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PORNOGRAPHY, CENSORSHIP, AND SEX
IN THE MOVIES

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PORNOGRAPHY, CENSORSHIP, AND SEX IN THE MOVIES

Pornography is a state of mind. There is no innate badness to nudity nor to any form of sexual activity. Living in a sexually-repressed society makes for sexually repressive legal codes defining some natural and varied sexual behavior to be obscene, i.e., lewd or coarse. Thus the restrictions placed on the inhabitants make criminals of those of us who feel our natural and innate preferences for the same sex and who act on those feelings. A criminal code makes us liable for fifteen years imprisonment. Our movies are suppressed or made by restricted viewpoints that portray us as lechers, promiscuous, role-playing and stereotypic cut-outs. The most felonious crime of murder is depicted in countless versions of cinema so it must follow that the moral codes of the State are not liable to censorship in the movies. Thus one would think the innocuous criminal penal law number 286, Crime Against Nature, which brands the natural as unnatural should not be liable to the censorship laws.

Every person who is guilty of the infamous crime against nature, committed with mankind or with any animal, is punishable by imprisonment in the state prison for not less than one year.¹

Unfortunately, our society seems more concerned with limiting sexual expression than in limiting visualization of violent behavior and we find the censorship of literature and screen to be based purely on sexual acts and nudity and not on crimes of theft or physical personal harm.

"Obscene matter" means matter, taken as a whole, the predominant appeal of which to the average person, applying contemporary standards, is to prurient interest, i.e., a shameful or morbid interest in nudity, sex or excretion; and is matter which taken as a whole goes substantially beyond customary limits of candor in description or representation of such matters; and is matter which taken as a whole is utterly without redeeming social importance.²

If I attack the law from a different viewpoint, the viewpoint of an artist, then the most repulsive clause is the requirement that art reflect the adjustment to social norms of the average. Art cannot be restricted to the average; cannot be limited by the State. Never! Art is often bacchanal, orgiastic and in lesbian films, orgasmic and organic. To describe interest in one of the most if not the most satisfying experiences of human animals, the orgasm, as prurient is typical of the psychopathy of a sick culture.

¹Deering's California Penal Code (annotated), 1971, p. 596.

²Ibid., p. 708-9.

Rather, a sick and degerate nation of man, for ^{how} can culture develop from repression. Films of the most redeeming social importance are films that show sensitive and physical expression of caring and loving sexual expression. Films where it's OK to hug, kiss, feed or take care of another person; films where the definition of sexuality is broadened to include general loving care and concern. What could be more necessary to a violent culture of rape and warfare than pacific and tender human exchanges? And in the place of care and affection we have violent rape scenes as in Little Sisters, heterosexual fuck scenes without feeling as in Wives, and abduction of women in Through the Green Door. In the latter movie, the voice over the abduction scene number one is implicating the audience: "you will recognize your friends in a row of victims" and absolving the audience from responsibility for voyeurism: with a statement like "you are powerless to enjoy!" The abduction of the female in this movie caters to male fantasies for it is mainly men who fill the audience of these so-called "sex" movie houses. How could women enjoy her crucified image as passive recipient with all the manipulation of her body done to her without her interaction while the men behind masks watch on masturbating organs so repressed as to be incapable of erection and ejaculation through personal sexual interaction. The possibility of women loving women is excluded from such movies that play to the interests of some men; women massage each other, kiss, genitally and orally, but for the purpose of men. They are only erotically preparing the victim for it is assumed that penis penetration is the end-all of sexual enjoyment. That a woman could bring pleasure, the highest or orgasmic pleasure, to another woman in the most sensual way is never shown. For the most part, men do not want to see women loving women; to admit that women are equal, and in my opinion, better sexual partners, is a conclusion permittable for the most open and honest male who has left his tremendous culture-trained ego needs behind in order to discover and be himself. Likewise, in these so-called "sex" films, men are never shown loving men. I can only guess the reason for this to be that it is ^{indeed} inconceivable and too threatening to the "average" man that so-called "sodomy" or oral sex could be pleasant. And interesting thought that comes to mind after reading the Penal Code is that there is a possibility that homosexual films made for homosexual audiences would not be censored or expurgated.

