Pornography and Pleasure: The Female Spectator

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In this paper, I wish to make some comments on the pornographic film text and the question of pleasure for the female viewer. My starting point is The Story of O, a film which is ‘about’ sado-masochistic relationships, but I shall also refer to Emmanuelle, The Anti-Virgin, which is part II of the Emmanuelle trilogy, a group of films which have been more widely viewed than any other recent soft-porn products.

Both The Story of O and Emmanuelle centre on a female character who has dedicated her life to the pursuit of sexual pleasure; in the former case, O justifies her quest in the name of romantic love, while Emmanuelle, to some extent, does the same, although she would probably argue that she is interested in sensual/sexual pleasure for its own sake. In both texts, the female protagonists occupy the centre of the narrative arena and are defined in terms of their sexuality — two factors which the films have in common with the woman’s melodrama. In both the narrative structures are organized so as to foreground the question of sexual pleasure for women or the question that so perplexed Freud throughout his lifetime — What Do Women Want? Apart from the pornographic film, this question has been most widely posed in the film noir texts which foreground the sexual desire of the femme fatale or phallic woman — texts such as Double Indemnity, Gilda, The Postman Always Rings Twice, Detour and Lady From Shanghai. In these texts the question of sexual pleasure for the female protagonist is posed in relation to the notion of a fixed feminine sexual identity — the sexually aggressive woman who attempts to control her own sexuality and/or deny her ‘proper’ place as wife and mother within a monogamous heterosexual marriage is ultimately punished, sometimes destroyed. In contrast, these two soft-porn texts, The Story of O and Emmanuelle, the Anti-Virgin, articulate the view that feminine sexual pleasure is not commensurate with a fixed feminine sexual identity.

The interest of these two films is that they, to some extent, challenge the viewpoint expressed in much recent feminist film criticism that women do not speak in their own voice in film, that the representation of women always signifies a male discourse. Drawing on the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, Claire Johnston elaborates this argument in her seminal paper, Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema:

Within a sexist ideology and a male-dominated cinema, woman is presented as what she represents for man... The fetishistic image portrayed related only to male narcissism: woman represents not herself, but by a process of displacement, the male phallus. It is probably true to say that despite the enormous emphasis placed on woman as spectacle in the cinema, woman as woman is largely absent.
Feminist film criticism has, of course, primarily addressed the question of woman’s voice to the Hollywood classic narrative text. Given that the pornographic film industry is also situated firmly within a ‘sexist ideology and a male-dominated’ cinematic process, and given that the pornographic film is primarily designed to arouse sexual pleasure in men one might expect that woman as signifier of woman would be totally absent — as John Ellis argues in his article on pornography, published in Screen. However, I would claim that this is not necessarily the situation and that the difference — where it exists — can be partly, even largely, explained by the fact that the pornographic text deals directly with the notion of sexual fantasy. However, I wish to hold this concept in abeyance for the moment while I present a brief synopsis of The Story of O as a referential basis for further discussion.

The Story of O (1977), directed by Just Jaekin and adapted from what has now become a cult novel, supposedly written by a woman, Pauline Reage (1954), tells the story of a heroine — known only by the initial of her first name — who consents to undergo a series of sexual and physical tortures to prove her love for the two men in her life: Rene (Udo Kier) and Sir Stephen (Anthony Keel). These tortures initially take place at Roissy (a chateau in the best tradition of the 19th century French ‘libertine’ pot-boilers) where O (Corinne Clery) is taken by Rene, who, unbeknown to O, is preparing her for his close friend, Sir Stephen. The narrative is accompanied by the voice-over of a female narrator who also remains unidentified but who could be O herself.

At Roissy, O joins a group of women who are not unlike an order of religious initiates in that they have all dedicated themselves to a higher ideal — that of love — and are all prepared to undergo a systematic scouring of the flesh, presumably in order to transcend the limitations of the body (through the endurance of pain and humiliation) to achieve a higher state in which they will become at one with their master/lover. This is one possible interpretation — another relates to the fantasy of being taken against one’s will — which I shall refer to later. The signifying practices of the film text, however, foreground the religious connexions, drawing parallels between religious and sexual obsession; the group is represented as a religious order with overhead shots of the women as they walk silently in their flowing robes along cloistered paths. Religious and sexual obsession is later related to sadomasochistic sexual practices.

O is told by the master of Roissy that she is free to leave but if she chooses to stay then she must obey without question every order given to her, she must observe a strict vow of silence and she must never look a man in the face. O is then dressed in the same attire worn by all of the Roissy women: a leather collar around her neck — with which she is chained up — and a long flowing dress that exposes her breasts and opens at the front and back in order that she may be ‘constantly at the disposition’ of any man who wishes to use her in any way he wants and whenever he wants. For the duration of her stay at Roissy, O undergoes a series of ritual whippings and engages in sexual encounters with individual men and groups of men whom she is not ‘free’ to refuse.

The female narrator tells us why Rene has brought his lover to Roissy:

...he felt the more he gave her to others the dearer she was to him. The fact that
he could was proof that she belonged to him.

Interestingly, the concept of romantic love and the couple (O and Rene; O and Sir Stephen) is central to the narrative structures of *The Story of O*; the couple as a viable unit is generally repudiated in pornographic texts, the narrative structures relatively weak and primarily there to organize as many sexual encounters as possible within the time available and between groups of people. For instance, in *Behind The Green Door*, the female protagonist is captured, taken ‘behind the green door’ where she is ‘forced’ to submit to both lesbian and heterosexual encounters with groups of men and women. There is an audience within the film, watching what happens to the female victim, until its members become so aroused they begin to engage in similar sexual encounters. There is virtually no narrative and certainly no attempt to construct a couple — the pleasure presumably lies in the fact that everyone is free to do everything to everyone without the constraints imposed by emotional involvement. No-one speaks — the sound track consists of a continuous low moan punctuated by the odd gasp of pleasure. By contrast *The Story Of O* and *Emmanuelle the Anti-Virgin* have relatively complex narrative structures which permit the representation of sex between the couple and also the group.

When O leaves Roissy she is given a ring to wear which will identify her to any man in the outside world who is a member of the Roissy group. O must continue to dress in a way that enables her to be at the constant disposition of any man who might recognize and desire to possess her. Once outside, O resumes her career as a fashion photographer. The narrator tells us that O’s experiences at Roissy have changed her:

O made about fifty photographs of Jacqueline, none of which were anything like she had taken before. She had never captured such a provocative quality in a face or a body until now.

