IS NOTHING SACRED?

Rumina Sethi

Vassilis Lambropoulos, *The Rise of Eurocentrism: Anatomy of Interpretation*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1993, pp471; £19.95 cloth.

Marx has noted that the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas. These ideas comprise the 'ideal expression' of the ruling material relationships of that class. Marx's views on the interests of the dominant groups in society forms, generally, the basis of Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony which gives the most thoroughgoing understanding of how a ruling group exercises and sustains domination through consent and persuasion. In other words, the ideas of the ruling class are not directly imposed through coercion over subordinate groups but permeated in society through a consensus of subordinate will in order to appear legitimate and normal.

In his recent book, *The Rise of Eurocentrism*, Vassilis Lambropoulos treats the controversial subject of the western hegemonic tradition, especially its development since the Protestant Reformation. His argument centres on the politics of 'interpretive imperative' and thus he goes on to explain the various Hellenic-Hebraic dialectical formations and the Hebraization of culture in the twentieth century. Lambropoulos' work is significant in present-day discussions concerning exegesis, canonicity, interpretive authority, tradition, originality and textuality, as he argues with much scholarship how the hermeneutics of interpretation constitutes, to take one example, the dominant impression of an unblemished, idolized Hellas – or a neglected, marginalized Israel. All such intellectual formations, in his view, bear the distinctive imprints of their political, religious, and philosophical structures.

It is interesting that Lambropoulos' book and Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* were published almost around the same time: both consider culture as a vehicle for the imperialist venture rather than as an area of art and learning alone. Following Gramscian parameters by treating culture as an instrument of political control, *Culture and Imperialism* has the ambitious scope of defining the patterns of relationships between the western world and its overseas territories.[1] Spurred by American forays into imperialism, Said takes the reader through two hundred years of narrative history with a view to highlight the unconscious imperial attitudes that underline the narratives of those writers scarcely associated with the governance of 'others'. Connecting Conrad and Jane Austen, for instance, with this enterprise, Said holds them culpable of depicting native peoples as 'marginally visible' and 'people without History'. It is in the very omission of the salient fact of imperialism that much English literature from *Jane Eyre, Vanity Fair* and *Great Expectations* to Raymond

1. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Chatto and Windus, London 1993.

Williams' *Culture and Society* assumes its character. For Said, Conrad may be deeply anti-imperialist, but he is also an author who believes with equal conviction that Africa or South America could never have had a history or culture independent of their western masters. Earlier, *Robinson Crusoe* introduced to English gentry the founder of a new world and Defoe's *Captain Singleton*, less explicitly but surely, related to the annexation of riches and lands abroad. Less directly, Fielding, Richardson, Smolett, and Sterne did the same. Indeed, the English cultural forms like the novel and the opera served as important cultural affiliations within England, yet, unconsciously perhaps, ignored the presence of an area outside 'felt vaguely and ineptly to be out there' instead of, as a body of humanistic ideas, preventing the acceleration of imperial powers.

Quite in the same way, Lambropoulos is inclined to link scholarship and power since the formation of any intellectual heritage is not simply a romantic exercise for disinterested seekers. Both Said and Lambropoulos are extremely useful in any discussion that brings the role of knowledge and power into the understanding of intellectual formations in the cultural sphere, and the consequent dialectical tensions between, say, Auerbach's Homeric-Biblical, Schiller's naive-sentimental, Hölderlin's Hellenic-Hesperian, Lukács' epic-novel or even Nietzsche's Apollonian-Dionysian archetypes. What makes Lambropoulos interesting is his willingness to consider both historical and legendary material in his interpretation of reality. In spite of existing polarities, he endorses Walcott's belief that the *Iliad* can still be read as a Caribbean epic without recourse to distinguishing between 'biblical narrative based on resentment and mythical narrative based on desire'. Within this debate, another Caribbean writer's ideas are worth mentioning: Wilson Harris advocates the need for fictions with the multidimensionality of seascape, skyscape, and riverscape. He uses ways of crossing boundaries through intuitive response and imagination. Blake's 'Tyger' from the perspective of Amerindian jaguar myths gives it a different place in the South American canon. These links can be forged, he believes, not by intellectualising, but by the workings of the imagination. But his thinking still leaves a concern about actual experiences which are invalidated by the crossing of boundaries. Any reasoning, then, can only be an interpretation, imaginative or otherwise. The subtitle of Auerbach's *Mimesis*, Lambropoulos reasons, should in fact read 'The Interpretation of the Representation of Reality in Western Literature' and not 'The Representation of Reality in Western Literature'. True to its claims, the purpose of Lambropoulos's book lies not in analysing dominant modes of representation, but in interpreting them. Of course, he agrees that 'to those who are happy to be explained, emancipated, assimilated into the civil rites of interpretation, anyone not sharing the aesthetic communion appears uncivilized and threatening'.

