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*The Rhetoric of Sincerity* (review)

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While innovative in the particulars of its theoretical argument and in its readings of literary texts, *In Spite of Partition* is not the first critical analysis of the historical and conceptual interrelationship between “Jew” and “Arab,” although a reader outside of Hochberg’s field might come away with that impression. Hochberg’s thinking is deeply indebted to the writings of other scholars in the field such as Ammiel Alcalay, Ella Shohat, and Gil Anijar—a debt that is underacknowledged in the text. Hochberg duly cites key works by these scholars and others, but she neither articulates how these works may have influenced her thinking nor critically analyzes them. For example, although Hochberg deems Alcalay’s *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (1992) to be “the most elaborate study of Arab and Jewish cultural and literary exchanges in and through the modern Levant” (45), the only place she engages with the arguments presented in this “seminal” (45) work is in an endnote (155n23). I should, at this juncture, reiterate that I view *In Spite of Partition* to be an important piece of original scholarship. Yet, by better situating her arguments within or against the body of existing scholarship in the field, Hochberg could have even more pointedly articulated the importance of this work as both an academic and political intervention.

Few scholars possess Hochberg’s familiarity with modern Jewish and Arab (as well as Arab Jewish) literature written in Hebrew, French and Arabic. *In Spite of Partition* reorients the discourse of Arabs and Jews away from imposed barriers—physical and psychological—toward contiguity and inseparability.

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#### THEORY

*The Rhetoric of Sincerity*. Edited by Ernst van Alphen, Mieke Bal, and Carel Smith. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008. 352 pp. Paper \$24.95.

The book features contributors from six countries and nine disciplines. It opens with a historical and cross-cultural justification for this collection: “In times of intercultural tensions and conflicts, sincerity matters” (1). The editors believe that sincerity deserves not only multiple cultural

(if not multicultural) takes but also interdisciplinary consideration: "The issue of sincerity cannot be appropriated as the exclusive domain of any intellectual field or academic discipline" (2). This laudable intention of the book, however, is undermined by its content. Despite the range of contributors and the collection's stated attempt to address "intercultural tensions," the "diverse cultures" being discussed in this book are limited largely to the experience of Jews, the exceptions being one chapter on Turkish immigrants in Germany and another on Italian southerners. The majority of people outside the West have no voice in this volume, nor are their cultures represented in its pages. As for the "non-Western" ethnicities that do get included, they are confined to immigrants in the *Western* hemisphere.

With the predominance of Western perspectives, the editors miss a chance for critically reflecting on a central assumption of the collection as suggested by its organization. The three parts of the book—"Sincerity as Subjectivity Effect," "Declining Sincerity," and "Sincerity as Media Effect"—seem to suggest that sincerity, be it of the effect of subjectivity or the media, is a mere ideological byproduct. Thus, while the book seeks to dislodge sincerity from its traditional *Western* association with the subject (the word "Western" not noted by the editors but added by the reviewer), it never questions its own ideology of taking for granted sincerity as a byproduct of ideology. Also, despite the book's attempt to question the "necessary tie" between sincerity and subjectivity, the existence of a "subject" seems never to be questioned by the collection, as is evident, for example, in the way that part 2 hastens to propose "alternative subjectivities" to replace "traditional subjectivity" (4). What the collection overlooks is that not all traditions entertain the idea of a subject in the first place, nor do all traditions deem sincerity to be an ideological byproduct. Confucianism, for example, underscores the necessity of grounding ethics in sincerity without associating sincerity with either a subject or an ideology.

The introduction presents part 1, "Sincerity as Subjectivity Effect," in primarily historical terms: "Here, historical beginnings are confronted with contemporary practices" (4). The section could perhaps have been more meaningfully conceptualized within an interdisciplinary rather than historical frame, because the contributors to part 1 do not seem to be primarily interested in history (with the exception of Jane Taylor, who traces certain rhetorical and performative apparatuses of sincerity to sixteenth-century Europe). In fact, Frans-Willem Korsten, Carel Smith, and Hent de Vries are concerned with theoretical rather than historical questions. The merits of the individual essays (such as those by Vries and Korsten) might have been better displayed if they had been framed more in accordance with their real foci and strengths.

Taylor's discussion of torture and conversion in sixteenth-century Europe is followed by Katherine Bergeron's discourse on the valorization in Republican France of the sincerity in Sarah Bernhardt's voice in relationship to its idea(l)s of democracy. Korsten analyzes sincerity and hypocrisy in politics, arguing for the important role of sincerity as "a necessary force to counteract hypocrisy, the latter threatening to undermine any system founded on justice" (8). Smith explores how the judge is bound by *legal* rather than abstract truth—that is, bound by law instead of sincerity. His insightful analysis is somewhat marred by his universalizing language, which glosses over the fact that the "legal profession" discussed in his essay has limited relevance outside the modern Western context.<sup>1</sup> De Vries takes up Cavell's engagement with J. L. Austin. His essay dramatizes the tragedy of sincerity, of "the *inability to be insincere*, an inability *not* to be signed onto your words and deeds." Equally tragic is that "we may go for something, be onto something—and do so quite (or fully) seriously and sincerely—and yet *not know* or *fail to know* whether and how we can or will *do things with words*" (114).

