

practice. The violation of an individual woman is *the* metaphor for man's forcing himself on whole nations (rape as the crux of war), on nonhuman creatures (rape as the lust behind hunting and related carnage), and on the planet itself (reflected even in our language—carving up “virgin territory,” with strip-mining often referred to as a “rape of the land”). Elaine Morgan, in her book *The Descent of Woman* (New York: Stein & Day, 1972), posits that rape was the initial crime, not murder, as the Bible would have it. She builds an interesting scientific argument for her theory. In *The Mothers* (1927; New York: Grosset & Dunlap Universal Library edition, 1963), Robert Briffault puts forward much the same hypothesis for an evolutionary “fall” from the comparable grace of the animal realm; his evidence is anthropological and mythohistoric. In more than one book, Claude Lévi-Strauss has pursued his complex theory of how men use women as the verbs by which they communicate with one another (they themselves are the nouns, of course), rape being the means for communicating defeat to the men of a conquered tribe, so overpowered that they cannot even defend “their” woman from the victors. That theory, too, seems relevant here. The woman may serve as a vehicle for the rapist expressing his rage against a world which gives him pain—because he is poor, or oppressed, or mad, or simply human. Then what of *her*? We have waded in the swamp of compassion for him long enough. It is past time we stopped him.

The conflict is escalating now because we won't cast our glances down any more to avoid seeing the degrading signs and marquees. We won't shuffle past the vulgarity of the sidewalk verbal hassler, who is not harmless but who is broadcasting the rapist's theory and who is backed up by *the threat of the capacity to carry out the practice* itself. We will no longer be guilty about being victims of ghastly violations on our spirits and bodies merely because we are female. Whatever their age and origin, the propaganda and act which transform that most intimate, vulnerable, and tender of physical exchanges into one of conquest and humiliation is surely the worse example patriarchy has to offer women of the way it truly regards us.

Sadism and Catharsis: The Treatment Is the Disease

Susan Griffin

This article is an excerpt from a forthcoming book by Susan Griffin entitled *Pornography and Silence*. Griffin says she began by thinking about how women are made to disappear. “Our invisibility in history. The manuscripts of Sappho burned, the writing of women never published, lives of genius and speech spent obscurely, or in domestic labor and child-rearing (this labor neither spoken of nor paid for) . . . The testimony of a woman in court held suspect by virtue of her gender, her body, her self. The denigration of women, and our bodies, pervades every expression of this culture, no less in ‘great’ art and literature than in what is sold as pornography, and our outrage against pornography must reach for this clarity: that the very way patriarchy has of seeing is a crime against our lives.”

In this article, Griffin speaks of catharsis, a model used by social scientists which hypothesizes that pornography is merely a device which allows men safely to get rid of antisocial behavior like rape, aggression against women, assault.

Catharsis, Catharsis, it is grimly implied, is the true role of pornography. There would be *more* rape, I hear the threat under the reasoning tone, were there not pornography. Be grateful. Be grateful. Oh, but what a depressing picture of the world believing this voice gives me. I imagine men filled with the desire for violence, the need for violence growing in them every day, as natural as hunger or thirst, controlled only by small, placating attention, bits of nourishment. I imagine the average male in the corner of a cage growling with menace. Here, his tenders say, let us give him these photographs of men beating women, of men holding knives up to women's throats, breasts, vulvas, of women's mouths gagged, their legs chained. This will appease him, they say, these images will bring him peace.

Drawn here in a woman's hand, this outline of male nature as essentially rapacious and brutal appears less glamorous than usual. But this is not my image. I have only copied the self-portraits of men;

it is the same picture of male nature that can be found, for instance, in the work of Norman Mailer.

His hero in *The American Dream* is far more violent than the man I have imagined. He goes beyond appeasement, past metaphorical catharsis. Only the real act can save him from the forces inside him; he murders his wife. As if this murder were what he had always wanted (the failure to murder his failure to be) the murder itself becomes a healing.