Lambropoulos does not chart a linear history or a chronological narrative of how reason and morality followed the spiritual, but through a series of digressions each beginning with a prominent twentieth-century aesthetic

position (Martin Bernal, Horkheimer and Adorno, Levinas etc), examines in detail and with clarity the various ideals of autonomy. Auerbach can serve as illustration here since *Mimesis* exemplifies a strong Biblical view of literary history. All of Auerbach's selected texts are from within the canonical European tradition, and are furthermore arranged with the Bible in mind which in his view is the absolute Book. It follows that there exists no other literature before it. In fact, no other literature, in his view, can match the glorious achievements of the western masters. As Lambropoulos writes of Auerbach's Story of Literature: 'The notion of the tradition itself is not discussed, and its authority is recognized unquestionably. The unity, borders, jurisdiction, and goals of that authority are established. The driving implication is that the West has its own Bible, although a secular one, which is its literary canon'. Two things emerge from Auerbach's claims to historical truth: that there is only one literature worth reading, and that there is only one way of reading it, the Biblical way.

But then these are familiar characteristics of Enlightenment thought: subjectivism, objectivism, positivism, and totalitarianism. In privileging Man and the principle of self, the Enlightenment rationale put man at the centre of the Universe, and turned individuality into individualism. Such subjectivism in turn distanced man from the world. The world became an object of observation and exploration, an alien which was infinitely discoverable. Enlightenment quantified too and generalized the particular, thereby enabling the creation of a total, manageable system. The programme of Enlightenment had to fail however, besieged as it was with inner contradictions:

> The grandiose enterprise that was launched to liberate humanity from the grip of mythological thinking ... collapsed into a new mythology, which is all the worse, since it is still mesmerized by delusions of power ... Before, people were paralyzed by the mythology of superstition; now the reign of reason has produced its own mythology, rationality. In another sense, we are even more helpless now, having been deceived by our best potential.[2]

2. Lambropoulos, p101.

By bringing myth and reason together and the contradictory interplay of knowledge and power, Lambropoulos is able to reveal the circular trajectory of Enlightenment reasoning, argued cohesively in his analyses of Horkheimer and Adorno's Odysseus and their views on the barbarity of anti-Semitism.

Horkheimer and Adorno proposed Judaism, or 'de-Hellenization', or even the complete annihilation of the Greek element from western learning, as a project of 'atonement' for wrongdoing. Their message was: repeat, repent, return. Accordingly, they created a sinister model of Greek thought, representing thirty centuries of western civilization, from Odysseus to Hitler. Horkheimer and Adorno could hardly have been able to create a culture of atonement if it had not been for inventing a mythology of their own. Lambropoulos demystifies the extreme position of Horkheimer and Adorno, and guards against further essentialisms while examining the various perspectives adopted by Lukács, Marx, Bauer, Sartre, Weber, and Derrida.

It is clear that in fashioning distinct identities, the rhetoric of 'otherness' is significantly important since identities are prone to becoming essentialist rather than relational, viewed as they then will be from a position external to the actuality of relationships between cultures or from a privileging epistemology centred in unequal relationships. From this position, the Other is always Hebraic: the essential Other is the Jew who has to qualify for the test of proficiency in Hellenic culture in order to enter into the civic society of interpretive rights. Lambropoulos here skilfully extricates himself from paying homage to either of the two schools. He reaches instead for an area of postmodern interpretation – 'interpretation at its last historical phase' – in which the canon does not matter so long as 'everything is read, treated like text, interpreted, Biblicized'. As Lambropoulos writes: 'Both the separatist and the assimilationist positions, both the humanist and the anti-humanist attitudes find in Hebraism the postmodern universal that asserts the moral superiority of contemplation, the cultural ethics of atonement'. Undoubtedly, this is another transfiguration into pure faith.

