

Public Rape

Representing violation in fiction
and film

Tanya Horeck



Sussex Studies in Culture and Communication

PUBLIC RAPE

Second-wave feminism's mission was to end the blanket silence shrouding rape and bring it to public attention. Now feminist critics must confront a different issue. In *Public Rape: Representing Violation in Fiction and Film*, Tanya Horeck considers the public investment in images of rape and the figure of the raped woman.

Introducing the idea of 'public rape', Horeck looks at how images of rape – from news stories to Hollywood films and popular fiction – serve as cultural fantasies of sexual, racial and class difference. *Public Rape* argues that the concept of fantasy, while much maligned in traditional feminist writing on sexual violence, is the key to understanding the investment in narratives of rape.

Topics addressed include the use of rape as an origin story in the work of classic feminist writers such as Susan Brownmiller and Marilyn French, the infamous New Bedford 'Big Dan's' gang rape case, rape in films such as *The Accused*, *Strange Days*, *Boys Don't Cry* and *Raw Deal: A Question of Consent*, and the controversy surrounding Sarah Dunant's feminist sex thriller *Transgressions*.

Horeck takes an interdisciplinary approach that works between the fields of gender, film and cultural studies to reveal how representations of rape raise vital questions about the relationship between reality and fantasy, and between violence and spectacle.

Tanya Horeck is Lecturer in Communication Studies in the School of Arts and Letters at Anglia Polytechnic University.

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PREFACE

This book is about the cultural representation of rape in feminism, literature, film and popular culture. It explores the prevalence of images of rape, and the figure of the raped woman, across a range of texts. Above all, it is a book about public fantasies of rape that dramatize collective fears and fascinations.

During the years I have researched and written on rape, people have frequently asked whether it is upsetting to study such a horrific subject. Often, the assumption is that I am writing about rape from a sociological perspective – collating case studies of rape, speaking to victims, looking at rapists' profiles. In fact, as I would explain, my subject is the cultural representation of rape, the depiction of sexual violation. It is an important distinction to make. This book is not about the physical crime of rape *per se*, but the ways rape is thought about, and used, in cultural texts, as a scene for working through questions regarding reading and spectatorship. It is also about sexual politics, ethnic and racial tensions, and the contested boundary between the real and the imaginary. Images of rape often make us self-consciously aware of our position in relation to the text. What are the ethics of reading and watching representations of rape? Are we bearing witness to a terrible crime or are we participating in shameful voyeuristic activity? These questions form the key preoccupation of this book, linking my discussion of texts from the fields of political theory, popular media, contemporary fiction and Hollywood film.

Inspired by, yet critical of, the groundbreaking feminist work on rape during the 1970s and 1980s, I explore the relevancy of that work to a present day critical reading of rape. Nearly thirty years after Susan Brownmiller brought rape to international attention with her pioneering treatise *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975), we are faced with a continuing proliferation of images of rape in the public domain. Susan Griffin's call to break the 'conspiracy of silence' (1982: 4) surrounding rape was once feminism's goal; it now seems that the main challenge facing feminist cultural critics approaching the topic of rape in the twenty-first century is how to deal with the intense publicity trained on the crime.

From the eighteenth-century onwards, it has been perceived as a crime 'in its nature commonly secret' (cited in Ferguson 1987: 91), but it is my contention that rape has increasingly become the most 'public' of crimes. From literary texts to popular films; to talk shows and reality crime television; to magazines and

newspapers; representations of rape permeate every aspect of cultural life. In the chapters that follow, I explore what I call ‘public rape’. By this I mean something more than simply the publicized controversies surrounding stories of sexual violence, though these will also be discussed. Rather, I want to use the term public rape to refer to the idea of rape as an event that relates to the affairs of a community or a nation.

To explore ‘public rape’ is not to ignore the personal tragedy that victims of rape suffer; it is to examine and interrogate the collective investment in narratives of rape. Stories of rape are essential to the way in which the body politic is imagined, serving as a site for cultural conflict and the embodiment of public concerns. As will emerge throughout this book, the question of who is represented by, and excluded from, the terms of the body politic, is made plain through images and stories of rape.

