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On Not Being Able To End Rape

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Doctor of Philosophy

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MA in Literary and Cultural Studies

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## Abstract

### On Not Being Able To End Rape

By Samia Vasa

This dissertation is both an attempt to understand rape better, as well as explain its persistence in spite of decades of feminist activism and scholarship. I place an archive of Muslim rape-survivor testimonies (2002) from my home-state of Gujarat in India in a cross-geographical dialogue with the radical feminist writings of Catharine MacKinnon (1946- ) and Andrea Dworkin (1946-2005). My primary texts are steeped in painful awareness of the violative sexual pleasure of the rapist. They challenge the widely accepted feminist dictum that rape is about power, not sex. I argue that feminism has a unique capacity to bear witness to the specifically sexual nature of rape. However, this same capacity also points to feminism's own sadism and aggression.

By making use of my own reading experience, I claim that wherever feminism truly encounters rape, it registers, records and unwittingly transmits to the reader the violative pleasure of raping the other. This transmission of sexual pleasure - between rapist, feminist and reader - is textual and unconscious. I argue that sexual violence is sexual, and not because it involves thrusting and ejaculating, but because it involves unconscious pleasure that cannot be neutralised by feminism. In fact, feminism repeats and transmits it *as* righteous aggression against the rapist. This pleasure can be critically read, but not destroyed. While this insight radically limits feminism's capacity to end rape, it also makes it possible to directly engage the sexual nature of rape. In the good fight against the evil of rape, feminism is neither righteous nor innocent, but powerfully negative. Instead of sanitizing feminism of its own violent tendencies, I suggest we use them intentionally to grasp the intimate violence of rape.

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# On Not Being Able To End Rape

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*for Andrea Dworkin*

In *On Not Being Able to Paint*, Marion Milner's autobiographical account of teaching herself to paint, she describes the anxieties aroused by space... By closing her eyes, Milner generates a 'meeting which destroyed neither the dark possibilities of colour nor dimmed the light of consciousness' (the possibility of colour on the inner eye is 'dark', only consciousness lays claim, without hesitation or scruple, to the light). In her Postscript, Milner describes the experience as ecstatic, a 'blissful surrender'... But in the main text what she describes is more like a journey through her own fears: 'of embracing, becoming one with, something infinitely suffering, fears of plunging into a sea of pain'.

\*\*\*

Freud [attempts] to absolve the dreamer of their moral anxieties; attempting too, no doubt, to dissuade his readers from retreating appalled from the unconscious desires he claims to have uncovered in the dream... Precisely because [dreams] lead us back into the deepest recesses of the psyche... they lead forward into something else.

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...ethical piety in recoil from the night is killing. It pulls us away from the world of the dream, keeps us awake, and stops us from being able to paint.

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Jacqueline Rose, *On Not Being Able to Sleep*

## **A Note on Method**

The more you interpret a dream, the more it interprets you. In this dissertation, I treat rape as text, as an active dream-screen that reflects, distorts, ventriloquises, and even thwarts the subject who desires to read it. But the distortions are real, and true. Rape touches us against our will, eliciting not only an ethical-political response, but also a psychic response from the depths of our own subjective knots of sexuality and aggression. If my argument in the following pages is difficult to stomach, if my reading is uncomfortable to read, it is also because you may be unconsciously – and productively – in touch with the parts of you that are in touch with rape, the trauma, the witnessing, the terror and the violative sadism. If there is a method in this work, it is a question: what does rape show us about our feminist selves?

## Chapter 1

**Witnessing 2002, a reading**

In 2002, my home state of Gujarat in India erupted in communal violence: Hindus against Muslims. At least a thousand Muslims were killed in the communal riots that engulfed Gujarat that year.<sup>1</sup> A majority of these killings were by fire: “As many as 400 people out of nearly a thousand seem to have been killed in this way” (Parekh 170). According to conservative estimates, at least two hundred and fifty women and girls were raped and killed (Kabir 146).<sup>2</sup> Three-year-old girls were raped; women were raped with or without objects like broken glass bottles, cricket stumps, swords, religious objects; women's genitals were mutilated; religious symbols were engraved on flesh. Pregnant women's bellies were slashed, fetuses/babies hoisted on swords before being burned alive. Children as small as two months old were set on fire; petrol was poured into the mouths and eyes of people before lighting them with a matchstick; everything from chemicals, acid, cooking gas, petrol, diesel, kerosene, and electricity was used to burn bodies and buildings.

In 2007, five years after the riots, I met a Hindu woman in one of the many poor neighborhoods of the city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat. While being interviewed for a microfinance research project, she mentioned that she lost a brother-in-law in 2002. We offered our condolences. She said she wasn't sad about his martyrdom – *shaheedi* – for he had died while burning a Muslim neighborhood. “Our men,” she said smiling, “destroyed and burned *all* their women. *Khatam* [‘over,’ as in ‘game over’].” She showed not indifference, but simple, open, eager pride. This wasn't a shameful secret; she was not confiding in us. She was sharing her joy with us, inviting us to be a part of it, just as she had kindly offered to share her family's dinner

with us before we began our interview. We had politely declined her invitation, though the wonderful aroma of freshly prepared food was all around us, and I remember feeling so hungry. Her words, the pride, the moment went through me as if it was nothing. Time stopped; world ended; *khatam*; hunger the only remaining link to my own rapeable, inflammable body, and hers.

Let me tell you about Kausar Bano, who was raped and killed on February 28, 2002 in Naroda Patiya, an area on the outskirts of the city of Ahmedabad. “*She begged them to spare her, that she was pregnant. She told them to spare her though everyone in her family was dead and her husband had run away. They said - OK come, we won’t do anything to you.*”<sup>3</sup> Her belly was ripped, her fetus/baby was hacked with swords and then burned. “*As soon as she walked towards them her belly was struck with a sword; the baby, who fell out, was thrown into the fire, they tore her clothes and pushed her into the fire[. . .]*”. She was burned alive, along with ninety-six other people by a five-thousand-strong mob in a riot that lasted for ten hours. “*I saw all this with my own eyes.*” Thirty-six women, including three pregnant women, are said to have been raped, gang raped, mutilated, raped with sharp objects, and burned alive in Naroda that day. The leader of the mob at Naroda, Babu Bajrangi, was captured on video in a sting operation years later saying that he really enjoyed himself that day: “The [cooking gas] cylinders were theirs [the Muslims’] [. . .]. Whichever house we entered, we just grabbed the cylinder and fired at it, and, *dhadak*,<sup>4</sup> they exploded [. . .] We had guns in any case [. . .] I can’t tell you what a good time it was” (Bajrangi).

My mother says she doesn’t remember. Winter of 1992, I must have been five years old. I was sitting on her lap on a bed by a window in our living room in Bombay. Our tiny apartment was on the sixth floor of a residential building. I loved this window; there was so much to see:

the slums of the neighborhood, a giant hill-size garbage heap, a gate on the side of our building that led to a quiet backroad that was used regularly by the adults in my life--I remember lots of happy waving. That day – afternoon? – I/we saw three men severely beat a younger man from our window. His face was full of blood. They picked him up, two of them holding his legs, one of them holding his arms, and swung his body in the air a few times before flinging him over the gate. *Tingatodi*, as we say in Gujarati, when a group of children pick another child up amid much laughter and screaming and swing him playfully onto some soft surface.<sup>5</sup> I don't think he was dead yet. I saw all this with my own eyes.

### **Burning: 2002, Feminism, and Other Scenes**

I return to the survivor testimonies of 2002 in an effort to rethink, on the one hand, the status of sexual pleasure/sexual violence in the riots and, on the other, the limits of feminist identification with the victim-survivors. 2002 has been extensively and painstakingly documented by feminist activists, civilians, journalists, and government officials, as well as academics. This rich, multilingual archive is composed of survivor testimonies, fact-finding documents, government reports, police records, court judgements, scholarly analyses, and even fiction, poetry, artwork, cinematic texts. My own argument is based on a close reading<sup>6</sup> of a fraction of this material.<sup>7</sup> My primary purpose in this chapter is to expose the reader to the strange and disturbing textuality of the extreme (sexual) violence of 2002. Existing feminist literature on 2002 has interpreted the disturbing nature of the testimonies as simply the intensity of the violence that the survivors witnessed and experienced.<sup>8</sup> I believe that this political – indispensable – reading of sexual violence has foreclosed the textuality of the testimonies that have emerged in the wake of 2002. I am interested in developing a reading of 2002 that generates its own politics rather than letting politics guide my reading. Feminism understands itself to

intervene in the life of sexual violence; I ask if 2002 can intervene in the life of sexual violence feminisms instead. Can we allow 2002 to read the limits of feminist inquiry into sexual violence back to us?

The survivors of 2002 speak of the intense sexual enjoyment of the rapists. Eye witnesses recount mistaking the violent mob for a wedding procession full of festive affects. Rioters themselves talk of the “good time” they had in committing acts of murderous violence. The cruelty was full of *playful* conversation with the victims. Countless reports offer evidence of the efficient, systematic, calculated, and *simultaneously*, drawn-out, sadistic, and excessive nature of the burning of bodies. Though existing literature documents these various signs of pleasure, play, and enjoyment of the rioters, it is not able to offer a satisfactory account of them.<sup>9</sup> Pleasure is mostly considered to be in service of hateful aggression; pleasure is excess, an extra cruelty, a surplus of barbarity, icing on the cake, fuel into an already raging fire. My reading surveys these multiple scenes of pleasure to argue that sexuality<sup>10</sup> was crucial to all the violence of 2002. There is simply no other way to understand the carnivalesque brutality of the violence, the *jouissance* unleashed in raping, burning, destroying the other: “I can’t tell you what a good time it was”. Instead of treating sexual violence as a mode of reinforcing identity, I show the devastating effect sexuality has on the volatile categories of self, other, group, subject. Pleasure, in my reading, *breaks* community down.

I take seriously not just the pleasure of the rioter/rapist but also the terrible reading pleasure of the survivor testimonies that speak of burning and raping. Sexual violence feminisms typically condemn, critique, and fight against the pleasure of the rapist. Because I lived through the events of 2002 as a high-schooler, I am unable to perform this political gesture of distancing.

What I see in the 2002 archive is necessarily tangled with my history of bearing self-decimating witness to the other's – and my own – violent pleasure. I contend that the feminist reader-witness is (always, in retrospect) part of the same cosmos that she sets out to investigate. As such, I make use of what the textuality of 2002 opens up within me as a reader. Throughout this chapter, I include and utilize my experiences and associations as affective data as well as sources of an abiding, heartfelt intellectual curiosity about extreme forms of sexual violence. I allow the 2002 archive to read parts of my identity – Gujarati,<sup>11</sup> Jain,<sup>12</sup> middle-class – back to me on the unstable and fantastic axis of identifications. *Unlike every single text in the 2002 archive that I analyze here, I let the Hindu rapist speak from within my voice. I lend my eyes to the Hindu fantasy of destroying the Muslim other. I give body to the desire that is 2002. I find myself repeating what I (cannot) read. This is a story, then, and not of moral condemnation, but of complicity, of devastating relationality. A politics of sexuality might need to begin at this point, after violence, after pleasure; it may be able to offer merely a reading. I am afraid sexual violence feminisms cannot turn away from this self-destructive entanglement with the textuality of sexuality.*

The communal history of South Asia is often recounted as a narrative of violent othering: we want to *obliterate* Muslims. I begin my account of 2002 with some of this historical background. I engage widely accepted explanations for the periodic occurrences of communal violence in South Asia and show that they register the psychosexual aspects of this repetition without accounting for them. What they see as ideological hatred for the other, I see as the shared inhabitation of a psychosexual cosmos.<sup>13</sup> What they see as the complete erasure of the other, I see as an affectively, aggressively, and sexually destructive *engagement* with the *fantasy* of erasing the other: we *want* to obliterate Muslims. The extensive fires of 2002 offer an opening

into the psychosexual cosmos of communal violence in South Asia, for burning can mean several things all at once: burning up, burning down, burning out, burning desire, burning fury, burning for something, burning with someone, burning the other, burning away.<sup>14</sup> Insofar as *all* acts of violence in 2002 were marked by viscerally depthless, impossibly gratifying aggression, I argue that it is sexual violence that emerges as the central conceptual category here: burning and murdering are a kind of raping. Such a formulation might help us gain insight into the psychosexual nature of all aggression without losing sight of the specificity of sexual violence. I use (mostly Lacanian) psychoanalytic theory to open up and lend texture to the strange sexuality/textuality of 2002, not explain or contain it. As such, my theoretical formulations are meant to function as questions to be explored rather than fully fleshed-out interpretations. This chapter ends with some preliminary notes on how and why 2002 poses political difficulties – and difficult possibilities – for contemporary theorizations of sexual violence.

### **An Eye for an Eye: The Mechanics of Repetition**

Hindu-Muslim violence in South Asia is full of revenge narratives – we did this because they did because we did because of what they did which is why we did for what they did to us seven hundred centuries ago but we did this now because of what they *will* do to us if we don't – and so is 2002. Burning to avenge burning to prevent burning. Each instance of violence seethes with an intensive accumulation of what is experienced and remembered as the past. It is widely believed that once something catches communal fire, once communal sentiments are provoked, they just have to be let out, they cannot be contained by the police or wise men or pleading mothers or wailing children. Together, these two models – one about revenge narratives and the other about affective economies of accumulation and discharge – are used to explain why the violence of 2002 was so intense. I am struck by the centrality of repetition that structures both of

these explanations of intensity and periodic reoccurrence of violence. Though there are several nuanced accounts of communal violence in relation to politics, religion, economics, history, ideology, subjectivity, as well as individual and group complicity,<sup>15</sup> the psychic mechanics of repetition remain unexplored. In what follows, I invoke one version of the historical background of 2002 with particular focus on the fantastic, and often seemingly mechanical, dimension of repetition. In other words, I return the subject of the unconscious to its history of communal violence in Gujarat.

In December of 1992, Hindu nationalist groups demolished the Babri Masjid, one of the largest mosques in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, home to more than thirty-one million Muslims at the time. Babri Masjid was located in Ayodhya, which is considered to be the birthplace of Rama, one of the most revered Hindu gods and the hero of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. It was believed by some locals and historians that the mosque had been built by Babur, first emperor of the Mughal dynasty on the Indian subcontinent, by destroying a preexisting Ram temple at the site. Subject to several court disputes and local clashes between Hindus and Muslims since the eighteenth century, the Babri Masjid issue accumulated more and more significance in postcolonial India. Hindu groups claimed that the demolition of the mosque was simply revenge – an eye for an eye – for the demolition of the temple and centuries of violent, Islamic domination.<sup>16</sup> The demolition sparked communal riots across India: first a backlash by Muslims and then Hindu violence against them. The riots in Bombay alone resulted in the death of nine hundred people, mostly Muslims, and lasted for two months. What I think I saw as a child was probably a Muslim man being beaten up – maybe killed – by Hindu men.

Over the next decade, right-wing Hindu groups, including one of the major national parties, the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), mobilized men and women in massive numbers to support and volunteer their service in building a Hindu temple at the site of the demolition. On February 27, 2002, a train carriage was set on fire just outside of Godhra, a small town in Gujarat. This train, and this carriage in particular, was carrying some of those volunteers. Apparently, they had been rowdy and verbally, even physically, abusive of Muslim copassengers and Muslim vendors on the railway stations (Punwani 33). Things got out of control at the Godhra railway station. Some of the volunteers got into an argument with a Muslim *chaiwallah* (tea vendor) and tried to grab his daughter and pull her into the moving train. She was let go as her mother intervened. The train pulled out of the station, only to be stopped by some passengers using the internal emergency brake. At this point, one of the carriages, S-6, was surrounded by a mob and burned. Fifty-nine passengers died in the fire. None of these details can be decisively corroborated. A combination of eye-witness testimonies, forensic investigation, and police reports reveal/construct a seriously contradictory narrative (Guruswamy 36). It is possible that the carriage was burned spontaneously by an enraged Muslim mob; it is also possible that the carriage was burned from within by Hindu miscreants; it is definitely possible that the fire was initially started by a Muslim mob but then caught on because of the kerosene supplies that the passengers were travelling with for cooking purposes.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), one of the Hindu nationalist groups – affiliated with BJP but operating at a more sociopolitical rather than a governmental level – declared a *bandh* the next day, February 28. A *bandh* literally means closure; it is used frequently by political parties, civil groups, activists, community leaders to lodge a public protest by shutting cities and states down. Amid widespread national concern about the safety of Muslims in Gujarat, the state

government backed the *bandh* instead of withholding police permission. The next day, mobs comprising VHP cadre and other Hindu men and women attacked, looted, raped, and burned Muslim bodies, homes, businesses, and properties.<sup>17</sup> Rioting continued unabated for the first three days, after which the army was deployed. At least twenty-one cities and sixty-eight provinces across the state were affected by the violence (Human Rights Watch 7). Acts of violence against Muslims continued well into May of 2002.

There is overwhelming evidence of police inaction and complicity in the riots. State machinery was utilized to systematically destroy Muslim neighborhoods, businesses, and other means of survival. The rioters had copies of voter registration and census records to determine who to kill and rape. The Chief Minister of Gujarat at the time – the current Prime Minister of India – Narendra Modi was accused of not only allowing the violence but even instigating it. Key state ministers were implicated in leading the rioters in particular neighborhoods. Police personnel are said to have stood by, watching the rioting and sometimes even actively participating in leading Muslim men and women right into the hands of the mob (IIJ 35–51). Police officers who actively prevented violence were almost immediately transferred out of the state. On being asked why such acute violence was not effectively contained, Modi explained: “Every action has an equal and opposite reaction” (Ghassem-Fachandi 62). A number of people expressed similar sentiments: the Hindus were so aggrieved by the Godhra carnage that they needed space and time to express their rage and grief. This economic model – production of so much negative affect that can be exhausted only through and as explosive aggression – was endorsed by *both* right-wing Hindu ideologues and civilians, activists, and critics of the 2002 violence against Muslims. A number of documentary reports and fact-finding panels maintained, for example, that the withdrawal of the state government’s punishing authority created a void

during the bandh in which people felt encouraged to do anything they liked with full impunity. “The trick is not to pull the strings, or perhaps to have no strings at all. All that the puppeteers have to do is clear the stage and allow free space for havoc to reign over a specified period of time” (Akbar 46). “If the violence has tapered off it is only because the vandal has run out of incendiary energy” (Khare 53). These descriptions imply that people were mechanically/maniacally driven by the excess accumulation of anti-Muslim affect and would stop or not engage in violence only if they were stopped by an external agency like the police or the military. However, the occurrence of repetition complicates this picture of ideologically brainwashed automatons.

There were various anti-Muslim rumors circulating immediately after the Godhra incident. One particularly powerful rumor was about the rape of Hindu women by the Muslim mob that burned the train carriage. It was said that Hindu women were found killed, their bodies mutilated, and the breasts cut. Some Gujarati newspapers published these rumors as news stories, lending credibility to them and resulting in widespread dissemination.

One such fictitious front page story in the *Sandesh*<sup>18</sup> [Gujarati Daily] on 28 February about the bodies of two women recovered at a pond in Kalol pruriently concluded: “As part of a cruel inhuman act that would make even a devil weep, the breasts of both the dead bodies had been cut. *Seeing the dead bodies one knows that the girls had been raped again and again, perhaps many times.* There is a speculation that during this act itself the girls might have died [ . . . ]. Is there no limit to the lust?” VHP leaders circulated copies of the fictitious *Sandesh* article across Gujarat. Eyewitnesses from Naroda Patiya in Ahmedabad reported that the mobs were “brandishing not only swords and stones but also copies of *Sandesh*, demanding blood for blood.” (Sundar 81; my emphasis)

Seeing the dead bodies, one knows, but what kind of knowing is this?<sup>19</sup>

Weeping devils, detachable breasts, multiple rapes, limitless lust: Hindu mobs would bring exactly this script of death to life on the bodies of Muslim women and girls. The rhetorical query – is there no limit to the lust – became a quest: what is the limit that marks the dimension of lust? The moral outrage over the brutal rape of Hindu women became the basis of the desire to punish the Muslim woman in the most outrageously immoral ways. The other was gleefully sacrificed to the somber demands of justice. In most cases, it was not enough to rape the women. They were hacked, quartered, mutilated, tortured, burned alive, and it was still not gratifying. Their bodies were reduced to ash, but it was still not destructive enough, for there was something impossible built into this fantasy of revenge. Although the avowed objective was to break the repetitive cycle of communal violence – they have been raping us for too long, let's show them once and for all – this objective was fleshed out through repetition. The repetition was both diachronic, that is, appearing in the periodic reoccurrence through history, and synchronic, as body after body, neighbor after neighbor, family after family, rape-burn-kill-rape-burn-kill. Not only was the question of revenge renewed and repeated, revenge itself was premised on the pleasure of repetition: an *I* for an eye. Not a knee-jerk substitution of the other for the self, this was a painful destruction of the self in the other, an absolutely devastating obliteration of the eye/*I* in the burning, killing, and raping of the *I/eye*.

The 2002 archive not only records these various modes of repetition, it also mirrors them in uncanny ways. The same cases have been recorded many times over. Key testimonies – and their translations – are reproduced across documents without specifying where they come from. Each report offers almost identical explanations for what happened and why. The 2002 archive

literally repeats what it cannot read. After all, what could the specter of repetition be but a call to repetition? For example, most documents about 2002 begin by saying that something unspeakable (Varadarajan ix), unimaginable (Engineer 5), beyond description (International 1) happened, and then proceed to speak, document, analyze. Extreme violence is often thought of as simultaneously calculated and mad, but to what dimension of sanity could we assign the calculation of death, and what is madness if it is readable, transmissible, thinkable, in spite of itself? Madness and calculation, the unspeakable and speech, reading and unreadability, the I and the eyes persist in these stories and their telling not as necessarily contradictory terms, but as inexplicably sinister doubles. Fantasy repeats itself; repetition itself is of the dimension of fantasy. This is particularly true of the testimonies that speak of fire and burning. Though these testimonies are supposed to simply capture the Hindu fantasy of destruction in repetitive action, they end up repeating the most absurd, fantastic details of the burning over and over.

### **Fire: Eating, Drinking, and Other Assorted Delights**

Because burning was such a prominent feature of 2002, almost all fact-finding reports attempt to document and understand its uses and significance. In fact, many reports that do not adequately focus on sexual violence against women still have things to say about the burning. The rioters made fire with matchsticks, petrol, kerosene, diesel, cooking gas, electricity, guns, and specialized chemicals. While some of these chemicals were sourced systematically through right-wing organizations, fuels like petrol and kerosene were locally obtained from rich Hindu/non-Muslim businessmen. Many survivors have testified to knowing who supplied the fuel in addition to supplying the names of the rioters. At various places, fire was made with materials like cooking gas cylinders that were already present in the houses and businesses of the Muslim victims. All of this information has been extracted primarily from survivor testimonies.

Many reports point out that fire came to be astonishingly capacious in its meanings and functions. First, it was ruthlessly efficient in killing people and disposing of the evidence of murder. Many women who were raped with and without objects were burned alive, thus doing away with any real evidence of what was done to them. The testimonies occupy such a significant place in the 2002 archive, therefore, because the material traces of the violence are mostly absent. Second, burning Muslim bodies was a powerful symbolic gesture. Hindus of most sects take care of their dead through cremation. Muslims bury their dead. To burn the body of a Muslim person is to deprive them and their family of a proper burial. While there are various emotional and spiritual implications to this deprivation, it is the symbolic ramifications that interest the critics and commentators of 2002. One of the many survivors who makes a note of this technology of decimation recounts:

First they told the petrified Muslims that they would not kill them and gave them water to drink. Then they asked them to leave. Just as they started to leave, they attacked them from behind and hacked and burnt 10 people. According to one account, 13 year old Yasmeen, the daughter of Mohd. Ibrahim was gang raped before she was killed. In *a symbolic act of conversion*, the dead were put into a pile and set on fire. Ten and twelve year old Hameed and Aijaz, the sons of Kulsum Ayyub (who was also killed) were made to go around the pyre and shout “Jai Shree Ram.” They were then shoved into the fire. (People’s Union for Democratic Rights [PUDR] 11; my emphasis)

Another testimony: “They then started killing people, first cutting them up with swords and then burning them saying, *We will even spoil your deaths*. Evidently, this was not spontaneous, but a premeditated attack meant to subjugate or even obliterate a whole community. Muslims do not burn their dead, they bury them. The widespread use of arson and burning was part of a

methodology to annihilate a community's culture and beliefs" (Concerned 1: 39; my emphasis). These testimonies, among countless others, suggest that the violence of 2002 was not only about destroying the other completely but also about converting the other, making the other one's own (kind) in and through death.

Though existing analyses of the pragmatic semantics of the 2002 fires contain a lot of explanatory power, they provide no interpretation of the elements of medieval fantasy that they document.<sup>20</sup> For example, what does one make of the childish games that the rioters played with the "petrified Muslims?" The games assume a monstrous tone in the context of the destruction and the death that they ultimately resulted in. Many survivors recount instances in which their plea for water was answered by the rioters urinating in their mouths. Petrol and kerosene were poured into the mouths of already terrified persons, including six-year-old children: "Nasir Khan Rahim Khan Pathan, principal of Sunflower School which catered to both Hindu and Muslim children, saw the attackers pour petrol into the mouth of six-year-old Imran. 'A lit matchstick was then thrown into his mouth and he just blasted apart'" (Varadarajan 137). Imran was not simply killed. Petrol was deliberately poured into his mouth. He was burned in a spectacular way: "he just blasted apart." There is a visual dimension to his death. Apparently, rioters carried cameras (Sundar 88; PUDR 9) to take pictures of the violence, suggesting that there was already an anticipation of visual pleasures to be had before the rioting began. After all, someone would have had to plan to carry the camera along, just as many rioters are said to have been prepared with bottles of water and packets of biscuits alongside assorted weapons of destruction. This aspect of meticulous planning and calculation is repeatedly attended to in the 2002 literature.

Setting property and people to fire required careful coordination among the large group of rioters. Some of the substances used for burning needed to be handled with expertise and restraint:

It was all carefully planned. They had allotted 10–15 minutes per structure. Each group of marauders, about 500 strong, would loot and destroy some 20 homes in one area and then, after about 30 minutes, move to the next block. In this manner, divided into four squads of around 500 each, the assailants set upon the village from different directions simultaneously. In a matter of approximately five hours, they had wiped out the entire Muslim locality in the village. It was all a matter of precise planning - loot all you can, burn what remains. A small group in each case was assigned the task of breaking the locks; the looters followed; and then came the arsonists for the final act. The attackers were armed with 3-litre petrol pouches. Specially crafted nozzles were fitted to spray gas from cooking gas cylinders at high pressure, then petrol pouches and fireballs (*kankdas*) were flung from a distance to ignite the place. Some chemical powder was also used to intensify burning. (Concerned 1: 178–79)

Various details about this chemical powder have been documented: “Witnesses spoke about a particular substance - a packet of whitish powder, which when thrown on a person’s skin made the skin peel off. Once the flesh was bared, people were burnt to death. Many witnesses saw the attackers throw this whitish substance. They used their hands to throw it but witnesses could not say whether the attackers used something to protect themselves when they threw it” (Concerned 1: 41). More, “To cause the maximum possible damage swiftly and comprehensively, a powdery-white chemical was widely used, which not only burnt human beings to the bone, but even cement houses were completely burnt down” (Concerned 2: 26).

Not only was the burning meticulously planned and executed in its mechanics but it was also directed at precise targets. There were instances in which only the one Muslim business in the middle of a Hindu neighborhood was burned down or the only one Muslim-occupied residential building was gutted while everything else remained intact. “They held the boys [his nephews, aged six and eight years old] by their feet and lowered them into the fire and then dumped them in it. They were so brutal that they even killed very old women. They pushed a hundred-year-old woman into the fire. They showed mercy to no one young or old” (Dalwai and Mhatre 337). Note the measured tone of the movements: first, the feet, then the whole body. Restraints are exercised to achieve unrestrained damage.

31 people, mostly women and children had taken shelter in a house in the Sheikh locality. The mob surrounded the house, locked them into a room, and threw acid at them through openings in the room. The metal conductor, an iron rod attached by a wire to the newly installed halogen light was shoved inside the room packed with Muslims and electric current passed through it. The device was moved around in the room and used to electrocute 29 persons to death. Two children who fell beneath the pile of bodies of the dead survived the attack. (PUDR 24)

Next to nothing is left when the rioters are done.

“Every place was burnt completely. In some places, even walls have been broken down. Elsewhere, only burnt, bare walls remained. The dwellings looked as though they had been bombed. Even bore-wells were totally damaged or blocked. Every single tree, including all fruit-bearing trees, was cut down. The marauders made sure there was no sign of life left anywhere” (Concerned 2: 28).

The physical destruction is excessive, overdetermined, almost decadent: “every place,” “even walls,” “bombed,” “totally damaged,” “every single tree,” “no sign of life,” “anywhere.”

These testimonies pulsate with something terrible. The destruction is focused, repetitive, and driven in quality: hurt, taunt, rape, tear, hack, burn, kill, annihilate to the point of nothingness. To be driven, though, is to be operated mechanically, that is, unconsciously, from within one’s own very nonmechanical, that is, subjective, shifting, feeling, unevenly experienced, self. In other words, drivenness has to do with a keen psychic involvement as much as it has to do with a seemingly soulless – “*Karvun j pade, karvun j pade*” [it had to be done, it had to be done] (Concerned 1: 228) – repetition. The fires provide a unique opening into the psychosexual cosmos of 2002. I say *cosmos* because there is a communicative aspect to the charged, tense encounters between the victims and the aggressors. People are touched, talked to, and lured into the fire rather than directly hurled into death. Precise body parts are burned. Already terrified victims are toyed with and only then subjected to painful bodily violence. The rioters seem to have wanted to ensure that the victims knew what was coming – not only that the victims knew, but also that the rioters could sadistically observe their knowing. It was not that the burning was more cruel because of the playful conversation. The play and the conversation signal not a breakdown of communication, but the sheer horror of it. The communication is not of a particular message; there is no content. The emptiness *is* the message: it is the jolt of desire for the other, we *want* to obliterate you, the jolt of knowledge of the other, you *want* us . . . to be destroyed. In the events of 2002, I see a sudden, open, clear channel of unconscious communication. We are unexpectedly and temporarily, but surely, a cosmos. “I asked my neighbor Hira Bai for some water. I was told ‘*Aaj to pani nahin aaj to marna hai*’ [Today is not for water, today is for dying]” (Hameed et al.). *Aaj to pani nahin aaj to marna hai*. I am touched

by the dreadful poetry of this statement. To want to destroy the other to ash is not a simple wish. An aggressive demand is a masochistic plea turned on itself; hatred is nothing but a chillingly honest, more childish love.<sup>21</sup> The eating, the drinking, the burning, the impossibility of gratification, the gluttony, the greed, the single-minded drivenness of the planning, are all different facets of a very painfully pleasurable, communal partaking of the object(s). The violence of 2002 is full of sexuality; it is so full of this empty, regressive, destructive love.<sup>22</sup> Seeing the dead bodies one knows.

