

FILM: HISTORICAL- THEORETICAL SPECULATIONS

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Pornographic Space: The Other Place

Dennis Giles

In the study which follows I will attempt to isolate a single but central feature of the pornographic film and to treat it as a *symptom* which gives access to a second, latent text.

I consider the symptom to be a link between two systems—two worlds. The psychoanalytical theorist Jacques Lacan points out that the word refers to a *meeting* or a *twisting together*. The symptom functions as a

password to uncanny regions in which one is never "at home" (Lacan 1956, p. 206; 1968, p. 13). It is a means of recognition and admittance, opening the door to that "Other Place" (*ein anderer Schauplatz*)—Freud's synonym for the unconscious (1900). As the physician reads the text of the body to discover the hidden disease, as the shaman reads the entrails of beasts to discern the traces of the fugitive gods, so the film analyst must read the film on the screen as a symptomatic text—as the disguise of an Other film.

I

The pornographic film is advertised as the cinema which reveals all that is normally hidden. It is reputed to tell everything, show everything. It glories in detail, in extreme closeups of private places, forbidden acts. It is apparently naked but not ashamed, claiming to screen the bare truth of its chosen subject—the physical career of desire. Many pornographic filmmakers echo Aristotle's doctrine of *Katharsis* by implying that the hard-core experience is a therapeutic one. It seems to be argued that it is necessary and "good" for an individual to exercise or liberate sexual desires which cannot be enacted within the confines of the normal marriage or the context of everyday life. In the theatrical situation, it is claimed, these potentially dangerous desires cannot only be recognized but released with harm to no one. To recognize the self in the actors on the screen, to realize that they are doing what *I* want to do—these would seem to be great steps towards personal wisdom and health according to the ideology based on the Socratic law "Know Thyself" and its Freudian corollary, "Know the Other in Thyself." I must quarrel with this argument, however, because I believe it to be founded on a dubious assumption. The claim for the educational and curative powers of pornographic film presumes that this cinema is transparent, that through it one can directly view the forbidden wishes of the unconscious. It is assumed, in short, that the pornographic image is a reflection of naked desire, undistorted by censorship. But this argument ignores the function of the ego, which stands between desire and its satisfaction.

The ego, which is largely unconscious, mediates between desire and the world attempting simultaneously to satisfy the instincts and defend the organism against them (Freud 1923, 1933).¹ In its "pure," unconscious form, desire desires the impossible. It seeks absolute satisfaction in an object which does not—and cannot—exist. Desire pursues a phantom which forever recedes; it is by nature insatiable. Which is why the ego must serve as mediator. Since the ego must come to grips with "reality," it tries to adapt desire to the possible world—to arrange limited, provisional satisfactions. Infinite desire is translated into finite demands, addressed to specific persons (Bar 1975, pp. 497-98).

But every translation betrays the text it seeks to serve. In the process of attempting to match desire with external reality the ego has, in Freud's words (1933, p. 76), "dethroned the pleasure principle."² By substituting the possible object for the impossible one, the ego has, for a time, tamed and retamed the cry of desire, distorted it into domesticated speech and action. In short, desire has been encoded into a second language acceptable to the conscious subject and the society in which he lives. I submit that film—even the relatively "savage" film of pornography—is never the speech of raw desire but is a compromise formation in which the "original" desire is thoroughly rebuilt. The analytic investigation begins, of course, with the film on the screen—the conscious, "finished" fantasy—but then works "backwards" (like a detective, Freud says) (1916-17, p. 31) to decode what has been encoded by the psychic apparatus (Lagache 1964, p. 183). The aim of this research is the recovery of the film which could *not* be filmed—the impossible project of desire—and the description of its relationship to the film on the screen.

The word *screened* can now be used in a double sense: the image is screened not only by the projector but also by the selecting, distorting ego. Simultaneous with the screening which shows the film is a screening which filters it; hides part of its message. In this sense of *selecting* and *sifting out* both the interior desire of the spectator and the exterior image are screened by the ego which sits on the frontier between them, refusing to fully recognize the speech of either world.

