

Critical Exchange

What follows is a dialogue prompted by the publication of this issue's Call for Papers. Below, we reprint the call for papers, the critique of the CFP we received from Lila Lee, a response from Jack Jackson (a member of the CRITICAL SENSE editorial board), and a brief rejoinder from Lee.

Critical Sense, Call for Papers (issued Fall 2004):
**THE PORNOGRAPHIC IMAGINARY:
SEX, VIOLENCE, COMMERCE, CULTURE**

The fierce debates that erupted in the 1980's over the production, distribution, and consumption of pornography look to many today to be terribly dated, sealed off (thankfully?) in another era: we've been there and done that. The slow recession of pornography as that which incites thought and contestation in theoretical circles has occurred, paradoxically, as the aesthetics and logics and narratives and economies of pornography have proliferated all around us. Pornographic visual tropes have migrated fully and almost indistinguishably into the worlds of fashion and advertising. Pornographic logics and narratives have become embedded in, and to a large extent possibly structure almost entirely, the sexual desires and practices of millions. So too do they configure the images of imperial occupation (e.g. Abu Ghraib) and resistance (e.g. beheading videos). Pornographic hyperconsumption has been facilitated by technological revolutions which in turn has created a massive multi-billion dollar globalized pornographic economy to meet the exploding demand. Porn stars have become Pop stars, and Pop stars have become Porn stars. It is a pornographic age; and that which defines our time deserves our continued attention.

We do not seek to rekindle or rehash the so-called ‘sex wars’ over pornography, but we do look forward to thinking anew and thinking again about the pornographic imaginary that today shapes sexual pleasures (heteronormative and sexually dissident), regimes of violence (domestic and imperial), political economies (psychic and material), and cultural productions (of all sorts). We welcome a wide range of submissions that deal with this topic.

The War Against What the “Pornographic Imaginary” Does to Real Women

Lila Lee

In the 1980’s women began a war against pornography. We did this because pornography hurt and subordinated women, both individually and as members of the group women. Apologists for pornography argued that it was harmless fantasy, but we showed that real women suffer real harm from the production and consumption of pornography. We showed that pornography is constitutive of gender norms because it conditions male arousal to depictions of dominant men and subordinated women. Finally, we showed that because pornography is constitutive of society’s norms, the harm from it tends to become invisible, to be seen as just the way sex is. This Call for Papers is a perfect example of what we have always argued, that the harms of pornography become invisible because they turn into a societally accepted norm. The writer of this Call for Papers sees a society saturated with and defined by pornography, but can’t see the harm to women.¹ Even after linking pornography, sex, and violence in the title, the writer asks us to avoid war, but instead to luxuriously contemplate all aspects of the pornography that saturates our world.² This Call for Papers is nothing but an invitation to intellectual masturbation. It erases the crucial issues of gender, power, equality that are inherent to pornography. Would anyone even guess from reading it that the vast majority of pornography is of women for consumption by men? And its writer refuses to see what is right in front of our eyes: an escalating spiral of increasingly violent and degrading pornography that violates women by its very existence and contributes to the rape, sexual harassment, and unequal pay of women all over the world.

Despite the Call for Paper's verbal sophistication, its reasoning reminds me of the undergraduates who took my pornography course. After our first class meeting, a bright young man approached me and said, "Did you know that Linda Lovelace became a Christian just before she started saying she's against porn? And it's really fake and nobody believes her?" I explained that Linda, who no longer wished to be known by the name "Lovelace," had passed a polygraph to verify her testimony that she made the film *Deep Throat* against her will. He appeared nonplused by my obtuseness: "But she's just saying that because she has to because she's a Christian now," he told me.

At our next class meeting I distributed copies of Linda's testimony before the Minneapolis Pornography Ordinance hearings and copies of the transcript of her polygraph examination.³ These documents contain exhaustive and detailed testimony that Linda appeared in *Deep Throat* as a result of severe and on-going physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, including kidnapping, death threats, beatings, and rape. When they had had a chance to absorb the material, I put to them this question: Is *Deep Throat* the documentary film of a rape? Responses varied but predominant among them were tropes and narratives typical of both rape myths and pornography.⁴ All responses were focused on Linda's behavior, credibility, and character; none concerned her abuser, Chuck Traynor:

"But she *looked* like she was enjoying it."

