Epistemological Sadism: Queering the Phallus in Monica Treut's *Seduction*

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ABSTRACT

This article is a queer analysis of German filmmaker Monica Treut's *Seduction: The Cruel Woman*. This reading simultaneously reworks some of the Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic narratives of the subject and desire which have been problematic for feminism and lesbian feminism.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article est une analyse de l'homosexualité de *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* par la cinéaste allemande Monica Treut. Cette oeuvre revoit simultanément certains récits de psychoanalyse freudiens et lacaniens sur le sujet et le désir qui on été problématique pour le féminisme et le féminisme lesbien.

Monica Treut's explicitly erotic, feature-length film, *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* (1985), has received little critical attention from feminist theorists or analysts. This cinema text might be read historically within a framework of the familiar western *fin-de-siècle* cultural themes of decadence and perversion - a reading resonant with community anxieties about homosexuality and women. What also appears as a familiar cultural trope, ironically and comically refigured by Treut, is the *film noir femme fatale*, the figure of the sexually threatening female, the phallic woman. This female figure has symbolic and imaginary significance in masculinist and feminist western cultural narratives of active forms of female heterosexuality and homosexuality. As a generic cinema figure "she" re-appears in *Seduction* as Wanda, a lesbian-bisexual (queer) figure turning perversely erotic tricks as an epistemological sadist, a dominatrix, an authority in the realm of historical discourses on sexualities. This contemporary lesbian-produced cinema narrative can be read, inflected by a postmodern sense of irony, as queering psychoanalytic constructions, Möbius-like, perhaps for some spectators, to feminist cultural, and subjective advantage. In other words, Treut could be said to rewrite epistemological mastery as a sexy, active, non-pathologised form of female desire, and Wanda as a fledgling symbolic female figure. The latter position has been unthinkable in traditional psychoanalytic discourses which privilege only the power of the symbolic father.

Before proceeding with the analysis of Treut's construction of Wanda within a postructural, postmodern, and psychoanalytic - albeit queer - framework, I will revisit briefly some of the feminist questions for psychoanalytic theory. The problems for lesbian feminist psychoanalytic theorising are also complex, but shifting. Firstly, there *are* linguistic and conceptual problems. In both Freudian and Lacanian discourses, human sexuality per se and the constitution of sexed subjectivity are premised on a significatory and conceptual system of male referents (eg. penis envy, masculine libido, phallus, castration, the law and function of the father). Two central structuring fantasies of Freud's narratives of the origins of sexual difference are the "castration complex" for boys and "penis envy" for girls. Lacan's writing privileges the penis-phallus as the universal signifier of lack and desire. In the Lacanian framework, symbolic castration and the paternal penis-phallus - both signifier of desire and designator of positions in desire - are inextricably linked. Secondly, the significance of the imaginary

mother- daughter relation and its representations are underdeveloped in Freudian and Lacanian fictions. Thirdly, most Freudian and Lacanian derived narratives of psychosexual constitution, including many feminist forms, have presumed desire and sexuality to be functional only in the structural relation between men and women (i.e., according to heterosexual difference). Lastly, psychoanalysis, unlike Foucauldian thinking, often re-assimilates larger social issues back into the closed circle of the familial domain, thereby ignoring the heterogeneity of the much more complex power relations and conflicts that structure our world.

When psychoanalysis has been understood as the study of how sexed subjectivities are culturally and psychically produced, it has been strategically deployed by many feminists to critique the constructions of "feminine" sexuality produced by masculinist psychoanalysts. For psychoanalysis to be of use to lesbian/feminist theory, a re-working of psychoanalytic principles and techniques against their traditional explicit pronouncements and presumptions is entailed. Many feminist writers have developed, and continue to develop, sophisticated methodological and theoretical procedures for understanding the psychic dynamics of the sexed identifications and desires of female subjectivities in contemporary Eurowestern cultures. This work could be said to have turned psychoanalysis to feminist political, social, and cultural advantage by both critiquing the paucity and pathology of "feminine" subjectivities narrated by Freud and Lacan, and by examining the diverse and complex constructions of female sexed subjects from feminist and lesbian feminist forms of cultural production.

