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Objectification

> It is true, and very much to the point, that women are objects, commodities, some deemed more expensive than others—but it is only by asserting one's humanness every time, in all situations, that one becomes someone as opposed to something. That, after all, is the core of our struggle.
>
> Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating*

Sexual objectification is a familiar concept. Once a relatively technical term in feminist theory, associated in particular with the work of Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, the word "objectification" has by now passed into many people's daily lives. It is common to hear it used to criticize advertisements, films, and other representations, and also to express skepticism about the attitudes and intentions of one person to another, or of oneself to someone else. Generally it is used as a pejorative term, connoting a way of speaking, thinking, and acting that the speaker finds morally or socially objectionable, usually, though not always, in the sexual realm. Thus, Catharine MacKinnon writes of pornography, "Admiration of natural physical beauty becomes objectification. Harmlessness becomes harm."[1] The portrayal of women "dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities" is, in fact, the first category of pornographic material made actionable under MacKinnon and Dworkin's proposed Minneapolis ordinance.[2] The same sort of pejorative use is very common in ordinary social discussions of people and events.

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1. Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 174.

2. See MacKinnon, *Feminism*, p. 262 n. 1. The Indianapolis ordinance struck down in *American Booksellers, Inc. v. Hudnut* (598 F. Supp. 1316 [S.D. Ind. 1984]) uses the related category: "women are presented as sexual objects for domination, conquest, violation, exploitation, possession, or use. . ."

Feminist thought, moreover, has typically represented men's sexual objectification of women as not a trivial but a central problem in women's lives, and the opposition to it as at the very heart of feminist politics. For Catharine MacKinnon, "women's intimate experience of sexual objectification . . . is definitive of and synonymous with women's lives as gender female."[3] It is said to yield an existence in which women "can grasp self only as thing."[4] Moreover, this baneful experience is, in MacKinnon's view, unavoidable. In a most striking metaphor, she states that "All women live in sexual objectification the way fish live in water"—meaning by this, presumably, not only that objectification surrounds women, but also that they have become such that they derive their very nourishment and sustenance from it. But women are not fish, and for MacKinnon objectification is bad because it cuts women off from full self-expression and self-determination—from, in effect, their humanity.

But the term "objectification" can also be used, somewhat confusingly, in a more positive spirit. Indeed, one can find both of these apparently conflicting uses in the writings of some feminist authors: for example, legal theorist Cass Sunstein, who has been generally supportive of MacKinnon's critique of sexuality. Throughout his earlier writings on pornography, Sunstein speaks of the treatment of women as objects for the use and control of men as the central thing that is bad in pornographic representation.[5] On the other hand, in a mostly negative review of a recent book by Nadine Strossen defending pornography,[6] Sunstein writes the following:

> People's imaginations are unruly . . . It may be possible to argue, as some people do, that objectification and a form of use are substantial parts of sexual life, or wonderful parts of sexual life, or ineradicable parts of sexual life. Within a context of equality, respect and consent,

3. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 124.

4. Ibid.

5. Cass Sunstein, *The Partial Constitution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) pp. 257–90; also "Neutrality in Constitutional Law (with Special Reference to Pornography, Abortion, and Surrogacy," *Columbia Law Review* 92 (1992): 1–52.

6. *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight for Women's Rights* (New York: Scribner, 1995).

objectification—not at all an easy concept to define—may not be so troublesome.[7]

To be sure, Sunstein expresses himself very cautiously, speaking only of an argument that might be made and not indicating his own support for such an argument. Nonetheless, to MacKinnon and Dworkin, who have typically represented opposition to objectification as at the heart of feminism, this paragraph might well seem puzzling. They might well wish to ask: What does Sunstein wish to defend? Why should "objectification and a form of use" ever be seen as "wonderful" or even as "ineradicable" parts of sexual life? Wouldn't it always be bad to use a "someone" as a "something"? And why should we suppose that it is at all possible to combine objectification with "equality, respect, and consent"? Isn't this precisely the combination we have shown to be impossible?

My hunch, which I shall pursue, is that such confusions can arise because we have not clarified the concept of objectification to ourselves, and that once we do so we will find out that it is not only a slippery, but also a multiple, concept. Indeed, I shall argue that there are at least seven distinct ways of behaving introduced by the term, none of which implies any of the others, though there are many complex connections among them. Under some specifications, objectification, I shall argue, is always morally problematic. Under other specifications, objectification has features that may be either good or bad, depending upon the overall context. (Sunstein was certainly right to emphasize the importance of context, and I shall dwell on that issue.) Some features of objectification, furthermore, I shall argue, may in fact in some circumstances, as Sunstein suggests, be either necessary or even wonderful features of sexual life. Seeing this will require, among other things, seeing how the allegedly impossible combination between (a form of) objectification and "equality, respect, and consent" might after all be possible.

I am going to begin with a series of examples, to which I shall return in what follows. All are examples of what might plausibly be called the objectification of one person by another, the seeing and/or treating of someone as an object. In all cases the objectified person is a sexual partner or would-be sexual partner, though the sexual context is not equally

7. Sunstein, review of Strossen, *The New Republic*, 9 January 1995.

prominent in all of the cases. Deliberately, I have chosen examples from a wide variety of styles; and I have not restricted my sample to the male objectification of women, since we need to be able to ask how our judgments of the cases are influenced by larger issues of social context and social power.

[1.] His blood beat up in waves of desire. He wanted to come to her, to meet her. She was there, if he could reach her. The reality of her who was just beyond him absorbed him. Blind and destroyed, he pressed forward, nearer, nearer, to receive the consummation of himself, be received within the darkness which should swallow him and yield him up to himself. If he could come really within the blazing kernel of darkness, if really he could be destroyed, burnt away till he lit with her in one consummation, that were supreme, supreme.

D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*

[2.] yes because he must have come 3 or 4 times with that tremendous big red brute of a thing he has I thought the vein or whatever the dickens they call it was going to burst though his nose is not so big after I took off all my things with the blinds down after my hours dressing and perfuming and combing it like iron or some kind of a thick crowbar standing all the time he must have eaten oysters I think a few dozen he was in great singing voice no I never in all my life felt anyone had one the size of that to make you feel full up he must have eaten a whole sheep after whats the idea making us like that with a big hole in the middle of us like a Stallion driving it up into you because thats all they want out of you with that determined vicious look in his eye I had to halfshut my eyes still he hasn't such a tremendous amount of spunk in him

James Joyce, *Ulysses*

[3.] She even has a sheet over her body, draped and folded into her contours. She doesn't move. She might be dead, Macrae thinks. . . . Suddenly a desire to violate tears through his body like an electric shock, six thousand volts of violence, sacrilege, the lust to desecrate, destroy. His thumbs unite between the crack of her ass, nails inwards, knuckle hard on knuckle, and plunge up to the palms into her. A submarine scream rises from the deep green of her dreaming, and she snaps towards waking, half-waking, half-dreaming with no sense of

self . . . and a hard pain stabbing at her entrails . . . Isabelle opens her eyes, still not knowing where or what or why, her face jammed up against the cracking plaster . . . as Macrae digs deeper dragging another scream from her viscera, and her jerking head cracks hard on the wall, . . . and her palms touch Macrae's hands, still clamped tight around her ass, kneading, working on it, with a violence born of desperation and desire, desire to have her so completely . . . that it seems as if he would tear the flesh from her to absorb it, crush it, melt it into his own hands. . . . And Isabelle . . . hears a voice calling out "don't stop; don't stop," a voice called from somewhere deep within her from ages past, ancestral voices from a time the world was young, "don't stop, don't stop." It's nearer now, this atavistic voice, and she realises with surprise that it is coming from her mouth, it is her lips that are moving, it is her voice.

"Laurence St. Clair," *Isabelle and Véronique: Four Months, Four Cities*

[4.] Three pictures of actress Nicollette Sheridan playing at the Chris Evert Pro-Celebrity Tennis Classic, her skirt hiked up to reveal her black underpants. Caption: "Why We Love Tennis."

Playboy, April 1995

[5.] At first I used to feel embarrassed about getting a hard-on in the shower. But at the Corry much deliberate excitative soaping of cocks went on, and a number of members had their routine erections there each day. My own, though less regular, were, I think, hoped and looked out for. . . . This naked mingling, which formed a ritualistic heart to the life of the club, produced its own improper incitements to ideal liaisons, and polyandrous happenings which could not survive into the world of jackets and ties, cycle-clips and duffel-coats. And how difficult social distinctions are in the shower. How could I now smile at my enormous African neighbour, who was responding in elephantine manner to my own erection, and yet scowl at the disastrous nearly-boy smirking under the next jet along?

Alan Hollinghurst, *The Swimming-Pool Library*

[6.] She had passed her arm into his, and the other objects in the room, the other pictures, the sofas, the chairs, the tables, the cabinets, the 'important' pieces, supreme in their way, stood out, round them, consciously, for recognition and applause. Their eyes moved together

> from piece to piece, taking in the whole nobleness—quite as if for him to measure the wisdom of old ideas. The two noble persons seated, in conversation, at tea, fell thus into the splendid effect and the general harmony: Mrs Verver and the Prince fairly 'placed' themselves, however unwittingly, as high expressions of the kind of human furniture required, aesthetically, by such a scene. The fusion of their presence with the decorative elements, their contribution to the triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though to a lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded, they also might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase. There was much indeed in the tone in which Adam Verver spoke again, and who shall say where his thought stopped? '*Le compte y est.* You've got some good things.'
>
> Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*[8]

Most of the works and authors are familiar. Hollinghurst's novel of gay London before AIDS has been widely hailed as one of the most important pieces of erotic writing in the 1980s. To those who are unfamiliar with the *oeuvre* of Laurence St. Clair, it is probably sufficient to point out that St. Clair is a pseudonym of James Hankinson, scholar in ancient Greek philosophy and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin, who wrote this novel for a standard hard-core pornographic series, and was later publicized as its author.

So: we have five examples of conduct that seems to deserve, in some sense, the name of "objectification." In each case, a human being is regarded and/or treated as an object, in the context of a sexual relationship. Tom Brangwen sees his wife as a mysterious inhuman natural force, a "blazing kernel of darkness." Molly reduces Blazes Boylan to his genital dimensions, regarding him as somewhat less human than the stallion to which she jokingly compares him. Hankinson's hero Macrae treats the sleeping Isabelle as a prehuman preconscious being ripe for invasion and destruction, whose only quasi-human utterance is one that confirms her suitability for the infliction of pain. The *Playboy* caption reduces the young actress, a skilled tennis player, to a body ripe for

8. Passages are taken from: D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (London: Penguin, 1989; first publication 1915), pp. 132–33; James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Modern Library, 1961; first copyright 1914), p. 742; "Laurence St. Clair," *Isabelle and Véronique: Four Months, Four Cities* (New York: Blue Moon Books, Inc., 1989), pp. 2–4 (of 181 pages); Alan Hollinghurst, *The Swimming-Pool Library* (New York: Vintage, 1989; first published 1988), p. 20; Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985; first published 1904), p. 574.

male use: it says, in effect, she thinks she is displaying herself as a skilled athletic performer, but all the while she is actually displaying herself to *our* gaze as a sexual object. Hollinghurst's hero represents himself as able to see his fellow Londoners as equal interchangeable bodies or even body parts, under the sexual gaze of the shower room, a gaze allegedly independent of warping considerations of class or rank. Maggie and Adam contemplate their respective spouses as priceless antiques whom they have collected and arranged.

