

Book Reviews

CELEBRATING FEMALE DESIRE: RE-VIEWING PLEASURE AND POLITICS IN THE CINEMA

Shameem Kabir

Daughters of Desire – Lesbian Representations in Film

London and Washington, DC: Cassell, 1997, 248 pp., ISBN 0-304-33382-4

This is a timely and comprehensive collection of essays on the subject of lesbian representation in film. The author's success in combining rigorous scholarship with a very personal approach is remarkable and is due to the way in which the thoroughly theorized material is mediated by her conversational, sometimes almost chatty, style. Kabir's modest introductory statement that she is 'not a scholar' (p. 7) is contradicted by the nine excellent and thought-provoking chapters which follow. Her offering of the collection 'not as an authority, but in the spirit of sharing, speculating, daring' (p. 7) may sum up the impulse behind her work but it does not do justice to the cogency of her thesis, which is perhaps best summed up in the book's final statement that

... we clearly need a revised system of representing the female, where we celebrate non-phallogentric possibilities that accord the woman her equality *and* her difference, that account for men *and* women in a new symbolic order, in another structuration of sociality. (p. 231)

In arguing her thesis Kabir engages with familiar themes in provocative and sometimes radically new ways drawing on some 20 films to illustrate and substantiate the issues raised. Fetishism, mothering, identification, rage, trauma and agency are all subjected to fresh enquiry and analysis and in the process Kabir makes use of a wide spectrum of diverse discourses: psychoanalysis, black politics, cultural criticism, film and literary theory, history, philosophy anthropology and sociology. Thus numerous voices inform and enrich this text in illuminating ways. Nevertheless Kabir's own bold and engaging voice is never overwhelmed as she remains firmly in control of her argument. Indeed, one of the strengths of this text lies in its author's self-reflexivity and confidence in the perspectives afforded her by her multiple positioning as black, Asian and lesbian to illuminate and to interrogate established theory and practice.

The fundamental impulse underpinning this work seems to me to be to open up the spaces – both rhetorical and actual – occupied by the makers and viewers of lesbian cinema, indeed of all popular cinema, and to enlarge these to be fully inclusive of lesbian experience. Kabir's is a reconstructionist project which makes use of deconstruction as a way into building socially transformative alternatives. Wonderfully honest in her willingness to challenge orthodoxy in whatever area, including feminist, lesbian and black theory and politics, she is not averse to raiding 'the master's tools' (Lorde, 1984: 112) when she deems them useful for

dismantling or rebuilding. Above all she wants to *change* the world not simply to redefine or reinterpret it and she believes sufficiently in the potential of film and her own and our agency to present a very powerful case.

Only two areas of this book mitigate against complete satisfaction with it as a popular text for film enthusiasts, generally, and as a useful reference for film scholars, specifically. The first of these is a matter of style. While I think that the pattern Kabir follows in each chapter works well on the whole, there is a tendency sometimes to digress from the particular to the general too meticulously and for too long before returning to the film(s) under discussion. Mostly she rescues herself just in time, but sometimes this occurs a little late. Perhaps greater recourse to the use of footnotes might have been the solution in such instances.

Second – and I think this is a more serious flaw as far as scholars are concerned – I felt the lack of a thoroughly comprehensive indexing system. Given the usefulness of the book as reference, it is a pity that the many and varied themes and issues explored within it do not appear in the index. So, although the book is certainly a valuable resource, even in its present form, I believe it would have proved more user friendly if it had facilitated the research process in this way.

However, despite these reservations, *Daughters of Desire* undoubtedly makes a valuable contribution to film literature and I highly recommend it both to film scholars and to readers outside this specific remit – to anyone, in fact, who is interested in the relationship of culture and society.

