Australian Feminist Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cafs20

Reviews

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Published online: 16 Sep 2010.


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08164649.1998.9994925

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Reviews


In many ways this is an exciting book. The authors (Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham) have produced much work in the field of Marxist political economy, but in this book they offer a reconsideration of that framework. While postmodern criticisms of universalist and unified accounts of social life now abound in many arenas, 'the economy' has almost entirely been left untouched by such epistemological rethinking. Moreover, there remain very few feminist critiques of the epistemology of the economic. Since The End of Capitalism offers an application of postmodernism and feminism to Left understandings of 'the economy', it must be viewed as an important book on both grounds. It is original and often poetically articulated.

Gibson-Graham argue throughout that the Left has ironically contributed to its own current paralysis by invoking a conception of capitalism with a capital 'C', a 'regulatory fiction' in which Capital is envisaged as all-powerful, all-embracing and indeed irresistible. In this construction Capitalism is equated with 'the economic' in modern societies and, therefore, according to Marxist precepts, fundamentally conditions the form of the whole of those societies. Moreover, Capitalism is depicted in naturalised terms as an inevitable destiny, becoming the Truth of modern societies and of history in Marxist thinking (even though the Marxist challenge to mainstream economics is to insist that this too can and will pass).

Gibson-Graham assert that although this Marxist account of Capital has had the benefit of mobilising antagonism to its overweening reach, it has also paradoxically reiterated Capitalism's monolithic status, and suppressed recognition of precisely the political and economic diversity in modern life that might quite practically contribute to the project of dismantling capitalist relations. Gibson-Graham engage in destabilising such essentialist characterisations of capitalism as a singular totality by suggesting procedures for demassifying it. In the process they also propose an expanded model of 'the economy' which recognises non-capitalist elements—a multiple sector conception with a range of different dynamics, which has connections with 'deep green' environmental economics, other Marxist approaches influenced by postmodernism, and some feminist frameworks. This expanded model describes capitalism as just one form of economic practice amongst many others which are non-capitalist, including forms of household/domestic economy.

In a number of ways the book applies the strategies of 'queer theory' to Capitalism by resisting its phallic mastery over conceptions of the economic in order to invoke 'a heterospace of both capitalist and noncapitalist economic existence' (p. 5). The intention is to provide room for an anticapitalist economic imaginary to flower. Undermining
prevalent practices of capitalist representation, destabilising the hegemonic status of capitalism, is seen as a means of generating a theory of ‘economic difference’ (pp. 3, 5).

While there is no doubt that the book provides a most useful and interesting addition to alternative understandings of the economy, several further points may be made in considering the view that Gibson-Graham outline. Firstly, although the book is sub-titled *A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*, its use of feminist themes or concerns (in the sense of attending to categories like gender) is limited. Those readers who expect such a focus from a book described as offering a feminist response to Left economics may be somewhat disappointed. But they should not be dismissive. What this book does offer is a usage of the postmodernist critique of foundational (modernist) thinking to rejig Left analyses of capitalism, which draws upon certain feminist postmodern methodological strategies. Gibson-Graham relate their critique of an overly coherent Capitalism to postmodern feminist criticisms of the concept ‘Woman’, they question the phallic centrality of concepts of globalisation, and they connect their rejection of Capitalism as inexorable parlysing penetration with postmodern feminist rethinking about the paradigmatic authority of Rape as disabling women. There are fascinating and creative usages of feminist writings here. The focus of this book is not upon sex, sexuality or women. Rather, women and women’s bodies function as metaphor or as methodological devices. This manoeuvre can be criticised, as some have done when writers like Derrida attempted it, but to my mind it is justified in this instance.

The overwhelming majority of feminist approaches to the economic have concentrated on the ways in which women are marginalised or made invisible within both mainstream and Left conceptions of the economy, counter that invisibility by highlighting women’s work, and most examine women’s waged work. The project here is to inject women into mainstream and Left paradigms of ‘the economy’ which refer to the capitalism/the market and wage labour—an adjustment of those paradigms. Most feminist economists, both liberal and socialist, adopt this mode.

A second, relatively rare, feminist approach involves a more radical strategy of reversal and displacement. In this approach the binaries (capitalist) economy/non-economic and public/private—which generally place men as productive workers in the public sphere and women as outside ‘the economy’ in unpaid arenas such as the domestic sphere—are reversed and the focus is placed upon the significance of unpaid labours, primarily undertaken by women. The intention of this strategy is to destabilise the centrality afforded capital/the market and economic activities associated with men by concentrating precisely upon that which has been deemed of no importance. The project is to highlight the sexual politics of the economic by challenging the notion of the economy as all one, that one being capital/the market, and by noting difference.

Gibson-Graham offer a third strategy which does not share these feminist concerns with sexual power relations and the sexual specificity of forms of labour, but does intersect with these concerns inasmuch as it destabilises capital by challenging notions of its overarching sway and coherence. Yet while the point of this book is to decentre/demassify/deflate the Left’s account of Capital with a capital ‘C’, paradoxically this focus does not displace its hegemony.

This tendency to reiterate the centrality of capitalism/class relations sometimes appears very directly, for example in their view of household labours in terms of ‘feudal domestic class process’ and ‘feudal relations of exploitation’ (pp. 206–15). Despite their own caveats about this perspective, this analysis of the household looks very much like Marxism with make-up on. I can only say I see some tension between elements in the book which attempt to demassify capitalism as a prelude to a theory of ‘economic
difference' (p. 5) and those features of the book which do not appear to diminish the centrality of capitalism/class relations even as it is presented as incoherent, fragmented and not the only fish in the sea.

