

FIGURES OF RESISTANCE

Essays in Feminist Theory

Teresa de Lauretis

Edited and with an

Introduction by **Patricia White**

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TERESA DE LAURETIS

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PATRICIA WHITE

Introduction: Thinking Feminist

Patricia White

Teresa de Lauretis is among the foremost feminist theorists of the past several decades; her thought has set terms of debate at key junctures, and it helps renew the relevance of feminist theory for our current moment. Just as her background bridges Europe and America, her work links continental theories with U.S. feminism in mutually productive ways. Having edited and introduced the 1991 special issue of *differences* entitled “Queer Theory,” she is a founder of that academic discourse who has nevertheless remained an astute critic of the status of feminist and lesbian theory within it.¹ Her writing, evoking that of such feminist prose stylists as Virginia Woolf even while analyzing it, is at once demanding and thrillingly precise.

The eleven essays in this collection, written over the two-decade span from 1985 to 2005, demonstrate the scope and impact of Teresa de Lauretis’s thought and its ongoing promise. Organized into three parts, “Representations,” “Readings,” and “Epistemologies,” the book includes benchmark pieces as well as harder-to-find interventions. The essays have been gathered and contextualized to illuminate their inter-

connections, with an emphasis on the constitution of subjectivity within representation, sexuality, and epistemology. While the volume will be welcome to readers familiar with de Lauretis's work, it can also serve as an introduction for teachers and students of women's studies and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) studies, as well as for the many readers from a variety of disciplines and from outside the academy who will find de Lauretis's thinking and writing uniquely stimulating. The selections consider representations of women and lesbianism, present readings of texts that theorize and invite desire and fantasy, and construct ways of thinking about feminism and subjectivity. Sometimes they double back on each other, detour to discuss related developments (while inevitably neglecting others), and introduce concerns adjacent to feminism and theory. Taken together, they show a writer and thinker who, despite her indisputable originality and a sometimes almost intimidating command of language and concepts, is deeply dialogic.

These essays invite the reader to join in a process of revisiting and revising that de Lauretis has demonstrated is central to the project of feminist theory. In keeping with two central discourses in her ongoing work—semiotics and psychoanalysis—the concepts and practices of feminism and theory in which she engages are reciprocal and open-ended. In her work, as in the work of such contemporary feminist theorists as Donna Haraway and Chandra Mohanty, no single, static notion of feminism will do. Moreover, as feminism cannot be circumscribed in object, scope, or period, the concept of postfeminism makes little sense. Neither does de Lauretis use the term “theory” as a scientist might, as a proven postulate, “a set of statements or principles devised to explain a group of facts”;² rather, she refers to her writing and the theories she critiques as “passionate fictions.”³ This designation, with its evocation of desire and narrative, demonstrates one way in which, for de Lauretis, feminism cannot be defined in isolation from theory or the speculative. Indeed, as I will argue, feminist specificity lies in a *subjective* way of knowing.

Poststructuralist theories of the subject—psychoanalytic and linguistic, cinematic and semiotic—are key to her work and to that of many of her peers, and they resonate with the feminist insight “the personal is political.” This resonance is perhaps clearest in de Lauretis's concept of “the subject of feminism.” The term implies “an understanding of the (female) subject as not only distinct from Woman . . . the *represen-*

tation of an essence inherent in all women, . . . but also distinct from women, the real historical beings and social subjects who are defined by the technology of gender and actually engendered in social relations.”⁴ That Woman and women are distinct from each other—and that therefore, despite and within the mythology of Woman, women can indeed be subjects of speech and desire, can even begin to represent Woman otherwise—is an insight eloquently elaborated in de Lauretis’s transformative 1984 book *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. It is in her next book, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (1987), that she introduces the “subject of feminism” as a third, conceptual figure, representing the tensions between idealized representation (Woman) and actual experience (women), and in particular the *consciousness* of this tension.

