identity and experience' where AIDS is explored, amongst other things, as a technology of production and reproduction in relation to an AIDS archive that is already too vast for a single reader/researcher to absorb. In Jeff Nunokawa's, "All the sad young men": AIDS and the work of mourning', AIDS is analyzed as literary conceit and as metaphor, re-establishing the link between text and world text, a link which Cindy Patton in 'Visualizing safe sex' takes up at the point where 'pedagogy and pornography collide'.

Each essay is then dedicated in its intention to intersect theory with politics and each is to varying degrees successful. Still, at some point the question that needs to be asked by any reader is, where do we go from here? How do we take the essays and the theories and the thesis out of the book and back into the community? It is a question which Ed Cohen asks in relation to the academy; how should 'we', as theorists, academics, students, situated both inside and out of the academy formulate and contribute to (should we even want

to?) a lesbian and gay studies programme? It is the question women's studies has had to ask itself, is still asking itself, or in some cases, has stopped asking itself – absorption or ghettoization, how much of the choice is even ours? The debate is as pressing in Britain where resource centres and courses are just beginning to be established as it continues to be in the US where resources are more extensive but the homophobic backlash against such advancements is more vituperative. It is a question the book takes up but does not really answer, preferring perhaps to leave conclusions to the reader.

On the whole, however, the book is an excellent introduction to some of the very best in contemporary lesbian and gay theory, committed, versatile and self-critical. Thanks to the current publishing vogue in queer theory (a phenomenon subject to its own speculation and irony) it will, almost certainly, not be the last.

Clare Whatling

Polish Women, Solidarity and Feminism

Anna Reading

Macmillan: London, 1992

ISBN 0 333 55063 3

£47.50 Hbk

This book is the product of a Western feminist's collision with Polish cultural reality and an attempt to understand that reality. It is also a record of a personal voyage of discovery. The structure of the book mirrors this process of approximation – as the author puts it: moving from the perception of an outsider (someone beyond the fixed boundary/*granica*) to a position of more tentative inclusion (within shifting borders/*kresy*). Thus, the first section comprises material

culled from existing 'accounts' of women's position in Polish culture and society, while the second, larger section gives voice to Polish women themselves. The picture of subordination and oppression painted at the outset becomes more nuanced as women themselves speak about their lives. The final section of the book offers the most detailed account to date of the various feminist groups which have recently come into existence.

The book has much to offer. First, it draws an uncompromising picture of the sexism which saturates Polish culture – historically, linguistically, socially and in literature; under state socialism and in Solidarity. The author's linguistic and literary insights and references

are of particular value here. For example, she makes interesting links between nationalism and the position of women and illustrates this with the observation made by the writer Czesław Miłosz concerning the 'feminine invasion' of literature during the periods of Polish history when nationalism took a back seat. Second, considerable space is devoted to interviews with women themselves. Reading is thus attempting to puncture the systematic silence which has existed around gender issues, and at the same time allow women a valid voice as women. There are some real gems in the interviews here. One example is the conversation with the economics graduate who now manages a Sex and Gun shop in Łódź.

Question: 'Could you tell me how you came to be interested in sex shops and why you wanted to run one?' Answer: 'Everything in Poland now is returning to normal. We're to be a part of Europe. . .' To cap it all, the shop, with its telling combination of merchandise, has special financial concessions from the city council.

A deeply sexist culture is undoubtedly a vital dimension influencing the position of women in Polish society, and an area which has been hardly studied at all. But the question the book sets out to answer – What does the fall of communism mean for Polish women? – cannot be answered in these terms alone: the specific distinguishing characteristics of state socialism as a political system have to be taken into account. All we need do is look at how women all over the Eastern bloc, regardless of national culture, regardless of the strength of the established Church, are experiencing a similar de-gradation of social position, just as the 'conditions' of life are set to become 'easier'. Similarly, the fact there has been a general lack of interest in feminism across Eastern Europe cannot really be explained in terms of the content of a single nation's culture. And here we

are confronted with the fascinating and important question which emerges from the pages of Anna Reading's book: How can a culture be so rampantly sexist, and yet have been accompanied by such systematic rejection of feminism? Culture and tradition *are* important, but one cannot assume that these are re-created in the same way in state socialism as in liberal capitalism.

In this book, state socialism is termed 'state capitalism', that is to say, it is conflated with Western capitalism because 'women are instruments of labour, as under capitalism and they are other/unknowable, as under capitalism' (p. 38). Elsewhere: 'Poland's economy displayed the same contradictions as economies in the capitalist West – competition, accumulation and exploitation. There were and are in both East and West those who sell their labour to those (owners) in control' (p. 6). This equation is quite misleading; it ignores the specific importance of private property and civil society in shaping gender relations. If differences of political system count for little in this explanatory framework, then the shift from one system to the other must also be essentially *meaningless*, a conclusion which I would contest. A focus on culture means that while Reading mines the subtleties of sexism in the Polish language, the opportunity to examine the nuances of other, more politically based, meanings is missed. What does it mean, for example, to be a 'second-class citizen' (p. 61), or a first-class citizen come to that, under a political system where there is no civil society? Only by looking at culture *and* the specifics of political domination in Eastern Europe, I suggest, is it possible to explain the very contradictory, and often self-contradictory accounts which women give of themselves in the second part of this book.

Peggy Watson