I remain unconvinced that the conditions for a theory of economic difference can be established without highlighting that which has been suppressed as different. Nevertheless, feminists who are interested in economics, public policy of any kind, or considerations of labour, including unpaid and caring labours, should read this stimulating book.

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A Reader is by definition a pedagogical text, one designed to introduce the neophyte to a domain of knowledge. In this case the domain is feminist interpretations of sexuality, interpretations which are intended to contest the dominant notion of sexuality as a natural and hence biologically fixed practice and render it as a field of historical and political practice. Such contestations have, as the editors point out in their introduction, been characteristic of feminism since the nineteenth century, but they have chosen to focus on the contestations made by second wave feminism, those which begin in the 1970s and which have gathered momentum since, so that any attempt to select a representative ‘sample’ from the enormous range of contemporary feminist writing on sexuality will be doomed to failure. This explosion of feminist discourse around sexuality in the last 15 years in particular ensures that any attempt to assemble a Reader will also be an act of reading, that is will involve the production of a particular interpretation of that field and the shape of its history.

The editors are clearly aware of this, and signal early on in their introduction that the selections in the Reader could have been otherwise. Nevertheless they have attempted to provide both ‘classic’ and less well known material to map the history of four debates which they position as central to the domain of feminism and sexuality. These are Essentialism and Social Constructionism, Affirming and Questioning Sexual Categories, Power and Pleasure, and Commercial Sex, and each of these subheadings contains texts from a range of positions and historical moments. Some pieces are, as I said ‘classics’: Luce Irigaray’s ‘The Sex Which is Not One’, Adrienne Rich’s ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’, Jacqueline Rose’s ‘Feminine Sexuality’ and Judith Walkowitz’s essay ‘The Politics of Prostitution’ could be described in this way. Some are rejoinders, for example Pat Califia’s still-confronting essay ‘Feminism and Sadomasochism’ is followed immediately by Sheila Jeffreys’ later essay ‘Sadomasochism’ which is highly condemnatory of the Lesbian S/M scene. The selection also represents a range of methodologies, from *écriture féminine* (Irigaray) to well-theorised engagements with empirical research, like that of the Women, Risk and AIDS project (Janet Holland et al.).

In general a number of positions on a subject are left to jostle with each other, so that the reader can find complex relationships between them without being overly directed by the editors. The editors do provide an excellent and very thoroughly footnoted introduction to their material, however, which contextualises the pieces and the debates,
providing a commentary on the historical circumstances in which they arose, the
interrelationship between the particular texts and other kinds of texts and activism, and
an assessment of the present state of the debate.

In general I think their reading of the debates on sexuality is a useful and productive
one, and will find a wide market in women's studies programs in a number of countries.
The editors have demonstrated a generosity towards material they are unlikely to agree
with, while at the same time taking responsibility for an overall favouring of social
constructionist positions within their Reader. Sometimes this generosity errs a little on
the side of the banal—some of the selections, particularly in the section on Commercial
Sex, seemed to me too descriptive, insufficiently engaged with the kinds of intellectual
debates so carefully explicated in the introduction. There is only one point, however,
where this generosity seems to me to fail, and that is on the relatively new area of Queer
textory. Both the introduction and one of the two texts chosen to represent Queer theory
(Catherine Grant 'Queer Theorrrhea'; the other is Judith Butler’s ‘Imitation and Gender
Insubordination’) characterise it as an elitist, ‘theoretician’ discourse which is produced
primarily for careerist purposes and which excludes ‘those outside the intellectual clique
which produces it’ (p. 16). This seems like an odd position for a Reader to take, given
that Queer theory, like other areas of poststructuralist discourse with which it is aligned
(including much feminist work like that of Irigaray, Butler and Gallop) is concerned to
generate with language as itself problematic. That is, it is concerned with reading as an
active process of interpretation rather than a passive imbibing of transparent meaning,
and furthermore uses this understanding of textuality to problematise sexual categories
themselves. The editors seem to forget just how opaque Irigaray's work seemed to
readers in the late 1970s, precisely because it was trying to make meaning differently,
and to engage with questions of sexuality and eroticism at the level of the text itself. If
it seems more transparent now this is only because of the work feminism has done to
broaden out what can count as acceptable kinds of intellectual discourse. A similar
comment could be made about Foucault, whose contribution to the debate on sexuality
is acknowledged in the introduction. This dismissive approach to Queer seems anomalous
in a Reader whose purpose is surely to encourage engagement with new forms of
sexual discourse.

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Brenda Cossman, Shannon Bell, Lise Gotell and Becki L. Ross, Bad Attitude/s on Trial:
Pornography, Feminism, and the Butler Decision (University of Toronto Press) Toronto, Buffalo

The Butler decision referred to in the title of this book is a decision of the Supreme Court
of Canada made in February 1992 in a case where the constitutionality of Canadian
obscenity law was challenged on the grounds that it violated the freedom of expression
guaranteed in Canada’s 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Court found that
obscenity law was justifiable under the provisions of the Charter relating to ‘reasonable
limit prescribed by law’. The main impact of the Butler decision has been to establish
a new test for defining obscenity. The Court found that if sexually explicit material did
not include violence, was not ‘degrading or dehumanizing’ and did not involve children then it would not generally be found to be obscene. The Butler decision has been welcomed by many feminists in Canada as a victory because it embraces a feminist definition of what is harmful about pornography. Indeed the Women’s Legal Education Action Fund, with assistance from US anti-pornography theorist and activist Catherine Mackinnon, had intervened in the Butler case to argue that obscenity law should not be declared unconstitutional.