The mode of definition de Lauretis uses (“not only distinct from . . . , but also distinct from . . .”) can frustrate some readers’ and students’ desire for an affirmative feminism. And yet the method enacts the thought: de Lauretis’s concepts move in and out of contexts where they take on meaning in tension with other formulations. For example, the essay “The Technology of Gender” ends with a paradox. The subject of feminism is spatially and temporally located “here and now. That is to say, elsewhere.”⁵ The contradiction here, possible in language if not in space, reformulates de Lauretis’s assertion that the subject of feminism is both “inside *and* outside the ideology of gender.”⁶ That is, women are constructed through gender (and other forms of) ideology, and feminism is the practice and consciousness of that ideology’s limits, a “de-re-construction.”⁷ The category of the subject, entailing the knowledge and the experience of being (constructed as) a woman, is central to de Lauretis’s theoretical project. And the subject, as in *topic*, of feminism is her domain as a theorist.

The histories and itineraries of feminism shape de Lauretis’s work and have in turn been shaped by it. Born in Italy in 1938 and educated there in literature, classics, and modern languages, de Lauretis emigrated as a young mother to the United States in the mid-1960s, where she taught in various Italian departments before moving to the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee in 1968. The Milwaukee campus was an epicenter of the U.S. reception of French and British film theory and a favorable environment for her first publications in film and feminist theory.⁸ The book that emerged from this period, *Alice Doesn’t*, made an

important intervention in both feminist theory and the male-dominated academy with its erudition (a few of the many discourses engaged are narratology, experimental cinema, and psychoanalysis) and its graceful rhetoric, which often delivered withering critiques of masculinist theory. *Alice Doesn't* brought wide visibility to emergent feminist theoretical work on film, articulating such concepts as the male gaze and “woman-as-image” together with narrative theory and semiotics in a way that is still authoritative. De Lauretis pushed debates beyond the rigorous but circumscribed work on language and textuality being undertaken by Anglo-American feminist psychoanalytic scholars in the 1980s, and feminist film theory quickly found a place at the cutting edge of feminist thought.⁹ Just as important, through theorizing such apparent givens as “experience,” she ensured that the political concerns of women’s cultural production and women’s studies programs remained pertinent to a sometimes insular feminist film theory. The very title of *Alice Doesn't*—drawn from a piece of ephemera, a feminist banner dated October 29, 1975—is provocative.¹⁰ It joins the concrete and the abstract, conjuring a heroine (Lewis Carroll’s, or perhaps another Alice) and a gesture of unspecified, ebullient refusal. For me, the slogan anticipates one of de Lauretis’s most important formulations about feminism: “[T]he critical negativity of its theory, and the affirmative positivity of its politics—is both [its] historical condition of existence and its theoretical condition of possibility.”¹¹ This interdependence of theory and activism, history and potential, describes a (women’s) *movement* rather than a condition of stasis.

In 1985 de Lauretis herself moved, accepting her second long-term academic position. She joined other *sui generis* thinkers such as Haraway, James Clifford, and Hayden White in the interdisciplinary History of Consciousness program at the University of California, Santa Cruz. De Lauretis has taught at UCSC ever since, with increasingly frequent, significant sojourns in Europe. *Technologies of Gender*, published a few years after this move, is informed by Santa Cruz’s multicultural feminist inquiry and activism. In this collection and in such influential essays from the late 1980s and early 1990s as “Eccentric Subjects” and “Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation,” which appear in the present volume, de Lauretis, in her inimitable and inspiring prose, recasts feminist histories of cultural production, reframes debates around sexual difference that had seemed exhausted, and generates far-reach-

ing concepts—the subject of feminism, the technology of gender—that keep sharp the revolutionary edge of feminist theory as it abuts other, crucial discourses.¹² Work by lesbians and women of color, burgeoning in U.S. feminist culture and thought of the 1980s, is central to her redefinition of gender “beyond sexual difference,” the difference of woman from man that is precisely *indifferent* to divisions of race, class, and sexuality. Foucault’s concept of a social technology, in which subjects are en-gendered (he would say produced) differentially but not oppositionally or (purely) oppressively, is rethought by de Lauretis in feminist terms that emphasize gender and experience. Her insistence on “differences among women as differences within women”¹³ bypasses the impasse of identity politics premised on coherent, volitional social agents by emphasizing multiple alliances and notions of division. It is lesbianism in particular that allows de Lauretis to specify the condition of being at once inside and outside the ideology of gender, constructed within and as the blind spot of sexual difference (that is, the institution of heterosexuality), constrained by its definitions yet critical of its precepts. Finally, the book’s readings of women’s texts demonstrate that feminist de- and re-constructions are themselves technologies of gender, thereby envisioning change as a local process of resignification and shifting consciousness, but one with global implications.

