

## Having been outed as a crypto-Christian anti-Semite, can one say "shalom"?

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I would very much like to wish "peace" to Miriam Peskowitz. If peace were mine to offer, she would have it.

The "I" who writes this is the problem, however. My critic (Peskowitz 1997) diagnoses my essay as if it were a psychological entity, with passions and needs, committing sins of cunning deceit. I am indicted in a series of *ad hominem* arguments that a mere personal protest of innocence cannot suffice to answer. That sort of criticism disables any response in advance. Nevertheless I owe it to readers to set the record straight, and Peskowitz's criticism illustrates a couple of theoretical issues that are worth some further attention.

For the record: I am, of course, in agreement with a number of Peskowitz's assertions. *I made them first!* My essay (Sawicki 1994b) clearly rejects essentialist or "flattened" versions of Judaism, and explicitly calls for scholarly attention to the mechanisms of construction and gendering through which Jewish identity was secured and transmitted in antiquity. The comparison of digging to tourism, the critique of social modelling, the questioning of the hegemony historically achieved by rabbinic *halachah*, the unmasking of the desire for pure untheorized representation and its effect on scientific fact-making, the critique of so-called biblical archaeology, the dissonance from any natural evolution in archaeological method, the satirical invocation of the trope "holy land" (lower case): all of these arguments were quite clearly made in my own essay. It takes some terrifically agile acrobatics for Peskowitz to flip my text over onto the very positions that it had actually targeted for critical attention.

My best recourse is simply to refer readers back to my own text for the particulars. That will allow me to say some new things here about the logical and theoretical moves instantiated in Peskowitz's response, which do have some significance beyond a petty tussle over turf between a philosopher of science and a religion scholar.

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There is a fatal logical flaw in the premise that a text has strategically and significantly hidden whatever it does not cite. It is mistaken to presume that any one essay is a self-sufficient universe of meaning — a fallacy that stems from the spurious analogy between a text and an individual psyche or self. My essay was designed with the limited purpose of introducing some anthropological literature to religion scholars and suggesting applications. I have published many other articles and books, with other purposes, where I have appropriately addressed issues that Peskowitz wanted to see in this essay. So it is nonsense to assert that I hide or erase whatever I have not footnoted in a given essay.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Feminist defence of science

This logical flaw has its roots in the deep cleft between the theoretical resources upon which Peskowitz takes her stand, and my own. By "theory", Peskowitz apparently means narrative or literary theory. All the entities in her universe are texts, and textual practices suffice to make them legible. The only way in which such entities relate is intertextually, by reference. Textual tools are presumed to be adequate for the interpretation of human bodies, physical motions, architecture, economic transactions, and every other human activity. Spatial terms like "local", "displacement", and "colonization" are reduced to metaphors for aspects of intertextuality.

As for me, I affirm a limited usefulness for such theory, but I find it inadequate for certain spatial phenomena.<sup>2</sup> That is why I proposed to inter-

1. For example, I excavated and recorded layers of Arab occupation in my field work at Sepphoris in 1989 and 1993. I discussed the depopulation and destruction of the Arab town of Saffuriyah, 1948-1953, in my book *Seeing the Lord* (1994a). I engage in dialogue with the work of many of the authors whom Peskowitz accuses me of having effaced, in scholarly papers and in forthcoming articles whose drafts I posted on the Internet as early as 1992 (Sawicki 1992; 1993; 1995; 1997b; 1998). (My paper and articles listed as "forthcoming" were posted for comment in draft form at several websites. The best index to these and numerous other scholarly resources for the study of gender in antiquity is *Diotima* [[http://www.uky.edu/Arts\\_Sciences/Classes/gender.html](http://www.uky.edu/Arts_Sciences/Classes/gender.html)].) I analyze the replication of the elite-masculine "gaze" that is enforced by the tourist museum at Sepphoris, and I compare its displacements with those made mandatory for the "dining room" at Qisrin (Sawicki 1997c; 1998). (All of this work was used in neglecting to take note of it.) Most importantly, my lengthy study of the mechanisms of Christian romanticizing of a Holocaust victim — Edith Stein — will appear later this year (Sawicki 1996; 1997a; 1997d). Thus, I actually *have* done a great deal of what Peskowitz charges I *could have* done.