The essays in Bad Attitudes on Trial disagree with the anti-pornography feminist position which champions the Butler decision. The authors position themselves through the frameworks of post-modern feminism and argue instead that pornography is a discourse, a site of contest and ambiguity, and that obscenity should be decriminalised. They describe a legal and political climate where ‘mainstream pornography appears to be flourishing ... Sexual representations that challenge conventional notions of sexuality—gay and lesbian sexuality, s/m sexuality, youth sexuality—are now the focus of the censor’s scorn’ (Cossman and Bell, p. 4).

I find Bad Attitudes on Trial an exciting book. It comprises an introduction and four essays written by authors from a range of academic disciplinary locations—political science, law, sociology and women’s studies. The introduction provides a history of obscenity law in Canada, including developments since the Butler decision, and sketches the authors’ theoretical assumptions (Cossman and Bell). Lise Gotell attends to the political and cultural context around the Butler decision and critiques the foundationalism of anti-pornography politics; Brenda Cossman deconstructs the Butler decision itself; Becki L. Ross discusses the 1993 case heard in the Ontario Court where she gave expert evidence about a lesbian s/m story at the centre of the police seizure of the US magazine Bad Attitude; and Shannon Bell focuses on attacks on the sexual expression of young people. The four chapters tackle different aspects of the subject matter, in different styles and from different perspectives but they also overlap and refer to each other’s arguments. They can be read independently but when read together create a richly textured analysis that is as complex as it is passionate and committed. The book’s commitments are to sexual diversity, to solidarity with people who are least powerful and most stigmatised under prevailing sexual regimes and to ‘an opening up of political spaces for arguing about feminist norms and not their restriction through the new politics of anti-pornography’ (Gotell, p. 101).

This book has stayed with me. I am also still pondering the implications of the assumption that Brenda Cossman identifies in the Butler decision, that I now recognise in myriad other forms, that sexual expression is an inferior form of expression, unrelated to the search for truth, political expression and personal self-fulfilment, and that representations of it have no intrinsic value (Cossman, pp. 118–26). Becki L. Ross’s account of giving evidence to the provincial court, at two days’ notice, about the context and meaning of representations of lesbian sadomasochism is chilling. Bizarre and frightening as the prospect of trying to explain lesbian fist-fucking to a judge might be, it is equally frightening to read Ross’s observation that apart from her own evidence, in a trial that centred on a lesbian s/m story in a lesbian erotic magazine seized in a gay and lesbian bookshop ‘the word “lesbian” was only mentioned sporadically’ (Ross, p. 174). Shannon Bell was the only author whose work (on prostitution) I was previously familiar with. Her piece is equally indebted to the stories and poetry of convicted young gay street hustlers and their clients and activist supporters as it is to the ethics of Michel Foucault and William Connolly as it is to lesbian s/m imagery and her own poetry. Her work is boundary-breaking.
Her focus is on the sexuality of young people and she discusses in detail a case where a young man of 23 was charged with making child pornography on the basis of a home movie, collectively made, of him with two 14-year-old friends, all of them gay street hustlers. Her chapter is a profound plea for an ethics which doesn’t prejudge but listens, case by case; which doesn’t deny young people sexual subjectivity on principle; which understands that ‘all truth is crooked’. One of her questions stays in my mind, and calls to mind some of the most dire situations of post-modern life: ‘How do we open communication between the hangmen and the accused, between the virtuous and the criminalized, between communicating positions in which one side has the power of the law, the police, the media, the “helping” professionals; the other, perhaps the power of their own lived ethics, perhaps nothing but a will for erotic/sexual integrity, perhaps nothing’ (p. 210).

The urgency of political engagement permeates this book. The political climate it describes and the theoretical and political work it draws upon are distinctively North American. However, it is provocative reading in the context of the sexual conservatism that seems to be increasing in Australia. I recommend it.

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In *Feminist Amnesia* Jean Curthoys develops an alternative narrative in an attempt to demonstrate that the moral imperative of what she calls liberation theory has indeed been lost and that the effects of this loss for feminism are grave. To this end she is critical of what she considers to be the official feminist history of the period since Women’s Liberation in the 1960s. Her own narrative, clearly identified as ‘the real history’ seeks to undo the silence imposed by a feminism that effectively prohibits ‘any positive identification with the early movement’ (p. 5). Curthoys claims that the re-writing of history goes hand in hand with contemporary feminism’s tendency to illegitimately claim the moral legacy of liberation theory. The concern with dichotomies, dualisms or binary oppositions typical of this type of feminism is characterised as a ‘surrational’ activity that ‘poach[es] moral credibility from the almost antithetical ideas of liberation theory’ (p. 10).

If I understand her correctly Curthoys seems to be arguing that feminism, at least in its intellectual guise, has lost its way. It remains trapped within the larger mire of intellectual mediocrity and confused reasoning that characterises the legacy of radical thought. The systematic intellectual confusion that fuels the current state of academic discussion arises from a conflict experienced by those caught between a radical self-identification and a conformist life. The pursuit of career has taken the place of moral and political judgment. While symptomatic of a political, moral and intellectual malaise that is endemic to contemporary radical thought, feminism is distinct for the following reasons. In a general sense, feminism partakes of an ‘unrecognised betrayal of earlier principles’ (p. ix). More specifically, it remains, in its academic guise, beyond the grasp of sound and reasoned criticism. Owing to its widespread moral appeal ‘there is some reluctance to expose the feminist instances of what is revealed to be widespread
substandard reasoning’ (p. x). The most recent phase of ‘second wave’ feminism is said to distort the morality that historically founds Women’s Liberation as a popular and political movement.

Now all this is interesting because it provides Curthoys with her opportunity to enter and discipline contemporary debate. By reminding us of our forgotten legacy Curthoys is able to speak from a time and place seemingly long repressed. The act of reintroducing the founding morality of those struggles associated with Women’s Liberation offers Curthoys the stage from which to re-present and recover the truth which now lies hidden beneath ‘mountains of feminist literature’ (p. xi). At least, this is how Curthoys sees it.