In all such analyses of literary works, we need to distinguish the objectification of one character by another character from the objectification of persons by a text taken as a whole. Both are of interest to me as examples of morally assessable human conduct, and, given the connections of my analysis to the debate over pornography, I shall be concerned with the morality of the conduct that consists in representing,[9] as well as with the morality of represented conduct. Both sorts of conduct can be morally assessed, but they should be kept separate. Frequently it is difficult to do this, but the attempt must be made, since important moral issues clearly turn on the difference, and in dealing with literary examples we must grapple with it. Fortunately, ethical criticism of literature has by now developed a rich set of distinctions to assist us. Especially helpful is Wayne Booth's threefold distinction between (a) the *narrator* of a text (and/or its other characters); (b) the *implied author*, that is, the sense of life embodied in the text taken as a whole; and (c) the *real-life author*, who has many properties lacked by the implied author, and may lack some that the implied author has. [10] Booth argues, and I agree, that the ethical criticism of the action represented in a text is one thing, and criticism of the text as a whole another; to get to the second we need to focus on the *implied author*, asking ourselves what sort of interaction the text as a whole promotes in us as readers, what sorts of desires and projects it awakens and constructs. In this way, ethical criticism of texts can be both sensitive to literary form and continuous with the ethical appraisal of persons.[11]

Here what we should probably say is that Brangwen's way of viewing

9. On the artist's creative activity as an example of morally assessable conduct, see my discussion of Henry James in "'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible': Literature and the Moral Imagination," in *Love's Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

10. See Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

11. See Booth, *Company*, Chap. 3. He uses Aristotle's account of friendship to ask about the ethical value of spending time in the company of texts of different sorts.

his wife is exemplary of attitudes that Lawrence advocates in his text taken as a whole, and in other related texts; that Molly Bloom's attitude to Boylan is far from being the only attitude to sexual relations that Joyce depicts, even in his portrayal of Molly's imagining; that Hankinson's entire text objectifies women in the manner of the passage cited, which is but the first of a sequence of increasingly violent episodes that, strung together, constitute the whole of the "novel";[12] that *Playboy*'s typical approach to women's bodies and achievements is well captured in my example; that Henry James's novel, by contrast, awakens serious moral criticism of its protagonists by portraying them as objectifiers. Hollinghurst is the most puzzling example, and it remains to me quite unclear what attitude the text as a whole invites us to assume to its protagonist and his fantasies.

To give a suggestion of my reaction to the texts: I think that while none of them is without moral complexity, and none will be to everyone's taste, two examples of conduct in them, perhaps three, stand out as especially sinister. (The James characters are the ones of whom I would be most ready to use the term "evil.") At least one of the texts shows how objectification of a kind might be quite harmless and even pleasant; and at least one, perhaps more than one, shows what might lead someone to suggest that it could be a wonderful part of sexual life. Taken as a group, the examples invite us to distinguish different dimensions of objectification and to notice their independence from one another. When we do so, I shall argue, we discover that all types of objectification are not equally objectionable; that the evaluation of any of them requires a careful evaluation of context and circumstance; and that, once we have made the requisite distinctions, we will see how at least some of them might be compatible with consent and equality, and even be "wonderful" parts of sexual life.

I. Seven Ways to Treat a Person as a Thing

Now we need to begin the analysis. I suggest that in all cases of objectification what is at issue is a question of treating one thing as another:

12. I want to emphasize that I speak only of the text, and make no claim about the motives and views of Hankinson himself, who may for all we know have had any number of different motives for writing in this genre. We should scrupulously observe Booth's distinction between the "implied author" and the "real-life author."

One is treating *as an object* what is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being. The notion of humanity is involved in quite a Kantian way in the Dworkin quotation that is my epigraph, and I think that it is implicit in most critiques of objectification in the MacKinnon/Dworkin tradition. Beyond this, however, we need to ask what is involved in the idea of treating *as an object*. I suggest that at least the following seven notions are involved in that idea:

1. *Instrumentality:* The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.
2. *Denial of autonomy:* The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. *Inertness:* The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.
4. *Fungibility:* The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types.
5. *Violability:* The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
6. *Ownership:* The objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.
7. *Denial of subjectivity:* The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.[13]

Each of these is a feature of our treatment of things, though of course we do not treat all things as objects in all of these ways. Treating things as objects is not objectification, since, as I have suggested, objectification entails making into a thing, treating *as* a thing, something that is really not a thing. Nonetheless, thinking for a bit about our familiar ways of treating things will help us to see that these seven features are commonly present, and distinct from one another. Most inanimate objects are standardly regarded as tools of our purposes, though some are regarded as worthy of respect for their beauty, or age, or naturalness. Most inanimate objects are treated as lacking autonomy, though at times we

13. Each of these seven would ultimately need more refinement, in connection with debates about the proper analysis of the core notions. There are, for example, many theories of what autonomy and subjectivity are.

do regard some objects in nature, or even some machines, as having a life of their own. Many objects are inert and/or passive, though not by any means all. Many are fungible with other objects of a similar sort (one ballpoint pen with another), and also, at times, with objects of a different sort (a pen with a word processor), though many, of course, are not. Some objects are viewed as "violable"[14] or lacking in boundary-integrity, though certainly not all: We will allow a child to break and destroy relatively few things in the house. Many objects are owned, and are treated as such, though many again are not. (It is interesting that the unowned among the inanimate objects—parts of nature for the most part—are also likely to be the ones to which we especially often attribute a kind of autonomy and an intrinsic worth.) Finally, most objects are treated as entities whose experiences and feelings need not be taken into account, though at times we are urged to think differently about parts of the natural environment, whether with illicit anthropomorphizing or not I shall not determine here. In any case, we can see on the list a cluster of familiar attitudes to things, all of which seem to play a role in the feminist account of the objectification of persons. What objectification is, is to treat a human being in one or more of these ways.

Should we say that each is a sufficient condition for the objectification of persons? Or do we need some cluster of the features, in order to have a sufficient condition? I prefer not to answer this question, since I believe that use is too unclear. On the whole, it seems to me that "objectification" is a relatively loose cluster-term, for whose application we sometimes treat any one of these features as sufficient, though more often a plurality of features is present when the term is applied. Clearly there are other ways we standardly treat things—touching them, seeing them—that do not suggest objectification when we apply the same mode of treatment to persons, so we have some reason to think that these seven items are at least signposts of what many have found morally problematic. And there are some items on the list—especially denial of autonomy and denial of subjectivity—that attract our attention from the start because they seem to be modes of treatment we wouldn't bother discussing much in the case of mere things, where questions of autonomy and subjectivity do not arise; they seem most suited to the thinglike treatment of persons. This suggests that they may be of special

14. I put this in quotes because I am conscious that the word is not ideal; it is too anthropomorphic for things like ballpoint pens.

interest to us in what follows, suggesting that we are going to be at least as interested in the treatment that is denied to persons as in the treatment that accorded them.[15]

How are the features connected? It will be helpful to turn, first, to two examples from the thing-world: a ballpoint pen, and a Monet painting. The way in which a ballpoint pen is an object involves, it would seem, all the items on this list, with the possible exception of violability. That is, it might be thought inappropriate or at least wasteful to break up ballpoint pens, but I don't think that worry would rise to great moral heights. Certainly it seems that to treat the pen as a tool, as nonautonomous, as inert, as fungible (with other pens and at times with other instruments or machines), as owned, and as lacking in subjectivity—all this is exactly the standard and appropriate way to treat it. The painting, on the other hand, is certainly nonautonomous, owned, inert (though not passive), and lacking in subjectivity; it is definitely not fungible, either with other paintings or, except in the limited sense of being bought and sold, which doesn't imply thoroughgoing fungibility, with anything else either; its boundaries are precious, and there is a real question whether it is simply a tool for the purposes of those who use and enjoy it. What this tells us already is that objects come in many kinds. Some objects are precious objects, and these will usually lack fungibility and possess some boundary-integrity (inviolability).[16] Others are not so precious, and are both fungible and all right to break up.

The items on the list come apart in other ways as well. We see from the case of the painting that lack of autonomy does not necessarily imply instrumentality, though treating as instrumental may well imply

15. The same is true of "violability"—see n. 14 above—although if I had chosen a term such as "breakability" it would not be.

16. It is interesting to consider in this regard the legal doctrine of "moral rights" of the creators of artworks, which, in much of Europe and increasingly in the United States, protects creators against objectionable alterations in an artwork even after they have relinquished ownership. Technically speaking, these are rights of the artist, not of the artwork, and may be waived by the artist, though not, in a jointly produced work, by one artist without the consent of the others; but the resulting situation is one in which the work itself has, in effect, rights against being defaced or destroyed or in nonpermitted ways altered. For a good summary of the doctrine, see Martin A. Roeder, "The Doctrine of Moral Right: A Study in the Law of Artists, Authors and Creators," *Harvard Law Review* 53 (1940): 554–78; see also Peter H. Karlen, "Joint Ownership of Moral Rights," *Journal, Copyright Society of the U.S.A.* (1991): 242–75; for criticism of some recent U. S. state laws, see Thomas J. Davis, Jr., "Fine Art and Moral Rights: The Immoral Triumph of Emotionalism," *Hofstra Law Review* 17 (1989): 317 ff. I am grateful to William Landes for these references.

treating as nonautonomous; the fact that most objects are inert should not conceal from us, for our later purposes, the fact that inertness is not a necessary condition of either lack of autonomy or instrumentality. Precisely what is useful about my word processor, what makes it such a good tool for my purposes, is that it is not inert. Nor does instrumentality entail lack of consideration for feelings and subjectivity—for one's purpose in using a tool may turn out to require concern for its experiences (as our pornographic examples will clearly show). As for violability, it is not entailed, it would seem, by any of the other six items. Even fungible items are not generally regarded as all right to break or smash, though the ones that are all right to smash are usually of the fungible sort, perhaps because it seems clear that they can be replaced by others of the kind.

Again, the fact that most objects are owned should not conceal from us the fact that ownership is not entailed by any of the other items on the list. Does it entail any of the others? Not fungibility, as is shown by the case of the painting. Not violability, not inertness, and probably not instrumentality, as our attitudes to household pets and even plants show us clearly. (We don't think they are just tools of our own purposes.) But probably ownership does entail lack of self-determination and autonomy; indeed it seems conceptually linked to that absence, though an item may certainly lack autonomy without being owned.