2. My arguments for the extra-textuality of somatic phenomena were made in Sawicki 1994a.

pret archaeology as "space technology". Peskowitz does not see the need for extra-textual theory and she denies its validity.

If I am correct about this, then I can see why Peskowitz would accuse me of overlooking feminist scholarship when in fact I delivered a whole trainload of feminist archaeology and anthropology. To Peskowitz, that work simply would not count as "feminist theory". She rejects out of hand the theory stemming from the scholarly discussions that Rosser (1989) termed "the feminist critique of science" and what Sandra Harding (1986) termed "feminist epistemology". Harding wrote that

a series of epistemological inquiries has laid the basis for an alternative understanding of how beliefs are grounded in social experiences, and of what kind of experience should ground the beliefs we honor as knowledge. These feminist epistemologies imply a relation between knowing and being, between epistemology and metaphysics, that is an alternative to the dominant epistemologies developed to justify science's modes of knowledge-seeking and ways of being in the world. (1986: 24)

Harding classified feminist epistemology into three streams, introducing what quickly became a standard frame of reference: (1) Feminist empiricism was calling for improvement in scientific methodology through elimination of bias from research;<sup>3</sup> (2) "The feminist standpoint" used Marxian premises to argue that oppressors can have only partial and defective understanding, while those whom they subjugate have privileged epistemological access to reality; and (3) "Feminist postmodernism" had not yet exhibited a cohesive direction. In my view, this third stream did quickly cohere around the application of psychoanalytic object-relations theory to the interpretation of the social and physical sciences, suggested by Keller (1985) and others. I criticize recent initiatives in materialist standpoint theory and psychoanalytic object-relations theory for what I call "the bogus epistemology of situation and inscription" (Sawicki 1996; 1997a; 1998). The gist of my complaint is that their equivocation between literal and metaphorical space ren-

3. Writing in the mid-1980s, Harding found feminist empiricism to be self-subverting. In any thoroughgoing empiricism, she reasoned, the social identity of the researcher should not affect the results; yet feminist empiricists at that time were asserting that women or feminists as a group would be more likely to produce "good science" than others would be. My proposal of "chastened" or non-naïve realism was designed to respond to such critiques by integrating elements of the other two streams into a pro-science position. Peskowitz thinks that a feminist empiricist stance must be a contradiction in terms; while I argue on the contrary that to reject empirical engagement is *ipso facto* to turn one's back on feminism. An example of rejecting empirical engagement would be Peskowitz's reduction of spatial, geographic, architectural, and somatic relationships to mere narrative ones. The possibility of a feminist empiricism raises complex theoretical issues; see the special issue of *The Monist* (1994) on "Feminist epistemology: For and against".

ders them useless for interpreting and guiding the material management of human dwelling.

Now it seems to me that while Peskowitz wants to restrict "feminist theory" to some contemporary representatives of those two trends, she is unaware of their applications in philosophy of science.<sup>4</sup> Therefore it is largely out of ignorance that she discredits the discourse of those like me – feminist philosophers of science – who compare and evaluate various theoretical operations. Given her narrow definition of feminist theory, Peskowitz presumes that the meagre fruits yielded to date in Israel by "feminist archaeology" are the only legitimately feminist possibilities. She accuses me of bulldozing this field just as the Israelis razed Saffurieh, to clear a space for my own pioneering.

But that diagnosis of my motives is wrong. In fact, my own chosen field is the one that Peskowitz disparages as positivist: philosophy of science. When a religion scholar like Miriam Peskowitz makes assertions about "local data" or "local evidence", the philosopher wants to challenge her to say what is meant by "data and evidence", and even by "local". This was the burden of the arguments in my essay. My desire is not to displace Peskowitz's heroes. I merely pointed to the many *feminist empirical* studies whose methodologies could spur archaeological research in Israel, where they are not yet widely known.