The morality of which Curthoys speaks is elaborated in her description of liberation theory, the intellectual and critical force behind the initial phase of the second wave of feminism. For Curthoys, liberation theory distinguishes itself from later radical theories by refusing to canonise the virtues of the oppressed. Instead it focuses on the deforming effects of oppression. This involves an attempt ‘more to change the world than to interpret (or represent) it’ (p. 1). Arguing that liberation theory (unconsciously) embodies an ancient form of Socratic wisdom married to a Christian morality founded on solidarity and personal transformation, Curthoys goes on to claim that as a social, political and intellectual force it has been displaced by a plethora of ‘postmodern’ theories ‘most of which proclaimed their own superior radicalism and almost none of which had any direct moral content’ (p. 3). One could well suggest that Curthoys acquaint herself with feminist interpretations of the work of Emmanuel Levinas or Jean-François Lyotard, or the many other contemporary theorists who call for philosophy to return to its pre-modern ethical vocation. In doing so she may well discover that the terrain of contemporary feminist scholarship, though diverse, is by no means divorced from the questions that found a community of responsible debate.

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The larger philosophical issues raised by embodiment are rarely looked at so freshly. The primacy of the wish, desire and pleasure are concepts set loose among sober notions of rationality, and of the dominion of mind over body, as Robyn Ferrell lightly raises serious questions for philosophy, psychology and the conduct of life. She challenges the Cartesian ‘cogito ergo sum’ with a sassy and well-argued, ‘libido ergo sum’: ‘By my pleasure I experience myself’, ‘the body is the condition of the mind’ and thought a concrete event in the body (p. 31), and ditto for the external world.

Using psychoanalysis, she lays bare the predicament of embodiment for how well we come to know the external world and convince ourselves of its reality. Rationality is held to ransom by the body and by desire, ‘or the rational includes the wish that it not be wishful’ (p. 27). It is taken on lease and at a price. Gender is central to the predicament of embodiment as we negotiate our conduct of life: ‘In living as a man or a woman, a reality is created out of a bodily situation, but further a difference in the material world is dependent on the cultural meaning for experience of it. And this to the point of satisfaction or despair in unconscious life. How do things become real? Real enough to despair?’ (p. 29).
We are divided within ourselves, she suggests, and yet, as a result of this, brimming with possibilities, some of which ‘are not acceptable to the social persona’ (p. 38). This limitless possibility does not survive culture and history: ‘[p]enetration and mastery, gift and exchange, production and reproduction—these lessons in social circuitry are learned on the body’ (p. 40). Ferrell distances herself from any essentialist position, noting ‘[b]odies differ as their histories differ’ (p. 34) but a complex stance on causality is lost in unnecessarily distancing herself from determinism in adding ‘[t]here is no necessary essentialist nor determinist inflection on the organic and the material’ (p. 34). Biology, certainly, is not destiny, as she notes of Freud ‘there is neither primordial masculinity and femininity nor is there a pre-ordained heterosexuality’ (p. 38). The material is there to recognise the welcome complexity offered by Freud’s account to notions of determinism: ‘Freud frees the instinct from its reductive biological givenness and opens it up to social construction’ (p. 42).

That there can still be a complex, causal amalgam of social and biological causes, that determinism and destiny are not invariably bedfellows, is not explicitly explored at this point, though it is a theme throughout the book. For example, in her chapter on love she discusses erotic templates, revealing them to be the mark of history on the body, which in turn shape the present and the possible. Uncanny and excessive features betray transference, not where it happens. Analysis is portrayed as a twilight zone where imagos, erotic templates, are reworked. There is no place for an elemental notion of love; it is more contingent, a resultant vector, the landscape of our desire shaped by historical vicissitudes of our pleasure.

Her chapter entitled ‘Language’ moves almost seamlessly from Freud to Lacan via descriptions of her ontological commitments which accommodate them both. She posits a circularity where a dialectic might be more appropriate in her description of the relationship between observations in science (based on theory) and the refinement of the conceptual terms that make up that theory. ‘Strictly it becomes a circular process; at a certain point, the observed material refines the concept that made the observation possible’ (p. 57). Perhaps it is only circular if there is no change; if the conceptual terms are not modified. This does not seem to be Ferrell’s concern, so much as the status of that which does the modifying. She pulls the plug on empiricism, on the ontological priority of reality to our perception of it (‘the external world is not even ontologically prior to our perceiving it’, p. 65), on any direct influence of reality on the mental. Thus ‘[i]n as much as it is the imposition of conventions on perceptions of the real’ the introjection that is science is not different in kind from the projection that La Planche and Pontalis characterise as being Freud’s notion of metaphysics. Not surprisingly then she asks, ‘can one do otherwise in theory than desire coherence?’ (p. 62). So defined, no. Judging a theory by its ability to give an account of observations of some ‘external’ reality has been blocked by her commitment to a constructivist ontology, not merely to a constructivist epistemology. Fulfilling the promise of her title, Ferrell notes that ‘[p]aranoia is our ontological agony’ (p. 90). ‘Knowledge is paranoia, par excellence since it is the mistaken belief in one’s own projections as literal objects outside the self, whereas they are in effect products of the relation of the inside to the outside’ (p. 69).

