

The new temperance movement

BRUCE MAJORS

Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography, edited by Laura Lederer. William Morrow and Company, 359 pp., \$7.95 pb.

IN THE INTRODUCTION to *Sisterhood is Powerful*, the first feminist anthology, editor Robin Morgan noted the deliciously uneven quality inherent in any collection of feminist articles. Feminism is not quite a comprehensive world-view; but it is so much more than merely a politics, that it can be found in a linguist's analysis, an economist's argument, a lawyer's brief, a writer's style, a mother's conversation. *Take Back the Night* has this uneven quality even within any one of its seven chapters, each devoted to a different aspect of the topic of pornography.

The seven chapters explore the questions: What is pornography? Who is hurt by it? Who benefits from it? What research has been done on it? What is its relationship to the First Amendment? What action should be taken about it? and, What is its role in future society?

Thirty-four authors address these topics. There is an afterword by National Book Award winning poet and lesbian-feminist Adrienne Rich. The editor is Laura Lederer, an organizer for Women Against Violence in Pornography and the Media (WAVPM).

WAVPM is spiritually the daughter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. The women of WCTU argued that women were the victims of domestic violence of men drunk on alcohol. The women of WAVPM argue that women are the victims of violence and other oppression by men drunk on pornography. Men taught to view sex as a kind of violence. Taught to view not only sex, but every activity from children's games to epistemological theorizing as conquest, domination, inherently violent. To view women as part of nature —

which means not an autonomous subject at which to wonder, but a volitionless object for manipulation.

As WCTU was part of a powerful temperance movement, which passed prohibition through Congress, WAVPM is part of a growing anti-pornography movement. While feminists have not yet had much influence on prohibiting pornography — have not yet even decided if prohibition is their goal — they are not without influence. Consciousness-raising about the issue is apace in most cities and universities. Thousands of women have gone on nocturnal marches through our urban red-light districts to "Take Back the Night." Indeed, if one wants to read a transcript of a powerful oration, it is here: Andrea Dworkin's midnight "Exhortation to March" entitled "Pornography and Grief," delivered before 3,000 women at the Times Square "Take Back the Night" rally.

Like the women of the temperance movement, many women in the anti-pornography movement are calling for state prohibition of the evil commodity. By now most of the newspaper-reading public has read Susan Brownmiller on the subject:

"To equate the free and robust exchange of ideas and political debate with commercial exploitation of obscene material demeans the grand conception of the First Amendment and its high purposes in the historic struggle for freedom. It is a misuse of the great guarantees of free speech and free press."

I didn't say that, although I wish I had, for I think the words are thrilling. Chief Justice Warren Burger said it in 1973....

Ms. Brownmiller by no means represents the variety of feminist opinion on the question of legal censorship of pornography, though she does represent the opinions of most of the authors represented here. Most of the authors who mention the question of censorship assume that anything immoral may or must be prohibited and punished by the state. A few attempt plausible definitions of pornography, that if embodied in law, would allow one to distinguish pornography from other, presumably permissible, speech. Philosopher Helen E. Longino displays her ignorance of the Lockean tradition in her article "Pornography, Oppres-

sion, and Freedom: A Closer Look," when she tells us that liberty means either (1) license to do anything, or (2) the right to participate in decisions about how one is governed. Longino finds license unacceptable; she concludes that no liberty is curtailed if we censor pornography, since pornographers and their customers can still vote, run for office, and advocate legalizing pornography. Would Professor Longino agree that women do not have their liberty curtailed when they are raped, as long as they get to keep the vote? If women have a right to their own lives, do not pornographers have a right to their own lives as well? And don't contemporary feminists demand more than what the suffragettes have already won?