O is taken by Rene to meet Sir Stephen. Prior to her vow of silence, Rene told O that the last two words that she was to utter were those of a man’s name — Sir Stephen. O is told that although Rene and Sir Stephen are unrelated they were brought up like brothers by Rene’s mother and that they have always shared everything. Because of her love for Rene, O agrees to belong also to Sir Stephen who tells O that he will be ‘a most exacting master because he has a penchant for rituals’. Sir Stephen’s name, of course, has a somewhat sinister ring as the initials are ‘S.S’. Gradually, Rene fades into the background and O begins to see more of Sir Stephen, her new master. At first O is angry, accusing Rene of loving Sir Stephen more than he loves her — an accusation which he does not deny. There are interesting parallels, here, between Rene’s behaviour and that of Johnny (Glenn Ford) in *Gilda* in that the two younger men appear to be in love with an older father-figure and both are determined at all costs to ensure that the heroine will become the partner of the older man. The homosexual/oedipal trajectory, however, is not developed in *The Story of O*.

Inevitably, O falls in love with Sir Stephen who tells her that, by sending her to
Roissy, Rene has simply given her an alibi for her sensuality, that she actually desires every man who wants her. In order to prove that she belongs to Sir Stephen, O agrees to stay at another chateau — one that is similar to Roissy except that it is run by a lesbian, Anne-Marie, and that there are no men in attendance. At Anne-Marie’s O is again whipped and also engages freely in lesbian lovemaking. O then learns to administer the whip herself. Finally, O agrees to prove completely that she belongs to Sir Stephen by agreeing to have his initials branded on her buttocks and to wear gold rings, also marked with his initials, on her labia.

During the period of her increasing involvement with Sir Stephen, O discovers that she desires a woman, Jacqueline, one of her photographic models. Now, more mature and self confident, O is able to seduce Jacqueline who falls deeply in love with O, finally agreeing to prove her love by become a graduate of Roissy. O does not love Jacqueline; the reason she wants Jacqueline to go to Roissy is that Sir Stephen desires it. Having fallen in love with O, Sir Stephen feels he is in Rene’s debt. But Rene desires Jacqueline who has eyes only for O. If Jacqueline goes to Roissy then she must be prepared to submit sexually to anyone — in this way Rene can satisfy his sexual desires. Thus, the narrative structures are organized to permit the representation of lesbian desire and lesbian love-making.

Finally, O agrees to demonstrate publicly her love for Sir Stephen by attending a fancy dress ball wearing the mask of an owl. O chooses the owl as she sees herself as a kind of bird of prey, one trained to retrieve her victim (Jacqueline) and bring it to her master. Traditionally the owl also signifies wisdom, an association that is reinforced in the film text by O’s magnificent and mysterious appearance. Interestingly, Sir Stephen does not want O to go through with this demonstration; having fallen in love with her, he seems to believe that she will be humiliated but he cannot go back on his word to his friend, the Commander, who is giving the party. Standing in front of a full size mirror, O dons the owl mask — her image doubled in the glass. She tells Sir Stephen:

Don’t regret anything. I’m yours and the whole world may know. Can’t you guess what I feel? I’m proud of what I am.

At the party, Nora, Sir Stephen’s black servant, leads O on a gold chain, attached to a collar, through the thronging crowd, her naked body showing through her flowing cloak, her eyes staring defiantly through the mask, her labia rings on display for all to see. The narrator poses the following question:

Was she made of stone, of wax or was she a creature from another world? Sir Stephen watched O triumphant in her insolent nudity and was enthralled by the measure of his power.

In the final scene, O, having just delivered Jacqueline to Roissy, lies in Sir Stephen’s arms. She asks him if he would undergo the pain and humiliations that she has endured for him. As he answers that he would — but there is a note of uncertainty in his voice — O grinds out his lighted cigar on his hand, burning her initial, O, on to his flesh. The close of the narrative echoes its beginning but with
significant difference — it is now the male protagonist, the master who must serve his term as slave, the insignia of woman marked out on his skin.

Earlier, I mentioned that *The Story Of O* seems to allow a space for the female protagonist to speak her desire as a woman and that, in contrast with the representation of woman in the classic realist text, her discourse is not necessarily part of an all-encompassing male discourse. I stated that this difference may be explained by the status of the pornographic text as sexual fantasy. Before attempting to specify the status of the text as fantasy, I shall briefly look at the instances in *The Story Of O* in which it could be argued that the representation of female sexuality differs markedly from its construction within the signifying practices of the classic narrative text.

In its interrogation of the classic text, feminist film criticism has specified the phallus as central in the representation of sexual difference. In his article on pornography, John Ellis⁴ extends this argument to the pornographic text. He claims that although female sexual pleasure ‘has become the dominant fetish within current public pornographic representation’ nevertheless pleasure is always given to her by the gift of the phallus.

This provides a certain security to the enquiry into female sexual pleasure: it is a fetish because it is in the orgasm that the woman’s phallus is re-found. Woman finds her phallus in the orgasm: woman is given that orgasm and hence the phallus by men... The phallus for the woman in the representation is provided by the male in the audience: it is a ‘gift’ from a man or men that provides woman’s orgasm.

Ellis quotes Angela Carter⁵ who describes this process as ‘a gap left in the text of just the right size for the reader to insert his prick into’.

No doubt many pornographic texts privilege the phallus as the condition and limit of female sexual pleasure, but the pornographic text is not always so deterministically constructed. In many texts a range of diverse sexualities are constructed which would suggest that the text, at least, ‘understands’ that fantasies at the level of the unconscious do not make clear cut distinctions between which sex does and which sex does not possess the phallus or that sexual pleasure for women is not necessarily dependent on the phallus.

In *The Story of O*, sexual pleasure for women is articulated in relation to three major fantasies: that of pleasure derived from sado-masochistic encounters; the fantasy of being taken against one’s will; the fantasy of a lesbian encounter and lesbian desire. Significantly, none of these articulations specifically relates to pleasure derived from orgasm and the ‘gift’ of the phallus. Central to pleasure derived from sado-masochistic encounters of the notion of power. Shortly after O enters Roissy she is prepared and taken before the assemblage of men and women. One of the men asks: ‘Has she been chained or whipped? If you had it might have given her pleasure.’ O is whipped constantly: at Roissy, at Sir Stephen’s and at Anne-Marie’s. Certainly, it is clear that the men derive pleasure from administering and watching the beatings, but the women at Anne-Marie’s similarly derive pleasure. The significant point is that pleasure is given to those who are in the position of
power whether male or female; O, herself, fantasizes about the pleasure she would experience if she could watch Jacqueline being beaten. The position of the victim, the extent to which the one being beaten derives pleasure from the position of passivity, is left unclear; presumably this allows a space for the spectator, whether male or female, to respond imaginatively, to construct their own fantasies around the sado-masochistic scenarios.

The dominant sexual fantasy of *The Story Of O* is that of being overpowered and forced to submit to the sexual demands of others. This fantasy is articulated three times in the text. The first reference occurs when the narrator describe’s O’s response to being held ‘captive’ at Roissy:

O wondered why there was so much sweetness mingled with her terror or why she found her terror so delicious.

The second reference occurs after a sexual encounter:

O felt defiled and guilty at having found pleasure in the arms of a stranger.

Finally, Sir Stephen tells O that she actually enjoys being taken against her will:

Does Rene realize that you want every man who desires you? He gives you an alibi for your sensuality.