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OUR BODIES, OUR PROJECTS: POSTHUMAN THOUGHTS OF SELVES AND OTHERS

Jacquelyn N. Zita
Body Talk: Philosophical Reflections on Sex and Gender
New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, 298 pp., ISBN 0-231-10543-6

Despite its seemingly straightforward title, this book is both more and less than what the phrase 'body talk' may lead readers, especially after the boost of 'new body theory' in recent years, to expect. More, in the sense that Zita, an established feminist philosopher, presents a wide-ranging and deeply probing theoretical perspective on the condition of the gendered and sexualized human body in the age of postmodernity, and thus takes us way beyond the level of ordinary, everyday 'talk'. Less, in the sense that the body as such eventually – and almost inevitably – remains mute, an object to be talked about rather than being able to talk (for) itself, even if the author makes some – variously successful – attempts at making her body speak itself directly to the reader.

Divided into three sections ('Articulations', 'Disarticulations' and 'Rearticulations'), each of which is preceded by a brief introduction in which the subsequent

chapters are outlined and placed in historical, political and theoretical perspective, the book contains ten exploratory essays on questions of the body as they have been evolving over the last few decades within 'corporeal philosophy' (p. 1) and cultural studies. Regardless of the subject, each chapter stands out from much other work in this field for being generally well-researched, carefully argued and written in an accessible style. With topics ranging from the commercial and normalizing production of black male athleticism in the body of Magic Johnson, and of the equally normative (re)production of the socially privileged, white, heterosexual female body through the strategic marketing of Prozac, to the more distinctly deviant constructions of the 'Male Lesbian', the Fem-body and the (Anzaldúan) body of the *mestiza*, Zita casts her net widely over 'body matters' as they have come to play centre-stage in a variety of theoretical and critical debates. Indeed, as she puts it in the general introduction, the book attempts to 'cross generations of contemporary body theory [she] has experienced in her own life' (p. 1).

Roughly spanning the period from the 1970s to the 1990s, the author identifies the 'emergence of multicultural and ethnic studies, postmodern theory, queer theory, and attacks on disciplinary formations' as the principal markers of this transitional era. While valuable (and long overdue) in itself, this attempt adequately to historicize developments in contemporary body theory, but especially the chosen approach, also has its drawbacks; or rather, does not quite fulfil its ostensible purpose. For rather than offering a critical genealogy of the emergence of the 'new body theory' per se, and thus showing why and how certain questions concerning the body appear to have acquired increasing theoretical and political urgency, Zita opts for newly addressing some of the knotty problems contemporary body theorists have been variously struggling with over and over again. Her arguments hence occasionally sound somewhat tired, and in a few instances, she ends up rehearsing what has been said equally eloquently and convincingly elsewhere and before.

Admittedly, the virtual boom in theoretical and critical writings on the (post)human body in recent years has made it extremely hard to say anything original or even surprising about the subject, despite its continued puzzling nature and complexity. Still, several of Zita's contributions to the debate will probably appear staid and repetitive even to readers who have not been trying to keep up with some of the most radical developments in this field. Her defence of the lesbian femme's body against the time-honoured stereotypes of passivity, powerlessness and invisibility, for instance, undertaken from a highly personalized perspective, is a case in point. The notion of the 'powerless' femme was effectively taken up and invalidated by political activist and writer Joan Nestle (see, for example, Nestle, 1987, 1992; Pratt, 1995; Newman, 1995). To these, Zita's chapter 'FemFire: A Theory in Drag', part of the book's middle section, does not seem to add anything new, and what is more, suffers rather than gains from the author's wish to 'experiment with different ways to bring a more personal edge to body theory' (p. 5).

A similar sense of walking along well-trodden grounds came over me while reading 'Anzaldúan Body', the second chapter in the collection's final section. By no means do I wish to downplay the groundbreaking importance of Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) mythopoetic work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, or to deny the enormous political and theoretical potential the book has continued to have for a great many feminist critics ever since its first publication. And yet, this incessantly celebrated text has been used to so many different purposes, and to serve so many different arguments over the years, that Zita's discussion – in itself a capable

analysis of the dominant Cartesian body-concept in relation to that of the *mestiza* – ultimately did not succeed in capturing my imagination.

