

THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE AND THE SALE OF SEX

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid spread of HIV infection in Thailand has resulted, in the space of a few years, in dramatic changes: a shift from official denial to acceptance and concern with the spread of infection nation-wide (Bamber, Hewison and Underwood, 1993); the introduction of the 'condom only' law for commercial sex establishments, introduced in 1991, to reduce transmission within brothels (Weniger et al., 1991); and the development of NGO projects to provide health education to reduce risk behaviors in the general population and employment opportunities to young women who might otherwise work as prostitutes. Parallel to these public health initiatives in response to the HIV epidemic, there has been a mushrooming of research projects concerned with the epidemiology of HIV in Thailand, with social risk factors of infection, KAP surveys, and the feasibility of interventions of which the acceptance and use of condoms has been the most predictable (Ford and Koetsawang, 1991; Na Bangchang, 1991; Pongswatanakulsiri, 1991; Sittitrai et al., 1991; Thanprasertsuk and Pimyothamakom, 1991; AIDSCAP, 1992; Havanon et al., 1992; Muecke, 1992).

Although HIV infection can no longer be regarded as a health problem of sex workers only or primarily, public attention has continued to focus on this group, both as the major vectors and victims of the virus. Such attention to the sex industry and its workers has an historical basis, given a long history of the representation of Thailand as a "paradise for Western males" (Bamber, Hewison and Underwood, 1993, pp.151-2). As a consequence, there is a sizeable literature on prostitution by Thai and other social science researchers, novelists and journalists, which clearly articulate the political economy of prostitution in Thailand (Cohen, 1982; Hewison, 1985; DaGrossa, 1988; Khin Thitsa, 1980; Muecke, 1984, 1992; Truong, 1990) and which emphasize women's agency in the industry (Pasuk, 1982; Sukanya, 1983, 1984, 1988).³ Even so, within Thailand and in western commentary, the popular emphasis has been upon the 'innocents' of this industry: young children and only slightly older virgins, sold by desparately poor parents to the brothel keepers of Bangkok and Pattaya, lured to the cities by the false promises of employment in the service sector by pimps and procurers; destitute orphaned boys and girls with no options other than to sell their bodies on a market that is represented as being dependent upon and essential to the tourist industry (see, for example, Foreign Correspondent, 1993; Kempton, 1992; Cater 1993).

Such dramatic representations of prostitution and the associated sex industry are repeated in the print and electronic media in Thailand and overseas. These journalistic texts carry a common argument. Extreme poverty forces parents to surrender their children to prostitution; foreign tourists sustain the demand for commercial sex with very young girls and boys; the Thai economy is dependent upon tourism; the government is not prepared to restrict or control prostitution for this reason and is unable to redress the economic and political problems which have resulted in rural poverty. The circle is complete.

Descriptions and analyses of the sex industry in Thailand have had much to say about prostitution as an institution, although with remarkably little variation over the past decade and with little to say about sex despite its depiction in film documentaries and documentary dramas (e.g. O'Rourke, 1991; Manderson, 1993). In an article on public sex performance (Manderson, 1992), I chose to focus on the sex acts in the bars of Patpong to examine the subjectification of women and women's resistance to this through the choreographies of pornographic dance, tricks and staged couplings. From this perspective, I then sought to link both specific acts and the institutions of the sex industry to Thai cultural practices, images, structures, and understandings of sexuality, maleness and femaleness. The impetus for the direction of that paper was, to me, the unsatisfactory proposition that the scope and forms of Thailand's sex industry were 'because of' US R and R or subsequent sex tourism. All evidence points to the long antecedent history of prostitution and its prevalence indigenously as well as within its entrepots (Embree, 1950; Turton, 1982; Bamber, Hewison and Underwood, 1993), and to the fact that whenever prostitution is discussed, particularly in the context of regulation, prohibition or control, its incidence is always represented as increasing - as was the case during the 1960s, with R and R, when the influx of American troops changed the social geography of the sex industry possibly more than the incidence of prostitution.

Yet having argued the case in this former paper for women's agency and the cultural locus of sex work, it remains true that the most flamboyant and excessive aspects of the sex industry are in tourist centers such as Patpong (in Bangkok), Pattaya, Hat Yai and Chiang Mai; and that many Japanese, northern European, American, and Australian men do travel to Thailand precisely for commercial sex. For countries such as Australia, in recognition of this fact, the primary issue has been an unsurprising self-interested concern that nationals might become infected with HIV by Thai prostitutes, and that they would then spread infection at home. In this context, sex tourism has gained increasing attention, although how this is defined and who is included in any discussion of it is usually unclear, as are the health (as opposed to moral and ethical) issues implicated by its promotion and practice.

Sex tourism is the 'pursuit of pleasure' of the title of this paper. The sale of sex refers to its marketing,

commodification and representation, not to its purchase. The sex that is sold is not only prostitution but also film, theatre, other forms of performance, and paintings, sculptures and other printed representations which have explicit sexual and erotic components. I include also the sexual referents and illusions used to 'package' non-sexual services; sex both sells and is sold by these marketing strategies. In this paper I deliberately side-step issues of the motivations and desires of the tourist-purchaser, and the structure of sex that finds an ephemeral pleasure in the explicit sex shows of Thailand. In the following text I focus on the entertainment industry. I first consider the nature of tourism and sex tourism, then describe the theatrical display of sex and its ironies in Bangkok, through descriptions of live sex shows and transvestite cabarets, prior to addressing more generally the production of sexual stereotypes as a means of sustaining the tourist market.

