On Pornography
Senior Essay, April 4, 1983
Kevin Foley

preferred readers:
Richard Bernstein
Lucius Outlaw
What does pornography mean? What does it say about a society in which it flourishes? Pornography has no uniform function, no constant role or meaning across the cultures in which it appears. The attempt to place pornography within a predetermined set of categories is doomed to apply categories native to a specific place and time where they can have no meaning. Thus when studying pornography we must examine its function in its own context for clues to its meaning. For example, 19th century Chinese prints depicting explicit sex seem to emphasize mutuality, peacefulness, and harmony, whereas Japanese prints of the same period, while stylistically very similar, seem only to emphasize size and detail of genitals, abruptness of movement, and expressions of passion. To understand the meaning of these differences we would have to undertake a study of their respective cultures, to grasp each style in terms of its own context.

Feminists have shown much concern in recent years over the plethora of pornographic images in contemporary culture. It is said that pornography, coupled with rape, transforms "that most intimate, vulnerable, and tender of physical exchanges into one of conquest and humiliation" as a means of keeping women subservient to men, (Robin Morgan.) It is also said that pornography is a means of transforming male fear — of each other, of Nature — into male aggression towards a common "other." Pornography projects an image of women as servile and degraded as a means of dominating them. Thus pornography is part of an over-all package of "woman hating," whereby men bind together by means of a Hobbesian sort of covenant to protect themselves against the state of Nature, (Andrea Dworkin.)

It is also said that pornography is a projection of a cultural
denial. That part of maleness, of Nature, which men cannot face in themselves is repressed, projected onto women, and attacked viciously. Thus pornography, as the product of a collective Freudian denial, reveals that which men cannot bear to see in themselves. It is the attempt of men to deny their own biological vulnerability by dominating the biological vulnerability of women, (Susan Griffin.) It is said again and again that the message of pornography is "violence, dominance, and conquest," (Gloria Steinem.)

On the other hand, there is a minority of feminists ("pseudo-feminists," says Andrea Dworkin) who claim pornography, as a force subverting traditional sex roles, is at least potentially liberating for women, (Angela Carter.) This view is supported by the traditional liberal "repressive hypothesis," which claims that an open and free expression of sexuality unleashes energies that loosen society's grip on men and women. Bourgeois society, it is said, controls the potentially anarchic forces of natural human sexuality in order "to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative." The repressive hypothesis is a philosophy of liberation, believing that most societies are inhumane insofar as they confine, suppress and deny sex. A society which can accept its own sexuality is therefore thought to be more liberating and humane.

The feminist-liberal debate, then, turns on the point of whether pornography is continuous or discontinuous with the dominant mode of control and repression of human sexuality. The antipornography argument claims pornographic images occur along a continuous spectrum of media depictions of women. The advantage of such an argument is that it explains an array of images with a single unified theory: the fashion model, the Playboy centerfold, and the Snuff character are examples of the media's depiction of male hatred toward women.
with increasing degrees of intensity. The liberal argument is unable to explain the tendency of mainstream images to move towards increasing titillation, nor can it explain the tendency of the pornographic industry to move towards images of increasing violence directed at women. And yet, the feminist argument covertly relies on a kind of repressive hypothesis that parallels that of the liberal argument. It is not human sexuality that is prohibited, confined, and suppressed by the sovereign, State, or Church. Rather, it is the natural sexuality of women that is rejected by the sovereign male order. Susan Griffin claims that this is a sexuality with the innocence of a child. "When we love a child, we love human nature before it has been reshaped by culture." Through their natural sexuality men and women can return to this innocence. "For isn't it eros we rediscover in the child's world? . . Erotic feeling brings one back to this state of innocence before culture teaches us to forget the knowledge of the body. To make love is to become like this infant again."  

It is my contention that a feminist analysis of pornography which clings to a model derived from the repressive hypothesis is inadequate. Feminists have demonstrated the disingenuous character of the literal opinion on pornography by emphasizing the violence towards women that appears either implicitly or explicitly in pornography. But although they are successful at overturning contemporary culture's self-understanding of its sexuality, they err in not retaining some element of that self-understanding in their own thinking. Certainly pornography is not natural human sexuality displayed in its pure and unalloyed form. But neither is it raw human violence in pure form. Pornography is sexuality intertwined with violence. By reducing pornography, and all of patriarchy, to woman-hating, radical feminism overlooks the fundamental ambivalence of the male
attitude toward women. Insofar as it is sex, pornography expresses a kind of adoration of women; insofar as it is violent, it expresses hatred of women. Thus pornography does not express a simple domination of women by men. There is no ground for the assertion that men aren’t swept along by the same societal forces that carry women.