Among the numerous truly captivating chapters, I should draw special attention to that on bisexuality, 'Fiddling with Preference', in which the author subjects recent work in sex research (by, among others, Dean Hamer and Peter Copeland) to an astute and compelling sociocultural critique. Drawing on insights from both queer and postcolonial studies, Zita explores the productive significance of bisexuality as a 'conceptual challenge' to a modernist – and, in effect, indeed postmodern – science of sexuality. By placing the material realities of the bisexual body/subject in the context of currently widely used notions such as hybridity and multiplicity, she concludes with a 'call to an ontology' of a 'new multiplicitous politic of sex' (p. 138), thus effectively blending various strands of postmodern theory to come up with perhaps not so much unexpected yet both theoretically and politically constructive results.

An overall successful attempt at 'bringing the body (back) in' by writing from a more personal angle is a chapter titled 'Venus: The Looks of Body Theory'. In this penultimate essay, Zita offers a fascinating and illuminating analysis of her own and other critics' highly divergent responses to Jennie Livingston's controversial documentary film, *Paris is Burning*. By relating her initial sense of visual pleasure while watching the film to the vehement expressions of visual displeasure by critics such as bell hooks, Jackie Goldsby, Judith Butler and Robert Reid-Pharr, she carefully explores the complex origins of such sensual and intellectual dissent and powerfully foregrounds the theoretical and critical implications of each spectator's actually embodied racial, sexual and gendered sociohistorical location. Hence, rather than merely bringing together what in itself has grown into a substantial body of criticism on a particular film, she thus successfully exploits an actually genealogical approach to arrive at a genuinely innovative and clarifying analysis.

A final inspiring and highly valuable chapter I have space to briefly discuss here is one I have already mentioned in passing, 'Prozac Feminism'. Appearing in the book's opening section, this essay stands out in the collection for dealing with the particularly urgent and as yet not sufficiently explored realm of body matters in the age of postmodernity. By carefully tracing the overwhelmingly effective marketing of what has rapidly become one of the most widely used prescription drugs in US society today, Zita shows how the instant popularity and financial success of this and similar antidepressants is an inherent part of a postmodern cultural formation. At the end of the millennium, when consumerism and excessive individualism have become the keywords in what appears to be a new religion, one's body has become a 'project', or, as Zita herself puts it, the 'body becomes one location where the self can find an anchor and a place from which to narrate a foundation for itself' (p. 67). Considering the long-standing association of women and (unstable) emotions, of excessive femininity with the need to control 'unruly nature', commercial advertising's traditional orientation towards primarily female purchasers, plus women's increasingly successful efforts at breaking free from the most constraining structures of western patriarchy, it is no surprise to find that, in such a context, the majority of Prozac users are (white, heterosexual, middle-class) females. Zita's clarifying account of how these divergent strands of late 20th-century culture tie in with one another to generate the heterosexual body as a '*yielded norm*, a norm often desired and a desire that yields itself to commodified completion' (p. 9) clearly belongs among the most acute and conceptually energizing writings coming out of the 'new body theory' today. Thus, despite my occasional misgivings about some of the

essays collected here, this chapter alone would have made *Body Talk* as a whole well worth reading.

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THE ADVANTAGES OF SEPARATE SCHOOLING AND THE SHORTCOMINGS OF MULTICULTURALISM

Kaye Haw (with contributions from Saeeda Shah and Maria Hanifa)
Educating Muslim Girls
 Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1998, 203 pp., ISBN 0-335-19773-6

This is an important and useful contribution to both the discussions about single-sex school for girls and separate Muslim schools for girls. Its core is research done in two girls' schools: one a comprehensive state school including girls from different ethnic backgrounds, 34 percent of them Muslim, and the other, a private school set up and financed by a Muslim community, teaching only Muslim girls whose parents mostly come from one region in Pakistan. Basically, Haw's research shows that Muslim girls feel more comfortable and are more empowered in a context where 'being a woman and being a Muslim is not an issue' (p. 19). They produce better academic results, are more encouraged to achieve academically and feel freer to discuss and question the discourse of 'Muslim-ness'. This is, Haw explains, because the staff of mainly Muslim female teachers is able to establish good relationships with the parents, especially the mothers and because, as Islam is the common ground on which everything is discussed, the girls are not constructed as a strange 'other', as is the case in the state school.