"But if she'd really wanted to, she could have gotten away."

"If it had been me, I would have found a way out of it."

"So what was she doing running around with men who made pornography?"

"Well, why did she marry the guy if she didn't want to be in his porno films?"

"I wouldn't want to do what she did, but some women are 'that way.'"

To push the students a little harder, I wrote two lists on the blackboard and asked them which statements are more likely to be true:

A woman's clitoris is in her throat.

A woman is raped.

She can take a penis to the base of her throat.

She is frightened of a violent man.

This is comfortable and even pleasurable to her.

She is abused by her husband/pimp.

Reluctantly, the students agreed that the second set of statements was more credible than the first, all things being equal, but they still did not find Linda credible. When I told the students that emergency rooms noticed an increase in the number of throat rapes after the release of *Deep Throat*, I was met with an indignant outcry.⁵ Such a thing, they assured me, could be no more than an urban legend. I asked them, “Does pornography in any way affect those who consume it? Does it help them form their norms of gender, their expectations for sexual activity?” The students were adamant that pornography had no effects on people in real life—unless those people were “already that way,” as one of them delicately phrased it.

Both this Call for Papers and my experience with my students confirmed for me the truth of Catharine MacKinnon’s words:

Pornography is a harm of male supremacy made difficult to see because of its pervasiveness, potency, and, principally, because of its success in making the world a pornographic place. . . to the extent pornography succeeds in constructing social reality, it becomes invisible as harm.⁶

Deep Throat is part of the “pornographic imaginary” this Call for Papers asks us to write about. The film has left us with the indelible “visual pornographic trope” its title describes. But in

addition to entering its viewers' imaginations, *Deep Throat* has constructed the social reality in which Linda had to live the rest of her life: a social reality in which her speech is not considered credible, a social reality where the film of her rape is still bought, sold, and enjoyed by countless persons in theaters or on video in private homes.

The film affected other women's social reality as well. Prior to the release of *Deep Throat*, no one had ever seen the act the title describes (probably because it cannot be done without hypnosis to repress the gag reflex). But after the film real men proceeded to demand the act of real women, and the demand caused women real distress and real physical harm. A New York City emergency room nurse testified that one rape victim told her that the men who raped her said, as she was becoming unconscious, "Let's deep throat her before she passes out."⁷ Other women have spoken of how the "pornographic visual trope" of *Deep Throat* has had a very real impact on their lives:

I read about Linda Lovelace in our morning paper which said that she testified for women's civil rights. I only hope that she is able to undo some of the terrible damage that was done by making her movie. Those years started days of misery for me and a lot of my friends. Linda was so convincing that she enjoyed what she was doing that our husbands began to think they were cheated in life with us . . . "I'm not satisfied!" "You don't know how to be a woman." And every young girl in town was brainwashed to show our husbands that they could be a better "Linda Lovelace" than the wife they had at home. I saw a lot of heartbreaks, nervous breakdowns to women that were being coerced in sex—many tranquilizers were taken because they had to keep up with the times or else. Being forced to do something they don't enjoy or "someone else will gladly go out with me!"⁸

Deep Throat set a standard that was devastating and dangerous for all women.

Linda is not the only woman whose credibility was destroyed by the pornography itself that she appeared in. Vanessa Williams, formerly Miss America, lost her title when pornographic pictures of her were published by *Penthouse*. Ms. Williams says she posed for the sexually explicit pictures under the representation that they were for private use, at most for silhouettes, and that she did not consent to their publication. Brian DePalma, Director of *Dressed to Kill* and *Body Double*, was interviewed concerning the Williams episode. Asked about her version of the events, DePalma said, "I believed her until I saw the pictures." The fantasy or "imaginary" of the pornography constructs the social reality of how she will be treated, whether her words will be believed.

