

and psychological problems that women sometimes experience in association with menstruation under the charged label of "disorder" provides an invidious sanction for belief in women's disorderly natures.

In "Sexual Difference and the Law," Kathy Kendall, sharing Stoppard's concern about PMS as a medical category, explores the implications of its invocation in legal cases. She recommends situating PMS in a context of interacting biological, social, and cognitive factors, arguing that this will illuminate the multiple dimensions of women's oppression, and help ensure that proposed solutions are not grounded in explanations partial to one or some (see Catherine Keller, 1986). Their writings are not as accessible as the rest of the essays in this collection, though this is to be expected in view of the profoundly radical nature of their enterprise.

In the final essay, "Habeas Corpus," Valerie Raoul, one of the editors, presents female narcissism as a central key to women's liberation, and the basic propellant of Women's Studies. But, while I agree that Women's Studies involves a focus on the investigation of women by women, to characterize Women's Studies as narcissistic is inappropriate. Narcissism has the derogatory connotation of egocentrism, and usually refers to a love that is self-consuming to the neglect of others. Women's Studies upholds the permeative self, relationships of cooperation and receptivity, not the separate self, relationships of control and domination. It promotes unity in diversity, feminism not feminisms. In denying that women are a homogeneous group, one is not forced to ground the WLM in egocentrism, reducing it to a haphazard formation of solitary women banging their chains together. This

collection of essays that vary widely in style and approach, yet partake in the common project of reclaiming the female body, supports an important task of Women's Studies: to reveal commonalities in the midst of differences.

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Teresa Brennan, *History After Lacan* (London/New York: Routledge 1993)

The postmodernist's scorn for history, in the form of great explanatory narratives, is probably rivalled by the historian's scorn for psychoanalysis, especially of the structuralist variety. This situation makes Brennan's book seem rather unlikely, to say the least: a defense of history from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis. More unlikely still, to those with a passing acquaintance of Lacan and Lacanians, is her insistence that Lacan was a historical thinker, rather than the ahistorical structuralist of legend. Noting that "the existence of the historical side of Lacan's theory of the imaginary, let alone its implications, has been ignored or at best mentioned in passing," (7) Brennan shows that there is a pervasive if marginal critique of the "ego's era" in Lacan's writing.

Using Lacan's comments as her starting point, Brennan argues that the modern era is psychotic. We are, she writes, in the grip of a historical development that saw its beginnings in the early modern period, and which has not yet reached its conclusion, a development in which the ego comes to be more and more central to the experience of the subject. One of the symptoms of this psychosis is an inability and an unwillingness to make connections, a condition

that may be at the heart of postmodernism's fifteen-second attention span, as well as its hostility towards history. Foremost among the symptoms, however, is that "we are more inclined to think of ourselves as contained, and in subject-object terms, than we were before modernity." (82) This belief in the containment, sufficiency, and, ultimately, self-originary nature of the subject, is a product of the ego's desire to sever connections between itself and others, and to fix these others as objects in an economy of sameness. The ascendancy of the ego leads to imperialisms both psychic and territorial, as the ego becomes increasingly aggressive and hostile to these others. This aggression and hostility rebounds back as paranoia, as the ego begins to fear these others, which escalates into a spiral of aggression and paranoia. The result of this ego gone mad is a world in which colonialization of the other is an imperative, natural time is replaced by a paradoxically deadening speed, and the natural world is consumed or poisoned at an ever increasing pace.

History After Lacan can be divided into two sections. The first outlines a theory of what Brennan calls the foundational fantasy of the ego's era, based on her reading of Lacan. The second section offers a brilliant rereading of the commodity form, and a critique of the subject/object distinction in Marx's political economy, which Brennan argues leads to a misunderstanding of productive labour and more particularly, of the role of nature as a productive force.