### **Pleasure: Possession, Destruction, and Other Ways of Loving**

The long history of sexual violence in the context of religious strife in South Asia has been noted and theorized extensively by feminist scholars and activists. That the body of the Muslim woman is an object of violent desire in times of peace as well as crisis is not a new argument. However, such desires have generally been treated as the result of faulty, patriarchal, xenophobic, bigoted, and identitarian fantasies. The pleasures unleashed by the unfolding of this desire have been understood as exclusively in the service of reinforcing group identities, cementing subject identifications, and decimating the other. Faced with the brutality and repetition of communal sexual violence, feminists have critiqued the pleasure of the rapist without fully describing, understanding, and reading it. This critique has, on the one hand, circumscribed the definition of sexual violence to injuries to a set of body parts and, on the other, entirely missed the negative force of sexuality animating the acts of sexual violence. I am interested in both expanding the scope of what we read as *sexual* violence, as well as attending closely to the details, affect, register – in short, the textuality – of sexuality in 2002.

Broadly, I have been able to identify three related lines of feminist thinking about the sexual violence of 2002. One, sexual violence is theorized as one of the ways that violence was inflicted on the Muslim other. For example, a lot of fact-finding reports and collections of testimonies place murder, physical assault, financial injury, and sexual violence together as different ways in which the Muslim communities in Gujarat were harmed, violated, and destroyed.<sup>23</sup> Sexual violence comes to be defined as a particular kind of violence against the female Muslim body. In other words, sexual violence is a subset of violence, and woman is a subset of human. This body of work is successful in mapping the multiple levels of violence that were activated against the Muslim communities, without privileging any one level as more or less harmful.

Two, sexual violence is understood as an exceptional kind of violence, a special kind of injury that is more traumatic than other kinds of injury.<sup>24</sup> Feminist activists like Syeda Hameed have argued that the meanings of sexual violence are saturated with community definitions of femininity, purity, honor, revenge, punishment, and destruction. Women are made to bear the symbolic burdens of identitarian fictions. Hindu mobs deployed rape to violate not just women but the entire Muslim community. Having your house burned is much less *shameful* than having been raped. This framework reverses the relation of Muslimness and gender: it privileges the womanhood of the Muslim to explain sexual violence. At the same time, it is able to account for the devastating intensity of the sexual violence in 2002 as the effect of Hindu desire to inflict maximum harm.

Three, sexual violence is analyzed as a particularly perverse but perfectly ordinary form of the violent structures of sexuality in South Asia. Tanika Sarkar and Manali Desai argue that

the riots of 2002 were not a stand-alone, spontaneous outburst, but the effects of a long-standing, powerful, and widespread historical-mythical narrative of Muslim violence and the rape of Hindu women. This structural and historically grounded perspective is much more attuned to the constitutive relations between aggression and pleasure. However, both Sarkar and Desai engage sexuality as a derivative or secondary force. Their accounts ultimately relegate pleasure to a perverse/normal effect of violence. The pleasure of the rioters simply made it worse for the victims. For example, gesturing toward a history of sexuality in Gujarat, Desai posits the overlap between governmentality and the representational strategies of the self as a site of acute, chronic sexual violence. Does this mean that sexuality is mostly determined within the terms set by the hierarchical institutions of heterosexuality and caste? Is sexual violence, then, simply a doubling of these discursive, cultural, and material conditions?

In her essay “Semiotics of Terror,” Sarkar narrates: “Bystanders and survivors during the days of maximal violence were struck by the festive, carnivalesque aspect of rampaging mobs. Indeed, one such mob looked like a ‘barat,’ a wedding band, to unsuspecting Muslims, on the fateful morning of February 28” (2872). She argues that the semiotics of pleasure are inextricable from the semiotics of violence. However, Sarkar posits this indistinguishability of pleasure and violence only to recuperate pleasure as a perversion *within* violence: “One can go on narrating the ways in which babies and women were tortured and killed, but *the point here is* often the two acts were coupled together [. . .]. But *what, then, is the point* of the elements of excess, the surplus of cruelty, and its multifarious forms?” (2875; my emphasis). In this strange doubling of the “*point*,” we have a powerful illustration of the limits of feminist theory about sexual violence: the simultaneity of sexual and murderous violence is marked only to mark the sexual as excessive and in service of something else, some other kind of violence.

The 2002 archive clearly disrupts this secondary status of pleasure. Pleasure, like fire, is everywhere. In his psychoanalytically inflected ethnographic work on the riots of 2002, Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi recounts the overt, widespread signs of triumph, jubilation, festivity, and plain old group fun that he observed on the streets of Ahmedabad. He argues that these observations point to a deeply subjective and involved complicity on the part of the rioters. He offers a psychoanalytic explanation of the symbolic efficacy of raping Muslim women: “Women are the objects of matrimonial communication between men, but as they are the ultimate objects of male desire, possessing them indicates having the phallus. [. . .] [I]n the timeless space of the unconscious, Muslim women remain the living proof of Hindu male castration. [. . .] Possessing them means having won the battle, even if they have to be reduced to dead corpses first” (57). Ghassem-Fachandi lends specificity to sexuality as an unconscious and volatile dimension of a body that is itself constituted of drive and fantasy. His ethnographic account is astonishingly able to hold the psychosexual, the discursive, the material, the cultural, as well as the linguistic together. I am attempting, however, to be more single-minded. I want to bring the psychosexual to bear more directly not only on the raping but also the burning and the killing; I want to demonstrate the pervasiveness of sexual pleasure in *all* acts of violence against Muslims in 2002.

During the riots, many reactionary pamphlets and flyers were circulated among Hindu men. A poem called “Jehad” is particularly notable:

The people of Baroda and Ahmedabad<sup>25</sup> have gone berserk

Narendra Modi you have fucked the mother of miyas<sup>26</sup>

The volcano which was inactive for years has erupted

It has burnt the arse of miyas and made them dance nude

We have untied the penises which were tied till now

Without castor oil in the arse we have made them cry  
 Those who call religious war, violence, are all fuckers  
 We have widened the tight vaginas of the bibis<sup>27</sup>  
 Now even the adivasis<sup>28</sup> have realised what Hinduism is  
 They have shot their arrow<sup>29</sup> in the arse of mullahs<sup>30</sup>  
 Wake up Hindus there are still miyas left alive around you  
 Learn from Panvad village where their mother was fucked  
 She was fucked standing while she kept shouting  
 She enjoyed the uncircumcised penis  
 With a Hindu government the Hindus have the power to annihilate miyas  
 Kick them in the arse to drive them out of not only villages and cities but also the country  
 Let the fuckers know that  
 The fucking of fuckers will not work. (Concerned 1: 79)

This “poem” articulates all violence as sexual violence: burn the arse of *miyas*, make them dance nude, untie penises, make them cry, widen the tight vaginas of *bibis*, shoot arrows in the arse of *mullahs*, fuck the mother standing while she shouts in enjoyment of the Hindu penis. All of this to drive them out of the country, to let them know that whatever their lives consist of will now not work. Note also the burning: the rape of men (though astonishingly unreported) is named *burning*. There is a mention of torture by pouring “castor oil in the arse.” Fire is not a parallel mode of violence here; fire *is* sexual violence.

The genital archery (“they have shot their arrow”) was real. Women and young girls, even children in some instances, were raped with a variety of things: “[A]ll kinds of objects and instruments were brutally inserted into their bodies. There were instances where young children,

even infants, were hoisted on swords or *trishuls* [tridents] before being flung into flames” (Concerned 2: 26). The point about objects and instruments is followed up by children and babies being hoisted on swords and *trishuls*. Can we think of the latter as sexual violence too, as insertion of phallic objects into bodies?

The sexual abuse was almost pornographic in detail. Young girls and women were raped by 6–10 men. All kind of objects were inserted in women’s vaginas. Others were found dead, with even cricket balls stuck in their vaginas. An example is Najmunissa Zarina, who had an iron rod stuck in her arm. (Concerned 1: 217)

Note that this fragment from a documentary report cites an iron rod stuck in the *arm* as an “example” of objects inserted in women’s vaginas. This odd example is not a mistake, but a sign that sexual violence is not confined to rape of the vagina in 2002.

Before they were finally killed, some were beaten up with rods and pipes for almost an hour. Before or after the killing, their vagina would be sliced, or would have iron rods pushed inside. Similarly, their bellies would be cut open or would have hard objects inserted into them. A 13-year old girl, had a rod pushed into her stomach, and was then burnt. A mother reported that her three-year old baby girl was raped and killed in front of her, while elsewhere daughters reported on the rapes of their mothers, now dead. Kausar Bano, a young girl from Naroda Patiya, was several months pregnant. Several eyewitnesses testified that she was raped, tortured, her womb was slit open with a sword to disgorge the foetus which was then hacked to pieces and *roasted* alive with the mother. (Concerned 2: 40–41; my emphasis)

The world is full of phalluses. And feasts.<sup>31</sup> And art!

There were countless injuries caused by swords. The mutilation of breasts in the case of women was common. There were some cases of mutilation of the penis [. . .]. A woman from Kheda district who was gang raped, had her head shaved and an Om cut into her head with a knife by the rapists. She died a few days after she was admitted to hospital. There were other instances of *Om* engraved with a knife on the back and other parts of women's bodies, as well as of some men. (Concerned 2: 21)

And dance!

Banusabil Qureshi of Randhikpur [. . .] claims she saw some Hindu women dancing the *garba*<sup>32</sup> after burning down Muslim houses. (Sundar 86)

And love. The rioters are said to have expressed a desire to father children with the Muslim women victims:

Do you want children? We will give them to you. (Dalwai and Mhatre 374)

Children were killed with a special enjoyment:

The intensity of hatred was so high that even a child if he was a male and Muslim was treated as a potential rapist. Children were killed very happily as though it was a destruction of evil. (Dalwai and Mhatre 374)

The Hindu cry for love was nothing but every lover's lament: how could you *not* be mine? I am going to kill you.

The violence against them was not driven so much by communal hatred as in the past but a dangerous mixture of self-righteous rage and despair that they "would never be ours,"

as a newspaper commentator put it. (Parekh 172)

*How* could you not be mine? How can we ensure that you will never be mine? I am going to kill you.

The wish for sexual possession aligns with the fantasy of religious conversion through burning the Muslim body. The Muslim (woman's) body is not an object of hatred as much as it is an object of hateful, aggressive, destructive, but nevertheless genuine, real, powerful desire. I read these descriptions of violence as primarily trafficking in pleasure; sexual gratification is neither secondary nor accidental. Pleasure is simply *the same* as sexual violence in 2002. No instance of violence in 2002 is exempt from this register of pleasure. The fun, the good time, the enjoyment, the delight, the surprise, the tension, the charge, the discharge, the play, the toying, the shouting, the watching, the photographing, the dancing, the fucking, the exploding, the smiling: *this* is the content of communal violence in India. This history of communal violence needs a feminist psychoanalytic supplement, and it needs it now.

Isn't 2002 feminism's worst nightmare: a world in which rape for the rapist is sex? And yet, this nightmare has already unfolded so many times, in so many places,<sup>33</sup> and in all our hearts. While 2002 was extreme in its expression, I am not certain that it was not full of the ordinary, everyday features of desire: wanting what the other doesn't have to give, wanting precisely because you can't have it, sealing the deal by destroying the object, the impossibility of gratification, desire as a rehearsal of loss, fantasies of omnipotence, the single-minded quality of the drive to pleasure, the socially and psychically destabilizing quality of *jouissance*. Though we don't burn and kill and rape each other every day – some would disagree – our killing and raping and burning, when it does happen, cite something of the everyday of sexuality. 2002, and

extreme sexual violence in general, force us to contend with the very nature of sexuality.

### **Eyes: Feminism and Other Witnesses**

To be in the presence of the other's pleasure is unnerving. One cannot predict where the self may find itself. Will you identify with the other who has been burned? Or will you identify with the other that has done the burning? Or both? What stories will you be able to tell from either place? What impossible story will be told from a place of both, or neither?<sup>34</sup> My chance encounters with anti-Muslim violence as a child, and then as a young adult, opened me up – my eyes – to a disturbing and intimate identification not with the victim, but with the aggressor. As a child, the bloody violence was mostly understandable as a version of play. Later, I was not old enough to shield myself morally from an instinctual encounter with the joy of destroying the beloved enemy. I could not understand until years later that my encounter with the Hindu woman respondent had been my first brief, and utterly terrifying, glimpse into the proliferation of an everyday, communal, nonmonogamous, queer-looking pleasure at the heart of utterly conservative Hindu caste heteropatriarchies--alive and proliferating not in spite of sexual violence, but because of it. For me, 2002 is full of murderous play, and *real*<sup>35</sup> love.

Feminist activists and academics have consciously chosen to identify with the Muslim women, children, and men who were mercilessly killed, raped, and burned. From that particular place, they are able to construct powerful accounts of Hindu bigotry and violence. 2002 is part of the centuries-old hatred of the Muslim other in South Asia, and it fits almost seamlessly into the current world-wide aggression toward Muslim nations, communities, and individuals. However, this feminist identification with the victim-survivor, and this political stance against sexual violence, has severely impoverished our accounts of extreme instances like 2002. The 2002

archive, in particular, is so driven in the name of justice that it cannot read the very thing it documents over and over: the fantastic contours of Hindu pleasure. In fact, it tries its best to distance itself from the Hindu violent subject and be aligned with the Muslim violated subject. For example, one of the documentary reports, *The Survivors Speak*, is full of sentimental narration, so much so that the testimonies are inseparable from their framing and the feminist activists are inseparable from the survivor-witnesses:

They're all survivors from the horrors of Naroda Patia in Ahmedabad where more than 80 people were burnt alive and many women raped and maimed in what is probably the worst carnage in the current spiral of violence. The girls are young and making sense of what they have seen and heard seems impossible. But they have been scarred for life, their trust in Hindus shattered. They speak of “evil Hindus.” The Hindu who burnt our home. The Hindu who didn't let us escape.

Some of them have seen with their eyes things no child should see. Others have only heard things. But they are still things no child should hear. “Hinduon ne bura kaam kiya” [Hindus have done “bad things” – a euphemism for rape], *they* tell *us*, as their eyes shift uneasily. They look at each other as if seeking silent affirmation of what none of them really comprehended.

Or, did they? (Hameed et al.; my emphasis)

Note the shift of pronouns: *they* to *us* to *them*. Note also the absence of quotation marks in the first half of the extract. This is clearly not empirical fact-finding. These are affective interpretations made in solidarity and compassion for traumatized children and young girls. However, it is difficult to look past the condescension and knowing tone of the report. The

rhetorical query, “Or, did they?” only aggravates the absurdity of this narration. Not only did the victims not comprehend their own trauma; we are told that they didn’t even know that they probably actually did understand what had happened to them!

I am extremely wary of the assumption that survivor testimonies are revolutionary and transformative political acts in themselves. Testimonies of trauma are psychically necessary and automatic speech acts as much as they are courageous and voluntary. They have to be put to political use in the spirit of compensation for the absolutely decimating damages that the survivors/victims have already incurred. While the 2002 archive takes cognizance of this searing devastation, it places feminism outside of it, as if feminist politics can provide an alternative to this world of violence. While I understand the historical anguish that drives this (bad) faith, all it can do is face extreme sexual violence with liberal moral disbelief and/or radical feminist certainty: how could you! Well, of course. Can we, though, stay untouched by what we touch? We repeat what we do not read. Repetition is not simply what feminism encounters as an external entity; feminism also participates in this repetition. We repeat the violent sentimentality of the Hindu rapist. In our affected identification with the Muslim victim, we repeat the Hindu lament: they [the violent Hindus] would never be ours. We repeat not the revenge, but the narrative of the eye/I: they don’t see us. What we can’t yet see is nevertheless looking at us.

Sexual violence feminisms routinely underestimate the contagious, insidious, rumorous register of sexuality. It spreads like fire though we try our best to contain it through iron-clad identifications and repeated declarations of political intent. The 2002 archive tries very hard to keep the distinctions between the violated Muslim self and the violent Hindu other stable and recognizable. However, these testimonies freely transmit the pleasure of the other in destroying

the self. This transmission is something sinister, for it repeats the psychic blur of sexuality and violence within which 2002 unfolded. Survivors speak but something other than themselves also speaks through their speech. Isn't this worse than feminism's worst nightmare: a feminist archive that is unable to neutralize or sufficiently condemn or simply stop the transmission of the pleasure of rape and the desire for destruction? Especially with sexual violence, it is impossible to maintain a clear boundary between witnessing and voyeurism. For example, my Hindu respondent's pride in her men raping Muslim women: who is to say that her unself-conscious affective response wasn't a more intimate, more damning form of witnessing rape than all the fact-finding reports and documentary analyses put together? *She* was not confused about the distinction between rape and sex. She said the Muslim women were destroyed – raped and burned – and by her own men.

I remain, in my attempts to understand 2002, committed to my encounter with the Hindu respondent. It would be appropriate to diagnose her – and my visceral knowledge of what she was feeling – as (ordinary) ideology, as (historical) hatred of the communal other, as (exceptional) psychopathology. I find all of these models inadequate in trying to describe and understand our encounter. This is not to say that we weren't immersed in an unknowable and unstable combination of the ideological, the historical, the pathological. It was an ordinarily unjust, miserable, productive day. By chance, she – and I – turned it into an extraordinary, ahistorical, fateful forever. As soon as I start thinking about it, my mind goes blank. I can only repeat what happened. I cannot step back and hold up a metalevel of analysis. I can only vicariously experience her vicarious experience of feeling satisfied. I am convinced that this is a much more intimate, more damning form of witnessing Hindu violent fantasy than all the moral condemnation and sentimental compassion in the world put together. At least she and I were

clear that there could be no wishful political or historical recovery of the burned Muslim women between us. They are destroyed. Nothing remains, the emptiness of desire remains.

It is not for nothing that feminist theorizations of 2002 do not dwell on sexuality as much as they stay with the question of aggression. To engage the psychosexual in 2002 is to inhabit the negative force of sexuality; sexual violence is perhaps a circumscription of this primordial violence of sexuality. In the presence of this destructive pleasure, there is no group, there is no community, there is no politics. But this pleasure *can* lead us to the subject of the unconscious: a subject who *wants* to rape and burn the other. This subject is neither ordinary nor exceptional. This subject cannot be explained or contained by histories of othering, inequality, and oppression. This subject burns in and for its pleasure across gender, class, caste, religion, race, sexuality, ability, education, profession, politics, geography, epoch, language. Feminist theory could come up with the most sophisticated understanding of sexual violence, and yet, it may never touch, change, or stop the person who wants to commit unspeakable acts of torture and murder. The other is lost in his/her *jouissance*. S/he does not see us.<sup>36</sup> In 2002, this subject--feminism's other--is temporarily locatable and identifiable in the body of the Hindu rioter. It is feminism's political and spiritual burden to *want* to intervene in the life of this subject. We assume that we can intervene conceptually, morally, and politically into a register of sexuality that is driven, that brooks no rational discussion and affords no meta access. What if we are wrong? What if the only *real* way to encounter and confront this subject is to pulsate with her/his violent fantasy? What if identification is the only way to unlock the secrets of this subject's sex? What if the price of unlocking the rapeful subject is to lose all sense of distinction between rape and sex ourselves? What if we happen to see them? What if we become theirs? What if there never was any place from which one could see one's own self watching what was happening?

The fight *against* sexual violence may be, in the last instance, a fight *with* sexuality. What can we do but say yes, no sexual violence. All we can do is keep losing. There is immense value in this loss, much to learn from it about rape, so much of feminism to bear.

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<sup>1</sup> It is widely acknowledged that 2002 was extremely destructive: “The numbers killed [were] among the highest in any riot in recent history [and affected] the population across an entire state” (PUDR 48). As far as I can tell, no one knows how many people really died. While the official death toll inclusive of Hindus is 1,044 (Dhattiwala and Briggs 491), other estimates reach upward of 2,000 (Amnesty International 6). Estimates are particularly hard because of the extensive use of fire in the riots. A lot of the bodies are simply missing. Human remains were also located in several “illegal dumps and mass graves” (“Mass Graves” 1).

Throughout this dissertation, the Gujarat riots will be referred to as 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Again, no one can say *exactly* how many women were raped and/or burned.

<sup>3</sup> All italicized quotations in this paragraph are from Dalwai and Mhatre 338.

<sup>4</sup> Both in Hindi and Gujarati, *dhadak* refers to the sound of a heartbeat, with undertones of excitement or devastation.

<sup>5</sup> Lots of children were flung into fires during the riots; some landed on soft surfaces: “In one house, where there was only one woman with her 8-month-old baby, the police beat the woman and flung the baby across the room. Fortunately, the baby fell on a mattress” (Concerned 1: 149).

<sup>6</sup> I quote the survivor testimonies in as much detail as possible to bring into my reading the (im)precise affect and atmosphere of the speech-text. As Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi argues in his

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own ethnography of 2002:

To be attentive to what people say, what they choose to reveal or inadvertently omit, and how they experience an event demands attentiveness to things that cover much more than what actors are able or willing to express in word or deed. The analysis of identification, affect, and emotion and of the content of idioms and opinions must include the consideration of that which remains unspoken, of that which goes without saying, or of that which remains unconscious--often enough not only to the native but also to the ethnographer him- or herself. (27)

<sup>7</sup> I primarily make use of testimonies from reports and documents put together by human rights organizations and activist groups.

<sup>8</sup> See Hameed et al.; Mander; Menon; and the reports compiled by the International Initiative for Justice (IIJ), and for their documentation of the affective and physical suffering of the survivors as well as volunteers and activists on the scene.

<sup>9</sup> Ghassem-Fachandi's psychoanalytically inflected ethnography is a notable exception among accounts of 2002. Throughout this chapter, I make use of his insights and formulations and indicate where I differ slightly, but significantly, in my focus and intent.

<sup>10</sup> I mean *sexuality* in a Freudian sense: not just genital sexuality but polymorphous, dispersed, sublimated--as much to do with aggression as with pleasure, as much to do with death as with feeling alive.

<sup>11</sup> The rioters in 2002 were mostly Gujarati Hindus of various castes and Gujarati tribals. The victims, however, were Gujarati Muslims as well as Muslim migrant laborers, workers, and

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entrepreneurs from other parts of the country. Though Gujarati Muslims speak standard Gujarati with native proficiency, depending on their sects and location, they also speak other languages, like Memoni, Kutchi Gujarati, Hindi, and Urdu, among others. The non-Gujarati Muslims targeted in 2002 mostly used broken Hindi to communicate within Gujarat. Thus, during the riots, both Gujarati and Hindi were spoken among the rioters and the victims.

The documents and reports that I analyze in this chapter have been written in English so that they could be shared with the rest of the country. The testimonies were presumably collected in local languages. Very few reports indicate if there was translation and how it was done. Thus, the 2002 archive is already at an unbreachable linguistic distance from the actual events of 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Jains are neither Hindu nor Muslim. Gujarati Jains are typically upper, upper-middle or middle class. They are socially treated as upper caste, though Jainism is technically casteless. The Jains did not come out in support of the rioters, but there was widespread internal complicity. There was a sense of satisfaction and joy in my own family after the riots. The Gujarati Jain communities, in my experience, are extremely Islamophobic. Ghassem-Fachandi examines some of this animosity in his discussion of vegetarianism in Gujarat (153–84).

<sup>13</sup> Sudhir Kakar has explored the violent, persecutory fantasies that both communities experience against one another in India. However, as Zehra Mehdi points out, Kakar misses the power differentials and the many sociopolitical and economic hardships that Muslim communities face specifically as an effect of everyday right-wing Hindu nationalism. Kakar posits an “Indian psyche” that Mehdi finds exclusionary in its focus on Hindu culture and group identity. By arguing for a shared inhabitation of a psychosexual cosmos, I do not mean to equalize these differentials. Instead, I am interested in exploring the efficacious transmission of meaning

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between the communities, groups, and individuals in times of crisis. I argue that it is not a communication breakdown that leads Hindus to kill Muslims. Rather, the killing is overflowing with the horrifying knowledge of unconscious desire. I am also interested in the various confusions and ambiguities within Hindu fantasy itself. As Ghassem-Fachandi puts it, “[O]ne group’s evidence for harm is cause for the other group’s confirmation of suspicion: a fundamental instability is at work about the status of victim and perpetrator” (82).

<sup>14</sup> Freud posits a link between fire and sexuality in his analysis of Dora’s dreams: “[F]ire is not only used as the contrary of water, it also serves directly to represent love (as in the phrase ‘to be *consumed* with love’). So that from ‘fire’ one set of rails runs by way of this symbolic meaning to thoughts of love; while the other set runs by way of the contrary ‘water,’ and, after sending off a branch line which provides another connection with ‘love’ (for love also makes things wet), leads in a different direction” (72).

<sup>15</sup> See Baxi; Desai; Ghassem-Fachandi; Kumar; Nussbaum; and Sarkar for their comprehensive and insightful analyses of 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Right-wing Hindu rhetoric.

<sup>17</sup> See Ghassem-Fachandi for a thorough ethnographic account of the events of the day (31–58).

<sup>18</sup> *Sandesh* means message, news, letter. In his reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, “The Purloined Letter,” Lacan says that the sender “receives from the receiver his own message in reverse form. [. . .] [A] letter always arrives at its destination” (72). The Hindus received from the Muslims their own message in reverse form: lust is that which is defined--limited, in effect--by the lack of a limit.

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<sup>19</sup> Lacan says about this mood of *knowing*: “When the space of a lapses no longer carries any meaning (or interpretation), then only is one sure that one is in the unconscious. *One knows*” (vii).

<sup>20</sup> It was the performance of cruelty that most took medieval forms: “In some terribly warped reenactment of a medieval battle scene, an old man in Tarsali (Vadodara) was shown his beheaded son’s head on a tray before being killed himself” (Sundar 103).

<sup>21</sup> “Childhood love is boundless,” says Freud. “[I]t demands exclusive possession, it is not content with less than all [. . .] it has, in point of fact, no aim and is incapable of obtaining complete satisfaction” (231).

<sup>22</sup> I use the word *love* not to paper over the violence of rape, but to take psychoanalytic knowledges about love seriously. Violence or aggression is not only a significant, but an essential, force in any experience of desire. These insights strain against popular, contemporary feminist thinking about sexual violence. For a wide range of feminisms, sex is not abuse, and rape is about power, not sex. At best, sexual violence is an extremely perverse form of sexuality. For me, the 2002 archive makes all of these positions on the normative distinction between sex and violence unsustainable. What we get, instead, is a violence that can only be understood as sexuality.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Bunsha; Mander; and Varadarajan.

<sup>24</sup> Granting an exceptional status to sexual violence is a pretty well-established feminist principle in analyzing communal violence in South Asia. In relation to sexual violence during the Partition of India and Pakistan, see Daiya; and Das. In relation to 2002 and other instances of violence

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against Muslim women in independent India, see Kannabiran; Khanna; and Naqvi.

<sup>25</sup> Baroda and Ahmedabad are two of the biggest cities in Gujarat. The riots were particularly intense in these cities.

<sup>26</sup> Term used to refer to Muslim men in several languages across the Indian subcontinent; sometimes used derogatorily like in this poem.

<sup>27</sup> Term used to refer to Muslim women in several languages across the Indian subcontinent.

<sup>28</sup> One of the distinctive features of 2002 was the widespread involvement of tribal men on the side of Hindus. Historically, tribal communities in Gujarat have been subject to terrible caste violence at the hands of Hindus. In 2002, however, tribal men joined forces with them against the Muslims. There was some evidence of them being paid or bribed with alcohol and food to commit violence.

<sup>29</sup> This stereotypes *adivasi* (tribal) people, as if they belong to a different time, a medieval time.

<sup>30</sup> Term used to refer to Muslim priests in several languages across the Indian subcontinent.

<sup>31</sup> A pregnant woman was beaten on her thighs, under her knees, and on her chest. “It is five days since my delivery. After the delivery, there is bleeding from my breasts instead of milk. Even now it has not stopped coming” (People’s Union for Civil Liberties 20–21).

<sup>32</sup> *Garba* is traditional/folk Gujarati dancing, in honor of goddess Durga, who vanquished the demon Mahishasur. Every year, Gujaratis across the world celebrate nine nights of *garba* dancing.

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<sup>33</sup> The IJ report brings Gujarat 2002 in touch with other histories ranging from

memories of Nazi terror; to strife torn Israel and Palestine; the consequences of a civil society in Algeria terrorized by Muslim fundamentalists; war crimes in Bosnia; ethnic chauvinism and a protracted war in Sri Lanka; the trauma of India's partition with the loss of homes, millions of refugees and abductions of women; to the public killing and burning of Sikhs during the anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984; the rise of right-wing parties in the early 90s and repeated rioting upon the emergence of the right-wing State in India that openly appeals to the religious identity of the Hindu majority. (8)

Rwanda is also mentioned (28).

<sup>34</sup> Gravediggers could not tell if the already charred bodies should be buried according to Muslim customs or cremated according to Hindu rites for "[t]hey couldn't make out a Hindu from a Muslim" (Nayar 48).

<sup>35</sup> I mean Real in the Lacanian sense: undifferentiated, unsymbolized, unencounterable, always missed, always by chance, rupturing the symbolic, and disrupting the Imaginary.

<sup>36</sup> See Copjec's discussion of the gaze of the Other (36).

## Chapter 2

### **The Argument: Sexual Violence is Sexual**

The survivor testimonies of 2002 are full of evidence of the pleasure of the rapist/rioter. Certainly, such pleasure is pathological, but pathological in relation to what? In this chapter, I seek to return the violence of rape to the violence of the psychosexual. I offer a critique of rape that is rooted in – not separated from – a critical engagement with sexuality, and without the consolation of a clear distinction. There is immense political and ethical risk in articulating the possibility that for the rapist in 2002, rape was good sex. The risk is two-fold: we lose the vision of non-violative sex and without that vision, we lose a precise sense of what is *sexually* wrong about rape. What we gain, however, is a truer grasp of the tremendous task that is fighting rape.

I witnessed the sexual violence of 2002 with a sadomasochist response of my own. It was through the sadomasochism of my receiving body that I was able to access the psychosexual cosmos of 2002. I contend that this chance reading experience is a central feature of feminist theory about sexual violence. Evidence of the sexual nature of rape is to be found not (only) in the behaviour of the rapist, not (only) in their bodily discharge, not (only) in the consequences of the act, but (also) in the text of feminism. I say text, but what I mean is the interaction between that which cannot be represented and the subject of the unconscious. Sexual violence is sexual because the feminist text registers and replicates the aggressive pleasure-seeking of the rapist as a sadomasochism of its own. In the very places where one would expect a total critical distancing from the pleasure of the rapist, I find astonishing replication of violative dynamics of gratification: powerfulness-powerlessness, vindication-injury, sadism-masochism, voyeurism-exposure, resurrection-castration. In my view, this alarming intimacy between feminism and rape

is not an indictment of feminism, but a testament to its efficacy, its masochistic, self-decimating capacity to bear witness.