Finally, a thing may be treated as something whose experiences and feelings need not be taken into account without being treated as a mere tool, without being treated as fungible, without being seen as violable—all these are shown in the Monet painting case; also, without being seen as owned (the Grand Canyon, the Mojave Desert), and, it seems clear, without being seen as inert (my word processor). If one treats an object as something whose feelings and experiences need not be taken into account, is that consistent with treating as autonomous? I think very likely not. Again, it seems that there is a conceptual connection here.

In fact, what we are discovering is that autonomy is in a certain sense the most exigent of the notions on our list. It seems difficult if not impossible to imagine a case in which an inanimate object is treated as autonomous, though we can certainly imagine exceptions to all the others. And treating an item as autonomous seems to entail treating it as noninstrumental, as not simply inert, as not owned, and as not something whose feelings need not be taken into account. The only kind of

objectification that seems clearly consistent with treating-as-autonomous, in fact, seems to be treating-as-fungible, and this in the limited sense of treating as fungible with other autonomous agents. This turns out to be highly pertinent to Hollinghurst, and to a well-developed ideology of gay male promiscuity, best exemplified, perhaps, in Richard Mohr's *Gay Ideas*, where fungibility-objectification is linked with democratic equality.[17] To this I shall return. Treating-as-violable, as lacking boundary-integrity, may well also be consistent with treating-as-autonomous, and it is a prominent claim of defenders of consensual sadomasochism, for example lesbian and gay writers Gayle Rubin and Richard Mohr, that this is so. Interestingly enough, the same claim has been defended by conservative political philosopher Roger Scruton, in an eloquent and surprising argument.[18] (In fact, Scruton's entire analysis has a great deal to offer the person who tries to think about this subject, and it is certainly the most interesting philosophical attempt as yet to work through the moral issues involved in our treatment of persons as sex partners.)

On the other hand, there is one way in which *instrumentality* seems to be the most morally exigent notion. We can think of many cases in which it is permissible to treat a person or thing as nonautonomous (the Monet painting, one's pets, one's small children), and yet inappropriate to treat the object merely or primarily as a tool of our own purposes. That, I have said, would be a bad attitude to the painting, even though the painting hardly displays autonomy. What is interesting is to see how few of the other forms of object-treatment are clearly ruled out by the decision not to treat a thing as instrumental. What more, in fact, is entailed by the decision to treat a thing as, to use the Kantian phrase, an end in itself? Not treating-as-autonomous, I have said; though this does not rule out the possibility that treating-as-autonomous would be a necessary feature of the noninstrumental treatment *of adult human beings*. Not treating as noninert, in the case of the painting; though again, it is at least arguable that noninstrumentality for adult humans entails recognition of agency and activity. Not treating as nonfungible, or at least

17. Richard D. Mohr, *Gay Ideas: Outing and Other Controversies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), especially the essay "'Knights, Young Men, Boys': Masculine Worlds and Democratic Values," pp. 129–218.

18. See Rubin, "Thinking Sex," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. H. Abelove et al. (New York: Routledge, 1993); Mohr, "'Knights, Young Men,'" cited above. See Scruton's *Sexual Desire: A Moral Philosophy of the Erotic* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

not clearly so. I may view each one of many pieces of fine silver flatware as precious for its own sake, and yet view them as exchangeable one for another. Not treating as having subjectivity, or not generally (the painting again); though once again, it might turn out that to treat an adult human being as an end in him or herself does entail recognition of subjectivity. And, finally, it seems quite unclear whether treating as an end in itself requires seeing as inviolable. That all seems to depend on the nature of the object. (Some experimental artworks, for example, invite breakage.) On the whole, though, there may be a conceptual connection between treating as an end in itself and treating as inviolable, in the sense that to break up or smash an object is usually to use it in accordance with one's own purposes in ways that negate the natural development and may even threaten the existence of the object.

I now pass over the fascinating issues of objectification raised by our treatment of plants and other animals, and move on to some cases involving the treatment of human beings by human beings. Let us for the moment avoid the sexual realm. And let us consider first of all the relationship between parent and child. The treatment of young children by their parents almost always involves a denial of autonomy; it involves some aspects of ownership, though not all. On the other hand, in almost all times and places it has been thought bad for parents to treat their children as lacking in bodily integrity—battery and sexual abuse, though common, are more or less universally deplored. Nor would it be at all common to find children treated as inert and lacking in activity. On the other hand, the extent to which children may be used as tools of their parents' purposes, as beings whose feelings need not be taken into account, and even as fungible,[19] has varied greatly across place and time. Modern American views of child rearing would view all three of these forms of objectification as serious moral wrongs; in other times and places, they have not been so regarded.

Let us now consider Marx's account of the objectlike treatment of workers under capitalism (abstracting from the question of its truth).[20]

19. In an interesting sense, the norm of unconditional love of children may lead love to disregard the particularizing qualities of the individual, and this may be seen as a good feature of parental love. See Gregory Vlastos, "The Individual as Object of Love in Plato," in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

20. For MacKinnon's account of the relation between this account and her feminist account of objectification, see *Feminist Theory*, p. 124; cf. also pp. 138–39. It is fairly clear from this discussion that the term "objectification" is intended by MacKinnon to corre-

Absence of true autonomy is absolutely crucial to the analysis, as is also instrumentality and absence of concern for experiences and feelings (although Marx seems to grant that workers are still treated with some lingering awareness of their humanity, and are not regarded altogether as tools or even animals).[21] Workers are also treated as quite thoroughly fungible, both with other able-bodied workers and at times with machines. They are not, however, treated as inert: Their value to the capitalist producer consists precisely in their activity. Nor, whatever other flaws Marx finds with the system, does he think they are treated as physically violable. The physical safety of workers is at least nominally protected, though of course it is not all that well protected, and the gradual erosion of health through substandard living conditions may itself be regarded as a kind of slow bodily violation. Spiritual violation, on the other hand, lies at the heart of what Marx thinks is happening to workers, when they are deprived of control over the central means of their self-definition as humans. Finally, workers are not exactly owned, and are certainly morally different from slaves, but in a very profound sense the relationship is one of ownership—in the sense, namely, that what is most the worker's own, namely the product of his labor, is what is most taken away from him. MacKinnon has written that sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism: In each case something that is most oneself and one's own is what is seen by the theory to have been taken away.[22] We should remember this analogy, when we enter the sexual domain.

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spond to Marx's language of "Versachlichung" or "Verdinglichung" in *Das Kapital*, and is closely connected with the notion of "Entäusserung," closely linked by Marx to "Entfremdung," usually translated "alienation." MacKinnon explains Marx's argument that the "realization" of the self in private property is really a form of alienation of the self, and then says that in the case of property "alienation is the socially contingent distortion" of a process of realization, whereas in sexuality as currently realized, women's objectification just *is* alienation: "... from the point of view of the object, women have not authored objectifications, they have been them."

21. One might certainly wonder whether Marx has underestimated the distinction between the worker's situation, based on a contract in which there is at least some kind of consent, and the situation of the slave, which lacks any sort of consent. This tendency to equate relatioins that may be subtly distinct is closely related to MacKinnon and Dworkin's tendency to efface distinctions among different types of sexual relations.

22. *Feminism Unmodified* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 48. See also *Feminist Theory*, pp. 124, 138–39. MacKinnon understands Marx to mean that the worker puts his selfhood into the "products and relationships" he creates, "becomes embodied in" these products. So read, Marx's idea is a version of Diotima's idea, in Plato's *Symposium*, that human beings seek to create items in which their identity may be extended and prolonged.

Now let us think of slavery. Slavery is defined as a form of ownership. This form of ownership entails a denial of autonomy, and it also entails the use of the slave as a mere tool of the purposes of the owner. (Aristotle defines the slave as "an animate tool.") This is true so far as the institution is concerned, and (as even Aristotle granted) is not negated by the fact that on occasion noninstrumental friendships may exist between slave and owner. (As Aristotle says, in that case the friendship is not with the slave *qua* slave, but with the slave *qua* human.[23]) Why so, given that I have noted that in the case of paintings, and house plants, and pets, treating-as-owned need not entail treating-as-instrumental? I believe that it is something about the type of ownership involved in slavery, and its relation to the humanity of the slave, that makes this connection. Once one treats a human being as a thing one may buy or sell, one is *ipso facto* treating that human being as a tool of one's own purposes. Perhaps this is because, as I have suggested, the noninstrumental treatment of adult human beings entails recognition of autonomy, as is not the case for paintings and plants; and ownership is by definition incompatible with autonomy.

On the other hand, slaves are certainly not treated as inert, far from it. Nor are they necessarily treated as fungible, in the sense that they may be specialized in their tasks. Yet the very toollike treatment inherent in the institution entails a certain sort of fungibility, in the sense that a person is reduced to a set of body parts performing a certain task, and under that understanding can be replaced by another similar body, or by a machine. Slaves are not necessarily regarded as violable; there may even be laws against the rape and/or bodily abuse of slaves. But it is easy to see how the thinglike treatment of persons inherent in the institution led, as it so often did, to the feeling that one had a right to use the body of that slave in whatever way one wished. Once one treats as a tool and denies autonomy, it is difficult to say why rape or battery would be wrong, except in the sense of rendering the tool a less efficient tool of one's purposes. Slaves, finally, are not always denied subjectivity; one may imagine them as beings mentally well suited to their lot; one may also think with a limited empathy about their pleasure or pain. On the other hand, once again, the very decision to treat a person as not an end

23. This is also the way in which I would regard the incentive of manumission as a reward for hard work: It is an incentive that is not exactly part of the institution, offered to the slave as human. Other incentives for hard work do not involve a recognition of autonomous agency and purpose.

in him- or herself, but as a mere tool, leads rather naturally to a failure of imagination. Once one makes that basic move it is very easy indeed to stop asking the questions morality usually dictates, such as, What is this person likely to feel if I do X? What does this person want, and how will my doing X affect her with respect to those wants? And so on.

This example prepares us for the MacKinnon/Dworkin analysis of sexuality, since it shows us how a certain sort of instrumental use of persons, negating the autonomy that is proper to them as persons, also leaves the human being so denuded of humanity, in the eyes of the objectifier, that he or she seems ripe for other abuses as well—for the refusal of imagination involved in the denial of subjectivity,[24] for the denial of individuality involved in fungibility, and even for bodily and spiritual violation and abuse, if that should appear to be what best suits the will and purposes of the objectifier. The lesson seems to be that there is something especially problematic about instrumentalizing human beings, something that involves denying what is fundamental to them as human beings, namely, the status of beings ends in themselves. From this one denial, other forms of objectification that are not logically entailed by the first seem to follow.

Notice, however, that instrumentalization does not seem to be problematic in all contexts. If I am lying around with my lover on the bed, and use his stomach as a pillow[25] there seems to be nothing at all baneful about this, provided that I do so with his consent (or, if he is asleep, with a reasonable belief that he would not mind), and without causing him pain, provided, as well, that I do so in the context of a relationship in which he is generally treated as more than a pillow.[26] This suggests that what is problematic is not instrumentalization per se, but treating someone *primarily* or *merely* as an instrument. The overall context of the relationship thus becomes fundamental, and I shall return to it.

