

GROSZ, ELIZABETH. *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction.* USA, Routledge, 1990, pp. 218, ISBN 0-415-01400-X.

In much the same way that Sartre, in *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, declared Marxism to be the determining theoretical frame of history, Elizabeth Grosz, in *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, identifies psychoanalysis as the privileged theoretical frame of feminist thought. This does not mean that she takes an uncritical stance with respect to either psychoanalysis or Lacan. She does not. It rather means that though she warns us against being seduced by psychoanalysis, she also warns us of the dangers of ignoring it; for psychoanalysis, Grosz tells us, is the crucial tool for assessing the questions of woman, women and the feminine.

This understanding of the relationship between psychoanalysis and feminist thought determines the overall scope of Grosz's book as well as its particulars. That is, it marks her project by determining which theories of Lacan will be attended to and which will not, and by determining which feminists she will find relevant and which she will not. Further, given these determinations, Grosz's analysis of the relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism is the grid through which the further determination is made concerning which feminists, from amongst those identified as relevant, will be given expositional space and which will not. In a work which dedicates most of its pages to Lacan this last determination sets the tone of the text.

Grosz identifies three categories of feminists:

those committed to Lacan's work and ultimately to his underlying framework, seeing it as a means of describing and explaining patriarchal power relations; . . . those who reject it from a pre-or non-psychoanalytic position . . . [and those] who seem to have an impressive familiarity with Lacan's work while maintaining a critical distance from it. (141-2)

She places Mitchell, Ragland-Sullivan, Kristeva, Plaza and Clement with in the first category; Spender and Greer within the second; and Irigaray, Rose, Gallop and Kofman in the third. The work of

Spender and Greer is dismissed. From amongst the others, two French feminists, Kristeva, one of the committed Lacanians, and Irigaray (with, Grosz says, Irigaray's name representing Cixous, Kofman and perhaps even Gallop), one of those familiar with but critical of Lacan, are the subject of the book's final chapter, "Lacan and Feminism."

Like all books, this one is intended to be read from front to back, from beginning to end. But, given Grosz's attention to Irigaray's account of non-linear feminine readings, I would suggest that this book be read in a way which considers the effects of its conclusions on its beginnings. This allows us to see that the account of Freud that opens the book and the account of Lacan that is the center of the book is both going to and coming from somewhere. These accounts are not for the sake of exposition *per se*. They are intended for those feminists interested in/concerned with theorizing subjectivity, knowledge and desire.

Reading in a linear way we see Grosz setting up the Freudian antecedents of Lacan's moves. Here Grosz concretizes Lacan's claim that he is engaged in the project of reading/re-reading Freud. Here, she shows us the workings of this reading/re-reading, introduces us to its dynamics, and allows us to catch the irony in Lacan's claim that his work vis a vis Freud offers nothing new.

But, if her analysis of the Freud Lacan relationship allows us to catch Lacan's irony, it also directs us away from the simplistic idea that Lacan is an improvement on Freud. Her non-linear readings reveal Freud and Lacan confirming each other on such issues as the heterosexual love relationship and shows Lacan continuing Freud's analyses in a different register. Grosz's non-linear and linear readings challenge each other as they challenge us to attend to the intersections as well as the divergences of the Freudian and Lacanian frames.

Grosz's feminist and expository projects confront each other in much the same way as her linear and non-linear readings challenge each other. Set within her feminist perspective, her expositions of Lacan, show us an heir of Freud who, in going beyond Freud, goes nowhere. For example, Grosz reads Freud as a biologist and Lacan as correcting Freud's biologisms. Given

Freud's biologism, she harbors no doubts as to his misogyny. But Lacan's rejection of biologism does not guarantee his feminist credentials. For however important Lacan's escape from biologism is, biologism is not the whole story of psychoanalysis's misogyny. As Grosz sees it, it is not only in Freud's hands, but also in Lacan's, that psychoanalysis is a risky and dangerous tool for feminists. Against Sullivan and Mitchell, Grosz does not accept the Lacanian phallus as a neutral signifier, "a neutral third term against which both sexes are analogously or symmetrically positioned" (121). She finds no place for a grounding signifier in a system of difference and insists that inserting such a signifier into a system of difference reduces the system to a binary oppositional set (and we all remember what this means for the so-called male-female binary pair).

As a sympathetic critic of Lacan, Grosz delivers what her book's title promises, a good, clear sensitive account of Lacan's ideas and an intelligent rendering of why these ideas are important for feminism. I am impressed with this piece (the bulk) of her project and recommend it to anyone wanting to get a start at cracking the Lacanian code. I also appreciate her accounts of Kristeva and Irigaray. Yet there is a discomfort. There are in the "Psychoanalysis and Feminism" chapter repeated allusions to the problem of women's autonomy. This question of autonomy is aligned with the work of Kristeva and Irigaray. As I see it, goals of autonomy make sense within the contexts of a Cartesian, non-psychoanalytic perspective, or within the context of an ego-psychology reading of Freud. Within the frame of psychoanalysis, however, this ideal of autonomy is called into question and within the field of Lacanian psychoanalysis it is rejected altogether. Given Kristeva's and Irigaray's Lacanian grounding I am suspicious of the suggestion that the issue of autonomy has a place in their work. Their more or less critical distance from Lacan does not, I think, move them away from his non-autonomous view of the subject.

My point in raising this issue is not to insist that the book is infected with a wronged reading of Kristeva or Irigaray (it may be that I am wrongly reading Grosz), but to pursue Grosz's insight regarding the psychoanalytic paradigm. This pursuit may be formulated as follows:

if feminism must attend to the psychoanalytic frame;
if the psychoanalytic frame puts the idea of autonomy in question;
if the idea of autonomy has been the ideal of feminist aspirations;
then
what are the social and political implications of a feminism which, under
the guidance of Lacanian psychoanalysis, attributes visions of autonomy
to the seductions of the imaginary?

George Mason University

DEBRA B. BERGOFFEN

PECCORINI, FRANCISCO L. *Selfhood as Thinking Thought in the Work of Gabriel Marcel: A New Interpretation.* Lewiston, New York, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987. 190 pages, including Select Bibliography and Name Index. ISBN 0-88946-329-8.

Appropriately, the author begins his "new interpretation" of Marcel's thought with a warning to the reader not to expect a general study of the important themes of Marcel's philosophy. This book is a specialized study. It grew out of the second biennial meeting of the Institute for the Encyclopaedia of Ultimate Reality and Meaning, and seeks to answer one question only, namely, what is ultimate reality and meaning as revealed in Marcel's philosophical reflections. The claim to giving a new interpretation of Marcel rests upon the author's focussing his attention on Marcel's notion of the "thinking thought" (*pensée pensante*) as the locus, and, indeed, in the last analysis and in a participatory form, the very identity of ultimate reality and meaning.

The book proceeds in six chapters whose close connection becomes evident only in the thoughtful reading of the text. Chapter One may appear at first to be merely an intellectual biography of Marcel, but its intent is to establish early on, the close connection between philosophical thinking and lived experience, a connection which is then relied upon and made central to the whole work.

Chapter Two, entitled "Being as the Pure Subject: The Root of Existence," undertakes the difficult task of showing how the