

PORNOGRAPHY
and
HATE

by

David Holbrook

'Pornography always contains in it somewhere
a hatred of man'

*The Times, Editorial on Cultural Pollution,
September 1970*

'The human body is the best picture of the
human soul'

Ludwig Wittgenstein

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PORNOGRAPHY AND HATE

PORNOGRAPHY: obscene writings or pictures intended to provoke sexual excitement.

(*Penguin English Dictionary*)

In the last ten years a small minority of fanatical 'liberators' has been extremely active, in trying to persuade us that pornography is harmless. They have been very successful, and today many people in all walks of life, from church leaders to teachers, have been persuaded that pornography is innocuous—or even that it is beneficial.

Some of the fanatics have made fortunes out of pornography as 'permissiveness' has been extended. An obvious example is Mr. Guccione, the promoter of *Penthouse* magazine, who believes that 'obscenity exists only in un-sophisticated minds'. Another is Mr. Kenneth Tynan, who offers us 'an evening of elegant pornography'. The public toleration of the latter's obscene revue has opened the floodgates of pornography throughout English culture, so that things are shown and done in public with a grossness of indecency never before experienced except in Ancient Rome in its decline.

In reply to the 'free-thinkers', it is futile to protest that, in the light of psychoanalysis, pornography is a form of sexual perversion—for some of them declare perversions respectable, too. Germaine Greer, for instance, has urged her disciples to 'choose lesbianism in an honourable, clear-eyed, fashion, rejecting shame and inferiority feelings as a matter of principle, whether such feelings exist or not'. Dr. Martin Cole, who has given students at Birmingham courses in pornography, sought by his obscene film *Growing Up* to 'dispel the sense of guilt and shame that surrounds the subject' of sex. Wayland Young, in *Eros Denied*, sought to dispel the 'confusion and danger' that surrounded the question of sex, by seeking 'freedom' for 'forthright' pictures and descriptions. He calls stage nudity a 'new dimension'. Obviously, any such movement which seems to promote 'freedom' and to drive away guilt and fear has a strong appeal to liberals and progressive people everywhere. So, today, educationalists and psychologists even go into the witness stand to defend obscene publications for children. The Advisory Centre for Education threw its weight behind *The Little Red Schoolbook*, against censorship, and declared that 'the present heated debate about pornography is no service to education'. It refused to allow the author to discuss, in the pages of *Where?* the opinions of psychoanalysts that *The Little Red Schoolbook* was perverted and that it might help lure a disturbed child into a seduction which could damage its emotional life. The magazine *Children's Rights* is enthusiastic about some new 'sex education' books which show photographs of sexual organs, how to put on a contraceptive sheath, and couples having sexual intercourse, pictures which some psychoanalysts and others concerned with children regard as not only brutal, but as likely to do harm to children's attitudes to sex, in a perverted way. We have not yet quite reached the situation in America where

dolls are dressed as whores and sold with telephones 'for those inevitable calls'. But there is today a definite movement to thrust pornography on children and young people. The magazine *19* echoes Germaine Greer's advice, while magazines like *Romance* ask their readers such lewd questions as 'Would you like to see any of the dishy men on these pages in the nude?' Such magazines contain pictures of men and women naked, with sleazy captions: 'Having convinced your man that cleanliness is next to godliness, you've got him in the tub, but he's asking you to scrub his back. At least, that's what he's called out: but when you get there he wants to play mothers and fathers—dolphin style. Do you (a) jump in the deep end, (b) pretend you're a mermaid, (c) splash his pash with cold water . . .?' This is pornography for young people—and it confronts every child who goes into the newsagents to buy sweets.

While organizations like the National Council for Children's Welfare are becoming concerned, an air of respectability still disguises what is in truth cultural perversion.