This book began life in an English Literature department, was completed at an interdisciplinary institution where it circulated between the fields of English, Critical Theory and Media Studies, and was finally finished in its present form in a Communication and Film Studies department. I was attracted to the subject of rape and representation precisely because it troubles the boundaries between literature, politics, law, popular culture, film studies and feminism. Rape is a topic relevant to many disciplines, and much of the excitement of this project has come from finding salient similarities and provocative disjunctions among different representations of sexual violation. Through exploring images of rape across a range of fields, I have been forced to continually reappraise my understanding of the very concept of representation, and its relationship to reality. The aim of the Sussex Studies in Culture and Communication Series – ‘to explore new ways of thinking about communication and the continual refashioning of meanings, messages and images’ – is one to which I remain committed, and is one that the topic of rape and representation exemplifies. I hope that my reading of public fantasies of rape demonstrates the promise and the possibility of interdisciplinary studies, raising critical questions about our relationship to representations of violence.

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INTRODUCTION

Rape and public fantasy

On 15 November 1993, a book review resulted in the ‘public rape’ of Catharine MacKinnon, the American feminist lawyer and anti-pornography campaigner.¹ One of the common critiques of MacKinnon’s work is that she blurs the line between real and represented rape. Responding to this perception of her work in a review written for US weekly *The Nation*, Carlin Romano began with a shocking suggestion: ‘Suppose I decide to rape Catharine MacKinnon before reviewing her book’ (1993: 563). The outcry that ensued as a result of this review has since become part of the mythology surrounding MacKinnon’s persona as the ‘lodestar of the feminist anti-pornography movement’ (Brown 1995: 78).

At a National Press Club conference, MacKinnon described the review as ‘public rape’ (cited in Hentoff 1994: 17). It was the extremely public nature of this bizarre controversy, as much as the incident itself, which caught the national media’s attention. *Time* covered the ‘war of the words’ under the headline, ‘Assault by Paragraph: Catharine MacKinnon, legal theorist and anti porn activist, says she was raped by a book review’. *The Nation* was deluged with letters denouncing the ‘wrongness of the use of rape as a tool for the conduct of criticism’ (‘Words’ 1993: 786) and a furious Jeffrey Masson – author of *The Assault on Truth: Freud and Child Sexual Abuse* and MacKinnon’s then partner – told Romano: ‘I want you to know, if there is ever anything I can do to hurt your career, I will do it’ (cited in Angelo 1994: 37).

This ‘public rape’ is fascinating for the way it lays bare fiercely debated questions in feminist, literary and cultural studies regarding the links between violence and representation, and fantasy and reality. The idea of ‘public rape’ is an unusual but powerful way of thinking about how sexual violation circulates in the public domain as a culturally invested issue. It provokes and horrifies, but also engages and fascinates. Paradoxically, while rape has been understood as the most private and shameful of crimes, it has always had a high profile in Western public life, with a rapt public following for famous cases and trials, as well as controversial literary and filmic depictions of sexual violation.

By way of introduction to this book and its exploration of rape, representation and fantasy, I’d like to discuss the ‘public rape of Catharine MacKinnon’ in greater detail to further explore its very public exposure of what is at stake in reading

and writing about rape. The first question that comes to mind is: why would Romano include such a scene in his book review? At issue, writes Romano, is MacKinnon's controversial view that pornography is 'an act of violence against women' (1993: 564). To dispute this point he begins his book review with the following:

Suppose I decide to rape Catharine MacKinnon before reviewing her book. Because I'm uncertain whether she understands the difference between being raped and being exposed to pornography, I consider it required research for my critique of her manifesto that pornography equals rape and should be banned. I plot and strategize, but at the last minute, I chicken out. People simply won't understand.

(ibid.: 563)

So Romano decides to 'do the next best thing': he imagines the act through 'fantasy'.

Not having raped before, I'm caught off guard by her fury, her indefatigable effort to talk me out of it, her insistence that pornography would be just as effective, the wrenching final expression of disgust and despair on her face and my own self-revulsion – even if it is just fantasy research.

(ibid.)

At this point in his increasingly elaborate fantasy, Romano imagines *The Nation* publishes his piece, which was written for 'literary reasons', a 'thought experiment' (ibid.).