De Lauretis’s *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* appeared in 1994 when lesbian scholarship found contexts not only within the women’s studies curricula that had first fostered it but also in the antihomophobic literary and cultural criticism of Eve Sedgwick, the gender philosophy of Judith Butler, and other works of queer theory.¹⁴ In this book de Lauretis aims to think through lesbian subjectivity with and against psychoanalysis. She accounts for what she calls sexual structuring, akin to the process of engendering outlined in *Technologies of Gender*, which engages and shapes private fantasies and practices in relation to public representations ranging from the patriarchal family to the movies. The book challenges and refreshes feminist and queer theory alike with its insistence on retaining feminist concepts of gender in its primary consideration of sexuality.

In more recent published work and work-in-progress, de Lauretis continues to think through psychoanalytic concepts—notably, that of the drives—to understand the relationship between psychic structuring and the possibilities and practices of a given social context and mo-

ment.¹⁵ While these concerns are not explicitly those of feminist theory, which de Lauretis defines as “a controlled reflection and self-reflection, not on women in general but rather on feminism itself as a historico-political formation,”¹⁶ they share a feminist epistemology, or way of knowing, with earlier work. It is this quality of *thinking feminist* that makes de Lauretis’s contribution vital at the current juncture, both for queer and psychoanalytic theory in particular, and for early twenty-first century feminism in general, as it approaches issues of human rights, globalization, and new media technologies.

The recent history of the concept of gender—a historical reconceptualization to which this current volume contributes—helps us map some important shifts in feminist theory since it was first practiced in the academy, by de Lauretis and many others, in the 1970s. At that point gender was likely to be deployed as synonymous with sexuality, defined by Catharine MacKinnon as “that which is most one’s own, yet most taken away.”¹⁷ Alternatively, gender was the organizing term of social constructionism, as elaborated in Gayle Rubin’s concept of the sex/gender system.¹⁸ But accounting for race and ethnicity and, more recently, postcolonial and transnational positions in feminism complicated assumptions of gender as a common bond—either of victimhood or sisterly solidarity—with the realization that “the experience of gender is itself shaped by race relations, and that must be the case, however different the outcome, for all women.”¹⁹ A definition of gender as simply sexual difference or complementarity also failed to grasp the institutional nature of heterosexuality, what Monique Wittig ironically calls that “core of nature within culture.”²⁰ De Lauretis suggests a more Foucauldian understanding of the “technology of gender,” one that in some ways complies, and in others competes, with the theories that gained prominence in the 1990s of gender as a performative effect. Certainly the accounts share an emphasis on discursive construction; however, de Lauretis insists on gender’s rootedness in the experience of the body and in a social subjectivity at once constrained by ideology and capable of creativity.

It seems to me that the current vitality of gender as an analytical and activist category testifies to the usefulness of de Lauretis’s conceptualization. Such diverse formations as, for example, Muslim women’s participation in democratic government and the rap music of Missy Elliot do not conform to universalizing definitions, nor are their effects purely

performative. They exemplify de Lauretis's sense of the "movement in and out of gender as ideological representation . . . between the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and . . . the elsewhere . . . those other spaces both discursive and social that exist, since feminist practices have (re)constructed them . . . in the interstices of institutions, in counter-practices and new forms of community."²¹