TOURISM AND THE TOURIST GAZE

Sex and tourism share marginal status within the social sciences. The disinclination of anthropologists, among others, to study the latter has been in part a wariness of the uncomplimentary analogy between tourism and anthropological practice, in part also because of tourism's association with leisure, hence the implicit triviality of its study as well as pursuit (Finney and Watson, 1979, p.470; Leiper, 1979, p.392; Crick, 1985, p.77). For sex too, uncomfortable sets of personal associations pertain (Manderson, 1982; Herdt, in press). In general and until relatively recently, those who have described, deciphered and rendered problematic this 'frivolous diversion' (Rubin, 1992, p.267) have occupied peripheral places within their disciplines, and the scientific imperatives in the time of AIDS have only just begun to change the politics of the production of knowledge.

A discussion of sex tourism necessitates, as a first step, a more general discussion of the nature of tourism and of what John Urry (1990a, 1990b) refers to as the 'tourist gaze'. Borrowing from Foucault and his notion of the 'medical gaze', Urry argues that gazes are constructed through difference, varying according to society, social group and period. At a given moment the tourist gaze is produced in relation to the opposite, the obverse; the tourist image and experience provides a mirror to everyday social experience and consciousness, an image (often enough, imaginary) that contrasts with and therefore serves to validate and legitimize routine experience, domestic and working life, and the social structure within which they are located.

Urry (1990a, pp.2-3) sets out the characteristics of tourism, which he argues hold regardless of time and place. In the first case, as noted above, he argues that tourism 'presupposes its opposite'. It is a temporary, organized and contrastive experience juxtaposed against the familiar. In this respect it is 'out of bounds', although in reality it is no less than routine life bounded, controlled and defined both by the tourist and by the site and structures where the tourist activities take place. The activities undertaken by the tourist are distinctive from and contrastive to everyday 'at home' life: the landscape and places subject to the 'tourist gaze' are extraordinary and are unconnected with usual activities, including work, usual domestic and personal life. In the, context of this paper and its referents to sex tourism, the individual tourist journeys to and returns (often within a relatively short time frame), with intent while away to 'have fun' and to seek out novel and unusual experiences. These predisposing factors shape interactions of tourists to places and with other people in various ways - in Thailand these include sex workers, 'tribal villagers', mahouts and their elephants, monks, Buddhist temples, floating markets, palaces, and archaeological ruins.

Tourism involves a journey *to* and *from*. The physical relocation both defines the activity of tourism and makes possible certain behaviors and activities that would not occur 'at home'. Further, the journey and the stay are temporary. The tourist departs and sojourns with a clear intention to return 'home'; hence the temporal as well as experiential boundaries of tourism, and consequently too the function of tourism in legitimating everyday life (pace Turner 1973, 1974; Urry, 1990a, p.10). The internationalization of travel and the mass character of tourism have also resulted in the reproduction of an infrastructure that circumscribes and bounds the experience. This is the "environmental bubble" to which Cohen (1972, p.166) refers. One can travel and find 'home' at the end of the journey - a Sheraton hotel, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Sanka coffee, and an American Express office, for example, and 'doing' tourism is limited therefore to a preselected range of activities, events, and places.

A number of characteristics identified by Urry are particularly relevant to this paper: the mass character of tourism, the mass production of objects of the tourist gaze, the anticipation of place and experience by the tourist which is created and sustained by media representations, and the construction of the gaze through signs. In the case of Thailand, the gaze is constructed through select images taken to constitute 'real Thailand' or 'the Orient'. Tourists depart on a journey that is anticipated and can be realized: the gaze is preselected. They can travel by boat along the *klongs* of Bangkok, see the Emerald Buddha, go to bars in Patpong, or travel north to Chiang Mai. Both they and others have a clear idea of what these activities or experiences might include, they can buy postcards that document them in specific, familiar and recognizable ways, and they can on return home tell stories around these events that fit with others preconceptions or prior experiences of the same tourist journeys (Mintz, 1977, p.60). Others are able to locate, associate, imagine and replicate the experience, and to collapse the journey into singular, emblematic acts - hence 'going to Bangkok' becomes a euphemism or substitution for 'going to a live sex show'. A 'sex tour' to Thailand is a very clearly defined activity, usually physically located in Patpong or perhaps Pattaya or Chiang Mai, built around images of beautiful Thai women in G-strings, and naked dancers performing a variety of explicit, gymnastic rather than erotic, tricks (in the language of the handbills distributed to tourists,

'fire stick, in pussy show', 'egg cracking show', 'pussy smoke cigarette show', and so on, e.g. O'Merry, 1990, p.168; Dawson, 1988; Manderson, 1992). It is also, at least for some men, built around a fantasy that extends beyond the idea of a 'good time' to the possibility of romance and true love that flows from a notion of 'the Oriental woman' who is not-only physically beautiful and sexually exciting but also caring, compliant, submissive and not Western' or modern (O'Merry, 1990; Barnes, 1993; Lehtimaki, 1993).

The commodification of sex within tourism involves a double journey. Tourism itself, as already noted, changes place and context. Likewise a visit to a brothel is a journey, a liminal or antistructural experience which legitimizes bourgeois domestic relations. In sex tourism, place ('Asia', 'the Orient') and sex are both commoditized, setting up a dual opposition to the conventions and ideologies of contemporary industrial/western (e.g. north American or Australian) life.