Neither is there ground for the assertion that there is a natural sexuality in women that is being suppressed by men. If we consider that femininity itself is thought to be a "man-made" construct (as Mary Daly claims) we realize the epistemological barrier the feminist analysis itself places in the way of any possible faculty for intuiting such a female sexuality. There is no experience that a woman might have that is not already given shape by the patriarchal culture. Just as Foucault challenges the Freudian notion of a natural sexuality suppressed by a culturally determined one, I wish to call into question the feminist notion of a female sexuality suppressed by a male-authored one. With this essay I would like to suggest an explanation of pornography based on Foucault's rejection of the repressive hypothesis. Pornography, I am contending, is a relation of a mode of knowledge-power to the human body. Foucault's thesis is that power and knowledge are articulated together in discourse. A point in the field of human experience is isolated, reified, interrogated for the truth it is supposed to contain. The process of interrogation, and the language that arises from it, define regions of knowledge. Relations of power are simultaneously articulated in the distribution of knowledge: men and women are subjugated not through their ignorance, but through their desire to overcome their ignorance, through their thirst for knowledge, their craving for the truth. Foucault's project
is to unravel these "truths," to trace their histories, and unmask their relation to power by unmasking their genealogies.

It is my contention that the truth of femaleness is an ideal point that has been posited in such a fashion. In pornography a truth is posited about the female body which eludes men and women, which draws them inexorably into behavior which resembles pornography itself, in order that they might possess this truth. "Where there is desire," writes Foucault, "the power relation is already present." It is not hard to find the power that is articulated in the pornographic deployment of femaleness. The pornography industry itself was assessed to be a $4 billion a year industry ten years ago. The advertising industry depends on soft-core titillation to harness this desire to material wants. Indeed, *Playboy* magazine claims that its readers heed *Playboy* advertisement more than any other ads and purchase the products they see in the magazine. The deployment of femaleness, by generating dependable consumers, serves the risk-minimizing interests of capital. But at what price to those dependable consumers?

With this paper I would like to outline a genealogy of the female body as a point of application of power in modern society. My treatment will begin with an analysis of the massive withburning movement of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for it is my contention that it is at this point in history that violence became intertwined with female sexuality. This essay can do no more than introduce the subject; ultimately, it points to the need for a history of the female body. Such a history would require extensive research on the meaning of the female body in ordinary experience before the withburning movement. In order to conclusively prove my thesis, I would need to prove that the early incidents of persecution of witches were indeed the peripheral events that I am here assuming them to
have been. Many feminists argue that the European male is inherently patriarchal. In order to trace a genealogy of patriarchy I would need to demonstrate that everyday life was experienced differently then from the way it is experienced today. My interest here is in demonstrating that pornography, far from being an expression of a truth of sexuality, is actually a method for extracting such a truth from the female body, that such a truth is actually a product of the methods employed to extract it, and that there is a history of such methods that appears to be evolving towards greater economy and efficiency. I do not mean to imply that the truth of woman is created solely by means of violence applied to the female body. Such a truth is the product of a heterogeneous ensemble consisting of diverse tactics. Architecture, medicine, philosophy, education — there is no limit to the methods by which any discourse can be deployed. This paper focuses specifically on one method among many in what I would like to call the "deployment of femaleness."

When one examines the witchcraft mania in Europe, what emerges are a number of historical forces coming together to produce a discourse about woman. Woman as "other" (to use Simone de Beauvoir's expression) preexisted a belief in witches, and belief in witches preexisted their systematic persecution. But we cannot simply reduce the witchcraft to an eruption of fear of, and a reaction against, the "other," as has been done. Rather, we must see how a number of historical and economic agents joined forces to enlarge the scope of an existing discourse, to deepen its impact, and to secure the meaningfulness of its "truth." My interest is in how the production of this discourse produced a way in which human beings experience their own bodies. It would be easy, perusing witchtrial documents of the fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries, to see in the witch-fantasies'
of the local authorities examples of typically European misogynistic behavior. In such a case we would be blinded by our own hindsight. The point is to trace the methods whereby historically peripheral misogynistic rituals became embedded in the everyday consciousness of the typical European.

Between 1400 and 1650 somewhere between 200,000 and nine million women were tortured and executed throughout Europe as witches. Although women were not the only victims of this mania, they constituted the great majority. The *Malleus Maleficarum*, the witch-hunters handbook commissioned by Pope Innocent VIII and written by Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, two Dominican monks, in 1486, gives us an indication of why the majority of victims were women. Kramer and Sprenger claim that the majority of witches are women because women are governed by their passions, not by reason, and thus are more likely than men to stray from the path of virtue. "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust," says the *Malleus*, "which is in women insatiable." There are three things in nature which know no moderation in goodness or vice — the Tongue, an Ecclesiastic, and a Woman. "There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, a fourth thing which says not, It is enough: that is, the mouth of the womb. Wherefore for the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort even with devils." Thus the concept of witchcraft is intimately connected with medieval Christian misogynistic notions about female sexuality. "Witchcraft is primarily a sin of the flesh, and while men are capable of it, women are more prone because of their insatiable lust.