'Across town', Romano writes, 'another critic who's been assigned to review *Only Words* – call him Dworkin-Hentoff – reads my piece and concludes that he too needs to rape Catharine MacKinnon before properly evaluating her book' (ibid.). The composite rapist constructed by Romano is a tongue in cheek reference to Ronald Dworkin and Nat Hentoff, First Amendment champions who are recognized opponents of MacKinnon's anti-pornography battle. Unlike Romano, who only 'fantasized' the act, Dworkin-Hentoff 'acts on the idea' and 'really' rapes MacKinnon. Afterwards, Dworkin-Hentoff publishes a book review in *The New York Review of Books*, describing 'his rape of MacKinnon in long-winded, pornographic detail, arguing that she does not really equate rape with pornography, that the claim in her book is a wild intellectualization' (ibid.). Police charge both Dworkin-Hentoff and Romano with rape. 'Not fair', Romano writes. 'What I did was different' (ibid.). But evidently not, according to MacKinnon: 'He had me where he wanted me. He wants me as a violated woman with her legs spread. He needed me there before he could address my work' (cited in Angelo 1993: 37). Columnist Nat Hentoff was asked by MacKinnon to 'disavow this rape of me in your name' (cited in Hentoff 1993: 16). In response to this request, Hentoff published an article in *Village Voice* that strongly criticized Romano for the dehumanizing nature

of his review: 'The rape – hypothetical or fantasy or whatever – was a rape. An invitation to the reader to imagine the actual Catharine MacKinnon being overpowered and stripped of her physical integrity' (1993: 17).

Editorial staff at *The Nation* took issue with readers who declared Romano's review to be 'misogynous', 'morally offensive', 'dangerous' and 'sickening', on the grounds that they were ignoring an important distinction between fantasy and reality ('Words' 1993: 786). 'Fantasy' was not even the appropriate word, they argued: 'The thought experiment – which is not the same as a sexual fantasy – is a familiar technique in philosophical writing. Romano made clear that he despises rape, and while the tone of his essay was fervently opposed to one woman, it did not seem to us to be anti women' (ibid.). For his part, Romano defended his review: 'I *despise* real rape and didn't rape anyone by writing *about* rape (an old-fashioned distinction, I'll admit, but there you are)... At the same time I think it's MacKinnon who trivializes real rape by equating it with everything from *Playboy* to graffiti' (ibid.).

But what constitutes 'real rape' in this dispute? More specifically, what is Romano trying to communicate or preserve with this idea of 'real rape'? Ostensibly, in using this phrase he is attempting to reiterate the point that there is a difference between fantasy and the 'real thing', between figural and literal rape. But by producing a fictionalized, composite figure, I would argue that Romano 'chickens out' from his fantasy rape as if he too suddenly loses the distinction he has been attempting to assert. As Hentoff asks: 'Even in protected fantasy, why step back from the act by making Dworkin and me the rapists?' (1993: 17) The answer, it would seem, is that Romano requires this idea of 'real rape' in order to put his fantasy into place.

I begin with the uproar surrounding Romano's book review in order to give an example of the violent debates that attend the attempt to determine the link between real and represented rape. In the book that follows I explore the phenomenon of what I call public rape – representations of rape that serve as cultural fantasies of power and domination, gender and sexuality, and class and ethnicity. Prior to the feminist politicization of the crime in the 1970s, there was a shroud of silence surrounding rape: a 'cultural cover-up' (Higgins and Silver 1991: 4). The feminist goal, as Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray attest, was to make rape public, to 'reposition the problem from the individual psyche to the social sphere where it rightfully belongs' (1993: 261). In contemporary popular culture, the silence on rape has been broken with an outburst of discourse. As Alcoff and Gray suggest, the worry for feminists now concerns the extraordinary publicity swirling around rape and the fact that 'the media...often eroticize the depictions...of sexual violence to titillate and expand their audiences' (ibid.: 262). Moreover, while the phrase 'breaking the silence' remains an important articulation of the difficulty victims of rape have in speaking out about their violation, it no longer has the same force when it comes to talking about what Ken Plummer refers to as the 'overload of stories' of rape in the public sphere (1995: 79).² As Plummer concludes, where in previous times the narrative of rape 'hardly existed except in private, often hidden, form' now 'such stories are everywhere' (ibid.: 78).

Instead of decrying the publicity surrounding rape, I am interested in interrogating the nature of its public status. Public rape: at first glance, the term seems paradoxical. How can rape, generally thought of as the most personal and private of crimes, be considered a public event? Yet as my reading of a variety of literary, filmic and media representations of rape will reveal, cultural images of rape serve as a means of forging social bonds, and of mapping out public space. It is a crime that has a pervasive effect on the life of the community and the workings of the body politic. And it is a crime that dominates public fantasies regarding sexual and social difference.