I have no allegiance to positivism. No living philosopher does. "Positivist" today is just a nasty name to hurl at an enemy. But I am indeed committed to science, on feminist grounds. In my forthcoming book *Body, Text, and Science*, I argue that feminism entails a basic commitment to improving real-world conditions. In a detailed review of current discussions, I fault the psychoanalytic inscription theorists and the materialist situation theorists alike for being unable to engage with the reality of the world. They postpone rather than facilitate emancipatory practices. They shrink from the kind of practical compromises that are required *not only* for science, *but also* for any cooperative cohabitation of the earth. No feminist should settle for theory that confines itself to textual critique. My conclusion is meant to be provocative: Real feminism is realist feminism. The rest is just fooling around.

Feminist science is pragmatic and eclectic. But that is not to say that it must import alien models into the "local" task of excavating in Israel. Peskowitz misreads my critique of modelling as if I were the one doing the mod-

elling. In fact, I listed several models that can suggest hypotheses for investigation in Israel. To frame a hypothesis is far different from using models to extrapolate missing data. Scholars of Christian origins have been guilty of abusing models in this way, and I have taken them to task for this (Sawicki 1997c; that critique cannot be repeated here).

## 2. Why do Jews survive?

My proposal for a "chastened" or non-naive realist stance challenges religion on scholars like Peskowitz and her teacher, Eric Meyers, to say what they mean by the terms they use. In my essay, I correctly showed that Meyers operationally defined the term "Jewish city" to be a city with ritual baths and without cemeteries. I explicitly argued that "Jewishness" was being constructed rhetorically as "Jews" identified themselves by means of practices involving these structures. I further argued that the "housing" of *halachah* in another structure, the study house, added a dimension of gendering to rabbinic lore. These historical, architectural developments give us the contours of Rabbinic Judaism. The "European package" is nothing more sinister than that: Judaism as embodied in an architectural centre where the study hall, the canonical texts, the official personnel (rabbi), and the ritual bath are housed.<sup>5</sup> Obviously, this is not my definition of "Judaism": it is my account of how social definition historically was taking place.

My historical portraiture quite clearly destabilizes the legitimacy and monopoly of Rabbinic Judaism. I recognized that this critical maneuver on my part would be unsettling or offensive to some readers. Therefore I inserted a parenthesis to express my own profound respect in the midst of criticism. But more than respect is at issue here. I would like to know whether Peskowitz objects to my assertion that Rabbinic Judaism, through its textual and architectural expressions, was the principal means of survival for a people identifying themselves as Jews. If she contests this statement, then *what other social mechanisms account for the fact that there are Jews among us today? Do Jews survive today only because the Christian narra-*

5. This was the Judaism of the Baltimore of my childhood. It was the Judaism of the Eastern European Jews among my forebears on both sides of my family. It still survived in the everyday practices of my co-workers when I was editor of *The Baltimore Jewish Times* in the early 1970s. One can visit this Judaism in the nostalgic museum exhibits of the Jewish Heritage Center at Baltimore's old Lloyd Street Synagogue. Because I have been *there*, because I have loved and been loved *there*, I can speak confidently of the non-identity between *that* and the social formations evolving amid the urban architectures of Greco-Roman Palestine. There is both difference and historical relation. This difference must be rendered conceivable before archaeologists proceed with excavating any such thing as a "Jewish" bath or house or city.

4. At issue is whether gender itself can be treated as a purely narrative, textual phenomenon, or whether we also need properly somatic, spatial, architectural, practice-oriented tools to study how societies construct gender. The latter approach is characteristic of the feminist anthropologists and archaeologists whose work I was discussing in my essay.

tive needs them? Obviously not, but this is the logical implication of Peskowitz's argument.

Absurd conclusions result when all theory and critique are transposed into the narrative-textual mode. If everything is a text, then there can be no extra-textual reality to check the texts against, no world of scarcity and delight to "go home to" when reading is over. On this view, strategies of reading do not seek to uncover "references" or "causes" or "results" of texts; instead, they fish for subtexts. A "hermeneutic of suspicion" is deployed to bring these allegedly hidden motifs to the surface.<sup>6</sup> They are what the text is "really" about. This kind of reading is "diagnostic" because it targets an alleged hidden illness behind an apparent symptom.

