

Projection in Sexual Objectification

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The notion of objectification finds eloquent expression in Kant's injunction against merely instrumental treatment of human beings, and more recently in feminist work that holds sexual objectification to be, in Catharine MacKinnon's phrase, 'the primary process of the subjection of women'.¹ It is first and foremost a moral notion, a notion of treating a *person* as an object (though it may have other applications).² In the previous chapter we considered an illuminating recent account of objectification proposed by Martha Nussbaum, which draws upon this Kantian and feminist thinking to distinguish different notions of treating as an object.³ In addition to instrumentality, she proposes distinct features of autonomy-denial, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership and subjectivity-denial, and her discussion of these is altogether a subtle and groundbreaking achievement. The notion of *sexual* objectification then emerges as the idea that someone might, through certain sexual ways of treating, be denied autonomy, denied subjectivity, treated as an instrument, as possession, as inert, fungible, violable. Nussbaum sheds considerable light on what it might be to treat someone, sexually or otherwise, as an object: however the notion of *treating* in the idea of treating as an object is one that deserves more scrutiny. And I suggested that pursuit of this question would reveal important dimensions to the feminist notion of objectification that Nussbaum leaves invisible. Her omission is no grave flaw, given the notion's breadth and complexity (what I say here will also have its omissions), but since I think the dimension missed is an interesting and significant one, I would like here to render it visible.

Sexual objectification is described by MacKinnon not only as 'the primary process of the subjection of women', but also as 'an elaborate projective system'. This may remind some of us, by association if nothing more, of a different notion. An

¹Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminist Theory of the State*, 122.

²For example, to our treatment of animals and the environment.

epistemological notion of objectification finds expression in J.L Mackie's famous complaint about our tendency 'to objectify values', the propensity of the human mind to *project* itself on the world, 'to spread itself on external objects', as Hume put it.

According to Mackie, in objectifying value we ascribe 'a fictitious external authority' to features which are nothing more than projections of our wants and demands. (My interest is confined to his notion of objectification as projection, not his skeptical conclusions.)

This epistemological objectification is, on the face of it, wholly different from the moral.

Projection might involve treating something as objective, when it is not; but this surely has nothing to do with treating someone as an object, when she is not?

Well, it may. The connection is, I want to suggest, more than mere association. In the feminist understanding of objectification, these moral and epistemological ideas come together, and in a way that is surprising and important. Treating something as objective, when it is not, can have a role to play in treating someone as an object, when she is not. That is why MacKinnon describes sexual objectification as both 'the primary process of the subjection of women', *and* 'an elaborate projective system'. What is missing in Nussbaum's proposal is just this epistemological component to objectification. My goal in this chapter is to make plain this connection—to show, in short, how projective objectification might help bring it about that women are treated as objects.

Feminists tend to be interested in how different modes of treating as an object may *unite* in a systematic way, how objectification 'unites act with word, construction with expression, perception with enforcement, myth with reality'.⁴ We are interested in how representational ways of treating women may unite with more active ways of treating women, as when pornographic speech may unite with subordinating act; and as when psychological attitudes may unite with treatment that is force. Among the psychological ways of treating, MacKinnon is interested in the uniting of belief with desire. She says the powerful 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 will be suggesting, is a kind of *desire-driven* projection. Recall, by

comparison, the role desire has to play in Mackie's account of the projection of value: objectifiers of value attribute 'a fictitious external authority' to features that are projections of their *wants* and *demands*, their *appetites* and *desires*.⁵

Mackie and MacKinnon share a like interest in the way desire and belief may 'unite' to create something both wish to call 'objectification'. This will form the topic of Section 1, where I shall be distinguishing three kinds of desire-generated projection, some familiar, some less so. One I shall call the *phenomenological gilding* of desired objects, and it generates beliefs about value. A second is the familiar mechanism of *wishful thinking*. And a third I shall call *pseudo-empathy*. What these mechanisms have in common is their propensity to generate belief, given desire. Thus understood they violate an epistemological rule about direction of fit: belief aims to fit the world, not to fit desire. But these beliefs fit desire.

Whether or not one agrees with MacKinnon that sexual objectification is 'the *primary process*' of the subjection of women, it will be my chief topic here. And accordingly, the desires that will be relevant to projective belief will be broadly sexual desires. Other, bleaker, desires might be equally relevant: for example, desires (possibly unconscious) to maintain or exercise power, to dominate or humiliate, or to hurt. I shall not be discussing these at all, and that is, I acknowledge, a grave omission, since it seems antecedently rather likely that such desires have a role to play in sexual objectification. After all, among these desires we are likely to find some that have it as their *aim* to objectify someone, to reduce someone to a thing: and, unlike Kant, I do *not* here assume that this is the aim of sexual desire. However the omission could be viewed as a dialectical strength: for if sexual objectification can, in a certain political context, be generated by sexual desires even *without* the aid of personal desires to exert power or humiliate, one can suppose that *a fortiori* it could be generated with their aid.

Kant considered it a moral mistake to treat people as mere objects. Mackie considered it an epistemological mistake to treat mere projections as objective. The feminist understanding of objectification brings these ideas together, to give an account of

what can go wrong morally when, through projection, women are treated as objects; and this forms the topic of Section 2. How do the moral and epistemological dimensions connect? First, the psychological attitude, the desire-driven projection, may itself be a way of treating a woman as an object. Second, the desire-driven projection may lead to distinct action that treats a woman as an object. Third, the desire-driven projection may have a self-fulfilling aspect, where thinking of women as object-like helps to make women more object-like. MacKinnon says that when objectification is going on, 'the beliefs of the powerful become [proven], in part because the world actually arranges itself to affirm what the powerful want to see'.⁶

With this latter possibility, we find a connection between desire-driven projection and what one might want to call construction. Here projection violates again, but in a different way, the rule about direction of fit: belief is supposed to conform to the world—the world is not supposed to conform to belief. But the world conforms, or appears to conform, to these projective beliefs. This final possibility is perhaps the most interesting of the three philosophically, and the most important politically, for it is here we see how objectification might cover its tracks. So in Section 3 I outline five ways in which objectification can be self-masking, and then move on in Section 4 to a brief epistemological and moral assessment of these. As I see it, this is important not only to the job of understanding objectification, but also to the job of doing something about it: for if objectification covers its tracks, it won't be noticed, let alone fought.

1. Projection and Desire

In thinking about projection, a useful starting point is to think about what projection is *not*. A projective explanation for a belief can be contrasted with what we can call an *epistemically receptive* explanation, and here I draw on some helpful recent work by Peter Kail.⁷ Projective accounts of colour, and of wishful thinking, provide interestingly different illustrations of the notion. The explanation for Sarah's belief that things are

⁶Feminism Unmodified, 58-9.