Three types of civil libertarian opinion are represented in this volume. Poet Robin Morgan takes the radical feminist position that you just can't trust male censors:

"I abhor censorship in any form (although there was a time when I felt it was a justifiable means to an end—which is always the devil's argument behind thought control, isn't it?). I'm aware, too, that a phalloscentric culture is more likely to begin its censorship purges with books on pelvic self-examination for women, or books containing lyrical paens to lesbianism than with 'See Him Tear Her and Kill Her'.... Nor do I place much trust in a male-run judiciary, and I am less than reassured by the character of those who would pretend to judge what is fit for the public to read or view. On the contrary, I feel that censorship often boils down to some male judges sitting up on their benches, getting to read a lot of dirty books with one hand.... Some feminists have suggested that a Cabinet-level woman in charge of Women's Affairs (in itself a controversial idea) might take pornography regulation into her portfolio. Others hark back to the idea of community control. Both approaches give me unease, the first because of the unlikelihood that a Cabinet-level woman appointee these days would have a genuine feminist consciousness, or, if she did, have the power and autonomy from the administration to act upon it; the second because communities can be as ignorant and totalitarian in censorship

as individual tyrants."

Martha Gevers and Marg Hall, of Rochester Women Against Violence Against Women, advocate the "Carrie Nation/direct action" approach as an alternative to censorship by the state. A movie made with actual film footage of the murder and dismemberment of a woman as its climax, "Snuff" came to Rochester and played at the Holiday Cine theater, and we quickly organized a picket line there." But Rochester WAVAW women were not satisfied with so moderate an action.

"Our instinct with this film, as in the past, was to use a direct approach. We never seriously considered appealing to men in power to intervene on our behalf (for example, asking the district attorney to ban the movie). We preferred tactics which might undermine rather than reinforce the legitimacy of their authority....

"We read on the poster: 'The Bloodiest Thing that Ever Happened in Front of a Camera.' We saw displayed on Main Street a woman's body cut into pieces by a pair of bloody scissors. This was how they advertised *Snuff*. It seemed appropriate to destroy that poster; it was the least we could do. The next morning four of us went to the theater, spray-painted the doors and chained them shut, put glue in the locks, broke the display window, and ripped up the poster."

Attorney Wendy Kaminer defends "First Amendment absolutism" in one article, "Pornography and the First Amendment: Prior Restraint and Public Action." Kaminer seems to be the first to draw the conclusion that, since feminists are claiming that pornography is political speech, the propaganda of patriarchy, they must conclude that it is more deserving of First Amendment protection than would be "mere" obscenity. In the conclusion of her complex analysis she states:

"We simply cannot look to the government to rid us of pornography; legally there are no 'final solutions.' The feminist movement against pornography must remain an anti-defamation movement, involved in education, consciousness-raising, and the development of private strategies against the industry. We have a crucial role of our own to play in a marketplace in which pornography is

flourishing.

"But it is essential for us to maintain a larger political perspective and a sense of ourselves as one of many competing private-interest groups. We can and should speak out, and take action against pornographers because they comprise a hostile group with interests antithetical to our own, that threatens our independence and well-being; but we cannot ask the government to speak for us. The Women's Movement is a civil rights movement, and we should appreciate the importance of individual freedom of choice and the danger of turning popular sentiment into law in areas affecting individual privacy."

Is consciousness-raising enough? Four social scientists present their research on the causal relationship between consuming pornography and raping women. Most of the women in this volume view pornography as incitement to violence. Since libertarians believe that the law's only role is to punish initiation of violence, surely they must offer some solutions. Though neither feminists nor libertarians nor libertarian-feminists have explored these, I think there are libertarian-feminist uses of the law that could help to solve the problem.

First, the law should defend the liberties of women in the anti-pornography movement. Some of the local organizers in this volume tell stories of police harassment of their peaceful protests.

Second, the law should allow women to defend themselves. It is a matter of historical record that gun control was instituted with the racist intent of disarming Southern blacks. Today gun control functions as if it were maintained for the patriarchal purpose of disarming women.

Third, the law should defend women against violence. There is a good argument for all-female juries and judges in rape cases, and for all-female rape-squads: only women have felt the threat of rape.

Fourth, equality before the law is both a libertarian and a feminist principle. Such equality before the law could help to move us toward a society where women are allowed to be different, and would therefore be viewed and treated differently. Discriminatory laws should be repealed. Equal-pay-for-equal-work regulations

should be issued for government employment. Public funds spent on children's physical education should not be allocated unequally. And for the 51¢ of every physical education tax dollar allocated to the girls, some of it should be spent on a subject that has some relevance—the art of self-defense.