Having agreed, of her own free will, to undergo the trials at Roissy in order to prove her love for Rene, O is then ‘forced’ to submit to every sexual command, she is no longer free to refuse — this is the main clause in the contract. O is therefore not responsible for what happens to her. While her decision to go to Roissy in order to uphold the ideal of romantic love might highlight an element of self-sacrifice, even nobility in her sufferings, the reason behind her decision functions primarily as a rationalization for the captivity fantasy.

One of the functions of the captivity fantasy, in general, is to use the scenario as a metaphor for total abandonment to sexual pleasure. Julia Lesage⁶ explains the fantasy in this way:

The actual pleasure of the fantasy (is) based in the woman’s complete control over the scenario while, at the same time, she imagines she is being compelled.

The sado-masochistic fantasy constructed in *The Story Of O* certainly works in this way in that, although O is forced to submit, nothing ‘terrible’ actually ever happens to her. Furthermore, she knows she is always free to leave. Sir Stephen’s comment, that Rene has simply given her an ‘alibi’ for her sensuality, is accurate. Like the Roadrunner, O emerges from every test, with no visible scars — not even marks from the lash — to show what she has been through. The spectator, male and female, is left free to use the film’s fantasy of being taken against one’s will as a metaphor around which to weave their own fantasies — if they so desire.

In her article, *The Body As Evidence,*⁷ Lesley Stern presents an interesting

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discussion of the relation between fiction and fantasy in which she examines the way in which the fictional elements of the pornographic text rather,

than suturing the viewer into the text... proffers a possibility of pleasure by stimulating the imaginative capacity. This projection of an other scene does not involve a looking ahead, a desire to fulfil a lack by jumping the metonymic gun. It is not motivated by the incompleteness of the image (which implies that completion may be achieved in the next image). Rather, the fiction declares the limits of its imagery in relation to the real. Fiction is posited on a pretense, but not a pretense of plenitude: instead of the image asserting its presence as the only possibility (or obversely signalling absence) it provokes other possibilities, substitutions. The projection of images onto the screen elicits the viewers projection or superimposition of images, of the Imaginary, of fantasy.

Certainly, the minimal narrative structures and the lack of strong identificatory figures in the pornographic text work against the classic structure of suturing; Stern's suggestion that the possibility of pleasure for the viewer relates to the way in which the representation of the image functions to 'provoke other possibilities', thus leaving the spectator a 'space' in which to construct other scenarios helps to explain how the different scenarios, for instance, the fantasy of being overpowered, are constructed so as to appeal to the imaginative capacity of both the male and female spectator.

Male fantasies of being overpowered are also common to pornography – particularly in those texts in which the phallic woman is the central focus of the narrative. The phallic woman brings out in the male protagonist a repressed desire to be submissive. In his famous work, Venus in Furs, Sacher-Masoch gives expression to this wish. Here, the narrator is engaged in a conversation with Venus, the Goddess of love:

_Undine Sueda_: 'The more submissive woman is, the more readily man recovers his self possession and becomes domineering; but the more cruel and faithless she is, the more she ill-treats him, the more wantonly she toys with him and the harsher she is, the more he quickens his desire and secures his love and admiration. It has always been so, from the time of Helen and Delilah all the way to Catherine the Great and Lola Montez.'

'I cannot deny it,' I said. 'Nothing could be more attractive to man than the idea of a beautiful tyrant, both voluptuous and cruel, who insolently and consistently changes her favourite to suit her humour.'

'And wears furs,' said the goddess.

'What made you think of that?'

'I know your tastes.'

_Venus in Furs_ is constructed around a male fantasy of vulnerability in which the heroine, Wanda, constantly whips Severin who willingly becomes her slave.

Male fantasies of being over-powered by a dominant woman also abound in pornographic magazines. The following is an extract from _Taboo_: it describes a Los Angeles party:
Here were gathered a congeries of leather fetishists, and fiery mistresses of the most exquisite kind of pain and humiliation a sufferer can possible imagine. Foremost among the dominatrixes was the ineffable Natasha, sublime mistress of pain, long known as a destroyer of the masculine ego, and supremely skilful in the use of fetters, whips and other tools of her trade. The wild, wet and wanton constumes gleamed threateningly in the subdued light as the beauteous Natasha humbles a hitherto proud male, reducing him to a quivering hulk of his former self as he grovels, offering obeisance to her dominating, awe-inspiring loveliness. He is obviously glad to learn his place.

The account of the party is accompanied by photographs of masked women dressed in leather, carrying whips, and leading men on chains. There are also photographs of men with rings and spikes through their nipples.

The notion of male as victim is taken to the extremes in the hard-core pornographic film, *Lashes*, in which the male victim, naked except for a black mask, and his torturer, Countess Anne, clothed in a fetishistic black outfit complete with boots, mask and whip, engage in a series of sexual encounters in which the penis is represented as the object of punishment and mutilation. The male victim is totally subservient to the Countess who verbally abuses him for being such a weak pathetic creature while venting her ‘sadistic’ impulses (which, of course, are a necessary part of his fantasy) on his penis which she burns with cigarettes, lashes with her whip, pierces with long sharp needles, and locks in a spiked screwing device which she tightens until the needles penetrate the skin. Throughout, the male victim humbly thanks her for whatever form of torture she is gracious enough to bestow on him. Finally, she urinates into his mouth then orders him to masturbate himself to a climax and eat his own semen.

In the soft-porn film, *Little Miss Innocent*, the male protagonist, Rick, picks up two young girls, takes them to his home and offers to teach them everything they always wanted to know about sex. However, he soon tires of them and orders them to leave. They refuse, threatening to report him for the seduction of minors if he doesn’t fulfil his promise. Rick is forced to comply; eventually, however, he collapses from exhaustion at which point Carol, the leader, who has become increasingly angry at his aggressive love-making, ties him up and tells him she will show him what it is like to be a woman. Rick is then subjected to a ritual of beatings during which Carol also straps on a large dildo and sodomizes him while taunting him with the words: ‘I bet you get pleasure out of inflicting pain on women’. Despite the pleas of her friend, Carol refuses to stop. She tells them both that Rick is just like all other men, that she was raped by her step-brother and father, and that she sees no good reason why she should treat Rick humanely. Eventually, the two girls depart, leaving Rick a mere shadow of his former self. The blatant moralizing of *Little Miss Innocent* is not atypical of certain pornographic genres, particularly those in which the male is constructed as victim. While the intention of these texts seems to be to warn men about the ruthless nature of women, much of the pleasure for the viewer presumably lies in the sado-masochistic scenario in which the male is ‘put in the place’ of woman. The response of the male audience to *Little Miss Innocent* was confused: some members chuckled heartily throughout the screening while others became restless towards the end — a few even yelled abuse at Carol for spoiling the fun. Clearly, work needs to be undertaken, not just on the multiplicity of pornographic genres but also on the conditions of screening.
(the ‘sex’ cinemas) and the ways in which the different genres order ways of seeing.