⁷Kail, 'Projection and Necessity in Hume', *European Journal of Philosophy* 9 (2001), 24-54. The examples and distinctions in this paragraph are from Kail. Colour illustrates what he calls 'ersatz response projection', wishful thinking illustrates what he calls 'non-response projection', p. 30. He does not consider whether desire may also

coloured lies not in her receptivity to colours, as features of an independent world, but rather in non-epistemic features of her psychology—in this case, the phenomenology of colour experience. The explanation for Fred's projective belief in the Loch Ness monster lies not in his receptivity to the facts, but in non-epistemic features of his psychology—in this case, his desire that the world contain odd creatures. The best explanation for a projective belief lies not in a sensitivity to the facts which form the belief's content, but rather in what we can (hand-wavingly) call non-epistemic aspects of the believer's psychology. And these examples, which are borrowed from Kail, illustrate two broad ways of understanding how projective beliefs may arise. For Sarah, the belief is a response to a distinctive *phenomenology*, in this case of colour experience. For Fred, the belief is not a response to a distinctive phenomenology, but to some other features of his non-epistemic psychology, in this case, to desire-driven wishful thinking.

A projective belief has, in Mackie's phrase, 'a fictitious external authority'. It appears to have 'external authority' because it ascribes to the world certain features viewed as independent of the believer's psychology, features thought to cause and validate the belief. It is a 'fictitious' external authority, first because the belief is (in many cases) false, and no such independent features exist; and second because beliefs about the projective belief are false—the believer has false beliefs about *why* he has the projective belief, he is mistaken about the belief's best explanation. A distinctive feature of projective beliefs is that they do not convey to the believer their own best explanation.⁸

When Mackie says judgements of value are nothing more than projections of wants and demands, appetites and desires, he is claiming that their best explanation lies not in sensitivity to independent features of the world, but rather in our non-epistemic psychology: in the examples just mentioned, in desire-like attitudes or experiences. Does he take the projective beliefs to be responding to phenomenological features of experience, by analogy with a projective account of colour? Or does he take them to be responding to non-phenomenological features of experience, by analogy with wishful thinking? The answer is not obvious, but I suspect he may have both in mind. I suspect

desire may generate projective belief both through its phenomenology (by analogy with colour), and independent of its phenomenology (as it does in wishful thinking, and in a third mechanism which I describe at the end of this section).

Desire may generate projective belief through its phenomenology, since a feature of desire is that the thing desired can appear phenomenologically as having independent qualities that justify, demand, or legitimate the desire: in short, it can appear to have independent value. When one desires something, one sometimes projects its desirability, so that one is aware less of one's attitude, than of an apparent feature of the intentional object of one's attitude. The phenomenology of desire is often quasi-perceptual: to the hungry, the fruit looks delectable; to the exhausted, bed looks wonderful. Desirability can appear as a genuinely phenomenological feature of experience, just as colour does, and this may have been partly what Hume had in mind when he wrote of our habit of 'gilding and staining' the world with value. His metaphor is quasi perceptual, it suggests a distinct phenomenology. And belief about value may sometimes be belief that is responsive to this phenomenology. So I shall dub this mechanism the *phenomenological gilding* of objects desired. It presents us with one sort of desire-generated belief, in this case, belief about the value of what is desired.

Mackie seems to regard the desire-generated projection of value as partly phenomenological. He 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, he says we attribute independent disvalue, a foulness, to the fungus that fills us with disgust.)⁹ To the extent this occurs, the projection of value can be seen as a projective response to phenomenological features of desire. Note that if this is a possibility, then desire can generate projective belief through its own phenomenology, and not only as the familiar agent of wishful thinking.

However, the projection of value may also be, for Mackie, a response to non-phenomenological aspects of our psychology, including (though not confined to) desire—and here the most immediate and salient idea that of *wishful thinking*, which I propose as a second distinct species of desire-generated belief. Someone who believes in the Loch Ness monster may believe it without the world phenomenologically appearing to him that way. He believes it, because he desires the world to be that way. Wishful thinking may generate beliefs about value, but it is not obviously restricted in scope, and may, as the illustration shows, generate beliefs about almost anything. Mackie says that we '*want* our moral judgements to be authoritative for other agents as well as ourselves'. In like vein he suggests that we want an external moral authority to save us from existential anguish, 'the feeling that nothing matters at all, that life has lost its purpose'.¹⁰ In such passages he proposes wishful thinking as source, or sustainer, of our projective belief in value.

Despite its radically different subject matter, the projective objectification described by MacKinnon resembles that described by Mackie, with respect both to its origin in desire, and to its generation of a 'fictitious external authority'. And it seems to me that MacKinnon has both phenomenological gilding, and wishful thinking, in mind.

1.1. Phenomenological gilding

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.¹¹

MacKinnon is attempting to describe a certain phenomenology of (male) sexual desire, in a certain political context. Women's sexual desirability is 'made to appear a quality of the object, spontaneous and inherent'. Here we have the idea of a 'fictitious external authority', where the sexual value of a woman appears phenomenologically as external, 'inherent' to the woman, independent of anything else: independent of the man's desire,

¹⁰Mackie 34, 43

and independent of any relevant social forces. It appears as authoritative, in seeming to justify the belief in the value, and in seeming to justify the sexual desire it provokes. One aspect to the process may be the phenomenological process just described, where sexual desire projects desirability onto the object perceived as desirable—something one can imagine being an innocent feature of sexual desire in any context, oppressive or otherwise.

However MacKinnon is adding the idea that women's sexual desirability is *commodified*, and that the pattern described here is distinctive of commodification. It is not entirely clear what this means, but (recalling some of Nussbaum's salient features) perhaps this: a commodity has been made of women's sexual desirability, with objects of sexual desire being treated as appropriate items for commercial trade, for buying and selling, for ownership, for easy satisfaction of appetite; and men's sexual desire has itself been twisted and shaped in these commodifying directions by the desire-manipulating strategies of a commercial industry, notably the pornography industry. Other passages from MacKinnon express this idea that through pornography desire is affected, and through desire, visual perception, and belief about women's value. For example,

In the society we currently live in, the content I want to claim for sexuality is the gaze that constructs women as objects for male pleasure. I draw on pornography for its form and content, for the gaze that eroticizes the despised, the demeaned, the accessible, the there-to-be-used, the servile, the childlike, the passive, the animal. That is the content of the sexuality that defines gender female in this culture, and visual thingification is its method.¹²

There is doubtless more going on here than just the mechanism I've been describing, but to keep it simple, let's say the thought is that when sexual desirability is commodified, the phenomenology of men's sexual desire for women is made to resemble, in salient respects, their desires for other commodities. If desire can, in general, be a phenomenological source of projective evaluative belief, then a commodifying desire can be a source of a commodifying projective evaluative belief; with the result that women are seen and valued in the way commodities are seen and valued.

The phenomenological account of desire-driven projective belief just described is distinct from wishful thinking. But there is little doubt that MacKinnon is attentive to wishful thinking too (though the label would perhaps be too mild for her liking), and we can turn to that now.

1.2. Wishful thinking

The powerful '*want to see*' the world as a certain way, and so they see it that way; the powerful '*want to believe*' it is that way, so they believe it is that way. Here belief is thought to arise not from the phenomenology of experience (as with projective colour beliefs, and the 'gilding' just considered), but in response to the aim of the desire (as with the envisaged belief in the Loch Ness monster, generated by a desire that the world contain odd creatures). In wishful thinking, desiring that something be so (or desiring that one believe that something be so) gives rise to a belief that it is so. I have no explanation to offer about the workings of wishful thinking, but we can assume it happens, can be innocent or otherwise, and is perhaps more pervasive than philosophers imagine. The label 'wishful-thinking', mild as it is, captures an important common factor between what feminists are describing, and what we know by that label elsewhere. Mackie was interested in wishful beliefs about value; feminists are interested in wishful beliefs not only about value but also about facts, particularly those relating to women.