Where the term 'public rape' sounds paradoxical, the phrase 'public rape fantasies' seems positively scandalous. Indeed, this introduction self-consciously brings together two terms rarely seen in feminist writing on sexual violence: fantasy and rape. When these two terms do appear in feminist discourse it is usually only to violently denounce their association. As is illustrated dramatically in the above case of 'rape by book review', rape fantasy is an explosive subject, particularly for feminism. There are important historical explanations for feminism's distrust of fantasy in relation to the issue of sexual violence. For many feminists, the conjunction of fantasy and rape has meant one thing only: the disavowal of women's experiences of sexual violence. According to this understanding of the term, fantasy means the opposite of reality; the fantastic, the untrue ('she made it up', 'she really wanted it'). Historically, the idea that women secretly fantasize about sexual violation has been grounds for dismissing women's charges of rape in the legal arena. Following this patriarchal use of the term, the expression 'rape fantasy' has generally been understood in two ways in feminist discourse: in the first instance, 'rape fantasy' refers to lurid male fantasies of violating helpless women. In the second instance, the term refers to the troubling 'female rape fantasy', in which women fantasize about being sexually violated by men (a prevalent subject in popular female romance and a thorn in feminism's side). Both, according to important feminist writers such as Susan Brownmiller, Andrea Dworkin and MacKinnon, are patriarchal fantasies, designed to tyrannize women. As is made clear in political writing from the 1970s, which I will discuss in Chapter 1, feminism's moral and political imperative has been to destroy fantasy in order to bring home the horror of rape to a culture that is either indifferent or hostile to stories of sexual violation.

But is this the only way to think about the idea of fantasy in relation to rape? If fantasies of rape, both individually and collectively, are a potent force in culture, as most second-wave feminists acknowledge, then is fantasy something to be forsaken in our discussions of rape? In her important book *States of Fantasy* Jacqueline Rose argues that 'fantasy is not antagonistic to social reality; it is its precondition or psychic glue' (1996: 3). According to Rose, there is 'no way of understanding political identities and destinies without letting fantasy into the frame' (ibid.: 4). Following Rose's argument, I will argue that the concept of fantasy is necessary for an understanding of the representational politics of rape.

Given the controversial history behind the term 'fantasy' and its relation to rape, it is important to specify my use of the term. My approach to fantasy is strongly

influenced by psychoanalysis, including the important re-reading of Freud's work by J Laplanche and J-B Pontalis, but also, in particular, the engaging psychoanalytic work on fantasy conducted by literary and film theorists such as Rose, Elizabeth Cowie, John Fletcher and Vicky Lebeau. Significantly, the psychoanalytic understanding of fantasy refuses the everyday notion of the term as the opposite of 'reality'. Psychoanalysis is concerned with the internal world of imagination (Burgin 1992: 84–86). The term that repeatedly crops up in psychoanalytic discussions of fantasy, and which is especially vital to my exploration of rape and representation, is that of 'scene'. Fantasies, as Laplanche and Pontalis point out, are 'scripts of organized scenes which are capable of dramatization – usually in a visual form' (1988: 318). The subject is 'invariably present in these scenes', even if only in the part of a spectator or an observer; it is not an object *per se* that the subject imagines, but a sequence of events offering up a number of different roles and positions (ibid.). Fantasy, therefore, is not only about fulfilling wishes in imagined scenarios; in Freudian psychoanalysis, fantasy is the 'arranging of, a setting out of, desire' (Cowie 1997: 133). In the analysis of representations of rape to follow, my interest is in looking at how rape is structured as a scene through which a multitude of conflicts are staged.