From the point of view of the analyst who wishes to read the interior text, the "on-screen" film is considered as a representation of an Other unconscious and fantastic plot which cannot be admitted to the screen except to this compromised version. The speech of the pornographic image, which pretends to "bare all," is fundamentally equivocal. Its function is as much to conceal as to reveal: the naked image is yet a clothed one. But as Freud (1939, p. 52) remarks in a distinctly Hitchcockian vein, "The distortion of a text is not unlike a murder. The difficulty lies not in the execution of the deed, but in the doing away of the traces." In the manifest film can always be found traces of a latent text screened out of the conscious narrative. Behind the screened, conscious fantasy may lie a whole chain of unconscious fantasies, each of which slides via repression and/or regression into another fantasy which both keeps and refutes its predecessors. In a previous analysis of pornographic cinema (Giles 1976), I attempted to describe the startling transformations an original fantasy was obliged to suffer before it could be screened as a manifest plot. Through a frantic oscillation between masochistic and sadistic positions, a series of reversals, displacements and condensations were able to "create" a conscious, acceptable fantasy which served to punish the prohibited desire of the subtext.

II

My aim here is to determine the *place of the subject* in the pornographic genre. The subject is the one the film is primarily "about." I suggest that in the type of film which dominates pronographic cinema this subject is the woman. The film usually relates *the woman's story* and asks the spectator to "identify" with her—to suffer her passions, to occupy her place. But (and this is the intriguing point) the spectator who identifies with the pornographic female is, in most cases, male. This implies that the woman on screen is something more than a simple object of desire; she also represents *me*, the male subject to whom and for whom the film is projected.

The claim that the classic pornographic film is *the woman's story* could probably be proved empirically. A random recital of the titles of recent hard and soft core efforts cues us that the apparent subject—the hero—of the film is the one who receives the phallus, not the one who provides it: *Deep Throat*, *Emmanuelle*, *Fireworks Woman*, *Kinky Ladies of Bourbon Street*, *Supervixen*, *Candy's Candy*, *Cry for Cindy*, *Memories Within Miss Aggie*, *The Devil in Miss Jones*, *The Story of Joanna*, etc. Although the genre boasts a number of male stars, promotion of coming attractions highlights the beauty and capacity of the actress, not the capabilities of the man who services her. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule (most notably the "gay" film) but this investigation is centered on what appears to be the mainstream of the pornographic cinema. In its most primitive form this film is a still photograph—the "beaver shot"; slightly more sophisticated is the 8 mm loop of the woman stripping, which progresses inevitably to the closeup of the feminine genitalia. When male actors and a rudimentary narrative are added to the central spectacle of the vulva, we are faced with the "typical" hard core feature—the object of this study.

Since the pornographic film is made *for* the male spectator, we must consider his relationship to the male and female parties on the screen. If the film is a fantasy which the spectator accepts as if it were his own creation, he is also a protagonist in the drama. According to Laplanche and Pontalis (1973, p. 318), the one who watches (*screens*) the fantasy is "invariably present" in its scenes, not only as an observer, but also as a participant. The film-fantasy is not just the story of an Other person, but also *my story*—the discourse of the spectator himself. The actor stands in for me, takes my place in the fantasy. It is not, therefore, "an *object* that the subject imagines and aims at . . . but rather a sequence in which the subject has his own part to play and in which permutations of roles and attributions are possible."

According to my reading of psychoanalytic theory, the spectator inserts himself into the pornographic fantasy by identifying himself with

both the male and female characters. I suggest that these identifications are of two types. At first glance, the female on the screen is the object of the spectator's desire. In order to vicariously possess the woman, he would therefore identify himself with the male actor who penetrates her. But in innumerable pornographic films, the masculine character is *not* the hero of the film; compared to the woman, he is relatively devoid of personality. The male figure often seems important only as the possessor of *it*—the penis, which is the object of feminine desire. We might theorize that the spectator's identification with this bearer of the phallus is more intellectual than emotional, that it is based on a species of *recognition*: the male figure is my representative in the plot since he possesses the same equipment I do and stands in for me (stands *up* for me) in my physical relations with the woman. If so, my identification with the male figure might also be one of envy, since I *know*, consciously, that *he* is possessing the woman while I am only watching.

