a contemporary semiotic of media? Is any political metaphysic or ideology implied or present in Peirce? The links to contemporary themes of “post-structural” semiotics, of habitus, discourse, temporality and power, are all there, yet only briefly so. What would a Protestant, non-conformist Peircean apology be like? What extended applied studies would best illustrate the themes of semiosis argued in the book? It is, of course, unfair to ask, from such a varied and broad miscellany of topics, cases and papers, that all its ideas and direction be followed up. It is more a compliment to suggest how pleasing such a prospect would be.

Such reader-based editorial requests, for supplementary commentary, do not diminish this volume at all. Part of its appeal is to invite seminar-like responses and debate - perhaps the papers finally reflect the seminars at Perpignan, where much of their content was apparently first delivered. The book is a useful, highly readable, even entertaining addition to any collection of contemporary Peircean commentaries. The controversy about Peirce continues unabated, especially with the international ubiquity his life and work has attained retrospectively in the last two decades. Long since Rorty and Eco debated the nature and value of his semiotic, Peirce has become a philosopher of convenience in fields as widespread as biosemiotics, neuroscience, business and architecture, and information studies. Is such attention warranted, or consistent? Deledalle reminds us that the nature and status of Peirce’s contribution will not be resolved until his semiotic behaviorism is fairly and widely understood. This book is a most timely contribution in that regard.

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## Theoretical Housecleaning

Herman Rapaport, *The Theory Mess: Deconstruction in Eclipse*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

By Clara Sacchetti

Herman Rapaport’s *The Theory Mess: Deconstruction in Eclipse* is an examination of the negative Anglo-American reception of Derridean deconstruction over the past thirty years. To this end, Rapaport suggests that the now popular and well-known sorts of criticisms that have emerged around deconstruction - i.e., deconstruction is nihilistic, solipsistic, apolitical, unethical, and socially irrelevant - are premised on an intellectual and scholarly “purposive failure to comprehend” it (6). That failure operates to eclipse deconstruction by rendering it unimportant while simultaneously furnishing the detractors of deconstruction an opportunity to increase their own symbolic capital by poaching upon that of Derrida’s; a poaching that, according to Rapaport, is a result of the increasingly competitive and ego-oriented world of a “celebrity star system that rewards people for not seeing eye to eye... and encourages academics to look the part of being an intellectual without necessarily doing all of the work of an intellectual” (xv). Moreover, the eclipsing of deconstruction and the development of an academic star system is part and parcel of a general trend in the academy that glamorizes theory in such a way that makes an “individual critic’s sexiness and popularity” more important than the “mundane things like checking one’s footnotes, readings one’s peers, or getting an argument or theory reasonably right” (xv). The lack of real scholarly engagement with deconstruction is, for Rapaport, a regrettable situation that persists even today despite a wealth of good material on the topic. Even more, Rapaport suggests that the eclipsing of deconstruction is partly responsible for the theoretical messiness that

currently plagues intellectual enquiry in Anglo-American universities - a mess that is characterized largely by the refusal, wittingly or not, of intellectuals to engage the work of their colleagues for the purposes of reaching a provisional understanding of what theory is, how it operates, and what it might achieve. Rapaport is not suggesting here that dissension needs to be eliminated in theoretical enquiry; he is rather suggesting that intellectuals ought to try to avoid the current situation of the theory mess which is like “wild analysis that cannot be reasoned with or entirely comprehended” (xvii). Rapaport thus aims to straighten up the theory mess by: (1) revealing the direct and indirect linkages between deconstruction and contemporary theory and (2) by suggesting that deconstruction might offer us a grounding for productive intellectual interlocution that, in turn, might allow us to reach some kind of temporary shared understanding of the notions, concepts, and ideas that inform theoretical enquiry. Oddly enough, Rapaport’s call for a shared understanding of theory is premised on Gadamerian hermeneutics - a premise that many readers of Jacques Derrida’s work might find a bit surprising given that Derrida has taken issue with Hans-Georg Gadamer’s work in the past. Rapaport is unaware of the potential criticism that deconstruction and hermeneutics are incommensurable. But rather than discount the possibility of marrying the two, he marshals ‘evidence’ to show how Derrida himself insists on “attention to history, context, philology, structure, logic and agreement” - all classical hermeneutical protocols - as “primary lines of defence at the moment [that] deconstruction is maligned and Derrida’s words are turned against him” (xiii). By pointing out how Derrida defends deconstruction, Rapaport is able to shore up his own position that theoretical enquiry in the humanities and social sciences might fruitfully proceed on the basis of a hermeneutically inflected deconstruction. Rapaport thus gives us a convincing account of how the latter is possible if one takes Derrida at his word; if, that is, one is willing to read Derrida in a very non-deconstructive way by assuming that his various defences and corrective readings of deconstruction reveal something about the *truth* of deconstruction. Rapaport tacitly acknowledges that taking Derrida at his word entails a “certain logocentric horizon of analysis” that “betrays deconstruction” (155). But he maintains that this sort of betrayal is necessary if deconstruction is “to be compelling enough to change our minds and affect our practices of theory” (155). Rapaport asserts that without such *truth* - what he develops as an *understanding* of deconstruction - deconstruction is “either untrue or inessential and therefore of little significance” (155). Without such *truth*, that is, deconstruction is irrelevant and destined for extinction.

