**Queer Post-gender Ethics. The Shape of Selves to Come**

**Lucy Nicholas**

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Within this book the author, Lucy Nicholas, states that her central project is to develop an androgynous, but not homogenous mode of thought that could inform ways that we come to understand ourselves, others and relate to society (Nicholas, 2014 p. 5). Throughout the book she uses gender-neutral pronouns replacing human with ‘humyn’, him/her with ‘per’ and s/he with ‘ze’, and in the spirit of this book I have adopted these for the purpose of the review. Per aim is to deconstruct and replace the role of sex/gender differences in order to move away from binary opposites towards a more androgynous mode of thought and multiple becomings. The author draws on queer theory using this to critique essentialist notions of identity and makes links between theory and practice considering the intersections of a range of social theories such as feminism, sociology, biology, ethics and political theory. By using this wide range of theories the author is able to debate why and how the reification of gender and sex has occurred and postulates how feminist praxis can be used to consider a non-foundational ontology of potentiality. I relate the use of the term ‘post’ as a means to move forward with our thinking of humyn identity and this book adds to a body of work explored by St. Pierre (2013) who considers how the work of the ‘posts’ allows for a critique of representational logic.

Chapter one starts with an exploration of the binaries of sex and gender where the author uses Bourdieu’s notion of social violence to consider how society promotes heteronormativity. This problematisation allows for a reflection on the challenges of moving beyond the long entrenched sex/gender binary and leads to an introduction of the work of New Materialists to reimagine sex/gender. These discussions continue in chapter two where the author considers the co-constitutive nature of sex, gender and sexuality and how they cannot be deconstructed separately. Drawing on biology ze theorises how the social and material nature of sex/gender can be constituted and uses the work of New Materialists and post-constructionists (such as Alaimo, 2008; Barad, 2003; Lykke, 2010) to promote a different view of sex/gender. This chapter also draws on Butler (1990) to destabilise and delimit sex/gender further allowing for a construction of a political position to remove hierarchical notions of sex/gender and disrupt hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter three introduces justice based on recognition reflecting on liberal feminism and queer theory which allowed for critiques but did not hold all the answers. The author turns to poststructualism to expose power dynamics and flows and concludes that a new way of perceiving ethics is required. This is expanded on in chapter four where the author builds on the work of Beauvoir and Butler to define an ethics that does not require essentialist foundations but is based on reciprocity. Drawing this chapter to a close there is a reflection on how post-gender thinking must move beyond the essentialist self to prevent symbolic violence allowing for misrepresentation of self. Here the author concludes how reciprocity can allow for a new way of relating to others without the presumption of identity.

Within chapter 5 ze starts to posit androgyny counselling that its usage needs to move away from notions of universalising masculine terms. Using Butler (1990) and queer theory, the author deconstructs androgyny and reimagines a utopian ethic which allows for androgyny to become a way of thinking rather than a fixed identity of being. Chapter 6 takes a political turn where power and ethics are theorised drawing heavily of the work of Beauvoir for conceptualisation. The author uses ethico-political examples of maximising gender choice and considers how these can mask androcentrism postulating that the aims of transcending gender hierarchy would benefit all. Within this chapter ze explores the challenges of deconstructing identity politics and encourages critical reading and thinking of both texts and real world events.

The final chapters of the book allow the author to consider sites for intervention, challenge and implementation of post-gender ethics. Chapter 7 discusses operationalising the precepts of the book and uses pedagogy to explore subjectivation. Drawing on Foucault and Nietzsche the author considers genealogy and the formation of a critical attitude which can transcend and resist the stable subject and identity. Queer pedagogy is used to help foster subjects to have a capacity for androgynous thought and to provoke ethical responses to normalisation. Chapter eight explores how social practice can allow self-determination and reflects on how positive and affirmative resistance transcends sex/gender. The work of Mouffe allows a discussion of how communication and a more democratic way of thinking and acting can be applied to real world events. There is also a consideration of relationships within groups and more intimate relationships where queer and anarchist practices are used to reflect on safe spaces for discussion and policy formation. In a wider sense the macro, societal and institutional spaces are deconstructed to preclude closure and dominance; here the author challenges the view of bigenderism and medical practice highlighting intersex rights. Furthermore queer prefiguration and post-gender prefiguration allows the author to note how sex/gender have been disrupted globally and the chapter ends with practical considerations of responses to sexual assault.

The authors concluding thoughts are headed ‘Utopian Realism’ and I would agree that ze has fulfilled the initial aim to radically deconstruct biology, sex and gender to provide alternative views of potentiality. The author challenges the reader with the analysis of theory and practice and does encourage a critical reading and thinking of selected theorists prompting a move past normative notions of sex/gender. This book encourages the reader to consider new ways of thinking and it questions normative sex/gender assumptions charting the expansive possibilities of moving beyond the constraints and limitations of either/or binaries.

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