From the time of Freud's writing *The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), human sexuality as drive can be seen to be linked to non-pathological perversion and to representation (the contents of fantasy). Teresa de Lauretis, following Laplanche and Pontalis, writes in *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (1994) that fantasy is at the origin of sexuality as a social, as well as a subjective construction. The fantasies of origin (of the subject and desire) are cultural myths that have, nonetheless, a powerful hold in subjectivity, but are historically and culturally structured. As such they are open to transformations along with historical change (xv).

Many of the Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic myths of the origins of sexuality can be read as historically transformed by queer cultural producers such as Treut. The fantasies which she redeploys and renegotiates in *Seduction* include, most noticeably, the fantasmatic scenarios of "castration," the "masculinity complex," the penis as the "little" representative of the phallus, and the phallus, the sign of power, as (ideally) an attribute of the father. Treut, a lesbian filmmaker who appears not to assume "masculinity" to be a prerogative of male subjects, appropriates phallic signification to the side of her female subjects, especially Wanda. Masculinity is transformed in the process through terms which might be said to semiotically disconnect the imaginary phallus from its traditional biological referent, the penis, and notions of sexual difference and sex from their groundings in genitalised anatomy. This multiply shifting strategy works in Treut's reconfiguration of a female sadistic subject - perverse in itself - as a female subject of epistemological mastery.

Treut constructs a female subject who "has" a phallus which resembles a brain more than a mere penis. Following on from Judith Butler's (1993) work on the lesbian phallus, the image of the phallic woman, as Catherine Waldby observes, clearly contradicts any singular masculine claim to "own" the phallus (274). This does not preclude the problem that "having" the phallus, even in Lacanian terms, is illusional, even at the same time that Treut might disconnect the penis-phallus connection into a more degendered and degenitalised zone (the brain).

In more purely Freudian theoretical terms, two of the polymorphously perverse component drives, female epistemophilia and anal-sadistic mastery, are amalgamated and appropriated by Treut symbolically to the side of Wanda. Treut reclaims for her textual subject Wanda the brain as the erotically favoured female organ and the shoulder blade as the bodily site at which separation and difference, that is castration, (hence desire and lack) are inscribed metaphorically. Of course, from a feminist perspective, reading in this manner raises

some much debated psychoanalytic spectres that have proven problematic - for instance the aforementioned metonymic slippage between penis and phallus, and the Lacanian premise that to enter the socio-symbolic order of language is to suffer interminably from desire (the lack of oneness with the maternal realm which effectively splits the presumably male subject). Even Lacan was canny enough to admit that nobody (male or female) could possibly "own" the phallus. I will attempt to work through, redeploying some recent developments in lesbian feminist psychoanalytic thinking - particularly those of de Lauretis - in analysing how Treut constructs her queer female protagonist, Wanda.

Treut's text could be said to reconfigure a discursive mode of lesbian sexed subjectivity, socio-symbolically constituted through specific and multiple fantasy structures and scenarios, that are intelligible through a synthesised framework of early Freudian and post-Lacanian feminist understandings of psychoanalytic narratives of the constitution of a (female) subject in desire. These include Freud's accounts of the perversions and pre-oedipal polymorphous component drives, bodily sites, and objects: the Irigarayan demand that female differences in relation to the mother be articulated, and de Lauretis' refusal to jettison the "masculinity complex" and the "castration" scenario as flexible frameworks for re-thinking "perverse lesbian desire."

Contrary to the strands of feminist theorising which followed Kristeva's, and to a certain extent Irigaray's, trajectory of coding the imaginary - the child subject's relation to the maternal body, de Lauretis insists perversely on following through on a form of female desire which, as I understand it, disidentifies with the maternal body in favour of entering desire (lack not withstanding). In other words, de Lauretis revives the butch lesbian (or in Treut's case the butch, queer, *noir femme fatale*) as a significant non-maternal figure who is subjectively and culturally legible, and who in Wanda's case is not narratively foreclosed by death, suicide or other pathologies. In short, in *noir* terms, Wanda could be said to be a phallic woman who "gets away with it." The problematic, in traditional psychoanalytic terms, then becomes, what replaces the penis-phallus in Treut's fantasmatic scenario as the marker of difference and separation (from the maternal realm) for this cool, if not stone, masculine female subject? What safeguards the female subject in desire from the illusion that she, like the man with the penis, "has" the elusive phallus? And what does it mean for feminism to theorise or culturally constitute perverse female subjects - for instance, sadists?