In a local bookshop I recently saw two copies of a magazine whose covers were obscene—a man kissing a woman's breast, and a couple having intercourse. These lay on public view next to magazines like *Penthouse*, on the covers of which were announcements of articles, one of which was about a model 'Miss Vivien Neves'. In *The Times* Diary of the Year for 1971 it said, of one date, 'Miss Vivien Neves woke today to find herself famous'. She found herself famous on that day because *The Times* printed a full-page picture of her, naked, to advertise Fison's chemicals. Of all the letters I have written to *The Times*, this was the first subject on which I received a petulant reply, which protested that many of the staff of the newspaper thought the picture was enjoyable. Have we given up all doubt about whether it is ethically acceptable to strip women naked to sell goods, by the titillating appeal of their bodies? Forty-four members of the staff of *The Times* wrote to protest, at the time of the *Oz* trial, against an Editorial supporting the verdict against this paper. Even though the Editor and Assistant Editor of such a paper as the *Sunday Times* are doubtful about pornography, their paper can be pornographic (the issue of 28th February 1972 contained flip articles on titillating underwear with suggestive pictures, mentions of auto-vibrators, and an article on the lesbian tendencies of Dr. Martin Cole's wife). A disastrous decline in standards of decency seems uncontrollable.

The acceptance of pornography as harmless fun today thus stretches from Thomson House to Soho. There is no doubt that pornography is felt to be a new bright feature of English life in the seventies, and hardly anyone who regards himself as a liberal or progressive would support any effective move against it. This is why Lord Longford is faced with so much ridicule and hostility. But there are also indications that what we are faced with is a kind of collective sickness of mind, whose essence is not love, but hate, and which is doing damage.

Where, however, can we begin, in trying to make discriminations over this problem? Recently, seven poets signed a letter to *The Times* asking for urgent discrimination against the exploitation of obscenity and violence in our

culture. Fortunately, there is a point at which most people would draw a line. It is surprising that more people did not draw the line over *Oz* 'Schoolkids Issue', now being sold off at inflated prices in London. Probably few of those who opposed the trial ever saw the actual paper itself. It combined brutal obscenity with small advertisements offering perverted sexual contacts. Writing recently in *The Guardian* Mary Stott said that looking at it she felt 'a wave of anger at the beastly, ugly drawings, calculated, I believe, to produce years of terror in any child not reared in a permissive home; and a great leaden sorrow'. 'What could be worse for our children than this?' she asked—the promotion of attitudes to sex which made acts of love look like 'a conveyor belt of physical excitement'. Mrs. Stott said she would be hesitant to ban much pornography. However, she balks at last at a Danish offer of films which show children engaged in sexual acts with dogs and donkeys. At this point she mentions Julius Steicher's *Der Stuermer*, the Nazi paper which was a 'pornographic excitement to hatred of the Jews'. *Oz* evidently reminded her of the sexual undercurrents in the collective psychopathology of the Third Reich.

So, at last, people are beginning to see what some of us have been pointing to for a long time: that pornography represents a kind of aggressive pseudo-male attitude which reminds one unpleasantly of Nazism. This is now becoming apparent, certainly, in film. As Joseph Morgenstern said in *Newsweek*, of the film *Straw Dogs*:

'The film puts us in touch with a machismo that's supposed to be unfashionable in sophisticated circles these days, yet persists in philosophical disguise. A man can only be a true male, according to the movie, when he's won his true badges in rape, combat and murder. It's as if de Sade has rewritten the worst of Hemingway for a special nasty edition of *Playboy*. There's only one possible role for a woman in this machisto-violent setting. She's there to be raped, she wants passionately to be raped, she deserves to be raped and raped she most certainly is, in *Straw Dogs*, *Macbeth*, and, of course, *A Clockwork Orange*.

Pauline Kael, writing in *The New Yorker* about the last-mentioned film condemned its 'finally corrupt morality', and said, 'How can people go on talking about the dazzling brilliance of movies and not notice that the directors are sucking up to the thugs in the audience?'

We may begin there, and then try to work our way back to the less harmful forms of sexual depiction, like 'girlie' magazines.

We can start discrimination at the point at which the hate in pornography shows itself clearly. As Masud Khan says, 'the politics of pornography are inherently fascist'. The extremists of sexual explicitness in our time, such as Richard Neville and Kenneth Tynan, seek to use pornography to subvert, for political purposes: they say they want to overthrow this society, by destroying its values. Their work, however, complements the depersonalisation of sex for commercial purposes in our society—as in *The Sun* newspaper, films, television and such papers as *Playboy* and *Penthouse*. It moves, like the rest of the 'liberation', towards 'sexual fascism', and represents a 'militant

and malicious assault on human values'.* The break-down of values happening now by default was once promoted deliberately by the Nazis, albeit in a different way. But the basic brutal naturalism is similar—as is the disastrous effect on youth.