Although the positioning of the male-as-victim is not central to The Story of O, it is nevertheless important in that the text could be read in terms of the construction of the phallic or sexually potent woman. As a result of her trials at Roissy, O becomes more articulate and self-assured – by the close of the narrative she has learnt to speak her own desire, turning her newly-awakened sadistic urges on her lover, Sir Stephen. O's sexual identity is never fixed; she takes up the so-called ‘feminine’ position of passivity and masochism and the so-called ‘masculine’ position of activity and aggression. Unlike the representation of the phallic woman of film noir, O's transgression of the socially acceptable feminine role does not end in punishment, nor is her image, in any sense, recuperated by the workings of the narrative structures of the film’s conclusion/resolution.

The final sexual fantasy that is represented in The Story of O relates to lesbian sexual desire. The question of the representation of lesbian sexual activities in pornography is extremely interesting, particularly as the representation of male homosexual activities is completely absent from pornography designed for the heterosexual audience – although some texts, such as Emmanuelle, The Anti-Virgin articulate a repressed homosexual desire. It would appear that in this area the pornographic text is subjected to a marked form of repression – possibly the notion is too threatening to the heterosexual male. However, this is not the case in pornographic literature; the representation of homosexuality is, for instance, central to de Sade's works.

Interestingly, the representation of lesbian sexual desire and activity in pornography – or in those texts that I have seen – is usually explicit; further, it is always made clear that women are able to give each other pleasure and that a woman’s orgasm is not dependant on penetration. This is certainly true of the Emmanuelle trilogy and also of the hard-core pornographic films I have viewed, such as Bottoms Up and Huge Hot Rod in which there exists a curious kind of sexual democracy; everyone does everything to each other – except for male homosexual sex – in the interests of the maximum amount of pleasure for all. Lesbian love-making is not represented in explicit terms in The Story of O, but neither are the heterosexual encounters, in that there are no close-up shots of genitalia or of genital contact. Nevertheless, neither is there any attempt to suggest that lesbian love-making is inferior to heterosexual.

Thus, the question of women’s sexual pleasure is articulated in a variety of ways in The Story of O, but in none of these articulations is feminine pleasure specifically related to the phallus, as claimed by Ellis. Rather a diverse range of sexualities are constructed; the implication is that sexual pleasure for women may be derived from some, or all, of the following: bisexuality, lesbianism, heterosexuality, encounters between the group or the couple, sado-masochistic encounters, oral sex, anal sex, and sexual activities associated with voyeurism. It could be argued that the nature of some of these practices, particularly those concerned with sex and violence, have been constructed and perpetuated by a male ideology and that women living in a non-patriarchal society would never have/construct fantasies related, for instance, to sado-masochistic notions of being taken against one’s will. The problem with this view is that it rests on a notion of an innate feminine sexual desire, (a desire that is
not shaped or constructed by the social), and implies that connections between sexuality, violence and death, at the level of the unconscious, are gender-specific, that is, they pertain only to the fantasy life of men. Lesley Stern expands on this important point in her article:

Phantasy, on the level of the Unconscious, does not make neat distinctions between sex and love, between clean and dirty, between pacifism and aggression. On the more conscious level fantasies might well be mobilized to focus in particular ways, but this is not to say that fantasies about masochism or life-nurturing love have nothing to do with sadism or death (p.38)

*Emmanuelle, The Anti-Virgin* (1975), directed by Francis Giacobetti, also constructs feminine sexual pleasure around a diverse range of experiences. Suffering from unrequited passion for another woman (*Emmanuelle I*), the heroine decides to devote her life to the pursuit of sensuality which mainly involves love-making with men and women in either one-to-one or group situations, although there is an interesting scene in which Emmanuelle has an onanistic fantasy, stimulated by the artistry of an acupuncturist who specializes in sexual pleasure for women. Unlike O, Emmanuelle does not, or is not, shown to derive pleasure from sado-masochistic encounters, rather she is a devotee of free love, interested mainly in the erotic. Again it is made clear that women can give sexual pleasure to each other, that the phallus is not central, and that women can control their own sexuality. The notion of the monogamous couple and romantic love is represented as antithetical to the pursuit of sexual pleasure. Interestingly the final film of the trilogy, *Goodbye Emmanuelle*, works to recuperate Emmanuelle’s image; having fallen in love with a man, she renounces her quest for the erotic and attempts to find a place for herself within the monogamous couple. If the Emmanuelle films are read within the structure of the trilogy, then the final film text works in a way similar to the conventional narrative structures of the classic text — that is the dominant discourse of *Goodbye Emmanuelle* asserts the primacy of romantic love and the monogamous couple in an attempt to reinstate the prevailing moral values of patriarchal ideology and to undermine the relatively subversive elements of the first two *Emmanuelle* films. I am not even sure if *Goodbye Emmanuelle* belongs to the category of soft-porn.

What I am arguing, then, is that in these two soft-porn texts, *The Story of O* and *Emmanuelle, The Anti-Virgin*, women’s sexual pleasure is not represented as being dependent on the male and the ‘gift of the phallus’ and that sexual pleasure for women is shown, not to be commensurate with a fixed sexual identity (i.e., heterosexuality), but rather with a range of sexual practices. Certainly, a male figure is important in both texts: Sir Stephen, to whom O ‘belongs’, but whose function is to signify a captivity fantasy necessary to the actualization of O’s sexual adventures; and Jean, to whom Emmanuelle is married, but who constantly reiterates that Emmanuelle does not ‘belong’ to him, that she is free to make love with whoever she chooses. In what sense, then, might these two texts offer the possibility of pleasure for woman-as-spectator? Here it is important to specify the filmic codes at work in the two texts for it is possible that both texts might present a different
— even radical — construction of female sexuality in relation to image and narrative event, while ordering ways of seeing in terms of the classic split between woman as image and man as bearer of the look.

In order to address this question, it is necessary to consider some of the key ways in which the pornographic text differs from the classic realist mode. Firstly, the pornographic text’s ‘intention to arouse’ requires the representation of a maximum number of sexually explicit images and sexual scenarios which necessarily results in a fragmented narrative, although the degree to which this occurs varies from film to film. Secondly, as Ellis points out in his article on pornography, the narrative structures of the pornographic text tend to be cyclic rather than linear in that there is a constant repetition of scenarios of desire; for instance, in *The Story Of O* the conclusion echoes the film’s beginning as O takes Jacqueline to Roissy and then questions Sir Stephen on his willingness to undergo the trials she endured in order to demonstrate his love for her. Thirdly, strategies to encourage spectator identification with a character(s) who is central to the narrative are fairly rudimentary; such strategies would only tend to cut across the way in which the text works to open up space in which the spectator is free to use the scenarios of desire for his/her own sexual pleasure. Fourthly, the minimal narrative structure and absence of identificatory figures creates a situation in which the organization of suspense becomes virtually impossible — this tends to have a curious effect on those texts modelled on the suspense genre such as *Revenge of the Virgins* and *Vampyres* in which it is impossible to feel any form of sympathy for the male victims who are hunted, mutilated and murdered by their female captors. But fantasy, not sympathy, is the point at issue. Fifthly, because the narrative structures are minimal and there is a marked absence of identificatory structures, the spectator is not sutured into the text in the same way as the spectator is sutured into the classic narrative film. The relationship of the spectator — male and female — to the diegetic world of the pornographic film is markedly different in that in these texts there is a fairly radical separation of viewer and image. The separation refers to what Willemen describes as ‘the look of direct access’ or ‘direct address’, that is, the way in which images of bodies and parts of the body, for instance, close-ups of genitalia and their interactions, are constructed in such a way as to reinforce their status as there to be looked at or designed specifically for ‘my’ look.