The latter question is suggested by Treut who wrote her doctoral thesis on images of women in the literary works of the Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. This background informs a distinctive theoretical positioning of her work. It appears less than co-incidental that two of the central queer protagonists of *Seduction* are named Wanda, a major character from Sacher-Masoch, and Justine, a major character from Sade. Treut constructs *Seduction* as the story of Wanda (Mechthild Grossman), the cruel woman of the title, who operates a performance art gallery where scenarios of perverse sexualities are enacted for an audience. A male journalist (played by Peter Weibel) enters the scene to interview Wanda. After conducting the writer, who is impeccably coded as a corporate "suit," on a tour of the exhibits - including a video of herself discoursing philosophically on perverse sexualities - Wanda ushers him into a bathroom resplendent with chains, spikes, and other s/m paraphernalia. The journalist, besotted by Wanda's knowledge of the history of sexual obsessions and perverse sexualities, takes up residence in this bathroom for the duration of the film. He insists that he desires to be Wanda's toilet. Responding indifferently, Wanda retorts: "Well do it." Previously, she has told him that: "To do something really surprising is art." Wanda however remains indifferent to the journalist's desire to suddenly do something really surprising (offer to be her toilet). He misses the irony of the situation in that, for Wanda, acting out perverse sexual scenarios is not anything surprising. She tells him that her profession is being cruel and that his, journalism, is not exactly harmless.

What is suggested by Treut's introduction to this film in a Foucauldian inflected sense, is that sexuality, and particularly perverse sexual fantasies, have their own history and narratives which can be

known and staged for an audience as a business. In other words, in this film diegesis, perverse sexual fantasies are deprivatised, they are public as well as subjective fantasies, are discursively and performatively constructed, and have their own history, themes and economic value. It is when the journalist asks Wanda if the staged scenarios in the gallery are personal fantasies of ensemble members that she retorts that (personal) perversions are only misunderstandings. In many ways her relation to the writer functions to establish Wanda's position in the narrative and sets the scene for the construction of her subjectivity as "the cruel or phallic woman."

Many of Wanda's (about-to-be-former) female and male lovers appear in the performances which she devises and directs. Wanda is positioned, from the ex-lovers' perspectives at least, as the traditional imaginary phallic mother to whom all demands for love are addressed. She also emerges in this filmic text as a female authority figure who insists on, and symbolically represents in performance, the meaning of castration as separation and difference. One performance in particular, near the beginning of the film, stages a fantasmatic scenario of female castration called "The Bleeding Rose." In Lacanian narrative terms, the lesbian sadist's lovers (female and male in this case) must desist in their demands for love (from the fantasy phallic mother) and accede to desire. In this Wanda is offered to the spectator as something akin to a symbolic mother (if one insists on working in the familial psychoanalytic domain). This position is not one ever entertained by either Freud or Lacan, and de Lauretis disclaims that any culture yet offers such a symbolic figure as an alternative to that of the symbolic father who designates positions in active desire presumably for male subjects only. The symbolic father is he who is so beloved of the male psychoanalysts. I would suggest that the position of symbolic mother (if you must) is subtly different to either the traditional imaginary phallic and/or castrated mother (as fantasised by male analysts), or the notion of the (albeit impossible) maternal body as imaginatively deployed by Kristeva for instance.