With his hands around his wife's throat, on the point of killing her, Mailer's hero envisions a door and on the other side of the door, "heaven was there, some quiver of jeweled cities shining in the glow of a tropical dusk. . . ." Yet he does not move toward this shining glow consciously. Rather, a kind of primal force in him takes to murder, and he likens this force to the power of his sexual feelings, "some black-biled lust, some desire to go ahead not unlike the instant one comes in a woman against her cry that she is without protection. . . ." Her death proceeds from him as if it were an inexorable historical process confirmed in its justice by the good it does him. . . .

and *crack* I choked her harder, and *crack* I choked her again, and *crack* I gave her payment—never halt now—and *crack* the door flew open and the wire tore in her throat, and I was through the door, hatred passing from me in wave after wave, illness as well, rot and pestilence, nausea, a bleak string of salts. I was floating. I was as far into myself as I had ever been and universes wheeled in a dream. . . . I opened my eyes, I was weary, with a most honorable fatigue, and my flesh seemed new.

And this imagining of Mailer is in its turn not his own because it comes from a long tradition of heroes who are violent to women: Raskolnikov, Bigger Thomas, in fantasy; Eldridge Cleaver, Caryl Chessman, in fact. And the theme of male violence appears everywhere, the strange yet not surprising narcissism of the Hell's Angels, the rapaciousness and the threat of rapaciousness of armies; it creeps into one's consciousness when one pulls the curtains closed at night, or locks the door. And yes, it is true, men are violent. I have read the statistics. But still, I begin to doubt. An uncanny feeling comes to me after I see the image projected again and again on different screens. Perhaps this image is in itself precious; perhaps the violence itself takes place in the service of this image. Perhaps underneath violence is the desire to appear violent.

Even science labors to keep this image of man as a menace alive;

to prove it. The words of Robert Ardrey: "The territorial imperative is as blind as a cave fish, as consuming as a furnace, and it commands beyond logic, opposes all reason, suborns all moralities, strives for no goal more sublime than survival. . . ." Lionel Tiger's descriptions of the aggressiveness and dominance of male masques, Darwin's theories of the struggle for existence, Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism, all part of a large work of defense. Man is violent, they protest, almost hysterically, man will always be violent.

Be grateful, I hear them telling us, look what we sacrifice to you, our true nature, our redemption. But the imperative to violence in us (as blind as a cave fish) must be fed something, some tidbit, or else even we, with our good intentions, will be able to do nothing against it. And so pornography in the light of these protestations becomes almost an act of mercy. For just as it prevents terrible actual violence, we are told, it is a kindness to those men who wage war against their own natures, a sop to their own mighty urges.

Like much of the thought of this male civilization, the story ends in tragedy. What an abysmal bitterness. A civilization of discontent. A nature forever held back, to be satisfied simply with appeasement, the transcendence, the shining glow of tropical dusk behind the door of real rape and murder, to be forever denied. And what is more, this old story implies that this denial has taken place for the sake of women. Somehow it is because we like to have our kitchen floors clean, because we are fussily gentle and given to soft fabrics, if not a kind of softness in the head, men have to contain the grandness of their true natures. (Lionel Tiger writes that the equivalent of child-birth for the male includes "perhaps even the violent mastery and destruction of others.")

Underneath the argument that pornography is cathartic, then, is a terrible nostalgia and a grief from the imagined loss of this primal violence. And so the double message. The speaker who utters opposite truths out of each side of his mouth. The Janus head. Gemini. The twin love of violence and fear of violence in the warning, don't take away pornography or the beast will be unleashed.

I do not believe what this head is saying to me. In the first place, the head is severed. And it is not Salome who holds it up for admiration. The head has detached itself from the body and blames the body now for its own beastliness. For it is the head, the intellect, which has imagined this violence to be part of male nature and then must speak and protest and defend and prove because the head needs this violence as the body does not. What leads me to feel this, to sense it out?