In pornography there is no way the viewer can fade into the diegesis or, alternatively, shov[e] the responsibility of the discourse onto the author. The viewer is left squarely facing the image without even a semblance of an alibi justifying his or her presence at the other end of that look. Porn imagery is perhaps the most blatant and uncompromising form of direct address short of physical contact. (p.59)

While I would not agree with Willemen that the look functions as a ‘substitute’ for physical contact, it certainly functions as a ‘look of direct access’ but not solely in relation to ‘close-ups of genitalia and their interactions.’ The viewer is also granted direct access to the scenarios of sexual desire in that he/she is not asked to view these spectacles along the axis of the gaze of the protagonists (male or female) who are represented within the diegetic world of the film text. Mulvey’s argument
about the construction of the ideal male spectator, with whom the viewer is encouraged to identify, does not apply to the pornographic text. The signifying practices of the pornographic text position the spectator so that he/she looks directly at the images/scenarios of sexuality.

The pornographic text avoids spectator-identification with its protagonists, just as it avoids eliciting viewer response through the construction of suspense, so that the viewer is free to construct imaginatively, to fantasize, to find room for his/her responses to the fantasy scenes. This does not mean that structures of identification are totally absent but that their presence is minimal. Here, it is relevant to point out that the activities of fantasizing in the sense of daydreaming and of fantasizing or constructing fantasies in relation to the material presented in a pornographic film are markedly different. In the former situation the fantasy can be freely invoked, the details of the scenario constructed and changed at will whereas in the latter situation the spectator does not construct the scenario, is not the source of origin. However, because of the pornographic text’s ‘intention to arouse’, to play to the spectator’s sexual desires, the spectator must be allowed a space in which to utilize the scenarios of desire - a space which is as necessary to the construction of pleasure for the spectator of the pornographic text as the opposite structure, the absence of such a space, is necessary for the spectator to derive pleasure from the classic narrative text.

The absence of structures of identification and suspense also helps to explain the emotional flatness of the pornographic text, a flatness which does not relate, as opponents of pornography might argue, to pornography’s inhumane attitude to human sexuality, but to this need to construct a space, a gap which gives the spectator the freedom to fantasize, to construct his/her own scenarios of desire, allowing for the fact that the form of these scenarios (for instance, the fantasy of being overpowered) may well be determined by the social construction of the individual. *The Story of O*, for instance, is marked throughout by an emotional flatness - despite the text’s sado-masochistic subject matter - while *Emmanuelle* is characterized by a blandness that arises from the employment of similar filmic structures.

Clearly, the conventions which mark pornographic representations and order ways of seeing differ from those of classic realist text and need to be theorized differently, particularly in relation to the construction of sexual difference within the diegetic world of the pornographic text and in relation to the spectator in the auditorium. In her highly influential article, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey draws attention to the way in which, within the signifying practices of the classic realist text, woman is constructed in terms of image, man as bearer of the look. She argues that the ‘determining male gaze’ is a look of power and possession and as such it has specific implications for the male spectator in the auditorium:

As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look,
both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. (pp.12-13)

But the (male) look, signifying power and pleasure, is constantly threatened:

...in psychoanalytic terms, the female figure poses a deeper problem. She also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure. (p.13)

Mulvey argues that the male unconscious has two means of escape from this castration anxiety; the first associated with voyeurism, the second with fetishism. The latter involves:

complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence over-valuation, the cult of the female star). This second avenue, fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. The first avenue, voyeurism, on the contrary, has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness. (pp.13-14)

Whereas voyeurism implies an acknowledgement of sexual difference in its attempt to punish and/or demystify woman who is located as the object of the male gaze, fetishism disavows castration through its reassuring display of the female star.

As I understand Mulvey's argument, a film text might privilege the fetishistic mode over the voyeuristic (as in the films of Sternberg) or the voyeuristic over the fetishistic (as in the films of Hitchcock) but the two modes can nevertheless co-exist within a film text in that voyeurism fits in well with narrative (making something happen, a battle of wills) while fetishism involves the eroticisation of the sexualised woman (close-up shots of the woman's face/parts of the body) - both which are indispensable elements of the classic narrative text.

Thus, the modes of looking represented in the classic narrative help to construct the problem of sexual difference in relation to castration, that is, the codes of looking, as part of the signifying system of the text, participate in the production of 'woman' as a sign of castration, within the text, around which male desire, the male fear of castration and the possibility of unpleasure are organized. (See Claire Johnston's reading of Double Indemnity and Cook and Johnston's article, The Place of Women In The Cinema Of Raoul Walsh). In contrast with the classic narrative, the look, in the two soft-porn films, The Story Of O and Emmanuelle, The Anti-Virgin, is not constructed as a signifier of sexual difference. Because the 'intention' of the pornographic text is to arouse sexually and offer the possibility of pleasure to the viewer, the look is constructed, not as a signifier of the male fear of castration and the possibility of unpleasure, but rather it signifies the possibility of symmetrical relations between the sexes, particularly in the way in which it works to offer the promise of pleasure associated with the act of looking.

When the look is foregrounded within/by the signifying practices of the text it offers three distinct forms of pleasure. (a) It can signify that the bearer of the look is in a position of power (whether male or female) and that sexual pleasure can be
derived from controlling the look and taking others, engaged in sexual activity, as the objects of the look and as stimulants to the heightening of sexual pleasure. (b) The presence of the voyeuristic look, however, does not signify pleasure simply for the one who controls the look; frequently, it is made clear that those protagonists within the text who are constructed as the object of the look derive a specific kind of pleasure, associated with exhibitionism, from being looked at while they are engaged in sexual activities. In the pornographic text, sexual pleasure is associated directly with both the active (looking at) and the passive (being looked at) modes. (c) The structures of looking can be coded to signify that sexual pleasure may be increased through/by a narcissistic form of looking – hence the protagonists may be represented watching themselves, through mirrors, engaged in sexual activity. In *The Story Of O*, the walls of Roissy are lined with full length mirrors so that O is not only watched but she is able to look at herself being watched by others. In the pornographic text sexuality is displayed and is ‘on display’ for both the spectator in the text and the spectator in the auditorium. The function of the voyeuristic look as an activity of eroticism is emphasized continually within/ by the signifying practices of the text.

