

stories inspire group interpretation among families, neighbors, and close friends, and these discussions are carried forward into village conversation throughout the following days. In tracing this trajectory Englund shows that the production and consumption of the media are active processes through which a national discussion is being held concerning the moral obligations embedded in the hierarchical dependencies of authority.

Part of the effect of this innovative news genre is the ambiguity of the narratives, whose moral interpretation might be framed by the editors but never definitively asserted, leaving the audience ample room for debate over what really happened and why. So another tantalizing thread in this book is the relationship between this radio show and an aesthetic for talking critically about relationships of power and authority without overtly challenging authority itself—think classic Max Gluckman, but also Andrew Apter in *Beyond Words* (2007), who argues for the transformative efficacy and multivocal nature of such oral genres as praise poetry and ritual speech.

The implicit critical content of these narratives of local scandal, and their resonance not only with social issues across the nation but also with higher-level relationships of authority and obligation is crucial to the construction of Englund's other central argument. International and national human rights advocates have damned the national Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) network for its constant pandering to the government and lack of critical discourse on the state. The news agency's behavior is thus understood to be evidence against the participation of Malawi in liberal democracy and its core values of equality and freedom (including freedom of the press). But Englund's ethnography of the news station reveals that news workers are guided more by a respect for the concept of the state and its enduring authority than by the allegiance to whatever corrupt leadership is currently in power. They consider it to be their job as public servants to support the government regardless of their personal opinion. Furthermore, the gossip show, which news workers cherish, actually functions to implicitly criticize the state by drawing attention to parallel hierarchical relations in which the obligations of mutual dependence are not upheld. The author suggests that human rights activists, in their promotion of a uniform concept of "equality" as a relationship between autonomous individuals, often miss the kinds of critical claims for equality African voices are making, in part because they are not listening to African voices—thus reinforcing the very hierarchical relationships they are supposedly fighting against.

At his most provocative, Englund argues that the terms of political equality have been misconstrued—that equality should not be understood as nonhierarchical or as based on parity between individuals but, rather, as the condition of a relationship of mutual dependence (whether hierarchical or not). Malawian radio can teach us that the human rights

claims are often taking place already, but by voices we are not listening to and in registers that are seeking to enforce the fulfillment of obligations embedded within legitimate hierarchical relationships rather than to eliminate hierarchy per se.

One might argue that the author is playing word games here by redefining *equality*. Indeed, his arguments for a more culturally informed understanding of equality mirror anthropological efforts for a more positive evaluation of the role of hierarchy, beginning with Louis Dumont (1970), who, like Englund, criticizes the individualist ideology of egalitarianism for masking the production of social hierarchy. However, by engaging the discourse of equality, this book rightfully asserts its relevance to evaluating the efficacy of human rights work. By effectively listening to the voices of those that human rights advocates are "speaking for," Englund explores an alternative language of politics, in which "claims addressing the wealthy and the powerful could be effective precisely when they left difference and hierarchy intact" (p. 224), thus revealing an understanding of equality as the condition for human relationships rather than a goal to be achieved in an ever-postponed future.

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Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the Circuits of Sexuality. *Margot Weiss*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. xviii + 318 pp.

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Since the 1970s, San Francisco's reputation as a diverse, sexually open city has become a contradiction of sorts, given how the conditions that once made possible the co-existence of people of various socioeconomic backgrounds have been eroded by soaring real estate prices, neoliberal municipal politics, and the privatization of public spaces. The emergence of the bondage, domination, and sado-masochism (BDSM/SM) community in the San Francisco Bay Area can be read alongside the broad set of social and economic changes in the Bay Area that saw major investment in information technology, huge population growth, and the development of bedroom suburbs. Drawing on interviews with more than 60 SM practitioners as well as participant-observation at numerous events organized through SM organizations in the Bay Area (e.g., dungeon

monitor training, sexual technique workshops, and sex parties), Weiss offers a complex portrayal of the productivity of power in shaping dimensions of selfhood. By foregrounding how practitioners invest financially, emotionally, and socially in SM, she shows how racial, sexual, and class-based privileges come to be reproduced and sustained through the policing of community boundaries and accepted standards of SM practice. In assessing the complicitous relationship between community and global capitalism, Weiss employs what she calls a “performative materialism” to study the relationships between political economy and the embodied subjectivities of SM practitioners (p. 8). As such, Weiss provides an astute analysis of neoliberal capitalism and sexuality.