Are we to then understand that Lambropoulos extends ultimately the Derridean model? Derrida, too, like Horkheimer and Adorno, blames the Greeks for the overwhelming oppression of Hellenism. As in *Writing and Difference*, he posits:

> The Greek father who still holds us under his sway must be killed; and this is what a Greek – Plato – could never resolve to do, deferring the act into a hallucinatory murder. A hallucination within a hallucination that is already speech. But will a non-Greek ever succeed in doing what a Greek in this case could not do, except by disguising himself as a Greek, by *speaking* Greek, by feigning to speak Greek in order to get near the King?[3]

Derrida must really settle his scores with Heidegger's Greeks than, in fact, with Plato. In other words, Derrida argues that Hebraism is not Judaism but its difference from the Hellenic, and further, that the Hebraic can kill the Greek father only by speaking the language of the Alien.

Towards the end, Lambropoulos asks the question: Can there be a Hebraic culture at all? In Derridean terms, 'the Jew and the Poet' are not circumscribed by the Greek Polis as both can attain the promised land of language. Judaism is on its way to becoming a universal condition: we are all Jews, and all things Greek are anti-Semitic. Or, the authority of theoria is simply eroded. This links up with deconstruction both being and not being a liberating enterprise. It questions authority but in the end, sanctions it, being really an affirmative movement. Deconstruction implies the awareness that interpretation and emancipation, reading and the freedom from it, the Hellenic and the Hebraic turns of culture are all supportive units of the Protestant project of modernity.

Indeed, Lambropoulos' new book sets up a discursive space for cultural politics, while adequately bringing out his optimism that it is not entirely impossible to conceive of a scholarship that neither corrupts history nor is indifferent to human reality.

3. Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1967, p89.

PLUS ÇA CHANGE . . .

N.J. Rengger

Stephen Crook, Jan Pakulski and Malcom Waters, *Postmodernisation: Change in Advanced Society*, Sage, London 1992, 264 pp: £12.95

Discussions of the character and significance of the changes that so-called 'advanced industrial societies' are currently undergoing seem to be one of the few growth industries such societies are still producing. In the last few months, for example, we have had three heavyweight sociologists weighing in with a combined effort (Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernisation*, together with another related treatment by Lash and his co-author John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space*, picking up where they left off in *The End of Organised Capitalism*.[1]

1. *Reflexive Modernisation*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1994; *Economies of Signs and Space*, Sage, London 1994; *The End of Organised Capitalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1987.

The study currently under review, though predating these by a couple of years, is very much focused on similar questions. Like the above books this one is co-authored and focuses on what might be called the socio-cultural aspects of modern political economy. It also attempts, however, to integrate wider theoretical and philosophical concerns within that framework and concludes that postmodernisation is both a radical change within, and a continuation of, modernisation. The study concentrates on six areas, culture, the state, inequality, politics, work organisations and science and technology, each of which effectively gets a chapter to itself, the whole then being bracketed, as it were, by an introductory chapter on modernisation and postmodernisation and a concluding one entitled 'the dialectics of postmodernisation'.

Unquestionably, the authors are treating serious and important issues. They do so, moreover, in a way that is relatively free of the worst excesses of the linguistic year zero that sometimes appears to have affected other writers working in this area. The accounts of the six basic areas offered are succinct and interesting and while the authors clearly share some assumptions and conclusions with the likes of Giddens, Beck or Lash and Urry their argument is sufficiently different to offer an alternative perspective on most of these points.

Overall then this is unquestionably a worthwhile book on an important subject and therefore deserves a wide readership. However, I also have some problems with the analysis offered by Crook, Pakulski and Waters. To outline what I have in mind here let me start by referring to their opening chapter. The authors offer a general survey of contemporary theories of what they term the 'current transformation'. Two broad approaches are essentially highlighted: on the one hand, there are views outlined by Habermas (together with some of his collaborators and allies such as Claus Offe), the ubiquitous and aforementioned Lash and Urry and David Harvey, all allegedly linked by a

'determination to save the analytic and normative salience of the idea of modernity (frequently within some variant on marxist themes)' (p30). On the other hand, we have a 'postmodern' approach championed (in different ways) by the likes of Lyotard and Baudrillard (p31).