II. Kant, Dworkin, and MacKinnon

We are now beginning to get a sense of the terrain of this concept, and to see how slippery, and how multiple, it is. We are also beginning to

24. Though, once again, we shall see that a certain sort of keen attention to subjective experience may be entailed by certain sorts of instrumental use of persons.

25. I owe this example to Lawrence Lessig.

26. One way of cashing this out further would be to ask to what extent my use of him as a pillow prevented him from either attaining or acting on important capacities with

approach, I think, the core idea of MacKinnon's and Dworkin's analysis. As Barbara Herman has argued in a remarkable article,[27] this core notion is Kantian. Central to Kant's analysis of sexuality and marriage is the idea that sexual desire is a very powerful force that conduces to the thinglike treatment of persons, by which he meant, above all, the treatment of persons not as ends in themselves, but as means or tools for the satisfaction of one's own desires.[28] That kind of instrumentalizing of persons was very closely linked, in his view, to both a denial of autonomy—one wishes to dictate how the other person will behave, so as to secure one's own satisfaction—and also to a denial of subjectivity—one stops asking how the other person is thinking or feeling, bent on securing one's own satisfaction. It would appear that these three notions are the ones in which Kant is interested. Inertness, fungibility, ownership, and even violability don't seem to interest him, although one can easily see how the instrumentalization he describes might lead, here as in the case of the slave, to the view that the other body can be violated or abused, so long as that secures the agent's own pleasure. Certainly Dworkin, when she follows him, does make this connection, tracing the prevalence of sex abuse and sadistic violence to the initial act of denying autonomy and endlike status.[29]

Why does Kant think that sex does this? His argument is by no means clear, but we can try to elaborate it. The idea seems to be that sexual desire and pleasure cause very acute forms of sensation in a person's own body; that these sensations drive out, for a time, all other thoughts, including the thoughts of respect for humanity that are characteristic of

which he identifies his well-being. Am I preventing him from getting up to eat? From sleeping? From walking around? From reading a book? And so forth.

27. "Could It Be Worth Thinking About Kant on Sex and Marriage?" in Louise Antony and Charlotte Witt, eds., *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), pp. 49–67.

28. See *Lectures on Ethics*, esp. the following passage, quoted by Herman, p. 55: "Taken by itself [sexual love] is a degradation of human nature; for as soon as a person becomes an Object of appetite for another, all motives of moral relationship cease to function, because as an Object of appetite for another a person becomes a thing and can be treated and used as such by every one."

29. See *Intercourse* (New York: Free Press, 1987), pp. 122–23: "There is a deep recognition in culture and in experience that intercourse is both the normal use of a woman, her human potentiality affirmed by it, and a violative abuse, her privacy irredeemably compromised, her selfhood changed in a way that is irrevocable, unrecoverable. . . . By definition, she [has] a lesser privacy, a lesser integrity of the body, a lesser sense of self, since her body can be physically occupied and in the occupation taken over."

the moral attitude to persons. Apparently he also thinks that they drive out every endlike consideration of the pleasure or experience of the sex partner, and cause attention to be riveted in on one's own bodily states. In that condition of mind, one cannot manage to see the other person as anything but a tool of one's own interests, a set of bodily parts that are useful tools for one's pleasure, and the powerful urge to secure one's own sexual satisfaction will ensure that instrumentalization (and therefore denial of autonomy and of subjectivity) continue until the sexual act has reached its conclusion. At the same time, the keen interest both parties have in sexual satisfaction will lead them to permit themselves to be treated in this thinglike way by one another, indeed, to volunteer eagerly to be dehumanized in order that they can dehumanize the other in turn.[30] Kant clearly believes this to be a feature of sexuality generally, not just of male sexuality, and he does not connect his analysis to any issues of social hierarchy or the asymmetrical social formation of erotic desire. He seems to think that in a typical sex act both parties eagerly desire both to be objectifiers and to be objects.

MacKinnon and Dworkin in a way follow Kant, but in a very important way depart from him. Like Kant, they start from the notion that all human beings are owed respect, and that this respect is incompatible with treating them as instruments, and also with denials of autonomy and subjectivity.[31] Unlike Kant, however, they do not believe that these denials are intrinsic to sexual desire itself. They do not have a great deal to say about how sexual desire can elude these problems, but the more overtly erotic parts of Dworkin's fiction suggest that it is possible to aim, in sex, at a mutually satisfying fused experience of pleasure in which both parties temporarily surrender autonomy in a good way (a way that enhances receptivity and sensitivity to the other) without instrumentalizing one another or becoming indifferent to one another's needs. Since

30. Thus sex for Kant is not like a contractual relation in which one can use the other person as a means in an overall context of mutual respect: For sexual desire, according to his analysis, drives out every possibility of respect. This is so even in marriage (see below), although there the legal context ensures that at least in other parts of the relationship respect will be present.

31. See, for a very Kantian example, Dworkin's *Intercourse*, pp. 140–41: "It is especially in the acceptance of the object status that her humanity is hurt: it is . . . an implicit acceptance of less freedom, less privacy, less integrity. In becoming an object so that he can objectify her so that he can fuck her, she begins a political collaboration with his dominance; and then when he enters her, he confirms for himself and for her what she is: that she is something, not someone; certainly not someone equal."

she is clearly much influenced by Lawrence, I shall return to these issues when I discuss him later. Moreover, in her discussions of James Baldwin in *Intercourse*,[32] Dworkin makes it clear that she thinks that the love-making of gay men can right now, in our society, exemplify these good characteristics. The problem derives not from any obtuseness in sexual desire itself, but from the way in which we have been socialized erotically, in a society that is suffused with hierarchy and domination. Men learn to experience desire in connection with paradigm scenarios of domination and instrumentalization. (The fact that pornography is, for both MacKinnon and Dworkin, a primary source of these paradigm scenarios is what explains the importance of pornography in their thought.) Women learn to experience desire in connection with these same paradigm scenarios, which means that they learn to eroticize being dominated and being turned into objects. Thus objectification for MacKinnon and Dworkin is asymmetrical: on the one side the objectifier, on the other side, the volunteer for object-status. And this means that it is only the female for whom sex entails a forfeiture of humanity, being turned into something rather than someone. MacKinnon and Dworkin sometimes suggest that this objectification involves elements of inertness,[33] fungibility, and ownership;[34] but it seems to me clear that the central core of the concept, as they use it, is in fact that of instrumentality, connected in a Kantian way to denials of autonomy and subjectivity, and in a related way to the possibility of violation and abuse.[35]

Kant's solution to the problem of sexual objectification and use is marriage.[36] He argues that objectification can be rendered harmless only if sexual relations are restricted to a relationship that is structured institu-

32. Pp. 47–61.

33. See, for example, MacKinnon, *Feminist Theory*, p. 124: "Women have been the nature, the matter, the acted upon to be subdued by the acting subject seeking to embody himself in the social world"; and p. 198: "The acting that women are allowed is asking to be acted upon."

34. Both fungibility and ownership, for example, are implicit in MacKinnon's description of males as "consumers" and "women as things for sexual use" (ibid., pp. 138–39).

35. See the convincing discussion of MacKinnon's ideas in Sally Haslanger, "On Being Objective and Being Objectified," in *A Mind of One's Own*, pp. 85–125, esp. p. 111, where she argues that instrumentality is at the heart of MacKinnon's concept of objectification.

36. See Herman's excellent discussion, pp. 62–63: "The rules are not so much to restrain or oblige action as to construct moral regard. That is, they make the sexual interest in another person possible only where there is secure moral regard for that person's life, and they do this by making the acceptance of obligations with respect to that person's welfare a condition of sexual activity."

tionally in ways that promote and, at least legally if not morally, guarantee mutual respect and regard. If the two parties are bound to support one another in various ways, this ensures a certain kind of respect for personhood that will persist undestroyed by the ardors of lovemaking, though it is apparently Kant's view that this respect and "practical love" can never color or infuse the lovemaking itself.[37] Characteristically, Kant is not very much worried about the asymmetrical or hierarchical nature of marriage, or about its aspects of ownership and denial of autonomy. These aspects he sees as fitting and proper, and he never suggests that sexual objectification derives support from these institutional arrangements.

For Dworkin and MacKinnon, by contrast, hierarchy is at the root of the problem. The lack of respect that much lovemaking displays is not, as I have argued, a feature of sexuality in itself; it is created by asymmetrical structures of power. Marriage, with its historical connotations of ownership and nonautonomy, is one of the structures that makes sexuality go bad. We see this, for example, in Dworkin's *Mercy*, in which the mutually satisfying passionate sexual relationship between Andrea and the young revolutionary turns sour as soon as they are man and wife. Encouraged by the institution, he begins to need to assert his dominance sexually, and the relationship degenerates into a terrible saga of sadism and abuse. In this morality tale Dworkin illustrates her belief that institutions maim us despite our best intentions, causing the eroticization of forms of sexual conduct that dehumanize and brutalize. The remedy for this state of affairs, it is suggested, is no single institution, but rather the gradual undoing of all the institutional structures that lead men to eroticize power. Thus the critiques of sexual harassment, of domestic violence, and of pornography hang together as parts of a single program of Kantian moral/political reform.

Failure to sort out the different aspects of the concept of objectification leads at times to obscurity in MacKinnon's and Dworkin's critique. Consider, for example, the following passage from Dworkin's analysis of *The Story of O:*

> O is totally possessed. That means that she is an object, with no control over her own mobility, capable of no assertion of personality. Her

37. Compare MacKinnon, *Feminist Theory*, pp. 138–39: "... objectification itself, with self-determination ecstatically relinquished, is the apparent content of women's sexual desire and desirability."

> body is *a* body, in the same way that a pencil is a pencil, a bucket is a bucket, or, as Gertrude Stein pointedly said, a rose is a rose. It also means that O's energy, or power, as a woman, as Woman, is absorbed. . . . The rings through O's cunt with Sir Stephen's name and heraldry, and the brand on her ass, are permanent wedding rings rightly placed. They mark her as an owned object and in no way symbolize the passage into maturity and freedom. The same might be said of the conventional wedding ring.[38]

Here we have inertness, fungibility, and ownership, all treated as if they are more or less inevitable consequences of an initial denial of autonomy (mixed up, clearly, with instrumentalization). It may be true that the novel makes these connections, and that the particular way in which Sir Stephen possesses O is in fact incompatible with active agency, with qualitative individuality, or with nonownership. But it is important to insist that these are logically independent ideas. One may deny autonomy to a beloved child without these other consequences. So what we want to know is: How are they connected here? What should make us believe that a typical male way of relating to women as non-autonomous brings these other consequences in its train? (For it is clear, as the wedding-ring remark indicates, that for Dworkin *The Story of O* is a paradigm of a pattern of relationship prevalent in our culture.) If we are contemplating institutional and/or moral change, we need to understand these connections clearly, so that we will have a sense of where we might start.

