Sexual Solipsism

Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification

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hitherto unrecognized status as used merchandize, as an item with a price that is lower than the usual. If she tells the truth, she becomes a thing, and the friendship—that small neighborhood of the Kingdom—will vanish. Should she lie? Perhaps. If her circumstances are evil, she is permitted to have friendship as her goal, to be sought and preserved, rather than a law to be lived by. So she is permitted to lie. Then other considerations come in. She has a duty to 'humanity in her own person', of which Kant says: 'By virtue of this worth we are not for sale at any price; we possess an inalienable dignity which instils in us reverence for ourselves'. She has a duty of self esteem: she must respect her own person and demand such respect of others, adjuring the vice of servility.[51] I think she may have a duty to lie.[52]

This is strategy, for the Kingdom's sake. Kant would not allow it. He thinks we should act as if the Kingdom of Ends is with us now. He thinks we should rely on God to make it all right in the end. But God will not make it all right in the end. And the Kingdom of Ends is not with us now. Perhaps we should do what we can to bring it about.

5. Coda

Kant never replied, and his correspondent, as far as I know, did not leave Austria.[53] In 1803 Maria von Herbert killed herself, having worked out at last an answer to that persistent and troubling question—the question to which Kant, and her own moral sense, had responded with silence. Was that a vicious thing to do? Not entirely. As Kant himself concedes, 'Self-murder requires courage, and in this attitude there is always room for reverence for humanity in one's own person.'[54]

[51] op. cit., 434, 435.

[52] For an argument challenging this conclusion, and my earlier claims about lies and reticence, see James Mahon, 'Kant and Maria von Herbert: Reticence vs. Deception', *Philosophy* 81 (2006), 417–44.

[53] There is one final letter from her on the record, dated early 1794, in which she expresses again a wish to visit Kant, and reflects upon her own desire for death.

[54] Ibid., 424.

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Autonomy-Denial in Objectification

The idea of objectification has existed in philosophy for quite a while, and long before feminism got hold of it. It gains one of its first expressions in Aristotle's matter-of-fact remark that a slave is 'a living tool'. The thought that, Aristotle's complacency notwithstanding, there might actually be something *wrong* with treating a human being as a living tool is one that gains eloquent expression later, in the work of Immanuel Kant. For Kant, moral wrong-doing consists in a failure to treat humanity 'always as an end and never as a means only'—a failure to respect that humanity 'by virtue of [which] we are not for sale at any price'. This historically Kantian idea has gained new impetus in recent applications by feminist thinkers, who have observed its relevance to oppression, and to the varied ways that women might have been treated as a means only, and sometimes put up for sale. For feminists, unlike for Kant, there is a focus on treatment encountered by women, and a claim that women's oppression partly consists in women's being treated 'as objects'. Catharine MacKinnon says,

> To be sexually objectified means having a social meaning imposed on your being that defines you as to be sexually used . . . and then using you that way.

That notion of sexual 'use' echoes the Kantian stricture against treating a person as a mere means or instrument; and Kant himself thought that sexual relationships presented special dangers about the 'use' of the other person.[1]

[1] A shortened version of this paper appeared as Part 3 of 'Feminism in Philosophy', *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, eds. Frank Jackson and Michael Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005), 231–57. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 1161b; Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785), trans. H. J. Paton

In an enlightening essay, Martha Nussbaum draws together the Kantian and feminist ideas about what it might be to treat someone as an object.[2] Objectification is a cluster concept, on her way of thinking, in which the ideas of autonomy-denial and instrumentality are at the core; but the cluster also includes related notions of inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity. Nussbaum's proposal deserves careful attention, as an outstanding example of the kind of enquiry that is seamlessly feminist and philosophical. I shall be wanting to ask whether her proposal does justice to the Kantian and feminist heritage she claims for it, and if not, how it might best be augmented.[3] I shall be drawing special attention to the idea of 'treating' in that notion of 'treating someone as an object'. And while Nussbaum places the *denial* of autonomy at centre stage, I shall also investigate a possibility that smacks of paradox: whether one might treat someone as an object through *affirming* their autonomy.

This latter question is of philosophical interest, and of practical interest as well. One feminist application of the idea of objectification has been to pornography, which has been thought to deny women's autonomy, in its depiction of women 'as objects, things, or commodities'.[4] However, other pornography has been thought to affirm women's autonomy, representing women as not in the least object-like or subordinate, but as active sexual agents; and the suggestion has been that this, surely, is politically innocent. Joel Feinberg describes with nostalgia some 'comic strip pamphlets' of the 1930s and 1940s, which

> portrayed . . . a kind of joyous feast of erotica in which the blessedly unrepressed cartoon figures shared with perfect equality. Rather than being humiliated or dominated, the women characters equalled the men in their sheer earthy gusto.[5]

(New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 428–9; *Doctrine of Virtue* (1797), trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 101; Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 122.