What do we mean by the phrase 'sexual fascism'? Here it will help if I paraphrase Masud Khan's article on *Pornography and the Politics of Rage and Subversion* (*Times Literary Supplement*, 4 February, 1972). He says that the champions of pornography make out that what they are trying to remedy are the inhibitions of our instincts through prudish traditions—they are trying to 'release' us. They are trying, they claim, to enable us to be more vital and feeling—to be 'ourselves' more, in the sexual realm. And yet, as Khan says, what pornography achieves is the opposite. In it, the images and words 'usurp' the natural functions of instinct. Instead of natural, loving feelings, moving towards 'meeting' another human being, we have an intense mental concoction of often brutal imagery—as in the cinema, where rape, and other gross acts of sadism are now frequent. The effect of these mental brutalities is to 'disregard the person and being of the characters'. We may observe this, even in 'girlie' magazines, in which the titillating way the girl is discussed, and her photographic exploitation as an object, destroy her personal unique qualities. This is the objection to the use of nudity in advertisements too. It makes woman into a commodity-thing. In all pornography she is humiliated, and subjected to contempt as a mere sex object. In her image, humanity itself is degraded, by being deprived of value and subjected to hate, as the Jew or Negro is degraded in racist propaganda. Guilt and fear are not dispelled by pornography: on the contrary, it encourages us to enjoy hate in our attitudes to sex, and to have contempt for other people, especially women.

In pornography 'instinct' is separated off from 'sharing' and from the satisfactions of meeting another person. This 'mutilation' of the sexual drive (says Khan) is then further intensified by a special kind of heightening of language or image. It is made more violent, and then further 'eroticised' to make it palatable. That is, what is really full of hate and rage is made to seem like something erotic. Mary Stott quotes an example, 'I think that if a girl was always whipped in tough strong pants, they would not mind it nearly so much and many of us would have more fun'. The same kind of cruelty, disguised by an 'erotic' colouring, may be found in the 'letters' pages of such magazines as *Penthouse*, which once held a discussion of the 'kinky' beating up of adolescent girls. ('I think we are all a bit kinky', said the proprietor). If these magazines merely discussed cruelty and used it for titillation, the public would be repelled. Because they disguise this hate as 'erotic' and by glossy colour pictures they sell two million copies, and people believe them to be harmless fun. But the effects are still to brutalise us, and the promotion of such cruelty disguised as erotic or as 'liberation' is perhaps more sinister than straight violence, which could be seen as bad. In film reviewing today we also read of scenes of sex, which are approvingly written up, even in *The*

* A useful phrase used by Masud Khan about the film by Kubrick mentioned above.

Times and *Daily Telegraph* as being 'jolly romps' to 'pleasant little tunes'—with no sense of the sadism evoked in watching such scenes.

Khan says that the aggression in pornography, dissociated from normal sexual processes, has the effect of *negating* the self and the 'other person'. It replaces sexual freedom and sharing by a 'mental act of coercion'—inflicted on one's own body and self, and on the 'object' of one's sexual attentions (in this case a phantasy woman). Pornography creates a fantasy of aggressive humiliation, and of submission, very much akin to the dynamics of the pogrom. This is why it is fascistic. It is thus full of deep political dangers, for it combines the urge both to control and exploit others, with the urge to submit oneself to something larger than oneself, as by becoming a member of the Playboy Club, or the 'sophisticated' cinema or theatre audience.

Democracy and a healthy society depend upon the recognition of personal value, and of mutuality and equality between persons. Genuine sexual freedom depends upon men and women developing mutual respect and a tender concern for one another as beings. Pornography threatens these modes of human equality and respect, by making the exploitation of others socially acceptable. It is a kind of collective submissiveness into which people enter when they put themselves under a dictator, as Winnicott has pointed out. Pornography prepares people for this kind of passivity, combined with a certain ruthless selfishness (James Bond). All these processes are based on hate, and those solutions to the problem of life which endorse 'the taboo on weakness' and adopt the postures of moral inversion and aggressive pseudo-maleness, or what Adler called 'masculine protest'.