MARKETING PLEASURE

Sex tourism is oriented to both heterosexual and homosexual men; this paper focuses on its heterosexual components only. It is dependent upon the marketability and marketing of 'Thai sex' and Thai women as a product, and the extensiveness of sex tourism to Thailand raises questions about the basis of western representations of Thailand whereby nation and woman, and woman as sex, are collapsed. In documentary films, novels, newspaper articles and tourist brochures, Thailand is constantly represented as 'the land of smiles', 'the brothel of the East' and 'the world's largest sex resort'; the partial displacement of monks in saffron robes with young women in G-strings as a national synecdoche maintains the tourist market. The promotion of Thailand as sex haven has occurred with official complicity and with wider political support. In the late 1960s, for example, the then Minister of the Interior, General Prapas Charusathiarana, was reported to have argued that a larger sexual service industry would result in increased tourism, with attendant economic advantages; in 1980 banker Boonchu Rojanasathien similarly exhorted provincial governors to promote sex tourism to boost the economy (Bamber, Hewison and Underwood, 1993, p.152). The promotion of Thailand as a 'pleasure periphery' has proceeded despite reactions from within Thailand against its representation as a brothel (or, anthropomorphized, as whore), seen as a slur on national integrity and nation/woman's virtue (Parker et al., 1992, pp.1, 6). In such rejections of the representation of Thailand as sex haven, foreign men (*farang*) are portrayed both as a symbol and vehicle of a neocolonialism whose rape/ domination of women and the country mocks Thailand's earlier independence from the nineteenth century colonization's of Asia.

Tourism to Asia is organized within the political economy of global relations and derives its market value from the general commodification of the 'Orient' as well as the commodification of leisure and pleasure. Current constructions of 'Asia' are successors to the Orient of nineteenth century imperialism, travelers' tales, early anthropology and their associated projects, all resulting in the collapse of the exotic and erotic to create a fetishized, imagined other with little attention to empirical veracity (Said, 1978; Kabbani, 1986; Marcus, 1992). The 'Orient' is mythic and fanciful, the named places even more so. Thailand is about being 'anywhere' rather than 'somewhere' (Crick, 1985, p.79; Lea, 1988, pp.23-24).¹² If the place is a mythical tourist destiny, so too are its people. Or rather, the 'Oriental woman' does and does not exist: she is produced partially and variably in different times and places, a set of embodied ideas that derive from notions of liberalism, fantasy, license, fancy and adventure, a vehicle to an imagined lawless paradise that might be anywhere (though not at home). In such fantasies, the Oriental woman - and oriental sexuality, although the term is an anachronistic one with respect to the nineteenth century - are both objects of desire and control: the licentious uncontrolled Orient a lure (or a promise) of imperialism and the justification for its oppressions.

These mythological representations of places and women are shared; it is their pervasiveness and predictability that ensures their efficacy for marketing purposes. They are common therefore at any point where tourists might be targeted, within the region as well as beyond. For example, a Hong Kong tourist brochure, the Pearl (July 1992), distributed at currency exchange points in Kai Tek airport, captures European obsession with foreign sexuality and how it is constituted (cf. Patton, 1992, p.225); it describes Hong Kong "girlie bars" as running "the gamut from slightly sleazy dives all the way to glittering hostess clubs with wall-to-wall Oriental and Occidental femininity" and continues:

Years ago, the main attraction (if it can be called that) in all the sleaze bars along the strip were topless Chinese bargirls. However management slowly cottoned to the fact that staring at two flea bites with nipples attached held appeal almost as limited as the girls' English vocabulary The upshot of this was "dancers" were imported from first the Philippines and more recently Thailand ... (but an) economy class return ticket to Manila starts at around HK\$1,200 (US1:HK7.3) and to Bangkok for a little bit more...

The above text is sufficiently explicit to not need deconstruction: Chinese women are represented as sexless ("flea bite" breasts) and unintelligent; elsewhere in the text as ugly, as "sluts", and as conniving, manipulative, wicked and deviant. Thai and Filipina women are represented as sexually more alluring and prettier, nicer, even - as not Chinese - decent women, and a better deal. As commodities, the text says, the Hong Kong product (Chinese women) is flawed, Thailand offers value for money.

This is not to say that Thailand is marketed as the only sex tourist destiny; the above inclusion of Filipina women demonstrates this of course. Other poorer countries, too, eager for tourist dollars and foreign investment, use similar (if subtler) marketing strategies. A recent article in a tourist booklet on Shenzhen, China, for example, juxtaposed

photographs of bars and song-and-dance halls with a photograph of women workers in crowded sleeping cubicles (Guo and Shi, 1993). The text noted that "Many of Shenzhen's female workers come from Sichuan and Hunan provinces. They are generally hard-working, frank and open to new ideas," and that 90% of the 1,000,000 workers who have come to Shenzhen from elsewhere are young women, between 20-30 years of age, resulting in a Very unequal male-female ratio in the city" (Guo and Shi, 1993, pp.20-21). Another article in the same journal describes the 42 song-and-dance halls which now operate legally in Shenzhen and attract 50,000 customers a night: "There is much to do at night in Shenzhen, whatever your pleasure" (Guan and Jun, 1993, p.45).