"Imaginary" pornography affects the reality of men's lives as well as women's. Male sexuality is at least partly constructed from pornography because pornography conditions male arousal to whatever is in it. It influences his standard and demands of what a woman should be. *Deep Throat* is not just a "pornographic visual trope." It is a reality of male sexual demand and a very unpleasant reality of female sexual experience. Having a man shove his penis down to the base of your throat until you choke and gag is painful and sometimes dangerous. The fact that "deep throat" is a "pornographic visual trope" drawn from the rich repertoire of the "pornographic imaginary" is little consolation to the woman who endures a throat rape.

It was during the sex wars this Call for Papers dismisses so condescendingly that something unprecedented in the history of pornography occurred: public testimony by persons who were harmed by pornography, in the production of it, the consumption of it, or simply by living in a society saturated with it. Testimony of women and men in the hearings for the ordinance was speech that had never been heard in public. It was not about "the imaginary," it was about real men and women, their bodies, their emotions, their childhood relations with parents, their homes, their sex lives, their endurance of sexual harassment and sexual assault or atrocities, the harm that had to be inflicted on them to make them perform pornography, and the lasting harm they

suffered from the distribution and consumption of the record of their violation. (Empirical studies by social scientists over the last quarter-century have amply verified the victims' testimony of harm.)¹⁰ The victims' new, unprecedented speech resulted in a new, unprecedented law: an Anti-Pornography Ordinance that defined pornography as "the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women," and placed a legal remedy in the hands of women, men, and children hurt by pornography.¹¹

The Call for Papers erases Linda's suffering, her testimony, her courageous activism. It implicitly dismisses her as nothing more than the incidental vehicle of a "pornographic visual trope." I read Linda's obituary in the April 23, 2002 *Seattle Times*. It was a mixed experience. To my sorrow, quite a bit of the pornographer's branding stuck to Linda even after death: the headline names her "Ex-Porn Star Linda Lovelace." Several of the most important facts about her life were recounted as something she "claimed" and not something that really happened—the fact that she received not a cent out of *Deep Throat's* \$600 million gross, the fact that her first husband, Charles Traynor, forced her into pornography, prostitution, and rape. But I was heartened just to see parts of her true story printed in a newspaper, even if qualified as "claimed." And it is nothing short of a miracle that the newspaper refers to Linda by the last name she wished to be known by, Boreman, her birth name, and tells us that she was an anti-pornography advocate, that she wrote her autobiography, *Ordeal*, and that she testified before congressional committees investigating pornography. The obituary accorded her something of the human dignity the *Deep Throat* pornographers did so much to destroy.

The sex wars this Call for Papers so condescendingly dismisses are where Linda and a lot of other radical feminists fought long and hard so that women hurt in pornography could reclaim their human dignity. Linda is gone, but we have not forgotten what pornography did to her. Even after death the pornography violates her memory and hurts her children. And we're not going to stop fighting this war until pornography is reduced to an

obsolete artifact powerless to ever hurt another woman. Only then will we agree with the writer of this Call for Papers that pornography is a fit subject for academic speculation rather than for war.

Notes

¹ "That which defines our time deserves our continued attention. . . . We look forward to thinking anew and thinking again about the pornographic imaginary that today shapes sexual pleasures, violence, political economies, and cultural productions. . . . We welcome a wide range of submissions that deal with this topic."

² "The fierce debates that erupted in the 1980's over the production, distribution, and consumption of pornography look to many today to be terribly dated, sealed off (thankfully?) in another era: we've been there and done that. . . . We do not seek to rekindle or rehash the so-called 'sex wars' over pornography."

³ *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings*, ed. Catharine A. MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 60-66 (testimony before City Council) and 204-213 (transcript of polygraph examination).

⁴ Robin G. Sawyer, Ph.D., et al., "Rape Myth Acceptance Among Intercollegiate Athletes: A Preliminary Examination," *American Journal of Health Studies* 18 (2002): 19-26 (explanation and example of Rape Myth Acceptance Scale).

⁵ MacKinnon, *Harm's Way*, 214.

⁶ Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Commentary: Pornography, Civil Rights, and Speech," *Harvard Civil Rights/Civil Liberties Rev.* 1, no. 20 (1985).

