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Martin McDonagh, the director of the award winning ‘Three Billboards’ film had this to say, “I’m coming from a punk rock background: The Clash and the Pogues. It’s all about trying to shake things up. Writing is about lying, telling tales. You are taking people to places that they hadn’t thought about before” (the latter claim a potential rallying call for psychoanalysis). Now, that may not be to everybody’s taste but, sadly, such considerations are a long way off for Weatherill at so many moments in this ill-tempered sneer of a book. Setting off with an eager enthusiasm to examine the alleged afflictions of our contemporary world, with the unnuanced verdict that, as we all head for hell in a handcart, all blighted by simultaneous alienation and unacknowledged despair, we are called upon to admit to a catastrophic social and spiritual crisis. According to him, there are two principal events that are critical in having spawned such a jaundiced and ultimately pessimistic world view: one was the student uprisings and libidinal unleashing of the 1960’s, the other, apparently, are the ideas stemming from Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘Anti Oedipus’ book published in 1972. Now, one might hold that the latter had considerable bearing on the emergence of Schizoanalysis, somewhat marginal within the multiplicities of forms that psychoanalysis may take, but whatever else, hardly mainstream within the concerns of what Weatherill sees as the anti-authoritarian Left. It is they who are principally held responsible for what is read off as the seemingly unstaunchable ‘victory of the inhuman.’

The basic assumption is that via this orgy of cultural and sexual revolution, the Left has been complicit in promoting, despite claims to be concerned with disrupting the Capitalist System, a collusive acquiescence in the commodification of our lives by valorising our enjoyment (aka jouissance) at all costs. The Anti Oedipus book is understood to be rejecting the ‘basic matrix of marriage and family’ in favour of a ‘freewheeling individualistic mode of pleasure,’ all sustained by an unmitigated
hatred of all authority, tradition and morality. There is much that has the vein of a *Daily Mail* article about the looney Left, where he situates the complexities and the variations that inform the writings of Baudrillard, Badiou, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Nietzsche to name but a few – for so many of us the luminaries of post-war Western thought – all under the rubric of these Anti Oedipal initiatives, all co-opted into an undifferentiated mass. In fairness, he makes a perfectly decent fist of bringing much of Levinas’s ideas to life but, for the rest, he compulsively displays a will to ignorance. At one point, he nails his colours to the mast when citing Christopher Hitchens and his claim that “it becomes more than a moral duty to betray the Left. It becomes a pleasure.” ‘Betray’ being the operative word. Much that is being peddled are the worn out tropes of a Richard Littlejohn/Jordan Peterson universe: the anti-feminism, anti-Islam, anti-trans, anti-abortion assertions. A mere example of these sensibilities will have to suffice; Weatherill writes: “Just think of the many achievements to be notched up for feminism. 42 per cent of marriages in the UK end in divorce, mostly initiated by courageous, intelligent women, who are then free to live lives of sexual freedom again” (71). In other words it is feminism’s fault that the patriarchal orthodoxies are no longer so straightforwardly upheld.

One knows that one is hardly in safe hands when he suggests the possibility that Deleuze was at one time in analysis with Lacan, which was never on the cards. Indeed, anyone with a serious interest in the intricacies of the work of Deleuze and Guattari would be well advised to avoid this poorly written hatchet job. The house style is to write with a symbol, an exclamation mark utilised to flag up yet another scornful insistence. It is beyond the scope of this review to catalogue the innumerable instances in which there appears to be a wilful inability to comprehend what is at stake in so many of the thinkers’ ideas. So one or two instances will unfortunately have to suffice. At one point, there is the claim that Foucault et al. are engaged in vicious, untenable and ultimately anti-human ideas with the suggestion that ‘man is dead.’ There is no sense that what is at stake is the issue of the perniciousness of identity, of the collapse into the closure of representation: anything that we take ourselves to be we are
not. All marinated in Weatherill’s pining for “the original myth (that) installed binary gender differentiation” (13). There is a repeated confusion between self and identity; again he has this to say: “The absent Other (aka God, the Father) absents the self, nullifies the self, after torturing it with its worthlessness. The subject thus identifies with a nothing, an absence” (159). A nothing is not ‘not anything’ and the primacy of presence is quite other than an absence. Similarly, the Deleuzian notion of the ‘body without organs’ is read off as a valorisation of disembodiment, of ‘disincarnation,’ rather than a proposal offering an emancipation from the normative organisation, codification of our embodied selves. So much of this is written with an academic veneer which veils that so much is little more than the reiteration of much that could be situated under the sign of old school, right wing cant – in so many ways no more than an old fashioned conservative, mourning the diminution of religious faith and the traditional family.

