

## Projection and Objectification

RAE LANGTON

### 1. Autonomy and Projection in Feminist Philosophy

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

Pioneer feminists viewed women's oppression in terms of women's autonomy and its thwarting, and this concern has remained central to the work of many liberal feminists, and those working in analytic philosophy. On this view, the basic problem has been that women have been cast in the role of human tools, as Aristotle described slaves: women have been treated as beings whose nature is to be directed by another, and whose purpose is instrumental; women have been treated as lacking in autonomy, and have had their autonomy systematically violated or stifled. This links the idea of oppression with that of objectification: when women are treated as tools, they are treated as things, items lacking in agency. Feminists tend in general to have few warm words for Kant, but these might find it in their hearts to concede he was on the right track when he said that 'autonomy is . . . the ground of the dignity of human nature, and of every rational nature'; and that we should therefore 'always treat humanity, whether in our own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.'<sup>1</sup> They may disagree about what, exactly, autonomy is, and how, exactly, it matters; but they agree that it matters. Martha Nussbaum, to take a recent example, offers an illuminating study of objectification that places autonomy-denial at centre-stage. Connected with autonomy-denial, through a variety of different entailments, are a cluster of other features: instrumentality; ownership or possession; fungibility, or replaceability; subjectivity-denial; violability; and denial of agency. I shall be drawing on her study in what follows.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. H. J. Paton, in *The Moral Law* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1948), 436, 429.

<sup>2</sup> Martha Nussbaum, 'Objectification', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 24 (1995), 249–91. See also Barbara Herman, 'Could It Be Worth Thinking about Kant on Sex and Marriage?' in *A Mind Of One's Own*:

The second idea I want to pick up is the idea of projection implicit in certain feminist accounts of social construction. Women's oppression stems from the operation of large-scale psychological or linguistic forces, shaped by unconscious and irrational desires, or shaped by the structure of language itself, a 'language of the fathers'. While feminists in this camp are if anything less likely to find warm words for Kant, and would view with suspicion his pronouncements on autonomy and the dignity of human nature, they might find it in their hearts to concede he was on the right track when he said, on a different topic, that 'the order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle nature, we ourselves introduce'—and when he showed an interest, not in how our cognitions conform to objects, but in how objects conform to our cognitions.<sup>3</sup> Taking this thought to the social world, they might ask how women conform to the cognitions or representations men have of them. They might add that Kant was mistaken in taking projective construction to be a product of reason, rather than irrational desire, mistaken in supposing it yields necessary constraints, and mistaken above all in his blindness to its political significance.

Those who draw on certain theories of language might speak in terms of the constructive power of certain concepts, or the projection of certain grammatical categories; in an extreme example, Luce Irigaray tries to convey the oppressive potency of grammar by proposing that 'I love to you' is an improvement on 'I love you', the latter after all making a direct 'object' of the loved one. Those who draw upon psychoanalysis (sometimes the same theorists) might speak in terms of the projection of unconscious desires.<sup>4</sup> Descartes's dualistic metaphysics, with its denigration of matter, gets interpreted as the projection of unconscious desires to reject one's mother, and insist on separation. Philosophy itself is put on the couch, interpreted as desire-driven belief which unconsciously expresses and perpetuates hostility to women, shaping thought about the world in general and women in particular. (Needless to say, a liberal focus on autonomy receives a similar projective and debunking explanation.) Distinctive features of this approach include the assumptions that belief is driven by desire; that desire-driven belief shapes and constructs the social world; and that the process is largely invisible to the participants. In this camp too one finds a link with a notion of objectification, understood rather

*Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, (eds.) Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993). For some alternative interpretations of autonomy, see, e.g., *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*, (ed.) Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980), A126 and Bxvi.

<sup>4</sup> Luce Irigaray proposes implausibly dramatic theses about linguistic and psychoanalytic projection in, e.g., *I Love to You* (London: Routledge, 1995); and *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), which puts Descartes and other philosophers on the couch. It is impossible to refer adequately to the vast literature here, but for another salient example see Jane Flax, 'Political Philosophy and the Patriarchal Unconscious', (eds.) Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka, *Discovering Reality* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983). Genevieve Lloyd's *The Man of Reason* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984) is a classic study of the conceptual (though not particularly psychoanalytic) associations between women and matter in philosophy's history.

differently, drawing on grammatical notions of an object, or conceptual associations of women with matter.

Feminist thinkers in one camp sometimes get impatient with feminist thinkers in the other. One side finds the other's preoccupation with autonomy naive, a relic of oppressive, dualistic ways of thinking; finds naive her apparent focus on individual action, and local manifestation of prejudice; and finds naive her apparent neglect of the invisible forces of desire and language. The other in turn finds naive her sister's exaggeration of the power of desire and language; finds frustrating the poetic style which seeks an alternative to the language of the fathers, an authentic woman's voice which in practice thwarts communication; and finds naive her apparent neglect of norms, whether of reason or morality, by which a case for feminism can be argued. Moreover, the background assumptions of psychoanalytic feminism can look philosophically suspicious. The claim that belief is driven by desire, and that belief shapes and constructs the world—these appear to violate rules of direction of fit. Belief aims to fit the world; desire aims for the world to fit it. But the psychoanalytic story violates these rules: instead of belief coming to fit the world, belief comes to fit desire, and the world, somehow, comes to fit the belief.

It is not my aim to referee these disagreements here. Instead I want to look at the twin themes of autonomy and projection, each emphasized by one camp, neglected by another. I shall say something brief about their on-going importance, and consider, in conciliatory spirit, how they unite in an adequate understanding of sexual objectification. I shall be assuming, but not arguing, that each camp is at least partly right. Yes, autonomy does indeed matter. And yes, belief can indeed come to fit desire; the world can indeed come to fit belief; the process can indeed go on in ways invisible to the participants. I shall be interested in the implications of this projective process for autonomy, in sexual objectification.

Section 2 considers how projection might *help* sexual objectification through its generation of certain desire-driven beliefs. I distinguish a number of projective mechanisms, and explore how these projective mechanisms might assist in the treating of women as things.<sup>5</sup> Section 3 considers how projection might *hide* sexual objectification. I focus here on the epistemology of objectification, and how projection might help to mask itself, and the objectification it assists.