⁷ MacKinnon, *Harm's Way*, 214-215.

⁸ See MacKinnon, "Commentary: Pornography, Civil Rights, and Speech," n. 65. (letter from "a bitter wife" to the Minneapolis City Council (Dec. 14, 1983)).

⁹ "'Double' Trouble: Brian DePalma interviewed by Marcia Pally," *Film Comment* 20 (Sept-Oct. 1984): 13, 16.

¹⁰ E.g., Larry Baron and Murray A. Strauss, "Sexual Stratification, Pornography, and Rape in the United States," *Pornography and Sexual*

Aggression, ed. Neil M. Malmuth and Edward Donnerstein (Orlando: Academic Press, 1984), 185 (50-state study found highly significant correlation between the rate of reported rape and the circulation rates of eight pornography magazines in the United States); Dolf Zillman, "Effects of Prolonged Consumption of Pornography," *Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations*, ed. Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant (Hillsdale, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1989), 124-145 (finding escalation from less to more aggressive materials after two weeks' experimental exposure); Mike Allen *et al.*, "A Meta-Analysis Summarizing the Effects of Pornography II: Aggression After Exposure," *Human Communication Research* (December 1995) (meta-analysis of 30 years' pornography studies confirmed exposure of "normal men" to pornography increased aggression even when the pornography was not violent, although especially so when pornography was violent); Mike Allen *et al.*, "Exposure to Pornography and Acceptance of Rape Myths," *Journal of Communication* 45, no. 5 (1995) (meta-analysis showed that, taken together, body of pornography studies shows that exposure to pornography increases aggression even if pornography is not violent; violent pornography increases aggression even more); Ken-Ichi Ohbuchi *et al.*, "Effects of Violent Pornography Upon Viewers' Rape Myth Beliefs: a Study of Japanese Males," *Psychology, Crime & Law* 1 (1994): 71 (study shows even non-violent pornography increases aggression while violent pornography increases aggression even more); Elizabeth Oddone-Paolucci, *et al.*, "A Meta-Analysis of the Published Research on the Effects of Pornography," in *The Changing Family and Child Development*, ed. Claudio Violato *et al.* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 48, 51, 52-53 (authors urge that research move beyond the question of whether or not porn influences violence and family functioning in light of conclusive evidence that it does).

¹¹ The testimony and the law it generated are reported verbatim in MacKinnon, *Harm's Way*.

Erasures and Imaginings: A Response to Lila Lee

Jack Jackson

The opening line and the closing line of Lila Lee's critique of the Call for Papers (CFP) for this special issue declares "war." The object of the declaration, that which we are called to the barricades against, is "pornography." Thought, or the call to, stands in contrast to this "war." Academic "speculation" is not action, and even if it is action it is not "war." Thought, about the declaration or its target, is viewed by Lee as "intellectual masturbation." So, thought and speculation do act, but in counter-production to "war:" it is mis-spent energy. But there is more: thought is itself rendered the object of the declaration. That is, to move the "pornographic" to a position of that which is thought-about is to in-itself perform the subordinating functions of "pornography." The call to thought is thus too the object of the declaration of war. Some might insist that a call-to-thought, the focusing of an inquiry, the posing of a question works in a politically neutral manner. Perhaps sometimes yes, but certainly not always. The proliferation of debates on when, exactly, and under what circumstances, torture might be permissible constitutes the very regime of torture that governs today. It is cognizable as a serious question *only* under that regime, and thus the rebellion against that regime necessitates a certain refusal to engage the question on its terms.¹ A similar conclusion can be drawn from the 'debate' initiated by the academic speculations of Harvard President Lawrence Summers on the possible 'biological' reasons for the sociological fact of the patriarchal misdistribution of the professoriate in the 'natural' sciences. What klan of lords hasn't wondered whether their lordship wasn't perhaps written into the bio-/cosmo-logical ordering of things and then seen fit to 'study' the 'question' in a manner that answers it *simultaneously*? The parameters of observation, the vocabularies of justification, the

criteria of measurement, and the objects of academic inquiry are in the first instance political questions. Thus this defense of this CFP is rooted not in claims of objectivity or neutrality or academic 'freedom,' but rather in the specificity of this call; it will leave liberal pieties to others.²