Another key dimension of de Lauretis's under-construction definition of gender is the way it is experienced in her writing. Across contributions to feminism, film, literary, cultural, and semiotic theory, Teresa de Lauretis's prose is at once dense and lucid, syntactically complex and tropically vivid. Even casual contact with her work lets the reader know that the language is irreducible; the work of thought takes place in and through writing, as concepts evolve from sentence to sentence. Teaching de Lauretis entails teaching ideas, but also, crucially, reading. Of course, she shares an attention to rhetoric and the figural with other prominent feminist thinkers—literary scholars Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson, and Jane Gallop, and film and cultural theorists Kaja Silverman, Mary Ann Doane, and Rey Chow, to name just a few who are based in the United States. Language-oriented French feminists Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva influenced this work, and the European connection runs deep in de Lauretis's case. She sometimes writes in her native Italian and remains engaged with Italian and wider European feminist theory, and her work is widely translated. But beyond a complexity of syntax one may be tempted to attribute to her facility with romance languages, the lack of linearity in de Lauretis's arguments and other distinctive features of her writing are structural manifestations of her feminist project that set it apart from the work of her colleagues. Writing is what she identifies as a "self-analyzing practice,"²² germane to feminist thought, and the effects of her essays are experienced cumulatively.

"What if, once Oedipus reached his destination, he found that Alice didn't live there anymore?"²³ When the reader encounters this rhetorical question toward the end of "Desire in Narrative," she might chuckle, or even feel jubilant, as if she's made an ingenious but somehow inevitable chess move. De Lauretis's sentences often mix metaphors and embed examples, qualifiers, and cognates. The process of revision enacted in the course of an argument (for example, in "The Technology of Gender" the reader finds italicized restatements of core propositions, with a twist of key phrases)²⁴ means that there is often no easily citable thesis.

Instead, whole paragraphs are quotable. Passages from other writers or from her own earlier work are often adduced, and her argument proceeds through reading these citations. Far from excluding the work of others, her prose introjects and makes it over. This dialogism extends to her own positions. De Lauretis will frequently call attention to her earlier thinking, layering or complicating it, and she often remarks on her rhetorical strategies. Finally, she has a distinctive tendency to conclude on an open-ended image (exemplified in the “elsewhere” in the punch line of “The Technology of Gender” quoted above; the rhetorical question; the fragment—*Alice Doesn't*; or the ellipsis, which concludes two essays collected here). As de Lauretis writes about Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, “the text actually produces the representation of its contradiction.”²⁵ Contradiction, paradox, tension: these are (im)possible figures of feminism. De Lauretis exemplifies writing—and perforce reading—as what she might call, in a favorite phrase borrowed from Monique Wittig, a “subjective, cognitive practice” a writing-toward what is known but not fully articulated.²⁶ Changes—of emphasis in key phrases, of subject in dependent clauses, of parallel tracks from essay to essay—recall the “habit changes,” the result of experience, that she suggests engender the subject of feminism.²⁷ Habit changes come about through the consciousness, and unconscious apperception, of changes in material and discursive reality as well as in internal fantasies. I will elaborate on some of these ideas and terms below in the context of the essays that develop them; what I want to stress here is that the form and the substance of argument are indivisible. Even as it is singular, a subject’s writing, this prose demands a dialogue, an answering subject.

In the organization of this volume and the introductions to individual essays that follow in the next section, I have tried to maximize this dialogue. Collecting and juxtaposing the essays changes their terms of address, allowing them to speak to each other. Previously published essays have not been revised for this volume beyond minor formatting changes and the occasional addition of references; instead, each is preceded by de Lauretis’s note on its original context. Although I would characterize all of the materials presented here as timely, they are often quite specifically “dated,” or at least marked by shifters—“recent,” “now,” “currently.” Updating these, an editor would obscure how de Lauretis’s work proceeds through interventions, and also how it pre-

dicts or anticipates shifts in terrain theoretical and cultural. But even more to the point, their deictic function—which the dictionary defines as “of or relating to a word, the determination of whose referent is dependent on the context in which it is said or written”—is consistent with de Lauretis’s theory and practice, in which it matters “who says that sentence, and where, when, and of whom it is said.”²⁸

The essays within each of the three parts, “Representations,” “Readings,” and “Epistemologies,” are chronologically arranged. Inevitably, there are repetitions and redoublings, yet these iterations often put concepts to work in new ways. And while the essay groupings have strong rationales, other orderings using the same rubrics are plausible. “Representations” gathers essays on the cinema, literature, and theory that illuminate the process of self-representation in conjunction with these practices. “Readings” includes close analyses of specific texts: a passage in a novel, a case history, a film. “Epistemologies” generates figures of feminist consciousness and sexual subjectivity, among them “eccentric subjects,” “habit changes,” and “figures of resistance.”