What brings these different aspects of the concept together is, I believe, a certain characteristic mode of instrumentalization and use that is alleged to lie behind the male denial of autonomy to women. For Sir Stephen, O exists only as something to be used to gratify his own pleasure (and, as Dworkin perceptively points out, as a surrogate for the male René whom he loves, but will not approach physically). Apart from that, she is O, zero. So she is not like a beloved child, who may be denied autonomy but retain individuality and agency. She is just a set of bodily parts, in particular a cunt and an anus[39] to be entered and used, with nothing of salience over and above them, not even the individuality and

38. Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974), pp. 58, 62.

39. Dworkin points to the prevalence of anal penetration in the novel as evidence that O is a surrogate for René.

agency of those parts. It is in this way, I believe, that Dworkin (and at times MacKinnon) make the further step from the core concepts of instrumentalization and denial of autonomy to the other aspects of the concept of objectification. They believe that these connections are ubiquitous. This, they suggest, is the sum total of what women are under male domination. But once we have noticed that the connections are not as conceptually tight as they suggest, we are led to ask how pervasive in fact they are. And we are led to ask whether and to what extent women and men can combine these features in different ways in their lives, uncoupling passivity from instrumentality, for example, or fungibility from the denial of autonomy.

III. A Wonderful Part of Sexual Life?

Before returning to the passages, we must observe one fundamental point: In the matter of objectification, context is everything. MacKinnon and Dworkin grant this when they insist, correctly, that we assess male-female relations in the light of the larger social context and history of female subordination, and insist on differentiating the meaning of objectification in these contexts from its meaning in either male-male or female-female relations. But they rarely go further, looking at the histories and the psychologies of individuals. (In fact, in judging literary works they standardly refuse appeal to the work-as-a-whole test; even where narrative is concerned, context is held to be irrelevant.[40]) In a sense the fine details of context are of little interest to them, involved as they are in a political movement; on the other hand, such details are of considerable interest to us; for I shall argue that in many if not all cases, the difference between an objectionable and a benign use of objectification will be made by the overall context of the human relationship in question.

This can easily be seen if we consider a simple example. W, a woman, is going out of town for an important interview. M, an acquaintance, says to her, "You don't really need to go. You can just send them some

40. See, for example, MacKinnon, *Feminist Theory*, p. 202, objecting that the "as a whole" test legitimates publications such as *Playboy*: ". . . legitimate settings diminish the injury perceived to be done to the women whose trivialization and objectification it contextualizes. Besides, if a woman is subjected, why should it matter that the work has other value? Perhaps what redeems a work's value among men enhances its injury to women."

pictures." If M is not a close friend of W, this is almost certain to be an offensively objectifying remark. It reduces W to her bodily (and facial) parts, suggesting, in the process, that her professional accomplishments and other personal attributes do not count. The remark certainly seems to slight W's autonomy; it treats her as an inert object, appropriately represented by a photograph; it may suggest some limited sort of fungibility. It may also, depending on the context, suggest instrumentalization: W is being treated as an object for the enjoyment of the male gaze. Suppose, now, M is W's lover, and he says this to her in bed. This changes things, but we really don't know how, because we don't know enough. We don't know what the interview is for (a modelling job? a professorship?). And we don't know enough about the people. If M standardly belittles her accomplishments, the remark is a good deal worse than the same remark made by a stranger, and more deeply suggestive of instrumentalization. If, on the other hand, there is a deeply understood mutual respect between them, and he is simply finding a way of telling her how attractive she is, and perhaps of telling her that he doesn't want her to leave town, then things become rather different. It may still be a risky thing to say, far more risky than the very same thing said by W to M, given the social history that colors all such relationships. Still, there is the sense that the remark is not reductive—that instead of taking away from W, the compliment to her appearance may have added something. (Much depends on tone of voice, gesture, sense of humor.) Consider, finally, the same remark made to W by a close friend. W knows that this friend respects her accomplishments, and has great confidence in his attitude toward her in all respects pertinent to friendship; but she wishes he would notice her body once in a while. In this case, the objectifying remark may come as a pleasant surprise to W, a joke embodying a welcome compliment. Though we still need to know more about what the interview is all about, and how it is related to W's capacities (and though we still should reflect about the fact that it is extremely unlikely, given the way our society currently is, that such a remark will ever be made by W to M), it may well seem to her as if the remark has added something without taking anything away. It is possible, of course, that W reacts this way because she has eroticized her own submission. Such claims, like all claims of false consciousness, are difficult to adjudicate. But it seems to me implausible that all such cases are

of this sort. To these human complexities Dworkin and MacKinnon frequently seem to me insufficiently sensitive.

Let us now turn to the passages. Lawrence focuses, here as often, on the willing resignation of autonomy and, in a sense of subjectivity. The power of sexuality is most authentically experienced, in his view, when the parties do put aside their conscious choice-making, and even their inner life of self-consciousness and articulate thought, and permit themselves to be, in a sense, objectlike, natural forces meeting one another with what he likes to call "blood knowledge." Thus Brangwen feels his blood surging up in a way that eclipses deliberation, that makes him "blind and destroyed." His wife at this moment does appear to him as a mysterious thinglike presence—in the striking metaphor, a "blazing kernel of darkness" (indicating that the illumination that comes from sexuality requires, first, the blinding of the intellect). This thinglike presence summons him—not, however, to instrumental use of it, but to a kind of surrender of his own personhood, a kind of yielding abnegation of self-containment and self-sufficiency. This sort of objectification has its roots, then, in a mutual denial of autonomy and subjective self-awareness. It has links with inertness, understood as passivity and receptivity, since both surrender agency before the power of the blood. It has links, as well, with fungibility: For in a certain sense Lydia's daily qualitative individuality does vanish before his desire, as she becomes an embodiment of something primal; and he puts aside his daily ways of self-definition, his own idiosyncrasies, before the dark presence that summons him. And there is also a link with violability: For in the sway of desire he no longer feels himself clearly individuated from her, he feels his boundaries become porous, he feels the longing to be "destroyed" as an individual, "burnt away."[41] Lawrence, like (and influenced by) Schopenhauer, sees a connection between the ascendancy of passion and the loss of definite boundaries, the loss of what Schopenhauer calls the *principium individuationis.*

All this is objectification. And whether or not one finds Lawrence's prose, or even his ideas, to one's taste, it seems undeniable that it cap-

41. In the particular case, this does not seem to be connected with a willingness to be broken or smashed, but one should see, I think, a close link between this sort of boundary-surrender and the boundary-surrender involved in at least some sadomasochistic relationships.

tures some profound features of at least some sexual experiences. (As I have said, it is this very idea of sexuality that animates the fiction of Andrea Dworkin, and it is this wonderful possibility that she hates sexism for destroying.) If one were to attribute a sense to Sunstein's remark that objectification might be argued to be a wonderful part of sexual life, one might begin to do so along these lines. Indeed, one might go so far as to claim, with Schopenhauer, that it is a necessary feature of sexual life—though Lawrence seems to me to make a more plausible claim when he indicates that such resignation of control is not ubiquitous, and can in fact be relatively rare, especially in a culture very much given to self-conscious aloofness and the repression of feeling.

It is worth noting that Lawrentian objectification is frequently connected with a certain type of reduction of persons to their bodily parts, and the attribution of a certain sort of independent agency to the bodily parts. Consider this scene from *Lady Chatterley*:

> "Let me see you!"
>
> He dropped the shirt and stood still, looking towards her. The sun through the low window sent a beam that lit up his thighs and slim belly, and the erect phallus rising darkish and hot-looking from the little cloud of vivid gold-red hair. She was startled and afraid.
>
> "How strange!" she said slowly. "How strange he stands there! So big! and so dark and cocksure! Is he like that?"
>
> The man looked down the front of his slender white body, and laughed. Between the slim breasts the hair was dark, almost black. But at the root of the belly, where the phallus rose thick and arching, it was gold-red, vivid in a little cloud.
>
> "So proud!" she murmured, uneasy. "And so lordly! Now I know why men are so overbearing. But he's lovely, really, like another being! A bit terrifying! But lovely really! And he comes to me—" She caught her lower lip between her teeth, in fear and excitement.
>
> The man looked down in silence at his tense phallus, that did not change. . . ."Cunt, that's what tha'rt after. Tell lady Jane tha' wants cunt. John Thomas, an' th' cunt o' lady Jane!—"
>
> "Oh, don't tease him," said Connie, crawling on her knees on the bed towards him and putting her arms round his white slender loins, and drawing him to her so that her hanging swinging breasts touched

> the top of the stirring erect phallus, and caught the drop of moisture. She held the man fast.

Here there is a sense in which both parties put aside their individuality and become identified with their bodily organs. They see one another in terms of those organs. And yet Kant's suggestion that in all such focusing on parts there is denial of humanity seems quite wrong. Even the suggestion that they are *reducing* one another to their bodily parts seems quite wrong, just as I think it seemed wrong in my simple photograph example. The intense focusing of attention on the bodily parts seems an addition, rather than a subtraction, and the scene of passion, which is fraught for Constance with a sense of terror, and the fear of being overborne by male power, is rendered benign and loving, is rendered in fact liberating, by this very objectification, in the manner in which Mellor undertakes it, combining humor with passion.

Why is Lawrentian objectification benign, if it is? We must point, above all, to the complete absence of instrumentalization, and to the closely connected fact that the objectification is symmetrical and mutual—and in both cases undertaken in a context of mutual respect and rough social equality.[42] The surrender of autonomy and even of agency and subjectivity are joyous, a kind of victorious achievement in the prison-house of English respectability. Such a surrender constitutes an escape from the prison of self-consciousness that, in Lawrence's quite plausible view, seals us off from one another and prevents true communication and true receptivity. In the willingness to permit another person to be this close, in a position where the dangers of being dominated and overborne are, as Constance knows, omnipresent, one sees, furthermore, enormous trust, trust that might be thought to be impossible in a relationship that did not include at least some sort of mutual respect and concern—although in Lawrence's depictions of a variety of more or less tortured male/female relationships we discover that this is complex. Where there is loss of autonomy in sex, the context is, or at least can be, one in which, on the whole, autonomy is respected and promoted; the success of the sexual relationship can have, as in Constance's case, wide

42. I mean here to say that a working-class man in England of that time is roughly comparable in social power to an upper-class woman. As for Brangwen and his wife, her higher-class origins and her property give her a rough parity with him.

implications for flourishing and freedom more generally. We do not need to find every single idea of Lawrence's about sexuality appealing in order to see in the scene something that is of genuine value. Again, where there is a loss in subjectivity in the moment of lovemaking, this can be and frequently is accompanied by an intense concern for the subjectivity of the partner at other moments, since the lover is intensely focused on the moods and wishes of that one person, whose states mean so much for his or her own. Brangwen's obsession with his wife's fluctuating moods shows this very clearly.

