



sider the placing of feminism in relation to peace and ecological movements, p. 248f). Third, and this is an extraordinary charge, given at who it is directed, that a profound weakness of the book turns around the discussions of cultural production (pp. 128-152; 177-199), but it is true for me. It is within that discussion that the one moment of rancour occurs. What is being condensed in the following happens to include - as a kind of ill-tempered concordance - a refusal of a profound character: "There is also a pseudo-radical practice, in which the negative structures of post-modernist art are attached to a nominal revolutionary or liberationist radicalism, though all they can do in the end is undermine this, turning it back to the confusions of late-bourgeois subjectivism." The next page speaks of "the reduced and distorted shapes of the modernist and post-modernist representations." (This is not a new theme, see also *Politics and Letters*, passingly, and his brief mentions of "late bourgeois modernism" and "a derisive vanguardism", *New Society*, 5 January 1984 p. 18). This I cannot take to be either principled or serious. It slams the door on too much which I hold precious as political resources. All that work which has shown resoundingly how things and people could be different by exposing the signified, represented nature of the world against naturalisms, or religious and secular Doxa, from the montage of Eisenstein, through the staging of Brecht, to the dancing, musical, festive, humorous politics of popular cultural forms. Socialist modernism - a project always in the making - is a serious, principled negation and an exuberant, affirmatory "festival of the oppressed".

Do I make too much of a few sentences? Yes and no. No, because it was Raymond Williams who taught me (and thousands of others) that art, literature, criticism are terms of anti-socialist specialisation and bourgeois control. No, because the glaring absence of this book is education taken in its widest meaning, to which Williams again (and in the same *Long Revolution*) directed our attention. Yes, finally, and in the end I affirm clearly, because in times of massive distraction, pain, despair and worse, we need a calm consideration, a reminding and remembering that socialism requires *mutual and co-operative social practices* (as distinct from the dominant bourgeois idea of individual practice, p. 167).

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The Sexual Fix by Stephen Heath (New York, Schocken, 1984)

The Sexual Fix is a strange work which gets curiously and curiously you re-read it. Even though it is clearly, even to the only half-awake reader, an adaptation of Michel Foucault's mischievously inspired speculations about sexuality, the man himself is never once mentioned. He is the ghost at the banquet. But he is a ghost with a pervasive power, for the second withering thing about the book is its scepticism, not to say hostility, towards Freud and all his works, which is similar to Foucault's critique of psychoanalysis. Freud, it seems, was both the discoverer of the subversive workings of desire and its arch re-codifier.

Now Stephen Heath was one of those enthusiasts in the mid-1970s who in the pages of the theoretical journal *Screen* and elsewhere enjoined us to address ourselves to the insights of Lacan's 'recovery' of Freud. Lacan has since died, however, and so apparently has much of the enthusiasm for this cause. Since Heath's book first appeared Foucault has departed the scene, I doubt if we shall have to wait very long the likely crumbling of his legacy.

There is of course nothing wrong in people changing their mind, but what is strange is that Heath's apostasy is another silence in the book. So though patently *The Sexual Fix* offers us an excursion into sexual theory, the two thinkers who have been most central to our recent thinking about the sexual, Freud and Foucault, are either minimized in the book, or ignored. Is this how all great thinkers fall; not with an uproar but with silence and a yawn?

If you can forget all that, Heath's book does offer a lively account of the overhauling significance assigned to the sexual over the past two hundred years, a significance which fixes us into our sexuality, which sees the human and sexual as identical, and which searches for the truth of our being in sex. These themes are illustrated through wide-ranging and intelligent discussions of a variety of writers, from 19th century sexual writers, through Freud and Lawrence, to modern pornographers. No one could doubt Heath's liveliness of mind or sensitivity to cultural phenomena, but I for one was left with a deep sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction.

