

Prostitution for Everyone: feminism, globalisation, and the "sex" industry

by D. A. Clarke

I. Uphill Work: feminist opposition to the traffic in women

Sex, as it is organized in this society, is the most common way in which human rights violations, injustice, and inequality are acted out. Acts of sexual injustice continue to be protected by the right as moral, and by the left as personal freedom. This difference creates a superficial political opposition over a fundamental agreement.

Both the right and the left have taken an active role in protecting traditional sexuality.... The left has responded to feminism's success and the breakdown of the patriarchal family not by trying to reassert the traditional family, but by actively defending as freedom, or dismissing as unimportant, its substitute: men's intensified sexual aggression against girls and women via pornography, libertine television and movies, prostitution, private sexual assault, and a culture that imposes sexual demands on girls at a younger and younger age.

Adriene Sere 'What if the Women Mattered?'

(Eat the State Sep 23 1998)

... Guan Somyong was no longer ashamed that his fifteen-year-old daughter was the first in their village to enter the sex trade. From the money she sent home, the family now had a brick house, refrigerator, TV and stereo. "Now all the girls want to go," her mother said.

William Greider, *One World Ready Or Not : the Manic*

Logic of Global Capitalism

A report from western Colombia describes a situation where women headed many of the households and provided, even when married, cash income as agricultural labourers, in addition to crops from their gardens. They were driven out of production with the encroachment of cash crops introduced by Green Revolution technicians. 'Whereas men saw their interests being improved by wage labour available in the mechanised farming sector, women lost control over the variety of crops that had been the mainstay of their

subsistence activities and ensured their children food in the face of market values of monocrop cultivation Some of their coffee trees were ruined by the insecticides dusted over tracks outside the commercial crop and by planes used in the commercial enterprises...' ... Starvation affects men and women differently ... Previously "moral" women turn to prostitution to obtain food.

Marilyn Waring, *Counting For Nothing: What Men Value and What Women are Worth* (quoting Anna Rubbo and referencing research by Rubbo and by Gail Pearson)

Female employees of beleaguered US telecoms firm WorldCom have been invited to pose in Playboy magazine as part of a revealing "Women of WorldCom" piece in an upcoming issue.

Women who choose to participate will be following in the footsteps of the "Women of Enron" who grace Playboy's July issue . . .

Not to be left out, the women of Arthur Andersen, the auditing firm linked to both the WorldCom and Enron corporate scandals, were also asked to pose nude for the men's magazine.

Agence France-Presse
Story republished by News.com.au, Australian online news magazine, 7/16/02

"I got the shit kicked out of me," she said. "I was told before the video -- and they said this very proudly, mind you -- that in this line most of the girls start crying because they're hurting so bad . . . I couldn't breathe. I was being hit and choked. I was really upset, and they didn't stop. They kept filming. You can hear me say, 'Turn the fucking camera off', and they kept going."

Regan Starr, porn actress, interviewed by Martin Amis
in "A Rough Trade", UK Guardian March 17 2001

Let me tell you what pimping is. Pimping is slavery.

Police Detective Herman Glass, quoted in
"They Call Their Pimp 'Daddy',"
Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Hurting women is bad. Feminists are against it, not for it.

Andrea Dworkin, "Woman Hating Right and Left,"
in *The Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism*,
eds. Leidholdt and Raymond

For well over a century, feminists of various nations have struggled to expose and delegitimise the practice of 'trafficking in women,' that is, the business of men selling or renting women and girls (and sometimes boys) -- or live voyeuristic views of women and girls -- or pictures of women and girls -- to other men. Feminists have been trying, in other words, to stop men from selling and buying every kind of access to the bodies of women and children.

Feminists have opposed and exposed various kinds of traffickers. In my view this includes married men who coerce their wives into being 'loaned' to male friends; husbands and boyfriends who take photos of women during sex (with or without their knowledge) and then trade or sell those images among other men; brothers and fathers who coerce or trick women and girls into providing sexual services, inside or outside the family; procurers who prey on the naiveté of young women with false offers of jobs, passports, love, security; outright kidnappers who imprison, beat, and 'break' women into sexual slavery; men who think that a dinner or a movie is sufficient 'payment' for forced sex; men who believe their daughters are their personal property and can be sold at their convenience; and many more. Feminists have also exposed and critiqued the male clients and customers of these traffickers.

The harm done to women by these conversions into tradeable commodity is well documented. In this book and others, there is ample evidence of the frequency and severity of abuse that trafficked women survive, or sometimes do not survive. The evidence, both testimonial and documentary, leaves no question that human rights are being routinely violated in this international trade. There is far less secrecy now than there was fifty or even thirty years ago -- pimps and pornographers have been driven (or

have proudly strutted) into the open. Prostitution can be discussed openly -- indeed, romanticised -- in film, literature, and theatre, as well as in the press; and pornography is increasingly visible to ordinary people.

Over the last few decades, pornography and prostitution have become more and more socially acceptable, more 'mainstreamed'. We are generally told that this process is a positive sign of the liberalization of society, a movement away from restrictive social norms associated with the Fifties and earlier decades. The acceptability of pornography and pimping is tied closely in the public mind with tolerance for lesbians and gays, improved sex education, improved access to birth control technologies, etc. We are told it is a package deal.

These two threads of social change -- to this feminist -- seem, on the contrary, quite opposite and contradictory. It's true that much of the greater 'sexual freedom' to which arch-conservatives object so strenuously is generally beneficial to women: sex education in schools helps protect girls from the pitfalls of ignorance, secrecy, and shame; lesbians are spared at least some of the stigma, violence, and discrimination they experienced in earlier decades; and access to birth control -- and if necessary, abortion -- is a fundamental feminist demand.

However, with the rising popularity and social presence of pornography has come an apparent intensification of its violently misogynist content. From video games aimed at pre-teens, to popular film, to all-porn TV channels and web sites, the supply of images and themes reflecting (and appealing to) a sadistic, paedophilic, and generally brutal attitude to women and girls has increased enormously. The "sex education" offered to contemporary youth via these commercial media is generally an education in contempt and even hatred towards women. Meanwhile prostitution (which according to liberal

futurist theory of the Sixties should have withered as general sexual freedom flourished and "repressions" were abandoned) has on the contrary burgeoned into an enormous and increasingly mainstream industry. Nor has there been any marked improvement in the conditions of life and work for the world's prostitutes; they still endure hardship, danger, violence, hunger, drug addiction, official contempt, low wages: every kind of violation of human rights and dignity.

The essential issues which traditionally inspired feminists to challenge and criticise the sex industry have not changed despite decades of effort. It has been remarkably difficult for feminists to make any progress on these issues. It is very difficult even to get the issue taken seriously. Obviously one reason for this is that feminist activity has not changed the fundamentals of social power. Men still control decisive power blocs such as armed force, the higher levels of government, big business and media -- and the 'sex industry' is a service industry for men. A critique of this industry is bound to be uphill work.

Perhaps more surprising is the difficulty we have had finding allies in this effort. Even though there is a fairly strong consensus among progressive or liberal people about the value of peace, economic justice, and human rights -- and about the negative values of corruption and secrecy in government, excessive concentration of wealth in the hands of small elites, and so forth -- there is a remarkable non-consensus about issues of gender power and sexual exploitation. The sexual privileges claimed by men under the rules of patriarchy are often still claimed by 'progressive' men marching under the banners of peace and justice.

To clarify: We know that the presumption of access rights in women's bodies leads to predictable abuses by dictators, kings, pharaohs and other 'oppressive monsters'

of history whom progressive men, as well as women, deplore. Tiberius and Caligula spring to mind, not to mention the iconic Henry (VIII) Tudor, or even the notorious sons of Saddam Hussein. We recognise *droit de seigneur* as an abominable abuse, symbolic of all that was rotten about feudal aristocracy. Yet we find that most men 'of good will,' i.e. progressive and liberal men -- despite their commitment to democracy and their distaste for feudalism and dictatorships -- continue to fantasize about unlimited access to women; to consume access to women in the form of pornography; and/or to imagine that they have 'rights' of some kind to sexual services from a particular woman or all women. Indeed many liberal/progressive men continue to use a privilege-inverting "poverty" model to understand sex and male behaviour; they see 'sex' (a euphemism for 'access to other people's bodies for my own gratification') as being in short supply and men as being needy, hungry, and somehow deserving, thus placing a kind of moral obligation on women to provide.

Male privilege is, we might conclude, the last bastion of those systems of privilege which progressive people generally try to critique or challenge. Men and women can stand together in solidarity along lines of class, race, political belief, or religion, but to talk honestly about male sexual privilege or the mythology of male sexual entitlement drives a wedge between heterosexual couples, threatens the most intimate infrastructure of ego and self-definition for men, and calls into question time-honoured rituals of courtship, mating, pairing, etc. to which most people are deeply attached. It is not, therefore, surprising that as a culture we attempt some rather fancy ideological footwork rather than confront directly the assumptions which even liberal/progressive men (and women) make about male sexual identity and behaviour .

Many feminists have felt baffled, if not completely speechless, in face of the

cultural mandate to welcome and applaud the work of the porn industry as a facet of social progress. Violently misogynist websites are reviewed with smug approval in 'liberal' and 'progressive' publications (both virtual and paper); traditional leftist journals such as *The Nation* continue to support pornographers as some kind of heroes of free speech and secular liberation. The feminist community is further divided by factions of women who claim that pornography and prostitution are in fact empowering for women, and that feminists should support and endorse them as such. Does all this defence of pornography spring only from the stubborn persistence of traditional patriarchal privilege in our cultures?

Running an online escort directory, it turns out, isn't much different than managing a corporate Web site. The same rules apply: Keep it simple, know your audience, keep the customer satisfied. "It's just like my regular Internet job was; the only difference is that I'm not hamstrung by the six-month VP review process," says Giorgio. "I can have a site up in a day and see immediately how it's doing and start fine-tuning it. As a Web professional, it's much more rewarding."

...

FrugalJohn's upcoming move into Texas is timely and could prove to be a much-needed tonic for a local economy battered by recession and corporate malfeasance. There have to be plenty of out-of-work guys in Houston who would like to do to a reasonably-priced escort what Enron did to them.

Tom McNichol, writing for *Salon Online*, March 11 2002

In the twenty-some years of my own adult life as a feminist -- despite passionate

and well-informed efforts and despite limited victories in many other areas of political struggle -- we seem to have made zero or negative progress in challenging or restraining the men who buy and sell, rent and lease, women and girls. Nor have we reduced the appetite of men, in America or elsewhere, for grotesque imagery of female humiliation, pain, and fear. The twin industries of pornography and prostitution have boomed worldwide and the degree of misogyny deemed acceptable in everyday cultural life has ratcheted upwards to levels I would not have believed possible. All this has happened 'on my watch'; and I suspect that other feminists may share my feelings of personal failure.

Despite our best efforts, the international traffic in women has grown, not diminished, and it has become harder, not easier, to generate serious public discussion of the violation of basic human rights in pornography and prostitution. In this set of interlocking short essays I try to understand why. Why is it so difficult to bring a critique of prostitution into the public discourse? Why do we seem to be losing political ground? Where might we go from here?

The difficulty of transcending either our historical or primate legacy -- we disagree amongst ourselves whether the mystique of the alpha male is a product of nature or culture -- might in itself explain our failure to increase the ration of social justice allowed to women and girls by abolishing trafficking. But I believe there is another factor that makes our critique even more difficult to articulate today, and particularly difficult to introduce into serious public discourse.

In this set of interlocking essays I will suggest that over the last three decades an ideological barrier -- perhaps a much more perdurable one than even the traditional hurdles of male privilege, right-wing misogyny, and liberal smugness -- has been raised with the intent to silence discourse about social justice in general. The ideology of

neoliberal economics (also known as 'globalisation' or 'global capitalism' or the 'New World Order') has created a new intellectual, cultural and media milieu in which it's virtually impossible for feminists to create any serious social dialogue about the meaning and implications of the traffic in women and girls. I will suggest that in order to renew a meaningful critique of the commodification of women and girls, we must rediscover a critique of commodification itself -- of neoliberal economics in general, of global capitalism, and of the 'consumer model' of politics, life, and reality itself which is now firmly enthroned in academia, government, and business circles.

II. There's Never a Leftist Around When You Need One

Suppose I decided to rape Catherine MacKinnon before reviewing her book. Because I'm uncertain whether she understands the difference between being raped and being exposed to pornography, I consider it required research for my critique of her manifesto that pornography equals rape and should be banned.

Carlin Romano, in the US leftist journal *The Nation*,
15 November 1993

In this scene, actor-director Hardcore is having rough sex with Cloey Adams, who is pretending to be under age. 'If you're a good girl, I'll take you to McDonald's later and get you a Happy Meal.' Hardcore then 'proceeds to piss in her mouth.' Addressing the camera, Cloey Adams says, 'What do you think of your little princess now Daddy?' Nor is Hardcore through with her. "Turning to the crew, he calmly says, 'I'll need a speculum and a hose' . . . One of Max's favorite tricks is to stretch a girl's asshole with a speculum, then piss into her open gape and make her suck out his own piss with a hose. Ain't that romantic?"

Adult Video News review of a Max Hardcore video,
quoted by Martin Amis in his article "Rough Trade",
published by the UK *Guardian* (3/17/01) and US Talk
magazine (3/01)

Max Hardcore is no unpopular aberration. *The Nation*, a known progressive, leftist,

noncommercial magazine, ran a fluff piece by pornographer Mark Cromer (2/26/01) heralding the work of Max Hardcore as a hero who works to keep porn dirty, "the way it should be."

Mediawatch (Ann Simonton)

The agenda of business is simple: to make a profit. Commerce, though it recognizes binding legal obligation, treaties and contracts between peers, and (sometimes) limits on the means which may be used in competition, does not otherwise observe the ethical boundaries of community life. One of the world's oldest businesses is the buying and selling of human beings -- slavery -- of which prostitution, sweatshop labour, kiddie porn clubs, the coyote trade ('people-smuggling'), and other modern exploitations are later and somewhat moderated forms.

When we recognize that buying and selling human beings is wrong -- as when we pass laws against slavery -- we contradict the fundamental agenda of business. Slave trading has always been a very profitable undertaking, and there are still people in the world who consider it a respectable one. The (partial) abolition of slave trading is a prime example of the defeat of purely business interests by the public or national conscience. Slave trading is *good business*, in the purely business sense: it turns a handsome profit. When we claim that slave trading is in fact *bad* business, we invoke standards and values from outside the marketplace.

Traditionally, the Left or progressive element in national politics has been that which counterbalances the profoundly amoral quest for profit and promotes what we might, in today's commercialised discourse, call 'non-market values.' These are values such as justice, the dignity of the individual, and the notion of civil (as opposed to purely property) rights. In theory, we expect to find the Left opposed to the narrow self-interest of capital, sympathetic to the worker rather than the boss, the exploited rather than the

exploiter. We expect the Left to take a stand against the unfettered pursuit of profit at any human cost; if the Left does not take this stand, it has forfeited its position on the political playing field.

For all these reasons, feminists have often been frustrated and infuriated by the fond attachment of the (male) Left to prostitution and pornography. The enthusiasm of good Leftist men for the high principles of *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité* all too often peters out before forging any genuine solidarity with the global *Sororité* of exploited women.