Who were the witches, and what was the cause of their persecution? Modern psychiatry tends to side with Jean-Etienne Dominique Esquirol (1772-1840), who is credited with the hypothesis that "witches were mentally deranged persons." In this sense psychiatry traces its
lineage from the witchburners, who simply failed to understand what it was they were faced with. This hypothesis presupposes that the reason for the witchburning lay on the side of the witches, and not the burners. According to Gregory Zilboorg, "The Malleus was a reaction against the disquieting signs of the growing instability of the established order, and hundreds of thousands of mentally sick fell victim to this violent reaction. Not all accused of being witches and sorcerers were mentally sick, but almost all mentally sick were considered witches, or sorcerers, or bewitched."

Szasz is of the opinion that the witches were actually midwives whose knowledge of healing by herbs and other natural means was an economic threat to the control of the medieval Church over medical education and practice. Alexander and Selesnick indicate that the Church and the lay medical establishment were not entirely aligned during the 12th and 13th centuries. The debate between the Hippocratic and scholastics traditions sometimes involved the Inquisition, for the Hippocratic tradition of clinical experimentation tended to blur into the region of witchcraft and demonology, according to Church officials. But by the 14th century a division between lay and clerical physicians emerged. These clerical "physicians" were charged with explaining those symptoms that lay physicians could not explain. It became one task of the physician to determine whether or not an ailment had been caused by witchcraft.

William Dufty advances the rather far-fetched hypothesis that the witches were midwives who attributed many ailments to the consumption of sugar, and their advocacy of a natural diet posed an economic threat to Church and State. The view that witches were midwives blessed with natural wisdom originated with Matilda Joslyn Gage. She claimed in 1893 that the witches were persecuted because their superior know-
knowledge, derived from practical experience, was believed to have originated with the devil, since it didn't originate with the Church. "The Church having forbidden its offices and all external methods of knowledge to woman, was profoundly stirred with indignation at her having through her own wisdom penetrated into some of the most deeply subtle secrets of nature." Szasz prefers to emphasize the economic threat posed to the Church; Gage believes that the threat was to the Church's monopoly on knowledge. In any case, the Malleus devotes considerable space to midwives, pondering such questions as whether "witches who are midwives in various ways kill the child conceived in the womb, and procure an abortion; or if they do not this, offer new-born children to devils.

Margaret Murray suggests that the witches were, in fact, persecuted for their religious practices. The witches, Murray contends, were members of a pagan cult that had survived since the Paleolithic era. The god of the old pagan religion, the "Horned God," became the devil of the new, Christianity. She makes her case by comparing descriptions of the witches' Sabbath with anthropological findings on various cults of the Horned God. But these descriptions come one and all from the documents left by the witchburners themselves, and are generally in the form of confessions made under torture. She makes a mistake similar to that of the psychiatric theorists in taking the word of the witchburners at face value. Mary Daly correctly points out the suspicious nature of evidence gathered from witnesses under torture. For example, one deposition from the Inquisition of Toulouse indicates that the victim was forced to confess by the means we have power to use to make people speak the truth... although she protested her innocence for a long time and made several false declarations."
Finally, many feminists have argued that the witchburnings were simply the product of male hatred of women. Mary Daly writes that "the witchcraze focused predominantly upon women who had rejected marriage and women who had survived it (widows)." The witch-hunters sought to purify their society of the "indigestible" elements — women whose physical, intellectual, economic, moral, and spiritual independence and activity profoundly threatened the male monopoly in every sphere." To Susan Griffin, the witch-hunters were wreaking vengeance on an image of woman projected out of their own personal denials. The witchburners "see what they secretly long for in themselves written over the faces of those they persecute." According to Herbert W. Richardson, the image of the witch is the flip-side of the image of the "lady" of courtly love, which also flourished during the Middle Ages. The witch "was the one who objectified all those anxieties and negative feelings that late medieval man could not allow to enter into his imagination and feelings about his Lady. Since the Lady had to be all good, there had to be someone to carry the unconscious fears man had that she might not really be all good — but also somewhat threatening. That is the function of the witch. She is the counterface of the Lady; she is the one on whom medieval man projected his fears of woman."

Ultimately, however, the evidence is inconclusive. Whether the original witches were exceedingly ugly, exceedingly beautiful, exceedingly clever, exceedingly wealthy, exceedingly demonic, or exceedingly independent, is impossible to determine. Witchcraft was a concern of the Church from the 12th century onward, and we can only conclude that this concern had something to do with a fundamental belief in a truth of woman, a truth mysterious and different from that of man. A parallel can be established between such
public misfortunes as storm, plague, or famine, and increases in
the persecution of witches. But the origins of the misogynistic
beliefs are unclear. Mary Daly argues that the structures of Chris-
tianity itself are inherently patriarchal and misogynistic. This
theory pushes the issue back another 1500 years, but still the question
"Why?" forces itself to the surface. One can look to the history
of the species, as Simone de Beauvoir did, for a partial explanation
of how woman was constituted as "other." But biological or psycho-
analytic theories can only be speculative. For my part, in this
essay I leave aside the question "why" and pursue instead the question
"how?" For whatever reason, the secular authorities who were charged
with the responsibilities of carrying out the executions ordered by
the Church were less reluctant to do so by the 15th century. "In
the 14th century mass burnings occurred primarily in Provence, the
Alpine regions, and Spain. In the 15th century they spread across
Europe; there were mass trials and executions at Rome (1424), Heidel-
berg (1446), Cologne (1456), Como (1485), and Metz (1488)."