Rapaport focuses largely on Derridean deconstruction because he believes that it is representative of what constitutes theory and theoretical enquiry in the wake of traditional philosophy’s death. Rapaport, following feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti, argues that theory is postphilosophy; it is what gets talked about, written about, and debated in an era in which Reason, God, and the Universal Subject no longer effectively hold the centre of philosophical or political enquiry. Theory is that body of knowledge that is produced by the continuing attempt at theorizing when theory - conceptually, logically, historically - hasn’t yet solidified (i.e., hasn’t reached some kind of shared understanding). Rapaport finds the elusiveness of contemporary theory *somewhat* similar to the indeterminacy/undecidability of deconstruction.<sup>1</sup>

Deconstruction, as is well known, does not provide us with an epistemology or a method. It is, rather, best viewed as a strategy of textual read-

ing, an approach to text that is sensitive to what is irreducible to a particular text; it is an approach that approaches text *as text* prior to any imposition of a particular method or epistemology on the part of the reader/analyst. Not surprisingly, attention to the aporias, lacunas, and tensions (i.e., what is irreducible) within a text has engendered the impression that deconstruction is too narrowly focused on the undecidabilities immanent in the text itself and, by turns, too unconcerned with questions of politics, sociality, identity/voice, and, by extension, the agency, will, or “doings” of a social subject. In Anglo-American universities, deconstruction has been grossly misunderstood as unconcerned with these latter matters, even though Derrida has addressed them from his earliest writings in the 1960s to his most recent writings at the turn of the twenty-first century.

That deconstruction is seemingly “free-floating,” subject only to the vagaries, inconsistencies, and aporias of a particular text at hand, forecloses in advance the possibility of cataloguing its main tenets (in so far as the deconstruction of a particular text is determined by the content, style, motifs, themes, ideas, etc. of any given text). Rapaport quite clearly knows this about deconstruction and rather than provide his readers with a straightforward definition of it he chooses instead to unpack a number of Derrida’s writings. In this way Rapaport is able to begin sketching an *understanding* of deconstruction in Anglo-American universities. Rapaport’s focus on understanding, as opposed to definition, is in keeping with his claim that a “horizon of apprehension” (xviii) around deconstruction - thirty years after its introduction - now exists. That horizon, more specifically, centres on a critical examination of the Enlightenment Subject in late-twentieth century thought and how Derridean deconstruction has either directly or indirectly shaped the trajectories of that thought. To this end, Rapaport’s development of an understanding of deconstruction also includes: (1) a careful look at the historical rise and overt decline of deconstruction as a rarefied field of inquiry,<sup>2</sup> (2) a survey of Derrida’s work in relation to the questions of the Subject and associated questions of politics, identity/voice, and sociality, and, by extension, (3) an examination of the latter with respect to gender studies, queer theory, post-colonial studies, and New Historicism; areas of enquiry that Rapaport directly or indirectly categorizes as “subspecialities” of the field of cultural/social studies - one of the most popular fields of study in the Anglo-American academy today. Not surprisingly, then, Rapaport discusses at length the problems that stem from the intersections between cultural studies, its associated subspecialities, and deconstruction.