As I have suggested, Foucault said much of this some years ago, and a number of recent (especially feminist) historians have explored, sometimes substantiating, sometimes challenging, his arguments. Peter Gay's recent odyssey into the 'bourgeois experience'¹, despite its conceptual inadequacies, has at least exhaustively padded out our knowledge of the contradictions of our moral codes, simultaneously inciting sexuality and tightly regulating it. What we urgently need is a sharper debate on the implications, for theory and political practice, of the main argument of Foucault and his supporters: that 'sexuality' is an historical apparatus that is deeply implicated in the play of power.

1. Peter Gay: *The bourgeois experience: Victoria to Freud*. Volume 1, Education of the senses. New York, London, Oxford U.P., 1984 (reviewed by J. Weeks, *The Body Politic*, No.104, July 1984).

Several issues immediately come to mind. Firstly, if sexuality is an historical construction, what weight are we to ascribe to its effects. Stephen Heath argues that: "Sexuality is without the importance ascribed to it in our contemporary society (Western capitalism); it is without that importance because it does not exist as such, because there is no such thing as sexuality." There is a strange non sequitur here. We may agree that sexuality should not have the importance assigned to it in Western culture, but the importance is that a contemporary construction of reality exists; it inflects our individual and collective responses, it shapes social policy, moral agitation and scientific intervention. There is such a thing as sexuality in our culture because the belief in its importance is inscribed in a vast array of social institutions. It cannot simply be wished away as a will o'the wisp. Sexuality is a material force. We may challenge its hegemony, rail against its power, opt out of its incessant claims. But we cannot forget it, ignore it, or pretend it does not exist.

Secondly, if sexuality is an apparatus of power, what are the best ways of challenging it? In particular, what is the place of the radical sexual movements and the call of sexual freedom against it? 'Sexual liberation' is complicit with the forms of power because it derives its term and form from it. We can all now readily concede that there was something profoundly authoritarian about the identification of quantitative sex with qualitative change in the 'era of permissiveness'. At the same time, as we all know, there is genuine sexual antagonism and female subordination, continuing oppression of minority sexual tastes and real personal misery. The New Right can pass over these in its pursuit of an apple pie authoritarianism. How can the Left oppose the appropriation of the sexual question by the Right if it denies the need for sexual freedom? To challenge the simple, essentialist alternatives of repression versus liberation is not the same as denying the need to find concrete steps towards achieving sexual change.

Thirdly, if sexuality is historically constructed, and not a good in itself, if it does not carry its own truth, what criteria are we to use in distinguishing between different manifestations of sexual desire; not only heterosexuality and homosexuality, but paedophilia, s-m, pornography . . . and incest, coprophilia, fetishism . . . and rape, necrophilia and so on. In a culture where there are genuine differences of value and political commitment, as well as cynical manipulation of prejudice, who is to decide what constitutes appropriate behaviour? Foucault's work radically breaks the connection between analysis and ethics, so that there can be no direct reading off of political positions from any history of sexuality. This makes it all the more incumbent on us to develop political positions which can cope with the diversity of desires and the pluralism of choice that face us as plural - and political - subjects.

I know many feminists and socialists who believe that blanket hysteria against pornography ignores the absolute necessity to make distinctions in discussing sexuality

Heath's own solution, unfortunately, is to adopt what seems surprisingly like a conventional moralist posture, with a touch of contemporary radical feminism thrown in for modernity. At one point in his concluding dialogue with himself he weighs in with a heavy moralistic tone to suggest that no socialist could possibly support pornography. Perhaps not, but I know many feminists and socialists who believe that blanket hysteria against pornography ignores the absolute necessity to make distinctions in discussing sexuality. The same point could be made with reference to the almost equally heated questions of the mid-80s concerning intergenerational sex and the sexual ritualization of power in s-m. Contemporary sexual politics is still dominated by a morality of acts. We need to move towards a politics concerned with the quality of relationships within which real, if subtle, distinctions can be properly made. These are crucial issues which a book on 'the sexual fix' should seek to deal with. Heath moves from theoretical deconstruction to sexual conservatism with scarcely a glancing look at the dilemmas confronting sexual radicalism today. The result, inevitably, is a disappointment.

Jeffrey Week's last book was *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London, Longman, 1981)