It remains true, however, that Thailand is the premier sex tourist destination. Images of Thailand as 'the land of smiles', of the specific nature of its sex industry, and of Thai women as available objects are, as the earlier discussion implies, mass produced signs of Thailand that all tourists, women as well as men, expect to see and seek out. Hence women travelers returning by Qantas from Bangkok to Sydney joke with each other and the airline stewards of the "delights of the dart blowers of King's Castle" (Field notes, June 1993) without apparent self-consciousness or embarrassment of then-patronage of the shows or complicity in an industry that is also, contemporaneously, being portrayed by the Australian media as incredibly nasty, violent, and exploitative (e.g. ABC, 1992; Eddy and Walden, 1992; O'Donnell, 1992; ABC, 1993).

PATPONG AND THE PLEASURES IN LOOKING

In the construction of images of country, people, and sexuality, individuals are stripped of agency. But in addition, they are denied personhood; they become *the sex*. As Spillers argues (with respect to black women), "sexual experience ... is so boundlessly imagined that it loses meaning and becomes, quite simply, a medium through which *the individual is suspended*" (1992, p.84; my emphasis). The dissolution of individuals is not unique in sex tourism, of course, nor in discourse of the sex(uality) of others. However, the structural subordination and textual silencing or muting (Ardener, E., 1975) of particular groups - women, the peasantry, the proletariat, homosexual men and lesbians - make them equally vulnerable to the essentialist representation that has them either as sex alone, or without sex. The representations of sexuality and sexual relationships found in both printed and other texts are not only descriptive, however, they may also reinforce or critique those relations, or contribute to their determination.

Bruner argues (1984, p.3) that such epiphenomena as play, games, story-telling, parades, carnivals, and so on are all means by which reshaping (of social and political formations) occurs (cf. MacAloon, 1984). Below, both live sex shows and transvestite theatre in Thailand are explored in this light. In this section, I provide a brief description of sex performances, based on observations in Patpong bars in 1990 (for detail, see Manderson, 1992). The bars have a high profile and serve an important function in attracting tourists to the city; certainly they are as well-known as Wat Arun or the Emerald Buddha. The bars attract men in search of commercial sex (that is, those who wish to pay for sexual intercourse), but the action within the bars, is, I suggest, in its own right a means of attracting patrons, and is as much about sex as the, promise (or purchase and experience) of coitus itself.

Although Dawson (1988) suggests that lewd sex in the Patpong bars is relatively recent (from the early 1980s), and that until then bars primarily employed girls who worked as go-go dancers, the depiction in *Emmanuelle* (Jaekkin, 1974) of a variety of acts now characteristic of the Patpong performances suggests are rather longer history, even if not in the same area.

Patpong consists of two lanes or *soi* (Patpong 1 and Patpong 2), which run from Silom Road to Surawong Road, and the name is connotative of both the lanes and their side alleys, their snack bars and souvenir stalls, the nightclubs, drinking bars, beer lounges, disco shows and go-go bars. Most performance sex takes place in the bars, usually "upstairs. Access may be through a cover charge, or for the price of a drink only. Patrons are expected to buy 'bar girls' a drink if they are joined by them, and pay the bar a 'fine' - usually around 350 baht - if they wish to go off with a woman. She then negotiates directly the price of her services, and in Patpong this can be from 500 - 1000 baht. In brothels, the brothel keeper takes about 50 percent of the woman's earnings and in some cases, women may work for a 'tip' only, hence at times receiving no money for their services (as described by Aoi, in O'Rourke, 1991).

Within the bars, when not on stage, women move among bar patrons, clad and wearing numbered identity badges to facilitate 'ordering' by patrons. On stage, women work as dancers and as performers of a variety of erotic and lewd sex acts, including as single performers, or with one or more partners. In general, single acts are trick acts using the vagina to explore two inter-related themes: female sex as power, and exploration of the unknown/fear of castration. Acts included cigarette smoking per vagina by squeezing the perineal muscles; the vaginal insertion and release of ping-pong balls; blowing darts/bursting balloons; blowing out candles on a birthday cake; opening bottles of soft-drink; holding the liquid within the vagina from a bottle of coke and emptying it into a second bottle; picking up sushi with chopsticks; writing messages ('Hello, Japan'), and so on.¹⁵ Other acts which manipulate the imagery of vagina as cavity, and play on a fear of castration, include the extraction from the vagina of meters of ribbon, of ping-pong balls, of around three meters of razor blades threaded on a string (depicted in *The Good Woman of Bangkok*, O'Rourke, 1991), of needles on string, and jingle bells. The bottle opening trick, a display of muscularity, explores the same realm of fear/excitement; by analogy, insertion (of the penis) occurs at the risk of amputation, and in various performances of this act, the audience is invited to check that

the bottle top has not been opened already. There is also a carpet snake routine (the snake is inserted, tail up, into the woman's vagina), again exploring the theme of the dangerous vagina as well as the insatiability of woman's desire and of the animality of her sexuality. In these acts, women are vaginas without faces (vide Spillers, 1992, p.77); this is the imagery used also in product advertisements that carry the eyes to the space between the legs (see Figure 1). If Thailand had already been reduced through marketing strategies of tourism to woman/sex, now woman has been reduced to vagina, leaving us with a final bleak equation (Thailand: Other :: vagina: penis).