Peskowitz's argument supplies an apt example of how wrong such diagnostic interpretation can go. She observes, correctly, that my essay did not cite a book by Richard A. Batey entitled *Jesus and the Forgotten City* (1991). This book contains watercolour drawings in which one reviewer detected antisemitic caricatures of the ancient inhabitants of Sepphoris.<sup>7</sup> These cartoons somehow coincide with my own secret dream of what Jews are like, Peskowitz supposes, and *therefore* I neglected to cite the book because I needed to hide my antisemitism from my readers and from myself. This line of reasoning is not so far-fetched – if you accept the premises on which the diagnostic hermeneutic operates: everything is textual; all texts are intertextually related; and the vast spatial, emotional, and logical remoteness of Batey's text from my own does not count. His cartoons and my alleged fantasies *must* be connected!

If Peskowitz has led readers to believe that my imagination feeds on stereotypes of Aryans and hook-nosed Jews, then I hope that you will examine my serious study of pre-Holocaust German literary constructions of Jewishness in *Body, Text, and Science*.<sup>8</sup> I cannot review all of its findings

6. Ricoeur (1965) coined this phrase to characterize the hermeneutic programs of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. The narrative literary theory that funds Peskowitz's diagnostic, suspicious reading of my essay has its roots in their works. It also has affinities with the hermeneutic program of Heidegger, whose "existentialist" philosophy failed to dampen his enthusiasm for National Socialism. By contrast, my alleged "essentialism" bases itself on the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein, both victims of National Socialism's antisemitic policies.

7. Unbecoming photos of myself also appear in the Batey volume.

8. Sawicki 1996; 1997a. I have also presented philological analyses of the markers of ethnicity among Hellenistic Jews in my earlier book, *Seeing the Lord* (1994a), which addresses the mechanisms of racial construction in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America as well. I do not expect a critic to have read every word that I have ever published, of course. But I reject her absurd assumption that I have said everything I think in a single article, especially one whose express purpose was expository.

here. But my ongoing critical historical investigations of the violence of genocide and race hatred have convinced me that a *purely textual* hermeneutic is not an adequate remedy for past horrors, nor can it provide a guarantee that they will not repeat.

Therefore my proposal is "realist": I regard bodies and bodily practices as more than media and texts. I look for ways to read them spatially, architecturally, materially, anthropologically. A "chastened" or non-naïve realism is required if we are to understand the complex, compromised cohabiting of spaces by differently-privileged bodies. Evidence emerging from the earth persuades me that "Judaism" defined itself by adapting to the complex frontiers between Hasmonean and Herodian occupations in the Galilee and in Judea of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. I am now working on this hypothesis in partnership with an Americanist zoo-archaeologist and an Israeli scholar of rabbinic texts. Collaboration is the only way forward.

Peskowitz's decision to reject this way of working, along with the feminist theoretical discourse that guides it, is surely regrettable. I hope that she will reconsider. I regard her own work highly, and I engage in respectful dialogue with it (see Sawicki 1997b; 1997c). But a scholar who makes the *a priori* assumption that all realities are texts disables herself from doing anything but calling names and drawing lines. This does not heal or equip us for a future together.

### 3. Accuracy and media

I was impressed and honoured at the list of scholars whom Peskowitz consulted while composing her response. Among them are several with whom I, too, have corresponded or consulted. This dimension of contact is significant because Peskowitz charges that I have deliberately misconstrued the arguments of two writers: Eric Meyers and Alison Wylie. Reading is always perilous, but I make it a practice to do whatever I can to counteract the effects of my own ignorance and unconscious bias. For example, in early 1994 I sent Eric Meyers a copy of the longer study from which my *MFSR* essay was abstracted. Although he expressed some disagreements, he thanked me and said he would pass the piece on to his graduate students for whom it would serve as a gateway into literature largely unfamiliar to religion scholars at that time. The longer study was also sent to Miriam Peskowitz herself because its second half discusses her own work at length.<sup>9</sup> Most importantly, I

9. That discussion is to appear separately (Sawicki 1997b), and has also been posted on the Internet for about a year. Peskowitz's criticisms may relate partly to my criticism of her work there. But this is a conjecture on my part, since she did not respond to my letters and declined to speak with me at national meetings.

have corresponded with Alison Wylie, who has encouraged my line of interpretation and kindly given me some unpublished research manuscripts. If Wylie thinks I mistake her meaning, she has not yet told me so. My interpretation seems to fit her subsequent publications (Wylie 1995; 1996; I examine Wylie's research agenda at greater length in Sawicki 1996 and 1997a).