The fetishistic look also functions differently in the pornographic text. In her discussion of fetishistic scopophilia, Mulvey argues that the male protagonist can deny castration by ‘the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous.’

In relation to the films of Sternberg, she argues that he produced:

the ultimate fetish, taking it to the point where the powerful look of the male protagonist (characteristic of traditional narrative film) is broken in favour of the image in direct erotic rapport with the spectator. The beauty of the woman as object and the screen space coalesce; she is no longer the bearer of guilt but a perfect product, whose body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator’s look (p.14).

Mulvey’s description of the look of ‘direct erotic rapport’ that is constructed within the classic text fits in well with Willeman’s categorization of the look of ‘direct access’ of the pornographic text. The crucial difference is that the fetishistic look of the classic narrative text seeks to deny castration through a process of substitution whereas the fetishistic look of the pornographic text works to demystify the representation of woman-as-signifier-of-castration through its widespread diffusion of images of female genitalia thus bringing the viewer in direct visual contact with those images.

Willeman initially acknowledges the importance of the way in which the pornographic text grants the viewer ‘direct access to the genitals’ leaving the viewer ‘squarely facing the image without even an alibi justifying his or her presence at the other end of the look’ (p.59) then later undermines his own argument by claiming that the pornographic text constructs a ‘second order’ of fetishism because the depiction of female genitalia must re-launch ‘the need for a disavowal’.

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Obviously, the depiction of genitalia, and especially female genitalia, is liable to provoke this. In the majority of porn images the bodies represented as objects of desire are shown as contained, sheathed in paraphernalia such as boots, stockings, garter belts, leather clothing etc. making them into representatives of the phallus according to the mechanisms lucidly described by Laura Mulvey in her article on the work of Allen Jones (p.59)

It is difficult to see how pornographic imagery can function as ‘the most blatant and uncompromising form of direct address’ in which the viewer is granted ‘direct access to the genitals’ if in the ‘majority of porn images’ the bodies are covered up.

In his article on pornography, John Ellis also has difficulty in theorizing the nature of the fetishistic look in the pornographic film text. Although he acknowledges that some phenomena, such as ‘the massive diffusion of vaginal imagery’ and the emphasis on lesbian activity and female masturbation, ‘cannot be readily accounted for in Mulvey’s terms as they stand’, he then attempts to account for them by suggesting that ‘the fetish offered by these sexual representations...is now the woman’s sexual pleasure.’

Physical sexual difference can be promoted within these representations because the fetish has been shifted from compensating for woman’s lack of a penis to the finding of the woman’s phallus in her sexual pleasure. (p.103)

Ellis’ argument that woman’s sexual pleasure is now the dominant fetish hinges on the fact that her pleasure is always represented as dependent upon the phallus; but as I argued earlier, this is simply not the case, and certainly not true of the two films I have been addressing in this paper.

The reason why the construction of the fetishistic look in the pornographic text has been theorized as problematic by Willemen and Ellis is that they have not distinguished clearly enough between the classic narrative and the pornographic text in relation to the question of sexual difference and the construction of pleasure for the film spectator — or rather they have collapsed the pornographic text into the classic narrative text as if the former were a sub-category of the latter. Mulvey’s article, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, explicitly refers to the construction of pleasure in relation to narrativity, where the possibility of pleasure is dependent upon three crucial factors, none of which are central to the pornographic text: the representation of and split between woman as spectacle and man as bearer of the look; the representation of woman as signifier of lack/castration around which male desire and male pleasure are organized in relation to the Symbolic; and the production of the heterosexual monogamous couple as the only legitimate social/familial/political unit. Before attempting to specify the status of the pornographic text in relation to these factors, I should first like to consider some of the ways in which ways of seeing are organized in the two texts under discussion and the implications of this in relation to the question of pleasure and the female spectator.

The construction of the voyeuristic mode as a signifier of sexual pleasure is foregrounded in the opening scene of The Story Of O. The film has two beginnings — a device whichforegrounds the film as a construction, a signifying practice, and similarly foregrounds the look as construction in its relationship to pleasure. In the first beginning the narrator tells us:
One day O’s lover takes her to a place they had never gone to before — Park Monceau... Park Montsouris... somewhere around there.

In the chauffeur-driven car, Rene prepares O for her introduction to Roissy. He orders her to remove what she is wearing under her dress so that her flesh and the car seat are touching. He tells her she must always keep her legs apart, then with a small knife, he cuts the straps of her bra and removes it. O remains silent throughout. The narrator tells us that O dares not ask questions in case the driver turns around.

In the film’s second beginning the narrator explains that:

Another version of the same beginning has been simpler but more brutal. O had been driven somewhere in a car by a friend of his — unknown to her — and it was his friend the stranger who explained to the young woman that her lover had been instructed to prepare her.

In this version, Rene repeats all of the actions of the first, but in addition he blindfolds O and ties her hands behind her back. In the first version, O enters Roissy alone; here she is led by the two men.

The major difference between the two versions lies in the different ways in which the look is constructed. In the first version, point of view alternates between Rene, the driver and the audience in the theatre. Of the twenty eight shots, O controls point of view in only four, and all of these work to mark out the voyeuristic look of the driver. The first reveals O looking in the direction of the driver’s head as the narrator tells us that O is afraid he might turn around (presumably to look at her) then there is a cut to a shot of the back of his head. The second pair of shots, firstly, reveals O looking again at the driver, then the film cuts to a close-up shot of the driver’s eyes reflected in the rear-vision mirror — we see that he is wearing glasses. The third pair of shots, firstly, reveals O exclaiming as her flesh touches the car seat and then looking in the direction of the driver; next we cut to a shot of the driver as he begins to turn around to look at O. The fourth pair show Rene caressing O’s breasts as O indicates to Rene that the driver is watching. Rene turns to look threateningly at the driver then there is a cut to a second close-up shot of the driver’s eyes reflected in the mirror but this time he looks away. These shots, in which there is an interchange of looks between O, Rene and the driver function as a master shot and are intercut with shots of Rene preparing O for Roissy while subjecting O to his look of desire — a look which the driver attempts to appropriate.

In the second version of the beginning, the drama unfolds directly before the ‘look’ of the camera/audience. This time the camera moves outside the car and reveals the action to us through the windscreen for a major part of the scene. Shots of the driver (a different driver who does not wear glasses) looking at Rene and O are also filmed through the windscreen but this time the driver’s eyes are completely blocked out by the rear-vision mirror which has the effect of marking his gaze as both present and absent and helps to effect the transition by which the audience comes to control point of view. Before Rene begins to undress O, he blindfolds
her with a black scarf so that she cannot see where she is going or whether or not the driver is looking at her. The black shape of the rear-vision mirror covering the driver’s eyes is similar to the black mask across O’s eyes; this masking device draws attention to the notion of the hidden voyeuristic gaze (the driver) and the practice of controlling/denying the look (O) and the place of this in the construction of sexual fantasies. When at Roissy, O is told she must never look a man in the face but there are also times when she is permitted to look at herself, through mirrors, engaged in sexual activities. In the shots of Rene and O taken from inside the car, the camera is positioned above the couple so that the look, once again, is not controlled by any of the characters.