Feminist theory in India<sup>1</sup> and the US<sup>2</sup> tends to engage the “sexual” in sexual violence either as a realm of discursively constituted cultural practices of sex<sup>3</sup> - wanting to change rape culture, for example – and/or the violation of genital/body as a mode of violent oppression<sup>4</sup> – raping Muslim women because they are Muslim, for instance. I break from these existing frameworks in my insistence on the psychosexual. In my argument, the psychosexual is not a co-constitutive aspect of the structural, the material, the sociological, the discursive, the historical. Instead, what I deem to be the psychosexual circumvents these other ways of inhabiting, understanding and countering sexual violence. In this, my approach differs from many psychologists who study the mental, behavioural and emotional worlds of rapists and survivors, for I do not consider the psychosexual to line up – either as an interiorized reflection or as a set of consequences – with what we consider to be social<sup>5</sup>. I am, on the contrary, interested in the emptiness of the psychosexual, the unconscious, the lack of an empirical foothold, or perhaps, an empiricism devoted to the unverifiable. I posit the psychosexual as an unknowable, unmanageable, unreadable negativity around which feminism both gathers and falters. It is in the faltering, that we are truly in touch with the measure of the problem of rape, the horror of not being able to end it, the dread that it may never end.

I offer this intervention at a time in feminist theory when theorists who are devoted to reading sexuality find themselves in critical relationships to sexual violence activists. Studies of sexuality and rape are in this present moment deemed to be in opposition to one another. This tension is not new; the Sex Wars in the seventies and eighties thematized a similar battle<sup>6</sup>. For

the radical feminists Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, sexuality was the organization of patriarchal power. Sex and sexual violence were too close – behaviourally, ideologically and institutionally – to be considered separate. Sex-positive and/or queer feminists disagreed with radical feminists with a vehemence that rivalled radical feminism’s own aggression against sexual violence. Ellen Willis, Gayle Rubin and Carole Vance critiqued the conflation of sexual pleasure and violent quests for power. They emphasised the anthropology of sex: the practices, the varied meanings, the negotiations, the sheer diversity of sexual experiences between men and women, but also between men, between women, non-conforming sexual minorities in general. What the sex-positive feminists brought to the table was a whole world of sexual being, exploration, and pleasure seeking that did not fit the model of power-as-orgasm. In fact, feminist scholarship on sexual subcultures of dominance and submission grew exponentially after the radical feminist dismissal of power play as antifeminist. What faded out of focus, though, was MacKinnon and Dworkin’s engagement with sadomasochism as a mode of implication in subjectivity. For the sex-positive feminists, s/m became a cultural-discursive site, whereas for the radicals, sadomasochism was the unbearable territory of being a psychic subject, not just a sexually active person<sup>7</sup>. For the ones dubbed sex-negative, sadomasochism could not be repurposed for sexual pleasure out of choice or consent. It was unbearable *because* it was pleasurable.

MacKinnon and Dworkin are considered by contemporary academic standards to lack nuance and coherence in their view of sexuality. I see in their work, however, a real, self-decimating encounter with sadomasochism/sexuality. I see their inadvertent proximity with psychoanalytic perspectives on the centrality of sadomasochism to the subject of the unconscious. It is their work, in conjunction with psychoanalytic theory, that makes it possible

for me to articulate the precise relation of rape, feminism and sexuality. I undertake close readings of MacKinnon and Dworkin's work separately in chapters 3 and 4. I argue that while MacKinnon helps us see the nature of feminism's implication in the desire to end rape, Dworkin offers a unique resolution between the violence of sexuality and sexual violence. My readings of MacKinnon and Dworkin go against both the conventional view of their work, as well as widely accepted theoretical and political postulates in relation to rape and sexual violence. I disagree also with how MacKinnon and Dworkin describe their own work, even as I submit to the profundity of their textual dynamics.

This chapter bridges my reading of 2002 with my readings of MacKinnon and Dworkin. It is here that I lay out the argument of the entire dissertation: sexual violence is sexual. I narrate the scene of contemporary feminist theory as the context for my contribution, and present the narration itself as a crucial part of the argument. In this chapter, my purpose is two-fold: to trace the contours of the textual transmission of unconscious pleasure in feminist theory, as well as show how we have not cultivated theoretical resources to read our own implication in what we study. In fact, feminist theory about rape actively disidentifies with the rapist, claims to operate from a place of pure political intention to end rape and treats the charge of complicity as the ultimate insult. However, it is in this distancing that we see the transmission, the implication most clearly.

I begin with the conjunctions and disjunctions between MacKinnon's work and my reading of 2002. We are so close to each other that our differences break us apart. And yet, it is the breaking away that lends coherence to what I present as the unreadable of rape. MacKinnon is notoriously uninterested in sexual pleasure, but the ones who are invested in pleasure, turn

away from an exploration of their own violent enjoyment. In the next section, then, I look at the ways in which pleasure, aggression and identification play out in contemporary feminist theory. I show how the lack of a concept of the psychosexual puts feminist theory in a bind: we call rape sexual violence while claiming that it is not about sex. I end the chapter with an explication of the psychosexual as unconscious/negative, and what it allows us to comprehend, not just of rape, but also of feminism. The thing is, everyone is already swimming in psychosexual negativity by insisting all at the same time that it neither exists nor matters nor belongs to us. The feminist fight against rape is itself a representation of what cannot be fought, or contained, or known. I do not offer an alternative fight. I argue that the limits of the existing fight are real. These limits cannot be transcended politically or textually. However, these very limits allow us to inhabit something of rape, and not as victims or survivors, but as sadomasochistic aggressors ourselves. And that's not a bad thing, unless we believe – we often do, not unlike the blessed and blissed out Hindu rioters – we are god's army against the evil of rape. By stripping feminism of its reliance on positive political visions like “ending rape,” “making a difference,” “creating a better world,” “transforming cultures of sex,” I offer an anti-rape feminism of negativity. This feminism – the one that already exists – does not fight sexuality; it inhabits its negative force.

I offer this intervention also at a time when we find ourselves immersed in increasingly complex vocabularies of the desire for political change. No matter how critical, or pragmatic, feminist theory of sexual violence anchors itself in the self-evident urgency for change. But what if this desire is available only in and through a repetition of what we want to change? What if our implication in what we fight does not demolish the fight but keeps it going? My own account of 2002, and the rest of this dissertation, explores this self-destructive path and ventures as far as it may be possible on the page. Here, in this place of indistinction between victim, survivor,

aggressor, rapist, feminist, reader, there is inconsolable anguish. Here, a reading emerges: a reading that can (almost) bear the weight of the problem of rape, its persistence, its immensity, its insistence in the life of feminism; feminism not as cure for a broken world, but as powerfully, unapologetically, shamelessly incurable in itself.

### **I: a child is being burned**

“Imagine that for hundreds of years your most formative traumas, your daily suffering and pain, the abuse you live through, the terror you live with, are unspeakable - not the basis of literature. You grow up with your father holding you down and covering your mouth so another man can make a horrible searing pain between your legs. When you are older, your husband ties you to the bed and drips hot wax on your nipples and brings in other men to watch and makes you smile through it. Your doctor will not give you drugs he has addicted you to unless you suck his penis.” Catharine MacKinnon’s *Only Words* (3) begins with a story of a woman many hundreds of years old. And yet, she is always the child who was held down by her own father as she is burnt – the pain of rape is *searing* – by another man. When she is older, she is burnt (with hot wax) again. When she is sick, (throat) burned again. This script plays on a loop: characters change, details change, the event does not. The event is rape, but rape is also the formal structure of patriarchal power. The event of rape is not an event in the conventional sense. It is not temporally limited, there is no uniqueness to it, no beginning, middle or end. Rape is all time under patriarchy.

No one believes the woman, MacKinnon claims, until she meets other women who are also (like) her. Until then, her sense of reality is radically undermined by the men (and

presumably women?) around her: “When you try to speak of these things, you are told it did not happen, you imagined it, you wanted it, you enjoyed it” (3). What is at stake for MacKinnon is not just that the woman has been brutally silenced, by both the penis down her throat and the people around her who do not mirror her reality back to her. What is more distressing is that her experience of rape is exactly the definition of pleasure for father, other man, husband and doctor. Whether the men are lying, or actually believe that she is enjoying herself, or ought to, is irrelevant. They are enjoying themselves. It is a miracle that the woman has any hold over any kind of reality at all. MacKinnon tells us that she has been photographed too: “You hear the camera clicking or whirring as you are being hurt, keeping time to the rhythm of your pain” (4)<sup>8</sup>. What is supposed to be evidence of her violation is further confirmation of her pleasure. “You find that the pictures, far from making what happened undeniable, are sex, proof of your desire and your consent” (4). The photographs make other men come. The pleasure of the photographer-voyeur-rapist is inexhaustibly transmissible. In MacKinnon’s telling of this transmission, the feminist knows better. The feminist is devastated by the suffering of the woman, the feminist *is* the woman: “Thirty-eight percent of women are sexually molested as girls; twenty-four percent of *us* are raped in *our* marriages” (7, my emphasis).

In the riots of Gujarat 2002, Muslim girls as young as 2 and 3 were raped, before being burnt to death. Naroda Patiya was one of the worst hit neighbourhoods in the city of Ahmedabad in the state of Gujarat, in the riots of 2002. As I mention in the beginning of the first chapter, close to a hundred Muslim men, women and children were burned alive in a riot that lasted for ten hours. The violence at Naroda was particularly brutal not only in its numbers, but also in terms of the acts of harm. Pregnant women had their babies cut out of their bodies and burnt on the edge of swords in scenes that one can only imagine through recourse to crudely made

Bollywood period drama, or MacKinnon's enraged but deadpan storytelling. Because of the complicity of the police, judiciary and many arms of the Indian state in Gujarat, solid evidence implicating the rioters in court was very hard to come by. A news journal named *Tehelka*, literally meaning "sensational", conducted a series of sting operations, capturing the rioters' testimony on video. One of the leaders of the mob at Naroda, Babu Bajrangi expressed how exciting it had been for him to blow up homes and bodies. "I can't tell you what a good time it was" (Bajrangi). Not just a good time, but a time for which there are no words, a time so good that words would lessen the intensity of the pleasure, a time so good that it feels good to tell someone, *I can't tell you...*

Most feminist responses to 2002 are in alignment with MacKinnon's point that rape is structural to patriarchy, not exceptional. Many scholars highlight the foundational place of rape in Hindu-Muslim relations in the South Asian sub-continent through the centuries<sup>9</sup>. They do not line up with MacKinnon, however, on the question of pleasure. They do not see pleasure as the central mode of violence; rather they see the enjoyment of the rioters/rapists either as a surplus layer of cruelty, or a derivative product of historical structures like caste, class, religion and gender<sup>10</sup>. MacKinnon does not see the pleasure of the rapist as a product of patriarchy. She sees the sadistic enjoyment of violence *as* sexuality. For MacKinnon, sexuality is a form of power, the lynchpin of gender equality and the primary social sphere of the subordination of women. That men enjoy rape is not surprising; what is surprising is that they also seem to get off in situations that are not violative or coercive. One cannot tell, though, MacKinnon cautions, for sexuality is not something *under* the conditions of patriarchy: sexuality *is* how patriarchy works: absolutely intimate, unendingly desirable. Sexuality is neither ideology - we cannot unlearn it by exposing its truth - nor biology - all of it is man-made. For MacKinnon, the subjugation of

women is total *because* of sexuality. Women are literally taught to want to be raped as a sign of being loved. Men are taught that the ultimate pleasure is the pleasure of being powerful.

In my reading of 2002, I am closer to MacKinnon's radical feminism than others in that I see pleasure as central to the violence of 2002, not ancillary to it. However, I part ways from her in that I do not see pleasure/rape/sexuality as structure. I see the psychosexual of patriarchy – is there any other kind – as exceeding its terms, as destabilizing patriarchy from within itself. One of the ways in which pleasure destabilized the annihilation of Muslims project in 2002 was through an uncontrollable proliferation of enjoyment; it was so intense that it took precedence over the actual killing of human beings<sup>11</sup>. It was the excessiveness of 2002 that made it impossible to look away from Hindu bigotry and communal hatred. If it was an “ordinary” riot, with ordinary amounts of killing and raping, the Indian judiciary or the general citizenry would not have batted an eye. The sadism of 2002 got the rioters into trouble; some into jail. Not for long, and certainly not for enough of the perpetrators, but it did happen. The violence was supposed to solidify the community; pleasure broke it open. The cruelty of the burning and raping took the form of the rioters wanting recognition from their victims. Can you see what's happening, can you see what's coming, can you see. The rioters desired communion in the face of ultimate separation. MacKinnon would say that the fantasy of the enjoyment of the woman makes the man feel powerful, but there was no question of the Muslim woman enjoying getting her child torn out of her body. The fantasy was not that of the woman enjoying herself; the fantasy/act was all about watching her experience the horror of *knowing* what was to come. And perhaps, that could have been an experience of ultimate powerfulness – I am going to kill you – but it was also seeking validation – it is your horror that makes my desire real. The fantasy of unconscious knowledge; in the fact of its transmission was the evidence of its presence.

I use the term “fantasy” not to denote any particular sociological content, but to evoke the presence of a psychic structure that overdetermines the meaning of an act in advance; a psychic structure that is designed for maximum pleasure without annihilating the subject. Unconscious fantasy is not fully known to the subject. However, parts of it can be inferred after an experience of gratification. Overdetermined in advance, but being able to say that only retrospectively. Here, we are not in the MacKinnonian time of rape, but in psychic time: too early is too late. Fantasy cannot, then, be understood as the cause of an act, but as part of its organizing structure. That too, we cannot fully read, and in this I depart from all directly or peripherally psychoanalytic work on 2002<sup>12</sup>. I do not subscribe to notions of “the Hindu unconscious,” or “the Muslim phallus.” These phrases assume that the psychosexual subject can directly correspond to sociological coordinates. The subject is assumed to identify with its identity. Hindu men have Hindu pleasure, Hindu women have Hindu anxieties in their Hindu unconscious. Who knows, though, what may have been the meaning of Bajrangi’s good time?

In “A Child is Being Beaten,” Sigmund Freud analyses a common phantasy: a child is being beaten. Freud analyses many different manifestations of this phantasy – dream, nightmare, daydream, a sentence one constructs in analysis, a sentence that one repeats like an incantation. Freud demonstrates that *we cannot know in advance* where the subject places itself in this phantasy-text. Is he the child, the father who is doing the beating, the other children that enter the scene, is he the instrument of the beating, is he the voyeur, the creator of this intriguing scene? I add: is he the analyst who would receive the dream and unravel its secrets, is he the secret? I say he, but Freud is most concerned with sexual difference in this essay. The text limits the unravelling of sexual difference by mapping it onto the girl’s cataclysmic identification *and* desire for the body of the mother. I say limits because the girl’s identification is a given for

Freud, but it is this limit that also keeps the question of sexual difference open. That some identification is a given, makes it possible for identification to be an open question always. The body of the mother can be anywhere for it is nowhere, now here, not here, not there. Each subject lives the convulsions of this phantasy differently – if you have it, that is – but following the trail of each subjective instantiation teaches us something about wanting to beat/be beaten. The phantasy does not explain identification, identification does not explain desire, but having a theory of the psychosexual allows us to approach something of the subject that does not quite appear as empirical, something of the subject that is nowhere, now here, not there.

Was Bajrangi the cooking gas cylinder that he strategically exploded to blow up families? Was he the unborn child who died by fire? Sexual pleasure - the kind you can't exhaustively describe in words it's so good - is not a product of sociological positions; it's a product of psychic positions. We do not need to know Bajrangi's psychic world, but assigning it fixed sociological meanings is simply inaccurate. We do not need to know, and also we cannot know. The psychosexual world of the rapist is not available to feminist theory except as a realm of pure speculation. What we cannot know of the rapist, though, we enact unconsciously in our own body/text.

I found myself in close proximity to the pleasure of the rapist in witnessing the extreme sexual violence of 2002. Not only is the psychic world of the rapist unknowable, one can also not predict the identificatory movements of the feminist reader.<sup>13</sup> Though physically absent from the scene of the violence, my indirect, second-hand, retrospective, deferred knowledge of what I saw of rape opened up the possibility of psychic complicity for me. I identified with the Hindu rioters, I could access the pleasure of raping, burning and harming the other, I could enter the

world of Hindu fantasy knowing exactly how it was organised for maximum gratification. This is not uncommon. Many feminist scholars and activists have made use of their intimacies with majoritarian communities and ideologies to understand them better. Ethnographies and documentaries of the Hindu right in India, for example, have worked deftly with the psychic dimension of identification<sup>14</sup>. By showing their viewer exactly how the authoritarian politician thinks and lives, these texts make available a visceral knowledge of the violent other. The framing of these texts, however, always remind the viewer/reader of who they are. Identification is accompanied by horror and outrage. Identification is never complete, never total in a way that makes politics impossible. Complicity in this sense is strategic, not unconscious. My implication, on the other hand, was unconscious. It could barely be interpreted, let alone used to fight rape.

## **II: the subject of the unconscious**

Identifying with the aggressor<sup>15</sup> instead of the victim/yourself is a problem that feminist theory is intimately familiar with. Traditionally, we think of it as ideology. Andrea Dworkin thinks of it as masochism. Like MacKinnon, Dworkin does not see sexuality as ideological programming that we can unlearn by exposing its truth. She treats sexuality as a real map of the subject of patriarchy. Dworkin's *Intercourse* is an anguished, enraged and slightly unhinged analysis on the problem of genuinely wanting to be destroyed. How to conduct politics when you want what you are organizing to destroy? By destroying yourself: this is Dworkin's radical and very unusual answer. Feminism as the greater masochism to counter everyday, ordinary and routine masochism. This is not how most feminist theorists address self-implication in structures of violence. Feminism is generally understood to be the antidote to internalized, gendered forms of sadomasochism.

Arielle Azoulay remembers not being allowed to go to the beach on Fridays in Netanya, Israel, because “that’s the day the Arabs go” (10). Azoulay, as a child, would imagine “Arabs half-submerged in the middle of the sea, struggling to get up, with the weight of their wet clothes pulling them down” (10). This was the only image she had of Palestinians; it would be many years before she saw real photographs: “A girl with soldiers pulling her hair as they try to arrest her, a young boy tied up and lying on the ground with a group of soldiers and a rifle aimed at him...” (10). Azoulay experiences herself as implicated in the Israeli occupation: as a daughter, as a citizen, and as a writer. This powerful relay of images, both “real” and imaginary, frames Azoulay’s sense of responsibility. She argues that it is “the writer’s duty to look” (11). She goes on to offer a theory of photography centred around the notion of renegotiating meaning.

“Photography has served me in ridding myself of these phantom pictures, or at least in reattributing them to their creators and detaching them from myself.” (13)

Azoulay harnesses complicity as a source of politics. But in doing so, she claims to have neutralised the force of the unconsciously violent self, the phantom pictures she has gotten rid of. The political work she does with photography seems to authorise her as an ethical member of this violent world; what happens, though, to the little girl’s curious image: Arabs, half-submerged always already in their clothes, and then even more half-submerged in the water, and struggling, and drowning, their own essence/identity pulling them down? Even the sea could not tolerate these Arabs of her imagination. As a reader, I can continue to access the pleasurable structure of watching people die of their own fault, even when I know it is all kinds of violent. I continue to see it, the flailing, the sea, watching but not intervening. When is the eye not lecherous? The violence of this image is not exhausted by politics. However, this has been the

preferred feminist way of discharging unconscious identifications with the violator/oppressor. Responsibility is the feminist answer to all kinds of bad deeds, especially unconscious ones.

*My first textual encounter with 2002 was a black-and-white photograph in the newspaper.*

*I remember looking at a woman burnt to death, and her unborn child outside of her, also burnt.*

I find myself closer to Dworkin's position on feminist intimacy with violence, than with Azoulay's. Though Dworkin is decidedly anti-psychoanalytic – she thinks Freud is a male manly man [tr. useless for lesbian/true feminists] – her understanding of sexuality aligns with my own psychoanalytic investment in the unconscious nature of identification, which cannot be discharged consciously, or agentively. It can be read, repeated and used, albeit in a limited way. In my reading of 2002, I make use of my identification with the Hindu rioter/rapist in order to draw out the sexual nature of all the rioting and killing. Making use of it, however, does not neutralise the violence of my psychic positionality. Though my experience is not uncommon – as Azoulay attests – it is commonly seen as something to be overcome. I want to demonstrate two things: one, intimacy with the aggressor finds expression in the feminist text *as* aggression against the aggressor, and two, this is useful, as much as it is self-defeating. Feminism repeats what it claims to want to end; in the case of sexual violence, the feminist text occupies the psychic blur of enjoyment and aggression. Until now, we have analysed the rapist – their behaviour, their actions, motivations, beliefs – to understand rape, and the victim-survivor to understand the nature of sexual trauma. I propose we look to the feminist text to understand the sexual nature of rape.

At least since the Sex Wars in the US (seventies and eighties), sexual violence has been the site of a severe litmus test: are you an accomplice to patriarchy or are you a real feminist.<sup>16</sup> MacKinnon and Dworkin, especially, were stringently critical of anyone who did not see pornography as an industry of rape. In turn, they were criticised for their stereotypical portrayal of men. For example, here's a sentence from an essay by Dworkin called "Men and Boys:" "For men, their right to control and abuse the bodies of women is the one comforting constant in a world rigged to blow up but they do not know when" (143)<sup>17</sup>. Critical feminist theory seems to have graduated from these kinds of ahistorical, generalizing descriptions of "men." At the same time, we seem to have continued displacing this suspicion – you're enjoying yourself, aren't you – onto one another. Contemporary feminist theorizing of rape is animated by a relentless relay of complicity accusations. You're guilty, no, you are! The rapist is bad, but you're worse. I trace this relay in two arcs of feminist infighting in relation to rape, one about governance feminism, and the other about the use/uselessness of feminist theory. My purpose is not to advocate peace, but to show how the feminist fight against sexual violence is in itself a textual site of pleasurable aggression. We keep something of rape alive and in play, even as we accuse each other of not being able to see it.

*My encounter with the photograph was distressing, not only due to the extreme violence, but also because I could not stop looking at the burnt female body.*

MacKinnon's theory of total subjugation has translated into a virulent approach to legal justice for women. She has asked for stringent penalties for crimes of sex-trafficking and intimate partner violence. She has utilized the legal system to give a structural spin to every act of violence against women. For example, MacKinnon's solution for the sexual violence in the

porn industry is to ban all porn. Harm to one woman is harm to all women everywhere. Janet Halley has critiqued MacKinnon's theory as well as her legal argumentation as disciplinary and oppressive in its heteronormativity<sup>18</sup>. Halley claims that sexual violence has become a site of governance feminism: a set of political beliefs and practices that replicate the ideological apparatuses of patriarchal systems: violent retribution, attributing lack of agency to victims, moral fascism. She claims that under the guise of advocating for victims, "feminists walk the halls of power" (21). Because sexual violence feminisms are particularly focused in countering force and violence, Halley's critique is powerful in its implication that feminism is actually complicit with patriarchy in its drive for justice. For Halley, as with other critics of the sexual violence feminisms like Wendy Brown and Laura Kipnis, the exposé of feminism's violent tendencies diminishes the legitimacy of the fight against rape and highlights the weakness of its politics. Complicity is something that lowers theoretical sophistication, something that is the sign of a knee-jerk reaction, rather than a measured response to ever-intensifying epidemics of sexual violence. Halley calls for a more open-minded feminism that is curious about women's sexual realities, instead of always assuming that women are sexually subjugated.

Not surprisingly, Halley's critique is charged with a complicity of its own. Lama Abu-Odeh argues that Halley's sexual libertarianism is classically liberal in its orientation. In Odeh's view, it is liberalism, not conservatism, that has historically been the biggest ideological opponent to left politics. Halley successfully diminishes many gains of left feminist politics in the name of "queer theory" (Odeh's quotes), all the while peddling good old ideals of freedom and liberty. In effect, Halley contributes towards maintaining a status quo; nothing changes, and yet, miraculously, we are all freer and bolder and stronger. For Odeh, Halley's under-the-table support for the status quo results in the continuation of the conditions in which sexual violence

occurs. In the same article, Odeh also charges Duncan Kennedy with complicity, but of a more serious kind. Presenting her own autobiographical account of being a law student at Harvard, Odeh argues that Kennedy's notion of "Sexy Dressing" is a direct result of his real-life lecherousness. In "Sexy Dressing," Kennedy has controversially argued - Halley often cites his argument as an ally for her own - that (some) women may enjoy participating in traditionally sexist dynamics of exhibitionism/voyeurism. Halley finds Kennedy's interest in such counter-intuitive recognition of women's agency refreshing. Both Halley and Kennedy are broadly interested in the unexpected feminist and queer uses of conventionally patriarchal spaces and structures. For Odeh, this is nothing but a convenient justification Kennedy's own abuse of graduate students, and Halley's complicity with these dynamics at the Harvard Law School:

"Kennedy was known among his graduate students as a seducer exhibitionist who sat beside his desk stretching his feet on it, lifting his crotch up at an angle that very much offered his students, the up of "his skirt", and he did it habitually as if insisting that "sex" was indeed a text in this office to be read and thought about by his students though never discussed (except through the medium of what he wrote). It appears that thinking of himself as an object of a gaze rather than its subject was so terrifying to Kennedy that not the slightest attempt at exploring it is made in his paper on Sexy Dressing." (39)

As if sex was a text in his office to be read and thought, though never discussed. Odeh's beautiful description of this charged dynamic, combined with her insight that Kennedy was actually *identifying* with the sexy dressers in watching them, paints a far more complex picture of the pleasures of sexy dressing/watching than Odeh herself would admit. These "pleasures" are no doubt violative; however, Odeh's critique continues the transmission of those violative pleasures. In fact it is *because* of that continuity of transmission, that the reader is able to grasp the

disorienting depth of these dynamics of sexuality/sexual violence in the university-workplace. Kennedy's engaged/lecherous eye becomes available for study through Odeh's own piercing gaze. Odeh herself, though, presents herself as a dissident. She does not see herself implicated in Halley's implication in Kennedy's criminality.

Odeh's critique I take to be true, not only because I believe her account of the "scene" at Harvard, but also because Halley's descriptions of feminism's gains do sound like letters from another galaxy. Apparently, people take rape very seriously in this wonderland and it has gotten shamelessly easy to publicly share one's story of abuse and harassment. However, I think both Odeh and Halley are underestimating the strength of their own interventions by conceptualising complicity as a moral-political problem. They are limiting the reach of their own lecherous eyes, they are selling short the critical power of their own violent identifications, even as they utilize the very affect that they find problematic: voyeurism, in the case of Odeh, and moralizing, in Halley's. The figure of the rapist or that of the toxic feminist is reduced to a straw man; Odeh and Halley actively displace their own necessary and useful complicity onto another.

*An unspeakable truth was being transmitted to me via my own fascination:*

*someone had had a good time.*

Those who *do* study complicity as an inescapable horizon of all theory are often caught in a self-circuitous impasse. For example, in *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler attempts to hold space for an infinite loop: is the subject implicated in its own powerlessness, power is psychically experienced, but does that mean it has no discursive reality, but does that mean discourses have nothing to do with the psyche, but does that mean that the psyche is independent of the world, but does that mean that the world is not psychically produced, but does that mean

psychic productions are not disciplinary, and so on. In her work, complicity becomes the object of a hunt that is powered by a notion of guilt/responsibility<sup>19</sup>. Complicity, however persistent, is ultimately a problem for Butler that compromises politics and theory. Therefore, we must keep recognising every possible pitfall in every possible theoretical formulation; apparently, if we can't neutralise these traps, we can at least make them legible. Psychoanalytically though, this kind of torturous self-questioning does not bring us any closer to the heart of the matter. Severe scrutiny is simply another form of sharp denial. What is needed is not concentration, but free association. Some dreaming, some forgetting.

Laura Kipnis' *Unwanted Advances* has been under severe scrutiny for its claim that a professor who was accused of sexual harassment was treated unfairly and harshly because of the current institutional policies on university campuses. Though these policies are supposed to prevent and address the problem of sexual violence, Kipnis argues that they are actually against the complexity of cultures of sex. These cultures do include rape, but they also consist of bad sex and sexual exploration. Kipnis believes that contemporary feminism is unable to separate rape from what is normal for sexual lives, especially of young people who are just beginning to explore sex: confusion, misunderstanding, risk-taking, posturing, projection, heartbreak, selfishness, betrayal, cheating, breaking promises. For Kipnis, (bad) sex and rape are so conflated within antirape activism, that we are punishing people not for actual crimes, but for being sexual subjects. Allied with Halley in many respects, Kipnis also evokes memories of sex-positive critiques of MacKinnon and radical feminism. In many ways, we are still fighting the same fight: one side says sex and rape need to be separated culturally, women are getting raped when they want sex, and the other side says sex and rape need to be separated within feminist

discourse, women want sex even as they battle rape. Everyone is agreed, though, on rape's relation to sex: they should be separate.

According to Kipnis, feminist anxieties about rape are increasingly custodial/parental. We are actively promoting a culture of protectionism, rather than empowering young women to have good, exciting, full sexual lives. Mama feminism wants to save women from bad sex. Kipnis, instead, wants us to cultivate what she calls "grown-up feminism," "one that recognises how much feminine deference and traditionalism persist amid all the "pro-sex" affirmations and slogans, even as women are trying to switch up gender roles and sexual scripts" (201). Here, Kipnis joins Wendy Brown in her critique of feminism's permanent state of injury. Brown argues that feminism has come to function through a state of victimhood. We are always already in historical suffering. We attack defensively, we defend aggressively. Our *ressentiment* manifests as an inability to move beyond these logics of injury and recognition. Brown asks if our drive for recognition keeps us tethered to the very structures that we name as oppressive. For example, if law has historically excluded marital rape, why do we keep trying to get the whole gamut of sexual violence recognized by it? Our desire for inclusion and visibility function as traps, as constitutively impossible projects in which we keep doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results. Even if law does include marital rape at some point, it will exclude something else. Why do we want what we want? Brown reads the rich emotional and psychological landscape of feminism through the poststructuralist insight about oppression. As long as we subscribe to the dialectic of oppression and victimhood, we will stay within the terms of what we ourselves identify as oppressive discourses.