The most damning charge offered by Lee is that the CFP ignores, and in ignoring thus contributes to, the subordination of women. Lee claims that the CFP is itself a "perfect example" of how the harms of pornography become "unseen." The CFP "can't see the harm to women" and in not seeing further obscures the harm from view. Its blindness blinds: the CFP "erases the crucial issues of gender, power, equality that are inherent to pornography." Curiously, Lee immediately prior to this accusation acknowledges that the CFP links "pornography, sex, and violence in the title." Perhaps here we should rescue from the confines of a footnote in Lee's piece the words of this CFP. We looked forward to thinking anew about the pornographic imaginary that today structures, among other things, "*regimes of violence* (domestic and imperial)."³ Nothing in this moment erases, obscures, or negates the harm and violence done to women in, by, and through pornography; it, in fact, *invites* and opens the space for such an inquiry. We are, after all, publishing Lee's piece. Thus, for Lee, the 'male' supremacist desire for erasure operates in reverse: any experiences with and thoughts on pornography that are not reduced entirely to the harms done to women must remain unseen and unspoken and unrepresented. Specifically, Lee's formulations deny the existence of queer bodies, pleasures, and practices: sexuality is always already heterosexual. Heterosexual norms so pervade social life that they are rendered natural and hence not visible, even among (or perhaps especially among) so-called and self-identified 'radical' feminists.⁴ But in a world where queer lives are harassed, mocked, demonized, bashed, strung up on fence posts, and extinguished daily, perhaps we should consider ourselves lucky to only be hidden from view; of course, we might also consider how such erasures are themselves complicit in the very harms just identified.

So if ‘collaboration’ is a question to be posed, then Lee has some answering to do. Consider her rendering of “pornography” and “male sexuality” represented and performed within it: “pornography is constitutive of gender norms because it conditions male arousal to depictions of dominant men and subordinated women. . . . It is a reality of male sexual demand and a very unpleasant reality of female sexual experience. Having a man shove his penis down to the base of your throat until you choke and gag is painful and sometimes dangerous.” Here, *all* of “male” sexuality is reduced to performances of dominance against women. Who would ever know that a world exists where men might be aroused by men; where queers of all genders are aroused by the thought of taking a cock down *their* throats and up *their* asses; where pleasure does not *necessarily* conform to hegemonic gender roles; and where “pornography” is a site for re-imaginings of something other than the grim heterosexual equations of ‘subject-verb-object’?

Let this not be confused with an uncritical celebration of queer practices or sexually-dissident productions of pornography. I have no disagreement with Catharine MacKinnon’s claim that within pornography “gender is never irrelevant.” I am skeptical, however, about the assertion that on the “simple descriptive level, the inequality of hierarchy, of which gender is the *primary* one, seems necessary for sexual arousal to work.”⁵ For example, in an essay analyzing racial identities and roles in gay pornography, Richard Fung focuses our attention on the “racist ideology” of particular North American pornographic texts in which Asian-American men perform.⁶ Fung identifies a recurrence of narrative and positioning in gay porn in which the “vast majority of North American tapes featuring Asians” privilege the “penis while always assigning the Asian the role of the bottom; Asian and anus are conflated.”⁷ And while traditionally gendered tropes might be relevant to the ordering, and thus reading, of the text, it cannot consume it entirely or primarily. Fung explicitly rejects any interpretation that would “suggest that the experience of gay men of color with this kind of sexual representation is the same as that

of heterosexual women with regard to the gendered gaze of straight porn.”⁸ Race is a modality of domination at work here; so too is empire; so too is gender. The refusal to *privilege* always and in advance the latter is not to deny it; such a privileging, however, would operate conversely and deny the specificity and lived reality of race, empire, and other modes of subjection. Consequently, any reading of “pornography” or “male sexuality” or modes of domination circulating within either or both, as monolithic or monological is an impossibility. It is also an act of political aggression. But when the fetish is for “war” prior to thought, who should be surprised by such hostilities?