Rapaport acknowledges that the pre-eminent place that he reserves for the importance of deconstruction appears to be in tension with the largely pragmatic theoretical orientation of cultural studies currently in vogue in Anglo-American universities. But Rapaport convincingly argues that any such tension is deceptive if one examines how deconstruction has been either influential in shaping the themes of cultural studies or how deconstruction, if given proper consideration, could advance the field of cultural studies by radically altering its overwhelming pragmatic philosophical orientation and the problems that stem from it. Such consideration would go a long way, according to Rapaport, to provide a basis for intellectuals interested in theoretical enquiry to begin speaking to one another; a basis, again, that might be grounded on a hermeneutically-inflected deconstruction.

Rapaport takes issue with the way that analysts of cultural studies often rely upon pragmatic philosophy by conflating the actions/doings of a

person with their being/consciousness. Being, in other words, is assumed to be an unproblematized function of doing in the field of cultural studies; and doing, in turn, becomes the material evidence upon which to carry out a cultural studies analysis. This pragmatic orientation is disturbing for Rapaport because it is the very transparency between being and doing, between representation and performance, that most needs to be deconstructed. Rapaport’s discussion of the conflation of being and doing is focused, most notably, on Judith Butler’s 1997 book, *Excitable Speech*, and her turn against Continental philosophy in general and Derridean deconstruction in particular.

For Rapaport, Butler’s book is a cautionary tale for scholars of cultural studies who unflinchingly rely upon an Enlightenment communication model of sender and receiver, of addresser and addressee, speaker and listener; problems that stem from an uncritical faith in the presence and possibility of direct face-to-face communication and, by turns, a metaphysics of voice. Rapaport points out, for example, that Butler argues that initiators of hate speech cite/repeat an already established ritualized discourse that connects them with other past and present speakers of hate speech. For Butler, there is little room for the possibility of a divergence between the being of a speaker and the doing of a speaker; a divergence, that is, between what a person says, what they think, and how they act. Moreover, Butler fails to seriously consider the possibility that when a speaker engages in a pre-established discourse of hate speech that s/he may engender an alteration of those meanings within that discourse. Butler’s inattentiveness to both the former and latter - i.e., to slippages of meaning - makes her analysis distinctly non-deconstructive. By contrast a deconstruction of hate speech might proceed by paying close attention to how the iteration of speech occasions slippages of meanings and divergences between speech and action that “results in multiple injuries that are both savage and comical, cruel and yet funny, but most importantly, furious and yet still good natured enough to be playful” (111). The repetition of hate speech, in other words, is polyvocal rather than univocal. Butler, however, seems unwilling to engage in a deconstruction of voice in her analysis of hate speech because, according to Rapaport, it runs counter to a pragmatic assumption that an addressee is situated in a “face-to-face relation of self and other” based on “their full presence as antagonists” with clear and decisive intentionality (115). In effect, Butler is unwilling to challenge the overwhelming “moralizing imperative of [cultural] studies” that “requires a simple binary logic of good and evil”; a logic that, unlike deconstruction, “cannot instantiate the illogic of a ... suspension of disbelief” (115), a logic that cannot even begin questioning how the binary between good and evil, between right and wrong, can be premised on an illogic that operates to destabilize any simple binary by complexifying it.

Butler’s failure to engage with the deconstruction of speech, meaning, and ultimately voice is, according to Rapaport, telling of the way that other “subspecialities” of cultural studies have also systematically eclipsed deconstruction. Rapaport argues that a scholarly concern for voice or agency in the areas of New Historicism, feminism, queer theory, and post-colonial studies is due largely to a concern for the politics and social relevancy of theory - concerns that are grounded on the idea that if one criticizes the “doings” of a subject one concomitantly undermines their voice/agency and, by extension, the ability of a social subject to engage in political action. Moreover, the overwhelming attention given to issues of voice, politics, and identity have,