From the very earliest witchtrials it is apparent that witch-
craft is, first and foremost, a sexual crime. A witch's inclination
and ability to murder people, destroy cattle, and perform other abom-
inations proceeded from her sexual union with the devil. A witch
may only have had sexual relations with the devil two or three times;
still, these incidents would be absolutely central to the proceedings
against her. In the case of Anne Marie de Georges, condemned by the
Inquisition of Toulouse in the 14th century, the very first thing
mentioned in her deposition was that "this monster asked her if she
would give herself to him and she said yes."  

Although witchcraft had been a growing concern in 12th century
Europe, it was not considered a capital crime. Indeed, the Council of
Trèves in 1310 recommended excommunication for the unrepentent witch. Kors and Peters suggest that the rising interest in witchcraft grew out of 12th century christology, which increasingly emphasized the humanity and suffering of Christ — and thus, the real threat of Satan as a tempter. During the 14th century witchcraft was coming more and more to be considered heretical and thus, a capital crime. It was at this point that the truth of witchcraft became intertwined with the juridical procedures of the Inquisition. During the early decades of the 14th century some witches were turned for heresy (not witchcraft), but not long after women were being executed in the south of France for the crime of witchcraft itself. The Inquisition of Toulouse provides the earliest descriptions of the witches’ Sabbath, from the 14th century — at least a hundred years before the publication of the Malleus Maleficarum. The 14th century saw such cases sprouting up occasionally — isolated, peripheral incidents where witchcraft became a subject of the judicial methods then employed for uncovering truth.

When a woman was accused of witchcraft, three methods could be employed to obtain a conviction. Confession under torture was most prevalent, but ordeal by water was also popular (in England a witch was guilty if she floated; in Germany, if she sunk), as was examination for “witch’s marks.” According to Szasz, what were taken to be marks left by the devil were actually supernumerary nipples, skin lesions, birth marks, moles, or other common, natural marks. They were often spotted by ordinary physicians, who would alert the local authorities. But the devil was also believed to leave invisible marks, and these could only be detected by “pricking,” for such spots would neither bleed nor cause pain when stuck with a pin. Thus arose a class of witch-prickers whose job it was to locate such spots. If
a woman had confessed her guilt under torture, her confession could then be confirmed by the discovery of a witch's mark, which she invariably had been made to confess having received. Because of the importance of locating the witch's mark for obtaining a conviction, victims were stripped and shaved completely. It is important to note that the witch-burners especially were interested in shaving the pudendum, the devil's most likely hiding place for his mark.

The techniques of torture applied to witches were the same techniques used on male criminals. Torture and execution were functions performed by the state; the Inquisitor would "relax" the suspect to the secular authorities for torture and/or execution. The methods of torture involved a continuous progression to more and more excruciating pain. The *Malleus* indicates that some witches are rendered insensible to pain by the devil, and may accidentally be killed before a confession may be wrought. Torture must proceed slowly, then, so that there is time for the devil to depart. For one victim torture began with the thumb screws, which involved "both hands bound together, so that the blood ran out at the nails and everywhere, so that for four weeks I could not use my hands." 27 The torturer might next apply a similar device to the legs of the victim. The most common method of torture was the strappado, according to one historian, which "consisted of a rope attached to the hands of the prisoner (bound behind his back) (sic) and carried over a pulley at the ceiling. By this he was drawn up and left hanging. To increase the pain, weights were attached to his feet or he was suddenly jerked up and let drop." 28 Another popular technique of extreme torture was to "stretch" the victim for 15 or 20 minutes at a time. Also employed were eye-gougers, branding irons, spine-rollers, forehead tourniquets, iron boots for crushing legs, and heating chairs, according to Robbins' *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft*.
and Demonology. Not only was torture the principle means of obtaining a confession, it was also the principle method for obtaining evidence for further prosecutions. Once a witch had confessed to participating at the Sabbath, she continued to undergo torture until she had identified other townspeople who had accompanied her.

The centerpiece of the witch's confession was the Sabbath, which Susan Griffin has likened to a "pornographic drama." "The witch-burners imagine that at the sabbat the witches kiss the devil's face, his navel, his penis, and his anus... The water the devil used to anoint his worshippers, the witch-burners imagined was urine; and they said he lit the candles of holiness with a fart... And then, of course, as is inevitable in the obscene plot, this imagined ritual ends when the devil fornicates with all who attend the sabbat." Mary Daly also sees the witches' Sabbath as a projection of the torturers' own fantasies. "A witch was forced to relieve her torture by confessing that she acted out the sexual fantasies of her male judges as they described these to her."