This elegant book is a provocative pocketful; testimony to the author’s remarkable capacity to deal in liminal issues of inside-outside, mind-body, material-mental, representation and real. She takes detail seriously and uses close textual reading in her account of two quite different psychoanalytic philosophers of mind. She shows the elision necessarily entailed in issues of urge and meaning, representation and pleasure that have in the past not only been distinct, but the rallying ontological differences of diverse

I have never been to Montreal, I can only imagine the balconies covered with people in summer and snow in winter that Elspeth Probyn writes about in her book, *Outside Belongings*. Like Probyn, I too have unusual origins, for as the story goes I grew up in a circus. My mother went into labour just before the Saturday matinee began, she sold tickets and fairy floss between contractions and was taken to the hospital in a brightly painted truck. I was born in Sydney just as the 1960s were coming to an end. I spent a great deal of my childhood travelling around this country, working, performing, studying via correspondence, living with my family in our caravan. So in many ways Probyn's text makes connections with me. My desire to belong, to fit in, was made complicated by our travelling, always departing yet never arriving.

Inspired by the work of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, *Outside Belongings* rewrites desire away from its more traditional place within psychoanalysis where it is defined as lack and refigures it as that which produces effects, moments and connections. Following on from her 1993 book *Sexing the Self* where she looked at the experiential outside of an essentialist framework, Probyn extends her analysis of subjectivity to suggest that identity is a problematic notion, for while it may account for our individual categories of specificity, it cannot articulate the desires which move us, to belong, to want to fit in. The self is not something characterised by lack, but is a dynamic site of movement, and the notion of an *outside* views social relations not in terms of inferiority or exteriority but as surfaces, surfaces on which desire seeks connections and produces the effect of a singularity of the self.

Instead of either canonising or canning Queer Studies Probyn's aim is a more difficult one: by weaving feminist and cultural studies together she asks how queer sexuality is produced and regulated within texts. She is not interested in where things begin but in their becoming. The essay 'Suspended Beginnings: of Childhood and Nostalgia' thinks through the ways scientific discourses fix and pathologise our present lives by positing a beginning of our queerness. However much we may be invited to write our sexuality from our childhoods, when we do so we run the risk of writing 'within a complex, established and stratified discursive field of moral meanings of childhood'. By queering our beginnings we break the line which figures our present as the result of the past. Nostalgic stories of past events can be used so long as they refuse to maintain a neat narrative to the present. For our childhoods cannot guarantee or prescribe our desire; desire is not a symptom of a childhood fancy or trauma any more than *my* carnivalesque childhood offers insight into *my* lesbian desire.

Probyn's writing both embodies the ideas she wants to explore and offers a comment on the ways our very writing can regulate our theoretical endeavour. She implements a writing practice which crosses boundaries of neat theoretical divisions and necessarily reflects on the possessiveness of theoretical investigation. She makes clear that while the
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‘theoretical perspectives [she] draw[s] on are important, of more import is the way in which they are put to work together ...’ Outside Belongings assembles various genres such as autobiography, fiction, film, and even government texts which, when placed in close proximity to each other, produce lines of inquiry outside of their original intentions. Hers is an exciting strategic writing practice that, in part, addresses some of the frustrations we may have felt about academic writing.

As I read over Probyn’s book again words and images circulate from another, more recent (political) circus. Nationalistic cries of the ‘ordinary Australian’ echo across this country as anxiety over the maintenance of a certain order is expressed through the deployment of particular notions of nation, migration and identity. Outside Belongings provides an opportunity to ‘glimpse alternative national manners of being’ and, in doing so, allows for different ways of belonging.

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Remember those vast anthologies that trumpeted the importance of Postmodernism, or Cultural Studies, or Postcolonialism (or Feminisms) to the ‘New Humanities’? Freakery is similarly gigantic, a fascinating collection that stages itself as an exercise in teratology. The collection opens with an excellent introductory essay by the editor, ‘From Wonder to Error—a Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity’, and the subsequent divisions of the text relentlessly demonstrate Thomson’s claim that any encounter with the differently formed body ‘is always an interpretive occasion’ (p. 1). Twenty-six essays are gathered into six sections: I will confine myself to mentioning those essays that might be of interest to readers of Australian Feminist Studies. In the first cluster on the cultural construction of freaks Elizabeth Grosz writes with characteristic vigour about ‘Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit’ (an essay originally published in 1992). ‘Exhibiting Corporeal Freaks’ has an essay on the conjoined Hilton twins, the ‘New Woman’, and the bonds of marriage by Allison Pingree, and Lori Merish writes on cuteness and commodity culture, taking Shirley Temple as the subject of her inquiry. In the section on exhibiting cultural freaks Linda Frost discusses gender, imperialism, and American popular entertainment in the nineteenth century, focusing on the so-called ‘Circassian slave’. The section devoted to the textual uses of freaks has two rather unexciting essays, one on ‘Freaking Feminism’ that reads The Life and Loves of a She-Devil and Nights at the Circus, another on Geek Love. The final section on relocations of the freak show in contemporary (American?) culture has much of incidental interest: dime shows re-configured as talk shows, extraterrestrials and ‘deep-space multiculturalism’, the medical documentary, bodybuilding, and the celebrity freak (in this instance, Michael Jackson).

Clearly, the blurb’s claim that Freakery is ‘a comprehensive handbook on freaks’ is an invitation to quibble. I will confine myself to three. Firstly, despite an urge to cover all angles, the book is shaped by two understandings of the freakish. The dominant conceptual frame comes from Susan Stewart’s work on the miniature, the gigantic and the collection in her book On Longing (1984): ‘the freak of nature is a freak of culture’ (p. xviii). Further, the freak is a consequence of our colonisation of the ‘other’ in order
to define/defend the boundaries of the self/same: ‘to live with the alien, the freak, and
the monster, is to come to terms with ourselves’ (p. 336). Both these models derive from
Leslie Fiedler’s classic work in the field (his Foreword to the collection may read as
breathtakingly self-congratulatory, but on reflection, I think he has every justification).
The collection does nothing to critique, contest, rethink or in any way modify these
conceptual frames, content to apply them, albeit across a wide range of excellent
examples. This brings me to my second quibble. Queer theory is cited as a related field,
because it is alleged to ‘celebrate human deviance in all its manifold forms’ (p. xvi).
Although I would want to refine that definition, it is curious that the book has no entry
for this term and there is no essay concerned with the field, despite the book’s obvious
engagement with other possibilities of embodiment, forms of subjectivity and desire.
Finally, where are the plural bodies (cyborgs, offensively pregnant television and film
celebrities, for example), and why is there nothing on the Addams family, those
paradigmatic freaks of (television) culture?

