

THE SPOILS OF FREEDOM: PSYCHOANALYSIS AND FEMINISM AFTER THE FALL OF SOCIALISM

Renata Salecl. London and New York:
Routledge, 1994.

by *Eva C. Karpinski*

Renata Salecl's study appears in the "Opening Out: Feminism for Today" series which, according to its editor Teresa Brennan, is committed to crossing disciplinary boundaries and returning feminist theory to current political questions. Salecl, a Slovenian philosopher and sociologist, introduces herself as "a feminist intellectual from Eastern Europe," a position she further problematizes by recognizing the conflicting claims on her by Western intellectuals, expecting her to be a kind of "privileged informer," and her own desire to address some fundamental issues in contemporary Western critical theory without being determined by her cultural background.

In fact, there is a constant tension in the book between these two perspectives: Salecl's political experience (her involvement in the opposition movement in Slovenia that led to the collapse of socialism and her participation in the struggle against nationalism and sexism in the post-socialist era) is coupled with her professional interest in philosophy, psychoanalysis, and feminism. The originality of her approach lies precisely in the reciprocity of these two perspectives. She gives a "new" theoretical reading to the political realities of Eastern Europe while offering new and often surprising insights into Western theory confronted with recent developments in Eastern Europe. In particular, she shows how the supposedly universal notions of democracy, human rights, or the capitalist society become incorporated into new political discourses in sometimes disturbing ways.

Salecl refers to her own East Euro-

pean "otherness" to illustrate how similarities and differences are constructed around power, how "sameness" of the Other often gets repressed and cultural differences are forcefully implemented. Since the questions of alterity are central to her argument, it is not surprising that she uses the framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis to explore the mechanism of ideological identification in the context of libidinal economy. Crucial here is the concept of fantasy understood as the way the subject organizes its enjoyment, which can explain why people are complicit with certain political discourses. According to Salecl, this Lacanian concept provides an important corrective to liberal theories of democracy that exclude fantasy and are thus unable to account for the fact that people will not always identify with the position that is ostensibly "good" for them.

The book is divided into two parts, moving from the particular ("the fall of socialism") to the universal ("its implications for theory"). I find the first part to be much stronger than the more speculative Part II, perhaps because the former successfully integrates theory and practice while the latter completely ignores the historical and material realities of people's lives. In Part I, Salecl offers a good analysis of such problems in today's post-socialist societies as ethnic tensions, neo-racism, nationalism, anti-feminism, and the emergence of the post-socialist moral majority, making constant cross-references between East European and Western countries. Particularly illuminating is her reading of the discourse of abortion in relation to the discourse of nationalism, as well as her two case studies of the working of fantasy behind the socialist enforcement of "normalization" after the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia and the struggle for hegemony in the former Yugoslavia.

In Part II, devoted to such theoretical issues as the liberal theory of justice, the self-binding of power in democracy, the subject's transgression of the law in socialism, and the problem of human rights and feminism,

Salecl makes several controversial and provocative claims, revealing her "democratic bias" *vis-à-vis* socialism (which to her seems to have been totally discredited by East European regimes). Salecl's "metaphysical" approach to human rights and her attempt to salvage the concept of "cogito" seem to me rather problematic and dangerous to the feminist project. The Marxist, feminist, or Foucauldian critiques of liberal democracy are either dismissed or given lip service while she firmly rests on orthodox Lacanian grounds. In this context, the weakness of Lacanian psychoanalysis as a "universal" explanatory scheme becomes apparent in that it disregards the historical and material differences, complexities, individual trajectories, and heterogeneity in the functioning of the two antagonists of Salecl's study, of what she calls the "socialist system" and "democracy" respectively.

BETWEEN THE FIELDS AND THE CITY: WOMEN, WORK AND FAMILY IN RUSSIA, 1861-1914.

Barbara Alpern Engel. Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1994.

by *Jacqueline M. Portuguese*

In her book, *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family in Russia, 1861-1914*, Alpern Engel sets out to analyze how the socio-economic changes which took place between the end of serfdom and the onset of the First World War affected the lives of Russian peasant women. While she ultimately leans toward the conclusion that peasant women were probably better off before the changes, Alpern Engel's main thesis is that the effects were ambiguous and contradictory, depending upon a woman's age, kin network, marital status, place of residence, and line of work. The changes which she refers to are those which accompanied the rise of industrialization and urbanization at the