This dichotomy yields three particularly important theoretical statements about the changes contemporary advanced societies are undergoing, the authors suggest: post-industrialism, disorganisation and postmodernist culture. Obviously, however, each of these is given different emphasis by the various approaches and it is the thesis of Crook, Pakulski and Waters that each is incomplete relative to the others and that a proper account of postmodernisation requires an account of each related to the other in the context of the six areas previously identified. The authors then give the following characterisation of our contemporary situation which it is worth quoting in full:

> The onset of postmodernisation is genuinely explosive as liberated social components diverge rapidly from the central direction of modernity. Postmodernisation is characterized by an unprecedented level of unpredictability and apparent chaos. Action is divorced from underlying material constraints (or rather these constraints disappear) and enters the voluntaristic world taste, choice and preference. As it does so the boundaries between determined social groups disappear. So class, gender and ethnicity decline in social significance and so also do some of their characteristic forms of expression ... the progressive differentiation of culture, society and personality characteristic of modernity involutes so that the very idea of an independent, purely social structural realm no longer makes sense. Rather 'society' must be understood in terms of culture as patterns of signs and symbols penetrate and erode structural boundaries ... The advanced societies of the contemporary world are poised on the cusp of this transformation ... the trend is not irreversible ... however ... a reversal would involve a legitimation crisis of such massive proportions that it would demand either cataclysmic economic decline or extreme coercion or both, on a global scale (p35).

There are a number of points that arise from this characterisation. I shall pass over the use of terms such as 'involute' as a temporary linguistic aberration but I want to concentrate on two points derived from the above argument. First, it seems to me at least, the authors' characterisation can be questioned in a number of ways. Is it really the case that such things as ethnicity and gender (and even class) are becoming less significant? Quite the contrary, I would have said. In so-called 'advanced societies', gender issues are increasingly seen as a central feature of political debate and action. Far from becoming less significant they seem to be becoming much *more* significant. Of course, the authors might suggest that this is what they mean, that in the process of such things as gender and ethnicity declining in importance,

contemporary understandings of them must be problematised. However, *gender* as such has an increasingly high-profile and is likely to continue to do so for the foreseeable future, however much particular gender roles or assumptions might disappear.

A similar point can be made with regard to ethnicity. It is clearly not the case that 'ethnicity' has ceased to be a feature of (say) contemporary German politics (Gastarbeiter, Grundgesetz), British politics (Northern Ireland, racial attacks) or – perhaps most obviously of all – the United States (the LA riots, for example). Many similar arguments could be made with regard to other claims the authors make. Must society really now be seen in terms of 'culture', or if it must, how is this different from the way in which anthropologists such as Geertz have suggested that we should always see the relations between society and culture? Moreover, if we are on the 'cusp' of this transformation (as the authors suggest) then presumably a 'reversal' is always possible unless you also assume that the trends they analyse have some kind of determinate logic which is itself irreversible.

This leads on to my second point. The authors clearly veer towards the 'postmodern' side of the debate (as expressed above) – though by no means entirely – and yet they do not really examine the notion enough nor discuss the philosophical and metaphysical claims that such a view might require. Of course, in some ways, this is fair enough; there should be some academic division of labour somewhere. However, it does leave the impression of unfinished business, as it were. In fact, I would argue that the authors quite understandably focus on (post)modernity as socio-cultural form, and they have not provided a sufficiently rich analysis of the postmodern mood which might accompany it. As a result the true implications of their analysis are, I think, obscured.

Despite these disagreements, however, I hope it is clear that I think that the book is an excellent one. Discussions of these questions that are as wide-ranging, as accessible and as stimulating as this one are none too common. One hopes that the authors will take their analysis further.

MODERNITY (AND AFTER)!

N.J. Rengger

David Lyon, *Postmodernity*, Open University Press, Buckingham 1994, 104 pp; £8.99 cloth, £30.00 paper.

People could be forgiven for thinking that the world could profitably do without many more more books on postmodernism, postmodernity and the like, of which, of late, we seem to have had a positive torrent.