[2] Martha Nussbaum, 'Objectification', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 24 (1995), 249–91.

[3] A further aspect of the feminist idea of objectification is epistemological. This is absent in Nussbaum, and in my opinion needs including; I do not address it in this essay, but it is the chief topic of 'Projection and Objectification', this volume.

[4] From the definition drafted by MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, see MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 176. Note that if pornography is defined as subordination, the possibility of non-subordinating pornography is ruled out as a matter of terminology. I use a more vernacular sense of the term here.

[5] Joel Feinberg, *Offense to Others* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 144. He adds, 'the episodes had no butt at all except prudes and hypocrites. Most of us consumers managed to survive with our moral characters intact'.

The pornographic film *Deep Throat* was hailed for representing women as sexually autonomous, its heroine described as 'Liberated Woman in her most extreme form—taking life and sex on her own terms'.[6] Such descriptions aim to be vindications, aim to distinguish a liberating from a subordinating pornography. Indeed feminist antipornography legislation allows for just such a distinction, labelling non-subordinating pornography as 'erotica'. So in thinking about whether pornography might objectify women, it is tempting to think that the question must be about pornography that *denies* women autonomy—and not, surely, about pornography that *affirms* autonomy.

Well, the answer, as we shall see, is not so simple. Perhaps there really could be a liberating, autonomy-affirming pornography; certainly there are feminists who think the solution is not less pornography, but more—more pornography created by women, for women. Perhaps the 1930s and 1940s comic strips really were liberating; for present purposes we might as well accept Feinberg's rosy evaluation. But while allowing this, one can also allow that it is not the whole story. The description of *Deep Throat* as representing 'Liberated Woman in her most extreme form' must in the end be resisted, not because its affirmation of autonomy is a sham, but because, as I shall argue, objectification sometimes *depends* on affirmation of autonomy. This may sound strange at first, but it turns out to be a natural enough consequence of the plurality of ways in which someone can be treated as object.

1. Treating as an 'Object'

Nussbaum herself begins with a plurality, naming seven features that form a cluster concept of objectification—seven ways to treat something, or someone, as a thing:

1. *Instrumentality*: one treats it as a tool of one's own purposes.
2. *Denial of autonomy*: one treats it as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. *Inertness*: one treats it as lacking in agency and activity.

[6] The words of a commentator quoted in a documentary made by Mark Kermode and Russell Levin, 'The Real Linda Lovelace', first broadcast on Channel 4 in the UK, 26 September 2002.

4. *Fungibility*: one treats it as interchangeable (a) with other things of the same type, and/or (b) with things of other types.
5. *Violability*: one treats it as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
6. *Ownership*: one treats it as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.
7. *Denial of subjectivity*: one treats it as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.[7]

I take this to be a particularly helpful proposal about what 'object' amounts to, in the notion of 'treating as an object', and this is, in my view, at least half the story. The other half, as we shall see, rests not on what an 'object' *is*, but on what 'treating *as*' amounts to. Nussbaum's proposal gives content to the idea of objectification by teasing out a number of features associated with objecthood: an object lacks autonomy, lacks subjectivity, is inert, an appropriate candidate (sometimes) for using as a tool, exchange, destruction, possession.

Nussbaum observes, interestingly, that objects themselves are not always candidates for 'objectifying' treatment. A painting is not treated as violable, or fungible, nor is its value merely instrumental, though it may be treated as an object in the other ways. Certain parts of the natural world are not merely instruments, not fungible, nor violable, nor ownable. Not all objects are to be 'treated as objects'; it depends on the nature of the object and the context.

However it is in the application to persons that the idea of objectification gets its chief point. And in the case of persons, she thinks treatment relating to autonomy is central in a distinctive way, partly because of its implications for other modes of object-making. When you treat a person as autonomous, you are treating them as someone capable of choice: and that seems to imply not treating them merely as instrument. It seems to imply treating them as not simply inert, not owned, not something whose feelings need not be taken into account. To put her suggestion another way, the ideas of instrumentality, inertness, ownership, and denial of subjectivity each imply

[7] Nussbaum, 'Objectification', 257. I have slightly adapted Nussbaum's own formulation. My neutral pronoun 'one', in subject position, replaces her term 'objectifier', which is more appropriate given that (on Nussbaum's own account) someone engaging in such treatment needn't be an objectifier, if e.g. the treatment is directed towards an object rather than a person, or if insufficiently many features of the 'cluster' are in play.

the denial of autonomy. So that is one reason for putting autonomy-denial at the core of objectification.