Since our focus is on sexual objectification, we shall be considering beliefs wishfully prompted by sexual desire, and especially by sexual desire under conditions of oppression—though, as I said at the outset, there will be some significant omissions, for example, of desires to exert power or humiliate. What sorts of beliefs are antecedently likely to be prompted by sexual desire? What a question! In answering, we shall have to oversimplify, even if that means riding rough-shod over terrain which deserves more delicate treatment. Since all sorts of behaviour and mental states contribute to a woman's sexual desirability, sexual desire might generate projective beliefs about a woman's behaviour and mental states. Wishful projective beliefs about a woman's behaviour might be of the form: 'she will do what I want her to do'. Projective beliefs about a woman's

own mental states may focus significantly upon her patterns of desire— 'she wants to do what I want her to do'—or patterns of sexual arousal—'she finds arousing what I find arousing'.

We can pause to observe an ambiguity running through all these envisaged beliefs. Read one way, the property ascribed to the woman in each case is a projected *submissiveness*; read another way, it is a projected *mutuality*. The ambiguity centres on the 'what' in each of these: whether it is understood as 'whatever', or whether instead it has a referential use.¹³ Taking behaviour first, 'she will do *whatever* I desire her to do', attributes an extreme submissiveness, the woman shaping her behaviour to whatever is desired. Taking the 'what' in a referential sense, in 'she will do what I desire her to do', what the woman will do may just happen to what the man desires her to do, and is open to the possibility of mutuality—it may be just what she herself desires, independently of his desires. This brings us from behaviour to mental states, the question of her desires (our main concern in this Section). The projective belief, 'she wants to do what I want her to do', read the submissive way, means 'she wants to do *whatever* I want her to do', the content of the woman's desire (as projected) being, 'whatever he wants, I want to do that'. Read as projected mutuality, 'she wants to do what I want her to do' means: 'the thing she wants to do, I want her to do', the content of the woman's desire (as projected) being simply 'I want to do *this*', where the 'this' merely happens to be what he wants her to do. What is ascribed to the woman here is a desire antecedent to, and independent from, the man's own desire. (Likewise, *mutatis mutandis*, for the arousal case.)

I described these as attributions of submissiveness and mutuality, but a better description would be attributions of *formal* submissiveness, and of *formal* mutuality. These characterizations have to do with the structure of the projected desire, not its content. Suppose someone projects a desire that is formally mutual ('she wants to do what I want her to do', interpreted the referential way), but the content of the desire projected on to the woman is itself submission—what is projected is a matching desire to submit, or to be submissive. He wants her to submit, and he wants her to *independently*

¹³The 'what' in e.g. 'she wants to do what I want her to do' is ambiguous between, roughly, an attributive use (the

want to submit. What is projected would then be formally mutual. ('We want the same thing, namely that she submits; she wants that independently, not just because I want it'). But it would attribute a formally mutual desire that is at the same time a concretely submissive desire. The distinction between formal and concrete attributions of submissiveness is important to bear in mind, when considering whether and how pornography eroticizes submission, and how women can be made submissive. We will return to this later, in Section 4.

When desire-driven projections of (formal) submissiveness and of (formal) mutuality are mere projections, they serve as a kind of 'fictitious external authority', to borrow Mackie's phrase. (For now I'll drop the qualifier 'formal', though it will need reinstating later.) They serve as 'external authority' in the simple epistemological sense that they attribute to the woman a desire that is independent of the believer's belief, her desire being viewed as source and justification for his belief about the desire. And they serve as an 'external authority' in the more practical sense that one's own sexual desire, and sexual behaviour, finds legitimation in the desire of the other person, whether submissive, or mutual.

Moreover, it is plausible to think that in paradigm cases, it is part of the very content of a sexual desire that it aim to arouse desire in the other person: not merely a formally submissive desire, but a mutual or matching desire.¹⁴ A matching desire in the other person is more than legitimation of one's own desire and behaviour. It is a constitutive part of what is desired. This mightn't hold for everybody: there are presumably some sexual agents for whom the active sexual desires of the other are simply irrelevant; and others for whom the desires of the other are relevant negatively, if they sadistically desire their partner to *lack* a matching desire. While such agents may well be ordinary moral objectifiers, what I have in mind are less pathological agents for whom desire is part of what is desired. For most, it is just sexier if the other person wants it too. This aspiration for mutuality is an integral part of sexual life; but it can go awry. It provides incentives, perhaps powerful incentives, to wishful belief in a matching desire.

¹⁴ Perhaps even the the complex and iterating reflexive pattern of mutual desire, of the kind described so by

The existence of a matching desire would constitute partial satisfaction of the desire, and make total satisfaction of one's desire the more likely. And mere belief in the existence of matching desire makes experience of an agent's own desire more pleasurable. If wishful thinking is generally possible—if a desire that something be so can sometimes generate belief that it is so—it would not be surprising sometimes to find a pattern of wishful thinking which is the projection of matching desire.

I want to consider in this connection some representative passages where MacKinnon describes just this phenomenon, of desire-generated belief in matching desire. The examples also illustrate, incidentally, why 'wishful thinking' all of a sudden seems too pale a label. My purpose is not, at this point, to consider how these attitudes are morally objectifying (that is a question for Section 2), but simply to offer them as salient examples of wishfully generated projective belief.

Example 1: attribution of matching desire, in rape.

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.¹⁵

What is ascribed to the woman is an independent desire for the man, even in cases of rape, where the woman had no such desire. What is projected is a desire-driven 'fictitious external authority', where the woman's desire is viewed as 'external' to the man's beliefs and desires, an independent justification for his belief in her desire, for his desire, and for his behaviour.

Example 2: attribution of matching desire, in 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.¹⁶

Here we have sexual objectification described explicitly as 'an elaborate projective system', one where, in the example, certain 'demand characteristics' are projected on to fictional women, in the first instance: a fictional woman's matching desire for throat sex,

¹⁵Feminist Theory of the State, 140-1

given the science fiction premise that she has a clitoris in her throat. The desire projected on to the fictional Linda Lovelace provides an 'external authority' prompting and legitimating the viewer's own arousal and desire, in the context of pornography consumption, and increasing the desire's strength and pleasurability. It is 'fictitious' in the literal sense that the pornography is explicitly fiction. But MacKinnon suggests that such projection has the capacity to condition and shape sexual desire, with the result that a man may then find desirable the prospect of throat sex (viewed as an extreme fellatio). He may then project on to a real woman a matching desire (an active desire to have done to her what he wants to do to her); a desire which likewise serves as an 'external authority' justifying both the man's desire and his behaviour. This time it is a 'fictitious' authority because the woman lacks the matching desire ascribed to her—unsurprisingly, since she lacks the fantasized anatomy. A projective pattern like this is, MacKinnon remarks, a 'delusional structure deserving of serious psychological study'.