I do not share the view, at least not quite. If by it it is meant that we have probably had about enough of allegedly 'postmodern' agonising (or celebration) about our 'radical', 'new' situation, the sort of thing that Gilles Lipovetsky has recently engaged us with in *Le Crepescule du devoir*, for example, then I would probably agree (with a hearty cheer). On the other hand the tendency, especially among many political theorists, to avoid discussing modernity (or its putative 'post') at all I find almost equally worrying. Whether or not we feel that we can agree with any particular theorist of 'postmodernity', to deny its importance as a cultural claim seems perverse. What we need, therefore, is work that attempts to treat questions about modernity and postmodernity in ways that bring out its importance without sounding either messianic or, worse, flippant.

David Lyon's book clearly attempts to pursue this aim and does so I think with commendable clarity and an unusual – though certainly welcome – brevity. The book is manifestly intended as an introduction to this enormously complex area and as such it succeeds extremely well. Divided into six chapters, the book traces the idea of postmodernity through its historical stages, its links with notions of modernity as such, its connection with such ideas as post-industrialism, and, the emphasis that Lyon sees as central for it, the change in the nature of such phenomena as consumerism. In the concluding chapter he also attempts, rightly I think, to relate some of the recent elevations of the pre-modern (MacIntyre, Grant, Milbank) to their postmodern cousins. Overall the book is clearly written, tightly focused and is likely to be an excellent book to put in the hands of students.

Lyon's book is about 'postmodernity' but he clearly sees this in terms of the discussions of both ideas *about* the postmodern and changes *in*, for example, productive forces which are creating a new society. These two aspects of the modernity debate could be seen as, respectively, modernity as mood and modernity as socio-cultural form and Lyon is, I think, quite right to see these two phenomena as linked. However, in my view they are also importantly distinct. Indeed, they need to be held apart *in order* to properly see how they might best be related to one another. For example, there are pronounced

changes in the character of consumerism in the late twentieth century created by (to just pick up some themes at random) informational and technological shifts, globalisation, demographic change (as Lyon discusses in some detail in his penultimate chapter). This seems to me to be undeniable. The question is how to assess the significance of such changes.

Here it is the relation of these claims to the more obviously theoretical and philosophical accounts of the 'crisis of representation' (and/or knowledge/and or ethics and/or meaning) that are the leitmotif of 'postmodern thought' (as mood) that is interesting and central with regard to an assessment of whether or not we can legitimately use the term 'postmodernity' to refer to a qualitatively different (or at least changing) society. However, to properly assess this we must have an understanding of the sense of each aspect of the question before we can say how closely one might depend upon the other or even how congruent the two claims are. After all, many thinkers not interested in 'postmodernity' as such would accept that there have been major changes in social or productive forms. To assert that we should see these changes in the way that theses about 'postmodernity' claim is to assert a *particular* relationship between 'postmodern' claims about knowledge/meaning and so on and these socio-economic shifts.

Lyon's book discusses discrete aspects of both modernity as mood and modernity as socio-cultural form very well. However, he sometimes seems to run the two together in a way that I think is problematic in that it runs the risk of hindering, rather than aiding, the task of understanding both. His discussion of consumerism, interesting though it is, has something of this about it as do his reflections on the history of postmodernity as an idea outlined at the beginning of the book.

None of this, however, should detract from Lyon's achievement. The book covers a large amount of territory in a remarkably brief compass, is clearly written and deals with an important issue in an unfussy and illuminating style.

IDENTITY ORGIES

Linda Ruth Williams

Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson (eds), *Dirty Looks: Women Pornography, Power*, BFI Publishing 1993, £12.95 paperback; *Social Text*, 37, Winter 1993.