according to Rapaport, inaugurated a number of vexing dualisms that, once again, operate to eclipse the work of deconstruction. These dualisms include: (1) the inability to decide whether language is an expression of experience or whether experience is expressed in language; (2) the inability to decide whether a subject is self-fashioning or is a product of structural factors (i.e., culture, politics, economics etc.); and, finally (3) the inability to decide whether identity is primordial or socially constructed. Rapaport convincingly argues that these dualisms have emerged largely because scholars working in these particular “subspecialities” of cultural studies fail to understand the difference between indecidability and Derridean undecidability. They fail, in other words, to deal with the “*productive* rupturing of boundaries that deconstructs dualisms.” A deconstructive strategy avoids indecidability in so far as it interrogates how dualisms operate and the effects that stem from them, including effects that pertain to issues of politics, sociality, and identity. Indeed, Rapaport’s discussion of the politics of deconstruction focuses precisely on these latter issues, particularly with regard to the politics that surround the positing of an us/them (or self/other) dichotomy. In this sense, Rapaport argues that Derrida has always, either directly or indirectly, dealt with the question of politics by problematizing how the self/other relationship plays into the dualistic “ground upon which the political is established” (142) and by critically questioning such dualisms *prior* to the taking-up of a political position.

The questioning of a self/other binary, its relationship to positioning/position taking, and its relationship to questions of politics, identity, and voice are of course vitally important in feminist theory. Rapaport rightly points out that many feminists reject deconstruction - and effectively eclipse it - by arguing that it offers no place from which to engage in the goal of improving women’s social, economic, and political status. Alternatively, a few feminist critics suggest that this sort of challenge to Derridean deconstruction is based on the misconceived notion that deconstruction makes it impossible to take up a position that counters more conservative political positions, particularly the opposition of (oppressed/marginal) women’s voices against the (dominant) voices of men. From a deconstructive strategy, however, it is the very binary of oppositional/dominant that needs to be investigated. Rapaport suggests, following feminist scholars Elizabeth Grosz and Drucilla Cornell, that oppositional political voices often promote and participate in the same exclusionary logics as those that they claim to oppose. As such, a key question, from a deconstructive angle, is whose voice is considered oppositional? All too often an oppositional voice is assumed to be univocal (and a correct representation of a group of subjects, i.e., women). And the assumption of univocality - i.e., a woman’s voice - may have the effect of foreclosing the possibility of the differences between oppositional political positions/voices; it forecloses, much like Butler’s work on hate speech, the possibility of iteration, difference, and heterogeneity. So while it is true that deconstruction presents a challenge to and/or position-taking and may therefore *seem* apolitical, its politics lay in the way that deconstruction opens up a space for us to interrogate who benefits from the way in which a particular position and its related goal is constructed.

Rapaport more thoroughly examines the relationship between the issues of voice (i.e., agency), the Subject, and deconstruction in his discussion of the concept of subject-positions, a much used concept in the field of cultural studies and its various “subspecialities.” In so far as the concept of subject-positions emerges in the 1980s



as a response to the dismantling of the humanistic Subject, Rapaport suggests that its development is linked to Derridean deconstruction in a negative way. He argues, in a nutshell, that intellectuals have forwarded the concept of subject-positions as an alternative to the deconstruction of the Subject - an alternative that *a priori* assumes the existence of an *interaction* between structure and agency, between the social and the subject. For Rapaport, the idea that the concept of subject-positions is an alternative to deconstruction marks yet another eclipse of deconstruction. Rapaport's discussion of subject-positions is crucial to his argument that the theory mess has been occasioned by the dereliction of a scholarly responsibility to engage with other scholars, particularly Derrida's work; a dereliction that goes hand in hand in with a "celebrity system in which each critic has his or her own product to sell (i.e., himself or herself)..." and is "less about a hermeneutical attempt to philosophically stabilize a conceptual field in order to patiently question aspects of that field than about matters of celebrity in which all that matters is who gets the best of whom" (xv). Although Rapaport values theoretical enquiry that engages in a particular sort of heterogeneity (e.g., the slippages of meaning that occur through the iteration of a speech act), he is nonetheless intolerant of the wild proliferation of the concept of subject-positions in as much as it is emblematic of a failed encounter with deconstruction that is extremely counterproductive. Rapaport's extensive discussion of the "untamed" proliferation of the concept of subject-positions thus serves as a way for him to once again underline the central problem with the contemporary theory mess; namely, a lack of conversation among intellectuals and the subsequent lack of theoretical consensus, understanding, and community that ensues. At the same time, Rapaport is tolerant, even encouraging, of the kind of theoretical messiness that provides a way for scholars to engage in meaningful debate; a mess that provides a way for differences of intellectual opinion to find expression against a *thoughtful* consideration of scholarly work by taking account of the historical precedents of any given area of such work.