Many insights from psychoanalysis can help us see such dangers in pornography. Masud Khan refers us to Anna Freud, who discovered the pervert's inability to enter into 'emotional surrender'. Pornography is a form of perversion which expresses, and glamorizes, the inability of the pervert to enter into a creative love relationship. It thus promotes the denial of one's generosity of feeling, and inhibits the warm-hearted flow of sexual love. One is encouraged by this form of education *not* to 'find' the 'significant other', the person who is to be everything to one, in love. It educates us to substitute mere sexuality for meaningful love, and to 'give ourselves up to the joys of hating' instead.

What is so strange about the current scene is the way in which people are so tolerant of the cruelties which pornography thrusts into them. They go to the cinema expecting to be pleased by, say, a film about a composer: instead they witness the most painful and embarrassing scenes of sex—essentially perverted. The producer is 'giving himself up to the joys of hating'—yet audiences have an immense capacity, it seems, to put up with being offended or hurt, and shrink from protest.

The reasons for this are very deep, but may be explained by some of the studies of sexual perversion which have been made by psychotherapists such as D. W. Winnicott and Masud Khan himself. They believe that those whose attitudes to sex remain sick and sadistic have failed to develop, in the early stage of play between mother and child, in infancy. Their sexual perversions,

and their cultural perversions, represent this kind of 'play' carried over into adult life.

This is why we are well-disposed towards those who would exploit permissiveness in culture, to act out in public their sick and sadistic fantasies. Yet they are taking advantage of us, to thrust their distortions and unhealthy attitudes to sex, into people at large, even as they go out to be entertained. In consequence, our own emotional lives may well be damaged. Moreover, as we now know, actors and actresses, too, are suffering from the disturbed impulses of a minority of malignant individuals, who have seized the present opportunity to involve others in their sexual perversions in public. In a recent film young actresses were humiliated, and badly man-handled and terrified during the making of a film, according to Equity, their union.

Surely, ethical values should be invoked, to prevent people being exploited in this way? Yet in England today, performers are being humiliated in perverted ways every night in studios and on the stage. Some are becoming physically and psychologically ill, and impotent, yet there is little public concern—even though the main reason why they take on such humiliating roles may be their fear of unemployment. What they are being forced to do is to 'act out' the hostilities of those who devise such shows. Masud Khan has written a study of sexual perversion in which he discusses this question of 'acting out'. It is the pervert's way of thrusting his phantasies out into the public world—rather like a man who exhibits himself sexually in public. He fears that perhaps he doesn't exist—and his sexuality isn't real. His 'indecent exposure' has the effect of producing a shocked reaction in the spectator—and so he can feel that his sexual organs exist, and so *he* must exist. But, of course, his increased sense of being real is achieved at the expense of others—who feel shocked and upset. Proposals are being made to embody in law the same sanctions against 'indecent exposure' on the stage or screen as in real life, and this move should be supported. As Erwin Straus argues, shame protects our creative eroticism, and the development of everyone's capacities to love is inhibited by the prevalence today of intrusive public indecencies, often with no creative purpose.

Another writer who has important things to say on these matters is Dr. Robert Stoller, of the Gender Identity Research and Treatment Clinic, Department of Psychiatry, University College of Los Angeles, USA. Dr. Stoller's most important paper is *Pornography and Perversion* (Archives of General Psychiatry, USA, June 1970, VOL. 22). Stoller declares that *all* pornography is perverted—because it leads not towards natural sexual relations, but towards a mere mental excitement. There is, he says, 'always a victim', while the basic dynamic in pornography is hostility. By this he does not mean simply aggression, but an unconscious urge to harm. We may see these things in such a revue as *Oh! Calcutta!* in which women and men are made to show themselves indecently, while the actors perform various sadistic ways of humiliating people—as when a girl is shown with her hands caught in curtain rings while she is undressed. Meanwhile the audience is subjected to shocks, and insulting lewd remarks ('I suppose you're wondering

what she does when she has her period?') The most cruel aspect of all is the disgust such shows generate for the sexual act itself.