After her torture and confession, the witch was led to a public place of execution, where her deposition was read aloud. She was then strangled or beheaded by sword, and her corpse was publicly incinerated. The more extreme cases were burned alive. But in virtually every case, whether dead or alive, the body of the witch was publicly burned.

The procedures employed for obtaining a conviction and punishing the convicted were, with only slight variations, the same procedures used by European legal authorities for dealing with all serious crime. It would be helpful to note some of Foucault's observations on those procedures, as they apply equally to the persecution of witches. First, in medieval jurisprudence torture was not simply "an extreme expression of lawless rage." Rather, it was a legal ceremonial, designed to produce in public the truth of a witch's crime. The long and drawn-out
process, the endless point-by-point questioning, the application of pain to the body, the cries of agony, followed by further somber questioning — here was a ritualized confrontation, a physical battle designed to extract truth from the body through the application of pain.

It should be remembered that before such incidents the details of witchcraft had never been the occasion for public spectacle. Even if Margaret Murray's thesis is correct, and secret gatherings did take place for the worship of a pagan god, never before had these rituals forced their way into the public life of the community. Popular folklore and theological speculation became transformed into a truth of the witch's body. Such a truth presented itself as a mystery, concealed within the witch's body. What was extracted from her by shaving her pudendum, by the application of pain to the entire body, was a mystery of her sexuality. Witches were altered irrevocably when they had sexual contact with the incubus, as he was called; the real witch's mystery, her real point of inaccessibility, was her sexuality.

But ultimately what was enacted in the ritual of punishment was the sovereignty of Church and State over the witch's body — over the mystery itself. The method for making public what was secret was inscribed in a ritual which affirmed at every point the power of God's representatives on earth over that secret. The authorities publicized the fact that the Church's sovereignty was temporarily diminished only the more to emphasize, with overwhelming vengeance and glory, the infinite power of the Church over its body. Ostensibly a defensive act on the part of a threatened Church attempting to extract the truth of that threat, the public mangling and burning of a witch's body was actually a spectacular stamp of the Church's infinite superiority to any such threat. What this ritual succeeded in producing was an elusive truth of the witch, mysterious and fearsome to men and women, yet
subsumed under the infinite power of the Church.

In the 14th century such public confrontations between the authorities and a witch or two were isolated, and their impact slight. Details of the depositions did not travel far. At this point the mystery of the witches must have been regarded more or less as something outside the community. With the rise in the number and size of trials, the mystery of witchcraft began to take on new dimensions. As Christina Hole has pointed out, any woman could be a witch in the 16th century. The mystery of the witch became the veiled truth of all women.

The explosion of concern about witches occurred at the end of the 15th century. Scholars point to the invention of the printing press in the 1450s as a major vehicle in the mania’s spread. Although the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* played an important part in spreading an awareness of witches throughout Europe, it was written in Latin and thus was only accessible to the educated. But this awareness trickled down to the general populace in the form of “devil-books,” printed in the native tongues, describing the practices and abominations of witchcraft in an accessible mode. (The proliferation of these “devil-books” in the sixteenth century has been compared to the pornographic explosion of the 20th century.) Midelfort suggests that the introduction of Roman law and the inquisitorial process into German law during the 16th century also facilitated the increase in witch trials. No longer was a trial in Germany a confrontation between the accused and a private plaintiff, in which the plaintiff was at equal risk. During the 16th century the State took over the functions of judge, prosecution, defense, and torture.

The witchcraze began to take on a life of its own, assert Szasz, as it assumed the character of an economic force. Charles Mackay notes that “a class of men sprung up in Europe who... made it the
sole business of their lives to discover and burn the witches."
Szasz writes that "the persecution of witches was exceedingly profit-
able for both the ecclesiastic and secular authorities and for the
individuals engaged in this business as well. The property of the
condemned person was confiscated and distributed among the witchmongers
and their institutions. In addition, towns and cities would pay witch-
hunters for their work, the remuneration depending on the number of
witches discovered." Mary Daly adds that most of the victims were
poor, probably because wealthy women were protected by and from the law.
Thus, since few single convictions brought in large amounts of money,
many convictions must have been necessary to support this class of
witch-hunters.

The century between 1550 and 1650 was the worst for witch-hunts.
The witch-hunting worked to a great extent by chain reaction, for often-
times a confessed witch would implicate residents of neighboring towns.
Often witches were executed in large groups known as auto-da-fés.
These were large processions during which the accused would make public
confessions and be burned. "Great care was taken," writes Szasz, "not
to produce any heretics at these ceremonies about whose penitence
there remained any doubt, lest they create a scandal by denial." The
spectacles must have attracted large crowds. For example, Martin
Crusius noted in his diary on May 7, 1596, that "today ten witches were
burned at Rottenburg (a distance of a few miles — K.F.)... In
lecturing on Thucydides I had few listeners since they had gone up to
watch." Tens of thousands of women were executed for witchcraft
each year. Witchcraft was an ever-present reality, and the fear of
witches must have touched everyone. In some cases even witch-hunters
were accused, tortured, and executed.