Prostitution, so the weary old cliché goes, is 'the oldest profession.' Many feminists, decade after decade, have protested that pimping, not prostitution, is the 'profession'; in prostitution, the management class is made up of pimps and madams, and the 'girls' are lowly line workers, garnering none of the benefits we associate with 'professional' status. Most do not earn high wages; most have no health benefits; as a group, prostitutes certainly do not enjoy the respect accorded to 'professionals' such as engineers, doctors, lawyers. (To describe prostitution as a 'profession' not only obscures the class and race stratification that characterises the sex trade; it casts an implicit slur on all legitimate professions to which women may aspire.)

The odds always favour the house. The pimps and the higher-level investors get rich; the 'girls' are sometimes lucky (and smart) enough to get out while they are ahead (if they ever get ahead); but the majority of the world's prostitutes -- like the rest of the world's sweatshop labour -- live and die poor, never collecting more than a tiny fraction of the profits made off their own bodies. Prostitutes are also at even higher risk than female sweatshop and field workers when we consider femicidal and misogynist violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, STDs, and police harassment.

The average prostitute, world-wide, is the very paradigm of exploited labour. The barons of the sex sweatshop trade are paradigmatic exploiters.

The international trade in women's and children's bodies, as a marketable commodity for the sexual entertainment of adult men, is a staggeringly large money machine. In the US alone, demi-respectable pornography alone is a multi-billion dollar industry; the global reach and cash-flow of the 'sex industry' is hard to measure, since much of its business occurs 'off the books,' conducted by extralegal operators with or without the connivance of government officials. But we know enough to be sure that it is very big business indeed. And we know that very, very few of its line workers ever escape from grinding poverty. The relationship of capital to labour in the sex industry is classically Dickensian, and we are not -- as a culture -- unaware of this.

The material facts of the relationship between pimp and prostitute are brutally obvious not only to those researchers who study the demographics or economics of 'the trade,' but to the average person, through the lens of pop culture. As the language and posturing of gangsters becomes once again romanticised and popularised in film, music, and TV, it is not uncommon to hear young men of the oblivious middle classes say jestingly of an overbearing boss or professor, 'Yup, I'm his bitch all right,' or 'He treats me like his ho.' 'Pimp and Ho' has become one of the more popular Halloween his-n-hers costume choices, with the party-goers often acting out 'humorously' the domination of the pimp over his 'property'. 'Official Pimp-Mobile' is a 'joke' sticker seen on the cars of college and high school students. 'Bitch-slap' has become a catch-phrase considered clever and slightly spicy, among pop-culture writers.

This just in: Pimps are greedy, vicious, criminal motherfuckers who make their pay through the exploitation, abuse, torture, and outright enslavement of women. Well, duh.

Geekery Today, April 22 2001

Whether literate in economics and sensitized to issues of class/race/gender or not, we are not, generally speaking, unaware of the real dynamics of prostitution. That knowledge is deeply encoded in the culture and available to us all.

So where is the (male) Left on this issue? Sadly the answer is usually 'nowhere in sight,' or worse, rooting for the 'civil rights' of the pimps and panders. Occasionally the Left stirs itself to advocate unionisation as the solution to the abuse of women and girls in the sex trade. This, we note, is in a country (the US) where as of 1999 less than 10 percent of the private-sector work force was unionised, and where union-busting is company policy at most of the biggest and most successful corporations (Amazon.com, McDonalds, Wal-Mart, etc). The notion that in this political and economic climate an effective union movement is miraculously going to spring up among prostitutes, seems naive to say the least. Unions rely on other unions as allies; solidarity strikes are the 'equalizer' that makes government and industry take seriously single-sector strikes. With US trade unions at an all time low, and mostly male-dominated, who is going to walk out in solidarity with striking prostitutes? Are masses of men going to honour the picket lines by refusing to patronise sex sweatshops until prostitutes achieve some kind of wage and workplace-safety parity?

Alas, a tip of the hat to unionisation is about as far as most of the male Left is willing to go. For the last thirty years and more, I have watched liberals in America and the rest of the G7 nations try to repackage pornography and prostitution as a hip and groovy thing, a liberating thing, something novel and progressive and good for us all, men and women alike. Allegedly 'leftist', 'progressive' men declare their loyalty (both as customers and partisans) to one of the biggest and most exploitative sweatshop industries

of them all. Men who would not be caught dead wearing Reeboks or Nikes, or drinking Starbucks coffee, can still kid themselves into thinking Larry Flynt is some kind of People's Hero.

This self-deception has not, I think, gone unremarked by the captains of other industries; nor have they failed to learn from it. There are suggestive parallels between the re-branding of the sex industry as a fun, wholesome place to work or as an agent of liberation, and the contemporaneous and intensifying hard-sell of market values and the New, Improved Global Economy as the truly groovy, modern solution to all our problems. It seems more than coincidental that pimps and pornographers have been flourishing during the decline and defeat of organised labour and the triumph of both centre-right and far-right policies and rhetoric.

I am convinced there more than just parallels -- the two trends are related. In fact, the two are one. The mainstreaming of prostitution and pornography is, I suggest, at least as much a result of the triumph of neoliberal dogma in politics and economics, as it is one of the mixed blessings of 'sexual liberation'.

III. Corporations R Us?

While IBM was going on the airwaves to proclaim "I am!", Friedman was virtually asking us to imagine that God was somehow behind the re-engineering programs at AT&T or GE, that God stood in solidarity with strikebreakers everywhere, that it was God who told American management to outsource the jobs to initiate "change" programs, to send the entire payroll out into the parking lot one fine morning and hire half of them back as temps.

Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God*

One of the world's biggest advertising agencies has declared that "brands are the new religion"... a new advertising strategy is being adopted in order to win customer loyalty, the tapping of religious yearning. "Everyone needs something to believe in," a recent

advertisement for a car reminded us...

Mark Corner, 'Religion and the Rise of Advertising',
Guardian March 2002

According to Active Parenting Publishers, more than three million parents have attended training sessions to make their families more like mini-corporations. Participants learn how to run family "board meetings" complete with printed agendas, mission statements, and rotating chairmanships...

Wall Street Journal August 10 2001

Commercialism is not making us behave against our better judgment. Commercialism is our better judgment.

James Twitchell, *Lead Us Into Temptation*

Now that pharmaceutical giant Pfizer sponsors Sesame Street, messages capping off the end of every episode have been replaced. Announcements that the show has been brought to you by, say, "the letter Z and the number 2," have been replaced with "Pfizer brings parents the letter Z -- as in Zithromax."

Pfizer company press release October 1999

see also FAIR Action Alert March 2000, "The Commercialization of Children's Public Television", and Mother Jones March 2001, "Sesame Street Meets Madison Avenue"

From a marketing point of view, you don't introduce new products in August.

White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, Sep 7 2002,
referring to the timing of the White House campaign to
promote a US invasion of Iraq

What happens if the commercial ethic (or lack of it) becomes paradigmatic or prescriptive for a society? If profit and business are adopted ideologically as the highest good, then what? What are the implications and consequences for community life and popular culture?

This is the cultural experiment that has been played out for the last forty years in the United States and its satellite nations (i.e. NATO members and Japan).

America came out of the war years with a ten-year lead over most of the other industrial economies (which had been bombed, burned, and looted into the ground). It was not difficult for America, with its vast natural resources and war-stimulated technological momentum, to leap into a dominant position in the world economy, and for its population to reap the benefits of such rapid economic growth and control of international markets. Combined with strong legislation and social safety nets inherited from the (increasingly disowned) New Deal past, it all added up to prosperity and a jubilant, optimistic ride of several decades' duration for large sectors of the public.

All in all, almost three generations of Americans were treated to a period in history when the nation's barons of industry really did seem to 'bring good things to life.' In relatively easy times produced by economic expansion, hidden government subsidies, cheap energy, and a temporary lack of global competitors, Americans experienced a period of general prosperity which seemed to justify blind faith in capitalism and big business. The ugly realities of the capital/labour skirmishes of the teens and 20's were forgotten; socialist and labour parties had a hard time scaring up anyone with a sufficient grievance to join. America's hot political issues were race and gender, and not without good reason; but even as these issues were courageously struggled over, for decades, the age-old dynamics of capital and labour, wealth and power, were being forgotten in the brief summer of (relative) opportunity and prosperity for all (or most).

America's conservative business and financial community, however, had never forgiven Roosevelt for 'caving in to the Reds'. (As of this writing, in 2004, a right-wing initiative seeks even to banish FDR's head from the US dime and replace it with that of Ronald Reagan: the first President of the neoconservative revolutionary calendar.) That business community -- which had fought every progressive measure for over fifty years,

tooth and nail -- had not changed its spots overnight. It was paying more attention than ever before, however, to changing its image; from the post-war years on, an accelerating catalysis between public relations, advertising, and media acquisitions changed the political strategy of capital.

The underlying agenda never changed; the aim of the highest echelons of industry (the ruling class, in an industrialised state) remained constant. To lower wages and remove restrictions on trade and more particularly on capital; to reduce employer responsibilities and employee rights, income taxes and corporate taxes; to sweep away pesky safety and consumer regulations; and generally to eliminate every possible cost of doing business — these have been the self-interested aims of Big Business for as long as there has been Big Business. America's corporate leadership has quietly pursued this agenda, steadily but surely, decade after decade. What with one thing and another, they have by now got almost everything they ever wanted. For people like myself who came of age in the 70's, the speed and success of the rollback is difficult to comprehend.

But there was more to this campaign than open bribery or brute force (though both were, and are, used when expedient). There was also a new mastery of popular culture, mass media, and public relations. The triumphalist culture of management and owners poured a tremendous investment into what (in biz-speak) is known as 'mindshare'. Business was no longer content to be mere commerce, a necessary but sometimes rather vulgar and brutal aspect of a greater civilisation; business was out to redefine *itself* as the pinnacle of civilisation and the ultimate purpose of human evolution.

Only Business, said Business, really knew how to Get Stuff Done. Needless to say, there was widespread agreement from major media wholly owned by Big Business, or beholden to advertising contracts for their revenues; from academics occupying

research chairs funded by Business; and from politicians owing their position and influence to generous donations from Business. Business knew much better than government, better than employees, better even than God, how to run the world properly. The professional management classes puffed themselves up into a frankly religious ecstasy over the benevolent world-shaping power of *pure unrestrained commerce*. And the fever was catching.

The metaphor of business, the monetary yardstick, and the overwhelming imperative to show a profit, permeated popular culture and the culture of government. Government departments started referring to the public as 'customers' rather than 'citizens,' and calling for cost-benefit analyses of public services. On the assumption that only private enterprise is efficient, public services were massively privatised and those which remained in the public domain were starved of funding. In the US (and in the UK, practically its client state) particularly, the whole style of public and governmental discourse was replaced, with familiar concepts and metaphors like 'family,' 'community,' and 'brotherhood' (evoking non-market values) giving way to concepts and metaphors drawn from the traditions of public relations, advertising, marketing, and accounting.

Most Americans are familiar with the various downstream effects of the great privatisation and anti-government backlash: Scroogeian slashing of welfare benefits; new 'workfare' programs; the emergence of HMOs to mete out and control the health care offered to employees by employers; metastatic growth of the prison-industrial complex; rollback of environmental safeguards; cuts in community services; degradation of conditions in public schools; a general scarcity of affordable health care; job flight and outsourcing -- it is a dismal litany. Given the devastating effect of this backlash on millions of Americans (including the middle-class), many observers both in and outside

America wondered how the business/government elites could get away with it. The US is, after all, a country where elections are regularly held and incumbents must defend their seats after fairly short terms of office. As the pain and dislocation of corporate-friendly policy was felt on Main Street, why didn't political heads roll? One fairly convincing answer is 'ownership of mass media.'

In the last twenty years, the process of 'commercializing' mass culture, and of concentrating media control into fewer and fewer hands, has accelerated. Unrelenting, persevering efforts by powerful business interests have paid off; almost every media outlet and press in America is now merely a subsidiary of a much larger commercial organisation whose primary purpose is not publishing or news. This includes our three largest television networks and most of our radio, as well as most newspapers.

The conflict of interest which has always haunted the newsroom -- how much news can be honestly reported if it annoys the advertiser whose fees support the paper -- is no longer a conflict; the 'advertiser' now owns the paper outright, and the paper is no longer an independent newspaper but a line item in the yearly public relations budget of a much larger outfit. The purpose of the paper (or radio station, or TV station) is to sell the audience, by the hour, by the demographic, to the advertisers. This has its inevitable effect on content. For example, I am not aware of any mainstream daily paper in the United States which still pays a 'labour reporter' for reporting labour issues. By contrast, every paper has a 'business' section reporting the antics, fortunes, and misfortunes of the business-owning class. Increasingly, newsworthy issues are treated strictly from the 'Wall Street point of view,' as in early 2004 when a 'mad cow' food scare in the US provoked more newspaper speculation about the effect on stock values than inquiry into the possible risk to public health.

Beyond the ideological control exerted by business interests via the mass media, it also helped that finance capital was having a party on the accumulated wealth of prior industrially productive decades. As finance capitalism displaced industrial capitalism in the leading economies, speculation displaced actual building, making, and selling; and money could be 'created' by the usual mechanism of bubble markets. Stimulated by cynical, deliberate crowd-herding on the part of insiders, world stock markets roared upwards -- particularly in the US, where the bull market to end all bull markets was in full cry throughout the 1990s.

As in all bubble markets, of course, fortunes were made on paper, based on paper prospectuses, without any actual employment, goods, warehouse, factory, or storefront ever existing to back the paper. But the money (on paper) was rolling in, and American Business hailed itself as the author of all this wonderful prosperity.

Even while the gap between rich and poor was widening every year, steady industrial jobs were vanishing, and consumer debt was ballooning, Americans revelled vicariously in the rising number of youthful millionaires, 'dot com kids', and lottery winners. Respectable financial journals purported to measure the economic health of the nation by the rising number of millionaires, and even proletarian media offered 'millionaire watch' web pages and feature-boxes in which enthralled readers could follow the rising personal wealth of the very uppermost crust. A handful of small investors managed to accumulate wealth during the boom, and their successes were over-reported in the breathless media enthusiasm of the time. Wealth itself re-acquired a glamour and magic which it had not had since the 1920s, and a second 'Gilded Age' seemed to be in full swing. This time, however, skilled spin doctors would avoid the appearance of elitism that might give the game away; the new capitalism was wrapped in a slick

populist veneer. Although even at the height of the boom only 25 percent of Americans held any individually-purchased stocks or mutual funds, the cultural fantasy being shaped in the corporate media was one of ever-broadening distributed ownership of the nation's wealth. Ironically, the reverse was happening.

It was quite a re-branding of capitalism. Shrewd public relations firms advised their clients to divest themselves of the stuffy suit and tie image of business -- no pin-stripe trousers for bankers, no Victorian financial *gravitas*. Venture capitalists and fortunate inventors redefined themselves as visionaries, prophets, and heroes, some acquiring a pop-star status which in previous decades had only been accorded to popular artists or sports figures of high achievement. This sugar coating of success, a 'growth' economy, and the illusory but mesmerizing promise of money for nothing and overnight riches, made the infiltration of commercial values and metaphors into the mainstream culture quite painless. Business was chic, business was hip, business was *radical*, business was *fun*. Business was the real wellspring of democracy, upward mobility, and freedom.

The mass media have been dutifully broadcasting Business' soaring, inescapable love song to itself to good effect. At this point American public discourse has been reshaped into a mold which, if the public had not had two decades and more to get used to it, would be embarrassing for everyone. After the semi-successful terrorist 'hit' on the World Trade Centre in New York, politicians all over the country urged Americans to go out and consume, *go shopping*, to express their *patriotism*. The mayor of San Francisco authorized the distribution of posters in which the American flag was converted, by means of two bold graphic strokes, into a shopping bag, surmounting the legend 'America: Open For Business.'