There, the teachers are also mainly women, interested in deconstructing gender roles and encouraging the girls to achieve good results and carve out an independent and successful life for themselves. In promoting these liberal and radical feminist views, however, the teachers fear that they are 'treading on the cultural toes' (p. 124) of the Muslim girls because they see them, especially their parents, as having different cultural values, which stand against their philosophy of 'independent, self-confident, assertive' women (p. 124). Thus, they are caught between their desire to encourage the girls to be independent and their wish to respect what they see as another culture. The problem is that, as opposed to the Muslim school, they do not treat the Muslim girls as individuals, but as a group, thereby constructing a reified image of 'Islam' and its treatment of girls and women which almost amounts to a stereotype. Confronted with these

contradictory attitudes from the side of the teachers, the Muslim girls tend to feel insecure, are not encouraged, and, therefore, they often retreat into silence. Ironically, the aims of multiculturalism and the respect for other cultures account for the tensions and anxieties on the side of the staff and make life for the Muslim girls in the state school difficult.

Does this mean, then, that we should be in favour not only of single-sex girls' schools, but also of girls' schools for Muslim girls or, for that matter, for girls and boys of every religion or ethnicity living in a country? Haw sees such a perspective as a danger, not a solution. Her concluding chapter discusses the difficulties of multiculturalism and equal opportunities policies in doing justice to the 'deeper needs' of ethnic minorities (as, for instance, a spiritual education) that go beyond such 'superficial' elements as clothes, eating, prayer rooms. Her alternative reads like this:

... a post-structural approach and analysis of the practices concerning the educational experiences of Muslim girls has relevance to future initiatives and innovations in the social justice debate, because it allows for a theory which transcends agency/structure dualisms and avoids simplistic notions of patriarchal power in understanding the complex educational experiences and (by implication) girls from a plurality of backgrounds. I hope this means there will come a time when social justice and equal opportunity reform has reached the point where Muslims (or any other minority group) do not feel the need, or indeed have the need, to educate their children in 'separate schools'. (p. 182)

I have quoted this at length because I think the passage exemplifies both the strength and the weakness of the book. Kaye Haw is very much at pains to explore the complexities of the issues involved in her research. She discusses at length the reasons why she, as a white feminist, is doing research into the schooling of Muslim girls (to look at the interdependencies of 'race', gender and racism). For example, she has asked the head of a Muslim school (Maria Hanifa) to write her own account about why and how the school was established in order to introduce her view and perspective into the book. She also asked a Muslim teacher from Pakistan, who spent years in Britain to study and got leave from her work in Pakistan to do her PhD (Saeeda Shah), to contribute to the book by presenting some basic information about the position of women and the education of girls in Islamic religion and culture. All this contributes to a multilayered, multidimensional view on the subject.

But at the same time there is a surprising neglect of views and perspectives which might have helped to clear the way for a better understanding and a firmer position concerning the issue of schooling for Muslim girls. Though Haw claims that her main interest is to make the voices of those heard who are normally not listened to, we learn almost nothing about the views of the Muslim girls themselves. Occasionally, a piece of an account is quoted to illustrate the point that the girls feel comfortable in the Muslim school and uncomfortable in the state school. Eleven of the 262 imaginary stories written by the girls about a Muslim girl who comes top in all her exams are reproduced. But we are not even informed from which school the girls are who wrote them, or given any other information about the girls and their relations towards their schools. The problem is not that I did not believe the author that the girls in the Muslim school wrote more positive stories about academic achievement or felt more comfortable in general. The problem is that in working with 262 girls there must have been a variety of perspectives,