Uniting and underlying these two sections is an argument about energy, more specifically, the world as an interdependent system of energy. (Brennan notes that this is one of the tenets of New Age believers, but deplores their "miser-

able arguments" for it [81]). One of the cherished fantasies of the ego is that it is a contained energy system, separate both from the body and from its environment. In its most elementary form, this fantasy appears as a denial of the child's dependence on the mother, imagining instead that she is dependant on the child. In the work of Melanie Klein, on whom Brennan bases much of her argument, this denial surfaces in a desire to dismember and poison the mother. In the modern world, argues Brennan, this fantasy of self-containment leads to a desire to dismember and pollute the natural world, in an aggressive denial of our dependence on the environment.

These desires are probably always present in the ego, argues Brennan, and elements of them can certainly be found in western philosophy long before the ego's era. Generally speaking, however, these desires were held in check. Virtually every society but our own, for example, has a system of belief that stresses the individual subject's dependence on, and origin in, something greater than itself. Nowhere but in the west, and especially in America, does the egoistic self-determination of the individual achieve the status of exalted pursuit, let alone social acceptability. In the seventeenth century in the west, these checks on the ego began to be removed by the emergence of certain conditions enabling the fantasies of the ego to be enacted on a large scale, in the world: "(a) by the available technology; (b) by the dominant social discourses, particularly religion, and (c) by the forms of economic and political organization." (18)

It is in the commodity form that we can see the desires of this psychotic era encapsulated. The commodity caters to the ego's dream of instant gratification, as well as to a host of other desires: "the desire to be waited upon; the desire to

believe one is the source of agency who makes it happen; the desire to dominate and control the other who is active in providing, but whose activity is controlled by a relatively passive director, and the aggressive desire towards the other, if we take pollution as evidence of aggression." (93) The problem is not simply, of course, that production causes pollution. Rather, the ever-increasing speed and scale of production of commodities necessary to support this structure of desire far outstrips the speed of natural reproduction, thereby necessitating an ever-widening sphere of consumption and depletion of resources: "short-term profitability depends on an increasing debt to nature, a debt that must always be deferred, even at the price of survival." (146) We are fast becoming a danger to our own existence: one of the legal definitions of psychosis, Brennan points out.

History After Lacan is an attempt to think in a global way, to offer an analysis of, and some propositions about, a large historical movement. Brennan's is an activist mentality, and this book is activist history in the spirit of Walter Benjamin. It is not, however, an easy read, requiring a certain familiarity with a wide range of writers, including Lacan, Heidegger, Irigaray, Spinoza, Marx and Klein. This complexity will no doubt result in charges of elitism from some activists, and certainly the book has something for everyone to take issue with: psychoanalysts, for the extent to which she makes psychosis a metaphor; liberals of all stripes, for her attacks on some current pieties regarding race, class, and gender (criticisms made because of, rather than in spite of, her uncompromisingly leftist and feminist ethics); even medievalists could potentially be offended by the notion that a

fundamental historical shift occurs at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Nonetheless, the book's theorization of the fantasy that underlies the movement of capitalism has a broad explanatory power that is remarkable, and remarkably timely, given the ongoing documentation of the World Bank's depredations in the "third world," the daily news of the continuing collapse of the environment, *et cetera*.

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John N. Vogel, *Great Lakes Lumber on the Great Plains: The Laird, Norton Lumber Company in South Dakota* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press 1992).

East of the 98th meridian, observed historian Walter Prescott Webb many years ago, American civilization stood on three legs — wood, water and land; west of that meridian, two of these supports were removed. Little wonder, Webb argued in his bold and incisive book *The Great Plains* (1931), that settlement stumbled and slowed as people from the humid, wooded east grappled with the unfamiliar challenges of the arid, treeless west. Adaptation was necessary at almost every turn. Pioneers found shelter in dark, often damp cabins of prairie sod, redesigned their ploughs, learned new ways of making a living from the land, even changed legal codes governing access to water. But in the last years of America's wooden age, there were few satisfactory substitutes for a commodity so common that it might be compared with a picture frame, escaping notice as it shaped the scene. Wood, says