But I submit that the *primary* unconscious identification of the male spectator is a *projective* identification with the pornographic female—the “harlot” whose story the film narrates.³ The male spectator meets the image on the screen with his own projection. In the psychoanalytic sense, projection is a means of expelling qualities, feelings, or wishes that the subject refuses to recognize in himself, attributing them to another person or thing.⁴ Since the woman on the screen is already constituted by the pornographic plot as *the one who receives everything* (penis, dildo, etc.) through a hole in her loins, she is admirably suited to accept what the male spectator rejects in himself. But what *are* these “bad” qualities which the male projects onto and into the feminine image? They will, of course, vary with the individual, but I suggest the rejected qualities are at least two in number:

- 1) the male spectator projects the feminine traits which he finds and fears in himself to the woman on the screen, thereby purifying his manhood.
- 2) the sexual urge in himself, which the spectator fears to be excessive or perverted, is attributed to the insatiable whore he sees before him.

Once he projects the “bad” in himself into the pornographic woman, the spectator is free to *desire* those very qualities he has expelled. The rejected traits—passivity, “femininity,” insatiable desire—now apparently belong to an Other, not to the self. And since the on-screen woman is already constituted as a “bad” woman (by the filmmaker, by the spectator's memory of previous films, and his reading of the posters, title, etc.) she seems in no way changed by the spectator's gift. What he has projected are qualities which already “fit” her character. If the spectator's “bad” self is projected onto the screen, there to merge with the image of the woman he desires, if the spectator identifies himself with this woman and her story, resides in her place, then the image which the spectator desires

(even loves) is (in part) the image of himself. This phenomenon is narcissism—the object of desire is the self. Stores of the real or imagined masturbation of spectators in pornographic theaters (the raincoat on the lap, the empty sack of popcorn strategically placed) all give popular evidence that the porno experience is indeed a form of autoeroticism.

When the spectator identifies with both the phallic figure *and* the receptive female of the film, he can enjoy both active and passive roles. To put it crudely, he is both “fucker” and “fucked,” simultaneously the “Devil” and “Miss Jones.” This phenomenon is well known to psychoanalysis, though to my knowledge it has not been related to film. In “Hysterical Fantasies and their Relation to Bisexuality” Freud (1908, p. 166) reported that an individual who is masturbating often “tries in his conscious fantasies to have the feelings of both the man and the woman in the situation which he is picturing.” I add only that such masturbation need not be manual to qualify as autoerotic activity.

This examination of the spectator's relations with the screened image can be concluded by saying that the normal pornographic film is, like the masturbation fantasies Freud reported, a construction in which the spectator projects his desire to *be* the woman he “fucks.” But unlike the daydream, the pornographic film is a conscious fantasy in which the subject is required to do no *work*. He pays his \$4.00 for the privilege of being free of the labor of fantasy construction. Just as he takes the woman on the screen for himself and *as* himself, the spectator appropriates the fantasy of an Other—the filmmaker—as his own.

III

I now pass from the general theory of the pornographic situation to a description of the on-screen subject. The pornographic woman—both the object of the spectator's desire and the subject of his identification—is not so much a person as a place. In many films of the genre, the woman is enclosed *within* a place—often a prisoner—cut off from the public world outside. It is a place beyond the normal time flow and its interiority seems to represent nothing other than the woman's vagina. The female of pornography is generally identified with this warm cave in which she is housed, and which she, in turn, houses in her abdomen. The men, on the contrary, are creatures of the Outside who enter the feminine space only to soon withdraw from it: the male will not or cannot remain within.