There was a time, and it was not too long ago, when large numbers of sincere patriots would have been outraged at the insult offered to the US flag by any graphic artist who turned it into a shopping bag for a corporate marketing campaign. At that time, those serious-minded patriots might well have fulminated about the *prostitution* of their flag (more on this and similar metaphoric uses of prostitution later). But in a culture in which television commercials quite literally compare major corporations to God, it raised few eyebrows.

Traditionally in Western (and other) cultures commerce and profiteering -- the 'worldly' activities of the human race -- exist in tension and counterpoise with other social spheres. Sometimes a traditionalist land-owning gentry class scornful of 'mere money,' sometimes a powerful religious/charitable tradition, or a strong network of guilds or labour organisations, might defend and protect what we now (tellingly) call 'non-market values'. In later, industrial societies, organised labour and strong socialist or social-democratic parties evolved to carry the burden of social conscience and mutual responsibility. But in America at the tail end of the 20th century, none of these counterpoises had enough mass to balance the cultural, ideological, political and material forces of commercialism.

Thus the 80's and 90's in America were the culminating decades of an enormous (engineered) cultural shift, from a sensible mistrust of excessive wealth and corporate power towards an open celebration and flaunting of the same -- towards a cult-like worship of Business-for-its-own-sake. Such a shift was especially easy in America, where there was already a strong ideological association between capitalism and freedom (the Free Capitalist West versus the Poor, Enslaved Communist East), and where a successful campaign of intimidation and repression had long ago silenced or dispersed

the core of a socialist intelligentsia. Rolling back legislation both nationally and internationally, buying politicians both openly and covertly, preaching non-stop the doctrine of the invisible hand and *laissez-faire*, demonizing 'big government' and 'do-gooders' with one hand, and sparing no expense to publicize its own charitable stunts with the other, American big business was (is) well on the way to creating *truly unrestrained commercialism*.

IV. Neoliberalism: Meet the New Boss

A general characteristic of neoliberalism is the desire to intensify and expand the market, by intensifying the number, frequency, repeatability, and formalisation of transactions. The ultimate (unreachable) goal of neoliberalism is a universe where every action of every being is a market transaction, conducted in competition with every other being and with every other transaction, influencing every other transaction, with transactions occurring in an infinitely short time, and repeated at an infinitely fast rate.

from the web site of Paul Treanor, freelance social critic

Neoliberalism is both an ideology and a strategy. Like so many criminals, it has many aliases, "Reaganomics", "Thatcherism," "supply-side economics", "monetarism", "new classical economics", and "structural adjustment". The ideology of neoliberalism is the worship of the "market" and subordination of all other economic actors to its demands, including government and individuals. The strategy of neoliberal economics includes privatization, reduced social expenditures, union busting, land enclosure, lower wages, higher profits, free trade, free capital mobility and the accelerated commodification of nature.

Accion Zapatista de Austin (Univ. of Texas) position
statements on globalisation and neoliberalism

The movement toward the neoliberal utopia of a pure and perfect market is made possible by the politics of financial deregulation. And it is achieved through the transformative and, it must be said, destructive action of all of the political measures (of which the most recent is the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), designed to protect foreign corporations and their investments from national states) that aim to call into question any and all collective structures that could serve as an obstacle to the logic of the pure market:

the nation, whose space to manoeuvre continually decreases; work groups, for example through the individualisation of salaries and of careers as a function of individual competences, with the consequent atomisation of workers; collectives for the defence of the rights of workers, unions, associations, cooperatives; even the family, which loses part of its control over consumption through the constitution of markets by age groups.

Prof. Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Essence of Neoliberalism',
Le Monde Dec. 1998

Deputies of the State Duma's rightist SPS (Union of Rightist Forces) faction have decided to push market reforms to the extreme and legalize prostitution in Russia. If the bill prepared by the rightists is passed in autumn, the prostitutes will turn into civilized "sex-workers", ridding themselves of pimps and providing services according to the law.

Viktoria Maliutina, Gazeta.Ru
(online Russian newsmagazine) 7/12/02

The overly stringent [IMF] "adjustment policies" in country after country forced cutbacks in education and health; in Thailand, as a result, not only did female prostitution increase but expenditures on AIDS were cut way back; and what had been one of the world's most successful programs in fighting AIDS had a major setback.

. . .

Disillusion with the international system of globalization under the aegis of the IMF grows as the poor in Indonesia, Morocco, or Papua New Guinea have fuel and food subsidies cut, as those in Thailand see AIDS increase as a result of IMF-forced cutbacks in health expenditures, and as families in many developing countries, having to pay for their children's education under so-called cost recovery programs, make the painful choice not to send their daughters to school.

Joseph E. Stilts, *Globalization and its Discontents*

The evangelists of globalised capitalism are eager to consign every form of socialism, collective responsibility, even the ancient concept of the Commons, to the proverbial trash-heap of history. They proclaim a brave new world -- a pure and perfect Market -- in which Capital is the Friend of the People, and Commerce the most progressive force on the planet. Ideological contortions surrounding the traffic in women and children, however, continue unabated on both the Right and the battered Left -- if

anything they may be amplified, raised to new levels of absurdity, by the new ideologies of neoliberalism.

As noted by those who attempt to define neoliberalism in the pull-quotes above, the keystone of neoliberal ideology is that the most essential -- the ideal -- model of human interaction and human society is the marketplace. The market is the perfect and maximally functional mechanism by which all human needs can be met; it is automatically just, fair, and free. All imperfections in human society are merely the result of interference with the perfect functioning of a free market, and all interferences of this type will inevitably lead to inefficiency, waste, unemployment, poverty, etc.; whereas the removing of artificial restrictions upon the functioning of markets will result in prosperity, wealth, progress, etc. Wealth, prosperity and progress can only be measured in money and in manufactured goods (i.e. only in those quantities and items which can be traded in the marketplace).

In the US, and increasingly throughout the 'advanced' nations, an almost seamless ideology has been constructed which equates 'capitalism' with 'democracy' and both with an idealized Smithian 'free market' -- a naive and oversimplified version of real commerce which conveniently ignores most of what we know about unfettered commercialism -- including some of Smith's own astute observations:

People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices.

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*

Thanks to this naiveté, neoliberal theorists now enjoy the kind of intellectual hegemony and stature that was once accorded to hard science, or in earlier times to prelates of the Church Militant; their jargon of 'rational agents,' 'cost/benefit analysis,' and 'optimisation'

has infected almost every discipline. It has become received opinion that human beings are inherently selfish, greedy, and amoral. Any attempt to construct more humane public policy; to challenge and limit the malfeasance of powerful men; to question the establishment of money as the only yardstick of productivity, well-being, or social good; even to envision a less brutal society, or suggest that kindness or conscience have any place in public life -- is contemptuously dismissed as 'naive' or 'ideological'.

'Ideology' is the convenient wastebasket into which the neoliberal establishment sweeps any argument which does not enshrine money and power as the ultimate social values. Suppose you suggest that social investment in such infrastructure as universal education, childcare for working mothers, public health, public transit, or (in some extreme cases) even libraries and museums, might enhance the quality of life for all and therefore 'pay back' generously the nation which makes such investments; then you are being 'ideological.' If, on the other hand, you suggest that diverting safely invested Social Security funds into the risky arena of the open stock markets will stimulate the economy, enrich retirees, and generally bring about the promised land, then you are a sound, practical, realistic thinker with no ideology at all. Truly it is said that those who claim they have no politics invariably mean that their politics are of the Right -- that is to say, of Business.

This atmosphere of 'tough thinking,' with its self-congratulatory contempt for such values as charity, kindness, empathy, justice, self-restraint, and so forth, has engendered backlashes and contradictions of every flavour in every realm of progressive discourse. Some feminists may immediately think of Katie Roiphe's published opinion, that is, that women who suffer date-rape have only themselves to blame (along the lines of *Boys will be boys, and girls should be more careful*) or Camille Paglia's glib dismissal of women's

contributions to human history and development (*If it were up to women we would all still be living in grass huts*), the iFeminists, and various other voices of the 'New Anti-Victim Feminism' who have found it unsurprisingly easy to win media attention and airtime in the last few years.

Much as the architects of the zeitgeist loathe and disown the word, it is a profoundly ideological culture they have created -- one in which the fundamental article of faith is that The System Works. If some people can't 'make it' in the system, it is not the system that needs fixing; it is their own fault. The world is as it is -- mean, selfish, competitive, and dangerous -- and only the fit will survive. This pseudo-Nietzschean, pseudo-Darwinist ethos is of course particularly appealing to the people who have already 'made it' and can now rest assured of their innate superiority as 'survivors.' (I would like to note here in passing the advent of 'survivor shows' and 'reality TV,' and their startling popularity -- a theme to which I will return later.)

Despite the elitism and brutality implicit in neoliberal ideology, its promoters maintain a thin veneer of populism which perhaps accounts for its hold on the popular imagination. Neoliberal ideology promises that when a 'boom' is experienced (i.e. large profits are reaped or monetary activity increases) in business, this is a Good Thing. The rising tide, as investment bankers and other multi-millionaires often assure us, lifts all boats. In other words, what is good for the Market is good for everyone; what is good for General Motors is good for the country; and what is good for Wall Street is just plain good.

Populist critics such as Michael Moore are quick to point out the fundamental disconnect -- while US media pundits congratulated 'us' on a 'booming' stock market, increasing numbers of Americans lost their jobs, household savings dwindled, the rate of

personal bankruptcies rose to an all-time high, control over wealth, property and media was concentrated in fewer hands, over 40 million Americans found themselves without medical insurance . . . and so on. The will of the prevailing ideologues to disregard such data (what Herman Daly calls 'feral facts') is notable; the ideological obedience of mainstream pundits and reporters may be measured by their ability to repeat such Orwellian oxymorons as 'jobless recovery' without even cracking a grin.

Many critics have decried this selective perception as amounting to fanaticism in certain sectors of the neoliberal school of economics. Neoliberal theorists are now ensconced in positions of influence and power in centre-right governments and at the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), ImEx Bank and similar institutions; to say that they are intolerant of dissent is to indulge in understatement. No matter how negative the outcomes of their utopian theories when applied to real populations, no matter the degree of poverty, dislocation, and desperation caused by their 'shock treatments,' 'market reforms,' and 'belt-tightening measures' worldwide, they continue to preach that only good can come of adherence to their True Religion.

In Argentina, for example, where the government has meekly obeyed the dictates of the IMF and World Bank for the last decade or more, the results have been disastrous, the toll in human suffering enormous. The disconnect between neoliberal theory and reality on the ground in South America is far more extreme and painful than anything the US has (yet) seen -- though our time may come. Nevertheless, the response of wealthy first-world pundits is that the only cure is more of the same. Prosperity, like paradise, is always just around the corner for those who are willing to suffer and have faith. To the true believer, all indicators always demonstrate the correct working of God's (or in this case the Market's) will on Earth; material evidence is irrelevant.

We may seem at this point to have wandered far from the topic of prostitution; but the thesis of this essay is that, in fact, we have not.

Sometime in the summer of 2001 (if I recall correctly) I was listening to the BBC World Service and heard a story on AIDS in China, which to me seemed illustrative of the tortuous doublethink of the cheerleaders for global US-style capitalism. With increased prosperity and 'market reform' in China, said the announcer -- in the victorious, vindicated tones we have become accustomed to in the West since the collapse of the USSR as a super-power -- the new, more democratic China was experiencing a 'boom in the sex industry'. A couple of snide, disparaging references to the 'Puritanism' of the Mao years made it clear that this was to be seen as a Good Thing and a sign of progress and enlightenment.

Except, of course, that over a million 'sex workers' in China had been exposed to AIDS. Western values were being imported via TV and movies, and teenagers were becoming sexually active earlier in life and more promiscuously, so there was concern about the possibility of an AIDS epidemic in China. Most people there, said the announcer, are still ignorant about this disease, and their ignorance can be blamed on (once again) the 'Puritanism' of the Communist past.

Now let us parse this brief news item, as presented. An increase in the number of prostituted girls, boys, and women is to be read as an indicator of prosperity and freedom; and if increased prostitution and the sexualization of youngsters at earlier and earlier ages exposes the population to the risk of AIDS, this should be blamed on the Communists who discouraged prostitution and sexual promiscuity. Globalization can only bring good; market values are identical with liberation and 'reform.' Not one person interviewed in the course of this story asked whether a resurgence of prostitution might not reflect a

resurgence of pre-Communist values such as feudalism and Confucian patriarchy, whether it might indicate a decline of egalitarian ideals and a revival of traditional male privilege; or even whether it might simply indicate an upsurge in poverty and inequity, fuelling economic desperation.

The neoliberal is prevented from perceiving any negative aspects to the boom in prostitution precisely because it is a boom -- an upswing in monetarist activity, an increase in the number of market transactions. It is *good business*. To me as a feminist, the neoliberals' centre/rightist ideology carries a familiar and unpleasant whiff -- it smells rather like the same logic (or illogic) that has consistently been applied to prostituted women by the doublethink of the US (and international) Left.

Though we know, culturally, by experience or by osmosis, that women and children are prostituted most commonly through violence, through poverty, through deprivation or betrayal -- Western liberalism has pretended for decades that more prostitution and pornography only mean more freedom, openness, and (just as in the case of neoliberals crowing over the 'softening' of Communist China) Democracy. The fact that real democracy plays very little part in the day-to-day experiences of the average prostitute, does not seem to register. The ideological fanaticism with which the neoliberal theorist ignores all negative effects of the 'freeing' of markets is not unlike the resolute effort with which the traditional sex-liberal theorist has ignored the negative effects of the so-called 'sexual revolution.'

Inconvenient statistics, feral facts like the average life expectancy of prostitutes, the average age of induction into prostitution, the average income of prostitutes, and so forth -- hard demographics -- have never disturbed those who defined the sex business as a force of liberation. The fact that the 'freedom' being realized is mostly the freedom of

men to access the bodies of women and children -- or of G7 nations to access the markets and raw materials of Third World nations -- is conveniently overlooked when predation is redefined as progress.

From the perspective of pure *laissez-faire* capitalist theory -- with its convenient intellectual mechanisms of externalized costs and discounted futures, abstract 'rational actors,' and other game-theory constructs -- there is nothing at all wrong with prostitution. Similarly there is nothing wrong with fixing drug prices too high for AIDS-stricken Africa (or uninsured Americans) to afford, and nothing wrong with relocating production facilities to whatever country offers the cheapest and most docile labour pool. It's nothing personal; it's strictly business. There's a demand, so there's a supply; prices are set by the Market, and by the demand of stockholders for high rates of return on investment capital. We should perhaps note that in the US, corporations are *required by law* to maximise return on stockholder investment.

Most of us are by now familiar with the line taken by corporate CEOs and their apologists with regard to cheap overseas labour. If women in the Philippines or Mexico, they say, are willing to work in FTZ factories for 60 cents (US) per diem, then those women are free agents making their individual contracts with their employer. They have chosen the best deal, as all rational actors do in a free market; anyone who questions the terms of the deal is impugning their personhood and their rationality. Anyone who tries to get the transnationals to pay their sweatshop workers more, or to alleviate the brutal conditions under which many labour, is merely working against the women she is trying to help, because the corporations will simply leave if their costs rise too high, and then the women will be jobless again.