Finally, we see that the kind of apparent fungibility that is involved in identifying persons with parts of their bodies need not be not dehumanizing at all, but can coexist with an intense regard for the person's individuality, which can even be expressed in a personalizing and individualizing of the bodily organs themselves, as in the exchange between Mellor and Constance. Giving a proper name to the genital organs of each is a way of signifying the special and individual way in which they desire one another, the nonfungible character of Mellor's sexual intentionality.[43] It is Mellor's way of telling Constance what she did not know before (and what MacKinnon and Dworkin seem at times not to know), that to be identified with her genital organs is not necessarily to be seen as dehumanized meat ripe for victimization and abuse, but can be a way of being seen more fully as the human individual she is. It is a reminder that the genital organs of people are not really fungible, but have their own individual character, and are in effect parts of the person, if one will really look at them closely without shame.[44]

43. This point is only slightly weakened by the fact that "John Thomas" is a traditional name for the penis, and is not original with Mellor. The entire exchange has a very personal character, and it is at any rate clear that this is the first time that Constance has heard the name, and that for her it is a fully proper name. The fact that the genital organ is given a personal proper name, and yet a name distinct from the name of the rest of Mellor is itself complexly related to my earlier point about loss of individuality: For it alludes to the fact that in allowing this part to take over, one does cease to be oneself.

What should one make of the fact that Constance's cunt is not given a proper name, but is simply called "the cunt of Lady Jane," with a joking allusion to the tension between sex and class? One could, of course, argue that Mellor is treating her genitals less personally than he treats his own; but then I think it would be a jarring note in the scene if he did simply invent a name for her cunt—presumably that is a game in which she ought to play a role, and she is too frightened at this point to play that game.

44. I think that this position is subtly different from the position developed in Scruton's *Sexual Desire*. Scruton holds that in a good sexual encounter the individual people encounter one another in one another's bodies, because they allow their respective bodies

We are now in a position to notice something quite interesting about Kant. He thinks that focusing on the genital organs entails the disregard of personhood—because he apparently believes that personhood and humanity, and, along with them, individuality, do not reside in the genital organs; the genital organs are just fungible nonhuman things, like so many tools. Lawrence says that is a response that itself dehumanizes us, by reducing to something animal what properly is a major part of the humanity in us, and the individuality as well. We have to learn to call our genital organs by proper names—that would be at least the beginning of a properly complete human regard for one another.

Thinking about Lawrence can make us question the account of the deformation of sexuality given by MacKinnon and Dworkin. For Lawrence suggests that the inequality and, in a sense, dehumanization of women in Britain—which he does frequently acknowledge, not least in *Lady Chatterley*—rests upon and derives strength from the denial of women's erotic potentiality, the insistence that women be seen as sexless things and not identified also with their genital organs. Like Audré Lorde among contemporary feminists,[45] Lawrence shows how a kind of sexual objectification—not, certainly, a commercial sort, and one that is profoundly opposed to the commercialization of sex[46]—can be a vehicle of autonomy and self-expression for women, how the very surrender of autonomy in a certain sort of sex act can free energies that can be used to make the self whole and full.[47] In effect, Mellor is the only character in that novel who sees Connie as an end in herself, and this nonin-

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to be illuminated by their own personalities—"the body of the other becomes the other self, and is illuminated in the moment of arousal by the 'I'" (Scruton, letter of 1 April 1995). I feel that in Scruton's attitude to the body there is always a sense that just as it is, it is not a part of our personhood—it needs to be transfigured, and in a sense redeemed from mere animality, by a momentary and mysterious "illumination." The view I share with Lawrence holds, instead, that it was always, just as it is, a part of personhood, and doesn't need to be transfigured, or rather, that the only transfiguration it needs is shame-free attention and love. The difference comes out clearly in our respective attitudes to the bodies of animals—on which see my review of *Sexual Desire* in *The New York Review of Books*, December 18, 1986.

45. Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," in *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, Calif.: Crossing Press, 1984), pp. 53–59.

46. See also Lorde, ibid., p. 54: "The erotic . . . has been made into the confused, the trivial . . . the plasticized sensation."

47. Ibid., p. 57: "For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of."

strumentalization, and the attendant promotion of her autonomy, is closely connected to his sexual interest.

MacKinnon and Dworkin would surely object that both Lawrence and Lorde are somewhat naive in their assumption that there is a domain of "natural" sexuality behind cultural constructions, that can be liberated in a sex act of the right sort. They would argue that this underestimates the depth to which sexual roles and desires are culturally shaped, and therefore infected by the ubiquitous distortions of gender roles. It is beyond the scope of this article to adjudicate this large controversy, but I can at least indicate the direction my reply would take. I believe that it is correct that Lawrence's romantic rhetoric of nature and blood knowledge probably is naive, underestimating the depth of socialization and, more generally, of cognitive awareness, in sexual life. Nor do I sympathize with Lawrence's idea that sexuality is better the freer it is of both culture and thought. On the other hand, I think that his larger case for the value of a certain type of resignation of control, and of both emotional and bodily receptivity, does not depend on these other theses, and that one can defend a kind of Lawrentian sexuality (as, indeed, Andrea Dworkin herself does, in the early chapters of *Mercy* and in her essays on Baldwin) without accepting them. Such a stance does involve the recognition that our culture is more heterogeneous, and allows us more space for negotiation and personal construction, than MacKinnon and Dworkin usually allow.[48]

We turn now to Molly Bloom. Molly regards Blazes Boylan as a collection of outsized bodily parts. She does so with humor and joy, though at the same time with certain reservations about the quality of Boylan's humanity. Her objectification of Boylan has little to do with either denial of his autonomy or instrumentalization and use—certainly not with inertness either, or ownership, or violability. It focuses on features of denial of subjectivity (she never in the entire monologue wonders about what he feels, as she so frequently does about Poldy), fungibility (he is just an especially large penis, "all right to spend time with as a joke," almost interchangeable with a stallion, or an inanimate dildolike crowbar). This is far from being a profound Lawrentian experience. It is a

48. In that sense, the proposal is in the spirit of the attitude to sexuality expressed in the writings of the late John J. Winkler, especially *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

little unsatisfying, in its absence of depth, to Molly herself—whose ambiguous use of the word "spunk" to mean both "semen" and "character" shows us throughout the monologue her own confusion about the importance of this physical joy by comparison to her physically unsatisfying but loving relationship with Poldy. On the other hand, it seems that Molly's delight in the physical aspects of sex (which was found especially shocking by prudish attackers of the novel) is at least a part of what Lawrence and Audré Lorde want women to be free to experience, and it seems wrong to denigrate it because of its incompleteness. (Indeed, one might say that the theme of the novel as a whole is the acceptance of incompleteness, and what Joyce would most profoundly be opposed to would be a moralizing Lawrentian romantic denigration of Molly's pleasure on account of the fact that it was not especially earth-shaking.[49]) So here we have quite a different way in which objectification may be a joyous part of sexual life—and maybe this sort of mythic focusing on body parts is even a regular or necessary feature of it, though Molly's comic exaggeration is not.

What is especially important to notice, for our purposes, is the way in which our reaction to Molly's objectification of Boylan is conditioned by context. Molly is socially and personally quite powerless, except through her powers of seduction. She is also aware that Boylan does not have an especially high regard for her—he is, like so many other men, using her as a sex object—"because thats all they want out of you." There is a retaliatory self-protective character to her denial of subjectivity that makes it seem right and just in a way that it might not be if it were Boylan thinking about Molly.

Hankinson's hard-core "novel" is both a typical example of the genre attacked by MacKinnon and Dworkin and, in itself, quite an interesting case in its pseudo-literary aspects. For if one holds this passage up next to *The Rainbow*, as the customer of the Blue Moon Press is not very likely to do, one notices the way in which Hankinson has borrowed from Lawrence, and has incorporated into his narrative of violence and abuse features of the Lawrentian "blood-knowledge" and denial of autonomy that serve as legitimating devices for the violence that ensues. We said that Lawrentian sexuality involves the surrender of individuation, and a cer-

49. See my discussion in "The Transfiguration of Everyday Life," *Metaphilosophy* 25 (1994): 238–61.

tain sort of porousness of boundaries that can border on violability. Lawrence certainly depicts the willingness to be penetrated as a valuable aspect of sexual receptivity. The questions then are, (a) can sadomasochistic sexual acts ever have a simply Lawrentian character, rather than a more sinister character? and (b) is Hankinson's narrative a case of that benign sort? (Here I shall not be able to say much about the characters and their conduct without focusing on the way in which the "implied author" has structured the narrative as a whole, since the "novel" is exceedingly formulaic and lacking in complex characterization.)

There seems to be no a priori reason why the answer to (a) cannot be "yes." I have no very clear intuitions on this point, and here I'm going to have to own to limits of experience and desire; but it would seem that some narrative depictions of sadomasochistic activity do plausibly attribute to its consensual form a kind of Lawrentian character, in which the willingness to be vulnerable to the infliction of pain, in some respects a sharper stimulus than pleasure, manifests a more complete trust and receptivity than could be found in other sexual acts. Pat Califia's disturbing short story "Jenny" is one example of such a portrayal.[50] And Hankinson certainly positions his narrative this way, suggesting that there is a profound mutual desire that leads the two actors to seek an absence of individuation. The Lawrentian "atavistic voice" speaking from within Isabelle asks for the continuation of violence, and Hankinson suggests that in asking this she is making contact with some depth in her being that lies beneath mere personality. All this is Lawrence, and Schopenhauer, in Blue Moon Press clothing.

What make the difference, clearly, are context and intention. For the answer to (b) is clearly "no." Not only the character Macrae, but Hankinson's text as a whole, represent women as creatures whose autonomy and subjectivity don't matter at all, insofar as they are not involved in the gratification of male desire. The women, including whatever signs of humanity they display, are just there to be used as sex objects for men in whatever way suits them. The eroticization of the woman's inertness, her lack of autonomy, her violability—and the assuaging fiction that this is what she has asked for, this is what nature has dictated for her—all these features, which make the example a textbook case of MacKinnon's views and a classic candidate under the Minneapolis and the Indianap-

50. "Jenny," in Pat Califia, *Macho Sluts: Lesbian Erotic Fiction* (Boston: Alyson, 1984). See also Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire*.

olis version of the MacKinnon/Dworkin ordinance, also make it crucially unlike Lawrence, in which vulnerability and risk are mutually assumed and there is no malign or destructive intent.[51] In Lawrence, being treated as a cunt is a permission to expand the sphere of one's activity and fulfillment. In Hankinson, being treated like a cunt is being treated as something whose experiences don't matter at all. The entire novel, which is nothing but a succession of similar scenes, conceals the subjectivity of women from the reader's view, and constructs women as objects for male use and control. There is a ghastly way in which subjectivity does figure: For Macrae's desire is a desire "to violate . . . to desecrate, destroy." It is a desire that would not have been satisfied by intercourse with a corpse, or even an animal. What is made sexy here is precisely the act of turning a creature whom in one dim corner of one's mind one knows to be human into a thing, a something rather than a someone. And to be able to do that to a fellow human being is sexy because it is a dizzying experience of power.