With this in mind, Rapaport claims that the first problem with the concept of subject-positions is a lack of engagement or proper intellectual consideration of its pre-history. Although Michel Foucault is often retroactively cited as the author of the concept, Louis Althusser actually developed it first. Next, the work of Jacques Lacan, according to Rapaport, must be considered part of the pre-history of the concept of subject-positions in so far as Lacan was interested in the ways that various psychological and societal structures "produce subjects whose meanings are dependent upon their positions in relation to signs, objects, and others" (77). Lastly, Rapaport claims that Derrida inadvertently entered the debate on subject-positions in his 1971 critique on the idea of positions/positioning. Derrida's implicit critique of subject-positions is once again, and not surprisingly, in keeping with the deconstruction of the humanist idea of the Subject. But unlike Foucault, Althusser, and Lacan, Derrida's work problematizes the concept of subject-positions for the way that it continues to implicitly rely upon the notion of the metaphysical Subject, a metaphysics that subsequently plagues its use in cultural studies in the late 1980s and 1990s. Derrida's implied critiques of Foucault, Althusser, and Lacan are mostly ignored by later Anglo-American cultural studies scholars who misuse or misread Derrida's work on the deconstruction of the Subject in an effort to ground their analysis on the operations of the "real world," (i.e., demystify ideology) and/or on the experiences that "real"

people have of the world (i.e., the question of agency and social practice).

The important work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (cf. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 1985) is a case in point. Laclau and Mouffe popularized Foucault's version of subject-positions within in the field of cultural studies by proposing that subjectivity is formed by the interaction of a given subject with a given array of institutional forces. Unlike Foucault's work on the matter, they argue that subjectivity and position-taking is always in process and that it is always only partially articulated (i.e., vexed with tension and conflict). And, unlike Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe are unwilling to critique the metaphysical assumptions that often go along with the very notion of positioning/position-taking. Stuart Hall's formulation of the concept of subject-positions follows in the wake of Foucault's work as well. But Hall, according to Rapaport, is more interested in political positions - i.e., argumentative positions - rather than the more socially focussed work of Laclau and Mouffe. And like the latter, Hall also ignores Derrida's 1971 work on positioning. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of subject-position, in contrast to Laclau, Mouffe, and Hall, focuses on group, rather than individual, positions that "are rhetorically situated by cultural norms" (84). Even Spivak, who acknowledges Derrida's influence in her own work, manages to eclipse Derrida's work on positioning in her formulation of subject-positions. Rapaport also discusses Diana Fuss's version of subject-positions in her book, *Essentially Speaking* (1989), as a distortion of Spivak's version and as yet another instance of the theoretical fraying of the concept of subject-positions. Fuss mistakenly suggests that Spivak's concept of subject-positions is grounded on the assumption that a "fully formed revolutionary individual" (86) exists apart from, and outside of, any particular subject-position and can thereby manipulate any given position at will. Rapaport points out that Fuss's reading of subject-positions "reflects the most commonplace use of the term in the American academy today: the subject in marginal position where resistance becomes thinkable, the subject as speaker of counterdiscourse and producer of countercultural practices, or, more simply, the subject in position of political opposition" (86).

Rapaport's extensive discussion of the concept of subject-positions is aimed at showing how the contemporary theory mess stems ultimately from a lack of discussion and debate among scholars. This is necessary if "researchers are seriously interested in theorizing social critiques that are going to have any compelling consistency" - a consistency that emerges from a willingness on the part of scholars and intellectuals to "learn from one another rather avoid each other's work" (paraphrased, 88). Moreover, it is troubling that scholars who advance the concept of subject-positions fail to achieve such interlocution because, according to Rapaport, the concept of subject-position is a "highly technical term" (88) that *ought* to be punctuated by a productive dialogue - a fusion of horizons - between intellectuals who employ it. The lack of a fusion of horizons has resulted in a "shouting match of different views and definitions that fail to undertake a systematic investigation and evaluation of work done by various colleagues at various times" that leaves us to "wonder if we are not being condemned to an interminability of under-theorized positions that quickly degrade into an uncritical morass of differences that are as incoherent as they are arbitrary" (88). Rapaport writes:

It is here that Hans Georg Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutical listening or receptivity becomes relevant within an institution that has become so compartmentalized and impatient to effect a 'race to theory'... that theorists,

both major and minor, speak at cross-purposes rather than in ways that might be theoretically constructive.... Gadamer rightly points out that in excluding the other from critical conversation, one excludes the other *in his or her positive function* as interlocutor whose substantive agreements and shared understanding is *essential* to the truth claims of an argument in so far as those truth claims cannot be legitimately made in the absence of a horizon of mutual agreement that is both constitutive within the process of theorizing and as yet to come as the theory is apprehended and judged by others... The theory of subject-positions is an excellent example of wild-cat hermeneutics done in the absence of this positive function. As such, this alternative form of a deconstruction of the subject [i.e., the concept of subject-positions] could be characterized as a series of failed critical encounters that would define a so-called theory mess, a process of theorization in the absence of classical hermeneutical controls, among them, the positive function of an informed community of scholarly agreement. It is in this sense that the alternative deconstruction of the subject [i.e., the concept of subject-positions] is itself but the eclipsing of deconstruction(s) that might well be far more viable (88-89).

Rapaport thus suggests that the concept of subject-positions suffers from the lack of an "informed community of scholarly agreement" (89) that might be fruitfully realized if Derrida's work on/around the related issues of voice, politics, sociality, and identity is taken seriously rather than crudely discounted, ignored, or minimized. What the development of the concept of subject-positions reveals, according to Rapaport, is a failure of scholars to communicate with each other in the wake of the death of the Enlightenment Subject, what Rapaport refers to throughout *The Theory Mess* as a *faux bond*. But herein also lies, I think, the main problem with Rapaport's book. For why should the scholars and intellectuals Rapaport discusses - i.e., Laclau, Mouffe, Hall, Spivak, and Fuss *necessarily* talk to each other? Why does Rapaport assume that because these scholars employ the term subject-positions that they *ought* to be prescriptively speaking to each other? Why is it not legitimate, for instance, for Laclau and Mouffe's formulation on subject-positions to be discussed primarily among intellectuals interested in neo-Marxist critiques rather than those intellectuals interested in feminist theory? Why does Rapaport not allow for the possibility that the concept of subject-positions formulated by Spivak might be primarily discussed and debated by say, the post-colonial studies interpretative community rather than a larger interpretative community that goes under the name of theory? Rapaport's discussion of the concept of subject-positions advances the idea that intellectuals who ought to be informed about and engaged by each other's work would, in turn, foster a shared understanding of the concept of subject-positions. But this call for a shared understanding of the concept of subject-positions is also extremely problematic in so far as it forecloses the radically different ways in which the concept might operate depending upon the arena in which it is discussed and debated. It forecloses, in short, the heterogeneity of the concept, a heterogeneity that is, in my opinion, valuable in and of itself. A heterogeneity that does indeed engender a theory mess, as Rapaport refers to it, but one that many postmodern, poststructural, and post-colonial critics welcome for the way that such a mess allows for an openness of theoretical enquiry that encourages polyvocality, what Derrida refers to as the "monstrosity of theory" (cf. 148).

Moreover, Rapaport's work on the concept of subject-positions underscores a broader problem with *The Theory Mess*, namely, an inattentiveness to how the "subspecialities" of cultural studies have developed their own interpretative communities - communities that might fail to engage in interlocution with communities of other

“subspecialities” but certainly do engage with the work of those who “belong” to any given “subspeciality.” In this sense, it seems a bit unfair to insist that we must develop a more generalized understanding of theory that transcends the boundaries of each “subspeciality.” Indeed, Rapaport’s employment of the term “subspeciality” points to this very problem. The implicit or explicit categorization of New Historicism, gender and queer theory, and post-colonial criticism, as “subspecialities” of cultural/social studies operates, in advance, to minimize the internal debates within these various fields - and therefore minimizes the particular concerns of each interpretative community - by assuming that they are auxiliaries to a broader interpretive community that is grounded on a unified theory of theory.

Even if Rapaport is right - even, that is, if one believes that the concept of subject-positions is in such a messy state of affairs because scholars seem to use it in many diverse and unrelated ways - one must also ask how much uniformity in the understanding and use of the concept is required. For Rapaport admits that the concept of subject-positions and its subsequent wild proliferation is largely a result of the struggle to come to terms with the fall of the Enlightenment Subject. If this is indeed the case then one could easily argue that it is precisely this latter issue - the Subject - that constitutes the common thread of understanding that informs various formulations of the concept of subject-positions. Clearly, that common thread does not seem to be sufficient for Rapaport. But rather than point out why it is insufficient, Rapaport claims that it simply is without clearly stipulating any of the evaluative criteria he uses to make such a claim. In other words, how much interlocution is necessary and how do we know when it has been reached? Rapaport doesn’t leave his readers with the answers to these questions, preferring, it seems, to assume that they are obvious to everyone, that they are somehow commonsensical.