Julia Creet, in discussing lesbian sadomasochism as a cultural representation and sexual practice, has theorised that this sexed subjective position (ie. lesbian sadomasochism) occurs in response to the maternal (read feminist) "no" to active female sexuality (145-6). Theoretically, this makes the possibility of even imagining any form of feminism as a maternal symbolic or consenting agency to active female sexualities, particularly perverse ones, difficult. What Creet is constructing as maternal law is a form of feminist orthodoxy which would refuse sexuality to the daughter, or at least refuses any form of female sexuality that is not morally acceptable. Lesbian sadomasochism, as a discursive construction or social practice, in Creet's terms, could be read then as a refusal of, or rebellion against, this inscribed maternal law. On the other hand, Teresa de Lauretis discusses, in Freudian terms, the question of maternal (the analyst's, mother's or lover's) consent to the girl's masturbation through the concept of "consent to [sexual] activity" (73). Provocatively suggesting a way of moving psychoanalysis "off the couch," de Lauretis considers the possibility that sadomasochistic impulses related to the mother's prohibition of masturbation may be recovered through fantasy in conjunction with public forms of representation (eg. viewing films, reading lesbian s/m fiction, in a lesbian bar) (75).

Seduction can be read with de Lauretis' suggestion that "consent" to an expanding diversity of female sexualities might be given to spectators in the viewing of such films as Treut's. Treut appears, at least through the narration of her character Wanda, to understand female (and male) sexualities as historically constructed within a whole range of discourses including religious and literary fictional ones. What Treut does in this film is redeploy the sign of sadism as a form of female symbolic mastery of the cultural discourses on queer sexualities. Wanda is positioned as phallic in Treut's text through her epistemological ability, rather than her possession of a mere penis. It is her authoritative discourse on sexuality and perversion which "beats" the journalist.

The body of the film deals with the shifting relationships between Wanda her trio of (by-now ex-lovers) to whom she increasingly exhibits sexual and romantic indifference. Explaining her position to the journalist, Wanda tells him: "Sexuality in a sense no longer interests me." Primarily she refuses

the sexual demands of her various ex-lovers as well as their escalating demands for love. Each is disappointed and frustrated to some degree, but each finally concedes. The last lover to concede defeat, her male ex-lover, Gregor (Udo Kier) persists to the end, becoming more hysterical as the "cruel woman" becomes increasingly indifferent. These are some of the most comical, and sometimes alarming, scenes in the film. Gregor threatens histrionically to commit suicide. When this ultimatum fails to elicit any response from the superlatively cool Wanda, he attempts to shoot her. He is an ineffectual marksman and the bullet merely grazes her hand. She laughs. Finally desisting in his pre-oedipal (incestuous) demand that the phallic mother love only him and marry him, Gregor resigns himself to the realm of desire. The two female lovers, Justine (Sheila McLaughlin) and Caren (Carola Regnier), concede somewhat more gracefully. What Justine demands from Wanda is sex, while Caren wants passion. The foursome remain working together amicably in the ensemble at the close of the film. The female protagonist's "sexuality" (and women are surely traditionally, for man, too much in sex or maternity) is reconfigured, through the trope of symbolic mother, as in epistemology. One may designate Wanda as cruel, as sadist, for refusing love and sex to the trio of supplicants, but I prefer to understand this figure as an innovative (re)configuration of Sade's explicitly sexual sadistic females. Wanda insists that her clamouring and petulant lovers learn that their demands are impossible. Therefore, I read the lesbian sadist ironically, against Sade, as a sexy epistemologist. Reading Wanda then might offer more than one, or even ambiguously signified, positions for spectatorial identification. As a symbolic female figure she might appear as transcendent, as positioned in the symbolic order of language in a way that exceeds the traditional idea of women as sex or in the "sexual" (for the man). In Treut's text Wanda also appears, except in her reveries in the bath, as exceeding lesbian sexuality (understood as some form of bodily contact between women) as well. Her position then is one which exceeds both heterosex and homosex in favour of one which comments on sexuality which, for her, exists primarily as fantasy (the lesbian sex) or as performances of desire (the scenes of "castration" enacted in her theatre). It is not that Wanda morally objects to sexuality as bodily contact practice. After all, she has had many lovers of both sexes simultaneously. Her bath-time fantasies of lesbian sex, including those in public places, are the most explicitly sexual (in this sense) scenes in the film. While this position does not necessarily equate easily with what might constitute a traditional sexual position, it might also be thought as a queerly "sexy," desiring position for a female subject in a scenario in which the term "queer" is expanded to encompass a desiring relation to any object - human part, bodily object, or even inanimate object. The latter scenarios, which constitute fetishism, are thought to be not available to female subjects in Freud's and Lacan's thinking, and have also not been overly popular with feminists.