The hysteria. The hysteria of these arguments, which I must now move through delicately and slowly, unwrapping a tangled and distorted web: this hysteria is a sign to me that the violence is unreal, has been fabricated by the severed head. And of course the head is hysterical. Without the body, it must feed on images alone.

What if we imagined our true natures, male and female, as undeniably tender?

Tenderness as deaf as moss, as enveloping as fog, it lives past words, opposes nothing, feeds all perception, cares for no concern past feeling . . . That laced through our profoundest stories are moments of confrontation when the soul of the heroine is overwhelmed because she perceives the depths of her ability to love and this takes the greatest courage, tests her being. Oh, but this is soft-minded. This in the culture of pornography, which is the culture of sadism, is the height of softmindedness.

Hysteria. For instance, the head claims out of one side of its mouth that pornography leads to nothing. Produces no behavior, they would say in the social science texts. That pornography does not make or encourage men to rape women, nor in any way to reproduce the acts of cruelty they see. But out of the other side of its mouth, the head tells us that pornography allows many men to achieve (and this in itself is an interesting word, "achieve") sexual release. This is not logical. Yet, in working through the knots of this hysteria, let me attempt to make it logical.

Perhaps what is being said by the two sides of the mouth is that pornography excites some behavior but not all behavior. That, to be precise, a pornographic magazine, with a drawing of a nude woman whose face is enclosed in a horse's bit, whose body is roped and suspended, will excite a man to sexual pleasure, but not to the desire to bind and bridle a woman.

Let us forget for a moment that the article which this drawing accompanies suggests that, "The world of restraint devices with its treasure trove of straps, harnesses and buckles, provides an acceptable way to act out their dream with a minimal risk of injury." Let us forget that these words surround the illustration in this case because here the argument is different. Here the argument is not for any acting out as "an acceptable way" to fulfill fantasy (leading, of course, to minimal injury). Here the argument is that simply to see a photograph or read a story about "restraint devices" (oh, how the language domesticates these horrors) is acceptable and leads to only minimal injury, if any injury at all.

And so that image, of the body of a woman unclothed and bound and in pain, which excites feeling in the body, the head says, introduces no corresponding idea of violence.

But this is the head speaking. And, of course, the image of violence does not make the body feel violent. A body feels violent only when physically frightened, threatened in its being. It is the head that requires images of violence, that is excited by them, that *wants* them. And this same male head convinces the body that it needs these images, pictures of women's bodies, and tyrannizes its own body, restrains and misshapes the bodily responses to these ends, to its far more complicated purposes. The head exploits the body's simple desire for pleasure and uses this for its own unsimple desires.

And the head that requires this violence will push the body further and further, for its demands, like the limitless world of images, can be inexorable. And so the head, while deftly constructing an ineffable association between the undeniable ways of the body and the tortuous binding of a woman, at the same time, out of the other side of its mouth, denies that such a thing as association exists. Says that a man may look at a picture of a woman bound and gagged and feel sexually, but feel no desire to bind or gag or cause pain.

In fact, the argument is that her body and the binding around her body have opposite effects on the same man. By her body, he is moved to action. He can "achieve" sexual pleasure. But her binding has an opposite effect. This does not stir him to action. This ends in the image, purges him of any striving toward action, placates him in his primal desire for violence.

What a tangle this head with its mouth speaking from two sides has created. It has obscured the perfectly obvious; that to put any two images together is to create an association. That to put violence and women's bodies together, to associate sexuality and violence fabricates a need. (But, of course, the head must conceal simple observations because it is the head which fabricates need, and in order to make a need felt, it is important that the need be believed, and, therefore, it must never be known that the need is fabricated.) Advertisers in the last decades have spent millions of dollars to create associations between their products and sexual pleasure in order to fabricate a need for those products. In this case the product is brutality toward women.

But I come back to the idea of catharsis. Because I have experienced catharsis. I have had catharsis pass through my mind and enter my body and have seen my body be sick and then be well as my mind

was healed of what I held too long within myself without seeing.