Unwise though it is to speculate, it seems unlikely that the importance of autonomy and projection will go away. One needs no crystal ball to guess that the forces of global capitalism will be around for a while, and with them a tendency to treat people not only as consumers but as commodities, items for use and consumption, and that this is likely to have a continuing effect on women's lives, as the ever-burgeoning

<sup>5</sup> The distinctions and arguments of Section 2 build on work in 'Humean Projection in Sexual Objectification', which draws upon Hume in more detail; forthcoming in *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Much other feminist work draws on Hume (see, e.g., Annette Baier, 'Hume: The Reflective Women's Epistemologist?', in *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, (eds.) Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993) ); but I am not aware of material that draws upon his views of projection.

sex industry illustrates. One can anticipate on-going scope for a feminist version of the Kantian idea that there is a dignity in human nature having its ground in autonomy, and that by virtue of this worth 'we are not for sale at any price'.<sup>6</sup> And one needs no crystal ball to guess that the substitution of the virtual for the real will become an increasing fact of life; and that projection will be a topic of increasing importance, as people increasingly substitute virtual action for action, virtual experience for experience, and virtual human relationships for human relationships.

The pornography industry again provides an illustration. But whether projection should matter here is perhaps less obvious. For even if pornography use does involve projection, and even if pornography also objectifies women in ways that deny autonomy, that would not show that the projective aspect of pornography matters. Projection could be a merely incidental feature of pornography, of as little moral interest as other accidental facts about pornography—as, for example, the uninteresting fact that its images supervene on dots of ink, or pixels on a screen.

To see how the ideas of autonomy and projection might connect, I turn now to an account of sexual objectification offered by Catharine MacKinnon which draws explicitly upon both ideas, and in so doing, unites elements from each of the camps I have described.<sup>7</sup> The hope is that this will enable us to see how projection might help, and hide, sexual objectification.

## 2. How Projection Helps Sexual Objectification

MacKinnon describes sexual objectification as 'the primary process of the subjection of women', and says:

To be sexually objectified means having a social meaning imposed on your being that defines you as to be sexually used . . . and then using you that way.<sup>8</sup>

This notion of sexual objectification draws in recognizable ways on the first of the two ideas, conveying a Kantian heritage in that notion of 'use', which picks up on idea autonomy-denial and instrumentality. Sexual objectification emerges as the idea (drawing here on Nussbaum's elucidation) that certain sexual ways of treating someone may be ways of denying their autonomy, ignoring their subjective inner life, treating them as readily replaceable, treating them as the kinds of things that can be bought and sold, treating them as something merely to be used, something that is a mere tool.

MacKinnon also describes sexual objectification in terms that draw on the second idea: sexual objectification is, she says, 'an elaborate projective system'.<sup>9</sup> She is interested in how objectification 'unites act with word, construction with expression,

<sup>6</sup> Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue*, trans. Mary Gregor (NY, Evanston and London: Harper & Row, 1964), 435.

<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that MacKinnon's proposals have been viewed sceptically by members of each camp. See, e.g., Nussbaum, 'Objectification', whose scepticism is directed not so much against the analysis but the legal proposal; Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (NY and London: Routledge, 1997), ch. 2.

<sup>8</sup> MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1989), 122, 140.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 140–1.

perception with enforcement, myth with reality'<sup>10</sup>. She is interested in how different modes of treatment 'unite': for example when speech 'unites' with act, and when thought 'unites' with coercion. She is also interested in how desire 'unites' with belief and perception: those who exert power over women see the world as a certain way because they 'want to see' the world that way; they believe the world is a certain way because they 'want to believe' it is that way. What she describes, I suggest, is a kind of *desire-driven* projection.<sup>11</sup>

This theme of projection, desire-driven or otherwise, tends to be absent in the accounts of objectification offered by analytic or liberal feminists; it seems, for example, to be missing in Nussbaum's otherwise admirably comprehensive study.<sup>12</sup> It receives plenty of attention elsewhere in analytic philosophy however, for example in analyses of the epistemology of colour, and of value. Indeed the projective process is given the very label 'objectification' by J. L. Mackie, when he complains of our tendency 'to objectify values', complains of the propensity of the mind to project itself—to 'spread itself on external objects', as Hume put it.<sup>13</sup> Mackie and MacKinnon share an interest in the way desire and belief may unite to create something both wish to call 'objectification', notwithstanding their different concerns; and they share an interest, too, in desire-driven projection. According to Mackie, in objectifying value, we ascribe 'a fictitious external authority' to features that are nothing more than projections of our 'wants' and 'demands', our 'appetites' and 'desires'.<sup>14</sup>

How are we to understand the idea of a desire-driven projection, as it bears on sexual objectification? In what follows I shall describe and distinguish three varieties of desire-driven projection, none of which should seem too unfamiliar. They all have in common a capacity to generate a belief, given a desire. And they all have in common a potential involvement in sexual objectification, or so I shall suggest, drawing on MacKinnon in each case to illustrate their possible workings. My purpose is analytical and exploratory, rather than polemical. I shall assume, without defending, the adequacy of some projective explanatory hypotheses MacKinnon proposes, though I am aware that more defence is needed.

The first mechanism I shall call the *phenomenological gilding* of desired objects, recalling Hume's description of our activity of 'gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment'.<sup>15</sup> This mechanism is distinctive in

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 140, 122; *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 58–9 (emphasis added).

<sup>12</sup> An important exception is Sally Haslanger, whose work on this topic has substantially inspired and influenced me; see Haslanger, 'On Being Objective and Being Objectified', in *A Mind of One's Own*. I draw upon this in 'Beyond A Pragmatic Critique of Reason', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71 (1993), 364–84; and 'Feminism in Epistemology: Exclusion and Objectification', *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, (eds.) Jennifer Hornsby and Miranda Fricker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); both reprinted (with revisions) in *Sexual Solipsism*.

<sup>13</sup> J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), ch. 1; David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (ed.) L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 167.

<sup>14</sup> Mackie, *Ethics*, 42, 43, 45, 34.