Such cruelty gives a perverted satisfaction, says Stoller, often because of our *identification* with the victims, in pornography. He says that while women have a more or less straightforward path of identification in growing up from little girls to women, men have to identify with their mothers primarily, and so have a burden of femininity, which they need to sort out with themselves, to become fully male. But there is also the fact that our 'anima' or 'female element being' is that part of us which, because it is sensitive and emotional, we are always inclined to fear. The woman in pornography represents this femininity in ourselves of which we tend to be afraid. So, we are capable of enjoying watching woman humiliated. When we look at her naked in a 'girlie' magazine, we feel we are stealing something from her which she would not give voluntarily. So, we are raping her with our eyes. The audience laughing at rape in the cinema today, or when naked women are subjected to ultimate humiliations such as being violated with a false nose in *A Clockwork Orange*, are laughing at the sadistic expression of contempt for their own most sensitive aspects—a manifestation which is exactly the same as the dynamics in racism, as when the Nazis made naked Jewesses dance on the tables at Treblinka. This 'fosters the barbaric potentialities in man'.

Again the processes are very complex. Robert Stoller argues that because we are afraid of our femininity, we identify with the woman in pornography—and enjoy being subjected masochistically to rape and humiliation. As sometimes in dreams, we thereby endure the worst that could possibly happen to us. We can then—especially if we feel a male kind of excitement—feel triumphant—and 'better than any woman'. It is obvious that this is the dynamic behind many of the *Playboy* methods of humiliating woman (she is a 'bunny' or 'playmate'). This perhaps also explains how women themselves can enjoy the debasement of their sex in such magazines as *Nova* and *Penthouse*. Some women perhaps fear their own femininity, and enjoy seeing it subjected to harshness and cruelty—so that they can feel strong, and in a strange way, pseudo-male. Women's clothes today also sometimes involve them in masochistic subjection to contempt and often in 'defeminization'. The subject surely commends itself to women's liberation movements?

Pornography tends to inhibit us by persuading us that sex can always be at the beck and call of our will. It thus menaces the kind of joy lovers find in the 'magic moment' of making something new, in going with creative time, into their own future.

The figures in pornography are *always under our control*, says Stoller, and only do what they are *ordered to do*. This is often subtly expressed in the captions, which invite the reader to gloat on the essential helplessness of the exploited models who often display a 'crushed' look. This enhances the effect of pornography in inhibiting natural 'emotional surrender'. As Erwin Straus points out, the intention of the voyeur is to objectify others—to make them into controllable things. This is because he cannot bear to see creative love developing, and moving forward in time, towards satisfaction. He cannot

endure this, so he wants to 'shrink' the emotional life of others, to his level. Pornography is never concerned with satisfaction—it depends upon a state of continual tension. The mood it induces is that of masturbation, a sterile self-stimulation. If this ever takes a mutual form it is likely to be masturbating 'on' someone, but in such a mood as never finds creative meeting between persons who enjoy and value one another. (See Viktor Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*.)

From the point of view of the true sexual revolutionary, who seeks to promote warm-hearted love, therefore, pornography is an enemy. The author of a book on Wilhelm Reich, David Boadella, says that the arguments of those who believe in 'welfare pornography' fail to see that pornography imprints a sick and distorted concept of sexuality which must block and impede the development of mature feelings and genuine sexual expression. The present trend in our culture towards the thrusting of sick and sadistic phantasies represents a 'mass prostitution of culture' which involves a 'hidden control over people's feelings' which is much worse than the old authoritarian repression.

As Boadella says, there are two 'revolutions'—one devoted to pseudo-sexuality, and the other recognising that sex is 'bound up with one's deep feelings for another person'. *Pornography does nothing for people's real problems of personal relationship*. So much for the pseudo-liberators.