J. S. Mill vividly described the distorted upbringing of men in England, who are taught every day that they are superior to one half of the human race, even though at the same time they see the fine achievements and character of women daily before their eyes. They learn that just in virtue of being male they are superior to the most exalted and talented woman, and they are corrupted by this awareness.[52] Consider in this light the education of Hankinson's reader, who learns (in the visceral way in which pornography leaves its impress, forming patterns of arousal and

51. Things are made more complex by the fact that the two Hankinson *characters* are in a sense quite Lawrentian—it is the implied author, not Macrae, who seems to be proceeding in bad faith, ascribing to the woman a subjectivity desirous of pain and humiliation. Why, then, do I move so quickly in the Hankinson case to a critique of the construction of the fiction as a whole, given that both cases are apparently equally fictional? The answer lies in the formulaic character of the Hankinson text, which invites us to see the characters as mere pretexts for the implied author's expression of a view about women's sexuality. It seems pointless to discuss their conduct independently of a discussion of the genre, and the author's participation in it.

52. Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, ed. Susan Okin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), pp. 86–87: "Think what it is to a boy, to grow up to manhood in the belief that without any merit or any exertion of his own, though he may be the most frivolous and empty or the most ignorant and stolid of mankind, by the mere fact of being born a male he is by right the superior of all and every one of an entire half of the human race: including probably some whose real superiority to himself he has daily or hourly occasion to feel. . . . Is it imagined that all this does not pervert the whole manner of existence of the man, both as an individual and as a social being?"

response[53]) that just in virtue of being male he is entitled to violate half of the human race, whose humanity is at the same time dimly presented to his vision. To the extent that he immerses himself in such works and regularly finds easy and uncomplicated satisfaction in connection with the images they construct, he is likely to form certain patterns of expectation regarding women—that they are for his pleasure, to be taken in this way. The work as a whole, which contains no episodes that are not of this kind, strongly encourages such projections.[54] Unlike MacKinnon and Dworkin, I do not favor any legal restrictions on such work, even the civil ordinance they propose, since I believe that any such proposal would jeopardize expressive interests that it is important to protect.[55] I also think that its availability has moral value, since we learn a lot about sexism from studying it. But I would certainly take it away from any young boy I know, I would protest against its inclusion on a reading list or syllabus—except in the way I recommend our reading it here[56]—and I would think that an ethical critique of it, which needs to be given again

53. For MacKinnon's accounts of this, see refs. in *Feminism Unmodified* and *Only Words*. See also Joshua Cohen, "Freedom, Equality, Pornography," in *Justice and Injustice in Legal Theory*, ed. Austin Sarat and Thomas Kearns (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996, forthcoming). Compare Mill's account of the way in which domination is "inoculated by one schoolboy upon another" (*Subjection*, ibid.), though with no explicit reference to specifically erotic education.

54. One might complain about the possible bad influence of the unrepresentative portrayal of women even in a narrative that contextualized the portrayal in a way inviting criticism or distancing; thus it is not obviously mistaken of MacKinnon and Dworkin to reject appeal to context in defense of objectionable passages. But their ideas about the construction of desire take on more power when the work as a whole encourages the belief that this is the way all male-female relations are, or can be. This point about the unrepresentative portrayal of women is logically independent of and has implications beyond the objectification issue: For one could, similarly, object to a work that, without objectifying women in any of the senses discussed here, portrayed all its female characters as stupid, or greedy, or unreliable.

55. My reasons are those given by Joshua Cohen in "Freedom, Equality, Pornography," presented at an APA Central Division session along with the present article, and forthcoming in *Justice and Injustice in Legal Theory*, ed. Sarat and Kearns.

56. It is an interesting question to what extent a critical context of reading can impede the formation of the patterns of desire constructed by the work as it addresses its implied reader. The ancient Greek Stoics, unlike Plato, wanted to keep tragic poetry around as a source of moral warning about the pain that would ensue from the overestimation of the "goods of fortune"—as Epictetus defined tragedy, "What happens when chance events befall fools." Rejecting Plato's banishment of the poets, they thought they could domesticate them by moral critique. Were they right? See Nussbaum, "Poetry and the Passions: Two Stoic Views," in J. Brunschwig and M. Nussbaum, eds., *Passions & Perceptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 97–149.

and again, is indeed, as Andrea Dworkin says in my epigraph, "at the heart of our struggle."

Playboy is more polite, but ultimately similar. Here again I agree with MacKinnon and Dworkin, who have repeatedly stressed the essential similarity between the soft-core and the hard-core pornography industries. The message given by picture and caption is, "whatever else this woman is and does, for us she is an object for sexual enjoyment." Once again, the male reader is told, in effect, that he is the one with subjectivity and autonomy, and on the other side are things that look very sexy and are displayed out there for his consumption, like delicious pieces of fruit, existing only or primarily to satisfy his desire.[57] The message is more benign, because, as a part of the *Playboy* "philosophy," women are depicted as beings made for sexual pleasure, rather than for the infliction of pain, and their autonomy and subjectivity are given a nodding sort of recognition. In a sense *Playboy* could be said to be part of the movement for women's liberation, in the sense suggested by Lawrence and Lorde. Insofar as women's full autonomy and self-expression are hindered by the repression and denial of their sexual capacities, thus far the cheery liberationist outlook of *Playboy* might be said to be feminist.

However, the objectification in *Playboy* is in fact a profound betrayal not only of the Kantian ideal of human regard but also, and perhaps especially, of the Lawrence/Lorde program. For *Playboy* depicts a thoroughgoing fungibility and commodification of sex partners, and, in the process, severs sex from any deep connection with self-expression or emotion. Lorde argues plausibly when she suggests that this dehumanization and commercialization of sex is but the modern face of an older puritanism, and the apparent feminism of such publications is a mask for a profoundly repressive attitude toward real female passion.[58] Indeed, Hankinson could argue that *Playboy* is worse than his novel, for his novel at least connects sexuality to the depths of people's dreams

57. See the very good discussion in Alison Assiter, "Autonomy and Pornography," in *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy*, ed. Morwenna Griffiths and Margaret Whitford (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 58–71, who argues that the person who frequently experiences satisfaction in connection with such limited relationships is less likely to seek out less distorting, more complicated relationships. Assiter's article contains a valuable parallel to Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic.

58. Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," p. 54: "But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling."

and wishes (both female and male) and thus avoids the reduction of bodies to interchangeable commodities, whereas in *Playboy* sex is a commodity, and women become very like cars, or suits, namely, expensive possessions that mark one's status in the world of men.

Who is objectified in *Playboy*? In the immediate context, it is the represented woman who is being objectified and, derivately, the actress whose photograph appears. But the characteristic *Playboy* generalizing approach ("why we love tennis," or "women of the Ivy League")—assisted in no small measure by the magazine's focus on photographs of real women, rather than on paintings or fictions—strongly suggests that real-life women relevantly similar to the tennis-player can easily be cast in the roles in which *Playboy* casts its chosen few. In that way it constructs for the reader a fantasy objectification of a class of real women. Used as a masturbatory aid, it encourages the idea that an easy satisfaction can be had in this uncomplicated way, without the difficulties attendant on recognizing women's subjectivity and autonomy in a more full-blooded way.[59]

We can now observe one further feature of Lawrence that marks him as different from the pornographer. In Lawrence the men whose sexual behavior is approved are always remarkably unconcerned with worldly status and honor. The last thing they would think of would be to treat a woman as a prize possession, an object whose presence in their lives, and whose sexual interest in them, enhances their status in the world of men. (Indeed, that sort of status-centered attitude to women is connected by Lawrence with sexual impotence, in the character of Clifford Chatterley.) One cannot even imagine Mellor boasting in the locker room of the "hot number" he had the previous night, or regarding the tits and ass, or the sexual behavior, of Connie as items of display in the male world. What is most characteristic of Mellor (and of Tom Brangwen) is a profound indifference to the worldly signs of prestige; and this is a big part of the reason why both Connie Chatterley and the reader have confidence that his objectification of her is quite different from commodification (in my vocabulary, instrumentalization/ownership).

Playboy, by contrast, is just like a car magazine, only with people instead of cars to make things a little sexier—in the Hankinson way in

59. See Assiter, "Autonomy and Pornography," pp. 66–69. One may accept this criticism of *Playboy* even if one is not convinced that its portrayal of women is sufficiently depersonalizing to count as objectification.

which it is sexier to use a human being as a thing than simply to have a thing, since it manifests greater control, it shows that one can control what is of such a nature as to elude control. The magazine is all about the competition of men with other men, and its message is the availability of a readily renewable supply of more or less fungible women to men who have achieved a certain level of prestige and money—or rather, that fantasy women of this sort are available, through the magazine, to those who can fantasize that they have achieved this status. It is not in that sense very different from the ancient Greek idea that the victorious warrior would be rewarded with seven tripods, ten talents of gold, twenty cauldrons, twelve horses, and seven women.[60] Objectification means a certain sort of self-regarding display.

The one further thing that needs to be said about the picture is that in the *Playboy* world it is sexier, because more connected with status, to have a woman of achievement and talent than an unmarked woman, in the way that it is sexier to have a Mercedes than a Chevrolet, in the way that Agamemnon assures Achilles that the horses he is giving him are prize-winning racehorses and the women both beautiful and skilled in weaving. But a sleek woman is even more sexy than a sleek car, which cannot really be dominated since it is nothing but a thing. For what *Playboy* repeatedly says to its reader is, Whoever this woman is and whatever she has achieved, for you she is cunt, all her pretensions vanish before your sexual power. For some she is a tennis player—but you, in your mind, can dominate her and turn her into cunt. For some, Brown students are Brown students. For you, dear reader, they are *Women of the Ivy League* (an issue in preparation as I write, and the topic of intense controversy among my students[61]). No matter who you are, these women will (in masturbatory fantasy) moan with pleasure at your sexual power. This is the great appeal of *Playboy* in fact: It satisfies

60. See Homer, *Iliad* IX.121–30: this is the offer Agamemnon makes to assuage the anger of Achilles.

61. The essence of the controversy was over the ethical question whether women should allow themselves to be hired as models, given that they would be cast in the role of representing Brown women generally, and given that Brown women generally didn't want to be represented in that way. Issues were also raised about whether the student newspaper should have run an ad for the recruitment, given that campus sentiment was against it; and students sponsored a forum to discuss the more general ethical and legal issues involved. Since the actual recruitment took place off campus, there was nothing else to say, and in fact Brown produced the largest number of applicant models of any Ivy League campus.

the desires of men to feel themselves special and powerful, by telling them that they too can possess the signs of exalted status that they think of as in real life reserved for such as Donald Trump. This, of course, Lawrence would see as the sterile status-seeking of Clifford Chatterley, in a modern guise.

Playboy, I conclude, is a bad influence on men[62]—hardly a surprising conclusion. I draw no legal implications from this judgment, but, as in the case of Hankinson, I think we should ponder this issue when we educate boys and young men, and meet the prevalence of that style of objectification with criticism—the most powerful form of which is, as Andrea Dworkin said, the assertion of one's own humanity at all times.