In light of the emphasis I have placed on style, it may not be surprising that the concept of the figural makes an explicit appearance in the previously unpublished essay that gives this volume its title—de Lauretis’s most recent piece, and the last in the book. The phrase “figures of resistance” captures the way certain figures—the thinkers and writers discussed in the essay—refuse to accede to prevailing orders and modes of knowing, as well as the way the figural properties of language (or representation more generally) *always* resist a purely referential approach to the world. This is how, de Lauretis figures, feminist theory takes place, here and now.

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“Rethinking Women’s Cinema” is the first and earliest work included in this volume. Here de Lauretis shifts the terrain of feminist film theory from the groundwork of Laura Mulvey’s 1974 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” to conceive of the female spectator who had been polemically and rhetorically excluded by Mulvey’s account of the male gaze constructed in and by classical cinema. More specifically, de Lauretis speaks of (and to) a viewer addressed *as a woman* by certain women’s films. “Rethinking Women’s Cinema” was originally published in *New German Critique* just after *Alice Doesn’t* appeared, and it ex-

pands that text's recognition of the "surplus of pleasure" the female spectator might find at the movies.²⁹ The essay shares questions about authorship and aesthetics, and certain canonical film texts (Chantal Akerman's sublime *Jeanne Dielman* [1975] among them), with much of the compelling work by other feminist film scholars in the mid-1980s. But, crucially, de Lauretis finds the work of Audre Lorde as useful as that of Jacques Lacan. She is able to overcome the terms of a stalemate in theories of female spectatorship by insisting on the social as well as psychic forces at play in processes of desire and identification. Finally, she sidesteps the pitfalls of political modernism's prescriptive aesthetics (avant-garde films produce radical responses in spectators), as well as cultural studies' often voluntaristic politics of reception (we make of texts what we will). Instead, she recommends that we "rethink the problem of a specificity of women's cinema and aesthetic forms . . . in terms of address—who is making films for whom, who is looking and speaking, how, where, and to whom" (35)—in other words, as "the production of a feminist social vision" (34). The importance of "reformulation—re-vision, rewriting, rereading, rethinking, 'looking back at ourselves,'" arises from the understanding that this social vision is far from homogenous; rather, it is shaped by "differences among women as *differences within women*" (39). Such differences—of race, ethnicity, generation, experience, and consciousness—de Lauretis sees figured in Lizzie Borden's collaboratively scripted, multiracial independent feature *Born in Flames* (1983). The essay exemplifies de Lauretis's contribution to feminist theory in the 1980s: intervening in technologies of representation, including theory; foregrounding the cinema as an arena of transformation; theorizing a multiple subjectivity shaped by sexuality and race, as well as gender; and recasting the apparent split between theory and practice as "the very strength, the drive and productive heterogeneity of feminism" (35).³⁰ Finally, the understanding of reception found here anticipates feminist interest in the public sphere and calls for further theorization of the public sphere of feminism itself.

The second essay in part 1, "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," first published in *Theatre Journal*, brought de Lauretis's work to the wider attention of LGBT scholars and communities when it was anthologized in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*.³¹ Its publication here allows readers to see connections to her other work on representation. The first essay de Lauretis published from a lesbian

perspective, “Sexual Indifference” is an expansive and provocative interrogation of lesbian literary and filmic figures that challenge the norms of visibility of hom(m)osexuality. Borrowing this pun, along with the term sexual (in)difference, from Luce Irigaray to underscore how a masculine imaginary excludes women from the position of desiring subject, de Lauretis sets an agenda for theorizing lesbian subjectivity by critiquing an impasse in straight feminist theory. Literary texts by Radclyffe Hall, Djuna Barnes, and Cherríe Moraga, and films in whose address de Lauretis finds an echo of her own relationship to desire and the gaze, provide figures (both characters and textual forms) of excess and contradiction.