But let us leave considerations of Weatherill’s primary thrust to one side and examine his claim to think psychoanalysis differently, which ultimately boils down to the wish to resituate Freudian psychoanalysis within a ‘radical Christian (or more pertinently Catholic) perspective.’ The claim being that it is ‘orthodoxy (that) is radical,’ heroic even, and the orthodoxy that is being promoted is that the analyst knows best. Why? The analyst “…because of his training, reading, experience, etc., may have a liberating vision of the patient way in excess of the latter’s repetitive self positing” (139; my italics). In other words, the one who comes for analysis is inherently to be seen as less than – or, at the very least, there is a strong tilt in that direction. Another culling is this: “God asks Job who he is? Who is this whose ignorant words cloud my design in darkness? (Job 38:2). And Job, like every analysand, cannot answer!” (202; my italics). All converges on this insistence: “In order to get beyond the resistance which is always present, some aggressive appropriation will be required by the analyst and some reciprocal submission by the analysand” (137; my italics). We may recall Derrida’s Resistances of Psychoanalysis and his subtle rebuking of Freud, who had this to say about Irma. She seemed to Freud “foolish because she had not accepted (Freud’s) solution. Her
friend would have been wiser, that is to say would have yielded sooner” (Derrida, 1998: 9). As if the desire of the analyst is that the other should yield, submit to the superior wisdom of the analyst; you will be in truth if you do not resist my solution. It is this concept of the analyst with the assumption of his or her superior wisdom, a form of looking down on the other in-mixed with an imposition of a particular world view that will inevitably provoke immense resistance. Or at least some of us would vehemently hope so.

Whilst acknowledging Derrida’s ideas of “donating affirmation” as being one of the hallmarks of the analyst’s positioning, Weatherill seeks to designate the theological as providing “the ground [for psychoanalysis] and guards it against the violent unleashing forces” which he compulsively insists is the Anti-Oedipal legacy (186; my italics). One might say it is none other than he who engages in a ‘violent unleashing.’ Curiously, at one point, he co-opts the history of animal magnetism, mesmerism and trance states, ‘right down to psychoanalysis’ as all being part of a ‘theological legacy’ apparently because “all have the whiff of the miraculous about them” (185). That is as maybe but all hope is dashed that there be a recognition of the validity of the claim that ‘Psychoanalysis is merely a chapter in the history of trance’ when he sets up the false oppositionality between analysis and mere listening. At the heart of the psychoanalytic tie is the axiom hearing is being heard; the possibility of hearing the multiplicities of what we, the analysand, are saying is an effect of the facilitating environment, an effect of being heard. All quite other than an effect of the efficacity of the analyst’s words.

Towards the end of the book, Bion is quoted as follows: he “envisages the creation of ‘mental faeces,’ as ‘the proliferation of fragmented envy’” (222). As Weatherill rightly points out, “envy is wildly indiscriminate” (223) – precisely as our man is, with regards to the subtleties and complexities of all these disparate thinkers, all congealed into the homogenised pen of the Anti-Oedipal. So often, it can feel as if those herded into this unprivileged enclosure appeared to be having too much fun, too much enjoyment, provoking this desperate nostalgia. “How did we lose the great and medieval Catholic vision?” (186). Whilst Derrida’s sug-
estion that contemporary Christianity “is incapable of reflecting on the orgiastic mystery that Platonic thinking incorporates” (Derrida, 1995: 24; Weatherill, 2017: 208) might be one answer, I cannot resist the following anecdote. I was leaving a coffee shop in Miami a few years back and I came across a bumper sticker proclaiming ‘Not all Catholic priests are paedophiles’ – to which the obvious rejoinder might be: ‘But a lot of them were.’

References