If feminist debate around pornography and censorship has been at best difficult, the new turn towards interest in the sex industry itself promises to focus a number of problems. What both *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power* (edited by Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson) and the Winter 1993 edition of *Social Text* (which includes a special section edited by Anne McClintock on the sex trade) have in common, apart from a couple of duplicated essays, is that they evidence a shift not just in feminist attitudes towards the representations of pornography, but in its desire to bridge the gap between analysis of images and the working world of production and consumption, by looking more closely at what sex workers offer their clients (on film or in body), and what the clients want from the sex industry and its images. One basic realignment comes through the ways in which writers in both collections are keen to mark the radical difference between their own positions and those of Andrea Dworkin, Robin Morgan, Catherine MacKinnon, or, in Britain, Catherine Itzin, adding to the burgeoning corpus of challenges to the marriage of certain strains of cultural feminism with right-wing pro-censors. The shift away from fixed models of gender difference is here once again made in a number of ways via a discussion of 'perversion'. Voyeurism, exhibitionism, s/m and b/d activities slide blithely across the gender divide, muddying it in the process; like transvestism for Marjorie Garber in *Vested Interests*, the activities which these texts discuss embody and perform social contradiction.[1] Against the grain of a once-dominant feminist voice, here the pleasures as well as the dangers of pornography and sex work are emphasised, looking towards, at the most extreme point represented in either collection, a feminist 'pornotopia'.[2] Porn is not just an issue around the body (and how bodies are represented), it moves the body (to arousal), just as other low cultural forms provoke tears (melodrama or romance) or screams (horror). The expanding subject area of 'porn studies' (a sexy new academic niche addressed with some irony by Jennifer Wicke in *Dirty Looks*: 'Pornography is sexy, and so is writing about it'[3]) forges connections with others ways of reading genre. Indeed, the potential cross-overs with work on other genres are multiple, not just through the connection made explicitly here with recent work on the identifications of horror cinema (Carol Clover, author of the important 1992 text on horror and gender *Men, Women and Chain Saws*,

1. See in particular Anne McClintock's discussion of Garber in 'Maid to Order: Commercial Fetishism and Gender Power', p98 of *Social Text*.

2. In Gertrude Koch's words – 'The Body's Shadow Realm', in *Dirty Looks*, p42.

3. Jennifer Wicke, 'Through a Gaze Darkly: Pornography's Academic Market', in *Dirty Looks*, p78.

introduces *Dirty Looks*), but with other work on mass-market pleasures and perils. Laura Kipnis reads transvestite self-portraiture alongside the Untitled Film Stills of Cindy Sherman, whilst Lynne Segal's lively discussion of the paucity of concrete evidence linking pornographic consumption with violent sex crime has a strong bearing on the current debate on the behavioural effects (or not) of horror films on their audiences.

The two collections come from different sides of the Atlantic (one is a British Film Institute publication, the other emanates from Duke University), and are inflected rather differently. *Social Text* is centrally concerned with the sex trade, and includes a number of contributions from its workers, whilst the other is a more diverse, but academically focused, set of essays which contain wide discussion of primary 'effects' studies of the relationship between porn consumption and sexual violence, Asian cinema, and the academic obsession with porn itself, as well as a number of readings of different pornographic texts and contexts. By addressing the way in which the primary identifications which psychoanalysis explains are mixed and muddied in the practices the sex trade facilitates, gender theory meets sexual practice in an important way in these collections. Pornography, prostitution, and the sex work associated with these have formed difficult territory for some feminists, upon which some of the bitterest splits in the women's movement have opened up. The battles of pro- and anti-censorship campaigners are well documented, and a number of pieces in the *Social Text* collection also highlight (and condemn) feminist opposition to prostitution as the prime symptom of female false consciousness (the sex worker as, in Laurie Shrage's notorious analogy, a female Uncle Tom), or as female victimage writ large (Dworkin's support only for prostitute groups which highlight the horrors of sex work, such as WHISPER, Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt). These essays radically depart from the position of anti-pornography campaigners, yet it is ironically here, with this new tone on sexual practice and sexual purchase, that the personal and the political are really being read together again, as escort workers discuss their autonomy, cross-dressers articulate their femininity as clients in s/m scenarios, sociolgoists debate the difficulties of participant observation in the sex trade, and Candida Royalle accounts for the new ways in which sex videos by and for women are being thought and made.

These are diverse positions, coming from a number of countries and rendered in very different first-person voices, a mixed bag perhaps because no formal academic style smoothes over the differences. Whilst the essays of *Social Text* do not *simply* celebrate the pleasures of sex work, they are keen to stress that pleasure and fun are often involved, that this is work like any other, and that all forms of sex work can offer women financial security and independence. (Male sex work is sometimes alluded to, but is not the central concern of either text, although call for more work not just on rent boys but on heterosexual male escorts, as well as on the desires and world of clients, is regularly made here. If there is a primary object which emerges through both books, it is of women as the 'bought' – but often profiting – object in a heterosexual contract).