The language of 'feminist' and left-leaning apologists for prostitution eerily

echoes the language of the corporate CEOs and their apologists. Prostitutes, we are told, choose their line of work in a free market; they are rational agents. To criticize the industry which exploits them, or even to say that they are exploited, is to deny their agency. To attempt to regulate or restrict it is only to deny them 'opportunities' and 'choices.' The similarity of the language is no coincidence, of course: the incursion of commercial values and beliefs into academia as well as popular culture has been gathering momentum for decades. It is becoming increasingly difficult -- and increasingly marginal/disreputable -- to think outside the box of the Market.

Popular culture reflects the *Zeitgeist* accurately and unflatteringly in such media excesses as the reality shows to which I alluded earlier, in which 'contestants' are pitted against each other not unlike Roman gladiators in a bitter contest for wealth. Some radio 'talk shows' now offer their 'guests' money or 'fame' as an incentive to submit to various public humiliations. In one notorious incident, shock-jock Howard Stern convinced a woman to strip in the studio and to eat dog food out of a bowl on the floor, in exchange for his giving air time to music recorded by a friend of hers. The pseudo-Smithian ideology of 'choice', and the rest of the market-populist mumbo-jumbo, would of course emphasise this woman's 'choice' to endure such a scene, rather than questioning the ethics of Stern, the radio station, or its advertisers and listeners. The scene itself is paradigmatic of prostitution: a man holds out the offer of something a woman wants or needs, in order to persuade her to do humiliating things for his amusement.

In an era dominated by neoliberal ideology, it is obviously difficult to mount a successful campaign against the sexual exploitation of women and children. On every front, feminists meet a brick wall.

First, the prevailing Market-worship mocks and devalues any suggestion of

altruism; if women fortunate enough to have escaped sexual exploitation in their own lives demonstrate concern and caring for prostituted women, they are dismissed as naive, unrealistic idealists and (of course) 'ideologues.' The 'sexual liberation' pseudo-progressive ideology then serves to cast women who object to exploitation, profiteering, coercion and other routine practises of the sex industry as 'crypto-conservatives,' 'neo-Victorians,' 'anti-sex,' and so forth. Should either of those barriers fail to discourage the feminist social critic, the neoliberal dogma is trotted out to prove that, for example, the woman eating dog food on the floor of Stern's studio is exactly where she wants to be. Any woman who expresses disgust at the men who enacted and enjoyed this ritual of humiliation is actually an *anti-feminist*: she is denying the agency and choice exercised by this 'liberated' female, the 'good sport' who is 'tough enough to take it' and needs no sympathy or interference from well-meaning nannies. Just as, of course, the poor are quite capable of pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps and need no insulting assistance from the smothering hands of Big Government.

V. Economies of Scale

An estimated 60 percent of two million tourists visiting Thailand each year are allegedly drawn by bargain price sex.

Thanh Dam Trnong, "The Dynamics of Sex
Tourism: the Case of Southeast Asia" cited in
M. Waring, *Counting for Nothing*

When governments promote tourism as a currency-earning growth strategy, they usually count prostitution as part and parcel of it. Local young women are seen as a sexual pool for tourists, regardless of the social consequences or the risks and side-effects for the women themselves. It is considered officially admissible, indeed desirable, for the national economy, that women's bodies should be thrown onto the world market at a knock-down price.

Christa Wichterich, *The Globalized Woman*

We [Americans] have 50 percent of the world's wealth but only 6.3 percent of the population. This disparity is particularly great between ourselves and the peoples of Asia. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security.

George Kennan, Director, US State Department's Policy
Planning Staff, 1948

from a top-secret memo declassified under FOIA

Each year approximately ten thousand American troops descend on Thailand for a joint military exercise called Cobra Gold. The military part of these visits is largely make-work for the American and Thai staffs, but the troops love Cobra Gold because of the sex. According to the newspaper *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, some three thousand prostitutes wait for the sailors and marines at the South Pattaya waterfront, close to Utapao air base. An equal number of young Thai girls from the countryside, many of whom have been raped and then impressed into the "sex industry," are available downtown in Bangkok's Patpang district. They are virtually all infected with AIDS, but the condom-equipped American forces seem not to worry. At the time of the 1997 war games, just before the economic crisis broke, sex with a Thai prostitute cost around fifteen hundred Thai baht, or sixty dollars at its then pegged rate of twenty-five baht to one US dollar. By the time of the next year's Cobra Gold the price had been more than halved. This is just one of many market benefits Americans gained through their rollback operation against the "Asian model" of capitalism.

Chalmers Johnson in *Blowback: the Costs and
Consequences of American Empire*

A top-selling video game, "Grand Theft Auto III," is an exercise in crime and violence . . . In "Grand Theft Auto III," the player works for the mafia, which involves killing police officers and innocent bystanders, stealing cars, and doing drugs. When the player begins to lose his health, he can pick up a prostitute on the street and have sex with her, as indicated by a bouncing car. As a result, the player's health goes up, but his funds go down. Once the hooker exits the car, if the player wants his money back, he can dash after her, beat her to death and recover the cash.

People who have played the game say that the bloody beating is done with a baseball bat that players can "feel" in their hands through the PlayStation controller.

MediaWatch campaign newsletter, Apr 2002

It's nothing personal. It's strictly business.

Don Vito Corleone, "The Godfather"

Make the economy scream.

Richard M, Nixon, US president: instructions to CIA,
Sept 15 1970, for the destabilisation of Chile's new Allende
government

We all know about the Mafia -- or about organized crime of whatever ethnicity. At least, we have some kind of folk knowledge, a sense of cultural familiarity. We know it's all about a tightly organized extended clan, controlled and operated by men, dealing in 'bad stuff' like guns, drugs, gambling, contract assassination, and (of course) prostitution. It operates in an atmosphere of violence; people who don't cooperate, or who threaten to inform, are likely to be murdered -- sometimes in spectacularly gruesome ways -- to 'send a message' to others and keep everyone toeing the line.

The object of any Mafia is simple: to make money, to secure the best return for their stockholders. It sells whatever will command a price, unfettered by pesky regulatory bodies or public oversight; and the best prices are often to be had for the 'worst' goods, as every drug dealer knows. Sometimes the more traditional families or clans have their own rules, their own 'lines' below which they don't wish to deal; but over time, truly unrestrained commercialism ensures a moral race to the bottom, a marketplace in which just about anything is for sale to the highest bidder.

The Mafia also specializes in 'closed loop' marketing; they sell fire insurance in neighbourhoods where their hired arsonists can be sent out at any time to demonstrate the need for insurance. They provide bodyguards and 'security' to protect business owners from their own thugs. They steal your stuff and then sell it back to you. They ensure that

you have to buy from one of their 'family' businesses; sometimes their competitors suffer a series of mysterious "accidents."

The operation of the Mafia is the purest form of *laissez-faire*. Its tactics do not differ substantially from the tactics used by 'above the line' businesses when they think they can get away with it. The only differences are those of degree and scale.

The Mafia can make you disappear if you don't buy what you are told to buy at the price dictated from above; a monopolistic corporation can shut your business down, revoke your lease, terminate your employment. Although the degree of violence and severity of threat involved varies, the basic principle of 'business at gunpoint' is shared. Even the differences of degree are not always observed; there have been many cases -- from the hired thugs whose head-bashing and gunfire was unleashed to break strikes in the 19-teens and twenties, to the defamation and removal of third-world leaders whose policies inconvenienced US business interests -- where murder has been done in the cause of 'legitimate' corporate profit.

Nor is there a strong and clear dividing line between 'the kind of people' who pursue one form of profiteering considered legitimate, and those who pursue another considered criminal. We read with horror and a sense of shock that the UN is called upon to investigate aid workers in Africa: 'The study of refugees in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone found almost 70 aid workers from 40 agencies had been pushing refugee children into sex in exchange for food, medicine and other supplies sent to save their lives.'

[Reuters, Feb 27 2002] -- or that in Bosnia employees of Dyncorp, a 'military contractor' (corporatised mercenaries) were implicated in trafficking, and that employees who blew the whistle on gun-running and prostitution rings run by Dyncorp and UN staff were sacked by the corporation[Observer July 29 2001]. The activities of 'legitimate'

corporations and agencies, in out of the way places unscrutinised by the First World press, may easily morph into flagrant Mafia-ism; if publicised, these 'lapses' by staff and functionaries will be roundly condemned, and in fact may serve to distract public attention and perception from the equally Mafia-like strategies and methods of the parent corporation. The small-scale operation seems genuinely criminal -- how dare these men take advantage of vulnerable women and children? -- and in our indignation over their crimes, we tend to forget that much of the world's poverty is engineered, and is often the wreckage left behind by larger scale, more respectable profiteering.

When I give food to the poor they call me a saint, When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.

Dom Helder Camara, bishop and 'liberation theology' activist, Brazil

When we condemn men -- corporate employees and NGO functionaries, police, soldiers -- for taking advantage of hungry women and children, we stay within the bounds of conventional morality. When we ask why women and children are made hungry and vulnerable in the first place, why their economies or societies have collapsed, why they are abjectly dependent on food aid or why corporate mercenaries are at large in their countries, we risk departing from the conventional by rejecting the camouflaging power of scale, and holding the larger crimes to be as wicked as the smaller ones.

When it comes to scale, in the years since the decline of antitrust legislation and the frenzy of corporate mergers, what is officially called 'organised crime' can hardly compete with the new, globe-spanning corporations. The Mafia buys a politician here and a politician there; the transnational corporations can buy entire governments, and the pursuit of their interests can bankrupt and ruin not merely a city or even a state, but an

entire country or several. National economies can be crashed by the deliberate manipulation of cross-border capital flow for the sake of the marginal profits which can be realized on currency exchange rates.

If scale lends legitimacy to crime, then it should be less criminal to murder ten people than one person. But it seems that scale doesn't kick in until some much higher number. You have to murder several hundred or several thousand people before your murders achieve the respectability of 'war.' You have to cheat thousands or millions of people before you are allowed to call your dealings 'business' or 'finance' instead of just plain cheating. I am not the first person to wonder bitterly why it is that when a handful of poor men with dark skins get over-excited during a period of disorder and loot a storefront, that's a deplorable crime and proof of their inherent barbarism and backwardness; yet when a handful of very rich white men with power get over-ambitious and loot an entire country, that's 'Progress' and 'History' -- and proof of their inherent Darwinian fitness and superiority. Scale is a wonderful thing.

If we divest ourselves for a moment of the legitimizing magic of large scale, we may see the neoliberal economic agenda in a new light. Many critics of globalisation have documented and condemned the 'fire-sale' acquisition, by deep-pocketed G7/transnational corporations, of essential resources and physical plant from countries whose economies have been crashed by IMF/WB 'austerity measures.' To drive one's competitors into bankruptcy by mailfist tactics, then buy up their properties at deep discount, is something the world's various Mafias have always been good at.

Not as much has been said, except by a few dogged feminists, about the creation of yet another cut-rate exploitable resource in these battered economies: an underclass of attractive young women thrown into sudden poverty.

Wherever the neoclassical economists administer their shock treatments, the pimps clean up. Women from the former Soviet Union, for example, have been for sale all over the Middle East, Asia, and wealthy Europe since the collapse of the Soviet regime which took down with it their chances of an education or a decent job. The story recurs wherever a country which once enjoyed some kind of social safety net has it ripped away.

Above the line, the transnational vultures acquire physical plant, rolling stock, mines, land, warehouses full of goods, all for pennies on the dollar. Local 'entrepreneurs' (usually the ruling elite who since colonial times have owned most of the land and other resources) snap up public services and public property in an orgy of privatisation and sign sweetheart deals with foreign corporations.

Meanwhile, below the line, the pimps scoop up the 'surplus' women at bargain prices, and drug dealers open whole new markets among the newly miserable and despairing. Everybody wins -- the predators and parasites, anyway. As in conventional wars, so in economic warfare: women and children generally lose.

Imagine for a moment that someone did this to your family: suckered you into 'easy money' loans with their best hard-sell techniques, let's say; got you in over your head at ruinous rates; crashed your credit rating; drove you into bankruptcy. Then the same people, or their very good friends, bought up your home at ten cents on the dollar when you were down and desperate, *and* enticed your teenagers into prostitution when you were unable to feed or clothe them properly. We would have little difficulty identifying this as the work of loan sharks, thugs, gangsters, Mafia, whatever they are called in your community. But when the IMF and first-world corporations do it to an entire country it is called 'politics' or 'policy' or 'reform' or even Progress. In both cases it

is *good business*. Fortunes are made.

That hungry women are prostituted is one of the ground rules of human history. It seems obvious to the average person of common sense that relatively few women would ever spontaneously or casually decide to service multiple men per day for very low wages. Mass prostitution flourishes where poverty and hunger flourish -- particularly where wealth flaunts itself in the near vicinity.

Thanks to globalisation, of course, wealth is always flaunting itself in the near vicinity. The obscene wealth and luxury of the G7 nations does not even require air transport to make its presence felt abroad. Every television in the Third World brings it close enough to touch -- *almost* -- makes it more immediate, more intrusive, more insistent even than the wealth of native elites. All that wealth, flagrantly flaunted, out of reach, tantalising, serves to make pimps greedier and girls more deluded.

In most cases, it was an experience of violence in the family or in a circle of acquaintances that first drove the women into commercial sex work. They are helped to get through the 'programme with a gringo' by the dream of a 'fairy prince,' preferably from Germany, and by drugs that deaden their feelings of repulsion. More than half the girls had already been once to Europe with a client, in the hope that a marriage might come out of it . . .

Christa Wichterich, on prostitution in Recife, Brazil

Moreover, cheap air transport ensures that wealthy men from the G7 (and almost any man from the G7 is wealthy compared to most women from the rest of the world) can easily seek bargain sex in the poorer nations. There is of course nothing new about this. Men have always traded in 'exotic' women across national and international borders. The Vikings and Goths in their day captured Irish people (women, kids, men) and sold them a long, long way down river -- to the Ottoman Empire and beyond. Wealthy men of all the

ancient empires prided themselves on the exotica of their harems just as they stocked their private zoos with rare and costly fauna.

Like cheap international travel, Internet access has proved to be far more about men's access to the bodies of women and girls, than about women's and girls' access to resources, education, employment, empowerment. 'Hot teen girls' of almost every nationality are now available to web-surfing men, only a few clicks (and perhaps a credit card charge) away. The vulgarisation of privilege that Engels foresaw has taken strange new directions; every man wealthy enough to own a computer and pay an ISP can enjoy an infinite virtual harem in the seclusion of his home.

The new technologies of travel and communication increase the scale and the ease of trading in access to women's bodies. It is a conceit of capitalist culture to believe that these improvements in ease and scale of access to women's bodies represent Progress and liberalism; but the wholly illiberal fundamentals of the business have not changed.

The current boom in prostitution and pornography is not a passing phenomenon generated by a localised war or famine; it is happening on a vast scale, in response to ever-increasing inequities of wealth and never-ending fiscal crisis and dislocation, in a world whose values are informed and shaped by mass production and monetism -- a world where vast scale lends respectability, where the mass replication of a crime seems to render it less, and not more, criminal, and where cash value is the only value.

What does scale really mean for prostitution and pornography? Does the inconceivable scale of Internet pornography, for example, normalize and legitimize pornography and prostitution in the same way that the sheer scale of destruction and murder legitimizes warfare? Does selling a woman to a potentially infinite number of johns somehow diminish the badness of each individual sale? Does replicating the

videotape of her rape or humiliation ten thousand times diminish the affront to her personhood? Surely it is the reverse: mass production, mass distribution, only intensifies our sense of commodification, depersonalization, reification of the female body and soul. The affront is amplified, not diminished. The industrialisation and mass-production of 'access to women's bodies' affront the humanity of the individual woman in a way quite symmetrical with other affronts to human nature and human dignity resulting from the intrusive ideology of industrialisation and mass production.