But what does it mean to take the brain, one of Freud's not-yet-gendered (oedipalised) polymorphously perverse erotic organs as "phallus?" And what of Lacan's sly aside that no-one "has" the phallus? In following through on de Lauretis' trajectory from fetishism to "perverse desire" one can arrive at a situation, postmodernly speaking, in which it is not "phallus" (as marker of difference) that is entirely problematic, but the definitive article, "The." The linguistic slippage between "penis" and "phallus" is, as always from feminist perspectives, problematic.

PERVERSE DESIRE

De Lauretis, who does not presume that the penis-phallus functions as the singular marker of difference and desire between subject and desired object, re-works both the Freudian "masculinity complex" (in which the lesbian subject suffers from the illusion that she has a penis), and the castration scenario (in which the presumed male subject accedes to desire) through the "perversion" of fetishism.

Case histories of fetishism, masochism and sadism including those from Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) to Freud's essay "Fetishism" (1927) typically

concerned male analysands. Freud in his later essay "Femininity" identified male masochistic characteristics with femininity. The same passive or self-destructive behaviour in women he construed as her essential nature - "masochism, as people say, is truly feminine" (1932, 102). Similarly, documented cases of female fetishism were called something else, as if, Emily Apter notes, "to protect some exclusive male prerogative" (312). Despite the doubts from feminist psychoanalytic theorists such as Marjorie Garber that quibbling over the exclusion of female perverts in psychoanalytic history is tantamount to a form of fetish or perversion envy, Apter points out that these omissions "pandered to a tendentious depreciation of the feminine erotic Imaginary typical of the male medical establishment at the turn of the century" (312). Freudian psychoanalytic narratives of structuring fantasies would leave female desire reduced to penis envy or sublimated into a wish for a child (maternity). Lacan's discursive constructions of lesbian subjectivity would leave the subject with the invisible man looking on while she pleasured her partner.

One of the few lesbian theorists to initially and explicitly re-appropriate, in a feminist perspective, Freud's notion of the masculinity complex in women was Diane Hamer (1990). Hamer rereads the lesbian masculinity complex as a psychic refusal, on the part of the lesbian subject, of the "truth" of women's castration. While this assertion is appealing from a feminist socio-political perspective, and works against Freud's notion of female castration as a deficiency in relation to the only biological sex organ of any worth, de Lauretis argues that "to refuse the meanings attached to castration" within a Lacanian framework (or to refuse to rethink its terms) is "to find ourselves without the means to signify desire" (17). The distinction is a fine one. While Lacan, for all his insistence on recasting desire in linguistic terms, is also criticised by feminists, and rightly so, for collapsing all signifiers of desire back onto the penis, there is also a sense in Lacan's discourses in which lack or loss refers to the (male) subject's loss of the original object of desire - the maternal body. What de Lauretis is driving toward, in my opinion, is that the lesbian subject, in a similar, though not the *same* manner as the male subject, must differentiate between the meaning of the lesbian (her) body and the meaning of the maternal (other) body for desire to (be seen to) emerge. What de Lauretis is asserting is the difference, the psychoanalytic distinction, between identity and desire, between heterosexual women who identify with the traditional position of maternal "mother" (in her turn occupying the mother's place) and a lesbian subject who signifies her difference from (hence desire for, and lack of) the maternal body. In Lacanian terms, for desire to emerge difference must be symbolised. For de Lauretis, to refuse to rethink Lacanian "castration" in lesbian terms is also to refuse to symbolically signify, or represent, a position for women separated from the (to date necessarily) heterosexual position of mother.