contradictions and tensions in both schools which would have been worth exploring because they might have shown a more multifaceted picture of schooling in both schools. Instead, it is somehow assumed in the book by all its authors that because the girls come from Muslim families they must identify themselves as Muslims. An account focusing more on the girls might have made it easier to develop some proposals as to how reforms in equal opportunity should be undertaken in order to meet the deeper needs of minority groups. In particular, the talk about giving voice to the silenced and not imposing one's views on others make the virtual neglect of the variety of the girls' voices annoying. The space that has been taken up in order to tell us again and again about how complex issues are and how complicated the position of the researcher is (with which I totally agree) could have been used much better by letting the girls speak.

Another aspect that might have facilitated a perspective for the future would have been a discussion of the lack of Muslim teachers in the state school. This school is taken as an example of multiculturalism and, for that matter, failed multiculturalism. But is this really multiculturalism, when more than a third of the students are Muslims and virtually none of the staff are? Does the problem not lie in the inability or unwillingness to provide minorities with equal access to the positions of power, where there views are not marginalized but are part of the forces that shape and determine discourse and policies?

In spite of these problems, there is a lot to gain from reading this book – especially a better understanding of (one possible way of) schooling in a Muslim school and of the shortcomings of some versions of multiculturalism. We are also encouraged to think about reformulating our concerns: maybe the question is not so much whether girls (or boys, for that matter) are educated in a single-sex school or in a monocultural or multicultural school, but whether they are in a setting where they are respected so that they are able, together with teachers and parents, to decide about the way in which schooling is done.

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GENDER AND HISTORICAL MEMORY IN THE CZECH LANDS

Marci Shore, Jacqui True and Eva Vesinova-Kalivodova (eds)
One Eye Open [Jednim okem] Special Issue: Vol. 1 (Spring)
Prague: Both Eyes Open, 1998, 155 pp., ISSN 1211-9148

The work under review here is the sixth issue of *One Eye Open* [Jednim okem] a collaborative English/Czech bilingual journal, published in Prague, devoted to 'women's issues in Central and Eastern Europe'. Founded by a concerned American feminist, Deborah Dubois, who at the time was residing in Prague, this pioneering periodical was originally conceived in 1993 as a quarterly; since 1996 it has been coming out annually. The present volume is the first of two special issues that focus on 'gender and historical memory'. While some organizational and editorial responsibilities were shouldered by Marci Shore and Jacqui True, the major force behind this volume, as behind most preceding it, was Eva Vesinova-Kalivodova. (In addition to teaching translation and American literature at the Institute for Translation Studies at Charles University, the Czech editor is now establishing a women's studies curriculum at that institution's humanities division, the Philosophical Faculty. She is also on the advisory board

of the Gender Studies Centre in Prague.) The publisher, Both Eyes Open, is a Prague-based not-for-profit organization that promotes public discussion about gender issues in society and culture. This special issue of *One Eye Open* was published with the support of a grant from the Sasakawa Foundation, Japan.

As stated by Jacqui True in the Editorial Introduction ('Grammars of Gender and New Narratives of History'),

Central to the theme of [this] special issue is [the] claim that historical events and transformations have different meanings and consequences when seen from the perspective of women's lives. Thus a gendered consideration of the various historical phases and discourses of social transformation in the Czech context, can begin to invigorate anew a critical discussion of the ties of past, present and future. (p. iii)

This clearly stated goal, for the most part, is well achieved through the seven individual selections that comprise this issue of *One Eye Open*.