'Jasmine', a prostitute and activist working for the international decriminalization of sex work, argues that 'women's lib shit' has done nothing for working women, yet emphasises her preference for the collective female support of the whorehouse over the separation of the street, and asks simply that prostitution be included in the 1992 EC Social Charter for Employees. Interviewed by Anne McClintock, Mistress Vena (a New York-based dominatrix) analyses the skills of domination work, the needs of the slave, the ambivalence of control. Robert/'Stella' discusses his long-term paying-partnership with 'Susie', dominatrix women of his dreams. Both of these latter pieces are accompanied by some of Grace Lau's marvellous photo-sequences, of the mistress with her slave, of the man transformed by his rubber femininity in the mirror. Royalle, the prototype 'couples' pornographer, tailoring her products to (her perception of) female desire, casts herself as the capitalist feminist identifying her market niche whilst still somehow gloriously breaking the rules (she is both a woman who 'dare[s] to break with a cultural taboo' and the capitalist who 'recognized and created the market').[4] As Lau writes in her own 'Confessions of a Complete Scopophiliac' in *Dirty Looks*, 'During the 1980s, female desire became a lucrative business'.[5] All voices argue against the image of the sex worker as victim, and not just because she so often controls the scene. Indeed, whilst the differences of women's experiences working across Europe and America as escorts, hookers, masseuses, porn actresses and dominatrixes are evident, one resounding message is clear: the single biggest improvement to prostitutes lives would come if their work were to be properly and universally decriminalised.

4. Candida Royalle, 'Porn in the U.S.A.', p24, 32 of *Social Text*.

5. Grace Lau, 'Confessions of a Complete Scopophiliac', in *Dirty Looks*, p205.

In keeping with Lau's title, early theories of the male gaze in cinema are also overtly problematised in both collections, with writers starting from the premise that the look is not intrinsically gendered, that (as Freud argued in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*) scopophilia is a primal instinct which plays a role in the sexual dynamics of both genders, of all infants. In 'The Body's Shadow Realm' Gertrude Koch thinks specifically about the pornographic gaze, and problematises the connection which is often made between porn and real acts between real bodies (porn as a substitute for, or a prelude to, 'real' sex or even real violence) by focussing on the way in which it is specifically geared to a solitary voyeurism, enacting 'the ultimate triumph of the eye over the body'.[6] Rather than being a replacement for sex with an absent partner, its pleasures run elsewhere. If two bodies are involved, these are the screen body and the audiences, mediated by the purest voyeurism in cinema, a voyeurism desperate not to be seen to be seeing. And this is the crux: involve another 'real' body here and porn ceases to work in the same way: make the pornographic response a substitute for real sex and you deny its peculiar conditions and pleasures.

6. Koch, p33.

Linda Williams' seminal (in more senses than one) text of 1989, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*, is the departure point for many of these essays, particularly its central discussion of the visibility of male pleasure in hard core porn (the money shot) and the (traditional) invisibility of a female pleasure that pornography is nevertheless desperate to represent. In

emphasising female sexual performance, and particularly forms of performance which actively obfuscate the division between porn and art, the centrality of male pleasure as key pornographic spectacle, as well as the certainty of genre divisions, are both disrupted. The excessive figure of Annie Sprinkle looms large here. Indeed, her current incarnation as post-porn-modernist performance artist is the subject of two essays, one by Williams herself ('A Provoking Agent: The Pornography and Performance Art of Annie Sprinkle', collected in both texts), the other by Chris Straayer ('The Seduction of Boundaries: Feminist Fluidity in Annie Sprinkle's Art/Education/Sex', in *Dirty Looks*). Sprinkle has become such an important focus for debate because her spectacular transformations, from hooker to porn actress to avant garde film maker to performance artist, challenge not only the boundaries between different selves and forms of work, but between the 'high' concerns of performance and the 'low' concerns of porn. By highlighting the elements of performance, artifice and pastiche, Sprinkle manages to problematise models of 'natural' or 'authentic' sexual response whilst also evidently enjoying herself. In the process, she offers herself and her audiences, in Straayer's words, 'a virtual identity orgy'.