The impact of such a massive movement was to take an element
on the periphery of European consciousness — witchcraft — and bring
it into the presence of everyday life in a radically transformed state. I would like to emphasize five points in regard to this transformation. First, in the 17th century the purest of women, to all appearances, very well could have been a witch. The secret was hers — beneath any woman’s breast lay the mystery of her sexuality, her desires, her passion. Second, the method for extracting the truth of a woman’s sexuality (in regard to witchcraft) in the 17th century involved the application of violence to the body. Third, this method created a power, held by the Church primarily over women, but secondarily over men as well. Any man’s closest relations — wife, mother, daughter, sister — held this truth from him, and the means to uncover this truth, or to be protected from it, were available only through the Church. Fourth, the constant presence of this truth of woman’s sexuality must have caused a ritualization of sexuality, a greater objectification of roles. For in 200 years the horrible fantasies of Sprenger and Kramer, no longer outside the boundaries of society, had been dispersed into the everyday possibilities of the average European. Fifth, we can infer from the public and spectacular nature of these rituals that they must have had a tremendous impact on the sexual roles internalized by both men and women. It is my contention that three centuries of witchburnings cannot help but have influenced private sexuality into the 20th century in a manner that we can identify.

Why did the witchcraze ultimately draw to a close? There is no comprehensive explanation available. Perhaps it was due to a decline in the Church’s power and influence, or to the tendency of philosophers to seek out more rational explanations for the world’s mysteries. In the late 16th century Montaigne argued that man ought not to execute witches because of the fallibility of his own know-
ledge about them. In the 17th century Hobbes attributed witchcraft to mere belief, not knowledge, and "pinoza attributed it to the lack of clarity of man's theological concepts." If the immediate effect of such rationalism was to reduce the sufferings of witches, the longer-term effects are less certain. Let us recall Foucault's landmark date in Madness and Civilization: 1656, the founding of the Hôpital Général in Paris. At this juncture an historical shift took place. Structures that had hitherto been reserved for the treatment of lepers had shifted to a semijudicial institution created to handle the city's poor. The Salpêtrière, which housed 1,460 women in 1661, was a confinement center for the city's poor and/or pregnant women, bothersome wives, prostitutes and children. By 1800 the Hôpital Général had become medicalized, as Foucault has documented. But what Foucault fails to recognize is that a medicalization of witchcraft occurred in the early 19th century simultaneously with the medicalization of confinement.

According to Szasz, the three leading figures in the founding of the pioneering French school of psychiatry were the people responsible for classifying witches as mental patients. Philippe Pinel, physician-in-chief at Bicêtre and the Salpêtrière, wrote in his Treatise on Insanity (1801) that "demoniacs of all description are to be classed either with maniacs or melancholics." Esquirol, Pinel's successor, is most responsible for establishing Pinel's views on witchcraft as scientific truth. Freud wrote in his obituary of Jean Martin Charcot (1825-1893), his teacher, that Charcot "drew copiously upon the surviving reports of witch trials and of possession, in order to show that the manifestations of the neurosis (hysteria) were the same in those days as they are now." Thus the shift from public spectacle to private confinement and medicalization, which all criminality under-
went, also took place for witchcraft.

That is not to say that the same women who were in one century being burned were in another century being confined. All we know for sure is that the 19th century authorities thought they were confining the same women that the 16th century authorities had burned. It is a theory that the psychiatry profession still embraces, as we have seen. The interesting point to note about this early period of medicalization was that the truth of sex, which had been the core of the truth of witchcraft, was overlooked by the psychiatrists. As Foucault has noted, a major turn occurred when Freud recognized in the behavior of hysterics what Charcot had refused to see: sex.

"Freud comes to Charcot's clinic," says Foucault:

He sees interns giving women inhalations of amyl nitrate, and they bring them, intoxicated, for Charcot to see. The women adopt certain postures, say things. They are listened to and watched, and then at a certain moment Charcot declares that this is getting ugly. What we have here, then, is a superb gadget by means of which sexuality is actually extracted, induced, incited and titillated in all manner of ways, and then suddenly Charcot says that that's enough of that. As for Freud, he will ask why that is enough. Freud doesn't need to go hunting for anything other than what he had seen chez Charcot. Sexuality was there before his eyes in manifest form, orchestrated by Charcot and his worthy aides...

But if we are to understand the reason why hysteria was intertwined with sexuality, we will need a history of the female body. We will require a history which traces a genealogy, from the three centuries of public spectacles which impressed upon men and women alike a notion about the hidden truth of woman's sexuality, to the scientific "discovery" of this sexuality in the 19th century asylum. There has yet been no attempt by historians to explicate this link.

Let us now turn to another, apparently unrelated milestone: 1839, the invention of the daguerreotype, the first camera. Photography was born during the lifetimes of Esquirol and Charcot, sixteen years before the birth of Freud. For several years it was but an
expensive diversion of the wealthy. But as the technology of photography evolved, and cameras became more accessible, photographs began more and more to find their way into the public's consciousness.