the predominant appeal to prurient interest of the matter is judged with reference to average adults unless it appears from the nature of the matter or the circumstances of its dissemination, distribution or exhibition, that it is designed for clearly defined deviant sexual groups, in which case the predominant appeal of the matter shall be judged with reference to its intended recipient group.³

³ ibid, p. 700

Basing my belief that all animals are innately bisexual and that the conditioning of men and women to dominant and submissive sexual role-playing makes it extremely difficult for individuation to take place and therefore, natural and satisfying sexual experience. Add this to the fact that men are trained to be grossly insensitive and insensual, and one can see that "clearly defined deviant sexual groups" might apply to all of us. If there is no prurience in bisexuality or homosexuality, then movies cannot be judged by those standards. Obvious to me, the law is as old as patriarchy and equally obscene to free expression.

If we look at a film such as Through the Green Door, a Mitchell Brothers' production, a so-called "hard-core" pornographic movie, we will see a sexist film that exploits women. The problem with censorship is that it is limited to the restricted viewpoint of a particular censor. And who wants to be a censor? Certainly not one with fine sensitivities. So, definitions and laws are enacted by brutes or at least by men who are insensitive to feminism, racism, and classicism. Through the Green Door is objectionable to people, men and women alike, because of its treatment of a woman as victim in the film, and the class and race biases which are perpetuated. For example, the woman who is being prepared to have intercourse is held by other women with her arms pinned behind her back. After finishing the "grand act", the male walks away, his bottom covered, leaving the woman a nude draped victim who is carried away like a corpse. This worship of the phallus as the independent, active side of intercourse is prolonged ad-nauseum with the 'wonderful' climactic close-up in slow motion of the ejaculation that seems to go on for ten minutes and, for certain, is a double run. Is the vagina or clitoris ever shown? No. Women are not sexual, nor independently aggressive sexually, nor do they have genitals; they are merely objects, recipients of the great white sperm. Moby Dick rewritten. As if the ejecting penis isn't dramatic enough alone in the close-up, a woman's head with mouth of so eagerly open lies horizontally on the left-side of the screen, waiting, waiting for the immaculate conception, the drink of drinks, fermented god! Goddess! What male fantasies of master and domineer do these flicks play to!

The second fuck scene gets even more rampant with images of victim and victimizer as "sexuality is turned into sadistic exploitation."³ The woman is placed in a

³Mitchell, Juliet. "Women: The Longest Revolution", Bay Area Radical Education Report, p. 15.

An interesting piece but completely impossible to "grade" in the conventional way.

crucified state with her arms held and pulled upwards by a trapeeze-like machine while she is massaged and entered. Woman as passive recipient, aswilling victim, again! Ti- Grace Atkinson of The Feminists, a Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles, is trying to develop a leaderless society in which the convention of Love ("the response of the victim to the rapist") will no longer prevail.⁴ Besides the sexism in Through the Green Door, there is class and race bias in the film. The image of the virile Black is perpetuated, the man with the big cock who can go forever, the Black stud image, the stereotype of Blackmen by Caucasians. The class bias is that the voyeurs are all Caucasian and elegantly dressed. Surely, this Sutter Street Cinema where the movie played caters to the well-dressed audience of suited penguins who attended the screening the night I was there. These masked men and women in the film, so carefully preserving their identities from recognition and shame, with masks of upper class privilege are capitalists exploiting sex in a sexist society. Everything is done for The Man. Women get Women ready for The Man, women get The Man ready for penetration, and the silent scene of preparation of the victim is broken by dramatic guitar music as the great He walks through, penis erect, a black and white puppet cardboard cut-out of his master's vision, Pig Mitchell.

Wives, another so-called pornographic movie, is shown with Through the Green Door at the Sitter Cinema and is a Grade-B film. The sync-sound is so poor in the opening scene with the six wives talking on a derrick as to be unintelligible. The non-plot continues with terrible acting. One so-called "wife" comes home to her "hubby" and starts stripping. "The exciting female of fantasy is the one who creates the desire and releases virile potential by the mere sight of her"⁴ Naturally he goes to bed with all his clothes on. The acting is terrible, the fucking is gross. There is no sensuality about it and the sexuality is most carnal. There are light flashes on the film, the microphone is hanging in scene after scene, the dialogue is insipid: "I took a bath this morning." With this type of film and many others like it playing in continuous showing from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M. it is outlandish and outrageous that censorship could be applied to student films on the State University campuses.