It is also worth noting that Rapaport’s attempt to straighten up the contemporary theory mess through the development of an *understanding* of deconstruction may be a point of considerable worry for staunch advocates of deconstruction. Rapaport suggests that Derrida’s

various defences of deconstruction are “evidence” of his reliance upon a number of hermeneutical protocols: an interpretive community of listeners and respondents, a call for the “real” operations and “meanings” of deconstructive analysis, a shared understanding of deconstruction, despite its non-systematic nature. Rapaport argues that Derrida’s various defences of deconstruction point to a call for the “controlled” uses of deconstruction rather than a sort of “anything goes” understanding of it. He further argues that Derrida’s defence of deconstruction shows us that Derrida himself is asking for some kind of common understanding of it, that Derrida acknowledges he can “‘deconstruct,’ ‘fissure,’ or make a text ‘tremble,’ he cannot do it without the reader’s or listener’s co-operation”; without, that is, “the willingness of a reader or listener to be open to the possibility that a text *can* be deconstructed” (155).

Rapaport thus seizes upon Derrida’s own public defence of deconstruction in order to put forward the notion that deconstruction is subject to the same sort of scholarly expectations that govern all good (hermeneutical) intellectual work: an attempt to read and understand the work of others in order to talk to each other, debate, and reach some kind of agreement about deconstruction. Although Rapaport is initially convincing in his attempt to show that deconstruction is subject to “the classical protocols of hermeneutical analysis” (xiii) he fails to deal critically with Derrida’s defence of deconstruction. For rather than appropriate Derrida’s numerous defences of deconstruction as indicators of deconstruction’s reliance on hermeneutical protocols, Rapaport could just have easily cited them as instances of a double-cross of deconstruction by its founder. Rather than “read” Derrida’s defences of deconstruction as a call to “hermeneutical reasonability” (xiii) or “communicative rationality” (155) one could equally “read” them as instances of Derrida’s disloyalty to deconstruction, instances of Derrida not being deconstructive *enough*, instances of the eclipsing of deconstruction by its founder.

Despite these problems, Rapaport’s book is a must read for any scholar interested in deconstruction and the contemporary state of theory. *The Theory Mess* is a critical look at the

ways in which deconstruction has either directly or indirectly influenced theoretical enquiry in the late twentieth century. It is also a way for beginners and experts alike to learn more about the historical developments of contemporary theory across a wide range of disciplines. And lastly, *The Theory Mess* reveals the extent to which intellectuals need to begin engaging in theory more seriously by reading the work of Derrida against both his detractors and supporters in order to develop a better understanding of the various possibilities offered by deconstructive analysis. Even from within the theory mess, we can admire Rapaport’s attempt to make a clean sweep of things and - to the extent it is possible - offer some much needed clarity to our thinking.

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#### Notes

1. The undecidability of deconstruction is underlined by what the term connotes in French. Deconstruction has both a mechanical and grammatical meaning. The former references the act of scrambling the construction of words in a sentence; the latter, used as a reflexive verb, means to lose one’s own construction.

2. Rapaport’s analysis of the rise and decline of deconstruction focuses on three “smear campaigns” that have plagued its reception in British and American universities; campaigns that have had a lasting effect on the way that many North American and British intellectuals have misunderstood it (cf. Rapaport’s discussion of the late 1980s and 1990s works of Allan Bloom, Dinesh D’Souza, and David Lehman, pp. 89-101). All of the “smear campaigns” - the Bate-Wellek campaign of the early 1980s, the 1987 De Man affair, and the Cambridge fiasco in 1992 - were, according to Rapaport, attempts to demonize deconstruction by claiming that it was nihilistic, solipsistic, and unethical. Derrida, in turn, responded to each campaign by asking how the scholars involved benefitted from their involvement; namely, how the scholars involved were able to boost their own reputations by “bad-mouthing” Derrida.

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