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REVIEW

Shannon Winnubst, *Queering Freedom* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 2006) ISBN: 978-0253218308

Queering Freedom treads the difficult and dangerous line between the reappropriation of the past and merely appropriating it—a task that it successfully manages with historical awareness, political insight, and onion-like layers of irony. In this text, Winnubst aims to reconsider the hegemonic liberal notion of freedom and to queer it, to disentangle freedom from its support of "phallicized whiteness" and its interlocking forms of racism, sexism, and heterosexism: "the concept of freedom still appears to harbor radically transformative power within our lives: it still appears capable of moving us from the fears and anxieties endemic to economies of scarcity toward the joys and generosities of economies of abundance." (113) To accomplish this task Winnubst undertakes a critique of the prevalent liberal notion of freedom and its ties to phallicized whiteness. By providing a basis on which to think about the failures of present notions of freedom, Winnubst prepares a critical perspective from which to queer it and produce a notion of freedom that is more than a cover for domination.

Much of the text is spent in a critical mode, working between Bataille and Foucault to uncover the complicities of liberal notions of freedom and phallicized whiteness. Phallicized whiteness is shorthand for "interlocking epistemological and political systems of domination," especially in their guise as racism, sexism, and heterosexism. (10) In terms of specific contributions, Foucault's work undergirds this text in an eclectic way that is difficult to briefly summarize (as is true for much of the text, which is loaded with well-cultivated insights). Methodologically, the influence of Foucault's archaeology drives this analysis into the history of philosophy both to uncover the strata that make up the foundations of the present and to uncover the possibility that things could have been otherwise—a move that parallels the strategy Foucault has summarized as counter-memory. (7) Thematically, *The History of Sexuality Volume I* is never far. In fact, I do not think that it would be entirely unfair to view this text as an expansion and reply—through the lens of freedom—to Foucault's enigmatic claim at the end of *Volume I* that "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures."[1]

From Bataille, Winnubst mobilizes his work on 'general economy.' (3) General economy works as an excellent foil to her analysis of liberalism and its economy of scarcity.

[1] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 157.

Bataille's work stands liberalism on its head by proposing that the economic problem is not scarcity but abundance. The 'accused share' is the excess that confronts us beyond our needs, beyond any necessity that would suggest a proper usage; in that confrontation, the accursed share reveals its unordered and bottomless possibility and transports us to the doorstep of our own radical freedom. It is here in this space of freedom in "which thinking recognizes the arbitrariness of the cultural codes into which it is habituated" that queering of freedom will occur. (8)

This queering takes place on the critical grounds that Winnubst develops in an investigation of contemporary desiring subjectivity and its structure of phallicized whiteness. Winnubst works through Locke to develop an account of humans as bound by desire. She argues that Locke, and liberalism more generally, views desire as a lack that motivates subjects to satisfy it. (76) This general lack and the need to fulfil it places subjects in an economy of scarcity: we all want to satisfy our desires but we are competing with each other for the limited resources to do so. Winnubst expands her account of Locke by detailing the temporal and spatial metaphysics of the desirous subject.

Winnubst argues that the temporality of scarcity, borrowing from Lacan, is set in the "future anterior." (157) From within a Lockean/liberal economy of scarcity the question is not about how one should use one's resources in the present but about how one may use them to arrive at a point in the future where one will have acquired even more resources to fulfil one's desires. Thought is structured to meet these future demands in a calculus of utility that aims to plot ever more productive ways of acquiring resources at the expense of the enjoyment of the present.

Likewise, the desirous subject has a concomitant form of spatiality that is oriented by its "logic of the limit." (114) The struggle over scarce resources works on the assumption that neatly divided and self-contained autonomous subjects compete with each other in a zero-sum game for satisfaction. However, not all bodies are self-contained and capable of independently managing their own share in this competition: "Class, race and sexual difference are read through the ability to contain oneself and wholeness becomes a primary index of cultural legibility." (114) Sick, deficient, and abnormal bodies are defined through a "pejorative" and often "politically violent" process that sets them apart as unfit for self-rule, and subjects them to the domination of whole bodies.

Although some of Winnubst's criticisms may be found in other texts, her strongest contribution is not in pointing out individual instances of domination—some of which her readers will already be familiar with—but in how she is able to describe those instances as part of an interlocking whole. Her exploration of liberalism and its metaphysics is able to tie together these different forms of domination as parts of the same process. Thus Winnubst tends to refer to these forms of domination as phallicized whiteness instead of listing them individually, uniting them in a phrase that indicates their deep generative fraternity in the metaphysics of the desirous subject.