⁴ Greer, Germaine. The Female Eunuch, McGraw Hill, New York, 1970, p. 207.

In the recent Appelgate vs. Dumke case in 1971, the court ruled that the Chancellor had executive authority over the welfare of the campus. This means, given a chancellor with perception, free expression could be the welfare of the campus. However, Dean McKenna, Chancellor of the California University at San Francisco, is not the liberated, democratic, perceptive person that is so forward-looking (or backward-looking if one were to read the Bill of Rights). Dean McKenna in his clarification on the campus March 27, 1973, listed many qualifications that would decide whether a film was presentable outside the classroom or not. He said that if a racist film were made it would not be presentable. But racist films are shown every semester in Film History. He didn't mention the sexism that offends many, not even in Through the Green Door. The man is off-the-wall or perhaps a better metaphor might be "on-the-wall", on the wall of a prison with a searchlight and a shotgun out to get "a film that based on an educational decision may preclude public showing". In so many words, the honorable dean spelled the doom of democratic freedom, of personal expression, when he said we must please the men in the Legislature who fund us. And so the film faculty runs scared with whispers that this isn't the right time for a court case, for a stand against State censorship, that the Department may be curtailed due to lack of funds if they, the faculty, transgress the boundaries of decency, that they, like Long Beach State's Film Department, may lose their program from punitive Legislative cutbacks. A scared faculty begging its students to make something "decent for a change " becomes the scolding father chastising his sons and daughters to achievements he can be proud of in his terms. An "A" for clean films, for finished films, for craftsmanship; an "F" for obscenity, politics and nudity. I realize I am stretching the image, but censorship makes everyone run scared and each one of us is one step further away from the great God Ryan or Reagan or whoever he be, and on individual interpretation, or so it seems, do more and more films get rated as poor by one of these self-appointed censors because of poor craft or poor subject. And so the Film Department judges itself a dish of mashed potatoes where all films run bland, white and clean.

Another attack I want to make on censorship has to do with the absolute restriction of the creative process that it implies and hence the impossibility of artistic achievement. It is a real contradiction when we study the fine works and theories of the film genius Eisenstein on this campus only to find that it is impossible to take his words seriously if your expression leads into what might be considered "too sensual of subject matter" that might be deemed inappropriate with educational values.

The dialectic of works of art is built upon a most curious "dual-unity", an impetuous progressive rise along the lines of the highest explicit steps of consciousness and a simultaneous penetration by means of the structure of the form into the layers of profoundest sensual thinking. The polar separation of these two lines of flow creates that remarkable tension of unity of form and content characteristic of true art-works. Apart from this there are no true art-works.⁵

Other learned men and women also emphasize the point that the individual must be able to explore, without limits, sensuality. "What should be stressed, though, is that in each situation in which a positive value is experienced, there is a characteristic hedonic feeling tone."⁶ "Spontaneity is a discovering-and-inventing as one goes along, engaged and accepting."⁷ "The grounds upon which the film is to be constructed, then, must reconcile the drive toward outwardness, toward experiencing and being experienced, with the capability of self-direction."⁸ It goes without saying that with censorship, one's self-direction does not belong to the self alone but partly to the censor, in this case, the State. I prefer to take Eisenstein's army mentor rather than the State of California and listen openly to the words of the master who tells us that "the essence of cinema is in shooting expressively."⁹ And that the laws of cinematography, "the derivative roots . . . lie in the nature itself of sensual thinking."¹⁰ Part of my sensual thinking will undoubtedly be erotic and judged possibly obscene, but I ain't lettin' 'em, i. e., the arrogant, politicized State, keep it in. Inner speech is image-sensual structure and this inner speech is what I need to search out and shoot to satisfy the latent images of women's consciousness lost to culture and to express myself personally.

⁵Eisenstein, Sergei. Film Form, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York. p.144-5.

⁶McGuire, Jeremiah C., Cinema and Value Philosophy, Philosophical Library, New York, 1968, p. 35.

⁷Pearls, Frederick, Hefferline, R.R., and

⁷Perls, Frederich, Hefferline, R.R., and Goodman, Paul. Gestalt Therapy.
Dell Publishing Co., New York., 1965, p. 376.

⁸McGuire, Cinema and Value Philopsohy, p.21.

⁹Eisenstein, Film Form, p.146.

¹⁰Ibid, p. 146.