No one states the contradiction of lesbian subjectivity more concisely than the widely mourned novelist, playwright, and theorist Monique Wittig (1935–2003). “Lesbians are not women,” Wittig famously declared.³² This flatly contradictory but intuitively resonant statement stakes necessary ground for lesbian theorizing, de Lauretis argues in “When Lesbians Were Not Women,” the final essay of part 1. Written for a French conference on Wittig in 2001, the essay includes and builds on passages from de Lauretis’s previously published work in which she engages with Wittig’s thought (chapters 2 and 7 of this volume). But the synthesis achieved warrants its inclusion here. Wittig’s critique of the institution of heterosexuality is a strong materialist account of gender, de Lauretis points out, despite current (mis)readings that characterize the French theorist’s assertion of lesbian difference as humanist or identitarian. But beyond this, Wittig’s definition of consciousness of gender and its limits as “a subjective, cognitive practice” provides a crucial component of de Lauretis’s own understanding of subjectivity as paradoxically en-gendered. “Lesbians are not women” is a conceptual figure, a representation of what can be known through and despite the limits of gender. De Lauretis returns frequently in this collection to key passages and phrases from Wittig’s essays “The Straight Mind” and “One Is Not Born a Woman,” finding in the French writer’s brief theoretical texts, in her circumscribed yet influential oeuvre, a generative representation of reading (as a) lesbian.

Part 2, “Readings,” comprises three close analyses of cultural texts—Radclyffe Hall’s classic novel of *lesbianisme damnée*, *The Well of Loneliness*, Freud’s case of homosexuality in a woman, and David Cronenberg’s 1993 film adaptation of David Henry Hwang’s play

M. Butterfly—readings that engage with psychoanalysis, particularly the concepts of fantasy and fetishism, and supplement and extend de Lauretis’s important, densely argued, and passionately invested book, *The Practice of Love*. What might be characterized as de Lauretis’s “return to Freud” in this work is perhaps the most challenging aspect of her recent thinking. Yet, de Lauretis stresses, her interest in and use of Freud is quite literally perverse, and readers will find much that is new, critical, and enabling here.

As in earlier work, de Lauretis rejects Lacanian orthodoxies—the dogma of sexual (in)difference—that would render unimaginable an account of lesbian sexual subjectivity. Far from defining psychoanalysis as inimical to lesbian theory, de Lauretis asserts a special relationship. No other discourse concerns itself so centrally with gender, sexuality, and their interaction with and shaping by the social. Furthermore, we must grapple with psychoanalysis’s widely circulating accounts of us. As de Lauretis notes, feminists have demonstrated that there are “very good reasons for reading and rereading Freud himself” and this is “[a]ll the more so for lesbians . . . whose self-definition, self-representation, and political as well as personal identity, are not only grounded in the sphere of the sexual, but actually constituted in relation to our sexual difference from socially dominant, institutionalized, heterosexual forms.”³³ She is certainly not alone in returning to psychoanalysis in the elucidation of queer theory, though she is arguably unique in how she does so.³⁴

The Practice of Love is a resolutely personal work; despite the density of its argument, de Lauretis describes it as all but autobiographical.³⁵ Its ambition and modesty are equally striking: it aims to construct what she calls “a formal model of perverse desire” (xiii) by reading against Freud’s normative account and to develop a theory of “sexual structuring” (xix) through readings of literary, filmic, and theoretical texts that speak to her own fantasies and experiences. Painstakingly worked out in *The Practice of Love*, though easy enough to grasp intuitively, the concept of perverse desire goes against—turns away from, in the literal sense of perversion—heteronormative desire. De Lauretis retains in her account of desire certain concepts in Freud’s theory (and its Lacanian revision) that might seem inimical to her task, namely castration and the phallus. Yet her revisions are significant. She keeps the concept of castration/lack—for its corollary is desire itself—and the notion of the phallus as signifier of desire, which structurally links desire (and the

sense of self that attends it) to representation.³⁶ No mere efflorescence of passion, desire is tied to objects—fantasy objects. But unlike a number of other feminist psychoanalytic thinkers, de Lauretis attempts to rewrite the law of the father by defining the signifier of desire in lesbianism not as the *paternal* phallus, but more on the order of a fetish. The fetish or fantasy phallus is an erotically invested figure of the loss of the original object (a woman's body—the mother's and one's own). What's the difference? Refusing the paternal signifier, the concept of fetish or fantasy-phallus no longer forces gender and desiring subjectivity to line up in complementary ways, no longer requires a masculine position of desire. De Lauretis thus restores desire's perverseness, a welcome turn, and her argument mimics this mobility, displacing or perverting the notion of the phallus with that of the fetish.