Freedom fits into this economy of phallicized whiteness as "freedom from prohibitions." (119) The relevant prohibitions are those placed by others to limit the legitimate means the subject can use to obtain the object of its desire. As a result, freedom is always a transgression and violation of the will of others. Freedom is part of a zero-sum economy

where an increase in one subject's freedom means the violation of another's. Freedom thus "continues to frame" and support discourses of phallicized whiteness by reinforcing its understanding of scarcity, the logic of the limit, a future anterior temporality, and the universality of desirous subjects. (2)

Like Foucault, who also found sex and sexuality to be a privileged node in the power relations that define the present, Winnubst claims that, "sexuality is the Achilles' heel of phallicized whiteness's domination of the social field. The field of sexuality is thereby the most effective site in our historical present of late modernity for intervention into fixed concepts of subjectivity and freedom." (19) Accordingly, she directs her reply at the desirous subject and its lust for satisfaction with a concept of freedom rooted in pleasure. (140)

Pleasure works to displace the desirous subject and its metaphysics on multiple fronts. Pleasure is an experience of the present; it directs us away from the future anterior of scarcity and situates itself in the bounty of the now. Against the economy of desire, which portrays bodies as lacking and needing satisfaction, pleasure assumes no lack, only overflowing enjoyment. Pleasure blurs the boundary of self and other; Winnubst borrows from Irigaray the image of the interwash of mucus between bodies that erases a clear boundary between them. (96) In focusing on bodies as a site of pleasure, over subjects as bound by desire, Winnubst crafts a practice of living that threatens to undo the ties that bind us to the domination of phallicized whiteness by unseating the subject as a locus of desire.

This focus on pleasure opens us to the possibility of "queering" the present and giving us freedom to redefine ourselves and the present. (137) Through the privileged example of desirous sexuality (hetero-, homo-, and bi-), Winnubst argues that we are today defined by our desires: for a woman to desire a woman makes her a homosexual, and so on. To think of ourselves as bodies and pleasures is to throw off the limiting logic of desire and its essentialism and enable a self-mobility that defies its categories. As different pleasures move through bodies and even constitute them, the question is not what stamp bodies' passports will bear (hetero-, white, male, etc.) but how bodies will manage the overflowing abundance of pleasures in the present. To focus on bodies and pleasures is to enter a queer space, where things become neither essentially this nor that, but mobile and free.

In all, Winnubst's text is interesting, powerful, and jogs the reader along at a brisk pace. It combines the grounding of personal insights and contemporary cultural criticism with the precision and abstraction of philosophical analysis in a way that does Bataille's method of general economy proud. I find its arguments convincing, but also inspiring with regards to possible future work. There are a few places where the text opens onto other philosophical work in ways that generously prompt new directions of study. For instance, some of the qualities of the overman in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* return in the bodies and pleasures of *Queering Freedom*: Zarathustra's rejection of a subject predicated on desire and future-oriented temporality and the whole-hearted embrace of the "overflow" and "honey" of the present.[2] Likewise, her text contains a philosophical avalanche of insights about contemporary life, many of which beg for further follow-up and discussion.

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[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None.* Translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 10.

My only serious criticism of this text is the slippage that occurs between the conclusions she draws about particular philosophers, genres of philosophy (liberalism, psychoanalysis, etc.) and Western society more generally. Put briefly, the observation that certain philosophers put forward certain sets of ideas is not sufficient grounds to conclude that those ideas therefore predominate and motivate society at large, or even that they characterize a specific genre of philosophy. For instance, Winnubst moves from her conclusions about Locke to broader conclusions about Classical liberalism to even broader conclusions about "modern political and epistemological projects"; all of this without much justification:

> Classical liberalism writes the individual as the (allegedly) neutral substratum of all political decisions, positioning it as separable from historico-political forces. In carving the individual out of both the natural and socio-historico-political landscapes, modern political and epistemological projects turn around Locke's fundamental metaphors of enclosure. (39)

Perhaps one is meant to take those jumps as I did in my reading—swept up in the affirmation of the text's insights that own my experiences gave; I often found that my own experience served to confirm the missing evidence.

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