Susan Sontag has made insightful observations on how this proliferation of photographic images changed the way people experienced their world, the Platonic cave of fleeting images. "Photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe... The most grandiose result of the photographic enterprise is to give us the sense that we can hold the whole world in our heads — as an anthology of images."# Photographs give us a sense of possession, and yet they themselves can be possessed, collected, returned to at will. Photography was a technology ideally suited for the acquisitive temperament of the bourgeois European. "To photograph is to appropriate the thing being photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge — and, therefore, like power... Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire," (emphasis mine.) Although the photograph may seem to present things as they really are, it is just as much an interpretation of what is depicted as a painting is. "Those occasions when the taking of photographs is relatively undiscriminating, promiscuous, or self-effacing do not lessen the didacticism of the whole enterprise. This very passivity — and ubiquity — of the photographic record is photography's 'message,' its aggression,"# (emphasis mine.)

The elements of Sontag's words I would like to emphasize are, first, the implicit interpretation that any photograph renders of its subject, however subtle, which Sontag labels photography's "aggression;" second, the role photographs play in structuring the world
as we experience it. It is my contention that these two elements of photography caused it to be ideally suited for the "deployment of femaleness" in the 20th century. With photography, the public impresses itself on the private. One encounters photographs in private, or in small groups. The dialogue which would be the necessary condition for the rejection of an element of society does not occur when one views a photograph. The photograph offers its interpretation of the world, and intrudes into the viewers' world silently, without debate.

In contrast, one must imagine the spectacle of 25 or 30 witches, their bodies shaved, legs broken, fingers crushed, foreheads branded, tied together to several stakes before a large crowd of taunting spectators. As Foucault notes, the public played a major role in such events. It was their right to witness executions, to offer their insults to the humiliation of the condemned, and thereby to contribute their vengeance to that of the Church and State. And although the crowd was not likely in the case of a witch to turn and take the side of the condemned, as happened in many capital cases, nevertheless there was a confrontation with the established order, a moment of opposition, a rejection, that the crowd enjoyed. At an execution the crowd had the opportunity "to hear an individual who had nothing more to lose curse the judges, the laws, the government and religion." Foucault continues, "In these executions, which ought to show only the terrorizing power of the prince, there was a whole aspect of the carnival, in which roles were inverted, authority mocked and criminals transformed into heroes."

In the 16th century this opposition was silenced. The hidden truth of women, no longer on public display, was confined. Society was shielded from the power of this truth to reject society. In silence and in secret the scientists confined bodies, classified cases, con-
ducted experiments, made observations, recorded their findings. Like the witchburners, these psychiatrists were searching for the truth of woman, but unlike the witches, the hysterical women of the 19th century could pose no threat, could garner no support, could make no rejection.

The photograph, however, brings the process full circle. In secret the witchburners wrung the private truth from the bodies of women, which they presented publicly from the scaffold. The photograph takes the public appropriation of the private truth and returns it to the private — without debate, without opposition. The public appropriation, we recall, has to do with the means employed for extracting the truth, and for handling it — that is, with violence and domination. The public encounters the private truth of the witch through the application of pain to her body by the authorities. The authorities assert their ultimate domination by destroying the witch’s body. The private truth, the hidden core of witchcraft, is the carnal truth. The truth of the witch — and hence, of all women — is sex. Photography was well suited for the deployment of this truth because of its easy accessibility in the public realm, its absolute refusal to entertain objection, and its inherent aggression. The two separate rituals of a witchburning — the public ritual of extraction, a very real ritual of violence; and the private ritual that is extracted, an imaginary ritual of sex — are collapsed into one in the pornographic photograph. The photograph itself is an act of violence, a violation of its subject. The photograph wrenches a soul from its flesh and renders an interpretation of that soul. The pornographic photograph renders a truth of sex which is true for anyone who sees it — this is the power of the photograph.

Thus it is that erotic depictions of women in our culture are
necessarily intertwined with violence. Our mode of exploring the truth of woman is through violence. The initial act of violence, snapping a photograph, is the initial act of exposing the truth which is concealed somewhere in a woman's flesh. In the darkroom one exposes her face, then all of her skin, then her labia, then her vulva. But still something hides within the flesh. The soul is exposed through pleasure. The woman is depicted obviously moaning, turning and raising her buttock to the camera. As Andrea Dworkin writes, in such a photograph "the camera is the penile presence, the viewer is the male who participates in the sexual action, which is not within the photograph but in the perception of it." But something still more remote, still more essential, still escapes us. Her pleasure is still hers. It is great bodily pain, "the most intense feeling we know of," says Hannah Arendt, "the most private and least communicable of all." The truth is pursued to its end with chains, monacles, gags, leather straps criss-crossing the body, pincers on the nipples, leather whips applied to the buttock. In some hard-core films women are bound in such fashion and hoisted into the air over a pulley in a manner resembling the strappado of the medieval witchburner. Finally, the woman is murdered, her body cut to pieces as in the now-famous pornographic movie, Snuff.