Part 2, "Declining Sincerity," responds to part 1 by examining "subjects [who] decline to participate in the culture of sincerity." Although the editors give more space to subaltern subjects under this category, the section perpetuates the modern Western assumption of a subject capable of subscribing to or refusing the idea/ideology of sincerity (in contrast to premodern East Asian cultures for which sincerity is not dependent on a subject). Cesare Casarino discusses how the "subaltern" subjects interviewed by Pasolini in *Love Meetings* toyed with the roles they were expected to play when "confessing their sexuality." The end product is a film that both anticipates and diverges from Foucault's theory of the modern sexual subject. Yasco Horsman reads Coetzee's *Disgrace* and *The Lives of Animals* as a subtle criticism of confession as deployed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Horsman identifies a structural problem inherent to confession: that its effectiveness depends both on the utterance of certain conventional formulae and on the individual's heartfelt sincerity. By insisting on grounding confession in sincerity, the TRC ended up Christianizing a secular, legal process. David McNeill explores how post-Fordist workers are obliged to sincerely believe in the "cause" of their employers, their sincerity thus contributing to the triumph of capitalist social relations. Leslie Adelson analyzes why the notion of (in-)sincerity "cannot be applied to qualify migratory subjects" (12).<sup>2</sup> For Adelson, "ethnic and gendered subjects" are products of "abstract structures of labor and commodification." As such, they are "social forms of alienation rather than personhood" (178).

Part 3, “Sincerity as Media Effect,” probes sincerity as an effect of the media rather than subjectivity. Despite this section’s challenge to the post-Augustinian Western belief in the subject as the “source” of sincerity, the subject per se is not questioned. At most, this section raises the possibility that sincerity is constructed through the media, but it again fails to take into account other cultural perspectives that might believe in genuine sincerity without associating it with a subject. In this section, Jill Bennett observes how sincerity has become a tool for politicians to engineer fear and mobilize support for preemptive strikes. This problem is further complicated by the fact that “the truth or falsity of [conviction] cannot be revealed in media” (212). Michael Bachmann uses Derrida on film to comment on how the staging of a first-person, “sincere” account—a testimony or confession—is inevitably haunted by its *being* (as) an image. Alison Young explores the problem of discussing sincerity in cases of trauma where the issue in question is not truth but its apprehensibility and representability. Focusing on the *9/11 Report*, Young observes how “sincerity demands truth-telling but is constrained by its institutional status as a commission of inquiry” (239). Maaïke Bleeker probes the intersections between political and theatrical representations and points out how sincerity as a media effect problematizes conventional notions of truth and falsehood. The entwinement between politics and theater challenges us to reconsider George Bush’s insincerity as the foundation of representative government, despite the common misperception that we vote for candidates who are sincere rather than those who “most convincingly *play the role* of politician” (253, emphasis added). Taking his cue from Paul de Man and poststructuralism, Reindert Dhondt argues how “an excessive openness and outgoingness risks undermining the autobiographical pact and the sincerity that it implies” (266). Using as examples the self-revelatory writings of two dying AIDS patients, Dhondt scrutinizes how their “confessions,” extravagant to the point of inventing as well as betraying themselves, their friends, and their enemies, “inevitably [fall] short of the reader’s expectation of sincerity” (279).

The editors’ introduction concludes by going beyond all the essays in an attempt to add one more dimension to the collection. Ernst van Alphen and Mieke Bal end their introduction by asserting that “together, the essays in this volume offer a double vision”—that is, they collectively unmask the ideological underpinning of sincerity while simultaneously arguing for the importance of maintaining the idea of sincerity and retheorizing the concept as a bulwark against “the state of the world in which the opposite of

sincerity continues to function” (16). While I endorse this need to retheorize sincerity, I am not convinced that the volume has offered a “double vision,” in the sense that, with the exception of Carel Smith, almost all other authors problematize the notion of sincerity only within the borders of the Western tradition.

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### Notes

1. Countermodels could easily be offered from feudal China, for example.
2. Note again the editors' appeal to the idea of “subject.”

*The Other Night: Dreaming, Writing, and Restlessness in Twentieth-Century Literature.* By Herschel Farbman. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. 166 pp. Cloth \$50.00.

ESTRAGON: I had a dream.

VLADIMIR: Don't tell me!

ESTRAGON: I dreamt that—

VLADIMIR: DON'T TELL ME!

Hershel Farbman, in his provocative discussion of dreaming (the “other night” of the title, as found in certain works of Freud, Blanchot, Beckett, and Joyce), never quotes this interchange from the early moments of *Waiting for Godot*.<sup>1</sup> But Farbman's readers may be reminded of it. (If he had quoted it, he might have thought he was defeating his purpose in writing. The fact is that his monograph may be considered a parallel commentary on the play.) He does set up an expectation in readers that they will confront something concrete, some kind of contextualization. After all, present-day readers bring to bear on the topic the real-life, common-sense objections of anesthesia, hypnosis, and, above all, sleep deprivation as torture, not to mention their own dream repertoires. This selection of linked essays (118 pages of text) does not make that claim. It is modest, discussing sleep, dreaming, and