

APA Newsletters

NEWSLETTER ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY

Volume 07, Number 2

Spring 2008

FROM THE EDITOR, SALLY J. SCHOLZ

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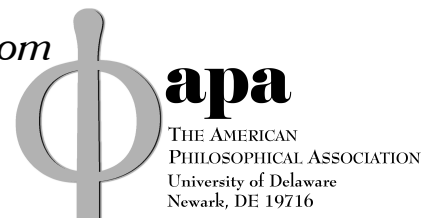
BOOK REVIEWS

Deborah Orr, Dianna Taylor, Eileen Kahl, et al., eds.: *Feminist Politics*

REVIEWED BY CYNTHIA D. COE

Shannon Winnubst: *Queering Freedom*

REVIEWED BY SHELLEY M. PARK



A prominent characteristic of the collection of essays lies in its focus on the concrete political implications of how we understand and negotiate identity. Two essays in particular highlight the way in which feminist concerns function in relation to national or cultural identities and conflicts: Marie-Claire Belleau's discussion of feminist strategic coalitions across the divides within Canada, and Sigal Ben-Porath's analysis of how militarism in Israel has affected conceptions of gender and how this effect might be countered by feminist pedagogy. Both essays emphasize the need to call attention to and challenge the subordination of feminist goals to a national or cultural struggle. A concern with political activism also governs Cathryn Bailey's description of third wave feminism, often criticized for its political quietism; instead, she claims, young feminists are critical consumers of pop culture. She convincingly argues that as the line between politics and culture blurs, "visible cultural images are simultaneously politically significant" (89). She acknowledges, however, that feminist ideas and images are easily co-opted by popular culture, and that more traditional forms of political engagement—including a critique of consumerism itself—are a necessary element of feminist activism.

The collection ends with two essays that advocate understanding feminist politics without relying excessively on assumptions about gender identity. The continuing debate between ontologies of gender leads Amy Baehr to propose feminist contractualism as an alternative that does not make claims about who women fundamentally are, but rather focuses on forging political arrangements that can be accepted by all, along Rawlsian lines. Dianna Taylor analyzes the political scene within the American Left after September 11th to draw lessons against the impetus toward conformity and unity. Instead, reading Arendt and Foucault, she proposes a "weak nonidentitarian politics" that takes identity as a significant political factor but does not constitute a stable, normalized, or homogeneous ground for political action (250).

The breadth and diversity of this volume is both its strength and a shortcoming: it faithfully reproduces the refusal to present a monolithic conception of identity or feminist politics by offering a variegated collection of current scholarship on these issues, rather than a synopsis of this intellectual territory. A reader looking for an introduction to feminist politics will not find it here; instead, this text is aimed at an audience already familiar with the basic framework of the relevant debates. For these readers, it provides a glittering array of divergent perspectives, in terms of the philosophical figures the chapters refer to, the wide range of questions that surround identity, the spectrum between a focus on the individual and on mass politics, the geographical and cultural contexts within which such ideas and politics play out, and even writing style. The chapters are consistently thought-provoking and timely, and the book as a whole challenges us to recognize the complexity of contemporary feminist theorizing and the pressing need for liberatory praxis.

Endnotes

1. Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1989), 267.
2. Kathleen Earle. *Beliefs, Bodies, and Being* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

Queering Freedom

Shannon Winnubst (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006). 253 pp. \$55.00 U.S. (cloth); \$21.95 U.S. (paper). ISBN 0-253-34707 (cloth); 0-253-21830-6 (paper).

Reviewed by Shelley M. Park

University of Central Florida, spark@mail.ucf.edu

In *Queering Freedom*, Shannon Winnubst deconstructs modernist notions of freedom in order to recuperate other meanings and practices of freedom, emphasizing the need for a non-reductive account of sexuality in explicating the interplay of joy, pleasure, and eroticism with freedom. The "field of sexuality," Winnubst contends, is the "most effective site in...late modernity for intervention into fixed concepts of subjectivity and freedom. But we cannot reduce such an insight to a claim about identity" (19). Indeed, Winnubst is explicitly critical of the identity politics that characterize, for example, affirmative action policies and the movement to legalize same-sex marriage, arguing that "categories of identity narrow our field of vision, and subsequently our fields of resistance" (17). Seeking to historicize categories of identity and demonstrate how their continued use perpetuates (rather than subverts) systems of domination, Winnubst draws on Foucault's archeological method and Bataille's method of thinking in "general (i.e., non-reductive) economies."

