But the reproducibility of genre is not innocent, and it does not always generate positive changes which expand and diversify possibilities for women. Part of the ambivalence of genre—and perhaps also of gender—is its exposure to commodification. If you liked *The Matrix* you will love (or you will at least pay money to see) *Matrix 2, Matrix 3*, etc. If your mother was a feminist, why not try *Girl Power*? It comes with three collectable stickers and a do-it-yourself jewellery kit! Precisely because genre reproduces the same differently, it is capable of generating a sense of novelty while reinforcing or even restricting conventional generic boundaries. Linked with the replicative power of modern technology and the voracious appetite of contemporary capitalism, the power of genre poses formidable challenges for anyone who desires radical social change. Ferrell’s development of this concept in relation to feminist issues helps to clarify the task of contemporary feminism, which both inherits a legacy from first- and second-wave feminists and also faces different challenges—but also new possibilities—in an increasingly technological age.

LISA GUENTHER, *University of Auckland*

**Experiencing the Postmetaphysical Self: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction**

FIONOLA MEREDITH

In this stimulating and well written book, Meredith proposes an antifoundational and hermeneutic/deconstructive approach which she believes escapes the pitfalls of deconstruction while assuming the best of hermeneutics. Following the poststructural erasure of the subject, the consequences for notions of experience, selfhood, and self-presence have been sizeable and, she argues, largely misappropriated. In response, Meredith reappraises the experiential in such a way that while she acknowledges there may no longer be a sovereign subject, she believes we may still meaningfully engage a notion of partial self-presence. To that end, she examines Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Althusser, Ricoeur, Gadamer, and others, so as first to diagnose what she views as “the ultra-negativity of post-structuralist thought” (2), and then to reposition what she determines to be salvageable from both sides of this less than clear philosophical divide.

Meredith argues that post-Saussurean/structuralist thinking, which she identifies chiefly with Derrida’s deconstruction, has reduced the
notion of experience to something sterile and static. Moreover, the deconstructed and decentred self, we are told, unnecessarily vanishes into radical alterity without hope of recovery. What is needed, according to Meredith, is a revaluation of the categories of experience, self-presence, and subjectivity which, if we are to relocate a meaningful sense of self, necessitates the dislodging of many persistent assumptions coming out of deconstruction. In the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur, Meredith believes she has found more promising ways of conceiving of the postmetaphysical self which, while privileging language and the loss of the singular subjective self, do not dissolve the self completely and irrevocably.

In the first chapter, "Difference and Undecidability: Post-Saussurean Thought," Meredith describes some of the basic elements of Derrida and Lacan, including some major criticisms, so as to prepare the way for her later proposal that goes beyond both and, to a lesser degree, beyond hermeneutics. Surprisingly, Meredith argues that both Derrida and Lacan are closer to the essentialism they so vehemently reject than either recognizes. While this is a little difficult to accept, her arguments are interesting, if perhaps a bit hasty.

In the second chapter, "Woman as Text: The Influence of Post-Structuralism on Feminist Theory," Meredith argues that poststructuralism has partially influenced feminism for the better, although she places more emphasis on its impact for the worst. Ultimately, for Meredith, feminism and poststructuralism are fundamentally incompatible. To help substantiate her claim, she examines Kristeva's theories of female subjectivity.

In Chapter 3, "The Post-Structuralist Erasure of Experience," Meredith further examines poststructuralist arguments and their failings, and elaborates on why a partial rejection of poststructuralism does not necessitate our acceptance of the metaphysics of presence. After exploring some of the major features of poststructuralist thought, Meredith argues for a notion of "direct, lived experience 'as something to be lived through'" (81) and, thereby, upholds a sense of self and world distinct from that of deconstruction. She envisions her position as somewhere between metaphysical objectivism and the pessimistic relativism evident in the "post-structuralist's high-handed attempt to suck lived experience into the vortex of the Text" (86).

In the fourth chapter, "Frameworks for Experience," Meredith examines the phenomenological hermeneutics of Ricoeur and Gadamer, and describes ways of overcoming some of the more obvious failures of Derrida, Lacan, and the like, through an "interpenetration" of deconstruction and hermeneutics. Here she develops her notion of experience "in all its contingency and uncertainty, identifying it as the continual weaving of
the cord which connects consciousness (in the form of beliefs, values, feelings, intuitions, desires and so on) to a world which always exceeds our capacity to understand it” (111).

Chapter 5, “‘It’s me here’: Writing the Singular Self, Writing the Post-deconstructive Female Self,” finds Meredith arguing for a notion of female subjectivity that has as its center “women’s symbolically mediated lived experience” (79). She examines what it means to “write the self” using her deconstructive/hermeneutic model of the experiential, which is meant to avoid the mistaken notion of self as radical origin as well as the extremes of a strictly poststructuralist analysis. This final chapter returns to feminist theory, as she argues further for an “approach that recognizes the equiprimordiality of singularity and alterity in our embodied existence” (170).

This is a very readable and enjoyable work. Given the number and complexity of issues discussed one would expect only a brief survey, but Meredith accomplishes more. There are times when her arguments fall short of solid conclusions, and her style of referencing is sometimes a bit forced (perhaps because of the excessive number of block quotes), but these are not overwhelming issues. This is a fair treatment, and she tries hard to avoid misrepresenting either side. It is curious, however, that Meredith chose to characterize Derrida and the larger deconstructive attitude as she has. Throughout the text she builds the case for a view of deconstruction (and poststructuralism generally) as a way of thinking that rejects the possibility of meaning and understanding (114). Yet on the last page of her conclusion she offers an all too brief account of Derrida’s later position that is said to lack the ardent relativism of his earlier work—the very relativism she argues against in order to bolster the persuasive force of her own project. This suspicious manoeuver notwithstanding, Meredith’s antifoundational revaluation of the postmetaphysical self presents readers with a number of interesting and challenging ways of thinking somewhere between hermeneutics and deconstruction.

JASON C. ROBINSON, University of Guelph

Sartre
DAVID DRAKE

David Drake has written what is possibly the shortest English-language biography of Sartre, his book clocking in at slightly over 140 pages of