Pornography collapses the two separate rituals of witchburning — the result of an historical interweaving of a mode of punishment with a discourse about the sexuality of witches — into one act. Thus pornography, as well as functioning as a means of extracting the truth of female sexuality, also functions as that which is extracted. The truth of woman is thus the very means employed for extracting that truth. But we recall that the means employed for the extraction of female sexuality are violent. Therefore, the truth of female
sexuality is violent. Female sexuality is violent. This is the meaning of pornography. If we recall the five points that I emphasized earlier, in regard to witchcraft, it is my contention that five analogous points can be made regarding pornography: first, the secret of the pornographic character is the mystery lurking within all-women; second, the method for extracting the truth of female sexuality in pornography is violence; third, pornography serves a capitalist power, generating a multi-billion dollar industry in this country, which exerts a tremendous influence on the wills and wallets of men and women alike; fourth, the proliferation of pornographic images in our culture has shaped our sexuality into pornographic ritual, with men and women acting out roles of domination and submission, violence and masochism; fifth, the sexual roles internalized by both men and women in a pornographic culture will have an impact on 21st century men and women that is impossible to predict.

Recalling Susan Spontag's observation that reality in the 20th century is experienced to a great extent through photographs, we can only conclude that the culture we live in is one in which sex and violence are hopelessly intertwined. On the lowest level a sexual partner is objectified — sex is masturbatory, even during intercourse. Gay Talese writes of the American male and the Playboy Playmate: "She was their mental mistress. She stimulated them in solitude, and they often saw her picture while making love to their wives. She was an almost special species who existed within the eye and mind of the observer, and she offered everything imaginable." The pleasure of sex had become mediated through the pleasure of seeing — seeing as a mode of possession. But in the act of lovemaking one is denied the power the eye is accustomed to. There is an element of sexual pleasure that is denied in the very act of sex itself. It
is a desire that can only be satisfied by media images, which in turn only fuel the desire more.

Alice Walker writes about a man who has realized his addiction to pornography: "Still, he does not know how to make love without the fantasies fed to him by movies and magazines. Those movies and magazines (whose characters' pursuits are irrelevant or antithetical to his concerns) that have insinuated themselves between him and his wife, so that the totality of her body, her entire corporeal reality is alien to him. Even to clutch her in lust is to automatically shut his eyes. Shut his eyes, and... he chuckles bitterly... dream of England. For years he has been fucking himself." 42

The work of Nancy Friday, who has written two books on the secret sexual fantasies of men and women, provides convincing evidence for my contention that the 20th century western man and woman have thoroughly internalized the rituals of the pornography industry. The secret fantasies of Americans, page after page, read like pornographic magazines — stories of domination, humiliation, even rape. Men fantasize about raping women; women fantasize about being raped. Even one who is conscientiously attempting to break free of the domination of pornography, like the man in Alice Walker's story, is trapped in his or her own desires. The man in the Walker story does not know how to communicate with his wife in bed.

The price we pay for a pornographic sexuality, a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative, is our inability to overcome the boundaries of individuation and communicate with one another physically, sexually. But as Mary Lydon points out, women's studies programs do not bring us any nearer to freedom. These programs are currently inventing "woman" as the object of a knowledge-power discourse, to be identified and controlled by the discipline of
academia. Lydon calls on women to abandon the confessional mode of academia, to reconstitute an art of female pleasures instead of a science of female sex. But what would this art entail?

French feminist Julia Kristeva has said that "certain feminist demands revive a kind of naive romanticism, a belief in identity (the reverse of phallocratism)." Feminists must use their identity as a slogan to advertise their demands for society. "On a deeper level, however, a woman cannot 'be'; it is something which does not even belong to the order of being. It follows that a feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it.'" 53

This is the option before us. It isn't much; it does not relieve us of our personal struggles. What constitutes a healthy sexuality, and how one might achieve it, we cannot say, What men and women can do together, collectively, politically, is reject the notion of sexuality that history has handed us. —Our one constructive option is our power to say no.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


The National Film Board of Canada, Not A Love Story (A Film About Pornography,) 1982.


FOOTNOTES

3. I do not mean to assert that pornography is a combination of two pure and different elements, eros and violence. Rather, it is the product of an historical intersection involving a discourse about sex and a strategy of violence, as we shall see.
7. Sprenger and Kramer, Malleus Maleficarum, p41.
15. Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p220.
17. Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p184.
18. Griffin, Pornography and Silence, p78.
22. Ibid., pp95-96.
23. Ibid., p11.
24. Ibid.
26. Ibid., p33.
27. Sprenger and Kramer, Malleus Maleficarum, p223.
29. Ibid., p258.
32. Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p214.
34. Szasz, The Manufacture of Madness, p36.
36. Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p192.
38. Ibid.
41. Szasz, The Manufacture of Madness, p70.
42. Ibid., pp72-73.
45. Ibid., p4.
46. Ibid., p7.
47. Foucault, Discipline and Punish, pp57-58.
48. Ibid., pp61.