Divided into five succinct chapters, each carefully building on the arguments of the previous one, *Techniques of Pleasure* explores how SM scenes “constitute and are constituted by social hierarchies, drawing attention to the multidirectional, awkward, and ambivalent circuits between social relations and sexual performances” (pp. 19–20). The book maps how practitioners embody rules about risk and safety as well as notions of neoliberal consumer identity through participation in “safe, sane, and consensual” SM play. The quest to become a practitioner involves developing an in-depth understanding of various facets of sex play: attending workshops on safety and special sexual techniques, as well as learning how to buy and use different kinds of sex toys. Weiss argues that the mastery of SM practices generates notions of selfhood that connect a sense of community belonging to modes of consumption and lifestyle, and to the eroticization of social inequality (p. 24). While many in the SM scene express a sense of nostalgia for a time when the SM community was less rigidly organized as a consumer culture with highly structured formal organizations and rules governing risk and safety, members of the community remain nonetheless invested in climbing the social ranks in pursuit of expertise and respect as practitioners.

The ethnography’s strength is its analysis of SM practitioners’ fundamental distinction between “real-world” social norms and the “safe” world of the SM scene (p. 145). Theorizing the SM community as “semipublic,” a privatized public, Weiss explains that the scene organizes feelings of belonging through neoliberal governmentality by celebrating freedom: a freedom to consume that is free from social inequalities like sexism or racism and divorced from real-life relations of power (pp. 60, 94–95). Revisiting radical feminist work on SM from the early 1980s, Weiss recovers a useful critique of power that emphasizes the connections between the way social categories frame everyday social life and how they are taken up and played with in various scenes. She shows how “consent” operates as a defining characteristic of SM, in which liberal notions of choice fail

to account for the way choice is itself constituted through unequal relations of power.

As the SM scene comprises primarily men who are heterosexual, dominant tops and women who are heterosexual, sexual submissives (p. 160), parallels between real-life and fantasy-life power differentials often produce feelings of ambivalence and anxiety. Weiss explains that many of her heterosexual male interviewees who recognize the similarity appeal to liberal notions of consent and choice to reconcile feminist concerns with their own desire to sexually dominate their female partners or with their desire to take submissive partners of color (pp. 164, 173).

The book also raises difficult questions about the traffic between SM play and actual torture in the post-9/11 world. Analyzing how news media portrayals of American soldiers involved in torture at Abu Ghraib prison as “somasochistic,” as well as how SM’s tendency to incorporate aspects of real-life violence into its scenarios, Weiss explains that while the two are related, they diverge in one fundamental way. She argues that SM “can enable an intervention into the social world through affective involvement, while the Abu Ghraib photographs close off a social response to torture through affective disengagement” (p. 222). Weiss finds that while SM is often characterized by how it foregrounds power relations and dramatizes historical themes of domination and torture (e.g., black slavery in the United States and concentration camps in Nazi Germany), it is only in instances where practitioners are confronted with racial differences between partners that they become aware of racialization within SM play. Arguing against the notion that SM shatters or moves beyond subject positions, Weiss finds instead that bodily experiments of SM that play with normative relations of power “rely on technique and knowledge of the body, which have everything to do with self-mastery and community production, rather than transcendence” (p. 141). Following Foucauldian work on power as a productive, rather than merely restricting force, she suggests that we ought not to valorize minoritarian performances in terms of transgression, imagining a split between those performances that enforce social power and those that uproot it (p. 228). As such, it is erroneous to imagine an oppositional relationship between queerness and heteronormativity.

Despite the text’s overarching critique of SM as complicit with capitalism and neoliberal governmentality, it ends on an optimistic note. By way of conclusion, Weiss raises an intriguing point concerning SM as a consciousness-raising practice: for SM scenarios to actually arouse partners or onlookers, they must reach people on an emotional level. In her view, scenarios that draw on cultural and historical instances of violence such as slavery, the Holocaust, rape, or incest are powerful because they are immediately recognizable and because they “generate a kind of reflective political energy” (p. 212). Thus, SM scenarios

in which erotic play is explicitly linked to actual historical and social realities hold the potential to generate awareness of social inequalities, unlike those scenarios that deny such connections and thereby depoliticize them by calling them “just play.”