Peskowitz takes issue with my critique of the media in which archaeological data are disseminated: digital databases and big books. In both cases the gist of my criticism escaped her. I am not irrationally afraid of computers as such; I am justifiably alarmed because biased data become harder to correct when ensconced in electronic databases.<sup>10</sup> As for those big books from the big digs, my critic unwittingly reinforces my argument. I pointed out that the heavy red binding of the Meiron publication served the rhetorical purpose of enhancing the perceived "reality" of its scientific findings. Peskowitz has chimed in with a whole rainbow of corroborating examples. Right! That's exactly how it's done. The impressive production values of official publications are an instrumentality for establishing and stabilizing the "facts" that they report, as has long been recognized in science studies.<sup>11</sup> I chose to mention the Meiron volume because it is a *final* report by the same excavators who are still digging at Sepphoris (which means that a final report for that site is still years away). Two of them, Eric and Carol Meyers, have co-authored the booklet *Sepphoris* in which a mosaic receives the title that offends Peskowitz: "the Mona Lisa of the Galilee". But this was hardly the beginning of the Europeanization of Israel that Peskowitz deplors. It began long before that, and long before the Crusades and before Constantine. Hellenization arrived in the wake of Alexander's conquests. Thus it is not possible to talk about Judaism and Israel apart from the continuing overlay of European imperialism. Nor is it possible to talk about any Europe since Alexander except the Europe that groped and grabbed at Palestine. This is historical fact; it is not some personal neurosis of mine.

Since I have reached the end of my allotted space, I will conclude by addressing the one passage that best illustrates the problem of question-begging in regard to Jewish identity. Peskowitz complains:

Sawicki's method of studying Jewish women within a model of contact and frontiers gives them significance only at the point that they are in contact with non-Jewish women. Jewish women become important only at the points of interaction with oth-

ers, or at the points where the elite tradition uses the bodies of Jewish women as markers of difference. (1997: 297)

But I do not study "Jewish women". I assert that we *cannot* study "Jewish women". We can only study the social practices through which people come to identify themselves as Jews, or as women, or as Jewish women, female Jews. "Jewish women" was the outcome of social negotiation *then*, and it can be a meaningful descriptive term *now* only on the basis of a long process of historical negotiation that was already ongoing *back then*. In other words, "Jewish women" is a cultural achievement, not a natural organic fact. Now ask yourself: *When and where would anyone own up to such an identity, "Jewish woman"?* The answers are obvious. When she was in contact with others. When she became a woman after being a girl. When her marriage was arranged. When she met neighbours who followed customs diverging from those followed in her own family. When she chose to pass on her values and her traditions to her children. When she made difficult economic decisions to ensure her family's survival in troubled times. In other words, when she faced frontiers and found herself in contact with others.

Thus, "contact" is exactly what we need to look for, in the archaeological record, if such situations are to be found and understood. Certain bodies – women's bodies – were indigenously designated as "markers" for the maintenance of Jewish identity in the socially constructed kinship system.<sup>12</sup> This is precisely the phenomenon that needs investigation.

In closing, I wish to recognize and express gratitude for the time and care that Miriam Peskowitz devoted to her study of my essay. As always, her work is provocative and well worth the effort required to read it.

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10. My own current writing is regularly posted on the web for comment, and I cannot imagine pursuing scholarly research in the 1990s without e-mail. It seems to me that Peskowitz is the one who underutilizes electronic research capabilities, inasmuch as she overlooked my electronic publications in framing her critique.

11. See Latour – Woolgar 1986. For a good introduction to this avenue of critique, see Woolgar 1988.

12. As I argue in Sawicki 1997c. The indigenous system of gender and caste (the two are inseparable co-constructions) comprises the intergenerational maintenance strategy for Jewish identity. This strategy presupposes the existence of real threats from within and without, for it is designed to cope with them. The identity of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be understood apart from this. Theology enters the picture only much later.

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