The three essays in part 2 (together with “Habit Changes” in part 3) develop these quite complex arguments, even as they engage specific texts, and can serve as a point of entry to *The Practice of Love*. In “The Lure of the Mannish Lesbian,” de Lauretis outlines the central concept of perverse desire in relation to a scene from *The Well of Loneliness*, a scene of mourning and masturbation. She argues that the “fantasy of bodily dispossession,” of an “unlovable body,” is marked or signified here by Stephen's scar; the character's pursuit of the perfect masculine trousers and a woman to love accompanies a kind of impaired narcissism.³⁷ This is a somewhat surprising fantasy to detect in a text that seems so invested in female masculinity, to borrow Judith Halberstam's term.³⁸ Yet the possible perverseness of de Lauretis's reading makes it all the more illustrative of the particularity of subjective fantasy, which can be sustained even in works created for public consumption, as the fact that Hall's novel continues to strike a responsive chord today suggests.

In chapter 5, “Letter to an Unknown Woman,” de Lauretis elaborates on the theory of perverse desire in relation to the young female patient discussed in Freud's “Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman.” More precisely, she elaborates on this theory in relation to Freud's *text*. De Lauretis demonstrates that because his normative notion of the (positive) Oedipus complex does not apply in this case, Freud does not “get” what is at stake in the young woman's desire; she remains unknown. Rather than attempting to set the record straight, de Lauretis uncovers Freud's misreadings, their stakes and consequences, and makes room for a story of desire featuring a new protagonist.

It is also misreading that fascinates de Lauretis in David Cronenberg's *M. Butterfly* (1993)—the white male hero's misreading not only of the gender but also of the desire of his lover, as well as the auteur's singular interpretation of the desire at work in the text (that is, Cronenberg identifies with the duped hero). The perversion at issue in chapter 6, "Public and Private Fantasies in David Cronenberg's *M. Butterfly*," is fetishism, and especially femininity as fetish, redoubled and inflected through Orientalism. Reading the film as "at once the public representation of a fantasy and an exploration of the effects of public fantasies on the private fantasies of individuals" (140–41), de Lauretis further demonstrates how a subject's fantasy can be sustained by a text—that is, a film, novel, or opera might serve as the *mise-en-scène* of one's desire—despite one's politics, and despite the absence of any strict correspondence between its characters and one's identity or sexual orientation. In this reading, opera as a form of "public fantasy" is extended in the contemporary function of cinema.³⁹ The Canadian director's vision of a Chinese-American playwright's deconstruction of an Italian opera classic based on both concrete and diffuse versions of the story of the West's love affair with (its construction of) subservient "Oriental" femininity is intertextually rich, illustrating Gramsci's account (so central to British cultural studies and cited here by de Lauretis) of popular culture as "something deeply felt and experienced."⁴⁰ René Gallimard (Jeremy Irons)'s love for Song Liling (John Lone) is nothing if not deeply felt, with his own suicide demanded by his identification with his version of the fantasy. Yet this film's staging indicates new possibilities of the subject, de Lauretis suggests, in our identification of and with Song Liling as an active agent of desire.

"Fantasy is the psychic mechanism that structures subjectivity by reworking or translating social representations into subjective representations and self-representations" (123). Lucidly addressing the intersections of private and public fantasy, this essay foregrounds one of de Lauretis's most exciting theoretical contributions to cinema studies. The insistence on the specificity of a subject's fantasy does not mean it is unmotivated by or unconnected to the text or intertext in question; on the contrary, specific characters and textual features elicit it. But it is engaged through one's personal history and identifications, both personal and political. In this way, the piece illustrates, psychoanalysis can enrich cultural criticism's sometimes prescriptive views of readers and viewers' encounters with texts.