Mirroring Hamer's defiant gesture, de Lauretis reappropriates not only the masculinity complex, but also the concept of the fantasy of castration and the fantasy phallus for lesbian subjectivity within the perspective of Freud's negative theory of perversion. She proposes a model of perverse desire based on the perversion that Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva claim was not open to women - fetishism. According to Freud in the major work on the subject, fetishism does not apply to women because, as they have nothing (penis) to lose disavowal would not defend their ego from an already accomplished and accepted "castration." What the male fetishist's ego is defended from is knowledge of the (m)other's castration. The construction of a fetish in the fantasmatic scenario replaces the missing maternal penis/phallus. Freud's classic male fetishist disavows the mother's castration by displacing the signifier of desire metonymically onto clothing or other body parts such as hair or feet.

According to Freudian classifications of perversions, fetishism and transvestism are overvaluations in inanimate or partial (body) objects to the exclusion of all other targets of desire. The dismantled - already split or symbolically castrated - body is preferred to a totalised corpus or body at risk of phallic loss. The choice of love-object is neither arbitrary nor convertible. The fetish both motivates the fantasm (of the lost maternal phallus) and directs the

questing path of the perverse subject. Within a Lacanian framework, Freud's notion of the idealised substitute phallus is interpreted as an antidote to the gaping wound opening around the splitting of the ego. This is qualified by Lacan as lack. For Lacan it is the credulity of the subject, the investment in illusion, rather than his or her misguided sexual aim that qualifies as perverse. Even though, for Lacan, both sexes can *be* lack, this model poses complications in the matter of female fetishism *qua* maternal cathexis.

What de Lauretis proposes is that many lesbian texts inscribe a fantasy of castration but also effectively speak desire and are thus fully in the symbolic, in signification. De Lauretis describes the lesbian fetish as "any object, even an inappropriate object attached to a desiring fantasy, any sign whatsoever that marks the difference and the desire between the lovers " (23). These substitute objects according to de Lauretis work for the lesbian fetishist because she doesn't care whether or not the objects represent the missing penis. Even Lacan, though he could not accomplish it in his own texts, would not necessarily dispute the disengagement of the notion of castration from its Freudian referent in the biological penis, by making it a condition of signification, of entry into language and the means of access to desire. De Lauretis does not dispute the concept of the penis-phallus as a signifier of desire, what she disputes is that it is necessarily or invariably *the* signifier of desire.

Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit (1985) argue that the fetishist did not simply disavow the mother's castration, but understood very well that the displaced signifier did not in any way resemble a real penis (68-9). They puzzled as to why the fetishist did not represent the missing maternal penis with a phallic symbol or object and concluded that the fetishist not only disavows maternal castration but also refuses the meaning of the paternal phallus. In this scenario the fetish object can be seen as representing for the fetishist what the male subject lacks, has lost, the "feminine" maternal body, rather than what the mother lacks - i.e., the penis. De Lauretis suggests that this might be read also as the structuring fantasy of the "masculine" lesbian subject.

De Lauretis does not dispute the Lacanian notion of a fantasy phallus as a signifier of desire. What I believe de Lauretis is suggesting in her re-reading of Bersani and Dutoit is how the signification of desire, particularly in the psychic processes of fetishism, is freed from penile representations of the phallus. These substitute objects according to de Lauretis work for the lesbian fetishist as signifiers of desire anyway because whether or not the objects represent the missing penis is not what motivates the subject's desire.

What Wanda/Treut stages, symbolises, in her theatre-within-film is another meaning of castration, i.e., another meaning of the phallus. I would suggest that what is constructed in Treut's discourse on a female sadist is close to de Lauretis' notion of a woman who does not desire the penis but something else; that is, a female fetishist. However, I would argue that in reading this film one might extend this theory in dialogue with feminist moves to fetishise non-phallic body parts. One might also extend the meaning of the phallus in Margaret Whitford's terms to mean the symbolic order itself (i.e., language itself severs the child from the maternal body). In terms of Kleinian feminist rereadings of Freudian and Lacanian theory, the child/subject's process of separation might begin at the breast, in the anal-sadistic stage - in which the child learns to master its own body - or in the stage of epistemophilia - in which the child desires to know about sexuality. It is logical to suppose then that a female child/subject might retain any, all, or some combination of pre-phallic erotic objects of desire, dragging them as it were into the symbolic universe. It is in this sense that I have designated Wanda as fetishist, in de Lauretis' terms perhaps - but more explicitly as "epistemological sadist." For Wanda, the desire for mastery - of knowledge about different sexualities and of the body - suggest a reading that more properly situates the subject's entry into desire in the anal-sadistic and/or epistemophilia scenarios.