From this point on, the majority of the scenes in The Story Of O, unfold as if they were occurring directly in front of the spectator in the auditorium. There is no dominant male or female protagonist who controls the look although there are scenes, similar to the opening scene, in which the look of various characters (male and female) is foregrounded in relationship to the inter-connection between sexuality, voyeurism and pleasure. The most notable of these occur during the scenes in which O resumes her work as a fashion photographer and we watch her taking photographs of her female models — in particular Jacqueline — in such a way that it is clear that O derives pleasure from controlling Jacqueline from behind her camera lens and that Jacqueline also derives pleasure from playing up to O’s look of desire. O also controls point of view in the seduction scenes of Jacqueline and also in the final scenes where she burns the initials of her name onto Sir Stephen’s hand. Throughout the film, it is clear that point of view is attached to the protagonist in the position of power, thus the controlling look is attached to the notion of power in relation to sexual pleasure and not to a construction of sexuality based on sexual difference. There is even one particularly interesting scene at Roissy where O refuses the entreaties of one of the men to look at him, thus denying him the pleasure of her look. In this situation, withholding the look places the protagonist in the position of power usually conferred on the one who controls the look.

In Emmanuelle, The Anti-Virgin, there is greater emphasis on scenes of erotic love-making with close-up shots of sexual activity and images of parts of the body held in direct erotic rapport with the gaze of the spectator in the auditorium. Willems’ notion of the look of direct access or ‘direct address’ is more applicable to Emmanuelle. In comparison with O, the female protagonist of Emmanuelle initiates the majority of sexual encounters with both men and women but because the film is not concerned with the sexual fantasy of being taken against one’s will, but rather with the free pursuit of sexual pleasure, the look is rarely associated with notions of power and pleasure for either the male or female protagonists. However, the connections between looking and sexual pleasure are still foregrounded within the film text. The relationship of both the voyeuristic and fetishistic look to sexual pleasure is emphasized in the scene with the black ballet instructor.

Here, Emmanuelle looks through a kind of What The Butler Saw moviola in the studio of a ballet teacher. What Emmanuelle sees is an animated line drawing of a woman dressed in a white outfit similar to her own and bending over just as she is bending over — the only difference is that the cartoon woman’s hands and feet
are tied to stakes in the ground. The cartoon woman smiles pleasurabley and seductive music plays as the figure of a dark woman wearing only long black gloves and long black boots, a large penis strapped around her waist, enters from the left of the frame and begins to penetrate the cartoon woman from behind. Meanwhile the ballet teacher has entered the room; he and Emmanuelle exchange glances, then Emmanuelle looks again at the peep show. Next, a male cartoon figure enters from the left, offering his dildo-like penis to the mouth of the captive woman who continues to smile with pleasure. Then, in the best Disney-land style all three figures sway back and forth to the rhythm of sexual activity, smiling as the music plays on. This sequence is intercut with close-up shots of Emmanuelle’s eye, opening and closing slowly to suggest she has entered a state of fantasy-dreaming, while the ballet dancer stands beside her caressing her genitals and breasts until she attains orgasm. Female voyeurism and female sexual pleasure are linked to a fantasy of bi-sexual penetration, which is accompanied in the diegetic world of the film by a representation of pleasure dependent, not on phallic penetration, although this is used as a stimulus to fantasy, but on the caress.

Mulvey’s account of fetishistic modes of representation is relevant to these two films in that the structure of the narratives is cyclic rather than linear and there is a repetition of images of the body fragmented by close-ups and represented in direct erotic rapport with the spectator. However, in many pornographic texts these are vaginal images and as such they do not work to deny castration – an essential factor in Mulvey’s account of the fetishistic look. I have already discussed the way in which the fetishistic look is constructed in many pornographic texts and the way in which it works to de-mystify the representation of woman as a signifier of castration. It is also interesting to note that in these two films there is also some attempt to ‘play’ with the notion of castration and fetishization. For instance in Emmanuelle, the cartoon woman is displayed with a large penis and in another scene parts of the naked body of a male polo player, which is covered completely with tattooed figures, are fetishized in a series of close-up shots represented as the object of Emmanuelle’s look. This scene raises the possibility of a female fetishistic gaze in relation to the question of sexual pleasure which would be difficult – if not impossible – to conceptualize in relation to fetishism as a disavowal of woman’s lack of penis. In The Story Of O, we see O’s naked body with the rings attached to her labia – a mark of fetishization which foregrounds the image of female genitalia rather than working to deny woman’s lack of a penis by the substitution of a fetish object.

Thus, I would argue that in these two films, the voyeuristic and fetishistic modes of looking are constructed in ways that differ markedly from their representation in the classic narrative and that, in these two texts, the difference is related to and can be explained by the notion of pleasure for the female protagonists of the films. Not only does the female protagonist occupy the centre of the narrative arena, but there are instances in which she controls the look in relation to both male and female characters in contexts in which looking is not associated with the male fear/dilemma of castration but is coded within the texts to suggest that the act of looking can intensify sexual pleasure for the protagonist in the diegesis and, by implication, the spectator in the auditorium.
As I have argued, the absence of a controlling male (and female) look as central to the narrative structures of these two texts also helps to construct a space which allows the spectator (male or female) the freedom to use the erotic scenarios as material for his/her sexual fantasies. In this context, the texts foreground the look of direct access as a basis for the activity of fantasizing. There is also the possibility that the female spectator may identify not only with the look of the female protagonist but also with the look of the male protagonist in those scenes in which a point of view is constructed. Mulvey addresses this possibility in her article, *Duel In The Sun*,\(^{18}\) in which she suggests that the female protagonist may:

find herself secretly, unconsciously almost, enjoying the freedom of action and control over the diegetic world that identification with a hero provides (p.12).

Mulvey argues that such pleasure may be open to the female spectator who has never fully succumbed to the repression of her active or phallic desires. She refers to Freud’s work on the pre-Oedipal phase for women:

I will only emphasise here that the development of femininity remains exposed to disturbances by the residual phenomena of the early masculine period. Regression to the pre-Oedipus phase very frequently occurs; in the course of some women’s lives there is repeated alternation between periods in which femininity or masculinity gain the upper hand.

Mulvey argues that the female spectator may derive pleasure not only from identifying with the male look but also from identifying with a female protagonist — such as Pearl in *Duel In The Sun* — who is unable to take up the so-called correct feminine position and achieve a stable sexual, that is feminine, identity — the issue at stake in the women’s melodrama. I would argue, in relation to both *The Story Of O* and *Emmanuelle*, that pleasure for the female spectator is clearly related to the fact that feminine pleasure, as represented within the texts, is not related to a notion of a fixed sexual identity for women but rather to the possibility of a multiplicity of sexual desires and identities for the female protagonists.

