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Inscriptions by Hugh J. Silverman

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was "a blunderer . . . quacksalver . . . bungling sorcerer's apprentice," and Christ "just an alibi, a man of straw."

His own adolescent denial of Jesus, the protagonist notes, paled alongside the deep desolation of the sanatorium priest. Sin, for the priest, was "invented by men so they would deserve the pain of living, so they would not be punished without reason." Prayer, for this cleric wrestling with belief, was "another solitary vice." Jesus? While trying to save dying inmates, the priest fights the painful suspicion that "he came to save himself, more than to save us." God was "not just a house of peace. . . . He's also a predator, a heavenly hound who follows us and forces us and loves us."

Marta embodies the central enigma of Bufalino's tale. She had survived the holocaust: partisans had shorn her hair when they caught her with a nazi. "Every enigma has its mirror," said Longbones, and the mirror in this case may be the protagonist/author who survived Marta, yet is left with a remorse greater than the relief: "I betrayed our silent agreement not to survive."

Against the mythic blue sea of Palermo, Marta seemed to be the pagan "Siren, birdwoman, fishwoman, mermaid hidden under the rock." Yet she is a Jewish woman and when she died, "the sluice-gates of God's flood truly rumbled, sang in those soiled sheets, and there was no dove from which salvation might come."

At the end, the protagonist/author is left "in the middle of the path: a squandered seed, deconsecrated substance, a fistful of earth on which the rain falls." And with jumbled emotion: "what sad days those were, the happiest of my life."

In this *deconsecrated judeo-christianity*, the central figure is a pagan/Jewish crucified woman and sanatorium inmates waiting to die who are incapable

of belief. Yet "the emotion with which we learned of others' deaths, as if they were our own, was itself love."

Bufalino's tale, a significant document in the history of belief in the late twentieth century, has resonances every where in Italy. Yet it could not have been written by anyone but a Sicilian, and could not have been located anywhere but on that Mediterranean isle.

LUCIA CHIAVOLA BIRNBAUM

Inscriptions: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism

By Hugh J. Silverman

New York and London:

Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987

"An archeology of knowledge is a dispersive practice" (320). This phrase aptly defines the hermeneutical and semiological practice of Hugh Silverman's *Inscriptions*. So does the following description of what constitutes an archeology of knowledge:

Instead of tracing a single idea through history, the archeologist of knowledge looks for discontinuous formations. Each formation will have sets of rules and each grouping of sets into systems will establish the epistemological signification which Foucault regularly calls the *epistémé*. (320)

This definition sums up very well what the reader finds in this clear, perceptive and stimulating work. Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Piaget, Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida—these are the names that make up the groupings that inform Silverman's archeology. The aim, however, is not the tracing of an idea through history through an examination of disparate authors or the delineation of

schools of thought that succeed one another historically; rather, the tracing is of two parallel yet convergent methodologies—phenomenology and structuralism—to determine their spaces of difference and intersection. “At the limit of one, signs of the other are already plotted. At the frontier of the other, the former is incorporated and advanced” (ix). In Merleau-Ponty there are already positions and interrogations that Derrida takes up and resolves: “While Merleau-Ponty stands at the opening of the place between, Derrida formulates its closure” (xii). For this reason the readings that set out to describe this archeology from Merleau-Ponty to Derrida are more properly termed “inscriptions,” that is, “essays at opening the space of difference” (9). They are analyses that mark the attempt at re-inscribing itself within the tradition of continental philosophy while re-inscribing this very same tradition to better define its place and position.

The space of this inscription is language. It is at this point that phenomenology and structuralism, hermeneutics and semiology, can be said to intersect. Merleau-Ponty’s meditation on Saussure’s theory of language or the later Sartre’s emphasis on the written word are examples of points of convergence that phenomenologically inspired philosophies share in common with structuralist or post-structuralist systems. At these points of transition, phenomenological systems interrogate their own postulates and can be said to move toward structuralist positions. In Merleau-Ponty, for instance, the move in the later works toward a conception of “non-philosophy” aligns it with the “decentering of philosophy” of later critical practice. Silverman’s focus here is on the “conceptual dissemination” of a writer’s thoughts (123), that is, the making of a philosopher in all its manifestations or, as he puts it, “se faisant” (123). In this fashion the re-reading of

Merleau-Ponty underscores those transitional elements that move toward structuralist and post-structuralist positions. In the case of Sartre, the qualitative shifting of the relation of self and language throughout his corpus makes it possible to speak of varying *epistémés* at different stages of his work. These are “different stages of thought in which the relationship between language and self forms different (but comparable) structures” (363).

But Professor Silverman’s task is not to draw, necessarily and at all costs, the common ground between phenomenology and structuralism or to show how phenomenology moves toward structuralism. The space of inscription that he delineates is at the same time the locus of differences that emerge from their con-frontation. While Sartre’s critique of human nature and of self-surpassing can be cited as conceptually compatible with structuralist claims (210), his stand on linguistics, on the role of the unconscious or on the concepts of synchrony and diachrony are incompatible with the views expressed on these subjects by Saussure, Lacan and Lévi-Strauss, respectively. Silverman wants to show, in fact, that Sartre’s position points to possible limitations in the structuralist perspective. Sartre’s conception of language as “signifying-consciousness object-signified relation” (217) situates language within human experience, making the notion of a psychoanalytic unconscious irrelevant. As lived experience, unreflected or reflective consciousness cannot be structured as a language, as Lacan maintains, nor can it be formulated as a structure or a myth, as Lévi-Strauss contends. “Diachrony must prevail and synchrony must follow. . . . Structural knowledge is produced by human activity—including structuralist activity” (218). It is this latter aspect which is determining. All things being similar between

the two accounts, the structuralist always comes up short on the side of human experience. "What they [the structuralists] cannot understand is the individual's project—this element of personalization stands firmly on Sartre's side" (276).