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Serena Anderlini-D’Onofrio, The ‘Weak’ Subject: On Modernity, Eros and Women’s Playwriting

The ‘Weak’ Subject is a book which articulates and connects a number of theses to speak
about plays by the European-American writers Rachel Crothers, Susan Glaspell, Sophie
Treadwell, Zona Gale, Zoë Akins, Lillian Hellman, Doris Lessing, Marguerite Duras and
Natalia Ginzburg.

Anderlini-D’Onofrio describes the plays of these writers as ‘realistic’ but redefines the
term to do so. She traces the ‘canonical’ version of the term ‘dramatic realism’ back to
Aristotle’s theory of tragedy to point out that the term is used to describe drama shaped
by a phallic eros. She thus defines Aristotle’s theory of mimesis as ‘phallic mimesis’. In
doing so, she redefines mimesis as an act of making personal experience intelligible
through desire and invention and thus as the act of an embodied subject in a particular
socio-cultural context. This definition differs from the popular literary definition applied
to novels at the turn of this century. Gyorgy Lukács describes this version of realism as
bourgeois, descriptive realism concerned as it is with creating an accurate copy of some
unchanging ‘real’. To speak about these plays by women as ‘realistic’, Anderlini-
D’Onofrio coins the term ‘labial mimesis’ to describe the way in which these plays are
patterned according to a different eros, the eros of a female body.

In these plays a complicitous and interactive female duo are the centre of the dramatic
action. This figure is a symbol of the labia (Irigaray’s two lips touching), through which
female bodies experience pleasure in both heterosexual and homosexual encounters. The
writer thus views the eros informing this writing as bisexual—the women gain pleasure
from both being in touch with each other and from a phallus which comes between
them. These women are thus ‘weak’ in traditional dramatic terms. They are the women
around the edges of the phallic, dramatic narrative. The male protagonist of this
narrative is understood to be strong because independent and autonomous. The women
in this narrative are ‘weak’ because dependent on him and invested in establishing good
communication amongst themselves. By doing so they don’t move forward, as does the
protagonist of phallic mimesis, in the direction of their goals, but control space by interacting positively with their peers. Bisexuality thus emerges in her writings as a queerness, a discomfort with heterosexual acculturation.

Anderlini-D’Onofrio locates these women playwrights in two ideological eras, the border of which, in her conceptualisation, is the Cold War. She names the pre-Cold War era as Progressive and the post-Cold War era as Counter-revolutionary. According to Anderlini-D’Onofrio the ideology of the Cold War produced a climate of intolerance to complex identity constructions and thus the need to declare oneself a univocal identity. She compares how the female playwrights writing in these two eras construct female identity as a female body with a capacity for multiple and heterogeneous pleasures, as both a libidinised site of pleasure and as pleasure seeking.

To explicate the notion of subjectivity constructed in these plays Anderlini-D’Onofrio uses Peter Szondi’s discussion of dramatic realism as a force in Socialism. For Szondi, the purpose of representation is knowledge of reality as a step towards action and social transformation. Dramatic action should thus produce the collective agency which might lead to such action. He believes such collective agency to proceed from the interactive space between related selves. He thus values interaction and intersubjectivity in drama over action and subjectivity and is interested in drama as dialogue rather than as the narrative of a single, male, ‘free’ subject. For Szondi, then, mimesis denotes the act by which a subject that already exists in discourse makes a likeness of something other than his/herself and thereby learns about the object or ‘other’ and is transformed in the process. For drama to be ‘realistic’ for him, it must inscribe in the scene of representation the socio-cultural reality with which the author is familiar and in which s/he is implicated, the present as s/he knows it. As I’ve pointed out earlier, Anderlini-D’Onofrio borrows and extends this model by suggesting that the eros of the particular body of the author is the determining factor in how that body experiences, and makes sense of, the socio-cultural reality s/he inhabits. She thus interweaves dramatic analysis with social analysis and a historical–materialist critique of culture with a psychoanalytic perspective.

The book is complex and far-reaching in its aims because of this interweaving of discourses and analyses but, as an act of recovery and as a challenge to the idea that ‘realism’ cannot be the dramatic form for feminists, it is intriguing and of wide appeal. I can imagine it would appeal to feminists and canonical drama theorists alike. She does, therefore, successfully establish a bisexual theoretical position for herself, as a theorist who is perhaps ‘neither, nor, but between’, as a ‘weak’ subject in the unique position of being able to mediate between the phallic symbolic order and the ‘lesbian continuum’.

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Nelly Oudshoorn’s book offers a stimulating account of how hormones have come to exist and to be sexed. It does this not by focusing on beliefs and ideas about gender and the body but by drawing a detailed picture of the material circumstances, technological possibilities, networks of actors and interests that have made possible the existence of sex hormones as we know them. The title of her book, *Beyond the Natural Body: an Archaeology*
of Sex Hormones, identifies the text as influenced by Foucault and contributing to the deconstruction of the notion of the body as natural. The book is important to the social studies of science precisely because it takes as its object of analysis the concept of the hormonal body, a phenomenon which has currency in medical discourse, popular culture and in lived experience, particularly of women.

