

Benoit Dillet, Iain MacKenzie and Robert Porter, eds. *The Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism*. Edinburgh University Press 2013. 560 pp. £125.00 (Hardcover ISBN 9780748641222).

Comprehensive, insightful and up-to-date, *The Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism* is an indispensable volume for anyone researching or teaching in the field. Something that makes this work so engaging is that its contributors do not shy away from taking clear stances on issues pertaining to the figures discussed; but this only serves to lend an air of relevance and urgency to the volume—characteristics often lacking in weighty tomes of this nature. It is in this sense that the work seeks to establish itself as a companion in an ongoing journey rather than as a static reference work for a fossilized school of thought.

In the Introduction, the editors articulate their vision of both poststructuralism and the present volume. They propose a rethinking of poststructuralism as a dynamic movement refractory to any ‘ism’ and describe it as an ‘intellectual and institutional event’ (4) the ramifications of which remain very much in play. Approaching poststructuralism as an event—the apex of which occurred from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s—grants it a specificity that, firstly, frees the volume from having to offer a codified overview of a wider spectrum of thinkers associated with poststructuralism but who are not emergent in this specific period and that, secondly, ensures that the event of poststructuralism is not reduced to a static set of reified tenets. In the interest of honoring this specificity, the volume primarily restricts itself to seven key figures: Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Felix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida.

Following this engaging introduction, the book is divided into four main parts, with each part containing stand-alone essays on specific aspects of the more general topic. Part I explores the intellectual and historical factors conditioning the emergence of poststructuralism. Part II examines the methods that characterize the work of key poststructuralist thinkers. Part III, the largest of the four parts and the core of the work, offers an overview of four axial themes of poststructuralism, with several essays devoted to each theme. Part IV presents thoughts on possible trajectories that might be followed by the range of ideas collectively bundled under the term ‘poststructuralism’.

Part I, ‘Emergence’, offers three insightful essays on the complex development of the poststructuralist movement. Poststructuralism, viewed from this perspective, is implicated with any number of fields – Marxism, psychoanalysis, existentialism, phenomenology, postcolonialism—none of which it should be solely identified with. The first essay, Simon Lumsden’s ‘Poststructuralism and Modern European Philosophy’ offers a portrait of the seminal concerns of post-structuralism *vis-à-vis* a contrast with Gadamer’s hermeneutics and an argued kinship with Heidegger’s rejection of a metaphysical subject. The critique of the subject—with Nietzsche and Kierkegaard cited as key early thinkers—is rightly presented as the defining problematic of poststructuralist thought. However, given the significance of these two towering 19th century figures, it is intriguing that Lumsden insists on positioning Heidegger as the pivotal figure in the critique of the metaphysical subject that informs poststructuralism. This may reflect the overarching intention of the volume to present poststructuralism as a uniquely 20th century phenomenon. Following this chapter, Simon Choat leads us on a post-war trip ‘From Marxism to Poststructuralism’. Marxism is presented as a ‘toolbox’ (50) for poststructuralism—as something to be appropriated, analyzed, critiqued,—and, in this sense, a significant influence. Most notably, as highlighted by Foucault, the metaphysical, teleological and scientific ‘pretensions’ (56)

of Marxism are to be criticized, and these flaws leave it particularly unequipped to offer a suitably non-essentialist, nuanced portrait of a subject implicated in a nexus of power relations refractory to an exploitative economic structure.

Finally, in what might be the most intriguing of the chapters in this first part of the volume, Craig Lundy explores the ‘post’ in poststructuralism by considering the ways in which the concerns of thinkers dubbed ‘poststructuralists’ might be differentiated from the commitments characteristic of the stream of thought referred to as ‘structuralism’. In particular, the questions of why we are even interested in this alleged transition and of the importance of these two terms in the contemporary intellectual framework—bringing to the fore, for example, the axial issues raised by Saussurian structural linguistics—are discussed in detail. This chapter functions as the most effective stand-alone introduction to the concerns and issues constitutive of poststructuralist thought. Most intriguing is the ostensibly anachronistic notion that a clear picture of classical structuralism only emerges *after* the movement designated as poststructuralism has been identified. Indeed, we may justifiably ask: ‘where does one end and the other begin?’ (84).

