

engagements, disenchantments, and complicities with institutionally-sanctioned ameliorative projects we have broken a powerful pact of censorship that forbids participants to say anything about these kinds of activities other than that which falls within the resolutely positive 'language of solutions.'

You could even say that, as is often the case for oppositionally-positioned marginals, we have taken a familiar pleasure in telling tales out of school. These are stories significantly at odds with conventional narratives and received wisdom about commitments to implementing progressive policies for the advancement of social change loudly proclaimed on our respective campuses. Audre Lorde's oft-cited words continue to be suggestive of an avenue for generative inquiry:

The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house... Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns.

In trying to work seriously on 'equity issues' it is critical to understand how institutional responses to, and production of, 'difference' function in the context of university communities so as to entrap minorities into doing work that, paradoxically, engenders further oppression rather than producing equitable social change.

Chandra Mohanty, writing about the "commodification of diversity," argues that, on university campuses in this period of right-wing backlash, the production of discourses of multiculturalism and so-called equity policies function both to depoliticize, and hence to 'manage,' difference. As Mohanty observes, "The central issue, then, is not one of merely acknowledging difference; rather, the more difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged." It is instructive in this regard to see how difference is treated in 'equity' initiatives, as something to be alternately represented by 'authentic members' (the walking, talking lesbian who, it turns out, is 'just like us') and re-constructed as commonality ('our common humanity') to which students in such diversity-management classes learn they must

become 'more sensitive' so 'we' can learn to 'work together.' (But for what! And for whom?). Would we then continue in this work, whose origins, we do well to remember, are in the defensive political strategies of institutions attempting to cordon off and contain social movements which became, in recent history, so powerful that they threatened to disrupt 'business as usual'? To participate in this work

is all too often to undertake a job of management, not scholarship, or pedagogy. This work of management resembles in name alone the social movements in whose name it purports to work. And that is treachery in/deed.

Perrot: And there's no point for the prisoners in taking over the central tower?

Foucault: Oh yes, provided that isn't the final purpose of the operation. Do you think it would be much better to have the prisoners operating the Panoptic apparatus and sitting in the central tower, instead of the guards?

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Father, Don't You See I'm Burning (You)?

BY Jim Ellis

Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

In spite of the vast intellectual and political gaps that separate them, Kaja Silverman's *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* and Robert Bly's enormously popular *Iron John* do engage the same issue: contemporary crises in masculinity. As with any crisis, of course, where you stand determines how you feel about it. Bly is attempting, through the invention of a new mythology centered on the hairy beast in every man, to reinvigorate the penis/phallus equation, while Silverman is intent on dismantling the murderous and repressive structure that that equation supports. While Silverman's book will never achieve the popularity of Bly's, it will certainly prove important for work in the areas of film studies, psychoanalysis, feminism and queer theory (rather than gay studies, towards which Silverman pays some lip service but remains a little hostile, associating it with biographical criticism). *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* constitutes an

analysis of what Silverman calls nonphallic masculinities in the work of, among others, R. W. Fassbinder, Henry James, T. E. Lawrence and Marcel Proust. On the way, the text provides often brilliant and always useful rereadings of such concepts as Althusser's theory of interpellation and ideology, Lacan's discussion of the gaze and its relation to female spectatorship, and Freud's analysis of "feminine" masochism.

Silverman's target is the group Bly feels has recently been victimized - white, middle class, heterosexual males. Her preferred method of attack is an undermining of their props. The basic premises of the book are Lacanian: that identity is external in origin, and that the basic condition for cultural subjectivity is lack. Her strategy is frequently to locate in male subjects those characteristics which are typically designated feminine, such as soliciting the gaze, acknowledging lack or castration, or assuming a passive or receptive role. In so doing she attempts to disrupt and denaturalize the categories of masculine and feminine, and indeed, homosexual and heterosexual.