Example 3: Attribution of matching desire, through supposed capacity for 'vaginal orgasm'. This time we have a science fiction about women that was long accepted as science, and it is one which recurs in MacKinnon's essays. Her 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.¹⁷ Wishful thinking projects an imagined biological basis for a matching desire on the part of women to do the very thing men want to do, an 'external authority' which legitimates a man's belief (in the capacity for vaginal orgasm) and desire (for mere penetrative intercourse) at once.¹⁸ And, in this case, there is whatever added legitimation can be granted by a Freudian scientific establishment. The example provides an eerie pseudo-science parallel to the science-fiction biology of *Deep Throat*, a parallel which would be amusing if it were not depressing.

¹⁷FTS 140-1. See also p. 123.

¹⁸I've interpreted MacKinnon's idea here as wishful thinking, but elsewhere she connects it with the 'envaluing'

Example 4: Attribution of matching desire, in the 'seduction theory'.

MacKinnon compares the projective syndrome in pornography with that in the 'seduction theory', where Freud interpreted as seduction fantasy women's reports of abuse as children.

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.¹⁹

The psychoanalyst hears a sexual narrative which he experiences as arousing. He desires the women to experience the narrative as arousing also, and for women accordingly to desire to entertain it. Such desire legitimates his own arousal and desire. Through a process of wishful thinking, he believes they too experience (and as children experienced) the telling of the narrative as arousing, and therefore desire (or desired) to entertain it. This belief offering in turn a sufficient explanation for the narrative's existence, the narrative is interpreted as desired fantasy, not as unwanted child abuse.

We have been exploring some common ground between the epistemological 'objectification' described by Mackie, and the objectification described by MacKinnon, notwithstanding their different (*very* different) concerns. What they have in common is the element of desire-driven projective belief in a feature which is viewed as an 'external authority', in which desires function as springs of belief via the two distinct mechanisms of phenomenological gilding, and wishful thinking.

There is a third way in which a projective belief may be desire generated, which I shall call pseudo-empathy; and it is a fairly familiar one, though not, this time, to be found in Mackie, so far as I can tell.

1.3. Pseudo-empathy

We considered how belief in the other's matching desire could be generated by wishful thinking, where the transition is roughly from 'I desire to do this', via a subsidiary component desire, 'I desire that she have a matching desire to do this', to the belief, 'She has a matching desire to do this'. A different projective mechanism might simply make a transition from 'I desire to do this' to 'She desires to do this'. Here the agent's own desire directly prompts the belief in a matching desire. Such patterns are a common feature of psychological and anthropomorphic projection, where these are understood as sub-rational dispositions to attribute features of one's own mind to other people, animals and things.²⁰ This is the pattern I shall call pseudo-empathy. (I call it *pseudo-empathy*, because I am presuming that anything deserving the name of empathy, even unsuccessful empathy, takes a little more care than this). While pseudo-empathy can be desire-generated, it need not be. Any datum about oneself, not just a desire but a belief, an emotion, or a pain, could be the prompt for a pseudo-empathic belief in a similar belief, or emotion, or pain, in another. Desire cases are the ones of interest here though.

Some of the passages from MacKinnon just quoted are as open to a pseudo-empathic, as to a wishful thinking, interpretation. 'Raped women are seen as asking for it: if a man wanted her, she must have wanted him.' The envisaged pattern may be the wishful 'I want her to want it; so she wants it'; or it may be the pseudo-empathic, 'I want it, so she wants it'. It may, of course, be both, working in tandem, perhaps (for example) *generated* by the pseudo-empathic and *sustained* by the wishful thinking. The projection of matching desire to the fictional Linda could likewise, if bizarrely, be a pseudo-empathic transition from what the viewer finds desirable, to belief about what she finds desirable; as could the same attribution to the real Linda. And the projection of matching desire involved in the myth of vaginal orgasm could also be construed as pseudo-empathy, making a similarly crude transition.

MacKinnon's projective explanation of psychoanalytic theorizing appears to have a pseudo-empathic component too:

²⁰They may be regarded, more rationally, as inductive inferences from one's own case, even where one's own

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.²¹

Here the projective belief is a belief that women desire to imagine certain things about themselves, where those are things the believer desires to imagine about them. The envisaged pattern may be a wishful transition from 'I desire women to desire to imagine themselves this way', to 'I believe women desire to imagine themselves this way'; or it may be the pseudo-empathic transition from 'I desire to imagine women this way' to 'Women desire to imagine themselves this way'. The rest of the passage (see Example 4) suggests a process more akin to wishful thinking, but there is no reason to suppose it has to be exclusively one or the other. Like Mackie, MacKinnon is interested in a variety of patterns of projective objectification, and there is some reason for thinking these desire-generated mechanisms, while distinct, may well work in a mutually reinforcing way.

2. Projection and Moral Objectification

We turn now to the question of the connection between epistemological and moral objectification, the question of what desire-driven projection has to do with treating people, indeed women, as objects.

As I said at the outset, I am going to talk here about a number of ways desire-driven projections may be morally objectifying. The projective attitudes may themselves be ways of treating a woman as an object. They may lead to actions that are ways of treating a woman as an object. They may have a constructive, self-fulfilling aspect, where they help to make women object-like. And finally, they may make moral objectification invisible, and thus protect it. What I shall consider now is how the projective attitudes may themselves be ways of treating women as objects, or may lead to actions that are ways of treating women as objects. The other possibilities will be considered in Sections 3 and 4.

Does *phenomenological gilding* morally objectify, either as attitude or action? The mechanism is innocent enough, in itself, if (perhaps) 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 Lawrentian lovers seek a mutual abandonment of autonomy. And when we think about the power of sexual love to transfigure perception of the beloved, so that through its eyes every bodily feature of the beloved is precious, every gesture illumined—we might conclude that this gilding of the beloved through desire is equally a 'wonderful' part of sexual life.

But in MacKinnon's description of the commodification of women's sexual value, things are altogether more bleak, both in terms of the attitude, and the actions it provokes. Women's sexual desirability is 'fetishized', it 'appears as a quality of the object itself, spontaneous and inherent', it is 'like the value of a commodity'. Sexual desirability is treated as a commodity when objects of sexual desire are viewed as appropriate items for buying, selling and ownership, easy satisfaction of appetite, and (perhaps) easily substitutable satisfiers of appetite. The ideas of instrumentality, possession, and fungibility seem relevant here (drawing on Nussbaum). MacKinnon is adding that commodification shapes and creates desire (think how marketing creates desire for what can be marketed); and men's sexual desires have been shaped in commodifying directions by the desire-manipulating strategies of a commercial pornography industry. So the claim is that consumers of pornography acquire commodifying sexual desires.

Phenomenological gilding allows a transition from desire to belief about value, via the phenomenology of the desire itself. The thought is 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. Women look inherently desirable in the way that pornography looks inherently desirable: 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 part of MacKinnon's idea 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'.²² If phenomenology of desire can prompt belief about value, commodifying sexual desires may lead to women being valued in the way that other commodities are valued, e.g. in the way that sexual commodities, such as pornography, are valued, as instruments for the easy satisfaction of desire, as ownable, readily exchangeable, and so on.