Fantasies are not unique, individual phenomena. Freud discovered this through his clinical work with patients. He observed that the same fantasies occur over and over again, leading him to conclude that there are 'types' of collective scenarios that are shared by members of a culture (Lebeau 2001: 6). One of these collective scenarios is the primal scene. Freud contended that behind every individual postulation of fantasy there lay an original, 'primal fantasy' (Laplanche and Pontalis 1986: 17). Described most famously in his 'Wolf Man' case study, the original Freudian primal scene is the child watching his parents engage in sexual intercourse. It is an act the child perceives as violent, 'a primal rape or wounding of the mother by the father' (Fletcher 1986: 113). The primal scene is ambivalent, however, because the child is confused by the 'expression of enjoyment' on the mother's face, which appears to contradict the perception of the act as violent (Freud 1979: 277). This 'primal rape', an act in which sex is indissociable from violence, came to be designated as '*the* primal scene', not only in psychoanalysis, but in a range of cultural narratives (Fletcher 1995: 343). As Mandy Merck has noted, representations of rape, 'in which sex is not so much coupled with violence as equated with it', are present in many contemporary artistic works, as well as in many feminist critiques of heterosexuality (2000: 255). Moreover, the position of the child, watching an illicit scene of sexualized violence in a darkened room, is, as film theorist Christian Metz suggested, similar to the audience's voyeuristic position in relation to the cinema screen. In the second half of the book, when I explore the idea of rape as public media spectacle, I look at how cinematic scenes of sexual violence call into question the activity of spectatorship.

Of course, to draw on the Freudian notion of fantasy to discuss rape is not without its problems. Psychoanalysis has always been seen as inimical to the subject of rape. As Margaret Whitford suggests: 'The psychoanalytic account of violence and

aggression is not thought to be adequate to deal with the many different forms which violence may take, nor to tackle the specificity of rape as a social and cultural phenomenon' (1992: 366). One of the main reasons why many feminists consider psychoanalysis inadequate in this regard, is Freud's so-called abandonment of the 'seduction theory' and his turn to the world of fantasy.³ Fuelled by Jeffrey Masson's 'exposé' of Freud as a coward who 'turned his back on reality' (*The Assault on Truth: Freud and Child Sexual Abuse* 1992), many feminists continue to repudiate Freud on the grounds that he covered up his discovery of the pervasiveness of child sexual abuse. Psychoanalysis' alleged 'betrayal' of female patients has become one of the keynote stories about rape within the feminist movement. Masson's pejorative definition of fantasy has set the tone for the debate: 'Fantasy – the notion from Freud that women invent allegations of sexual abuse because they desire sex – continues to play a role in undermining the credibility of victims of sexual abuse' (1992: xxiii). Here fantasy is understood as the opposite of reality. Those who are interested in the psychoanalytic understanding of fantasy are seen to be denying the 'truth' and colluding with those who sexually victimize children. However, as many critics have argued (see Fletcher 1986; Laplanche and Pontalis 1986; Rose 1989; Brown 1993; Lebeau 1995; Scott 1996), it is not accurate to say that Freud turned away from the 'real event'. In fact, the question of the relationship between fantasy and the 'real event' was one he grappled with throughout his career.

It is not my intention to revisit the exhaustive debates over Freud and the seduction theory. A great deal of time has been spent trying to rescue Freudian theory from those who would reject it purely on the grounds of Masson's argument. It is time to move past the well-worn debate over whether Freud turned his back on 'the reality of sexual abuse' in order to explore what significance the concept of fantasy may hold for a consideration of representations of rape. Where the debate over Freud's so-called abandonment of the seduction theory pits 'reality' against 'fantasy' and assumes their fundamental incompatibility, psychoanalytic theory, by contrast, sees 'reality' and 'fantasy' as involved with each other in uncomfortable but nonetheless fascinating ways. As Laplanche and Pontalis note, 'the use of the term "phantasy" cannot fail to evoke the distinction between imagination and reality' (1988: 315). Psychoanalysis recognizes that the question of what was real and what was imagined is often difficult to determine, particularly in regard to traumatic events. The internal mind does not make a clear distinction between the two. As Ann Scott puts it: 'In psychoanalysis all events become invested with fantasy, conscious and unconscious, and may on occasion be potentiated by fantasy' (1996: 6). It is the question of how the event of rape becomes invested with fantasy that fascinates me. The subject of rape forces us to a new understanding of the critical communication between the real and the imaginary.

In my reading of rape and its representation in a number of texts, both written and visual, my interest in this book is to explore what Elizabeth Cowie calls 'public fantasies', those collective or typical fantasies found in the 'creative writing' of novels and films (1997: 137). In exploring the 'public circulation of fantasies', it is fascinating to see how the same scenarios reveal collective wishes that 'devolve, as

in the original fantasies, on positions of desire: active or passive, feminine or masculine, mother or son, father or daughter' (ibid.: 137, 143). In looking at public fantasies of rape designed for cultural consumption, I consider what sort of wishes or desires are being played out in and through these texts. Why do the same stories about rape get told and retold? What is the mythic status of rape in popular culture?

