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Similarly, her bounded choice of white, middle-class women must be applauded not because it is racist, sexist and exclusionist (she is anything but) but because, like Engels and Emberley, she acknowledges the endeavors of the circumscribed.

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1 Denise Riley used the trope "pleating" in a lecture she gave at the University of Manchester, 21 June 1994.

2 Emberley quotes Paul Tennant's definition of "internal colonialism" within Canada (p. 131).

3 Griselda Pollock, "Painting, Feminism, History," eds. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips *Destabilizing Theory, Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Cambridge 1992), 138-76.

4 Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London, 1992), 254.

SHIRLEY NEUMAN AND GLENNIS STEPHENSON, eds., *ReImagining Women: Representations of Women in Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994, 334 pp. $24.95 (paper).

What are the claims of the postmodern text? In the notion of the fragment, first, the call for local, specific and contingent discourses to replace the ahistoricism of past meta-narratives, stories Roland Barthes refers to as myths. Second, and with the call to native texts, a breach from scientific models of critical enquiry whose earlier effect was to normalize institutional authority. Local geographies and mobile sites, then, give rise to the imperative of the postmodern text: the repositioning of authority via the contestation, among other things, of the author as source of Truth, a singular myth of origin that, continuing the tradition of the unified self, once legitimized all academic enquiry. Postmodernism's repositioning of authenticity engenders reception theory. And, focalized as speculation, in the best postmodern writing, the act of naming and translating gives rise to new patterns of disciplinary (in)coherence.

Postmodernity seeks to render culture and society problematic. This is the goal of *ReImagining Women*, a collection of essays whose critical programme is to think the differences of representational practice and to render a sense of what Jean-François Lyotard called "the institution in patches." Exploring critical texts, art works and theories, *ReImagining Women*, drawn from investigations into the lives and works of women visual artists and writers, traces, analyses, extends and contests the interstices between gender, language and the imagination.

It is difficult, even inappropriate, to synthesize the contents of this text, whose eighteen essays are as complex as they are fascinating, as subtle as they are distinct. An excellent introduction already specifies the discursive terms of the reader's engagement with the text, describing "representation" in general terms and in relation to women as subjects as follows:

> as a mimetic act; as a re-visionary act within dominant representational practices; a process of production and consumption; and a re-presentation radically otherwise, outside of and alternative to present representations of women. (p. 11)

Loosely, then, the text is concerned with woman as sign.

A significant portion of the book is given over to postcolonial theories of representation. Uzoma Esonwanne's "Feminist Theory and the Discourse of Colonialism," whose consideration of identity politics in relation to feminist practice offers new insights into political correctness as a motivated text, and Aruna Srivastava's "Imag(in)ing Racism: South Asian Canadian Women Writers," which explores the specific nature of racism as a lived positionality, emblematizes the interpretative method suggested by feminist and postcolonial theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha, who reminds us that practices of interrogation constitute strategic acts of resistance through the simple act of writing a different voice. Jeanne Perreault's "'touch the matrix': Native/Woman/Poet" makes this position explicit as she articulates the sometimes difficult and frequently conflicted choices faced by subjects whose political identity and community alliances ("First nations people among whites, gays among straights, women among men," p. 293) claim divided loyalties. To their voices is added Kateryna Olijnyk Longley's consideration of the critical and strategic ways Australian women writers have negotiated their historical displacement as subjugated discursivities framed by colonial power. In these essays the ab-original voice is invoked as critical practice that continually, subversively, and resolutely contests orthodox institutional, social and cultural canons.

Other essays in the collection foreground in different ways the enmeshing of individual authors in the phenomenon being studied. Catharine Stimpson, for example, textualizes her own internalization of the culture's double image of women as pure and impure before suggesting that addicted mothers signify a "terrible, double impurity" (p. 317) that contemporary discourse attempts to administer and contain. Pamela Banting's investigation of Daphne Marlatt's erotics of rhetoric lays stress on the discursive subject, while Diane Chisholm considers the ways in which

the carnavalesque or more precisely, the grotesque body described by Bakhtin is appropriated to serve Monique Wittig's *Lesbian Body*. In re-inscribing and re-articulating knowledge these voices are political in a double sense invoked by Trinh: "the political domain not only penetrates every statement, it is also informed by and reflected in the means by which the statement is carried out."[1]

But there are still other strategies for engaging this important and ambitious compendium. One of the most efficient, it seems to me, is that of philosopher Judith Butler, who, writing for queer and cultural theory, proposes a hermeneutics of mimed, performed and enacted subjectivities. Butler's project is to distinguish, to articulate and, significantly, to displace the epistemic, ideological and psychic boundaries between fantasy, representation and social action. For Butler, the body is the site of an articulation that engages the theatrical with the sign's strategic provisionality; in her book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, she critiques the idea of fixed gender identities.