I will begin by citing the image which sparked this essay, an image displayed by a hard-core feature which in all respects echoes the conventions of the genre. The image served as a catalyst to thought not because it was unique but because it seemed so typical, even prototypical—a condensation of innumerable pornographic scenes into a single essential shot:

The woman has been led from an antechamber into a darkened interior space. Because this inner room is lit only by candles, its expanse seems limitless. Hooded figures lay the woman on a draped table in the center of the pool of light. These faceless ones then surround the table, chanting in some alien tongue. Mysterious signals are given by a figure who acts as the high priest of this ritual. Immediately, two masked assistants fold back the woman's robe, then part her legs. Although the girl is drugged, she moans softly as the assistants caress her vulva. Apparently, she is dreaming. The vaginal mouth is now at the center of the screen, confronted directly by the camera, by the projector, by the eye of the spectator. The lights have brightened so that the lips are clearly visible. Yet within them, behind them is a dark area—a slit or a hole in the light. Into this interior the camera cannot penetrate. The site has been reached by an inward movement of our vision from anteroom to ritual room to the door of the vagina, but all further progress is at this point arrested. The continuation of the move is now delegated to another instrument—the penis of the high priest. As he effects his entrance into the feminine interior, the black hole in the center of the image is plugged, eradicated. Overexposed flesh tones now glare from the screen as the dreamer moans in mounting ecstasy. Our image is now complete.

The scene I have just described is built of three boxes, each inside the other. The projected gaze of the spectator moves inward until it can rest on the edge of the ultimate interior—a hole in the flesh invested with erotic potential. The spectator's gaze is at this point displaced to (and *re-*presented by) the projecting phallus of the faceless high priest. But what does the image tell us about the female subject who suffers penetration? First, that she is woman defined not as a whole person but as an abdominal cavity, as the innermost box, as (crudely speaking) nothing but a "cunt." Second, although the woman in question is drugged, unconscious, although her will is disengaged, she "naturally" desires and enjoys the penetration of the phallus—a phallus which belongs not to her chosen lover but is the projection of a faceless everyman; i.e., it is not a specific penis she desires but the *penis*. Third, the interior space she encloses (identified as the woman *in essence*) is an *invisible* place. In contrast to the previous rooms we have entered it cannot be possessed by visual knowledge. In order to emphasize its separation from the *known* space of the pornographic film, I call this central interior *the Other place*.

In the Western metaphysical tradition, knowing is intimately related to seeing. Visible evidence is considered to be the firmest proof, and much of the persuasive power of the cinema rests on the assumption that "seeing is believing." In popular speech the statement "I see" often signifies "I understand," and in the Greek "I know" (*oida*) is the present perfect tense of "I see"—a correspondence with deep meaning for Plato. But the most erotic, the most *valued* place in the pornographic film is invisible. The woman desires that the outside come inside and the camera records the penetration. But the camera can never pass within the body to see what happens there. The woman sighs and exclaims her pleasure but the knowledge of feeling is *not* full knowledge according to our philosophical and cinematic traditions. The feminine interior remains a mystery—an alien

and Other place to both the male who penetrates it and the female who contains it.

Since what lies beyond the mouth of the hole must remain unknown, the participants demand visible evidence that something has really happened inside. In the typical film the penis is withdrawn at the point of orgasm to spill semen upon the woman's belly or breasts. Male satisfaction is thereby proven beyond a doubt, while that of the woman remains in question. The pornographic film accepts that visually "knowing" the act in the sexual interior is impossible. The emphasis is displaced from the mysterious events inside the female body to the exterior masculine orgasm *and* to the visible act of penetrating the mouth of the hole. The visible events (penetration, ejaculation) not only have value in themselves but are *signs* of what must remain invisible. To show the foreplay which precedes and prepares penetration is therefore preferable to screening an extended session wholly within the female body. Better three penetrations in fifteen minutes than a single act of intercourse.