*Years later, having been exposed to the extent and the degree of the violence, I began fasting*

*– no food, no water –*

*on the anniversary of the riots every year.*

*I thought I needed to mark others' suffering with some suffering of my own.*

Carine Mardorossian, whose work is often hailed as a moment of renewal for anti-rape feminisms, has critiqued Brown's dismissal of the category of victimhood in an essay called "Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape." Mardorossian is especially concerned about the psychologism in Brown's work: anxiety, suffering, aggression, psychic injury, desire, fantasy. These terms shift attention from the structural dynamics of power to the individual subject. According to Mardorossian "making women's psyche the site of the analysis of rape or of rape prevention is a depoliticizing gesture for feminist politics" (756). Brown seems to imply – in Mardorossian's reading – that feminism needs to manage its emotions better, thus taking away from the seriousness of the structural violence we combat every single day. Brown's psychological spin places even more pressure, Mardorossian argues, on victims of rape. Not only have they undergone violence and trauma, now they are also expected to function from a place of non-injury. She also questions Brown's assumptions about the term "victimhood," and claims that it is a negative term for Brown only because she sees it as a psychological state. Mardorossian is in favour of completely eschewing the psychological to get at the real issues of sexual violence, which have nothing to do with one's state of mind. In general, Mardorossian is suspicious of what she calls "postmodern theory." Postmodern feminists like Brown, according to her, tend to get so lost in the pleasures of textuality, language and the intellectual possibility of cultivating new perspectives, that they completely miss the "concrete" social issues in which the

text, language and pleasurable thought are embedded (755). Brown is too theoretical, too psychologistic and ends up victimizing the victim.

The *Signs* issue in which Mardorossian's essay is included, also carries two responses to her and her response to the responses. Both responses are quite critical. Beverly Allen says that Mardorossian is too theoretical and not focused enough on concrete issues:

“You see, since I began spending time in Croatia (during the war) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (since the war), I have stopped reading feminist theory pretty much altogether. This was not due to any kind of decision or remotely polemical stance. It was because, once I was busy working with people who had been affected by the war, including those affected by genocidal rape, the relevance of contemporary theory grew pretty distant.” (777).

Mardorossian's critique of Brown – not engaged with the concrete real – is returned to her almost without any acknowledgement of this absurdity. Allen implies that all theory is postmodern in so far as it thinks rather than acts. I don't see any basis for Allen's blanket dismissal of Mardorossian's essay as polemical theory. If anything, Allen and Mardorossian are agreed that whatever they deem to be polemical theory is of no use to people who have been raped. Much can be said about this assumption that theory is ineffective and indulgent. What I am interested in, though, is the relay structure of critique within feminist theory. It is everywhere, the repeated assertion that the other[’s commitment to feminism] is simply not enough. Not observant enough, not holistic enough, not inclusive enough, not trying to explain everything in one go enough. I know this feeling. This familial feeling, this attack bearing down upon me, this feminist demand I want to meet with everything in my body and spirit, *you are not suffering enough*.

But there is more. The second response by Janice Haaken is more in touch with Mardorossian's text and argumentation than Allen. Haaken argues that Mardorossian gives "the word games of postmodernism" (785) a little too much importance. As a feminist psychologist, Haaken is able to argue that the psychological experience of victim-survivors does not need to be thrown out of the window just because of certain trends in cultural theory. Haaken's piece is titled: "Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape": The Seductions of Theory;" the title of Mardorossian's essay followed by a word of caution: why be seduced by theory when you can fight rape? I am hardly a sex-positive feminist; I have no quarrel with Haaken prioritising feminism over sex, but I do think we are mistaken if we think feminism could be a seduction-free space. Haaken's title plays also on radical feminist rage about women (and men) being taught that saying no is seductive; or, seduction is coercion, manipulation of some kind. Mardorossian, Haaken implies, has been taken in by the very enemy she sets out to debunk. She has been taken in specifically by the size of the enemy, or the size the enemy claims it has. Classic problem of patriarchy: believing that men are powerful when it's just that they say they are. Psychically, though, knowing that power is nothing but an empty claim does not neutralise it. The phallus is a joke, except that the joke is real. Calling it a joke does not in any way counter its seriousness.

It is the intertextuality here that is seductive. We are looking for the enemy, but we keep finding ourselves. The critique of theory is too theoretical, the dismissal of psychologism is too psychologistic, MacKinnonian theories of the state are too governmental, we are seduced by an indictment of sexuality, a negative assessment of word games, that is also a commentary on feminist theory in general, for how else do we characterise this delightful culture of chewing each other out in the name of the very thing we have vowed never to eat? The enjoyment of exposing the other's lack, the other's not big-enough theoretical gaze, too small to satisfy me, to

satisfy the needs of rape victims, this enjoyment is not a diversion from our commitment to theorizing rape; this enjoyment is evidence of how utterly committed we are; so committed that we start generating in our own body/text the very terms of the psychosexual that we imagine the rapist enacts: excessive aggression to cover over one's lack, punishing the other in lieu of facing one's own very real limits, engaging in mindless pleasure, so mindless it starts looking like pure violence. We do not have solid data about the psychosexual world of the rapist. But it looks like we have something deeper. We have, in the place of the secrets of the rapist's violative pleasure, our own.

*I see it*

*– her burnt body, my fasting, all the suffering –*

*more clearly now. The fire of hunger bearing witness to the hunger of fire;*

*I did it for the poetry.*

We are exactly where we need to be, that is what I am trying to say.

### **III: sex without sex**

Brown analyses the fantasies of feminism – she also thinks MacKinnon is terribly violent – as if we could have a feminism without fantasy, as if we could rid ourselves of the engine of our own desire. I agree with Mardorossian that Brown is deeply psychologistic; I disagree, though, with her assumption that victimhood – I support this term – has nothing to do with the psychosexual. The problem is that when it comes to sexual violence, the psychosexual is either treated as a bunch of individual feelings, or as a world of nuance and complexity that does not belong to rape. In fact, Kipnis and Halley are deploying the subjective, ambiguous and shifting

nature of sexuality to argue that where sex is, rape is not. For all their attentiveness to the details of sexuality, their understanding of rape is surprisingly simplistic.

The contemporary critique of psychologism has emerged, in part, in response to theorists like Halley and Kipnis, who cite sexual subjectivity as a counterpoint to sexual violence activism. This suspicion of psychologism, however, is also geared towards deflating any motivational explanations for the rapists' behaviour. For example, in 2002, the riots were explained by recourse to emotional upheaval. When the Hindus heard about a Muslim mob burning a train coach containing Hindu devotees, they could not contain their anguish and horror. They committed acts of extreme rape, looting and murder because they were in deep pain themselves. Feminists rightfully condemned this "explanation," as it justified injustice by citing injustice: Hindus wrongfully hurt because they were wrongfully hurt. The rioters, whether hurting or not, were fully supported by the police, government officials, were given solid social and financial support from Hindus all over the world and were able to rely on decades of arming and training young Hindu boys. The entire machinery of Hindu power - for lack of a better term - supported their actions and crimes. I see how crude psychologism obfuscates the issues at stake in sexual violence rather than actually explaining them. However, the psychologism and the structuralism in relation to rape are similar in that they are *both* guilty of crude psychologism. Explaining human behaviour solely on the basis of socio-cultural conditions implies that there is no psychosexual life that is properly its own. He killed Muslims because he had been trained to think of Muslims as enemies. How is this any less psychologistic than "hurt people hurt?"

Paradoxically, feminist theory about sexual violence is very attentive to the psychological impact of trauma. However, this impact is something to be overcome, something that is evidence

of the insidious and long-lasting harms of rape. If in relation to the rapist, the psychosexual is (some kind of) cause, on the side of the victim, it is effect. This realm of psychic devastation is both ubiquitous and elusive in the survivor testimonies of 2002, partly because it is considered to be one of the losses - loss of home, loss of livelihood, loss of peace of mind, loss of sweet dreams, loss of hope, loss of loved ones, loss of childhood - and partly because we don't know what to do with it except keep describing it. We don't know what to learn from it, except the story we already know. Dworkin exemplifies this approach: every text of fiction or non-fiction she wrote contained the same stories of rape. She repeated each story without the addition of any newer details. All the women who were raped, abused, assaulted in her books, were traumatised in the same ways. There is a deep stagnation in Dworkin's writing; it is a performative stagnation: the story of rape plays on a loop for the victim, the survivor, the feminist. At the same time, it also demonstrates something of her assumptions: the victim, the survivor and the feminist understand each other; they *are* each other. If a child dreams of being beaten, he is the child and he absolutely does not want it unless patriarchy has allowed him to identify as a child on the condition that he want it.

Conflating crude psychologism with a framework of psychic subjectivity - conflation also of the individual/particular with the singular - has led to a wholesale rejection of the psychosexual, except as a direct product of the socio-political. While many Indian feminists treated pleasure as secondary or a surplus of violence in 2002, Tanika Sarkar and Manali Desai responded with an analysis of the sexual dimension of power. They argued that what produces pleasure for the violent Hindu subject is governed by specific socio-cultural dynamics of caste, class, religious othering and gender. For them, sexuality is constituted of discourses and relations of power. They do not see structures as ahistorical and deterministic, but historically evolving

and constitutive. The difference between determinism and constitutiveness is that of the position of the subject in history. While structuralists like MacKinnon and Dworkin tend to posit the subject as either one with the structure or against it, post-structuralists see the subject's relationship to structure as ambivalent, double-sided and often paradoxical. For example, Sarkar sees right-wing Hindu women, who cheer their men on to rape Muslim women, as both violent and vulnerable. Sarkar argues that these Hindu women are themselves caught in an extremely abusive and misogynist familial and cultural bind: either they learn to fight their conditions and risk death, or they manage the violence in their own lives by participating in the rape and death of Muslim women, and then disidentifying with them. *I am not the one who was raped*. In Sarkar's descriptions, right-wing women in India emerge as complex subjects who are not simply limited by their conditions, as if they could break those limits, but are constituted by their limits. Their actions, no matter what they choose, are implicated in their conditions. However, the subjection is not total; subjection is not the same as subjugation. The relationship between structure and subject is contingent, dynamic and adaptive.

Their careful attention to sex as culture, sex as practice, and the organisation of power relations in what comes to be understood as sex is exemplary of the complex approach to sexual violence within feminist theory at the moment, often referred to as the political critique of desire. While Sarkar and Desai are able to satisfactorily explain many aspects of 2002, I find their analysis ultimately inadequate for not being able to account for the excessive sadism of the riots. Their complex framework grinds to a halt when it comes to the subject's relationship to violence. The content of this relationship is assumed to be that of survival, not of sadomasochistic enjoyment. In fact, enjoyment itself becomes a product of the relations of power that inhere in that moment. In this, Sarkar and Desai are deterministic and ahistorical. Their readings arrest the

counter-intuitive movements of pleasure and aggression. It is not that pleasure does not matter to them, but they have pleasure tell us the same story of structural violence, albeit in a more intimate way. As I demonstrate in the previous chapter, structural descriptions of any kind simply cannot hold the destabilising effects of pleasure: for the victim, the perpetrator *and* the feminist reader. I do not read the destabilisation as a story of the infectious moral decrepitude of the rapist. I read it as a chain of transmission of textual pleasure, sexual pleasure, the textuality of sexuality. The pleasure of the rapist is not (only) a psychological and/or structural problem.

The absence of engagement with textual-sexual-psychic life has put feminist theory in a bind: we call rape sexual violence, while arguing that rape is not about sex. An Amnesty “Activist Toolkit” document (2020), “Let’s Talk About Yes” defines its objective as helping anyone who wants to learn how to move from “rape culture” to “consent culture.” The 24-page document covers a broad range of topics from creating online and in-person conversations about rape, to engaging students on campuses, conducting training workshops and supporting survivors. The second page of the document features an image of a person presenting as a white woman, with her palm pressed onto the bottom of her face, eyes looking alarmed, even horrified. The text accompanying the image defines rape as “sex without consent” (2), and encourages a cultural shift towards “positive, enthusiastic consent” (2). Presumably, the woman in the image is horrified by the fact of rape, though textually, she appears to be alarmed by these widely accepted feminist political objectives. This absurd misfit between text and image, issue and tone, scale of the problem and the casualness of the “solution,” runs through the entire document. The tone is almost cheerful: people who are raped are traumatised but there is almost nothing that a respectful conversation cannot make better; people who say things like rape is uncontrollable lust

just need to be educated; everything will be okay, sex can be wonderful when consent is given enthusiastically.

A lot is wrong with this document. Political work is presented as something you can do by effectively garnering social media engagement. The guidelines for being a feminist against sexual violence, and an Instagram influencer blur into one another. In this liberal-corporate text, everyone has the potential to be good; all you need is the right information to disseminate and “multiply.” A neoliberal governance feminist document like this one is low-hanging fruit, I admit, for any critical feminist reading. What I want to show, however, is that the muddles of this document in its definition of rape extend to the upper echelons of contemporary critical feminist theory about sexual violence.

Rape, according to the Amnesty document, is sex without consent. This message is repeated several times. What we need, therefore, is more consent; then we will have less rape. Sex is a constant in this equation. It’s a bodily act, “non-consensual sexual intercourse” (14), which can either be pleasurable or violative. Anti-rape activism is all about changing the cultural practices of how we have sex: what we say, do, expect, give and receive. Good sex and the end of rape are the same things. After having established this equation, the text offers a contradiction when confronted with the question of “lust.” In the section about rape myths that the reader-activist must debunk, we are suddenly told that rape has nothing to do with sex:

Sexual violence including rape is not about sex or satisfying sexual desire, it is about exercising power and control over the victim. Perpetrators are perfectly capable of controlling their sexual urges and do not engage in sexual activity in a spontaneous way

under the pressure of their sex drive. (*In response to: "Sexual assault is an act of lust and passion which can't be controlled".*) (14)

Rape is sex without consent *and* rape is not about sex. In the first claim, sex is an act within "rape culture," a network of practices, whereas in the second, sex is motivating force. There are many ways to derive sexual pleasure. The fact that someone wants it through violating another person's bodily integrity means that something other than satisfaction is in the mix. Rape is the act of sex that is about power and control. Men (and women) are taught, as part of the rape culture, to confuse rape-sex with sex-sex.

Rape, then, is the act of sex without sex. At the heart of rape, not an absence of sex, but a doubling, a void, a negativity. The thing is, it's not just rape that is sex without sex. Sex has no content that is proper to itself in the Amnesty document; by that I mean that "sex" is indistinguishable from a notion of any meaningful, relational, and hopefully pleasurable cultural practice of the body. One could be talking about best practices of group jogging, or maintaining private property, as they do:

"The importance of sexual consent can be explained by considering other scenarios in which consent may be important and how they might be similar to sexual situations:

- Would you eat someone else's food without asking them?
- Would it be ok to go into someone else's room or house without asking them? What if you were only going in to tidy up for them, or do some other kind of favour?
- If you bought someone a jumper as a present, would it be ok to make them wear it, or threaten that you will no longer be their friend if they don't wear it?" (12)

The evacuation of sex from within itself makes the problem of sexual violence a problem of faulty socialization under a structural dynamic of power. As "Let's Talk About Yes" puts it,

“[perpetrators] are not beasts or some “mythical creatures” that only do “bad things”. They have friends, families, careers, they say “hello”, “thank you”, they can be very famous or very charismatic, they can be our friends” (14). The text, in keeping with the current scholarship on rape, moves away from a moral model of culpability, to a political view. If someone is able to rape another person, they are drawing on a violently established and enforced system of oppression. Rape is not an isolated act. This connection to culture and power becomes the content of rape. Rape becomes, if not eradicable, at least manageable: everyone can do something about it! Survivors present as eminently believable: they went in for sex and got raped instead; rape as a genre of contract violation. And sex continues to appear desirable.

The only reason, then, why rape is called “sexual” violence, it would seem, is because it involves the genitals. Choking and stabbing are part of the rape culture too, but they do not constitute the crime of rape. Indeed, Nivedita Menon, taking a Foucauldian perspective, has argued that there isn’t much that is qualitatively different between getting stabbed and getting raped. In fact, the stabbing may be more injurious physically than the rape. In *Recovering Subversion*, she suggests that by calling rape “sexual” violence, we affirm the patriarchal jumble of rape and sex. If someone stabs us, we don’t feel ashamed, but if we are raped, we do. According to Menon, the shame comes from this conflation of sex and rape. As long as we consider rape to be *sexual* violence, we keep buying into patriarchal definitions of sex. Menon believes that though feminism claims that rape is about power, not sex, we also seem to inadvertently affirm that there is something sexual about it. Menon advocates that we end the patriarchal charge of rape by refusing to see it as “sexual” violence.

Menon’s account betrays a performative wishfulness: I say it so it will be. Though she bases her account in Foucault’s critique of sexuality, she proceeds as if it were a diagnosis. Now

that we know what's wrong, we can commence treatment. Menon argues that the only way to create conditions of real justice is to replace existing discourses with feminist ones. She proposes that we make feminism hegemonic through a real, grassroots political movement. Menon's emphasis on subverting existing discourses undermines the co-constitutive status of history, discourse and relations of power in Foucault. Menon leaves us with a solution not unlike "Let's Talk About Yes:" let's shift the emphasis from the sexual to the physical within feminist discourse, as if it is just a matter of deciding amongst ourselves; democratically, of course. Worse, Menon relies on a non-discursive understanding of violence. Her argument deploys "violence" as a self-evident term that is not imbricated in the discourses of sexuality, body, law, and capital. Taking the sexual out of rape, but leaving the violence in, does nothing to change rape's relationship to these other surrounding, but absolutely significant discourses. Menon brings into focus the discursive construction of sexuality, only to proceed as if feminism can operate outside of it and create an outside to it.

Menon's approach to sexual violence is based on her assumption that the "sexual" is fully known and knowable as discourse. While the Amnesty document rendered sexual violence manageable by making it a culture problem, Menon renders sexual violence not only knowable, but even discursively malleable. We change the talk, we change the thing itself, which is actually just the talk, there's no thing "itself." Sexuality, once again, in relation to rape, is nothing. Like all conceptual frameworks, Menon and "Let's Talk About Yes" have limited, but real, explanatory potential. Menon is able to demonstrate, for example, how the legal discourse upholds normative categories like heterosexuality and caste, and feminism's reliance on the very same legal system makes us complicit with the violence of the law. My critique of Menon is not, therefore, that she is not able to explain everything about sexual violence. My contention really

is that the Amnesty document, Menon and much of contemporary feminist theory about sexual violence are not in touch with the measure of the problem of rape. They are in touch with the statistics, the pervasiveness of sexual violence across the world, the everydayness, the relentless intensification, but as soon as sexuality is thrown out of the picture, we are left with a knowable socio-cultural problem, a set of manageable political tasks and a clear political goal: the end of rape. Meanwhile, sex continues to look good politically, separated from rape.

Elsewhere in queer and feminist theory, sexuality is a wholly complex, ambiguous and even violent world. Sex is neither act nor practice, but a quest to experience the relation between subject and other, subject and mother, body and word. The political webs of violence and pleasure are found to be messily intertwined. For example, Jennifer Nash argues that racist tropes in pornography produces violent sexual pleasure that is available to Black subjects. This pleasure is political in that it is masochistic *and* uses hierarchies for erotic work. It turns upside down the neat categories of oppressor and oppressed, free and enslaved, dominant and submissive. This violent pleasure simultaneously allows for an experience of the other, and an experience of the self through the eyes of the other. When it comes to rape, however, Nash brings none of this richness of textuality to the discussion. In an essay called "Pedagogies of Desire," Nash carefully traces the concept of affirmative consent, and how it has come to stand in for the vision of sex without violence. Nash emphasizes the intellectual and political value of being able to theorise sexual violence without letting go of the very real imbrication of sex and violence. However, in her work, sexual violence continues to remain separate from this imbrication. It's almost as if any textuality would take away from the problem of rape, whereas sexuality cannot be approached without a notion of textuality. She continues to speak of the need to teach sex differently, neither risk-free nor free of vulnerability. But what of rape? I am skeptical of being

able to do both: see the entanglement of sex and violence *and* keep sexual violence free of textuality/sexuality.

#### **IV: the psychosexual as negativity**

Feminist theory has not found productive the data about the internal worlds of those who rape, because we have assumed that psychosexual life is ultimately an interiorization of empirical conditions. Was he abused as a child? Was he taught to love? Was he coerced into toxic masculinity? These kinds of questions don't get us to the cause of rape, because everyone is coerced into toxic masculinity, everyone doesn't start raping others. I am proposing a different notion of the psychosexual. I am engaging the psychosexual as not a set of sociological data of one's childhood, but as one's unconscious psychic relationship to that which we can identify as sociological. Sexual pleasure - the kind you can't exhaustively describe in words it's so good - is not a product of sociological positions; it's a product of psychic positions. Obviously, we cannot psychoanalyze every rapist, we cannot even analyze ourselves. The psychosexual world of the rapist is not available to feminist theory except as a realm of pure speculation. It does not mean, though, that it does not exist. I propose that we pay attention to the pleasure of the rapist *not* as a cause of rape, but as a sign of the absence of a knowable cause. I suggest that we treat the psychosexual as an explanation of why we *cannot* fully explain rape and why we cannot end it. The psychic worlds of those who rape as a giant hole of nothing at the heart of feminist theory: *I can't tell you..*

Tell me, the analyst *does not* say, what this means. Tell me, the analyst says, what comes to mind. No dream has a singular, accurate, stable meaning; rather, a dream can be interpreted in multiple ways, and all of those interpretations can be true at once. A dream cannot be understood

literally, it has to be carefully interpreted. Freud argues that the interpretation of a dream can unfold in the space between the latent and manifest content of the dream. The manifest content is what the dreamer remembers having seen in the dream, and the latent content is that which is reconstructed of the unconscious wish that may have produced the dream. Cynthia Chase argues that Freud “describes the relationship between latent and manifest dream not as negation or reversal but as a radical indeterminacy: it can never be known for certain whether a given element is to be interpreted antithetically, literally, metonymically, symbolically, or by word-play” (996). This is where reading comes into play. A dream can be interpreted, not for its content, but for *the dreamer’s relationship* to this so-called content. And for this reason, anything that presents itself as related to or as the content of a dream can be sites that lead the analytic dialogue to an interpretive moment. Freud contends that it does not matter whether an association is organically or historically related to the dream-content. Just the fact that an association is made in the analytic context, can be considered a valuable resource to understand the significance of the dream, for it unconsciously leads us straight to the heart of the matter.

The radical indeterminacy determines the interpretation, not as positive content, but as an unconscious negativity that elicits something irrelevant, something of unspeakable value to the dreamer, the subject of the unconscious. The measure of the validity of the interpretation is not empirical accuracy, but in what it opens up for the subject of analysis. The resolution of unconscious representations does not result in a modification of reality as much it results in the installation of newer representations, that may or may not serve the subject better (Montrely 90). No interpretation can explain the subject, it can only describe it. Here, an infinite chain of mediation is at work. Language, memory, screen-memory, repression, construction, representation, transference, the rhythms of analysis, the analyst-analysand relationship, the

analyst's own associations, gasps, the work of listening *as* the subject of the unconscious. Note that these are not factors, but elements of mediation; they do not affect what opens as much as they give form to the opening. Here, there is no meta-position available. Anything that comes up becomes part of the text. Between the radical indeterminacy and the opening into infinity, the rhythms of the psychosexual.

These rhythms are not graspable by recourse to culture or sociology or history, because the psychic circumvents the sociological by means of the unpredictable paths of identification and relentlessly proliferating fantasy. Joan Copjec points out that Lacan was able to bring into focus Freud's radical claim that sex has no domain, neither culture, nor history, nor biology; sex is neither substance nor signification. Sexuality is that which exceeds all of these dimensions, but operates from within them, just as it is something much greater than oneself and yet becomes the most powerful site of apprehending oneself. The body, in this Lacanian mood, is not the medium of experiencing sexuality, but an obscure object that is the closest one can come to the experience of an other: in me, but more than me, the whole of me that can only be understood as a part of me.

In witnessing 2002, I found keys to my own psychic organization, my own family romance. The Hindu woman who offered me food and spoke proudly of her rapacious men, the Muslim women who were raped, the Hindu men who did the raping: they came to shatter - which is a kind of constituting too - my sense of place, belonging, home. I identified with them all, I experienced them all. They became representations of my unconscious representations; from here on, I could not tell a story or fall in love or eat lunch without recourse to 2002. Image of burnt body made my flesh real. The truth, so to speak, is that 2002 only crystallised what was

already nascent and available of my body unbeknownst to me. I say “my,” but the possessive adjective is empty without 2002. I offer the personal here, not as content, not as the particulars of a subject-formation, but as the site of a reading experience, as evidence of the psychosexual dimension of sexual violence. It does not matter what the witnessing unlocked; what matters is the fact of the unlocking.

Trauma is something which cannot be seen, says Shoshana Felman. Witnessing, for her, is the bedrock of feminist responsibility. Witnessing is not a revolutionary seeing of what is invisible, but a validation of the survivor’s horror that their pain cannot be seen, at least not through the conventional ways of seeing. Witnessing trauma is traumatic. What cannot be seen replicates itself in the body of the witness as a kernel of unsymbolizable libido stuck in the throat, or the belly, or the legs. *I cannot move, I cannot un-see what I could not see*. Felman brings to the fore the witness’s own unconscious material. The witness’s psychic activity, composed of their own fantasies, fears and associations animates the experience of seeing what cannot be seen. Felman calls this whole phenomenon *reading*. Reading is an encounter with one’s own unconscious, but in the context of another/an other. Witnessing *is* reading for Felman; it requires interpretation, it involves identification.

In Chapter 1, I show how the survivor testimonies of Gujarat 2002 make the reader/feminist experience/witness the delight of the rapist/rioters in extremely distressing ways. The extremeness of the violence of 2002 is perhaps the reason this transmission of pleasure is so powerful and clear. But this transmission is not exceptional. What we cannot access of the psychosexual of rape, we generate in our own body/text. We repeat what we cannot read. By making use of my own reading experience, I claim that wherever feminism truly encounters rape,

it registers, records and unwittingly transmits to the reader the violative pleasure of raping the other. This transmission of sexual pleasure - between rapist, feminist and reader - is textual and unconscious. I argue that sexual violence is sexual, and not because it involves thrusting and ejaculating, but because it involves unconscious pleasure that cannot be neutralised by feminism. In fact, feminism repeats and transmits it. This pleasure can be critically read, but not destroyed. While this insight radically limits feminism's capacity to end rape, it also makes it possible to directly engage the sexual nature of rape. If witnessing rape is cataclysmic, it is because rape touches the subject<sup>20</sup> as sex: destabilizing what one had until the moment perceived as the line between pleasure and aggression.

Psychoanalytic literary scholars like Shoshana Felman and Jacqueline Rose have shown how texts can be read through the clinical tools of engaging the unconscious: look for what slips through, listen for what is not said, what cannot be said, what will not be said, allow for a proliferation of associations, engage the play of tone and content. I insist, though, on the transmission of the pleasure of the rapist being *both* textual and unconscious. It is in our witnessing, our writing, our reading, our fighting that we bring the negativity of the psychosexual to the fore, and as much in and of the body, as on the page. Rape touches us, against our will. Tears, rage, screaming, wanting to burn everything down, passive aggression, aggressive aggression, not being able to write, not being able to sleep, nightmares, fantasies, hormonal imbalances, fear of fellow feminists saying you are worse than a rapist for calling yourself a feminist: via the feminist, I seek access to the subject of the unconscious that is ever-ready to cathect itself into scripts of aggressive pleasure-seeking<sup>21</sup>. The subject of the unconscious who enjoys always some form of raping and burning, others, itself, itself in others, the others inside.

I am not saying, then, that the Muslim woman figures as the breast/phallus for the Indian subcontinent; hungry for hunger. I am not saying that Bajrangi is a pervert. I am not saying my Hindu respondent refuses sexual difference. I am saying, instead, that it is the non-psychoanalytic interpretations of 2002, feminist responses that range from furious to sentimental to self-righteous that show us most clearly what is sexual about sexual violence. *They will never be ours*. It is the chain of textual mediation that feminism upholds that tells us that we are in the realm of the unconscious. Here, there is repetition, not signification. Each feminist text bears the consequences of this repetition differently, and yet, each text takes us in its own singular way, straight to the heart of the matter. Rape as sexual, not in cause, but in its effect on feminism. It is true, then: rape is a litmus test of severe proportions; red, or blue, what matters is that the paper turns, the paper burns. When we try and assign meaning to the turning – Halley says MacKinnon is violent, MacKinnon says lesbian sadomasochists are violent, lesbian sadomasochists say we really know what we are doing – we miss the point, even as we stage it. The point is that unconscious pleasure is not full, but empty. It figures as a negativity that hollows out whatever it touches, not because it is powerful and demonic, but because it simply repeats without content, but in the form of a representation. As such, the representation takes up space, but what it represents is the negativity of pleasure, *I can't tell you*, because there is nothing to tell.

For Alenka Zupančič, the task of analysis – tell me what comes to mind – is not a path of amassing meaning, but of rendering meaning useless. Freud looked for sexual meaning in every act, every word, not because everything is about sex, but because what appears as sex screens the unconscious at work. Working through the forms, the manifestations, the mediations, and the distortions of the screen, the abundant and inexhaustible meanings of every movement brings us to the place where the subject is most singular, most universal; the place where subjectivity

emerges as a mode of living the unliveable. Not fighting it, not mastering it, but almost inhabiting it, letting it inhabit what one thinks of as most one's own. In my reading of the relay of unconscious pleasure within feminist texts in response to rape, I see feminism's heroic effort to live the unliveable, to understand what cannot be understood, and I am moved by it.

The psychosexual, via psychoanalysis, is not an explanatory tool. Or perhaps, it is more accurate to say that if we use it only as an explanatory tool, we lose the negativity of the unconscious in such a deployment of psychoanalysis. And here's what is at stake in the negativity: the anguish, the rage, the incredible frustration of feminism: the more we change, the more we remain the same. The more feminist theory we have, the more violence proliferates. There is no end in sight. There is no relief in sight. There is not a single area of gendered, sexual violence where we have seen reduction of incidence or intensity. It is not that feminist explanations are inaccurate, and we need to get better at what we do. It is that we cannot explain it. Engaging the psychosexual as a precise formulation of what we cannot explain allows us to see something of the predicament of feminism: feminism makes real in its own text, in its own flesh something that cannot be represented otherwise. On the one hand, this repetition undermines any moral gap that we may want to uphold between the rapist and the feminist. On the other, this repetition keeps the real stake on the table and in circulation: the pleasure of the rapist, whether that pleasure is derived from feeling powerful and/or powerless; in circulation and available to be played with. The repetition implicates feminism in rapacious pleasure, even as it affirms its absolute commitment to understand rape, even if the cost is losing all sense of its own commitment. Our texts *stand in* for what cannot be explained. What we can do is keep reading our own representations of what is not available to be described and represented, and keep installing newer representations in its place.

It is in the radical feminist work of MacKinnon and Dworkin, that I see feminism encountering its own shattering limits most clearly. In their absolute insistence that the feminist is nothing like the rapist, we find the indistinguishability between pleasure and aggression most strikingly offered. In not having a theory of the psychosexual, their texts overflow with the psychosexual. Not only do MacKinnon and Dworkin show us the implications of being in touch with the sexual nature of rape, they also represent for me ways of living with it, having to live with an endless fight. MacKinnon and Dworkin are unique in that they are directly in touch with this despair of fighting sexuality, with this pleasure of fighting sexuality. That they end up prescribing remedies is not nearly as significant – which is what most people focus on – than the fact that their texts bear the consequences of a deathly identification with the rapist, the sadomasochist, the pornographic camera. They tell us what comes after 2002: a feminism that wrestles with rape by reckoning with itself.