The other key term in this book is representation. According to WJT Mitchell, representation takes two forms: 'aesthetic or semiotic (things that 'stand for' other things) and political (persons who 'act for' other persons)' (1995: 11). Rape exposes the double meaning of representation in so far as it is often made to serve as a 'sign' for other issues, and as it is also frequently used as a means of expressing ideological and political questions concerning the functioning of the body politic. Representation, the attempt to open the 'lines of communication with others', is also, as Mitchell argues, always a misrepresentation. 'As soon as we begin to use representations in any social situation... then representation begins to play a double role, as a means of communication which is also a potential obstacle to it' (ibid.: 13). As I will demonstrate, depictions of rape bear out this 'double role' of representation, in which representation is at once a means of, and an obstacle to, communication. For example, in my discussion of Rousseau's story of rape and revenge, *Le Lévite d'Ephraïm*, in Chapter 2, I reveal how the raped woman is the figure that negotiates the link between semiotic and political representation. While she is an obstacle to social and political unity – it is the discovery of her raped and mutilated body that initiates untold suffering and warfare – she is simultaneously the means by which the dispersed people come together and originate the social contract. In this story of the origins of the social–sexual contract, we also see how the decision to have rape stand in for something or somebody is done by 'virtue of a kind of social agreement' (Mitchell 1995: 13).

In the representations of rape I examine, the raped woman is not only a sexual other. She is also often marked out as other by dint of her ethnic and class positioning. From the Levite's 'concubine', a woman who is 'virtually a slave, secured by a man for his own purposes' (Trible 1984: 66); to the real life New Bedford rape victim, a woman from a working-class immigrant community; to the representation of the raped woman in *The Accused* as 'white trash'; to the labelling of the woman at the centre of the controversy in the documentary *Raw Deal: A Question of Consent* as a 'low-class whore', the figure of the raped woman stirs up fears about sexual and social distinction.

Just as I provide readings of diverse texts from different media, so too, my reading of texts employs a wide range of critical theory and approaches, from psychoanalytic film theory, to black cultural studies, to deconstruction. In examining how rape is always a problem of representation, just as the problem of representation is constantly revealed through the issue of rape, my aim is to disturb a positive-images approach to the question of violence. Discussions of literary and filmic depictions of rape have been particularly prone to pivot on the question of whether a depiction of sexual violence is 'positive' or 'negative', 'good' or 'bad'. This is perhaps

because of the high emotional and political stakes involved in reading and watching rape in contemporary culture, particularly in the wake of feminist consciousness-raising on the subject. Much of my interest in the topic derives from the charged discussion around depictions of rape in the cultural arena. Tracking the issues that get thrown up in the wake of cultural panics surrounding representations of rape is one of the preoccupations of this book.

This study can be situated in relation to a growing body of feminist cultural criticism on rape and representation initiated by the influential anthology *Rape and Representation* (Higgins and Silver 1991). The key questions emerging from this body of work concern the proliferation of representations of rape in both 'high' and 'low' culture, the cultural fixation on the figure of the violated woman, and finally, and perhaps most critically, the question of feminism. As both Jacinda Read (2000) and Sarah Projansky (2001) note, representations of rape are one of the prime locations for determining popular ideas about femininity, feminism and post-feminism. A second related issue tackled by these writers concerns the direction feminist criticism should take in regard to dealing with cultural images of rape. For the contemporary feminist, analysing depictions of sexual violence necessarily brings self-reflexive questions about feminist politics and feminist interpretation to the foreground.

From the beginning, this study presented me with a challenge: how to retain the important insights of second-wave feminism on rape, while resisting some of the more programmatic aspects of that work. Like many other feminist cultural critics influenced by post-structuralist theory, I am concerned about some of the rigid conclusions drawn by the major feminist thinkers on rape (Brownmiller, Dworkin and MacKinnon notably). In the script of gender relations offered by these thinkers, there is often a disheartening repetition of the male as the abuser, the female as the victim. In her engaging essay, 'Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words', Sharon Marcus notes that traditional feminist discourse takes 'violence as a self-explanatory first cause and endows it with an invulnerable and terrifying facticity which stymies our ability to challenge and demystify rape' (1992: 387). In order to avoid such a debilitating view of violence, Marcus proposes that we understand rape as a 'scripted interaction' (ibid.: 390). A script involves a narrative, and the 'concept of a narrative avoids the problems of the collapsed continuum ... in which rape becomes the inevitable beginning, middle, and end of any interaction. The narrative element of a script leaves room and makes time for revision' (ibid.: 391). According to Marcus, 'rape is not only scripted – it also scripts' (ibid.). The question is how narratives of rape position men and women in particular ways, and to what cultural uses narratives of rape are being put.

