

questions, that of how to reconcile the death of the subject with the realization of the 'feminine' is the most frequently repeated. Like Oliver, too, Braidotti is inclined to overestimate the contribution of theoretical rectitude to providing resolutions of these issues and thus correcting the oppression of women.

In this spirit she recommends the shift to a 'nomadic' understanding of the subject as alone able to resist the potential 'microfascism' of all 'hegemonies' whatever their size, and however local. Such nomadic shifts, she argues 'designate a creative sort of becoming; a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and of knowledge'. They also, one might argue, make it difficult to see how you would defend any positive form of hegemony or constructive solidarity (where does it leave, for example, the politics of the neo-Gramscians and advocates of 'radical democracy'?). Braidotti clearly intends to entice us with this vision of the territories and transgressions opened up to the 'nomadic' subject, and makes a number of astute points in the course of its elaboration. But overall I found these essays rather flatly written and repetitious in their argument. A little more self-irony and some more exacting editing would have considerably added to the pleasures of this particular voyage of discovery.

Kate Soper

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## The Practice of Love, Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire

**Teresa de Lauretis**

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This book is a passionate rendering of Teresa de Lauretis' journey through psychoanalysis, structuralism, and semiotics. Her search is guided by her desire to represent her experiences of lesbian sexuality. The author consistently and vibrantly expresses her own stake in the questions she raises; this is not an abstract, ungendered, unsexualized, pseudo-scientific quest for the foundational 'truth' of lesbianism.

Part One of the book presents a critical reading of psychoanalytic texts focusing on their analyses of lesbian sexuality. De Lauretis stresses that her aim in re-reading Freud is to exemplify the discontinuities and ambiguities of his theories of sexuality: the complexities which engage our interest and allow for new questions and formulations of desire. She

argues that Freud's theory of sexuality could be seen to construe sexuality in terms of independent modalities. This would not be an opposition of normal-perverse but, rather, a notion of sexual instinct as having different component instincts. 'Normal' would refer to a function of the social norm whereas the concept of perversion offers, in de Lauretis' view, a model of sexuality as it is subjectively lived through, that is, in fantasy and desire.

Throughout the book de Lauretis is fascinated by how it is that we become sexual subjects, embodied psychic beings, and this leads to her interest in Freud's notion of instinct, 'the psychical representation of an endosomatic, continuous flowing source of stimulation' (*Three Essays on Sexuality*). Here 'instinct' is the pivot between the mental and the physical. Following Laplanche and Pontalis, de Lauretis stresses the constitutive role of fantasies for subjectivity. Psychoanalytic theory offers three major fantasies of origin: the primal scene, seduction, and castration. She stresses that the fantasies are not innate facts but are historically constituted.

Theories of sexuality in the early followers of Freud, Lampl de Groot, Deutsch, and Jones, are critically analysed. De Lauretis is particularly interested in Deutsch because of her emphasis on the problem of representing women's desire for women. Lesbianism, for Deutsch, is a return to 'the mother'. Here the return to 'the mother' is far from being interpreted as a longing for pre-Oedipal bliss and is seen as a complex movement through the instinctual vicissitudes of sadomasochism, exhibitionism, voyeurism, and fetishism.

Although de Lauretis shares Deutsch's privileging of the concept of the Oedipus complex for human development, she disagrees with her notion of lesbian object-choice. For Deutsch a lesbian's desire for another woman is interpreted as desire for a mother or mother substitute. De Lauretis argues that, within the perspective of perverse desire, the 'fantasmic object' of lesbian desire is the subject's own body image. She maintains that the castration complex instantiates sexual difference. For the lesbian the threat of castration is not the threat of not having a penis but, rather, it is the wished-for female body that is threatened with non-existence. A major argument of this book is that a rejection or refusal to re-think the notion of castration is a foreclosure on the possibility of signifying desire.

De Lauretis construes desire in terms of a lack to be fulfilled. The lack is bridged by fantasies, in the case of a lesbian it is not the paternal phallus that is desired but the fetish which resolves the Oedipus complex because it carries an instinctual investment in the female body-image. The fetish

makes satisfaction possible because it stands for what is absent but what is wished for in fantasy, thus expressing its absence and the subject's desire for it. Erotic power represented, for example, in butch and femme roles functions as fetish of desire that can carry women sexually to a more fulfilled experience of their femaleness: 'In my view, then, lesbian desire is not the identification with another woman's desire, but the desire for her desire as signified in her fetish and the fantasy scenario it evokes' (p. 251).

De Lauretis presents extensive analyses of texts and films which represent lesbianism. In her analysis of Sheila McLaughlin's film *She Must be Seeing Things* the author elaborates her critique of the relationship between sexuality and fantasy. De Lauretis sees the film as being about two women who share a common fantasy of lesbian origins; this scenario sustains their respective and mutual desire. The film constructs the looking at lesbian desire in a non-objectifying way and opens out a way in which women look at each other with desire and where the spectator-woman sees their look and is alive to their desire.

The author's aim is to offer a theory of sexuality which is non-heterosexual and non-normatively homosexual, a theory of sexuality as perversion which is not pathological. She interprets psychoanalytic theory and practice as based on a logic of seduction. The fantasy of seduction, in de Lauretis' view, is the condition of the possibility of transference and countertransference. She insistently distinguishes perversion from pathology and she also insists on the specificity and contingency of desires. The danger is that, in remaining preoccupied with questions of origins, she risks reinstating the kind of universalist psychoanalytic interpretations that have, traditionally, been so destructive to lesbians as well as to gay men and to heterosexual and bisexual women and men.

How does de Lauretis know that the concepts of seduction, castration, and the Oedipus complex are necessary for the symbolization, the expression, and satisfaction, of desire?

Noreen O'Connor

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