My readings of 2002, MacKinnon and Dworkin stand separately in this dissertation except in this chapter. Part of it is pragmatic; it took such violent effort to extract the psychosexual out of each of these objects, that I could not also read them together. First, I had to read them as themselves. The chapters represent this first step. However, there is a narrative progression here. By not engaging the psychosexual, we foreclose inquiry into the pleasure of the rapist (as I show in the case of Gujarat 2002), we do not engage with feminism's own sadomasochist apprehension of this pleasure (as I will show in the case of MacKinnon) and perhaps most importantly, we are unable to explain why sexual violence does not end (as I will show in the text of Dworkin).

Every time I have to type or say or present the title of my dissertation, I have been afraid I will misplace the “end,” and it will read: On Not Being Able To Rape. *This* is what I mean by the subject of the unconscious. This whole dissertation is about the pleasure of the rapist, and yet my identification reveals itself through the fear of a slip. A slip that bears the signs of a deprivation, not triumph. The possibility alone of wanting such enjoyment is terrifying, in spite of my own encouragement of this emergence. Here is the subject of the unconscious, it cannot be engaged democratically. It is unwelcome, it is unwanted, its sighting is a violent experience; violent to whom, though? Violent to the one who enjoys in spite of itself; enjoyable in that it does not know *it knows* it violates itself. The truth is this dissertation was so difficult to write. It just would not end. The enjoyment. The path that leads to unconscious negativity is marked by moral negativity. Not immorality, not losing sight of the violence of rape, but a painful suspension of our certainties about our own morality. My hope against hope is that in this suspension, we learn what it means to fight rape without the guarantee of a distinctly separate enemy, what it means to conduct feminist work as subjects of the unconscious ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Rape has been foundational to the evolution of an autonomous women's movement in India. It was around the issue of sexual violence that women's activists found a foothold in their engagement with law, the emerging postcolonial state and the deep-set cultures of familial oppression. See, for example, Agnes; Agnihotri and Mazumdar; Baxi, et. al; Chakravarti; John.

Theoretically, sexual violence has largely been understood as a mode of silencing women and consolidating caste-patriarchies, especially for Dalit (Bansode; Brueck; Rao), Bahujan (Rao; Rowena; Kannabiran), Adivasi (Devi; Punwani), Muslim (Batool et. al; Kannabiran; Naqvi) and working class women (Kannabiran and Menon). More recent scholarship has engaged the silencing as not only oppressive and punitive, but constitutive of women's lives (Baxi; Kapur; Menon; Tharu).

The focus has been on understanding the socio-political function of rape (Chakravarti), analyzing its many different meanings for and effects on specific populations of women (Das; Oza), reforming and using the legal system (Agnes; Satish; Sen) and creating social awareness for rape-prevention. In all of this work, rape is considered sexual because of its relation to the genitals/body, and its confusion and imbrication with consensual sexual practices.

<sup>2</sup> In the US, feminist theory about sexual violence has developed in three main directions: intersectionality (Davis; Crenshaw; Musser), discourse analysis (Alcoff; Cahill; Hartman) and legal reform (Halley; MacKinnon; Nussbaum). The effort – across the board – has been to understand the experience and meanings of sexual violence for different populations of women in as much detail and complexity as possible.

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Though feminists do not agree on how sex/sexuality is constituted and inhabited, there is consensus that sexual violence disrupts the full development of sexual being and becoming (Berlant; Cornell; Nash; Spillers). Pleasure is where rape is not. I go through some of the debates about sex and rape in this chapter, and revisit them in specific relation to the work of MacKinnon and Dworkin in chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>3</sup> Many recent advances in feminist theory about sexual violence adopt a theoretical framework of social construction and rely directly or indirectly on Michel Foucault's critique of sexuality (Alcoff; Gavey; Hartman; Mardorossian). Ann Cahill, for example, makes use of Foucault's formulations of power to critique both Susan Brownmiller and Catharine MacKinnon's all-or-nothing worlds; for Brownmiller, rape is about power, not sex, and for MacKinnon – on Cahill's reading – sex is about power, power is about sex. For Cahill, rape must be theorized within a shifting, multiple, and complex set of discourses that make – and undo from within – the categories of woman, sex and body. Cahill is also critical of Foucault's claim that rape is an act of violence, not sexuality. Thus, she uses Foucauldian notions of constitution and construction against his own views on sexual violence. I work through some of these Foucauldian postulates and debates, as taken up by feminist theory in relation to the "sexual" in sexual violence, in the work of Tanika Sarkar, Manali Desai and Nivedita Menon later in this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> I discuss the framework of rape as violation in relation to 2002 in the work of Syeda Hameed, Farah Naqvi, Tanika Sarkar and Manali Desai in Chapter 1.

<sup>5</sup> See Gavey and Senn for a thorough review of psychological literature on the relation between sex and sexual violence; see also Herman; McKibbin, et. al.; Ward as examples of engaging the psychological in direct relation to the sociocultural.

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More literary and psychoanalytic takes on the survivors' experience, especially the work of Caruth on trauma, and Felman on the work of witnessing violence, offer the psychosexual as a distinct realm of experience that may or may not correspond to other dimensions of collective existence. I am interested in bringing these insights to a feminist understanding of the pleasure of the rapist.

<sup>6</sup> Emily Bazelon, in fact, has persuasively argued that the Sex Wars have returned in the context of sexual assault on university campuses in the US. On the other hand, Suzanna Danuta Walters believes that feminist theory has transcended the sex vs. rape framework. In the Introduction to the special issue of *Signs* devoted to revisiting the Barnard Conference, the "Sex Wars" and Carole Vance's *Pleasure and Danger* anthology, Walters claims that "[p]ornography and theorists like Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon come in for more derision than devotion among both feminist professors and their students. This may all be for the good, an indication that the better argument has triumphed" (4). Walters argues that it is no longer useful to conduct feminist inquiries about sexuality and violence through a mode of polarization. This language of war within feminism is something that contemporary feminist theory has already left behind, for the "only real war is against overweening male dominance" (4). Here, Walters practices what Janet Halley would term as "convergent feminism," where a whole world of diverse feminist interests are collapsed into an us vs. them stance. Ironically, then, Walters affirms the moral righteousness of the radical feminists, even as she claims to have risen above it.

<sup>7</sup> Even the scholarship that focuses on psychic, sexual subjectivity rather than sexual practices tends to think of s/m as a way of creating positive, political change for the subject. For example,

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in *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power and Masochism*, Amber Musser works through many different scenes of masochism, some of which make it truly difficult to mark any real distinction between an event of extreme violence and a (perverse) desire for masochism. However, Musser sees this indistinction itself as historical and cultural, as something that can be actively changed, not psychic and unconscious: “We might, then, ask how we might begin to shift frames of knowledge so that it is possible to think about black female masochism and produce an agential black female sexuality.” (180) While Musser recognizes the constitutive nature of masochism for the black subject in particular, both men and women (though differently), she ultimately sees masochism as something available to agential production: making art, reading, s/m practices (she discusses “race play”), theorizing from a different place, having sex in newer ways. I find MacKinnon and Dworkin startlingly psychoanalytic in their insistence that sadomasochism – the indistinction between aggressor and victim, the desire for hurting being the desire for hurting – is neither practice nor culture.

<sup>8</sup> MacKinnon’s description of the rhythm of the clicking camera recalls Freud’s ‘A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Disease’ (SE 14). In what Elissa Marder calls a “pseudo-clinical case” (2017: 56), Freud tells the story of a young woman who hears the clicking sound of a camera while making out with her lover. She concludes, like MacKinnon, that her lover has hired someone to take their photographs. Freud, however, posits that the sound is entirely imaginary. What she heard was the throbbing of her own clitoris, aroused not by the man she was with, but by a complex constellation of primal phantasy, unconscious desire for the mother and an unconscious identification with her lover. The voyeurism she alleged was the structure of her desire in which she got to see herself be taken like the mother would be by her, but also be seen by the mother as an object that was being had by someone else. This is exactly the kind of

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psychic ordinariness/mess that MacKinnon organizes into a rigid, fixed structure of submission and domination. MacKinnon would see Freud's conclusion as doubly violent just like the father, other man, husband and doctor: he claims that the woman was enjoying it, thus inscribing sexual violence as the content of sexuality.

Marder argues, on the other hand, that Freud's text has the potential to reconfigure his theory of sexual difference, based on castration. For Marder, this case is a Freudian counterpoint to Freud's own impoverished metapsychology of female sexuality:

“Freud's reading presupposes that the primal image that he asks us to see or to hear cannot be reduced simply to biological sexual arousal even if it is also that as well. One of the most interesting things about this case is that the clicking clitoris cannot be understood as a body part in any simple sense. Sexual arousal is an effect rather than a cause of the structure proposed here. Throughout Freud's writings the clitoris is a dangerous supplement, a figure for the first knob or knot on which the primal attachments are fixated, a transmitter of images, sounds, neither purely imagined nor experienced. Relic from a time before time, the clicking clitoris keeps time out of joint.” (365)

Fundamentally different conceptions of sexuality are at stake for MacKinnon and Marder's Freud. And yet, not unlike Marder's Freud – she argues he reproduces the primal phantasy of the mother's body in transmitting it as a photographic device himself – MacKinnon transmits the cold thrill of the voyeuristic, devouring, destructive camera/gaze herself: “...keeping time to the rhythm of your pain.” (4) It is *her* aggression that makes the aggression of the men available to be read and critiqued. I am interested in this dimension of the MacKinnonian text, which I explore more fully in Chapter 3.

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<sup>9</sup> In relation to sexual violence during the Partition of India and Pakistan, see Daiya; and Das. In relation to 2002 and other instances of violence against Muslim women in independent India, see Kannabiran; Khanna; and Naqvi.

<sup>10</sup> I examine this body of literature in Chapter 1; see 21-23.

<sup>11</sup> A strictly Lacanian analysis would see the Gujarat riots of 2002 as unbridled, and therefore horrifyingly destructive, *jouissance* of the drive rather than the limited *jouissance* obtained by means of desire. While desire is in the realm of the symbolic and is attached to an object – or eddies around it – drive brooks no subjective engagement. Drive breaks the subject, desire makes it.

I do not offer this interpretation myself because there is simply not enough data about the subjects at stake to speak of their drive satisfaction. Perhaps, a Lacanian perspective on group psychology can be useful here. In general, though, I am skeptical about using psychoanalysis to settle the textual meanings of an act or event. I use psychoanalysis in this dissertation as a set of reading questions, rather than a template of answers.

<sup>12</sup> I discuss the ethnographic work of Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, and the theoretical work of Zehra Mehdi and Sudhir Kakar in Chapter 1.

<sup>13</sup> In Chapter 3, I argue that MacKinnon's own text creates textual positions of feminist sadism and feminine masochism that the reader keeps shuttling between. This sadomasochist dynamic of identification undercuts MacKinnon's legal-political vision of ending the patriarchal world sadomasochism.

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<sup>14</sup> I have in mind the powerful documentaries of Anand Patwardhan on the rise of right-wing Hindu nationalism in the nineties in India, *Father, Son and Holy War*, and *Ram Ke Naam* [In the Name of God]. Bollywood films like *Firaaq* and *Kai Po Che* have also made available the psychic worlds of Hindu aggression to the viewer, without blurring the line between good and evil.

<sup>15</sup> Sandor Ferenczi laid out the concept of identification with the aggressor in his discussion of child abuse.

“These children feel physically and morally helpless, their personalities are not sufficiently consolidated in order to be able to protest, even if only in thought, for the overpowering force and authority of the adult makes them dumb and can rob them of their senses. *The same anxiety, however, if it reaches a certain maximum, compels them to subordinate themselves like automata to the will of the aggressor, to divine each one of his desires and to gratify these; completely oblivious of themselves they identify themselves with the aggressor.*” (227, emphasis in the original)

Further, “the weak and undeveloped personality reacts to sudden displeasure not by defence, but by anxiety-ridden identification and by introjection of the menacing person or aggressor” (230). He proposes that analysis should try and help the patient *get rid* of this identification in order to create conditions in which they can say: no. See Jay Frankel for a review of the development of this concept in psychoanalytic scholarship and beyond.

I propose that we *make use* of this identification to study the pleasure of the rapist in our own bodies. In the Afterword, I work through a memoir of incest and severe sexual violence that absolutely embodies such an identification with her aggressor, her father. While the instinct of

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most feminist readers has been to read such identification as evidence of the harm she bore, I read this identification as an opening into the psychic messiness of rape, and the traumatic absence of a stable meta-narrative.

<sup>16</sup> Sex-positive feminists have been severely unhappy about this polarization even as they reinforce another one: are you a real feminist if you don't care about women's sexual lives? Some of the classic texts of sex-positive feminism bring this aggressive response to the aggression of radical feminism to the fore; I have in mind the work of Carole Vance, Lisa Duggan, Nan Hunter and Gayle Rubin. More recent critiques of radical feminism's matriarchal-moral authority have come from Wendy Brown, Janet Halley and Laura Kipnis. Some of this work I discuss later in the chapter. The Sex Wars are also being re-read for the unlikely alliances between the positives and the negatives. Helen Hester has pointed out, for example, that in relation to pornography, both camps were deeply invested in redeeming human sexuality, whether it was through banning porn or watching it.

<sup>17</sup> More discussion of Dworkin's peculiarly timeless/ahistorical descriptions of "men" in Chapter 4.

<sup>18</sup> I revisit this criticism of MacKinnon in more detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> Queer theory is very aware of this problem of paranoid reading, taking after Eve Sedgwick's delineation of paranoid vs. reparative reading. However, Sedgwick's terminology does not quite capture Butler's reparative paranoia. Everything must come together, everything must be explained in one breath, everything must be political at the exact same time it is social, historical, discursive, psychic. Many have argued that reparative reading allows for a better handle on

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unexpected, aggressive, surprising, open-ended reading pleasures (Lauren Berlant, Heather Love, Ellis Hanson). My critique of Butler, though, is not that reparative reading would be more productive. My concern is that she does not take her own paranoia seriously. She refuses to concede that she is right that there is no Answer. Butler deflates the critical reach of paranoia/negativity (and reparation) by both constantly evoking the impossibility of theorizing Everything, and attempting to resolve it by constantly evoking the impossibility.

<sup>20</sup> The subject here being the feminist reader/witness. The victim-survivor can also occupy this position of witness, though I want to be clear that getting raped is not the same thing as witnessing it either first-hand or in text. Instead of collapsing them as one and the same, I want to mark a distinction between the trauma of rape, and the trauma of witnessing rape. At the end of my first chapter, I discuss how collapsing the two positions – one of survivor, and the other of witness – projects political assumptions on the survivor's experience. Though survival is readable through politics, it may not always be a political statement. In claiming that every victim is a feminist survivor, we may be organizing traumatic experience for them.

<sup>21</sup> According to Melanie Klein, aggression is a source of great pleasure for the infant. Wanting to ingest the mother, for example, so enjoyable, so much to eat, but also so much to destroy, eliminate threat of bad feelings, increase and engage only good feelings. Aggression is at once a mode of survival, and a mode of enjoyment that rapidly develops unconsciously. Wanting to eat the mother: is that not a rapacious fantasy? Who can say they haven't had it?

## Chapter 3

**The End Repeats: Toward an S/M Theory of MacKinnon**

“Participants typically agreed on an ethic of openness, honesty, and self-awareness... What brought women to these groups is difficult to distinguish from what happened once they were there.” (Catharine MacKinnon 85)

“They [Marxism and feminism] exist to argue, respectively, that the relations in which many work and few gain, in which some dominate and others are subordinated, in which some fuck and others get fucked and *everybody knows* what those words mean, are the prime moment of politics.” (MacKinnon 4, emphasis mine)

MacKinnon<sup>1</sup> backs her reader, you, into a corner. The corner becomes the universe, all the more infinite and vast in its finitude and closedness. The MacKinnonian camera is positioned exactly below that which is fucking you<sup>2</sup>. You recognise yourself as a heterosexual woman in that moment, because MacKinnon doesn't recognise *you* if you're anything else. Are you behind the camera? Are you being made to hold it? Are you floating above the scene, detached from your body? Are you there at all? Difficult to know what is happening. According to MacKinnon, though, *everybody knows*. Can you think a world that is not this universe of a corner? Is there an outside at all? You can't make out if you're inside and feeling good about your powerlessness, or if you're able to reflect on how thoroughly bad you feel. Is this pleasure? You are in the middle of something without knowing how you would like it to end, or proceed. You may not complain because MacKinnon is staging this whole scene for *your* benefit, so that you can finally *know* what the world is about. It is about sex<sup>3</sup>.

Catharine MacKinnon's radical feminist work on sexuality has been critiqued by queer, sex-positive feminists for her disinvestment in women's sexual pleasure, and her watertight positions on the meanings and effects of pornography<sup>4</sup>. She is also widely recognised and cited for her clear articulation of the constitutive relationship between everyday sexuality and sexual violence<sup>5</sup>. Almost everyone agrees that MacKinnon's political vision is more oriented towards ending *the* culture of sexual violence rather than cultivating cultures of good, consensual, pleasurable sex within what she sees as the absolutely violent conditions of capitalist patriarchy. Unlike most sexual violence feminisms that pay attention to both ends of this political vision - good sex *and* no rape - MacKinnon appears to be willing ultimately to sacrifice sex for feminism. In what follows, I offer a reading of *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*<sup>6</sup> to suggest that the MacKinnonian end of sexuality is, alas<sup>7</sup>, composed of endlessly more sex.

I consider select parts of the book to argue that MacKinnon ends up repeating what she claims to end: the sadomasochistic blur of sexuality and violence. In effect, she sets up an s/m scene of and for feminism. This is not a new claim<sup>8</sup>; however, I offer a psychoanalytic reading of the very switchy form of this sadomasochism and its relationship to the exquisite, self-flagellating reading pleasures of her text. Whether you agree with her or not, you cannot stop reading her, can you. The unique value of MacKinnon's feminism is to be located not in its foreclosures of sexual pleasure and consent, but in her anguish that pleasure persists in an oblique relation to anything that forecloses it. Her vehement critique of sexuality unfurls for you as a fervent s/m textuality. My reading takes this instance of repetition as *the* question of sexuality and violence that all sexual violence feminism finds itself encountering and crashing against, over and over. While MacKinnon would want to cast this as ideology - we reproduce that which has already destroyed us - I read this production of self-destructive pleasure as the

very terrain on which sexuality - and her s/m textuality - unfolds. I suggest that the MacKinnonian subject is not only ideologically compromised, but also internally riven, like you: s/he<sup>9</sup> wants what s/he does not want, s/he does not know what s/he wants, s/he does not want what s/he knows she wants, s/he does not know where pleasure begins and (if) pain ends: s/he is a psychoanalytic subject.

MacKinnon makes and unmakes her feminist subject/reader by activating an s/m economy of inflicting and enduring pain. If nothing else, this at least reveals the devastating *investment* in sex that lies at the heart of MacKinnon's politics. MacKinnon, I argue, does not reduce the sexual to fucking and subordination in the domain of reality, but in fact, explodes the scope of the sexual within feminist politics. The blurring of content and tone, reality and consciousness, feminine pain and feminist pleasure, is much more the stuff of sex in MacKinnon than has been recognised in feminist scholarship. This is not to say that her argument is flawed; on the contrary, the operations of her textuality only intensify the stakes, thereby implicating feminism right alongside patriarchal cultures in the deadly life of pleasure. Complex configurations of forceful desire proliferate within all feminisms that claim to want to end sexual violence. MacKinnon, however, allows her own political desire to unfold *as* a play of violence. She presents us with the truth of sexuality, but only as it exists in a scene: complete, powerful and imbued with real desire, but only as long as the scene lasts – not that it ever ends.

### Setting up a Scene: What's s/m got to do with the Revolution

“Sexuality is not confined to that which is done as pleasure in bed or as an ostensible reproductive act; it does not refer exclusively to genital contact or arousal or sensation, or narrowly to sex-desire or libido or eros. Sexuality is conceived as a far broader social phenomenon, as nothing less than *the dynamic of sex* as social hierarchy, its pleasure the experience of power in its gendered form.” (MacKinnon xiii, emphasis mine)

“Is women’s sexuality its absence?” (MacKinnon 118)

In *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, MacKinnon argues that sexuality is violent - femininity is essentially masochistic and masculinity is essentially sadistic - and that this constitutive overlap is both the result and the basis of patriarchy. It is not biological sex that produces gender. For MacKinnon, the feminine and the masculine positions of power in sexuality – you are a man if you dominate/fuck, you are a woman if you submit/are fucked - inaugurates the irredeemably hierarchical socio-cultural codes of gender<sup>10</sup>. Femininity is constituted in and through powerlessness. The eroticisation of masculine domination is sex. This eroticisation is deadly, for it makes women (and men) mistake rape for sex, domination for love. As such, there is no field of power that is not eroticised when it comes to the relations between men and women. MacKinnon uses the term “fucking” to elide the distinction between sex and rape, love and violation (251). In this top-down structure of power, pleasure is not unreal, but it is ideological. This means that for anyone, especially women, to feel pleasure is to be compromised, or entirely given over to the terms of the ruling class. The more women feel good about sex, the more complicit they are in sexual hierarchies. According to MacKinnon, femininity is pure masochism, and *that* is bad for women. The social and the sexual are so

seamlessly sutured that women simply reproduce the same power equations in the workplace, in the market, in the bedroom, with their children, amongst themselves, even in their own heads, even if they happen to be lesbians. Feminism, for MacKinnon, is revolutionary because it is able to engage the very terms on which sexuality is propped up, and this engagement in itself is disruptive of the near total metaphysical perfection of the sexual system. It is the task of feminist politics to put an end to this crucial alliance between sex and violence, even if it means putting an end to sex as we know it. MacKinnon takes the structuralism of her account to its logical extreme in her discussion of law: injury to one woman is injury to all women, it is possible to know in advance what will constitute this structural harm to women, and adjudication is possible when it comes to violence against women. On the one hand, heterosexuality renders women completely powerless; on the other, legal reform will bring them to serious power.

MacKinnon has been critiqued for both her articulation of the problem – sexuality – and the proposed solution – feminist jurisprudence. In between is the process of consciousness-raising, which I will come back to in the next section. For now, I want to focus on the *dynamic* between feminine powerlessness to feminist powerfulness. According to Wendy Brown, this is the distinctiveness of the “rhetorical structure” of MacKinnon’s work (79). In Brown’s view, MacKinnon channels a late modern anxiety and political despair through her “theoretical closures and political foreclosures” (91). Brown argues that MacKinnon incites “libidinal excitation” and taps and reworks “pornographic guilt” (91), only to “manipulate” (95) her readers into settling for a conservatism about pornography and sexuality without changing anything about them. In effect, MacKinnon creates a picture that is historically inaccurate, politically useless, and textually irresponsible for it rehearses and exploits “a powerful underground (pornographic) code of gender and sexuality” (Brown 91) that it claims to

denounce. The powerlessness, says Brown, is all laid out only so that MacKinnon can rally her readers towards a “solution” that does not even begin to address the problem that MacKinnon herself posits. Brown argues that MacKinnon suspends “us” “in a complex pornographic experience in which MacKinnon is both purveyor and object of desire and her analysis is proffered as substitute for the sex she abuses us for wanting” (91).

Brown’s reading raises several questions for me. Is the movement between femininity and feminism a one-time event in the MacKinnonian text? Does the reader start with misery, and get manipulated into feeling powerful? Does s/he begin with nothing/patriarchy and end with everything/something/law? What does it mean for MacKinnon to be both purveyor and object? Though Brown presents this “both”-ness as a severely controlled environment for readers, I am struck by the possibilities of identificatory movements that this may open up for you. In her discussion of Freud’s case study of a patient he calls Dora, Parveen Adams argues that it is *not* clear if Dora identifies only with her father, and therefore with masculinity. Adams calls attention to the constant movement of Dora’s positions in fantasy and in dreams: “[S]he oscillates between a masculine and a feminine position” (13)<sup>11</sup>. Adams reminds her readers that for Freud, “a sadist is always also a masochist,” an exhibitionist is also a voyeur (13)<sup>12</sup>. Drawing on Adams’s work, Lalitha Gopalan analyses a number of Indian films of the eighties and nineties in which women protagonists avenge sexual violence by castrating or mutilating or brutally killing their rapists. Gopalan argues that the identification structures of these cinematic texts allow the spectator to swing from masochistic viewing positions to sadistic viewing positions and back and back, hence the term, sadomasochism. In Gopalan’s complex and layered reading of these films, it is this constant sadomasochistic movement in viewing positions that produces

the cinematic pleasures of these films (42-45). I use the term “sodomasochism” to characterise the reading pleasures of MacKinnon in a similar way.

Just as MacKinnon wants to preserve masculinity and femininity as altogether separate ways of being in the world, many readers of MacKinnon<sup>13</sup> posit powerlessness and powerfulness as two entirely different textual positions. This separation, however, holds up neither in the (psychic) world nor in the MacKinnonian text. Powerlessness is not where it all begins in MacKinnon, and power is certainly not where anything ends. There is neither a beginning nor an end in sight. There is, on the contrary, a constant shuttling, a switching between positions of powerlessness and powerfulness. Power itself is not available in any position. What you, as a reader, have access to is either a lack or an excess. Or both.<sup>14</sup> If MacKinnon is both purveyor and object, the reader is both object and purveyor, feminine and feminist too. Or neither.<sup>15</sup> What’s more, you keep oscillating, for the suspension is pendular. It is this experience of switching from a masochistic position to a sadistic one, and back, and back, which becomes the formal, dynamic structure of your participation in the text. It is because of this constant movement in reading positions that the reader is implicated in the movement of power and pleasure of the text; no reader can claim innocence of, or complete mastery over this dynamic<sup>16</sup>.

Almost every paragraph of the book consistently articulates what it considers to be the impossibility of women’s sexuality: “Top-down relations feel sexual” (147). “[W]omen notice that sexual harassment looks a great deal like ordinary heterosexual initiation under conditions of gender inequality” (112). “The moment women ‘have’ it – ‘have sex’ in the dual gender/sexuality sense - it is lost as theirs. To have it is to have it taken away” (172-73). Several readers, most notably Brown and Janet Halley (57), have persuasively argued that MacKinnon’s

insistence on women's powerlessness installs injury as the essence of femininity. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that MacKinnon makes this "injury" available for circulation between text and reader. You're injured; here, revolution; so, injured?; REVOLUTION; so, so injured; "Women's situation offers no outside to stand on or gaze at, no inside to escape to, too much urgency to wait, no place else to go, and nothing to use but the twisted tools that have been shoved down our throats. There is no Archimedean point-or, men are their own Archimedean point, which makes it not very Archimedean. If feminism is revolutionary, this is why" (MacKinnon 116-17).

Feminist jurisprudence is certainly offered as a way out by MacKinnon, but in itself, legal reform functions like a part of the same impossible equation between constitution and liberation. "Can such a state be made to serve the interests of those upon whose powerlessness its power is erected?" (MacKinnon 161). If the state is "male," how can it speak for women? MacKinnon issues recurrent warnings that the state can never be the outside to women's oppression and sexual violence. For Halley, this is an internal contradiction that undermines MacKinnon's radical critique of sexuality (41-58). This contradiction, though, could also be read as a fantastic and non-logical dimension of the text. On the one hand, MacKinnon thinks that being inside is a trap, and having proof of an outside could mean that you may be able to get out. On the other, you, the woman who seeks consciousness<sup>17</sup>, the activist who has emerged out of the consciousness-raising effort<sup>18</sup>, and the theorist<sup>19</sup>, everyone is inside. Reality is inside consciousness, which is inside reality<sup>20</sup>. Both Drucilla Cornell (128) and Brown (91) refer to this reading experience of being inside a text that offers its readers both the hope of a way out and the dreadful horror of there being no outside, but neither accounts for the intense engagement that this doubleness produces.

Law, especially in the form of the state, can, of course, be interpreted as the sign of an outside that MacKinnon channels as a way out. However, for MacKinnon, all manifestations of the socio-political world are simply equivalent at the level of form: literature, cinema, sexual relationships, law, politics, are all representations of sexuality. They may not represent sexuality in the same way, they may have very differing purchases on the socio-political world, but they all have the same *function* in MacKinnon's textual universe. The law is not special;<sup>21</sup> it is not liberatory, just as cinema or literature cannot be. The law is a fantasy of the way out. Law is the projection of an outside on the screen that is the closed door of this text. *This* is law's work in the dynamic of sex in MacKinnon's s/m textuality. Thus, the political rallying for feminist jurisprudence does not disrupt feminine powerlessness, but provides an anchoring point for the switch to feminist powerfulness. Against this backdrop of the movement of power and pain, and the dynamic of sex, it is not consciousness that needs to be raised, but reality.

### **(If) You Don't Know What You Know: Reality-Raising and Consciousness**

“Where does consciousness come from?” (MacKinnon 85)

“[F]eminist theory probes hidden meanings in ordinariness and proceeds *as if* the truth of women's condition is accessible to women's collective inquiry” (MacKinnon 39, my emphasis)

In MacKinnon's textual universe, the only way for women to fight their own constitution as women, is to uncover, bit by bit, the itinerary and the mass nature of their production. Accessing each other's truths as structural, rather than individual, will allow women to apprehend their own roles in the heterosexual system. Women will come into consciousness of

their selves; neither the self nor the consciousness precedes this moment of communal confrontation. Though MacKinnon often presents these claims as undeniable facts, she is decidedly skeptical of objectivity<sup>22</sup>. One of her quarrels with Marxism is that its focus on the real is seriously obfuscatory on the question of sexuality. It is Marxism, according to MacKinnon, that does not let women realise that there is a fundamental alliance between “the parasite of a parasite,” that is, the bourgeois woman, and “the slave of a slave,” that is, the proletarian woman (9). As such, what a particular theory or a structure assumes as the ‘real’ is often a mechanism of maintaining the status quo. MacKinnon doesn’t reject this mode of politics; she embraces it to a point of implosion. In the introduction to *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, for example, MacKinnon describes her attempt as “epic theory” her attempt to provide “a symbolic picture of an ordered whole” that is “systematically deranged” (x). She presents *her* real as the domain of pervasive sexual violence, of “rape, battery, sexual harassment, sexual abuse of children, prostitution and pornography” (127). There is almost too much of *this* reality in MacKinnon’s text. She undoes her own near constant usage of the verb “is” by insisting that aperspectivalism is anything but the route to objective truth. Reality is an epistemological difficulty for her feminism.

In most of her theoretical work, MacKinnon is engaged with sexual politics at the level of epistemology (ix): how do we know what we know about sex, how do we know this is pleasure, or pain, how do we know this is rape, how do we separate consent from a patriarchal understanding of feminine sexuality, if at all? Even as MacKinnon answers all of her own questions, she maintains that there is no neutral place from which one can gather data and come at proper knowledge; consciousness is as ideologically compromised as reality. More, consciousness is as painful as reality. She argues persuasively that consciousness raising is not

about the discovery of a real “real,” but about the making of something new, about a different use of the same tools that make women women<sup>23</sup>. Consciousness raising is not a fact-finding mission, but a full-fledged epistemological undertaking with no guarantees.