What of the large-scale distribution of 'freeware' Internet porno, hailed by some (naive) cyberleftie types as a radical and positive development? If there is no monetary transaction, does this make the granting of access to a woman's body, by one man to another man or to all comers, a less offensive proposition?

Suppose for a moment that such amateur, self-published porno -- 'open source' or GnuPorn -- started to displace the commercial variety. If cyber-voyeurs, for example, place webcams in hundreds of thousands of women's restrooms, changing cubicles, and locker rooms, charging nothing for viewing access online, is this 'free porn' somehow less destructive than corporate porn? My personal feeling is that whether the currency is hard cash, or the more nebulous yet quite measurable currency of 'web hit rates' and online reputation, we are still seeing men selling women to other men; the relationship of Seller (male), Buyer (male) and Product (female) still obtains. Even if the only return for the pimp/pornographer is being able to brag about how many voyeurs visit his site as opposed to someone else's, a woman is still being marketed.

Scale (and distance) operate strangely here to distort perception, as they do with other Mafia-like activities. If in the average workplace one man turned to another and offered him nude, pornographic pictures of 'my wife,' my guess (based only on the

workplaces and the male colleagues I have known) is that the recipient of the offer would be embarrassed, disturbed, and even offended. Yet the same men might (perhaps furtively) visit amateur porn websites offering 'hot pictures of my girlfriend.' Perhaps the web-hit counter is reassuring -- to look at a picture of a woman stripped and paraded seems less harmful if one knows that 'this page has had 20,195 visitors so far.'

Yet the woman -- supposing that (a) she was unaware of being photographed in the first place, (b) she later wished she had not permitted the photography, or (c) she cooperated in the photography as 'love play' but had no idea the pictures would be published online -- I suspect would feel rather differently about that web counter and its implications.

Perhaps the effect of scale here reflects the old masculinist belief that a woman can only lose her 'honour' once -- that once a woman is raped or seduced she is 'dirty' and it no longer matters what happens to her. If so, it is a familiar theory, an attitude millennia-old and still thriving not only in the 'backward' traditional patriarchies of the pre-industrial world, but at the heart of 'modern' capitalist societies which claim to be their polar opposite.

Neither vastness of scale nor technological modernity should be allowed to distract us from the man behind the curtain.

VI. Metawhores: whore as metaphor, prostitution as market model

The site that set out to bring the media to their knees -- but found out they were already there.

motto of "mediawhoresonline.com," a media criticism site

Politics is supposed to be the second oldest profession. I have come to realize that it bears

a very close resemblance to the first.

Ronald Reagan, March 2, 1977

During the US presidential campaign of 2000 -- which ended so dubiously -- many progressive voters felt that both the major parties had become so corrupted by corporate/business influence that there was little to choose between them any more. That Fall I went to hear the 'hopeless outsider,' Ralph Nader, speaking at a small civic auditorium. Outside, on the steps, a small group of activists cheerfully chanted 'Albert Gore, Corporate Whore,' to the tune of 'Frere Jacques'.

What they meant, of course, was that Democratic candidate Al Gore was for sale. They referred to the Democratic party's acceptance of huge 'soft money' contributions, but specifically to Gore's own family and its fairly large stake in Occidental Petroleum -- a company with (like most oil companies) a shady record in both the environmental and human-rights arenas.

At the time, and when the first draft of this essay was written, 'Oxy' (as it is affectionately called by managers and stockholders, and contemptuously by activists) was facing opposition from an indigenous group in Colombia, the U'Wa tribespeople, who did not want oil exploration and drilling to happen on their ancestral territory. The Colombian government, of course, was keen on a profitable contract with Oxy, and the company's deep pockets were said to be funding a brutal campaign of repression and intimidation against the stubborn indigenous resisters.

In other words, Oxy's money was buying the Colombian government; it was trying to buy the land out from under people whose livelihood, culture, and very life is in their land; and, the chanting critics asserted, Oxy and companies like it had also bought and paid for not only the Republican candidates in US elections, but the other party as

well. Al Gore, critics said, should sell his Oxy stock and sever his family's association with this dirty money, rather than allow such a conflict of interest where traditional Democratic party values (like human rights and social justice) were involved. The fact that a few years earlier a book on environmental ethics had been published under Gore's name only intensified the perception of his hypocrisy and venality.

All this was implied and contained in the terse chant calling Al Gore a 'corporate whore.' So, of course, was a legacy of misogyny which blames *women* for prostitution. Presumably some chant could have been devised which would dwell on Occidental Petroleum as a 'thug and pimp,' but the immediate goal was to confront/insult Gore or his supporters. To call Gore a 'whore' worked on the gut-level as a slur on his masculinity, by ascribing to him a 'female' subservience and spinelessness (or mercenary amorality), as well as on the more intellectual level by calling attention to his dubious financial connections and lack of probity.

And yet, as weary feminists know, in liberal and even in radical American circles prostitution and pornography (the literal rather than metaphorical kind) continue to be for the most part redeemed and defended, even if lukewarmly, on the grounds of free speech or sexual liberation. It struck me at the time as deeply interesting that one could make a public statement that 'the relationship between Oxy and Al Gore is like that of a john (or a pimp) and a whore, and this is despicable,' to fairly good effect; yet the same demographic segment who were more or less receptive to this statement would almost certainly be wary (or even hostile) towards radical feminist critiques of porn and prostitution.

The brutal face of capitalism -- profiteering with the mask off -- is loathsome to progressives and liberals when it is embodied in Oxy's cynical use of violence and

corruption to further its commercial aims. The analogy with prostitution is on some level perceived, and used to criticise the corruption by wealth of a better relationship that should exist between government and business, between government and people, between people and commerce. One risks, however, being called prudish or neo-Victorian if one suggests that the sexual relationship between free persons is also corrupted and damaged by money influence.

The way we use metaphors of pimping and whoring reveal a profound mistrust, a perception (valid, in my view) that the intrusion of 'market values' into community life or intimate life is not a healthy thing. Yet we persist simultaneously in the fantasy that the relationships of literal prostitution, the trade itself, the original from which our metaphorical distaste is drawn, are somehow harmless.

The disconnect is remarkable; it is as if we could thoughtlessly describe something wicked or corrupt as 'as bad as racism,' and in the next breath accept last week's lynching or cross-burning as a commonplace -- or even a healthy expression of free speech and democracy.

Despite our loose usage of 'metawhores' in common speech and thought, we do not often consider far deeper correspondences between prostitution and the daily life and culture which is (for most of us) largely defined and shaped by corporate capitalism.

In the world of commerce, the customer is not (despite the best efforts of PR agencies) anyone's best friend. As one corporate honcho memorably put it, 'Our friends are our competitors. Our enemy is the customer.' This is an interesting statement, one which codifies two of the great contradictions of commercial culture.

One is that the 'free market' of theory, in which cut-throat competition assures innovation and puts ultimate power in the hands of the customer, is a myth. One of the

first things that corporate power does, just as national powers and Mafia families do, is to make strategic, diplomatic, and contractual alliances with its apparent competitors -- dividing up the available supply of prey as amicably as possible and settling down to fix prices. Apparent competitors often turn out to be in reality co-investors, or to have made 'gentlemen's agreements' on or off the books. The customer is the 'mark' as it were, and the corporate powers are the wily old hucksters of the sideshow, wise to each other's tricks and bound by a kind of rogues' fraternity.

But there is another aspect to the customer as prey or enemy, and that is the imperative of marketing. The customer in some cases seems to be less customer than *product*.

Critics of corporate media and culture have often remarked that corporate-controlled newspapers or broadcast media, for example, have entirely changed their nature over the last few decades. Although there has generally been some commercial presence, some advertising, in public media, the roles of the media, the public, and the advertiser have changed significantly.

The 'customers' of broadcast television, as I mentioned earlier, are not the viewers. They are the advertising agencies (and by extension their corporate customers) who desire access to the attention span of the audience. The fantastical prices paid for 30 seconds of prime time major-network advertising slots, and the fabulous budgets of these obsessively overcrafted micro-masterpieces of video production, are the real business of television. The audience is the commodity, to which access is granted for a fee by the broadcaster.

This selling of timed blocks of 'customer' attention span, by the media corporations, to the advertisers who 'rent' the audience, presents an undeniable analogy to

prostitution. Cast the media companies as the pimps, the audience as the whores, the marketing departments as the johns. Television watchers are sold -- by the half-minute interval -- to avid advertisers, who hope in their turn to permute the relationship, provoking and stimulating the appetites of the consumer so as to part the public from its money.

Several very successful PR agencies now exist whose business is to write pseudo-reportage for the paper media (mostly newspapers, some magazines). The corporate customer approaches the agency with a product, event, or process which it wants publicized; the agency hacks write a 'news article' which just happens to give a high profile to that corporation, its product, or its process. The agency then makes it known to newspaper editors throughout the country, or in a targeted demographic region, that 'news' can be obtained for free -- in other words, they offer something like a wirefeed, but with no charge. Many newspapers both small and large, eager to cut costs for fear of being downsized out of existence by their new corporate owners, leap at the chance to fire a few reporters and replace column-inches which cost salary money with column-inches which cost nothing.

As a result, some industry analysts estimate that as much as 40 percent of some newspapers' content is 'placed material,' *i.e.* is actually advertising -- though not designated as such. Experts in the trade claim that they can tell, when reading a daily newspaper, which pseudo-articles were written by which PR agencies; the different agencies are said to have 'fingerprints' of prose style and content which (if you know which writers are working where and who has which corporate contracts) identify the articles far more accurately than their fictitious bylines. Some journalists refer to working for the 'infomercial' agencies as 'whoring' or 'prostituting oneself.'

In our 'marketized' society, we must expect these analogies with prostitution to abound, and to expand and multiply. Since the working definition of a prostitute is 'someone who will do anything for money,' and a monetarist society is one in which money is the only thing worth doing anything for, a gradual convergence is inevitable: the 'rational actor' of neoliberal economic theory would never refuse good money for the sake of a mere point of principle. Second only to outright slavery, prostitution has to be the ultimate expression of loyal adherence to 'market values.' What interests me is that the analogies, as in the Albert Gore example, seem to arouse more outrage and distress than real prostitution itself.

The crass commercialisation of childhood, for example, rouses even market-happy G7 denizens to protest. Some commentators say that some American schools have "prostituted themselves" by signing contracts obliging students to drink only Pepsi, or only Coke, or to participate in public relations stunts for soft drink companies. Schools have taken corporate money in exchange for placing advertising in restrooms, or making students watch a mandatory hour of the infamous 'Channel One' so-called educational TV (a great deal of the content of which is product placement or outright advertising). 'Renting our children to advertisers,' as the Channel One contracts have sometimes been described, certainly has overtones of prostitution.

The same BBC World Service which reported a boom in Chinese prostitution as a sign of reform and liberalisation, has run a few cautionary stories on the 'disturbing trend in commercialising our schools.'

Children are even recruited as 'secret agents' by toy and clothing companies, who pay parents a fee if the child files reports on what his or her playmates like to wear, eat, play with, etc. Corporate sponsors offer 'free' computers to schools, on the condition that

the students use the provided web browsing software which (a) exposes them to advertising and (b) keeps track of all their browsing habits for later analysis by demographic marketing experts.

Recently, a video game producer joined forces with marketers to use a children's video game for information-gathering; kids use a barcode wand to scan labels on food and other household products to 'add strength' to their fantasy dinosaur characters in the virtual world of the game. Meanwhile, the corporate databases are filled with interesting data about what the kids' families buy and consume.

The outrage that many people express about these manifestations of intrusive marketing is remarkably similar to feminist anger about the sexual exploitation of women and children. It is inappropriate, in the moral and philosophical frame inhabited by feminists, to make use of another human being in such an instrumental, calculating way.

It is inappropriate, say outraged parents, to smother the authentic experience of childhood in a blizzard of manipulation and brand-name promotion, to make every experience a child has into a commercial transaction (the end state of neoliberal theory), a matter of selling or being sold to, or being sold. The life in which every experience is one of selling or being sold is of course the experience of the average prostitute; the destruction of the authentic experience of life is even more brutal and overwhelming when one's living depends on faking enthusiasm, or suppressing fear and disgust, during hours of sex with strangers.

In any case, porno is littered - porno is heaped - with the deaths of feelings.

Martin Amis, "Rough Trade"

It is perhaps a similar death of feeling -- the death of non-market feelings such as affection, sympathy, and joy -- that parents fear when they see their children being

redefined as consumers, and childhood itself redefined as a marketing opportunity. All human feelings other than competitiveness, greed, fear, and the satisfaction of impulse are 'non-market' values. The death of such feelings is implied by the neoliberal ideal of imposing the conceptual mould of the market onto all human life, converting every human interaction into a market transaction, every earthly thing into commodity. At some point our human sensibilities rebel, in moral outrage or in simple 'common' sense.

In recent years the commercial concept of intellectual property right, for example, has been stretched to the point of absurdity -- the point at which common sense rebels. Monsanto now claims to 'own' the genome of rice. In theory, no one can do research using these genome data, or perhaps even grow rice (the staple food of half the world), without owing Monsanto some kind of copyright fee. At present, Monsanto is being nice about it and offering to share the data; but according to the letter of intellectual property law, they have the option not to be nice.

All through the Third World, First World companies have been prowling, collecting herbs and foodstock which native farmers have conserved and bred for centuries -- in some cases millennia -- and patenting their genotypes; patenting something, in short, which they (the companies) never invented, never created, never put a lick of effort into, only 'discovered' (much as their predecessors claimed to have 'discovered' lands in which other people had already been living for millennia). In passing, we might consider whether we find a parallel here with the pornographer who can copyright as his own intellectual property the rawest snapshot he manages to take of a woman's body -- to be sold and re-sold at his will and at a profit, with or without her consent. We also say of porn and movie stars that they are 'discovered,' even though they have existed and led their own lives all along, until the arbitrary moment when someone

else decided money could be made from them.

Controversy erupted in Iceland in early 2000 when the government announced its plan to 'sell' the genotype of the Icelandic population to a US-backed corporation, -- *i.e.* to sell intellectual property rights over the genetic information encoded in living people. Monsanto drew heavy fire in 1999 and 2000 for its plans to implement 'terminator' technology, a genetic tweak which would make the seed of agricultural crops monogenerational; if a farmer planted Monsanto's GE seed, next-generation seed collected from the resulting crop would be infertile. This technology is still being developed by the European biotech giant Syngenta. The goal is evident: to put a stop to the millennia-old human tradition of seed saving, and make farmers dependent for each year's crop on a fresh purchase of patented seed from the corporation. (I remind the reader here that wherever we wander in the transnational corporate world, we never drift far from the topic of prostitution: the displacement of subsistence and village farmers, worldwide, by corporate agriculture based on expensive Western technologies such as patented seed and tailored herbicides, has dispossessed and impoverished millions of women and girls. What happens to hungry, landless women and girls? We know the answer.)

What these snippets from the news-stream have in common is that they elicited an angry and indignant response from a fairly large proportion of the reading public. These intellectual property claims over life itself induce in the average progressive or humanitarian person a sense of revulsion or indecency, an affront to human feeling, that ominous sense of the death of feeling. Ownership is being asserted over something which it seems not reasonable or right to consider as property. Jokes, those sure indicators of public fear or covert social criticism, started to make the rounds. 'Patent

your genome and sue your parents!' was one: a terse comment on the fundamental absurdity of patenting life at all, and on the violation of fundamental human relationships implied by this incursion of Business into intimate life.