Part II consists of four chapters on the various research methods employed by central poststructuralist thinkers. In his essay on Foucault’s research methodology, Nick Hardy traces Foucault’s utilization of archaeology and then of the more characteristically poststructuralist genealogical method. Hardy points out that while the adoption of the latter method—influenced by a Nietzschean approach to the axial concept of power—might be interpreted as an evolution in Foucault’s thought, we should be wary of presenting it as displacing the former in his work. The other chapters in this section offer insightful examinations of deconstruction (Derrida), *écriture féminine* (Cixous and Irigaray) and schizoanalysis (Guattari and Deleuze).

Part III, ‘Themes’, focusses on four core themes of poststructuralism, *viz.*: structure and subject; language and text; form and institution; resistance and limit. The chapters on structure and subject explore interrelated questions pertaining to the core issues of subjectivity and agency. The first of three chapters on the theme of language and text, entitled ‘Derrida’s Language: Play, Differance and (Con)text’, is equal parts illuminating and infuriating. Author Nicole Anderson compellingly defends Derrida from his many critics; however, while her discussion is thorough and erudite, Anderson’s repeated assertions that Derrida’s detractors either do not understand his work or have simply not read it (251; 254; 266) do begin to appear as something like special pleading.

The next two chapters focus on Cixous and Irigaray, respectively. Tara Puri’s essay charts out how Cixous subverts the phallogentric discourse of traditional philosophical thought with a disruptive ‘libidinal’ (272) form of writing referred to as an *écriture féminine*. Yvette Russell characterizes Irigaray as a thinker whom we should be wary of categorizing at all. Nonetheless, we can espy in Irigaray’s work a feminist poststructuralist project that can be divided into three phases: a first phase critiquing the phallogentric tendencies of the dominant Western philosophical tradition; a second phase reorganizing the very system of representation characteristic of that tradition; and a third phase exploring a vision of sexual difference.

The next suite of four essays focus on the theme of ‘Form and Institution’. The first focusses on Kristeva, photography and the indexicality of the photographic image. This essay includes a particularly fascinating case study of early Victorian photographic images. Next comes an examination of the Deleuzian analysis of cinema and the production of the new via a mapping of the movement from the picture to the motion picture. From here we move to a discussion of the potential

of the contemporary art museum employing Guattari's *The Three Ecologies*. The suite concludes with another utilization of Guattari's work—this time with an analysis of the manner in which it suggests possible resistance to the forces of capitalism and neo-liberalism.

The last three chapters in Part III centre on the theme of 'Resistance and Limit'. First we have, through a discussion of Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze, a characterization of poststructuralism as political resistance, albeit resistance that has notable limits. The next chapter, by Veronique Bergen, continues the examination of poststructuralism and resistance through a consideration of the dramatic forms of expression in the works of Deleuze and Cixous. Finally, in an illuminating essay entitled 'Politics in-between Nihilism and History', Corinne Enaudeau, concerned with 'what is at stake in the current social struggles' (438), examines how a consideration of Lyotard and the problem of nihilism can be instructive in resisting and contesting political injustice.

The essays constituting Part IV, 'Trajectories', offer thought-provoking meditations on what may be called the poststructuralist intellectual diaspora. Paul Bowman's essay on 'The Receptions of Poststructuralism' contests the notion that poststructuralism is a French phenomenon or that it can be identified with a particular geographic locale or isolated socio-political movement. In the next chapter, Caroline Rooney explores the symbiotic relationship between poststructuralism, postcolonial theory and liberation theory. In the final chapter of Part IV, Benoit Dillet, one of the editors of the volume, interviews Bernard Stiegler, paying particular attention to Stiegler's views on the political relevance of poststructuralist theory.

It is apropos of the overall tenor of the volume that the concluding chapter should be framed as a question. The conclusion, entitled 'Poststructuralism today?', refuses to offer a simplistic portrait of the state of the art of poststructuralism. Instead, it examines how poststructuralism as an emergent event has been, and continues to be, submerged in and expressed through a diverse range of philosophical and political movements. Culminating with this chapter, *The Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism* offers an engaging and immersive exploration of the many facets of the ongoing event of poststructuralist thought.

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