It is nearly impossible, after all of these critiques of realism, to take MacKinnon’s own enunciations of the real as literal descriptions of the world at the level of the text<sup>24</sup>. Her text stages the real as a question of politics, not of empirically verifiable truths. Male power, she says, is as much a myth as it is real (100). The staging of that which is deemed to be real, and the realness of the staging, come together to create a dizzying circuit that is fundamental to the s/m textuality of *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*. These gestures establish MacKinnon’s reality as a production of her own complex textual universe. MacKinnon doesn’t simply swap the content of what gets to count as real, she asks us to think about what the real counts for in our politics. For my reading, the important question is not what is true in the reality that MacKinnon posits, but if true, what is the nature of “if” in MacKinnon’s feminism? MacKinnon makes it possible to read “is” and “if” together not for the sake of truth, but for the sake of politics.

MacKinnon recognises the contingent nature of theoretical formulations, only to stake *everything* on a particular theoretical formulation. Consequently, the (masochistic) tone of this text is, *do or die*. She is totally committed to the scene, to the interests of women. There is no escape valve of contingency, or humility; there is no admission of the possibility of being wrong. This is why it is so hard to resist the spectacle of the text, regardless of whether one agrees with the content of these so-called interests of (heterosexual) women. There’s no cultural feminist ethic here of convincing the reader that the text is right. There’s no liberal feminist conviction here that there may be many truths. There’s only the authoritative institution of a universe, a tight

political economy of gestures and images, a complex set of stakes, and the sustained, delicious, longed-for, calls to action. MacKinnon denies all truth except the force of this political desire, all affect except the feminist anguish of being unable to distinguish between rape and sex, and all sexual fantasies except the heady fantasy of rising to total feminist power from utter powerlessness in capitalist patriarchies *and* back, and around, and if.

MacKinnon honours both the epistemological difficulty and the political necessity of feminism: she asserts that we do not - may never - know if what we know is knowledge, *and* she insists we work towards true knowledge, for there is nothing else to do<sup>25</sup>. MacKinnon maintains simultaneously the desire implicated in reality, and the reality of desire; she brings them into contact with each other; the distinctions blur. On the one hand, you get a political program, the desire for a new reality, as a response to the terrible reality of the desire for femininity/masochism; on the other, you get an anguish, unassimilable to the political program, the recognition that the feminist and the feminine are inextricably implicated in the reality that you want to change<sup>26</sup>. There is an atmosphere of indistinguishability in the text: between consciousness and reality, pain and pleasure, sexuality and violence. MacKinnon wants neither: neither objectivity nor subjectivity, neither femininity nor domination, neither sexuality nor violence. *She wants both*. The sadomasochism, thus, transacts “both” in every form. Caught not only between feminine powerlessness and feminist powerfulness, the reader switches between every dualism posited in the text: “subject and object, person and thing, dominant and subordinate, “fuckor and fuckee”” (Brown 88).

Feminine powerlessness and feminist powerfulness have the same driving force: anguish. However, the other side of anguish is not pleasure. The chapter called “Sexuality,” for example,

is all about sexual violence. This does not (only) mean that sexuality is inseparable and indistinguishable from sexual violence. Something unbearable - MacKinnon circumscribes this as sexual violence - drives feminism *and* sexuality, but their pleasures do not neutralise the anguish that precedes, and exceeds, them. Something does not add up. Perhaps the self-abnegating intensity of MacKinnon's knowingness is a powerful measure of what cannot be known: of sex, of violence, of feminism, of reality, of consciousness, of her own textuality<sup>27</sup>. Unlike most of her readers, I think that there is fundamental *unknowingness* at the heart of MacKinnon's feminism; there is suspension, oscillation, a dynamic and you don't know where you are.

### **Have Feminism, Not/Which Is/Which Can't Be/Without Sex**

“The battery cycle accords with the rhythms of heterosexual sex. The rhythm of lesbian sadomasochism is the same.” (MacKinnon 178)

“A minute-by-minute moving picture is created of women *becoming, refusing, sustaining* their condition.” (MacKinnon 89, emphasis mine)

While tracking a number of surprising resonances between MacKinnon and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Cornell points out that MacKinnon does not write in psychoanalytic terms: “MacKinnon completely externalizes the power of desire because she pays no attention to the unconscious. As a result, her analysis of feminine desire, and desire more generally, is overly simplistic. Desire, for MacKinnon, is expressed by women in one way, because male power makes it so. Certainly, if psychoanalytic theory has taught us anything, it has taught us that the relationship between desire and politics is extremely complicated and, indeed, much more

complicated than MacKinnon herself would have it” (134). While this is all true<sup>28</sup>, MacKinnon is unexpectedly more productive through a psychoanalytic *reading*. For if the MacKinnonian subject is staked out in her own annihilation and in deep anguish about her liberation, this is territory that is almost unreadable outside of psychoanalysis. Instead of reading MacKinnon only literally, why not affirm her affirmations, blindly follow her blind-folded arguments, read seriously her very serious pronouncements, enter her reality through the closed door<sup>29</sup>? Neither ironic irreverence, nor undying devotion, this reading aspires to be both.

According to MacKinnon, masochism is so bad that there is no option for feminism but to invoke urgent, reparative measures in the form of legal redressal. And yet, MacKinnon’s descriptions of masochism invoke a response in the very register of the sexual that she seeks to destroy. She asks, “Why is hierarchy sexy?” (136). She scoffs at “the excitement at reduction of a person to a thing” (130). She declares with as much contempt as is textually possible: “Man fucks woman; subject verb object” (124). How impossible to not read this sex-negative feminism as a defiant reproduction of the sexual. How impossible to not read this militant feminism as a fantasy of power, forced, in spite of itself, to contend with masochism as a condition of experiencing the social. How impossible to not admit shamefully that the sex ed teacher may have only ended up producing a sex fantasy *of* prohibition, chastity, and modesty. MacKinnon argues that “male sexual desire is...simultaneously created and serviced, never satisfied once and for all, while male force is romanticized, even sacralized, potentiated and naturalized, by being submerged into sex itself” (137). What, however, of the desire that MacKinnon’s own text creates and services, never satisfied with itself or with its heterosexually feminine reader? You are wrong, masochism is bad, you’re so bad, masochism is so wrong, it goes on and on,

MacKinnon does, thereby elevating *and* reducing her own feminism to an utterly delightful single-mindedness.

For Brown, this is one of the fundamental problems with MacKinnon: the reader cannot help but be exploited and activated sexually by MacKinnon's rehearsal of the "code" (91) she herself claims to critique. Brown's explicitly stated mission is to figure out why MacKinnon is successful, why "students" (91) hold on to her analysis in spite of its weaknesses. But how is this characterization of the reader any different from MacKinnon's lament that women want what they should not want? MacKinnon is relentlessly critical of women who seem to want to maintain the status quo of patriarchy at home and in the workplace and in the parliament and in their bedrooms. Why, cries MacKinnon, do these women want to harm themselves to the point of annihilation? Unwittingly, perhaps, Brown echoes MacKinnon's outraged bewilderment: why do you want it when it is so bad for you? I believe that both MacKinnon and Brown are onto something crucial: the subject/reader may have a complex relationship to that which is deemed to be harmful, painful, or simply not politically useful<sup>30</sup>.

For MacKinnon, the axes of pleasure and politics seem to be in an oblique relation. What feels good is what needs to be disrupted by politics so that we can end the oppression and the subordination of women. MacKinnon wants to align this oblique relation; she wants politics to guide your experience of pleasure. For example, it is not enough to say that lesbian sadomasochists engage in s/m sexuality because they like it; MacKinnon wants you to explain how you can possibly justify engaging in violence - the forceful sex that women are taught to want - by citing pleasure. I want - if only temporarily - to wrest these axes apart and argue for a pleasure that is not only politically harmful, but pleasurable *because* it cannot be aligned with a

political program. Such a pleasure may generate its own politics<sup>31</sup>, but MacKinnon forecloses this possibility altogether, by fantasizing an s/m scene about the end of masochistic fantasies. Surprisingly, MacKinnon's critics engage in a somewhat parallel exercise when they read her only to ask if and how she is useful to feminism. This insistence on political utility forecloses the very possibility of a reading pleasure that does not - and cannot - contribute to politics<sup>32</sup>. In this foreclosure, many critics of MacKinnon may inadvertently be allied with her in her anguish that pleasure persists, that it may be politically harmful, and that that's probably why one wants it.

MacKinnon's feminism, like any other politics of sexuality, is forced to contend with the specter of becoming a part of the very scene of sexuality it critiques. In my reading, the sadomasochism of her textuality does not consist in MacKinnon bullying the reader to give up on feminine powerlessness and embrace feminist power, but in the doubling of pleasure: inhabiting both sides of power-ness in an endless loop. This is probably why most readers of MacKinnon report intense engagements with the text, whether they are laudatory or critical. Thus, it is not enough to say that MacKinnon is pornographic, or that she "fucks her audiences" (Cornell, quoted in Brown 91), for these assessments do not account for the depth of your reading experience<sup>33</sup>. The s/m textuality of MacKinnon undoes its own radical feminist critique of sexuality by amplifying and aggravating pleasure in the name of ending it. MacKinnon engages the terms of power not outside of sex, but as sex, continues to name violence as violence, but also delivers it as an experience of masochism (which is also a version of sadism).

That MacKinnon addresses herself mostly to heterosexual women only augments your already considerable painful pleasure. As MacKinnon's reader, you have to *play* at "becoming, refusing, sustaining" (89) the heterosexually feminine reader that you are not, and cannot be. Her

heterosexism has you slightly giddy, for it means that she can be read only if you are willing to perform the role of a heterosexual woman who would engage in a play of power and pain with her. It turns out that *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* is quintessentially - wait for it - a lesbian s/m text! Heterosexuality as role-play is available to people of all sexualities, of course, but it may be particularly violent and/or/but meaningful and/or/but pleasurable for a lesbian sadomasochist. I am arguing that the MacKinnonian text may be special to you in a similar way, not in spite of its heterosexism, but *because* of it. You have to admit, then, that if there's a sadist (which is also a kind of masochist) in the text, it's you, reader, it's also you.

I want to stay with MacKinnon's contentions that sexual pleasure is disturbingly proximate to the pleasure of committing violence, and that the question of sexual violence often takes away from the pervasiveness of violence in the everyday of the sexual<sup>34</sup>. This is a "powerless" political position to be in, and yet, MacKinnon inspires, in spite of herself, taking one's submission to its extreme; not to accept that law is a way out, not to accept that consciousness is a way out, but to see this very corner of a universe as a place made within law and within consciousness. An s/m scene, as opposed to a scene of rape, is always legally instituted *between* the participants, even when one does not know why one does it, or where it would lead; verbal or unspoken, it is an evolving contract. The scene stages law and consciousness as much as it stages wishes and fantasies, without necessarily resolving or bypassing the political difficulty of wanting to hurt and be hurt in sex. The scene, instead, allows for a pleasurable, but perhaps politically useless, experience of this difficulty by repeating<sup>35</sup> it. It is in this impossible psychic space between acting out a fantasy and believing it in reality, between hurting and hurting, that MacKinnon helps you experience and stay with the most unbearable of truth possibilities: that sex may never be able to offer pleasure that is not also

some kind of violence. MacKinnon's s/m practices allow us to appreciate the full horror of this predicament: not that of (heterosexual or lesbian and/or sadomasochistic) women, but of feminism.

A "pornographic" feminism against pornography, the invention of a lesbian s/m textuality to critique lesbian sadomasochism, a political call to arms against violent pleasures in the affective register of a crime of passion: how can you be indifferent to the devastating romance of MacKinnon's tribute to the entanglement of feminism and sexuality? If Brown is right, if MacKinnon does indeed offer up feminism for the sex you shouldn't want, her feminism is simply the sublimated form of sexuality. *Feminism is sex too*, MacKinnon wants you (not) to know. And therefore, feminism is subject to the same questions, the same critiques, the same unravelling that MacKinnon administers to sexuality: what feels good and bad and why do you still want it and why can't you not want it and how should you want what you can't yet want?

MacKinnon, teaches us, in spite of herself, to view sexual violence as that which can perhaps be read through, but *not* resolved by, feminist politics. The best feminism can possibly do - and must continue doing à la MacKinnon - is to stage and repeat the very *real* violence of sexuality: the rape fantasies, the abusive situation you just could not bear to leave, the sex that felt like rape, the rape that felt like some kind of sex, the awful delights, the sighs of despair, the useless pain, all the wrong words, all the impossible pleasures, the lovely fantasy of peaceful, benign, democratic love that you did not get to live out, and never will, and not for lack of trying. Feminisms that disavow this insidious and self-destructive entanglement with sexuality, feminisms that wish to purge either the world of sex, or sexuality of violence, are having the

same (bad) dream; it can't be done. We have on our hands a very compromising situation, for MacKinnon is with you in the corner, reader; she has been there all along.

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<sup>1</sup> By 'MacKinnon,' I mean the text of *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, not the woman, or the lawyer, or the activist.

<sup>2</sup> This image was inspired by Lalitha Gopalan's discussion of women avenging sexual violence in Indian cinema of the eighties and nineties.

<sup>3</sup> MacKinnon is mostly engaged with heterosexuality in her theoretical and legal work, though she often refers to it as "sexuality". When confronted with the question of gay or lesbian or any other kind of sexuality, MacKinnon has been known to subject them to the logic of heterosexuality. Janet Halley has powerfully demonstrated the homophobia and misogyny of such a stance in her analysis of a US Supreme Court case, *Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Services* (1998) (54-57, 290-303).

Adrienne Rich, on the other hand, finds MacKinnon productive for anti-homophobic work because she helps apprehend "the nature and extent of heterosexual pressures" (643).

For the purposes of this chapter, I take it for granted that MacKinnon's descriptions of heterosexuality have something to contribute to descriptions of sexuality in general. While the essentialism and the inaccurate generalizations in her work have been very usefully critiqued, I adopt a universalizing approach (Sedgwick 3) here: I argue that the heterosexuality of and in her

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formulations has been sexuality all along. Leo Bersani best exemplifies this approach to MacKinnon's work for this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Adams; Brown; Butler; Cornell; Franke; Halley; Marasco; Rubin; and Walters for their insightful and critical readings of MacKinnon.

<sup>5</sup> This is something that the contemporary #MeToo movement is also very invested in navigating and theorizing.

<sup>6</sup> Published in 1989, this book runs through the many themes and questions that MacKinnon addressed in her theoretical, legal and activist work over a period of two decades. As such, it is an uneven text. This chapter does not claim to account for the multiple, sometimes conflicting, ideas in the book; however, the fact that this text is not a consistent, cohesive, ordered whole contributes to, rather than undermining, my reading.

All the page citations of MacKinnon in the body of the chapter, as well as the notes, refer to *Toward the Feminist Theory of the State*.

<sup>7</sup> The "big secret about sex," according to Leo Bersani, is that "most people don't like it" (197).

<sup>8</sup> Wendy Brown argues that MacKinnon's descriptions of domination and submission fold back into her own style of writing (90). Drucilla Cornell points out, "In MacKinnon's world of 'fuckees' and 'fuckors,' an obviously heterosexual social reality, the only possible alternative to being a 'fuckee' is to be a 'fuckor.' The sado-masochistic system of gender identity is, as a result, confirmed at the same time that it is supposedly being rejected" (132).

Parveen Adams and Mark Cousins, in their analysis of MacKinnon's *Only Words*, claim that MacKinnon's text is sadistic and the reader is in the position of masochistic violation (63).

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Others, like Halley (363) and Linda Williams (18), cite sadomasochistic sexuality and a complex understanding of masochistic pleasure as the counterpoint to MacKinnon's analysis of sexuality. Adams even argues that lesbian sadomasochistic practices are, in fact, a disruption of sexuality in general and of heterosexuality in particular (27–48).

<sup>9</sup> I use "s/he" to emphasize the role-play quality of the gender of MacKinnon's subject/reader. It does not matter who you are - or who you would like to be - as long as you can occupy the position of a heterosexual woman to unlock the textual movements of her argument. I offer more evidence of this textual capacity for role-play in the beginning of the next section.

<sup>10</sup> For MacKinnon, in fact, it is sexuality that is the linchpin of gender inequality" (113). She argues that sexuality is a "form of power," and that it is gender that embodies this power, "not the reverse" (113).

<sup>11</sup> Surprisingly, the chapters on Freud's Dora and a critique of MacKinnon (see note 8) are part of the same book by Parveen Adams.

<sup>12</sup> In 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes,' Freud argues that one of the vicissitudes that instincts undergo is a reversal into the opposite. He offers sadism-masochism and scopophilia-exhibitionism as examples of such a reversal in which the *aims* of the instincts are affected: "The active aim (to torture, to look at) is replaced by the passive aim (to be tortured, to be looked at)" (127). Further, "The enjoyment of pain would thus be an aim which was originally masochistic, but which can only become an instinctual aim in someone who was originally sadistic" (129).

<sup>13</sup> See, in particular, Brown; and Cornell.

<sup>14</sup> MacKinnon uses the term *power* in a non-Foucauldian sense. Men, the state, pornography are

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all exceedingly, unfailingly powerful; women and porn actors are unfailingly and utterly powerless--either surplus or lack on each side.

<sup>15</sup> Though Adams cites the oscillation of Dora's identification as evidence of her wanting to be in the desiring positions of both man and woman, Rose points out that this oscillation also signals the impossibility of being either: "This can be referred directly back to the case of Dora, woman as object and subject of desire - the impossibility of either position, for if object of desire then whose desire, and if subject of desire then its own impossibility, the impossibility of subject and desire (the one implying the fading of the other)" (47)

<sup>16</sup> As Shoshana Felman says about the controversy after the publication of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*: "[W]e are forced to participate in the scandal...the reader's innocence cannot remain intact; there is no such thing as an innocent reader of this text. In other words, the scandal is not simply *in* the text, it resides in *our relation to the text*, in the text's *effect on us*, its readers; what is outrageous in the text is not simply that *of which* the text is speaking, but that which makes it speak *to us*" (144).

<sup>17</sup> MacKinnon plays with the play-acting nature of political action: "Women can act because they have been acting all along" (102).

<sup>18</sup> MacKinnon challenges the distinction between theorizing and consciousness raising by arguing that neither allows for an escape from reality: "In contrast to science, consciousness raising does not devalue the roots of social experience as it uncovers them, nor does it set up rules for certainty. It allows a *critical embrace* of who one has been made by society rather than demanding a removal of all that one is before one can understand one's situation.[. . .]It also makes everyone a theorist" (102, my emphasis).

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<sup>19</sup> MacKinnon argues for the immanence of theorizing in relation to the “inside” of women’s oppression: “This posture places the theorist inside the world and the work, not above or outside them--which, to be frank, is where the theorist has been all along” (xvi).

<sup>20</sup> MacKinnon’s consciousness seeks to be conscious of itself, her reality seeks to be real to itself: “The pursuit of the truth of women’s reality is the process of consciousness; the life situation of consciousness, its determination articulated in the minutiae of everyday existence, is what feminist consciousness seeks to be conscious of” (39).

<sup>21</sup> This is not to deny that MacKinnon’s legal career and her antipornography feminism, in particular, have not made use of law as precisely a way out of the so-called reality of women’s subordination. My point is that law functions differently in her *s/m* textuality.

<sup>22</sup> Knowledge is literary and relational: “An epistemology is *a story* of a relation between knower and known” (MacKinnon 96, my emphasis).

<sup>23</sup> Consider this passionate articulation of the convoluted, almost dead-ended nature of creating a new world for women:

Feminism affirms women's point of view, in large part, by revealing, criticizing, and explaining its impossibility. This is not a dialectical paradox. It is a methodological expression of women’s situation, in which the struggle for consciousness is a struggle for world: for a sexuality, a history, a culture, a community, a form of power, an experience of the sacred. If women had consciousness or world, sex inequality would be harmless, or all women would be feminist. Yet women have something of both, or there would be no such thing as feminism. Why can women know that this--life as we have known it--is not

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all, not enough, not ours, not just? (MacKinnon 152)

<sup>24</sup> Halley points out that although MacKinnon began her career with a radical position - we do not know, we cannot know, we seek women's point of view - she later modified her stance: *we* speak from the point of view of women, and from *our* point of view, injury to one woman is injury to all women everywhere. Halley argues that MacKinnon had started with expressing a painful desire to know reality, but ended up claiming to know the painful reality of desire (41-57). In my reading, this is not simply a one-way movement from desire to reality.

<sup>25</sup> Women are both totally identified with their conditions, and completely alienated from them: "Realizing that women largely recognize themselves in sex-stereotyped terms, really do feel the needs they have been encouraged to feel, do feel fulfilled in the expected ways, often actually choose what has been prescribed, makes possible the realization that women at the same time do not recognize themselves in, do not feel, and have not chosen this place" (MacKinnon 102).

<sup>26</sup> Consider, for example, this complex, admittedly self-contradictory formulation: "Women's complicity in their condition does not contradict its fundamental unacceptability if women have little choice but to become persons who then freely choose women's roles. For this reason, the reality of women's oppression is, finally, neither demonstrable nor refutable empirically" (MacKinnon 124).

<sup>27</sup> An example of MacKinnon's unknowingness can be found toward the end of the chapter titled "Sexuality": "The feminist psychic universe certainly recognizes that people do not always know what they want, have hidden desires and inaccessible needs, lack awareness of motivation, have contorted and opaque interactions, and have an interest in obscuring what is really going on. But this does not essentially conceal that what women really want is more sex. It is true, as Freudians

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have persuasively observed, that *many things are sexual that do not present themselves as such*. But in ways Freud never dreamed” (MacKinnon 152, my emphasis). It is difficult to read such statements about Freud without a sense of irony given that the formal contradictions of sexuality are the very object of psychoanalysis.

<sup>28</sup> Adams and Cousins also point out that “[t]he term ‘representation’ seems to irritate her almost as much as ‘fantasy’” (Adams 60).

<sup>29</sup> MacKinnon herself advocates such double negative affirmations: “Women experienced the walls that have contained them as walls--and sometimes walked through them” (91).

<sup>30</sup> In fact, as Bersani puts it, sexuality is nothing but an intensely pleasurable, self-shattering relationship to pain: “Freud keeps returning to a line of speculation in which the sexual emerges as the *jouissance* of exploded limits, as the ecstatic suffering into which the human organism momentarily plunges when it is ‘pressed’ beyond a certain threshold of endurance. Sexuality, at least in the mode in which it is constituted, may be a tautology for masochism” (217).

MacKinnon and Brown recognize these masochistic tendencies in women and readers only to reject them as politically useless, or even harmful.

<sup>31</sup> Bersani articulates the difference between rooting for a politically acceptable form of sexual pleasure versus reading sexuality as its own mode of politics as “the question not of the reflection or expression of politics in sex, but rather of the extremely obscure process by which sexual pleasure *generates* politics” (208).

<sup>32</sup> While criticizing MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin’s “pastoralizing, redemptive intentions,” Bersani argues that their “indictment of sex - their refusal to prettify it, to romanticize it, to

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maintain that fucking has anything to do with community or love - has had the immensely desirable effect of publicizing, of lucidly laying out for us, the inestimable value of sex as - at least in certain of its ineradicable aspects - anticomunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing, antiloving” (215).

I am attempting, on the contrary, to argue that MacKinnon's redemptive intentions, if any, are precisely the site of a repetition of what she wants to redeem, or end: sex. As such, the place of negativity in her work may be located not just in her critique of sexuality, but also in her s/m textuality/feminism.

<sup>33</sup> Not that I think that pornographic materials or getting fucked cannot be deep (reading) experiences, but I am assuming that Brown and Cornell use the terms “pornographic” and “fuck” in this context to imply something that is not exactly deep or profound.

<sup>34</sup> Jacqueline Rose offers a much more productive psychoanalytic formulation of these very insights: “as feminism turns to questions of censorship, violence and sado-masochism, psychoanalysis hands back to it a fundamental violence of the psychic realm - hands back to it, therefore, nothing less than the difficulty of sexuality itself. For if psychic life has its own violence; if there is an aggression in the very movement of the drives; if sexual difference, because of the forcing it requires, leaves the subject divided against the sexual other as well as herself or himself; if the earliest instances of female sexuality contain a difficulty not solely explicable in terms of the violent repudiation with which the little girl leaves them behind...then there can be no analysis for women which sees violence solely as accident, imposition or external event.” (16).

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<sup>35</sup> In her brief discussion of the dissolution of the *école freudienne* by Lacan in 1980, Jacqueline Rose ponders over the relationship between psychoanalysis, femininity and institutionality in the responses of two women analysts, Michèle Montrelay and Marie-Christine Hamon. For Montrelay, Rose notes, “[T]he only way to deal with that crisis is to continue to *be* an analyst, that is, to continue to create a space in which the problem of identification and its laws, in all their force and impossibility, can repeatedly be experienced” (5).

## Chapter 4

**The Way Fire Holds What It Burns:  
Andrea Dworkin's Sex-Negativity**

*The world may end tomorrow, but tonight there is rape - a kiss, a fuck, a pat on the ass, a fist in the face. In the intimate world of men and women, there is no mid-twentieth century distinct from any other century. There are only the old values, women there for the taking, the means of taking determined by the male. It is ancient and it is modern; it is feudal, capitalist, socialist; it is caveman and astronaut, agricultural and industrial, urban and rural.*

The world may end tomorrow, and instead of offering consolation, American radical feminist Andrea Dworkin (1946-2004) suggests that men may still be able to make the best of whatever's left of time to continue raping. As if this was not bleak enough, Dworkin implies that kiss, fuck, pat, fist are all part of the same economy of male sadism and female masochism. In this intimate world, there isn't much, nothing really, that is independent of rape. For years now, Dworkin's readers have objected to this sweeping, ahistorical, universalist characterisation of women's sexual lives. Linda Williams argues that Dworkin reproduces the very essentialist stereotypes - men are violent and rapeful, women are victims and rapeable - that she claims to want to end (20). Ellen Willis finds no space for women's agency or their capacity to consent in Dworkin's world (9). Moira Gatens points out that in the name of ideology, Dworkin reifies masculine imaginaries instead of transforming them: "Is not this precisely the fantasy *par excellence* of patriarchal cultures: the phallus as origin of all value, signifier of signifiers?" (88) Mandy Merck slams the ahistorical nature of Dworkin's analysis (101). It appears as if Dworkin is a major figure of feminist theory only because of the severity of the criticisms levelled against her.

Dworkin's largely repudiated writings are undergoing a revival of sorts in the context of the MeToo movement. Dworkin's work has found its place in a moment riven by intense focus on long-standing cultures of rape and abuse. The recent publication of a collection of her previously published and unpublished writings, *Last Days at Hot Slit*, edited by Johanna Fateman and Amy Scholder, has catalyzed this renewed interest in Dworkin. However, most of her current readers also find her sex-negativity bizarre and extreme. They maintain an active distance from Dworkin's sex-negative, anti-pornography, anti-sex work, pro-censorship and transphobic stances. Some even argue that she did not actually say that all sex under conditions of patriarchy is rape of some kind. I think she did. She said it many times and in many different contexts. It is, of course, possible to find places in her archive where she says something slightly contrary or nuanced, but that dissonance does not help us understand her radical feminist sex-negativity any better.

In this chapter, I revisit many of Dworkin's writings, especially *Intercourse* and her traumatically trippy novel, *Mercy*. Instead of reading her literally, I attend to the complex irony in her formulations. I argue that her sex-negativity straddles a double violence: that of rape, and of sexuality itself. It is true that good sex is not Dworkin's political goal. Her indifference to the possibility of democratic sex is driven by her conviction that a truly sexual experience ought to be devastating, and *not by choice*. The pain of wanting should break you, for rape has a constitutive function in the world of gendered sexual beings; rape *makes* you; someone becomes a *man*, someone becomes a *woman* (Dworkin, *Right-wing Women*, 84). Sex in a man-made world is awful because it keeps women (and men) trapped in a hideously limited experience of orgasm. Instead of opening the body up to a shatteringly vast and unfathomable abyss, men and women come to shore up patriarchal subject-formations. Dworkin is aghast. There could be so much

more ecstasy in coming to naught. Dworkin's negativity is a complex and nerve-racking meditation on feminism's relationship to - and desire for - sexuality without rape. And yet, by the logic of her own argument, sexuality is more violent than rape. Her submission to the violence of sexuality is the very site of her fight against rape. She fights the fight against rape without needing to uphold a vision of good sex. *This* is Dworkin's singular contribution to feminist theory about sexual violence. It is her sex-negativity.

My first claim is that the term "sex" encompasses two related, but ultimately separate sets of meanings in Dworkin's work: one is the act of sex that is regulated and heavily overdetermined by patriarchy; the other is the essentially human capacity to experience pleasure and want, simply want: sexuality, if you will. Dworkin is totally militant in her condemnation of sex; she is unabashedly passionate in her commendation of sexuality. Her writings are full of the most searing descriptions of women wanting sex, having sex, falling in love, waiting to say something, determined to be loved back, and actively soliciting heartbreak. If they are subject to the violence of the world, they are also subject to the senseless, affective, meaningful, pure, extreme drivenness of their own desire. Dworkin celebrates these vicissitudes of sexuality, even as she slams all (hetero)sex<sup>1</sup> as (some kind of) rape.

My second claim is that alongside her cataclysmic portrayal of sex, Dworkin has an intensely *negative* understanding of sexuality. There is something profoundly beautiful about the body eating itself out in seeking pleasure. According to Dworkin, this negativity is the only way to truly experience the measure of our humanness. Sex in a man-made world has made it impossible for women (and men) to experience this other seeking, this other dimension of pleasure that is not in service of patriarchy. Dworkin's fight, though, is *not* the sex-

positive/liberal feminist/MeToo fight for a good, fulfilling sex life free of rape. Dworkin's politics consists of freeing women from the violence of everyday heterosex, just so that they can open themselves up to the negativity of sexuality. However, in Dworkin's own narration, this other pleasure is not in service of feminism either. In fact, this other pleasure is in service of nothing. It's self-decimating, shattering, and literally mind-blowing.

My third claim, then, is that though Dworkin desperately fantasises about having sexuality without the rapeful sex, her textuality undulates in opposition to her own fantasy. The fact that she writes them together, often weaving in and out of them, blurring them to the point of indistinction, demonstrates that there is no real meta-position from which the distinction can be upheld. Dworkin, in spite of herself, turns the question of ideology on its head. One cannot say where ideology begins and ends; but more crucially, one cannot say where sexuality - wanting to be possessed and consumed and had - begins or ends. The mind-numbing, everyday violence of ordinary sexual lives is not entirely separate from the mindless pleasures of sexuality. *This* is the negativity of Dworkin's work.

