

1.

Last Friday I went to see a film called "Not A Love Story". It is billed as a "film about pornography", which it isn't of course. It's a film presenting a certain very definite view about porn. Before I went, I noted my prejudice that it was a film saying that pornography was something that men, who are exploitative, dominating and bad, do to women, who are victimised, suffering and good. I wanted to be careful about this, but that's exactly the kind of film I saw.

The line of argument recalls those films where some careleess innocent at a party ~~accepts~~ their first marijuana cigarette and soon ~~ends~~ up as a depraved heroin addict dying a horrible death. "Not a Love Story" shows how you start off looking at tits-and-bum strip shows and end up with violence and mutilation. There was even a (male) psychologist who stated this quite explicitly (the academic expert, see); he said you get satiated with one "level" and have to "move on".

The unstated thesis of the film seemed to be that there was an inherent badness in men that made them susceptible to the depravations of pornography and that the women who participated were either victims or misguided and if they thought they were ever having a good time they just weren't liberated enough to realize that the men who liked looking at them actually wanted to carve them up.

There were quite a few references to an important difference between pornography and erotica but there was nothing to show us what this lovely and acceptable thing called erotica actually is. Makes you think about the eye of the beholder. We were being shown a world where anything sexually explicit is porn -

i.e. male, and bad. The women presenting this point of view were unconcerned with personal appearance and had tears in their eyes and anger in their souls. The film offers a progressive view of a stripper, first seen evidently enjoying herself in a terrific, sexy, witty strip act, to finally wearing overalls on her body, tears in her eyes and anger in her soul, having realized that as a life in porn can be hell for some she must have been wrong to have fun that way.

There is a curious scene where a mother is carrying on about the magazines in the shop where she goes with her kids and, shock, horror, the kids see them and ask what they are. It seems she doesn't know how to tell them, and that somehow this is the fault of the magazines. Her kids shouldn't know that porn exists and that some people like it, so suddenly we have a case for censorship. As I believe that any censorship is worse than any pornography, this currently popular direction in feminist criticism is distasteful to say the least. There is no doubt that the sadism and mutilations we were shown near the end of "Not A Love Story" - (the marvellously skilful manipulation of the film's structure had plenty of people in the audience believing they were watching a natural progression from the strip shows, and my companion was crying) - the violence was horrible and shocking. Still, the talk was of stopping all of that by force. Sounds like fighting for peace, or fucking for virginity. (Interestingly, all the porn sadism was hetero, which conveniently ignored the huge amount of gay men's porn and the fashion in ^{gay} S&M practices.)

It was all the talk of how we were going to stop all this that convinced me that "Not A Love Story" is the worst argument against pornography I have seen. A countering example which is inspiring is the best argument for anything; why look as joyless and loveless as what you're supposedly against? What about compassion? What about acknowledgement of how much pain you'd have to be in to be into pain?

Inez Baranoff

6 July 82