In Treut's scenarios Wanda uses knowledge of, and symbolisation of, discourses on perverse sexualities as her sign(s) of difference - from the maternal landscape, from the journalist, and ultimately, from her lovers. These may be traditional attributes of the father, or at least

traditionally attributed to the father, but in Treut's case Wanda is shown to be able to manipulate knowledge about, and signs of, sexuality, sexual difference, and perversion in her own laboratory/theatre. She is also constructed by Treut as able to utilise knowledge as a symbolic means of turning her lovers away from investing imaginary fantasies of "the One" in her.

Treut re-deploys the Lacanian narrative of the subject's entry into desire in female terms. In the "Bleeding Rose" performance Wanda stages or symbolises a female "castration" fantasmatic scenario in her theatre. This highly ritualised performance is enacted before the gallery audience within the film, the cinema audience, and Wanda's watching lovers. The spectator is positioned in the place of each female and male lover (Caren, Gregor, Justine) in turn as they watch this symbolised primal scene. The cinema spectator also sees at times from the transcendent, objective camera position the gallery audience, the lovers watching the ritual performance and the enacted ritual itself. "The Bleeding Rose" entails a pair of female performers one of whom cuts the outline of a rose into the other's upper shoulder blade with the point of a knife. This symbolisation of separation is marked ritualistically and symbolically on a female body at a site other than the ubiquitous genitals - as it is in Freud's scenarios of female castration. Immediately following this scene Treut begins to introduce in turn the film scenes in which each of Wanda's three suitors begin to articulate their demands - for love, for passion, for sex. In turn, throughout the remainder of the film, these claims on the imaginary phallic mother Wanda - from the lovers' points of view - are refused. Wanda herself is not constructed by Treut as vaguely interested in granting these impossible demands. In other words Wanda is fantasised by each of the lovers, in one way or another, as the all powerful (m)other able to make good whatever it is that they might think they lack. Each imagines that oneness with Wanda will ease their angst. Wanda refuses to be positioned in these fantasies as the phallic mother. On the contrary Wanda can be read as a symbolic female figure, one who precipitates the clamouring greedy lovers into desire. The ritual of separation is enacted in Wanda's theatre for the cinema spectator as well as the characters in the film diegesis. Wanda is not constructed by Treut as attempting to fill up any Lacanian prescribed "lack" by fusing sexually or romantically with other subjects. She remains in language, in work, in business, and non-pathologised at the narrative closure of the film. This does not mean however that she morally disapproves of "sex." Rather than *in* the sexual, Wanda is represented as an authority *on* the sexual. She is constructed as, by now, indifferent to sex but not indifferent to manipulating discourses about, and signs of, sexuality in performances in her gallery. She wishes that her lovers would seek sexual and romantic gratification elsewhere. In coding her queer protagonist as an authority on the history of discursive production of perversion and fantasy, Treut rewrites Sade's, Sacher-Masoch's and psychoanalytic texts through Foucault's concepts of power/knowledge. Wanda emerges as the female figure who designates Lacanian positions in desire - a female symbolic figure saying "no" to demands for exclusive love. What Treut also articulates in *Seduction* is a form of female libidinal sublimation in epistemological and artistic production, a subjectivity traditionally assigned to male subjects.

Taken together, these elements of *Seduction* can be understood as disassembling the psychoanalytic and cultural fantasies of phallic masculinity and reinscribing them - in both symbolic and imaginary terms - as culturally and subjectively appropriate and intelligible articulations of female desire. What viewing this very queer text can provide are female subjects who are signified as powerful, queer and epistemologically sexy in their own right rather than appearing as defective men, and who have no difficulty telling the semiotic and epistemological difference between penis and phallus. Treut adds significantly to the diversity of contemporary constructions of female subjects.

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