Instrumentality seems central too, she thinks, and in a different distinctive way. On the face of it, the other modes of object-making do not immediately imply instrumentality. Many things are treated as lacking in autonomy which nonetheless ought not to be treated as mere means to one's ends. For example, children are treated as lacking in autonomy, but it would be wrong to treat them instrumentally. The same perhaps applies to pets, and to certain objects such as paintings. These examples suggest that while instrumentality implies autonomy-denial, the converse does not in general hold. That said, however, when it comes to the treatment of adult human beings, the connections between instrumentality and autonomy-denial are very much closer. She goes so far as to suggest that, when we restrict ourselves to the domain of adult human beings, there is an implicit biconditional connecting these two modes of object-making. She suggests that autonomy-denial and instrumentality are mutually entailing: one treats an adult human being as mere means if and only if one denies their autonomy.

Nussbaum does not explicitly say quite this, but it seems to be implied by what she does say. One half of the biconditional is implied by her view that 'treating an item as autonomous seems to entail treating it as non-instrumental', i.e. (by contraposition) *instrumentality entails autonomy-denial.* The other half of the biconditional is implied by her view that 'treating as autonomous [may] be a necessary feature of the non-instrumental use of adult human beings': non-instrumentality entails treating as autonomous, or (by contraposition) *autonomy-denial entails instrumentality*, for adult human beings.[8] Now, if Nussbaum is indeed claiming that instrumentality and autonomy-denial are mutually entailing, in the domain of treatment of adult persons, that claim is much too strong, as we shall be in a position to see in Section 2.

Having spelled out this 'cluster concept', Nussbaum applies it illuminatingly to sexual objectification, attending to a variety of texts, from the relatively highbrow (D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Henry James) to the low (*Playboy*, and a sadistic sample from the work of one 'Laurence St. Clair'). She uses it to defend many aspects of the feminist understanding of

[8] Nussbaum, 'Objectification', 260–1.

women's subordination developed by Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, together with their associated critique of pornography. While for Kant, all wrong-doing is, in a sense, objectification, Nussbaum narrows her focus to the special kind of wrong-doing that most of us, somewhat informed by feminist thinking, would describe as objectification. So not all wrong-doing is objectification. Not all objectification is wrong-doing either: for Nussbaum also argues that some sorts of objectification, including some sorts of denial of autonomy, may be 'a wonderful part of sexual life'—a surprising result, if our initial thought was that objectification is a distinctive moral failure. She argues that, in a manner sensitive to context, in background conditions of equality, a mutual 'denial of autonomy' may be valuable, and she offers as an example a kind of sexual self-surrender, described by D. H. Lawrence.

If we are interested in whether Nussbaum's proposal does justice to the feminist philosophical understanding of 'treating someone as an object', it is worth asking whether there are aspects of the idea of an 'object' that are relevant to feminist thinking, but absent from Nussbaum's proposal. There is a methodological point to this: for when dealing with a cluster concept, something counts as coming under the concept in case it satisfies a vague 'sufficiently many' of the listed features. This means there can be reason to add features especially associated with objectification, even if (in some cases) they imply or are implied by existing members of the cluster. In the remainder of this section, I'll propose and defend three additions.

One absence from Nussbaum's list, notwithstanding its prominence in her illustrative examples, is the idea of reducing someone to their body. So let us put this down this as an eighth feature.

> 8. *Reduction to body*: one treats it as identified with its body, or body parts.

This idea appears as a clause of the famous feminist anti-pornography ordinance from which she takes inspiration, according to which (some) pornography treats women 'dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities . . . reduced to body parts'. The idea is also important to Kant's own concern about sexual objectification. As Barbara Herman has commented, Kant finds moral difficulty in the fact (as he sees it) that sexual interest in another is not interest in the other as a person, but as a body.[9]

Here is one more idea:

> 9. *Reduction to appearance*: one treats it primarily in terms of how it looks, or how it appears to the senses.

This is worth including for its importance, in different ways, to both Kantian and feminist thinking. It appears in Nussbaum's illustrative examples too, whether in the objectifying character of soft core pornography, or in the relationship of a couple described by Henry James, who value each other in a purely aesthetic way, appropriate for fine paintings and antiques.

And here is another idea:

> 10. *Silencing*: one treats it as silent, lacking the capacity to speak.

Speech is a distinctive capacity of persons, just as distinctive perhaps as autonomy and subjectivity. Admittedly, this was not a particularly important idea for Kant, but it has been important to feminists, who hold that women's subordination is partly constituted by the fact that women have been silenced, for example, by pornography.

> Pornography makes [women's] speech impossible, and where possible, worthless. Pornography makes women into objects. Objects do not speak. When they do, they are by then regarded as objects, not as humans.[10]

Leaving aside the question of what exactly this silencing amounts to, the idea of silence has been central to feminist thinking about women's situation, and it is worth adding independently to Nussbaum's list.