The structure of the text reflects the author's interest in actor network theory and her desire to focus on the 'materiality of discourse making' (p. 12) and move beyond the portrayal of science merely as a creation of the mind. This grounded approach results from the author's dissatisfaction with constructivist analyses which privilege the linguistic dimension of knowledge claims, a tendency that she recognises both in some feminist and non-feminist scholarship. The book promises to elaborate the making of the hormonal body, the gendering of this body, the extraction of the essence of gender/sex hormones and the subsequent transformation of 'female' sex hormones into the contraceptive pill.

I found the book fascinating. It is well written with the threads of argument, analysis and contradiction clearly and usefully articulated. This is assisted by the structure of the book which reflects a rough chronology. In the opening section, titled 'The Birth of Sex Hormones', Oudshoorn takes the reader to Holland during the exciting decades of the 1920s and 1930s when scientific exploration of gonadal hormones was burgeoning. She identifies three different groups of investigators who were active in hormonal research, gynaecologists, biologists and bio-chemists. The first two of these groups were predominantly interested in the function of hormones, they shared a clinical interest in sexual difference and dysfunction which was grounded in a pre-scientific belief that sexual duality was located in the reproductive organs (ovaries and testes). The bio-chemists on the other hand were interested in the chemical structure of sex hormones and their influence on the whole body. Oudshoorn shows that the theory of duality (sex difference) was transformed through the bio-chemists' challenge and that the location of sex difference moved from the gonads to the whole body. This she identifies as pivotal in the emergence of the concept of the hormonal body.

The next three chapters document the processes whereby sex hormones became measured, made and marketed. These chapters exemplify Oudshoorn's conviction that '(it) is crucial for feminist studies of science to take into account the strongest tools that scientists have at hand to transform and sexualise the world we live in: the creation of material products. A focus on the materiality of science shows how the construction of meanings and practices of sex and the body is not restricted to the domain of theories and semiotics' (p. 148). In keeping with this materialist approach Oudshoorn documents the alliances between various actors, technologies, disciplinary groups and the interdependencies and cultural contexts that created the possibilities for hormones to be synthesised, sexed, standardised and marketed as having potential application to a range of clinical conditions in both men and women. Oudshoorn describes hormonal preparations as 'drugs looking for diseases' (p. 108).

A number of material factors are identified to explain the overwhelming success of the marketing of female sex hormones compared with male hormones, a major factor being the availability of the raw materials in the form of urine from pregnant women, which was available through gynaecology clinics, and which consolidated a relationship of mutual dependence between gynaecologists and the laboratory scientists who conducted clinical trials for pharmaceutical companies. The absence of an equivalent medical speciality for men and the consequent lack of a source of raw material was a major factor in the relative paucity of research and therapeutic applications of male sex hormones.
The sixth chapter documents the transformation of sex hormones into the contraceptive pill, which crystallised the feminisation of hormones and narrowed the therapeutic uses from a range of menstrual and reproductive disorders to predominant use as a means of fertility control. The documentation of the clinical trials of hormonal contraceptives shows the ways in which the hormonal product is further de-contextualised from the lives and bodies of the women ingesting it by conventions of research such as the standardisation of cycle length to 28 days and the use of ‘cycles’ rather than women as the reference point in recording the pill’s effectiveness. Oudshoorn discusses the meaning that emerges from the construction of women as cyclically affected by hormones (against a presumed ‘stability’ in men).

Having established her thesis that hormones are not ‘found in nature’ and that the focus on women’s bodies in sex hormone research doesn’t reflect ‘the natural order of things’, in her final chapter Oudshoorn reflects on the processes through which concepts such as the hormonal body come to assume the appearance of a natural phenomenon.

This is an impressive book which stimulates the imagination and offers a model for the investigation of other scientific phenomena. Although I was not entirely convinced by the materialist explanation for the undue focus on sex hormones in women, the book has provoked me to identify the grounds for my disquiet, in particular to investigate more fully the technologies and practices which supported the age-old beliefs that menstrual blood constitutes the biochemical essence of femininity and the marker of sex difference.

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One of the most potent images for me in Alison Mackinnon's book was the Olive Schreiner story ‘Life’s Gifts’ (p. xviii) in which a dreaming woman is approached by Life and asked to choose either the gift of love which is held in one hand or the gift of freedom which is held in the other. The woman chooses freedom. Life tells the woman she has chosen well and she promises to return later with the gift of love as well: ‘I shall return. In that day I shall bear both gifts in one hand.’ For many middle-class Western women this idea of choosing love or freedom is familiar and translates crudely today into choices between motherhood and paid work or a career and personal/sexual relationships. Mackinnon suggests that many women today are still waiting for Life’s gifts and while they wait they are juggling, organising, giving, taking, negotiating, losing and winning in the making of their personal and working lives.

Mackinnon’s work interrogates the world of a group of women who were ‘pioneers’ in trying to negotiate this choice between love and freedom—a group of mostly middle-class, Anglo Australian women who entered university at the end of the nineteenth century. These women’s personal negotiations about career, family, sexuality, relationships were made in a world where metanarratives of national population growth, race politics and eugenics, the dangers of ‘advanced women’ and the inviolability of men’s rights to jobs and careers dominated. These narratives were contested and Mackinnon sets out in the first few chapters the debates of the early twentieth century in Australia about the decline in the (white) birthrate, the contestations of rights to
knowledge about contraception, and the raced discussions about who was having children. She asks how Western feminism, access to higher education for some women, relations within a heterosexual couple and civil and workplace rights for women were related in this moment in Australian history (p. 12). Rather complexly, though productively I think, Mackinnon also adds into this matrix a discussion of the ‘invention’ and deployment of demographic analyses. This gives her the opportunity to analyse not just how Timothy Coghlan’s statistics produced a particular problem called the ‘declining birthrate’, but also how contemporary demographers continue to produce particular ways of imagining women as absent, inert or agents.