Moreover, and finally, the CFP does not generate a dichotomy between the “imaginary” on the one hand as opposed to the “real” on the other. Again, Lee offers up a curious misreading that suggests either a negligence or willfulness at play, and as a lawyer Lee must recognize the indefensibility of both. Here is Lee: “‘imaginary’ pornography affects the reality of men’s lives as well as women’s.” Further, in reference to the public testimony on behalf of the Minneapolis Pornography Ordinance: “testimony of women and men in the hearings of the ordinance was speech that had never been heard in public. It was not about ‘the imaginary,’ it was about real men and women.” Again, the CFP explicitly rejects this articulation of the imaginary as severed from the real. In fact, it is in agreement with Lee that pornographic logics help to order an entire series of lived relations and experiences. Again the text of the CFP: “pornographic logics and narratives have become embedded in, and to a large extent possibly *structure almost entirely*, the sexual desires and practices of millions. So too do *they configure* the images of imperial occupation (e.g., Abu Ghraib) and resistance (e.g., beheading videos).”⁹ The CFP therefore sides with the observation made by Josue Harari that “the real cannot be separated from the imaginary or the imaginary from the real: any such division. . . would be either pure representation or reality in its raw state—imageless and therefore meaningless.”¹⁰ Indeed, part of the pressing interest in the pornographic imaginary, the impetus for the call to

thought, is the fact that the reality we inhabit is cognizable and representable only via the imaginaries that do organize the reality of that reality *as* reality. So, the CFP does not fight the idea of pornography as a constitutive practice; it *presumes* it.¹¹ Thus, Lee is battling a specter of her own conjuring.

And against such misinterpretations in the service of monoracial, heteronormative and otherwise reductionist political maneuverings, I too am happy to indulge in declarations of “war.”

Notes

¹ On this point see Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*, (London: Verso Press, 2002) 103-104.

² To be clear: I am not hostile to freedom of and in academic inquiry; rather my point is that the rote invocation of ‘academic freedom,’ rooted in the politically aligned and problematic jurisprudence of the First Amendment, too often and too quickly elides recognition of, and indeed frequently buttresses, the regimes of unfreedom that partially constitute the particular practices of inquiry in the first place.

³ Emphasis added. Lee misquotes the CFP and reduces this quotation to “violence.” See Lee at note 1.

⁴ Wendy Brown notes a similar move in Catharine MacKinnon’s theorizing: “In MacKinnon’s theory as in the pornography she analyzes, heterosexuality is the past, present, and eternal future of gender.” *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 89.

⁵ Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 172 (emphasis added). On the irreducibility of dominance to “primary” logics, see Angela Harris, “Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory,” *Stanford Law Review* 42 (1990): 581; Anna Marie Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary* (London: Routledge Press, 1998), especially Chapter 5, “Power and Hegemony.”

⁶ Richard Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," in *How Do I Look: Queer Film and Video*, ed. Bad Object-Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991). On race and queer pornographic texts, see also Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge Press, 1994), especially Chapter 5, "Black Masculinity and the Sexual Politics of Race;" Nguyen Tan Hoang, "The Resurrection of Brandon Lee: The Making of a Gay Asian American Porn Star," in *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham: Duke Press, 2004).

⁷ Fung, *How Do I Look*, 153.

⁸ Fung, *How Do I Look*, 154.

⁹ Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Josue V. Harari, *Scenarios of the Imaginary: Theorizing the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