The emphasis on entering the female rather than on being inside her is, perhaps, an "unrealistic" aspect of the pornographic film, since in actual sexual intercourse the pleasure in seeing is usually subordinated to that of "feeling." One does not need visible evidence of the event. But pornography features sex with eyes wide open; therefore, there must be something to see.

The subject of the pornographic film is woman, but not the "whole" woman. The consciousness that informs her acts has been convinced that first, she is "only" a sexual creature and, second, this physical being is further delimited to be nothing more than a hole. The reclining woman of pornography does *not* ask to be loved as a person; she requires only that she be penetrated again and again. The penetration tells her who and what she is—a sexual cavity which lures the penis. The place within her is Other to herself as well as to the male. She has no immediate knowledge that the hole is there—or that she is defined as a hole—unless the male invades her. She cannot *feel* her interior space unless it is filled with an alien presence; she cannot *see* it except by watching the penis disappear in its depths. The pornographic woman can therefore know herself only when the male cooperates. She is entirely dependent on the action of another in order to become who she is. She received her *being* by being penetrated. Without the invasion from outside, this woman is nothing but desire for a being which will "make" or finish her own.

The simple and repetitive plot of the pornographic film is a story of passage between two "moments"—states of being—of the female subject. These moments are both opposed and identical. As she is penetrated, she "progresses," time and time again, from empty to filled, from negativity to a positive being, from hole to whole. But filling the hole only reveals it to be truly a hole, penetration is an affirmation of the void, the act of completion is itself a perception of lack. The "progress" of the female subject

is thus a spiraling hunger since every sexual act reconstitutes the hole and, as the plot grown more complex, reveals the further holes of mouth and anus. The acts not only repeat the message "I am a hole—an absence, a void" but extend it into every nook and cranny. As the hole grows, so must the craving for being grow ever more voracious. Since every filling only increases the knowledge of lack, each sexual act insures that other acts must follow in endless variation, with no possible terminus in sight. Insofar as the pornographic plot moves towards the ever receding, impossible goal of "being fulfilled," the female story remains always unfinished. Any end of the movement—any sudden conversion of nonbeing to being—is entirely "fictional," purely arbitrary, given the knowledge of the pornographic female that she is "nothing" but a widening, deepening hole. As the man informs Joanna in *The Story of Joanna*, "You're not a woman. You're not even a girl. You're a cunt, a cocksucker; now bend over and open your ass."

In sum, the pornographic female is not so much a female "being" as a *lack* of being. The subject with whom we identify is not an entity like a rock, an animal, or a phallus, but a hollow place into which being enters and withdraws. The penetrating being is careful not to leave any of itself behind to contaminate this place of absence with any germ of presence—one more reason why the male must ejaculate outside the hole, rather than within it. The "love" displayed by pornography does not merge two *I*'s into a *we*; by withdrawing to spurt its seed upon the woman's belly the penis arrogantly rejects a union of substance (in both the physical and psychic sense). If the woman is nothing but a hole or a series of holes, there is nothing and no one *there* to be loved.

The conception of the woman as a hole also insures her passionate acceptance of almost any person or object as a lover. Since she *must* be penetrated in order to complete her negative being and render it "real" and since her moment of completion or full reality is annihilated when the phallus withdraws, she must seek partner after partner, incessantly. She needs an object to fill her void—the penis, the banana, the tongue, the snake, the hand. An examination of these films shows, however, that it is not any *specific* object which is desired. Lust for one object is easily displaced to the need for a second and a third object in the same or different channel of the body. Neither the site of the need nor its object remains constant. This easy substitution implies that feminine desire cannot be satisfied by a single penetration. One sexual act usually *increases* the hunger for successive invasions. The pornographer chooses a woman as his subject precisely because in life, as on film, the female is less likely to achieve orgasm from intercourse than a male subject. The male spectator brings to the film a life-knowledge (his "experience"—or lack of it—seen through an ideological lens) of this supposed "incapacity" of some women. He probably equates orgasm with satisfaction and may even desire that the woman *remain* "beyond fulfillment"—to quote a recent title of the