Including these features has some advantages. Not only do they pick up on some ideas that have been important in feminist thinking; they also provide us with resources to address some possible counter-examples to Nussbaum's initial proposal. Of course since Nussbaum offering a 'cluster concept' rather than a definition of objectification, it is not open to counter-example in the usual way. Nevertheless, we would expect that if a way

[9] Barbara Herman, 'Could it be Worth Thinking about Kant on Sex and Marriage', in *A Mind of One's Own*, eds., Louise Antony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1993), 55.
[10] MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, 182.

of treating someone happens to possess the core features of objectification, plus a decent number of the others, it ought to count as an objectifying way of treating someone. These expectations are sometimes frustrated.

Example 1: Burglar

If someone burgles my house, he does something that arguably denies my autonomy, and violates my choice. He treats me as a mere tool for his purposes. He disregards my experiences and feelings, thereby denying subjectivity. Fungibility is in play, since as far as he is concerned, any house sufficiently well-equipped and ill-secured will do. Perhaps violability is in play, in his invasion of a personal space. One would expect something satisfying so many features of the cluster to deserve the concept. But in this case, I think it does not: we would not normally think of burglary as objectification.

Example 2: Management

A university bureaucrat introduces new and absurdly time-wasting policies, arrogantly steam-rollering them through without consulting his colleagues. His policies are rather pointless, but he wants to leave his mark. He denies the autonomy of his colleagues, in forcing them to go his way. He is not interested in what they think or want, and ignores their subjectivity. He perhaps uses them as the tools of his petty ambition. Many of the features of Nussbaum's cluster are in play; yet we would not think of this as objectification.

How to respond to these examples? One could ask whether there already are resources to address them in Nussbaum's initial proposal. A feature on Nussbaum's list absent in both of these examples is that of *possession*. Suppose we include that feature—suppose, for example, in a different employment situation, the employees are sports stars who are in effect bought and sold. Might that be objectification? Perhaps. If so, perhaps the feature of possession could be given greater weight. But one can also ask whether it helps to have the additions I just proposed. Suppose we adjust the example further still, so that, for example, employees are treated merely as *bodies*. Some feminists will perhaps think of prostitution as illustrating such a case, and of being more obviously objectifying. But the idea has wider application. Readers of Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* may recall the exploitative Mr. Gradgrind, and his habit of regarding

his factory workers as 'the Hands'.[11] He, unlike the bureaucrat, really does objectify his employees. My suggestion is not, of course, that any of my proposed additions are necessary for objectification; but that the presence of these features raises the likelihood that the behaviour will count as objectification, on a par with such features as possession and fungibility.

With these inclusions, the relevant idea of an 'object' turns out to be of something lacking in subjectivity and autonomy, something inert, something that is an appropriate candidate for using as a tool, exchange, destruction, possession, all as Nussbaum suggested; and in addition it is something that is *silent*, something that is just an *appearance*, just a *body*.

Teasing out a plurality of features associated with objecthood is, I suggest, only half the task. In this idea of 'treating someone as an object', we need to look not only at the notion of an object, but also at the notion of *treatment*. Here too we confront a plurality, albeit a different one. 'Treat' is a wide-ranging verb that has so far been functioning as a dummy, standing in for a host of different attitudes and actions. 'Treating' may be a matter of attitude or act: it may be a matter of how one depicts or represents someone, or a matter of what one more actively does to someone.

2. 'Treating' as an Object

Suppose we restrict our attention to treatment relating to autonomy. This is partly for reasons of simplicity, and partly because of its core status in the concept of objectification. Suppose we agree with Nussbaum that lack of autonomy is a salient feature of objects, and that 'denying autonomy' is therefore an important aspect of 'treating as an object'. Suppose too that we can postpone contested questions about what autonomy might actually be. Let us think about what the 'treating' part of that idea involves: what exactly does *denying* autonomy amount to?[12]

[11] Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (1854) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[12] There is a vast literature on autonomy, to which I am not doing justice here, but for some significant feminist contributions, see e.g. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, eds., *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Alison Assiter, 'Autonomy and Pornography', in *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy*, eds., Morwenna Griffiths and Margaret Whitford (London: Macmillan, 1988); Marilyn Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

On Nussbaum's description, denial of autonomy takes place when one treats something 'as lacking in autonomy and self-determination'.[13] Here are some examples she uses to illustrate autonomy-denial. One (permissibly) denies autonomy when one treats a pen, a painting, one's pets, or one's small children, as non-autonomous. Ownership is by definition incompatible with autonomy, so slaves are denied autonomy: and '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'. Aspects of slavery anticipate, as she rightly says, the MacKinnon–Dworkin understanding of sexual objectification. Slavery

> 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, 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 relationship between the Brangwens, described by D. H. Lawrence, also involves 'a mutual denial of autonomy', 'a kind of yielding abnegation of self-containment and self-sufficiency'. An example of hard-core sadistic pornography 'represents women as creatures whose autonomy and subjectivity don't matter at all', the woman's 'inertness, her lack of autonomy, her violability' is eroticized.[14]

