

Diane RAYMOND (ed.), *Sexual Politics and Popular Culture*
(Ohio, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990, 249
p., ISBN: 0-87972-502-8)

Fiona Green

Volume 15, Number 1, 1993

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082555ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1082555ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Green, F. (1993). Review of [Diane RAYMOND (ed.), *Sexual Politics and Popular Culture* (Ohio, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990, 249 p., ISBN: 0-87972-502-8)]. *Ethnologies*, 15(1), 162–164. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1082555ar>

up on interesting and valid points introduced at the start of each chapter, e.g. the relationship between fairy lore and tales of extraterrestrial encounters. More problematic, however, is the apparent ignorance Rieti betrays about certain folklore scholarship. For example, she claims that there has been relatively little work done concerning relationships among narrative performance, audience influence, and context; hence she does not cite or even seem aware of the publications on precisely that topic by Dell Hymes, Richard Bauman, or even by Gillian Bennett, whose book is cited in the bibliography.

In sum, I found myself increasingly frustrated by the failure of Rieti to present an even and coherent narrative or analysis. Although excerpts of this publication could be well-employed for classroom discussion of narrative style, I do not recommend the book as a whole for undergraduate or graduate courses. Barbara Rieti is undeniably responsible for her own work, but the editors of this volume did her and the discipline a disservice by not demanding that she present her valuable research in a more usable form. As it stands, this material would have been better issued as an annotated collection of fairy lore narratives with an introductory chapter on the fieldwork and a concluding chapter on the possible contextual meanings of the beliefs and narratives to those who espouse them.

Rachelle H. SALTZMAN
Delaware County Historical Association
Delhi, NY

Diane RAYMOND (ed.), *Sexual Politics and Popular Culture*
(Ohio, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990,
249 p., ISBN: 0-87972-502-8).

This is a collection of nineteen articles on popular culture by authors concerned with uncovering/dis-covering power and sexual politics in the United States. All but one are original to this collection. Advertising, popular music, stand-up comedy, literature, film, soap opera, situation comedy and music videos are the forms of popular culture used to address sexual politics.

The essays are organised along five "themes" rather than according to their specific "medium". The editor, Diane Raymond, admits there is no distinctive methodological perspective uniting the essays. In fact, "the volume's organisational framework is, to some extent arbitrary" (p. ii).

Section one, Theoretical Perspectives, contains four essays. "The Politics of 'Meaning-Making': Feminist Hermeneutics, Language, and Culture" by

Nancy M. Theriot is a "useful methodological perspective for culture studies in general" (p. 3). Cynthia Willett draws on Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* to study a group of Hollywood screw-ball comedies from the 1930's and 1940's that serves as a practical moral education to the conditions of happiness for their audience. Ray Pratt examines how women have been silenced in the popular music industry. He convincingly argues that to give "women a position of genuine equality in popular music becomes inevitably a demand for social autonomy of women generally" (p. 35). In "Kate Clinton: The Production and Reception of Feminist Humour", Cheryl Kader argues that a lesbian perspective deconstructs and contests the social relations of "heteropatriarchy".

The section Desire and Sexuality begins with Paul Gripp's discussion of the structure and content of typical girl groups of the 1960's in "Party Lights: Utopic Desire and the Girl Group Sound". Sandra Y. Govan's "Illicit Sex in Black American Literature" destroys the misconception that Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor are the first Black writers to publicly present or disclose "sexual deviancy, sexual promiscuity, illicit sexual activity, or violent and unlicensed sexual misconduct within Black American communities" (p. 68). Suzanna Danuta Walters successfully argues that using a sensitised method of analysis assists in understanding Ann Bannon's lesbian pulp in "As Her Hand Crept Slowly Up Her Thigh". Linda Singer argues that *Fatal Attraction* is liked because the film draws upon and manages the anxieties induced by contemporary sexual conditions. As well, it uses feminist backlash to create forms of pleasure in danger for the audience. Diane M. Calhoun-French discusses the use of contemporary social issues, particularly AIDS, in *All My Children* to increase viewer awareness and understanding.

The articles in the third section, Sexuality and The Family, would be placed better elsewhere. Minabere Ibelema's brilliant uncovering and analysis of a definite pattern television situation comedies use in episodes on African or racial identity would fit under the heading Theoretical Perspectives. Diane Raymond's article on images of mothering would suit the fourth section: Sexuality and Images of Women.

The first article in this section is by Judith Bryant Wittenberg and Robert Gooding-Williams: "The 'Strange World' of *Blue Velvet*: Conventions, Subversions, and the Representation of Women". This in-depth and thought-provoking work would be better placed in the first section. "Humour and Gender in Feminist Music Videos" by Robin Roberts adds lightness to the volume and is placed well after Gail E. Burns and Melinda Kanner's excellent analysis of the construction of women in Steven King's films. The fourth article, by Melinda Kanner, shows how images of alcoholic women have remained constant over time, even as social and medical conceptions of alcoholism have changed. Kerry Shea discusses the various roles of women in "Return of the Planet of the Apes, or What is a Woman?: Science and Gender in *Probe*."

The final section is Sexuality and Politics. "*Platoon* and the Failure of War" by Bat-Ami Bar On argues that *Platoon* valorises and edifies war, as well as presenting men and violence as generative. The article by Timothy W. Luke does not belong in this collection; "Xmas Ideology: Unwrapping the American Welfare State Under the Christmas Tree" focuses on the ideology of consumerism and the nuclear family, not sexuality. Douglas Kellner deals effectively with the contest between liberal and conservative sexual politics in the 1980's in "Sexual Politics in the 1980's *Terms of Endearment* and *Independence Day*".

This collection is interesting, clearly written, easy to read and free of jargon, as promised in the preface. I enjoyed most of the articles and I am impressed with the inclusion of work concerning lesbians and Black/African American women, as well as feminist analysis. I am, however, concerned that the majority of essays discuss a narrow range of sexual possibilities: i.e., female sexuality. Raymond states that "[our] bodies are capable of a range of sexual practices and sexual pleasures, none of which are 'natural' or 'essential'" (p. i). However, the limited number of articles focusing on male (hetero)sexuality and the omission of discussions of gay sexuality in this collection leaves a void in the an area that needs to be addressed when considering power and sexual politics. The editor hopes the differences among the essays will stimulate further discussion of the themes presented; I agree.

Fiona GREEN
University of Winnipeg
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Chandra MUKERJI and Michael SCHUDSON (eds.), *Rethinking Popular Culture* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991, 501 p., ISBN 0-520-06892-0).

Rethinking Popular Culture is more than a collection of nineteen essays on the topic of popular culture; it is an attempt to articulate a new area of study and at the same time to rediscover its roots. These are its strength and weakness.

Mukerji and Schudson present to the field of cultural studies a well thought out and researched volume. The book is in two parts: a lengthy introduction by the editors, and articles organised under four headings — popular culture in history, anthropology, sociology and literature. Since *Rethinking Popular Culture* is to be used as a classroom text (I assume at an advanced level), the