<sup>15</sup> David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, (ed.) L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised P. H. Nidditch, 3rd edn., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 294.



generating beliefs about *value* in particular. The second is the familiar mechanism of *wishful thinking*, which can generate a belief that something is so, given a desire that it be so. Its scope goes beyond beliefs about value to beliefs about almost anything. The third mechanism I shall call *pseudo-empathy*, which is an over-hasty disposition to attribute features of one's own mind to other people, animals, or even inanimate objects (I don't address the question of when exactly such a leap counts as 'over-hasty'). Pseudo-empathy can generate a belief, given a desire, when it leaps from one's own desire that something be so to a belief that someone else desires that it be so. While these mechanisms can all generate belief, given desire, they vary in the sorts of belief they can in principle generate, given a desire—phenomenological gilding generating beliefs about value, wishful thinking generating beliefs about almost anything, and pseudo-empathy generating beliefs about the desires of others. To the extent that these mechanisms generate belief, given desire, they violate the aforementioned rule about direction of fit: belief aims to fit the world, not to fit desire. But these beliefs fit desire.<sup>16</sup>

There is a question about what sorts of desires will be relevant to a projective belief implicated in sexual objectification; and I shall be considering broadly sexual desires. More sinister desires might be equally relevant, or more relevant: for example, explicit desires to maintain or exercise power, to dominate or humiliate, to cause pain; but I shall not be attending much to these.<sup>17</sup>

*2.1. Phenomenological Gilding* Sometimes projective belief may have its source in a distinctive phenomenology of experience. Our beliefs about colour, for example, are thought by some philosophers to be mere projections based on the phenomenological character of our colour experience. Our beliefs about colour do not, of course, have their source in desire, so this example is different to the projective beliefs we shall be considering. But I want to ask whether there might be something about the phenomenology of desire—by analogy with the phenomenology of colour—which could yield certain beliefs. If there were, this would be a desire-driven mechanism quite different to the familiar mechanism of wishful thinking: my wishful belief in the immortality of the soul does not arise from any phenomenological feature of my desire to avoid death: my life does not *look* to be immortal, in the way that objects *look* to be coloured. If the phenomenology of desire has the capacity to generate beliefs, possible candidates for such beliefs are beliefs about value.

Hume applied his metaphor of 'gilding and staining' to colour and value alike, and may partly have had this phenomenological parallel in mind when he pursued his extended analogy between them. Describing 'the impulse to desire', he said

it has a productive faculty, and gilding and staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner, a new creation.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See 'Beyond a Pragmatic Critique' for further discussion.

<sup>17</sup> This is a substantial omission, since such desires may well have a role to play in sexual objectification, given that some of them presumably *aim* to objectify someone, reduce someone to a thing. It is a gap I shall have to leave, and in any case may be a dialectical strength: presumably if sexual objectification can be generated by more ordinary sexual desires, without help of sinister desires to exert power or humiliate, it could all the more readily be generated with their help.

<sup>18</sup> Hume, *Enquiry*, 294. He is here describing taste as the first impulse to desire.

Mackie, following Hume, regards the desire-generated projection of belief about value as partly phenomenological. He also quotes Hobbes—‘whatsoever is the object of any man’s Appetite or Desire, that is it, which he for his part calleth Good’—and comments on how (in his view) we reverse the direction of dependence, regarding the desire as depending on the goodness, rather than the goodness on the desire. In parallel manner, but for aversion rather than desire, Mackie says we attribute independent disvalue, a foulness, to the fungus that fills us with disgust.<sup>19</sup> To the extent this occurs, Mackie’s account of the projection of value (whose sceptical implications don’t concern us here) can be seen as describing a projective response to phenomenological features of desire. The thing desired can appear phenomenologically as having independent qualities that justify, demand, or legitimate the desire, making it almost literally *appear* to have independent value, just as a strawberry appears to be independently red. When you desire something, you can project its desirability, aware less of your attitude than of an apparent feature of the object of your attitude. The phenomenology is quasi-perceptual. (To the eye of a hungry Goldilocks, the porridge literally *looks* delicious.) Belief about value may sometimes be belief that is responsive to this distinctive phenomenology of desire. This phenomenological gilding presents us with one sort of desire-generated belief: belief about the value of what is desired.

Let us think about the possible role of phenomenological gilding in sexual objectification. MacKinnon says,

Like the value of a commodity, women’s sexual desirability is fetishized: it is made to appear a quality of the object itself, spontaneous and inherent, independent of the social relation that creates it, uncontrolled by the force that requires it.<sup>20</sup>

MacKinnon is here attempting to describe a certain phenomenology of desire, of men’s sexual desire, in an oppressive political context. A woman’s ‘value’, a woman’s ‘desirability’ is ‘made to appear a quality of the object, spontaneous and inherent’. The sexual value of a woman appears, phenomenologically, as an ‘inherent’, independent feature, independent of the desire and independent of relevant social forces, seeming authoritative, seeming to justify the belief in the value, and seeming to justify the sexual desire it provokes. This is what I have described as phenomenological gilding. And so far, so innocuous: there is nothing yet to indicate sexual objectification, nothing yet to indicate how this valuing might be involved in treating a woman as a thing. But now: a woman’s value, a woman’s desirability, is somehow ‘like the value of a commodity’. What does she mean? Perhaps this. A massive commercial industry, namely the pornography industry, makes certain objects of sexual desire into commodities, items for commercial buying and selling, for easy satisfaction of appetite, for ownership; and it shapes men’s desires to attract them to these sexual commodities. When this occurs, men’s sexual desires can themselves become, so speak, commodifying desires: the phenomenology of men’s sexual desire comes to resemble, in certain aspects, their desires for other commodities, to the extent that their sexual desires for real women can come to resemble, in certain aspects, their desires for other commodities.

<sup>19</sup> Mackie, *Ethics*, 43, 42.

<sup>20</sup> MacKinnon, *Feminist Theory*, 123.

What then would be the implications for belief about a woman's value? If phenomenological gilding is possible, desire can be a source of projective evaluative belief. So a commodifying desire could be a source of a commodifying evaluative belief. The result would be that the value women are seen as having, and believed to have, will be the sort of value that commodities are seen as having, and believed to have.

This in turn would have implications for question about whether and how phenomenological gilding is implicated in sexual objectification. In many contexts, phenomenological gilding is innocent, in moral terms (whether or not dubious epistemologically); indeed it may be better than innocent. Nussbaum wanted to allow that the objectification she describes could, in certain contexts, be a 'wonderful' part of sexual life, as, for example, when lovers (as described by D. H. Lawrence at any rate) might seek a mutual abandonment of autonomy. The same applies here: when one thinks of the power of sexual love to transfigure perception of the loved one, so that through its eyes every bodily feature appears as precious, every gesture illumined—this 'gilding' of the loved one through desire likewise appears as a potentially 'wonderful' part of sexual life.

