

1 SIRI HUSTVEDT, *A Woman Looking at Men*
 2 *Looking at Women: Essays on Art, Sex, and*
 3 *the Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster,
 2016), 552 pp.

5 Siri Hustvedt's sixth collection of essays, *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women*, even deeper than her previous work, explores the gaps between various modes of thinking within different disciplines. Maintaining that "all human knowledge is partial" (xii),
 10 Hustvedt integrates findings from phenomenology, biology, neuroscience, cognitive sciences, psychoanalysis, linguistics, etc., in order to investigate profound philosophical questions, such as: Who are we? What is the self? Where do ideas come from? What is the mind and how is it related to the brain, the consciousness, and the body? What role do emotion, memory, and the unconscious play in perception? Hustvedt's goal is to "interrogate certainty and trumpet doubt and ambiguity" (149), and eventually inspire her reader to start asking questions about the received ideas and cultural truisms. Being a novelist and a feminist, an art admirer and a lecturer in psychiatry, a literary scholar and a public intellectual, Hustvedt attempts to "make sense" of plural perspectives (xiv) on many unsolved problems and complex phenomena, intercepting them with her own experiences, observations, and humor.

The first of three sections, "A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women," addresses the questions of art and perception. The title essay discusses the work of the three artists—Picasso, Beckmann, and de Kooning—in the larger framework of existing cultural ideas and codes associated with the man/woman binary. Thus, Hustvedt argues that centuries-long equating women with emotions and the body, referring to them by their first name in the books on art and labelling their pieces "woman's art" (32), while at the same time linking men to intellect and genius, promote unconscious ideas and biases against women that have become part of human perception. Hustvedt's own in-depth analyses of some paintings, however, disclose that great art escapes gender and sex categories—an idea that repeats itself in other essays of the first section, especially in her discussion of Louise Bourgeois's work in "My Louise Bourgeois."
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46 Hustvedt expands her theory of perceptual biases in the following articles of the first part,

referring to artists Jeff Koon and Anselm Kiefer, photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, filmmakers Pedro Almodóvar and Wim Wenders. Based on the latter's piece about the choreographer Pina Bausch, the author investigates "the perceptual chasm" (46) between on-screen and live performances, giving special attention to the concept of the body and its immediacy. In her essay on Susan Sontag, Hustvedt scrutinizes Sontag's lecture on classical pornography, her "posthumanist" position, and the meaning of the voyeuristic gaze, and comes to her own intriguing conclusion that, like sex, fiction, too, "is an occasion to leave one's self and make an excursion into the other" (77). In many essays in the first part of the collection, Hustvedt expresses her feminist position and encourages the reader to realize the underpinnings of perceptual biases: how "unconscious ideas about masculinity and femininity [...] infect our perceptions and [...] tend to overrate the achievements of men and underrate those of women" (81). In her essay "No Competition," Hustvedt exhaustively elaborates on this premise, illustrating it with a personal story—an incident that happened to her when interviewing the Norwegian writer Knausgaard who dismissed women writers as competition. In the last two articles of the first part, "The Writing Self and the Psychiatric Patient" and "Inside the Room," invoking her own experience as a volunteer writing teacher in a psychiatric clinic, Hustvedt draws many parallels between psychoanalysis and the therapeutic effects of creating art. Thus, the author conceives of writing fiction as a "form of transference" (127): both partake of the fictional and the real, both are "intuitive, unconsciously driven, rhythmic, emotional, and often ambiguous" (120), and both take place in "the world of the Between" (133), between the self and the other.

The second part, "The Delusions of Certainty," is a two hundred-page meditation on the mind-body problem "that has haunted Western philosophy since the Greeks" (xv). It is a very erudite, scholarly, and, therefore, more challenging for a broader audience essay. In it, Hustvedt indicates that she is "driven by a sense of urgency, in part because the unsolved problems of the mind and body are often treated as if they were behind us," when in fact they are not (156). So, the author's mission is "to dismantle certain truisms that have been flying at [her] from left and right for years, truisms about nature, nurture, genes,

1 twin studies, and the 'hardwired' brain" (156).
 2 In "Delusions of Certainty," Hustvedt criticizes
 3 Descartes's dualism, his very influential
 4 "belief that mind and body are two different
 5 substances" (144); Hustvedt denounces writers
 6 and journalists, Jonah Lehrer and Steven
 7 Pinker being among them, who "reduce
 8 scientific findings to convenient bite-sized
 9 pieces" and present hypotheses and half-
 10 truths as facts, turning "the speculative into
 11 the known" (178). Hustvedt is also skeptical
 12 of such ongoing fads as evolutionary psychol-
 13 ogy, artificial intelligence (AI), and the com-
 14 putational theory of mind (CTM), because
 15 she does not believe it is possible to separate
 16 the mind from the rest of the body. Instead,
 17 Hustvedt advocates a more holistic, "corporeal"
 18 (338) approach to the mind-body split,
 19 supporting her position with the examples of
 20 various psychosomatic disturbances and phe-
 21 nomena, such as false pregnancy, placebo/no-
 22 cebo, mirror-touch synesthesia, hysteria, sei-
 23 zures, etc., that suggest a certain indivisibility
 24 between the psyche and the soma. The author
 25 explores how "ideas, beliefs, wishes, and fears
 26 transform bodies" (205) and why emotions
 27 have been largely neglected in the sciences
 28 and medicine. Hustvedt does not claim to
 29 have all the answers; rather, she encourages
 30 her reader to think more critically and start
 31 asking questions and doubting the ideas taken
 32 for granted. Hustvedt conceives of doubt as a
 33 very noble feeling: "Doubt is not only a virtue
 34 in intelligence; it is a necessity" (340).