At the beginning of this review I claimed that feminism was more than merely a politics. And it is, despite my emphasis on the discussions of civil liberties in this volume. Laura Lederer

begins the book with a quotation from the letters of Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Susan B. Anthony:

"Man in his lust has regulated long enough this whole question of sexual intercourse. Now let the mother of mankind, whose prerogative it is to set bounds to his indulgence, rouse up and give this whole matter a thorough, fearless examination."

Such examination this book has given. A number of women address the problem of the ori-

gins of misogyny. Several other women have extremely interesting articles here on the intimate relationship between racism and sexism. Ms. Lederer is to be commended for an important, readable, thought-provoking anthology, albeit one uneven in quality and slightly unbalanced in its emphasis on only one proposed solution.

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Nineteenth century feminists Susan B. Anthony (left) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.



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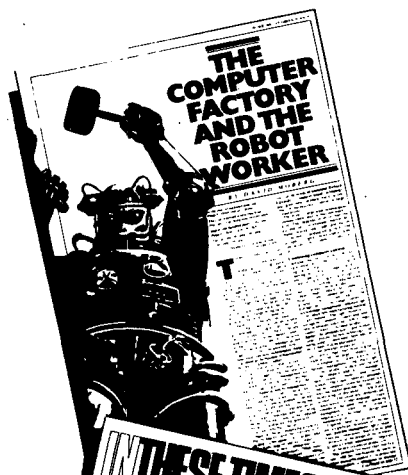


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Acid, then and now

THOM LA SPINA

Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered, by Lester Grinspoon and James Bakalar. Basic Books, 343 pp., \$15.95.

AS TIME DISTANCES US from that period of social ferment that was the sixties we begin to find attempts at reconciliation on both sides of our culture. Jerry Rubin has donned coat and tie, and is working on Wall Street. Government officials in most states will no longer lock you up and throw away the key if they catch you smoking marijuana. Another substance, LSD, is still looked on with total contempt by these officials, however. The penalties for its use are very much alive and even more likely to be meted out. Research into its use as a therapeutic agent, meanwhile, has been almost completely stymied, its great potential lying like a discarded book gathering dust on a shelf.

No doubt about it: LSD was and is a controversial drug. The controversy arises from the fact that a few millionths of a gram is capable of producing the most profound alterations of consciousness that human beings are likely ever to experience. Yet LSD slipped quietly enough into this world after its discovery in 1938 by a mild mannered scientist, Albert Hoffman, who was experimenting with derivatives of ergot, a substance found on molded rye. Ergot itself had caused occasional mass dislocation in the populations of medieval Europe when unwitting people ate bread containing the substance. It was said to cause the dreaded disease Saint Anthony's Fire, which was said to be characterized by delusions and, sometimes, death. Hoffman was not working on anything of this nature, however. He had previously synthesized the drug ergonovine, a mild medicine used for the treatment of cramps, and was looking for other derivatives with similar medicinal properties. While synthesizing a new one, LSD 25, Hoffman inadvertently absorbed a small amount of the drug through his

skin, and subsequently noticed a curious change in his temperament. A few days later he swallowed what he thought was a minute amount, 250 micrograms, enough to cause the world's first acid trip.

The power of Hoffman's discovery was confirmed, and LSD was soon in use on psychiatric patients and soon thereafter became generally considered an adjunct to psychotherapy. In 1959 an international conference was held to correlate the LSD research that was going on in various fields. By the mid-sixties when LSD and related substances were outlawed, over a thousand research papers had been written on the drug. The public for the most part was left uninformed about LSD, however, although occasional articles did appear in the lay press such as the one that appeared in *Life* magazine in 1958. It was not until the drug escaped from the medical domain and began being used by an emerging hippie culture that LSD became a household word.

Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered establishes Lester Grinspoon and James Bakalar of the Harvard Medical School as the foremost authorities now challenging the government's restrictions on the psychedelic drugs that came into popular use during that decade. This book follows two others, *Marihuana Reconsidered* (written by Grinspoon alone) and *Cocaine*. It is a comprehensive and exacting work which encompasses not only LSD but such similar (and dissimilar) drugs as mescaline, psilocybin, and PCP.