But with commodified desire, things will be altogether more bleak. Phenomenological gilding allows a transition from desire to belief about value, via the phenomenology of desire; and MacKinnon's thought seems to be that, to the sexually objectifying eye of the pornography consumer, women appear, phenomenologically, a certain way—they, so to speak, 'look' the way pornography looks, not (or not just) because pornography tries to resemble women (which would make the idea trivial), but because pornography's commodified view of women gets transferred, through the eye of the consumer, to women themselves. That is perhaps why MacKinnon says elsewhere that pornography shapes a 'gaze that constructs women as objects for male pleasure . . . that eroticizes the despised, the demeaned, the accessible, the there-to-be-used, the servile'.<sup>21</sup> If phenomenology of desire can prompt belief about value, and commodifying sexual desires lead to women being seen and valued in the way that other commodities are seen and valued, this would result in women being treated as things. Women would be valued as instruments for the easy satisfaction of desire, as ownable, readily exchangeable; and those who value women as sexual commodities would be more likely to treat them that way in their behaviour. One could expect these attitudes to result in autonomy-denying action, as women's autonomy is inadequately attributed, and violated, through harassment and rape.

*2.2. Wishful Thinking* Wishful thinking is a phenomenon so familiar it needs little in the way of introduction, and while it poses many difficult philosophical questions, they will not be our topic here. It presents a different aspect of Hume's idea of the mind 'spreading itself' on the world. Hume himself thought many of our beliefs have such wishful origins, including, for example, belief in the immortality

<sup>21</sup> MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, 53–4.



of the soul: 'All doctrines are to be suspected which are favoured by our passions; and the hopes and fears which gave rise to this doctrine are very obvious'.<sup>22</sup>

Our question is whether wishful thinking might have a role to play in sexual objectification. What salient beliefs might be wishfully prompted by sexual desire? Candidates might be beliefs that help the desire to persist, that seem to fulfil the desire, or that make the desire seem more likely to be fulfilled. A belief in a *matching desire* seems a likely candidate: the belief of the form 'she desires to do what I desire to do' will legitimate the initial desire and make its satisfaction seem more likely. Moreover, it has plausibly been suggested (by Thomas Nagel) that a constitutive component of an ordinary sexual desire is the aim for a matching desire in the other person.<sup>23</sup> (There will be other, more pathological, cases where the desire of the other person is irrelevant, or relevant negatively, as for a sadist who might desire an *absence* of matching desire.) Belief in matching desire would then convey the belief that this component is already satisfied, as well conveying hope of the desire's complete fulfilment. So we might antecedently expect wishful incentives for belief in matching desire, and in a source that is far from sinister, namely the very desire for mutuality which is so central to sexual life, but that can go awry, if it helps generate merely wishful belief.<sup>24</sup>

We turn now to some candidate examples, most of which are drawn from MacKinnon, though the first is not. They are examples which also make 'wishful thinking' appear a sadly inadequate label (which is perhaps why MacKinnon does not use it).

*Example 1:* attribution of matching desire, in a scene from *The Innocent*, by Ian McEwan. Leonard, a young and 'kindly' Englishman, and Maria, who is German, meet and fall in love in post-war Berlin. Later on Leonard begins to have a fantasy:

It began . . . with a simple perception. He looked down at Maria, whose eyes were closed, and remembered she was a German . . . Enemy. . . . Defeated enemy. This last brought with it a shocking thrill. He diverted himself momentarily . . . Then: she was the defeated, she was his by right, by conquest, by right of unimaginable violence and heroism and sacrifice . . . He was powerful and magnificent. . . . He was victorious and good and strong and free. In recollection these formulations embarrassed him. But next time round the thoughts returned.

<sup>22</sup> David Hume, 'On the Immortality of the Soul', from *Essays Moral and Political* (1741–2), reprinted in *David Hume: Selected Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 331.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Nagel, 'Sexual Perversion', in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)—describing not merely a matching desire, but a matching desire which has a complex and iterative Gricean structure.

<sup>24</sup> There is an important ambiguity in the notion of a 'matching' desire, which is roughly the contrast between 'same desire' and 'complementary desire'. I do not attend to this adequately here, though it is a topic of 'Humean Projection in Sexual Objectification', in the volume *Sexual Solipsism* (forthcoming). Depending on how it is described, the projected 'matching' desire may look like the same desire as the man's, or it may look like a desire that complements his. To take Example 1, the desire Leonard attributes to Maria is under one description the same as his ('a desire to entertain this rape fantasy'), under another description very different from his ('a desire to imagine raping' vs. 'a desire to imagine being raped').

They were irresistibly exciting . . . she was his by right of conquest and then, there was nothing she could do about it. She did not want to be making love to him, but she had no choice.

Still later, he begins to imagine himself a soldier forcing himself on a defeated German enemy; and then he found himself

tempted to communicate these imaginings to her . . . He could not believe she would not be aroused by it . . . His private theatre had become insufficient . . . He wanted his power recognized and Maria to suffer from it, just a bit, in the most pleasurable way . . . Then he was ashamed. What was this power he wanted recognized? It was no more than a disgusting story in his head. Then, later, he wondered whether she might not be excited by it too. There was, of course, nothing to discuss . . . He had to surprise her, show her, let pleasure overcome her rational objections.<sup>25</sup>

Leonard uses Maria's body as, so to speak, a screen, his 'private theatre', on which to project the fantasy of Maria (or: anonymous German enemy) as victim of his rape. The process, as it develops, involves wishful thinking: first in the desire-driven attitude which falls short of belief (he does not believe she is a victim of rape, it is merely 'as if'); then in the desire-driven genuine belief that she will find the fantasy exciting too. Does this example involve sexual objectification? Surely yes. There is instrumentality and autonomy-denial merely in this use of Maria as a projective screen, especially given the fantasy's hidden content. And when Leonard still later succumbs to the temptation to share his solipsistic theatre and 'show' her his imaginings, what ensues is something both parties view, or come to view, as attempted rape. This brings us to the more general issue provided by the next example.