My fourth claim is that Dworkin is absolutely striking among anti-rape feminists in her commitment to the psychic messiness of sexuality. There is no way out of it. Rape is a subjective experience, and is therefore subject to confusion, doubt, uncertainty. Rape is non-mutual and forced, albeit an experience to do with sex, and therefore also horrifyingly entangled with feelings of intimacy, pleasure, enjoyment, and love. Dworkin does nothing to extract rape from rapeful sex. She does nothing to separate the disorientation of rapeful sex from the spiritual ecstasy of losing your bearings in an orgasm. At the same time, she does not use the complexity of sexuality to dilute her commitment to fighting rape. She is committed to both: the fight against

sexual violence *and* the negativity of sexuality. She is not anti-pleasure; but pleasure itself is not innocent, pleasure is not non-violent. And in this, it remains catastrophically close to the enjoyment of the rapist.

This is an intolerable and impossible position to maintain. My final claim is that Dworkin fails to manage it. It is not clear what one is to do with the tension between sexual violence and the violence of sexuality. Her failure is her conceptual breakthrough: the tension *cannot* be managed, in spite of the best political fantasies of feminism. Dworkin allows this tension to destroy the coherence of her political program. Dworkin has no real answer; she “want[s] to want,” (Dworkin, *Mercy*, 107) *and* she wants to fight. Her affective impulse, in spite of her best political instincts, is to continue to experience the suffering of desire, her own, and that of feminism.

### **I: sex kills; don't die**

Dworkin famously suggested that (heterosexual) men should stop pounding into women and try to come just by gently placing their penises inside a convulsing, orgasming vagina. Or, they could “make love as women do together”, their penises limp, erections not involved (Dworkin, *Intercourse*, 82). According to Dworkin, it is not biology that makes aggressive thrusting so exciting for men (and women), it is ideology. The figure of the penetrative thrust stands for everything Dworkin despises about the culture of heterosexuality: force, invasion, domination, possession, control, mechanical use, objectification. Women do have choices, though, in the face of the thrust: either they willingly, but passively, take it - act dead - or be raped - which is a kind of everyday death - or simply be killed. Dworkin believes that this last

“option” of just dying is more humane compared to repeatedly having violative sex or being raped on a regular basis. Dworkin’s portrayal of sex is so dire that it sounds almost comical. The stakes, though, are extremely serious: are women alive, could they ever be anything but dead, and what’s the difference between women who are brutally killed and those who continue to live a deadly life?

*Intercourse* begins with a multi-dimensional story that Dworkin cobbles together from various sources.

“In 1905, at the age of twenty-five, with two sick children, tired, alienated and unhappy in her marriage, Alma Mahler had an argument with her husband, Gustave, during which she told him that his smell repelled her. Her biographer speculates that it was the smell of cigars. In her diary she wrote:

“He was a stranger to me, and much about him is still strange to me - and will, I believe, remain so forever...I wonder that we can continue to live together, knowing this. Is it duty? Children? Habit? No, I know that I do really love him and only him...” (3)

The story is too familiar; so familiar that the biographer is able to speculate/intuit that it must be cigars; obviously, she is penis-fatigued. Dworkin offers validation to Mahler by tapping into the feminist common-sense of her readers. At the same time, she casts suspicion on Mahler’s own account of her feelings: you “really” love him, do you. Here, as in several other places, Dworkin is acutely sensitive to the ideological dimension of romantic love. For Dworkin, ideology refers to a mode of thinking and being naturalised by the ruling class for the perpetuation of its own power. Hetero-patriarchy is a complex, hydra-headed ideological apparatus in her work; it works in tandem with other apparatuses of subjugation like race and class. Dworkin is concerned that

women are conditioned to blur the difference between love and (ab)use even when they are dying in/of the space between. Ideology creates a blur between love and hate, aggression and affection, consent and coercion, rape and sex. This blur facilitates the emotional, physical, sexual, and economic exploitation of women, while making them - us - everyone - think that this is not duty, children, or habit, but real love. The theoretical framework of ideology allows Dworkin to conduct the double work of confirming women's experiences even as she investigates the conditions within which women are (un)able to articulate their experience.

Soon after making this journal entry, Mahler meets a friend/colleague of Gustave. They flirt, they embrace; Mahler confesses, Gustave gets angry, leaves her alone to walk home on her own. Mahler is followed by a stranger. He sees it as "more proof of her disloyalty" (ibid., 3). They have a fight.

"Usually, when Gustave wanted intercourse, he waited until Alma was asleep, or pretended to be; then he would begin his lovemaking. On this night, he came to her knowing that she was awake; told her she should read *The Kreutzer Sonata*, a short novel by Tolstoy; fucked her; then left." (3-4)

In contemporary feminist parlance, having sex with someone who is asleep or pretending to be is an easy indication of non-consensual sex, or at least something non-consensual about the sex, something that both partners are not able to mutually control and/or direct. However, for Dworkin, sex in a man-made world is always already non-mutual; male arousal is conditioned to be tethered to violence. In this context, Gustave waiting until Mahler is asleep almost reads as a mark of respect in Dworkin's telling of it; she calls it "lovemaking." Him waking her up to have sex is rude; she is "fucked." Waking her up is to look into her eyes while treating her as an object. It is to watch her humanity get extinguished and get off on precisely that thrill of

annihilating the other. Making her come would only add to the feeling of being absolutely powerful; making her come is *not* a feminist move.

Dworkin points out that *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the novella by Leo Tolstoy, that Gustave recommends to Mahler, is also about the deadening nature of intercourse. A man kills his wife because regular sex with her causes deep repulsion in him. Gustave's recommendation of such a story to Mahler is absolutely sinister. What he seems to be saying is that her wanting more sex - her wanting anything - is only going to lead to her physical death. The more he is aroused, the more he might be repulsed-roused one day to just kill her. At the same time, in the twisted logic of the twisted world of male power, this very sinister warning serves as textual possibility that Gustave might be human after all. He cannot bear fucking her. Best to wait until she is asleep. On the surface of it, this sounds like a sex-negative argument: one way or another, sex is doomed for women. Best to just get away from the misery of it all.

After the sex, according to the biography, Mahler "lay awake, fearing the future, feeling that she was on the verge of losing her courage and her will to survive" (4). Mahler is not devoid of agency, or the capacity for sexual pleasure. She is just terribly constrained by the conditions within which she gets to experience and express her desires. Mahler's desire to be desired, and her violation by a stranger provoke the same reaction in Gustave: jealousy and the need to "have" her, possess her, use her. Mahler is treated unfairly, given a book recommendation, fucked, and finds herself thinking of death. Sex in this man-made world has brought her in contact with death, when all she was trying to do was want, be wanted, love, be loved and live. On the surface of it, this sounds like a sex-positive argument *also*: patriarchy blocks women's

access to good, mutual, consensual, self-affirmative, pleasurable sex. Fateman argues, for example, that,

“[h]er sweeping descriptions of patriarchy's toxic viscera were taken as evidence of a conviction that men are irredeemable; heterosexuality is hopeless, and, most famously, all sex is rape. But the bedrock of Dworkin's feminism was, to the contrary, a repudiation of the essentialist, biological determinist logic that undergirds fascism and genocide. She believed that men, women and sex could be different than they are now.” (4)

Sex, as it exists, is doomed, not the sex, that could be something else, something we cannot yet imagine but nonetheless is available in possibility and through politics. The relationship between sex and death is ideological, and therefore subject to change. *This* Dworkin is militant, but hopeful and sex-positive in the future.

Likewise, some post-structuralist readers like Jessica Joy Cameron and Leah Claire Allen have suggested that it may be more productive to read Dworkin's work as a critique of the *representations* of heterosexuality rather than its truth. Both Cameron and Allen open up a literary mode of reading Dworkin in which her “truths” can be examined textually in the critically productive gap between representation and conceptions of reality. This approach makes generative the very bits of Dworkin that have been deemed to be bizarre and extreme.

The problem with all of these readings - Dworkin is sex-negative, Dworkin could be sex-positive, Dworkin is descriptive - is that they assume that “sex” means having sex. However, Dworkin's use of the term “sex” encompasses two sets of meanings. On the one hand, sex is the act of sex, on the other, sex is a spiritual, psychic, bodily reckoning with the limits of pain and pleasure. The first kind of sex should ideally be the material basis for this second kind of sex; the

physical act should open the body up to an otherworldly music. However, this is what patriarchy blocks by colonising sex for its own nefarious purposes. Mahler and Gustave, for example, are nowhere near this spiritual annihilation/ecstasy. Their sexual relationship - even if Mahler is satisfied by it, though Dworkin has serious doubts - is caught in worldly power imbalances. Against this backdrop, Dworkin expresses an ironic approval of austerity because it can help disrupt this viciously suffocating nature of sex. This is most striking in her narration of the story of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the plot as well as the conception of the novella itself.

One evening, Leo Tolstoy feels the need to have sex with his wife, Sophie. He has just listened to a powerful rendition of Beethoven's "Kreutzer Sonata," and he turns to sex for an emotional release. Tolstoy was a lifelong advocate of sexual austerity. Dworkin points out that he had thirteen children. While he got to philosophise about the immoral consequences of sexual indulgence, his wife was bearing child after child, nurturing them, raising them, managing his estate as well as transcribing and publishing each of his manuscripts. Sophie did not feel loved. She felt used as an object: Tolstoy would experience passion and immediately require a human vessel to discharge all the sexual tension. The use itself would then be critiqued by Tolstoy as a moral degradation. Sophie's degradation at his hands was dirtying for *him*. While all this is bad enough, Dworkin goes further. The sonata - the elevated music, the carnal catharsis - bears fruit: Sophie gets pregnant, Tolstoy delivers the novella. Embarrassed that he still needs to have sex, he channels his repulsion into writing. Having written a novel about killing your wife after having sex with her, Tolstoy feels self-conscious about the date of the conception of the baby. He imagines that everyone will know that the plot of the novel is - almost - real. Tolstoy did not murder his wife, though. Her agony continued.

The protagonist of *The Kreutzer Sonata* is presented as ethical by Tolstoy for having chosen austerity even if it meant having to kill his wife. He could not keep using her as an object. It was only after killing her that he was able to see her as human. As she lay dead, he looked at her as a person for the first time. She appeared peaceful, finally free of the brutal regime of man-made sex. He felt pity, he felt loss. To the protagonist of the *Sonata*, sex-positive feminism was simply a cruel joke. The protagonist of the *Sonata* confounded all expectations when he killed his wife, not because he was supposed to love her, but because he was supposed to be indifferent to the plight of her subject-position in intercourse. Death set the stage for mercy, and the formal inauguration of his own humanness. Unknowingly, the wife got what she wanted: her husband's compassion. Death was the climax she did not know she needed. Murder was the sex the husband did not know he would find most spiritually explosive.

Tolstoy's advocacy of austerity was based on his conviction that sex blocked spiritual growth. In my reading of Dworkin's reading of Tolstoy's text, though, this very repulsion activates the full spiritual potential of sexual experience. The landscape of violent sex is accidentally jolted into a moment of reckoning with the violence of sexuality. The wife paid the price of the husband's reckoning, though. *That* is the only thing that is wrong in this picture. According to Dworkin, sex *should* bring us to a climax where we ourselves pay the price of the violence of desire. The experience of oblivion should be our own. The tight connection between rape and sex makes it impossible for sexual experiences to reach this zone of nothingness, where all is painfully undone. This Dworkin – *mine* – believes that sexual violence can be superseded only by a greater violence: that of sexuality. No nihilism here, though; in our relationship to the negativity of sexuality, we are painfully, profoundly, properly alive.

## II: the life of sexuality; for I have *wanted* to die

The second chapter of *Intercourse* is called “Skinless.” The writing is pressured and probing. The argument is very hard to follow. On the surface of it, Dworkin seems to be continuing her critique of the violent culture of sex from the previous chapter. However, almost every sentence of this chapter doubles as a paean to the depth and meaningfulness of sexual experience. This is how “Skinless” opens:

“Sexual intercourse is not intrinsically banal, though pop-culture magazines like *Esquire* and *Cosmopolitan* would suggest it is. It is intense, often desperate. The internal landscape is violent upheaval, a wild and ultimately cruel disregard of human individuality, a brazen, high-strung wanting that is absolute and imperishable, not attached to personality, no respecter of boundaries; ending not in sexual climax but in a human tragedy of failed relationships, vengeful bitterness in an aftermath of sexual heat, personality corroded by too much endurance of undesired, habitual intercourse...” (25)

Dworkin here makes a distinction between the intrinsic non-banality of sexual intercourse, and its representation and circulation in popular culture. Note that the “internal landscape” is in a state of mad want. It is not anchored in human individuality and not attached to personality, which means no gender, no sexual preference, no racial hierarchy, no class consciousness. At least not yet. However, this wanting does not result in sexual climax. Instead, it results in failed “relationships.” We have moved from an internal to an interpersonal world, in which there is intercourse of habit and hierarchy. Note that in Dworkin’s view, no sexual subject can actually live with this hierarchical man-made intercourse; it is “undesired” from the get-go. Sexuality is wild and cruel; sex is unendurable.

“The experience of fucking changes people, so that they are often lost to each other and slowly they are lost to human hope. The pain of having been exposed, so naked, leads to hiding, self-protection, building barricades, emotional and physical alienation or violent retaliation against anyone who gets too close.” (25)

What is “the experience of fucking?” Is it the wanting, or is it the unsatisfactory getting? Is the exposure painful because it is essentially so, or because one is exposed to the hideousness of the world? What is one hiding from: one’s own brazenness and cruelty, or that of the world?

On the one hand, Dworkin is focused on the interplay between the internal and worldly dimensions of sexual intercourse. This interplay is disastrous. It leads either to exposure or hiding. Women are necessarily exposed - they are not allowed to cover up; at the very least, they must spread their legs - while men have a choice to be as vulnerable as the women, or as closed off as is humanly possible: “Being naked does unnerve the men: it is an ordeal; and being looked at is nearly a terror.” (40) In the interest of self-protection, men stay armoured, women give up defenses. Neither position is fulfilling, which leads to more aggression, more coercion. Sex exposes them to the worst of the world in each other. Sex is tragic because it is so inevitably full of this violent world.

On the other hand, it is not very clear if the violence of the internal world can ever be discharged in a satisfying, non-violent, agreeable way. If the journey to climax wasn’t overdetermined by patriarchy, might we have a chance of being blissed out? I don’t think Dworkin thinks so, for this is how she describes her vision of non-rape sex.

“Sometimes, the skin comes off in sex. The people merge, skinless. The body loses its boundaries...the skin dissolves altogether; and what touches is unspeakably,

grotesquely visceral, not inside language or conceptualization, not inside time; raw blood and fat and muscle and bone, unmediated by form or formal limits. There is no physical distance, no self-consciousness, nothing withdrawn or private or alienated, no existence outside physical touch.” (25-26)

This does not sound pleasant, especially the bit about touching grotesquely visceral bits. But more crucially, there is no space for consent in this psychosexual dissolve. How is this mindlessness different from the mind-numbing aggression of rape?

“The skin collapses as a boundary - it has no meaning; time is gone - it too has no meaning; there is no outside. Instead, there is necessity, nothing else - being driven, physical immersion in each other but with no experience of “each other” as separate entities coming together. There is only touch, no boundaries; there is only the nameless experience of physical contact, which is life; there is no solace, except in this contact; without it, there is unbearable physical pain, absolute, not lessened by distraction, unreached by normalcy - nearly an amputation, the skin hacked off, slashed open; violent hurt.” (26)

Unbearable physical pain without this contact; the experience of such wanting is like the skin slashed open violently, nearly an amputation. Even just the desire for skinless sex is far more unbearable than the sex that is full of skin. Throughout *Intercourse*, Dworkin plays with this double violence of sex: sometimes, one is being raped skinfully, and other times, the skin comes off.

The naked skin in sex recalls, according to Dworkin, “the dim echo of that original nakedness, primal, before anything else that is also human” (27). However, the naked skin also takes on social identity - sex, gender, race, class, ability, nationality - so definitively that it can

never collapse into that original innocence. In Dworkin's fantasy, the original innocence is nothing but the capacity to want. Not want anything or anyone particular, just want. While sex in the man-made world forces individuals to pick from carefully curated categories - black, white, man, woman, tall, short, rich, poor, rebellious, religious - and be satisfied and settled, sexuality is simply endless, more, always something else. Dworkin believes that sex is so powerful because it has the capacity to activate the *fantasy* of that non-place, non-time, non-dimension of *before anything else* and *always something else*. Our skins - our social identities - bar us from living in that fantasy all the time. And yet, *because* of that barrier sexuality is all the more radical. *This* is the difference between rape and sexuality. Rape shatters the individual by *preserving* the subject of gender, sex, race, class. Sexuality strikes at the heart of our subjection. Sexuality introduces not rebellion, but indifference to worldly arrangements and concerns. Dworkin invests sexuality with transcendence over social identity. This transcendence is not rosy and revolutionary, it is painful. Sex is a battle of skins; sexuality is a war *on* skin.

Sexuality's indifference to the worldly conditions of human subjectivity takes the form of an extreme drivenness. This is not a conscious undertaking; no one can say I will now go mad, even if they wanted to. No, these special subjects do not even mean to be special. As if by chance, they happen to be able to withstand the negative force of sexuality. Dworkin does not specify any historical circumstances here; no mention of nature or nurture or zodiac sign. Sexuality rises from nowhere.

“[S]exual desire...marks the person, as if it can be seen; a great aura emanating from inside; an interior play of light and shadow, vitality and death, wanting and being used up; an identifying mark that is indelible; a badge of desire or experience; a sign that differentiates the individual carrying it, both attracting and repelling others, in the end

isolating the marked one, who is destroyed by the intensity and ultimate hopelessness of a sexual calling.” (45)

Dworkin follows the fate of this hopeless calling in Alma, from Tennessee Williams’ *Summer and Smoke*.

“Ethereal or promiscuous, she is stigmatized by the awesome drive behind her desire, the restlessness of her soul on earth, the mercilessness of her passion, hardest on her, leaving her no peace. Chaste or promiscuous, she is sexual because she is pure and extreme...Her desire is grandiose and amoral, beyond the timidity she practices and the conscious morality she knows. She is stigmatized by her capacity for passion...” (50)

Their love is limitless, their need to merge with the object is relentless, they are willing to sacrifice everything else in their life to have this one wish come true. The “purity” seems to imply a quality of wanting that is tempered not even by the survival instinct. Even the self does not mediate - and therefore, disrupt - what it wants. Nothing is needed as much as it is wanted. This drivenness is not necessarily pathological. In fact, it’s achingly honest. It attaches itself to pathology because such unselfconscious purity of desire is unsustainable in relation to the sexual division of labour in the world. The search for immensely spiritual sexual experiences is inevitably met with violative and abusive sexual relationships. No matter what the world does to them, though, they cannot stop wanting, they cannot stop living through the consequences of true sexual desire.

Though she has a handful of readers who do pay attention to this other scene of sex in Dworkin’s work, they see it as a positive, constructive vision of what sex could be. For example, in the foreword to *Intercourse*, Ariel Levy argues that alongside her “extreme” descriptions of sex, “Dworkin asseverates an alternative, a way of representing and having sex that dissolves

boundaries and offers not only intimacy but merged humanity. . . a kind of magic, fleeting selflessness.” Levy calls her “a poet of erotic love.” (XIII) Similarly, Magnus Ullén casts Dworkin’s vision of sex as “fundamentally utopian.” (159) In my reading, Dworkin’s sexuality is neither utopian nor romantic.

“Being marked means that the sex has costs, and that one has paid. It means having human insides, so that experience - all experience, including sexual experience - has a human resonance...a vocation for sex [is] perhaps...a vocation for human consequence - loss, suffering, despair, madness.” (Dworkin, *Intercourse*, 51)

On this point, Leo Bersani has famously critiqued MacKinnon and Dworkin for their “pastoralizing, redemptive intentions” in relation to sex (215). I argue here, on the contrary, that Dworkin’s intentions are very much in alignment with Bersani’s own negative investment in sexuality. The negativity *is* the redemption for Dworkin. No fucking though; yes only to shattering<sup>2</sup>.

In a beautiful reading of James Baldwin’s *Another Country*, Dworkin argues that “[i]n fucking, one’s insides are on the line” (*Intercourse* 64). Here Dworkin can be said to offer a positive political vision for a sexuality that is not completely worn out and filled up with sex in a man-made world. Baldwin’s novel, in Dworkin’s telling of it, is about gay and straight, black and white, men and women not being able to love each other because of their own bloody history with racism, sexism and homophobia. Their trauma of becoming a recognisable human subject is so immense, that they cannot let sexuality undo the knot of their being. Their refusal to surrender leads them to violence towards each other, and themselves. Literally, their insides are on the line.

“In fucking, the deepest emotions one has about life as a whole are expressed, even with a stranger, however random or impersonal the encounter. Rage, hatred, bitterness, joy,

tenderness, even mercy, all have their home in this passion, in this act; and to accept truly another person without those bounds requires that one must live with, if not conquer, the fear of being abandoned...” (65)

Even though there is no safety - neither in Baldwin’s story, nor in Dworkin’s text - there could be shelter in submission to one’s own desire. A truly sexual experience holds possibility for a subject to suture the limits of identity with the limitlessness of desire. Fucking could be “a bridge from ignorance to truth - to the hardest truths about who one is and why” (64). Dworkin argues that this kind of intimate self-knowledge is the only way out of sexism and racism. With Baldwin, Dworkin comes closest to articulating a political use for sexuality.

In Dworkin’s world-view, sex *is* full of rape. Her own breathless meditations on sexuality, however, offer something of the sexual that cannot be exhausted by rape. In fact, Dworkin presents sexuality as the poisonous antidote to the poison of sex/rapeful sex/rape. Everyone should stop having sex, Dworkin seems to be saying, so that they can have sexuality. The content of *this* sexuality is as bloody, riven and strife-driven as rape. Only the effects of sexuality are radically different than that of rape. Sexual violence must end, not only because it is violative of women’s bodies, but also because sexual violence does not let women or men experience the violence of sexuality. Women should stop dying of intercourse, so that they can really participate in the deadly life of pleasure. One should be able to say no to rape, to sex, to force, so that one is able to surrender to this *other* death, this radical negativity which is neither subject to refusal nor choice. To be alive is to be able to want, actively want, to die of pleasure. Dworkin is on *this* side of things, on the side of living.

### III: the textuality of sex; so dead it is alive

No to the patriarchal couple of sadism and masochism, yes to the essentially sadomasochist soul. This political program, however unconventional (and impracticable - imagine giving a political speech on the beauty and value of suicidal ideation), appears to be somewhat coherent. However, this coherence is based entirely on the feminist possibility of instituting a clear *distinction* between rape/sex and sexuality. How else can you have sexuality without rape/sex? Dworkin identifies the construction and sustenance of this distinction between rape and sexuality as the foremost political task for feminism. The problem is that her own writing is not able to hold up this distinction. Sometimes, there is literally no difference between a character in her stories asking for or committing abusive, violative sex, and burning up with self-decimating desire. Sometimes, her critique of (ideologically conditioned) masochist desire transmits her desire *for* (existential) masochism. The suffering of sexuality - the good suffering that breaks you - and the suffering of rape - the bad suffering that makes you - are impossible to separate at the level of her text.

In her critical reading of Pauline Réage's pornographic, s/m classic, *Story of O*, Dworkin admits that she "once believed it to be what its defenders claim - the mystical revelation of the true, eternal, and sacral destiny of woman..." (*Last Days*, 61). Dworkin argues that any "clear-headed appraisal" will show that O demonstrates "the psychology of submission and self-hatred found in all oppressed peoples" (62). The absorption that Dworkin once felt in reading *O*, though, transmits itself even through her critique. There is something about the quality of her writing that mirrors the possession that she sees as the sign of rapacious ownership. Dworkin's own argumentation is deeply involved in the experience of reading *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...It also means that O's energy, or power, as a woman, as Woman, is absorbed. Possession here denotes a biological transference of power which brings with it a commensurate spiritual strength to the possessor. O does more than offer herself; she is herself the offering. To offer herself would be prosaic Christian self-sacrifice, but as the offering she is the vehicle of the miraculous - she incorporates the divine.” (64)

O is totally possessed. This critique incites desire to read *O*, not in spite of Dworkin's withering criticism, but because of it. Unlike the original text, Dworkin is able to focus the reader's attention on the *lack* of spiritual ecstasy in *O*, in spite of the seductive promise of it. Dworkin shifts the stakes from the rapeful sex to the sexual-spiritual dimension of O's embodiment and capacity for pleasure. Dworkin's descriptions of O are sensuous, not in the sense of titillating, but in the sense of engaging the reader at the level of a yearning curiosity: O. Who was she in being raped? Who was she in wanting to be loved? Who was she in wanting to be a goddess? Who was she in *wanting* to be possessed?

“As long as I am beaten and ravished on your behalf, I am naught but the thought of you, the desire of you, the obsession of you. That, I believe, is what you wanted. Well, I love you, and that is what I want too.” (Réage, quoted in Dworkin, *Last Days*, 63)

On the surface of it, Dworkin makes a clear argument that this is ideology. In its details, though, all these articulations of longing are not that different from the purity of desire that she lauds in Williams' *Summer and Smoke*. What is the difference between being possessed and being driven? What is the difference between embracing the pain of self-decimating love and letting a

demon live through you? Dworkin's own absorbing writing mirrors Réage's, inciting desire in the reader, and horror: could I want to be raped?

Dworkin's own use of pornographic language, and the blur of rape and sex in her writing has been noted and critiqued. Mandy Merck (89-103), Harriet Gilbert (216) and Judith Butler (194) have all noted that Dworkin relies heavily on the very tropes, fantasies and identifications that she finds abhorrently violent. For these readers, this is a crucial flaw in Dworkin's writing, not because pornography is bad and we are all going to hell, but because Dworkin fails to acknowledge and recognise the necessity of her staging; she fails to theorise the complex difficulty of her own complicity. By casting pornography as a product purely of ideology, Dworkin ends up constructing a false moral division between those who are good/victims/survivors, and others who must be evil/aggressors/oppressors. For Merck, Gilbert and a host of sex-positive feminists, this moral division is of no use to feminist politics, because it just cannot hold up in a world where there *is* pleasurable sex that is not violative, there *are* women (and men) who are already actively creating and maintaining cultures of consent, fun and meaning in the midst of desolation. Dworkin emerges as a tragic figure in some of these readings because it's almost as if she is attacking exactly what she claims to seek. Susie Bright, for example, argues that Dworkin herself "started a sexual revolution that she ended up repudiating". The confusion between rape and sex in Dworkin has thus been read as her (unsuccessful) attempt to obliterate the possibility of sexual pleasure<sup>3</sup>.

In my view, though, Dworkin complicates and intensifies the feminist stakes in sexual pleasure by engaging the blur between rape and sex as a *psychic* blur. At the heart of her negative feminist vision, is her commitment, not to ideology, but to the messiness of psychic

reality. The “internal landscape of mad want” never quite recedes in her analyses. Because Dworkin is committed to a reading of the internal world of the life of ideology, she quickly gets so entangled in the psychic chaos of her subjects that there is no meta-position available to her. There is no place from which ideology can be distinguished from what she thinks of as constitutional, quintessential, existential. This lack of a meta-position coupled with her textual blur of sex/sexuality creates unintentional windows into the psychic morass of violent men and women. Dworkin is so engaged with the internal experience of wanting and hurting, that she ends up tapping into all kinds of wanting: wanting to be abused, for example, wanting to be violated, wanting to rape, wanting to kill oneself, wanting to use someone to death. These desires unfold under the ideological terms of patriarchy, but in Dworkin’s writing, they assume a logic and a dignity of their own. Dworkin brings witnessing to the internal contestations of all the characters she reads and creates. She floats with the fragmentary bits of fact and fiction that the characters generate for themselves and others. Dworkin’s own reading practices do not let her access the “self-knowledge” of any of the characters. Even when it is at odds with her feminism, Dworkin makes space for the psychic messiness of wanting, having and losing. In spite of herself, Dworkin affirms the rapeful sex to be an experience of desire too. Or at least she affirms its disturbing proximity to non-violative manifestations of sexuality.

In the face of this horrifying *psychic* intimacy between rape and sexuality, Dworkin does not relinquish sex, as is usually believed. She cannot embrace rape, though. The result of these constraints is a tense textual loop between that which beckons as irresistible, and that which feels chillingly inevitable. The overall plot of one of Dworkin’s novels, *Mercy*, is pretty straightforward: the protagonist - her name is Andrea - keeps getting raped and she keeps falling

in passionate love. The writing of both the rape and the sex is intensely evocative, feverish, driven. At one point in the narrative, Andrea is in love with someone called M. They're in a bar,

“The songs make me want to cry and we hold each other *the way fire holds what it burns*; and everyone looks because you don't often see *people who have to touch each other or they will die*. It's true with us; a simple fact. I have no sense of being a spectacle; only a sense of being the absolute center of the world and what I feel is all the feeling the world has in it, all of it concentrated in me.” (Dworkin, *Mercy*, 77, my emphasis)

M will later abuse her, beat her, rape her. The suffering of desire transmogrified into the suffering of rape. Dying of wanting, suddenly looking like the possibility of a rape-murder: we have to touch each other or I will kill you. The repetition<sup>4</sup> of the circuit of love and rape opens up a textual space in which Dworkin is able to stage this impossible conundrum - am I in love, am I getting raped - over and over. Andrea is alive. “...I don't get burned up no matter how I burn. I'm indestructible, a new kind of flesh” (91). But this is not a victorious survival. It's negative, it's repetition, it's empty, and it's terribly meaningful precisely because Andrea never quite knows where she is. And neither does Dworkin.

#### **IV: Andrea/Dworkin**

*Mercy* begins with a child struggling to articulate an experience of assault in a cinema hall. The child is absolutely trapped in her psychic reality that finds no takers in the adult world. 9 years old, Andrea does not have the language to express what happened; and yet, her psychic reality is composed of this absence of language. She wonders if this man had three hands. She guesses he must be from another planet. Her mother keeps asking her anxiously if something happened. Yes, yes, Andrea keeps saying, yes, but when probed about the actual details, Andrea

keeps missing the mark. She is not able to prove satisfactorily that whatever happened to her was significant enough to be counted as a bad experience. What is striking about this narration is Dworkin's insistence on psychic reality. Both mother and Andrea have no access to a meta-position from which they could shed light on their own limits and apprehend the other's truth. Though the focus is on the child in the novel, neither can really prove that they have a handle on being able to understand what's happening to them.