The duo acts may be trick acts but may also include sexual intercourse; the trio (and larger number) acts usually replicate single routines (i.e. more than one girl performs the same trick) and include such tricks as cigarette smoking, and the removal of ribbons, flowers, flags (reading "Welcome", "Thank You", and "Enjoy") and razor blades. In addition, sexual intercourse, heterosexual or lesbian, may be performed. Heterosexual sex acts work through a menu of poses that display penile length, stroke-style, and female agility, usually without ejaculation since there are often several performances in an evening. Lesbian sex involves caressing, tribalism and cunnilingus. These live act shows are relatively infrequent; perhaps six single acts or similar duo acts, and group dancing, might occur between them.

The bars and the voyeurism of their shows provide, I have argued, an environment of disinhibition, the necessary precondition to maximize customer potential in the world of commoditized sex. In addition, part of the point of the shows is their location, that is, sex is performed before an audience, and each patron is one among 100's observing the same show. Urry (1990b) underlines the significance of the social experience involved in many tourist contexts; that is, the importance for the tourist of being able to consume particular commodities in the company of others: in this case, 'watching sex' is the commodity. However, it is difficult to determine the effect of the acts on the bar patrons, and observer responses, reactions, and imputed meaning varies for a single individual for a number of reasons. For some patrons, the bar is simply a familiar place, the performances 'background noise' to drinking (as implied at several points in O'Merry, 1990). These patrons, often longtime sojourners in Bangkok, contrast with others - tourists - for whom the bars are unfamiliar and the performances entirely extraordinary. Others affect boredom and disinterest. For others again, the desire to explore the erotic realms played out on stage is translated into a desire to return, for further viewing: the voyeur is a consumer catered for within the context of the bar and its performances. Whether or not the commoditization shifts from voyeurism to active sex, sex remains a commodity; the bar a commercial venue of the sale of sex.

In pornographic performance, women remain objects, existing for and representing the fantasies of men (usually), as corporeal reality and erotic illusion. However, at one level, women are not simply objects, for the performances are also enactments of men's versions of women and their sexuality, staged examples of "passive female eroticism as a compliant compliment for (men's) own active desire" (Cocks, 1989, p.9). Yet their subordination is not complete; parody, irony and satire are possible. Although writers such as Sontag (1970: 148) have argued against the possibility of parody in pornography (it remains pornography regardless), I have argued that the performances in the bars of Patpong provide women with the opportunity to invert, caricature, tease, manipulate and exploit those who use their bodies (see Manderson, 1992, pp.463-466). In particular, Thai notions of pollution, and the profanity of the genitals, allow - with or without intentionality - a nice inversion within the bars, as women, genitals displayed, literally perform over the heads of men. The fact that most bar patrons are innocent of this insult adds rather than strips it of power (cf. Ardener, S., 1975).

IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER...

In the Patpong bars, the irony is subtle. This is not the case in the transvestite cabarets such as Calypso in Bangkok and Simon Cabaret in Pattaya; it is to these shows that I now turn. This section describes Calypso in Bangkok, and in so doing explores the inversions, paradoxes and parodies of sex, gender, desire and sexuality, and also nation and ethnicity. The following description, like that for the Patpong bars, again derives from observations (in 1989), and the intent of the performers of the emergent parodies is open to question. The potentiality is there, even so.

Calypso is located off Sukhumvit Road in Bangkok, and is again patronized by tourists, primarily from Japan, northern Europe, America, and Australia. The performance consists of mime and dance to English, Japanese, Chinese and Thai songs, with specific routines using from two to 30 performers. Costuming is elaborate; sometimes, as in the "straight" rendition of Chinese opera pieces, the music would appear to be a vehicle to enable the performers to dress flamboyantly. Other songs, however, appear selected for text and style. The songs presented in English are performed with 'high camp' in costumes which exaggerate body forms and features - décolleté gowns, tuxedos, waist cinches, bare buttocks, tight, ripped jeans; the dress used for Japanese songs predominantly parody various dress styles from Japan (kimono, geisha attire, frilly dresses preferred by female pop stars in television appearances). In contrast, local Thai dances are performed conventionally (the cross-dressing the only minor departure from more conventional performance), and in these numbers there is no apparent sub-text concerning Thailand/the other. Indeed, both representations of Chinese and Thai music are conveyed conventionally and without the apparent camp and parody characteristic of a drag show, and in consequence they stand in contrast with most of the songs (English and Japanese).

The English language songs have a deaf auto-biographical text alluding to sexual preference, sexual identity, gender identity and desire. These are songs that fit with contemporary (camped up) identity politics and include, for instance, "If They Could See Me Now," "I Did It My Way," and "I Love You Just the Way You Are." Others songs uphold

musical comedy and 'camp' favorites like "Mame" (from the musical *Mame*), "Welcome" (from *Cabaret*) and "Let me Entertain You" (from *Gypsy*), and Marilyn Monroe numbers ("Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend," performed by a Munroe look-alike. Whilst the Munroe impersonations were numerous, there were also frequent 'appearances' of Japanese pop-star Matsuda Seiko, suggesting that her comic potential for parody is nearly as great as Monroe's. In addition, Japanese members of the audience were singled out for ridicule with the presentation of "Nagasaki Minatomachi," performed in a highly stylized representation of courtesan attire with heavy makeup and immense wig, which allowed the performers to direct their refrain "Baka mitai" ("You Idiot!") to various Japanese men in the audience.