¹¹ Lee shifts at the end of her critique from viewing pornography as constructing the social reality of women *as* women to seeing pornography as an object that 'hurts' women: "we're not going to stop fighting this war until pornography is reduced to an obsolete artifact powerless to ever hurt another woman." This moves away from MacKinnon's observation that the harms of "feminization" extend beyond "women," as my friend and colleague Tucker Culbertson has reminded me, what imagines sex and gender as prior to the 'hurts' that MacKinnon sees as constitutive of sex and gender, and also quarantines, again *contra* MacKinnon, the "pornographic" into an identifiably marked artifact called "pornography." MacKinnon's claims are at moments far more provocative as when she sees pornography as *not* radically distinct from other cultural productions but rather as the moment where the gender-subordinating/producing logic of the culture is most visible and pristine, visible at least from a feminist perspective: "existing standards of literature, art, science, and politics, examined in a feminist light, are remarkably consonant with pornography's mode, meaning, and message," *Feminism Unmodified*, 175. Thus, to render "pornography" obsolete in Lee's terms is to potentially render the "pornographic" largely unscathed in MacKinnon's. I am well aware that there are other moments in Mackinnon's work and activism that cut against the conclusion offered here, and those moments have unfortunately been the most embraced and elaborated upon by the self-proclaimed 'radical' feminists. But there is no reason why we might not begin retrieving MacKinnon's thought from the MacKinnonite's practice and locate

within MacKinnon's work a political vision far more vibrant than the construction of municipal ordinances.

Rejoinder

For Andrea Dworkin, 1946-2005¹

Lila Lee

The editors of this journal, generous in publishing my essay that roundly criticizes their Call for Papers, compound their generosity and allow me to rebut Jack Edward Jackson's response to that essay, which enables me to repair a major omission. I should have written that pornography harms women *and* gays, lesbians, persons of color, and persons of minority ethnicity. I write it now.²

From the late Andrea Dworkin's work I learned how diverse are pornography's victims. In her landmark *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Dworkin gives detailed examples and analyses of pornography that sexualizes the degradation and denigration of gays,³ lesbians,⁴ persons of color,⁵ and persons of minority ethnicity.⁶

Dworkin shows what pornography's victims—despite their diversity—have in common: lack of social power relative to those who literally consume them in order to make and enjoy pornography. In her book *Life and Death*, she frames the consistently unequal power of the two groups vis-a-vis the American political system:

Pornography uses those who in the United States were left out of the Constitution. Pornography uses white women, who were chattel. Pornography uses African-American women, who were slaves. Pornography uses stigmatized men; for instance, African-American men, who were slaves, are often sexualized by contemporary pornographers as animalistic rapists. Pornography is not made up of old white men. It isn't. Nobody comes on them.⁷

Dworkin's analysis of pornography and equality logically extends beyond America to encompass all those whose social inequality is both sexualized and constituted by pornography.

As Jackson points out, we have much common ground. I am grateful for his refusal to be sucked into First Amendment fundamentalism, for his refusal to be sucked into the tired porn-is-just-fantasy, and for his agreement that pornography is constitutive of those who use or are used in it.

And I am willing to acknowledge that the Call for Papers does, indeed, have "specificity"—it speaks of aesthetics, logics, narratives, and economies. It also suggests how pornography helps constitute the sexual desires and practices of millions, images of "imperial occupation (Abu Ghraib) and resistance (beheading videos). . . political economies (psychic and material), and cultural productions (of all sorts)." I am not opposed to labeling this language as "specific." But is it concrete? Does it remind us that pornography sheds blood? That it leaves real bruises (psychic and material)? That it involves the consumption of the relatively vulnerable by the more powerful? Does it evoke the violated bodies of the victims? And why does it write of "sexual pleasures" rather than sexual pain and sexual abuses?

I may even agree with the Call for Paper's request that we "think and think again" about pornography. However, I believe our thinking—and speaking, writing, organizing, and strategizing—should be directed at ways to: stop the harms of the sex trade of which pornography forms a major part; help the victims and survivors of pornography; and hold the perpetrators of pornography accountable. And I think that pornography as a purely academic subject has already been done to death.⁸