The authors first bring in historical references for the use of psychedelic plants in various cultures throughout antiquity. The plants, some of them with effects quite similar to LSD, have been the sacraments of various religious denominations. In our own culture the use of peyote, a cactus containing mescaline, is legal for use by members of the Native American Church, who use the drug in periodic all night rituals. Psilocybin mushrooms and morning glory seeds (which contain iso-LSD) were used by both the Mayan and Aztec cultures.

Information on such matters is sketchy, of course. The Aztec culture was almost totally dismantled, buildings, books, reli-

gion and all, by the invading Spanish Conquistadors. Much of the information we have about them came to us only recently through study of remnants of the Indian culture which remains intact in remote locales and through archeological digs at earlier Mayan sites.

Of special interest to students of the history of psychedelics is the authors' detailing of the studies of Gordon Wasson and his wife Valentina. This couple, he a respected banker, she a pediatrician, left their fields of endeavor and for twenty years gathered information on religions which had formed around the ritual use of psychedelic fungi. They found references for their use in early Russian, Indian, Mayan and Greek cultures. Gordon Wasson went on to write a book on SOMA, a drug which is extolled in the hymns of the Rig Veda as divine but lost to the Brahman culture. Wasson identified SOMA as the psychedelic mushroom, *Amanita Muscaria*. Grinspoon and Bakalar present related evidence that our own ancestors in their Biblical visions may also have been under the influence of some psychotropic substance.

But if *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* emerges as one of the most complete and illuminating books on the ritual uses of psychedelic drugs, Grinspoon and Bakalar clearly distinguish themselves from libertarians when they begin to discuss their ideas on the issue of who should be allowed to use such drugs. Granted that there is some problem with people using these drugs and having bad reactions to them: the much discussed nirvana which some find in psychedelics is a grueling, trying experience for others. Still, many of the horror stories spread about these drugs during the sixties—the chromosomal damage, the violent reactions—have turned out to be distortions of reality when they were not complete fabrications of the truth. And Grinspoon and Bakalar go to great length to disprove the myths that have sprung up around these drugs. But after disproving them, they draw back from Thomas Szasz's proposition that adults should be able to take any drug they want, and be held responsible only for whatever acts they commit afterwards.

In this respect their book

comes off like a soliloquy to the members of their own profession. "Hey," they seem to be saying, "these drugs have some potential. Let's look into them further." Figures like the hippies and Timothy Leary they hold up as childish people who were dealing with a substance bigger than themselves. Yet in fact it was members of the authors' own profession who were to blame for much of the hysteria that developed around the psychedelics in the first place. A few, the brutes of the profession, saw the drugs as merely a way to induce psychotic episodes in their "patients," as a chemical equivalent of electroshock therapy. In effect, it was the responsible medical men to whom Grinspoon and Bakalar want to entrust LSD, who created the first bad trips.

It was some of this early research that led the CIA in project MK ULTRA to buy up a massive amount of LSD and test its potential as a tool to incapacitate the enemy. The drug was given to usually unsuspecting volunteers who were provided with little or no warning of its effects. It may also have been the CIA who planted the stories about hippies planning to dump LSD into various cities' water supplies, a story that spread genuine fear among the populace.

The hippies, it should be pointed out, pioneered what many of the doctors working with the drugs would acknowledge only later: that psychedelic drugs could benefit a person with a stable personality, and that this outcome was much more common than the case of the troubled soul who was shattered by the acid experience. It is good, as the authors point out, that the furor about psychedelic drugs has died down and that the horror stories have, for the most part, melted into the fantasies that they were all along. The use of psychedelic drugs in our culture has leveled off. And the people who are still using them, judging from the lack of turbulence they have created, must be capable of handling the experience. And even if they don't care to participate in the doctors' scientific quest, they should have the right to use this drug.

Thom LaSpina is a veteran of the '60s whose byline used to appear in the late *Berkeley Barb*.