While I draw on post-structuralist theory to critique certain limitations of what can be called 'radical feminism', this is not to say that I dismiss second-wave feminist discourse on rape entirely. I would argue that some critics are too quick to reject that work as irrelevant or outdated. This is especially true of the popular 'post-feminist' response to rape, as expressed by critics such as Katie Roiphe. Described on the dust-jacket of her book, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism* (1993) as

the 'first of her generation to speak out publicly against the intolerant turn the women's movement has taken', Roiphe's cynical book inspired angry debate amongst feminists, in large part because of the dismissive tone she takes towards the feminists who preceded her.⁴ Like Marcus, Roiphe worries about the view of gender relations being offered in much feminist discourse: 'Rape-crisis feminists reinforce traditional views about the fragility of the female body and will' (1993: 66). But Roiphe takes this point even further. She suggests that 'rape is a natural trump card for feminism' and that 'arguments about rape can be used to sequester feminism in the teary province of trauma and crisis' (ibid.: 57). Roiphe writes that Susan Brownmiller, one of the 'prophets of the rape-crisis movement', uses 'grand, sometimes paranoid strokes' to describe rape as 'something originary, something that defines relations between men and women' (ibid.: 56).

Rather than discarding founding feminist texts such as Brownmiller's for the perceived limitations of their vision, I suggest that we need to explore how second-wave feminism casts rape 'as something originary'. It is important to inquire into the kind of work rape has performed for feminism not so we can conclude, as Roiphe does, that the views of 'rape-crisis feminists' are outdated and puritanical, but so we can understand the role that rape plays in feminism as a scenario through which questions are posed about masculine and feminine identity, sexuality and sexual difference, and the origins of culture. Beginning with a re-reading of Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975), I want to retrieve what I see as the most forceful aspect of her argument: her conception of rape as an act that renders something explicit about the workings of what I will call the socio-sexual contract. One of my interests in this book is to look at the ways the theory of rape attributed to Brownmiller has been taken up in the years following *Against Our Will*.⁵ As I will demonstrate throughout, Brownmiller's exemplary vision of rape, and its relation to the socio-sexual contract, plays an animating role in a number of different cultural productions. Though its meaning will emerge more gradually through my discussion of cultural objects and texts, it is necessary to define here what I mean by the 'socio-sexual contract'. A social contract is the agreement between individuals that constitutes an organized society. The sexual contract, which tells the story of how women become excluded from public life, is, according to feminist political theorists such as Carole Pateman, what gets omitted from masculine stories about the foundations of modern civil society. Representations of rape, and the figure of the raped woman, I will argue, operate as the ground over which the terms of the social – and the sexual – contract are secured. As I will have occasion to illustrate in a number of different ways throughout this book, images of rape function as the site of collective identification, what Rose refers to in a different context as the 'emotive binding [...] of social groups' (1996: 3). As Rose suggests, 'fantasy surely ceases to be a private matter if it fuels, or at least plays a part in, the forging of the collective will' (ibid.). Here the idea of public rape is given an added resonance. It is in the literary, media and filmic depictions of rape that these public, collective fantasies take hold.

Visual images of rape have always been especially contentious. This book seeks not only to reconsider some of the more notorious cinematic images of sexual violence, as in *The Accused* (1988) and more recently in *Strange Days* (1995), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) and *Raw Deal: A Question of Consent* (2001), but also to inquire more broadly into the relationship between images of sexual violation and anxiety about spectatorship and visual technology. Graphic images of rape in visual culture have long played a significant role in debates regarding what it is acceptable to watch. Films featuring rape are routinely singled out as objects of moral outrage. Critics such as Christopher Goodwin worry about the 'dangerous devaluation of sexual violence' at the movies and suggest that rape by its 'very ubiquity has begun to seem like a mere sensational device', a public spectacle (1996: 10 March). But more often than not, the worry is that images of rape are something more than 'mere sensational devices'. Arguments about screen violence tend to turn around the question of whether or not images of rape on television and at the cinema are directly related to real-life violence. What I find worthy of note about these arguments is that while critics battle over the question of reality and representation, they do not really consider the issue of rape. It is thus important to ask: What might it be about rape that expresses an anxiety about the relationship between fictional and actual violence? How is rape being used to communicate ideas about the relationship between audiences and texts?