genre. If the woman *cannot* be satisfied, there is no need for the male to even pretend to concern himself with her pleasure; no guilt will be attached to a single-minded pursuit of his own orgasmic satisfaction. This is, of course, another autoerotic aspect of the pornographic experience. Once again, I point out that only male orgasm is required to be screened. Furthermore, if the woman *does* achieve orgasm, the spectator knows that this need not interrupt the sexual action. Although a male requires a period after orgasm in which to retrieve his sexual capacities, the woman is often capable of multiple orgasms within a single act of intercourse. Indeed, it is "known" that the woman sometimes *demand*s that the act continue when the male would prefer to withdraw. In other words, to the male spectator, the woman's sexual appetite can seem endless. Such masculine life-knowledge is simplified and extended in the pornographic film into the spectacle of the insatiable void-woman, incapable of being filled, or satisfied, refusing to cry "enough." The masculine partners of this creature, too easily drained, are mere transients in the film, coming and going, as it were. The male is a necessary tool, but readily broken. It is characteristic of the penetrating instrumentality that it is quickly used up, exhausted—as though it were a fossil fuel, or a drug. The phallus soon wilts and leaves the pornographic space, necessitating a replacement. The invader comes in discrete, discontinuous units. His desire is terminated, explosively finished, while that of the female subject constantly grows.

The pornographic film is pervaded by the "knowledge" that every woman "wants it," desperately, no matter how much she denies it. However, some women have to be *taught* to know themselves as a creature in need. In such cases an initial sadism on the part of the male teacher is deemed a necessary evil, even a kindness, since only through such persuasion can the woman learn to recognize herself "in truth" as a mouth, a vagina, an anus. (Remember that in the theory of *projection* the male spectator is already "punishing" the woman by loading her with all his "bad" qualities.) In any case, according to the pornographic ideology, the woman is "really" a hole but in her everyday life may not know her own truth. Therefore, the film often narrates a process of *conversion* whereby the heroine discovers the Other—the hole—within herself, learns to know herself as a void which desires, insatiably. In *The Joy of Letting Go* a wealthy bored housewife achieves sexual liberation under the tutelage of a pimp, then returns to her husband to initiate him into her Other life. In this type of film, the plot recounts a journey beyond or beneath the normal preoccupied self of the subject, presenting her with the opportunity to discard a life ruled by practical concerns and uncover a simpler, more basic existence by affirming her sexual desires as the definition of her now negative being. The woman is permitted or prodded to relax societal censorship and live wholly instinctually, promoting unconscious desire to rule the ego.

This is no mere inference. Scores of pornographic films explicitly state

the goal of "freeing" the female to pursue bodily pleasure. The liberation is often achieved by splitting the ego into two entities. To cite only one case, *Sexual Ecstasy of the Macumba* begins with the explanation of a voodoo priest to the female subject that once she swallows a certain ritual drug her soul will be separated from her body so the latter is free "to do what it wants to do." When the woman awakes from the "dreams" which have formed the body of her film she now defines herself as wholly a creature of the id. She consciously accepts the desires revealed by her unconscious to be her waking destiny as well, immediately proceeding to ask the priest for "real" intercourse as opposed to drug-induced fictions. In each act of her dream, the girl is transformed into a species of angel, merging her ghostly presence with the bodies of nuns, repressed housewives, and frustrated brides with the object of bringing their latent desire to ecstatic fruition. Thanks to the girl's benevolent influence these timid ones become sexual tigers, vowing to remain so even after the angelic visitation. Each of these woman miraculously discovers her "right" mind, much to the joy of her masculine partner. Befitting its "religious" umbrella-plot *Macumba* recounts the conversion of pagan women to the ranks of the sexually blessed.