Such jokes, and a growing 'consumer' resistance to lifeform-patenting, GMO crops, and so forth, suggest that ordinary 'apolitical' people fully embedded in a neoliberal cultural matrix may become critics of capitalism when Business's strategies of enclosure, expropriation, and control pass a certain threshold, approaching the logical conclusions of neoliberal theory. The outrage, disgust, mockery or disbelief then expressed poses a direct challenge to neoliberal ideology. Public distaste, boycotts and jibes in response to genome patenting and other radical enclosures attempted by corporate culture, assert a contemporary heresy: some things should not be for sale; the market should not encompass all things.

This is the same heresy asserted by feminists: women's bodies should not be for sale -- it is simply wrong to commodify and trade in some things. The values of the Market are not the ultimate human values. Yet this feminist position -- despite a long tradition and obvious parallels with other established human rights movements -- seems more marginal, less popular, than the recent resistance to Monsanto and its ilk.

The ground rules of the sex industry -- which are the ground rules of capitalism -- offend and disturb us when they invade 'respectable' people's lives. But looking at contemporary liberal mainstream culture we have to wonder: where is the collective outrage at the accelerating, nearly complete commercialization of sexuality? where is the hip 'anti-globalisation' protest against the commodification of women and children -- which has so much more extreme immediate, physical, material impacts than the commodification of audiences, schoolchildren, education systems?

VII. Supply and Demand

SE: There's no question that the internet is increasingly a territory for consumption. I just talked with someone last week about how all these industries now are studying the pornography industry because pornography is the most successful business on the internet.

CM: Yeah, even a "family" company like AOL is making all their money off porn. They censor bad words from their "legit" conferences or whatever and then make all their money off smutty chat rooms.

Stuart Ewen, interviewed by
Carrie McLaren, StayFree #14 Jan 1998

Americans, roughly 4% of the planet by numbers, gulp down more than half the world's illegal drugs, but in all the strident speeches and in all the poorly-conceived foreign policy measures, it is always the fault of Mexico or Colombia or Vietnam or Panama or the French Connection or someone else out there. Anyone, that is, but the people who keep gulping and snorting the stuff down, and all the shady American officials who are so clearly necessary to keep the merchandise widely available.

John Chuckman in YellowTimes, an online journal, March 2002

What appeals to the male gaze and what sells is certainly integral to the coin of the realm. That's why the contradiction of a corporate conglomerate like Viacom trying to tame its hip sexual sensationalist subsidiary MTV is rather laughable. While the right will prate on about indecency on television, capitalism will continue to consolidate its media control. The boob tube will, when necessary, respond to the political winds, hoping never to expose too much of its own sordid relationship with the master class of mind managers, whether corporate or political. Only when the body politic reveals the bawdiness of capitalism as the real violator of human beings will the boob tube no longer suckle those who would bite the breast that feeds it.

Fran Shor, "Whose Boob Tube? Return of the Culture Wars,"
Counterpunch, Feb 4 2004

Hovering over the relationship of commerce to society at large -- assuming we have not yet accepted the prevalent notion that the two are one and the same -- is the

question of *legitimacy*, both of supply and demand. It should come as no surprise that three areas in which ethical questions are often artificially restricted to the supply side are the "Mafia" businesses: arms, drugs, and prostitution. The criminalisation of prostitutes rather than johns is a typical result of deflecting any critique of demand and focusing exclusively on supply. Feminists should take heed, however, of some encouraging indicators that a debate over the legitimacy of demand may be taking shape.

The infamous 'War on Drugs' stands as a premier example of the hypocrisy of a predatory 'free market' society which establishes certain apparently arbitrary limits to the legitimacy of commerce. Certain recreational drugs are legal (notably nicotine in the form of tobacco, and alcohol); other drugs are not (notably cannabis, and the various heroin derivatives). Other psychotropic drugs are prescribed in startlingly large quantities, such as the SSRIs and other behavioural modification meds now routinely administered to children as young as six and seven years of age.

All these drugs have potentially harmful effects. Tobacco smoking alone accounts for some 400,000 American lives per annum, and nicotine is said to be the single most addictive drug in the Western pharmacopoeia. Alcohol is implicated in serious national health problems, as well as in behaviour disturbances which may lead to violence. Yet these drugs are quite legal; the defence invariably offered to critics of the suppliers of these substances is that the consumers know what they are doing and are exercising freedom of choice. The consumers want these items, and the logic of the Market dictates that where there is a demand there must and should be a supply. No one is being forced to smoke or drink, say the tobacco and alcohol companies. If people become addicted it is due to their own 'misuse' of the products. If people become ill, it is because they 'misuse' the products by consuming them to excess.

The officially proscribed drugs, on the other hand, are demonized with a zeal remarkable in an allegedly secular nation, and in this market sector the drug dealers are presented as public enemies of the first order. The argument that demand exists, and therefore supply naturally arises to meet it, is not deemed acceptable even by the most passionate free-marketeers when it comes to the illegal drugs. The suppliers in this case are held very culpable indeed for the negative outcomes of their customers' preferences. Cultural legitimacy or illegitimacy, rather than actual amount or degree of harm done, seems to determine the extent to which suppliers will be criticized for the end results of their trade. The heroin dealer is considered a vile criminal who preys upon human weakness, but the multinational tobacco or alcohol producer is not.

A similar impasse is reached with regard to small-arms sales. The individualist doctrine on which American political life is based persistently regards private ballistic weaponry as an inalienable right. There is a demand, therefore there is a supply; America has many gun shops. Again criticism, where it exists, is levelled at the suppliers; it is 'too easy' to buy a gun, gun shop owners are told they should exercise more discretion, and so forth. As mentioned above, debates over prostitution also tend to focus on the supply side. For men to desire and purchase sexual service is considered normal and harmless; for women to provide it is considered immoral, unclean, and criminally culpable by traditional conservatives, and despicable (as our colloquial use of 'metawhores' in conversation and rhetoric clearly indicates) but harmless by sex-liberals. It is noteworthy that 'What a john he is' not only lacks the derogatory punch of 'What a whore she is', but sounds artificial and contrived because 'john' is not a conventionally insulting epithet.

I propose that 'What a john he is' can never be a catchy epithet in the context of

hegemonic capitalist ideology. To question the demand side of any market is dangerous ground in contemporary American public discourse. The religion of the market rests on a fundamental assumption that all desires and appetites are valid, and that to criticize any 'customer preference' is to become that dreadful thing, a judgmental or Puritanical person-- committing the cardinal sin of Interfering with the Free Market. However, in each case above we may find grounds for questioning the demand side of the transaction.

Why do so many people rely on alcohol as an excuse for committing acts of violence? *Why* are so many people sufficiently depressed or bored that recreational drugs easily become necessities? *Why* do people indulge in self-destructive behaviours generally, and in specific behaviours such as chain-smoking, heavy drinking, and other drug abuse which is well known to inflict physical harm, impair judgment, etc? *Why* do so many Americans want to own a gun, and what are they planning to do with it once they own it?

Or, in our case, *why* do so many men want to rent or buy a woman, girl, or boy?

To critique desire is to render oneself virtually an intellectual outcast in contemporary American discourse. It is acceptable to critique scheming suppliers, but not excessive demanders; to blame the tobacco company, but not the smoker; to blame the prostitute, or perhaps if one is *very* radical the pimp, but never the john. The thread of discourse which critiques insatiable desire is vanishingly marginal, as one would expect in a hyperconsumer culture. Profits are maximised by maximising consumption. Consumption is maximised by stimulating desire to irrational extremes. Modern capitalism works, irrationally enough, by depriving more than half the world of basic necessities in order that the remainder of the world can go into consumer debt feeding an insatiable hunger for luxuries.

The values I longed to give my children -- honesty, cooperativeness, thrift, mental curiosity, physical competence -- were intrinsic to my agrarian childhood, where the community organized itself around a sustained effort of meeting people's needs. These values, I knew, would not flow naturally from an aggressive consumer culture devoted to the sustained effort of inventing and engorging people's wants.

Barbara Kingsolver, "A Good Farmer," *The Nation* Nov 3 2003

Nevertheless, a slender but tenacious thread in American public discourse over the last quarter century and more is deeply contrarian -- as contrarian as anti-prostitution feminism. At the very margins of this 'consumer society' -- branded kooks, 'neo-Puritans' (a label certainly familiar to anti-prostitution feminists!) and so forth by mainstream pundits -- is an eclectic group of people questioning the primacy of material acquisition and the sanctity of the market.

These people ask not (as the market dictates), 'How shall we satisfy every desire?' but rather "Is it necessary to satisfy every desire? Is it even possible? Are all desires justified?' and 'What are the implications of insatiable desire?' More specifically, they ask such important questions as whether it is legitimate to desire a level of luxury and convenience that can only be achieved by bankrupting future generations; to desire cheap consumer goods, if they are so cheap that they can only be obtained by exploiting sweatshop labour. These questions are fundamentally homologous with the feminist questions: 'Is the demand for prostitution and pornography a legitimate demand?' 'What is the price of fulfilling it? Is this price justifiable?'

This question of the legitimacy of desires, and whether the fulfilment of desire is the same thing as 'freedom,' is at the heart of a feminist critique of pornography and prostitution. Traditionally the defence of such predatory sexual manifestations as sadomasochism and the consumption of pornography and prostitutes has been on the

grounds that all desire is *ipso facto* legitimate, and therefore the suppression (or even critique) of desire is *ipso facto* illegitimate and oppressive.

This unconditional defence of desire and appetite is free-market ideology at its finest. It is the basis of the alleged synonymy of Capitalism and Freedom.

Thus it is not possible to critique the various forms of sexual instrumentalism and objectification, without critiquing the fundamental assumptions of neoliberalism; nor is it possible to make neoliberalism the official ideology of the world without making prostitution its official sexuality, and pornography its official medium.

Playboy founder Hugh Hefner is to star as a cartoon superhero fighting evil alongside a bevy of buxom Bunnygirls, it was announced today. He has teamed up with Spider-Man creator and Marvel Comics guru Stan Lee to develop the TV cartoon. Septuagenarian Hefner will lead an elite crime-fighting team made up of various Playmates of the Month, in the show Hef's Superbunnies, according to Variety magazine. The adult cartoon will take viewers inside the Playboy Mansion, the heart of his operation to fight injustice [. . .]

Lee said: "As a fan who bought and cherished the very first copy of Playboy in 1953, it is an enormous thrill for me to be partnering with a man who has done so much to shape the culture of the times we live in.

"Hugh Hefner has long been one of the great communicators in our society, and I can't think of anyone I'd rather work with."

"Breaking News" July 18 2003 (online Irish news journal)

VIII. Allies and Prospects

Of course, the usual dynamics of "It's not our problem, it's theirs" is going on, as the article totally fails to account for how our political economy drives girls and women into grinding poverty, how our epidemic of child rape provides an easy source of psychologically tormented and economically desperate young girls for pimps to prey on, how our pop culture glorifies pimps, how we either ignore or demonize women caught in the system of prostitution, how perfectly "ordinary" men continue to pay the pimps to

sustain the industry of prostitution, and so on ad nauseam. The only time any recognition of our wide-scale cultural responsibility for these kinds of horrendous crimes is allowed to creep in, is when it is in the mouth of the defendant for the pimps: "All you have to do today is turn on MTV, turn on any radio station that plays music, and half the songs you hear are about being a pimp. It's just a part of the culture." True. Too bad that nobody will listen to this person, since he's already been discredited by defending the pimps.

Geekery Today, April 22 2001

I suppose the drawing and quartering of an individual's dignity is at the heart of the appeal of all reality shows . . .

Ana Marie Cox, "Donald's Wannabe Slaves", *In These Times* Feb 18
2004

I am against pornography and against the wars of empire. This confuses some of my left-wing allies, who also oppose the war but think pornography is about sexual freedom, and therefore wonder if I am a closet conservative. It also confuses some of my right-wing opponents, who cheer on the war but think all lefties are pro-pornography, and therefore wonder if I am a closet conservative.

Robert Jensen, "Blow Bangs and Cluster Bombs: the cruelty of men
and Americans" in *Feminista!* an online journal, v5n1

The growing polarization of wealth and poverty between nations (a polarization that exists within nations as well) is the system's crowning achievement on the world stage. It is also what is ultimately at issue in the struggle against modern imperialism. As Magdoff argues in "Imperialism without Colonies," there is an essential oneness to economic, political, and military domination under capitalism. Those seeking to oppose the manifestations of imperialism must recognize that it is impossible to challenge any one of these effectively without calling into question all the others and hence the entire system.

John Bellamy Foster, "Imperial America and War", *Monthly Review*
May 28 2003

I suspect that many of the feminists who have contributed their research and writing to this book have often felt painfully marginalized, as though struggling against a smothering hegemony. We are. Commerce, government, and pop culture have merged into a new Orwellian orthodoxy, the ideology of the monetarist centre-right; just 'liberal' enough to approve of sex in general, but quite capitalist enough to approve of it even

more if it turns a profit.

The Left, or what remains of it, does seem to be rallying feebly to protest the corporate domination of just about everything; but the corporate exploitation of women and children always seems to slip under their radar.

In 'liberal' or 'progressive' circles, pornography and prostitution are either sacralized by a knee-jerk association with freedom of speech (and sexual liberation), or discussed with a kind of sniggering, prurient 'humour' and smug self-satisfaction (at our being so very liberated and worldly and modern as to find the subject amusing rather than shocking or depressing) which obviates any need to take the lives and deaths of prostituted women seriously. Trafficking is at one and the same time regarded as a visible symbol of liberation and progress, and as a dirty joke. It is either above criticism, or beneath notice.

When the subject of pornography or prostitution comes up in polite right-wing circles it is discussed in a framework so misogynist -- i.e. that wicked, sinful, 'low' women deserve to be shunned and driven out from respectable society -- that one almost feels driven to defend the institution itself as a means of defending its victims. Similarly, when the subject of women's oppression in traditional patriarchies is discussed in right-wing circles, it is currently in the context of an anti-Arab racism or an anti-Muslim religious bigotry so offensive that it drowns the allegedly feminist principle being discussed. What these two rhetorical styles have in common is the exploitation of a social justice issue -- the violation of women's civil rights and human dignity -- to fuel a quite different rhetorical agenda.

Feminists seem to be no closer today to winning widespread support for a critique of prostitution *as an international social justice issue in its own right* than we were thirty

years ago.

Some feminists (perhaps in despair?) have sought to forge alliances with the conservative Right. At least, they say, right-wing women have an analysis of prostitution and pornography as degrading to the human spirit. Yet the remainder of the right-wing agenda, in keeping with its long history of commercial and business advocacy, further marginalises non-market values. And while such movements as 'Promise Keepers' may chide men for irresponsible or predatory sex, they also enforce traditional gender roles and male authority over women to a degree that no feminist could view without profound unease and suspicion.

For feminists seeking allies against the traffickers in women and kids, the men of the traditional Left and Right remain fairly useless.

The conservative politician of cliché thunders from his (always his) pulpit about Family Values and premarital sex and indecency. One would think he might be moved to thunder a bit about rich, respectable men who take sex tours to Thailand. But after his speaking engagement he is likely to fly back to the Bohemian Grove or any other exclusive rich-men's-club, where in discreet privacy he can enjoy strippers, call girls, and the other higher-ranking geisha who service the wealthy. He may even take the occasional sex tour of Thailand himself, though of course it will appear on his expense account as a business trip.