For all its "specificity," the Call for Papers conveys no sense of urgency, no sense of harm, and no sense of the terrible pain pornography industry inflicts on living beings. Here's a question for the editors of this journal: Would you defend your Call for Papers if the phrase "foreign and domestic sexual trafficking in pornography" replaced the word "pornography"? Isn't there a *real*, and not just theoretical, difference between the phrase and

the word, in the real world, down below academia's ivory tower?⁹

To sum up, I turn again to Dworkin: "Fiddling with the hairs on an elephant's nose is indecent when the elephant happens to be standing on the baby."¹⁰ In such a case, it's fine to think about the situation, fine to create an opportunity for diverse opinions to be heard, but what excuse can there be for doing these things *without getting the elephant off the baby*? The MacKinnon-Dworkin ordinance, perfunctorily dismissed by Jackson in a footnote,¹¹ was an urgent, concerted group effort at getting the elephant off the baby. I defy anyone to read, as I have, every word of *In Harm's Way* and still natter on about pornography and "privileging gender" or "visual tropes." And if anyone wants a "vibrant political vision," they'll find a searing account of one in that book.¹²

Notes

¹ Those interested in learning more about Andrea Dworkin's work and life, I direct to her essay "Suffering and Speech," *In Harm's Way: The Pornography and Civil Rights Hearings*, 25-36.

² Jackson argues that my exclusive concentration on pornography's harm to *women* effectively erases harms it inflicts on others. Certainly, such was not my intention. As a heterosexual Caucasian woman I hesitate to take upon myself the role of spokesperson for gays, lesbians, persons of color, and persons of ethnic minorities, but I am in fact committed to fighting any pornography that harms any being.

³ Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Perigee Books, 1981), 36-45 (gay male inherently seen as less desirable than straight).

⁴ Dworkin, *Men Possessing Women*, 44 (lesbians portrayed as manipulators and controllers of men), 46-47 (two naked women portrayed as existing for the male gaze rather than in authentic desire and relation to one another), and 129-133 (two sexualized women portrayed together as examples of inherent female sadism).

⁵ Dworkin, *Men Possessing Women*, 45 (black male portrayed as servile in employment and attitude, with large genitals), 210-217 (“Black Fashion Model”), 153-158 (racially coded sexual activity among white man, Mexican prison guard, and Mexican woman), and 131 (“older” woman of color portrayed as hardened sexual veteran in service to male via preparation of younger woman for male sexual use).

⁶ Dworkin, *Men Possessing Women*, 130-131 (Polish woman portrayed as sexual joke signifying stupidity) and 138-146 (naked and manacled “Jewish physical type” woman threatened with laser burning).

⁷ Andrea Dworkin, *Life and Death* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 133.

⁸ See Catharine MacKinnon, “Points Against Postmodernism,” *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 75, (2002): 687, 702, note 37 (there are great quantities of academic writing that never mention “how pornography exploits and mass-produces sexual abuse.”) Jackson’s response does not deny that pornography creates enormous harm and injury (see footnote 8); he only quibbles about who is harmed most. I think that the question of how we should rank pornography’s victims—women, gays, lesbians, persons of color, or persons of minority ethnicity—is a red herring. The real question we need to consider is the practical one of how we can best stop injuries to *any* or all of porn’s many victims. MacKinnon has an excellent discussion of the faux argument that feminism “privileges gender” in “Points Against Postmodernism,” 696-697.

⁹ I urge readers to check out “Captive Daughters: Dedicated to Ending Sex Trafficking” which offers a detailed agenda for its recent 2005 conference on “Pornography: Driving the Demand for International Sex Trafficking.” See www.captive Daughters.org.

¹⁰ Dworkin, *Pornography*, 80 (citing John Gardner, *On Moral Fiction*).

¹¹ Jackson makes various—and in my reading somewhat decontextualized—references to different aspects of MacKinnon’s writing and political theory in his footnote 11. For those interested in the evolution of MacKinnon’s political theory, I would suggest consulting her own lucid, accurate, and characteristically brilliant summary of it in “Points Against Postmodernism.” I would also suggest they read everything else she’s ever written.

¹² As for Jackson’s apparent allegation that the MacKinnon-Dworkin ordinance was not exemplary of a “vibrant political vision,” I would suggest he—and everyone else—read: *In Harm’s Way*, my own article “FACT’s Fantasies and Feminism’s Future,” *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 75 (2000): 785; and Donald Alexander Downs’s *The New Politics of*

Pornography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) which is critical of the ordinance but still captures the burning energy of the hearings.

