

## Delicious

At River House, where the OLR was produced in the late 1970s, we used to have a Lacan reading group, and Ann would always be there. Decades on, it's hard to distinguish a one-off memory, now settled into indicative story, from something that really did happen pretty much all the time. But what I remember is this. We would take it in turns to read out a couple of sentences or a paragraph of Lacan from the English translation, and then there would be a pause. A pause when—so it has since come to seem—almost none of the five or six people sitting there thought they had understood a word of it. But a pause at the end of which, as often as not, with a longing and ever-lengthening exhalation, Ann would slowly articulate the single word, *delicious*. It was a kind of *sotto voce* exclamation, as if such a thing could also be a pure and concise perfection of critical utterance. *Delicious!* After that, there was really nothing more to say. Perhaps a nod or a technical query from here or there, and then on with the next bit.

Ann had an almost aesthetic appreciation of all things hard-line theoretical, and she shared or perhaps she initiated the militant OLR dismissal of anything that could be construed as a dilution or distortion of theory. There was a lot of that about at the time, all up for our condescending or exasperated condemnation. At some point I had got hold of a book that had just come out by Rosalind Coward. Coward had all the theoretical credentials—with John Ellis, she had recently written another book that was severely entitled *Language and Materialism: Development in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject*. But this new one was called *Female Desire* and was all about issues such as body image and food porn. It had a mainstream trade publisher and a consciously journalistic subtitle, *Women's Sexuality Today*. No one could have mistaken it for a treatise on Lacan. It intrigued me because I hadn't seen anything like this before—a feminist cultural studies book that was written by someone translating theory into a readable language.

I really wanted to show it to Ann, perhaps because there was a rumour that she had gone through a radical feminist phase, with anti-housework banners stuck up on the landing at Warborough. At the same time I couldn't imagine the Ann I knew endorsing such a frivolous development of theory. And so it was with some trepidation—I think this was at her house—that I took the object out of my bag and handed it to her. She looked at the cover, opened it up, examined the contents page. She asked me what I thought of it. She probably lit another Gauloise. She read a page or two. Then she carefully closed the book and smiled and gave it back to me. *'Delicious!'*

Rachel Bowlby  
21.6.2016