The thing is: if Dworkin's commitment to the convolutions of psychic reality challenge the convictions of sex-positive feminism, it challenges the certainties of sexual violence feminisms also. Her descriptions of rape are as blurry, counter-intuitive and textually fragile as her meditations on sex. In "The day I was drugged and raped," her own account of her date-rape in Paris is a testament to Dworkin's - ultimately suicidal - insistence that no matter how feminist you are, no matter how sure you are of the reality of women's sexual oppression, the claim of rape can be very difficult to formulate. Dworkin brings this struggle to life in her writing. She was attacked viciously for her statement about her rape.<sup>5</sup> Some found factual errors (Bennett), some alleged that she was milking her rape for publicity for her new book (Gracen' McLaren); others wondered why she didn't go to the police, why she couldn't help wondering if she was at fault, why she wrote it "almost as if" she wanted to be doubted (Bennett). If she is critiqued for not making space for the ambiguity and complexity of sexual desire and pleasure, she is definitely not read for the ambiguity and complexity that *does* exist in her searching, searing, skinful rendering of rape. It is her skin in the game; she pays the price; she loses.

That Andrea and Dworkin are caught in the psychosexual *textual* mess of rape, sex and sexuality does not mean that there is no reality to the claim of rape. It does not mean that rape

does not exist. It does not mean that Andrea is lying when she says she was raped. It does not mean that Dworkin was confused when she said *she* was raped. What this textual mess does is simply stage the measure of the difficulty in interpreting one's own experience under the twin pressures of the conditions of ideology *and* the convolutions of sexuality. I see in her work an extraordinary effort to contend with the messiness of distinguishing between everyday violation, abusive love, and complex events of rape. There is no question that Dworkin was committed to ending sexual violence. There is no question that she believed herself to be absolutely devoted to the well-being of victims and survivors. In my reading, then, the textual confusion between rape, sex and sexuality in her work is neither a denial of rape *nor* sexual pleasure. The blur of rape/sex/sexuality is instead the sign of a serious theoretical attempt to integrate the complexity of sexuality within sexual violence feminisms: to be able to say that one was raped, not in spite of psychic-ideological confusion, but in relation *to* it; to be able to say that one was raped, not in spite of the lack of a meta-position, but *because* the lack of a meta-position creates the space for story, narrative, meaning, and truth.

Having said that, it *is* true that the textual confusion in Dworkin weakens feminism's claim that rape is a fact. Instead of placing pleasure on the side of sexuality and pain on the side of man-made sex, Dworkin places force on both sides: sexuality as drivenness, rapeful sex as violence. Her investment in the pain of wanting weakens her own radical feminist critique of the sadist-masochist positions in rapeful sex. Not only does this doubleness undercut her political vision from within, she fails to manage the tension between hurting and hurting. She is just not able to hold the simultaneity of the negativity of sexuality and the violence of rape in her writing. She *does* evoke them interchangeably; she *does* slip in and out of them. She demonstrates, in spite of herself, why any effective sexual violence feminism necessarily needs a vision of non-

negative, good sex. If feminism *wants* to end rape, it has to - temporarily at least - turn away from the fundamental negativity of wanting, to be able to clearly distinguish between rape and sex. But Dworkin can't help it. Rape is killing us, she is saying; let's die of sexuality anyway. She wants to want, *and* she wants to fight. The contradictions don't break, but sustain, her desire. Like the heroines she idealises, she does not give up on her desire, regardless of the consequences. *The restlessness of her soul on earth, the mercilessness of her passion, hardest on her, leaving her no peace...Her desire is grandiose and amoral, beyond the timidity she practices and the conscious morality she knows.* Her impulse to self-decimate is the inexhaustible source of her (textual) survival.

Dworkin is in touch with the contradictions of wanting: alive only when you're dying of love, fulfilled only when you're wanting - wanting, as in lacking - and sheltered only when you're surrendered, defenceless, vulnerable. She pays tribute to these contradictions by burning up with the desire to end rape. Knowing what she knows about rape, what else is there to do? Dworkin is not a liberal, sex-positive feminist. Rape *is* full of sex. And Dworkin wants to know *how* one is to survive it, and still continue wanting to want. How to live with wanting to die without getting killed? *This* is Dworkin's question. She fails to answer it, but the question is all the more powerful for it. As far as Dworkin is concerned, rape may not end, but we can die a far more painful death, and that may be the ultimate saving grace. There is no reason to stop fighting. There can be no reason to stop wanting. We have to touch each other *or* we will die. *And* we might die anyway.

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<sup>1</sup> For Dworkin, all kinds of sex emulate the heterosexual role-model of sadism and masochism: “since all individual consciousness and social relationship are polluted by internalized notions of polarity, coupling, and role-playing, the criteria cited above must also be applied to homosexual relation. Too often homosexual relation transgresses gender imperatives without transforming them” (Dworkin, *Woman Hating*, 185).

In this chapter, I don’t challenge this obvious oversimplification; instead I examine it on its own terms.

<sup>2</sup> Here, I am in *disagreement* also with Dymock, who argues that Bersani misunderstands Dworkin and MacKinnon. Dymock reads both Dworkin and MacKinnon as wanting to *reject* sexuality completely rather than redeem it; Bersani’s point is exactly that wanting to reject sexuality is just as redemptive as wanting to transform it.

<sup>3</sup> Though Ullén also characterises Dworkin’s writing as pornographic, he finds this textual quality useful in understanding the pornographic imagination itself.

<sup>4</sup> Merck finds such repetition in *Intercourse* also: “At times *Intercourse* reads like a large-scale exercise of this repetition compulsion, in which a succession of violently misogynist narratives seem destined to circulate in perpetuity. In an account which flattens the material variations of textual origination and design, history evaporates, leaving us in an immutable present of male oppression. This sense of an endless round is in part a product of Dworkin's circular account of causation, in which intercourse constructs male power and male power constructs intercourse...”

While Merck clearly sees this repetition as tedious, I treat it more properly as repetition-

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compulsion: a structure that needs to be taken seriously and interpreted, without relegating it to the realm of pathology (101).

<sup>5</sup> See Serisier for an exhaustive overview of the reception of Dworkin's testimony. Serisier argues for an ethics of believing women's narratives, especially those of rape and sexual violence.

### Afterword

What does reading have to do with sexual violence?

*“It makes my palms sweat remembering how my father asked me if I wanted to fuck when I was little. He asked me in baby talk if I wanted to fuck. Yes, I replied, let’s fuck.”*

(The Incest Diary, 35)

I am stunned by the unselfconscious sadomasochistic embrace of sexual violation when I first read *The Incest Diary*. I want to absorb her intensely pleasurable writing neutrally; I want to receive the quiet tension of each fragment without losing sight of the difference between rape and sex. I want to remember that this is a woman writing about the rape and the abuse she experienced at the hands of her father since she was three years old until she was twenty-one. I want to hold on to all my feminist commonsense about rape: a child cannot be expected to consent meaningfully; rape is rape even if the victim has been ideologically/psychologically conditioned to want it and find it pleasurable; the testimony is the truth<sup>1</sup>. Each page of the *Diary* makes it harder and harder for me to hold on to my political wishes; I find myself completely absorbed by the sharp contours of its complex textuality; my reading pleasures align me with the narrator’s experience of pleasure in rape; I am afraid politics is impossible for the moment. There is yet reading.

Sexual violence feminisms, especially the contemporary MeToo movement, rely on accounts of psychic reality only to ultimately extrapolate descriptions of empirical reality from them<sup>2</sup>. The tentative, fuzzy nature of experience is interpreted in favour of certainty, and confirmation of already known structural facts about the world. This move allows the personal to

be addressed as the political. The *Diary* renders this fairly conventional feminist gesture almost impossible. The *Diary* is a text solely of a subject's psychic reality. It holds on to its diariness even in the moments of acute self-doubt. And yet, it definitively claims rape. The politics of the *Diary* consists not in relinquishing the psychic, but in reading it. Rape is posited not as an objective fact, but as a reading that can only be formulated and experienced internally. And it is, more often than not, like every reading, insidious and self-contestatory. Part of the violence of rape is having to live through this internal contestation, to come up against self-involvement, and having to tolerate not one meaning, but too many of them. Part of the trauma of rape is having to conjure, construct, constitute its subjective truth over and over.

In what follows, I first illustrate some of the features of the *Diary's* textuality by way of narrating its story. Though sexual violence feminisms and theorists of sexuality are in the present moment often construed to be in opposition to one another<sup>3</sup>, I demonstrate that the *Diary* is practically unreadable by both camps. I argue that the *Diary* - its own commitment to reading and its demand to be read<sup>4</sup> - slows us down politically in the urgent struggle to end sexual violence, and that is precisely its inestimable political value.

### **nowhere to go: the problem with psychic reality**

Published anonymously in 2017, the *Diary* is composed of twelve unnumbered sections; each section is a collection of memories, strung together not by chronology but what appears to be some form of association. The narrator recounts being raped in many different ways; she was also tortured, tied up, cut with a knife, choked, locked up in a closet, coerced, threatened, abused, humiliated, all while being taken care of as a child, as a teenager, by her father. He was the one

who fed her, bathed her, took her to school, bought her sanitary napkins. She felt orphaned. She also felt desired. She felt abandoned in the periods that he did not have sex with her. She liked some of the things they did. Sometimes, she initiated sex. She wanted to take care of her father. She once managed to stop him from killing himself by giving him a hand job. She says that for a long time she would only see her father's face when she came. She entered dissociative states when the physical pain and the fear became too much, like when her father tried to kill her in the bathtub or when he cut into her vagina with a steak knife; she was eight or nine years old.

The *Diary* narrates the experience of extreme violation *and* the desire for it in unflinching detail. Of the last time she had sex with her father, she writes about the anticipation, the clothes she wore, the way in which she held her body when she knew he was looking. She writes about waiting in her bedroom:

“The first two nights I couldn't stop masturbating, thinking about my father being so close. At the other end of the house, alone, sleeping in the bed with the walnut headboard. I couldn't help it. I wanted and didn't want him to come in and fuck me. On the third night he did” (5).<sup>5</sup>

She says she wanted *and* didn't want him to come in. This is the tense, double-edged sword-like atmosphere of the entire text. She goes on:

“My father pulled off the bedspread and saw my twenty-one-year-old body. I was naked and I was wet. I wanted his big hard cock deep inside me. I was very wet. I wanted him inside me all the way up. I had never felt sexier. My body was pure sex. My father had made himself a sexual object for me, too. I objectified him as I objectified myself for him. I had an orgasm bigger than any single one I had in my subsequent twelve-year marriage. We didn't say anything. Not one word. Then he got out of my bed, went out of

the room and down the hall and back into his bed. Not one word ever about that night” (6).

She says that he fucked her and made her come. They did not kiss.

“We never kissed. We didn’t kiss that night, and we didn’t kiss when I was a teenager, and we didn’t kiss when I was eleven or ten or nine or eight or seven or six or five or four or three.

He never put his tongue inside my mouth” (6).

It is not clear if this is a complaint. It is not clear what their lack of kissing means to her. That this is how she communicates the ages through which she was abused makes it sound like she is hurting about not being kissed. That she felt used without being loved. But the last sentence about her mouth also suggests that this was some relief, some safety: at least he did not do *that* to her when she was eleven or ten or nine or eight or seven or six or five or four or three.

The effects of this extreme sexual violence are serious and damaging. As a child, she is afraid that people will know her secret by looking at her. She wonders obsessively if she was pregnant in the first, second and the third grades. She is surprised that her peers don’t have the same bloody dreams as her. On a family trip to New York and Boston, she feels sharp pains in her body because she thinks that all the tall buildings are about to fuck her. She tells her mother about it as a child, and then as a grown woman; her mother does not help her, or validate her experience, or acknowledge her injuries and pain except when she is furious with her and sees her as a rival. The narrator tells a family friend she trusts and respects. The older woman places a hand on the narrator’s mouth and asks her to move on. She sees therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts. She tells none of them about the extent of the sexual violence. With most of them she does not even mention it. She is unable to have lasting friendships and

relationships. She finds herself repeating the pattern of having an abusive, secretive romance with an older, married man in another country. She gets married to a man who she does not desire so that she can have a “sexless home” (121).

She wonders if it is her fault. She mentions her father’s own history of being abused by his grandfather along with his sister. But there is no real explanation of why her father did this to her. No thesis of ideology, toxic masculinity, generational trauma and psychopathology or individual depravity. Instead, we have his kettle-logic.

“...my mother sang me to sleep. Then later my father would come into my room.

Sometimes he would penetrate me, sometimes he would masturbate onto my body.

He said he couldn’t help it. He told me it was my fault. It must have been my fault. He said that he couldn’t help it because I was so beautiful and it felt so good. He said he was a sick man. A weak victim of his desire. And I, too, felt desire; I felt my wildness.

Sometimes I rubbed myself on his hairy thigh. I did it because it felt good” (13).

Mother sang lullabies; father had sex. The proximity of tender, protective, soothing care by someone who did *not* make her feel loved, with penetrative, possessive, desirous contact with someone who did, was confusing: did I do it, did you do it, do you want it, do I want it, what do you want, what could I want, who wants what. Against all of that confusion, her own simple admission: “I did it because it felt good.” The feeling good is obviously fraught.

“I had orgasms. I remember how scary they felt. Scary and so good. Like I was flying and falling and exploding and about to die. I didn’t know if my body would still be there when it was over. Every time he fucked me, every time he made himself come, or me come, I was pushed further into solitude” (40).

The violence is severe; the experience is too *full* - of pain, pleasure, fear, arousal - for a child.

Her father's kettle-logic, on the other hand, maintains an emptiness at the heart of (his) desire: I did it because because because because. The writing follows each possibility articulated in her father's discourse to its logical end. Nothing holds up. What remains is the narrator's psychic relationship to these probable "causes." This relationship is subject to the extreme violence, and also a subject *of* it.

"...I didn't [escape]. A child can't escape. And later, when I could, it was too late. My father controlled my mind, my body, my desire. I wanted him. I went home. I went back for more" (4).

Didn't, can't, could not want to, wanted, went, went back for more. The claim that her father controlled her mind, body, desire, cannot contain this climactic chain of verbs. Her brother suffers a breakdown; she assures him it must have been someone else who raped her. She briefly makes up with her father; she assures him too: "someone else must have raped me." (12) These assurances compromise the content of her truth, and yet, they affirm something of its quality: certain, *because* one has to take a position in relation to the chaos of experiential data in order to make meaning; speculative, for there is something radically unknowable about one's own psychic reality. Between these two slightly different assurances - it must have been someone *else* and I *must* have been *raped* by someone - the narrator does not fall into the abyss of confusion and psychosis. On the contrary, her testimony deepens every time she interprets an event.

"My father wanted to fuck me, and sometimes he wanted to kill me. Sometimes it was both" (16).

She organises the many meanings of each "sometimes" into an interpretation that is intelligible, without nullifying that which is contradictory.

“Sometimes fucking me made my father very happy. And sometimes it made him very angry. When I remember the day in the bathtub, I can only see it either from above, watching the two of us, or from my father’s perspective. I see the terrified girl. But there is nowhere to go. The tub is so slippery it is hard to move, and the water sloshes about when she does” (14-15).

### **let’s do something: the problem with politics**

Very few readers are able to tolerate this “nowhere to go” quality of the account<sup>6</sup>. They want to do something with the *Diary*. Anything! Lisa Schwarzbaum suggests the book is highly marketable and has the added advantage of rousing a reader to throw it across the room. Many reviewers doubt the veracity of the account because of the extreme nature of the violence. David Aaronovitch claims that a psychotherapist he spoke to expressed high skepticism about its authenticity. These smug, misogynist reviews are precisely why the more feminist readers like Lauren Oyler want to use the *Diary* for political purposes: raise awareness about the severe effects of child abuse, listen empathically to the story of a survivor, feel her suffering. Many reviews address the problem of her pleasure. Is it rape if she feels good? Is she forced or is she complicit? Rich Smith cites scientific studies of women who experienced wetness, arousal and orgasms during rape. These studies point out that the body reacts in this way to survive even when the person is being forced and absolutely does not want to have sex and is not enjoying any of it. Zosia Bielski’s whole “review” is about the sociological facts of child sexual abuse, the psychological literature about it, and strategies for survival.

Amia Srinivasan also relies on the crucial link between pleasure and survival to counter the negative reviews of the book. She argues that pleasure and wanting it are beside the point:

“When a victim of sexual abuse says she wanted it, she is telling us about the sort of person the abuse required her to be. [...] She is sexually obsessed with him. How, indeed, could it be otherwise? Describing her father letting her out of the closet in which he had locked her, she asks, “How could I not love the man who set me free?””

According to Srinivasan, there was pleasure precisely because a child was sexually used by an adult who she was dependent on. Her capacities for pleasure were taken over by the need to survive. This was “the kind of abuse that comes so early as to precede the child’s ability to express it, to others or to herself”. Srinivasan points out that there is ample evidence in the text to support her view that whether the narrator wanted it or not, whether she enjoyed it or not, whether she initiated it or not, she was raped by her father. In Srinivasan’s reading, the “how could I not” - heartbreaking, terrifying, tense - becomes “how, indeed” - knowing, resigned, deadening.

At the time of writing the *Diary*, the narrator is in a romantic relationship with a man called Carl. Soft-spoken and gentle in front of others, Carl is angry, possessive and violent as a lover. The narrator says they must have both smelled the need for violence in each other.

“I don’t like pain, but I desire pain from Carl. I like it when he pushes on my wounds. It makes them feel better. I like it when Carl hits me. I like it when he bites me. I like it when he holds me down and I squirm, which makes him fuck me harder. And if I cry, harder still. I like it when I have marks from him. Marks I carry around with me, like badges on my body. I want him to abuse me. I like it when I can’t tell the difference between sexual pleasure and sexual pain - when they are the same. The fact that my

father raped me makes him want me more. When I told him about my father tying me up and putting me in the closet, Carl said that was his now, he owned all of it. Carl tied me up and put me in the closet. He let me out and face-fucked me. How could I not love the man who set me free?" (126)

Erin Spampinato argues that this "psychoanalytic repetition" points to the inescapability of the kind of violence that the narrator went through. She "lived" but did not emerge as a conventional "survivor." Amia Srinivasan also cautions against reading her relationship with Carl as a liberatory narrative where she owns her sexual trauma. There is no freedom here, Srinivasan says, for the narrator is still only trying to survive; Carl is an accommodation without judgement, without blame, but still just that: a reenactment. I am alarmed by Srinivasan's specifically political foreclosure of textuality. Even if it is a reenactment, how do we know what that means to the narrator? What is the psychic status of this repetition; what does it express, what does it work through *as* reenactment, what are the satisfactions it affords, what is the nature of that satisfaction; who is the narrator in this repetition: is she Carl, is she the little girl, is it possible to *be* the little girl ever; who is Carl? And what about the repetition that is writing? What about the pleasure of reading her repetition?

Rich Smith argues that the reading pleasures are the very point, for they approximate the "shame-pleasure-horror spiral" that the narrator describes as desire. The reading pleasures of the text are simply there to serve the feminist purpose of creating awareness. The more powerful the testimony, the more stark its effects. No reading here, only truth-telling. He recommends the book to everyone who can stomach it; he says he couldn't stop reading. Some readers, however, are concerned about this very feeling of not being able to stop reading: isn't this the most banal apology for rape? I couldn't stop, I just had to. What if the *Diary* repeats what it is supposed to

critique and condemn? What if evidence of her pleasure is used by pedophiles to justify child abuse? What if the *Diary* turns pedophiles on? Allison Pearson claims that though she does not know much about the reading habits of pedophiles, she is certain the *Diary* would delight them. What if evidence of the narrator's rape fantasy is used to justify rape: she was asking for it, she liked it, she meant yes when she said no, it is what she really wanted, she consented to being raped, it was just violent sex? The political stakes are very high. Pleasure is a problem, hers, and especially that of the readers.

Srinivasan, however, is not engaged with the question of reading pleasures, except to explain its origin in abuse. She admits that the *Diary* is as much about pleasure as it is about pain. She recognises that "that sometimes rape and seduction, coercion and desire, are not opposed at all." She ends the review by saying that it is very difficult to review the *Diary* as a literary object:

"For all its elegance, its moments of chilly beauty, the book never allows one to fully divorce it, as a piece of writing, from its devastating occasion — much less to entertain the thought that the abuse might be somehow redeemed through its writing. It is far easier to say, or should be, that the book is a significant feminist text."

She does admit that the writing is powerful: "It is a controlled, exquisitely written book, it disturbs and disgusts, but it also mesmerizes and, at certain moments, charms in its quiet brutality." The narrator's pleasure is an effect of rape; the pleasure that her father may have experienced is a psychopathology borne of his own experience of intense child abuse; our feminist pain - disturbance, disgust - is an effect of witnessing her pleasure; our literary pleasure - feeling mesmerized, feeling charmed - cannot be explained. In any case, it is beside the point.

**something else entirely: the problem with rape is (not) sex**

The narrator is date-raped when she is twenty-one. She says that the hospital staff was very kind and her boss was very understanding, but she herself was not very traumatised by it.

“The truth was that what happened that night didn’t really get to me. I also felt partly responsible for it. We can smell these things. I have a weakness that he sensed. He might not have done that to another woman, but he did it to me. Perhaps I smelled the violence in him and acted differently around him, unconsciously, like I did with Carl. And I knew how to leave my body behind and let things happen to it” (116-117).

Here, as in everywhere else in the text, the *Diary* does not privilege either the violation or the self-involvement. They co-exist. They do not cancel each other out. Feminism, however, is currently - always - under immense pressure to prove the reality of rape in the courtroom, on the couch, in one’s own mind, in the classroom, in the hospital room, in the bedroom, in the senate. Feminism tries to rescue the subject from the terrible effort of reading. It was not your fault. Pleasure is inconsequential. Rape is rape is rape. You are being truthful. The *Dairy* is unable to find relief in this feminist rescue that is predicated on the opposition between complicity and consent. She presses on, she repeats, rape, pleasure, yes, no, no, no, yes, no, pleasure, sex, rape.

The *Diary* does not posit the complexity of sexuality as something that compromises the politics against sexual violence. However, a lot of contemporary theory on sexuality does present literary reading and the messiness of desire and pleasure as a counterpoint to claiming, understanding and fighting against rape. For example, Janet Halley re-reads the facts of two American Supreme Court cases of sexual violence - *Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Services* (1998) and *Twyman v. Twyman* (1993). Events that were interpreted as sexual violence in court

could also be read as ambiguous, confusing sexual encounters. While Halley's reading is generative and persuasive, she completely undermines her own argument about the fuzzy and counter-intuitive nature of sexuality: if everything sexual is up for interpretation by its very nature, why can't men and women interpret their own experiences as rape? Why does rape have to be countered by reading? Why can't rape be a reading? It is not that I am arguing - liberal feminisms would - that we simply add rape as one of the many interpretive possibilities. Neither am I claiming - like a radical feminist - that rape is *the* reading. I am suggesting that it is only *as* reading, that the claim of rape can profoundly alter the text that it addresses. Once it is on the table, this reading will *have* to be contended with.

In a move similar to Halley, Laura Kipnis argues for the complexity of sexuality and the rich life of fantasy<sup>7</sup> in situations of hierarchy as grounds for invalidating an allegation of rape. Though Kipnis is primarily concerned with the execution of Title IX cases on university campuses, it is difficult to find any real space - beyond her rhetorical assertions every dozen pages that she believes people shouldn't be raping each other - for critiquing sexual violence. More, her argument replicates some of the gestures of sexual violence feminisms that she finds problematic. She analyses the evidence of a Title IX case herself to argue that the student, who filed a complaint against a faculty member that she was once consensually involved with, could be lying. The Title IX officers, Kipnis claims, refused to believe the faculty member and thought *he* was lying. Is there really a difference between the officers and Kipnis? Everyone is actually agreed that rape is a factual truth, and it can only be on one side, and people can either have sex or be raped, and it is not fair for women to allege rape in hindsight. Kipnis is also very committed to women cultivating sexual and emotional maturity for their own good rather than rely on legal systems. She calls it grown-up feminism. That Title IX is faulty and not up to the

task for tackling sexual harassment on university campuses, I understand. What I don't understand is the moralism attached to alleging rape; for all of Kipnis's criticisms of the rescue fantasies of sexual violence feminisms, she is pretty much trying to rescue young women from their confusion, aggression, vindictiveness, fear, masochism, risk-taking legal behaviour herself. Have the vicious chaos of sexuality, she is saying, instead of the virtuous chaos of rape cases. What she demonstrates, in spite of herself, is that the chaos of rape *is* the chaos of sexuality. The takeaway is not that the confusing presence of sexual complexity - queerness, sadomasochism, intergenerational sex, regressive behaviour - makes rape impossible to allege, but that the claim of rape is the surest sign of the destructive force of sexuality.

Srinivasan, Halley, and Kipnis have very different political commitments. If Srinivasan is interested in understanding sexual violence to fight against it, Halley and Kipnis are broadly allied in their desire to understand feminism's relation to sexuality. What they have in common is their refusal to *read* rape. Though they claim that rape and sex are deeply proximate to one another, they are not able to think beyond the "rape is not sex" maxim. Consequently, they can either allow themselves to have a pleasurable reading of sexuality *or* a painful politics against sexual violence. *The Incest Diary* reconfigures these territorial battles by simply turning away from them: "I feel his pleasure exploding out of me. His pleasure between my legs. I want to fuck myself like that, feel him splitting me in two. Feeling us become each other and something else entirely" (67).

### **bloody insides everywhere: the problem that is reading**

In the eighth grade, the narrator is asked to keep a journal. She writes everyday about the Persian Gulf War and the weather. Her teacher asks her why she doesn't ever write about herself.

“The curves of the clouds, where they were white and where they had gray. If the gray was from shadows, or if it was from being full of rain and the clouds were about to burst. I wrote about the color of the sky. Whether it was hazy or blue. What kind of blue in the morning, what kind of blue at noon, and the blue before the sunset. And the blue of dark, of night, and the moon. Waxing or waning. I wrote about the shadows of the clouds on the fields. I wrote about birds. I wrote about how the air smelled. I wrote about dust, I wrote about wind. I wrote about how the smell of the rain hitting the earth was like yellow mustard” (69).

Later she will say that she went into the clouds when her father cut her.

“I floated up out of that bedroom and house. I lived in the sky. I played in the clouds. My body was down in that house, but I was up in the sky. I *was* the sky. I was endless blue sky when I was tied to the chair when he put the knife inside and cut.” (75)

She *was* writing about herself in the journal, carefully and with nuance, in writing about the clouds, the sky and the moon. As a teenager, she dreams of her “bloody insides being everywhere” (47).

Writing about herself is to write about rape because “[m]aybe all of the things I do are about my father raping me before I knew how to read or write” (39). She tries again and again to go back to this “before” of reading/writing. Her body remembers everything, she says, all the feelings. In her fantasies, she goes back to being eight or nine or ten, “just before getting breasts”

(48), when her body was not big enough to accommodate penetration. “Putting his cock into me was pure pain until...I was a teenager” (40). She remembers feeling split into two, impaled, and that’s the time of the body she wants to return to. “My body is pure rapture” (22). Not the whole, inviolate body, but the body at the moment of being split, the body that was now accessible only in the play between the representation of the cut and the fantasy of unmediated pure substance. “My body was pure sex” (6). Once she sits down on a heater and burns herself because she needs to feel her body/pain. She is the sky. She is tied to the chair. In the middle of the book, she faints at hearing the word “incest.” It is the body that hears the cruel word, it is the body that responds to this word that writes her, this word that she will learn to write. Flying, falling, exploding, about to die; she says she didn’t know if her body would still be there when the fuck was over. What body if and when the fuck is over?

What I am trying to say is that the rape and the pleasure and the before and the burning flesh and the sky and writing and reading are the knots around which the narrator’s subjectivity gathers and frays. Her father unties the knots with which she is tied to the chair. She runs out in the sunshine. This does not (only) mean that she survives the violence; it also means that she survives the fantasy of being rescued. She survives the terrible fantasy of pure pleasure in living with it. The narrator survives repetition in writing it. *The Incest Diary* is a stupendous analytic achievement. It is not survival that is the achievement, but the reading/pleasure of it and in it, ours *and* hers.

“Today I read in a book about torture that the more a captive is raped, the more likely she is to experience pleasure. Pleasure as a means of survival. The more she is raped. The more pleasure. Does this mean I have felt the most pleasure in the world? My body is

pure rapture. Writing this arouses me. I think about my father and I get wet. I think about my father and I feel him in my pussy” (22).

I feel her words in my body, I feel them in my heart, I read them aloud, I hear them out, I feel shards carving into my eyes. I feel engaged and alive and in her and with her. I feel gratified for having read something so beautiful.

“Pleasure as a means to survive. My father is my sexual pleasure. I’m tied up and he’s hand-feeding me his semen. Hand-feeding me what he just jacked off into his palm. This great pleasure of ours is bursting in light. I feel God in my heart getting bigger. I’m swallowing his sperm while I’m bound to the chair, and I have rays of light shooting out of my head and face” (22).

The reading pleasures of this text recast pleasure not (only) as a means of survival, but as that which survives, transmits itself, outlives, exceeds and decimates our speculations about its functionality. There is no meta-position here; this pleasure is in service of nothing; pleasure *is* nothing; it is certainly of no political use. There is yet reading: not as understanding or resolution, but as the endless reaching for this textuality of sexuality, *and* not being able to do anything about it. The *Diary* returns the violation of rape to the violence of sexuality; it turns on the analytic insight that reading is perhaps the only political intervention available to us in relation to sexuality. It is all we can take.

I suggest that we stop wanting to do something with *The Incest Diary*, especially if doing something means sacrificing politics and reading to one another. I advocate passivity, the kind that Freud associated with femininity: performed painstakingly, maintained actively, sustained aggressively. First, we must learn to take the cataclysmic intimacy of sex and violence seriously. She did. And who is to say that she is more fucked than the rest of us?

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<sup>1</sup> See Judith Herman and Elizabeth Ward and for their work on incest and child abuse in the fields of psychology and feminism. For a more psychoanalytic understanding of incest, see Arnold W Rachman and Susan A Klett, especially their reading of Sandor Ferenczi's *Confusion of Tongues*.

<sup>2</sup> See Katie Way and Ijeoma Oluo as examples of this move in the MeToo movement.

<sup>3</sup> See Bari Weiss and Lisa Duggan for their sexuality-based critiques of sexual violence feminisms.

<sup>4</sup> There is much in the *Diary* that can be read through psychoanalytic theory. I resist the impulse to interpret in this short text for fear of arresting or containing the textuality of the *Diary*, though I do use psychoanalysis here as a set of reading techniques. I privilege psychic reality over political fact-making; I treat each piece of pathological structure as an expression rather than something to be cured; I use my own reading responses as data about the text. I quote extensively from the *Diary* to allow the readers to experience something of the text themselves.

<sup>5</sup> All the quotes followed by page numbers belong to *The Incest Diary*.

<sup>6</sup> Two notable exceptions are Erin Spampinato's essay on the history of the reception of incest memoirs and H. C. Wilentz's review of the book.

<sup>7</sup> Jacqueline Rose has critiqued what she sees as Kipnis's (mis)use of fantasy. Elizabeth A Wilson, on the other hand, has found Kipnis useful precisely because of her "subterranean

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deployment of Freudian principles” (199). See also the low on reading, high on rhetoric, “Short Takes: Laura Kipnis' Unwanted Advances ” published in *Signs*.

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