Is autonomy-denial a matter of attitude, or act, or both? Nussbaum's examples exploit a number of different ways of treating. An agent presumably *believes* the pen, the painting, the small child, are lacking in autonomy—that is why they then *act as if* they are lacking in autonomy—and act rather differently, depending on whether it is the child or the pen whose autonomy is 'denied'. In buying the slave, an agent thereby 'denies' autonomy: but in what sense? The act may presuppose an attitude, of failing to *regard* the slave as autonomous. The act of buying may be an act of autonomy-denial that *violates* the slave's autonomy, preventing him from having any choice in the matter. Or perhaps slavery does something even worse to the slave's autonomy—*stifles* it, or *destroys* it.

[13] Nussbaum, 'Objectification', 257.

[14] Ibid., 261, 264, 265, 273, 280.

To make a start, in considering autonomy-denial, *non-attribution of autonomy* needs to be distinguished from *violation of autonomy*. I take it that non-attribution is primarily a matter of attitude, while autonomy-violation is something more—a more active doing, perhaps one that prevents someone from doing what they choose. The distinction between non-attribution and violation is somewhat obscured by allowing 'autonomy-denial' to label both. The two are quite independent: there can be autonomy-denial *qua* non-attribution, without autonomy-denial *qua* autonomy-violation—and vice versa.[15]

To illustrate the first possibility, there can be non-attribution of autonomy without violation of autonomy, in the 'objective' attitude described so well by P. F. Strawson, the attitude of the doctor or social scientist:

> To adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment; as something . . . to be managed or handled or cured or trained.[16]

Someone denying autonomy in this attitudinal way need not deny autonomy in other ways. A doctor viewing his patient from what Strawson calls the 'objective' stance *may* act in ways that override his patient's choices, but he may well not: perhaps institutional procedures of securing informed consent will prevent autonomy-violation, notwithstanding the shortfall in the doctor's attribution of autonomy. When doctors attributed hysteria to women, they were attributing something that was, in part, supposed to be an affliction of autonomy; but they were not *ipso facto* violating women's autonomy.[17] And consider the failure to attribute autonomy to beings that actually lack autonomy (the pens, paintings, and small

[15] For a related discussion of the relationship between using someone and failing to treat them as a person, see Onora O'Neill: 'Making another into a tool or instrument in my project is one way of failing to treat that other as a person; but only one way', 'Between Consenting Adults', in *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 105.

[16] P. F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment,' in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974), 9. Strawson would not wish to reduce such attitudes to e.g. metaphysical beliefs about whether the person is free or autonomous.

[17] For a surprising discussion of how women occasionally exploited diagnoses of hysteria to find a limited outlet for their own sexual expression, see work by Jennifer Saul, 'On Treating Things as People: Pornography, Objectification, and the History of the Vibrator', *Hypatia* 21 (2006), 45–61; drawing on Rachel Maines, *The Technology of Orgasm: 'Hysteria,' the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction* (Baltimore, Md and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). Saul's work includes criticism of the argument in 'Sexual Solipsism', this volume.

children of Nussbaum's examples): such failure is not just compatible with non-violation of autonomy; it is presumably incompatible with violation of autonomy, there being no autonomy there to violate. These examples illustrate in different ways how there can be failure to attribute autonomy without violation of autonomy.

To illustrate the second possibility, there can be autonomy-violation without failure to attribute autonomy, as in the classic examples from Kant's *Groundwork*, where autonomy is attributed, *and* violated. Someone who makes a lying promise to repay his friend's money does not suppose his friend lacking in autonomy, but does violate his friend's autonomy, on the Kantian view.

Another kind of example relevant to feminist work might be sadistic rape, by which I mean rape where non-consent is actively sought, rather than disregarded or ignored. In this sort of case, it's not that he doesn't *listen* to her saying 'no'—he *wants* her to say 'no'. Here there is violation of a woman's autonomy committed by someone who affirms her autonomy, attributes to her a capacity for choice, and desires precisely to overcome that choice, make her do what she chooses not to do. In sadistic rape, someone is 'treated as an object' in part by attributing autonomy to them in one way—so that autonomy can be denied a different way. A certain kind of autonomy-affirmation is thus a necessary feature of this way of treating as an object. Notice an important difference between this sexual example and those typically described by Kant. For Kant, autonomy-violation is in the service of some other purpose (for example, gaining money) achievable innocently by other means. Sadistic rape violates autonomy, not in the service of some other purpose (for example, achieving sexual pleasure), but partly for its own sake. So we might even be motivated to draw a further contrast, *within* the category of violation of autonomy, distinguishing whether it is done as a means or as an end.[18]

Reflection suggests that *deliberately* violating someone's autonomy (whether as a means or as end) is not just compatible with not affirming their autonomy, but requires it. Deliberate violation of someone's choice presupposes attribution of a capacity for choice. This underlines even more

[18] For discussion of a related contrast in the social psychology literature, see Roy Baumeister, *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1997), chs. 4 ('Greed, Lust, Ambition: Evil as a Means to an End') and 7 ('Can Evil be Fun? The Joy of Hurting'), a psychological study of, roughly, a contrast between evil as means (ch. 4) and as end (ch. 7).

clearly the distinctness of the two 'autonomy-denials' of non-attribution, and violation.

