



# **Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation (MIT Press)**

*Joan Copjec*

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Jacques Lacan claimed that his theory of feminine sexuality, including the infamous proposition, "the Woman does not exist," constituted a revision of his earlier work on "the ethics of psychoanalysis." In *Imagine There's No Woman*, Joan Copjec shows how Freud's ragtag, nearly incoherent notion of sublimation was refashioned by Lacan to become the key term in his ethics. To trace the link between feminine being and Lacan's ethics of sublimation, Copjec argues, one must take the negative proposition about the woman's existence not as just another nominalist denunciation of thought's illusions about the existence of universals, but as recognition of the power of thought, which posits and gives birth to the difference of objects from themselves. While the relativist position currently dominant insists on the difference between my views and another's, Lacan insists on this difference within the object I see. The popular position fuels the disaffection with which we regard a world in a state of decomposition, whereas the Lacanian alternative urges our investment in a world that awaits our invention. In the book's first part, Copjec explores positive acts of invention/sublimation: Antigone's burial of her brother, the silhouettes by the young black artist Kara Walker, Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, and Stella Dallas's final gesture toward her daughter in the well-known melodrama. In the second part, the focus shifts to sublimation's adversary, the cruelly uncreative superego, as Copjec analyzes Kant's concept of radical evil, envy's corruption of liberal demands for equality and justice, and the difference between sublimation and perversion. Maintaining her focus on artistic texts, she weaves her arguments through discussions of Pasolini's *Salo*, the film noir classic *Laura*, and the Zapruder film of the Kennedy assassination.

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