The radical activist of cliché thunders against exploitation, sweatshop labour, putting-profits-before-people, corporate propaganda, etc. He may even want to ban tobacco advertising, or tear down alcohol billboards in Black and Chicano neighbourhoods. But he suddenly turns squeamish when feminists approve (or commit) nonviolent action against porno stores, or argue for limits to the pornographic content of

public media. Freedom of speech, and access by men to women's bodies, are for him inseparable. The symbolic destruction of porn videos or magazines strikes at the root of his own male privilege, unlike the destruction of a tobacco billboard; it is usually at this point that he suddenly remembers his absolutist First Amendment principles.

The conservative's staunch pro-business stance, reflected in his stereotypically pro-gun, anti-EPA, anti-labour, anti-OSHA, government-is-bad, *laissez-faire*, profit-is-good speechifying, always stops just short of publicly supporting the very profitable business of selling or renting women and kids to men for sexual use. *That* business is below the line, beyond the pale. He will not admit that this also is Big Business, the logical conclusion of 'getting government off the back of business,' the ultimate in *laissez-faire*.

The radical's staunch anti-business stance, reflected in his highly developed critique of monetism, the WTO, NAFTA, GATT, IMF, WB, IEB, OECD, biotechnology, HMOs, sweatshops, etc., stops just short of publicly vilifying the sex-sweatshop trade in women and kids. Sex is above the line, inside the pale, a groovy thing -- after all, the right-wing bad guys (see above) say it's bad, therefore it must be good.

There's nothing new about this interlocking mirror trick which makes the sex business disappear -- *as a business* -- from both the pro-business and the anti-business rhetoric. But the new extremes of capitalist ideology, and the new corporate and transnational face of colonialism, have ratcheted up the contradictions to a new level. This intensifying cognitive dissonance may provide a window of opportunity for feminist social critics.

It remains for feminists, the only political thinkers with a fundamental stake in the human rights of women, to connect what has been consistently disconnected; to call

down the masculinist ideologues of both the Right and the Left for their hypocrisy. Based on past experience one may be forgiven for wondering whether much change of heart can be achieved among the men themselves -- but to what extent we can, surely we must try to disabuse their female constituents and colleagues of the illusion that (left to male leadership) 'family values' will ever include the abolition of so profitable a family-destroying business as the traffic in women, or that 'fighting the power' will ever include fighting the power of the pimp and the john.

Perhaps the best hope for an international challenge to prostitution lies in the anti-globalisation movement. Though this movement is not feminist *per se*, it does uphold a core value without which no challenge to prostitution or pornography can be maintained. The anti-globalisation movement believes that commerce is not the crown and goal of human evolution and civilisation, that market values are not the only values, and that it is immoral and despicable to buy and sell certain things, or to make money in certain ways. This is a sound philosophical basis from which to critique the traffic in live sex toys.

The anti-globalisation movement poses a fundamental philosophical challenge to the current corporate/monetist intellectual and media hegemony in the G7 nations. It is rankly and frankly heretical, and its spirited rejection of commercial control and intrusion might, without great difficulty, be extended to include a rejection of the commercialisation of sex. Its desire to balance the agency and autonomy of Third World nations against the need to protect their resources and populations from First World exploiters is almost exactly analogous to the feminist desire to respect and yet protect the exploited women and children of all nations. It seems promising ground for building a bridge and an alliance.

But whether this movement, still mostly dominated by men, can be made to face

facts with regard to commercialised sex -- to admit that the sex industry is not merely *parallel to*, but *identical with and implicated in*, the rest of corporate power and profiteering -- is an open question. One would think that the connection was abundantly clear between the forcible commercialisation of just about everything, from genomes to water supplies, and the commercialisation of women's bodies. But 'leftist' men for several generations have done their best to ignore the obvious, and the WTO generation may be able to do likewise unless and until a strong feminist voice develops in the Green and anticorporate movements.

It must also be said that for US feminists to build a bridge to the international anticorporate movement will require a refreshment of our own radicalism. Many US feminists are spending their time on discrimination issues which, while legitimate in their own local context, do not make sense in a wider global justice movement. For example, the campaign to force US auto insurance companies to stop discriminating against women drivers may not win friends in an anticorporate movement whose members are painfully aware of the connections between US car-centric lifestyle, petroleum consumption, global warming, and oil wars. If we wish the Greens and the 'Seattle generation' to take pornography and prostitution seriously, then US feminists will have to take anti-capitalism, global resource maldistribution, and global warming seriously.

Where the neoliberal ideology rules unchallenged it is not possible to challenge the traffic in women and girls: the official sexuality of capitalism is prostitution. It is my hope that feminists, Greens and other progressives will seize the historical moment -- this modest, but possibly growing groundswell of populist disgust with crass commercialism, hyper-exploitation of human and natural resources, and the naked brutality of unfettered profiteering. I hope that we will manage to make, or re-forge, the connections between

the Commodification of Everything, the corporate colonisation and enclosure of both private life and the public sphere, the neo-colonial agenda making itself embarrassingly plain in current US foreign policy, and the commodification of women and the colonisation and expropriation of the female body. Truly, 'it is impossible to challenge any one of these effectively without calling into question all the others and hence the entire system'. Feminists have been saying for over a century that some things should not be for sale. This may be the right time to say it again -- and to challenge the entire system.

NOTES

For typical "left-liberal" enthusiasm over prostitution and pornography in various forms, the trendy online journal "Salon" is an inexhaustible source and may serve as a typical instance representative of many other publications. The online journal Feminista (www.feminista.com) devoted an issue to the enthusiasm of a "liberal feminist" columnist for a necrophilia web site. The track record of such "mainstream lefty" institutions as *The Nation* and the ACLU speaks for itself.

An excellent short introduction to media ownership and its implications is "Free Press for Sale," Derrick Jensen's interview of media critic Robert McChesney in *The Sun* magazine. For more eerie parallels between corporate/advertising culture and prostitution, see Jim Rutenberg's disturbing "The Way We Live Now: The Secret Agents of Capitalism are All Around Us," *New York Times* July 15 2001. For my analysis of the "poverty model" of male sexuality as used to justify abuse, see "Scandals of Sexual Greed," *Z Magazine* October 2002. My thinking as of about 15 years ago on the nexus of capitalism and sexuality is preserved in the essay "Consuming Passions" in the anthology *Unleashing Feminism* (HerBooks 1990, out of print), or online at www.nostatusquo.com courtesy of N. Craft, webmaster.

Neoliberalism has many near-synonyms. It's known as "Chicago School" economic theory because of the enormous influence of neoliberal economist Milton Friedman during his tenure at the Chicago School of Economics: many contemporary neoliberal pundits were Friedman's disciples in their younger days. It's also known as "the Washington Consensus" due to the strong influence of American economists and to the tacitly understood role of the IMF and World Bank as enforcers for US financial/corporate interests. "Globalisation," which might legitimately apply to any world-wide phenomenon such as the world-wide antiwar movement which responded to the US invasion of Iraq, or a world labour movement, has been "branded" by the

neoliberal economists to mean the imposition of their theories, by coercion or by armed force, on all the world's economies. Hence "anti-globalisation" activists are actually "anti-neoliberalism" activists; they are themselves global activists, with strong international connections.

A word or two of heartfelt thanks is due to the readers who bravely waded through many drafts early and late: Irene Reti, John Burke, Vicki Behrens, Sarah Pheral, Robert Jensen, Rebecca Whisnant (more or less in chronological order). Their comments, caveats and questions were often like a flashlight in a very dark cave.

FURTHER READING

Rather than weigh down this text with a blizzard of footnotes, I've compiled a *partial* list of sources which have strongly influenced my thinking about prostitution, pornography, commerce, and globalisation over the last ten years. I am no longer able to compartmentalise these topics; readings in capitalism, colonialism and globalisation seem to be "about" prostitution and pornography as much as readings in prostitution and pornography are "about" globalisation, colonialism and capitalism. (I am reminded of the brief scandal when British troops in Iraq were found to have staged and photographed pornographic scenes using Iraqi POWs; how can these threads be neatly disentangled?)

Shovelling Fuel for a Runaway Train (Czech)

Globalisation and its Discontents (Stilts)

The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (Bell)

Affluenza (de Graaf et al.)

For the Common Good (Daly & Cobb)

A Green History of the World (Ponting)

One World Ready or Not (Greider)

Hegemony and Survival (Chomsky)

The Sorrows of Empire (Chalmers)

One Market Under God (Frank)

No Logo (Klein)

Amusing Ourselves to Death (Postman)

Upside-Down (Galeano)

Tools for Conviviality (Illich)

Energy and Equity (Illich)

The Culture of Make-Believe (Jensen)

For Adult Users Only (Gubar et al.)

Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics (Enloe)

Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women Are Worth (Waring)

The Globalize Woman (Wichterich)

See also: many essays by Arundhati Roy, Vandana Shiva, George Monbiot, Bill McKibben, John Adams and other critics of Market-worship too numerous and various to list here. The web site socialcritic.org offers a varied hoard of dissenting essayists. I've been inspired by many bloggers and online news and editorial websites; in these days of tightening corporate media control, access to international and independent news is not merely refreshing but a necessity.

If I had a particular goal in mind when writing this set of essays, it was to encourage feminists to explore both the new and older literatures of anticapitalist thought, and to encourage antiglobalisation and anticorporate activists to explore feminist critiques of sex-capitalism. I believe we can and should make common cause against the hegemony of the hucksters; now's the time.

ADDENDUM

This essay was begun before 9/11, and was in near-final draft before the American invasion of Iraq. The original end notes indicate that hints of the sexualised abuse of prisoners were emerging in late 2002 or early 2003. By May 2004 the Abu Ghraib scandal had been broken by veteran US journalist Seymour Hersh in *The New Yorker*, and at the time of final copy-editing in June, the scandal continues to spread upwards into the Bush Administration. Two things happened which compelled me to expand the terse comment which appears in the paragraph above.

When the first photographs were made available by the Washington Post and other media outlets, some images alleged to be of Iraqi prisoner abuse were found to be instead, commercial 'war porn' – pornography which specialises in military imagery. Specifically, they were of the gang rape of women dressed in flowing black robes and veils, apparently in a barren desert environment, by a group of men dressed in US-style military fatigues. In a discussion group online I read the comments of one angry American, shocked by the Abu Ghraib revelations, who said s/he was 'relieved' to find that at least some of the pictures were 'just ordinary commercial porno'. Apparently it was possible for this person to disconnect, utterly, the fact of a thriving sub-genre of porno devoted to racist depictions of the gang rape of 'Arab' women by US soldiery, and the fact of actual US soldiery abusing and raping actual Arabs. This honest and naive expression of relief haunted me for weeks afterwards.

Then, in correspondence with a feminist colleague, the inevitable question was raised about the US troops at Abu Ghraib and the many digital pictures they took of prisoner abuse – pictures that were traded, collected, shared via email and stored on personal and work-related computers, and finally 'leaked' to the American public after months of ongoing torture and sexual abuse had been documented. 'Why,' asked my colleague, 'Why on earth did they take pictures? I mean, they're doing this stuff, and it's horrible enough as it is,' she wrote, 'but by taking pictures they are just leaving evidence. Why do it, except that it adds to the sexualised thrill to be making porno?'

This is a good question, deeply thought-provoking, deeply connected to the first troubling incident. This question applies across the board. Why did the Nazis take pictures and meticulously document the atrocities committed in the camps? Why did a generation of white hunters take pictures of themselves standing on wild animals they had shot? Why do hunters hang trophy heads on their walls? Why did white people take pictures of lynchings and make them into postcards that were then collected and traded? Why did GIs in Vietnam collect ears and other more private body parts from their victims? Why did 'Indian fighters' and bounty hunters in the old American West collect body parts from dead Indians? And – lastly – why do men make documentary pornography?

Reverting to our first question again, why is some documentary pornography reassuring and normal, whereas other examples (like the Abu Ghraib pictures) are deeply shocking and horrible?

‘Documentary pornography’ is a term I am using to try to distinguish, for my own clarity, pornography of the imagination (such as literature, paintings, animation) from pornography that is photographed or filmed, using real people – real women, real children, real male and female models. It is pornography that, while details of it may be ‘faked’ or simulated, purports to be a document of actual events. The fact that it is photographic – still, film or video – lends it, even in these digital times, an aura of verisimilitude. The use of live models are used in it makes it documentary in another sense: it is a document of the use of these live models required by this genre make it documentary in other senses, which I’ll address in a a moment.

Structural similarities between the documented humiliation of prisoners and the conventions of ‘normal’ pornography are many and strikingly obvious. The prisoners were made to masturbate for the camera: images and footage of women masturbating are a stock theme in commercial porn. The prisoners were made to pose in tableaux suggestive of homosexual activity such as fellatio; a large and profitable sub-genre of commercial porn is ‘girl/girl’, in which (presumably heterosexual) models are posed in tableaux mimicking lesbian sex, or directed to engage in sexual behaviour with each other while the camera rolls. These models usually bear little resemblance to real-life lesbians, being selected for their conformity to commercial and male-defined standards of heterosexual attractiveness.

In these forms of documentary porn there are surely two gratifications, one overt and one tacit. The overt gratification is the fantasy of violation of privacy, of spying on the intimate and private acts of another person. But the Abu Ghraib pictures should illuminate for us a further, tacit or covert gratification, which is knowing or believing that the persons depicted were compelled or persuaded or paid to submit to a violation of privacy in reality and to perform acts in reality which ordinary people would not care to have seen or photographed by others. This is one sense in which this genre is genuinely documentary.

The ‘kick’ of girl/girl porno lies partly in its catering to the fantasy of violating the privacy of lesbians, of making even sex between women – something very threatening to male sexual prerogative – serve a male agenda; the other, tacit element is the kick of seeing ‘normal girls’ made to emulate homosexual activity. The assumption is that homosexual activity is repulsive, and therefore the models are disgusted by it and endure it under some compulsion – whether the compulsion of money, force of personality, or physical threat. Pictures of real lesbians – at Gay Pride rallies, for example – kissing, necking, and flirting are often considered ‘disgusting’ and ‘ugly’ by the same men who enjoy girl/girl fantasy porn. Lesbians in the public world who kiss, hold hands, or otherwise behave like a sexually intimate couple (in a restaurant, in a park, at a movie) have often been subjected to abuse, threats, and violence from hetero men – the same men who constitute the market for ever-popular girl/girl porno. What is *disgusting* in the case of real lesbians in the real world seems to be the women’s autonomy; what is *attractive* in the case of commercialised, fictionalised documentary porn is the evidence

of reduced autonomy, and the dissonance between what the porn consumer assumes are the real wishes of the model, and the reaction she is being bribed or forced to perform. If the model were a real lesbian, she would experience violation and humiliation due to the invasion and exploitation of her sexual privacy by men; if the model is conventionally heterosexual, she is presumed to experience a degree of humiliation in being made to commit or mime homosexual acts.

Ironically, (being otherwise deeply opposed in many ways) Arab men and Western lesbians both represent an Uppity Other, in their different ways claiming a private culture and personal pride, defiantly separate and distinct from white male Euro-American power. It's not surprising that a parallel to girl/girl porn is found in the picture from Abu Ghraib, in which Arab men were forced to pose in suggestively homosexual tableaux. The covert kick of documentary porno is that the viewer/purchaser believes it genuinely documents some violation of the will and autonomy of the subject. In the Abu Ghraib images this feature has become overt.