*Example 2:* attribution of matching desire, in certain kinds of rape. MacKinnon says, of the 'system' that is sexual objectification, In this system . . . women men want, want men . . . Raped women are seen as asking for it: if a man wanted her, she must have wanted him.<sup>26</sup> In a case where a woman is genuinely believed to have 'wanted him', either at the time, or later on in *post hoc* rationalization, the rapist desires to have sex with the woman, and projects a matching desire, perhaps wishfully generated.<sup>27</sup> (I shall not speculate about how common such cases of genuine belief are.) Wishful belief of such a kind may also be projected by other people, including, perhaps, jury members and other ordinary women, prompted in the latter case by a rather different sort of desire—a desire, perhaps, that the world should be a safe one. To the extent that wishful thinking is responsible for the attribution of

<sup>25</sup> Ian McEwan, *The Innocent* (London: Picador, 1990), taken from 83–5. This scene is also discussed in 'Humean Projection' (where the examples from MacKinnon are also discussed); and in 'Sexual Solipsism', *Philosophical Topics* 23 (1995), 149–87, reprinted in *Sexual Solipsism*.

<sup>26</sup> MacKinnon, *Feminist Theory*, 140–1.

<sup>27</sup> Such cases may be more common in date rape, and raise issues that parallel the Morgan case in British law (where Morgan's friends claimed genuine belief that his wife consented to sex with them); which I discuss briefly in 'Pornography: a Liberal's Unfinished Business', *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 12 (1999), 109–33; partly reprinted in the volume *Sexual Solipsism*, ch. 2, in the section responding to Ronald Dworkin.

matching desire in such contexts, it would be implicated in sexual objectification, in particular the profound autonomy-denial and violation which is rape.

*Example 3:* attribution of matching desire, in the pornographic film *Deep Throat*.

This elaborate projective system of demand characteristics—taken to pinnacles like fantasizing a clitoris in a woman's throat so that men can enjoy forced fellatio in real life, assured that women do too—is surely a delusional structure deserving of serious psychological study.<sup>28</sup>

This is a peculiar case, in which something like wishful thinking may well be implicated, first in the desire-driven generation of an attitude that falls short of belief, the entertainment of the fiction that Linda Lovelace madly desires throat sex, due to a quirk of anatomy. Genuine beliefs are also generated, according to MacKinnon (who cites evidence about subsequent behaviour), among them a belief that the star, Linda Marchiano, enjoyed what she was doing; and that women, more generally, are likely to enjoy throat sex.<sup>29</sup> Wishful thinking provides a possible explanation (plus the fact that desire is assisted by genuine belief that pornography 'actors' enjoy what they do). Sexual objectification is described here as 'an elaborate projective system', where 'demand characteristics' are projected first on to a fictional protagonist, the projected desire sustaining and legitimating the viewer's own arousal. The wishful shaping of belief is mediated by the shaping of desire: MacKinnon suggests that pornographic fantasy conditions and alters sexual desire; a consumer may subsequently find desirable the prospect of throat sex, which desire in turn provides incentives for attributing matching desire to Marchiano herself, and to other women—notwithstanding the real world absence of science-fiction anatomy. A projective pattern like this is, MacKinnon remarks, a 'delusional structure deserving of serious psychological study'.

How would this projective pattern be implicated in sexual objectification? A small part of the question is whether the envisaged desire attribution objectifies the merely fictional Linda, and here one might be tempted to think it does not: there is (in Nussbaum's terms) no denial of subjectivity or autonomy, but an affirmation, an attribution to the fictional character of an avid and independent desire for throat sex. The process may still be objectifying, though, in its instrumental view of a woman desperate to make herself sexually available to anyone who wants her. A more important part of the question is whether the desire-attribution to the real Linda objectifies her, and here the answer is surely affirmative: her testimony in *Ordeal* tells how she suffered threats to her life, sexual torture, and rape, in the film's making, and that it took that plus hypnosis (to reduce the gag response) to make her do it. The attribution of matching desire to the real Linda obscures all this, and is thus a denial of subjectivity

<sup>28</sup> MacKinnon, *Feminist Theory*, 140–1.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. MacKinnon on the 'realism' of *Deep Throat*: '[B]efore "Linda Lovelace" was seen performing deep throat, no one had ever seen it being done that way, largely because it cannot be done without hypnosis to repress the natural gag response. Yet it was believed. Men proceeded to demand it of women, causing the distress of many and the death of some. Yet when Linda Marchiano now tells that it took kidnapping and death threats and hypnosis to put her there, that is found difficult to believe'; (see *Feminism Unmodified*, 181, and associated references to relevant empirical data).

which assists the deep instrumentality and autonomy-denial involved in her abuse, and silences her later testimony.<sup>30</sup> Thirdly, there is the question of whether desire-attribution to other real women by consumers later on objectifies those women.<sup>31</sup> Here again the answer again may be affirmative, if one accepts testimony that some consumers later attributed, or tried to attribute, matching desires for throat sex to their partners (resulting sometimes in 'deep throat' assault): such attitudes and consequent behaviour are likely to instantiate particularly serious versions of (in Nussbaum's terms) subjectivity-denial, instrumentality, and autonomy-denial.<sup>32</sup>

*Example 4:* Attribution of matching desire, through women's supposed capacity for vaginal orgasm—a science fiction about women that was long accepted as orthodox science. MacKinnon's explanation is that because 'men demand that women enjoy vaginal penetration', they acquire the belief, dressed up as science, that 'vaginal orgasms' are the only 'mature' sexuality; and accordingly the belief that women desire penetrative sex because this is their natural route to orgasm.<sup>33</sup> Wishful thinking projects an imagined biological basis for a conveniently matching desire on the part of the woman, and adds whatever legitimation is granted by a scientific establishment—an eery pseudo-science parallel to the science-fiction biology of *Deep Throat*. Does such attribution of matching desire objectify women? One might suppose again that the attitude itself is not objectifying, that on the contrary it attributes an active independent desire to women, a distinct source of pleasure unique to women, that however erroneous, it is at least subjectivity-affirming and autonomy-affirming. This would be too hasty, given that the attitude denies that women have the sexual experiences they have, and asserts they have sexual experiences they lack—something that may count as subjectivity-denial, rather than affirmation.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> In 'Autonomy Denial in Objectification' (forthcoming in the volume *Sexual Solipsism*) I add the notion of silencing to Nussbaum's list of features. Cf. 'Objects do not speak. When they do, they are by then regarded as objects, not as humans, which is what it means to have no credibility,' MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, 182. For an understanding of what the silencing amounts to, and how Marchiano is silenced, see 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22 (1993): 305–30, reprinted in *Sexual Solipsism*.