Perhaps the most powerful chapter in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* is Silverman's rereading of Lacan through the films of Fassbinder, in which she rigorously distinguishes between gaze and look. Whereas the gaze, like the phallus, is something to which no subject can lay claim, the look of an individual subject remains within the realm of desire, and often functions as a signifier of lack. Feminist film criticism since Laura Mulvey has often argued that women in film typically function as the object of the male gaze, and that women must work to turn the gaze around. Silverman argues instead that we are all always simultaneously subject and object of desire, and that the real problem with the dominant cinema is that "male desire is so consistently and systematically imbricated with projection and control" (144-5). Just as the penis is continually conflated with the phallus, to support the belief in the male subject as "whole," so too is the male look, a signifier of lack, often conflated with the gaze. "We have at times assumed" writes Silverman "that dominant cinema's scopic regime could be overturned by 'giving' woman the gaze, rather than by exposing the impossibility of anyone ever owning that

visual agency, or of him or herself escaping specularly." This, for Silverman, is precisely what Fassbinder's films demonstrate over and over: "The insistent specularization of the male subject in Fassbinder's cinema functions not only to desubstantialize him, but to prevent any possibility of mistaking his penis for the phallus, a dislocation which is at the centre of Fassbinder's 'aesthetics of pessimism.'" In films such as *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* and *Gods of the Plague* the male characters are inevitably caught in the same structures of seeing and being seen as the female characters. We are all always subjected to the gaze: like castration, it is a basic condition of subjectivity, a condition which is not strictly limited to women. As Thomas Elsaesser notes, in the films of Fassbinder to be is to be seen.

Much of the second half of *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* deals with what are normally designated as perversions. Silverman devotes three chapters to various forms of masochism and a fourth to male homosexuality. The significance of these sexualities goes beyond the purely sexual (and indeed, Silverman argues that nothing is purely sexual), in that perversion "turns aside not only from hierarchy and genital sexuality but from the paternal signifier, the ultimate 'truth' or 'right.'" Writers such as Jean Laplanche (*Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*) and Leo Bersani (*The Freudian Body*) have taken care to separate sadism from masochism, insisting that they are neither reversible nor complementary. Freud noted that sadism was completely compatible with heterosexuality (and hinted that sadism was in fact a usual component of it). Masochism, on the other hand, when it occurs in men, disrupts the economy of heterosexuality, often by foreclosing on the position of the father. (In Gilles Deleuze's account of masochism, derived from the novels of Sacher-Masoch rather than the writings of Freud, what is being beaten in the masochistic fantasy is precisely the father. Masochism is a contract entered into by the subject and the pre-Oedipal mother, who attempt to bring a new subject into being without the intervention of the father. Although certain elements of Silverman's and Deleuze's

models of masochism are similar, Silverman more or less dismisses Deleuze's account as radically utopian.)

In her first chapter on masochism Silverman provides a review of Freud's writings on masochism, and other contemporary psychoanalytic accounts. The second chapter returns us to the films of Fassbinder and the "ruination of masculinity." Silverman is at her best when discussing Fassbinder, when her stern and completely humourless style becomes as perversely thrilling as Fassbinder's unrelenting pessimism. In this stunning account of masochism in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and *In A Year of Thirteen Moons* Silverman picks up Max Scheler's differentiation between heteropathic and idiopathic identification. Idiopathic identification is the model of identification usually encountered in psychoanalytic writings. It works as an incorporation or assimilation of the other: a sort of psychic imperialism. Heteropathic desire, on the other hand, is ex-corporative: it takes the form of an evacuation of libido from the ego and a total identification with the other's suffering at the site of the other's body. This form of identification "turns not only upon the exteriorization of identity, but also upon a pleasurable painful acknowledgement of the 'otherness' of all identity" (264-5). Heteropathic identification is thus closely linked to masochism, and could be seen as an instance of what Bersani calls "psychic shattering" or "psychic detumescence." Silverman emphasizes that the ego always functions as a loved object: in the writings of Bersani, it is precisely the libidinally charged or "phallicized" ego that is at the base of our problematic belief in "the sacrosanct value of selfhood" ("Is the Rectum a Grave?"). Both writers emphasize the political value of masochism and its potential for "self-shattering," which inevitably constitutes an attack on the proud ideal of masculine subjectivity.