Our reaction – as a nation and a public – to the use of Iraqi prisoners in amateur pornography shows that we believe this was a deeply humiliating experience for them. Our media have made much of the ‘special’ characteristics of Arabs, to explain why this experience is so very humiliating for them in particular – whereas it is of course perfectly harmless and good for the women and girls spread, splayed, stripped and mocked throughout our commercial advertising/porn media nexus. This neocolonial cultural essentialism deserves an entire essay or book unto itself, of course, starting with a no-holds-barred critique of ‘The Arab Mind’ (appalling enough, this racist classic appears to have been used as a serious planning document by the Bush regime). But our space here is limited and we cannot afford to digress.

To summarize, no matter what degree of fakery may be involved in some documentary pornography, it is still presented and consumed as a document of humiliation; even if the actresses or models are inured to their trade, take it casually or even take pride in it, the consumer is still buying the ‘idea or concept’ of a document of humiliation. This explains the enduring market – despite an astounding glut of every variety of ‘normal’ pornography available in many media – for ‘real’ porno, as in the ‘real incest, real rape’, porn sites and videos which claim to document real abuse. The primary fantasy is the purported story of voyeurism, homosexual humiliation or rape. When this fantasy is no longer sustained by a willing suspension of disbelief, the secondary fantasy provides the thrill. The secondary fantasy involves the humiliation or constraint of the people used to create the primary fantasy. When the secondary fantasy is weakened by a belief that porno is a Good Thing and the actresses/models in it are all well-paid and happy, then ‘really real’ pornography fills the gap by purporting to be a ‘genuine document of abuse – *We mean it this time, really*. Unfortunately, we know from survivor testimony and police records that at least a substantial chunk of it is all too genuine.

The Abu Ghraib pictures fall squarely into this last ‘outlaw’ category of documentary porn. But they are not distinct or separate from the rest of the industry. The taste for porn pretending to be a documentary of rape or torture, combined with the underlying taste for inferred, real humiliation or pain involved in acting out the pretended rape, humiliation or torture, lead logically to a taste for documentation of unambiguously real rape,

humiliation or torture. Or, alternatively, it is the same taste being indulged with *varying degrees of impunity*. The Abu Ghraib pictures are pornography made in a culture of total impunity.

Let us now return to the second vexing question: *Why?* What is this compulsion of men to purchase or share documents of other men's sexual exploits; to be – or to court – the peeping-tom, in what is conventionally described as a most private and secretive activity; or to consume the documentary evidence of other men's acts of violence or domination? Why do they take pictures? Why do they like to look at these pictures? Why do they document their own crimes?

I'll put forward a theory. Suppose (for argument's sake) that there is a durable, venerable form of male (primate?) sexuality that is wholly male-oriented; suppose that the structural, social, functional and emotional point of this sexuality is men engaging with, showing off for, gratifying, other men. Call it the sexuality of gang rape – in which a woman is the prop or target for a ritual among men, possibly a primate resource-sharing ritual not unlike passing food around. This aggressive, vicarious homoeroticism might be dignified and ritualised – as in the ancient Viking funerary rite in which the dead man's friends gathered, drank to his memory, and 'shared' (i.e. raped) one of his servant girls, who was then killed and burned along with the body of her 'lord and master' (the Viking equivalent of *sati*). Or it might be impromptu, as in a gang of youths getting drunk and raping any passing girl, or 'getting out of control' at a party. My point is that the men, acting together, overpower, rape, humiliate, and perhaps kill a victim, and they do so primarily not because of the victim, but because of a social and emotional ritual amongst themselves.

The act of violence, however, is not the end of the ritual. Part of the ritual is that they brag about it afterwards. I'm thinking of locker-room jocks, boasting about their (sometimes imaginary) sexual conquests; of the endless barracks anecdotes about what the guys did on their liberty nights; of sailors' stories about shore leave; of 'dirty joke' contests and boys sniggering together over centrefolds. Men, among other men, practise a kind of oral pornography that consists essentially of bragging about their masculinity, how dominant they are, their genital size, how they 'put women in their place', what 'base' they got to, what they talked (or forced) her into doing or permitting. Trophy display and bragging, as a ritual of male bonding, are a cultural tradition crossing boundaries from hunting to tourism, name-dropping to warfare to sex.

The more benign form of this competitive talk in the sexual arena might be boasting about what great lovers they are, how 'the ladies' love them, how happy they can make a woman, how married women can't resist them, etc. But there's a more dismal, savage side that comes down to – basically – bragging about rape. This ritualised bragging might be a story about the 'little flirt' who 'got what she deserved', told by a man hoping to impress other men by telling how he coerced or threatened or physically overpowered someone weaker, demonstrating his dominance/control/manhood, clearly defining himself as an aggressor and not a victim (lest his fellows get any wrong ideas). At the same time the braggart offers, for the collective consumption of the peer group, his own pornographic narrative – shared as one might share food or drink, in a ritual of social bonding and fellowship. (The British comedy team French and Saunders have produced a

painfully percipient series of skits about ‘two dirty old men’ which illustrate this dynamic in a more pathetic form: the transparently imaginary misogynist boastings and fantasies of a couple of sad old men.)

It seems obvious that many men get off on listening to this kind of bragging, (it seldom involves violence), on hearing or watching male dominance exercised. (It's hard to determine whether a majority of men actively enjoy ‘locker room talk’, and how many endure it or participate only for fear of losing status.) It seems to me a kind of male/male sexual encounter, where some men listen while another man brags, or where a group of men relive their ‘adventure’ as a gang by telling the story over again. Male peers in our form of patriarchy cannot have sex with each other, because that would require someone to lose his ‘manly status’ by taking on the passive or victim role. But they can create intimacy and shared sexual thrills by sharing their sexual dominance over someone else. Prison rape survivor (and researcher) Stephen Donaldson has written about being raped by two men at once (orally and anally) while incarcerated; his perception at the time was that the two men were having sex with each other far more than with him – he was just the ‘medium of exchange’ (to take a note from Levi-Strauss). His notes on male definitions and perceptions of heterosexuality are also worth mulling over: in prison culture, a man who rapes other men is ‘straight’. Only a man who is raped, or consents to being penetrated, is ‘gay’. There is little distinction between consent and force; ‘gayness’ is an attribute of the receptive role, regardless of volition or physical gender.

The idea of ‘sharing a woman’ has a mythic quality in patriarchal male thinking – the woman (or in Donaldson's case the victimised male) being the connection that permits sexual intimacy, while avoiding ‘forbidden acts’ which would necessarily demote one man to ‘woman status’. If we are willing to posit the existence of a male/male sexual dynamic based on this ‘sharing’, on the acquisition of ‘sex partners’ partly for their own value or pleasure but just as importantly by their value as ‘offerings’ to a male peer group – whether anecdotally or literally, physically – then the obsession with documentation starts to make sense. In this model, men make documentary porn as a valued commodity to be shared, bartered, offered to other men in social bonding.

This deepens our understanding (above) of the dual nature of the attraction of documentary porn. In light of the ‘sharing’ dynamic, we might view it as material produced as a form of trophy or bragging: *Look what we did to her! We can show you!* We might see it as a commercialised, ersatz, sanitised substitute for the showing/sharing of trophies from a rape. Or it might be both at the same time: deniable/acceptable/sanitised because it is ‘pretend’, yet satisfying because it is still consumed and appreciated as a document of (perceived) humiliation.

The come-ons for online porn rely heavily on the braggart style: ‘You won’t believe what these girls can handle!’ [read: *What we did to these girls*], etc. The tone is (to my ear) not strongly differentiated from the sniggering of high school jocks over what they got some girl drunk enough to endure at last night’s party: the social/ritual continuity between violation and bragging is consistent.

The fact, then, that the tortures and humiliations committed by the US troops at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere were documented, and were evidently committed in a ‘party

hearty' atmosphere with clowning around, big stupid grins, etc, shouldn't surprise us. It's the logical extension of the frat-house or barracks male bonding experience, the use of the body and person of some third party as the medium for expressing an intimate sexual and social connection among men. When Rush Limbaugh commented that the upset over the Abu Ghraib photos was excessive, that these were just a bunch of guys 'blowing off steam' and no worse than a frat hazing, the Left responded with (appropriate) outrage. But after all, what Rush said about Abu Ghraib is what men have been saying about the rape of women by frat boys ever since there have been frat boys: namely, that it's no big deal.

Real rapes do happen – sometimes gang rapes – do happen at frat parties.. Hazings occasionally result in real deaths or permanent scars. The overexcited, giddy atmosphere of the frat party 'out of control' is notable in first-hand accounts of lynch mobs, who tellingly referred to their social bonding events as 'necktie parties' [emphasis mine]. Violence and the party atmosphere are by no means incompatible. The irony is painful: the US Left leaps to vilify Rush for daring to trivialise the Abu Ghraib abuses by comparing them to something unimportant or benign – like rape and abuse at frat parties. Some commentators did make the connection with 'lynching postcards' that were traded, sold, and collected in the US. These photos have sometimes been referred to metaphorically as 'lynch mob porn', but this is merely another metawhore; the essential connection with commercial porn and its various structural purposes is obfuscated, not illuminated.

The participation of women always shocks the general public – whether in lynch mobs, management positions in the prostitution industry, or the Abu Ghraib pictures. Their presence and participation suggest several possibilities to me (perhaps a complex blend of them all):

- (1) The women were grateful to have their male cohorts' sadistic/aggressive gang-bang impulses safely diverted to some other target;
- (2) The women were trying very hard to be 'one of the boys', as the support/approval of the unit/tribe is very important to surviving military service in a hostile environment, and, as we know, a woman has to try twice as hard to succeed in 'a man's job';
- (3) the women were already strongly racist and were bonding racially with their troopmates in a mode parallel to male bonding, through pack violence;
- (4) the women had themselves been victimised or intimidated (rape is quite common within the US armed forces) and were themselves being used as porn models, told where and how to stand, when to smile, etc.

Some of the Abu Ghraib pictures (which the public has not yet seen) are said to show 'group sex' among soldiers, not involving prisoners. One Congressman commented that these pictures seemed to be 'consensual' – but that is always what men say about sex, unless there is overwhelming forensic evidence of force. Whether female troops participated willingly in consensual orgiastic group sex (perhaps with the aid of recreational drugs), or whether these pictures are more trophy porn documenting gang

rape, we may never know.

I don't rush to claim victim status for the female troops. Female Nazis existed and demonstrated ideological enthusiasm in excess of what mere survivalism would require. White women were prominent in the crowd at many lynchings, laughing and cheering the men on. While we might believe their mere presence in the crowd could be compelled by domineering husbands or fathers, raucous enthusiasm is harder to explain. The female troops at Abu Ghraib may have been fully complicit in the abuses, as they appear to be from the photographic record. I preserve a reasonable sliver of doubt because we know that the millions of women apparently smiling, laughing, and enjoying themselves in documentary porn from around the world are often smiling and laughing on command. To what extent they may have 'gone along' as weaker men sometimes have, cooperating in a gang rape even though stomach and conscience rebel, to avoid themselves being made the target of the gang-rape party mood – and to what extent they actively enjoyed humiliating and hurting helpless prisoners – is known only to them. They have to live with their complicity, as do we with ours.

There was a howling silence at the heart of US liberal discourse on 'the Abu Ghraib thing'. That silence was the protective shell built around our multi-billion-dollar porn industry and the ideology of neoliberal capitalism that enables it. Throughout all media discussion of the torture pics and revelation, the doublethink caused by the mainstreaming of porno makes itself painfully obvious, as it has throughout all media discussion of the torture pictures and revelations. Pundit after pundit has referred to the Abu Ghraib pictures as 'like a bad porno flick', 'the S&M war', 'dirty pictures from Iraq', etc. Predictably, the conflicting necessities of responding to the Abu Ghraib documents with appropriate revulsion and outrage, yet continuing to maintain the received definition of pornography as a Good Thing, has tied left/liberal commentators in knots.

To take just one example, one leftist pundit's Abu-Ghraib-inspired discussion of the American 'culture of suffering' includes a wholly unselfconscious reference to pornography:

'America's Funniest Home Videos' – the once-backchannel program where we became comfortable in snickering at people's pain like a kid thumbing through porno locked in the bathroom – has now come out of the closet and moved into the mainstream.

<http://www.alternet.org/story.html?StoryID=18659>

The kid thumbing through porno in the bathroom *is* snickering at people's pain; how much porno can you dig up that is not somehow predicated on women's (or kids') pain, or if not outright pain then at least shame and embarrassment? The viewer/purchaser knows that s/he would not like to strip naked and pose in front of cameras, to be displayed to thousands of strangers – and that some extraordinary inducement must be offered to convince anyone to consent to such vulnerability and exposure. The more humiliating or offensive the poses and props, the more obviously uncomfortable or painful the activities photographed, the more dubious the probability of genuine consent,

the stronger becomes the voyeuristic thrill of watching the documentary evidence of abuse.

I have come slowly to believe that documentary pornography of the most prevalent kind – that is, highly misogynist, often racist, definitely cruel and demeaning, hateful of the human body and particularly of female bodies, the kind of pornography promoted by spam mailers every day in mailboxes all over the world – is part and parcel of the social dynamics of gang rape. It's all about 'taking pictures of what we did to her', even if 'what we did to her' is as structural and generic as the reduced economic opportunities available to women, the impact of poverty on women.

Feminists have documented several ways in which men use pornography on/against women in their lives. Documentary pornography may be socially functional not only in male bonding, but also as a social tool for emphasizing and enforcing women's lower social status. It might serve as an impossible standard of sexiness and beauty that no living woman can measure up to, as a message of intimidation and hostility to female employees trying to enter traditionally male workplaces, as a 'how to' manual which they coerce or wheedle their lovers/wives into imitating for them, or (I suspect this is a more important function than we realise) as a veiled threat: this is what can happen to women without money, without the protection of a man. Certainly this parallels the use of state-sanctioned torture; one need not torture very many individuals to send a cautionary message to the general population: *This is what can happen to you.*

Misogyny drips from all accounts of Abu Ghraib, and all attempts to analyse it. The outrage of Arab men that the Americans 'treated our brothers like women'. The idea that making men wear 'women's undies' is a form of torture. The overarching, stunning hypocrisy of the world's largest pornography-exporting nation acting so dreadfully shocked when its line troops treat POWs in the same way that its prison guards and stronger inmates treat weaker men, and that its pornography and prostitution industry treats women, every single day.

For this radical feminist, the Abu Ghraib pictures merely elucidate or focus what porno is really about. The essence is not obfuscated for once because the victims are men, and literally prisoners behind bars and facing guns (instead of behind economic bars, facing hunger/homelessness). Therefore we can suddenly perceive that they are victims, that they have personal pride and dignity which have been assaulted, that they have rights which have been violated. The nameless, traceless women posing for websites like 'See Asian Sluts Get What They Deserve', or 'Farm Girls And Their Pets' – whether guns are pointed at them in the course of their work or not – arouse no such outrage or compassion. Even with such a searing illustration and example before us, the connection was made by only one or two marginalized feminist voices: Linda Burnham and Susan Brison, for example, whose essays at least start to address the connection between 'Bush porn', Abu Ghraib, male supremacy and US imperial supremacy.

Nor does anyone (except me?) wonder why we would expect any other behaviour from the troops of a nation so completely addicted to pornographic imagery, or indeed from any group of men forced into close bonding by immediate physical danger, indoctrinated with race hatred, trained in brutality and violence, and isolated in a culture of impunity.

What no one wants to face – in America, anyway – is that these pictures are not just *like* pornography. They *are* pornography, the raw essence of pornography: taking trophy photos of people being stripped, sexually humiliated, raped – so that you can brag about it afterwards.