It would be interesting to see how Weiss’s criticism and questions speak to the realities of SM practices amongst gay men or in queer or color scenes. How might neoliberal processes that organize the subjectivity of members of the dominant scene through notions of consent, concerns with risk and safety, or sexual techniques actually constitute sexual subjectivities differently in more marginal SM, kink, or leather scenes? But even in restricting herself to mostly middle- and upper-middle-class, white heterosexuals, Weiss offers a nuanced reading of sex, power, consumption, and subjectivity that makes *Techniques of Pleasure* a major contribution to new theoretical work on neoliberal economic processes and the anthropology of sexuality and gender.

Ethical Consumption: Social Value and Economic Practice. James Carrier and Peter Luetchford, eds. New York: Berghahn, 2012. 238 pp.

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At the heart of this collection is a series of nine case studies exploring the perceptions, values, and behaviors of European consumers, as well as consumer–producer relationships in Europe and the Global South. These cases broaden standard definitions of *ethical consumption* by revealing the diversity of people who identify as ethical consumers, the complexity of rationales and values they cite for doing so, and the ways configurations of ethical consumption are shaped by specific contexts. They also illuminate the inherent tensions and paradoxes of ethical consumption for consumers, producers, and imagined relationships between them.

James Carrier’s introduction provides the theoretical framing. It begins with a primary distinction between *economy* and *society* and Polanyian concerns with the disembedding of the former from the latter. From this perspective *ethical consumption* is defined by activities that are explicitly meant to promote and protect social values and relationships (associated with home and community) in the face of self-serving rational calculation (associated with work and economy). Framed thusly, it becomes clear that ethical consumption is not new (e.g., consumer boycotts of slave-grown sugar in the 19th century) and not necessarily motivated by what would be typically regarded as progressive agendas (e.g., local trade motivated by right-wing na-

tionalism in Hungary—as seen in the case study by Tamas Dombos). Also what appears as ethical consumption may not be (e.g., Quaker “plainism”—as seen in the social history by Peter Collins), and what appears not to be ethical consumption (e.g., holiday-season shopping frenzies) may in fact be.

A key point, explored by several case studies, is that contemporary ethical consumption frequently entails the discursive and imaginary social reembedding of circulating commodities, referred to throughout the volume as *defetishization*. Defetishization consistently entails selective presentations of certain relationships and selective concealments of others. Socially conscious labor practices by large-scale chocolate manufacturers are, for instance, inconsistent with the small-is-beautiful images of fair-trade chocolate (as seen in the case study by Amanda Berland). “Low foods” produced by rustic rural “artisans” must be reinterpreted as haute cuisine for sophisticated urban consumers (as seen in the case study by Cristina Grasseni). Images of peasant coffee producers obscure less romantic economic and technical aspects of fair trade undertaken by professionals who run coffee cooperatives (as seen in the case study by Peter Luetchford).

The studies also address the closely related paradox of harnessing market forces to fix problems caused by market forces. Ethical philosophies that motivated early organic farming movements in Belgium have been lost as market demand for organic food increased and definitions of organic farming practices were taken out of farmers’ hands (as seen in the case study by Audrey Vankeerberghen). Environmentally conscious consumers in Sweden struggle to signal their ethics to others without the necessary “stuff” as they endeavor to consume less (as seen in the case study by Cindy Isenhour). “Fair Shop Ltd.” in Norway emphasizes the socially transformative power of free markets, when demand for their merchandise is insufficient to truly transform the lives of their Bangladeshi partners (as seen in the case study by Lil Vramo).

All of the case studies summarized here are remarkable in terms of their analysis and ethnographic richness, providing a wonderfully nuanced picture of ethical consumption. One that particularly stood out for me, however, is Giovanni Orlando’s chapter on critical consumption in Palermo, which inverts common understandings of ethical consumption as proximate acts that are imagined to have positive effects on distant lives. Instead, Orlando argues, critical consumers in Palermo appeared to “subsume fair-trade’s and organic’s general (far away) values with those of the close by experiences of their lives” (p. 152). These far-away values stood in stark contrast to life in this marginal-tertiary Sicilian city characterized by corruption, competition, and inefficiency. Many of those Orlando interviewed expressed hope that such values could contribute to positive transformations in their own communities.