The identificatory cross-overs which pornography can facilitate are central to perhaps all of the issues and subjects raised here. The argument which Clover has made in *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, that the pleasures of horror and other forms of exploitation cinema involve the audience in a number of contrary and cross-identifications, with victim, monster, and victim-turned-killer, have a role to play in the analysis of porn. In *Dirty Looks* Clover returns to this issue, but it is Williams' first essay here ('Second Thoughts on *Hard Core*: American Obscenity Law and the Scapegoating of Deviance') that makes the point most intriguingly and candidly. The piece looks not only at the deviance of those who militate against porn, but Williams' new willingness to discuss the pornographies of gay and lesbian, as well as straight, sexualities. *Hard Core* concentrated on the latter, since, as Williams now puts it, 'I felt I had no right or authority to analyse gay and lesbian porn'. Her revision resonates with a wider position on access to diverse images:

> Speaking from what I now recognise to be a false sense of fixed sexual identity ... I was unable to see then that what I was learning from the book was actually how easy it was to identify with diverse subject positions and to desire diverse objects, indeed how polymorphously perverse the genre of pornography could be.[7]

And just as our responses are fluid, so are the objects upon which we choose to fix pornographically. There is, then, no single dominant image which is intrinsically pornogrpahic and, simple as this sounds, 'Context really does matter'.[8] 'It is never possible, whatever the image', writes Lynne Segal, 'to isolate it, to fix its meaning and predict some inevitable pattern of response, independently from assessing its wider representational context and the particular recreational,

7. Linda Williams, 'Second thoughts on *Hard Core*: American Obscenity and the Scapegoating of Deviance', *Dirty Looks*, p56.

8. Lynne Segal, 'Does Pornography Cause Violence? The Search for Evidence', *Dirty Looks*, p15.

educational or social context in which it is being received'.[9]

Context also matters here, in the way in which the essays are presented, and the moments at which the essays repeat. Williams' piece on Annie Sprinkle appears in both collections, Anne McClintock edits one, and her piece on commercial fetishism appears under slightly different titles in both. The same words are accompanied by rather different illustrations, however, pushing McClintock's essay itself into somewhat different territory. With its British publication comes a flagellation wood-cut from 1718 (risky, but steeped in the authority of an historical artefact), and three coy tabloid cartoons focussed on that peculiarly British phenomenon, Madame Cyn. The photographs which accompany Grace Lau's essay in *Dirty Looks* are somewhat tamer than those of Lau's which are used alongside the American version of McClintock's essay – of a rubber-hooded, mirror-imaged, s/m embrace. This is followed by a diverse collection of dominatrix's calling-cards ('Be my chair if you dare'; 'Make no mistake ... She's in control'), common evidence to be found in every city phone box – and many of these essays – that one of the key spectacles of the skin trade is the woman in control of the submissive man. 'The economy of S/M is the economy of conversion' writes McClintock in her succinct Foucaldian discussion of debates around the transgression and reversals of sex games which 'play the world backwards'.

Yet whilst the BFI collection engages in these debates in a more theoretically ground way, *Social Text* contains a number of first-person accounts from workers in the sex trade which offer the testimony of wide practice. 'Nine times out of ten', writes escort worker "Barbara", 'all men want you to do is seduce them. Men are sick, fed up, and tired with taking the sexual initiative'.[10] If, for Freud, gender begins with a set of alignments which sets masculinity alongside activity, voyeurism, domination, sadism (as opposed to passivity, exhibitionism, submission, masochism), and yet men themselves slide towards the 'wrong' side in their sexual practices, what does this do to the models of gender difference with which we are working? That it is the more passive of each of these pairings which is most characteristic of male practice and identification is evidenced in both volumes. For Mistress Vena, the S/M scene is largely about male submission to female discipline: 'As my own slave says, you can get sex anywhere. What men want, and what they are paying for, is a really strong dominant woman. You've got to show them who's boss'.[11] This does not, for McClintock, add up to a feminist utopia, however. If Mistress Vena's control is finally controlled by her client ('they just want you to have the upper hand ... The Mistress controls the scene, so they can let go. It's about making them feel safe while exposing them to extreme danger'),[12] then the female power of the dungeon 'is a paradise arranged and organised for male pleasure'.[13] It's a well-rehearsed argument, but in the context of the worker's analyses of *Social Text*, one which is certainly not yet resolved.

Please note that Linda Ruth Williams, the author of this review, is *not* the same person as Linda Williams whose work is under discussion here.

9. Segal, p15, italics original.

10. 'Barbara', 'It's a Pleasure Doing Business with You', *Social Text*, p11.

11. In Anne McClintock, 'Confessions of a Psycho-Mistress: An Interview with Mistress Vena', *Social Text*, p71.

12. P71.

13. McClintock, p102.