Some of the examples illustrating the distinctness of these 'autonomy-denials' also serve to illustrate the distinctness of autonomy-denial and *instrumentality*. Recall that Nussbaum suggested a mutual entailment between autonomy-denial and instrumentality, when it comes to the treatment of adult human beings: that whenever one denies a person's autonomy, one treats them as an instrument; and whenever one treats them as an instrument, one denies their autonomy. We can see now why this suggestion is too strong.

Does instrumentality entail autonomy-denial? I think it may well entail autonomy-denial construed as autonomy-violation; but it does not entail autonomy-denial construed as non-attribution of autonomy. A liar or rapist may treat someone as a mere means, while attributing autonomy to them.

Does autonomy-denial entail instrumentality? Clearly not; there can be autonomy-denial of either kind without instrumentality. There can be non-attribution of autonomy without instrumentality. A kindly, paternalistic doctor who takes an 'objective' attitude to his patient denies autonomy via non-attribution, but he does not use the patient as a mere tool, or a means to his ends. There can be violation of autonomy without instrumentality. Suppose the kindly, paternalistic doctor goes too far, and has the patient admitted to hospital against his will: the patient's autonomy is violated 'for his own good', but this is not rightly described as a *use* of the person. From Nussbaum's examples it is clear that she wishes 'autonomy-denial' to cover non-attribution and violation of autonomy, but neither of these have quite the intimate conceptual link with instrumentality she suggests.

Our main business here has been to show that non-attribution of autonomy, and autonomy-violation, are two importantly different ways of denying autonomy. However, still further modes of treatment are implicit in Nussbaum's discussion: for example, *self-surrender* of autonomy, and relatedly a *demand* for another's self-surrender of autonomy. These are features of Tom Brangwen's sexual experience, as described in *The Rainbow*, 'a kind of yielding abnegation of self-containment and self-sufficiency' offered by himself, and hoped for from his partner. This self-surrender, and the demand for it, are not failures to attribute autonomy, nor violations of autonomy. These are characterized by Nussbaum as potentially 'wonderful' parts of sexual life, in conditions of mutuality and

equality; but an asymmetric version of the demand for surrender is perhaps less wonderful, being a feature of a different sadism, which seeks surrender of autonomy, the 'abjuration' described unforgettably by Sartre:

> The spectacle which is offered to the sadist is that of a freedom which struggles against the expanding of the flesh, and which freely chooses to be submerged in the flesh. At the moment of abjuration . . . a freedom chooses to be wholly identified with this body; this distorted and heaving body is the very image of a broken and enslaved freedom.[19]

The result sought by the sadist is that the other abjure herself, abjure her autonomy, freely choose to become thing-like. I think it misses something to place this demand for surrender under the generic label of 'autonomy-denial', as if it were a version of what is going on when someone 'denies' autonomy to small children and inanimate objects.

Still further possibilities include the *destruction* or *stifling* of autonomy, perhaps implicit in the sexual slavery of *The Story of O*, described by Andrea Dworkin, and discussed by Nussbaum.

> 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 body is a body, in the same way that a pencil is a pencil, a bucket is a bucket.[20]

This presents a deeper damage to autonomy, a snuffing out of the capacity for choice; or a stifling of that capacity, if it is prevented from growing in the first place.

We have been observing how varied are the modes of 'treating', even when the aspect of 'object-hood', namely absence of autonomy, is held constant. This variation allows for the possibility of treatment that denies autonomy in one way, while affirming it in another. It probably allows for variation in moral significance: thinking of someone as lacking in autonomy is occasionally appropriate, and always less invasive than violating or destroying someone's autonomy. Such variations are due not just to the context-sensitivity which Nussbaum rightly emphasizes, but to differences in what the agent is doing to autonomy itself: failing to attribute it, violating it, surrendering it, demanding that another surrender it, destroying it, stifling it.[21]

We can note that this plurality of modes of treatment probably extends to other listed features of objecthood. Subjectivity-denial, for instance, may be failure to attribute subjective mental states; sytematically attributing the wrong subjective mental states; manipulating someone's subjective mental states; even perhaps invading, destroying, or stifling their subjectivity. Silencing may be failure to attribute a capacity to speak, preventing someone from speaking, destroying or stifling someone's capacity to speak. The diverse ways of *treating as* an object link up with the diverse aspects of *being* an object, creating combinatorial possibilities whose surface we have barely begun to scratch.