As theorized by Butler, identity is the product of culture, not the consequence of nature. Following the Derridean logic that directs us to the endless polyvalence of the sign, she envisions identity as an inherently subversive and always potentially dangerous experiential category. For her, "identity can become a site of contest and revision, indeed, take on a set of future significations that those of us who use it now may not be able to foresee."[2] In other words, she views sexuality as a structure of exchange. Hence, gender, not sexuality, is her object.

There are a number of points that might be taken up in a more comprehensive discussion of Butler's theoretical and philosophical programme: here I want to limit discussion to those points in her analysis that touch upon aspects of Neuman's and Stephenson's texts, that is to say, to those points that refer specifically to the body and to its image. In this context the most fruitful passages are contained in the final sections of Butler's book, where she elaborates concretely upon ideas introduced in abstract terms in the first chapters. Briefly, Butler's position is as follows: (a) much feminist theory has historically been implicated in heterosexist norms; (b) furthermore, feminism in its formation as historically anti-porn has served to police desire. In other words, identity-based feminism has been caught in a bind, the bind of exposing men's oppression of women by recourse to essentialist notions of "masculinity" and "femininity," a bind whose effect has been to shut down fantasy; (c) fantasy and representation must be distinguished from reality and protected, since not to do so carries profound social and cultural implications; and (d) the instrument is language, a tool that always potentially opens up a space of subversion, resistance and resignification.

In order to make her point, Butler builds on the texts of a number of critical theorists ranging from Sigmund Freud to Monique Wittig. The key figure, however, is Foucault. In Butler's analysis, Foucault represents on this point a moment of dualistic thinking in which the body divides into surface and ground. By contrast, Butler envisions a body without boundaries, a body, therefore, that cannot instate or naturalize such dualistic distinctions. This, then, is a "malleable" body. It is a body whose surface skin is embedded within and licensed by social systems of discourse and power. Plainly stated, for her the body is neither substance nor symbol but a space upon which experience is inscribed and across which ritual meanings are simulated.

In speaking of this fantasy of the body as conduit, a body beyond the more traditional nature/culture divide, Butler speaks of representation and then of social powers and cultural bodies rather than of particular bodily surfaces or of specific corporeal archives. She contributes to the field of representation the scenario of gender as a corporeal style — in Mary Ann Doane's term, a masquerade.

Butler exposes the paradox of gender identification, instating reclamation through exhibitionism. Referencing the theatrical, she proposes that gender is the impersonation of "an ideal that nobody actually inhabits."[3] She makes the point that *being* is always already *miming*; "gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original."[4] Following Butler, what might be advanced is that the processes of representation are proprietorial. The ownership of the body signifies through its self-imaging as a condition of its self-determination and its strength.

I have been taking this detour via metaphysics, Butler, and performativity not only because, in my opinion, Butler is equal to the task of *ReImagining Women*, but also to come to what seems to me to be the text's most puzzling and disturbing theoretical effect: the effect of correspondence between representation and simulation; the effect, that is, of an equivalence between that which, as representation, is imagined as the social, cultural and discursive body of woman and actual historical women themselves. This feature of *ReImagining Women* is striking because the text's theoretical premise, the result of a play between fantasy and experience, the product of knowledges defined in social, cultural, philosophical and aesthetic terms, always takes account of its presentation, describing, inscribing, and circumscribing a certain and spectacular space.

Futhermore, although substantive, the papers included in *ReImagining Women* do not, on the whole, propose the

reorganization of foundational disciplinary or institutional claims. Certainly, Elizabeth Grosz's theorization of Luce Irigaray's sexual morphology is far-reaching in suggesting the strategic importance of subversion, and Glennis Stephenson's essay on nineteenth-century women poets, with Isobel Grundy's "Against Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fiction Writers Confront the Problem of Woman-as-Sign," is indicative of a turn away from commonplace understandings of identity, the body and the imagination in the author's mutual exploration of the social forces which shape women writers' lives. Definitely, Patricia Yaeger's is a deviant (and fascinating) reading of the maternal sublime, but on the whole these texts are oriented towards pointing to the biases and inadequacies of the present state of knowledge or towards recuperating existing narratives in order to open up existing fields rather than to raising questions in the broad sense about the assumptions of the text, or to challenging the divisions of intellectual enquiry themselves.

Hence my incorporation of Butler. The phantasmic construction of Butler's *topos* references discourse and theory as theatre and world, as a performance and a politics of culture. The distinction between *the real* and *representation*, enabled by her radical reconceptualization of the categories of *sex* and *gender* as naturalized constructs, nominates, most significantly, a cleavage where established bodies of knowledge are torn apart and in their place substituted discursive dis-articulation. Butler defines the limits of identity as the space of constructions and negotiations, always advocating a reconceptualization of the social without erasing its political significance, and always reading the political as disruptive, unstable and discontinuous. She advances representation as an exhilarating moment of instability. The body proliferates under her brazenly perverse gaze.