I remember when I was at the University of Melbourne walking around the corridors of a hall of residence, where there are wall to wall images of men and then all of a sudden, in a nook, a couple of photographs of early university women. I remember always staring very hard at these photographs as if they might ‘reveal’ their story to me. The latter chapters on the Australian and British university women construct some of those stories. They are engaging, providing a series of elegant interpretations and analyses of a group of university women’s personal archives where they negotiate the complex passions of work, art, love, friendship, sex, relationships, family and motherhood.

Mackinnon ends her work by writing: ‘the future constantly threatens to become the past’ and in her analyses there is a productive dialogue set up between two fin de siecle moments; an important dialogue because many women today still seek to redefine and rework this either/or choice.

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*Why History Matters* represents important articulations of a social critic, feminist, and historian. The book represents Lerner’s life, works, and vision for the future. With extraordinary clarity, Lerner traces her life story as a young Jewish woman, her experience and memories of the holocaust in Germany, her escape to America, experiences of integrating into American society, and her career as a feminist historian. The book dismantles stereotypes of ‘Otherness’ regarding race, ethnicity, gender and patriarchy and articulates new politically enabling identities for women.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I examines Lerner’s self-analysis as a Jewish woman. This section contains moving accounts of Lerner’s life under the Nazis, her life as a refugee in America and how the American experience further shaped her consciousness as a feminist and historian. We are presented with how the author has negotiated her racial and gendered identities and her reconciliation with the past culminating in a visit to Austria and Germany after 50 years. Lerner examines Jewish identity in historical and contemporary contexts revealing the absence of the Jews in these countries and the anti-Semitism that is still apparent in them.

Part II deals with theoretical and professional thoughts on a range of issues in history and society. In the essay on ‘non-violent resistance’, Lerner offers admirable synthesis of the origin of the idea and how it influenced events in different parts of the world. The
discussion extends to a wonderful insight on ‘American Values’ and offers a recipe for future prosperity, stability and sustainability. Lerner explores the gains women have made in the West in the twentieth century, the place and contribution of women to history and shows how engendering history enriches our knowledge of socio-economic and development processes and the past. Despite women’s gains in the twentieth century, Lerner provides statistics to show that women’s chances of economic and political power have only improved slightly and remain grossly uneven (p. 100). The author concludes that the dismal catalogue of unresolved problems and profound contradictions that mark the twentieth century signals a profound breakdown of institutions and ideas (p. 105) and advocates embracing varied social, commercial and political groups from which we can learn to cope with the changing world. Lerner explores the problem of the historical profession and asserts the centrality of the discipline, arguing that history matters essentially (p. 115).

In Part III, the first essay, ‘Difference Among Women’, Lerner demonstrates the strength of an approach which focuses not only on women as a category but recognises the differences among them. She takes a serious and essential look at the issues of class and race and their implications for women. The author’s vivid imagination and thoughtfulness are manifested in her presentation and conceptualisation of these volatile subjects. In the concluding chapter, Lerner presents a synthesis and critical analysis of the importance of history in our personal and group lives. In essence, history matters because our thinking and feelings are built on reflecting on the past and envisioning the future. This is an important work for all interested in the past, the present and the future of race and gender relations.

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This book is a very welcome addition to the collection of works of Japanese history available in English. Whilst there are a few works in print which might appear to be similar, not one of them focuses entirely upon socialist women in Japan in the first few decades of this century. The author, Vera Mackie, covers some familiar ground, but she also offers readers a wealth of new information and many new insights. Her claim to originality is grounded on more than her topic, for, methodologically, the book is a work of discourse analysis or, more specifically, an analysis of social constructions of gender. Mackie achieves more than a mere ‘rewriting’ of women into history—in this case of Japan’s early socialists, including some active earlier than the ‘Bluestocking’ liberal feminists often represented as the founders of Japanese feminism. She locates her socialist women within a broad discourse participated in by women and men, on the ‘nature’, roles, duties and possible subject-positions of women, paying close attention to how class and other differences impacted upon such constructs. She therefore structures the book in a logical and effective manner around dominant gender constructs and oppositional voices, in chapters entitled ‘Imperial Subjects’, ‘Wives’, ‘Mothers’, ‘Workers’ and ‘Activists’. 
The 'socialist' women Mackie focuses upon were those who represented themselves as such, defining themselves as socialist in opposition to liberal feminists and also to others on the left. She largely limits her study, therefore, to social democratic (parliamentary) and revolutionary socialists, excluding the illegal left constituted by anarchists and communists. The latter are discussed only where they are pertinent—as the author puts it, they are 'referred to where their activities influenced the socialist movement, and where they contributed to the definition of a “socialist” position through their debates with members of the “legal” left' (p. 20).

No doubt, including women of the ultra-left would have been beyond the scope of a study which is already impressive in its breadth, both topically and in terms of the range of primary sources consulted. No longer will English readers be left with the mistaken impression that women’s resistance in early twentieth-century Japan was insignificant in its scope and impact, or that liberal feminists alone resisted. Whilst a work seemingly concerned only with socialist women might appear to be somewhat narrow in its focus, it seems to me that Mackie’s is the first book on pre-war radical women to appear in over 10 years that could be used as a general textbook. (In fact, I can think of only one or two other texts that are comparable in this sense.) Its contribution to the field of Japanese history is therefore invaluable.

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