This leads me to the final point, raised earlier in the paper, of the status of the pornographic text in relation to the classic narrative and its foregrounding of the Symbolic order. Given that the classic text signifies a patriarchal order founded on castration, and the impossibility of permitting any form of libidinal satisfaction that cannot be contained within the Symbolic order and the structure of familial relations, then it seems clear that the pornographic text is attempting to explore the range of sexualities possible before entry into the Symbolic, the heterogeneity which must be repressed to allow the order to structure itself and to exist as an order. In her article, *Signifying Practice and Mode of Production*,\(^{19}\) Kristeva stresses the crucial importance of this process:

The family ensures unity in the face of the process of drives and of pleasure-overflow. This unity, of state and family, is achieved at the price of a murder and a sacrifice — that of the *soma*, the drive and the process (p.65)
While it could be argued that film noir traces the precariousness of the patriarchal order and its internal contradictions — although the patriarchal Symbolic is usually reinstated at the close of the narratives — it would seem that pornography explores the range of sexualities possible before entry into the Symbolic with the latter’s legitimation of the heterosexual couple and sex for procreation as the only acceptable forms of sexual expression. If so, then this would suggest a connection between the Imaginary and sexual pleasure for women (and men?) — an important connection in relation to women that Mulvey acknowledges in her discussion of pleasure and the female spectator (*Duel In The Sun*) but which she seems to regard, from the Freudian viewpoint, as signifying a regressive step for women.

The relationship of pornography to the Imaginary is foregrounded in the endings of both *The Story Of O* and *Emmanuelle, The Anti-Virgin* in that the female protagonists are represented in control of the look, a look which in both films is clearly one of transgression of the Law of the Father. As mentioned, O looks up enigmatically as she brands Sir Stephen with her mark, the letter O, which not only signifies the letter of her first name but also signifies what Susan Sontag describes as ‘a cartoon of her sex, not her individual sex but simply woman’. Until this point, Sir Stephen has signified the representative of the Law, that is the law of Roissy; the ending suggests not only that O might desire to take his place but that — unlike the film noir heroine — she is able to take his place in that she has already taken up the active male position through her freedom to speak her own sexual desires and her control of her own sexuality — a freedom she has won through her rejection of patriarchal law and those forms of sexual desire permitted within the Symbolic order.

At the close of *Emmanuelle*, the heroine firstly gazes at the naked bodies of her husband and Anne-Marie, with whom she herself has been making love, then she turns her look of erotic desire directly at the audience in the theatre. Unlike the Jane Russell figure in *The Revolt Of Mamie Stover* (see the article by Cook and Johnston) Emmanuelle is not punished for her look of desire, a look that signifies that she controls her own sexuality and her own sexual desire. In an earlier scene, she verbally attacks her husband’s friend, Christopher, not only for paying for prostitutes with casino chips but also for attempting to control her. ‘Too late, Christopher,’ she says, ‘there was a time when I wanted you but I make love when I want and with whom I want.’ In contrast with the conventional ending of the classic narrative text, the endings of these two soft-porn films do not work to construct a viewing subject who thinks him/herself to be a harmonious, consistent entity through the employment of the conventional resolution/ending in which everything is finally clarified and put into place in relation to values consistent with the Symbolic order. Rather, the endings of these two films work to undermine the Symbolic in their validation of female sexual pleasure as not commensurate with a fixed feminine sexual identity but rather with a range of sexual identities and practices.

The relationship of the pornographic text to the Imaginary may also help to explain its popularity. Although the narrative structures of these two pornographic films are minimal, they nevertheless do organize and structure the material
so that there is a progression of events, even if the structures are cyclic rather than linear and pivot around the constant repetition of scenarios of desire. In this sense the status of the pornographic text as sexual fantasy is similar to the nature of fantasy as a conscious imagining or daydream in that both lend themselves to a certain degree of scripting and organization but the pornographic text differs from the daydream in that the latter does not necessarily bear any logical relation to everyday life. But although sexual desire, as articulated in the sexual scenarios of the pornographic text, is represented as 'belonging' to the real, it is a reality which remains forever elusive, forever out of reach. In this sense, the text appeals to the viewer's desire to bridge the gap between the ever-hoped for but never realized enactment of the fantasy in the real.

In his article on pornography, Willemen\textsuperscript{22} argues that:

\[\ldots\text{it is the loss generated by the friction between phantasy looked for and the phantasy offered which sustains the desire for the ever-promised, never found gratification, the hope of finding the representation which would coincide point for point with the phantasy evoked. (p.61)}\]

I would place the emphasis differently. I would argue that what is crucial is not 'the loss generated by the friction between the phantasy looked for and the phantasy offered' but rather that the viewer's desire is sustained by the promise of the actualization of the fantasy in the real, of the unification of the Imaginary and the Real and the subsequent denial of the Symbolic, the denial of difference. In \textit{The Story Of O} and \textit{Emmanuelle}, \textit{The Anti-Virgin} pleasure for the female spectator is articulated in terms of the possibility of the actualization of a fantasy of feminine sexual pleasure enacted in the real.

In this paper, I have argued that these two films pose the possibility of sexual pleasure for women by privileging a 'feminine' voice. The areas through which the feminine voice is articulated include relations of looking, the 'openness' of the narrative structures, the representation of a diverse range of sexualities for women, and the interrogation of the notion of the male phallus as the condition and limit of feminine sexual pleasure. It is important to specify the codes and conventions by which sexual desire and ways of seeing are constructed within the pornographic film, not because the text necessarily signifies a 'radical' view of feminine sexual desire (many texts clearly do signify a patriarchal discourse about feminine sexuality) but rather because the differences between the codes and conventions of the pornographic film and the classic narrative text open up a space in which it is possible to glimpse new ways of articulating sexual desire for women and representing a diverse range of sexualities for women, all of which work to undermine the notion of a fixed feminine sexual identity as it has been constructed within the signifying practices of the classic narrative. When Juliet Mitchell was asked recently, at a talk she gave at Melbourne University, by a male member of the audience: 'What Do Women Want?', she relied, 'I think that women simply want to be allowed to want.'
Notes

3. The term, 'fantasy', in its everyday sense (a conscious imagining, daydream, reverie) differs from 'phantasy' which has a more specialized psychoanalytical meaning, defined in The Language of Psychoanalysis (London, Hogarth Press, 1972) by Laplanche and Pontalis as 'an imaginary scene...representing the fulfilment of a wish (desir) in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser degree by defensive processes.' (p.314) This does not mean, of course, that conscious fantasy and phantasy as it relates to the unconscious are unrelated; clearly, the fantasy or daydream may include, even be based on, elements of phantasy. Except where I am referring to the unconscious, I have chosen to use the term 'fantasy' as a discussion of phantasy in its more specialized sense and its relationship to the pornographic text is outside the scope of this article.
4. Ellis, op. cit., pp.103–4
5. Ibid, p.104
10. Ellis, op. cit.
17. Ellis, op. cit.
22. Willemen, P. op. cit.