Considering controversial visual depictions of rape, I set out to re-evaluate a long-running debate about the association between reality and representation, a debate that has hinged on the radical feminist slogan: 'Pornography is the theory; rape is the practice'. The idea that there is a tie between the reality of rape and its representation, made most famously by MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, has been much criticized. Though many of the criticisms of the MacKinnon–Dworkin position on pornography are useful and valid, important questions about the negotiation between the reality of rape and its representation have been overlooked in the clash between anti-pornography and anti-anti-pornography feminists. To avoid the generalities that have mired debates about screen violence, I engage in a close reading of media texts and controversies, arguing that it is important to re-examine the connection between the violence of representation and the violence of rape.

Organization and structure

Rape sparks discussion across a number of fields, including criminology, film and media studies, art history, literature, anthropology and evolutionary biology. Prevalent in an array of fields and intellectual disciplines, rape is a subject that needs to be approached from an interdisciplinary standpoint.

This book is divided into three main sections. Part I of the book, 'Primal Scenes', develops the question of rape and its relation to the socio-sexual contract and lays the theoretical foundation for my examination of public rape in popular culture. Chapter I, 'Origin Stories: Rape, Fantasy and the Foundations of Feminism', begins by looking at how rape is cast as the originary moment of the social contract in

two of the best-selling Anglo-American feminist texts of the 1970s – Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* (1975) and Marilyn French's novel *The Women's Room* (1977). These texts offer an epic reading of rape as the origin of patriarchal culture. But I also want to examine how the narratives they provide function as origin stories of feminism, considering how an image of rape as primal scene secures feminism's own foundations.

The images of original rape found in these best-selling feminist books, I contend, generate subject positions predicated on race and gender. Exploring the critique of Brownmiller's work by black feminists such as Alice Walker, Angela Davis and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, I consider how, to borrow Marcus' phrase, 'rape is not only scripted – it scripts', when it comes to imagining sexual and racial difference (1992: 391). To open up a question about the status of rape as private and public fantasy, I turn to two novels: Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* (1988) and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1993). These novels call attention to how rape operates as fantasy and narrative, a recognition missing from Brownmiller and French.

Chapter 2, 'Body Politics: Rousseau's *Le Lévitte D'Ephraïm*', puts the question of rape and its relation to the social contract in a historical context by looking at a violent prose poem by the eighteenth-century political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Remarking on the curious absence of this story in feminist accounts of rape and the social contract, I argue that Rousseau's story of rape, murder and mayhem brings into graphic focus what Carole Pateman calls the 'lost story of the sexual contract' (1988: 19), the dark and murderous underpinnings of the social contract. Moreover, in its subplot of homoerotic desire, the story calls attention to a subject largely ignored by traditional feminist accounts of sexual violence: male-on-male rape. Rousseau's prose poem also reveals the way rape is turned into a 'civic crime', raising questions about the links between violability, citizenship and a fantasy of the body politic. The raped woman becomes 'public property', with her dismembered body serving as a sign over which men initiate then resolve war. In addition to exploring how rape gets re-written as 'love' and marriage in Rousseau, this chapter asks why Jacques Derrida's reading of Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages* fails to discuss his use of the Levite story, choosing instead to discuss the example of 'love'. A story of rape and revenge, *Le Lévitte D'Ephraïm* brings into focus the argument at the heart of this book: that rape is at once essential, yet disruptive to, the social order.

In its exploration of the raped woman as a grotesque means of communication, the *Lévitte* sets the stage for Part II of this book: public spectacles of rape. 'The Spectacle of Rape' examines representations of rape in popular media and film. I explore how images of rape have come to serve as public spectacles *par excellence*. The emphasis here is on how public desires and anxieties about the links between violence and spectatorship find expression in visual representations of rape. Here, I seek to reveal how the politics of rape exists in what one can call the violence of civic identification, which is in turn propped up by technologies of news and entertainment.

A particular interest in this section of the book is the tension between 'reality' and 'spectacle' and the possibility of mistaking one for the other. My key case study