<sup>31</sup> There is also the question of the attribution of desire to women more generally by the film itself: despite being fiction, it may attribute to real women the sorts of desires the fictional Linda is represented as having, in which case the attitude to women in general is at the least an instrumental one. See 'Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game' (co-authored with Caroline West), *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1999), 303–19, reprinted in *Sexual Solipsism*, for an argument about how mere fiction makes claims about the real world.

<sup>32</sup> Such testimony was given at the Minneapolis Hearings: *Public Hearings on Ordinances to Add Pornography as Discrimination against Women*, Committee on Government Operations, City Council, Minneapolis, Minn. (12–13 Dec., 1983), vol. 1, p. 60; cited by MacKinnon in *Feminism Unmodified*, 286, n. 65.

<sup>33</sup> *Feminist Theory*, 140–1; also 123. Elisabeth Lloyd cites blindness to 'orgasm-intercourse discrepancy' for women as an example of bias in evolutionary explanations of women's sexuality, 'Pre-Theoretical Assumptions in Evolutionary Explanations of Female Sexuality', *Philosophical Studies* 69 (1993), 139–53: 'Not to have orgasm from [unassisted] intercourse is the experience of the majority of women the majority of the time' (144), citing studies according to which 30% never have orgasm from unassisted intercourse, 20–35% always or almost always do.

<sup>34</sup> 'Treating as an Object' addresses the question of how subjectivity-denial is best understood.

There may also be instrumental thinking involved; how much more useful if the shape of women's sexual desire were the perfect match to that of men! The theorizing in turn perhaps helped to legitimate instrumental sexual use of women by other parties, by silencing, as 'immature' those women whose desires were apparently less convenient.

*Example 5:* Attribution of matching desire in Freud's 'seduction theory'. The Freudian interpretation of women's testimony about abuse as children bears comparison, according to MacKinnon, with the projective 'system' in pornography use:

Both the psychoanalytic and the pornographic 'fantasy' worlds are what men imagine women imagine and desire because they are what men, raised on pornography, imagine and desire about women . . . Perhaps the Freudian process of theory-building occurred like this: men heard accounts of child abuse, felt aroused by the account, and attributed their arousal to the child who is now a woman . . . Classical psychoanalysis attributes the connection between the experience of abuse (hers) and the experience of arousal (his) to the fantasy of the girl child. When he does it, he likes it, so when she did it, she must have liked it. Thus it cannot be abusive to her. Because he wants to do it, she must want it done.<sup>35</sup>

The psychoanalyst hears a sexual narrative which he experiences as arousing; since sexual desire aims for a matching desire, he desires the woman likewise to experience the narrative as arousing and accordingly to desire to entertain it. Such desire, on the part of the woman, would sustain and legitimate his own desire. Through a process of wishful thinking, there is a transition to belief: he believes the woman herself experiences the telling of the narrative as arousing, and desires to entertain it; and he believes that as a child, she had that sort of experience and that desire. This belief offering in turn a sufficient explanation for the narrative's existence, the narrative is interpreted as desired fantasy, rather than testimony of child abuse. MacKinnon suggests that a similar projective pattern can destroy testimony of rape in the courts today; and that fear of it contributes to the known reluctance of rape victims to testify—the fear that in effect, their testimony becomes pornography.

How would this desire-attribution be sexually objectifying? Despite the fact that it attributes an active independent desire, the attribution nonetheless exemplifies sexual objectification: the attitude is (in Nussbaum's terms) subjectivity-denying in its blindness to the experience of women who had suffered sexual abuse as children. It is also, perhaps, instrumental, in treating the women and their actions—speech acts of testimony about sexual abuse—as if they were themselves pornographic artefacts, as if they were items whose function is to stimulate arousal. As an action of discounting a woman's testimony, the theorizing that followed was a speech act that denied their subjectivity and autonomy, and silenced them. The implications go beyond the particular woman to women more generally: seduction theory perhaps legitimates other sexual abuse and violence by undermining women's credibility, conveying the thought that women's testimony is probably a lie, that women find the thought of abuse arousing, but are too repressed to say so. The most salient

<sup>35</sup> MacKinnon, *Feminist Theory*, 152.



initial feature here seems to be that of subjectivity-denial, leading then to significant instrumentality and autonomy-denial, to the extent that it also makes sexual violence more likely, and redress against it more difficult.

*2.3. Pseudo-empathy* In arguing for the projective origins of many of our beliefs, Hume cites yet another disposition; he complains of the

universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious.<sup>36</sup>

Such pseudo-empathic tendencies provide an anthropomorphic explanation for belief in primitive deities; and also for over-hasty belief about the mental states of other people—though how precisely it is to be distinguished from sympathy is a question I shall here leave aside.

Where wishful thinking makes a transition from 'I desire that she desires to do this', to the belief, 'She desires to do this', pseudo-empathy makes a transition from 'I desire to do this' to the belief 'She desires to do this', the agent's own desire directly prompting belief in a matching desire. While pseudo-empathy can be desire-generated, it need not be: any datum about oneself, whether a desire, a belief, an emotion, or a pain, could prompt pseudo-empathic attribution to another of a similar desire, or belief, or emotion, or pain. We are confining our attention to what these projective mechanisms can generate, given a desire.

Most of the examples just considered under the heading of wishful thinking are as open to a pseudo-empathic as to a wishful interpretation, given that what is attributed in each case is a matching desire, a desire that appears to mirror the desire of the person attributing it. Leonard's belief about what Maria desires could be wishful; and it could as easily be the result of an over-hasty leap from his own experience. 'He could not believe she would not be aroused by it . . . He had to surprise her, show her, let pleasure overcome her rational objections.'<sup>37</sup> Is it a wishful move from 'I desire her to desire it; so I believe she desires it'; or a pseudo-empathic move from 'I desire it; so I believe she desires it'? Quite possibly both, working in tandem: the projective belief might be prompted by pseudo-empathy, and sustained by wishful thinking.

Likewise for the examples from MacKinnon. 'Raped women are seen as asking for it: if a man wanted her, she must have wanted him.' Is this the wishful 'I want her to want it; so I believe she wants it'; or the pseudo-empathic, 'I want it, so I believe she wants it'? Again, quite possibly both, working together. The projection of matching desire to the real Linda Marchiano could be a pseudo-empathic leap from what the viewer finds desirable, to belief about what she finds desirable.

<sup>36</sup> David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), (ed.) H. E. Root (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1956), 141.