The sex and sexual identity of each performer remains mysterious. The audience is asked to speculate upon the sex of each performer, and presumptively, any sex/gender status is possible. Actors may include gay men, transsexuals (who have had hormone therapy) and transvestites, although these terms all have primary reference to western, not indigenous, sexual categories. The possibility, to the audience, that any man or woman on stage might fall into any of these gender categories, challenges conventional categories. The audience is teased, too, by further play with identities. For example, as noted above, throughout the show, an actor appears as Marilyn Monroe. In the finale, there are three Marilyn's, and we are left to ask, who is the 'real' one? Sex and gender identity are also used as themes of specific routines. In "I Did It My Way," the performer slowly strips off make-up and clothes and transforms herself before us to his 'real' self. In general, the sex of the performer is not revealed; in the strip tease mime to "Let Me Entertain You" (from *Gypsy*), the tease is sustained, and the sexual and gender identity of the performer remains a mystery. The lack of revelation sustains the possibility that the 'woman' might be a man, hence any man (or woman?) might cross over the borders of gendered identity or desire. At the same time, in shows such as *Calypso*, Thai transvestites, cross-dressed actors, and transsexuals - all with different notions of their own sexuality and/or gender identity perform in ways that reflect their own perceptions of the feminine or their perceptions of western notions of feminine - or parody both. Hence a European man watches a Thai man performing/passing as a European (or other) woman, caught by illusions of both race and sex (is the woman really man, the American really Thai?). As Garber (1992) argues, this play with reality is precisely the point in transvestite - and any - theatre.

Whilst at one level the shows exploit the theatricality of drag, the inversions are a commentary on the paradoxes of sex, gender, identity and desire. In several numbers, members of the audience are brought onto the stage, where their juxtaposition to the players makes a stark, visual contrast which itself conveys a message. The teasing of members of the audience by performers challenges conventional constructions of sex and sexuality, as the text 'speaks' of possible worlds and possible ways of orientating oneself within them (Ricouer, 1971, p.558). Even so, the inversion explored within the shows are bound spatially and temporally; the space for these is contained within the theatre.

The cabarets are about sex, as well as about identity and desire. Acts of sex are depicted through the eyes of men, albeit homosexual and heterosexual; since the theatre associates itself with commercialized male homosexuality, this is not surprising. Anal intercourse, masturbation, and fellatio are all depicted through explicit choreography of the songs. In "Surprise," for example, the dancers form pairs, back to front, hands on hip; the 'women' are receptors, the men-as-men the active penetrative partners punctuating chorus lines with pelvic thrusts. The sex of women remains largely invisible, although implied in two numbers, when the 'women' straddle the men, their crotches over the men's faces or 'on top'. But since in this show the women are also men, and we are constantly reminded of this, the renderings of female sexuality are doubly ambiguous. Women through their omission, by definition because of the nature of this show, are occluded or erased (cf. Garber, 1992).

An analysis of the performance draws attention to the way in which its structure and content operate as text (Bruner and Plattner, 1984; Ricouer, 1971; Geertz, 1975). Each performance provides us with description and commentary at both textual and sub-textual levels on Thai (men) and the 'other', "opening up a world which it bears within itself" (Ricoeur, 1971, p.544). The *Calypso Theatre* is a drag show modeled on those that one might find elsewhere (or anywhere), perhaps here reflecting the international commercialization of 'the homosexual' (Altman, 1982) and the creation and reproduction of gay male identity within Bangkok and elsewhere in Asia, assembled from icons and symbols that have an international currency (*The Nation*, 28 August 1990, p. A2). However, although forms of transvestism differ in rural Thailand, ambiguities of sex, gender and sexuality are also familiar and used in irony and play: Gray (1990), for example, refers to the transvestite buffoonery of a bawdy theatrical performance at a village wedding in northern Thailand; in northeastern Thailand, young men seek to ward off the "widow ghosts" (*phii mae mii*) by painting their nails and sleeping in women's sarongs (Field notes, 1990). In addition, discordance with community norms in terms of sexuality, desire and gender identity may be flagged through cross-dressing: these are the images that *Calypso* appropriates.

I have noted that *Calypso* uses western and Japanese musical repertoire for parody and 'camp' performance; it includes few Thai numbers and these are done as fairly conventional set pieces. *Calypso Theatre* contrasts, as a result, with other performances which draw on indigenous metaphor or mix genre: *Calypso* presents a 'modern' cosmopolitan show in a familiar format, by which means to examine the elasticity of gender identity and desire and its cultural scaffolding. In contrast, in Thai live-sex shows, traditional imagery and form merge with western music and style to exploit multiple layers of meanings (Manderson, 1992). In other clearer examples of syncretism in theatre, the differences between 'indigenous' and 'other' are fully exploited for rhetorical purpose. The White Lion Dance Company, for example, in its AIDS education

show performed in the -bars of Soi Cowboy and Patpong in Bangkok, includes a number that provides a very direct commentary on sex tourism: an ugly and drunk red-haired European male leers at the dancers as they sing "I love Thailand/ I love Pattaya/ I love Patpong"; dressed in Thai costume, the Thai in the troupe rally together and destroy the foreign devil.