Somewhat ironic is the nature of the first article, 'Reconstructing Historical Memory', a retrospective sketch written specifically for the volume by the eminent Canadian scholar of 20th-century Central Europe, H. Gordon Skilling. Relying on his and his wife's personal experiences in Czechoslovakia, Skilling unabashedly notes,

Gender was not . . . a central feature of our experience or memory or a predominant factor in my own thinking. My purpose in this rough outline of Czechoslovak history was to provide a general context for the essays which follow and which deal expressly with gender aspects of that history. (p. 5)

Perhaps one could argue that, in a sense, the explicit lack of gender consciousness in what purports to set the background for the topic 'Gender and Historical Memory' serves to underscore the validity and timeliness of the project undertaken in this volume. Unlike the situation in North America and Western Europe, the role of gender in Czech cultural history is still a relatively unexamined phenomenon. Therefore the efforts represented by this special issue of *One Eye Open*, and the forthcoming second volume, are an important step towards correcting this regrettable situation.

In the journal under review, the reconstruction of historical memory is found notably in two strikingly different works. The first is a stylistically unconventional and emotionally moving essay by one of the editors, Marci Shore, entitled 'Narrative/Archive/Trace: The Trial of Milada Horakova'. Born in 1901, Horakova became a prominent women's activist in Czechoslovakia of the 1930s, surviving imprisonment by the Nazis during the Second World War, only to be arrested and executed by the new Communist regime in 1950. Through an imaginative style of compositional montage, the author juxtaposes excerpts from primary texts, including Horakova's long-unpublished letters to her family, the transcript of her show trial and novels by Milan Kundera, with her own (Shore's) interpretative remarks. The latter, in part, are the author's personal response to what she found in Horakova's recently available archive. Through Shore's unusual text, the reader encounters an intersection of the voices of two women who are culturally and historically remote. From the sensitive perspective of a North American graduate student we experience the ordeal of a courageous woman who fell victim to the Stalinist show trials in Czechoslovakia.

The longest work included here (and to be continued in the second volume) comes from a major ongoing oral history project begun in 1996 under the auspices of the Gender Studies Centre in Prague. (The first two collections of interviews were published in Czech in 1998.) In 'More than a Family Saga', Jana Hradilkova interweaves selected fragments from interviews she had with three generations of women from one Czech family (ages 78, 52 and 30), providing the reader with fascinating insights into a wide range of life issues of ordinary people. As she states in her brief introduction, through a 'montage' of the separate interviews, she 'offers three narratives about life's tangles and turning points, about ways of understanding the world within and the world outside, about personal barriers and about trust – and above all about an uncommon will to rise above troubles' (p. 61). What Hradilkova does not remind us of specifically, but amply reveals through the voices of the women she interviewed, is the continued complexity of gender roles and human relationships from one generation to the next, despite changing external circumstances.

The remainder of the journal (just over one-third) deals with more contemporary topics. Marketa Rudikova has contributed a review of *Young Women of Prague*, a recent sociological study by Alena Heitlinger and Suzanna Trnka, which 'explores how opportunities have changed for Czech women; how women orient themselves and make choices within new conditions; and how the current temporal framework influences their choices' (p. 89). (The book appeared in London in 1997, and in Prague in 1998.) Although the title uncannily echoes another recent work – Wilma A. Iggers's (1995) *Women of Prague* – the content of the two books is entirely different. While Iggers, whose book is subtitled 'Ethnic Diversity and Social Change from the Eighteenth Century to the Present', introduces readers to the lives and writings of 12 prominent women who lived in the Czech capital during the past two centuries, Heitlinger and Trnka draw their generalizations about today's young Czech women from a sample of graduates from a nursing school. In her review, Rudikova judiciously indicates both the strengths and weaknesses of the study, preparing the reader for a productive encounter with Heitlinger and Trnka's book.

'Women on the Wires, or Czech Cyberfeminism' by Petra Jedlickova raises some provocative questions about the relationship between gender and today's computer technology. Logically, this essay might have been better placed at the end of the volume, since it only remotely deals with issues of historical memory. Instead, it challenges women to resist the typical prejudices against their engagement with technology, and urges them to join the Internet wave of the future. The bibliography on questions of feminism and technology is particularly useful.