The creation of the mental domain of fantasy has a complete counterpart in the establishment of "reservations" and "nature parks" in places where the inroads of agriculture, traffic, or industry threaten to change the original face of the earth rapidly into something unrecognizable. The "reservation" is to maintain the old condition of things which has been regretfully sacrificed to necessity everywhere else; there everything may grow and spread as it pleases, including what is useless and even what is harmful. (Freud 1916-17, p. 381.)

The "reservation" to which Freud refers is that of the conscious fantasy—typically, the daydream—informed by unconscious and "primal" fantasy structures. The pornographic fantasy presents itself as a kind of wild kingdom where desire "may grow and spread as it pleases" once the woman has discovered her "natural" being. Although the free growth of desire is subject to certain constraints (the supposedly liberated woman is free to obey the call of Eros but cannot deny it), the region which the manifest fantasy gives to the woman and defines as *her place* is explicitly an arena in which *everything* is permitted. It is a region of consciousness invested with the Features of the *Unconscious*—the system and "location" Freud designated as "the Other Place."

The woman's discovery of her truth does not occur in streets or plazas but prefers a place within. Since the ostensible aim of this type of pornographic film is to free its subject from bourgeois restrictions, it abandons the everyday world and the "reality principle" which inhabits public spaces to reside in another country—an isolated farm house, a voodoo church, a nunnery, a jail, a chateau, a whorehouse, or some other interior place removed from everyday lifesites. There the woman is assigned a

biological destiny and is expected to "freely" pursue it. But she is free only at the manifest level of the plot. Once the woman is installed (by the male) in her place, she lies at the mercy of the pleasure principle, unable to postpone, sublimate, or otherwise represent desire in a "civilized" form. Like any savage creature, she must be caged off from the world. She is "converted" to sexuality in order that she might be *put away*. Since she is now "sick" with desire, she is put in an isolation ward, not to "cure" her, but to intensify the disease. In line with the idea that female sexuality is all-consuming, implacable, the "reborn" woman is allowed none of the usual stratagems by which desire is compromised or deferred to other times, other places. In the place without limits desire must be total, uncontaminated by the reticence, regret, or other moods of the exterior. All doors to the outside are irrevocably closed in order to 1) lock the woman in her scene of desire, and 2) guard the purity of her desire. The most depraved whore is here the purest of women. Like the Holy Virgin, who is her antithesis, the woman whose mark is the open vagina is simultaneously *sealed off* from the world and a *receptacle* to be used and discarded by the masculine god. (Pornography assumes that all nuns are essentially prostitutes since they have withdrawn from the everyday world to engage in a total surrender to a masculine deity.) The pornographic woman is twice *possessed*: first by her *daimon*, the "it" within her loins, and only secondarily by the phallus. The ambiguous title of *The Devil in Miss Jones* signals both forms of demonic possession. Religion in the widest sense (possession, witchcraft, the return to the "source," the desire for transcendence, separation of body and soul, concern with death and afterlife) extends beyond the conversion plot proper into all provinces of pornographic film which 1) clearly separate outside from inside, and 2) posit a passage between them.

When the subject enacts her passage from everyday sites to the Other Place the act is often screened as a dying to the world. She has come from the periphery to the source of "pure" desire. If she has not properly severed all connections between outer and inner worlds, the danger exists that she might pollute the erotic charge with secular concerns. In order that the woman can emerge cleanly as the creature of desire, her former identity is sometimes quite literally *killed*. In *Kinky Ladies of Bourbon Street*, the usual chateau is occupied by attempted suicides who seal a pact to be "fucked to death." Through their first death (the "failed" suicide) the ladies have gained access to a region where desire no longer flows and ebbs at the whim of the moment but is rendered a permanent state. The second death terminates the desire which the first constituted as endless. These "dead" may well belong to the clan of the undead—sisters of the insatiable ghouls so celebrated in the legends of middle Europe—since death does not annihilate the body but renders it voracious. Unlike the Kinky Ladies, Miss Jones (*The Devil in Miss Jones*) succeeds in killing herself, and awakens to the joys of Purgatory—situated between

the boredom of the heroine's repressive life-world and the tortures of a *post-coitum* Hell in which *nothing happens*. All sexual activity—all plot—occurs in the land Between. Insofar as the woman is *dead*—to lie with her is an act of necrophilia.