Such commodifying attitudes to women (of both desire and projective belief) would count as ways of treating women as objects. (It may also be that such attitudes to *pornography* would count as ways of treating *women* as objects, which would be, of course, a distinct and in my view plausible claim.) Moving beyond attitude, and given the involvement of beliefs and desires in action, feminists will note that men with objectifying attitudes are more likely to perform objectifying actions: men who value women as sexual commodities are more likely to treat them that way in their sexual behaviour. In that case, besides instrumentality, possession, and fungibility, one should perhaps add the features of subjectivity-denial, to the extent that the woman's psychological states are ignored; and autonomy-denial, both in the sense of failing adequately to attribute autonomy, and, in the sense of violating autonomy (e.g. through rape, assault and harassment).

Now we turn to wishful thinking. Does wishful thinking morally objectify, either as attitude, or cause of action? As attitude, as projective mechanism, it might well be morally neutral. Perhaps there are moral duties to seek the truth, to be rational, in which case wishful thinking may be morally wrong as well as silly. I, for one, doubt it. Wishful thinking may have good consequences, of moral significance. Wishful belief may get Pascal salvation. Wishful expectation of one's children may improve them, even when pessimism is more justified. Wishful belief may be a positive, if not a 'wonderful', part of sexual life; a good relationship may be mended by the blind eye turned to adultery, even if better ways of mending are imaginable.

The wishful thinking described by feminists is, again, another matter. The wishful projection of women's sexual submissiveness, or of women's matching sexual desire, could quite easily be ways of treating women as objects. The fundamental reason is that

wishful thinking is projective, and therefore *not epistemically receptive*: and epistemic receptivity is, in a social context, not merely an epistemological norm. Epistemic sensitivity to independent facts about people can be a *moral* requirement, both in our general dealings with other people, and specifically in sexual encounters.

Recall Nussbaum's idea of 'subjectivity-denial', in her moral notion of objectification. Its appearance there is one illustration of the fact that that knowledge of other minds, therefore receptivity to other minds, is a more than epistemological issue. Subjectivity denial may take a number of forms (just like autonomy-denial, discussed in the previous chapter). It may fail to attribute any subjective states, or some important subclass of them. It may actively deny all subjective states, or some subclass of them. It may attribute some subjective states, but the wrong ones, or, the right ones for the wrong reasons. Here is wishful thinking's most obvious territory: it will often get things wrong, or if right, for the wrong reason. Someone lacking in epistemic receptivity to the desires and beliefs of the other person, is *ipso facto* not adequately acknowledging their subjectivity. This sort of wishful projective attitude is therefore likely to be, in itself, a certain kind of subjectivity denial, and it could on those grounds alone be considered objectifying. Even if the woman actually *possesses* the submissive or matching desires attributed to her, the wishful believer is making a moral mistake if his belief-forming mechanism is not sensitive to those facts: if, in short, he has not bothered to find out.

So let us consider now, how these wishful projections of submissiveness and matching desire might be objectifying, whether in terms of the attitudes themselves or the actions they lead to.

The wishful projection of submissive desire might, as an attitude, be objectifying in many other ways. Drawing again on Nussbaum's seven features, it is subjectivity-denying, not only in being wishful, and therefore insufficiently receptive, but also in its content, in denying independent desires. It also appears to attribute diminished autonomy, insofar as the projected desires are thought simply (slavishly?) to follow whatever it is the believer desires. It seems to instantiate an instrumental way of thinking: how useful, after all, to have someone whose desires have the shape, 'I want to do whatever you want me

to do'. It attributes a kind of inertness, in the lack of independent desire. Fungibility? Perhaps, to the extent this tends to go with instrumental thinking (any tool that will do the job). Then there is violability, understood as treating something as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into. What of this? Well, perhaps, if that is the violent sort of thing he wants to do, since attribution of submissive desire functions to legitimate *whatever* desire he has (though we are trying to bracket the bleaker desires). Ownership? Perhaps, depending how systematic and pervasive such attributions are, for who else but a slave would always so bend her desires? So the attribution of (formally) submissive desire may be an objectifying attitude in most, if not all, of Nussbaum's ways.

The feminist argument will add that objectifying attitudes lead to objectifying actions, and that somebody in the habit of attributing submissive desire will be more likely to treat women as objects in ways that go beyond thought. If she lacks a submissive desire, but he nonetheless attributes it, and fails to correct his false belief, sexual coercion is likely. This in turn involves the additional feature of autonomy denial understood as autonomy *violation*; and instrumentality, not just *thinking* of someone as means to your ends, but *using* them that way. If by contrast she already has a formally submissive desire (possible, given the fact of oppression), sexual coercion would not be the best description of what ensues. In this case the woman already has diminished autonomy, but his action is still objectifying in being one more link in the chain that suppresses her autonomy further, and prevents its emergence. (We return to this case in Sections 3 and 4.)

We turn from wishful projection of formally submissive desire, to like projection of formally mutual, or matching desire. One feature of wishful projection of matching desire is that it bears structural similarities to *pseudo-empathy*. Where wishful projection of matching desire makes a transition from 'I desire that she desires to do this', to 'she desires to do this'; pseudo-empathy makes a transition from 'I desire to do this', to 'she desires to do this'. When both initial desires are present, it might not be easy to distinguish them. And since they are similar in most salient epistemological and moral respects, I'll discuss them together here. Pseudo-empathy, like wishful thinking, is a

projective mechanism that is perhaps morally neutral in itself. Think of harmless anthropomorphic 'ascriptions' of matching desires to inanimate objects, such as one's car ('come *on*, go go go! we can do it!'). And again, we might expect the pseudo-empathic projection of matching desire *not* to be morally objectifying: for, like its wishful counterpart, it attributes to the woman independent desires, and a sort of mutuality.

The projection of matching desire (whether wishful or pseudo-empathic) is indeed a more complicated prospect than the wishful projection of submissive desire. After all, what is attributed is an *independent* desire that happens to match. And the aspiration for matching desire is, as we said, an integral, perhaps even a 'wonderful' part of sexual life. And if the aspiration for it is so wonderful, how could the projection of it be so bad? Antecedently we might expect this projection *not* to be objectifying: after all, it credits the woman with her own independent desires, and finds mutuality a turn-on—and isn't this the antithesis of objectification? [Quotation from Feinberg]

Pseudo-empathy and wishful thinking are alike, though, in their lack of epistemic receptivity. So both will still be subjectivity-denying in the basic sense described above, being insufficiently receptive in an encounter where (we assume) acute receptivity is needed. To see in what other respects these projective attitudes might be morally objectifying, let us turn back to MacKinnon's examples, taking them in reverse order.

Example 4 was the attribution of matching desire, in Freud's seduction theory, (though MacKinnon presumably also has in mind a wishful explanation of its subsequent acceptance by men as orthodoxy). This attribution concerns a woman's matching desire to entertain a certain narrative as sexual fantasy. Construed as wishful thinking, the idea is that since the man found the narrative arousing, he desired the woman to find it arousing, and attributed to her a disposition to find it arousing, and with that a desire to entertain it as sexual fantasy. This in turn supplies a better explanation for the woman's narrative than the alternative explanation, that she was genuinely abused. Construed as pseudo-empathy, it involves a transition from the hearer desiring to imagine women that way, to the hearer believing that the women desire to imagine themselves that way.