Part I of *Queering Freedom* represents the archeological portion of Winnubst's project. It consists of three chapters, exploring some of the specific ways in which bodily spaces of domination have been demarcated by a modernist politics of freedom. Chapter 1 traces a dominant notion of freedom (as the ability to express one's power) to Lockean liberalism and its conception of the self as delimited by its utilitarian labor and accumulation of property. Chapter 2 turns to an exploration of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, arguing that Lacanian ocular metaphysics explains how we come to view bodies as separate contained units demarcated by the boundaries of their skin and yet ultimately renders "Lacan's authoritative ego," like Locke's liberal individual, operative "within an economy of scarcity that is grounded in a model of desire that can never find any external satisfaction" (76). In Chapter 3, Winnubst explores Irigaray's model of touch as a method for reorienting feminine embodiment, suggesting that her tamed versions of homoerotic desire express the same logic of containment that Irigaray critiques, as evidenced by the eventual return to heterosexism in Irigaray's texts.

Some of the critiques of these texts will be familiar to feminist readers—Winnubst is not the first to critique Lockean individualism, nor Irigarayan heterosexism, for example. Yet Winnubst takes these critiques in a new direction, focusing on the ways in which norms of "phallicized whiteness" (the norms produced by "interlocking epistemological and political systems of domination" such as sexism, heterosexism, and racism (10)) arise in *similar* ways in seemingly disparate texts. Central to her analysis is Winnubst's emphasis, throughout Part I, on the "logic of the limit," a logic that characterizes a dominant understanding of difference, and thus also of subjectivity and freedom in cultures of phallicized whiteness. This logic, she contends, is the foundational problem plaguing most attempts to think about (social, political, psychic, or sexual) freedom: "Whether the carving of the liberal, neutral individual out of the state of nature through its demarcation of private property, the racializing of bodies according to their visual epidermal

delimitations, or the suppression of sexual difference through the logic of containment, a logic of the limit is at work in the classing, racing, and sexing of bodies” (114).

Part II of *Queering Freedom* turns to the challenge of imagining concepts and practices of freedom not constrained by a logic of the limit. In Chapter 4, Winnubst argues that conceptualizing freedom as “freedom from prohibition” upholds a logic of containment and thus fosters the politics of colonialism and tolerance (119-22). In desiring to transcend the very limitations that define them as “Other,” the raced, classed, and sexed bodies produced by those boundaries serve to “keep the dominant subject position in power” by allowing phallicized whiteness to erase their difference and “swallow them up” into itself (123). This is at the heart of Winnubst’s critique (a critique with which I agree) of the same-sex marriage movement, as contained in the brief epilogue to her book: Same sex marriage will not free gays and lesbians; instead, it represents the co-optation of lesbian and gay resistance by absorbing the “good queers” into the “white-identified, patriarchal, Christian-centric middle-class” (202).

If freedom is not liberation from prohibitions, then what is it? To queer our notion of freedom, Winnubst suggests, is to orient ourselves toward pleasure (rather than desire) and eroticism (rather than sexual identity). These reorientations require us to abandon a notion of the (desiring) self that “projects itself into the future” and thus they require us to queer the ways we inhabit space and time (140). Having already outlined how spatiality functions in cultures of phallicized whiteness (by containing us in raced, sexed, and classed bodies viewed as discrete social units), Winnubst turns in Chapter 5—the chapter which I found most pleasurable—to explicating “the temporality of whiteness.”