This, then, is the Other Place of my title; it is the enclosure inhabited by the pornographic woman and the metaphor of her psyche. The Other Place is the empty space which defines her and motivates her every act. It is the scene of the woman's desire—a desire constituted by the male as infinite, insatiable. She is an absence of being, a hole to be filled by the spectator's gaze and its representative—the phallus. But the hole can *never* be filled; it is a bottomless pit carrying overtones (to the male spectator) of underworld prisons, implications to death.

The fantasy of the pornographic film speaks both the desire and the dread of the spectator. The woman is the place which lures the male sex but also the abyss in which manhood is lost. The Other Place is a site of danger because in its depths the phallus *disappears from sight*. In this cinema, above all others, light gives being; the black hole is a region of nothingness in which one can be annihilated. When woman is constituted as an infinite need to be filled, the ultimate fear is that the phallus will be kept by her, that it will never again return to the light. To retrieve one's visibility by withdrawal and ejaculation is to recover one's proper (male) being. Withdrawal is *the* triumphal movement of the masculine fantasy, all the more ecstatic in that it refuses to satisfy the woman's need and thus proves the "impossibility" of her desire.

I believe that all other acts of sadism in pornography are rooted in this fundamental denial of being to woman constituted as the insatiable hole—the *vampire*. Mainstream pornography is an act of male sadism in which the spectator punishes the woman by projecting upon her the desire which he refuses to recognize in himself. The projection establishes a temporary identity between the spectator and the woman who accepts (and returns) his desire—an identity which cannot be admitted. Withdrawal denies that this woman is myself and reinstitutes the "acceptable" identification with male representative. By withdrawing the male once more establishes the difference between the sexes: through the spectacle of his satisfaction he "shows" the woman that he *is* the being which she lacks, that he is the *projector*, she an apparatus of introjection which possesses only the being he chooses to give her, that his gift can be withdrawn at will, leaving her with *nothing*. The male withdraws from what St. Paul calls "the natural use of woman" (Romans 1:27) in order that she might see (know) that he is the user, she the used; that he can be "satisfied," she cannot: that his desire has reached its end but she is desire *in need of an end*. He shows her, in sum, that he is the phallus, she the infinite hole.

Notes

1. When Freud first structured the psychic apparatus in terms of three agencies (ego, super-ego, id) he assigned the censorship function to the super-ego. In his ultimate formulation, however, censorship is considered to be an ego-function, particularly when it is considered to be the force which distorts dreams and fantasies. Since the super-ego is determined to be one part of the ego set against the other, for the sake of concision I include both in the general term "ego". See Freud (1940, Chapter 4), and the entries "Censorship" and "Ego" in Laplanche and Pontalis (1973).

2. The pleasure principle is "dethroned" only at this "upper" level of the psyche; in the id, desire continues to crave an absolute and impossible satisfaction. Like the dream and the symptom, fantasy not only expresses instinctual urges but "is also the locus of defensive processes, such as turning round on the subject's own self, reversal into the opposite, negation and projection" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 319).

3. The Greek term "pornography" signals a writing or text concerning a harlot. Again, it is "the woman's story," usually written by the male.

4. Projection in psychoanalysis may have "a sense comparable to the cinematographic one: the subject sends out into the external world an image of something that exists in him in an unconscious way. Projection is defined here as a mode of refusal to recognize (*méconnaissance*), which has as its counterpart the subject's ability to recognize in others precisely what he refuses to acknowledge in himself" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, p. 354).

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*It is customary to refer to works by Sigmund Freud by the date of first publication according to the precedent set by *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (24 vols.), London, 1953-73. This usage is followed here.