In what might seem an unlikely move (although others have made it before her), Silverman deals with the utopian impulses in Fassbinder's cinema. Drawing on the Marxist writings of Ernst Bloch, Silverman finds in Fassbinder a utopian yearning that depends upon positing a "psychic elsewhere," one that is only glimpsed in moments of masochistic ecstasy. Whereas in Bloch's writings utopia depends upon transformation of

society, in the films of Fassbinder the transformation takes place at the level of the psyche. Both however are based on a refusal to affirm anything in the present order. This form of utopia depends upon a complete foreclosure of the past, and thus upon a renunciation of the paternal legacy. Fassbinder's utopia, then, presents a stark contrast to the pastoral or nostalgic utopian impulse of Bly, which inevitably involves a re-finding of the father. For Silverman and Fassbinder, reaching utopia involves the ruination of the masculine ego and a killing off of the father once and for all.

The final chapter on masochism takes Silverman more firmly into the realm of the political (although she continually insists that the sexual is always imbricated with the political) with a discussion of T. E. Lawrence's autobiographical works, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and *The Mint*. Silverman characterizes Lawrence's relation to the "Arab other" as a double mimesis: rather than employing the usual colonialist strategy of attempting to reproduce the colonialist within the colonized, Lawrence identified with the Arabs, seeking to become, in effect, the ideal Arab leader, who would then be reproduced in the other. Silverman argues that the ease with which Lawrence identified with the other was facilitated by his rather complex sexuality: a non-genitally based homosexuality that found its expression in extreme masochism. Lawrence's masochism is initially self-reflexive: he is both the punisher and the punished, who abases himself before the ideal and simultaneously partially identifies with it. This peculiar sort of masochism is, argues Silverman, completely compatible with Lawrence's extreme virility and his egoistic zeal for leadership. (One wonders if this analysis might also be extended to the leaders of the men's movement, who perversely seem to thrive on the ridicule that they generate.) After his rape at Deraa by the Turkish leader (although there is some question whether this actually took place) Lawrence's masochism undergoes a shift: he is not able to identify with his Turkish rapists and thus is unable to become his own punisher. The self-reflexive masochism is subsequently reconfigured as feminine masochism, which is no longer compatible with leadership. Lawrence, after the rape and after the

war, withdrew completely from public life (despite numerous requests for him to take leadership roles) and enlisted as an R. A. F. airman. The point of the analysis in this chapter is, perhaps, to demonstrate that sexualities have consequences beyond the simply personal. Lawrence's relation to the Arab uprising was to a large extent determined by his own libidinal politics, a relation and intervention which had far reaching consequences in the political world.

The last chapter of *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* may well prove controversial, which is perhaps why Silverman occasionally adopts a somewhat defensive tone. Although it is for me the least satisfying part of the book, her discussion of the place of femininity within male homosexuality does have much to recommend it. It is not often, for example, that one sees three separate models proposed for male homosexuality in which one is not eventually privileged as the model. Although I'm not sure how radical it is to insist on the centrality of femininity to male homosexuality, it is certainly true that gay scholars have not questioned enough their relation to and investment in masculinity. Silverman's reading of Proust in this chapter develops a model of male homosexuality that can incorporate desire for a woman (and a lesbian at that), and if the reading itself is a little strained, the impulse behind it is certainly worthwhile. By attempting to destabilize the boundaries of homosexuality (and by insisting on the possibility of homosexualities that are not centered around the penis) Silverman enters the realm of queer theory, where, in effect, anything is possible. Queer theory is perhaps the ultimate perversion: a borderless terrain that denies every identity a natural, coherent or stable status. Although the call to perversion that ends the book is a little hilarious given the texts discussed (would you really want to be a character in a Fassbinder film?) Silverman gives us both the impetus and the critical tools to explore more critically the complex relations between politics, sexuality and identity.

Jim Ellis is in the graduate program of English at York University.



Eco: echoes...

BY Jean-Francois Coté

Umberto Eco,
The Limits of Interpretation,
Bloomington and Indianapolis:
Indiana University Press, 1990.