<sup>37</sup> The desire he attributes may look like a formal match to his own, but can be readily redescribed as its opposite: Leonard's desire to imagine raping generates a belief about Maria's desire to imagine *being* raped. This complexity, which depends on how the initial desire is described, is one discussed in more detail in 'Humean Projection'.

Pseudo-empathy could similarly be part of the explanation for projection of matching desire in scientific theorizing about vaginal orgasm; and it could be part of the explanation for the projection of matching desire in MacKinnon's hypothesis about the origins of the seduction theory.

How is pseudo-empathy implicated in sexual objectification? This question exactly parallels the question just considered, of whether wishful thinking might be so implicated; and the answer stands or falls with the answer given for wishful thinking. If it seemed plausible that these are indeed examples of sexual objectification, when construed as wishful projection, because of their subjectivity denial, instrumentality, and autonomy-denial; then it should seem equally plausible that they are examples of sexual objectification, when construed as pseudo-empathic projection. So I shall not rehearse the examples case by case, but shall simply assume that the argument about wishful thinking can be extended to pseudo-empathy.

I said I would be sharing some assumptions of psychoanalytic feminists (though leaving aside their substantive proposals): they are right to emphasize the significance of projective desire-driven belief; right also to think that such belief can shape the world; and right to suppose that these processes can be substantially invisible to the participants. In this section I have looked at the first of these, distinguishing three ways in which desire might projectively generate belief, and showing how each can, in certain circumstances, be implicated in sexual objectification. How widespread or systematic their significance might be, how far their importance extends beyond these particular examples, are questions I don't address, but I suspect MacKinnon is right to give projection a central place in the notion of sexual objectification.

There remain the questions of how such projection may help shape the world, and in ways that are in part invisible: and this bears on the issue of how projection may not only help sexual objectification, but also hide it.

### 3. How Projection Hides Sexual Objectification

Suppose an Evil Genius were to invent a social system that benefits one group of people at the price of subordinating or objectifying another; suppose he were to realize that the system could be helped along by means of a complex pattern of desire-driven projective beliefs on the part of those people; and suppose he were to want the system to evade notice. He ponders, and, after taking advice from the Devil, dreams up a nearly perfect Plan from Hell. It goes like this.

*Step 1: Genesis.* Make genesis of the projective belief invisible. Nobody will notice where the belief came from, nobody will wonder about its possibly dubious origins. *Step 2: Subjective appearance.* Let the mind create a subjective appearance of confirming evidence for the projective belief. Make it look as though there is confirming evidence for the projective belief to the eye of the observer, by helping the observer see the world a certain way. And make counter-evidence subjectively hard to see, so that evidence proving the belief wrong will not be noticed. *Step 3: Objective*

*appearance.* Let the world create an objective appearance of confirming evidence for the projective belief. Make the world change, so that it produces evidence that really is genuine evidence for the belief, notwithstanding the belief's falsity.<sup>38</sup> *Step 4: Reality.* Let the world make the projective belief true. Make the world change, so that it fulfills the projective belief; in which case it will keep supplying all the evidence one could ever want.

The beauty of this Plan from Hell is that it will work whether or not it is planned (indeed better the less it is planned), and will work just as well in the absence of Evil Genius and his devilish adviser; so one need be no conspiracy theorist to see how effective it might be. Let us take a look at how projection might help to implement it.

*Step 1: Genesis.* Make genesis of the projective belief invisible. This trick is achieved by the very nature of projective belief. A distinctive feature of projective belief is that it does not convey to the believer its own best explanation.<sup>39</sup> Such beliefs have their origin in non-epistemic features of the believer's psychology, they are not epistemically receptive—but to the believer, they will seem as good as any other belief. This is partly because of belief's direction of fit. Belief, even projective belief, aims to fit the world; and although projective belief fits desire, rather than fitting the world, it must seem to the believer to be aiming to fit the world, or it would not be belief. Desire-driven projection must make its origins invisible if it is to be belief at all: one cannot (usually) be a merely wishful thinker and believe one is a merely wishful thinker. Of course, that does not make wishful thinking, and the like, immune to discovery. But, with some special exceptions, the moment it is detected, it disappears. Its existence depends on its invisibility, to the believer.

This invisibility is not enough to protect a belief in the face of compelling evidence to the contrary. Even a wishful belief *aims* to fit the world, and enough evidence that the world is not as wished will make the belief go away. So the next step, indeed all the next steps, involve doing something about the evidence.

*Step 2: Subjective appearance.* Let the mind create a subjective appearance of confirming evidence for the projective belief, which seems also to make counter-evidence disappear.

The projective attribution of matching desire, in rape, meets counter-evidence in a woman's refusal, a woman's 'no'. She does not want it, and says so. This counter-evidence will seem to disappear, if from the subjective viewpoint it may not sound as though she is refusing—if, for example, her refusal has been disabled by pornography's lie that women who say 'no' mean 'yes'. Her 'no' will not look like counter-evidence, and may even look like confirming evidence. The projective attribution of

<sup>38</sup> Assuming here one can have evidence for something that is false; for an alternative view about evidence, according to which one cannot, see Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> For further discussion, see, e.g., Peter Kail, 'Projection and Necessity in Hume', *European Journal of Philosophy* 9 (2001), 24–54; and *Projection and Realism in Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); to both of which I am indebted.

matching desire to the real Linda Marchiano meets counter-evidence in her testimony about abuse, in *Ordeal*. This counter-evidence will seem to disappear, when it looks as though she is not describing abuse, but producing more pornography (*Ordeal* was sold as pornography).<sup>40</sup> The projective attribution of matching desire, based on women's supposed capacity for vaginal orgasm, meets counter-evidence in many women's descriptions of their actual sexual experience. This counter-evidence will disappear, if those descriptions sound instead like descriptions of repression, frigidity, or immaturity. The projective attribution of desire to women who narrated to Freud how they were abused as children meets counter-evidence in that very narration. The women were abused, and said so. This counter-evidence too will disappear the minute the projective belief is adopted, and it will appear to be transmuted into confirming evidence; the narrative sounds like an arousing fantasy that anyone would enjoy making up. Belief is supposed to fit the world: but here the world—at least the world *as subjective appearance*—has come to fit projective belief.

*Step 3: Objective appearance.* Let the world itself change, so that it creates an *objective* appearance of confirming evidence for the projective belief, evidence that goes beyond how things happen to look to the theory-laden eye of a projection-influenced observer; genuine evidence for the belief, even if the belief is false. Pornography will be helpful in supplying it, and so too, sadly, will women themselves.