Despite the fact that it attributes an active independent desire, this attitude is pretty clearly objectifying. It is subjectivity-denying, and not only in the basic way of being insufficiently receptive: it radically fails to understand the experience of the women who had suffered sexual abuse as children. It is also instrumental, in treating the women and their actions—which are human speech acts of testimony about sexual abuse, of testimony about having been treated as objects—as if they were themselves pornographic artifacts, as if they were items whose function is to stimulate arousal. It is autonomy-denying in a way not yet sufficiently explored, that has something to do not just with the status of a human being as a chooser, but as a knower.

As an action, e.g. as an action of discounting the women's testimony, the theorizing that followed was a speech act that treated those women as objects, again by denying their subjectivity and autonomy. It also treats women as objects by *silencing* them. The idea of silencing is partly captured by the idea of autonomy denial: the woman chooses to perform a certain speech act, she intends to perform it, she uses the right words—but she fails to do it nonetheless. While she is allowed her words, she was prevented from performing the action she meant to perform. But, if it is autonomy denial, it is a very distinctive kind, which deserves attention in its own right. Silencing does not appear as a feature of objectification on Nussbaum's list, but it probably deserves to be there, and is clearly part of the feminist notion. ('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.'²³)

Given the universalizing assumption of seduction theory, this objectification then extends its grip to women more generally. By undermining women's credibility, it legitimates further sexual violence against women (itself an extreme form of objectification), by selling the myth that women's testimony of sexual abuse is likely to be a lie, and that women find the thought of abuse arousing, only we are too repressed to say so. Such attributions make sexual violence more likely, and redress against it more

²³MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, 182. Actually, the issue of credibility is not quite the same as that of

difficult. These are modes of objectification that involve autonomy-denial, instrumentality, and silencing.

We turn to Example 3, the attribution of matching desire, through a supposed capacity for vaginal orgasm. This I interpreted on the lines of wishful thinking (though a pseudo-empathic transition was imaginable). Is this attribution *morally* objectifying, whether as attitude, or cause of action? As attitude, one might think obviously not. We have an active independent desire being attributed to women, a distinct source of pleasure unique to women. Surely this, however factually erroneous, is not objectification?

Well, it probably is. As wishful thinking (or as pseudo-empathy), it is as usual subjectivity-denying through its lack of receptivity. But it is more profoundly subjectivity-denying, in denying that women have the sexual experiences they have, and asserting they have sexual experiences they lack. There is also instrumental thinking involved: it would be so much more *useful* if women's sexual desire to be penetrated were the perfect match to men's sexual desire to penetrate. As for ensuing action, the theorizing that followed was a speech act equally subjectivity-denying, which helped to legitimate instrumental sexual use of women, by propagating the idea that if she doesn't come, it's her fault—this in turn being achieved by silencing, as 'immature', those women at fault.

The projective attribution of matching desire in 'Deep Throat' (Example 2) is complicated, since there are possibly four attributions to consider: one is the attribution of desire to the fictional character Linda; one is the attribution of desire to the actress Linda Marchiano; one is attribution, in the film, of desires to real women (what the film claims to be true of real women); one is the generalizing attribution of desire to other women, by viewers of the pornography (what viewers later believe about women). Which, if any, of these projections (whether wishful or pseudo-empathic) are morally objectifying?

The projective attribution of desire to the fictional Linda is justified by the fictional premise that she has a clitoris in her throat. Does this desire-attribution objectify the fictional Linda? One might be tempted to think not. There is a sense in which there is no denial of subjectivity, but an affirmation: it is true in the fiction that she has an avid and

independent desire for throat sex. But it is still objectifying, in its instrumental view of a woman desperate to make herself sexually available to anyone who wants her.

Does the desire-attribution objectify the real Linda? Very clearly, yes. Her testimony (in *Ordeal*) tells 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 film obscures all of this, and attributes to the real Linda desires similar to the fictional Linda, notwithstanding the lack of science-fiction justification. It is important to pornography that not only is the fictional woman presented as enjoying it, but also the real woman is presented as enjoying it: just as pornography must present real sex, not just acted sex, so it must present real enjoyment, not just acted enjoyment—even if there is plenty of fiction elsewhere in the narrative. (This is supported by what viewers believed about the real Linda, notwithstanding her testimony to the contrary.) So the film silences the real Linda.²⁴ This attribution is a profound denial of subjectivity, which aids and hides the deep instrumentality and autonomy-denial that went into the film's making.

Is there an attribution of desire in the film to real women, and if so, is it objectifying? That is the third question, and its answer is—perhaps. Despite being fiction, it may attribute to real women the sorts of desires the fictional Linda is represented as having²⁵; in which case the attitude to women in general is at the least an instrumental one. The same questions can be asked, fourthly, about projective attributions of viewers later on. And the answers again may be affirmative, if one accepts testimony that men later found throat sex desirable and attributed, or tried to attribute, matching desires to their wives and to others (resulting, sometimes, in 'deep throat' sexual assault).²⁶

We turn finally to Example 1, the projective attribution of matching desire in rape. This is the almost universal strategy of defense of a rapist in trial, to the extent that 'she wanted it' is thought equivalent to 'she said yes'.²⁷ More than anything else, it is responsible for the low conviction rate of rape. Moreover, the likelihood of attribution of

²⁴See references in MacKinnon

²⁵See 'Truth in Pornographic Fiction'

²⁶Evidence at Minneapolis Hearings.

²⁷They are not of course equivalent, but I pass over the distinction here. The strategy is also the universal

matching desire, and a raped woman's consequent lack of credibility, is probably one of the significant reasons that only a tiny fraction of rapes are reported.

In the cases we are thinking of, there is genuine belief in matching desire for sex—albeit wishfully (or perhaps pseudo-empathically) generated. Such belief is subjectivity-denying in its lack of receptivity, its lack of willingness to see what the woman wants, even given her refusals. The blindness to a critically important psychological state, namely that the woman desires not to have sex, is part of what makes the state objectifying: her desire is the opposite to that attributed. (Blindness to some desires would not matter; but getting it right on this one is vital.) As an attitude, it is likely to be instrumentalizing, in its readiness to ascribe the desire that is most convenient, in the teeth of evidence. And then going beyond the projective attitude to action, rape is perhaps the most graphic example of sexually objectifying a woman—it violates autonomy, it is an instrumental use, and also violative in Nussbaum's other sense of boundary-invasion and destruction.

Given the importance of sexual violence to the feminist understanding of sexual objectification, the omission advertised at the outset at this point seems especially pressing: namely, the omission of consideration of, for example, desires to dominate, or humiliate, or hurt, relevant in very many cases of rape. Such desires may sometimes wishfully seek a matching desire to be dominated or humiliated, on the part of the woman; or may sometimes (as mentioned before) seek the opposite, a contradictory desire, a desire not to be dominated or humiliated, a desire not to have sex. These deserve attention, but they will not, I'm afraid, get it here.

We have been considering how objectification in Mackie's sense of projection may converge with moral objectification, in the sense articulated by feminists. We have looked at the three mechanisms of phenomenological gilding, wishful thinking, and pseudo-empathy, and seen how their application in sexual contexts, particularly in conditions of oppression, may lead to the projective valuing of women as object-like; and may lead to projective ascriptions of submissive or matching desires on the part of women, that have a central role to play in sexually objectifying attitudes and behaviour. Through such

projections, women are treated as things—denied subjectivity, denied autonomy, and used, or instrumentalized. I now want to consider the way objectification *conceals* itself: for it is here that the projective aspect of objectification assists in the treatment of women as things, by making that thing-like treatment invisible.