Hollinghurst is a case full of fascinating ambiguity. On its surface, this scene, like many in the novel, manifests the exuberant embrace of sexual fungibility that characterized parts of the male gay subculture in the pre-AIDS era. It seems like a very different sort of eroticizing of bodily parts from the sort that goes on in Hankinson and *Playboy*, more like Molly Bloom, in fact, in its delight in the size of organs, coupled with a cheerful nonexploitative attitude, albeit an emotionally superficial one, to the people behind the parts. Richard Mohr has written eloquently of this sort of promiscuous sexuality that it embodies a certain ideal of democracy, since couplings of the anonymous bathhouse sort neglect distinctions of class and rank. In a rather Whitmanesque burst of enthusiasm, he concludes that "Gay sexuality of the sort that I have been discussing both symbolizes and generates a kind of fundamental equality—the sort of fundamental equality that stands behind and is necessary for justifications of democracy."[63] The idea is that anonymous couplings establish that in an especially fundamental matter everyone really is equal to everyone else. Mohr makes it very clear that this can happen among men because they are already acknowledged socially as more than just bodies, because the social meaning of objectification among men is altogether different from its meaning between men and

62. I am thinking of bad influence in Wayne Booth's way (*The Company We Keep*, see above), as a bad way of spending one's time thinking and desiring during the time one is reading. I make no claims in this article about causal connections between those times and other times, though I do find convincing Assiter's claim that the habit of having pleasure in connection with fantasies of this type is likely to lead one to seek out such undemanding relationships in life, rather than those involving a fuller recognition of women's subjectivity and autonomy.

63. *Gay Ideas*, p. 196.

women. This being the case, promiscuous and anonymous sex can exemplify a norm of equality.

Mohr does seem to have gotten at something important about democracy, something about the moral role of the fungibility of bodies that is probably important in both the utilitarian and the Kantian liberal traditions. Certainly the fact that all citizens have similar bodies subject to similar accidents has played an important role in the thought of democratic theorists as diverse as Rousseau and Walt Whitman. Some such egalitarian idea animates Hollinghurst as well, at some moments. On the other hand, it is a little hard to know how the sexual scene at issue really is supposed to show the sort of equal regard for bodily need that underlies this democratic tradition. Notice how distinctions of class and rank are omnipresent, even in the prose that pushes them aside. The narrator is intensely conscious of racial differences, which he tends, here as elsewhere, to associate with stereotypes of genital organ size. Nor are the cycle-clips and duffle-coats that mark the lower-middle classes ever out of mind, even when they are out of sight—and the disdainful description of the small genitalia of the "smirking" neighbor strongly suggests the disdain of the "jacket and tie" for these signs of inferiority. We notice, in fact, that all the genitalia described are stereotypes, and none is personalized with the regard of Mellor for the "cunt of Lady Jane."

Now the question is, how is this connected with the emphasis on fungibility? Mohr would say, presumably, that there is no connection—that this narrator, an upper-class Englishman, has just not managed to enter fully enough into the democratic spirit of the bathhouse world. But the suspicion remains that there may after all be some connection between the spirit of fungibility and a focus on these superficial aspects of race and class and penis size, which do in a sense dehumanize, and turn people into potential instruments. For in the absence of any narrative history with the person, how can desire attend to anything else but the incidental, and how can one do more than use the body of the other as a tool of one's own states?[64] The photographs used by Mohr to illustrate his idea focus intently on hypermasculine characteristics of musculature and penis size, which presumably are not equally distributed among all citizens of this world, and indeed one imagines that the world

64. I think that this is the point made by Roger Scruton in *Sexual Desire*, when he holds that a context of intimacy and mutual regard promote the sexual attention to individuality.

so constructed is likely to be one in which morally irrelevant characteristics count for everything, rather than nothing, an extremely hierarchical world, rather than one without hierarchy. Maybe this just means that people are not after all treated as fungible, and that if they were to be more fully treated as fungible things would be well. But the worry is that in a setting which, in order to construct a kind of fungibility, denies all access to those features of personhood at the heart of the real democratic equality of persons, it is hard to see how things could turn out otherwise. This is not a knock-down argument showing that Mohr's Whitmanesque ideal is doomed to failure. The connection between fungibility and instrumentality is loose and causal, rather than conceptual. But it is a worry that would, I think, be shared by MacKinnon and Dworkin with Lorde and Lawrence: Can one really treat someone with the respect and concern that democracy requires if one has sex with him in the anonymous spirit of Hollinghurst's description?

We arrive, finally, at the end of *The Golden Bowl.* This is, to my mind, the most sinister passage on my list, if we focus on the conduct of the characters rather than the implied author, and the one that most clearly depicts a morally blameworthy instrumentalization of persons—though of course it is the business of the novel as a whole to question this behavior. Treating their respective spouses as fine antique furniture is, for Adam and Maggie, a way of denying them human status and asserting their right to the permanent use of those splendidly elegant bodies. This use involves denial of autonomy—Charlotte has to be sent off to the museum in America to be "buried," the Prince has to be turned into an elegant if flawed domestic object—and also denial of subjectivity. To appreciate them as antique furniture is to say, we don't have to ask ourselves whether they are in pain. We can just look at them and neglect the claims that they actively make. The *sposi* are rendered inert, morally and emotionally, and as in a sense, fungible—for from the outset Maggie has noted that to treat her husband as a work of art is to neglect his personal uniqueness.[65] In fact, we see every item on our list except physical violability—and emotional violation is amply attested.

This should tell us that the dehumanization and objectification of

65. See Chap. I, Pt. i (Maggie to the Prince): "You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. You're not perhaps absolutely unique, but you're so curious and eminent that there are very few others like you. . . . You're what they call a *morceau de musée.*"

persons has many forms. It is not obvious that the "core" of such objectification is sexual, or that its primary vehicle is the specifically erotic education of men and women. Mill tells us that the entire education of men in his society teaches the lesson of domination and use; he does not put the blame at the door of the specifically sexual education. Here we are reminded that there can be morally sinister objectification without any particular connection to sex, or even to gender roles. Maggie and Adam learned their attitudes to persons by being rich collectors. Their attitude probably has consequences for sex, but it has its roots elsewhere, in an attitude to money and to other things that James associates with America. All things, in the rich American world, are regarded as having a price, as being essentially controllable and usable, if only one is wealthy enough. Nothing is an end in itself, because the only end is wealth.[66]

The skeptical incursion of the narrator, with his "lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion demanded," points out that what we really see here is the "concrete attestatio[n]" of "a rare power of purchase."

This complicates our question—for it tells us that we should question the claim of Kant, Dworkin, and MacKinnon that the deformation of sexual desire is prior to, and causes, other forms of objectification of the sexual partner. It also seems possible that in many cases an antecedent deformation of attitudes to things and persons infiltrates and poisons desire.[67] I shall not be able to pursue this question further. I leave it on the table, in order to suggest the next chapter that would need to be written in any story of sexual objectification in our world.

To conclude, let me return to the seven forms of objectification and summarize the argument. It would appear that Kant, MacKinnon, and Dworkin are correct in one central insight: that the instrumental treatment of human beings, the treatment of human beings as tools of the purposes of another, is always morally problematic; if it does not take place in a larger context of regard for humanity, it is a central form of the morally objectionable. It is also a common feature of sexual life,

66. See the impressive Marxist reading of the novel in Ed Ahearn, *Marx and Modern Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 76–99.

67. See Ahearn, *Marx*, p. 99: "... the celebration of the aesthetic and the misuse of persons, two forms of acquisition, are rooted in that original accumulation, the money of the amiable Adam Verver."

especially, though not only, in connection with male treatment of women. As such, it is closely bound up with other forms of objectification, in particular with denial of autonomy, denial of subjectivity, and various forms of boundary-violation. In some forms, it is connected with fungibility and ownership or quasi-ownership: the notion of "commodification."

On the other hand, there seems to be no other item on the list that is always morally objectionable. Denial of autonomy and denial of subjectivity are objectionable if they persist throughout an adult relationship, but as phases in a relationship characterized by mutual regard they can be all right, or even quite wonderful in the way that Lawrence suggests. In a closely related way, it may at times be splendid to treat the other person as passive, or even inert. Emotional penetration of boundaries seems potentially a very valuable part of sexual life, and some forms of physical boundary-penetration also, though it is less clear which ones these are. Treating-as-fungible is suspect when the person so treated is from a group that has frequently been commodified and used as a tool, or a prize; between social equals these problems disappear, though it is not clear that others do not arise.

As for the aetiology of objectification, we have some reasons by now to doubt Kant's account, according to which the baneful form of use is inherent in sexual desire and activity themselves. We have some reason to endorse MacKinnon and Dworkin's account, according to which social hierarchy is at the root of the deformation of desire; but Lorde and Lawrence show us that the deformation is more complicated than this, working not only through pornography but also through puritanism and the repression of female erotic experience.[68] In that sense it may be plausible to claim, as Lawrence does, that a certain sort of objectifying attention to bodily parts is an important element in correcting the deformation and promoting genuine erotic equality. Finally, we should grant that we do not really know how central sexual desire is in all these problems of objectification and commodification, by comparison, for example, to economic norms and motives that powerfully construct desire in our culture.

There is no particular logical place to end what has been intended as

68. This double aetiology is suggested in some parts of Dworkin's *Intercourse*, especially "Dust/Dirt"; and in the episode in *Mercy* in which the Greek lover of Andrea abuses her after discovering that she has been having sex with other men.

an initial exploration of a concept whose full mapping will require many more investigations. So it may be fitting enough to end with the juxtaposition of two literary scenes involving what might well be called objectification. One is a vivid reminder, courtesy of James Hankinson, of what motivates the Kantian project of MacKinnon and Dworkin. The other is a passage in which Lawrence indicates the terms on which objectification, of a kind, can be a source of joy—mentioning a possibility that Kant, MacKinnon, and Dworkin, in different ways and for different reasons and with different degrees of firmness and universality, would appear to deny:

> She feels the sole of his foot on her waist, then waits for what seems like an eternity for him to bring the crop down onto her flesh, and when eventually the blow falls squarely across her buttocks and the pain courses through her, she feels a burning thrill of salvation as if the pain will cauterize her sins and make her whole again, and as Macrae brings the crop down on her again and again, she feels the sin falling from her, *agnus dei qui tollis peccata mundi*, and she finds in the mortifying a vision of the road to paradise lined with the grateful souls who have been saved from fire by fire, and she too is grateful to Macrae for beating her clean again.
>
> "But what do you believe in?" she insisted.
>
> "I believe in being warm hearted. I especially believe in being warm hearted in love, in fucking with a warm heart. . . ."
>
> She softly rubbed her cheek on his belly, and gathered his balls in her hand. . . .
>
> All the while he spoke he exquisitely stroked the rounded tail, till it seemed as if a slippery sort of fire came from it into his hands. . . .
>
> "An' if tha shits an' if tha pisses, I'm glad. I don't want a woman as couldna shit nor piss. . . ."
>
> With quiet fingers he threaded a few forget-me-not flowers in the fine brown fleece of the mount of Venus.