In the later essays, another key aspect of Silverman's inscriptions is developed. The confrontational analyses, which pit the phenomenologist against the structuralist in order to essay the relational differences, become the groundwork for the elaboration of more prescriptive notions. In the chapter on Sartre and Piaget, the conceptual tension which is described by accounting for two opposing theories of human development gives way to a third that contains them both. "In moving through this confrontational analysis, I will show the groundwork for a theory of human development which accounts for both the contextualist and the structuralist perspectives" (219). The term given to this theory is "multi-contextual experiential structuralism" (233), which means to account for both the situation in which an individual develops and for the structural differences that pertain to it. "A multi-contextual experiential structuralism brings out all three of these aspects: biography, situation, and structural identities and differences" (235).

Similarly, out of the confrontation between Sartre and Barthes, or between two conceptions of Writing, Silverman sketches out the possibility of a "critical practice of Writing" (253) that would account for both the totalization and the textualization of Writing that they advocate:

In order to achieve such a signifying critical and theoretical practice, it would be necessary to situate both writing and reading at the slash, on the line, in the interface between work and text, between totalization and textualization, between problematics and pleasures of literature/text. (253)

And by juxtaposing Sartre and Foucault, he similarly establishes the place of History: "In this chapter [14] I will show that the place of History is located at the frontier between Dialectic and Epistémé" (254).

Silverman's theoretical practice is one in which theoretical approaches (here those of Sartre and the structuralists) are juxtaposed to determine a relationality and a difference, namely, the boundary at the slash where these accounts converge and differ. In so doing it neither repeats nor proliferates needlessly existential or structuralist practice, not is it a synthesis of the two or even a third practice. Rather, as a practice that would determine the limits of the existentialist and structuralist positions, it is offered as an alternative to these critical practices "without end" (276).

The setting of limits as the space of inscription of Silverman's theoretical practice is then articulated in terms of Derridean discourse and of self-decentering. Silverman shows first of all that both Sartre and Heidegger can be credited with having approached the limits of metaphysics with a conception of self-decenteredness even though they remain on this side of its boundaries: "Sartre finds no center to man. In this respect, his position is similar to that of Heidegger. 'Difference' for Heidegger is 'nothingness' for Sartre. Both move close to the edge of the epoch of metaphysics" (306). Similarly with Foucault, whose announcement of the nearing of the end of man ushers Derrida: "The Derridean de-centering, announced by Foucault, takes place in grammatology" (307).

In the last chapters, Silverman develops an interpretive typology which aims at determining the extent to which "heterotopias" (the multiple places where we live) take up hypertopian or hypotopian characteristics. A hypertopia is a deconstructed utopia experienced in the heterotopia of the

here and now (331), and a hypotopia is the opposite, a de-generate form of dystopia, that is, a degraded place that exhibits all the shortcomings of human places. "Here at the interface between desirable places and undesirable ones is the locus of social formation, meaning and structure" (332). With reference to three different types of spaces—the Paris Latin Quarter, Sartre's *No Exit*, and a painting by Pinturicchio—Silverman shows how these heterotopian discourses can be analyzed in their relation to "utopian projections or dystopian dejections" (337). In all these cases, the deconstruction of this interpretive topology not only opens up the understanding of these spaces, but also deconstructs the hypertopian/hypotopian opposition in order to make explicit, says Silverman, "the text of human spatial experience [which] is situated at the juncture between the two" (334).

The possibility of an archeology of heterotopias leads directly to Silverman's last and perhaps most crucial task: a hermeneutic semiology of the self whose task will be "to establish a direct correlation between the self as interpreter and the system of signs produced in the interpretation" (338). It is in this gathering of the "how" of hermeneutic interpretation and of the "what" of semiological analysis that the self is formed. This is because signs are signs of an interpretive act, signs of a presence and of an actualization of the self's sign system which can only be recovered through interpretation itself (345).

As Silverman points out in the Introduction, *Inscriptions* "is not a philosophical treatise." This qualification announces the distancing that distinguishes it from a traditional philosophical investigation. *Inscriptions* prescribes neither a new centering for philosophy nor proliferates older ones. Rather, it seeks to inscribe the space at which philosophies intersect by defining their

terms and their boundaries. *Inscriptions* is at the same time an archeology of knowledge, a theory of typology, a hermeneutic semiology or, simply, a theory of textuality. In other words, it is an important work that creates the possibility for new areas of analysis and requires close scrutiny from all those who today engage in the practice of theoretical understanding.

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Mosca and the Theory of Elitism

By Ettore A. Albertoni

Trans. by Paul Goodrick

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There is a tradition in political and social theory which consists in large measure of the study of the origin and consequences of the following fact—every politically organized society is divided into two classes: a minority of rulers, and a majority of subjects ruled by them. It is often labeled the elite or elitist school, although the term elitism is misleading by conveying an anti-democratic connotation which is not necessarily part of the theory; further, we do not really have a "school" in the full-blown sense that sociologists of knowledge deal with. An example of an important issue discussed by elite theorists is the question of whether and how this class division exists in a democratic society, how elitism conceives the difference between democratic and undemocratic societies, what is the nature and origin of these ruling and elite classes, whether there is any way in which this class division could ever be eliminated, and what is the relation-