The witty and engaging writing of Eva Hauserova, one of the Czech Republic's best-known advocates of feminism, has been a regular feature of *One Eye Open* since the journal's inception. This special issue excerpts the last chapter of her latest book: *You're a Woman After All. A Little Feminist Guidebook* (Hauserova, 1998). (I prefer novelist Iva Pekarkova's English rendition of the title, cited above, to that of Randall Lyman, who translated the title as *You Are Some Woman, Ain't You . . . (A Small and Moderate How-To-Be-a Feminist Guide)*.) Having already introduced concepts of western feminism(s) to Czech readers in her book *Broomsticks Can Also Be Used for Flying* (1995), Hauserova confronts the stereotypical misconceptions about feminism held by a majority of Czechs, men and women alike. From her latest small book of 'the most common prejudices about women', 'Prejudice No. 12' (published here for the first time in English) reads: 'Our women enjoy full rights and absolute freedom, with nothing preventing their

development and self-actualization' (p. 121). In an informal yet authoritative manner the author attempts to overcome the prevalent uninformed attitudes towards gender relations in Czech society, aiming to raise the consciousness of both women and men. The inclusion here of this chapter importantly reminds us of the fresh perspective that Hauserova's work brings to questions of gender and historical memory in the Czech lands.

The final essay in this volume is Iva Popovicova's intellectually demanding foray into feminist literary criticism, entitled 'Gender and the Kundera Paradigm: "Truth-telling" in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*'. After posing general questions about memory and truth ('First and foremost, what *is* national memory and how does one distinguish where its truth begins and where it ends?' (p. 133), the author seeks answers through an analysis of the motif of laughter in Kundera's novel. To develop her argument she creatively applies theoretical notions of Mikhail Bakhtin, Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva, among others. In her reading of the novel, 'Women are eventually displaced from producing their own laughter: on the level of personal, but also collective, memory that is fabricated through the lenses of the former' (p. 139). Although Popovicova admits that '[T]o claim that women's topos in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* produce or at least encourage an anti-feminist framework in the Czech Republic might be an overstatement', she does 'believe that these narratives of remembering cannot serve as axioms for attempts to construct, and "re-think" post-communist national consciousness' (p. 150). Through her detailed feminist interpretation of the novel, she does more than simply muster new arguments for Kundera's blatantly sexist (mis)representation of women. More importantly, especially in the context of *One Eye Open*, she provides a challenging model for the integration of the perspective of gender into future Czech literary criticism. (The Czech translation of this article will appear in the second volume of this special issue.)

With the just mentioned exception, each essay in this journal appears first in its original language, and then in Czech or English translation. The quality of translation of those pieces originally written in Czech varies. Two were excellently translated into English: Rudikova's review and Hauserova's 'Prejudice No. 12'. Least successful is the selection by Hradilkova from the Memory of Women Project, translated by two different people. The first part, done by Laura Bush-eikin, reads reasonably well, although there are some rough spots. For example, the composer Gounod appears as Goudon (p. 62). Unfortunately, the second part, translated by Simon Pellar, has some noticeable lapses. In his translation there are palpable problems with syntax, idiomatic usage and the choice of stylistic register, which might have been easily corrected by a competent native Anglophone copyeditor. Here I should also add that I found rather more typographical errors in the English texts than I as a reader can tolerate. Those too could have been readily caught by a native speaker of English. Since the bilingual nature of this journal is one of its important features, one hopes the next issue will reflect more care in this technical aspect of the project.

In conclusion, I would like to add that the long-established compact format of *One Eye Open* serves this special issue well. Dagmar Bromova's cover collage visually anticipates the topic 'gender and historical memory' developed within, effectively juxtaposing and superimposing images from the past and the present. And whatever small imperfections this volume may exhibit are definitely outweighed by the overall significance of the achievements it represents. Through the continued cooperative efforts of North American and Czech feminists, the 1998 special issue of *One Eye Open* is an important contribution to the ongoing project of giving voice to women's issues in Central Europe. Those who read it will,

undoubtedly, await the forthcoming appearance of the second volume with impatience.

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