There is, of course, in *ReImagining Women* one notable exception and with it, some distinguished breaches of the theoretical canon, especially in the area of the visual arts. Bracketing the visual and literary arts, Linda Hutcheon's "Splitting Images: the Postmodern Ironies of Women's Art," for example, contemplates the paradoxes of the textual/sexual body in aesthetic representation. Citing as exemplary the work of Joyce Wieland and Joanne Todd, this essay discusses how, by means of a series of strategic reversals, contemporary Canadian women's production practices expose the asymmetries inherent in language. And then there are Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace who, taking a page from Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic capital" in their "More than Pin Money: Economies of Representation in Women's Modernism," articulate two simultaneous yet contrasting meanings of capital, one symbolic, the other economic, in relation to a signal relationship: the avant-garde artist and her patron. In modernity, these authors tell us, the wealth and power of patrons such as Peggy Guggenheim and Bryher was deployed by a multitude of means and to a crucial effect; in artists whose economic capital was (sometimes provisionally) low but whose symbolic worth or credibility was high, such as Natalie Clifford Barney, Romaine Brooks or Nina Hamnett, they met their match. Power, in Elliot and Wallace's materialist framework, is as diffused and complicated as are, in previously unacknowledged ways, the economies of representation in relation to the conditions of emergence of any given text. This essay breaks new ground mapping a productive course into our understanding of the means by which culture mediates knowledge.

Rose Marie San Juan's paper, entitled "The Queen's Body and Its Slipping Mask," is equally important. In her succinct analysis of the actual and historical image of Queen Christina of Sweden, San Juan calls attention to the Queen's representation as the nexus for competing glances. The monarch's image, she argues, is organized according to at least two distinct conventions at once: the description and glorification of femininity and the personification of power. The monarch's body is thus a troubling body, a condition exacerbated by her evident willingness to determine, control, manipulate, circulate and administer the historical circumstances and the figure of her self-representation.

In stressing the connections between the institutional and the individual features of historical narratives San Juan, like Elliott and Wallace, offers a new paradigm for art historical investigation. But the more far-reaching exception is provided by Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin's "A Woman's Touch: Towards a Theoretical Status of Painterliness in the Feminist Approach to Representation in Painting." Dubreuil-Blondin points to paradigms of art history in relation to identity as fictions, the products of interpretation and history. Citing Foucault, she theorizes the correspondences and disjunctions in western histories of art in terms of the "apparatus" of representation, "a term referring not to the content of representation but to the way it organizes itself as a meaningful system and to the way this system has evolved through time." (p. 152) She highlights the complicated movements that take place in culture around the question of what objects mean.

Dubreuil-Blondin's first concern is to historicize representation in painting. From there she goes on to identify two sets interconnected problems centering on mimesis and the feminist perspective of the history of art. Theories of visualism, she advances, run the risk of psychologizing aesthetic intention while stylistic analysis occludes, for the feminist art historian, the context of art. The feminist his-

torians' flight to ideology and popular culture tends to ignore "the material particulars of an image and the ways they have been transformed, through work, to produce representation." (p. 154) For Dubreuil-Blondin, the space of meaning in representation is a space where the three trajectories can meet and interact.

In problematizing the contested terrain of visualism and academic enquiry, Dubreuil-Blondin alone disrupts, destabilizes and undercuts the political stake in disciplinary unity that subtends many readings in this text. For her, the representational body of woman constitutes a moment of politicization that might potentially and finally shift certain paradigms of power and knowledge; she brings into relief the fact that beyond a political commitment to radical change indexed by a preference for theories of subjectivity or material practices and concerns lies the necessity for the continual interrogation of the text, for new languages that interact with one another in order to empower and enable social action, and for new forms emergent outside structural foundations.

Imitation, reversal and disruption are the strategies of resistance of the subaltern class. They produce new knowledges in a climate of change. Taken as a whole, and re-created through its struggles and contradictions, *ReImagining Women* constitutes an always potentially productive space where temporary knowledges wrought from conjunctural identities are instructively conjoined. *ReImagining Women* nominates discourse as an ambiguous, indeterminate space, a space where subjectivity, agency and feminist practice can always potentially and instructively be (re)introduced.

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1 Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* London, 1991), 188.

2 Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Subordination," *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diane Fuss (New York, 1991), 19.

3 Liz Kotz, "The Body You Want [interview with Judith Butler]," *Artforum* (November 1992), 85.

4 Butler, "Imitation and Gender Subordination," 21.