3. Autonomy-denial in Pornography

In applying this to the question of pornography, we can begin with Nussbaum's comment on a violent sexual tale in the work of 'Laurence St. Clair', material which in her view would fall clearly in the scope of MacKinnon's definition. Nussbaum agrees with MacKinnon that such material is objectifying, notwithstanding an 'assuaging fiction' that this violating treatment 'is what she has asked for'—i.e. notwithstanding an 'assuaging fiction' that violation is *the woman's choice*. Nussbaum dismisses the affirmation of autonomy as, in this case, an 'assuaging fiction', but her remark brings us to the issue of pornography that 'affirms autonomy'.

Recall that *Deep Throat* was hailed as presenting 'Liberated Woman in her most extreme form, taking life and sex on her own terms'. Should that description likewise be dismissed, as a mere 'assuaging fiction'? It is tempting to say yes, that the autonomy-attribution is a sham: Linda Lovelace is hardly affirming her autonomy when she embarks on a life driven by nothing more than an insatiable desire for throat sex. That is a possible option, but it is not the only one. For there is a clear sense in which it is not completely a sham: *Deep Throat* attributes genuine choices

[19] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), trans. Hazel Barnes (London: Methuen, 1966), 404. I discuss this passage in 'Sexual Solipsism', this volume.

[20] Nussbaum, 'Objectification', 269, quoting Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974), 58.

[21] It would be worth thinking about how these interact, the relevance of repetition and pervasiveness, and institutional support; whether repeated and widespread autonomy-violations may, for example, destroy autonomy; how a one-off autonomy-violation (e.g. being lied to once) is vastly different to a systematic pattern that requires institutional support (e.g. slavery).

to its fictional heroine. There is also the real Linda to consider: and here too, the film may have attributed real choices, affirming the autonomy of the *real* Linda. It claimed to be 'introducing Linda Lovelace as herself' (so the billing went), and in so doing, it portrayed not only the fictional but the real Linda as acting autonomously. Extending further afield, there are women more generally to consider: and here again, if Linda is an iconic 'Liberated Woman', standing for all women, the film in a certain sense affirms the autonomy of women in the wider world.

Do these affirmations of autonomy (of the fictional Linda, the real Linda, or other women) settle the question of whether the film affirms autonomy, *tout court*? No. There is scope for treatment that at once denies and affirms autonomy, as we have just seen. A paternalistic attitude may deny autonomy through non-attribution, without denying autonomy through violation. Certain sorts of rape may seek to override refusal, and seek to violate an autonomy whose existence they at the same time affirm. Certain kinds of sadism may seek the willing self-subjugation of an autonomy that abjures itself. Various kinds of autonomy-affirmation are compatible with various kinds of autonomy-denial, once the plurality of possible modes of treatment are recognized. Even if *Deep Throat* were to affirm women's autonomy in all the above ways, that would not settle whether it affirms autonomy *tout court*.

The film does not affirm autonomy, *tout court*. First, the claim that the film affirmed the real Linda's autonomy, even if true, requires instant qualification: for the film also denied her autonomy, as documented in her own testimony, *Ordeal*, and as more or less admitted by her one time husband and pimp, Charles Traynor. Autonomy was attributed to her in the film, but denied her in life. In a remarkable set of televised interviews, Traynor admitted the autonomy-denial:

> She was pretty dumb. So everything she did, she had to be told how to do it, when to do it, and why she was doing it, and how to dress, and it just kinda rolled along like that, y'know . . . it was always a matter of telling her what to do.[22]

What she was told to do was (among other things) to *deny* that she was being told what to do. The message was, 'look as though it's your choice—or

[22] This and the later quotations from Traynor and Marchiano are from interviews in the documentary made by Kermode and Levin, 'The Real Linda Lovelace'.

else.' Autonomy sells. Linda couldn't choose, but was more saleable if she looked like she could. She was a useful object, more useful if it looked like a subject. There is an odd sense in which her autonomy was *itself* commodified, thwarted in life but exaggerated, in fiction, for its cash value.

The film's autonomy-attribution served autonomy violation. According to Linda's testimony in *Ordeal*, it took violence, rape, and death threats to make her play her role. Traynor admitted the violent relationship:

> I was the dominant figure, she was a submissive figure, so if it reached the point where dominance had to take over, then dominance took over. . . . If you argue to a point and somebody keeps pushing you, you know, fists are bound to fly. I don't mind somebody putting in their two cents worth, but I don't want them to argue with me to the point where I get upset or violently upset, and . . . yeah, that happened, on occasion. [. . .] I think she didn't enjoy us getting in arguments with each other, but they say if you don't want me to get into an argument, don't argue with me.