SUSTAINING THE STEREOTYPES

Images of Thailand, and specifically Bangkok, frequently centre around its particular confluence of sex and entertainment, and these images - of Patpong rather than the cabarets - are repeated in a wide range of visual and text representations of Thailand, despite often fundamental differences in their major purposes. Many of the documentaries produced over the past five years (see n.4 above) provide analyses of the sex industry in Thailand which are critical over the Patpong bars and their neighboring brothels, massage parlors, and tea houses whilst identifying the economic and cultural basis of their operation. Such commentaries are sympathetic with and repeat the arguments of a number of sociological studies of prostitution (e.g. Khin Thitsa, 1980; Muecke, 1992; Pasuk, 1982; Sukanya, 1983, 1984, 1988; Truong, 1990), which argue also the importance of the political economy in understanding the extent of sex work in Thailand. The film *Slaves of Progress* (BBC, 1984), for example, speaks of women working in the bars of Patpong from 'poverty stricken villages', picked up by men, held against their will, and sold to highest bidder, Porteus and Cooper, in *Foreign Bodies* (1988), argue that prostitution needs to be understood in the context of a complex set of circumstances that include rural poverty and indebtedness, the importance of the tourist industry, the establishment of a foreign-oriented sex industry as a consequence of the Vietnam war and continuing, subsequent American presence, together with - they argue - the subordination of women and their lack of negotiating power within Thai society (women are "chattels under Buddhism"). Several studies emphasize too the cycle in which women are caught. Despite some evidence that women are able to move from prostitution back to conventional village life when their earning potential within the sex industry decreases or according to other changed circumstances (e.g. Muecke, 1992), others are sceptical of this and note the usual downward mobility of women involved in various paying liaisons (Cohen, 1982, p.424; Gray, 1990). In *Foreign Bodies* (Porteus and Cooper, 1988), Bee asks "What can I do? I can't go back to being a virgin"; in *The Good Woman of Bangkok* (O'Rourke, 1991), Aoi's aunt says: "She is so damaged now. No man in this village would marry her".

While some of the film texts that highlight the domestic economics of sex work draw attention to the exploitation of women as a result of sex tourism, many romanticize women's recruitment into prostitution and their loyalty to their families that keeps them working. Further, explanations of the political economy of sex work in Thailand, of rural poverty and local culture, have been so well rehearsed that the arguments are repeated by those running tourist services and by tourists themselves. Tim Dragoo, an American bar owner in Pattaya, says to one team of film makers that "the woman feels very grateful (to her client or short-term partner) that he's helping her family - getting tractors, drinking water, mosquito nettings etc." (Porteus and Cooper, 1988); in *The Good Woman of Bangkok* (O'Rourke, 1991), an Australian argues:

They are prostitutes and we feel sorry for them. They're very poor, but we love 'em. I feel sorry for them because they have to resort to what they do. I think that it's best that we do go with them because what we give them ... it helps them if it helps them, it's not so wrong. The oldest girl comes to Thailand (i.e. Bangkok), they try to get a job and this is all they can really get because they haven't got an education. So to break a vicious cycle they send the money home to get an education for the younger ones, which is good, because eventually there won't be this, they won't need to do this ...

These sentimental accounts are certainly more sympathetic than the portraits of Thailand included in films such as *Shocking Thailand* (a.k.a. *Weird Thailand*) (Friedman and Gatewood, 1991), which includes the Patpong sex shows as part of a panoply of purported exotica and other 'out-of-the-ordinary' acts that include opium smoking, eating baked snake, ritual mutilation, tattoos, dirty books and postcards, and riding trishaws and Pedi cabs (tuk-tuk) as exemplary of 'weird' Thailand. The images in this kind of material are fantastic and partly imaginary exotica, a means of marketing. The marketing of destination through sex itself is predicated upon the liminality that the journey affords: the tourist steps outside of (his own) culture; unconstrained/temporarily unenculturated, he is able to act in ways unimagined or barely imagined at home. Beyond the moral control of home/the west, *anything can happen* (cf. Manderson, 1992).

Other films offer a counter-commentary which argues that sex tourists, not the sex workers, are the innocent and exploited. The documentary *You Can't Buy a Wife, Can You?* (Lehtimäki, 1993), for example, explores the rather complex issues surrounding marriage agencies and intercultural 'relationships', implicated also of course in *The Good Woman of Bangkok*. In *You Can't Buy a Wife, Can You?* the central English character, Chris Roughan, is a romantic, naive but with some insight: whilst he maintains that 98 percent of Thai women have a 'higher morality' than western women, he concedes that their interest in European men is largely economic. The original evil 'character' of the film is the marriage agency (Thai Contacts International) and its Bangkok manager, Morris Cohen. In the end, however, the Thai wife shifts from her position as an morally innocent factory worker, to a duplicitous and manipulative woman who has used marriage with *farang* to generate, through dowry payments, an irregular but lucrative flow of cash to her family. (An alternative reading here, of course, would be to give her higher moral ground, through actions that privilege filial loyalty and duty over personal affiliative ties.) A similar perspective - of women's agency or their exploitation of lonely men, depending on the reader's perspective - is possible at the end of *The Good Woman of Bangkok*, when Aoi accepts O'Rourke's offer to

purchase a rice farm and then returns to work in Bangkok. This version of women's duplicity is also presented by Barnes (1993), in a brief newspaper article that challenges "the image of corrupt western men plucking Asian girls from a wall of vulnerable and innocent young flesh" with a counter-image of naive and lonely men whose emotional involvement in the women they partner lead them to confusion and hurt. In this account of Thai/Western encounters, men confuse the language of love and the language of work, the payments for sex and financial support for a lover/beloved; the women, in turn, are shrewd, manipulative and willful. Here Pearce and Moscardo's (1986) concept of authenticity is useful: the conflicts that are pursuant upon men's involvement with sex workers are an outcome of their pursuit of authenticity and their failure or unwillingness to perceive the 'staged' or inauthentic nature of the scene, that is, that women's declarations of love are part of their work (cf. Hochschild 1983, Wouters 1989). However, not all western men are fooled and others exploit the system to their own advantage (O'Merry, 1990).