Pornography by implication reduces the body and person to a mere bearer of sensation. By 'leaving nothing to the imagination' it destroys human vision. In doing so it undermines empathy—and the capacity to care for the 'being' of others. Many commentators discuss this question. Masud Khan, talking to Moira Keenan, in *The Times*, felt that some 'sex education' books, by reducing concern for others and the sense of their tenderness, and by 'stealing our dreams', by its attack on imagination, might make people more likely to be less considerate to each other. Professor Ernest van Der Haag says that in reducing the value of the other person, in this way, pornography makes it more likely that individuals will commit 'non-consensual acts'—and he believes that Ian Brady may have been encouraged by pornography to commit his crimes. This would seem to be the implications of a case-history in *Existence—a New Dimension in Psychiatry* in which a butcher used pornography to inflame himself for sexual escapades, in one of which he shot a prostitute. Pamela Hansford Johnson also connects pornography with violence, while in Dr. Gregory Zilboorg's *The Psychology of the Criminal Act and Punishment* there is a good deal of discussion of how little we know about why individuals 'act out' their aggressive phantasies in crime. As we have seen, pornography is a form of 'acting out'—and there are many recent crimes which suggest that primitive phantasies, such as the cutting off of a woman's breasts, are not only being 'acted out' in films but are being imitated by forms of acting out in murders and other crimes.

While only a small proportion of individuals may act out primitive phantasies as a consequence of pornography, there is also the much wider question of the general diminishing of mutual self-respect which is induced

by it, not least because of its glamorization of contempt and humiliation. In promoting mental rage dissociated from personal 'meeting' and true imagination it also promotes irrationality and corrupts feelings. As Suzanne Langer says, 'the vulgarization of art is the surest symptom of ethnic decline' while 'bad art is corruption of feeling. This is a large factor in the irrationalism which dictators and demagogues exploit'. Professor Walter Berns in *Pornography versus Democracy* says that pornography, and especially the situation in which it is increasingly accepted socially, is leading to a state of affairs in which it is no longer possible to make the necessary discriminations between good and bad in culture, and to relate art to the values of real life. (This is only too evident in film and theatre reviewing today.)

It should be clear from this brief summary of opinions from psychology, sociology, philosophy and cultural criticism why (as *The Human World* has said) 'pornography does not cause depravity and corruption—it is depravity and corruption'. Today we have the absurd situation in which the authorities watch depraved sex shows—and report that they are not obscene, because they don't deprave those who see them. But the depravity is there, all the same, for everyone to see—on the stage or screen—as people are abusing the meanings of their bodies.

It should also be evident—once the seething pressures of hate in pornography are clear—that this cultural manifestation requires urgent public control. The steam behind the movement, as E. J. Misham has said, is economic. But permissiveness is now threatened by those who are exploiting—for their own gain, and to express their hatred of woman, and of humanness.

This menaces our new and valuable gains in real sexual freedom—which no-one would wish to go back on. As Dr. Benjamin Spock says, pornography threatens the attitudes of young people to sex and love, and menaces their idealism. It could bring a new kind of inhibition on feeling, far worse than Victorian repression—not least because the new kind of inhibition is welcomed as a friend. Pornography may wear an 'elegant' smile, and wave gaily from the stage at us—but it is yet another manifestation of that kind of evil by which man can turn on himself, to attack, and destroy, his own most sensitive spheres of consciousness, meaning, and love. (See Professor Jules Henry, *Culture Against Man*.)

The test of how controls might work must centre round the question (which has, alas, been lost sight of, in the England of today)—as to whether or not there is an overall creative purpose, or genuine public value in what is depicted. This will ultimately be a matter of whether the effects of a cultural work are human or anti-human, as judged not in its 'effects' but its meanings and symbolism. To discriminate is difficult—but in racism we no longer find it too difficult to operate laws of a similar kind. Over pornography, if we become aware of the hate it contains, and judge how much hate is expressed in the symbolism, as a form of education (rather than in any supposed 'effects'), then we can decide which works must be suppressed, in the interests of our fulfilment in the 'natural embrace', and the preservation of the human image—not by one-man censorship, but by democratic law.

Much more important, however, than the organization of controls is the development of an alert, critical, and *outspoken* public opinion. When, at last, people see how degrading and full of hostility pornography is, then they will renounce it, reject it, and use their democratic institutions to thrust it back into the shadows. Only then will the fanatics, and the commercial exploiters, meet the failure they deserve—and be routed by those creative energies of love in human beings which they most fear, and most want to damage and destroy.

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