3. How Projection Masks Objectification

Suppose you want a projective belief (or a system of them) that morally objectifies someone (or a group of someones), and you want it to evade notice. Here would be a good strategy to follow, a nice recipe for a disappearing trick.

Step 1. Make genesis of the belief invisible. Nobody will notice where the beliefs came from, nobody will wonder about its dubious origins. *Step 2.* Make counter-evidence disappear. Nobody will find evidence that proves the beliefs wrong. *Step 3.* Create the subjective appearance of confirming evidence. 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. *Step 4.* Create the objective appearance of confirming evidence. Make the world change, so that it produces evidence that is good evidence for the belief, notwithstanding the belief's falsity. *Step 5.* Create the reality of confirming evidence. Make the world change, so that the projective beliefs become true. Then it will supply all the evidence you could ever want.

The beauty of this recipe is that it can work whether you want it to work, or not. In fact, it works better if you don't think about whether you want it to work. Let's see now how projection may help objectification perform its disappearing trick.

Step 1. Make genesis of the 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.²⁸ 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 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 copious and 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. 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 disappear, given the other evidence you have that when a woman says no, she really means yes (see Step 3). She is not, really, refusing.

The projective attribution of matching desire to the real Linda Marchiano meets counter-evidence in her testimony about abuse, in *Ordeal*. This counter-evidence too will disappear, when you see that what she is doing is not describing abuse, but producing more pornography. (*Ordeal* was sold as pornography.) Linda is not, really, complaining.

The projective attribution of matching desire, based on women's capacity for vaginal orgasm, meets counter-evidence in many women's descriptions of their actual sexual experience. This counter-evidence will disappear, when you see that the better explanation for the women's experience lies in the women's frigidity and sexual 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: in this case the content of the projective belief is the negation of the evidence, and evidence will remain invisible so long as the belief exists. Counter-evidence, if it emerges, will have to come from elsewhere.

Step 3. Create the subjective appearance of confirming evidence:

In making counter-evidence disappear in most of the ways just described, you will also have created a subjective appearance of confirming evidence, something that looks like supporting evidence to the eye of the wishful beholder. If women who say no mean yes, that helps confirm the rapist's attribution of matching desire. No will sound like yes. If purported testimony of abuse is really pornographic sexual narrative, that helps confirm attributions of desire to Freud's patients, and to Linda Marchiano. Testimony about abuse will sound like pornography. 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 4. Create the objective appearance of confirming evidence:

Let the world produce real evidence for the belief, even if the belief is false. Pornography will be helpful in supplying it. Its systematic generation of wishful desire-attribution to fictional women makes claims about what real women desire. In pornography, when women say no, they really mean yes; when women are treated with violence and coercion, it is not violence and coercion but sex. 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.²⁹ Coercion and other incentives 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, one relating to desire, the other relating to belief. In addition to its role as shaper of commodified desire (discussed in Section 1), pornography has an epistemological role as confirmer of projective belief. Yes, says pornography, women *do*

have the desires you wish, therefore believe, women to have. And what better authoritative source for evidence about sex than pornography?

Women too will be helpful in supplying the objective appearance of confirming evidence, and here your own projective beliefs will assist. Women will be aware of your projective expectations, and will respond. (This may be part of what MacKinnon means when she says that sexual objectification unites perception with 'enforcement'.) In conditions of relative vulnerability and powerlessness, and with penalties for non-cooperation, some women will counterfeit the evidence you want: 'Women fake vaginal orgasms, the only "mature" sexuality, because men demand that women enjoy vaginal penetration.' And what better authoritative source for evidence about women's sexuality than women themselves? 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 5. Create the reality of confirming evidence.

[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.³⁰

We are considering here the possibility that the world not simply as appearance, but as *reality*, might come to fit the projective objectifying belief: that the world 'arranges itself to affirm' the projective belief. When the projective belief comes true, there will be no shortage of confirming evidence for it. 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 feminist 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.³¹

³⁰MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, 58-59. I follow Haslanger in substituting "proven" for "proof".

The idea that the world 'actually arranges itself' to affirm what the powerful want to see' is not a peculiar transcendental idealism, where the thoughts of the powerful are credited with the power to, of their own accord, produce some social reality. (That is how analytic philosophers are sometimes inclined to view the feminist idea of social construction.) 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, themselves are part of the constraint, given the woman's awareness of them, and the conditions of oppression. Here is Marilyn Frye, on the same 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.³²

Expectation is belief about what will happen. The future being open, expectation is open to self-fulfillment in a way that other belief is not. Expectation can be partial agent of its own fulfillment, a fact that can be useful, or dangerous. Perhaps that is why it expectation has two conceptual careers, not only as mere future-directed belief (we expect rain tomorrow), but as an imperative or prescription, whose direction of fit is the opposite of that of belief (England expects every man to do his duty).

With this in mind, consider the projective expectation of submissive desire, taking first formally submissive desire, i.e. a woman's desire that she do whatever the man desires her to do. This might be self-fulfilling, especially if it were part of a long term pattern. Desire is constrained by what is perceived to be possible. If circumstances suggest that desires other than formally submissive desires are futile, desire may conform to this restricted world, and lower its sights. So the expectation of formally submissive desire may help create formally submissive desire; all the more so, of course, if alternative desires are penalized.

With formally submissive desire, what is attributed is a desire whose content is 'I want to do whatever he wants me to do'. But, as we saw earlier, there is a different way to project submissive desire. The attribution of formally *mutual* desire may have a content that is concretely submissive: he believes she desires to submit *independently* of what he desires and believes her to desire. ('I want her to submit, and that's what she independently wants.') It is a central theme of MacKinnon's work that pornography eroticizes men's dominance and women's submission, so that submissiveness of women is desired, and projected, and enforced. I think she probably has in mind not merely formally submissive desire, where what is attributed to the woman is a desire to bend her desires to his, whatever they may be; but concretely submissive desires, where what is attributed to the woman is an active and independent desire to subject herself. MacKinnon says, 'Subjection itself, with self-determination ecstatically relinquished, is the content of women's sexual desire and desirability,'¹³³ —this is the content of women's desire, as projected by men, and also as really instantiated by some women. Expectation of concretely submissive desire may be self-fulfilling in just the same way as expectation of formally submissive desire, with the difference, perhaps, that if it is really an active and independent desire for submission, the woman herself has eroticized submission. This self-fulfillment of attributions of submission is among the most distinctive features of projective objectification.

4. Masking and Moral Objectification

In Section 2 we considered how epistemological objectification connects with the moral, and how in the context of sexual objectification, projective belief might, in various ways, count as treating a person as a thing. We have just looked at five ways that projection might mask objectification, help to render it invisible. This masking ability itself needs some brief evaluation, both in epistemological and moral terms.