The difficulty in interpreting these works, and other written work on Thailand, is the line between the production and representation of such stereotypes, as suggested by a film like *Shocking Thailand* (Friedman and Gatewood, 1991) or *The Good Woman of Bangkok* (O'Rourke, 1992; for discussion see Hamilton, 1993; Manderson, 1993). Margaret Drabble's latest book, *The Gates of Ivory* (1992), provides another example: a work that hovers between novel and social history (note the bibliography) and characterizes Bangkok by its red-light district and brothels - red-Indian style, geisha style, and wedding style complete with gowned brides and organ music. This may be a further ironic play at the way in which sexuality and desire transgress national boundaries and seek the erotic in the (stereotypic) other, but we must take on faith that the attitudes of racism and ignorance in the book are the characters, not Drabble's own; that the errors are innocent; and that Bangkok is presented as a brothel because that is how tourists come to know the city. In other texts, there is less reason to assume irony or satire. An Australian magazine, targeted at middle aged women, in an article on male impotence, refers to the possibility of learning "the internal muscular tricks of Asian girls" (Spencer-Mills, 1992, p.61).

Earlier in this chapter, I noted some government resistance to the promotion of Thailand as a sex resort, resulting - inter alia - in initiatives to enforce closing hours of brothels (in the face of lack of success in their suppression, notwithstanding their technical illegality), and to prevent the publication of material which might imply women were other than innocent before marriage and chaste thereafter. To some extent, the national English language press, whose readership includes tourists as well as longer term visitors, has also sought to counter Thailand's stereotypic images by offering alternative images of chaste womanhood, while exposing the most excessive violent edges of the sex industry, such as the prostitution of children (e.g. Pompimol, 1990; Pongpet, 1990). At the same time, unofficial voices also challenge this conflation of sexuality and nation, and challenge the economic and political relationships implicit in sex tourism, as the example of the White Lion Dance Company, described above, suggests.

Yet this is not complete. Whilst images of women's bodies are used to sell Thailand to foreign tourists, the same images are also used to market a wide range of commodities within Thailand. These images are presented both in voyeuristic and invitational poses (Kuhn, 1985, p.42). The voyeuristic images position the woman within her own activities, the male viewer of the advertising poster (or elsewhere the bar patron, the film viewer, the reader) is the voyeur, in contrast the invitational poses position the woman to provoke and establish contact with the viewer. An example: an advertisement for a Thai film, placed over a cinema in Khon Kaen in northeast Thailand (Figure 1) draws upon this repertoire of woman as object: the woman's eyes are directed at the viewer in an invitational pose, her legs spread so that her hidden vagina is the central focus of the shot (and see Patra, 1990). Advertisements for products such as Kodak film and Nescafe instant coffee (Figure 2) also use invitational poses to seduce the viewer to buy.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Earlier in this paper, I referred to Said's argument of the creation of 'the Orient' as a cultural, political and intellectual entity. Said, and others following his lead, have argued that current constructions of 'Asia' are successors to the fetishized, largely mythic, geographically proximate and sometimes faithless 'Orient' of the nineteenth century (Said, 1978; Kabbani, 1986; Cocks, 1989; Marcus, 1992; Suleri, 1993), such that the popular representations of Asia in general, and countries such as Thailand in particular, are a sentimental mix of the erotic and exotic. European tourists to Thailand today may have little interest in or awareness of the post-colonial context in which they operate, far less the theoretical and scholarly backdrop that has shaped it; they are influenced primarily or solely by the popular cultural images corralled to promote tourism and investment. As Cocks has argued, in this respect global expansion of capital has been accompanied by a cultural imperialism of a "corrosive/productive sort" whereby poor countries are reconstituted "both in the West's own image and ... as its negative reflection" (1989, p.16). Said has written of the 'idea' of the Orient (1991 [1978], p.23); in this case, the 'idea' is that of Thailand, of Thai women, and Thai sexuality. As he notes (Said, 1991 [1978], p.26), the electronic media has drawn the Orient nearer, such that it is "less a myth perhaps than a place criss-crossed by Western, especially American, interests", hence the advantages of marketing the place as a tourist destination, wherein the Orient becomes not idle fancy, but a possible lived "trip of a life-time". With contemporary tourism, the tourist travels 'anywhere' and finds home - as elaborated above - whilst at the same time takes advantage of the 'out-of-bounds' nature of this other place, with access (at least theoretically) to sexual expressions or experiences not imaginable or tolerated or possible at home.

Popular culture, in media such as film and television, cements these stereotypes. Just as industrial interests (American, Japanese, and Australian companies particularly) were lured to off-shore factories through favorable concessions, the lure of cheap labor, and the pliability of the (female) labor force, collapsed within the image of the 'nimble fingers' of Asian women (Elson and Pearson 1981: 149), so tourists are lured to Thailand, and other resort settings of Southeast Asia by low costs, friendly service, pliability of the 'native women' and their purported gymnastic skills. The marketing technique, and the symbolic use of bodies, are the same: fingers and vaginas are the synecdoche of both woman and nation.