If one is looking for evidence about what sex is like, pornography may seem to be as authoritative a source as any. True, it is often fiction: but it also makes claims about what real women desire. Pornography's fictional narratives are made against a backdrop of claimed truths about the world, just as a novelist's fictional narrative about Sherlock Holmes are made against a backdrop of claimed truths about London. Pornography will be a source of independent testimony that women's desires are the desires they are projected to be. Coercion and other incentives in the background can help, as when Marchiano and other women are forced or simply paid to be false witnesses about what gives women pleasure. On this way of thinking, pornography has at least two distinct roles to play in projective objectification, in shaping desire (as discussed in Section 2) and in confirming belief. Yes, says pornography, women *do* have the desires you desire, therefore believe, women to have.

Women too will be helpful in supplying the objective appearance of confirming evidence, and what better authoritative source for evidence about women's sexuality than women? Here the projective beliefs will themselves assist the process, in a context of oppression. Women will sometimes be aware of those projective expectations, and—depending on their circumstances—will sometimes respond in a confirming way. In conditions of relative vulnerability and powerlessness, and with penalties for non-cooperation, some women will act in ways that confirm the belief. Had Maria been less assertive, more dependent and vulnerable, she might have had incentives to behave in ways that confirmed Leonard's expectations, notwithstanding

<sup>40</sup> It was marketed that way in junk mail I once received: see 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts'.

their falsity. Women of whom vaginal orgasms are expected, and who are penalized as repressed or immature without them, will, as MacKinnon says, have incentives to fake them.<sup>41</sup> Belief is supposed to fit the world, but here again the world—at least the world *as objective appearance*—has come to fit the belief.

*Step 4: Reality.* Let the world make the projective belief true. If the world changes, so that it fulfills the projective belief, it will keep on supplying all the evidence needed. MacKinnon says,

[The] beliefs of the powerful become [proven], in part because the world actually arranges itself to affirm what the powerful want to see. If you perceive this as a process, you might call it force, or at least pressure or socialization or what money can buy. If it is imperceptible as a process, you may consider it voluntary or consensual or free will or human nature, or just the way things are. Beneath this, though, the world is not entirely the way the powerful say it is or want to believe it is.<sup>42</sup>

We are considering here the thought that the world *as reality* might come to fit the projective objectifying belief: not simply the world as subjective appearance, or the world as objective appearance. This is what MacKinnon has in mind when speaking of how the world 'arranges itself to affirm' the projective belief. MacKinnon describes this as a sort of projective seeing, and a sort of projective belief, that has a self-fulfilling aspect. This fits in with a broader view about how gender works.

If a woman is defined hierarchically so that the male idea of a woman defines womanhood, and if men have power, this idea becomes reality. It is therefore real. It is not just an illusion or a fantasy or a mistake. It becomes embodied because it is enforced.<sup>43</sup>

The idea that the world 'actually arranges itself to affirm what the powerful want to see' is not the transcendental idealism Kant was proposing in saying that objects must conform to our cognitions: the projective attitudes we are considering become true, partly because of the responsiveness of human beings to the attitudes themselves, and to the modes of treating those attitudes generate. The seeing, and the belief, are themselves part of the constraint, given the woman's awareness of them, and given background conditions of oppression. Marilyn Frye makes a similar point:

The arrogant perceiver . . . coerces the objects of his perception into satisfying the conditions his perception imposes . . . He manipulates the environment, perception and judgment of her whom he perceives, so that her recognized options are limited, and the course she chooses will be such as coheres with his purposes . . . How one sees another and how one expects the other to behave are in tight interdependence, and how one expects the other to behave is a large factor in determining how the other does behave.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> MacKinnon, *Feminist Theory*, 140–1, 123.

<sup>42</sup> MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, 58–9. I follow Sally Haslanger in substituting 'proven' for 'proof', see 'On Being Objective'. This passage is also discussed in 'Beyond a Pragmatic Critique' and 'Feminism in Epistemology'.

<sup>43</sup> *Feminism Unmodified*, 119.

<sup>44</sup> Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality* (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1983), 67. I am leaving aside other important ways of understanding construction which draw on language, e.g., speech act theory, or the semantics of natural kind terms.



For example, a wishful attribution to a woman of submissive desire may be self-fulfilling: the woman in question may not merely fake such desire, but actually acquire it. MacKinnon says, 'Subjection itself, with self-determination ecstatically relinquished, is the content of women's sexual desire and desirability'<sup>45</sup>,—and she means that this is the content of women's desire, as projected by men, and also as really instantiated by some women. Desire is constrained by what is perceived to be possible; if it seems that any other than submissive desires are futile, desire may conform to this restricted world, and lower its sights. This, by the way, seems like yet another violation of rules about direction of fit: desire is supposed to aim for the world to fit it: desire is not supposed to aim to fit the world. But as the Stoics showed long ago, it can be a wise course to fit one's desires to the world, at least to some degree. The projective expectation of submissive desire can help create submissive desire; and if the desire is really there, of course it will supply evidence that it is there. Belief is supposed to fit the world, but here again the world—this time the world *as reality*—has come to fit the belief.

By way of a less gloomy conclusion, we can note that there will be limits on the extent to which the world can come to fit projective beliefs, limits on the extent to which the world will make those beliefs true. As MacKinnon puts it, 'the world is not entirely the way the powerful say it is or want to believe it is.' For example (and here I draw on Sally Haslanger) projective beliefs that women are *naturally*, or *essentially* submissive will be false: there are likely to be mistakes in the modal content of the beliefs in question.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, there are likely to be mistakes in meta-beliefs about projective beliefs. The 'arrogant perceiver' believes the reason his belief is true is that it has come to fit the world; really it is true because the world has come to fit the belief.

If projective beliefs are bound to be at least partly mistaken, that makes sexual objectification epistemologically vulnerable. Its masking can be discovered. The Plan from Hell is, thankfully, not perfect. But, vulnerable or not, the projective system does make sexual objectification harder to notice—and noticing it is surely a first, and necessary, step to doing something about it.

<sup>45</sup> MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, 148. The projective attribution of submissiveness is a central theme of Haslanger's discussion, which has influenced my views considerably; see 'On Being Objective'.

<sup>46</sup> Haslanger, 'On Being Objective'.