Her interviews with the press, scripted by Traynor, convey not just violation of autonomy, but other kinds of autonomy denial, perhaps destruction or stifling of autonomy. Linda later said of those interviews:

> I was just like a robot, I was told what to say and I said it, because if I didn't I was beaten, brutally.

Traynor admitted the scripting:

> I schooled her on what to say. Always sound sexy. Always look cute. Wink at the camera. Wink at the interviewer . . . Always be titillating. You'd rather be having sex than doing anything. Y'know, it was just schooling, teaching her what to say, how to say it, and when to say it.

This is autonomy-denial, and it is silencing too. What she was told to say was (among other things) to deny that she was being told what to say. Linda's own voice is silenced, in the scripted interviews, and silenced in a different way later on when her own testimony about abuse, in *Ordeal*, was sold as pornography.[23]

Finally, there is the autonomy of other women to think about. Linda is not just *a* woman, but *woman*, 'Liberated Woman in her most extreme

[23] *Ordeal* was sold as pornography: this example of illocutionary disablement is discussed in 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts', this volume, where a distinction is made between locutionary silencing due to threats (e.g. the scripted interviews), and illocutionary silencing (e.g. of *Ordeal*).

form, taking life and sex on her own terms': there is autonomy attribution here, a vision of what autonomy is, not just for Linda, but for women in the wider world. But it can be argued that this autonomy-affirmation serves autonomy-denial, a false vision of autonomy being, after all, among the most potent enemies of autonomy. According to MacKinnon, and to testimony at the Minneapolis Hearings, the film legitimated a series of real-life autonomy-violations, provoking an increase in throat rape (with associated suffocation), and an increase in unwanted and sometimes coercive attempts at throat sex.[24] In affirming women's autonomy one way, and identifying that autonomy with sexual freedom, *Deep Throat* style, it legitimated autonomy-denial a different way, when the pornographer's image of women's choices was used to thwart real women's choices.

Some pornography, I conclude, might objectify even as it affirms autonomy: indeed, it might objectify through its autonomy-affirmation, the way it objectifies depending on the distinctive way it affirms autonomy. The autonomy-affirmation in *Deep Throat* (of a fictional Linda, a real Linda, or real women elsewhere) is one that serves autonomy-denial (of a real Linda, and real women elsewhere). These denials of autonomy—the violations, silencings or stiflings of autonomy—depend, substantially, on the affirmation of autonomy. That attribution of sexual autonomy to Linda was a structural feature of her oppressive circumstances, making abuse easier, hiding it, and hindering escape. That attribution of sexual autonomy to an iconic Liberated Woman, and thereby to other women, likewise facilitated violation of at least some other women's autonomy. Now whether *Deep Throat* is a typical or significant sample of autonomy-affirming pornography is a question I shall not, here, take time to address. But it is enough to suggest, I think, that pornography's way of affirming women's autonomy could, at least sometimes, be a way of denying women's autonomy; and there would be no paradox, at all, about that.

[24] See Minneapolis City Council, *Pornography and Sexual Violence: Evidence of the Links* (London: Everywoman, 1988), transcript of *Public Hearings on Ordinances to Add Pornography as Discrimination Against Women*, Committee on Government Operations (Dec. 12–13, 1983).

11

Projection and Objectification

1. Autonomy and Projection in Feminist Philosophy

It is hard to say anything uncontroversial about present feminist work in philosophy, let alone about prospects for the future. All the same, I shall begin by picking up two ideas, and saying something about why they have mattered, and will continue to matter. They are the ideas of *autonomy*, and of *projection*. These two have mattered to different camps within feminist philosophy, camps that have sometimes disagreed in ways that roughly, though not exactly, mirror an older division between analytic and continental philosophers. I shall be wanting to see how the two ideas unite in a phenomenon of wider interest: that of sexual objectification.[1]

Pioneer feminists viewed women's oppression in terms of women's autonomy and its thwarting, and this concern has remained central to the work of many liberal feminists, and those working in analytic philosophy. On this view, the basic problem has been that women have been cast in the role of human tools, as Aristotle described slaves: women have been treated as beings whose nature is to be directed by another, and whose purpose is instrumental; women have been treated as lacking in autonomy, and have had their autonomy systematically violated or stifled. This links the idea of oppression with that of objectification: when women are treated as tools, they are treated as things, items lacking in agency. Feminists tend in general to have few warm words for Kant, but these might find it in their hearts to concede he was on the right track when he said that 'autonomy is . . . the ground of the dignity of human nature, and of every rational nature'; and that we should therefore 'always treat humanity,

[1] This essay originally appeared in *The Future for Philosophy*, ed., Brian Leiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 285–303.