Temporality has been an important tool of colonialism (with white concepts and practices of time functioning as a regulative ideal against which other ways of inhabiting time are judged). Again, this is not a new idea; yet, Winnubst’s analysis of it is provocative and illuminating. Explicating the temporality of phallicized whiteness by sketching Lacan’s notion of “the future anterior” and Bataille’s “mode of anticipation,” Winnubst notes two interlocking difficulties with these modes of temporality: first, they locate “the psychological horizon of desire” at the “horizon of the infinite”; secondly, they “embed us, unconsciously, in two sets of socio-psychological values that ground cultures of phallicized whiteness: utility, and thereby capitalism with its concept of pleasure as satisfaction and convenience; and white guilt, with its enactment of the Protestant work ethic and the myth of Progress” (152). The temporality of the future anterior leads us to desire that which “will have been,” (e.g., “I will have traveled to Venezuela”) while the temporality of anticipation leads us to endlessly defer pleasure in favor of incessant planning for the future (e.g., reading travel brochures throughout one’s journey). Neither permits us to live in the present—which is only regarded important insofar as it plays a role in the attainment of useful ends (e.g., compiling a record of one’s travels). Moreover, these modes of temporality undergird an endless cycle of guilt-and-apology (166), in which whites desire to erase the sins of their past, progressing toward salvation via the work of confession itself (e.g., Bill Clinton’s apology for slavery)—without ever engaging past suffering (172-74).

Resistance to oppression, Winnubst concludes in Chapter 6, requires remembering “lost pasts” and learning to think and live “without a future.” By reframing our experience “through a temporality of ‘what might have been,’ rather than the dominant ‘what will have been,’” we open ourselves up to the forgotten violences of our past (e.g., the history of slavery, AIDS) “not out

of guilt, but out of political commitment to open our practices of pleasure onto more sustainable practices of freedom” (such as the pleasures of unregulated eroticism between uncontained selves) (190-99). In queering freedom, we radically suspend the future, abandoning desire and courageously experiencing pleasures with no foreseeable utility—including the pleasure of having “no fixed idea of who or what [we] may become” (199).

Of course, Winnubst cannot quite perform what she advocates. As she indicates, “the attempt to write concretely about such a politics of resistance... involves us in some strange contortions” (186). How does one queer a scholarly book? One can attempt, as Winnubst does, to avoid prescriptive injunctions. And yet one cannot avoid the expectations of one’s audience that the book “make sense” and forward “useful” ideas in a scholarly language that establishes one’s “cultural capital.” I have here explicated *Queering Freedom* as a unitary text with a progressively linear argument—an argument couched in a language which will be most accessible to feminist theorists trained in contemporary continental philosophy, but which has considerable utility for all feminist, anti-racist, and queer theorists and activists engaged in various struggles against oppression. And, to some extent, this is an accurate portrayal of the work (reflecting the limitations under which scholars—even queer theoretical scholars—must write and publish books). At the same time, my explications and assessment reflect the boundaries and containments of the modernist project of the book review itself (it is the role of a reviewer—even queer theoretical reviewers—to explicate the central arguments of a text and indicate to whom the text may be useful). If I were, however, to assess this work merely in terms of the queer pleasures it has to offer, I would recommend that the reader not turned on by the work of scholarly exegesis (some are, some aren’t) or who doesn’t find joy in conversations with Lacan and Irigaray (some do, some don’t), simply abandon her professional work ethic and skip straight to the second half of the book, where one’s imaginings are provoked by examples, autobiographical anecdotes, and theoretical meanderings that are a genuine source of pleasure—pleasures which the boundaries of this review contain to a mere mention.

The Situated Self

J.T. Ismael (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007). 248 pages. \$65.00. ISBN 978-0-19-517436-6, ISBN 0-19-517436-4.

Reviewed by Karin Susan Fester

University of Wales, karin.fester@tin.it

From the very moment one’s eyes scan the bold colored symbol of self-location on the cover of J.T. Ismael’s book *The Situated Self*, it will be quite evident that this book would be an exciting read because it is a fresh and vivid challenge to dualist and physicalist views about the *mind*, language, and the *self*.

In this book J.T. Ismael rigorously argues for her view of mind, defined thus: “in favor of a view of the mind as a mapkeeper that stores the information coming through the senses in an internal model of self and situation that it uses to steer the body through a complex and changing environment. This view of mind makes self-representation one of its principle tasks and accords central role in the intrinsic dynamics of the body” (201). Ismael is committed to clarifying the cognitive and epistemic gaps (111, 134) that one confronts when attempting to understand how the “coordination of experience *across* minds” (109) is possible in a structured world of physics. Ismael