And so why should it not be true that seeing pornographic photographs could purge a man of his need for violence, even if the mind has created the need? If it is a mental need, born of fantasy, fantasy should be able to answer that need.

But this has not been my experience, nor is this the shape of catharsis, for catharsis is not an end in itself. That deep experiencing of old, sometimes long-buried emotions bears a fruit, and the fruit is knowledge. If there were really to be a catharsis experienced regarding sexual violence toward women, the need for that violence would disappear or if it reappeared, be only a shadow of itself and renamed, linked to its source, its origin.

How I wish that Freud had begun his practice on young men, treating their hysteria, their fatal attraction to war, rape, dominance. How I wish he had treated the fathers who were accused of raping their daughters for whatever illness brought them to these acts. But this is the central problem, and why I write these pages and why our lives as men and women have taken the shape they have in this civilization. Such behavior as war and rapaciousness has not been seen as proceeding from illness. Such behavior has been termed normal, if not "animal," wild, untrammled, uncivilized perhaps but not pathological. But this behavior is not seen as illness. Who sees. The severed heads are seeing. Freud himself was a severed head. He would not see himself.

And, of course, this behavior is normal in the sense that it is practiced by most men. As has been widely documented, first in Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness*, but now in many other places, male healers of the mind are themselves very often rapists and they rape their clients in the name of wellness. There is such a phenomenon as an illness which is created by and sustained by a culture; and one of those illnesses accounts for a great deal of the range of masculine behavior, including rape and sadism and the enjoyment of images of brutality toward women and the apologia for that brutality which constitutes much of our culture. Freud was not above this illness. What he saw, he saw through the lens of this cultural madness.

So how understandable it is that he treated mostly women, that he saw hysteria in women, so that the very term hysteria has come to connote a young female patient. When I think of catharsis, naturally the cases of the young women whom Freud treated come to mind. A woman who had fits of choking; one who had a morbid fear of snakes, whose arms were paralyzed; a woman who had attacks of dizziness and fear of heights. A young woman who would not eat or drink. In

order to make them well, the doctor brought these women to their own memories. The death of a friend who was never mourned, the death of a father who was hated, a mother who forced her daughter to eat food which had sat for two hours and was cold. Feelings which could not be recognized or lived to their full extent and *never named* living on in the head, finally expressed by the body as distortions.

In all these cases it was not the mere experiencing of choking or dizziness or fear or paralysis or nausea or revulsion that healed illness. In each case the origin of these symptoms themselves could be revealed as unreal and the real source of illness be precisely named. Knowledge, ultimately, is what healed. Had these women gone on experiencing nausea or dizziness or fear or paralysis, moreover accompanied by the belief that these symptoms were somehow causes or accumulated passions which would subside with some indulgence, one might presume that the symptoms would have gotten worse, for the continual indulgence in them would strengthen a belief in them and thus take each psyche farther away from a real knowledge of herself.

But this is precisely what pornography, which the severed heads claim is cathartic, does. It is dangerous to confuse the therapeutic experience with the experiencing of the symptoms of one's illness. But such is an old habit, an old trick of systems of oppression, whether they be psychic or social. What George Orwell called the politics of language; to name peace war or war peace. This is what Mary Daly calls reversal. The truth only hidden in what is said. The wolf in sheep's clothing. Language itself, which can be the healing agent, takes us farther away from what we know to be true, and we are severed from our own knowledge and so obsessed with the distorted ghost of truth.

And then once possessing this knowledge, one desires to be free. This is the first emotion. I have felt it. In *Tribute to Freud*, H. D. wrote of her investigations of dream states and memories, "I am drifting out to sea. But I know I am safe, can return at any moment to Terra Firma." This is the clarity one wants, not the freedom to be ill to the extremity of one's illness, but the freedom which comes from being free of illness, free of an obsession with the past.