It seems difficult to reach a point where one might feel a *common committal* when reading Umberto Eco's *The Limits of Interpretation*; that is, a concern in which the author and the reader could partake and develop according to a specific shared interest or motive. Although the book covers a truly colossal amount of material, ranging from the Ancients (Aristotle) to the postmoderns (Derrida); from the tiniest needle point of erudition (some sixteenth century authors such as Giulio Camillo Delminio, or Cosma Roselli) to television commercials and series (*Dallas*); from the medieval tradition of semiotics to the contemporary theory of media; from the scholarly-oriented, chapel-like debates, to popular clichés of our time; one senses (at least, I do) a kind of emptiness in all of this. It is not due to the truly encyclopedic knowledge of the author, to his witty writing or the book's overall sympathetic tone. What is it, then? Is it the fact that the book, although concerned with a central theme, is actually a collection of previously published essays which hardly help to work out its "systematicity"? Is it his "mixture

of styles" - which on the whole characterizes Eco - in a theoretical enterprise that we find there? Perhaps it is that we hardly find the definition of a position here. But is it not paradoxical that no position emerges from this attempt to grasp "the limits of interpretation," as the book title suggests? For paradox has now taken the place of contradiction, dissolving the need for a particular position which would result in drawing a line between conflicting views. But since the attempt to reconcile the opposites is today an effort of producing a "middle-range" arrangement, it seems to me that Eco finds his own way in the necessity of the day, and this makes him a very astute reader of himself; proving that, at some point, the "unintentionality" of an author can truly reveal some of his intentions after all.

This book is indeed a direct response to Eco's earlier book *Opera aperta* (originally published in 1962, and only recently translated in English as *The Open Work*). Echoing himself almost thirty years after the quite famous stance contained in *Opera aperta* (contemporary works of art evolve in a "undetermined" sphere of meaning, and do not assert any particular content out of the multi-various interpretations that can be made of them) and taking advantage of the feed-back effect that a very successful intellectual career can bring to the matter, Eco now tries to trace the limits of its own previous intentions. The shift is stated quite clearly at the beginning of the book, when Eco explains the difference between the two enterprises; he writes: "...I was [then] studying the dialectics between the rights of texts and the rights of their interpreters. I have [now] the impression that, in the course of the last few decades, the rights of the interpreters have been overstressed. In the present essays I stress the limits of the act of interpretation" (6). The essays that follow, most of them written through the 1980s, develop different aspects of Eco's present enterprise.

Going to the crux of the matter, the reader's intention in "Intentio Lectoris: The State of the Art," Eco advocates, quite carefully, that: "I shall claim that a theory of interpretation even when it assumes that texts are open to multiple readings must also assume that it is possible to reach an arrangement, if not about the meanings that a text encourages, at least about those that a text discourages" (45). Here is an attempt to oppose some impor-

tant currents in present literary theory (mainly the deconstructionist and pragmatist trends), in stating that it is only by acknowledging the necessary inter-relationship between two levels of interpretation (literal on the one hand, and critical or interpretive on the other), that the question of the validity of reading can be addressed. One cannot read, or rather interpret a text, in a way that would obviously contradict the first, semantic, level of the textual analysis.

How far can a reader decide to go, intentionally, from the text's intention? The pragmatist would state: as far as this "use" of the text benefits a certain desire, need, interest, etc., the reader can use it to "fulfill" oneself; whereas the deconstructionist would state: the reader can go as far as one can demonstrate the (illegitimate) metaphysical reference that the text entails. Eco wants to avoid both the "self-sufficiency" of the former, and the relative "irresponsibility" of the latter. The text becomes an occasion for the meeting of a "Model Reader" and a "Model Author," and finds its limits of interpretation in the meaning that is found through this "reciprocal tension." Eco thus writes that "...the text is an object that the interpretation builds up in the course of the circular effort of validating itself on the basis of what it makes up as its result," adding to this that, "I am not ashamed to admit that I am so defining the old and still valid 'hermeneutic circle'" (59).

The problem, then, is not that this fails to constitute a specific position, but rather that this position is immediately challenged by Eco himself, in an effort to validate it through some "scientific" devices. The first of these is the explanation of interpretation as proceeding from abductive reasoning ("The logic of interpretation is the Peircian logic of abduction"), which leads to the constitution of an hypothesis of interpretation, and the second is the application of a typical economy of research which seeks to eliminate "bad" interpretations which do not recognize the text's internal coherence. We see quite clearly here to which constraints Eco's vision of interpretation responds: first, the reader's distance from the text, which allows the development of the interpretation itself; second, the text reaffirms its presence against any pretension that the interpretation would impose on it. But can the solution to these two constraints really be attained by a legitimization of the