Beginning with epistemology, one question concerns the relation between objectification and objectivity: in Mackie's usage objectifying something means projecting

it, and thereby treating it as objective. And if, as we have found, projection contributes to moral objectification, that should make us wonder about connections between objectification and treating something as objective. This is a large question, and one which brings us to the vexed territory of feminist critiques of reason. I won't do justice to it here. But we can note that, to the extent that projective objectification is going on—to the extent that beliefs are generated by wishful thinking and the like—they are not objective. The projective beliefs will, in many cases, be just plain false: as MacKinnon says, 'the world is not entirely the way the powerful want to believe it is'. Beliefs in matching desire will often be false. Projective objectification may help create the *appearance* of confirming evidence, whether through conditioning subjective perception of a woman's sexual refusal, or her testimony about abuse, or objectively, through women's faking: but it is mere appearance. Those beliefs in matching desire on the part of a rape victim, of Freud's patients, of Linda Marchiano, and of the supposed experiencers of vaginal orgasm, are just plain false. In some cases the beliefs are not just plain false. Projected belief about women's submissiveness, for example, can make women submissive. The world 'actually arranges itself' to affirm the belief, it is 'not just an illusion or a fantasy or a mistake'. Do we say then that since the belief is true, it is therefore epistemologically in good order? I think not, though full argument for this belongs elsewhere. If it is wishfully generated, it is unjustified even when it is true. Moreover, a number of associated beliefs are false: for example (as Haslanger has pointed out) the belief that women are *naturally* submissive is false;³⁴ and so too are meta-beliefs about dependence, for example the belief that one's belief is responding to women, whereas in fact women are responding to the belief. These remarks will have to do for the present, though I take them up in more detail elsewhere..

In moral terms, our question is whether masking counts as, itself, a way of treating women as objects. And the main answer of course is that since *noticing* objectification is a precondition for *combating* it, to the extent that objectification is hidden, it will be left just as it is. Masking therefore perpetuates moral objectification.

And it is also worth saying something about how the individual ways of masking outlined above themselves might morally objectify. Making counter-evidence invisible, creating the subjective appearance of confirming evidence (Steps 2 and 3)—these are achieved at the price of dismissing women's testimony. They are subjectivity-denying, and silencing, features which in turn lead to instrumental and autonomy-denying treatment of women, most graphically in the case of rape. Creating the objective appearance of confirming evidence, as when women fake orgasms, or when Marchiano is made to pretend a delight she does not feel (Step 4)—these too are subjectivity-denying and silencing, in what is perhaps a deeper way, making women false witnesses about themselves, objectifiers of themselves. Perhaps in this case there is not exactly autonomy violation, but something like destruction of autonomy; not just treating someone instrumentally, but getting them to treat themselves instrumentally.

Finally, creating the reality of confirming evidence, as when women really become submissive in response to force, or to persistent expectation of submissive desire, whether formal or concrete (Step 5)—here women have been made to conform to the projective belief's image. Someone who has been made submissive has been made to objectify herself: made to treat herself instrumentally, so that her desires will conform to whatever is desired. To be made submissive is to be made more tool-like, lacking in autonomy, lacking in independent subjectivity. It is not simply to be treated *as if* you are that way: it is to be made really to *become* that way—to a significant degree, if not (one hopes) completely. This last example illustrates the importance of something else that was missing in Nussbaum's account of objectification: how it matters what the 'treating' amounts to, in treating someone as an object: the differences between (for example) *viewing* somebody as a tool, *using* them as tool, and *making* them tool-like. A person can be made object-like, made tool-like, through something that indeed begins as a desire-driven way of viewing, a desire-driven projection that is in the first instance a matter of attitude—but that reaches beyond attitude, in its self-fulfillment: so that viewing someone as a tool can, with a little help from circumstance, really make someone tool-like.

[Concluding remarks].

Appendix: Haslanger on Objectification

I have tried to show how sexual objectification has both moral and epistemological dimensions: women are treated as things, and that treatment is made invisible. These are two important themes of Sally Haslanger's careful articulation of the notion of objectification, and I want here to say something about how our proposals are connected. They are basically complementary, though what I present here goes beyond Haslanger in its examination of the role of *desire* in generating projective attitudes (Section 1); in its moral assessment of those attitudes, drawing on Nussbaum (Section 2); and in its exploration of five different ways in which objectification is self-masking (Section 3). She is interested in the connection between objectification, and feminist critique of objectivity—a question beyond the scope of my project in this chapter.³⁵

Haslanger proposes four individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for objectification, each condition being a distinctive way of treating women. In this, her proposal narrows objectification down from the usage adopted by Nussbaum and myself, since for her it is just these conditions, working together in the way she describes, that together constitute objectification. (Nussbaum and I, on the other hand, might be willing to describe something as objectification even if it doesn't satisfy all these conditions.)

Women are objectified when, first, they are viewed as objects for the satisfaction of desire. A certain instrumental, or perhaps commodifying, attitude is thus the starting point: women are valued as mere means to desire satisfaction. In what I have said above, this idea appears in the notion of phenomenological gilding, which allows a transition from commodifying desire to commodifying belief about the sort of value women have; and it appears in the notion of instrumentality displayed in so many of the other attitudes.

Second, women are made to have, forced to have, a property that is desired of them; or (and I suggest there is a need for this addition) they are made to *appear* to have

the property desired of them. Examples of desired properties we have been considering have been submissive behaviour, submissive desire, and (broadly) matching desires for sex. These examples differ in whether the property in question is actually instantiated, or merely appears to be instantiated. When women are made submissive, they really instantiate the desired property. When women are made to seem as if they have matching desire, they (in the examples considered) merely appear to instantiate the desired property.

Third, women are *believed* to have that property. In the above examples, these are the projective beliefs and expectations about the property desired: beliefs attributing submissive behaviour or desire, beliefs attributing matching desire. I have been exploring a question about these projective beliefs which Haslanger does not consider, namely their origin in *desire*, through the wishful and other mechanisms described above.

Fourth, and finally, women are believed to have that property by *nature*. Women are believed to be *naturally* submissive, or are believed *naturally* to possess conveniently matching desires. These are the same projective beliefs attributing submissive behaviour or desire, or matching desire, this time understood as making a claim about a woman's *nature*. Some of the examples considered here provide vivid illustrations of this; for example, the attribution of vaginal orgasm is committed to biologically natural facts. And Haslanger is surely right to think that in many cases the objectifying belief is one that attributes modal facts, that women naturally, or essentially, possess the attributed properties. A projective belief that women are essentially thus and so is one that offers, *par excellence*, a 'fictitious external authority', to borrow Mackie's phrase again. But I think one could objectify in something close to Haslanger's sense without believing in essences (there can in principle be objectifiers of all metaphysical stripes, not merely Aristotelian ones). A weaker way to construe the naturalness of the attributed property might be in terms of the idea that the property is possessed *independently of interference*, and in particular, independently of the interference supplied by the objectifier's own beliefs, desires, values, and actions. The clause that describes interference most explicitly is Haslanger's second one: the woman is forced to have the property. This could be a matter of *action* penalizing non-compliance (e.g. anger, violence or threats). but I have

tried to show here how the attitudes themselves help make the woman have the property. Viewing a woman as an object for the satisfaction of desire, believing she has the desired properties, and has them by nature—these are among the mechanisms that work to make her acquire the property, or the appearance of it.