35 Section three, "What Are We? Lectures
 36 on the Human Condition," continues explor-
 37 ing the questions of the self and the nature
 38 of subjectivity. Most of the essays in the final
 39 part of the collection were developed from the
 40 talks Hustvedt had given at academic confer-
 41 ences, and, therefore, again address a trained
 42 audience. In "Borderlands: First, Second,
 43 and Third Person Adventures in Crossing
 44 Disciplines," the author promotes to procure
 45 multiple perspectives on the current problems
 46 and unresolved phenomena, in line with the
 47 lengthy essay that precedes it. Hustvedt insists
 48 on the importance of 'I' in academic papers
 49 and claims that a third-person objectivity is an
 50 illusion. It is in the essays of this last section
 51 that Hustvedt's own philosophical position,
 52 which can be termed as 'intersubjectivity,'
 53 starts to sound more and more prominently.
 54 Although Hustvedt gives a definition of the
 55 notion of intersubjectivity already in the "De-
 56 lusions of Certainty," the essays primarily

dealing with the concept are in the final part
 of the collection. "Intersubjectivity refers to
 our knowing and relating to other people in
 the world, our being with and understanding
 them, one subject or person to another, and
 how we make a shared world through these re-
 lations" (242). Hustvedt reiterates that "there
 is no self without an other, no subjectivity
 without intersubjectivity" (357). A person, a
 self, is literally *of* an other, being generated
 inside a woman's body; and, moreover, "no
 one becomes a person in isolation"; "We are
 beings embedded in a world" (392). The re-
 lationships between people are fundamental
 for experiencing the world and defining what
 these experiences mean.

In "Why One Story and Not Another?,"
 "Becoming Others," "Subjunctive Flights:
 Thinking Through the Embodied Reality of
 Imaginary Worlds," and "Kierkegaard's Pseud-
 onyms and the Truths of Fiction," Hustvedt,
 among other topics, contemplates the nature
 of imagination and the mechanisms of literary
 creation and engages with author-reader inter-
 subjective collaboration. Hustvedt reveals that
 she becomes her characters when writing in
 their voice; to her, "[t]o write or to read a novel
 means becoming others" (377)—an idea that
 was first expressed in the first section's essay
 on Sontag (77). Hustvedt also emphasizes the
 crucial role of the reader in the creation of tex-
 tual meaning. In "Remembering in Art: The
 Horizontal and the Vertical" and many other
 essays of the present collection, the author ex-
 plores the connection between memory and
 imagination and engages with the artist-viewer
 intersubjectivity. In her essay on suicide, Hus-
 tvedt considers various views on the problem
 of self-murder and what it means "to kill your
 'self'" (418), differentiating between the 'I'
 and the 'Me' of the subjective experience.

The last essay in the collection, "Kierke-
 gaard's Pseudonyms and the Truths of Fiction,"
 demonstrates Hustvedt's fascination with the
 Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and
 his influence on her own work. In it, the au-
 thor again stresses the importance of the first-
 person narratives. In her theory, the truth of
 fiction "can only be communicated by an
 I to an I" (487), from one person to another
 through indirect communication. "It consists
 of many small truths" (505) perceived subjec-
 tively by each single individual; therefore, as
 Hustvedt argues, "[e]very book is read one
 person at a time" (487). The author and the
 reader work in intersubjective collaboration,

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and every interpretation is, therefore, unique, fresh, and creative.

Everyone will definitely find something of interest in *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women*, as the collection ponders a wide range of topics, from art and literature to memory and the models of the mind. The essays can be read separately as well as consecutively. The book may not provide the reader with the definite explicit answers to the mysteries surrounding the notions of perception, consciousness, or the self, but it will definitely

stimulate intelligent questions about the nature of knowledge itself. Hustvedt hopes that her reader “will discover that much of what is delivered [...] in the form of books, media, and the Internet as decided truths, scientific or otherwise, are in fact open to question and revision” (xx). Engaging multiple perspectives, findings, and outlooks, Hustvedt manages to implicate her own ideas and personality, as well as the subtlety of wit.

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